

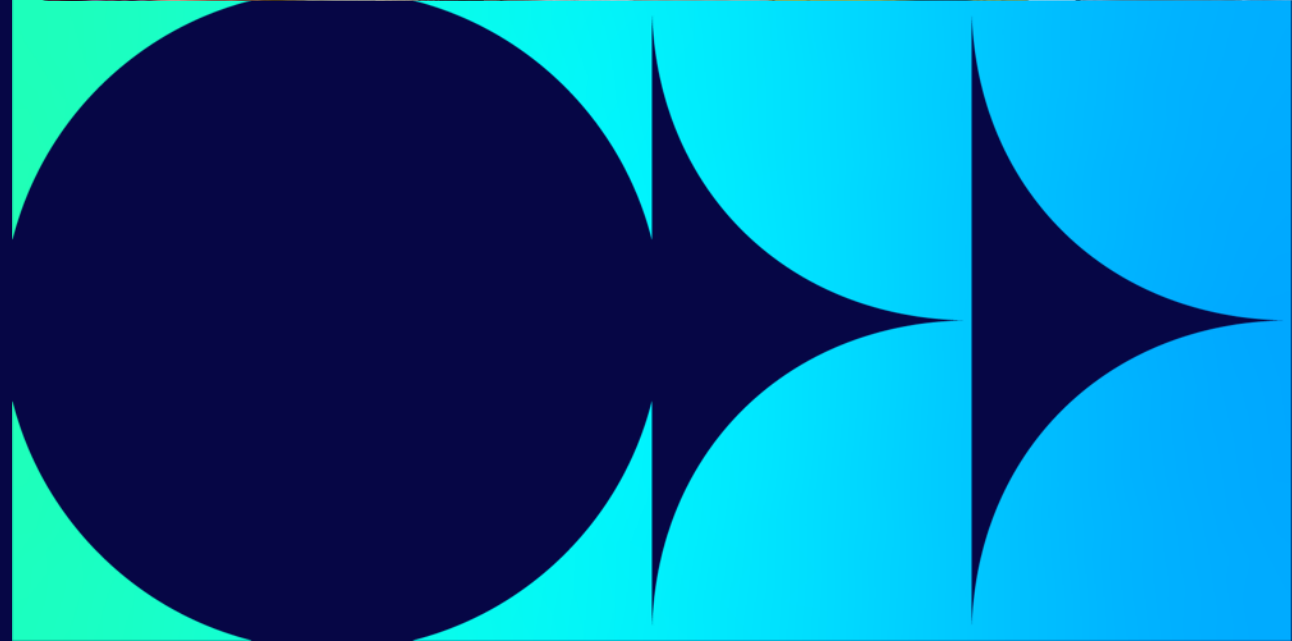
Police Families Wellbeing: A Debt of Gratitude

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Centre for Policing Research and Learning



The College of Policing and the Police Covenant

It is intended to ensure that officers, staff, volunteers and **their families are not disadvantaged as a result of their service in the police** and seeks to mitigate the impact that this may have on day-to-day life. In practical terms the covenant will:

- place a legal requirement on the government to report annually to Parliament on issues relating to police welfare, wellbeing and support
- aim to improve the working experience of people in policing
- help smooth the transition out of policing for police leavers
- **provide support to the families of those working in policing**



The Study Part One: Existing Research

Family Impact : 14% of spouses of Australian police officers reported probably PTSD and distress related social disfunction. 24% of partners of US police officers reported distress in their relationships.

Work/Family Conflict: partners of emergency responders experienced extreme pressure due to their partners day to day role. Spouses of US police officers and paramedics described feeling like a single parent. Long working hours, unpredictable shifts, reduced quality relationship time had a negative effect on family.

Work Related Stress: partners of emergency responders suppressed their own emotional needs to balance the mental health needs of their service partner. Australian police officers scored highly for hyperarousal whilst their partners scored low on arousal.

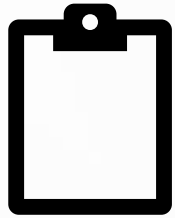
The Study Part One: Existing Research

Intermate partner violence and violence against children (IPV) of police officers indicates a rate of physical aggression against a partner between 7% and 10% and just over 8% for physical aggression against children.

Where police officers used their authority from their police officer role (authoritarian spill over), they were more likely to engage in IPV, which **increased through work related stress or exposure to violence.**

Children Child mental health influenced by the level of trauma their parents exposed to, as well as the trauma the child is exposed. Symptomology displayed by police parents is associated with children who are more fearful and dependant and who display externalised behaviour and increased somatic problems. are at **increased risk of developing PTSD and behavioural problems when their emergency responder parent experience PTSD themselves.**

The Study Part Two: Primary Data Collection



Survey: Respondents – non-police service family members (partners, parents, adult children etc) 1406 responses.



Focus Groups: Four focus group – three non-serving family members including grandparents and an adult child, one of serving officers.



Autobiographical Interviews: Four interviews – serving police officers, three married to officers, one also child of officer, all with children.

Findings

Work/Family Conflict

Single Parenting

Solo Parenting for police officers. Unpredictable nature of job – absent partners, unreliable. Grandparents picking up childcare.

Mental Health

Mental health partners is eroded as they carry the burden of the complexity of arranging childcare/family life alongside their own careers.

Social Support

Unpredictability and unreliability also erodes partners support networks and opportunities for self-care, as they can't commit to classes (gym or other) or friendship gatherings.

Findings

Work/Family Conflict

Organisational Injustice

Police Officers: Stigma of getting pregnant, having a family, parental leave, flexi-plans, accommodating family. Seen as less than & end of career.

Not Family Friendly

Lack of support or accommodation of family by job – family do all of the compromise for the job.

Victim Support

Victim support for police families, are they less than other members of the public? Assuming the identity of police officer, no recognition – secondary citizen.

'A very anti-family organisation. I have experienced an incredible burden of managing home/children and my own job since my partner signed up which has been further exasperated by covid. Everything falls to me now. The shift patterns, partners constant tiredness, unpredictable nature of each shift end time – it's hard work. We cannot plan holidays or days out. His leave can be cancelled, and we have no say. Important training courses are staged over half terms with no regard to impact on families. He loves the job, he's brilliant at it and we support him – but it's had an immeasurable impact on family life and my personal well-being. I often feel like a machine now and my children miss out on many things without their Dad. He is also constantly torn between a career that is his passion and the family he loves. It is a hard life – I have never felt so lonely.'

Findings

Psychological Wellbeing

Secondary Trauma

Partners concerned about their police partners mental health they step in as counselling support, hearing the details of an officer's day, yet they have no support themselves

Psychological Impact

Unaddressed mental health issues of officer impacts police family, impact on parent of officer, impact on partner – impact on child development.

Social Identity & Isolation

Partners are isolated from society and family friends and often partners, but also still considered as outsiders from the police service. No sense of belonging or support.

'You never get used to shift work and the impact this has on family and quality time. I have anxiety/PTSD and my husband's job has certainly impacted me, there have been far too many times that I have needed him and he's not been there, you know it's not their fault but it's hard to see that at times...The mental strain on the officer is hard too, even for the strongest which does in turn pass on to the family as we always discuss his day but at times it can be quite draining for all involved but we know he needs to talk.'

'And he's also been diagnosed with PTSD at work, and I very much share in a lot of his trauma. And again, there's no. Reach out or just consideration for how it affects families UM, and I'm aware that as my children get older, these are all risk factors for them as well.'

'A lot of the time he's a very angry man and it can. It can make life very difficult at home. You know, you can start walking on eggshells sometimes, you know, can just cross their path and you're in my way you all that sort of. Because they're not. They're not. They're not dealing with the root cause of something, so they're taking it out on you.'

Findings

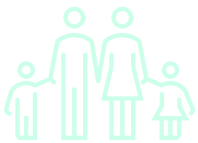
Children – Intergenerational trauma



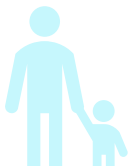
Children reflecting behaviour of police officers – children are very aware of their police parent’s jobs– often wanting (and becoming) police officers but also aware of the risks that their parents are involved in.



Children recognise the absence of their parents – are they secondary to police work too?



Children are affected by parent’s mental health – children aware of this, non-police parents of children witness this, parents admit to their behaviours, describing and witnessing anxiety and vulnerability.



Children learn to suppress emotions either to protect already stressed parent, or due to agitated mood or inaccessibility of parent. Dissociation,

'Child required wellbeing / psychological support when aged 10 due to serving family member was working on numerous murder enquiries and working away from family, child became fearful of dangers presented and needed some support . Obtained via GP'

'I worry about his relationship with my little boy because, there will be times when [our child], [says], Mommy, don't tell Daddy that or is Daddy home or is Daddy in bed or don't tell Daddy this happened. Umm. Because he's worried about him, like snapping or getting cross or...And then other times I do worry about [our child's] ability to express his emotions, because ...[partner] just doesn't deal with emotion that well generally. So he tends to be told to be like your stop being silly or you know it doesn't hurt that much or. Some, and I mean we all, we all do it... But I feel like it happens in our house, maybe more than it should..'

'I felt like I didn't have anyone to protect me...I suppose I couldn't be honest with him. I couldn't. like I didn't want him to think that I was weak... But he was never really there to, to talk to and didn't.'

'Sometimes not venting my feelings and views and then may be taken out my children. When I shouldn't and they don't understand why I might be a bit more snappy with them.'

Findings – Support Needs

Safe Spaces:

loss of police social clubs has impacted the development of social support networks for all family members, no place for couples to speak privately (local pub won't do!).

Where do you go to feel safe as a family?

In house childcare – third party providers cannot accommodate unpredictability of police hours – this has been done before: Broadmoor hospital, also Bright Horizons – emergency childcare. Participants spoke of this as something that want provided by police service, including serving officers.

Networks:

for family members Families want to be recognised and included – newsletters, communications, events, networking – partners, parents, children, grandparents. Everyone feels isolated in their experience. Don't rely on officer to relay message!

Family Mental Health Support

Families feel that regular family therapy would help families navigate the day-to-day challenges of police life, having therapy as a family would help encourage officers to engage with therapy and children would benefit from learning to speak with their parents.

Children need to be supported in having a parent (or both) as a police officer.

'I think if a police officer is having to go through counselling, I think some sort of counselling or therapy needs to be offered to their immediate family. I think it's completely naive to think that an officer might be dealing with these mental health issues and that his family are absolutely fine.'

'...no matter how old they are, they're always your kids and you always want to help them to get the best from life and you know to maximize the opportunities and you know, I certainly don't feel that's the case for him. And I'd wanna be able to try and help him... So if there was something I would absolutely connect to it, definitely that's without a shadow of doubt.'

'It can be very lonely...so I've got some, some of my very close friends have got husbands that are also police officers. In differing roles and I've made friends with some of my husband's colleagues. Wives. It's a sort of try and you know, find other people, who understand...'

'...they use the term police family, don't they as a way to try and get people into the job...but it's kind of, yeah, become part of this family because you're about to destroy your one at home..'

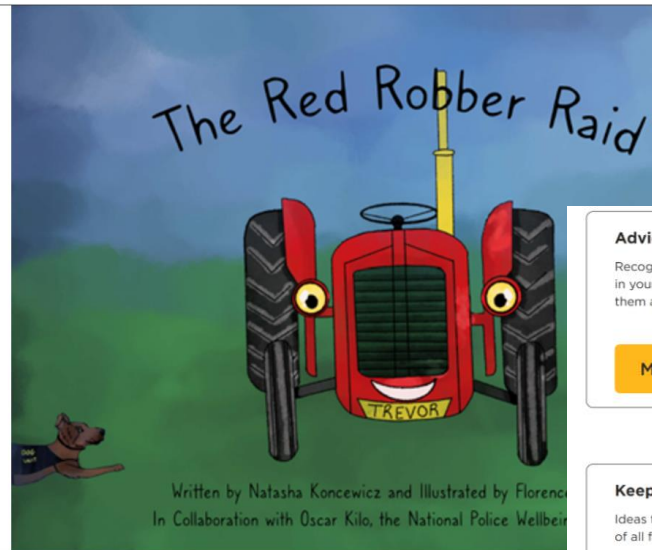
Families Hub on Oscar Kilo

The screenshot shows the top navigation bar of the Oscar Kilo website. It includes a logo on the left, followed by links for 'Services', 'Resources', and 'Events and training'. On the right, there are links for 'News, research, guidance', 'About us', 'Contact us', and 'Login', along with a search bar. Below the navigation, a breadcrumb trail reads 'Home > News >'. The main article title is 'Police families wellbeing and support needs research project - findings', published on 23 Sep 2024, written by Oscar Kilo, and associated with 'The National Police Wellbeing Service'. A 'Reading time 2 mins' indicator is also present. The background of the article header features a photograph of a smiling family.

The Red Robber Raid - children's story

The "Red Robber Raid" is more than just a children's story – it's a window into the lives of policing families. Created in partnership with the Norfolk and Suffolk Constabulary Wellbeing Team, this beautifully illustrated story helps explain why loved ones in policing may miss out on important family moments like mealtimes, bedtimes, or celebrations.

[Find out more](#)



Written by Natasha Koncewicz and Illustrated by Florence
In Collaboration with Oscar Kilo, the National Police Wellbeing

Advice on mental health

Recognise the signs of poor mental health in your family and know how to support them and get them help.

[Mental health advice](#)

Eat better as a family

What you and your family eats can have a huge impact on your health and wellbeing. Find out how good nutrition can help.

[Nutrition advice](#)

Craving better sleep?

Living with a shift worker can be tough for all the family. The Sleep Scientist shares her advice on how to improve your sleep.

[Sleep advice](#)

Keeping fit as a family

Ideas to get moving and improve the fitness of all family members.

[Family fitness support](#)

Financial wellbeing for police families

Some of the key things to think about when it comes to financial wellbeing.

[Financial guidance](#)

Communication in police families

Tips to improve communication in police families, including talking to children about police work.

[Communicate better](#)



Search

Home >

Families toolkit

This toolkit has been designed for forces, by forces with the aim of ensuring that police families are heard, valued, informed and know where to seek wellbeing support for their loved ones if they need it.

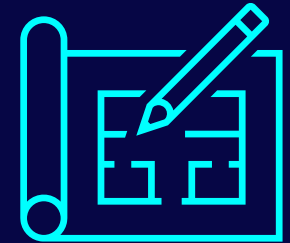
It is intended to help bolster the support that forces currently have available to strengthen confidence and acknowledge the vital role they play, whilst often managing their own busy careers and commitments.

Link for the Toolkit:

<https://www.oscarkilo.org.uk/families-toolkit>



Oscar Kilo Families Toolkit



Contents

Family Stall

Find out how to deliver a portable family stall - a hub which includes a range of resources.

Family stall

Family knowledge hub

The addition of a family knowledge hub to your force website can be an easy way to connect with the family audience.

Family knowledge hub

Family days

A great way to thank families for the support they provide to their loved ones and give them an insight into the world of policing.

Email newsletters

Email-newsletters can be a very cost-effective way of communicating with your workforce and their families.

If you would like a copy of the research:

<https://assets.production.oscarkilo.aws.college.police.uk/s3fs-public/2024-09/Families%20Wellbeing%20and%20Support%20Needs%20Findings%20Report.pdf>



Research: Police families wellbeing and support needs



For the Families

The police dominates every aspect of our lives in one way or another, really... his job kind of dominates every aspect. So, every decision we have to make or I make or make around the kids, it's got to kind of run through his work and his shifts or his commitments and so on.

Police families are an often-overlooked member of the wider 'police family', despite being integral in supporting police officers and staff in their chosen vocation and maintaining their presence at work. Typically, the impact on families, partners, children, parents and grandparents is not recognised, neither is the work that they do to keep their loved ones healthy and well and the family functioning. However, our research highlights the impact that having an officer or staff member in your family can have; the stress and upset caused by the very nature of policing, the disruption to everyday life, often leaving family members to juggle careers with family needs as police family members are absent and unpredictable, the isolation – from partners, and from wider communities and the difficulties in explaining all this to children. It all takes a toll, and we identify and capture this in our research. What we find is that there is a debt of gratitude owed to police families for their role in keeping the wheels of policing turning. Thank you to all those police family members who took time out to speak with the research team. Without your support our work wouldn't be possible.

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Research Summary

This research project investigated the wellbeing and support needs of police families. It was commissioned by the College of Policing National Police Wellbeing Service and responds to the commitments expressed in the [Police Covenant](#).

The key aims of this research were to:

1. Explore with family members the perceived influence of police occupational experiences on the wellbeing of their families, including resilience, coping and sources of support.
2. Explore the influence of occupational stressors on family functioning and dynamics among policing families.
3. Identify key areas of need in terms of family support.

The wellbeing and support needs of police families in the UK is a largely under researched area and this project represents one of only two pieces of research conducted in the UK (at time of research – 2023).

The research comprised of a large-scale survey that engaged 'non-serving' family members, this obtained 1400 responses. Four focus groups were conducted, three with 'non-serving' family members, one with serving officers. Four biographical interviews were also carried out with serving officers. Within this data the study captured the perspectives of partners, parents, grandparents, adult children, and serving officers.



**A role in policing can be tough, and
not just for the person in the job.**

**To the families and loved ones
of those working in policing,
thank you for all you do.**

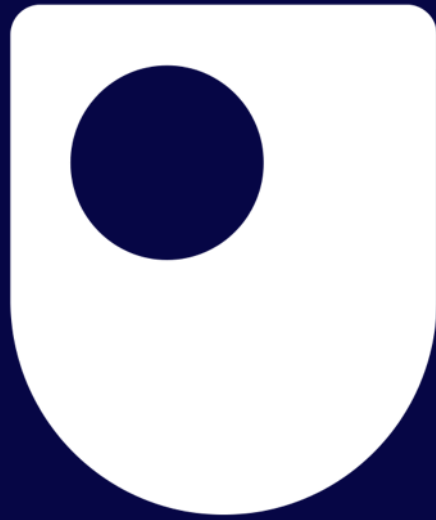
<https://www.oscarkilo.org.uk/family-life/thank-you>



THANK YOU

A woman with dark hair, wearing a black top and a gold necklace, looks thoughtful and slightly sad. She is at a birthday party with a lit cake in front of her. Another woman is partially visible on the right, smiling. The background is decorated with string lights and a red balloon.

At times it's lonely, tiring and tough,



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