

**Fathers on the frontline: How UK police officers experience involved  
fatherhood**

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A thesis submitted for the degree of PhD in Management Studies

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Date of submission for examination (July 2024)

## **Declaration**

This is to certify that (i) The author of this thesis declares that it does not include work forming part of a thesis presented successfully for another degree, (ii) All work presented represents the author's own original work except for when referenced to others, (iii) This thesis is less than 80,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, references and appendices.

## Table of Contents

<b>Declaration.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Acknowledgements.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Chapter One: Understanding caregiving, involved fatherhood and fathers.....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Chapter Two: Policing and police work: The research context.....</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>Chapter Three: Understanding caring as/and dirty work: Theoretical framing.....</b>	<b>102</b>
<b>Chapter Four: Researching police officers’ parenting and caring: Methodology.....</b>	<b>146</b>
<b>Chapter Five: The uncaring organisation, preventing overspill and caring promiscuously: Findings.....</b>	<b>194</b>
<b>Chapter Six: Police work as collective caring and compassionate organising: Discussion.....</b>	<b>236</b>
<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>300</b>
<b>References.....</b>	<b>317</b>

<b>Appendices.....</b>	<b>359</b>
Appendix One: Demographic table of research participants.....	359
Appendix Two: Participation sheet .....	361
Appendix Three: Consent form.....	363
Appendix Four: Interview schedule/plan.....	364
Appendix Five: Kohlberg’s stages of human moral development.....	365
Appendix Six: Key accountabilities of police constables.....	366
Appendix Seven: Example of field note (14 April 2021) .....	367
Appendix Eight: Reflections on stages of research .....	368
Appendix Nine: Reflexivity: Reflections on my own voice and positioning.....	372
Appendix Ten: List of caring needs of police father-carers.....	374
Appendix Eleven: List of PTSD-related triggers.....	375

## List of Figures

<b>Figure Number</b>	<b>Figure Name</b>	<b>Page Number</b>
One	WhatsApp message from gatekeeper (March, 2021)	169
Two	WhatsApp message with Duncan, Area C1	173
Three	Text message – the importance of hospitality	174
Four	Example of initial notetaking	182
Five	Example of initial coding of an interview extract	183
Six	Example of generation of list of codes	183
Seven	The ordering of codes	184
Eight	Thematic map of initial themes	187
Nine	Conceptual map: Lived experiences of fathering-caring in the UK Police Service	243
Ten	Circles of care for frontline fathers	275

## **Abstract**

Based on a critical case study of the UK Police Service, this thesis provides insight into the experiences of father-carers who work in frontline protective service roles. It draws on data collected via in-depth, narrative style interviews with 27 frontline police officers who are fathers with caring responsibilities. The research interviews were carried out during the Covid-19 pandemic but the narrative approach used allowed participants to describe their experiences both before and during this time. The analysis shows how officers face relentless trauma in their interactions with criminals, victims and police managers, highlighting the extent and nature of the physical and emotional damage to which they are subject as result of operational and organisational stressors.

The findings make three inter-related contributions to the extant research on gender, protection and caring. First, they provide insight into participants' perceptions and experiences of the police service as an uncaring organisation, one that fails to protect them from physical and emotional harm, to alleviate their emotional suffering, and to recognise or accommodate their needs as aspirant caregiving fathers. Second, the findings provide insight into how father-carers experience their own caregiving fatherhood whilst working on the frontlines of policing, developing a conceptual analysis of the methods they use to prevent their work-related emotional dirt from spilling over into family life and their relationships. Finally, the findings contribute to knowledge and understanding of what conditions of possibility might need to exist for frontline protective service workers to be better supported and more involved as parents and/or caregivers now and in the future.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my supervisor Professor Melissa Tyler. I have thoroughly enjoyed our time spent discussing this thesis online and during our trips to the British Library. You have expertly guided me throughout this six-year journey. Through your consistent praise for every chapter I turned in, you have given me the confidence to keep writing and will remain my biggest source of inspiration as I go on to supervise others.

My thanks also go to Dr Pasi Ahonen. Without your encouragement I would have struggled to start this thesis. Thank you for introducing me to the works of Foucault and for your flexibility when I struggled with ill health.

I would like to acknowledge the people I have known through my personal connections with the police service. Some have lost their lives along the way and have left behind loved ones because of the issues that I describe in the thesis. To all the amazing police officers who gave up their precious time between shifts to tell me about their experiences of being frontline father-carers, I am so thankful. Hopefully, others will learn from your stories.

To my wonderful children, George Jnr, James and Edward, I am very proud of each of you and the men you have become. I hope that I have inspired you to achieve the things you want to in your lives.

To my husband George, I am beyond grateful for your support and willingness to discuss my ideas, even if they were triggering for you at times. Thank you for taking over all the life-admin so I could complete this project.

Last but not least, I'd like to thank all my amazing PhD peers and work colleagues at Essex Business School and Hertfordshire Business School who have encouraged me along the way.

## **Introduction**

### **Purpose and focus of the thesis**

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the lived experiences of father-carers who also work in protective frontline service roles. Building on a feminist ethics of care, as it has been articulated most recently through the recent *Care Manifesto* and related work (Chatzidakis et al., 2020; Segal, 2023) and research on emotional dirty work (McMurray and Ward, 2014; Ward et al., 2020), it focuses on a critical case study of the UK Police Service to elucidate answers to three main Research Questions. These are shown below and emerged from the literature review that is the focus of the first two chapters of the thesis.

### **The Research Questions are:**

- 1) What does it mean to be a father-carer who wants to be involved, but who also works in a frontline protective service role?
- 2) How do father-carers who are frontline protective service providers experience caregiving fatherhood?
- 3) What could be the future conditions of possibility for frontline protective service workers who are, or aspire to be, involved father-carers?

### **Rationale for the study**

Frontline police officers are those who are in everyday contact with the public and directly intervene to keep the public safe and enforce the law (HMIC, 2011). This protective service



role is visible, i.e., it entails responding directly to 999 (emergency) calls or working within neighbourhood policing teams to serve the public. In addition, some frontline officers have specialist roles, and these include working in criminal investigations, scenes of crime, and traffic issues (Home Office, 2019). There are currently 123,465 visible frontline police officers across the 43 territorial UK police services, representing 91% of the total UK police workforce. The remaining 9% work in frontline support roles or business support roles (in administration for example) (Gov.uk, 2024).

The work of a frontline officer is becoming increasingly demanding for a number of reasons, including an increase in the volume of crimes handled and the changing nature of crime. For example, UK crime rates have been rising over the past decade. In 2014 there were 62 reported crimes per 1000 people but by 2019/20 this had risen to 89.5 per 1000 people (Statista.com, 2024). Whilst crimes such as theft have remained at relatively low levels, violent crimes including murder, throwing of corrosive substances and the use of guns or knives, have increased dramatically over the past decade. Such violent offences rose from a total of 634,600 in 2013/14 to just over 2.1 million in 2022/23 in England and Wales (ONS, 2024; Statista.com, 2024), with a concomitant increase and change in the nature of the workload for frontline officers.

Policing responsibilities and demands are widely accepted as having a negative impact on the physical and mental health of officers (Clements et al., 2020; Gill et al., 2018; Maran et al., 2018). Physical issues include poor sleep (Ma et al., 2019) and cardiovascular disease (Magnavita et al., 2018), whilst constant exposure to danger and distressing situations can lead to a variety of psychosocial issues (Fielding et al., 2018) which can include Post-Traumatic

Stress Disorder (PTSD), depression and anxiety. Recent empirical studies have exposed policing as one of the highest risk and most stressful occupations (Tehrani, 2018; De Camargo, 2022). Not only are officers exposed to constant danger and threats to their own physical safety, but they often have to witness the same happening to their colleagues or to victims of crime, i.e., when attending callouts to incidents of assault and domestic abuse, for example.

Sometimes even seemingly low risk or routine police duties can turn into volatile or even fatal situations. For example, in September 2020, serving Metropolitan Police Sergeant Matt Ratana died after being shot in the heart by a man who had a gun concealed in his coat whilst in custody (BBC News, 2020). Matt was also a husband, a popular colleague and a respected, loved coach for a local rugby team. At the time of writing (April 2024) news headlines remind us of the shocking murder of PC Sharon Beshenivsky, of West Yorkshire Police, who was gunned down after responding to an alarm call at a travel agent in 2005 (Halliday and Vinter, 2024). Sharon was also a mother of three children and two stepchildren. She was a childminder before joining the police service and a probationer when she was killed (BBC News, 2009).

A complex and evolving range of operational and organisational stressors can have an ongoing negative impact on police officers' experiences of their work, and work environments. Typical operational stressors include being exposed to situations of conflict (Can et al., 2018; Regehr, 2019), violent incidents involving victims (Ellrich, 2016) and investigating child abuse (Tehrani, 2018). Organisational stressors include poor management and unmanageable workloads (Duxbury and Halinsky, 2018), experiencing conflict with managers and colleagues (Duran et al., 2019; Purba and Demou, 2019), unpredictable working patterns (Scholarios et al., 2017) long working hours and shift work (Duxbury and Halinsky, 2018). These operational

and organisational stressors can lead to emotional exhaustion (Purba and Demou, 2019), depression (Nelson and Smith, 2016) and even suicide (Spence and Millot, 2016; Violanti et al., 2018). Whilst not unique to policing, these stressors are particularly acute (for example, during periods of ‘crisis’ such as the Covid-19 pandemic) yet are also chronically ‘normal’ in this occupation, as noted in research to date (Frank et al., 2017).

Indeed the pandemic highlighted both (and somewhat paradoxically) the extent to which society depends on frontline protective service workers, and the unequal impact of this crisis on them (OECD, 2022). For example, workers within the NHS, care homes and police service could not isolate and perform their duties remotely but had to remain working in close physical proximity to others. This led to a higher risk of infection for them and their families (OECD, 2022). During the pandemic, over a third of the police officer respondents to an Annual Pay and Morale survey (Police Federation, 2020) said that they did not have access to adequate Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) when they needed it, and that they had not received the training necessary for policing the crisis (Police Federation, 2020). Over half of all respondents stated that the negative impact of their job on family life was a major contributor to their intention to leave the police service (Police Federation, 2020). An empirical study carried out by De Camargo (2022) similarly revealed that officers perceived a lack of support from police management and colleagues during the pandemic, line managers downplayed the seriousness of the virus, and officers were ridiculed by managers if they showed fear of it. Further, police stress and anxiety whilst working during the Covid-19 pandemic was at an increased level compared with pre-pandemic times, and the same was experienced by their families (De Camargo, 2021).

The most recent Police Federation Pay and Moral Survey (2023) revealed some alarming perceptions and attitudes held by police officers. The majority say that their morale is low, that they feel disrespected by the government, and that they feel undervalued by their employer. They are considerably less happy than the rest of society; their average life satisfaction is rated at 5.2 out of 10, compared with 7.5 in the general public. One in six officers want to leave the force within the next two years, and 73% say they would not recommend joining the force to others. Distress and dissatisfaction stem primarily from inadequate pay in the face of the cost-of-living crisis, an untenable workload, persistent and constant risk of abuse and/or injury, and a lack of organisational support for mental health issues (Police Federation, 2023). The survey's stark findings reveal an urgent need for action, with the human cost being 'reason enough to move quickly to fix these problems', and 'the consequences for long term police capacity' as ones that 'do not bear thinking about' (Police Federation, 2023: 9). Of particular concern is the emotional wellbeing of officers. This has recently been viewed as a 'clinical and public sector crisis', without the right resources, monitoring, or interventions available to improve it (Brewin, 2022). Deschênes et al. (2018) acknowledge that the emotional well-being of officers is an under-researched area that urgently requires better understanding and evidence-based action.

In the past five years, over 20% of police officers have reported having PTSD and 50% reported having to take sick leave for mental ill-health reasons (Police Firearms Officer Association, 2017). This is considerably higher than PTSD and sick leave figures within the general population (Bullock and Garland, 2020). It is not generally easy, however, for officers to disclose mental health problems to their managers, due to the stigma that surrounds doing so (Bell and Eski, 2016; Edwards et al., 2021) fears about lack of confidentiality (Haugen et al., 2017) and an impression that it will affect their promotion prospects (Martin et al., 2021).

Within the context of a police culture of dominant, hegemonic masculinity there is a perpetuation of the view that mental illness and other related experiences are a weakness (Evans et al., 2013; Newell et al., 2021) and officers feel that seeking care for mental health issues might call their masculinity into question (Bell and Eski, 2016; Edwards and Koteró; 2021). It is generally accepted in academic literature that a lack of mental health training exists in the police service and there is a need for a change in attitude towards mental health generally (Cummings and Jones, 2010; Soomro and Yanos, 2018).

Against this backdrop of organisational and occupational stressors and the concomitant mental health crisis that characterises the UK Police Service, the policing profession has also come under increasing attack from the press and social media in recent years. This situation has, unsurprisingly, exacerbated anti-police sentiment amongst the UK public. For many years, the police service has been accused of being institutionally racist, with a problematic focus on bad behaviour at the individual and institutional level (Akram, 2022). In addition, the service is viewed as corrupt (Holmes, 2020) and misogynistic (Brown et al., 2020). But this is more than just a viewpoint, however. In recent years, members of the public have been subject to violent police attacks, a notable example being that of Sarah Everard, who was abducted by an off-duty police officer in London in March 2021, who raped and murdered her (BBC News, 2021).

High-profile commissioned reviews of the culture of Britain's largest force, the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS), have included the MacPherson Report (1999) and the Casey Review (2023). The MacPherson Report found the MPS to be institutionally racist, professionally incompetent and with poor leadership (MacPherson, 1999). Over twenty years later, the key findings of the Casey Review (2023) were that the MPS remains institutionally racist and is

misogynist and homophobic. Specialist units such as Firearms were highlighted as being of particular concern regarding malpractice and false overtime claims for example. Bullying of those with illnesses or disabilities was viewed as rife in the MPS. The Casey Review (2023) declared homophobia to be ‘deep seated’ within the MPS and stated that female employees and female members of the public are not sufficiently protected from police perpetrators of domestic abuse or those who abuse their position for sexual purposes. Discrimination is usually ignored, and black officers are over 80% more likely than their white counterparts to be accused of misconduct. There is a lack of diversity, and it is anticipated that it will take until 2053 to reach gender balance and until 2061 for the MPS to be representative of the communities it serves in London (Casey Review, 2023).

Not only are officers, including father-carers, impacted by the findings identified in the Casey Review and other similar reports on an individual level, but there are ramifications for their family lives, relationships, parenting and caring roles too. Research by Bullock and Garland (2020; 2021) highlights many of the aspects of police work that can have a damaging impact on families, including atypical schedules, shift work, the macho culture, parents’ high commitment to the role of police work, leading to overprotectiveness and hypervigilance. McDowell (2017) similarly suggests that caring for officers suffering from PTSD, having to advocate for them or worrying about them committing suicide, is exhausting for the spouse/partner concerned. According to Waters and Ussery (2007) the strain of living with someone with mental ill-health can lead to breakdowns in relationships, a withdrawal from social networks and difficulty in trusting others. Randall and Buys (2013) found that there is a high rate of divorce and separation amongst police families compared to other occupations, but the risk of a breakup does not increase if the relationship survives beyond its first few years (Miller, 2007).

Whilst there has been some speculation by researchers that the children of police officers fear that their parent will be killed on duty or they are themselves bullied because their parent is a police officer (Helfers et al., 2021), how children of police officers experience the secondary effects of mental illness in a police officer parent is considered as neglected in the literature (Kirschman, 2014).

The background and context outlined above sets the scene for the exploration undertaken by this study. Police officers who are father-carers are caught up in this complex web of work-related duties, connections and commitments to their role, colleagues, and family, amidst a wider social, political, and economic context that makes their day-to-day working lives very difficult. A key, practice-orientated aspect of the rationale for this study is therefore to answer the important question that is, what impact does this have on those who want to be involved parents and carers but who are also doing this frontline job in very difficult circumstances? It is timely and important because the current situation is unsustainable and is widely viewed, in the evidence-based studies cited above and more, as a crisis. Further research into what can be done about this crisis is thus extremely important. Therefore, this study aims to find out what the conditions of possibility might be for a different, more caring, and more connected way of working for father-carers within the UK Police Service, now and in the future.

There is also, of course, an academic and intellectual aspect to the rationale for this study which is as important and timely as its more practice-orientated concerns. There is a body of literature on dirty work (Hughes, 1958; 1962) and emotional dirty work (McMurray and Ward, 2014). The latter is currently viewed as under-theorised (Mikkelsen, 2022). There also exists a rich body of literature on emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983; Ward et al., 2020; Ward and

McMurray, 2016), as well as an increasing interest in men and masculinity (Connell, 1995; Hearn, 2019; Hearn et al., 2023). A growing focus on social research into men's emotional lives (de Boise and Hearn, 2017) has revealed that men now have a more active understanding of their own emotional lives (Galinski, 2004; de Boise and Hearn, 2017), appear to be 'practising a more emotional form of masculinity' (Galinski, 2004; Roberts, 2025) and many are enacting a more caring masculinity (Scambor et al, 2014; Elliott, 2016). Despite this, there is very little literature that brings these sets of literature together, and particularly with reference to the police service, which is viewed as a very male-dominated occupation (Loftus, 2010; Buhrig, 2023), that values emotional repression (Workman-Stark, 2021). Frontline policing and specialisms such as firearms are viewed as a particularly male domains (Heidensohn, 2008; Westmarland, 2017). This study offers insight into this particular group of workers, ie frontline police officers, many of whom have specialist roles. This enables a greater understanding of other groups of workers who share the conditions and culture that exists within policing; i.e. other emergency service workers and military personnel. It also develops insights into the uncaring organisation, as perceived by the workers within it and the meanings they attribute to their work, and asks what it is about such an organisational culture that makes it so difficult for fathers to be caring, involved fathers?' and how can this understanding of their experience of emotional dirty work in a masculine culture contribute to the relevant literature on emotional dirty work?

The final aspect of the rationale for this study is a more personal one. I wanted to complete it because it is a subject I care about very deeply. It is an area of my life, and that of my family's and wider social network, in which I would like to use my role as a researcher, and my access to opportunities to be able to undertake and disseminate research findings and recommendations. In this sense, I want to make a difference to police officers' lives and those



of their colleagues, families and friends, by raising awareness of the issues facing officers and their families. I am the wife of a retired officer, the mother of a serving one and a friend to many families in which a parent is a police officer. I have witnessed the fatigue, stress, and burnout experienced by serving mothers and fathers in the police service, as well as the breakdowns of several police marriages as a result of fathers and mothers having to work long, anti-social hours detrimental to family life. Many partners of officers I have known over the past 30 years simply cannot cope with the constant worry and loneliness they experience being married to someone in this occupation or feel they cannot continue to support a partner suffering with long-term depression or PTSD caused by often constant exposure to traumatic incidents at work. In 2022 one of my closest friends was left widowed, with an 8-year-old child to bring up alone, after her husband committed suicide by shooting himself at his police station. Someone who felt unable to seek support from his organisation or colleagues for the mental health difficulties he was experiencing in the build-up to his death, he will be forever missed by his family and those who knew and cared about him. This was a preventable tragedy that no-one should have to go through.

### **How this study was completed**

With the above motivations in mind, this study adopted a critical case study design (Yin, 2009) so that an in-depth exploration of the lived experiences of father-carers in frontline police roles could be achieved. As a form of empirical enquiry, the case study allowed a phenomenon to be investigated in its 'real-life context' (Yin, 2009). In total, 27 participants were interviewed during their rest days, or sometimes just before or after a shift at work. This enabled them to reflect on and express their feelings about the impact of their work on them and their family

lives. Essentially, interviews took place at the intersection between work and home, in terms of both when and where they were carried out.

In-depth interviews were carried out with officers serving in two different constabularies (anonymised as C1 and C2) and the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS). The study focused on frontline officers who have experience of working in a variety of teams, including firearms, traffic, response, safer neighbourhoods, and criminal investigation. Non-visible support roles and non-police staff are excluded from this particular study as they are not considered to be 'frontline' roles for the purposes of this research. The participants shared, through their narratives, their experience of trying to be involved caregivers for their children (including those who, age-wise, are 'adult' children) and to make a positive contribution to their children's wellbeing whilst struggling to balance this with their frontline police work. They are regarded as 'experts' in this type of experience.

As an academic researcher I am an outsider to the world of the police, but as someone with close family relationships to and friendships with retired and serving officers, I found myself being considered by many of those who took part in the study as more of an 'insider'. This is despite not working in/for the police service (although ostensibly, it could be argued that over the many years in which my husband and now son have worked directly for the police, I have undertaken copious amounts of unpaid, and largely unrecognised emotion work and other forms of caring 'on behalf' of the organisation).

Access to the officers who took part was gained through gatekeepers (Reeves, 2010), who acted as essential mediators (Andoh-Arthur, 2019) between potential participants and me. Without

their help I doubt that the interviews could have been conducted, as police officers are (not surprisingly) naturally suspicious of people or are, at least, cautious about opening up (Asad, 2004; Fassin, 2013; O'Brien-Olinger 2016). The crucial role of gatekeepers is well documented by previous police researchers (Reeves, 2010; Yang, 2022). The recruitment window for interviews lasted nine months, from June 2021 to March 2022. Interviews took place face to face in cafes, at the participants' place of work (but in quiet spaces, to allow for privacy), in my own home/work office, or online via Zoom. Interview data collection resulted in over forty-five hours' worth of semi-structured interview data being gathered that I subjected to thematic and theoretical analysis. The next section introduces the thesis chapter by chapter.

### **Thesis structure**

Chapter One summarises and reviews current literature from a range of academic disciplines including management, policing, sociology, health, gender and family studies, to fully explore the concept of caregiving, involved fatherhood in men who are in paid employment, and particularly those in frontline protective services roles. It considers the diverse meanings of key terms and concepts used throughout the study, such as 'fatherhood', 'father', 'fathering', 'caregiving' and 'involved fatherhood'. It then chronicles the historical evolution of these concepts, charting significant changes in social discourse, politics and the economy that have shaped working fathers and their families from the late eighteenth century to the recent past. This was a period of history that began with rapid industrialisation in the UK and witnessed vast changes to the economy and the composition of working families.

This chapter then turns to what 'caregiving' and 'involved' fatherhood mean in contemporary society before considering what the literature tells us about the particular challenges faced by

caregiving, involved fathers in paid employment. Specific attention is paid to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on working fathers and their families because the data collection for this piece of research occurred at that time. Finally, Chapter One explores what is already known and what is not known about those who are or aspire to be caregiving, involved fathers on the frontlines of the UK Police Service, which provides the context and critical case study for this research. It discusses how they execute caring and protective activities at work and at home.

Having mapped out the conceptual framing of the research, and of the thesis, in the first chapter, Chapter Two establishes the empirical context of the study. First, a brief historical overview of the UK Police Service is given, tracing its origins as a protective service during the medieval period through to its status as a uniformed institution in the present. The discussion then turns to policing as an occupation, with consideration being given to what police work involves and what it means to be a serving police officer. The impact on the individual of performing this kind of work is considered here, i.e., by examining what it is like to work under the conditions of policing, with its particular demands, and within its distinctive culture. Links are then made between the individual experience of police officers and the possible impact on their family life and relationships at home, including those between father and child(ren). Attention then turns to the Covid-19 pandemic and the effects of this global crisis on the work and family lives of frontline officers. Finally, as this research is about men, i.e., fathers who work on the frontline of policing, this chapter explores masculinity within the police service and considers what it means to be a (cis)man within this type of institution.

In order to show how I have responded to the three Research Questions set out earlier, Chapter Three discusses my use of a theoretical framing that understands social relations through a

feminist ethics of care and relationality. In addition, I draw on theoretical ideas that understand caring as a process that involves grappling with ‘emotional dirt’. This chapter starts with a consideration of how we have arrived at a contemporary notion of a feminist ethics of care and gives an overview of what care means from this perspective. The origins and evolution of the concept of care are charted, starting with its early beginnings in Greek philosophy and the influences on care within Christianity. Discussion then turns to Heidegger’s writing on care, before consideration is given to feminist developments in the formulation of a relational care ethics made by Gilligan (1977, 1982) and in the subsequent work of Tronto (1993, 2010). Discussion then turns to some of the more contemporary ideas about an ethics of care, focusing on developments put forward about it by Chatzidakis et al. (2020). Writing as *The Care Collective*, in the wake of Covid-19, Chatzidakis et al. (2022: 41) called for an acknowledgement of individuals’ mutual interdependence, the valuing and sharing of care, and an expansion of caring kinship through what they term ‘promiscuous care’ (care beyond kinship, into all spheres of society). This term, and its relevance to this research, will be discussed later in this chapter. Finally, the recently published work of Lynne Segal is considered. In her book *Lean on Me: A Politics of Radical Care* (2023), Segal explores the concept of ‘radical care’. This means acknowledging that there are failures of care everywhere and at all levels, but also that we all need care in order to survive and flourish. Radical care involves registering and responding to the interconnections of carelessness wherever it is, building a more caring world beyond the immediate family and shoring up essential services to be able to support and nurture each other (Segal, 2023).

Attention is then given to theoretical ideas that conceptualise caring as dealing with ‘emotional dirt’, ideas that necessitate an understanding and framing of dirty work and taint as it relates to the protective services and masculinity. Consideration is given to how such ideas help us to

understand the emotional experiences of coping with dirt as well as how an overspill of emotional dirt into family life might be prevented or at least stemmed. This brings us, finally, to a discussion of the work of Jenna Ward, whose work on emotional labour and emotional dirty work is highly relevant in this context, and which is combined with insights from Lynne Segal's writing to develop a theoretical framing for the study.

Chapter Four outlines the methodological approach taken to the research. It explains and evaluates how it was designed in order to answer the Research Questions outlined above. It also explains how the approach taken was underpinned and framed using a feminist ethics of care, providing details of the research philosophy and the epistemological approach taken. It then describes how a critical case study of frontline police officers who are also caregiving fathers is an epistemic community ideally positioned to generate insight and knowledge for this research. Subsequently, the ontological framing is discussed, focusing specifically on how a social constructionist understanding of fatherhood, fathers and fathering foregrounds how these subject positions are something that people do rather than what they are. Fathering is understood as a social interactional process and as something that can be done in a caring way, rather than simply as a biological relationship that a man has with a child. This chapter outlines the methodology, methods of data collection and analysis used. A qualitative, narrative style of interviews was employed, to enable rich data that was intended to fully answer the Research Questions outlined above to be gathered. Finally, the chapter turns to reflexivity and research ethics, reflecting on some of the ethical challenges raised by the research, and explaining how these were responded to.

Chapter Five presents the findings of the research which were arrived at after following analytical use of Braun and Clarke's (2013) model of 'data analysis phases' (outlined in the previous chapter). Three key themes were developed from the data analysis and were connected together to create a coherent analytical narrative, as well as to focus on addressing all three Research Questions.

In Theme one 'The uncaring organisation', the analysis highlights how officers perceive an organisational lack of care for their physical and mental wellbeing and a lack of recognition and support for father-carers amongst its ranks.

Within the sub-theme 'They don't care for our bodies and minds' officers describe the physical and emotional damage they sustain through frontline policing. The Covid-19 pandemic was highlighted as a time when they realised the lack of organisational strategy for protecting them and their colleagues against viral infection and assault by the public. Officers described being aware of heightened levels of PTSD, suicide and emotional burnout amongst peers and ascribed this to relentless exposure to traumatic situations. Officers perceived an organisational disinterest in supporting, and inability to support, those with mental health issues. The sub-theme 'They don't care we are dads' exposes how many new and experienced father-carers feel that their needs and desires for caring are unrecognised and how they are made to feel guilt, reluctance and fear when asking for flexible working. Doing so has repercussions for their promotion prospects and creates tension with colleagues as they are perceived as receiving special treatment. Officers described how the hypermasculine, macho culture still expects mothers to shoulder the care-burden and dismisses and ridicules fathers who need to care for sick or vulnerable family members. Further, the analysis shows how there is an over-reliance

on haphazard support arrangements with exceptional managers, who appear to be very rare, who are doing the best they can within the context in which they are working, to provide minimal support to officers.

In Theme two 'Preventing emotional dirt overspill at home' the analysis emphasises that all the fathers interviewed had experienced multiple life changing events at work such as deaths and serious assaults. They described the need to display or hide emotions such as compassion, neutrality or aggression depending on the situation and many described their distorted view of humanity, good and evil. Methods used to prevent emotional dirt overspill into the home included 'downplaying'. This means that officers, when aware of the toxicity of their emotions, minimised their feelings, their role or the situations they encountered in order to protect their loved ones from worrying about them or from developing anxiety about their own safety. 'Avoiding triggers' reveals the huge array of situations that officers try to avoid in order to prevent suffering flashbacks and being propelled into a heightened negative emotional state. 'Partners as emotional anchors and protectors' describes the reliance on proactive and supportive partners who help officers to regulate their emotions, find coping strategies and use their own unpaid but highly valued and recognised (by their partners in this study) emotion work in the home to create order and peace amongst family members. 'Encouraging glimmers of hope and normality' speaks of officers' attempts to engage their children in everyday fun or normal, peaceful activities in an attempt to wash away work-related emotional dirt and to make efforts to build and sustain caring connections at home.

Theme three, 'Caring promiscuously' highlighted how officers care for others at work, inside and outside their teams, through making informal welfare checks, being a father figure to new



recruits, and being part of a work ‘family’. This is covered in sub-theme one, ‘caring at work’. In sub-theme two, ‘seeking care in different places’ officers reveal how they might form short- or long-term relationships and networks of care. They are cared about by friends who have knowledge or expertise to help them confront and defend themselves in the uncaring organisation. They engage with charities and events to meet caring individuals they term *people like me* with whom they share the same values. They might experience being part of a church family or a sports clubs to connect with and care for/be cared about by others there.

Chapter Six discusses the analytical themes that have emerged from the study with reference to the three main Research Questions:

- i) What does it mean to be a father-carer who wants to be involved, but who also works in a frontline protective service role?
  - ii) How do father-carers who are frontline protective service providers experience caregiving fatherhood?
- and
- iii) What could be the future conditions of possibility for frontline protective service workers who are, or aspire to be involved father-carers?

In returning to the three Research Questions in light of the findings, this chapter emphasises the key empirical, conceptual and theoretical contributions made to existing academic research by the study.

It is evident from the research that father-carers working as frontline police officers are not able to be as involved in their children's and families' lives as they wish and feel restricted in how they are able to care for their families, colleagues, and individuals within wider society. The reasons for this are predominantly due to occupational and organisational stressors, as well as the wider social, economic, and political landscape shaping these. Occupational and organisational level factors include shift working, extreme working, emotional dirt, the hegemonic culture of the organisation, a lack of organisational care for employees and their needs, poor leadership and management, and the combined impact of these factors on the individual and his family life. Wider social, economic, and political factors intersecting with these include a hegemonic gender landscape, austerity measures and successive government policies that preclude union membership, and which have cut policing budgets over recent decades. In combination, these factors mean that not simply caring promiscuously, but caring at all, is extremely difficult for police officers as frontline protective service workers.

In its Conclusion, the thesis will argue that a radical vision for a more caring police service is urgently needed, where the ill-effects of emotional dirty work on the individual and their ability to care for others is properly recognised. This radical vision would involve the police service working more urgently towards the provision of proper and adequate resources to prevent the risk of physical and emotional injury amongst new officers and towards alleviating the suffering of those already injured. Father-carers now and in the future would be fully supported to become the involved parents they desire to be. Mapping out the future conditions of possibility necessary to realise this vision, the Conclusion notes that key to shaping the police service of the future is the development of compassionate leadership skills, a more widespread use of the language of care, and the inclusion of narratives such as those given voice in this

research, which would allow stories of pain and loss to be shared, reflected on and learned from.

## **Chapter One: Understanding caregiving, involved fatherhood and fathers**

### **Introduction**

Many men in paid work aspire to be caregiving, actively involved fathers, want to share child-caring responsibilities with their partners and forge close and long-lasting emotional bonds with their children. However, their attempts to realise this form of fatherhood are often thwarted. After a short spell of time on paternity leave, many return to workplaces and cultures where the ideal worker norm prevails and involved fatherhood, with its associations of being preoccupied with family life, is neither welcomed nor valued. Those who persist in trying to combine the separate spheres of work and family experience forfeits such as mockery from colleagues and managers, and a lack of opportunities for promotion to name but two. In addition, some fathers work within organisational cultures where hegemonic masculinity is still the norm and where conformity to working long hours and refraining from showing emotions, for example, is demanded. Any other form of masculinity that stands in opposition to this, including the caring masculinity exhibited by a father who might wish to work more flexibly, is actively discouraged and penalised. Hegemonic masculinity is experienced quite vividly in the UK's frontline protective services, including the military, fire service and police service. The last-mentioned institution provides the context and critical case study for this research. Fathers working on the frontline of the UK Police Service can find themselves with little access to the space, resources or policies they need to support them in their fatherhood and caring responsibilities.

This Literature Review chapter sets out to assimilate and discuss relevant contemporary literature from diverse academic disciplines including management, policing, sociology, health, gender, family and social policy, to fully explore the concept of caregiving, involved fatherhood in men who are in paid employment and particularly those in frontline protective services roles. It is organised into five main sections, the first of which considers the diverse meanings of key terms and concepts used within this review and study in general, such as ‘fatherhood’, ‘father’, ‘fathering’, ‘caregiving’ and ‘involved fatherhood’. The second section chronicles the historical evolution of these concepts. It charts significant changes in social discourse, politics and the economy that have shaped working fathers and their families from the late eighteenth century to the recent past; a period that began with rapid industrialisation and saw enormous changes to the economy and the composition of working families. Discussion then turns, in the third section, to what ‘caregiving’ and ‘involved’ fatherhood mean in contemporary society. The fourth section unearths what the literature reveals about the particular challenges facing caregiving, involved fathers in paid employment, with a subsection dedicated to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on working fathers and their families, as the interviews for this piece of research took place during that time period.

The fifth and final section of this literature review explores what is already known and what is not known about aspirant caregiving and involved fathers who work on the frontlines of the UK Police Service, which offers the context and critical case study for this research. It discusses their motivations for joining and staying in their policing roles and how they undertake their caring for others through both caring and protective activities at work and at home.

First, the meaning of key terms used in this research will be briefly explored, to explain how they are used and understood within this study.

### **Meaning of key terms as used in this thesis:**

#### ***Fatherhood***

‘Fatherhood (is) a cultural institution and a social role, fathering ... part of the life course of most men and fathers ...actors and emotional, embodied individuals’ (King, 2015: 6).

As can be seen from the above quote, ‘fatherhood’ is considered to be a cultural institution and a social role. It includes the rights, duties and responsibilities associated with being a father, and also the general ideologies and public meanings attributed to the status of being one. Hearn (2002: 245) also states that fatherhood should be understood as an institution, but also one that is constructed historically ‘as a form of certain men’s power’, thereby making it explicitly about gender and power. Fatherhood, as a social construct, is enmeshed with masculinity and how that is constructed socially, how it is understood and how, according to Rohner and Veneziano (2001) it cannot be separated from masculinity.

As an institution, fatherhood is certainly complex, and as an ideological construction it has been ‘continuously negotiated and reconstructed’ (Petroski and Edley, 2006) and will continue to be subject to this in the future. Fatherhood is also context-sensitive (Johansson, 2023). In order to gain fuller understanding of it, specific information needs to be gained about national culture and norms that surround it, and the social policies and workplace conditions and support that might have an impact on it.

### ***Fathering***

Fathering refers to the behaviours of fathers, to the paternal practices related to the care of a child (Bosoni and Mazzucchelli, 2019), and the skills a father learns that contribute to part of the experience of being a father. As part of the life course of most men, fathering is also understood through and shaped by cultural, political and economic contexts (Duckworth and Buzzanell, 2009). What constitutes a good father, or what is expected of one, can change with time and is context specific. For example, different national cultures have different ideals or expectations of fathers and their fathering practices, and what is seen as good or bad might even depend on individual families. Fathering activities, such as spending time with children, forming close emotional bonds with them and so on, are all affected by changes to cultures and contexts, (Latshaw, 2011), by social policies that might encourage or discourage certain types of fathering, and the father's work environment with its structures and policies that can help or hinder fathering activities.

### ***Father***

The term 'father' describes the biological or social relationship between a particular man and a particular child or children, i.e. it describes the state of being a male parent. It is interesting to note that a simple search for the word 'father' in the Collins Dictionary (2023) reveals that a father can be 'any male acting in a paternal capacity'. This contemporary definition embraces the diversity of configurations seen within modern families, where a father might care for a child or children who are not biologically his.

### *Involved, caregiving fathers*

Involved, caregiving fathers, for the purposes of this study, are those who self-identity as taking an active role in parenting (Kelland, 2022), and who are explicitly involved in the care of their children, such as playing with them, washing them and reading to them (Cohen-Bendahan et al., 2015). They also want to forge close emotional bonds with them throughout their life course, regardless of their profession, work conditions or contracts, family configuration, or social class. *Involved* fatherhood is used interchangeably with *caregiving* fatherhood in this research. This is because many of the fathers interviewed were more comfortable speaking about being ‘involved’ than being ‘caregivers’. For them, the term ‘caregiving’ implied that they were ‘carers’ in the sense that they had to take time off work to be physically present with their children, and many acknowledged and felt that their wives did more of the caregiving than they did. Being an involved father, who actively cares for his children, was a description that the participants felt was a more accurate reflection of them or reflected an identity they aspired to have.

Unsurprisingly, ‘involved fatherhood’ is a term that remains difficult to define in the literature as it complex and context specific. According to Dermott (2008) it is about men and women being equally involved in the spheres of paid work and home life, whereas Gatrell (2007) asserts that ‘involved fathers’ are those who do more than have fun with their children and engage with practical tasks such as feeding and bathing them. Gatrell’s definition is somewhat apt for the purposes of describing what involved fathers do, but still does not capture the entirety of it, for this study at least. Most of the participants acknowledged that their partners did much more of the day-to-day caring for children and did not describe themselves as equally involved. They did however describe having more involvement than just having fun with their



children or providing practical care of their young children. They also spoke about giving ongoing emotional support to their growing children through various life-stages. This included using their own knowledge and experience of mental health issues to support and guide teenaged children who were experiencing depression for example. They also showed care by physically protecting their families from the Covid-19 virus where possible and encouraged their children to do well at school despite school closures in lockdowns, thereby attending to their educational needs. They coached their older children through selection processes for their first and subsequent jobs and provided a safe space for their adult children to come home and talk about relationship issues even when the children had become married adults. None of the definitions in the literature on involved fatherhood seems to fully capture the range of behaviours and skills employed by fathers, and nor does the literature adequately discuss what involvement looks like over the whole life-course of being a father. Bailey (2010: 1) suggests that the involved father is 'emotionally accessible' to his children, in addition to sharing the care of them. Perhaps Behsin and Robbins' (2016) description most closely relates to this particular study however, in that they view involved fathers as attending to the 'behavioural, emotional/psychological, social and cognitive/academic development of their children'.

It is clear from the range of opinions about the meanings of fatherhood, fathering, fathers, caregiving and involvement that these are highly ambiguous and multi-layered terms, with increasing plurality of practices across the world and in the UK, which is the specific context for this particular study. It is however, widely agreed that men increasingly want to be more involved in family life (Abendroth and Pausch, 2018; Pedulla and Thébaud (2015) and that a more ideal, gender-equal form of parenthood and fatherhood is emerging or is at least aspired to in the UK (Faircloth, 2021).

It is important to consider how fatherhood has been constructed in the past, and how it has evolved over time. It is, after all, 'fundamental to understanding human experience' according to Griswold (1999: 251). Everyone experiences what it is like to have a father or has felt the absence of one. Many men's identities and life-experiences are shaped by fatherhood as most have children of their own or fulfil a parenting position within other children's lives. The next section moves us to a position of better understanding some of the significant changes that have shaped fatherhood and working fathers' care and involvement in family life from the mid-late eighteenth century to the recent past, with a focus on the UK.

### **The evolution of fatherhood, fathering and fathers – a brief historical overview.**

Academic literature tends towards agreement that parenthood and fatherhood have changed over the past 150 years (Pleck and Pleck, 1997; Burnett et al., 2010; Kelland, 2022). This section discusses these changes, in the context of the UK starting from the emergence of industrialisation in the mid-to-late eighteenth century, in order to give a more detailed understanding of the origin and prevalence of traditional norms, but also to go some way to understand the complexity of contemporary fatherhood, and fathers as multidimensional, emotional individuals.

Family life in the mid-to-late eighteenth century and into the early nineteenth century was characterised by patriarchy. A father was viewed as holding a position of ultimate power over and responsibility for all family members. In addition, he played the role of 'protector and educator' as well as 'moral overseer' (Broughton and Rogers, 2007; Bailey, 2010).

With the onset of the Industrial Revolution in the mid nineteenth century, many fathers began working away from the home to gain paid work, thus becoming ‘distant breadwinners’ and were deemed to be a ‘good father’ for economic provision rather than for moral leadership of the family. (Allard et al., 2011; Burnett et al., 2010; 2013). Mothers tended to remain within the home and, in the absence of the father, took on more of the authority, power and responsibility in the parent-child relationship that had traditionally been associated with the father’s role. Eventually the mother’s role became one of having ultimate responsibility for the home, which by this time was seen as a separate sphere to work (Allard, 2011; Hughes, 2015).

The First World War (1914-1918), saw an absence of men of working age, since many were away and/or killed fighting in the war, with the resultant need for much greater female participation in Britain’s labour market (McCalman, 1971; Light, 1999). Once the war was over, most women returned to their homes and men to the workplace. The Great Depression of the late 1920s and early 1930s and resultant mass unemployment of men made it difficult for many of them to fulfil the role of provider. The upsurge in the number of women prepared to work to make ends meet was evident (Bland, 2005). The inter-war period saw a shift in men’s involvement in the life of their families, where shared decision-making between parents became more common (Davis and King, 2018), including discussions about birth control, which was increasingly approached as a joint problem for the couple in a relationship (Szreter and Fisher, 2010).

The Second World War (1939-1945) saw women carrying out the work traditionally performed by men, but this participation declined when the men, with a sizeable reduction in numbers, returned from fighting in the war. After the war there was a renewed interest in fatherhood and

this period witnessed the emergence of a ‘family-orientated’ masculinity (King, 2013: 5), with men often depicted as enjoying normal peacetime life within a family setting and being loving and attentive fathers. Despite this new kind of masculinity emerging, a mixed picture of fatherhood remained. Division of labour in the home was still unequal (Fogarty et al., 1971) for example and some fathers behaved in distant and neglectful ways (Bourke, 1994).

In the 1950s and 1960s the theory of structural functionalism posited that the nuclear family was one of several social systems needed to ‘adapt to a changing environment and uphold societal stability and order’ (Johansson, 2023: 50). The main expectation of the family was to reproduce, instil a set of norms and values and ensure that children were socialised into society properly, and girls and boys into their respective gender roles. According to Parson and Bales (1955) mothers and fathers also fulfilled separate, clearly differentiated roles. It was believed that women were more natural carers of infants than men, with an expertise and maternal instinct that was inherent and due to biological differences between the sexes (Davis and King, 2018). The cultural ideal and norm was of the female carer/homemaker and male psychologically distant breadwinner who provided for the family and left any emotional, nurturing and expressive tasks to the mother. Men’s involvement in the home was merely considered as helping their partner rather than sharing tasks equally, and good parents abided by the role distinctions, ensuring that children always had a mother at home and a provider father in paid employment outside it (Davis and King, 2018).

Whilst men had been responsible for contraception until around the beginning of the 1960s, the contraceptive pill was to become widely available shortly thereafter and women started to gain more autonomy over birth control and family size (Szreter and Fisher, 2010). Pregnancy

was still framed as an issue for women to deal with, men were not welcomed at antenatal classes (Davis and King, 2018) or at the birth of their children at home or in hospital. Towards the end of the 1960s it became more commonplace for fathers to attend hospital, at least whilst mothers were in labour, and from the 1970s onwards fathers were expected to be at their children's births. Fathers were becoming recognised as being more involved in raising their children and encouraged to do so as a result of welfare policy (Perrons, 2009).

Household division of labour (which had begun to change in the 1950s) and gathered pace into the late 1970s, was due in some part to women's greater ability to control the number of children they gave birth to, as previously mentioned. The Abortion Act (1967) and aforementioned availability of the contraceptive pill were key to this, but the rise of the feminist movement was one of the most significant events in the 1960s, 1970s and beyond. Many couples tried to share an equal role in childcare and breadwinning despite the unequal treatment of women in the labour market, with women often earning less than men for the same job (Davis and King, 2018). Changes in legislation such as the Equal Pay Act (1970) and Sex Discrimination Act (1975) afforded women more rights at work. A corresponding shift away from manufacturing in the UK, and towards service work and knowledge work, offered some flexibility in hours and contract types, making it easier and more attractive for women to work whilst raising a family. By the end of the 1970s, one in six women had returned to work within six months of having their first baby (Davis and King, 2018). As a result of these shifts, the concept of the male breadwinner became less prevalent (Brannen and Nilsen, 2006).

Despite an emphasis in the 1970s on the mother-child relationship, there was a wish to hear and understand paternal accounts of family life among researchers, which spawned a variety

of research projects into fatherhood (Lamb and Lamb, 1976; Lamb 1976; Lewis and Pleck, 1979). For some social researchers, the 1970s and 1980s were viewed as a time when a significant shift towards fatherhood occurred (Jackson, 1983; McKee and O'Brien, 1982). For others however, a more sceptical opinion about fatherhood involvement was formed, where women remained primary carers in the domestic sphere (Lewis, 1979).

The 1980s saw a further increase in dual-income families, with implications for the division of labour and caregiving in the home (ONS, 2011). Data about the subsequent recession of the 1990s revealed that male economic inactivity rates were higher than for females (ONS, 2011). According to Woollett et al. (1982) over 70 percent of births were attended by fathers in 1981, compared with fewer than 10 percent of births in the 1950s, a phenomenon indicative of greater male involvement in family matters and the wish or insistence of women to encourage their presence (O'Brien, 1982). By the end of the 1990s about 90 percent of fathers attended the birth of their children (King, 2017), indicative of their shared involvement and understanding of their significance in family life. Indeed the UK policy agenda reflected an even greater desire for involvement of fathers through the introduction of legislative changes, including stand-alone rights to paternity leave in 2003.

In the decade from 1988 to 1998 the employment rate for women with children aged under five years increased to 50 percent from 36 percent (Davis and King, 2018). By the end of the 1990s about 90 percent of fathers attended the birth of their children (King, 2017), indicative of their shared involvement and understanding of their significance to family life.

The financial crisis of 2007-2008 was a time when many support services for working families were at risk under the Conservative-led Coalition. Davis (2013) suggested this was an attempt by the Coalition government to combine Conservative values such as promoting the private family unit, with initiatives of the Liberal Democrats to promote gender equality.

The Children and Families Act (2014) gave male and female employees the right, depending on service, to request flexible working. Then one year later, in 2015, Shared Parental Leave (SPL) was introduced, which allowed working parents to share the leave that accrues following the birth or adoption of a child. This was aimed at facilitating both parents to combine caregiving with paid employment (Eikhof, 2012) and a step towards reducing the barriers facing women in the workplace (Kelland, 2022). However, the take up of SPL was and still is exceptionally low according to Howlett (2022), which is attributed to lack of clarity about SPL, adverse financial implications for parents who use it, feelings of maternal guilt resulting from leaving a baby to go back to work, and mothers not wanting to give up or share leave (Mercer, 2017), as well as the prevalence of gender role stereotypes (Hacohen et al., 2018).

At the time of writing (October 2023), the UK's parental leave system is viewed as not keeping pace with shifting norms about gendered parenting (Franklin, 2023). It is difficult for fathers to afford to take a significant amount of leave following the birth of their children, and this is seen as 'perpetuating gender inequalities in the labour market which damages women's careers, long term earnings and the UK economy' as well as impairing the UK's ability to 'compete with international peers' (Franklin, 2023: 3). Currently there is a petition calling for the UK Government to make a change to parental leave and pay, to give employed fathers/second parents two weeks' paternity leave, as well as four weeks' non-transferable parental leave paid

at 90 percent, in the baby's first year (Petitions, UK Government and Parliament, 2023). According to Davies (2023: 2), 'longer, better-paid leave for fathers should help support greater gender equality in the labour market.' He was referring to OECD data pertaining to twelve countries that already offer more than six weeks of paid leave to fathers, stating they have 'smaller gender pay and labour force participation gaps' (Davis, 2023: 3).

This section has chronicled the historical evolution of the role of fathers in the family by focusing on the intersection between paid work and family life from the mid-late eighteenth century up to the recent past, highlighting how women's increased contribution to the labour market, new legislation, and the changing nature of industry prompted a decline in the prevalence of the breadwinner model for fathers. It has also shown how fathers who cared about, and cared for, their children, as well as forming close emotional bonds with them, can be found throughout this period in Britain, regardless of their social and economic circumstances. It is evident from the literature on the history of fatherhood that the nature and meanings attributed to it have changed, but an attempt has been made in this section to avoid over-simplifying the changes or implying that *all* fathers have somehow moved seamlessly from single roles as disciplinarians or absent breadwinners to a more emotionally engaged and involved role over the past 150 years.

The next section discusses how the contemporary role of the 'good father' aligns with active, involved caregiving rather than relying on breadwinning or being a good provider, and how ongoing shifts in the composition of the labour market continue to shape fatherhood.



### **Contemporary caregiving, involved fathers and fatherhood**

Contemporary working parents are seen as moving towards a position of ever-greater equality at work and at home than their historical counterparts (Moran and Koslowski, 2019; Taylor and Scott, 2018). More active involvement with the care of children is widely considered to be just as important as being a good provider, if not more so (Podnieks, 2016), and this type of father, who is attentive and ‘emotionally close to their children’ (Kelland, 2022: 32) seems to be increasing in prevalence (Solomon, 2014). Mothers are continuing to contribute to the labour market in increasing numbers (Henz, 2017) and according to ONS (2022) data, three out of four mothers with dependent children now work in the UK, which is the highest level over the past twenty years. Additionally, in families where both parents are employed, it has become increasingly common for mother and father to work full-time instead of the father working full-time and the mother working part-time. This is often because of the shifts in cost of living and economic need for both parents to be engaged in full-time paid work. Many modern fathers are now expected to use flexible working practices to be able to mediate between family and paid employment effectively (Burnett et al., 2013).

Many fathers also appear to want to reject traditional, gendered views of their primary role as a lead-breadwinner, imagining a fuller relationship with their children than previous generations (Pew Research Center, 2019) and want to take a more egalitarian role in caring for their children (Kelland et al., 2022). Modern fathers are more emotionally invested and practically involved in their children’s lives (Burnett et al., 2013; Settersten and Cancel-Tirado, 2010), with a concomitant shift to a public discourse of ‘involved fatherhood’.

What then are the benefits of being an involved father, and who benefits? This is well documented in relevant literature. Involved fathers can: contribute towards family welfare and economic wellbeing, support mothers' prenatal and postnatal health, help to improve children's educational outcomes and reduce adolescent behavioural risks (Cano et al., 2019; Yogman et al., 2016). According to Chung (2022), children with involved fathers benefit in terms of socio-emotional development, lifelong opportunities and improved health over the long term. In addition, there is increasing evidence to suggest that men themselves can benefit from involved fatherhood, in terms of experiencing improved psychological and physical health outcomes and being able to develop new capacities as employees (Grau-Grau, 2017). They enjoy stronger family ties as an effect of being more emotionally and practically involved at home, tending to increase their participation in civic organisations such as churches and sports clubs, and experiencing greater longevity due to a corresponding reduction in risky behaviours (substance abuse and criminal activity as examples) when they commit to being actively involved fathers (Eggebeen et al., 2013).

In the UK, a neo-liberal economic system is in operation with an 'influential and dominant new middle class' (Johansson, 2023: 56). It has been suggested that middle-class families strive to improve the quality of life of all of their members and encourage unique experiences for them to enjoy. Children are viewed in some respects as being able to provide their parents with unmissable experiences too (Reckwitz, 2022). Unmissable experiences for parents might be milestones such as birthdays, a baby taking his/her first steps, or special occasions such as Christmas, watching a child perform in a school play or leave home to go to university. I would argue that it is not just middle-class families who try to improve the quality of life of family members, but most families in general, regardless of class. This has been evident from the

findings of empirical research into involved fathers during the Covid-19 pandemic (Burgess and Goldman, 2021) which is discussed in more depth in a later section of this chapter.

Despite the intention of families to enjoy experiences together and the awareness that involved fathers bring benefits to others and themselves, it is still difficult for many families to achieve this ideal. Traditional gender stereotypes of fathers and masculine identity remain rooted in breadwinning (Powell, 2019; Williams et al., 2016) which causes inevitable conflict with expectations of greater care and involvement (Braun, 2011) and raises questions around inequality of caregiving in the home (Kelland et al., 2022). As a result, even the most well-intentioned new father, keen to form an emotional bond with his child, or intent on sharing the workload at home equally with his partner, or keen to attend the unmissable experiences described above, can find himself pressured to concentrate on earning money once he returns to work from statutory paternity leave (Miller, 2011). In addition to gender norms and expectations, the norms and culture of organisations can prevent fathers from realising their aspirations of involvement. Many organisations actively discourage or penalise fathers who want to engage in a caring role outside of work (Reimer, 2015; Tanquerel and Grau-Grau 2020). This results in conflict and compromise for the caring father; he loses out at work by maintaining a caring role outside it or loses out on involvement with his children by conforming to ideal worker, breadwinner expectations. Much of the existing research into father's involvement in caregiving is quantitative in that it considers how much time they spend with their children. In addition, the literature considers the extent to which fathers in paid work should or could contest these norms and the challenges facing fathers who go against deeply ingrained notions of masculinity in the workplace, but there is very little known about how fathers in paid work struggle with these issues or how they struggle with notion of masculinity

and caring masculinity within specific work domains. This is examined in more detail in the next section.

### **The challenges facing father-carers in paid work in Britain**

This section draws upon key literature as well as recent data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and Working Families and the House of Commons Select Committees. Research on fatherhood and employment has been developing rapidly since the late 1980s (Greenhaus and Powell, 2017), originating mainly in the discipline of organisational psychology. The focus has tended to be on dual-income families in professional or white-collar roles, favouring quantitative over qualitative research (Philip, 2014). Despite the growth in interest in the fatherhood-work intersection over the past few decades, academic conversations about work and parenting have, until fairly recently, focused on motherhood (Grandey et al., 2020). Such research has centred on the mother's own experience of organisational barriers (Chang et al., 2014; Ladge and Greenberg, 2015) and her ensuing struggles associated with identity and image (Ladge et al., 2018) as well as the outcomes for her of trying to combine pregnancy/motherhood with work (Hackney et al., 2021). Many questions about fathers' experiences of combining paid work with fatherhood remain unexplored (Stovell et al., 2017; Gatrell et al., 2022). Whilst there has been research over the past decade into fathers' experiences in various contexts, including low-income fathers (Bathelemy and Coakley, 2017; Rebello, 2019), black fathers (Allen, 2016), millennials (Alsop, 2017), Nordic fathers (Farstad and Stefansen (2015) lone fathers (Schaefer, 2020), and stay-at-home fathers (Stevens, 2015), there remains a paucity of research into the experiences of fathers in specific work contexts. Rather, employed fathers have tended to be represented in a restricted way in research, as a homogenous group, which can lead to poor understanding of their exclusion from policies and

resources and can diminish paternal opportunities for work-life balance (Gatrell et al., 2022). By exploring fathers in protective frontline roles, this research aims to provide a detailed and context-specific study of working fathers and how they experience fatherhood, which will go some way to fill the gap in knowledge, but first, attention will be given to barriers to involved fatherhood more generally.

It has been an enduring expectation of organisations that male workers perform the role of the ideal worker, who is unencumbered by outside distractions such as family life (Acker, 1990). Where men contest this norm, by seeking to be more involved fathers for instance, they can experience workplace stigma (Humberd et al., 2015) and repercussions, in the form of lack of opportunities for progression or marginalisation (Holter, 2007). Tanquerel and Grau-Grau (2020) argued that working fathers broadly fall into one of three categories: conformers (those who place paid work as central to their lives, with fatherhood not interfering with it), borderers (those who pursue invisible and/or informal strategies at work to avoid conflict with their fatherhood aspirations), and deviants (those who practise a caring masculinity and make their father-status evident at work through flexible working, and/or reduced hours for instance).

The barriers to greater involvement of fathers in their children's lives have been well documented in the literature for about the past decade. Burnett et al. (2013: 52) for example described working fathers as 'ghosts in the organizational machine' in their empirical research, revealing how fatherhood goes largely unrecognised in the workplace, and how flexible working policies that might support parents are aimed primarily at mothers instead of fathers. There also exists a lack of organisational understanding of fathers' needs which 'reduces paternity to a troublesome process' for fathers and employees to navigate, according to Crespi

and Ruspini, (2015: 354). The uptake of working arrangements that would enable more caregiving by fathers, including Shared Paternity Leave (SPL) remains low in the UK (Powell, 2021) which comes as no surprise (Mercer, 2017). This shows that shifts in levels of the involvement of fathers are not reflected in their day to day working lives, especially with regard to flexible working. ACAS (the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service that works with employers and employees to improve workplace relationships) have suggested that fathers are not as aware as mothers about the flexible options available to them (Mercer, 2017) and may even conceal any work-life conflict they experience, rather than admit to it. In addition they may be afraid to ask for flexible working (Mercer, 2017) for fear of being viewed as uncommitted or lazy. This is not the case in some other countries, however. Managers have been found to be more supportive of fathers in Scandinavian countries for example, and in Finland, a specific case in point, paternal work-life balance is encouraged through the use of parental leave (Kangas and Lamsa, 2020).

The role of line managers as mediators between fathers and the organisation has also been explored in the literature, with supportive and sympathetic line managers enabling fathers to combine their roles of committed worker and involved father (Ladge et al., 2015). Conversely, unsupportive or unsympathetic line managers might deny a father the opportunity to work from home or leave early to pick up his children or believe that family-friendly policies are designed solely for mothers (Gatrell et al., 2015; Tracy and Rivera, 2010) and are described as ‘detrimental to the pursuit of involved fatherhood’ (Atkinson, 2022: 848). The role of line managers in supporting or preventing involved fatherhood cannot therefore be understated.

Norms around what men should or should not do, and how they should or should not behave can also serve as barriers to involved fatherhood. Whilst cultural norms around masculinity are evolving in some countries, including the UK, hegemonic masculinity is still the predominant construct, with other forms of masculinity viewed as subordinate to it (Connell, 2005). The central depictions of traditional hegemonic masculinity are emotional distance, stoicism, aggression and independence (Eisen and Yamashita, 2017). By contrast, caring masculinity embodies a rejection of these hegemonic behaviours, favouring instead a valuing of care, interdependence and relationality (Elliott, 2016). Fathers with caring responsibilities or aspirations to care might feel inhibited, reluctant or prevented from realising this in a public setting such as their workplace, especially as they risk being marginalised or ‘othered’ for doing so (Schwalbe et al., 2000) and can suffer what Kelland (2022) terms ‘fatherhood forfeits’, which include being less likely to have a role at work that they can combine with caregiving, or less likely to enjoy a positive workplace experience if they have, or seek to obtain, a caregiving role. Such caregiving fathers can also experience mockery and be perceived as idle or ‘viewed with suspicion’ by colleagues (Kelland et al., 2022).

### **The Covid-19 pandemic and caregiving, involved working fathers**

This sub-section briefly explores the literature that might explain how the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdowns affected working fathers, their caregiving activities and involvement in their children’s lives in Britain.

When Britain went into lockdown on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020, most working people were forced to isolate and work from home to avoid spreading the Covid-19 virus. All over the UK (and the rest of the World of course), schools were closed and children needed to be home-schooled.

The elderly and high-risk groups needed more help than usual with routine tasks such as shopping or picking up prescriptions, for example. In short, care needs increased and therefore more unpaid caregiving was required. According to the Institute for Fiscal Studies (2020), during that first lockdown of March 2020, fathers' time spent on childcare increased from about four to eight hours per day. In comparison, mothers' time increased from about seven to just over ten hours per day. The extra time was spent by both parents on caring for children, helping them with homework and learning more widely, and doing housework, according to a study carried out by Burgess and Goldman (2021). Father participants, who numbered 2,027 in this study, and came from all socio-economic groups, reported an increased insight into the caring role normally performed by their partner, said they felt more able to help their children learn and had become 'more aware of the importance of dads spending time with their children' as a result of the lockdown and isolating at home. (Burgess and Goldman, 2021: 2). In addition, according to the same study, fathers who reported a better father-child relationship reported better mental health in themselves during subsequent lockdowns. Multiple other studies carried out during the pandemic found that fathers hoped to be able to make future permanent changes to their working and family lives, through seeking a reduction in working hours as a way to increase the time spent with their families. (Chung et al., 2020; Clayton et al., 2020; Kelland et al., 2020).

The pandemic created an opportunity for many men to become more involved in not just caring about others, but taking care of others, which, according to Tronto's typology (1998) is described as the third meaning of care (caregiving). For fathers this involved taking care of their own children and partners primarily, but also other members of society such as elderly neighbours and friends. According to Margaria (2021) this involvement in caring activities during the pandemic enabled men to display a more caring masculinity than before.



This section has explored the particular challenges facing father-carers who are in paid work, with some attention given to their caregiving during the Covid-19 pandemic. The challenges are varied, but it is widely agreed in the literature that workplace constraints have been instrumental in frustrating fathers' attempts to be the kinds of involved fathers they want to be. In the next section, discussion focuses on what the literature can tell us about individuals' motivations for joining and staying in the UK Police Service. Consideration is then given to the challenges facing father-carers in organisations with hyper-masculine, male-dominated cultures such as the UK Police Service, as this must surely be a very challenging environment for the aspirant involved father.

### **Motivations for joining and staying in the UK Police Service**

According to a recent study, there is a worldwide police retention crisis (Drew et al. 2024), resulting in 'a bleeding of ...talent that must be quelled' (Wilson et al. 2023). If it is so difficult to keep officers in the job, why are they attracted to it in the first place and why do some stay in it? More specifically, what is the appeal of becoming and remaining a police officer, when the role is widely considered to be hazardous, unpredictable, highly stressful and exhausting (Brandl and Strohine, 2003; Syed et al. 2020; Drew and Martin, 2023)?

Reasons for entering this line of work have been investigated in previous studies, including in developing and developed countries (UK included). Elntib and Milincic (2020) for example, highlighted factors such as job availability, benefits and altruism. Of particular attraction is the opportunity for early retirement and a sizeable pension; benefits that are not commonly found in many other occupations (Violanti, 1990). This is a role that offers opportunities for building expertise and experience that can be used in another career after retiring at a relatively young age (Raganella and White, 2004).

This notion of being motivated by the desire to help others is supported by Chu (2018), who also found that many view the policing profession as prestigious. Police work has long been associated with offering security, power and status (Lester, 1983), with attractive promotion opportunities (Gau et al. 2013). For younger officers especially, the role is seen as exciting (Ragnella and White, 2004), where no two days are the same and where responding to emergencies involving members of the public keeps the job interesting (Carroll, 2023).

In a more recent report written for Lancashire Constabulary about new police recruits (Millie and Hirschler, 2018), a dominant reason given for joining the service was a desire to help people, with the profession seen as a caring one. This type of motivation can be associated with early life experiences, such as being raised in areas with high crime rates and wanting to *be* different (to criminals) and also *make* a difference to the lives of others. (Millie and Hirschler, 2018).

There are certain factors that are negatively associated with attrition of police officers, i.e. factors that can help to keep officers in their roles and reduce turnover. These factors include an organisational focus on the wellness of officers (Hilal and Litsey, 2020), high levels of trust in managers (Gächter et al. 2013) and support given to officers in the workplace (Gonzalez and Perez-Floriano, 2015). In another study, employee commitment and perceived opportunities, along with intrinsic motivation, satisfaction with the job and perceptions of group cohesiveness have all helped to reduce attrition (Jaramillo et al, 2005). Ramshaw (2013) found that it is not just the rewards of vertical promotion that keep officers in the role, but that horizontal moves to community-support roles (i.e. Safer Neighbourhood Policing in the UK) can increase the likelihood of officers remaining. Enjoying autonomy to make decisions in unpredictable situations (Hilal and Litsey, 2020; Muir, 2019), problem solving and having a sense of ownership over duties performed at work can all bring professional satisfaction (Muir, 2019).

In sum, policing can be said to be rewarding work for individuals, for the many reasons outlined above. This is important to mention here, because a fundamental contribution of the work of Ward and McMurray (2016) is that emotional dirty work is also rewarding for the individual. Emotional dirty work and its prevalence within policing is discussed in detail in Chapter Two Theoretical Framing and Chapter Three Context of this thesis, respectively.

### **Aspirant caring, involved fathers on the frontline of UK policing – what is stopping them?**

This section explores the way in which existing literature offers an explanation for the particular challenges facing fathers in a frontline protective service role, such as those within the UK Police Service. These types of fathers have to demonstrate caregiving at work and at home. They show they *care about* and take *care of* victims of crime, and members of their team who depend on them for protection and personal safety. This is in addition to being caregiving fathers within their own families. How is this managed though? And what are the most salient conditions and aspects of culture within a frontline protective service such as the Police Service that might present challenges for fathers with caring aspirations outside of work? The next section aims to reveal the answers to that question by exploring relevant literature on hegemonic and protective masculinities, policing, gender and fatherhood.

### **Caregiving fatherhood in a culture of hegemonic masculinity**

Hegemonic masculinity is viewed as a traditional form of masculinity marked by ‘stoicism, competitiveness, dominance and aggression’ which is generally viewed as harmful and damaging to others because of its tendency towards misogyny, homophobia and racism for example, and damaging to those who subscribe to such gendered constructs because of heightened risks of physical injuries and an inability to express emotions. (Pappas, 2019).

Police services across the UK have claimed that a macho culture and gender stereotypes have disappeared and that gender parity exists across roles (British Association for Women in Policing, 2019; Metropolitan Police Service, 2020). However, this is not the case according to The Casey Review and the MacPherson Report, both of which are discussed in detail in the next chapter, Context. In addition to these reports, sociologists have focused on the unique challenges facing women who try to progress through the ranks, drawing the conclusion that the prevailing culture is indeed characterised by hegemonic masculinity (Loftus, 2009; Silvestri, 2017, 2018; Brown et al., 2019) or machismo (Alexander and Charman, 2023). This masculine culture can put pressure on all officers, whether male or female, parent or not, to conform to the macho stereotype, which according to Cochran and Bromley (2003) entails valuing the physical aspects of the job and crime fighting, rather than feminine aspects of it such as looking after victims. Another aspect of machismo in the policing culture is apparent in how officers are expected to show total job commitment and ambition, and female officers should accept that motherhood ‘may be incompatible’ with police work (Silvestri, 2006: 277). There are, as of yet, no studies that discuss involved fatherhood in the UK Police Service explicitly. It can be inferred though, by being attentive to the work of Silvestri and other sociologists mentioned earlier, that men who show a desire to be involved caregiving fathers could be viewed as showing a lack of job commitment and lack of ambition that are both incompatible with macho norms. In addition, as was discussed in the section above on the challenges facing working fathers, men who seek opportunities to work flexibly to care for others can expect ‘fatherhood forfeits’, mockery and being perceived as idle according to what was discussed earlier in relation to the findings of Kelland’s (2022) work.

It is pertinent to turn now to the detail and context of the research I have undertaken. The father participants in this study all work in frontline roles, which include being part of Response, Safer Neighbourhoods, Traffic and Firearms teams. It is important to set this out here, as the last-mentioned role is considered to be particularly ‘masculine’ (Cain, 2011), where officers are armed, usually male, and are expected to conform to gender norms. For example, men in frontline roles have been found to be aggressive and ambitious (Eagly and Karau, 2002). When working in such a role, it is particularly difficult to balance shift work with family life, and it is expected that officers will work long hours with no clear end to them. It is therefore fairly typical for them to not take primary responsibility for childcare and not to work in a part-time capacity. According to Silvestri (2006) there is an expectation of ‘the doing and managing of time’ in the police service, i.e. the culture rewards those who work excessive hours and those who serve their time are seen as showing organisational commitment and credibility in the eyes of colleagues and managers. Conversely, those who seek to work part-time or flexibly to take care of children can be perceived as ‘part-able, part-committed and part-credible’ (Silvestri, 2006: 274). Additionally, if they resist the dominant macho culture they can become ‘othered’, which means that their colleagues display hostile behaviours towards them, and it is common to engage in bullying and harassment to undermine men and women across all ranks (Alexander and Charman, 2023). It is understandable therefore, that many will find it easier to acquiesce to the macho culture, avoid appearing as if they are juggling family responsibilities with work, and avoid asking for flexible working hours even if they want or need this.

Many officers find managing family life a challenge due to the conditions of their work, including having to work long shifts and nights. Officers who are fathers may feel pressure to seek promotion ‘due to the pressure of being the main earner’ and because their partners are ‘more likely to work part-time’ because the officer has little flexibility in their work schedule,

which impacts the partner's ability to work full time (Alexander and Charman, 2023: 13). In addition, according to the findings of the empirical research carried out by the authors mentioned above, where male officers had been able to provide childcare, this was generally because they had retired and therefore had the flexibility to offer more care. For those who were not in retirement and provided more childcare, they stated that this had come at a cost to their own careers in the police service.

It was mentioned in the above paragraph that officers who are fathers might feel pressured into applying for promotion. Within the police service, promotion is generally only granted after an officer takes advantage of opportunities to work in a specialist role and he or she must pass exams in order to qualify for the next level in the hierarchy, which involves spending a considerable amount of time learning the law and revising outside and on top of normal working hours (Bury et al., 2018). Also, not applying for promotion and not taking advantage of opportunities to specialise or do a frontline role limits future progression prospects for officers (Drew and Saunders, 2020).

According to Saint-Michel (2018), who draws on Eagly and Karau's (2002) role congruity theory, agentic characteristics are stereotypically male. This means that men are expected to display assertiveness, to strive for achievement and be competitive. In contrast, women are expected to display communal characteristics, namely nurturing and the ability to show caring for the concerns of others (Eagly et al., 2000). Whatever the expectations of the gendered roles of men and women in the workplace, there also remain cultural and structural barriers that affect both men and women. Alexander and Charman (2023) found that within the police, a

commitment to full time work is expected and rewarded, which is incongruent with the demands and responsibilities of raising a family.

It seems worthwhile at this point to summarise working as a father within the police service as being a very male career experience, which accords with the notions of 'ideal' workers and leaders as suggested by Acker (1989) and Silvestri (2018). Officers are expected to conform to the predominant hegemonic masculine or macho culture of the police service, regardless of gender, and especially in frontline roles where men dominate in numbers. One of the main features of a 'masculine' organisation is working excessive hours, as mentioned previously, and this is a prevalent aspect of policing culture, according to Caless (2011), who also suggests that working in this way has an adverse effect on family relationships and health outcomes (Caless, 2011). The expectation of conformity to the hegemonic culture can often lead to bullying, harassment and 'othering' of those who want to go against the established norms and do things differently. An example of this might be wanting to work flexible hours where the expectation is to work long shifts or consistently work overtime hours. One of the main outcomes of expecting conformity is a homogenous approach, and a stifling of any diversity (McGinley, 2013). For fathers this could lead to a maintenance of the status quo, a lack of progressive change to policies relating to leave or flexible working, and an inability to gain support from their own managers for their caregiving responsibilities.

Father-carers are widely seen as not putting work first and not conforming with expectations of them. This has been found in previous studies of women in the police, where balancing work with childcare is seen as a major barrier for career advancement (Archbold and Hassell, 2009) and is even viewed as an 'irresolvable conflict' (Silvestri, 2006: 273) despite contemporary

legislation such as SPL being in place. Men are not unaffected by the ‘demands, commitments and responsibilities of parenthood’ according to Collier (2019: 81) often having to endure being the main breadwinner, or becoming a workhorse, working longer hours than their childless counterparts (Dommermuth and Kitterød, 2009) in order to conform with gender role congruity (Alexander and Charman, 2023). Many feel that this is inevitable and that they have little choice but to continue in this vein, applying for promotions to earn more money to support their family, even when they might not feel ready to take on more responsibility and more hours. (Alexander and Charman, 2023).

It is interesting to note at this point that despite the macho culture and masculine role performed by many frontline officers in fighting crime, most of them actually spend a considerable amount of their working time supporting victims of crime and protecting the public, which requires them to show a more caring side or to act in a protective way towards others in distress or under threat. For example, and as will be seen in the Findings Chapter of this thesis, in the day to day working life of officers, they might have to talk to and support the family of a murder victim, encourage a victim of assault to give a statement and so on. In this respect, the most macho of officers still need to switch to a caring or protective form of masculinity in order to do the job properly. The next section explores the concept of protective masculinity further, examining how it is enacted within the police service, and revealing how it is entangled in practices of care.

### **Between caring, protection and fatherhood**

As has been discussed in the previous section, police officers work within a culture that is dominated by hegemonic masculinity ideals, practices and expectations. However, as also just



mentioned, police officers also spend a considerable amount of their working time caring for and protecting others. Although the primary role of policing was once described by the then Home Secretary Theresa May (2010) as ‘to cut crime, no more no less’, it could be argued that it has moved away from crime-fighting to being a ‘social worker’ or even an ‘emotional supporter’ (College of Policing, 2019). According to Foley and Massey (2018) the impact on officers is that they are moving away from gathering evidence of crimes to showing empathy for victims. Officers might want to emotionally support colleagues who are suffering with mental ill-health after dealing with traumatic incidents, members of the public who have witnessed an assault, or victims of crimes and their families. In many instances they also show care for wider community groups, by giving talks in schools to prevent drug-taking or linking women’s refuge charities to domestic abuse victims for example.

Perceptions of males in caring roles such as those outlined above, in the police service, are heavily gendered however, and shaped by a protective understanding of masculinity. First introduced by Johnson (2013: 16), who studied the emotions of politicians, protective masculinity is a form of male performance centred around ‘strong, tough men protecting women and children, and sometimes other men... from diverse threats to their security.’ It is viewed as a form of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005) with physical power, control, and the economic dominance associated with being a breadwinner at its core (Wojnicka, 2022). Protective masculinity stands in opposition to caring masculinity according to Elliott (2016), which is associated with being ‘power-free’ and ‘non-hierarchical’ and involves routine daily based care of others. (Wojnicka, 2022).

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has explored the challenges facing caregiving, involved fathers who are in paid employment, and, in particular, those working within a particular context that has been neglected in the literature, the frontline protective roles within the UK Police Service.

The literature reveals how the concepts of fatherhood, fathering and fathers have evolved throughout British history since the mid-late eighteenth century. Over the past 150 years, fatherhood, as a multifaceted, complex and context-dependent social construction and cultural institution has undergone significant changes and has been shaped by changes in the constitution of the labour market, politics and economy more broadly. From being viewed initially as protectors, educators and moral overseers of children, holding ultimate power and control over family members, fathers then assumed the role of distant breadwinners as they moved into paid work outside of the family. A more contemporary understanding and ideal of fathers positions them as much more nurturing, caring, and involved than their historical counterparts, and as individuals who yearn for emotional closeness to their children and who are capable of being part of a more gender-equal partnership at home. As has been seen, the benefits of caregiving involved fatherhood have been widely documented in the literature, and include improved family welfare and economic wellbeing, stronger family relationships or ties, better educational outcomes for children and improved psychological and physical health outcomes for fathers themselves. It appears that the new actively involved father has much to offer and much to gain.

However, in order to reject traditional, gendered views of the primary breadwinning role, and enjoy this emotionally close, fuller relationship with their children and all the benefits that it

brings, many men face having to mediate between home and work much more effectively. Flexible working practices and improved access to shared parental leave may seem like obvious solutions to this, but the literature has shown that fathers face a variety of challenges when trying to strike a better balance between work and home life. The enduring prevalence of the ideal worker norm, gendered role expectations of men and women, hegemonic masculine organisational cultures, and a lack of organisational and managerial understanding of fathers' needs are some of the barriers facing men who aspire to be involved fathers.

A lack of empirical research into the experiences of fathers in specific work contexts has led to restricted representation of them in the literature and in work-life balance debates more generally and has resulted in poor understanding of why they are excluded from policies and resources that might otherwise support them.

Related literature documents the fact that many organisations can actively discourage or penalise fathers who want to enact a caring form of masculinity inside or outside work but this was found to be particularly acute in organisations with a prevailing hegemonic masculine culture. Examples of these include the military and emergency protective services such as the UK Police Service. The latter offers the context for this study and the participants take us straight to the frontline of it, to better understand their experiences of being father-carers in what outwardly appears to be a hypermasculine, macho role. Closer examination of the literature however, reveals that expectations of frontline officers have shifted away from crime fighting and gathering evidence, to displaying a high level of emotional intelligence. They frequently care for, empathise with, reassure and protect the public, the vulnerable, victims of crime and their families, in addition to proactively stopping crime. However, the literature

shows that perceptions of males in caring roles such as those outlined above, are heavily gendered. The caring aspect of this masculinity stands in direct opposition to hegemonic masculinity because of caring masculinity's associations with being power-free and non-hierarchical, which contrasts sharply with the notion of the Police Service (formerly Police 'Force' interestingly) as being a *power-full*, hierarchical organisation. A protective form of masculinity might be more palatable and acceptable, because as a form of male performance, it centres around strength, being tough and protecting mainly women and children from security threats.

Finally, although extant research on the work and family arena is well established, it focuses largely on the challenges facing mothers when they seek to combine these two spheres of life. As a result, knowledge about the experience of fathers is disparate and lacking within the literature. What is known about working fathers who aspire to be caregiving involved fathers is often homogenous and lacks specific work contexts. There is a paucity of empirical, qualitative research into the lives of fathers who work on the frontline of protective services such as the UK Police Service. This begs the questions 'what is the experience of these men in these kinds of roles who also want to be caregiving, involved fathers? And 'how do they cope with working in such a hegemonic masculine culture when they have to constantly switch between enforcing law and order and caring for and protecting their colleagues and the public?' As well as 'how do they navigate this and how do they experience it as fathers?' These Research Questions are all addressed in this study, to give a much fuller picture of fatherhood in an explicit context that has hitherto not been explored.

Chapter Two the next chapter, provides the context and a detailed overview of the UK Police Service to set the scene for the rest of the thesis and research. It provides its history as a protective service and uniformed institution, discusses policing as an occupation, and what it means to be a police officer. It considers some of the impacts of this work on officers' family life and relationships. As the data collection took place during the Covid-19 pandemic, there follows discussion about how this global crisis affected the work and family lives of frontline officers. Finally, as this research is about men, i.e. fathers who work on the frontline of policing in particular, the following Context chapter explores in more detail what it means to be a man within this particular institution.

## **Chapter Two: Policing and police work: The research context**

### **Introduction**

What is it like to work within the UK Police Service as a father with caring responsibilities, when the institution you work for has been heavily criticised by recent reports and the media for being racist, misogynistic, homophobic, bullying, with failing leadership and a lack of diversity and gender balance (Davis, 2023; McPherson, 1999; The Casey Review, 2023).

This chapter sets the scene for the research, as a way to provide a ‘thick description’ of the participants’ contexts and to make their behaviour, experiences, perceptions and feelings meaningful (Korstjens and Moser, 2017). It is divided into four sections, with the first providing a brief history of the UK Police Service, tracing its origins as a protective service during the medieval period, through to its status as a uniformed institution in the present. The second section discusses policing as an occupation, outlining what it involves and what it means to be a police officer. This section gives an overview of the impact on the individual officer of doing this kind of work, working under its conditions, with its particular demands and within its distinctive culture. Links are then drawn between the individual experience of day-to-day life as a police officer, considering how this might impact officers’ family lives and relationships, particularly those between fathers and children. The third section focuses on the Covid-19 pandemic and how this global crisis affected the work and family lives of frontline officers. Finally, as this research is about men, and fathers who work on the frontline of policing in particular, section four explores masculinity and the police, examining what it means to be a man within this particular institution.

## **A history of the UK Police Service as a protective service and institution**

To understand contemporary policing culture, we need to engage with its long history. This section traces that history from medieval times to the early modern era, as a period of the advent of modern governance.

### ***Medieval and early modern police***

The Medieval period (1066 to 1485) may not, upon first consideration, seem relevant to an understanding of contemporary policing. During this period, policing was community-led, and was a task created out of the necessity to protect individuals and their land. It was carried out by local community members, with a constable in each parish, whose position changed by rotation each year. Men, typically labourers, who were appointed because they were also deemed to be 'fit and proper' (Emsley, 2016: 10), patrolled the district as night watchmen in return for payment of various forms (Waterfield, nd). Some were professional policemen who, for a fee, would make arrests and bring 'felons, miscreants and nuisances' (Emsley, 2016: 9) to court, usually for minor transgressions. Such transgressions included living as a couple out of wedlock, stealing livestock (hens and sheep for example), not attending church, and swearing and drunkenness. It can be determined that the role of constable was, even back then, varied and demanding, much as it is nowadays, albeit with different societal laws being broken. In fact, because of an ever-increasing demand to keep the peace in this way, the role of constable became burdensome and took up so much of an individual's time that according to Defoe (1714: 7) 'his own affairs are frequently totally neglected, often to his ruin.' This is important because it shows that policing is, and has long since been, inherently difficult as a role, the impacts of which continue to extend to the officer's life outside of it.

### *Eighteenth and nineteenth century policing*

This section focuses on London because it was the location of the first organised and uniformed police institution in England. Concerns about crime and disorder were increasing in Eighteenth century England. A time described by Reith (1938: v) as ‘the golden age of gangsterdom’, and London as ‘a more dissolute and disorderly place’ than ever before (Ascoli, 1979: 27). Although no crime statistics were kept in that century, there is some agreement amongst crime historians, who have studied court records and indictments, that larceny was on the increase, and that poor harvests led to riots over high prices and shortages of the staple food, bread. The contemporary belief amongst the rulers of the country at that time, was that crime and disorder were posing a serious threat to social order, so demands began to grow for a new standard of order and decorum, particularly in London (Emsley, 2016). Writing in 1751, Henry Fielding (novelist and Bow Street magistrate) declared that London, Westminster and the suburbs allowed ‘a thief to harbour with ...great Security, as wild beasts do in the Desarts (sic) of Africa...’ (1757: 116). Fielding was instrumental in creating the first modern-day Police Service in England, which can be traced back to the ‘Bow Street Runners’; a group of six men which he formed, with the purpose of advocating for and acting on the authority of magistrates to locate and arrest offenders throughout the country. (Beattie, 2012). These paid runners formed the basis of the modern-day police service.

In 1829 Robert Peel, as the then Home Secretary, introduced the Metropolitan Police Act, and went on to establish the Metropolitan Police. As mentioned earlier, this was when England saw its first organised and uniformed police institution, heralding a new era of policing and a British model of policing where the work of the police depended on the trust and cooperation of the public (The Police Foundation, 2022). Constables were no longer accountable to the people or



their representatives, and the previously mentioned Bow Street Runners were absorbed into this institution. Peel is widely recognised as the founder of the MPS, and police constables have been nicknamed 'Bobbies' after his first name (Robert). It is interesting to note that the police had become an institution by this point, and were uniformed, paid professionals, rather than community-elected farm labourers. This is significant because the idea was emerging that policing could be a stable career for the lower ranks who were predominantly skilled working class or from the lower middle class (Lee and Punch, 2004). It offered opportunities for men from these backgrounds to improve their economic circumstances and life chances, gain training and progression routes for long-term employees, with associated pay-increases. and the ability to earn an income for them and their families. Because of the need for a permanent police service, and a drive to reduce high turnover, the MPS and police authorities sought lifetime commitment and loyalty from workers, in return for which officers could enjoy rewards and incentives denied to other workers. These included provision of a lodging allowance for married officers, payment even when sick or injured at work, a pension for life, a widows' pension, after-work leisure and other benefits in kind including boots, uniform and coal. Notably, according to Police Journals of the day, many enjoyed the 'convivial atmosphere' of the chance to live communally in section houses with their colleagues (Wynter, 1901: 91) and an 'esprit de corps' (Police Review, 1893) and sense of community began to develop, aided by working anti-social hours together, not fraternising with others within the working class, and the vast opportunities to spend leisure time together with other police families.

The Municipal Corporations Act (1835) was passed in Parliament and required a total of one hundred and seventy-eight Royal Boroughs to establish their own police services. Then in 1839 counties were permitted to set up local police services, although it was not yet a legal requirement to do so. In 1856 however, it became law that every borough and county had a

police constabulary. The first force of detectives in London was formed in 1842, reorganised in 1878 and named the Criminal Investigation Department (the CID). When uniformed police institutions were set up outside London, they were under the direction of the local authority, i.e., a committee of magistrates. This changed in 1888 with the local government reforms which established Standing Joint Committees (SJC), consisting of magistrates and elected county councillors (Waterfield, no date).

Supervision of police in towns was carried out by Watch Committees made up of councillors. This way of organising police services across England and Wales meant that at the turn of the Twentieth century there were around fifty-eight forces and another one hundred and thirty city or town forces. Some of the larger counties and cities had over one thousand constables, whereas smaller ones had up to twelve.

### ***Twentieth century policing***

During this time, the British police entered something of a 'golden age', becoming known as the best in the world and a cornerstone of the constitution (Emsley, 2016). They were considered to be capable of keeping order through consent rather than coercion; officers did not carry lethal weapons such as guns as a rule, and were therefore not considered to be military, unlike in other countries which had experienced revolutions during the previous century (Emsley, 2016).

The invention of fingerprinting had a facilitative influence on law enforcement, with the Metropolitan Police forming its own fingerprint branch in 1901, and the first murderers being

convicted and hanged in 1905 as a result of this method (Lane, 1988). Police officers became more mobile and able to respond more quickly to calls in the early Twentieth century, with the arrival of the first police cars in Britain. Bicycles started to be used as an alternative method of police movement to walking the beat. Police cars were first equipped with radios in the 1920s and the first police boxes were seen in England so that a policeman could call his station (Lambert, nd). Just after the end of the First World War, in 1919, the first British policewomen entered the force, but with the then Commissioner Sir Nevil Macready announcing there were to be no 'vinegary spinsters' joining up (O'Neill and Weekes, 2009). Their duties included caring for female detainees, preventing fortune telling and gathering evidence of bad behaviour in brothels and betting houses. Moreover, they had to call in a male colleague if a crime was being committed and had to seek permission from a senior male officer to carry handcuffs (BAWP, 2023). In 1918-1919 police strikes took place amid concerns over worsening pay and conditions. This resulted in higher pay and the formation of the Police Federation, as a representative body for the police. However, this also resulted in the British government putting proposals for a Police Act before Parliament, barring police from belonging to a trade union.

Crime rates soared in London during the Second World War, amidst the chaos of aerial bombardments. Crimes included looting, and the theft of goods for illicit black market sales during rationing, posing an increased challenge to officers at that time and beyond in the post-war period; recorded crimes increased tenfold between 1920 and 1948 (Mason, 2004). In 1947, a National Police Training College was set up, enabling new recruits to receive fourteen weeks of instruction and training before they started the work of an officer. Technology became even more widely embraced by the police in the 1960s, when they started carrying personal radios, and the police boxes were no longer needed. Further innovations in policing (Weatheritt, 1986) occurred in the 1960s and 1970s, including computer-aided dispatch systems, and centralised

criminal records databases. Additionally, the force recruited its first black male officer, Norwell Roberts, in 1967 and its first female black officer, Sislin Fay Allen, in 1968 (O'Neill and Weekes, 2009). Calls for a public order unit arose after police clashes with violent protesters in London in the 1950s and 1960s. Thus in 1965 the Special Patrol Group was formed and officers who worked within it received specialist training.

Tensions continued to rise between the police and public throughout the 1980s, a time when the MPS were given powers of stop and search, i.e. they were legally allowed to stop people they suspected of wrongdoing. For example, the Brixton riot saw a series of clashes between black youth and the police in Brixton, London, in 1981, the result of perceived racist discrimination against people in the black community by white officers. In the same year, there were further riots in other UK cities involving black youth and police, and the government commissioned an enquiry into the situation, which resulted in the Scarman Report being published in November 1981. It stated that the MPS was having issues with racial discrimination. Another riot in Brixton was sparked after the shooting of black mother Dorothy Groce by police, whilst searching for her son. These racial tensions led to the Broadwater Farm Estate riots in Tottenham, following the death through heart-attack, of a black man's mother, during a police raid on a house there. During the riot PC Keith Blakelock was murdered after being surrounded by a mob and stabbed (BBC News, 1985).

In 1989, the Metropolitan Police name was changed to the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS). A year later, following a report called 'A Service for Change: Report on the Corporate Identity of the Metropolitan Police' (1990), the Plus Programme was introduced by Sir Peter Imbert for the MPS. The main goals of the Plus Programme were to initiate a change in the traditional

culture of the MPS, enhance its efficiency and improve its service to the public (Mills, 1992). In 1999 a third Brixton riot took place, after the death in custody of a black man, resulting in the MacPherson Inquiry. The subsequent report is discussed in more detail in the section below. In the same year, 1999, a system of one Borough Operational Command Unit (BOCU) was set up for all of the thirty-two London boroughs, each headed by a Chief Superintendent.

### ***Twenty-first century policing***

Operation Tiberius was an internal investigation commissioned in 2001, linked to *The Independent* newspaper. It found that organised criminals had been able to infiltrate Scotland Yard ‘at will’ and recruit corrupted officers by means of bribery. They had been able to tamper with evidence and interfere with the pursuit of criminals involved with drugs and prostitution, as well as the buy-off or the threatening of jurors (Harper, 2014).

More police-related controversies followed in the first decade of this century, involving black officers of high rank making allegations of racism. As a result, The National Black Police Association (NBPA) boycotted the MPS in 2008 for racial discrimination. In 2011, MPS officers shot dead Mark Duggan, a 29-year-old black British man in London, suspecting that he was planning an attack and was armed. This sparked a number of disturbances, including arson and looting incidents across London. In 2017 Cressida Dick was appointed the first female commissioner of the MPS by Mayor of London Sadiq Khan, reported to be ‘thrilled by the historical legacy of the first woman commissioner in the...MPS’ (Independent, 2022). She was forced to step aside in 2022 after accusations that she had failed to deal with the MPS’s misogyny, racism, and toxic culture.

The UK now has forty-eight police services, with forty-three territorial services of varying size in England and Wales. Each of these is commanded by a chief constable, or ‘commissioner’ for the MPS and the square mile of the City of London. These roles report directly to the Home Office. Scotland and Northern Ireland have separate, nationally run police services. Three specialist services include the British Transport Police (BTP), the Ministry of Defence (MOD) and the Civil Nuclear Constabulary (CNC).

As of the time of writing (Sept 2023), there are approximately 164,000 police officers in the UK, around 8,000 fewer than in 2010 (Statista, 2022). This fall in numbers is linked to a reduction in government spending on public services in the UK following the global financial crisis of 2008, the fiscal deficit in the UK and an ensuing policy of austerity carried out by the 2010 Coalition Government, along with the Conservative Government cuts to public spending reflecting election pledges and long-standing neo-liberal ideology. This called for major reductions in public expenditure, and a 20% cut to the police budget (Millie, 2013). Equal to a fall in spending by £3 billion between 2009/10 and 2013/14, measures included an 18% reduction in police personnel, made up of officers, PCSOs and other staff between 2010 and 2018 (Brown and Silvestri, 2020). Government spending began an upward trajectory in 2017/18, with the most recent figure standing at £24.49 bn per year according to Statista (2022).

As can be seen from the examples given in the historical overview of the police in the earlier sections, there have been many controversies, riots and violent altercations between the police and the public. In addition, the police-public relationship in the UK has been historically defined as one of ‘mistrust and contempt’ (Kiely and Peek, 2001). This is supported by the findings of the 2020 Crime Survey of England and Wales (Brown and Hobbs, 2023), which

reveals a trend of decreasing trust in the police. It decreased from sixty two percent in 2017 to fifty five percent in 2020. This lack of trust has been shaped by some high-profile events elsewhere in the world; including the 2020 police-killing of George Floyd in the USA, which prompted discussion about racial inequality and police power in the UK (Dray, 2021; Nivette, 2023). Perhaps one of the most recent examples of mistrust of the police came after the kidnap, rape and murder of Sarah Everard in 2021 by MPS Officer Wayne Couzens, along with the policing of her vigil in London and subsequent investigations into offensive social media messages linked to Couzens (Home Office, 2021). In addition, in 2023, MPS Officer David Carrick was found guilty of serial rapes of vulnerable women, which led to the conclusion that the police are perpetrators of harm (Spurrier, 2023) and, according to a recent UK Parliament Research Briefing (2023), these types of high-profile crimes have contributed ‘to a decline in public trust in the police across England and Wales’ (Brown and Hobbs, 2023). The BBC reported on Carrick’s twenty-year history of raping and abusing women whilst serving as an officer in the MPS, stating that the MPS had failed to ‘root out a criminal in police uniform’ (BBC News, 2023) and that this ‘pattern of abusive behaviour should have been spotted by the force’ (BBC News, 2023).

One of the key themes in the media coverage is that there is lack of public trust in the police because it fails to recognise and remove predators and criminals amongst its ranks. This lack of public trust is not limited to the UK. In fact there has been similar sentiment in France (Restelli, 2020) and the United States (Jackson et al., 2020). In recent times especially, the profession has come under increasing attack from the media, with the press and social media playing a key role in heightening anti-police sentiment amongst the public. The police service has, for many years, been accused of being institutionally racist, with a problematic ‘focus on rooting out bad behaviour at the individual level... focussing on individuals rather than

institutionally generated problems and solutions’ (Akram, 2022: 385), In addition it has been labelled ‘corrupt’ (Holmes, 2020) and ‘misogynistic’ (Brown et al., 2019). The reasons for these sentiments are explored in more detail below, with overviews given of some of the most high-profile reviews of the MPS culture from 1997-2023. First the MacPherson Report (1997) and then the Casey Review (2023) will be examined, both of which investigate the MPS, which is the largest police service in the UK (43,571 personnel) and second only to New York Police Department (50,676 personnel) when comparing the size of police services across the world. (Levin, 2022). The Casey Review is very significant to this research as it was published in March 2023, just six months before this context chapter was finalised in September 2023.

### ***The MacPherson Report (1997)***

‘We failed. We could and should have done better’ (Sir Paul Condon, MPS Police Commissioner, 1999).

In 1997, the then Home Secretary Jack Straw announced a public inquiry into the 1993 racially motivated murder of Stephen Lawrence, an eighteen-year-old black British teenager, killed by a group of white men whilst he was waiting for a bus in Eltham, London. The enquiry followed the collapse of a private case by his family and an investigation by the Police Complaints Authority into the murder case (The Guardian, 2022). Published in 1999 the investigation is seen as one of the most important moments in the modern history of criminal justice in Britain, and as ‘truly ground-breaking, leading to major changes in policing’ (House of Commons Home Affairs Committee, 2021). It set out to identify the lessons to be learned from the investigation and prosecution of racially motivated crimes. Sir William MacPherson chaired the report, joined by a team of supporting advisors; Mr Tim Cook, the Rt Rev Dr John Sentamu



and Dr Richard Stone (MacPherson, 1999). The report itself was set out as forty-seven chapters written in order of the witnesses called and the issues covered in the hearings. Its methodology is based on an examination of the events leading up to the murder of Stephen Lawrence, the murder itself, the group of youths responsible for it, witness accounts, medical evidence given, the subsequent prolonged police investigation into it and the trial. It considers the evidence and recommendations given by 100 people and organisations in order to identify the lessons that can be learned, 'using and distilling raw material' (MacPherson, 1999) such as 12,000 pages of transcripts, 100,000 pages of reports and statements that were surveyed and checked. Conclusions were then drawn from all the evidence given, and key findings were that Mr and Mrs Lawrence were justified in their complaints, that minority ethnic communities' dissatisfaction and unhappiness with the UK police's treatment of them in 'stop and search' was underplayed. In addition, it was found that crimes affecting minority ethnics were being improperly investigated, and racist crime and harassment was not adequately regarded or pursued by the UK police. 'Professional incompetence, institutional racism and a failure of leadership' within the MPS were described, and it was considered that this has had marred the investigation into the killing of Stephen Lawrence (MacPherson, 1999). The report named specific officers and criticised the entire force as being institutionally racist and led to profound cultural changes in attitudes to racism, the law, and police practices. It set out measures that would see greater public control of the police, give greater rights to victims of crime, widen the number of offences classified as racist and see freedom of information and race relations legislation apply to the police in future.

Awareness of this is important as it shows that the police service has been subject to commissioned reviews which have found it to be institutionally racist, and incompetent professionally with poor leadership. This sets the ground for an exploration in the later section

on what it is like to work within such an organisation, where there have been resultant changes in legislation and policy and a critical spotlight on institutional racism, misogyny and corruption.

### ***The Casey Review (2023)***

(Those who speak up) ‘learn the hard way that there are adverse consequences for themselves, for their careers, and for their teams’ (Casey Review, 2023).

More than two decades after the MacPherson report discussed above, Baroness Louise Casey’s review of the Metropolitan police was commissioned. This followed the rape and murder of thirty-three-year-old Sarah Everard, by off duty MPS Police Constable Wayne Couzens. Regarding the research and methods used for the review, Ipsos, a multinational market research and consulting firm, was commissioned, in November 2022, to collect data to gain evidence for the final report. Methods included a staff survey of 6,751 serving MPS Police employees and volunteers. A link to the survey was sent to all employees and volunteers via email and the survey was also available in an online forum. Another survey was carried out, involving 1,218 Londoners aged 18-75, available through the Ipsos Online Access Panel (Shrimpton and Jones, 2023). The damning independent three-hundred-page report set out ‘grave concerns’ (The Independent, 2023) about the MPS Police’s internal culture and standards of behaviour. Some of the key findings of the Casey Review were that the MPS, Britain’s largest force, is institutionally racist, misogynist and homophobic, where bullying within its ranks, and especially against those with illness or disability, is widespread.

According to the Casey Review (2023) homophobia is 'deep seated' with 30% of LGBTQ+ employees having been bullied. Unfortunately, the Sarah Everard case was not an isolated one, in fact the review states that the MPS does 'not protect its female employees or members of the public from police perpetrators of domestic abuse, nor those who abuse their position for sexual purposes.' In addition, post-MacPherson, nothing seems to have improved for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) staff within the police service. They are more likely to experience discrimination by those with racist attitudes. Moreover, discrimination is usually ignored, and black officers are eighty-one percent more likely to be accused of misconduct. There is a lack of diversity and the report states that it will take until 2053 to reach gender balance and until 2061 for the MPS to be representative of the communities it serves in London (Casey Review, 2023).

It appears that the MPS does not own its failings and operates within a toxic culture of denial (Tiplady-Bishop and Evans, 2023), where complainants are penalised and there is a conviction that nobody outside of the organisation has any understanding of its unique demands. It has allowed predatory, unacceptable behaviours amongst wrongdoers to run rife, and enables these perpetrators to hide in plain sight. As a result, the integrity of the organisation is under threat and leaders are seen as running the organisation in a way that has led to systemic and fundamental problems (Dodd, 2022).

Of particular interest and significance to this research is that the Casey report shone a light upon malpractice amongst specialist units within the police service. Many of the participants of this research work within specialist units or have specialist roles. The Casey report pointed to an uneven distribution of funds within different units. It stated that firearms officers were

seen as having elite status and could have ‘any toy they want’ (Casey Review, 2023) including high end tomahawk axes, unusable night vision goggles and specialist camouflage wraps for vehicles; all viewed as examples of their excessive spending on items that could not be used in London’s streets. Such officers were also accused of gaming the system by claiming paid (but unworked) overtime and were allowed to break the rules because they are harder to replace than the average officer.

What is significant and interesting from reading the two key reports discussed above - MacPherson and Casey, is that in the data collection for these, there were no interviews carried out to gather rich qualitative insights into what it is like to work within and experience the police culture of the MPS or British Police more widely. The MacPherson report drew on accounts and statements of officers involved in the investigation of the tragic murder of Stephen Lawrence, and the Casey Review commissioned Ipsos to gather survey data from police employees and Londoners. Since my own study seeks to understand what this institutional culture is like for officers who work within it, I have personally gathered the stories and experiences of police officers in interviews. This has enabled them to tell their story, going into rich detail about what it is like to work in these police units during the Covid-19 pandemic, and has enabled me to use prompt questions and probe deeper into the stories to discuss the impact on them as individuals and their family relationships, especially relationships with their children.

### *Scandals, special measures and future prospects*

It is clear from observing the contents of the two major inquiries above, that things are not going well for British policing. According to the Times (2023), hardly a week goes by without there being some kind of ‘new scandal’. The MPS and five other forces are currently in special measures (Dodd, 2022). Undoubtedly, and as was described earlier, austerity had a negative effect on staffing levels. However, policing as a profession has struggled to be identified as a prestigious one and continues to fail to attract applicants. Lack of accessibility, the dangers of the role, uncertainty, and lack of diversity are cited as the main reasons why young people are not interested in joining the police service according to a survey of over 2000 respondents carried out by The University of Law (TLF, 2019).

The Policing Vision 2025 sets out that all future officers will need to be degree-qualified, in order to attract and retain confident professionals and the Government has pledged to recruit twenty thousand new police officers (Syed, 2023). This is not turning out to be an easy feat however, as there is a lack of capacity to train the new starters after austerity measures have resulted in ‘disproportionate losses from more senior ranks’ (Dearden, 2020). There are not enough trainers to teach new recruits and the majority (59%) of police officers would not recommend the job to those considering a career in the service, according to a Police Federation Survey (2020). The survey also reported on new police officers with one year’s service, finding that only just over half felt valued, and the majority of respondents saying that they were not respected by society as police officers. Empirical studies about the police occupation reveal that there are many different and conflicting narratives about it, which could affect public perceptions about it and influence decisions to join the force or not. For example, some studies present it as a highly regarded occupation, whereas others show it as looked down upon. At the

time of writing (September 2023), a Google search of the term ‘police heroes’ produces 260 million hits, and ‘police heroes UK’ produces 90 million hits.

Media coverage highlights stories about police bravery and selflessness; saving children’s lives, putting their own at risk in the process (Jobson, 2021; Fricker and Weston, 2022), fighting off terrorists to save members of the public (Lloyd, 2019), and celebrating those who have received bravery awards for their ‘selfless, heroic and instinctive acts’ (West Mercia Police, 2022). Speaking at this particular awards ceremony, Police and Crime Commissioner John Champion stated: ‘we must remember these are ordinary people with lives and families outside of work who do extraordinary things to keep others safe’ (Champion, 2022). This is of particular interest because media accounts rarely acknowledge the family behind the brave officer depicted in their news articles. This study aims to explore that intersection in more depth. Literature about the police occupation concurs with media accounts of the police as heroic, where individual, noble and heroic acts receive a lot of public attention. However, Terpstra and Salet (2020) also discuss how the social construction of ‘heroic police’ can be ‘disturbed’ because of increasing levels of surveillance of them through ‘electronic eyes’ and widespread dissemination of videos’ (Terpstra and Salet, 2020: 8) resulting in these heroes falling into disgrace and being re-defined as villains. Corruption of heroic officers has a negative impact on the public’s trust in them (Schaap, 2018).

Having traced a brief history of British policing, and discussed how the service has transitioned from protective service to uniformed institution, as well as looking at some of the major issues facing it, including lack of public trust in the police service, its poor ability to attract and retain

officers, the next section will discuss the police as an occupation and will review research and related insights into the impact of policing on serving officers and their families.

## **Policing – the occupation and its impact on officers’ lives**

### ***An occupation simplified for jobseekers***

If an individual were interested in joining the Police Service of England and Wales, as a Police Constable for example, he or she might visit a careers information website and would discover that the role is neatly described thus: ‘keep law and order, investigate crime, and support crime prevention’ (National Careers Service, 2023) or ‘protect members of the public and property...detect, prevent and investigate crimes’ (Prospects, 2023). The working environment is described to potential officers simply as ‘outdoors in all weathers and physically and emotionally demanding’ (Prospects, 2023) but little more detail about the nature of those demands or the impact on the individual is given. This is intriguing because contemporary research points towards a view that the occupation of policing is extremely stressful and has widespread and damaging effects on the individual and their families also. This is explored in the next section in more detail but is significant to mention from the outset of this one.

### ***The glamorous rhetoric and traumatic reality of policing***

A more in-depth look at policing as a day-to-day activity, reveals a fairly extensive list, including responding to the public and their needs for help; investigating criminal activity and offences; making arrests and conducting interviews; attending court to give evidence; controlling large crowds at public events and protests; giving advice about personal safety; and promoting respect for race, diversity and human rights (Indeed Career Guide, 2023; Police-

recruitment.co.uk, 2025). This section focuses on the policing occupation and the aspects of it that present challenges for the individual officer and his family life.

There is notable public interest in the crime-fighting aspects of police-work (Innes, 2003), glamourised in TV shows such as *Miami Vice* in the 1980s, and more recently *Line of Duty*, *Unforgotten* and *Happy Valley*, which allows officers to maintain fairly high occupational 'esteem and pride' (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999: 418). Yet policing is still undoubtedly a male-dominated occupation characterised largely by poor wellbeing. What it means to work as a man and a father, within a male dominated environment, is discussed in the next section, 'Masculinity and Policing', but this section focuses on the poor wellbeing experienced by many officers. This will provide greater understanding of the conditions of the occupation of policing in the UK, where, when, and how, it leads to poor wellbeing, and its effects on officers and their families.

Officers experience frequent exposure to trauma, along with intensive demands (Irizar et al., 2022). Trauma within this occupation is often experienced as a result of 'routine duties' (Violanti et al., 2018b) such as interviewing suspects and guarding crime scenes, as well as less frequent but more severe traumatic events such as attending road traffic collisions, investigating sexual assaults, murders, suicides and crimes against children (Roach et al., 2017). Trauma within policing can also be experienced when officers themselves have direct exposure (McCormack and Riley, 2016) to dangerous or life-threatening situations, i.e., are attacked by someone armed with a knife, or when their colleagues are exposed to these types of incidents. Seen as high risk and one of the most stressful occupations (Tehrani, 2010; De Camargo, 2022), constant exposure to danger and distressing situations can cause a multitude



of psychosocial issues for them (Fielding et al., 2018), including Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS) depression and anxiety. A Cambridge University Survey, '*Policing: The Job and The Life*' (2018) revealed that police employees score much lower than other sectors on the WHO well-being indices. Over 20% of police officers reported having PTSD and 50% of officers reported having to take sick leave in the past five years for mental ill-health reasons (Police Firearms Officer Association, 2017). This is considerably higher than PTSD and sick leave figures within the general population (Bullock and Garland, 2020).

If policing is known as a stressful occupation, it is important to understand where the stress comes from. It arises from two different origins: operational and organisational stressors. (Maran et al., 2022). Operational stressors could include exposure to violent incidents, or those outlined in the preceding paragraph, i.e., stressors encountered whilst doing the job of a police officer. On the other hand, poor management or unmanageable workloads are seen to be organisational stressors (Duxbury and Halinsky, 2018) along with, among others, poor staffing levels, pressure to work long hours, and shift work (Houdmont and Elliott-Davies, 2017). These stressors, whilst not unique to policing, are particularly evident in this occupation and in the literature about it (Frank et al., 2017).

Ethnic minority officers and women face additional operational and organisational stressors within the police service. As was discussed in the previous section, public inquiries such as the MacPherson Report describe the police service as a racist and misogynistic organisation. According to Ghaffur (2004) ethnic minority officers of both sexes experience discrimination, bias in their appraisals and are often isolated by white colleagues and managers, all of which

are barriers to their progress. This study includes the stories told by ethnic minority male officers, some of whom describe how their white colleagues would not talk to them and never congratulated them or showed any interest in them after they returned from paternity leave. Others describe how they felt sexualised, degraded and humiliated by their white colleagues, being asked to dance for the team as part of their initiation into the team, and later, being told to patrol alone. This is supported by the findings of Hasan (2021), whose research shows that officers of Pakistani origin were forced to patrol alone because of their race or had sex toys left in their lockers. Smith et al. (2012) state that in addition, individuals from different ethnic minority backgrounds are more often subject to formal disciplinary actions than their white counterparts and these can have a detrimental effect on promotion prospects and other career progression opportunities such as secondments and access to training courses. This is supported by ethnicity data published by the Home Office (2020) which shows that although only 7% of officers in England and Wales are from minority ethnic groups, they account for 14.5% of misconduct investigations. The experiences of ethnic minority women officers is an under-researched area (Hasan, 2021) but they are more susceptible to bullying and harassment than their white colleagues, which is difficult to challenge in the police due to its patriarchal, racist, bureaucratic and hierarchical structure (Hasan, 2021).

### ***The Police Service - an uncaring organisation***

As described earlier, the police service has been surrounded by controversy for many years, including a concerning level of misconduct amongst officers, and alarming incidents of misogyny, racism and homophobia (HMICFRS, 2022). In addition, there are recent issues with retention; 2.45% of the total police population voluntarily resigned in 2022 compared to 0.86% in 2012 (Home Office, 2022). This situation is not unique to the UK; Wilson and Gammich

(2024) assert that policing agencies in the United States and elsewhere are facing significant staffing shortages, Mourtgos et al (2022) describe a decrease in police morale, and concomitant increase in voluntary resignations over the past few years. Many services ‘have been losing officers faster than they can hire new ones’ according to a survey conducted by the Police Executive Research Forum (2023). It is therefore pertinent to understand the reasons behind these staffing shortfalls and officer discontent, as well as understanding how police officers are managed. In addition, if officers are discontented with their work, is this because of the way that they are taught and managed, and if so, is this a result of individual managerial styles and choices? Or is it just inherent in the nature of the work? These questions will now be considered in this and the next sections of this chapter.

According to a recent study by Tyson and Charman (2023) many of the officers who have resigned from the British Police Service report having experienced a lack of voice, little recognition of their skills, and barriers to promotion. In addition, they perceive the organisation to be unfair towards them and feel undervalued and unsupported (Tyson and Charman, 2023). It is understood that in order to retain more officers in the service, much more organisational support of them is needed (Parsons et al, 2011), and that a culture of greater inclusivity needs to exist (Cordner and Cordner, 2011). In addition, greater opportunities for development and a reduction in unfair promotion practices are needed according to Mukwevho and Bussin (2021). It appears from the above literature that officers, are discontented, perceiving a lack of organisational and managerial support, i.e. they do not feel sufficiently cared for or cared about in their workplace.

As has been widely reported in the literature, the challenging work conditions of policing and the stress it brings can also impact negatively on officers’ work commitment and job satisfaction, increase their intention to quit and damage their physical and mental health (Martin et al, 2017; Allisey et al, 2014). In order to respond to the many challenges facing the

British Police Service, police leadership has become a key focus for improvement. According to Neyroud (2011), the then Chief Executive officer of the National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA) (2006-2012): ‘this is a moment for radical change in the approach to police leadership...’ (2011: 2). So what is the role of managers in the police service, if it is such a challenging and stressful environment, suffering from poor retention, where working conditions are difficult and dangerous, morale is low and officers feel unsupported?

According to Biggs et al (2014), and van Gelderen and Bik (2016), the ability to care for subordinates has been identified as a fundamental attribute that police leaders and managers should demonstrate. This helps to gain trust and create organisational cohesion (Ingram and Lee, 2015). According to Emeriau-Farges et al (2019), it is critical for leaders to be able to empathise with their subordinates and find solutions for safe working and wellbeing for those who face constant risk and might be suffering physically and psychologically as a result. Related to this is the need for leaders/managers to use high levels of emotional intelligence. This includes handling their own emotions and anticipating the reaction of those in their team (Filstad and Karp, 2021). According to Can et al (2017), police leaders must be trustworthy so that subordinates feel they can share information with, be inclusive of others (Alderden et al, 2017) and able to hear the voices of subordinates so that important information can be shared and problems jointly solved (Audenaert et al, 2021; Petrou et al, 2018). Studies have shown, however, that police leaders are perceived by serving officers as poor, because they are out of touch with frontline work (Hoggett et al, 2019). Great value is placed on being led by those with a considerable experience of it according to Rowe (2006). This notion of having the right type of experience or credibility is also supported by Caless (2011) who discussed the exclusivity of policing that is only comprehended by those who have done it and learned the hard way. For this reason, direct entry (from outside the organisation) is viewed by many officers as having a negative impact not only on leadership decision making, the public, and

operational effectiveness, but also presents a serious issue for officer safety and wellbeing, according to an empirical study by Hoggett et al (2019). In the same study, participants viewed managers as only looking after themselves, who lack the ability to do what is best for frontline officers and fail to provide the support and recognition they need. According to Haslam et al (2011), where followers believe that their leader is acting in the interests of the group rather than his/herself, and when that leader is in tune with and committed to meeting the needs of the group, then followers will trust and adopt the leader's vision. Haake (2015) suggests that officers' voices must be heard in any organisational decision-making.

### ***Dirty, invincible warriors***

It has been stated that a 'culture of invincibility' (Turner and Jenkins, 2018) can prevail amongst those serving in the police service, or that many officers can develop a 'warrior mindset' (McLean et al., 2019) in order to cope with the stress and the trauma outlined in the previous sub-section. The implications of developing this kind of mindset are that officers and their managers accept stress and trauma-related psychological morbidities simply as an occupational hazard, and for which they are not always properly supported or prepared (Bullock and Garland, 2020). In addition, it is likely that many of those who suffer from mental ill-health do not take sick leave and tend to 'battle on' (Cartwright and Roach, 2020). Many officers develop a 'hardening of personality' (De Camargo, 2022: 6) which is akin to wearing a mental uniform (Miller, 2007) in order to protect themselves from the trauma and stress they encounter in this occupation or can become withdrawn and desensitised to dealing with death and horror. De Camargo (2022) describes the occupation of policing as dirty work, applying a concept introduced by Hughes (1962), who described how some workers have to do jobs that are seen as objectionable to other people, but necessary to sustain an effectively working society and

carried out so that others in society can be considered 'clean'. Hughes (1962) developed this notion of dirty work into a typology of physical, social and moral 'taints', which was extended by McMurray and Ward (2014) who explored the nature of 'emotional dirt'. They describe this as 'the handling of difficult and burdensome emotions... outsourced to society's agents in the containment of [it]' (2014: 1123). Emotional dirt embraces the emotional labour and resultant psychological effects on individuals, which is involved with tertiary sector service provision.

Emotion-laden organisations (Boyle and Healy, 2003) are defined by the centrality of emotional labour and the processing of life changing events such as births and deaths. This is significant to this study because police deal with members of the public who have experienced life changing events; among them, the loss of a loved one, sudden deaths, road-traffic accidents, and incidents of domestic abuse. This research considers how handling such dirt affects them as individuals, how they experience it and cope with it and then what the impact is on their family life and relationships with their children, as this is an area where very little research has been done.

### ***Mental ill-health in the occupation***

Frequent exposure to operational stressors can have a significant impact on the psychological functioning of police officers (Marchand et al., 2015). This is compounded because a stigma exists for officers in disclosing mental health problems (Edwards and Kotera, 2021). It is generally accepted that there is a lack of mental health training in the organisation and the need for a change in attitude towards mental health (Cummings and Jones, 2010; Soomro and Yanos, 2018). In addition, the reluctance to disclose poor mental health can be attributed to the police culture of dominance and masculinity (Evans et al., 2013), which is explored in more detail in

the next section, as well as the need for emotional self-control (Bell and Eski, 2016) in the face of doing dirty work, as discussed in the previous section.

The negative psychological and emotional effects of doing such stressful and dirty work has become of increasing concern, as shown by the following recent initiatives and projects. MIND, the mental health charity launched a Blue Light programme in 2015, as a result of research into emergency services employees' experiences of mental ill-health (MIND, 2020) and their reluctance to take time off or report these issues compared to the general workforce. Findings from MIND's survey showed that ninety-one percent of the sample had suffered stress or low mood since joining the police service. In addition, Houdmont and Elliott-Davies, in 2017, conducted a survey of all police services in the England and Wales, and results showed that thirty-nine percent of employees experienced stress levels, which is three times higher than the rest of the population in the UK (Elliott- Davies, 2019). The findings of studies such as these clearly show that mental ill-health and wellbeing are core features of the police as an occupation and that wellbeing developments are needed. In 2019, the College of Policing launched the National Police wellbeing service, with the financial support of the Home Office, totalling £7.5m (College of Policing, 2019). In the same year, The Police Federation of England and Wales introduced the nine-point stress plan, and The University of Cambridge joined Police Care UK to examine PTSD amongst a sample of over sixteen thousand UK-based officers. The reported findings showed that twenty percent of those who had experienced trauma suffered from PTSD (University of Cambridge and Police Care UK, 2019). In 2020 the College of Policing and Public Health England launched Oscar Kilo; an initiative that included online resources for police employees (Oscar Kilo, 2020).

### ***Impact on family relationships***

It is widely acknowledged that the police role and its stressors present many issues for officers' family lives (Waters and Ussery, 2007; Miller, 2007; McDowell, 2017). Atypical schedules, shift work, macho culture, hypervigilance, commitment to the role, and overprotectiveness (Bullock and Garland, 2018) can all have negative impacts on families. For example, caring for officers suffering from PTSD or having to advocate for them or worrying about them committing suicide is exhausting for the spouse (McDowell, 2017). In addition, family members can suffer when living with and caring for a loved one with this disorder. According to Waters and Ussery (2007) the strain of living with someone with mental ill-health can lead to breakdowns in relationships, withdrawal from social networks and difficulty in trusting others. Randall and Buys (2013) conducted a study which showed that there is a high rate of divorce and separation amongst police families compared to other occupations. Miller (2007) however has suggested that there is no greater risk of a breakup if the relationship survives beyond its first few years.

### ***Impact on children***

There has been some speculation by researchers about the fears and difficulties experienced by the children of police officers, including fears about a parent being killed on duty, or a child being bullied (Helfers et al., 2021). However, an issue that is considered to be neglected in the literature (Kirschman, 2014) is how children of police officers are affected by the experiences of those officers. This particular research gap is explored through this study of the lives and experiences of frontline officers in the UK, to understand how those experiences of police officers trickle down to affect their children. It is important because children are thought to be especially vulnerable, lacking the maturity to cope and still learning to manage their own



emotions. Young children especially may lack the language skills to express their own emotions when experiencing the secondary effects of mental illness in a police officer parent, for example (Kirschman, 2014).

This section has explored how the occupation of policing can have a profoundly negative impact on officers' lives and their families too. It discussed, at the outset, how, in a bid to recruit new officers, the policing role is presented to job seekers in a simple way, with a focus on keeping law and order or protecting members of the public, which belies the widespread traumatic, stressful reality of the occupation and provides little warning about the damaging resultant effects it can have on individuals and their familial relationships. Discussion then turned to the glamorous rhetoric of policing often presented in popular TV shows, transposed against the reality that is characterised for many officers as being routine duties, trauma, high risk situations and high levels of organisational and occupational stressors that pose a myriad of psychosocial issues for officers and their family members. The notion of 'dirty work' was introduced in this section and explored, with examples taken from recent empirical studies, with the notion of emotional dirt, emotional labour and emotion-laden organisations being placed as a central tenet of the occupation of policing. After this, the links between the dirty work of policing and poor mental health amongst its officers were explored, with consideration given to the stigma associated with it and the reasons for stigma, including lack of mental health training in the police, and a culture of dominance and hyper-masculinity that prevents individuals from seeking help. As has been shown in this section, the issues experienced by officers become issues for the whole family, whether that is as a result of having an over-protective officer-father, suffering vicarious trauma as a spouse or child of an officer, or experiencing compassion-fatigue. These types of issues can lead to the much higher than average rates of divorce or separation experienced by police-families. The next section

examines how policing changed during the Covid-19 pandemic, which is when the data for this study was collected.

### **Policing during the Covid-19 pandemic**

Policing during a pandemic is undoubtedly complex, given the discussions in the previous section about the volatile nature of police-public relations, anti-police sentiment, the stressful nature of the occupation and lack of organisational or managerial support. Added to this mix, was the arrival of Coronavirus, first declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on 30 January 2020 and characterised as a pandemic on 11 March 2020 (WHO, 2023). At the time of writing (September 2023) there have been over 2.2 million confirmed deaths attributed to this virus, in Europe alone. (WHO, 2023). This section examines how the Covid-19 pandemic served to exacerbate tensions in the police-public relationship, as well increasing the chronic stress and anxiety experienced by many officers and their families.

### ***Covid-19, key workers and... the police***

It is widely accepted that the Covid-19 pandemic impacted key workers more severely than the general population (Stogner et al., 2020). Some of those key workers, notably NHS doctors and nurses, and care-home staff, were exalted as heroes for saving lives, and applauded by the media and general population. This gratitude was encouraged and shown for example by the weekly round of applause for key workers, which ran for ten weeks in the first lockdown, under the name 'Clap for our Carers'. The initiative returned in January 2021 under the name 'Clap for Heroes', in an attempt to lift spirits (Nursing Times, 2021), but many nurses responded via social media that they did not support the return of the event, and wanted 'the government to raise wages for nurses', believing the term hero implied 'invincibility' when in fact nurses were

struggling or had ‘seen too much ...abuse and harshness towards the medical profession ...to fully believe the sentiment is real’ (Twitter, 2021). Resentment was felt by many working in these professions and their respective unions, and this was mobilised through strike action and demonstrations in support of fair pay in 2022 and 2023 (BBC News, 2023).

Whilst the NHS might have appeared to be revered by the public during Covid-19 lockdowns, not all occupations benefitted from such largely rhetorical gestures. As a result of reports discussed in the earlier section, and by some media articles about the police, also discussed earlier, public sentiment about the police is now ‘frayed’ (De Camargo, 2022). The study of the police as dirty key workers carried out by De Camargo and Whiley (2022), revealed that the police performed the role of villains during the pandemic, effectively dropping down the ranks of prestige compared to other key workers such as care home staff and nurses. In fact the media glorified such workers during that time (De Camargo and Whiley, 2022) in the US as well as here in the UK (Mejia et al., 2021). The police on the other hand, had to carry out unpleasant, unwelcome duties such as issuing fines for non-compliance of social distancing rules and prohibiting contact with loved ones. This positioned them as ‘dirty’ workers, whilst ambulance crews and nurses were revered and seen as prestigious because they were saving lives, and, for example, helping families stay together by surviving the virus. This lack of esteem for the police, and lack of gratitude for their efforts had a negative effect on their morale (De Camargo and Whiley, 2022).

### ***Covid-19 and police stress in over-drive***

As was discussed in the previous sub-section, the Coronavirus presented and, even at the time of writing (December 2023), continues to present a dangerous and largely unknown risk to

police officers and indeed other key or emergency workers. It was the cause of more officer deaths than any other in 2020 (Hider, 2020). Fearing contraction of any infectious disease, including SARS and Ebola, can lead to overwhelming levels of stress, anxiety, PTSD and depression (Xiang, 2020), even though both of these diseases were shorter in duration and not as widespread as Covid-19 continues to be. Rooney and McNicholas (2020) support this assertion by stating that frontline staff are particularly exposed to ‘an insuperable amount of stress’ during outbreaks. In addition to concerns for their own safety during pandemics, frontline workers suffer psychologically and experience feelings of guilt as a result of the risks of them transmitting the virus directly to family members and others.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, officers were exposed to trauma repeatedly and in many different ways. For example, they had to attend a huge number of deaths in care homes, where the virus was the cause: ‘15 deaths in 24 hours’ as one officer reported (Dearden, 2020). According to Che Donald, vice chair of the Police Federation of England and Wales (PFEW) at the time, what took particular toll on officers was ‘exposure to grieving families.’ (Donald, 2020). Officers came into regular contact with the general public when most people were isolating at home and were without adequate PPE (Personal Protection Equipment), describing access to it as a ‘postcode lottery’ (Dearden, 2020). In addition, twenty-four percent of officers reported incidents where members of the public had purposely coughed on them ‘at least once’ during 2021 (Elliott-Davies, 2021: 3). This shows that the Covid virus was being weaponised against officers and is in keeping with earlier research carried out by Bullock and Garland (2020) who found that increased levels of fear about contamination of any virus, i.e. even before the Covid-19 pandemic, can lead to emotional fatigue and anxiety. The mental health charity ‘MIND’ states on its help pages for workers, that stress levels are negatively impacted if an occupation requires an individual to ‘come into contact with a lot of people’ and explains

that anxiety levels can increase if there is lack of access to PPE (MIND, 2020). To put this into perspective, almost one in three officers reported that a member of the public believed to carry the virus had threatened to cough on them and nearly a quarter of officers reported that someone had actually carried out this threat (Police Federation, 2021).

### ***Organisational stressors on officers during Covid-19***

As was discussed in the previous section on the occupation of policing, a stressor in policing stems from the organisation itself. During the Covid-19 pandemic for example, many officers felt that they received inadequate support from management and that a lack of collegial support existed simultaneously (De Camargo, 2022). According to her study, ways that line managers showed lack of support included downplaying the seriousness of the virus and ridiculing officers for being afraid of it in some instances (De Camargo, 2022). In policing, having emotional responses to traumatic situations is seen as showing weakness (Kurtz, 2008) and surface acting and impression management (Hochschild, 1983) can be seen as an integral part of the ‘working personality’ of an officer (Waddington, 1999). This is significant to this research because the heightened levels of stress and trauma experienced by officers during the Covid-19 pandemic have had major impacts on them as individuals and, in light of the work of Kurtz and Hochschild above, it means that officers may need to repress emotional reactions and manage impressions even more. Understandably police stress and anxiety whilst working during the Covid-19 Pandemic is at an increased level compared to pre-pandemic times, and this is also experienced by their families (De Camargo, 2021b). This type of stress and emotional management, and its impact on police-families will be analysed in this research. The next section explores masculinity in the police, and how that is produced, reproduced and performed in the hegemonic, hyper-masculine police organisation.

## **Masculinity and the police**

### ***Masculinity in the police – a complex, dynamic and situational phenomena***

Sociologist Joan Acker provides a useful starting point when considering gender and then masculinity within an organisational context such as that of the police. Acker argues in her seminal work (1990, 1992) that organisations provide settings for the production and reproduction of gender by individuals and structures as well as via beliefs, symbols, routines and ways of working. In this context, gender can be viewed as a contextually situated, complex process. This view is backed by Connell (2005) who put forward the idea that masculinities, the subject of this research, are multiple and dynamic rather than static, constantly being socially constructed and can be occupied situationally. This means that the masculinity that is performed in one context or organisation can be different from that of another (Connell, 2005) and also acknowledged by sociologists Collinson and Hearn (1996) and Kerfoot and Knights (1998).

Underpinning sociological literature on gender, and its impact on work and organisation studies, is a view that gender is not a characteristic that individuals have or possess, but something they do with their behaviour, and organisations ‘do gender’ through gendering processes or structures, through what Acker (2006) terms ‘inequality regimes’ whereby in her research in 1990 she found that police culture puts work first, in fact prioritising work above family life and any involvement in it. This gendered ‘ideal’ worker who puts work first and above family is found not only in the police but is present in other organisational settings that have been the subject of research, including the military (Hale, 2012).

More recently, Agocs et al. (2015) in a study of 16 police mothers in Canada, supported these earlier views espoused by Acker and Connell, by discussing how work and family life are expected to be kept separate in the masculine organisational culture and work has to take priority over family. Agocs et al. (2015) describe the police organisational structure as paramilitary, building on Manning (1978) who described its propensity towards rigid rules and inflexibility regarding shifts. Schulze (2011) discusses the hegemonic masculinity that exists in the police culture, and how this marginalises women within it, particularly mothers who experience further challenges once their mother identity is known. The mothers in the Agocs et al. (2015) study felt torn between work and home demands, and guilty for not spending as much time as they wished to with their children due to the demanding and regimented nature of policing. In addition the dangerous situations they face at work shaped their perceptions of danger facing their children, making them over-protective. There is a small number of studies that examine the intersection of policing and parenting, highlighting the importance of separation of home and work life in the police. Participants in these studies believed that if, in this highly masculinised environment, they mentioned childcare making it difficult or impossible to work overtime or certain shifts they would be perceived as unsuitable for police employment (Cowan and Bochantin, 2009). These beliefs are similarly espoused by participants in another study by Duxbury and Higgins (2012).

In line with Acker and Connell's work, and the later research by Agocs et al. (2015) described above, this research argues that the police service is premised on the notion of the ideal worker, and is not gender neutral, which ultimately contributes to the challenge that fathers also face when they are seen to be not 'ideal', i.e. by wanting to be involved in their children's lives, when making requests, for example, for flexible working hours in an inflexible organisation.

### *The police as a hegemonic, hyper-masculine organisation*

The police service has been described as a 'prototypical hegemonic masculinity organisation; (Alcadipani, 2020: 735), one that privileges characteristics associated with masculinity such as physicality and aggression (Brown et al., 2020). The notion of hegemony describes a position of dominance and stems from the writing of Gramsci (1971). Further to this, Connell (1987) formulated the concept of hegemonic masculinity, which serves as an instrument through which to identify men's attitudes and practices that cause gender inequality, domination of women by men and the subordination of some other men, usually minority groups.

Masculinity is seen as the main characteristic of police occupational culture (Fielding, 1994; Innes, 2003), and its focus on officers being outwardly heterosexual (Loftus, 2008) showing virility, being tough, and having an interest in sports and sex (Van Maanen, 1978). Hegemonic masculinity is maintained within the police service by the use of 'authority, heterosexism, displays of force and the subordination of women' (Rabe-Hemp, 2009: 3). The police working environment is described as highly masculinised by Cowan and Bochatin (2009), which is echoed by other studies showing that the subculture of policing is hypermasculine, and where traditional gender roles are reproduced to maintain male dominance and to keep women at a disadvantage (Agocs et al., 2015; Kurtz et al., 2012).

Hegemonic masculinity is of particular relevance to this research because officers who want to be involved fathers also have to be very committed to their role at work. Hegemonic notions of what it means to be a police officer and a father or parent are ostensibly incompatible. This research explores, through the third Research Question, whether there are counter-hegemonic



ways of being and working, as it asks, ‘What could be the future conditions of possibility for police officers who are, or aspire to be, involved father-carers?’

### ***Police as a masculinity contest culture***

Rawski and Workman-Stark (2018: 608) suggest that a masculinity contest culture is present in the police service, the dimensions of which are: ‘show no weakness’, ‘strength and stamina’, ‘dog-eat-dog competition’ and ‘suppressing emotion’ other than anger, to avoid being perceived as weak. The typical officer is depicted in various literatures as macho (Dick and Cassell, 2004), physically strong (Courpasson and Monties, 2017), rational in his decision making rather than emotional (Fassin, 2013), able to diminish whatever stress is caused by his working conditions (Yates et al., 2018), along with a downplaying of any other health issues (Rawski and Workman-Stark, 2018), and aggressive and competitive (Silvestri, 2017). In addition, there is a requirement for police officers to prove their masculinity which can lead to them taking risks (Rawski and Workman-Stark, 2018). Police culture embraces the idea that the public are not trustworthy (Pickett and Nix, 2019), which affects how they interact with people outside of the organisation. As was touched upon in the previous section, police officers have been found to develop a working personality that serves as a way of coping with danger and the unpredictable nature of the work. This working personality includes being conservative, hyper-sensitive to danger and developing solidarity with peers. Campeau (2019) goes further than the idea of solidarity however, and states that officers form a brotherhood, and that the narrative of the family can exist amongst officers when they describe how they have a sense of safety and belonging when in the company of other officers (du Plessis et al., 2021). Officers at work often describe their colleagues, i.e., those working on the same shift or team, as a second family (Thompson et al., 2023).

If hegemonic masculinity and overt performances of machismo are the foundations of organisational culture in the police, this research sets out to unearth the ramifications for men who work for this organisation and want also to be active, involved father-carers.

### ***Impact on family relationships***

As has been described above, and revealed through the studies discussed thus far, working family-friendly hours carries the ‘taint of having only a half-hearted commitment to policing’ according to Yates et al. (2018: 96.). This concurs with other research too, where caring responsibilities are described as creating a barrier to progression in policing (Laverick and Cain 2015). In addition, police culture condones and encourages traditional masculine gender norms, which restrict men’s active involvement in family life (Bünning and Pollmann-Schult, 2016), along with the maintenance of ideologies about fathers as breadwinners and mothers as homemakers (Burnett et al., 2013). What then are the impacts of policing on frontline officers’ familial relationships? This is a neglected topic within social science. Finch (1983) states that wives perform emotional labour when supporting partners in their jobs, and according to Southern (2018) this type of labour can be detrimental when there are high levels of occupational stress, such as in policing. In a study by Jackson and Maslach (1982) it was revealed that policing results in stress being taken home, creating a negative and disruptive effect on officers’ families. For example, officers can arrive home exhausted, angry and upset as a result of their work and the situations they have encountered. The authors noted that family members can then develop a negative attitude towards the job, distance themselves from it and the officer who is a father or a partner and fail to offer the social and emotional support he or she may need. Whilst there is a paucity of research about police officers and the effects of their

work on their families, research has been carried out on other security related jobs, for example Crawley's (2002) study of prison officers and family issues. She describes the conflicts and tensions experienced when navigating between prison and home life and discusses the notion of a spill-over effect. This is highly relevant to my own study and extends Hughes' idea of dirty work and then McMurray and Ward's (2014) idea of emotional dirty work, by examining how father-police officers try to prevent emotional dirt spill-over into the home. According to Southern (2018), in a study of police officers who were dealing with terrorist attacks, conflict usually occurs within a masculine framework. That is to say that there is a focus on males as defenders or aggressors within conflicts and 'women go less observed' (Southern, 2018: 108). In my own study, I bring to life the voices of the partners and children of police officers, through the stories of their fathers, to reveal how they have been affected by the policing occupation, thus making a contribution to the scholarly understanding of the impact of policing on them and not just the serving officer.

## **Conclusion**

This Context chapter has been developed around a four-part structure, to discuss the following areas: first, a brief history of British policing was discussed, to understand how it has transitioned from being a protective service to its current status as a uniformed institution. Second, policing as an occupation and its impact on officers was explored, to reveal what the day-to-day life of a serving officer involves, and the conditions under which officers work, with analysis of some of the major impacts that this has on the individual. It is clear from engaging with contemporary literature and empirical research that the conditions and nature of policing places particular stresses and demands on those who perform this role. It is also apparent from considering empirical studies, that managers and leaders in the police service

are viewed as uncaring towards officers, and recognition and support is considered to be lacking. Links have been drawn between the individual experience of the officer and their family life, with particular attention given to the relationship between fathers and children because that is what this thesis sets out to explore. Third, policing during the Covid-19 pandemic was included because the data for this research was gathered during that time, and therefore it is salient and interesting to understand how this global crisis affected the work and family lives of frontline officers. Fourth and finally, this chapter has explored masculinity and the police, i.e., what is currently known about what it means to be a man within this distinctly hyper-masculine, macho and hegemonic institution.

On the basis of the issues raised in this chapter, the following Research Questions underpin the study that is outlined in the next chapter, Chapter Three:

1. What does it mean to be a father-carer who wants to be involved, while working in a frontline protective service role?
2. How do father-carers who are frontline protective service providers experience caregiving fatherhood?
3. What could be the future conditions of possibility for frontline protective service workers who are, or aspire to be involved father-carers?

A really interesting context within which the empirical problem and Research Questions can be better understood is the UK Police Service. Not only is it a protective frontline service but one that has been subjected to public scrutiny and critique in recent years because of the dynamics of masculinity. These particular Research Questions have been developed because

police officers work effectively have two caring responsibilities; one as a father and the other as a provider of a protective frontline service role that requires them, for example, to care for victims of crime, and care about what happens to their colleagues. Neither the MacPherson Report nor the Casey Review included qualitative insights about what it is like to work within and experience the police culture of the MPS or British Police more widely. The MacPherson Report used accounts and statements of those involved in the investigation of Stephen Lawrence's murder, and the Casey Review used survey data from police employees and Londoners. Neither of these reports, nor does the academic literature reviewed in this chapter provide an account of what it is like to be a parent/carer within an institution that has been examined and labelled as hegemonic, toxic, and bullying, with a culture of denial and poor leadership and the challenges that might pose for fathers with caring responsibilities. This is surprising given the media concerns about hegemonic masculinity in the police. This study aims to fill those gaps by gathering the stories and experiences of current police officers through narrative style interviews. The generation of such rich data reveal what it is like to work in such an organisation as a father with caring responsibilities. It reinstates the whole person, to unearth what it was like for them before and during the Covid-19 pandemic, when they needed space and support to care but did not find it in a culture that does not value or put care first. This study also allows greater understanding of the impact of policing on them as individuals, on family relationships, especially with children.

## **Chapter Three: Understanding caring as/and dirty work: Theoretical framing**

### **Introduction**

To understand the complexities and the challenges of being an involved father-carer who works within the UK Police Service, it is pertinent to turn to the theoretical ideas that help to frame the research that can be done to respond to the Research Questions outlined in Chapter Two. So, in order to respond to these Research Questions, I will be working with a theoretical framing that understands social relations through a feminist ethics of care and relationality. In addition, I will be drawing on theoretical ideas that understand caring as emotional dirt. This chapter therefore starts by considering how we have arrived at a contemporary notion of a feminist ethics of care and gives an overview of what care means. It reveals the origins and evolution of the concept of care, starting with its early beginnings in Greek philosophy, discussing the influences on it by Christianity, before considering the work of Heidegger in relation to care. Discussion then turns to contemporary and nuanced developments of relational care ethics by considering how it was developed by Gilligan (1977, 1982) and the subsequent work of Tronto (1993, 2010), who argued for care as a deliberate activity showing concern for the individual. Discussion then turns to some of the most contemporary ideas about an ethics of care, focusing on the ideas and developments put forward about it by Chatzidakis et al. (2020). Writing as *The Care Collective*, in the wake of Covid-19, Chatzidakis et al., called for an acknowledgement of individuals' mutual interdependence, the valuing and sharing of care, and an expansion of caring kinship through what they term 'promiscuous care' (care beyond

kinship, into all spheres of society) (2022: 41). This term, and its relevance to this research, will be discussed later in this chapter.

Attention is then given to the theoretical ideas that understand caring as emotional dirt, which necessitates an understanding and framing of dirty work and taint as it relates to the protective services and masculinity. Consideration is given to how this helps us to understand the emotional experiences of coping with dirt, as well as how spillover of emotional dirt into family life might be prevented or at least stemmed. This brings us, finally, to a discussion of the work of Jenna Ward and Robert McMurray, , whose work on emotional labour and emotional dirt is highly relevant in this context.

### **How did we get to a feminist ethics of care?**

What does ‘care’ mean? As a term it is hard to define because, in the English language at least, it is ‘flexible and expansive’ (Chatzidakis et al., 2020). In addition it can take a multitude of forms, which will now be distinguished from one another. According to Rottenberg and Segal (2023) ‘caretaking’ has been historically associated with the feminine, understood as women’s work, confined to the private or domestic sphere, where women are central to reproduction and mothering considered the archetypal caring relationship. Caretaking, often carried out by women and other marginalised groups such as ethnic minorities, without payment of a wage, is essential but not valued in the same way as other forms of work. According to Chatzidakis et al. (2020: 890) ‘neoliberal capitalism has drawn on a longer history of devaluation (of care) whilst reshaping and deepening it’. Another form of care is ‘caring for’, which involves the physical or hands-on aspects of care and is evident, for example, in how children are cared for by their parents, or how care workers look after the elderly in a home. ‘Caring about’ describes a more emotional investment and attachment to other individuals, causes or the environment.

Finally ‘caring with’ is a political orientation, describing how individuals experience and express solidarity with others in order to ‘help transform our world’ (Rottenberg and Segal, 2023).

Definitions of forms of care and meanings aside, it is also interesting and useful when researching the care challenges of fathers, to understand the origins of the concept of ‘care’ and how it has evolved, which are explored in the next section.

### **What are the origins of the concept of care and how did it evolve?**

In Greek philosophy, human beings were regarded as ethical, socially responsible and community-contributors. This was achieved by being able to control and discipline one’s individual bodily and mental activities, or what Foucault (1984) terms ‘taking care of the self’.

The idea of ‘care’ was then developed and refocused through Christianity, where the attention of the caretaking became directed at others rather than the self. This idea stemmed from the Bible and its teachings that all human beings are created and loved equally by God. New Testament verses such as ‘My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.’ (John 15: 12–13) and ‘in humility value others above yourself, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.’ (Philippians 2: 3–4). This shows how, according to scripture, humans should look towards caring for others rather than themselves. This expansion and refocus of ‘care’ is considered the turning point for more contemporary philosophers (Faldetta, 2016). German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1927) for example, used the term ‘Sorge’ (care), proposing that humans, in their sense of ‘Da-sein’ (being there) essentially exist



as individuals who ‘take care’. This means they put effort, time and energy into being concerned about others and their needs.

Care is something that most humans experience (hopefully) throughout their lives, or at least some part of it. This is perhaps most evident in the parent-child relationship at home but can also be seen in teacher-student relationships at school, amongst colleagues in the workplace, or in the carer-elderly person relationship in a care home. Those who do the caring are viewed as being able to direct attention onto others who are in need of care, forging interpersonal and interactive relationships in the process (Faldetta, 2016).

The next section considers the work of scholars such as Carol Gilligan and Joan Tronto, who are some of the most influential contributors to an ethics of care, before discussing the importance and relevance to this research of the work of the Care Collective and Lynne Segal.

### **Key contributors to an ethics of care (EoC) – Gilligan, Tronto, The Care Collective and Segal.**

An ethics of care (EoC) proposes that relational connections serve to ‘guide moral decision making’ and that ethics are ‘best explored through contextually relevant experiences.’ with a focus on building trust and being responsive to individuals’ needs (Formentin and Bortree, 2018: 3). EoC, whilst embracing Gilligan’s feminine perspective, (discussed in more detail in the next section) is not bound by it. Rather, it takes into consideration the lived experiences and interconnectedness of all individuals and also recognises that relationships are impacted by power discrepancies. Using an EoC in this research is important as it considers the experiences

of caregiving fathers within the UK Police Service as a context, who are interconnected with other individuals including colleagues, managers, family members and the public, all of whom exert power over them and impact on their ability to care for others.

First, let us consider the contributions of key scholars who have developed different but relevant notions of ethics of care since its beginnings in the 1980s when ‘care’ was seen as a feminine approach to morality and which also ‘pays attention to the relevance of relations, individual situations and unique problems’ (Leget and Kohlen, 2020: 76).

### ***Carole Gilligan***

The ‘ethics of care’ is a term and framework stemming from feminist moral judgement and commonly associated with research carried out by American Carole Gilligan (1977). In the 1960s psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg (1981) developed a human moral development model, showing the stages individuals pass through (See Appendix Five), and claimed that individuals become morally mature as a result of these defined stages. He suggested that girls were less likely than boys to make moral judgements in terms of justice so less likely to reach the higher stages of moral development (Kohlberg, 1981). Gilligan (then Kohlberg’s academic assistant) criticized Kohlberg’s theory on account of its gender bias and absence of women in the samples from which he had developed his theories (Reiter, 1996). She carried out empirical work focusing exclusively on women, exploring their decisions about having or not having an abortion. The goal of this work was to understand moral development from a female perspective (Simola, 2003) and address historical norms about human development that privileged and defaulted to men and framed women as deficient in comparison. She discovered that women did not talk about rights and rules but about ‘relationships, connections and social

context' (Leget and Kohlen, 2020: 77), which revealed the need to consider concrete situations. This work led to Gilligan (1982) presenting an account of ethics that focused on women's moral orientation. In her monograph 'In a Different Voice' she presented care as a 'neglected form of everyday morality or moral thinking' (Leget and Kohlen, 2020: 76).

According to Gilligan (1982), individuals live life in a network of care and dependence. She contrasted the voice of care with the voice of justice, seeing care as a 'moral orientation that pays attention to the particularities of individual situations and meaning of relationships' (Leget and Kohlen, 2020: 77) and suggested that women, rather than being morally deficient, progress through decision-making by caring for themselves and others (Gilligan, 1977; Liedtka, 1996). This was different to 'masculine ethical frameworks that establish universal rules centred on abstract reasoning' (Lemon and Boman, 2022). Thus, whilst Kohlberg had focused on males, Gilligan had focused on females, which led to the debate about a 'male ethics of justice' and a 'female ethics of care' (Leget and Kohlen, 2020: 77). Despite the central role that Gilligan played in bringing to the fore a feminist analysis of developmental psychology and in empowering girls and women (Gilligan et al., 1990; Brown and Gilligan, 1992), her work has been criticised for its exaggeration of differences between males and females and for being restricted to existing networks of personal relationships (Senchuk, 1990). Other critics of Gilligan have suggested that she exhibits essentialism of 'a particularly strong kind' (Heyes, 1997: 146) and reinforces a 'biologically deterministic notion of women's nature' (1997: 146). This permits a conclusion that women have 'an affinity for relationships of care' which is seen as 'biologically natural and a good thing' (Kerber, 1986: 309).

By the 1990s however, care was no longer discussed in such terms, i.e. from a feminine perspective and care ethics ceased to be a purely feminine approach. The next section considers how Joan Tronto contributed to the ethic of care and how her approach differed to that of Gilligan outlined above.

### *Joan Tronto*

Joan Tronto, professor and feminist political theorist, who first defined care as a social practice of public and political concern (Tronto 1993), suggested that EoC must be shown through actions not just intentions. She suggested that there should be no caring exemptions and that: ‘everyone should receive adequate care throughout life... everyone is entitled to participate in relationships of care that give meaning to life... (and) everyone is entitled to participate in the public process by which judgements about how society should ensure these first two premises.’ (Tronto, 1993: 19).

Tronto understands care work as necessary but devalued in society, and something that is mainly performed by women. In addition, her assertion is that care work should be an activity in which individuals are constantly engaged and which should form part of public debates and be viewed as a political ideal, to raise its status as a practice and for those who perform it. (Tronto and Fisher, 1990, Tronto 1993, 2006). She wanted to avoid a romanticisation of the mother-child relationship as it eliminates any responsibility (to care) by other societal members. Tronto and Fisher (1990) acknowledge that caring activity varies according to different cultures and is not a single activity but an ongoing one.

Tronto and Fisher (1990) developed a four-phase model of EoC, which included the following interconnected phases; ‘caring about’, ‘caring for’, ‘care giving’ and ‘care receiving’. Tronto (2013) subsequently developed this model further to include ‘caring with’. Each of these phases is discussed in more detail below.

‘Caring about’ is the first of the five phases. This happens when an individual’s or group’s needs are noticed through others being attentive to them (Groot et al., 2018). This requires both caregiver and receiver to listen, be present and interested in one another. The second phase is ‘caring for’ which, according to Tronto (2013: 34), involves ‘meeting the needs identified in phase one’ and is where power dynamics are acknowledged (Groot et al., 2018). The third phase, ‘care giving’ is the actual act of providing care (Lemon and Boman, 2022), and the fourth, ‘care receiving’ is where the caregiver and receiver find meaning in the actions collaboratively. Finally, ‘caring with’ happens once trust and solidarity have been developed and relies upon all the previous phases having transpired. Ongoing engagement and care can then become expected. This model of care highlights how care is connected to the ongoing actions and attitudes between caregiver and receiver, with its focus on building relationships. It is a useful framework to use when exploring and trying to understand whether fathers in frontline policing are cared about. For example, are their needs as fathers noticed by other possible caring agents such as managers and HRM function in the police service?

The next section discusses how the work of The Care Collective drew upon and expanded this earlier model provided by Tronto, to provide more nuanced notions of care.

### *The Care Collective*

The Care Collective is a group of London-based authors and activists; Andreas Chatzidakis, Jamie Hakim, Jo Littler, Catherine Rottenberg and Lynne Segal. They draw upon the insights of Tronto described in the previous section, and by drawing attention to her distinction between ‘caring for’ (hands-on care), ‘caring about’ (emotional investment in and attachment to others) and ‘caring with’ (mobilising care politically) (Tronto, 2013), they state that these distinctions: ‘do not do justice to all care capacities and practices in their many diverse configurations and manifestations. Nor do they account for the paradoxes, ambivalences and contradictions inherent in care and caretaking’ (Chatzidakis et al., 2022: 21).

So, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic (2020) they published *The Care Manifesto: The Politics of Interdependence* and launched what they termed ‘a radical vision’ of care that recognised ‘the need to acknowledge our mutual interdependence and vulnerabilities’. They advanced a model of ‘universal care’ that valued and shared care, no longer tolerating it as an exploited labour-form carried out primarily by women or other marginalised groups. This model called for more inventive forms of collective care including an expansion of the notion of kinship through what they termed ‘alternative caring kinships’ (multiplying individuals’ circles of care) and a ‘new ethics of promiscuous care’ (multiplying the numbers of people they care for, care about and care with). In so doing they allowed individuals to experiment with how they care (Chatzidakis et al., 2020: 33).

A particularly useful example of alternative caring kinships provided by Chatzidakis et al. (2020: 37) is the care network they term ‘strangers like me’, where care is carried out by strangers whose lives resemble each other’s. The authors draw upon the research of digital

sociologist Paul Byron, who revealed that trans people, as a marginalised group at risk of violence and suicide, used Tumblr (a social media platform) to provide care for each other anonymously. Tumblr therefore offers a space for trans people to experience belonging and care (Byron, 2016). This notion of alternative caring kinships, used within the context of British frontline policing and the fathers who carry out roles within that organisation, is extremely useful. It reveals how fathers who experience a lack of care about them in the workplace might seek out and establish different ways of caring inside and outside of work. With regard to seeking caring relationships outside of work in particular, it is interesting to note that care networks of ‘strangers like me’ are used by officers to make connections with others in different contexts to the police, for example in charity fundraising events and extreme endurance competitions as the Findings and Discussion Chapters of this thesis will reveal.

‘Promiscuous care’ is also a term used by The Care Collective and is based on AIDS activist theory of the 1980s and 1990s according to Chatzidakis et al. (2020: 41). Here they suggest that everyone has the ability and capacity to care and that all forms of care should be equally valued, recognised and resourced. In addition, they suggest ‘not just mothers and not just women...all our lives are improved when we care and are cared for, when we care together.’ (2022: 44)

Rather than caring casually or in a neoliberal capitalist detached and indifferent way, promiscuous care ethics spread outwards, indiscriminately, from intimate relations to more distant ones. Chatzidakis et al. (2020) argue that the caring state should ‘furnish both carer and cared for with the legal, social and cultural recognition for the resources they need.’ (2022: 42). I argue and show through this research that organisations should also do this, so that carers,

regardless of gender, should be cared about and have their needs to care met. Having adequate recognition of fathers' caring responsibilities and desires and giving them time and space to care for others (especially their partners and children), would make them feel secure in asking for organisational support to do this, go some way to relieve mothers of the burden of care and help create greater gender equality in the workplace.

### *Lynne Segal*

Lynne Segal, former Anniversary Professor of Psychology and Gender Studies, was one of the co-writers of the above-mentioned Care Collective that published *The Care Manifesto* (2020). She went on to publish *Lean on Me* (2023), in which she uses the notion of 'radical care' to describe individuals' shared interdependence and fragility, along with their mutual need for recognition and support. She makes a 'rallying cry' to put questions of care at the heart of everything, to collaborate and transform how we approach our everyday care needs and vulnerabilities. Segal acknowledges that the giving and receiving of care requires 'time, support and resources... to be done well' (2023: 8). In addition she draws upon the example of hospitals and other caring professions, calling for lessons to be learned from the global calamity of the Covid-19 pandemic, when emergency services were overwhelmed and its workers exhausted and where care workers were denied the equipment needed to protect them from the virus. This is also relevant to the work of other protective frontline workers such as police officers. As this thesis will show, they are also a vulnerable group who are increasingly suffering as a result of lack of care and in need of urgent and radical transformation of the way they are cared about.



Having discussed the meaning and evolution of care and an ethics of care, as well as the contributions of key scholars, the next section considers additional concepts that might help in understanding the lived experiences of frontline police officers who are caregiving fathers. Notions of dirty work, and particularly emotional dirty work can help to give context to the working conditions of police officers and help in understanding how they might respond to their emotional dirty work by positioning themselves as caring in a paternalistic way.

### **Caring as emotional dirt**

Research into the tainted, dirty and emotional lives of police officers necessitates greater understanding of the theoretical framing that surrounds it. To this end, the next section will give an overview of the evolution of the concepts of dirty work, first introduced by Hughes (1951, 1958) and taint (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999). Discussion then turns to the significance to this study of the concept of emotional contagion, understood as the ‘transfer of moods or emotions from one person to another’ (Barsade et al, 2018). Consideration is then given to the role of toxin handlers, a concept introduced as ‘toxic’ handlers by Frost and Robinson (1999) and then developed as ‘toxin’ handlers in subsequent literature by Frost (2003) to describe individuals within any part of an organisation who help to manage and mitigate the effects of toxic emotions expressed by others. Emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983) in the policing context is discussed. It then examines how the concept of emotional dirt (McMurray and Ward, 2014) has been applied in other contexts before honing in on its relevance to policing and considers the work of key contributors to academic literature and research that applies the concept of dirty work to various occupations.

## Introduction

Dirty work describes certain occupations and associated tasks that are viewed as disgusting, degrading or undignified to perform (Hughes, 1958), and which are delegated to agents who deal with problems or people that might threaten the solidarity or self-concept of a community (Hughes, 1962). However these occupations are a 'necessary evil' in society (Kreiner et al., 2006), 'noble' even (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999), and where the 'agents' (Hughes, 1962) maintain the order of an organised system by removing 'matter out of place' from that system (Douglas, 1966). The individuals who carry out such dirty, disgusting and distasteful work can be tainted by it, or stigmatised simply by association with this matter out of place, because they remind us of our proximity to it, i.e. the dirt, and the fragile nature of the boundaries that separate us from it (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999). This section explores the different forms of dirty work, first by drawing on Hughes' typology (1951, 1958), to consider how work can be physically, socially and morally tainted. It then moves on to explore the contribution of Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) and other empirical studies and literature that have analysed work using the concepts of dirty work and taint. Consideration is then given to the more recent work of McMurray and Ward (2014) and Ward and McMurray (2016) who developed the notion of a fourth dimension of emotional taint, thereby adding to Ashforth and Kreiner's tripartite classification. Ward and McMurray's work is drawn upon and developed because, as this section reveals, previous empirical literature on dirty work in the protective services has tended to neglect the emotional and care-related aspect of dealing with dirt. Ward and McMurray foregrounded that, opening up a new avenue for this kind of research. Research on the emotional taint associated with policing is limited in the sense that it does not sufficiently consider the strategies employed by frontline officers who are caregiving fathers and who are trying to cope with work-related emotional dirt and prevent its overspill into their home life.

### **Dirty work and taint – the evolution of the concepts**

In 1951, sociologist Everett Hughes introduced the term ‘dirty work’, using it to describe occupational tasks that are viewed as disgusting or degrading in different ways:

‘It may be simply physically disgusting. It may be a symbol of degradation, something that wounds one’s dignity. Finally it may be dirty work in that it in some ways goes counter to the more heroic of our moral conceptions.’ (Hughes, 1951: 319).

In order to better understand the different forms of dirty work, Hughes (1958) subsequently classified these tasks simply as ‘physically, socially or morally’ (1958: 122) tainted but did not give further insight (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999). He did however convey a sense of what dirty work consisted of by using a variety of occupational examples, including the work of janitors (Hughes, 1958) and prison guards (Hughes, 1962). For Hughes (1958, 1962) dirty work exists because of the need to deal with problems or issues in society that can ‘threaten the solidarity and self-conception of a given community’ (McMurray and Ward, 2014). Dirt is a dividing practice, with in-groups separating themselves from others who they deem to be ‘dirty’ or ‘unscrupulous’ (Hughes, 1962). According to Douglas (1966) dirt is also a social construction, and ‘the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter...’ and ‘matter out of place’ (1966: 35). In this sense, dirt is contextual and relates to the systems and ordering of society. Some types of work are not essentially or inherently dirty, but their dirtiness is decided upon subjectively, according to whichever standards of cleanliness exist at a given time. It also has a social significance, because it separates ‘clean us’ from ‘dirty them’ (McMurray and Ward, 2014: 1126). Hughes observed (1962) that dirty work is delegated to groups who are assigned, as agents, to deal with it on behalf of the rest of society and that ‘society then stigmatises these groups, effectively disarming and disavowing the work it has mandated’

(Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999: 413). In addition, Hughes (1951: 313) observed that an individual's occupation is a combination of 'price tag and calling card', meaning that workers can choose the work they do within reason, so are judged more harshly for choosing to do such dirty work.

Ashforth and Kreiner (1999: 415) went on to 'enhance the conceptual rigor' of Hughes' earlier attempt to classify dirty work, by offering two criteria for each form of taint. Physical taint was viewed as being associated with 'garbage, death, effluent...' (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999: 415), with examples given of the work of butchers and funeral directors. Physical taint was also experienced in noxious or dangerous conditions, i.e. in occupations such as mining, and the protective services, including the military and firefighting. Social taint was evident in occupations involving contact with stigmatised individuals or groups, where a 'courtesy stigma' existed (Goffman 1963; Page, 1984). A courtesy stigma involves the evocation of public disapproval as a consequence of associating with a stigmatised person or persons. Stigma was first defined by Erving Goffman, a sociologist, in 1963, as a social attribute that discredits an individual or group and has a resultant negative impact on their self-concept and identity formation (Scambler, 2009). In addition, Goffman (1963: 30) suggested that 'the problems faced by stigmatised persons spread out in waves of diminishing intensity among those they come into contact with' which could include friends and family members. Examples of such occupations which are stigmatised because of the social taint associated with them include police detectives and social workers, and those where a servile relationship to others exists, i.e. a maid or customer complaints handler. Moral taint is described by Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) as an occupation where the work is seen as 'somewhat sinful or of dubious virtue' (1999: 415) including that performed by exotic dancers or pawnbrokers, or where intrusive or confrontational methods are used, which could describe the work of police interrogators or tabloid reporters. Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) acknowledged that many

occupations can be tainted in more than one way, giving the example of executioners who experience all three kinds: physical, social and moral. It is important to note also, that it is not the work itself that is inherently dirty, but that 'dirtiness' is a social construction. It evokes subjective, societal beliefs about what is dirty and what is not, based on societal 'standards of cleanliness' (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999: 415) which leads to people being repulsed by work that falls short of this standard. They simply do not want to come into contact with or be polluted by it (Hughes, 1962), wonder why and how others can do it (Ashford and Kreiner, 1999) and would rather not think about it (Ward and McMurray, 2016). Ashford and Kreiner went on to develop a classification of dirty work occupations, relating them to occupational prestige in order to capture enduring, embedded perceptions of different types of work. Most dirty work has low prestige, and its workers suffer stigma, which they respond to or try to manage, by what Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) describe as reframing, refocusing and recalibrating.

Evidence of reframing is revealed in Rivera's (2015) study of Border Patrol agents in the US. These agents downplay their punitive, law enforcing role, favouring instead an identity as 'contributing to the greater good' (2015: 221). In a study of the London Metropolitan Police, De Camargo (2019) discussed the contamination and purification rituals used by officers and found that officers place 'lower value on the contaminating features of the job... reframing negative events into positive ones..., to minimise problematic elements' (De Camargo, 2019). Refocusing means to 'overlook stigmatised characteristics altogether' according to Mastracci (2022: 541) and is evident in, for example, criminal defence solicitors, who may believe their client is guilty of a heinous crime but choose instead to overlook that and focus instead on the more noble cause of ensuring that the defendant is given their right to legal representation. Recalibrating emphasises the 'redeeming aspects' of a dirty job (Mastracci, 2022: 541). In their

2020 study of ‘agents of social control’ such as police officers and door (wo)men, Ward et al.’s interview participants recalibrated by emphasising their redeeming aspects, i.e. their responsibility to maintain order, keep the public safe, and downplayed the servile aspects of their roles.

Reframing, refocusing and recalibrating are therefore understood as coping mechanisms workers in dirty jobs, who are attempting to manage the stigma associated with their jobs and tasks. The way in which the coping happens is through emotional labour, which is next to be discussed. But staying with the notion of moral taint and prestige briefly, according to Ashford and Kreiner’s classification (1999), police workers are viewed as morally tainted (due to their deceptive, intrusive and confrontational methods), but also have relatively high occupational prestige. (Ashford and Kreiner, 1999: 416). Regardless of the stigma and lack of prestige associated with dirty workers and their occupations, they are still ‘necessary’ (Hughes, 1962). These workers, by dint of performing the tasks that others do not want to do, enable society to keep running in an orderly manner.

The next section discusses emotional contagion in the workplace before considering how and why emotional contagion exists within the police service.

### **Emotional contagion**

Frontline policing is dangerous, stressful (Sweeney, 2022), and complex (Ugwu and Idemudia, 2024). Stressors can include dealing with the heightened emotions of victims and perpetrators of crime. For example, victims may be severely injured, scared or angry after being assaulted, and perpetrators may be dangerous or threatening to officers as well as the members of the public officers seek to protect. In addition, frontline officers may have to react quickly to

unfolding emergencies, which could include driving response cars at high speed with noisy sirens and the potential for accidents, operating radios or other equipment, or administering first aid, depending on the situation facing them. In such circumstances there exists the potential for heightened emotions in colleagues and the potential for disagreements with colleagues and managers about courses of action to take. These types of stressors can lead to a multitude of health issues including emotional exhaustion, burnout, depression and anxiety (Liakopoulou et al, 2020; Santre, 2024); a key predictor of which is emotional contagion.

Defined as the ‘transfer of moods or emotions from one person to another’ (Barsade et al, 2018), emotional contagion is understood as a process in which the emotions or behaviour of a group or person can ‘consciously or unconsciously influence or infect the emotions of others in a community’ (Wilson et al, 2023). According to Barsade (2002) the transference of emotion can happen face to face or in the absence of direct contact with others, and a ripple effect of emotion is brought about as ‘people spontaneously mimic each other’s facial expressions, body language, speech patterns, and vocal tones’ (2002: 4). This is not a new concept; it has been of scholarly interest since Le Bon (1896) published a book about his study of sentiments in crowds and how individuals behaviour and feelings can change in a collective setting. Emotional contagion theory is significant in my own research about frontline policing because it provides a method of understanding how officers as individuals, and collectively, are influenced by the emotions of those they work with (colleagues and managers) and those they serve (the public).

### **Emotional contagion and policing**

There are very few existent empirical studies of policing and emotional contagion. Bakker et al (2006) investigated the crossover of burnout and work engagement in Dutch officers. They posited that officers do not perform their roles alone but rather work in teams and that those teams' experiences of burnout and work engagement can have an impact on individual officers' experiences of the same, because they take on their colleagues symptoms of burnout. In this way a 'collective mood' might be achieved (Totterdell, 2000) or an emotional convergence (Hatfield, Cacioppo and Rapson, 1994). This is interesting and relevant to the study of frontline police officers because when dealing with victims of crime for example, it is possible to imagine how it feels to be in that position, and to then experience the same emotions (fear, shame, anger for example) as the victim. In another study (of teachers), Bakker and Schaufeli (2000) found that teachers who spoke to burned out colleagues about difficult students had to 'tune in' to their negativity and went on to develop a negative attitude (towards students) of their own. This can be applied to policing as officers often have to work with colleagues who feel fatigued and cynical about their work or the public and might therefore, upon repeated exposure to such cynicism about the public, develop a similar attitude towards them (Bakker et al., 2005). Conversely, engaged and positive employees who are inclined to help others can create a 'positive spiral of success' that is also contagious (Bakker et al, 2006). For example, having a conversation or interaction with an enthusiastic colleague can lead to individuals feeling more engaged.

### **Toxic Emotions in the workplace**

Pain can be viewed as integral to and 'a fact of organizational life' according to Frost (2003:12) and can be experienced as result of a variety of difficult factors that produce it, including



organisational change, the behaviours and excessive demands of certain managers, job losses, inter-personal conflict, stress and so on (Frost, 2003; 2006). It is not the emotional pain that follows these types of events that is toxic, but how it is handled (or even ignored) by the organisation and its leaders, which determines a long term positive or negative impact. If for example the response to an event causes harm instead of healing, the emotional pain can turn toxic (Frost, 2003). Toxicity can be understood as ‘the outcome of emotionally insensitive attitudes and actions of managers’ and company practices (Frost, 2003: 13). It is noxious, contagious (Frost, 2006) and can threaten or disrupt workflow, individual and company performance, and cause issues with motivation, engagement and retention of employees, along with causing health issues for employees (Frost, 2006). It is interesting and relevant to the focus of my own research, that despite the pervasive and destructive nature of toxic emotions in organisations, the recognition and discussion of pain and emotion at work is often lacking; viewed as ‘weak’ (Frost, 2003). Indeed, previous research reveals that, within the police service, expression of authentic emotions are seen as a weakness (Lennie et al., 2021).

Evidently, some managers and other employees at work will try to unobtrusively support people who are hurting within an organisation and try to keep them focused on their work. The next section discusses the often unacknowledged and unsupported ‘toxin handlers’ (Frost, 2003; 2006).

### **Toxin handlers**

The concept of the ‘toxic handler’ was introduced by Frost and Robinson (1999) to describe individuals within organisations who take on the emotional pain of their colleagues, ‘shouldering their sadness, frustration, bitterness, and anger that are endemic to organizational life’ (1999: 97). They do this in order to manage and alleviate the emotional distress of others

and by absorbing their pain they can help to ensure that quality work continues to be done. Subsequent literature by Frost (2003) discussed the concept of toxin handlers; individuals within any part of organisations who help to manage and mitigate the effects of toxic emotions expressed by others. Described by Frost (2006) as being ‘like a kidney or the immune system that neutralizes, dissipates or disperses the toxins that build up in the system’ (2006: 3) handlers are relied upon to deal with toxins (Frost, 2003). These are empathetic individuals who recognise emotional pain in others and who have concern for the organisation too (Frost, 2006). They provide support to others in turbulent or challenging situations at work, particularly those who are at risk of burnout and illness. They do this by listening to others in emotional pain, which is often not performed by busy managers in fast-paced environments. They might hold space for healing; allowing someone who is struggling to access the space and time needed to deal with their issue before reconnecting to their work. Toxin handlers can also buffer team members from outside toxins; allowing the toxicity to dissipate or go unnoticed by individuals rather than infecting them. Toxin handlers can remove individuals from painful situations and facilitate their transfer to a better environment for them. They help to create a healthier working environment, keep employees focused and connected to their work. In addition they can prevent employees from ruminating or even obsessing over negative feelings, which might otherwise result in a loss of the intellectual or emotional capacity needed to complete work tasks. In effect, toxin handlers, acting as a sort of safety valve, preventing colleagues’ toxic emotions from derailing or delaying the achievement of organisational goals. They can ensure the success of projects despite ‘significant distractions and emotional events (e.g. downsizings, mergers and acquisitions, bankruptcies)’ (Daniel, 2020: 1).

On the whole, the efforts of toxin handlers go unrecognised and unappreciated by managers and the organisation’s leaders. So why do they perform this role? According to Frost (2006) they derive personal satisfaction from helping others and from seeing tasks finished that might

not otherwise have reached completion. However, handlers can also face certain personal 'costs' from performing this hazardous work. They might be faced with having to work extra hours to get their own work done to catch up after supporting others or begin to take on the emotional pain of those they are trying to help, with a resultant toll on their own health and quality of life as well as running the risk of burnout (Frost, 2006). They can also eventually lose their sensitivity towards the pain of others, ie constant exposure to stress, suffering and negativity in others can lead to compassion fatigue and even burnout (Daniel, 2020). The term compassion fatigue, first coined by Joinson (1992) primarily affects those in caregiving roles, including healthcare and social workers, as well as police officers who can face relentless traumatic situations and resultant pain and suffering in others (Brown, 2013).

Given the potentially high personal costs of toxin handling at work, discussed above, it is unsurprising that Frost (2006) raises the question of who is looking after the toxin handler. He acknowledges that the work of handlers should be recognised, supported and shared. If organisations are sites and sources of toxicity and inevitable suffering (Lilius et al, 2011) and pain is 'a normal part of organisational life' (Frost, 2004) but also 'sites of everyday healing' (Frost et al, 2000) then we must next look to the role of compassionate leaders in creating, preventing and healing from toxicity and pain at work.

### **Compassionate management in emotionally toxic workplaces**

Compassion is an innate part of the human response to suffering in others, and involves first noticing another's suffering, feeling with another individual and making some kind of response (Kanov et al, 2004). Individuals can face emotional pain at any time of their lives; divorce, illness, crises, tragedy outside of work for example, and that pain will spill into the workplace and affect those who witness the misfortune (Dutton et al, 2002). Most commonly, compassion

in the workplace consists of giving emotional support, allowing work-time flexibility and giving material goods as a symbol of concern (Lilius et al, 2008). These types of actions can help to build relationships between individuals, and help employees to view the organisation as caring, which in turn can bring about an increase in positive feelings and work commitment (Lilius et al, 2008).

Leaders can influence how compassion spreads or is prevented in an organisation and can also be the cause of emotional pain in others through bullying, overloading employees with work etc. so should aim to handle the toxic byproduct of their behaviours more effectively (Frost, 2006). He suggests that policies and practices are required to prevent toxins from seeping into the system, and to intervene if they do contaminate, In addition he advises that attention should be focused on healing from emotional toxins so that the organisation and its members can survive and thrive. Dutton et al., (2002) acknowledge that some organisations can actively suppress the showing of compassion but call for leaders to demonstrate compassion in order to transform a situation and ‘unleash a compassionate response throughout the whole organisation’. What Dutton et al., (2002) are asking leaders to do is move beyond empathy into taking public action to ease the pain of others and inspire others to act similarly. They suggest that leaders reveal their own humanity, ie express rather than stifle their feelings, especially in times of trauma, when grieving the death of a colleague and other extraordinary events. This makes employees more able to express their emotions and feel recognised as human beings. Dutton et al., (2002) also suggest that leaders should allow employees to take care of basic needs, such as focusing on their children when they are ill, knowing that they organisation is supporting them when they bring personal matters to the workplace. In addition, Hallowell (1999) described such times when a manager gives her physical presence, ‘emotional and intellectual attention to an employee in distress’ as a ‘human moment’.

In sum, compassion has a healing impact on others. It can help instil hope and confidence in them (Frost, 2003). However, whilst Frost (1999; 2006) also emphasised the importance of compassionate management within emotionally toxic workplaces and suggested that managers who can show empathy towards employees and understand their issues and challenges can serve to reduce the damaging impact of toxic emotions and thereby improve organisational wellbeing (Frost, 2006). The next section considers how the emotional stress of policing, which is in part brought about by handling the toxic emotions of others might spill over into the family life of officers.

### **Emotional stress and spillover into officers' family lives.**

According to Violanti (2003) and Sousa et al (2023) the police culture demands professional secrecy as well as emotional regulation in its officers, and research into the family lives of police officers has revealed that as police officers are less inclined to talk about work issues with family members, emotional distancing from their loved ones can occur (Viegas and Henriques, 2023). However, the organisational and operational stressors associated with policing can lead to physical and psychological issues (Regehr et al, 2021) as well as work-family conflict, according to Acquadro Maran et al (2020). Research conducted into pandemic policing (Jones, 2020) revealed that officers feel that their families help them to cope with their role-stress but also feel that when stress and work-related tension is brought home it can have a negative impact on the family and relationships within it (Lambert et al, 2019; Roberts et al, 2013; Spicer, 2018;).

Despite the adverse effects of work-related stress on police officers' intimate relationships, there is a paucity of empirical research on the effect of this on female spouses. According to

Tuttle et al (2018) the toxic environments of policing and demands of the job (working shifts and dealing with human sorrow for example) can negatively impact on the quality of communication between couples. Tuttle et al (2018) also acknowledge that very little is known about how emotional stress spillover affects marital relationships or parent-child relationships. Spillover occurs when the emotions and behaviours of the workplace transfer into the home environment (Staines, 1980). Burke (1993) suggests that spouses of officers absorb work-related stress and 'authoritarian spillover' has been developed as a term by Johnson, Todd and Subramaniam (2005) to describe the harshness exhibited towards family members by some officers, or their use of command-and-control tactics in the home. Tuttle et al (2018: 250) found that 'an officers inability to leave the badge at work can be maladaptive for relationship functioning'. Viegas and Henriques (2023) suggest that the job of police officers have got increasingly complicated which negatively impacts family life. Spouses must adapt to ever-changing shift patterns, parenting by herself, helping the children to understand why their father is routinely unavailable, and live with frequent fear for their husband's safety at work. Women often serve as an 'anchor role' in the home (Bam et al, 2024) with the primary responsibility to care for all those within it. Part of that care is emotion work. Whilst Hochschild (1983) defined emotion work as the 'management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display' (1983: 7), i.e. it relates to self management of emotion (Erikson, 2005), emotion work can, in addition, be done 'by the self upon others' (Hochschild, 1979: 562) and includes 'the activities concerned with the enhancement of others' emotional wellbeing and the provision of emotional support (Erickson, 1993).

## **Emotional labour**

According to Hochschild (1983) emotional labour is the commercialisation of emotion work. This form of labour occurs when an individual has to internalise real emotions whilst simultaneously presenting significantly different emotions to the public (Brunetto et al., 2023). In a study of emergency services, Guy et al. (2012) suggest that this emotion work requires an individual to constantly sense, govern and manipulate their emotions in order to elicit the desired emotional response in others. Employees' emotional suppression or expression is controlled through what Hochschild terms 'feeling and display rules', where emotional exchanges between employees and customers, or between officer and victims of crime for example, become commodified; these (usually) implied rather than overt 'rules' are designed by the organisation, for the employee to follow. (Hochschild, 1983). In addition, organisations use a variety of methods to monitor and ensure employees' obedience of the feeling and display rules, including recording telephone calls in call-centre interactions, use of customer reviews and the use of body-worn cameras (BWC) in the police.

Hochschild's study of flight attendants revealed that emotive dissonance can exist when there is a conflict between experienced (true) emotions and those expressed to conform to the display rules (Hochschild, 1983) or the expected 'official' emotions (Grandey, 2000). This dissonance can lead to stress and burnout in the long term (Brotheridge and Lee, 2003). The toll, emotional effort and resources used by employees in using emotional labour can have dire physical health consequences for them, including hypertension and heart disease, as well as psychological issues such as mental exhaustion and memory loss (Jeung et al., 2018). Authentic emotional processing supported by the organisation in a safe setting can lead to healthier outcomes and relief for individuals. In addition, Pennebaker and Seagal (1999) noted that those who express

their authentic emotions experience fewer symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and greater physical and mental wellbeing compared to those who do not. However some organisational cultures, including hegemonic masculine ones such as the police and military discourage emotional expression and instil a sense of stigma and shame in emotional display. Workers in such settings are not likely therefore to benefit from expressing authentic emotions or engage with opportunities for therapy offered by the organisation (Kennedy-Moore and Watson, 2001).

### **Emotional labour in policing**

The literature is replete with evidence that police officers perform emotional labour when serving the public but suppress authentic emotions to meet organisational and public expectations of them (MacEachern et al., 2018; Lennie et al., 2020; Mastracci and Adams, 2020; Brunetto et al., 2023). It is also recognised that they use emotional labour daily when in emotionally challenging interactions with other stakeholders including line managers and colleagues, which also involves them hiding their true feelings (Farr-Wharton et al., 2023; Brunetto et al., 2023).

As an occupational group the police have high levels of stress and poor wellbeing (Purba and Demou, 2019) with one in five officers suffering with a form of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (CPTSD), according to a force-wide survey undertaken ('Policing: The Job and The Life', 2018). PTSD is an anxiety disorder caused by exposure to traumatic and/or life-threatening situations and can cause flashbacks (disturbing and intrusive memories), hypervigilance to threats, insomnia, sweating and alcoholism and/or drug addiction (University of Cambridge, 2023). CPTSD is a newly defined



condition (Brewin et al., 2022) which has been recently adopted by the World Health Organisation (WHO). As yet there are no clinical trials evaluating interventions for treatment for this disorder (Brewin et al., 2020). CPTSD occurs when ‘PTSD symptoms *harden* through repeated trauma exposure into a chronic condition of emotional numbness and disconnection’ (University of Cambridge, 2023) which requires additional treatment sessions to standard PTSD (National Institute of Health and Care Excellence, 2018). Sufferers face difficulties regulating emotions and can feel empty and hopeless as well as detached from family and friends and have higher levels of depression and dissociation than PTSD sufferers (Brewin et al., 2020).

It is important to note here that leaders in the police have usually had many years of exposure to trauma, which supports a cumulative burden model (Brewin et al., 2020) and where increasing years of continual exposure gradually reduces resistance to PTSD and CPTSD. Leaders (sergeants, inspectors and so on) are typically those who are first line managers for officers, who they go to when experiencing difficulties. A guide has been produced by the College of Policing, written by Hesketh and Tehrani (2018) to improve understanding of how trauma affects those working in policing, encouraging leaders and line managers to ‘lead by example and inspire others to embark on a deeper personal development journey with many positive benefits’ (2018: 18). Whilst the guide acknowledges the role of the organisation in treating officers with compassion, it does not discuss how leaders themselves are likely to be suffering with CPTSD and may therefore find it difficult to support and be compassionate to others. CPTSD increases the likelihood of retirement and/or medical discharge (Brewin et al., 2020). Male officers are at more risk of PTSD and CPTSD, due in part to their greater exposure to abuse, threats and humiliating behaviours, seen as some of the most toxic forms of exposure (Brewin et al., 2020). In addition, stressors such as repeated bullying are also linked to the

onset of PTSD (Nielsen et al., 2015). In recent research by Brewin et al. (2022) such high levels of emotional damage are viewed as a clinical and public sector crisis, and one that is currently without the right resources, monitoring or interventions in place to support officers.

In the police, expression of authentic emotions are seen as a weakness (Lennie et al., 2021) and the imposed feeling and display rules can affect officers' interactions with not only victims and offenders, but with colleagues and managers (Adams and Buck, 2010; Lennie et al., 2019). In their study of police officer interactions with insiders (colleagues and supervisors for example) and outsiders (civilians and victims for example) Adams and Buck (2010) found that the social stressors and resultant emotional and psychological stress that was experienced in interactions with insiders was at least equal to that experienced in interactions with outsiders (2010: 1038).

There also exists an erosion of trust of managers, an increase in micromanagement, increased surveillance of officers through Body-Worn Cameras (BWC) and emphasis on meeting targets and professionalising the police service (Westmarland, 2016). Similar to other emergency workers, police officers have been 'subject to austerity-driven funding and management models' (Brunetto et al., 2023) which has resulted in intense working conditions and reduced wellbeing (Brunetto et al., 2023), and under-resourcing which has a negative impact of motivation and employee engagement (Bakker, 2015). Townsend and Loudoun (2023), in a study of Australian police line managers, argue that line managers of officers are faced with working in an environment where extreme work is a 'common part of their everyday work, not as an exception' (Townsend and Loudoun, 2023: 19) and is a role that involves skills and training beyond the more traditional and central role of managing crime prevention. In addition, McCann and Granter (2019) suggest that line management in this context is distinctly

hierarchical with a command-and-control mentality. The HR systems are viewed as dated and authoritarian (Hyde et al., 2016) which all contributes to a low trust, blame culture, fear of management reprisal, lack of ability or desire to speak openly, and poor relations between staff and managers (Mildenhall and McCann, 2022). These factors all serve to inhibit officers from showing authentic emotion such as anger and distress for example. There is no standardised organisational support for officers who are suffering emotionally (Brunetto et al., 2023). The importance of organisational support is also discussed in Tham et al.'s (2023) study of frontline paramedic workers, with a key finding being that paramedics, exposed to extreme work during the Covid-19 pandemic, experienced less stress and burnout and greater resilience when they perceived they had higher levels of support from the organisation.

The next section considers a concept defined as emotional dirty work (McMurray and Ward, 2014), which was added to the existing three forms of dirty work already described. It then discusses how emotional dirty work has been applied in empirical research, with a view to exploring how it can be relevant to a study of British frontline police officers who are caregiving fathers.

### **Emotional dirty work**

McMurray and Ward (2014) added a fourth dimension to the earlier typology of dirty work; 'emotional dirt'. This describes occupations that 'require the handling of difficult, burdensome or out of place emotions' (Gunby and Carline, 2020: 345) and stigmatise the worker due to their working with feelings 'that threaten the solidarity, self-conception or preferred orders of a given individual or community' (McMurray and Ward, 2014: 12). A central feature of this form of dirt is the performance of emotional labour; the worker suppresses or induces certain

feelings in order to ‘sustain an outward performance’ (Gunby and Carline, 2020: 345) or maintain a state of mind that is deemed appropriate to others (Hochschild, 1983). The concept of emotional dirty work is currently under-theorised (Mikkelsen, 2022) and has much relevance to my own study because it can provide greater insight into the material, embodied aspects of policing as dirty work. The next section illustrates how the concept of emotional dirt has been applied in other empirical studies that use contexts and occupations that could be considered similar in some respects to policing, for example because they are considered to be extreme, or hyper-masculine environments, or where the context is protective services.

### **The application of the concept of emotional dirt in other contexts**

This section discusses how various empirical studies have examined different occupations and workers’ responses to emotional dirty work. Because my own study is centred around caregiving fathers on the frontline of policing in the UK, I have focused here on occupations that share characteristics of policing, i.e. those viewed as typically masculine or with an extreme working environment, and those in the protective services. These include analyses of emotional dirt across a variety of occupations, including those of Samaritans, slaughtermen, butchers, funeral directors, firemen, barristers, prison officers, and of course existent studies of police officers.

McMurray and Ward’s (2014) ethnographic study of Samaritans enabled them to explore how these agents act as society’s agents in the containment of dirt and thereby opened up a new avenue in research that considers the ‘emergence, nature and relational effects of emotional dirt’ (2014: 1121). They found that the work of Samaritans is largely hidden; they deal with a wide range of emotional encounters ‘separated and anonymised’ by a telephone system (2014:

1132). Many of the calls made to Samaritans involve mental health crises, suicidal thoughts or actions, and experiences of sexual abuse. Callers to the Samaritans display a range of difficult emotions, including outbursts of anger, and can be threatening. Samaritans have to deal with paedophile abusers, for example, who are doing or thinking of doing what is considered wrong or taboo in society and are therefore considered problematic and evil.

In 2016, Simpson et al. explored the meanings and lived experiences of dirty work by studying butchers and refuse collectors, among other male-dominated occupations. In so doing, they built on a body of research that had already explored the management of taint by dirty workers across a variety of occupations including firefighters and correctional officers (Tracy and Scott, 2006), and slaughtermen (Ackroyd and Crowdy, 1990), but which acknowledged the centrality of emotional dirt and the need to include emotions in work analyses (Fineman, 2003). In their study of butchers for example, the work is considered dirty because dead meat and its association with the slaughtering of animals is repulsive. Yet butchery, at least for meat eaters in society, is seen as a necessity. Because of their proximity to dead meat and killing of animals, butchers can be stigmatised (Goffman, 1997), which is something they may feel they need to manage along with the ‘dirtiness’ of their work, in order to gain or regain ‘social validation’ (Simpson et al., 2016). In their study, Simpson et al. (2016: 204), highlighted dirty work as being ‘embodied’, ‘a property of self, experienced through bodies (e.g. feelings of shame or pride)’. They also revealed, through their findings, the importance of nostalgia; how butchers reminisced about times gone by, when ‘dirt and heavy work were more integral to work practices’ (2016: 204) and when butchery was seen as real man’s job or as a ‘densely masculine’ occupation (2016: 205). Their study also showed that emotions such as disgust can arise from the physical and moral dirt associated with the job, for example the touching of offal and their proximity to the slaughtering process.

Funeral directors have also been the subject of research into dirty work (Jordan et al., 2019) and are viewed as coming into contact with all four forms; physical, social, moral and emotional, which necessitates their handling of associated stigma. For example, funeral preparation or ‘death work’ (Henry, 2004) involves handling corpses, their bodily fluids and waste (physical dirt), places its workers in a servile relationship with bereaved customers (social dirt), combines commerce with care of the dead (moral dirt) and has at its heart, a requirement to deal with difficult and burdensome emotional encounters such as feelings of grief, loss and even disgust (Jordan et al., 2019: 701).

In their study of barristers who prosecute and defend in rape cases, Gunby and Carline (2020: 349) describe this kind of work as emotionally tainted. Barristers come into contact with serial abusers as well as complainants of all ages. They have to examine evidence of ‘vomit, semen and blood’ and handle difficult and burdensome emotions (McMurray and Ward, 2014) including ‘guilt, anger, resentment, shame and self-blame’. Most of the barristers in the study described their work as ‘emotionally draining’, i.e. when they have to respond to the heightened feelings of victims by listening, encouraging and reassuring (Gunby and Carline, 2020: 349). This type of emotional labour, or ‘surface acting’ (Hochschild, 1983; Sommerlad, 2016) is in line with what is expected of being in the barrister profession, but the Bar is also ‘a profession premised on the masculine’ (Gunby and Carline, 2020: 359) where stoic handling of the emotional aspects of the occupation is also expected.

Gunby and Carline (2020) note that as a result of constantly responding to emotional dirt, there was the potential for feelings to arise in the barristers that might threaten their own emotional states. They add that emotional dirt is a distinct element of stigma surrounding

their work, and which intersects with the social dirt associated with being in contact with victims of sexual assault, as well as the moral dirt associated with defending abusers. Essentially, it is not easy to distinguish which types of dirt contribute the most to the tainting of the work of rape barristers. But it is certainly evident from considering studies such as this, that the impact of working with the burdensome emotions of others has an impact on the worker's own emotional state; it is not simply commodified but actually 'felt' by them (Kadowaki, 2015), and especially where barristers might truly identify with victims who are being processed by what they sometimes view as an unjust or faulty legal system (Gunby and Carline, 2020: 352). The emotional dirty work of barristers is made even more difficult because of limited welfare provision for them, similar to the lack of mental health support given to police officers (HMCPSI – the HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate, 2016). It is also interesting to note, relevant to my own study, that Gunby and Carline (2020: 354) discuss the 'uniquely gendered challenges' experienced by female barristers, who are affected emotionally by dealing with sex offenders. According to their findings, this issue was not raised by male participants, but females reported feeling vengeful towards offenders: 'when you've got kids you ... want to stab them (sex offenders)'. They also reported feeling sick, needing to 'clean out' their minds and change their clothes before interacting with their own children. In short, mothers who are barristers reveal how their emotional dirty work cannot be neatly contained within the work environment of courtrooms and police stations, but that it actually spills over into their home lives, and that they have to develop strategies to try to prevent this. My study is also gendered in that it explores the lived experiences of fathers who are also frontline officers, and who are seeking ways to mitigate the impact of emotional dirt on their families.

The above study's findings about prison officers is in accordance with those of another, conducted by Petrillo (2007). She found that female probation officers who worked with sex offenders were able to discuss the impact of their work on their personal lives. The findings revealed that many officers were disturbed and overwhelmed when reading about details of offences, especially if the officer had a child of a similar age to the victim. They described having a heightened awareness of risks that threatened their own children, which they sought to balance by actively trying to avoid being too 'neurotic' or 'overprotective'. They also spoke of feeling 'contaminated' by their 'knowledge of abuse which spilled over into their personal lives' (Petrillo, 2007: 402), and feeling the need to counter or manage this by washing themselves after going home. They also spoke of their use of 'gallows humour' at work, with colleagues, to avoid feeling 'destroyed' by their work. It is notable that all of the officers in the study felt that organisational support for the issues they faced was lacking, which also concurs with the findings of the study of barristers conducted by Gunby and Carline (2020) discussed earlier.

A second study of prison officers, conducted by Mikkelsen (2022), explored the concept of 'contamination' too, and how it is experienced and responded to in the 'extreme emotional dirty work' performed by Danish prison officers (Mikkelsen, 2022: 1770). This occupational group experience high levels of psychological stress and high rates of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) according to Andersen et al. (2019), as a result of working in a dangerous environment with constant exposure to violence (Andersen et al., 2017). Contamination or 'corruption' that comes about as a result of entities being in contact with each other (Höpfl, 2012) occurs in the context of prisons, when officers allow prisoners to manipulate, intimidate or pressure them, or when officers grant prisoners illicit favours. Mikkelsen (2022: 1774) gives insight into the material, embodied aspects of dirty work, acknowledging that 'we cannot assume that the work



with the burdensome, unwanted feelings, emotions and behaviours of others will not impact on workers'. She draws upon Brennan's (2004) notion of 'transmission of effect' which explains how feelings and sensations emerge out of bodies and are then transmitted to others in the form of 'enhancing or depressing energies' (2004: 3). Although this study gives a nuanced account of worker experiences of, and bodily responses to, contamination at work, it does not consider how contamination or transmission of effect are carried over into life outside of work, i.e. into the family. It would be useful to know how police officers transmit enhancing or depressing energies to others, i.e. their children and partner at home, and how they seek to prevent this transmission, which is explored in my own study.

### **Emotional dirt in policing**

There have been some analyses of dirty work in policing that focus on physical, social and moral taint, but just a handful that explore emotional dirt in this occupation. Dick (2005) for example, considered how occupations negotiate social and physical taint in relation to levels of professional and public prestige. Homicide investigators were the subject of research for Huey and Broll (2015), who set out to examine how investigators' proximity to physical dirt affects their own perceptions of their work. More recently, Schneider et al. (2020) examined vice-squad work and how its proximity to carnality characterises it as 'dirty'. Similarly, Spencer (2019) considered how officers working in sex crime units were able to neutralise moral taint through operational and organisational cynicism. De Camargo and Whiley (2022) focused on the Covid-19 pandemic and how police officers in the UK were constructed as 'villains', due to their dirty work of enforcing rules that transgressed societal order, lessening their occupational prestige and damaging their morale.

There have been far fewer studies however that explore the emotional dirt experienced by police officers but some of these are summarised here. In their 2016 book *The Dark Side of Emotional Labour*, Ward and McMurray discuss how engaging with emotions that are ‘burdensome, polluting or out of place’ (2016: 61) can be applied to police work, and use an example of delivering a death message to illustrate this. This task is emotionally dirty, and something the officer, Steve, hopes he never has to do. It is viewed as ‘disrupting the preferred order of the recipient’s family life’ (2016: 61) and the officer must respond appropriately, which in this case means offering emotional care of just the right nature to the family.

Ward and McMurray (2016) also acknowledge that emotional dirty work often runs alongside physical dirt in a police context. For example, attending a sudden death involves searching the corpse. In my own example, an officer in my research pilot described having to wipe bodily fluids from the mouth of a dead infant before attempting to give mouth to mouth resuscitation. Another described how an elderly man had died in his bed and had not been found for weeks. His bodily fluids had seeped first into his mattress, then through the floor beneath the bed and ultimately into the ceiling of the flat under that, which is how the residents below came to alert the police. In all of these cases the officers had to handle their own difficult emotions as well as those of the people around them. In a qualitative study of men and women who are police officers, prison officers and door workers, Ward et al (2020) reveal, through data collected via semi-structured interviews, the physical and emotional pain endured by agents of social control. They explore how ‘edgework’, the boundary or edge between safety and danger is managed at the time or ‘in the moment’ (Ward et al, 2020: 82), and how empathetic and antipathetic emotional labour, as well as emotional neutrality are used by such dirty workers.

In their study of UK officers, Gagnon and Monties (2023) state that the policing environment is extreme, uncertain, highly stressful and difficult. In addition, an earlier study by Lennie (2019) suggested that the expression of emotions in police work is censured (Lennie, 2019). Gagnon and Monties (2023) explored the strategies used by mainly male officer-participants to regulate their own emotions and the contextual factors that enable or inhibit this regulation. Their findings showed that officers used a wide 'repertoire' of strategies (Bonanno and Burton, 2013) to achieve this. Often emotional regulation is facilitated by others, i.e. colleagues at work who might for example legitimise feelings of anger in a genuine attempt to help. Such a presence of colleagues is considered to be a 'social resource' (Williams et al., 2018) in the stressful situations likely to be encountered by officers, and close colleagues or 'partners' at work were found to help officers to express rather than suppress their emotions. This runs counter to Lennie's (2019) findings that suppression of emotions is the norm within the policing culture. The officer-participants in Gagnon and Monties' (2023) study were also able to flexibly draw on a wide range or repertoire of emotional regulation strategies, i.e. they could adapt to the demands of different situations as they unfolded (English et al., 2017). They could effectively change their emotional state to suit the situation and cope with it. This study, like most extant ones about the police, addresses self-regulation strategies at the individual level, but does not examine how individuals might regulate the emotions of others. Nor does it explore how emotions are regulated by officers beyond the confines of the work environment, i.e. how they seek to regulate the emotions they feel at, and because of, their work when they at home, and how they might need to regulate the emotions of family members who can become emotionally affected by the officer's dangerous, traumatic job. All of this speaks to a need to know more about the management of emotional dirt overspill into the home.

Another fairly recent study focusing on policing was carried out by Wilson et al. (2022), who examined how digital forensics examiners (DFE) in the police service manage extensive contact with indecent images of children (IIOC), and how they ‘distance themselves from imputations of being dirty workers’ (Wilson et al., 2019: 107). This study is also particularly relevant to mine as, among other findings, there were strategies used outside of work to minimise the effects of IIOC exposure. Participants described using the drive home as essential in that it helped examiners to physically and emotionally separate work from family life. They described how they would try to avoid speaking about IIOC in social situations or dismiss their work as simply ‘police training’ when strangers asked them about it, to avoid having to go into more detail which would involve describing graphic, vile images. Others described how their partners at home ‘managed’ their interactions when out socialising, so that the examiner did not start talking about the work they do and what they see. (2019: 116). This is in accordance with the findings of Cheshire (2018) whose study revealed that officers avoid talking to their loved ones about the upsetting nature of identifying and categorising illegal images of children. This is done to spare them and to protect them from the emotionally distressing and damaging world that officers are routinely exposed to.

## **Conclusion**

As has been discussed, dirty work takes different forms; physical, social, moral and emotional and has been applied as a concept and theoretical framework in numerous studies to date. Emotional dirty work however, which involves difficult and burdensome emotional encounters, is an under-researched area in academic literature. Frontline police work requires officers to manage a variety of such encounters. They deal with the demands of death work and its toll on colleagues and victims’ families, as well as other significant and life changing events

and emotions that victims of crime might suffer. For example, those who have been physically assaulted or robbed might express their sadness, shame, fear, anger or frustration when talking to an officer. Perpetrators of crime such as thieves or murderers might express anger, guilt or aggression when being detained or arrested. My research contributes to scholarship on dirty work in the protective services which hitherto has tended to neglect the emotional and care-related aspect of dealing with dirt. Specifically, this research complements and develops recent work on emotional labour (Ward et al., 2020) and emotional dirty work McMurray and Ward (2014). First, in their qualitative study (Ward et al., 2020), which was summarised earlier, a variety of occupations are explored, including police officers. Ward et al. (2020) reveal the physical and emotional pain endured by agents of social control and explore how ‘edgework’, the boundary or edge between safety and danger is managed ‘in the moment’ (Ward et al., 2020: 82), and how empathetic and antipathetic emotional labour, and emotional neutrality are used by such dirty workers. My research complements this work by also focusing on frontline protective service workers, but centring on the lived experience of frontline police officers who are also caregiving fathers. It discusses how they experience the physical and emotional pain caused by constant interactions with victims and perpetrators of crime and also by the conditions of policing such as working long shifts and nights in a hegemonic masculine culture and environment. It reveals how they perceive the organisational care and support they are given (or not given) to cope with this.

My research also develops Ward et al.’s (2020) work by exploring how the injurious conditions and culture of frontline protective service roles, in this case policing, impact not only the workers, but their family life, family members and their ability to be the kind of involved, caregiving fathers they aspire to be. One of its biggest contributions, is that it gives greater understanding and insight into how officers seek to manage and prevent emotional dirt overspill

into to the home, or how they try to *protect* their families from the dirt of their job. Interestingly, it also reveals who and what else is acknowledged by officers as helping them manage emotional dirt overspill into the family. There is, in fact, a precise point in Ward et al.'s (2020) research article about agents of social control that resonates with my own research and is important to mention, as it provided an obvious jumping off point from her research to mine. It is where Jackie, the door woman (participant), describes an experience of extreme violence whilst at work; she has been stabbed after an altercation. She hits the floor 'like a ton of bricks', is crying and all she can think about is her 'two boys at home' (2020: 89). Whilst Ward et al. (2020) explain that this edgework threatened Jackie's 'physical wellbeing, emotional state... and existence as a mother' (2020: 89), my own research enables parent-workers like Jackie to go on to reveal what (if anything) the organisation and line manager (if applicable) did to help them with their physical and emotional pain after the incident, and what impact this incident went on to have on Jackie's relationship with her two sons and her ability to care for them. Did Jackie manage to self-regulate her emotions at home to protect her sons, or did others have to support her in this?

McMurray and Ward's (2014) ethnographic study of Samaritans described earlier is also highly relevant to my own study. McMurray and Ward (2014) explored how the Samaritans act as society's agents in the containment of dirt, opening a new avenue in research that considers the 'emergence, nature and relational effects of emotional dirt' (2014: 1121). They found that the work of Samaritans is largely hidden and that they deal with a wide range of emotional encounters 'separated and anonymized' by a telephone system (2014: 1132). Calls made to Samaritans can be used to share details of a mental health crisis, suicidal thoughts or actions, and experiences of sexual abuse. Regarding the hidden nature of this work, its content and range of emotional encounters described above, this is similar to the work of frontline police

officers. In addition, callers to the Samaritans display a range of difficult emotions, including outbursts of anger, and can be threatening. Samaritans have to deal with paedophiles abusers, for example, who are doing or thinking of doing what is considered wrong or taboo in society and are therefore considered problematic and evil. Again, this is similar to the types of individuals who are dealt with on behalf of society by the police. These diverse encounters describe emotions that are out of place and which McMurray and Ward explicitly term 'emotional dirt' (2014: 1134) and describe as 'expressed feelings that threaten the solidarity, self-conception or preferred orders of a given individual or community' that 'require a particular occupational response' and are under 'threat of contamination and taint' (2014: 1134). This study of Samaritans took a detailed and insightful look at the challenges facing those who perform emotional dirty work, and the nature and effects of doing this.

McMurray and Ward (2014) found that emotional dirty work requires engagement with the feelings expressed by others and which threaten their preferred order, and the emotions are considered to be burdensome. Regarding the relational effects of emotional dirty work, McMurray and Ward moved away from the psychological effects of emotional labour, which include stress and burnout, and towards a greater understanding of the 'sociological costs' (2014: 1139) of inducing or suppressing feeling in order to produce a proper state of mind in others (Hochschild, 1983). They do however acknowledge that a psychological lens could be useful in research into emotional dirty work, especially in understanding the coping strategies used by different emotional dirty workers to cope with the short- and long-term impact of this type of work. My own research develops the work of McMurray and Ward (2014) by exploring how frontline police officers develop strategies to cope with the demands of constantly dealing with emotional dirt at work and handling the burdensome and out of place emotions of victims and perpetrators of crime. In addition it gives greater insight into the impact of this type of dirty

work on their families and relationships with their children and how they try to prevent emotional dirt overspill into the realm of home life.

### **A recap of what has been covered so far**

To recap at this point, Chapter One considered the conceptual framing for what it means to be a father, to engage in fatherhood, and fathering. That was examined with reference to experiences of providing paternalistic care in the workplace, for those who work in frontline acute protective services. In Chapter Two, attention turned to the context and history and contemporary challenges shaping the UK Police Service and what it means to be a police officer, including perceptions and experiences of hegemonic masculinity. Following that, in this chapter, the concepts of care and emotional dirt have been considered as underpinning the theoretical framing of the study.

Having reviewed paternalistic care and the history and contemporary challenges for men working in the UK Police Service, along with the theoretical framing of the study, the aim now is to answer the following Research Questions:

### **Research Questions:**

1. What does it mean to be a father-carer who wants to be involved, while working in a frontline protective service role?
2. How do father-carers who are frontline protective service providers experience caregiving fatherhood?
3. What could be the future conditions of possibility for frontline protective service workers who are, or aspire to be involved father-carers?



In the next chapter I will explain how a feminist ethics of care also guided the research design and fully divulge its methodology and methods.

## **Chapter Four: Researching police officers' parenting and caring:**

### **Methodology**

#### **Introduction**

In this chapter, the methodological approach of the research is outlined, with the aim of describing how it was designed in order to answer the Research Questions listed at the end of the previous chapter 'Theoretical Framing'. It explains how it is underpinned and framed using a feminist ethics of care, which was also defined and discussed in the preceding chapter. An explanation of the research philosophy is then given, which details the epistemological approach taken, and describes how a critical case study of frontline police officers who are also caregiving fathers, is an epistemic community that is ideally positioned to generate insight and knowledge for this research. Next the ontological position is discussed, and how a social constructionist ontology of fatherhood, fathers and fathering are used, and how fathers are framed within wider society. These terms are not understood as something that people *are*, but something they *do*. Fathering is a social interactional process and a caring role, i.e. it is something that can be done in a caring way. Being a father is more than just a biological relationship that someone has with a child. This chapter then moves towards outlining the methodology used, before describing the methods of data collection and analysis. A qualitative, narrative style of interviews was employed, to enable the gathering of rich data that was intended to answer the Research Questions. Finally, the chapter turns to reflexivity and research ethics.

The next section considers how a feminist ethics of care, as a critical perspective, can be used when researching frontline police officers who are also caregiving fathers. It discusses how research can be a caring practice, and how this was made possible by returning to the work of

Joan Tronto, using her ‘phases of care’, as described in Chapter Three, to guide the research process.

### **Adopting a feminist ethics of care as a researcher**

The approach to conducting this research is guided by a feminist ethics of care, a critical approach that aims to ‘understand the necessity of care to wellbeing, to understanding marginalisation and identifying responsibility to remedy social injustices’ (Brannelly and Barnes, 2022: 6). This critical perspective has gained in popularity within diverse disciplines and contexts including crisis management (Branicki, 2020) childhood education (Langford, 2021), leadership (Johansson and Edwards, 2021), and more recently the environment (Allison, 2023). As a researcher, I have found it very useful to look beyond my area of expertise to these other quite diverse applications of an ethics of care. For example, Lewis-Stempel’s (2016) research on the secret life of farmland looked closely at soil enrichment and its connection with cycles of growth and decay. This helped me to think more deeply about interdependence between individuals and their community, and between humans and nature during the Covid-19 pandemic for example and led me to think about what it meant for different groups of people to be vulnerable during that time. As will be discussed later in this section, during the course of my research interviews, I came to view police officers as especially vulnerable; not only during the pandemic but more generally, as I listened to their stories about their working conditions and the daily physical and emotional pain they suffer.

### **Research as a caring practice**

I particularly draw on Brannelly and Barnes’ (2022), principles of feminist care ethics to guide the way that I have approached my research. This means trying to make a difference as a result

of what and who I have studied and to try to care deeply, as opposed to superficially, by gaining in-depth knowledge about the lived experiences of police officers who are fathers. According to Hamington (2018) knowing is to care, that is to say care and knowledge are considered to be interwoven. However, according to Visse and Abma (2018) knowledge is only ever partial; we simply cannot know the entirety of another's experience. For my research this means accepting that officers cannot and will not tell me everything there is to know about their experiences. In addition, whilst Dalmiya (2016) agrees that knowing is a fundamental part of caring, it is impossible without relation, and particularly with those who are vulnerable, oppressed, marginalised, or whose voices might not be heard because they are silenced or devalued. This resonates with my experience of researching police officers and has presented a particular challenge, because I have had to engage in relationships with those who might not be typically positioned as vulnerable or oppressed. That is until I consider them as individuals oppressed by a hypermasculine institution that does not value them as fathers. I return to this research dilemma in more depth later, but first I will explore how a feminist ethics of care approach to research or as Brannelly and Barnes call it 'care-full' research has been applied to this particular study, and in particular what phases and stages of care were involved in it.

### **Researching police-fathers in care-full stages**

As was described in the previous section, research is an activity that can be done with care. According to Brannelly and Barnes (2022: 17) 'People who do research care about what they research.' I have chosen to research police officers because of the hardships and challenges I know they face when trying to reconcile their experience of work with family relationships. I have also experienced that directly as I am part of a police family. I have drawn on the work of Professor Joan Tronto, researcher and author in the field of gender and the ethic of care, because

I have found her ‘phases of care’, which she discusses in her 1993 book *Moral Boundaries* and develops in her later work of 2013, to be a useful way to guide and critique my practices whilst carrying out this study. Tronto’s five phases of care, discussed in Part One of this chapter, have enabled me to think deeply about what happened during it, what was achieved as a result of it, and for whom. My inspiration for doing research according to Tronto’s phases of care came from reading Branelly and Barnes’ book *Researching With Care* (2022), as they diligently (and carefully) show researchers how to link the stages of research with Tronto’s phases of care. The stages I used in my own research are discussed in Appendix Eight and this reveals how I was attentive, responsible, competent, respectful and showed solidarity with my participants. It also shows some of the field notes I made, which highlight how participants in this research felt the differences between me and them.

Appendix Nine discusses the importance of voice to this research, how it was inspired by Gilligan’s (1993) work on the exclusion of female voices from psychological research and how I have expanded on her insights to include the voices of working fathers with caregiving responsibilities. It also includes mention of how and where fathers like this notice when care for them is absent (Visse and Abma, 2018), before discussing my own researcher voice and position.

First, a reminder of the Research Questions that I tried to answer through those stages:

**The Research Questions:**

1. What does it mean to be a father-carer who wants to be involved, while working in a frontline protective service role?

2. How do father-carers who are frontline protective service providers experience caregiving fatherhood?
3. What could be the future conditions of possibility for frontline protective service workers who are, or aspire to be, involved father-carers?

### **Research Philosophy – Ontology and Epistemology**

This section gives an overview of the research philosophy that supports this study by discussing its underpinning ontological and epistemological assumptions.

As discussed above, the aim of this research was to explore, from their own perspectives, the experiences of men who are caregiving fathers, who work on the frontlines of British policing and perform emotional labour as part of their role. The study was underpinned by a socialconstructionist ontology that aligns with relativism and an interpretivist epistemology, both of which will now be explained and justified in greater depth.

#### **Ontology**

Defined as the essence of reality (Heidegger, 2013), ontology as a branch of philosophy, seeks classification and explanation of different entities. In research, this entity is the object of enquiry, or what is to be examined. In social research, such as that conducted in this thesis, ontology refers to beliefs about the nature of experience and social reality, and whether an objective reality exists independent of the observer. Bryman (2001; 2012) discusses these beliefs as a dichotomy between an objective reality, i.e. reality exists independent of the observer, and reality as it appears subjectively or how groups negotiate it. Saunders et al (2012) supports this view by adding that objectivism is an ontological position where social entities exist in a reality that is ‘external to social actors concerned with their existence’. Subjectivism, on the other hand, which is also known as Constructionism or Interpretivism, is an anti-

positivist or anti-foundationalist ontological position or perspective which views social phenomena as being created through social actors' perceptions and/or actions. This means that reality is viewed as socially constructed and as varying between different groups and their contexts. This understanding of ontology aligns with relativism, which posits that reality, as a social construct, can vary significantly across different contexts and cultures and that multiple perspectives can be used in answering research questions (Pessu, 2019). As a perspective, relativism acknowledges that no single reality exists, but rather that multiple constructs of realities exist (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012) and are shaped by social interactions (Saunders et al., 2016), between researcher and participant for example. According to Easterby-Smith et al., (2012) each different view of reality is considered right.

Reflecting on this approach, I recognise that an understanding of the existence of multiple contextualised realities has informed how my own research has been conducted, how the research questions have been formed and asked. It has also informed the methods I have chosen to gather and interpret the data collected. For example, I employed a qualitative approach which centred around in-depth, narrative-style interviews. This enabled me to capture a wide variety of fathers' experiences, as told through their unique narratives, and to explore the meanings attached to their police roles, and their experiences of combining work and care-giving fatherhood, all of which were constructed by social, cultural and organisational conditions.

My ontological position on emotion follows Hochschild's social constructionist view of emotion. She does not see emotion as entirely cognitive or embodied but a combination of the two (Hochschild, 1979). In addition she views emotional states as socially constructed, through what she terms 'feeling rules' (Hochschild, 1983). These rules are societal norms dictating how

individuals should feel in a given situation: They ‘guide emotion work by establishing the sense of entitlement or obligation that governs emotional exchanges’ (1983: 56). These rules guide emotional expression and shape how individuals manage their own emotions to conform to societal expectations of them.

Masculinity is also a social construction that needs to be discussed in the context of this thesis which explores the experiences of fathers (men) who have caregiving responsibilities alongside their policing work. Masculinity is understood to be complex, with varieties across different cultures and contexts (Connell, 1998) and is viewed as a social construct (Butler, 1990; Hearn and Collinson (1998). It encompasses diverse behaviours, traits and roles associated with being male which are not inherent or determined through biology but shaped by the norms and values of a given society or culture. Some traditional ideals of masculinity in patriarchal cultures for example (Fields et al, 2015; Khan and Malin, 2023), include being a breadwinner, aggressive and unemotional (Brannon, 1976). Masculinity is performed through actions and/or behaviours that align with societal and cultural expectations, can vary according to context and audience, and is viewed as fluid and dynamic (Schrock and Schwalbe, 2009).

This constructivist ontological approach was considered to be appropriate for understanding the subjective, lived experiences of this particular population of father-carers, and how they make meaning through their lived experiences. In addition, the constructivist perspective argues that knowledge is constructed via social interactions between individuals and groups, and shared understandings. Constructivism has been used in my own research to understand how individuals (fathers on the frontline of the police service) create and maintain their realities; how they work, what it means to them, how they enact their fatherhood and overcome challenges etc.



The next section discusses how fathers and the concept of involved fatherhood are products of social construction requiring methods that enable an interpretive understanding of their work as police officers who also care for their children. The methods are the outcome of this ontological position. However, before that, attention must be turned to epistemology. Ontology and epistemology are so closely linked and dependent on one another that it is difficult to discuss the ontology of research without also discussing epistemology Grix (2002)

### **Epistemology**

In social research, epistemology refers to the study of knowledge, the nature of knowledge and how knowledge is generated (Bryman and Bell, 2015), or, according to Mauthner and Doucet (2008), what counts as valid knowledge, how it is acquired, and how it is constructed. Hallebone and Priest (2009) suggest that it is how we know what we know. Because there is no single objective reality or truth when researching fathers who work within the police service, but rather reality depends on the details of the situation they are in and they all have their own subjective meanings attached to their work, and their fatherhood, an interpretivist epistemology is appropriate. Interpretive researchers, according to Myers (2008) assume that access to reality (given or socially constructed) is only through social constructions such as language, consciousness, shared meanings, and instruments. There is not one underlying truth, but multiple interpretations of what people live and experience. According to the interpretivist approach the researcher should, as a social actor, appreciate the differences between individuals (Saunders et al, 2012). This approach has enabled me, as the researcher, to choose a critical case study and narrative style interviews as ways of focusing on and socially interacting with a selected group of participants. In addition, it has enabled me to select interview questions that

will elicit responses and add richness to the qualitative data (Riyami, 2015) that can be analysed to answer my research questions.

Limitations of the ontological and epistemological approaches taken also need to be considered. According to Junjie and Yingxin (2022) interpretivism can be influenced by the researcher's subjective bias, and according to Tuli (2010) the research results will inevitably be influenced by his or her values and interpretations. A constructivist ontology emphasises the subjective nature of reality but different researchers could interpret the same phenomenon or data in different ways, which can make it a challenge to establish consistent, generalisable findings (McPhail, 2016).

In order to mitigate against these limitations, I have maintained reflexivity, as discussed in Appendix Nine. I have also been transparent in my findings and analysis of them. For example I sent all transcripts back to respective respondents and asked them to add anything else they thought was important. Importantly, this enabled me to continuously give voice to the community of father-carers who participated in this research and helped me to produce rich nuanced data. In addition, on advice from my supervisors, I maintained a reflexive journal throughout the research, which helped me to remain aware of my positionality not just as a researcher but as a mother and wife within a policing family, and how this might impact the research. For example, as someone who empathises with father-carers in the police service and appreciates the many challenges they face in blending work with family life, i.e. when working shifts and dealing with trauma etc, I risk introducing bias and over-emphasising the negative issues brought up by participants. By regularly reflecting on my empathetic nature towards fathers and my own experiences of being in a police family, I have sought to make sure that my analysis of the data is not grounded in my negative preconceptions, but that it also considers some of the positive aspects of policing and family life, as discussed in the Findings and Discussion chapters.

In addition, I have engaged in regular conversations with my supervisory team and wider PhD community to challenge my assumptions and the themes I have developed from the data analysis. These types of discussions have helped me to examine the data from a variety of perspectives.

To conclude this section, critical reflexivity in the research process has enabled me to navigate through the ontological and epistemological positions I adopted and served to help me produce a transparent piece of research.

### *How fathers are framed within this research and in society*

This study contributes to understanding the challenges facing fathers with frontline roles in the police service of the UK. It is important to describe how fathers are framed within it and in society more widely. For the purposes of this study then, fathers are defined as men who self-define as having a positive impact on their child(ren's) wellness through their involvement or caring (Levtov et al., 2015). The qualitative methods and data gathered give a rich and contextual understanding of their lived experiences of working in extreme conditions within a hypermasculine organisation, before and during the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020. Whilst most people were forced to work from home during the Covid-19 lockdowns in the UK, most frontline officers were not able to. They, like other emergency and essential workers had to carry on dealing with the public, putting themselves and their families at greater risk of contracting the virus.

So why is there a need to focus on fathers in this way, i.e. to care about how they work and the impact this has on them and their children, or how their fatherhood might be better facilitated within institutions such as the police service? It is essential at this point to discuss how fathers are framed and valued within society and contemporary research. A burgeoning body of research shows how important fathers are to family welfare and the economic situation of the family, whether they live with their children or not. They can have a positive and significant impact on children's cognitive development and educational achievement, and on behavioural risk reduction amongst adolescents (Cano et al., 2019; Yogman and Garfield, 2016). In addition, fathers can also benefit from improved psychological and physical health when they are involved dads and can bring the skills learned through fatherhood into the workplace (Grau-Grau, 2017). When fathers are more involved with their children, according to Ladge and Greenberg (2015) they may experience greater job satisfaction, a higher level of work-family enrichment, and a lower level of work-family conflict. However, the strains of combining work with fatherhood can also negatively impact the welfare of men and their families (Cameron et al., 2016), and they can face a backlash if their involved fathering detracts from workplace perceptions that they are ideal workers, fully present at all times and devoted to work above everything else. (Williams, 2013; Rudman and Mescher, 2013).

This research focuses on the experiences of fathers so that there is greater understanding of the conditions that are preventing them from as being as involved as they would like to be, and to consider some of the changes necessary to support them in the future. All parents face pressures and challenges when combining work with caring for their children, and for male police officers on the frontline, this is especially difficult. Without attention to these pressures on men, there is a danger of reinforcing long-standing expectations of the genders at work and at home.

## Use of a pilot study

I will briefly summarise some findings that emerged from a pilot study I conducted in March 2020, at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, which gives a glimpse of how officers viewed and presented themselves and their occupation during a period of upheaval and change and explains, in advance of discussing relevant academic literature, why the socially constructed concept of dirty work should frame this study. I wanted to find out, in those initial interviews, what the work of a British frontline police officer involves, how it was changing as the country went into its first lockdown and what impact the work had on officers' lives at home. The pilot study participants are listed along with the main study participants in Appendix One. These are samples of their quotes:

“If I were to sum up the job of a police officer for you... We are no different to bin men – I’ve always said that. They take away physical waste, and we deal with human waste. Or maybe a sewer! Yes, we are the sewer that takes society’s shit away so people can go about their daily lives.” (Niko, Safer Neighbourhoods team)

“Covid hasn’t changed anything for us in terms of public perception. We were always the villains and still are.” (Pete, Firearms team)

“As far as callouts go, there are more domestics to attend. And it’s more volatile, unpredictable... not just in terms of people’s behaviours and threat to us, but in terms of risk from the virus, being in confined spaces with people, not having masks and so on.” (Byron, Response team).

As can be seen from these quotes, the pilot study participants viewed their job as dirty, likening it to a sewer system or refuse collection. They felt increasingly under threat from contraction of the virus during the Covid-19 pandemic and experienced greater uncertainty and danger

when dealing with some situations, despised by the public, even in a pandemic when society's members are experiencing fear and disorder and come to rely on frontline protective services even more.

It is evident from the preliminary accounts and insights given above that much of the work of police officers is traumatic and dangerous and they do not feel valued. In addition, they did not feel valued and lacked essential protective equipment. Yet many also described heroic acts of lifesaving and protection, for which they were thanked. 'It is the job of the police to step forward when everyone else steps back' said Pete (Firearms). The media is replete with examples of officers saving people's lives, often at the cost of their own. Typically they are described as 'a true hero', 'caring and compassionate', 'an ideal officer' (Martin, 2023) or 'dedicated' and 'selfless' (Northumbria Police, 2023). These are undeniably narratives of heroism and a paternalistic form of care, where officers describe taking the lead and intervening to shield the vulnerable in society. This paternalistic care is executed when dealing with the types of people who cause a threat to society's members and who most people try to avoid and situations that the rest of society tries to avoid contact with, murderers, violent drunks, rapists, paedophiles and terrorists for example.

In addition to doing good for society, officers in the pilot study gave numerous examples of caring for and about their colleagues, and described being involved, caring fathers to their children. It was intriguing to me how such an occupation can be so multifaceted and complex in terms of the emotional repertoire required of its workers. It requires the ability to adapt to different emotionally charged situations at work, to step in and protect the lives of others, all whilst being treated as a hero or villain by the public but never knowing exactly how they will

be received or what they will encounter in each situation. What emotional toll does this take on the individual frontline officer and how does this impact on his family life? And why do some officers minimise their role, explaining it away to me, the researcher, as being akin to collecting rubbish? Investigation into academic literature about dirty work began to reveal the parallels between policing and refuse collection, but before that, a quick trawl of the National Careers Service website and then media articles, revealed the nature of refuse collection, described below.

‘Bin workers’, also known as ‘refuse collectors’ or ‘waste operatives’ (National Careers Service, 2023), are those employed to collect rubbish and recycling from homes and businesses. They take away the physical waste that is produced in everyday life, which prevents homes and roads from over-flowing with rubbish, vermin and disease. Media articles about this job shows public perceptions of this occupation have changed with time. In post war Britain for example, ‘bin *men*’ as they were commonly known then, were seen as friendly and strong, whistling and chatting to members of the public whilst being able to hoist cylindrical metal bins onto their shoulders. Described as ‘proper bin men’ in social media platform Facebook (2022), one commenter remarked that bin men (historically) were ‘always a friendly crowd you could have a laugh with. Not like the bin men of today, you are lucky if they respond to a “Good Morning!”.’ Perhaps this is just nostalgic thinking (Hancox, 2022) but this historic shift in perceptions of bin workers shows that attitudes towards occupations is socially constructed. It shows how a certain occupation can be associated with certain attributes at a particular time in history. Roll forward to the recent Scotland bin strikes of 2022 and a different set of associations with bin workers were made. This 12-day strike in Edinburgh and other parts of Scotland coincided with the Edinburgh Festival (5<sup>th</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> August 2022). Workers were battling for higher wages amidst sharply rising living costs. Showing photos of rubbish piled high across

the city streets, the media described it as ‘embarrassing’ for city leaders (Mnyanda, 2022), ‘raising a stink’ and giving ‘the wrong impression of this great city’ (Reuters, 2022). In effect, this had challenged the appearance of ordered lives (Douglas, 1966). Non-collection of rubbish had created filthy, chaotic scenes in an otherwise beautiful tourist destination, which was not in keeping with standards. Despite their usefulness however, bin workers are stigmatised because of the type of the smelly, repulsive, physically dirty work they perform, perceived as ‘lower than a snake’s belly’ in Hamilton et al.’s (2019) empirical study.

Issues with stigma can apply to many other occupations, of course. Police officers can also suffer low occupational prestige or a perception of low morality, which can lead to public indifference around their exposure to workplace violence (Ozkan et al., 2016; Perrott, 2019). Police work is associated with the notion of occupational taint and, according to Jenkins (2021), the police service were described as having ‘a long and tawdry history of corruption’, with officers boasting ‘we are the biggest gangsters in Soho’ whilst being secretly recorded talking to criminals.

The next section discusses how and why, after the pilot study above, a critical case study was conducted.

### **Using a critical case study**

This study employed a critical case study design (Yin, 2009) in order to achieve an in-depth exploration of the lived experiences of frontline police officers who are also caregiving fathers. Case studies are one of the most extensively employed strategies of qualitative social research and are ‘used in several disciplines of social science such as sociology, management, anthropology, psychology and others’ (Priya, 2021). As a form of empirical enquiry, Yin (2009:



18) suggests that a case study allows for a phenomenon to be investigated in its 'real-life context'. Whilst participants were not interviewed in their work setting, they were interviewed during their days off, or just before or after a shift at work. This enabled them to express their thoughts and emotions about the impact of their work on them and their family-life. Essentially, interviews were conducted at the intersection between work and home. Multiple methods of data collection can be used in case studies, and the method used here is in-depth qualitative interviews. It must be noted however, that, as highlighted by Yin (2009), a case study is not a method of data collection, rather it is a research strategy or design to study a social unit. In addition, Creswell (2014: 241) explains that, as a qualitative design, case studies allow the researcher to explore in depth events, activities, processes and one or more individuals. In my study, many participants were able to discuss various work and home-based events and activities to reveal how they were impacted by their working conditions and culture and how they sought to prevent their resultant negative emotional states from bleeding over into family life.

## **Methodology**

As has been described above, a critical case study as a research design, allows for an in-depth exploration of police officers and their experiences of work and of being caregiving fathers. This is a useful way to explore a complex phenomenon within a given context (Mamas et al., 2016). In this section I elaborate on how I employed such a design, describing the research setting, how access was gained, how consent was granted and confidentiality and anonymity guaranteed. This section then describes the methods of data collection, showing the interview questions used, followed by a description of the methods and phases of data analysis, before moving to ethical considerations. Finally this section includes a reflection on the methodology and methods used.

### **The research setting – geographical area and frontline role**

The police officers who were participants for this study serve across two constabularies, anonymised as C1 and C2 and the MPS Police Service. The populations within these three areas total over twelve million people and cover a total of almost two and a half thousand square miles. A total of 7,711 officers work for the three constabularies combined in this study, all of which are located in the South-East of England and a further 34,207 work for the MPS (Gov.uk, 2023). This study focused on frontline officers within those areas, from firearms, response, safer neighbourhoods, and criminal investigation teams. Frontline roles are distinguished from back-office roles which are, as the name suggests, office-based and provide support services to keep the organisation running smoothly. These include planning, finance and human resource teams for example.

The police front line consists of officers who are in everyday contact with the public, and who ‘directly intervene to keep people safe and enforce the law’ (HMIC - HM Inspectorate of Constabulary, 2011: 6). They provide initial and ongoing response to a range of incidents, including complex and/or confrontational ones. Appendix Six, indicates frontline officers, who account for around two-thirds of the police workforce in England and Wales, need to employ a wide range of skills to deal with the various situations they may face. These skills include assessing risk to themselves and members of the public, gauging levels of threat and harm in order to determine a response that is line with the law and policy, engaging with and supporting victims and the vulnerable in society, and so on. (College of Policing, 2019)

### **What the participants have in common**

All of the participants of this research share, through their narratives, the experience of being fathers who work on the frontline of policing and want to be active in their children's lives and want to make a positive contribution to their children's' wellbeing. All have them have struggled with balancing the needs and conditions of their work with their role as fathers, so are experts in this type of experience. All of the participants were interested in taking part in this research because they wanted to see change for fathers in the police service, even if many did not think that this kind of change was possible. Their stories and experiences present as complex and contradictory at times. I am reminded of a quote by Brannelly and Barnes, where they state that 'care ethics research requires an engagement with the messy reality of complex situations' (2022: viii). This resonates with me as police work is certainly messy, dirty work, as discussed in Chapter Two, where I set out the conditions of police work and the emotional dirty nature of dealing with trauma.

### **Gaining access to and collecting data from participants**

Despite the visibility of police officers, they have, for decades, been considered one of the most inaccessible parts of the criminal justice system for research purposes. Gaining access to participants in institutions such as this is recognised as difficult (Perrott, 2019) and most of what they do and the decisions they make happens out of sight of the public gaze (Skolnick, 1975). This was apparent in the Casey Review which described a culture where individuals do not whistle-blow or speak up about malpractice for fear of 'adverse consequences for themselves, their careers and teams.' (Casey Review, 2023).

A researcher is considered to be an insider when he or she shares certain attributes with the participants, or an outsider when he or she does not belong to the same group as the participants

(Merton, 1972; Braun and Clarke, 2013). As an academic researcher I would be considered an outsider but as a wife of a retired officer and someone who has a social network and contact with serving and retired officers and their families, I could be considered by them to be more of an insider, despite not working within the organisation. However, most of the officers I interviewed were not known to me personally; they were put into contact with me by various 'gatekeepers' (Reeves, 2010), who acted as essential mediators (Andoh-Arthur, 2019), and I doubt that without the help of the gatekeepers I would have been granted interviews with them. Police officers are naturally suspicious of people (Asad, 2004; Fassin, 2013; O'Brien-Olinger, 2016), so the role of gatekeeper was fundamental to this research taking place, and this is well documented by previous police researchers (Reeves, 2010; Yang, 2022)

### ***Consent***

Participants were given an information sheet prior to the interview, so that they understood what the research was about. A discussion about the study was also held between the researcher and participant before the interview, so that participants had a chance to ask questions. Some did, and a few also asked to see copies of the interview questions in advance, so that they were better prepared. In addition, consent forms were given to each participant before the interview and completed by them (see Appendix Three).

I recruited many officers through gatekeepers and snowballing, which has advantages and disadvantages for the research. For example, a gatekeeper known to me put forward names of others in his organisation who could take part. Some of these then suggested other names of individuals, fathers, with whom they had worked in the past or worked at the time. One disadvantage of using gatekeepers is that these participants may have felt under pressure to

take part in the interviews once their colleague had contacted them. For this reason I always made contact with them and went through the study again to make sure they knew exactly what it was about. Other potential issues with using gatekeepers and then snowballing is that participants are aware of who has taken part other than themselves in some instances and may try to find out what others have said. In addition, the researcher runs the risk of interviewing individuals who are all very similar to each other.

In order to overcome some of the issues associated with using gatekeepers and snowballing samples, I understood the need to maintain complete confidentiality. So when one participant said for example: 'Did Dave speak to you about when we were at (X venue) and our inspector wouldn't let me go home when my son was admitted to hospital?' I had to remind the participant that 'I can't say who else has or has not participated or what any other participants have said, as I need to maintain confidentiality'.

Participants were also reminded of their right to withdraw consent at any time, to see the transcripts and change anything they were not satisfied with or add anything they later thought of as important. Once participants had signed a copy of the consent form, they were given a copy to retain.

### ***Confidentiality and anonymity***

As has been previously described, all interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim and anonymised so that no participant could be identified through his name, team, workplace, role, or events.

All anonymised transcripts were stored securely on a password-protected laptop, and any handwritten field notes were kept in a locked drawer. Audio recordings on an iPhone were only kept until transcription processes were complete and then deleted. All use of the data was in accordance with the conditions set out in the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix Two) and the Participant Consent Form (Appendix Three).

### **Methods of data collection**

Interviews were conducted in a variety of settings including cafes, in the participants' homes, via Zoom calls and at the researcher's office. When in cafes, there is undoubtedly going to be a risk of being overheard, so measures were taken to meet when it was quiet, and I was able to look around and see if anyone seemed to be listening to our conversation. When at participants' homes physically or online via Zoom, there were occasional interruptions when other family members walked in or were making noise in the background, but this did not unduly disrupt the flow of conversation because the father would normally say that I was there to interview him and they would leave, or in the case of younger children wandering into a Zoom call background, the partner would take them away.

My initial contact with C1 (anonymised Constabulary) happened when I spoke with an individual I knew from my son's football club. He knew a firearms officer based in C1, to whom I was later introduced and arranged to meet. This officer spoke to me about my research and although he was interested in it because he was a father who felt that he had not been treated very well by the service compared to mothers he worked with, he was cautious about it at first. 'What are you going to do with the information?' he asked. I assured him that I would

only be finding out about fathers' experiences of working on the frontline and the impact this had on family life. I said that anonymity would be guaranteed and that participants would have the chance to read the transcripts of the interview and make any changes necessary. He then asked, 'Why are you doing it?' and I talked about being part of a police family, to which he responded with more interest than the research itself necessitated, asking lots of questions in rapid succession, about where my husband had worked, and in what role, did I know such-and-such an inspector who lived locally to me. Once we had established the basics, he spoke about how common it was for him to be asked to help with research by doing interviews, as he enjoyed extreme endurance-type sports in his spare time and how 'people seemed fascinated by that'. He said researchers were often trying to find out more about the police too. The conversation turned to our shared interest in skydiving and Army Reserves work, and we discovered that we had both completed basic training at the same camp and used the same types of rifles. Here are two extracts from my fieldnotes after that first interaction:

***Fieldnote extract (March 2021):***

*I spoke with Greg (pseudonym used for anonymity) today. We chatted about the time I served in the Territorial Army (TA), and my regiment at (ABC) barracks where I completed basic training and then officer training. He was keen to hear about the rifles used there, which doesn't surprise me as he is in firearms. I didn't feel very confident speaking about this as it was such long time ago that I served, and I was never much of a shot. But I remembered that I was there around the time that the Army moved away from using SLRs to SA80s, in the mid-90s, and I told him about the timed assessment where we'd had to strip the rifle down to its component parts and put it back together again under the scrutiny of a sergeant, and I'd ended up feeling*

*humiliated as I was the last to finish. Greg spoke about the technicalities of the SLR; its weight and accuracy compared to the SA80. I don't think he cared much for the SLR.*

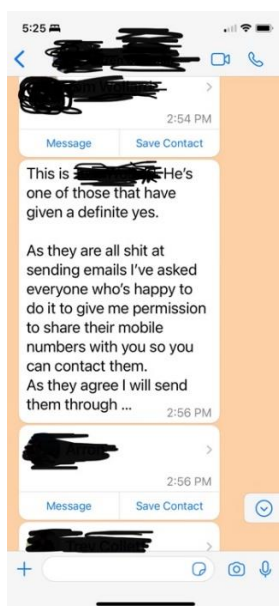
*Conversation turned to experiences of parenting teens; shared horror-stories of them staying out all night, and of being suspended from school. He was quick to defend our respective children, reassuring me that 'they will turn out alright'. We also chatted about his interest in extreme sports, our dogs and their role as therapists in lockdown. I feel like we got on, had a lot of common experiences of life and a similar outlook. I was surprised when he offered to get as many participants as he could for me: 'Right, how many interviewees do you need and by when?' I opportunistically suggested 'About 25? Within the next 3 months?' He didn't seem fazed and said he'd come back to me within 2 days with a WhatsApp group set up to communicate with as many of his colleagues as he could get. I'm not sure if anything will materialise out of this, but let's see.*

As can be seen from the above field note extract, made after the first interaction with my gatekeeper, I was left unsure if he would be true to his word of getting me more participants. The next day I was added to a WhatsApp group that consisted of ten officers in the C1 area, all on frontline roles, including firearms, safer neighbourhoods and response teams. My gatekeeper messaged me 'This is (name of potential participant). He's one of those that have given a definite yes.' As can be seen from the image in Figure One below, he announces their participation as 'they are all shit at sending emails I've asked everyone who's happy to do it to give me permission to share their mobile numbers with you so you can contact them. As they agree I'll send them through to you.' Three potential participants were sent through within as many minutes. I think they were keen to be involved because they all worked closely with the



gatekeeper and were keen to show their support for him. He had already described them as ‘my police family, with whom I spend more time than my own family.’

**Figure One: WhatsApp message from gatekeeper (March, 2021)**



(Source: WhatsApp message from gatekeeper, 2021)

The WhatsApp group grew as each of the gatekeeper’s colleagues responded to his call for involvement, often using nicknames, I noticed. My gatekeeper would then tell me their real names (adapted here for the purposes of anonymity), i.e. ‘Grand’ (Grand-Prix) was so-called because he drove too fast, ‘Freddy F-wit’ because he had sustained a head injury whilst arresting someone and suffered from amnesia. I got the impression that these men enjoyed working together, and that banter was a necessary part of everyday communication between them, to help them cope with the demands of the job. This made me think about how I would come across when I met them. I made it clear on the WhatsApp group that I would be buying the coffees. This sparked another round of teasing amongst group members: ‘When was the

last time a woman bought you a drink and actually listened to you?’ or ‘First time for Tracker, he’s never been out with a woman’. It also shows that the participants are not used to having a female in their midst as they are an all-male team. They resort to macho behaviours like teasing and banter in a hyper-masculine organisation, throwing thinly disguised insults at each other at every opportunity, insinuating that team-members might be gay.

Despite this I wanted to be accepted as a researcher, and felt I had to show hospitality, have a sense of humour, and to anticipate banter both in the build up to and during the researcher-police interview. As I was on my way to my first interview, due to be held in a busy town centre café, I realised that I had no idea what my participant looked like and he had never seen me before, so how would we recognise each other? I texted him ‘I’m wearing an orange cardigan’. He replied, ‘Christmas present?’ As soon as he saw me at the café, he laughed out loud and asked ‘hmmm... still working for EasyJet or do you just like the uniform?’

### **The interview questions**

Although the narrative style of interviewing allows participants to tell their stories their way, I became aware after the first one that there was a danger of them going off course and me not being able to gather all the data I needed to effectively answer my Research Questions. I therefore decided to create an interview questions template, to make sure that all relevant areas were discussed, which acted as a prompt for me to use either during the interview, or afterwards, when thinking about how the content of the interview related to the Research Questions. The questions are shown below in Box 5, along with an example of how I added notes after an interview:

**Box 5: Reminders, narrative opener, and back-up interview questions asked of police officers**

**Reminders:**

- Introduce self
- Remind participant of anonymity and confidentiality – complete forms
- Read Single (Narrative) Question

***Narrative opener:***

*Tell me about your role as a police officer including during the covid pandemic and how this has affected you and your family. You can start as far back as you like, from before the pandemic if you want. I will just listen but might ask occasional questions.*

I then used the template in Box 6 below to check that participants had covered all of the areas I wanted them to in the course of the interview. This example shows the notes I added to the question template during and after the interview.

**Box 6: Example of interview question template and interviewer notes**

<b>Questions</b>	<b>What effect did this have on you (emotionally, physically etc). Examples.</b>	<b>What effect has this had on your family (spouse, children) with examples:</b>
<b>Participant: DC (Custody Sergeant, Area C2)</b> <b>Tell me about your working patterns and shifts before and during Covid. Have they changed?</b> Longer shifts and working more weekends due to staff shortages, 3 members of team shielding for health reasons.	Positive: Glad I have more hours = more money. Negative: Tired, falling out with managers and HR. Tension has increased in all relationships at work – having health issues (diabetes and high blood pressure) and not being allowed to shield in 2020. Being acutely aware that I needed to lose weight. Then losing about 2 stone in 3 months.	During Covid, I had more overtime, so money for them – able to provide more. My sons tried to get me in shape – running round block. Could only do 1 min at first. Kids were scared for my safety. I was scared for theirs. Longer shifts and working weekends = inability to plan/attend family events in 2021-22.
<b>Tell me about the nature of your work and whether this has changed during Covid (i.e. types of crimes, job you do etc)</b>	More Domestic Violence than ever before, and shoplifting. Fewer burglaries. Constantly doing things differently – changing into PPE, checking on prisoners, putting	Again, it's about protecting the family against this sort of rubbish. Keep them in a bubble of ignorance about my job and the kinds of things I have to deal

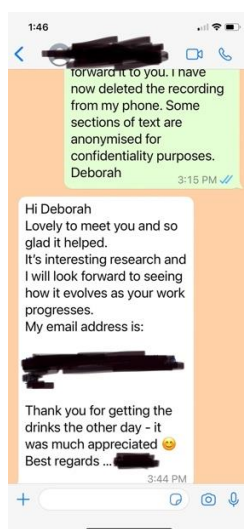
	gloves on to touch prisoners, removing gloves before touching anything else. Higher amount of stress now as greater risk of infection.	with. They can't help me can they!
<b>Describe your relationships with people at work before/during covid (colleagues, manager etc)</b>	Greater sense of camaraderie with colleagues during Covid but frustration with manager and HR – zero support. Being made to feel small in HR meetings when expressing concerns for own safety. Not being listened to.	Not really – I tend not to talk to my wife and kids about my work relationships. It's two different worlds and family don't understand the work one. My wife is quite naïve, my mum even more so because of her cultural background.
<b>Describe how you felt about your own physical safety before/during Covid (PPE, contact with public etc)</b>	Always feel unsafe at work, whether Covid or not. The minute you put your uniform on you are scared for self, scared for colleagues. Getting shot at in a town centre is an example. Most colleagues have some form of PTSD. Female officer I was teamed with was victim of assault by prisoner. She did breath-work exercises whilst I was making arrests when she came back to work! During Covid, Lack of PPE – completely exposed to virus. Family coming into counter to see person in cell. Threatened – spitting, coughing when delivering meals to prisoners in cells.	Before Covid – Scared for own safety. Knives routinely taken out by youths, Being single crewed due to cuts very risky for officers, especially in constabularies. Most of my team have been assaulted. During Covid - Being restricted and limited – needing family to go to shops for me when I had to isolate. I depended on them, not other way round for first time. Kids trying to help me lose weight.
<b>How would you describe your relationship with your spouse before/during the pandemic? And with your children?</b>	Before: Enjoy time off work – fun, play, lots of sport. But coupled with poor mental health – need alone time. During: Fear for their safety and mine because of my health issues. Enjoyed being at home in isolation – found out more about them than I ever knew before. Did physical things together – workouts, walks. I realised how much I had missed of my older kids growing up.	Better for them to have me at home for a change. I've realised they want me and my time, not the extra money.
<b>Has the culture of policing changed during covid? (more macho?)</b>	No but I think colleagues at first relied on each other more, then as people started going off sick	Not answered.

	or isolating because of health conditions, people started getting grumpy with each other. We were always down in numbers and that puts pressure on those left behind.	
<b>Did you ever get the chance to work from home or work more flexibly?</b>	No, it wasn't for want of trying. There is admin you can do from home, but it's not allowed.	Not answered.

After the interviews, some of the participants followed up with me via the WhatsApp group.

See below in Figure Two for an example of this and note the appreciation for the coffee.

**Figure Two: WhatsApp message with Duncan, Area C1**



After conducting this first set of interviews, some of the participants suggested other colleagues in different teams and in other constabularies and the sample snowballed from there until I had reached 20 participants. In March 2022 I gained access to the police at a Crown Court in London, through knowing a wife of one of them. Again, I showed hospitality by taking them lunch from a nearby delicatessen, which they seemed thrilled with and appreciative of. See Figure 3 overleaf:

**Figure Three: Text message – Importance of hospitality**



They suggested a further 5 participants across the MPS, who were all interviewed via Zoom to fit in with their shifts and to save the travel costs as I live outside London.

In total, 27 frontline officers were interviewed for this study, across three different police services (two Constabularies and the MPS), so it is exploratory in nature and not generalisable. However, the intention of this study is to unearth the experiences of those who did participate in it, and these individuals presented some scathing accounts of a lack of managerial support for them as fathers and working conditions that prevented them from being physically or emotionally present in their child(ren's) lives.

The recruitment window lasted 9 months, from June 2021 to March 2022. Interviews took place face-to-face in cafes, at the participants' place of work, in my work office in London, or via Zoom, resulting in over forty-five hours of semi-structured interview data recorded via my iPhone's Voice Memo function. All participants were informed in writing before the interviews and again at the start of each interview that their names, roles and team members would be anonymised, I used University standard participant and information forms and told participants

that they could have access to the transcribed interviews to add or change anything they wanted to. Only five of the twenty-seven participants wanted to see the transcripts, which were emailed to their private email accounts. One of these carried out a complete proof-read and edit of the transcript, before returning it to me. I didn't ask him why and am still not sure why he went to those lengths.

As has been stated, a number of different venues served as meeting places for the interviews. I will now give more detail about each, why they were chosen and the effect they had on the interviews.

All participants agreed to meet in the venues I suggested, and the only ones who offered to meet me at their homes, with their partner and children present, had been known to me for many years. In fact I was godmother to one of his children and had watched all the children grow up and had been close friends with his wife until they moved away to Scotland in 2015 but had remained in contact by social media since then.

I met three officers at their place of work; two at a Crown Court, who were interviewed together, and another at a police station before his shift started. I found the experience of being at a Crown Court particularly interesting as a researcher, as I was able to observe how the officers interacted with each other, with other officers who came into the office, and other court employees. I also spent the rest of the afternoon, after the interview was concluded, in the public gallery watching a live trial take place. At one point a sergeant came into the office and asked, 'Who's this?' looking at me. My participants explained that I was a researcher. The sergeant then came back and took delight in pranking me later that afternoon, asking 'Did you

leave a rucksack in reception? We've called bomb disposal in and destroyed it, didn't know it was yours.' I felt that this was probably the treatment that any visitor to the office would get, and that it helped officers to lighten the mood and enjoy their day.

The majority of interviews took place online via Zoom. This was launched in 2012 and became the most popular meeting platform during the Covid-19 Pandemic. I sent participants a link to enable them to join the meeting. This was an effective way to meet because many participants were working shifts or there were social distancing measures in place. All interviews were conducted without issues.

Of the 27 officers interviewed, who ranged in age from twenty-four to fifty-seven years, all were male and fathers of at least one child with whom they lived. Twenty-one participants were married, living with their children, two described themselves as divorced and remarried with access to the children from the previous marriage and living with those from the current one. Three participants described their relationship status as a 'partnership', i.e. not married but living together with children, and one was separated and living alone but with full access to his children. One participant described being 'separated' from his partner but with full access to his children. They had worked for between 3 and 23 years within their respective police services, and the following roles were identified: Youth Offenders Team officer (n = 1), Custody Suite officer (n = 1), Safer Neighbourhoods Team officer (n = 6), Territorial Support Group (n = 1), Sexual Offences Investigations officer (n = 1), Firearms/armed response officer (n = 7), mounted police (n = 1), dog unit (n = 1), Major Crimes Unit (n = 1), Court Officer (n = 2), Counter-Terrorism officer (n = 1), Domestic Abuse Investigation officer (n = 1), National Crime Agency officer (n = 1). The 27 participants served across 2 constabularies and the MPS.



The constabularies were anonymised for the purposes of confidentiality and renamed C1 and C2. I attempted to access ethnically diverse participants where possible, to give insight into the experiences of officers from ethnic minority backgrounds. Those interviewed self-identified as Black African (n = 3), Black Asian (n = 1), Indian (n = 1), Italian (n = 1), Eastern European - Polish and Romanian (n = 2), Greek Cypriot (n = 2), Welsh (n = 1), and the rest as White-British (n = 16). Whilst there is some diversity represented in this study, as can be seen above, the numbers are so small that generalisations cannot be made, and this should be addressed in similar studies in the future. All the participants were on full-time contracts and on varying shift patterns at the time of the interviews. Shifts and rosters vary across constabularies and within the MPS depending on role but are typically known as 'early turns' (7am-3pm), 'late turns' (2pm-11pm) and 'night duties' (10pm-7am). Officers typically work 40 hours per week if fulltime, with opportunities for paid over-time. Common schedules include 4 x 10-hour shifts, or 5 x 8-hour shifts per week and could look like this:

2 x early turns, 2 x late turns, and then 2 x night duties.

Within the Safer Neighbourhood teams the shift patterns can be different from the typical early, late and night hours outlined above, in order to meet demand, i.e. so that there are sufficient numbers of officers to patrol and make arrests in busy town centres on Friday and Saturday nights. Specialist units such as Firearms teams and dog units can work 12-hour shifts in the pattern of 4 days on and 4 days off work. The table in Appendix One shows the participant demographics.

Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim using the voice recording function on my iPhone, with the participants' permission. Zoom meetings were also recorded and transcribed

using Otter.ai audio transcription initially, but although it was fast, I did not find it to be very accurate, so I reverted to transcribing by playing the recording and typing up the transcript myself. I gave all participants pseudonyms to maintain anonymity. In the next chapter, Data and Findings, I identify these participants by their pseudonyms and their role, i.e. Jack, Firearms. On occasion, where I thought that officers could be identified by events, colleague interactions, family members or other situations, I have anonymised these factors also.

## **Conclusion**

Reflecting on how I gained access to the participants of this study and conducted the interviews with them, I used a mainly narrative approach to elicit rich and detailed data, saying very little in some instances, but showing good and active listening skills, demonstrating to the participant that I was interested in everything they had to say and that they could share all the details of their working conditions, challenges and family lives with me if they wanted to. I did however also find it useful to go into each interview with a list of questions to remind me to cover certain areas, and I felt more 'prepared' and perhaps 'professional' as a researcher by having these to refer to. I found that some participants enjoyed the informal nature of what they called 'chats' with me and these tended to be the interviews where I did not constantly check against a list of questions. In some interviews the questions helped to avoid participants going off on complete tangents though, providing a manageable framework for the session together. It became apparent that the role of gatekeepers, building and maintaining trust, being comfortable with the police sense of humour, surroundings or setting for the interview and hospitality are all important aspects of the researcher-researched relationship in the context of the police. The need to be credible as a researcher, of having a topic that is deemed to be important to participants, the ability to build trust and rapport, as well as accepting banter and gallows

humour as a form of communication and way of achieving more of an insider status are what I see as the foundations for the researcher-police relationship. Reflecting on why hospitality was so important to the participants, and in light of the data gathered from the interviews, I can see that all participants talk about how under-valued their role is, and that they do not feel cared for by their organisation. They search for contact with people outside their organisation, through charity work and involvement with sports clubs for example, where they can be reminded that not all of humanity is bad, or where they can experience acts of kindness from others. One participant recalled how he had moored his boat at a marina one weekend, and how an elderly sailor had helped him repair his engine, expecting nothing in return. My token gesture of buying a drink obviously meant more to the participants than it did to me.

The next section describes the methods of data analysis, and explains how reflexive thematic analysis, when blended with narrative analysis, helped to give an in-depth understanding of frontline officers who are caregiving fathers.

### **Methods of data analysis – blending reflexive thematic analysis with narrative analysis**

This section discusses the multi-method approach taken to analyse the data gathered. It justifies why the blending of two qualitative data analysis methods, reflexive thematic analysis and narrative analysis, can help to develop a rigorous and deep understanding of the experiences of fathers who work in frontline roles in the police service. By combining these two techniques participants' experiences can be viewed from different perspectives. Thematic analysis helps describe the answers to 'what' regarding police fathers experiences of work and family, whilst narrative analysis describes the dynamics of their experiences, or 'how' they perceive

themselves, others and events at work and at home and also which events they include as significant in their stories.

### **Reflexive Thematic Analysis**

My research sits within the paradigm of social constructivism and is focused on understanding the lived experiences of frontline police officers who are fathers. I decided therefore that a reflexive thematic analysis would be appropriate as a method to find common themes across the narratives told to me by the officers, and to find out about the aspects of their work that have an impact on them and how this trickles into family life.

Thematic Analysis (TA) has a number of approaches, including the coding reliability approach, codebook approach and reflexive approach (Braun and Clarke, 2019). TA has been widely used in qualitative studies and is quite a flexible method to use (Bryne, 2021). Reflexive TA enables researchers to take an active role in coding and generating themes from the data, and in addition, it allows for the subjectivity of the researcher to become a ‘tool’ in that process rather than something to be controlled (Braun and Clarke, 2019). I am not just a researcher of the police, but a wife of a retired officer and mother of a serving officer. As previously stated, this positions me as more of an insider than an outsider to the study population; officers could relate to me as someone who is familiar with the challenges facing officers and someone they could talk to with ease. I am not shocked by what they say, the language used, gallows humour, or the distress, anger and frustration they feel when recounting experiences. They knew that I would have heard similar stories in my own family, in fact many said things like ‘As your husband has undoubtedly told you...’ or ‘As you are well aware...’ before proceeding to describe their experiences. My personal experiences of bringing up children with a husband

who worked shifts and suffered from PTSD really helped me to confidently start dialogue with gatekeepers and later participants, building trust because of those shared experiences.

I used the six-phase process for data analysis, as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2012, 2013, 2014, 2020), which are organised sequentially (please see below). I am aware however that it can be expected that analysis is not a linear process and I found that I moved back and forth flexibly through these stages, taking time over each.

### **Phases of data analysis followed:**

- 1) Familiarising oneself with the data
- 2) Generating codes
- 3) Constructing themes
- 4) Reviewing potential themes
- 5) Defining and naming themes
- 6) Producing the report

### **Phase one: Familiarising oneself with the data**

I listened actively to the interview recordings before taking any notes, recalling officers' behaviours and mannerisms, and then read and re-read the transcripts which I had transcribed verbatim manually, allowing a deep dive into the data. Although it was time consuming, this phase enabled me to answer questions such as 'what are the conditions of policing on the frontline that negatively impact the father-child relationship?' and 'what strategies do police-fathers use to help prevent emotional dirt spill over into family life?' I took note of my observations of any trends and patterns I was seeing in the data and highlighted interesting

sentences or paragraphs. I then wrote down my thoughts about the data. Below, in Figure Four, is an example of some of my initial notes as I became familiar with the data:

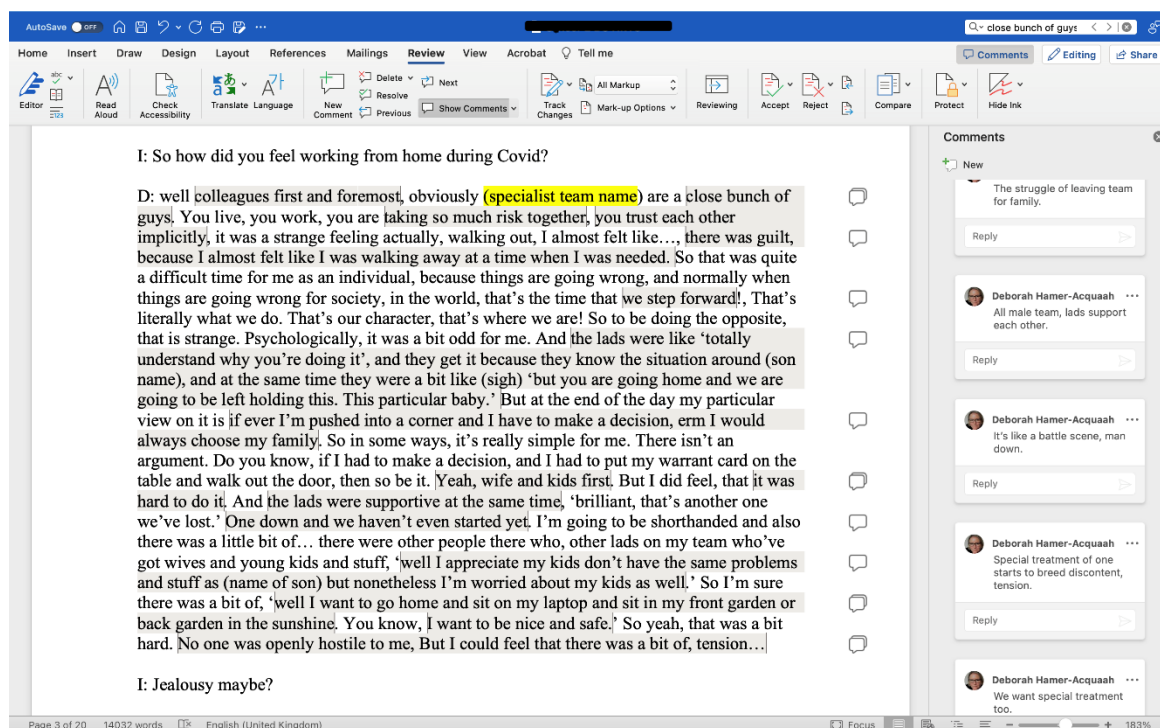
**Figure Four: Example of initial notetaking**

- Participants often spoke of the organisational lack of care for them as officers and readily gave examples of times when they had asked for support and had been refused or ignored.
- Participants are good at telling stories or recalling details of events, and are able to recount who was involved, what happened and when, why things happened the way they did and how they felt about the situations they encountered.
- There was usually a crisis point described, during the Covid-19 pandemic, or a moment of realisation, when the participants knew that something had to change. They had reached breaking point.
- Dependence on team, but tension between members arises when special treatment given to one.
- Family is both a site of tension and relaxation – fathers ‘escape’ family through hobbies.
- There was a lack of engagement with mental health support outside the organisation and a tendency to rely on outside interests as a way of staying stable mentally.
- High levels of mental ill-health due to conditions of work – fathers try to protect family and outsiders from this.

**Phase two: generating initial codes**

I started to assign initial codes to the text, working through the whole data set of twenty-eight transcripts, identifying aspects of the data that was interesting and might lead to theme generation. These initial codes were brief and shown in the right-hand side ‘comments’ function of MS Word, which also allowed for chunks of text to be highlighted where needed. An example is given below, in Figure Five, of a participant (D) who was permitted to work from home during the Covid-19 pandemic, and I the researcher (I) asked him how he felt about that change (see Figure Five overleaf):

**Figure Five: Example of initial coding of an interview extract**



The comments on the right-hand side are the shorthand descriptive labels that helped me to start answering the Research Questions shown at the beginning of this chapter. See below, Figure Six, for an example of how codes were generated.

**Figure Six: Generation of list of codes – example**

1. Police are about action, being assertive and protective.	6. Banter helps them cope in every situation.
2. There is a certain character associated with being a police officer – they are different.	7. Team recognises importance of family for others in team
3. The Team supports you; team is like family; you live with your team	8. Fears for children's safety during pandemic
4. Team need you, you can't desert the team	9. Home is place of safety, relaxation and enjoyment for officers.
5. Family take priority over work for police officers	10. Tension arises in team when one given special treatment.

In order to start answering the Research Questions, I carried out repeated iterations of the codes and became more familiar with them, tracking their evolution through use of a table, an extract of which is shown below in Figure Seven:

**Figure Seven: Ordering of codes**

Ref No.	Participant	Data Item	First order codes	Second order codes
1	Kris	It was horrible. I felt absolutely ridiculed for being concerned about my family, my wife and my unborn child. I felt these were legitimate reasons, but all my employer did was make me feel like I was creating a battle with them.	No support from institution for fathers	Uncaring organisation
2	Deano	I felt that me and my family were being put unduly at risk. I didn't see the necessity for so much stop and search at this point. Streets were very barren, and I felt that the job was just putting me on offer for want of a better phrase.	Being put at risk physically by institution	Uncaring organisation
3	Greg	Two months into first lockdown I had to have surgery on my shoulder from an incident that happened 2 years prior where somebody stabbed me and were a lot of complications with the shoulder surgery, and since the surgery there haven't been any welfare checks.	No concern for officers' health and welfare	Uncaring organisation
4	Jon	Quite a lot of the team have got young kids. When I say young, I mean like babies. X has got an 80-year-old mum, Y's wife has cancer, and no one knew what the risks were at that point. but they can't go home! It's very worrying.	Team shows concern for others' families	Caring promiscuously
5	Mash	I enjoy mentoring the probationers. It's quite rewarding to help bring someone up in the service, who can eventually be like you.	Supporting younger officers	Caring promiscuously
6	DC	The certainty of encountering trauma is absolute – your physical and mental state <i>will</i> be GBHd.	Emotional dirt	Emotional dirt
7	Greg	You live in a constant preparedness for shit	Dirty work	Emotional dirt
8	Deano	No, I don't talk about my day. Why would you want to fill their heads with all that stuff at work?	Preventing emotional dirt overspill	Emotional dirt



### **Phase three: Constructing themes**

After all individual data items were coded I moved to interpreting aggregated meaning across the dataset. I looked at different codes to see how they might have shared meanings and how they could form themes. I collapsed codes with a similar underlying meaning into one single code. For example, 'Guilt', 'worry', 'leaving this particular [work] baby' in the extract in Figure Seven above, were all codes used to describe how officers felt if they were allowed to go home (during the pandemic), due to a family member having an underlying health condition such as respiratory issues or cancer for example that would render them more vulnerable to the effects of the virus. Officers would often talk about the effects of this on their work team, who they felt they were letting down. I collapsed these codes into 'Team need you', and later 'Interdependence'. Codes such as 'mentoring probationers', 'rewarding to train others' 'looking out for each other', 'know about each other's families' 'working and living together' are all used to describe the significance of seeking out and forming meaningful emotional bonds and family-like relationships with team members at work; a core group of people who trusted and depended on each other. For example, what is behind the code of 'mentoring probationers' and the 'rewarding' feeling this gave officers was the idea that fathers who are officers are replicating the father-son or father-daughter relationship in the workplace, bringing a young person up, showing them the ropes and turning them into someone like themselves.

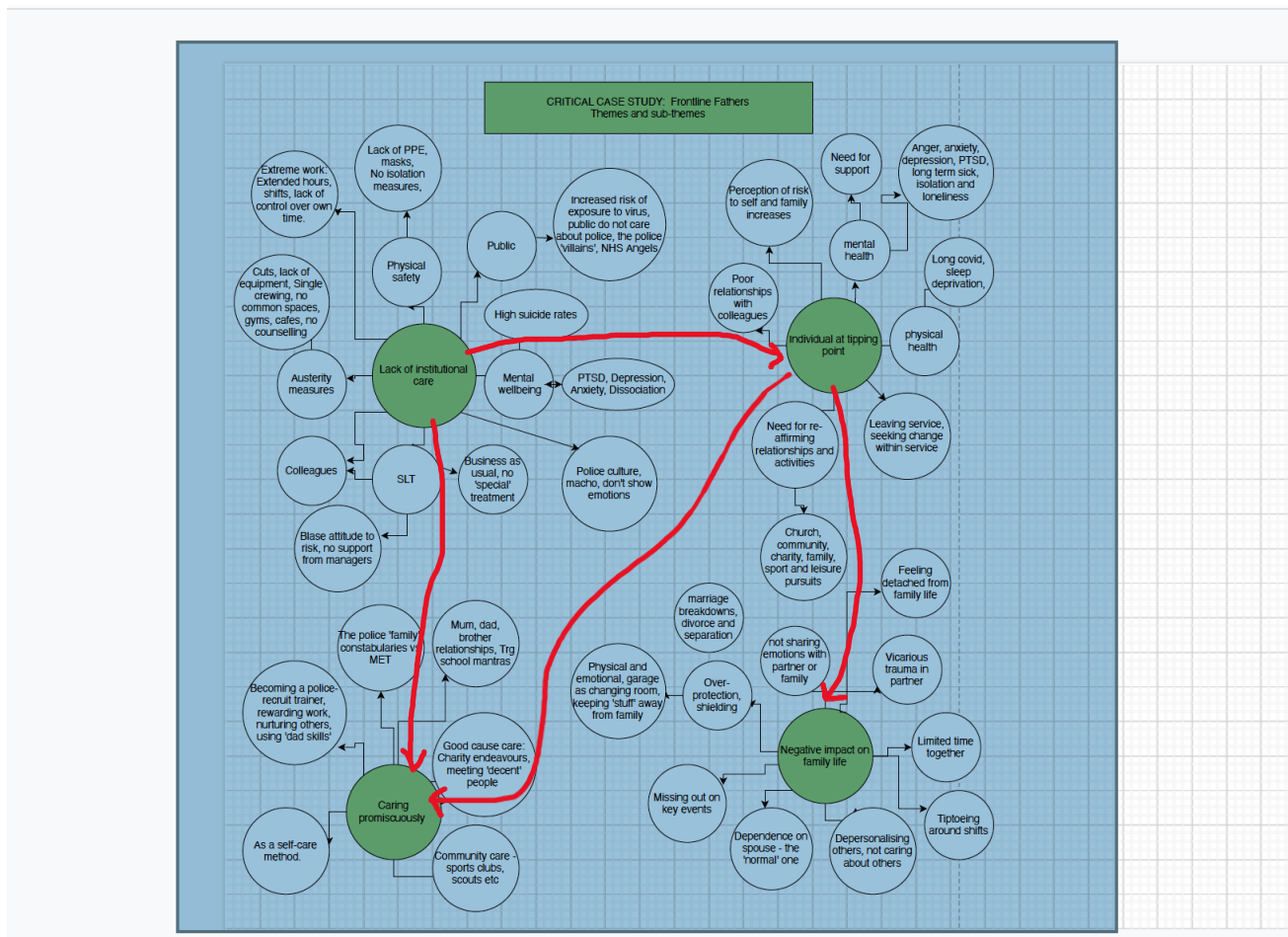
Mentoring is a voluntary role that many want to do because they enjoy the closeness of working with those new to the service, and this was later developed into the theme 'caring promiscuously'. Many of these mentors were also involved in youth work outside of the service, extending kinship beyond the workplace. The key overarching narrative of stories like

this is the desire for caring relationships with others. This helps to partly answer Research Question one for example, ‘What does it mean to be a father-carer who wants to be involved, but who also works in a frontline protective service role?’ It is culture that is so unrewarding in many ways, so demanding physically and damaging mentally, that officers try to find balance by actively seeking out opportunities to form close and meaningful relationships inside and outside the institution.

The themes that emerged were distinctive and sometimes appeared to be contradictory. For example, many officers try to protect their family members from the trauma and dirt of their jobs, i.e. they try to prevent emotional dirt overspill (Ward et al., 2020) at home. However, silence can be used as a tactical method of achieving this; not talking about their day or pursuing solitary hobbies such as fishing or running which take them physically away from their family. I struggled initially to see how this could be considered to be involvement as it appears to be a form of anti-involvement. It is also contradictory to the notion that officers seek caring kinships with others. This detached form of caring in this sense is discussed in more detail in Chapter Six.


At the end of this stage I produced a thematic map that helped me to collate the initial codes and themes. See Figure Eight on the next page:


Figure Eight: Thematic map of initial themes




Key:

Theme: 

Sub-theme: 

Relationship between themes 

Link to sub-theme 

#### **Phase four: Reviewing potential themes**

During this phase (Braun and Clarke, 2012), I reviewed the themes in relation to the coded data items and whole dataset. I considered whether the themes told me something useful about my Research Questions. For example, the first theme ‘The uncaring organisation’ was prominent and needed to be divided into three sub-themes to show what or who the organisation did not care about. Sub-theme one was ‘They do not care about my physical health’ and this helped me to start to answer Research Question One: ‘What does it mean to be a father-carer who wants to be involved, but who also works in a frontline protective service role?’ Sub-theme one tells me that officers often sustain physical injuries via assault and suffer other health issues such as insomnia as a result of working constantly changing shift patterns. The organisational culture is one that penalises sick leave and makes no effort to improve working conditions, and often under-resources officers making them vulnerable to assault when on duty.

I considered whether the theme was supported by enough data and if the themes were coherent and contributed well to the overall narrative of the data. I considered that they were indeed useful but that a different method of analysis might show a greater sense of the whole story told to me by officer-participants. For this reason I also opted to conduct narrative analysis, which is discussed in more depth in the next section, entitled ‘Narrative Analysis’.

**Phase five: Defining and naming themes**

During this phase I expressed each theme in relation to the dataset and Research Questions. I identified the data items that were to be used in the data analysis chapters that follow this chapter.

**Phase six: Compiling the report**

At this phase I established the order of reporting the themes, connecting them logically to build a coherent narrative of the data. For example, I reported the theme ‘uncaring organisation’ first as I felt that it set the context and underpinned the other themes, i.e. the lack of care for their personal safety and the increased risks they faced, explained why some officers were at breaking point or tipping point during the Covid-19 pandemic. ‘Tipping point’ became the second theme to be discussed and linked directly to the third theme, which was the ‘negative impact’ or overspill into the family, which officers often tried to prevent. The fourth theme, ‘caring promiscuously’ was illustrative of the steps taken by officers to remedy some of the ill-effects of the uncaring organisation, culture and conditions of policing. As the theoretical approach to the research was a feminist ethics of care, it felt appropriate to offer the closing discussions to officers’ narratives about how they approach caring and the necessary role of caring for and about others as widely as possible.

For the next section discusses why, in addition to Reflexive Thematic Analysis, I chose to use Narrative Analysis.

## **Narrative Analysis**

I was drawn to narrative analysis because although I had identified themes within the data and across cases using Reflexive TA, I still wanted to be able to retain a sense of the whole story that my officer-participants had told me; what I thought might be a more holistic way of exploring the data. In May 2019, one year into my PhD programme, I attended a conference ‘*Amor Narratio: Celebrating Catherine Kohler Riessman’s Narrative Scholarship*’ at the University of Greenwich. I was able to sit with Ms Riessman, the event organisers and other delegates during lunch, and heard their own stories of how and why they had researched different populations in different organisations, and of the importance of hearing the voices of marginalised communities and individuals, whose stories might not otherwise be heard. Eventually somebody asked about my research, which was still at an early stage of development. I said it was about fathers, ones who were trying to be involved, but perhaps could not be because of their working conditions. At that stage I had been exploring how many different fathers across different sectors and organisations were experiencing this but had not yet decided to focus on frontline police officers. Discussions ensued about how these fathers were probably trying to present themselves in the best light to me, as good fathers, and I was advised to listen to the voices of their partners too, to get a fuller and perhaps more honest account of the extent of their involvement with children. These types of conversations made me think about how mothers are still viewed by many as the parent who does the most childcare, and the reactions of those around me revealed a belief that mothers know best and somehow hold the key to the truth. This made a big impression on me, and I returned to my data to examine more closely whether participants might be constructing preferred narratives about their experiences, whether they were trying to impress me with their levels of fatherly-involvement or exaggerate their working conditions. I was particularly intrigued by the notion that ‘particular events can be selected, organised, connected and evaluated as meaningful for a

particular audience' (Riessman, 2019), so paid closer attention to the events that the participants chose to talk about. This view is supported by Hinchman and Hinchman (1997) who propose that that storytellers can also create moral tales about how the World should be, and their narratives become storied ways of knowing and communicating.

### **Ethics**

This section considers the ethics of conducting research with police officers and discussing their work and family lives with them. Ethics approval was gained from the University of Essex on 16th November 2018 and can be seen in Appendix Two and Three. Consideration was given to the ethical issues that might arise when conducting a study like this, including consent, confidentiality, anonymity and harm.

### ***Harm***

Conducting narrative-style interviews with police officers about their work and family life involves participants speaking about sometimes sensitive subjects, and this can cause powerful emotions to be brought up. In addition, these emotions might arise before, during or after the interview, which may cause harm to the participants. Emotions are inevitable when discussing family relationships according to Gabb (2010) and researchers need to minimise harm to those who participate in their studies. In the course of my own research I have interviewed many fathers who have discussed distressing situations at work and have described how this has affected them and their families, but rarely have they demonstrated their own distress about workplace events in a way that might be understood, i.e. they have never broken down or cried in the interview. This is not to say that they do not feel distress at what they have had to go through at work, but they have learned coping mechanisms to deal with it and are therefore

usually quite adept at hiding their emotions in an interview or steer the conversation towards a version of events with which they are comfortable. Despite this, as a researcher who interviews individuals about extreme and stressful working conditions and its impact on family life, I am aware that I am working with a raised level of ethical responsibilities and must take measures not to inflate the emotions of participants. Riessman (2018) states that researchers can help to protect their participants by not probing stories that are painful or damaging, and the ethics of care framework (Gilligan, 2011; Tronto, 1993) highlights that researchers have a caring obligation to the researched. In addition, I propose that an ethics of care means thinking with emotions, not just rationality and ethics, which should be at the centre of the research process (Blix et al., 2019). It was evident to me from the outset of the interviews that most participants had come prepared, and some said ‘I know what I’m going to tell you and what I can’t’ or similar. At first I thought that they meant they were going to maintain confidentiality about their organisation and people they worked with, but on reflection I also think they were trying to protect me from the trauma associated with the incidents they deal with.

## **Conclusion**

This methodology chapter has given an account of the research methodology and methods used and has revealed how it was underpinned by a feminist ethics of care. The stages of the research follow Tronto’s (2013) Five Phases of Care. During the research it became apparent that a multitude of opportunities and challenges can arise for the researcher when interviewing participants within the police service. It has made me aware for example, of the privileged position I had as someone who was not quite seen as an outsider, but in some ways an insider, as not just another researcher, but a researcher from a policing family. I became more aware of the value of other shared experiences between researcher and researched; in my case a brief



stint in the Army Reserves, ability to use a rifle and an interest in skydiving became conversation points that helped to build rapport. Being immersed in the police way of life, familiarity with the type of banter used and difficulties faced, enabled me to confidently approach and gain access to a range of frontline officers, via the gatekeepers I met or was introduced to. However, this only took me so far and I never felt that I was blindly trusted. I needed to build that trust and do it quickly if I were to maintain those newly developed networks but also be able to have the answers to participants' questions when they were assessing or re-assessing how trustworthy I was. This often came in the form of quite direct and blunt questions before and again during interviews – for example, what I was going to do with the research. I felt honoured to be given such insights into the lived experiences of fathers working in frontline conditions, but at times I was quite emotionally affected by some of the stories told to me. This has been emotional work in many ways, for its researched, wider audiences and of course, me as researcher. As a wife and mother within a policing family, I stand in solidarity with officers and their families and am aware of how my position as researcher-mother-wife of officer has helped me to gain access to and the trust of participants fairly easily and quickly. For me it has taken quite a lot of resilience to keep going and research individuals who work in emotionally dirty jobs.

## **Chapter Five: The uncaring organisation, preventing overspill and caring promiscuously: Findings**

### **Introduction**

This chapter presents the findings arrived at after following Braun and Clarke's (2013) data analysis phases outlined in Chapter Four Methodology and Methods. Three key themes were developed from the data analysis, and were connected together to build a coherent narrative of the data and to focus on addressing Research Questions one, two and three, as shown below:

### **Research Questions**

1. What does it mean to be a father-carer who wants to be involved, while working in a frontline protective service role?
2. How do father-carers who are frontline protective service providers experience caregiving fatherhood?
3. What could be the future conditions of possibility for frontline protective service workers who are, or aspire to be involved father-carers?

### **The three themes**

The data has been identified as falling into three main themes. The first theme is 'The uncaring organisation'. There are many definitions of what it means to care for employees, but in line with the theoretical framework of this research discussed in Chapter Three, I have drawn upon the work of Tronto (1998) who describes a caring organisation as having an awareness of and a concern for employees needs and well-being, and caring actors as being attentive,

responsible, competent, and responsive to others (Tronto, 1998). In contrast, an uncaring organisation does not do these things adequately. This over-arching theme also sets the context for the other themes and describes what it is like for fathers, as frontline police officers, to work within the Police Service generally and during the Covid 19 pandemic more specifically. The uncaring organisation, in this context, shows a lack of care in many ways, so three sub-themes have been developed to allow a more in-depth exploration of these. The sub-themes are ‘they don’t care about our bodies and minds’, ‘they don’t care we are dads’ and ‘how we cope’. The first sub-theme, ‘they don’t care about our bodies and minds’, refers to participants’ perceived lack of response by the service to the physical ill-health they suffer as a result of working long shifts, with high risk of accident and injury, for example when being forced to work alone, or having inadequate PPE (Personal Protection Equipment) during the Covid-19 pandemic. It also refers to the descriptions and experiences of officers’ poor mental health and the lack of organisational care shown for this. The sub-theme ‘they don’t care that we are dads’ speaks of the lack of workplace support and attention received by new dads or those with ongoing caring responsibilities, as well as the hostile response to fathers requesting flexible work arrangements. The sub-theme ‘how we cope’ describes the methods used by officers to reduce the stress associated with their public-facing role, including the othering of those they come into contact with. It also discusses how they seek to regain self-esteem and meaning in their work where a lack of care for them is perceived.

The second overarching theme ‘preventing emotional dirt overspill at home’ builds on the work of Ward et al. (2020) to explore how emotional dirt is contained by social agents, in this case frontline officers, to avoid it seeping into family life. It was a considerable theme revealing a plethora of methods used, so four sub-themes were highlighted in the analysis to allow for greater exploration of each sub-theme. The first sub-theme ‘downplaying’ shows how officers

seek to minimise the danger and trauma of their work to protect family members emotionally and gain their own sense of perspective about their work. The second sub-theme ‘avoiding triggers’ reveals participants’ awareness of situations that might prompt or trigger a negative emotional state in them, which they seek to circumvent. The third sub-theme, ‘partners as emotional anchors and protectors’ reveals participants dependence on partners, i.e. wives, to act as a buffer between his work-related emotions and the family, literally sponging up the dirt. The final sub-theme, ‘encouraging glimmers of hope and normality’ brings to light how officers encourage their children’s participation in leisure activities, in order to forge connections between family members, develop a sense of well-being and replace negative emotions with positive ones.

The final overarching theme, ‘caring promiscuously’ builds on the work of Chatzidakis et al.’s Care Collective (2020), as discussed in Chapter Three’s Theoretical Framework. This theme is presented as two sub-themes. The first, ‘caring at work’, reveals how participants sought to build relationships of care with other officers, for example by mentoring probationers, or devoting free time and support to those with depression. The second sub-theme, ‘caring in different places’, explores how many sought to improve their lives by forging reciprocal, caring relationships more widely, i.e. with individuals outside of their organisation and families and typically through membership of clubs, participation in team activities and endurance events. This helped them to mitigate and heal from the damaging effects of police work.

Each theme will now be described in turn, with quotes taken from the data, shown in italics. Identifying information about participants has been changed, i.e. names, rank, team worked

for, but their marital status and number/age/sex of children is given (see Appendix One for details).

### **Theme one: The uncaring organisation**

All the fathers interviewed for this research were frontline officers with experience of shiftwork and dealing with victims and perpetrators of crime. Their stories revealed a diverse set of reasons for wanting to join the service, including 'I was quite happy to have a rough and tumble', 'the fast pace and excitement', 'great pension', 'wanting to help others', 'being part of the police family', and 'the security of knowing you can't get made redundant'. These reasons for joining reveal that policing was an attractive career choice for participants because it offered the chance to do something physical, was viewed as being interesting and exciting, offered the financial reward of a good pension, a sense of camaraderie and belonging, and the security (of not being made redundant) that many private sector jobs lack. Many participants described how they found responding to emergencies 'less exciting' or 'not at all exciting' after being in the job for a few years, but explained that what kept them in it was the 'sense of camaraderie' and relationships they had built up with certain colleagues who they felt were 'like me', 'practical', 'task-focused' 'reliable' and who 'have each other's backs' i.e. could be trusted to protect or support in dangerous situations. They also described feeling 'different' to certain members of the public, in that they did not feel suited to or 'could not cope' with working indoors or 'in an office all day', that they could no longer 'fit in' with individuals they viewed as 'easily shocked', or who would expect them to 'mind Ps and Qs'.

Regardless of their initial reasons for joining or staying within the police service, participants were united in their perceptions of the reality of policing as a dangerous, dirty, stressful, and traumatic job, with one describing it as ‘the sewer that takes society’s shit away, so people can go about their lives’. Many reflected on their experience of policing, their views of society and their role within it, crime, good and evil and the ‘inevitability’ of being physically or emotionally damaged by their work.

Their narratives revealed perceptions of an organisation that cares very little about physical or mental health issues suffered by officers, and in fact exacerbates such issues through its ‘indifference’, ‘lack of strategy’, ‘zero creativity’ and ‘irresponsibility’. Participants interviewed during the Covid-19 pandemic, which started in March 2020 in the UK, described a growing sense of risk and danger to themselves and their families during that time because of the lack of care shown for them by the Service and described some of the coping mechanisms they developed as a result.

As fathers, participants outlined how the organisation has repeatedly failed to adequately recognise and accommodate their caring responsibilities, and this was felt even more keenly during the pandemic, when they were ‘refused permission to work from home’, and ‘unable to protect vulnerable loved ones’ from the virus. The following sub-themes explore the types of situations and interactions with line managers and colleagues that made officers perceive a lack of care for the physical and mental wellbeing of officers, a lack of support for fathers, and how they cope with this.

**Sub-theme one: They don't care about our bodies and minds**

The first element of lack of organisational care for the physical wellbeing of officers, emerging from the data, was evident in participants accounts of the impact of working long shifts. With 'no certainty of leaving on time' or 'constantly rotating between earlies, lates and nights', they described suffering with 'body-clock maladjustments', 'insomnia', and 'a poor immune system'. Many gave suggestions for how the service could better support them, for example with 'longer rest periods between shifts', 'shorter shifts' and 'working from home for admin', but they also expressed how their concerns went unheard and how they foresaw no improvements in the future. Greg, a Safer Neighbourhoods Sergeant, close to retirement, reflected that 'shift work has certainly taken a toll physically, especially as I've got older'.

High sickness rates were often referred to as an inevitable consequence of working long shifts, especially nights. Danko, in a Major Crimes Unit, first describing his immune system as 'seriously fucked from lack of sleep and eating crap' went on to explain why sickness rates are high, through the scenario of a colleague feeling below par whilst facing another long shift:

"They go 'you know what, I've got a bit of a sniffle, fuck it, I'll have a week off then.' If you want to know how people feel about shift-work policies, look at the sick rates. People that are valued and treated well don't have loads of time off sick!"

It is evident from these quotes that officers suffer physically as a result of their working conditions and believe the organisation could show better care for them.

Officers also felt physically endangered, left 'exposed' or 'put on offer by the organisation', and described being 'forced to single crew' (work alone), and 'having no back-up when

arresting aggressive suspects'. Arron, a Response Team PC, recalled how a colleague attended a domestic violence call alone, was attacked by a male at the residence, who 'threw her to the kerb, fractured her ribs before any assistance arrived'. These examples given by officers show how dangerous policing is and how many officers feel vulnerable to attack when dealing with the public.

Others described examples of being 'stabbed', 'shot at whilst driving the area car', 'spat at', 'filmed', and 'mocked and threatened by the public whilst patrolling alone'. These incidents, described by participants, reveal some of the ways that officers' physical health is put in danger whilst at work and how they perceive interactions with the public as having the potential for hostility and aggression.

Participants felt their physical safety was especially compromised during the Covid-19 pandemic. Woody, who has since left the police for a career in retail fraud investigations, described the initial lack of organisational response to the danger facing officers:

"They aren't acknowledging the seriousness of Covid in my opinion. I mean they're telling us to keep going down into tube stations and do operations in there. Doing stop and search."

Similarly, other participants described being sent into enclosed public areas, in close contact with the public, and without PPE (Personal Protective Equipment). Pat, a sergeant in Safer Neighbourhoods, stated 'it was business as usual as far as management were concerned', leaving him 'unduly at risk'. Marek, also in Safer Neighbourhoods, reported feeling like 'a sitting duck amongst certain *individuals* who would spit or cough at us.'



These memories of policing whilst in the midst of a global pandemic reveal how many officers felt that they were being neglected by their organisation, left unprotected and working under threat of attack from some members of the public. Deano, a Custody Suite Officer, discussed how organisation-wide lack of preparation led to officers being vulnerable to infection:

“There was no briefing. This chap came into the nick, shouting he had Covid. No-one knew what to do with him. We just looked at each other, put a circle round him but nobody went forward. Assistance was called up, we took him outside...nice and airy, and it wasn't a plastic bag (laughs), but we put some kind of covering on his head in case he spat.”

Similarly, ‘dumbfounded by the lack of process and resources’, Mariuszc in a Safer Neighbourhoods team described removing a corpse from a care-home:

“We were like what do we do with this? Chuck it in the van because there were no ambulances available? Hang on, that takes the van out of circulation. So we waited ages, massively exposed to the virus, and eventually it (the corpse) goes in an ambulance. That was right at the beginning.”

These quotes are of particular interest because they show that when working in extreme conditions, and when under extreme pressure or threat, (ie during the Covid-19 pandemic, and when there were no ambulances available to take dead bodies from care homes), officers might ‘other’ the members of the public they were dealing with, dehumanising or objectifying the dead for example. In addition, humour is used (see ‘laughs’ comments above) when describing a situation where the officers felt unsure what to do, in a novel situation, where their physical safety threatened by a potentially virus-infected member of the public, in their police station.

Many officers did feel, however, that the provision of PPE improved later, for instance: ‘We had the whole lot at one stage... spit-hoods and so on’ and ‘when we went to sudden deaths we had the white suits.’ However, some remarked that there still remained a lack of resources: ‘A

couple of times we've had a shortage of masks' and 'we were hunting around for a spit-hood and couldn't find one.'

Mark, a Sergeant in Traffic recalled:

"We were eventually given a couple of masks chucked in the back of the car. Single-use ones that you were expected to use for 12 hours. A bit of a shambles really."

All participants worked in teams and some explained how the organisation endangered them through enabling cross-contamination between team-members. Rossy, a Firearms PC, expressed his incredulity at the lack of precautions:

"If guys in one team get infected, so will the guys in the other team, because we all use the same office. Basic stuff wasn't done to prevent cross-contamination and I honestly find that hard to understand or forgive."

In addition, some participants had pre-existing health conditions rendering them vulnerable.

Bradley, a traffic officer, self-describing as 'not just lardy, but diabetic too' was extremely worried about the lack of organisational strategy concerning team-working and safety:

"It was a joke. We'd be in a car, two officers spending 10-12 hours a day together in a small tin box. They could have been more creative around keeping people safe. In terms of firewalls, and the ways that teams operate and stuff."

Another echoed this sentiment saying: 'I thought a lot more could be done, and team bubbles could be done much earlier on. The careless, uncreative, tardy organisational approach to safety impacted how officers began to treat the situation, according to Mash, a Sergeant in a Sexual Investigations Team:

"This really concerned me, that SLT (Senior Leadership Team) weren't taking it seriously, so you're not going to have police officers taking it seriously in my opinion."

He went on to explain that the blasé approach of officers, working in intimate spaces with the public and colleagues, resulted in mass-contamination within weeks of the first lockdown:

“The guy I worked with got it from some victim, then pretty much all the team got it, then all our families got it.”

Despite rising infection rates, participants described being ordered to ‘just go out, don’t question it’ and that ‘SLT’s mantra was business as usual’, which Greg, a PC in Safer Neighbourhoods described as ‘An absolutely horrible situation to be in, to be led like that.’

The physical dangers presented by police work and its conditions were evidently in existence before the pandemic but exacerbated by the lack of care shown to officers during it. In addition many officers spoke widely about a lack of care for their mental wellbeing.

Participants described experiencing ‘inevitable’ or ‘guaranteed’ PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) and gave examples of ‘relentless exposure’ to traumatic incidents with ‘no time to process events’ and described ‘never knowing what to expect’. These aspects of policing and resultant emotional fallout were considered ‘part and parcel of the job’ for which the organisation showed little concern.

What types of events or callouts are considered traumatic in policing and why are they inevitable? The data yielded examples of child abuse, domestic violence, threat of (and actual) attack on oneself or colleagues, road traffic fatalities, performing CPR (Cardiopulmonary

Resuscitation) on the dead or dying, and suicides. Participants experienced a swathe of negative emotions, including anger, frustration, sadness, fear and disgust when dealing with perpetrators and victims of crime, and many explained how after years of exposure to the ‘evil’, ‘shit’ or ‘scrotes’ of society they had come to accept that ‘there will always be a percentage of the population involved in crime’, or society is ‘just like that.’ They also spoke of the longer term mental-health issues they suffered, including ‘hyper-vigilance’, ‘depression’, ‘PTSD’ and being ‘unable to switch off at home’.

Kris, a PC in a Youth Offender Team described the effect of his ten-year career on his mental wellbeing:

“There are times when the job has broken me. Knife-crime, gang rapes... I’m not ashamed to say that I’ve had tears over some things. We see some unbelievable stuff as you can imagine.”

This notion of ‘being broken’ was echoed by Kenny, who described his own ‘collapse’ after fifteen years on Response and how he had witnessed breakdowns in colleagues:

“I don’t know if it was the shifts, the incidents, or what caused that final collapse. I always hated the not knowing what would happen. And I’ve seen others break in big ways. You know, the macho types... its all the stuff they’ve seen and what it does to people... it breaks them.”

It became apparent that despite the commonplace event of breaking down, early signs were missed or ignored by managers. Fillipe, Inspector in Traffic recalled:

“Good friends of mine have had breakdowns because they got to a point with the stress and trauma..., but the people around them are not recognising it.”

He carried on with a detailed example of lack of response to a colleague appearing ‘grumpy and withdrawn’:

“It’s just John being a dickhead, having a bad day. Very few times have I heard officers going ‘why is he drinking so much?’ Those first few indicators. And it’s not well okay I’ll have a chat with him and find out. Is it just a coincidence that he went to that horrible road death last week and now he’s biting people’s heads off?”

Many officers had experienced the suicide of a colleague. Wiggy, who worked in the Dog Unit remarked: ‘No-one had realised how bad things had got.’ This was supported by Taz, a Firearms Inspector:

‘I’ve lost two lads at work to suicide. One I knew really well. The other got to a point of not coping with stuff.’

Similarly, Mark, also in Firearms, reflected: ‘You go to those funerals, and you can’t work it out, and you think what did we miss?’ This reveals that officers felt that suicides amongst their police colleagues was unexpected and that they felt responsible for not having noticed the immense distress experienced by others in their teams.

The widow of an officer who committed suicide, described ‘the long build up to it’ where she’d ‘begged him to get professional help, or to talk to his manager’ before her husband shot himself.

Many of the participants described the lack of care for officers mental health and the ‘futility’ of seeking help, even if they are, as Mash stated, ‘usually a long way down the road before they ask for help’. In addition, participants described men as being ‘not as good at dealing with it as women are’, or ‘in my experience men don’t like talking about mental health’ and ‘blokes don’t have as much emotional intelligence as women and aren’t encouraged to get it here.’

Marek, in Safer Neighbourhoods described ‘not wanting to go out of the station but fearing looking like a wuss’ for months after he and his colleague were chased by a machete-wielding robber. His sergeant told him to ‘stop acting up’ and her to ‘forget the princess treatment’.

These quotes reveal a reluctance and the inability of men to seek help, and a hostile response

from the organisation. In other examples, seeking help was described as ‘like a battle, hitting a brick wall’, where officers were ‘frowned upon... ridiculed,’ and where doctors advice was ‘ignored’ by managers. Charlie, a PC in Safer Neighbourhoods, went to his GP with PTSD, following an assault where he was tackled to the ground and repeatedly stamped on:

“My GP said I’ll write that you’re not fit for duty out on the streets, but you could work from home if you want. HR said that they would not be dictated to by my doctor. I was absolutely shocked by that mindset.”

He added:

“I’d come to my employer after complications with neck surgery and related PTSD and they made it feel that it was a battle. Then I was just left to rot at home.”

Officers recalled many traumatic incidents during the interviews, with one officer describing the utter shock of seeing the injuries inflicted upon a 3-year-old rape victim. He had to simultaneously mentor a probationer at the scene, remain stoic in front of social workers and interview the father whilst feeling a seething rage. He went on to explain that he was unable to ever bathe his own young daughter again and suffered flashbacks for years. After a failed CPR attempt on an infant, another officer described ‘panic attacks and flashbacks every time I saw my own sleeping child’. He recalled a conversation with his inspector:

“I’m telling you I’m really stressed out here. Is there nothing available to us? ‘Nah’. Haven’t we got a force counsellor? ‘Yeah but she’s really busy’. And that was the answer that I got. We can’t really help you mate.”

Another issue of concern raised by those with experience of poor mental ill-health was how sickness records are ‘closely monitored and used as a basis of promotion decisions’, how sick leave ‘becomes something to beat you with’ and usually results in ‘being put on a management

programme'. Deano, who suffered paranoia and stress after being bitten in a custody-suite declared:

“There is a one-size fits all, punitive approach... going sick affects your progression, so it's used against you as a deterrent.”

The over-riding feeling amongst participants was that mental health support was “*lacking*”, described as having ‘dried up even more since budgetary cuts’. Addie recalled his conversation with an NHS nurse whilst getting a vaccination:

“I was chatting to her and said we used to have a mental health nurse, but they got rid of that post with the cuts. And she said, that is so short-sighted, because mental health starts impacting at home before it starts impacting at work. So I guess that's why they made that decision, but hey.”

Participants commonly discussed the largely rhetorical attempts at mental health support made by the organisation:

“Management want to say mental health, we love our staff, we want you to be healthy. So well have a poster on the wall. And you say to them I'm struggling. And its yeah okay mate, but I need you to do this job first. It's just a poster on the wall, not a genuine ethos. Managers don't buy it, so it doesn't go anywhere.”

Taz, another Inspector, reflected on ‘the irony of being in a profession where we help people, talk about safeguarding, yet when it comes to our own, they struggle’. He went on to question the motives for those who *seem* to support initiatives:

“You're going for promotion, you've got to fill in the competencies (form), so you go' I'm going to put that poster on the wall and get promoted on the back of that.”

This is echoed by Addie, who mentioned ‘some higher ups still think that depression is used as an excuse and should be penalised’ and then discussed how a ‘lack of budget and will’, meant

that mental health 'will never be properly on the cards'. He made this conclusion about the organisation:

"They don't care enough, if I'm honest, to do what is required to change how police officers are and how they deal with the distress, the emotion, and how that cascades into their children, their marriages..."

It is evident from the above quotes that whilst some think mental health provision is slowly improving, it remains inadequate, rhetorical or is used politically for personal gain in what one officer called a 'me-centric' organisation. Often participants became angry or appeared frustrated at the lack of line manager care for mental health issues or concern for the needs of parents like himself, describing male police leaders as 'psychopathic cunts', individuals who have 'experienced years of trauma' before becoming managers and are 'unable to manage others with any empathy' and are, 'bullies' and 'pit bulls', 'dissociative' and 'aggressive... go for the throat' and 'negate anyone needy', because the organisation 'does not want or value that'. Female managers were described as displaying the same aggressive traits as males, showing 'favouritism', being like 'snakes with tits', and 'cut from the same cloth' as male managers.

Some officers had sought private therapy for their mental ill-health. One explained he was:

"sceptical at first... I mean I could sit here and bleat about my wife's cancer. But guess what, I leave here and she's still got it!"

But for others, talking therapy and EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing) therapy were beneficial, which gives some insight into what officers feel about the efficacy of currently available therapy types and what they think should be used instead:



“I’m like I need that! I need to talk to somebody and get a kind of perspective on this. I’ve done it a couple of times and it has helped.”

Despite the paucity of mental-wellbeing care, some officers mentioned enjoying ‘local arrangements with more sympathetic managers’ and tried to emulate them. One of the managers interviewed corroborated this:

“I wish I could have the attitude of most senior officers and not give a shit about the people they are supposed to lead but that’s not me.”

Another explained how he tried to be different from his leaders and treat younger officers as he would one of his own sons:

“Sometimes I tell myself that I don’t care but I do. I’m a father-figure to the younger lads especially because they are most at risk of depression.”

Thus far, the evidence points towards the police service being uncaring about officers’ mental wellbeing, in the Tronto sense of showing little awareness of or concern for it. As an (un)caring actor it is not attentive, responsible, competent, or responsive (Tronto, 1998) according to this data. In addition, the evidence suggests that when put under extreme pressure in what is already a very demanding role, or when there exists a higher degree of uncertainty or fear, then officers might other certain members of the public, including the dead.

### **Sub-theme two: They don’t care that we are dads**

This sub-theme reveals another aspect of the uncaring organisation, namely its disregard for, and poor treatment of, fathers on the frontline. Many fathers believed that the organisation cares very little about their needs and wants as fathers, or the sacrifices they have made for the

organisation. For example, many participants described being 'absent' from family life because of their shift patterns, and long, unpredictable hours, which often led to 'missing out' on special family occasions such as birthdays, Christmas and New Year celebrations. Officers described being expected to 'cancel' or 'curtail' family holidays due to riots for example and missing more routine activities such as 'picking up children from school' and 'reading bedtime stories'. Some reflected sadly that they had no recollection of milestones such as 'baby's first steps' and one stated that there were 'gaping holes where memories of my children should be'.

In addition, participants remembered having little acknowledgement of their fatherhood status and no support when returning to work from paternity leave. For example, participants recalled being 'sleep-deprived in a job where you have to be *on it*' or needing to care for a sick partner or child but 'no exceptions were made' and with 'zero chance of working from home'. Officers recognised similar treatment of others:

"Many have a lot of caring responsibilities outside of work, we all know that, but management don't pay attention to that."

Some participants were older dads with multiple children, who had needed to care for other family-members at some point, but especially during the Covid-19 pandemic. Officers described being MPS with resistance, ridicule or hostility when requesting flexible working hours or to isolate at home to care for those with health conditions. This is reminiscent of sub-themes one and two, when fathers used the 'battle' analogy for requesting time off. Fathers also described how colleagues could turn against them if leave were granted. Finally this sub-theme also explores how fathers depended on 'exceptional' managers to balance work with caring responsibilities.

Participants recalled how their new fatherhood status was 'ignored' or 'irrelevant' when returning to work after paternity leave. Mike, in Counterterrorism said:

"First day back, sat in the briefing room with the team. No congratulations, no how's Estelle and the baby? They just sort of got up and went out."

This is echoed by Addie, a father of two daughters, describing both of his returns to work: 'It was like wham! Straight back onto long shifts, unpredictable hours and the rest of it.'

These quotes capture the way that fatherhood can go unacknowledged at work. Many also complained about the lack of support for new fathers, remembering how difficult it was to work after picking up 'whatever cold, sniffles or chickenpox a new-born gives you' and how being a parent adversely affected their sickness record. The expectation of working in extreme conditions, without adequate rest or flexibility was seen as 'illogical' or 'dangerous'. Charlie, father to a 4-year-old son, highlighted this:

"You've worked through from 10am to 8am the next day, so 22 hours, so you'd think they'd let you work from home on admin, call you in if needed. That's a sensible and legitimate approach, but it was 'well we need you to come in and get a few more stop and searches in.'"

What is apparent from the above quote is that the organisation put its KPIs (Key Performance Indicators expressed as number of stop and searches carried out) before the needs of new fathers.

Many participants repeatedly asked to work from home, to meet caring needs. Mark, whose wife had suffered a post-natal infection, stated:

"It felt that no welfare could be had. Nothing taken into consideration about me becoming a father or needing to care for my wife."

Similarly, Danko described needing time off to care for his new-born daughter:

“I had a legit reason, attending follow-up checks for her health condition and stuff, so why would you think I was just trying to have a bit of a time off? It’s disgusting.”

It is totally apparent from these quotes that fathers needed to work flexibly sometimes, to care for sick children or partners, As Kenny, father of two stated:

“It shouldn’t be such a big thing to say I’ve had a few bad nights, I can’t go chasing people and be responsible for others’ safety.”

Many other examples were given for needing flexibility to meet care needs. These needs are summarised in Appendix Ten.

It was apparent from the narratives, that requests for flexible working were ‘not well-received by managers’. Taz described a ‘20-week scan that revealed organ development problems’ in his unborn child, and his leave request:

“I felt absolutely ridiculed for being concerned about my wife and my unborn child. These were legitimate reasons but my employer made me feel I was creating a battle with them.”

Bradley received a call at work, when his teenaged son was injured in a road traffic accident and was taken to hospital. Armed and on surveillance duty, he wanted to see his son, but his manager refused to release or replace him:

“I just needed to get away. It wasn’t just the disgusting way I was being treated, but I was also furious because from a common-sense point of view, why on earth would you try and force someone to work with a gun in a public environment with this massive emotional load all day?”

The Covid-19 pandemic was an especially fraught time for many of the participants who feared contaminating their vulnerable children with the virus. Woody stated:

“My son is particularly prone to infections due to lung problems. So for me it was this thing going to kill him if we get it? But the view from management was completely unreasonable and very much ‘well don’t go home then! Rent somewhere!’”

A similar experience was had by Kenny, father of a 12-year-old daughter:

“HR said I should move out if I have concerns about her health conditions, offering a residence for about £1000, not even free! I was shocked. Their answer is to say I should move out of my home?”

The examples given show that officers felt the organisation was unreasonable and unfair, which shocked and frustrated them. Rossy described his son’s compromised immune system and feeling ‘backed into a corner’ when requesting to isolate:

“It wasn’t a question of okay mate, well look after you, it was very much ‘Are you saying that you can’t work under these circumstances then?’”

He went on to compare this response with that received by his wife who worked in a school:

“So the head-teacher said ‘you go and look after your son’, that kind of thing. So there was no kind of pressure from her side.”

Fathers described the police culture as ‘macho’ or ‘all men together’ with an attitude of ‘just let the Mrs get on with it mate’, which they believed contributed to lack of support for fathers. In addition, ‘people at the top’ were not role-modelling good fatherhood. Bradley explained:

“There should be leaders saying, ‘look I’m doing extended paternity and flexible working, and you’re entitled to it, so do it.’”

Others thought that managers lacked the people skills needed to support fathers. Woody, a 44-year-old PC intimated: ‘You have to understand that middle management are only promoted on the basis of an exam’, whilst Dazzer, a 45-year-old Sergeant, stated: ‘Inspectors haven’t been trained particularly well, they don’t have a skill set in management’. Despite this, some mentioned having supportive managers, who were ‘the exception’ or ‘different from your usual inspector’ or ‘a parent themselves’, inferring that it was rare to find a manager within the police who understood or accommodated fathers’ caring needs. This was summed up by Mike: ‘Only if they can empathise with you will they help you. But most have no empathy!’

Giles, a PC in the Mounted Police described such a manager:

“My son and wife got very unwell after the birth, hospitalised, and my duty inspector was very understanding. He gave me work to do from home, and I had about two months of leave, including paternity leave and working-from-home. God did I work hard for him after that!”

Similarly, Deano, whose wife suffered post-natal depression, said:

“My manager was the exception really, he understood what we were going through and said, ‘just go, look after your wife, don’t worry about this place, we’ll be here when you get back’. I said, ‘Thanks governor, I’ll get you more stop and searches than you can cope with!’”

Where permission was granted for some to work flexibly, tension was created between team-members. Andy, who isolated with his family at the beginning of the first lockdown, described colleagues’ reactions:

“They were a bit like (sigh) ‘but you are going home and we are going to be left holding this baby’. No one was openly hostile to me but I could feel that there was a bit of tension. Another man down.”

He described how the situation worsened after two months:

‘We’d all realised by then how serious this was. I was seen as the one rocking the boat, and we argued. They all had vulnerable people; grandparents with cancer, etc, but they couldn’t go home and I could, so they were telling me to get back to work.’

The above quote describes how when one team-member is given ‘special treatment’ by the uncaring organisation, they can become problematised by those who do not. Andy felt guilty, stating ‘I was walking away when I was most needed.’

The few who experienced working from home during the pandemic were hopeful that there would be future possibilities to do this again and felt it was achievable:

“We can’t do our face-to-face stuff from home, that’s different, but if we have a bit of admin, we can now do that from home.”

An inspector who had worked from home throughout most of the pandemic stated:

“We can log onto all the applications, all the programs that we need, so we can look at live logs, and missing people programs for example.”

Similarly, Danko who mentors new recruits concluded:

“Covid has shown me that it is absolutely possible to work from home for many aspects of the job: training days on Teams, probationers can write up their one-files, there’s no need to be in the station for that.”

Mark in Response echoed this:

“Crime reports MERLIN, Intel checks, [and] warrant applications can all be done at home and the sooner they realise that they’ll have a happier, healthier workforce.”

### **Sub-theme three: How we cope**

It was apparent that officers develop coping mechanisms in order to reduce the stress and negative emotions associated with being under constant threat of physical danger and emotional trauma. Many of these coping mechanisms are woven into the quotes and extracts already used above in sub-themes one and two of the main theme ‘The uncaring organisation’. For example, officers described the ‘inevitability’ of being physically and emotionally injured whilst policing and interacting with the public, because ‘there will always be that percentage or element of criminality in society’. Andy described being shot at in his squad car:

“It's just how certain individuals behave. We can't stop that, they were always going to do it, we can only respond to it when it happens.”

Danko described trying to ‘talk down’ someone who was threatening to commit suicide:

“At the end of the day, he's already made up his mind whether he'll jump or not. I can talk to him, but it doesn't really make a difference because the outcome is predetermined if you like, so I can walk away knowing I tried but can't stop him. It's his choice.”

When attending domestic violence and abuse callouts, many officers talked about the ‘cycle of abuse’, how victims will ‘inevitably go on to let their abusers back into the home’, how children ‘in those types of homes will definitely go on to form relationships of abuse’ later in life.

When describing the lack of organisational care, officers tended to be vociferous in their descriptions of managers who had failed to help them with health issues or give support to them as fathers. They coped by reflecting on how, despite this, they could ‘rely on a few good men’, inside and outside the organisation, or had encountered, albeit rarely, ‘exceptional, empathetic managers’ who had been able to show care for them. They felt that despite a lack of caring role



models at work, they could still be caring and show care for others, including probationers to whom they were 'a father-figure' or 'a nurturer'. They enjoyed caring for others who had suffered with mental breakdowns, expressing how worthwhile and important it was to 'touch base' and 'go for a coffee' with them.

So far the evidence presented in the theme of 'The uncaring organisation' and its sub-themes has mainly considered the impact of policing on the individual officer. The next main theme broadens the discussion to describe the impact on officers families and relationships at home.

### **Theme two: Preventing emotional dirt overspill at home**

When asked about the effects of policing on their families, participants became more agitated and overwhelmingly negative, likening policing to 'a cancer to people!', saying it was 'responsible for the destruction of marriages and a source of misery that cascades into family life!' All participants had dealt with various life-changing events in the course of their work, including deaths, accidents, and assaults. Many had experienced these events in a single shift too. Bradley, a Response team Sergeant, gave an example of the emotional labour involved:

"My first incident that day was violence of the highest order. A bloke threatening to blow up a house, and I'm standing as close as we are, so there's a war between us. Seriously violent. So we tasered him. You then you have to be compassionate with someone bereaved, or even the other way round, you see someone who has lost a loved one, and then you have to suddenly turn off your compassionate side and become quite confrontational, and that is really difficult."

All participants had experience of supporting victims in distress and families of the deceased. They had also all dealt with suspects in cases involving paedophilia, domestic abuse, rape,

murder and anti-social behaviour. These are crimes, societal issues and people that members of the public rarely come into contact with. Marek, father of two, described the consequences of his emotional dirty work:

“You see the worst of people in their behaviour, and only when things are going wrong in their life. So it’s very easy to become massively negative about everything and everyone, and you take all of that home if you’re not careful.”

This was echoed by Arron, who explained that seeing ‘high levels of criminality’ led to a ‘skewed view of people, a huge negativity that enormously affects families.’

Officers therefore used emotional labour to “induce or suppress feelings to sustain an outward countenance that produced the proper state of mind in others” (Ward et al., 2020). For example officers might perform the preferred empathic, positive emotional labour when reassuring and taking a statement from the elderly victim of a break-in, or neutrality and bravery when coordinating the rescue of victims involved in a motorway pile-up. They might also need to perform antipathetic emotional labour when with a volatile suspect resisting arrest. The consequences of performing emotional labour in this way were revealed in the earlier sub-theme ‘They don’t care about our minds’, with officers commonly describing being exhausted ‘by the things that we have to deal with’, reaching a point of ‘emotional collapse’, or witnessing ‘mental breakdowns in colleagues’. The over-arching theme ‘Preventing emotional dirt overspill at home’ reveals the emotional labour performances used by participants to contain the emotional dirt of their work and prevent it from affecting family life. Sub-theme one ‘Downplaying’ describes how officers minimised or made light of situations to protect family members from emotional dirt. Sub-theme two ‘Avoiding triggers’ reveals how officers avoid being reminded of unpleasant or traumatic work experiences which might put them into a negative emotional state. Sub-theme three ‘Partners as emotional anchors and protectors’ describes how officers relied on their wives to help them regulate emotions, give them coping

strategies and use their own emotional labour to prevent further contamination of dirt into the family. Sub-theme four 'Encouraging glimmers of hope and normality' describes how officers encouraged family members to engage in pleasurable, fun or peaceful activities to wash away the emotional dirt they bring to the home.

### **Sub-theme one: Downplaying**

A method used frequently by officers to prevent emotional dirt overspill was to minimise or downplay the seriousness, danger or trauma of the situations they have faced at work, in order to *protect* loved ones and also me as the researcher. As Mark, a father of two, explained: 'Why would you want to fill their head up with that nonsense?' Similarly, in the interviews, some officers would downplay their roles to me, by not giving explicit details about 'gruesome accidents'. One described having to break the news to a man that his wife had been murdered in their family home by her stalker. Rather than describe the crime scene in detail or what he described simply as 'some raw emotions' displayed by the husband, he summed the incident up as 'unfortunate' and how the team 'had to sit down and go 'wow, that wasn't a nice one''. Others explained at the beginning of the interview 'I know what I am prepared to tell you' or later 'there are things you can't unhear once I say them. I won't do that to you.'

Participants did not want their children to 'catch my anxiety' or to 'worry about me'. Fillipe, father of three now-adult children started off by discussing how policing was a dangerous job 'with higher mortality rates and risks of attack than all the other emergency services put together' and how regular contact with abusive people had made him hyper-vigilant. But as far as his children were concerned:

“So dad is in the police, but I think basically it has been played down over the years, and I think that gives them more confidence that I am not at risk, and therefore the job doesn’t have as much of an impact on them as it could.”

Similarly, Dazzer, father of three and in Armed Response declared:

“I’m very honest about my job, I don’t claim to be superman and I’m not interested in getting promotion, so I’ve had no reason to harp my job up at home. It’s a job where, yes, we get a bit of excitement. But I’ve always tended to play it down so my wife and kids don’t have to worry about me.”

Officers described avoiding talking about their day to family-members, passing it off as ‘same old, same old’ or focusing on ‘the more mundane stuff like what I had to eat or a conversation I had with a colleague’. Reliving the day made them feel that they were back at work with all its associated negative emotion. Danko, married with a young son, spoke of how he also downplayed his job to himself as a way of gaining a sense of perspective:

“The angry people, the criminals, really its only always 0.05% of society, so I tell myself there’s another 99.5% I don’t see. The really lovely ones, going about their daily business.”

The next sub-theme ‘Avoiding triggers’ explores in more depth some of the situations that officers avoid in order to escape the negative emotions associated with work.

### **Sub-theme two: Avoiding triggers**

“It was the Holy Trinity of very long hours, getting called out in the middle of the night, and on top of that dealing with particularly ghastly things. If I got called out in the night to deal with something, that was never good news because they would only call me out if someone had died or if someone was expected to die. The end result is that whatever my intentions when I get home, there are many things that trigger me, then I can’t regulate my emotions after that, so I try to not get triggered in the first place.”

As the above extract shows, officers are aware that certain situations unique to them can prompt or trigger a negative emotional state. The data revealed so many triggers that a summary list has been compiled in Appendix Eleven. Officers used a repertoire of emotional labour performances to try to avoid these. Bradley, about to become a second-time father, avoided arguments with his pregnant wife by ‘quietly and privately seething, going to another place in my head’. He described these occurrences: ‘It was like we were arguing but not arguing’, justifying that his silence and non-engagement stopped him from remembering the ‘countless DA (domestic abuse) calls I’ve attended where someone’s been assaulted in front of their kids.’

Tim, a father of three, considered how he avoids ‘consuming news’ whilst at home because it reminded him that ‘bad things happen to people all the time’. He explained:

“I give a lot of consideration to cutting out the drip, drip, drip of negative influence through the way I consume media and think about work, to make sure that I keep it at arm’s length when around my kids.”

But he found this difficult to do:

“It’s an ongoing piece of work and it takes massive amounts of effort, something I have to focus on doing. Not something you can just do a little bit of and then everything is going to be fine but requires constant attention. I’m trying to make sure I don’t fall down that hole of negativity.”

For other officers, triggers to avoid were crowded places. Mike, in Counterterrorism, attended an O2 concert with his children, and became panicked as they became part of the huge crowd of people exiting:

“I was like oh fuck, this is a good place to set off a device. Come on kids, let’s get out of here! No you’re not getting merch, let’s go!”

Some officers were triggered by the actions of their children, citing driving, ‘going to a party’ or ‘staying out late’, as events which would heighten their anxiety. Fillipe gave the example of how a constant exposure to fatal road traffic accidents at work had made him extremely anxious when his grown-up daughter drove:

“You go to so many incidents that are tragic that you get a disproportionate view of how common these incidents are. When my daughter comes down to visit, I’m anxious about her driving. She only drives about 40 or 50 miles an hour, so the chances of a serious crash are so slim its untrue, but in my mind it’s not so slim. And that’s where I’ve got to train my mind to think it’s so slim you don’t need to worry about it.”

How else do officers manage emotional dirt overspill and is anyone else involved in this? Sub-theme three looks at the important role of partners who can help officers to regulate their emotions and prevent dirt overspill in the home by assuming the role of ‘emotional anchor and protector’.

### **Sub-theme three: Partners as emotional anchors and protectors**

Many participants struggled to prevent emotional dirt overspill by their own endeavours and depended on their partners for support. Greg, who suffers with PTSD and is father of two teenaged sons spoke about the difficulties he faced and how his wife helped him:

“There is a big price to pay for stoicism. You can’t just go ‘that doesn’t bother me’, it *does* bother you, you just choose not to show it. So that comes out in other ways. My wife is very, very good at spotting when I’m not feeling or acting right.”

The notion of partners being ‘supportive’, and ‘sensitive to moods’ was commonly spoken about and appreciated. Woody referred to his police pension as ‘belonging to my wife’ and explained that she had ‘earned’ it. Andy echoed this: ‘I really need to say that it’s not our pension, its theirs. They’ve worked as hard as we have for it.’

Participants 'depended on' or 'leaned on' their wives, to cope with transitioning from work to home life emotionally and described wives as able to 'take over', 'find solutions' and 'give coping strategies'. Mariuszc, married for 12 years stated:

"She will ask searching questions, honest questions, and it's a good way of flagging up warning signs with people that they need counselling."

Similarly, Arron, in his second marriage, recalled how his wife encouraged him to leave the role that was making him anxious:

"You'd be managing a murder, fatal crashes, an incredible amount of risk and after two and a half years, she says 'you need to get out of there'. And I was like 'what do you mean?' And she was like 'LEAVE!' 'I'm fine, I'm fine.' But it just got me thinking. She said, 'it's affecting who you are.'"

Kenny described the impact of his work and its conditions on him and acknowledged of wife's help:

"On a number of occasions I've had to work 24 hours without a break, when I went to multiple fatal crashes. You go to one, you come back thinking I've done my days' work; I've worked eight hours. Then there's another fatal... and another. And it impacts me, I can't unsee it or relate to people after. And my wife is very supportive, even though it has an impact on her too."

Officers acknowledged the vital role played by wives in 'finding strategies'. Andy, father of one daughter and married for 8 years stated:

"You can't say well at work I'm mentally shot, but when I come home I'm going to be fine. You can't do that; sometimes I'm good at finding strategies to deal with it and sometimes not. I thank my wife for helping me deal with that."

Danko described how his wife helped him:

"She's not someone to let things lie, won't pussyfoot around. If there's something not right, she will say. She calls me out for weird behaviour."

It appears from the above quotes that officers value and benefit from partners who challenge their behaviours and help officers to find coping strategies for their difficult emotions. It is evident too, that partners not only gave emotional support but were often described as the ‘driver in keeping the family going’, able to ‘hold the fort’ at home and provide a ‘constant presence’ for the children in a father’s absence. Andy gave this example:

“Our son talks more to my wife than me. Even this week she said to me he actually woke her up and said, ‘can I come and talk?’ And they were up talking till midnight whilst I’m at work. So, you know, it’s a difficult time for him and I’m not always there and the children prefer to go to my wife because she’s the constant at home if you will.”

The above quotes show that partners support the management of emotions and the home, are an emotional buffer between the spheres of work and home, and able to influence career decisions. In addition, for the participants of this study, partners are fundamental to the emotional wellbeing of children at home, where the fathers are largely absent from it.

The final sub-theme ‘Encouraging glimmers of hope and normality’ was prominent and was often spoken about by participants as they considered their own methods for finding happiness and peace in life.

#### **Sub-theme four: Encouraging glimmers of hope and normality**

Many of the officers interviewed described how they encouraged their children to share leisure activities with them, as this was a useful way to ‘detach’ from the heightened negative emotions of work to de-stress, and ‘gain a positive optic’, ‘do something nice’, or ‘immerse in nature’. This also helped officers to remain connected to their family in a positive way.



Tim, father of three now adult-children recalled spending his rest days gardening and building a tree-house for his daughter when she was young: ‘one summer I taught her basic carpentry, and we built her treehouse. I even made a little welcome home sign!’ Later in the interview he added that whilst visiting home during university holidays it remained her ‘special quiet place’, and reflected that he had never removed the treehouse.

Giles, father of three, recalled how he and his son (then aged 17) had road-cycled across Europe:

‘Barely a word passed between us some days, probably because he was way faster than me and too far ahead (laughs), but no, we were very similar in that we both enjoyed the challenge, pushing ourselves...’

Andy mentioned how during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns he loved fishing with his daughter, adding ‘just me and her, waders on, enjoying the serenity of the river.’

Similarly, Filippe shared a love of weight-training with his daughter during Covid-19 lockdowns: ‘I used to love doing strength training and conditioning, showing her how to use the equipment properly,’ adding that it helped him to ‘completely switch off from work’.

Sometimes the officers who had been able to isolate with their families during lockdowns, had mixed emotions about the time spent together, describing it as a ‘strain’ or ‘difficult’ to

start with. Some were saddened to realise how much of their children's lives they had missed out on. For many however, it was a joyous time, described as 'like Christmas' or 'a fabulous holiday'. Jon, father of two young sons stated: 'We kind of shut the door and said, we're not going anywhere, so let's have some fun!'

Similarly, Mike spoke fondly of locking down with his family: 'We just messed about, played games, watched telly, went for walks, built a firepit in the garden...'

The above quotes reveal that officers and their children shared an enjoyment of various hobbies and sports that forged a bond between them, created happy memories and helped replace negative emotions with more positive ones such as love, peace, showing care for others and feeling connected.

In summary, emotional dirt overspill is managed in a variety of ways and to varying degrees of success according to the data. It is managed through downplaying dangers, avoiding triggering situations, depending on a partner to be an emotional anchor and protector, supporting him with the navigation through emotional difficulties experienced as a consequence of his emotional dirty work, and encouraging participation in joy-bringing or peaceful activities with children.

Next, consideration is given to how officers form relationships of care inside and outside of work and beyond the family.

### **Theme three: Caring promiscuously**

‘Caring promiscuously’ is the final prominent theme in the data and is divided into two sub-themes; ‘Caring at work’ and ‘Seeking care in different places’ to encompass the diversity of places and people mentioned by participants when discussing relationships of care they form.

As described at the outset of this chapter, the term ‘caring promiscuously’ is taken from the work of Chatzidakis et al. (2020), described in detail in Chapter Three’s Theoretical Framework. It is employed here to explain the finding that participants sometimes feel unable to cope alone with the demands and challenges of policing. This is evident in the other themes and sub-themes already discussed, where participants depending on partners for mental health support for example. They described ‘needing someone to lean on’ to gain a sense of perspective about their work, to ‘feel alive’ and ‘connected’ to others not just within their families but in relationships with wider circles of individuals. Promiscuity comes from the idea of being widespread in those connections, caring for people who aren’t immediate kin, and being cared about by others too.

#### **Sub-theme one: Caring at work**

The first sub-theme ‘Caring at work’ reveals how participants formed caring relationships with others within and outside of their immediate work-team. They spoke of ‘looking out for others’, not leaving colleagues ‘isolated’, or ‘left to rot’ when aware that a colleague was off sick for an extensive period. They expressed how the ‘uncaring’ organisation often failed to carry out welfare checks and how they personally ‘stepped up and stepped into’ a caring role, effectively doing what the organisation would not. Tim, concerned about a PC signed off with depression stated:

“I took him out for a coffee, off the record so to speak, to let him know we were thinking of him, that he wasn’t alone with his demons.”

Bradley, an Inspector with 15 years’ experience of frontline work stated:

“I’m massively passionate about people’s welfare, when I was a sergeant and now as an inspector, and I can give up an hour or two to have a chat with someone, every now and again, when I recognise that somebody needs help.”

This is echoed by Andy, who described himself as ‘a bit of a father figure to the guys I work with’ and explained how his fathering skills are used on probationers:

“They need somebody to watch out for them, look after them, bring them along, develop their interpersonal skills and stuff like that. I will often sit down with them and say, ‘how are you getting on mate?’ Please don’t think I’m trying to be their father because I’m not, it’s a professional environment, but I *do* want to connect with them and nurture them.”

Many participants, having discussed their own experiences of being fathers in the police, felt it was incumbent on them to care for other new fathers:

“It’s about recognising how daunting the first months are and having a proper sit down. Doing ongoing welfare (checks)... now that’s beneficial.”

Other participants were able to give narratives of caring for others more widely, i.e. outside of their teams. For sergeants and inspector participants this often meant giving up their time to help individuals for whom they had no management responsibility. Woody described his motives for doing this:

“Some years ago someone committed suicide at work and I still kick myself for it. But I made a conscious decision that I would look out for people even more, not leave them isolated, even people not on my team. I look out for them, contact them, make sure they are okay, and they appreciate that.”

Participants at a more junior level, described how they had formed and maintained relationships of care with officers they had joined up and trained with, but not worked with since. Taz, a PC with five years' service explained:

“Not everyone who passes training gets on very well with their new team. There's a lot of snideness, bullying, and probationers often get the brunt of that.”

He added:

“So I still go out for drinks with Marcus, go online (gaming) and stuff. He probably won't last because his team hate him, don't want to work with him. He *is* awkward, but if I can help him get through this I will.”

For many officers, their team is their 'work family'. Long shifts meant spending more time with colleagues than their families, 'relying on colleagues', and 'replicating family relationships'. Charlie, a PC described being scolded by his sergeant or 'work mum' for his poor driving: 'She goes 'what are you? A boy-racer? Get both hands on the wheel NOW'''. And Arron, a PC described how his sergeant was 'like a dad to me', with his 'constant ribbing but huge support' after those 'first few gruesome sudden deaths'.

The above quotes show the benefit of building work-place based relationships of care for junior and senior officers alike. Participants also experienced relationships of care with others outside of work and family, which is covered in the next sub-theme 'Seeking care in different places'.

### **Sub-theme two: Seeking care in different places**

Participants often spoke of their outside connections and friendships, especially in terms of how they could depend on certain people outside of work for care, advice and protection during

the Covid-19 Pandemic. Mike, told by HR that he was not permitted to work from home to protect his vulnerable son, sought the help of a doctor friend who advised him and helped him:

“He identified that it was extremely risky for me to go out. He helped me write to HR, as my friend and as a doctor, to put my case forward.”

It is evident that the friend is able to support the officer in arguing his case for isolation, giving him the tools to negotiate with the uncaring organisation.

In another example, Tim discussed the role of his ‘good friend who is a scientist’ in gaining perspective about the danger of the virus which had been downplayed and ignored by the organisation:

“He’s actually worked on the Government response to Covid. I said, ‘err, what should I do? Shelley is pregnant, and I’ve got these circumstances at work’, and he said ‘If I was in your situation, there is no way I would go out on duty, not a chance. I’d be staying at home and doing work from home.’”

It is evident from the above quote that the ‘good friend’ is someone outside of the police service who is able to provide expert advice that is contrary to the approach of the organisation, where officers were told it was ‘business as usual’.

Other officers told similar stories of the friends they could rely on to give them expert knowledge that helped them to confront the organisational decision makers:

“One of my friends, a doctor, told me very early on that viruses mutate. He explained some pretty complex stuff to me, who is obviously a bog-standard copper. So he put it in simple terms. The virus wants to survive. In order to survive it needs to not kill the host. So mutations make it survive better. It wants to spread more and reproduce. It needs to get milder so it don’t kill the host. So I went back to work and told my sergeant this and initially tried to separate myself as much as I could from my family.”

Another way of caring promiscuously that was evident in the data, is how officers engaged in charity work or events where they met people described as ‘unlike those we meet in the course of a duty’ or ‘not your usual victim or perp’. Bradley explained:

“When you do charity events you’re trying to do something good in the world, so you come into contact with good people, it’s like the ANTI-police. You come into contact with wonderful people that don’t want anything from you and just want to help.”

He went on to describe his motives for being part of a charitable group who share his concern about childhood leukaemia:

“I just want to try and help the kids, they just want to help the kids, and actually I think that has gone a long way in helping me balance the scales in my mind, to keep things on an even keel at home.”

Another officer gave an example of a caring individual he met when training for an endurance expedition in Bali:

“He said here’s my card, I want you to know that I think what you do is amazing and I just want to help. I don’t want any money off you but if you need someone to help you and train with you, anything you need, I’m your man.”

Then added:

“So that’s an example of when you do these things you see such wonderful people, and for me personally it has helped me be more realistic about the world.”

Other officers wanted to meet individuals who share a similar background to themselves, often citing those from military backgrounds as people they could get on with. However in the new context of charity events, they also enjoyed being able to help others, be helped in return, with no motive other than supporting a charity. Andy said:

“One of the first events I did was really dangerous and there was a load of SAS guys there and all the national hardman heroes and a few slightly lardy coppers like me!”

He went on describe these ‘hardman heroes’ as ‘people I could depend on.’

Working for charities that assist those in distress, i.e. in natural disasters, was a common way for officers to show their caring side and to meet individuals who reciprocated with caring behaviours. Pat recalled working for a disaster relief charity:

“I was in Haiti once when a tornado hit and my experience is that people in distress were fighting all over each other to help each other and you. You’re a long way from home and they will help you out.”

Many officers did not have to go so far afield to find caring communities, however. They spoke of the clubs they joined, being part of a church, or other community groups. Tim described how his ‘Church family’ had helped him as a police officer and father:

“I don’t mind sharing with you, that we are a church family. I think that’s what’s kept us really close as a family and connected to our community.”

It appears from the data that involvement in groups outside of work and family enables officers to deal with the stress of work and is a way of forging closer caring relationships with people who are unlike the perpetrators/victims of crime and unlike the organisation which shows them very little care. In addition it brings them closer to their own families and communities.

Other officers mentioned sports clubs as a place where they helped others and were helped in return:



“I play golf. It gets me out in the fresh air and socialising with people. I like to play different people all the time. I find them interesting and if they need help I will give it. If they can help me they do. I’ve always had that sort of caring side, it’s just me, part of my make up.”

It is evident from the above quotes that officers rely on people outside of the uncaring organisation, with whom they can form relationships of care that compensate for the lack of care they receive at work.

### **Key findings from the themes outlined**

This findings chapter has thoroughly explored the data garnered from the interviews with frontline officers and, on occasion, their children and partners. The purpose of this has been to address Research Questions one, two and three, and was achieved to a significant extent by identifying the following main themes:

1. The uncaring organisation
2. Preventing emotional dirt overspill at home
3. Caring promiscuously

In Theme one, ‘The uncaring organisation’, the data showed how the police service shows a lack of care for the physical and mental wellbeing of its frontline officers and fails to recognise and support the caring needs of fathers with regard to their children and partners.

Within the sub-theme ‘They don’t care for our bodies and minds’ officers are physically and emotionally damaged by the conditions of work in the service. This was experienced especially during the Covid-19 pandemic where officers noticed a lack of strategy for protecting individuals and teams against the virus and from assault by the public. Shocking levels of

PTSD, suicide and emotional burnout amongst officers were described, due to relentless exposure to traumatic situations. There was an overriding feeling that whilst mental health agendas are slowly gaining traction, there remains an organisational disinterest in supporting mental health issues. Its hypermasculine culture dismisses and ridicules those in need, penalises those on sick leave, and expects officers to 'just get on with it'. Many officers remain silent about their difficulties or rely on haphazard arrangements with exceptional managers or colleagues for support in the absence of robust caring organisational processes. Sub-theme 'They don't care we are dads' exposes the challenges for fathers of working in the police before and during Covid-19. Many feel new fatherhood goes unrecognised and that it is futile to ask for support when needed. They experience guilt, reluctance and fear when needing time off to care for others because of repercussions for their jobs, teams, promotion prospects and the unwanted tension with colleagues resulting from any special treatment they might receive. Participants viewed the organisation as too macho where the expectation is still that women will shoulder the burden of childcare and no role models for fathers exist. The next chapter will explain how all of the findings above link to existing theoretical frameworks, and with a view to establishing new knowledge.

In Theme two 'Preventing emotional dirt overspill at home' the data indicated that all the fathers interviewed had experienced life changing events such as deaths and serious assaults, and often multiple times in one shift. They were aware of their own need to display or hide emotions such as compassion, neutrality or aggression at work, depending on the situation and described having a distorted view of humanity. Many sought to prevent emotional dirt overspill into the home, evident in the sub-themes 'Downplaying', 'Avoiding triggers', 'Partners as emotional anchors and protectors', and 'Encouraging glimmers of hope and normality'. Sub-theme one 'Downplaying' revealed how officers minimised their feelings, their role or

situations encountered to protect their loved ones. Sub-theme two 'Avoiding triggers' showed the huge array of situations that can propel officers back into a negative emotional state, which they try to prevent. Sub-theme three 'Partners as emotional anchors and protectors' unearthed a reliance on proactive and supportive wives who can help officers to regulate their emotions, find coping strategies and use her own emotional labour in the home to try to create a sense of order and peace amongst family members. Sub-theme four 'Encouraging glimmers of hope and normality' spoke of officers' attempts to engage their children in fun or peaceful activities in an attempt to wash away their emotional dirt and build caring connections at home.

Theme three 'Caring promiscuously' revealed how officers care for others at work, inside and outside of their teams, through informal welfare checks, being a father figure to new recruits, and experiencing something of a work family. This was covered in sub-theme one 'Caring at work'. In sub-theme two 'Seeking care in different places' it was evident that officers can and do forge fleeting or long-term connections and caring relationships. They are cared about by friends who have knowledge or expertise to help them confront and defend themselves in the uncaring organisation. They engage with charities and events to meet caring types or individuals many term as 'people like me' with whom they can care. They might experience being part of a church family or join sports clubs to connect with and care for/be cared about by others there.

Chapter Six Discussion explores the outcome of the data collection and links the findings to existing literature and theories around ethical care and emotional dirt. It also discusses some of the challenges with the data and the study in general to ascertain what specific contribution this work has made and to decide upon areas in need of further exploration.

## **Chapter Six: Police work as collective caring and compassionate organising: Discussion**

### **Introduction**

The aim of this research was to explore the lived experiences of caregiving fathers who work in frontline protective service roles in the UK. It situates fatherhood within a critical case study of the UK Police Service to understand what it means to be a father-carer who is or wants to be involved, but who also works in this context; how such fathers experience caregiving fatherhood, and what future conditions of possibilities could exist for those who are or who aspire to be caregiving fathers. This chapter sets out to interpret and situate the significance of the findings of this research in relation to what was already known from the existing literature discussed in Chapters One and Two, with a particular focus on promiscuous care, emotional dirty work and the coping methods for it, along with emotional labour as these relate to policing as an occupation. This has highlighted the contribution that the research findings make to this literature, explaining the insights that have been gained through the use of this critical case study of the UK Police Service.

First, a recap of the preceding chapters is given, to remind us of the key literature and the context used for the study, as well as the theoretical framing for it. Following this, a reiteration of the key themes that emerged from the data collection and analysis in the preceding chapter is given, in order to show how the three main Research Questions overleaf have been answered:

## **Research Questions**

1. What does it mean to be a father-carer who wants to be involved, but who also works in a frontline protective service role?
2. How do father-carers who are frontline protective service providers experience caregiving fatherhood?
3. What could be the future conditions of possibility for frontline protective service workers who are, or aspire to be involved father-carers?

## **Recap on the study's context and theoretical framing**

This section provides a reminder of what was covered in earlier chapters that engaged with relevant literature and mapped out the study's context and theoretical framing (Chapters One to Three, inclusive). Empirical findings, relevant concepts, and their links to the findings of this study will all be discussed in more detail and depth later in this chapter.

As a socially constructed concept, fatherhood has evolved historically, and has been shaped by labour market changes, politics, and the economy (Moran and Koslowski, 2019; Taylor and Scott, 2018). Many contemporary father-carers are viewed as more involved, caring versions of their distant, breadwinning predecessors and seek emotional and physical closeness with their children (Solomon, 2014; Kelland, 2022), and others they may be caring for. In addition, many strive towards more gender-equal relationships at home, rejecting a gendered, breadwinning identity and seeking flexible working arrangements that allow more successful mediation between work and home-life (Cook et al., 2021). The Covid-19 pandemic, and work-from-home mandates, enabled many occupational groups to spend more time with their

families (Clayton et al., 2020; Kelland et al., 2020; Burgess and Goldman; 2021;) but protective frontline roles such as the police, deemed ‘critical workers’ (Gov.uk, 2022) were largely excluded from this opportunity and had to continue working in their frontline roles (De Camargo, 2020; Johnson and Hohl, 2023). Police officers in the UK had to carry on working in extreme conditions in a public-facing role (Khan, 2021) often with inadequate protection from the Covid-19 virus (De Camargo, 2022), which left them, as well as other key workers, at the highest risk of infection (Khan, 2021). What did it mean to work in such conditions whilst having caring responsibilities as a father, and how fatherhood is experienced by workers in frontline protective roles needs to be further explored as it is not sufficiently addressed in the literature nor in any of the recent high-profile investigations into the police service culture; The Casey Review (2023) for example. Therefore, to this literature about fatherhood, I have contributed insights about what it means to be a father with caregiving responsibilities within a specific working context; the frontline of the British Police Service. These insights are given by answering the first and second of the three Research Questions above.

The UK Police Service has been subject to high-profile reviews and reports recently, including the Casey Review (2023), which exposed alarming levels of institutional misogyny, racism, homophobia, transphobia and poor leadership. In the wake of this Review, the service is attempting to reduce gender imbalances amongst its ranks and rebuild public trust through greater care for victims of crime. However, the extreme conditions and hegemonically masculine culture of policing does not seem to value care and continues to present challenges for those with caring responsibilities amongst its ranks. As was discussed in Chapter Two Context, officers perceive a lack of managerial support for and recognition of their needs, along with a blatant disregard for their safety during the Covid-19 pandemic, which was perceived as a dangerous level of managerial and organisational neglect.

Whilst mothers' experiences of police work have been discussed in a limited number of empirical studies (Cowan and Bochantin, 2009; Schulze, 2011; Duxbury and Higgins, 2012; Agocs et al., 2015), fathers' experiences remain largely under-represented in empirical research in police and non-police contexts, as well as in non-police contexts for research that has occurred wider policy and planning debates. For example, in non-police contexts that have been studied in the past fifteen years, it has been revealed that fathers have little access to flexible working and face stigma when seeking it (Humberd et al., 2015) or they face being marginalised at work when requesting flexibility (Holter, 2007). Burnett et al. (2013), suggested that fathers can perceive their fatherhood as unrecognised in the workplace and Mercer (2017) posits that fathers are not as aware as mothers of flexible work options, or are too afraid to ask for it.

Even more recent empirical studies, i.e. those conducted in the past five years, have shown that fathers can be perceived as deviant if they practice a caregiving masculinity by engaging with flexible working policies (Tanquerel and Grau-Grau, 2020), are viewed as idle, or can face mockery at work when trying to fulfil their caregiving aspirations (Kelland et al., 2022). The research on which this thesis is based, sets out to address these gaps in knowledge about men's experiences of being a carer of children within this particular context; the police service, by providing their own unique and nuanced narratives about their frontline roles and how it impacts on them and their family life.

A feminist ethics of care forms the theoretical framing of this research and is combined with concepts of emotional labour and emotional dirty work to help to understand how father-carers in the police service are impacted by emotional encounters with the public, their colleagues and managers. A feminist ethics of care views care as flexible and expansive (Chatzidakis et

al., 2020) and is not limited to women's work or confined to the domestic sphere (Rottenberg and Segal (2023). In addition, care can take a multitude of forms (Tronto, 2013; Rottenberg and Segal, 2023) including *caring for* (physical, hands-on aspects of care typically associated with the parental care given to young children), *caring about* (an emotional investment in and attachment to other individuals or causes) and *caring with* (a political orientation or expression of solidarity with others). Fathers in frontline protective service roles have caring responsibilities and desires to be caring fathers, yet little is known about how they are able to give care whilst working in this context, nor how they experience being *cared for* and *cared about* by their organisation and managers. My contribution to the discussions put forward by Chatzidakis et al (2020) about the notion of promiscuous care, is that I reveal how father carers in the police service develop wider relationships of care with those they work with and those outside of it, including those they have never met before.

Emotional labour is the commercialisation of emotion work (Hochschild, 1983) which requires an individual to internalise their real emotions whilst presenting significantly different ones to the public (Brunetto et al., 2023). The concept of emotional labour speaks directly to this study of frontline workers because police officers and other emergency service workers have to constantly sense, govern and manipulate their emotions to elicit desired emotional responses in other individuals (Guy et al., 2012). Police officers have been the focus of several other empirical studies, where it has been suggested that they hide their own feelings when in emotionally challenging interactions with others, including colleagues and managers (Farr-Wharton et al., 2023; Brunetto et al., 2023). Expression of emotion in the police service is seen as a weakness (Lennie, 2021) despite the acknowledgement that this is extreme work (Townsend and Loudoun, 2023) where many feel overwhelmed and distressed by the situations they have to deal with (Adams and Buck, 2010; Lennie et al., 2019). In addition, a lack of trust



in police managers and a tendency towards a hierarchical, authoritarian command and control management style (Hyde et al., 2016; McCann and Granter, 2019) result in the micromanaging of officers in a drive towards achieving targets (Westmarland, 2016). Austerity measures (Brunetto et al., 2023) have led to reduced wellbeing amongst officers, lack of support for those suffering emotionally (Brunetto et al., 2023) and poor employee motivation and engagement (Bakker, 2015). A longstanding and widely held view in the literature about police officers' coping methods in this emotionally difficult environment, is that they begin to wear a mental uniform (Miller, 2007) or develop a warrior mindset (McLean et al, 2019), which helps them to shield themselves from the stress and trauma they face. More recently, researchers have described the 'hardening of personality' in officers (De Camargo, 2020), or the 'battling on' mentality (Cartwright and Roach, 2020), which enables many officers to continue working, even when faced with ill health. Bullock and Garland (2020) posit that officers develop an 'acceptance' of psychological co-morbidities, as if these were just part of the job. I contribute to the literature about coping methods used by frontline police officers by revealing how they adopt a reflexively fatalistic approach towards crime, society and their role within these areas. By reframing negative emotional interactions with the public in this way, they feel more able to cope with the associated anxiety and tension they experience in traumatic or threatening situations. This reflexive approach also shapes how officers present themselves to those within the police service and those outside of it, i.e. researchers and family members. This is discussed in more depth in the next section.

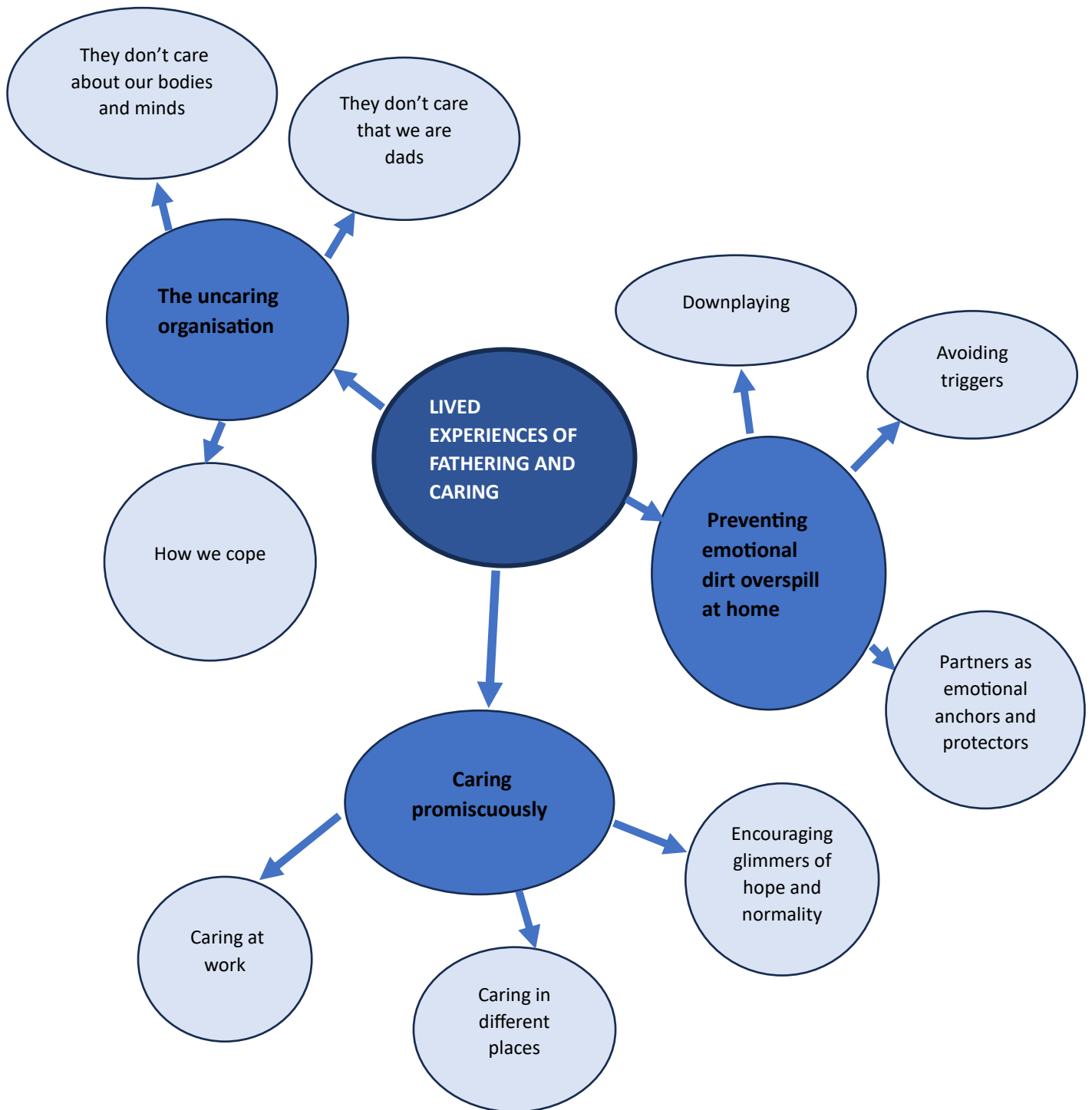
Emotional dirty work, first defined by McMurray and Ward (2014), involves working with 'people who are upset, isolated, suicidal or abusive' (2014: 1125). According to Gunby and Carline (2020: 345), this concept describes occupations that 'require the handling of difficult, burdensome or out of place emotions' In addition, workers in emotionally dirty roles can be

stigmatised due to working with feelings that ‘threaten the solidarity, self-conception or preferred orders of a given individual or community’ (McMurray and Ward, 2014: 12), which necessitates the performance of emotional labour in order to suppress or induce certain feelings that ‘sustain an outward performance’ (Gunby and Carline, 2020: 345) that is appropriate to others (Hochschild, 1983). According to Mikkelsen (2022) emotional dirty work is under-theorised. I add to current understandings of emotional dirty work by revealing, through my own research, how father-carers are impacted by the ostensibly emotional dirty frontline service work they do, how they respond to it in the moment, but also how they respond to it *after* the event(s) for (sometimes) many years. In addition, I give insights into who and what supports them as they endeavour to cope with the emotional distress many invariably experience. A key contribution of this study is that it shows how officers seek to prevent emotional dirt from spilling over into family life. This study set out to answer this question, as well as seeking to better understand, through answering the final question, what the conditions of possibility might be for frontline fathers and carers in the future

### **The lived experiences of father-carers in frontline roles in the UK Police Service**

The conceptual themes in the data, represented in Figure Nine on the following page, were described in the preceding chapter. The aim of this (current) chapter is to move towards showing how the themes and sub-themes foregrounded in the data combine together to form a coherent narrative, and then to give an explanatory, analytical account of the key empirical findings, explaining how they relate to existing concepts and published research.

**Figure Nine: Lived experiences of fathering/caring in the UK Police Service**



In the next section I will explain the links between the concepts and empirical themes that are mapped out in Figure Nine above, in which the main themes are interconnected, and help to paint a rich picture and give detailed answers to the Research Questions which cover i) what it means to work within frontline roles in the police service as a father-carer, ii) how fatherhood and caring is lived and experienced by officers, and iii) what conditions of possibility exist for such fathers in the future.

### **The uncaring organisation**

The first main theme, ‘The uncaring organisation’, connects to the other themes as it sets the overall tone and context for them, revealing that officers perceive the organisation to be one that does not care about their physical and emotional health, (shown in sub-theme one). For example, under this umbrella of non-caring, and as already discussed in Chapter Two, Context, officers experience woefully inadequate mental health support from managers and perceived negligent or dangerous managerial disregard for their health and safety during the Covid-19 pandemic as an example. They perceive managers as only looking out for themselves rather than others, feel they do not have a voice and receive little recognition of their needs as fathers. Generally there is a sentiment amongst serving frontline officers that the organisation is unfair towards them and that a culture of greater inclusivity needs to exist. From the literature covered in Chapter Two, Context, officers are experiencing great discontent with the lack of organisational and managerial care and support for them.

This lack of care is also laid bare in sub-theme two ‘They don’t care we are dads’, where the data speaks of scant regard for the needs and aspirations of father-carers. It sheds light on the nature of the interactions between managers and father-carers, and how the latter respond

emotionally to this. Officers develop coping mechanisms for the stress caused by the inevitability of danger and emotional trauma in their frontline roles, which are revealed in sub-theme three.

### **Preventing emotional dirt overspill**

Given the context provided by main theme one 'The uncaring organisation', and its impact at the individual level, i.e. the father-carer, main theme two 'Preventing emotional dirt overspill at home' brings us towards a greater understanding of the types of challenges of enacting fatherhood, and the impact of policing on family life. Here, the notion of emotional overspill from a police officer's working life to his family is not new. On the contrary, it is widely acknowledged that the police role and its stressors present many issues for officers' family lives (Waters and Ussery, 2007; Miller, 2007; McDowell, 2017). Shift work, the macho culture, commitment to the role, and overprotectiveness can all have negative impacts on police families (Bullock and Garland, 2018). Caring for officers suffering from PTSD, advocating for them or worrying about them committing suicide is not uncommon and is exhausting for the officer's spouse (McDowell, 2017). Family members can suffer when living with and caring for a loved one with PTSD or CPTSD and the strain of living with a partner with mental ill-health can lead to relationship breakdowns, withdrawal from social networks and difficulty in trusting others (Waters and Ussery, 2007). There has also been speculation by some researchers about issues facing children of police officers, which include fears that a parent might be killed on duty, or being bullied for having a police officer parent (Helfers et al., 2021).

However, an issue that is considered to be neglected in the literature (Kirschman, 2014) is how the partners and children of police officers are affected by the experiences of those officers.

This particular research gap is explored through this study as it gives greater understanding of how police officers seek to prevent the emotional issues they suffer from impacting their loved ones. It is important because children are thought to be especially vulnerable, lacking the maturity to cope and still learning to manage their own emotions. They may not possess the language skills needed to express their own emotions when experiencing, for example, the secondary effects of mental illness in a police officer parent (Kirschman, 2014).

I highlight how frontline officers use a range of methods to try to prevent emotional dirt from spilling over into family life. Four such methods are identified in the data. First, 'downplaying' shows how officers seek to reframe the dangerous and traumatic nature of their jobs for the sake of family members, through minimising and pretending that their role is unremarkable, safe even. This serves to protect others emotionally, especially young children, in that it helps them to worry less about their fathers' safety. Second, the method of 'avoiding triggers' reveals participants' awareness of situations that might prompt or trigger a negative emotional state in them, and how they might circumvent this. Third, 'partners as emotional anchors and protectors' is a technique that requires participants' dependence on partners to act as a buffer between an officer's work-related emotions and the family, to support the officer emotionally and protect the family from contamination. Finally, 'encouraging glimmers of hope and normality' brings to light the methods used by father-carers to forge connections between family members, develop a sense of wellbeing, replace negative emotions and memories with positive ones and establish mundane, normal practices and events into family life that are far removed from the drama of police work.

## **Caring promiscuously**

The final main theme, ‘Caring promiscuously’ enables a zooming-out from the close confines of familial relationships into the wider world and networks of care forged by officers. The notion of caring promiscuously is one that was developed by Chatzidakis et al. (2020) in their *Care Manifesto*, and which describes how individuals can multiply the numbers of people they *care for*, *care about* and *care with*. Doing so, Chatzidakis et al., argue, might open up possibilities for individuals and communities to experiment with how they care. I extend the notion of promiscuous care by showing how, where and why a very specific population, i.e. frontline police officers, develop wider relationships of care with those they work with (sub-theme ‘Caring at work’) and then in even wider circles outside of work, as the officer seeks to prevent or heal from the emotionally damaging effects of police work (sub-theme ‘Caring in different places’).

The next section takes each of the three Research Questions in turn, aligning the findings with previous studies. It also explains how these findings make a unique contribution to knowledge about the experiences of father-carers in frontline policing.

### **Research Question (1): What does it mean to be a father-carer who wants to be involved, while working in a frontline protective service role?**

In order to answer this question, the analysis of the data was guided by the concepts of an ethics of care and emotional labour. I propose that both of these concepts are highly relevant in the context of frontline policing when seeking to understand how officers attribute meaning to their work, how it impacts on them, what coping mechanisms they develop, how they perceive and respond to the organisational lack of care they experience as officers who are caregiving

fathers. For example, I focus on the notion of ‘reframing’, discussed in more detail below, and with specific examples taken from the data, to show how it is used as a specific coping method by frontline officers to make sense of and manage their feelings about their public-facing work, and relationships with line managers and colleagues. I also focus in the next section on the notion of how a lack of organisational care is shown for officers, with specific examples taken from the data and findings.

### **Coping with inevitable physical and emotional injury**

Emotional labour is the commercialisation of emotion work according to Hochschild (1983) and occurs when real emotions are internalised (Brunetto et al., 2023) or when feelings are induced or suppressed in order to create an ‘outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others’ (Hochschild, 1983: 7). Frontline police officers perform emotional labour in their public-facing role but suppress their authentic emotions in order to remain professional and meet public and organisational expectations of them (MacEachern et al., 2018; Lennie et al., 2020; Mastracci and Adams, 2020). In addition, it is recognised that emotional labour is used by officers when faced with challenging interactions with other stakeholders, including colleagues and line managers (Farr-Wharton et al., 2023; Brunetto et al., 2023).

The findings of this research show that frontline officers can experience a range of positive and negative emotions when serving the public but tend to focus on what they perceive as ‘relentless’ and ‘guaranteed’ exposure to physical danger and emotional trauma when explaining what they do at work. This came as no surprise as it is in accordance with the literature which describes policing as a dangerous and extreme form of work (Tham et al., 2023; Townsend and Loudoun, 2023; Ward et al., 2020), one of the most high-risk and stressful



occupations (Tehrani, 2010, 2018; De Camargo, 2022) and one where exposure to trauma is frequent (Irizar et al., 2022). Many of the participants who worked on response teams, for example, were routinely called out to multiple domestic violence incidents over the course of a single shift. Officers have to suppress their own feelings or perform ‘emotional neutrality’ (Jordan et al., 2019) in situations such as these, even though they might feel intense fear about being attacked or upset when they see the effect of violence on young children for example. They suppress authentic emotions in order to remain professional, to conform to ‘display rules’ (Hochschild, 1983) or ‘official’ emotions (Grandey, 2000), to show that they are in control of confrontational interactions, and to present themselves as reliable, competent colleagues to those they work with.

Hochschild (1983) describes this suppression of authentic emotion as ‘surface acting’, which can lead to emotive dissonance and stress and burnout in the long term (Brotheridge and Lee, 2003). The findings of this research illustrate how this happens, with officers often managing emotional interactions with multiple parties simultaneously and having to manage the emotions of others too. For example, one officer described his utter shock from witnessing the injuries suffered by a toddler who had been abused by her father. He had to control his rage when interviewing the father, remain stoic when liaising with paramedics and social workers, all whilst mentoring a probationer who had never been exposed to such gore. He explained how the tension and dissonance he experienced, along with visions of a blood-filled bathtub, rendered him unable to ever bath his own daughter again.

The emotional labour involved with caring for victims and their families, or dealing with perpetrators of crime can lead to significant adverse mental health issues for officers, including

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), depression and breakdowns, and many describe witnessing these issues in their colleagues too. This is in line with empirical studies that suggest that police officers experience a multitude of psychosocial issues (Fielding et al., 2018; Maran et al., 2022) as well as physical issues such as hypertension and heart disease (Jeung et al., 2018). Results of a recent survey show that over twenty percent of officers report having PTSD (Policing: The Job and The Life Survey, 2018). In addition, fifty percent of officers have taken sick leave in the past five years due to poor mental health (Police Firearms Officer Association, 2022). These figures are much higher than PTSD and sick leave figures within the general population (Bullock and Garland, 2020). I would assume that these figures for officers would be an under-representation, as the culture within policing has long been regarded as one that impedes discussion about mental health with managers (Bell and Eski, 2016), makes officers reluctant to speak up (Karaffa and Tochkov, 2013) or seek help for mental health issues (Violanti, 1995).

An interesting contribution by this study is that it builds on Ashforth and Kreiner's (1999) concept of reframing by giving insight into the coping methods used by frontline officers to reframe their negative experiences when serving the public. 'Reframing' is a coping strategy that enables workers to protect themselves and their social esteem by directing attention away from the disturbing, unpleasant aspects of their role, to more meaningful or rewarding parts of it (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999).

Whilst emotional neutrality, (Ward et al., 2020) feeling invincible, (Turner and Jenkins, 2018), developing a warrior mindset, (McLean et al., 2019) and a hardening of personality, (De Camargo, 2022) have been found to be coping mechanisms in previous empirical studies, my

findings show that officers can also become 'reflexively fatalistic'. This concept will be explained in more detail below.

Fatalism, as a concept, has its roots in philosophy and is associated with an attitude of resignation when facing future events that are considered to be inevitable (Soloman, 2003). According to Dennett (1984: 104) fatalism is the notion that 'what happens has to happen'. The concept of fatalism has been used in the field of psychology too, where according to Bachem et al. (2020) for example, it is a belief that one's destiny is externally determined and that one's daily actions will not impact inevitable life events. Interestingly, and relevant to this study, Hayes et al. (2016) explain that a belief in fatalism can actually help to reduce fear, anxiety, or tension when in traumatic or threatening situations. It is this latter psychological understanding of fatalism as a coping method that can be applied to the police service in my own study because officers are routinely exposed to traumatic and threatening situations, including criminal activity, abuse, suicide, and sudden deaths. For example, Dazzer, an Armed Response Officer and father of two, described society thus: 'it's always going to have a certain percentage of evil and good people within it, regardless of how it's policed.' Andy, a Domestic Abuse Investigator and father of one likened domestic abuse to 'a cycle we can't stop' and explained: 'Inevitably kids in violent homes grow up and either perpetuate abuse or fall victim to it in later relationships.' Why does this attitude of fatalism develop? How can it be termed reflexive? A closer examination of reflexivity is discussed below.

Reflexivity is 'the act of examining one's own assumptions... and judgement systems' (Jamieson et al., 2023). In addition, Kuehner et al. (2016: 670) describe reflexivity as 'a strategy of using subjectivity to examine social and psychosocial phenomena.' Whilst there are many

other definitions of reflexivity, it is commonly used within qualitative research to enable researchers to ‘account for how their subjectivity shapes their inquiry’ (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023: 241). In my own study reflexivity was actively constructed (Varpio et al., 2021) and demonstrated during the research process; officers reflected on the traumatic situations they have to handle and why they view society and crime through a fatalistic lens. They viewed fatalism as a personal coping method for the emotional dirt they encounter, a way of situating themselves in relation to the types of individuals they come into contact with at work. A fatalistic attitude becomes a survival tactic after exposure to multiple traumatic or threatening events. For example, Kris, in a Gang Violence Unit, recalled trying to save a thirteen-year-old stab-victim’s life:

“I did what I could; I stemmed the blood, I interviewed the suspect, but gang-related violence is so enmeshed in the crime community’s economy, so ingrained and massive, that it will always be there and I can’t beat myself up about it.”

Officers’ reflexive fatalism shapes how they present themselves to others both individually and collectively to outsiders such as researchers, family, friends and insiders such as colleagues. It enables them to articulate what they experience and what they know about crime, criminals and the trauma they cause. Becoming reflexively fatalistic enables them to better manage their stress when encountering or thinking about or talking about shocking, unpleasant people and situations because they can reframe it as ‘predetermined’ and therefore as largely outside of their control even if they still have to respond to it as social agents. Officers could also be self-consciously (reflexively) aware of their fatalistic understanding of the context in which they work, and hence, of how it shapes the way they act.

### **Coping with a lack of organisational care**

Brewin et al. (2022) suggest that the high levels of emotional damage experienced by officers are a clinical and public sector crisis, and one without the right resources, monitoring or interventions available to help them. My own findings support this assertion because the data is replete with examples of officers receiving extraordinarily little support when emotionally (and physically) damaged. According to my findings, frontline officers experience emotionally charged interactions with their line managers and colleagues when they feel at their most vulnerable, in need of care and having to ask for help. Many referred to the frustration, anger and incredulity they felt when describing the lack of care shown to them when they are suffering physically, emotionally or need help in order to fulfil their responsibilities as caregiving fathers.

First, consideration is given to health-related support. My findings give numerous specific examples of the instances when support was required. For example, during the Covid-19 pandemic, many officers wanted to work from home due to having pre-existing health conditions such as diabetes, which made them vulnerable to infection. Others wanted to isolate with family members who were receiving treatment, i.e. for cancer, and had weakened immunity. Most had experienced mental health crises before or during the pandemic, citing breakdowns or PTSD symptoms, and expressed how little monitoring or awareness of these types of issues is carried out by managers. They explained how seeking help is futile because they have discovered that mental health support is only a rhetorical gesture or because they fear being seen as weak for expressing authentic emotions (Lennie, 2021) i.e. not being able to cope. The police service is widely recognised however, as having a hegemonic masculine culture (Alcadipani, 2020; Innes, 2003; Rabe-Hemp, 2009) which discourages emotional

expression and instils a sense of stigma and shame in those who do so and prevents workers from engaging with any mental health therapies the organisation might offer (Kennedy-Moore and Watson, 2001). This research reveals that officers not only suppress emotions because they feel the shame and stigma associated with expression but have no faith that the organisation has the resources needed to support them, and there exists a managerial lack of interest and ability to handle emotional encounters such as asking for help with mental health difficulties.

Second, father-carers often need to work more flexibly in order to accommodate their aspirations of involved fatherhood, to support their partners, be present for family events or respond to family emergencies for example. The findings of this study show that the majority of officers described managers who do not care about their needs and do not accommodate or support them. This is in line with previous empirical studies that reveal that the hypermasculine culture of policing serves to reproduce traditional gender roles that serve to maintain male dominance (Agocs et al., 2015; Kurtz et al., 2012).

A caring organisation has at its core, an awareness of and concern for employees' needs and wellbeing (Saks, 2021) and according to Tronto (1993) caring requires attentiveness, responsibility, competence and responsiveness on the part of actors and is a key feature of what makes people human. Care is also relational (Chatzidakis et al., 2022) meaning that individuals are embedded in webs of overlapping and dynamic relationships in their personal and public lives (Hawk, 2011) as well as being dependent on one another (Chatzidakis et al., 2022). My assertion, based on my research findings, is that frontline officers perceive the majority of police managers to be lacking in people-skills, i.e. they show little empathy or compassion for those they are responsible for. In short, life as a father-carer in the police means being managed

by someone who is incompetent, unresponsive, and inattentive to his needs; the antithesis of the caring agent described by Tronto above. In addition, when officers approach managers for support as fathers, i.e. making request for flexible working, they feel bullied, harassed and belittled. This is in keeping with the findings of Kelland (2022), who describes the ridicule and mockery meted out by managers to fathers in other contexts.

In addition, during the Covid-19 pandemic, officers felt that they were put in even more danger than was expected and attributed this to an organisational lack of care for them. For example, officers were forced to carry on working as normal, interacting with the public or being confined to offices and response vehicles with colleagues. This is in line with the findings of De Camargo (2022) who described officers' concerns about a lack of PPE and a high risk of viral contamination. My own research has revealed that officers responded emotionally to what they perceived as complete lack of care for them, bordering on organisational negligence. They vilified their managers, imbuing them with psychopathic qualities for example, and suggested that some police managers actually enjoy inflicting pain on officers by denying them access to flexible working, or 'being left to rot at home' (Charlie, PC Safer Neighbourhoods) when suffering mental collapse.

Line managers (sergeants) and senior managers (inspectors and above) were described as 'me-centric, selfish individuals' (Greg, Safer Neighbourhoods), as emotionally damaged individuals themselves, who have been exposed to years of emotional trauma before and after being promoted and are viewed by officers as therefore unable to manage others in a caring way. Existent literature about management in the police tends towards focusing on the challenges facing the service, how managers are impacted by these and acknowledges that there

is a resultant impact on wellbeing of officers. For example, Townsend and Loudoun (2023) discuss how line managers have to manage more extreme conditions than ever before and therefore need skills and training beyond managing crime. Westmarland (2016) posits that there is an over-emphasis on meeting targets and professionalising the service, whilst Brunetto (2023) found that the austerity-driven management model has resulted in reduced funding and reduced wellbeing. McCann and Granter (2019) suggest that line management in policing is hierarchical with a command-and-control mentality, whilst Zheng et al. (2019) focus on the police service's authoritarian leadership style and its resultant negative effect on officers who become reluctant to speak up or speak out about ethical issues. This literature does not sufficiently explain however, how officers respond to the way they are treated, whatever the background or reasons for it or discuss how and why they view their line managers as uncaring, and how they respond emotionally to this. Mildenhall and McCann (2022) acknowledge that poor relations exist between staff and managers in the police service and found that a lack of trust and a blame culture, along with fear of management reprisals leads to a lack of desire to speak openly. Building on Segal's (2023) relational view of care, which underscores the significance of solidarity and shared responsibility in addressing societal issues, my own study shows clearly that that officers are overwhelmingly discontent with their relationships with their managers. It reveals that officers are desirous of a much more human, relational and caring form of welfare support by managers but instead experience interactions that can be so confrontational, that they liken such interactions as going into battle. Many perceive that some police managers have such a negative influence on teams that individuals within them become blasé and uncaring about their own health and safety as well as that of others. This was evidenced in the findings where officers described working during the pandemic with officers who failed to wear face masks or carelessly tossed them into the boot of squad car. These types of experiences left officers with an extremely poor impression of their managers, viewing them



as the enemy in many instances. This type of relationship conflict leads to further suffering by officers as they feel so let down, undervalued, judged and uncared for (Lennie et al., 2020).

My study also shows that in order to cope with this emotional dirty work, defined by McMurray and Ward (2014: 1134) as ‘expressed feelings that threaten the solidarity, self-conception or preferred orders of a given individual or community...where emotions are deemed...in some sense polluting’ (McMurray and Ward, 2014: 1134). Many use reframing to restore and preserve their self-worth. They present themselves not just as victims of poor, uncaring managers, but in many instances as individuals who have learned something from these interactions and their own experiences to become more caring, responsible, and responsive when interacting with others who need help. This is shown in the examples given in the findings, where officers describe feeling that their role is more meaningful and rewarding when they notice that colleagues are suffering, describing how this might prevent suicides and help others get through tough times by being attentive and present for them. They gave examples of showing gestures of care such as taking someone for a coffee and a chat when they are off sick and even extending this offer to those who are not part of their team.

A second way of reframing negative interactions with uncaring line managers is to redirect their own attention to the ‘few good managers’ who have helped them in the past. This is significant because it shows that officers who are treated well, in a personal and caring way, want to reciprocate and show great appreciation and loyalty to the manager, as well as greater work commitment in return. This is evidenced in the example of the officer who, as a father, was permitted to work from home in order to support his new-born son and wife, who were both ill after the birth. He described having a local arrangement with an empathetic manager

and showed his gratitude by working even harder (getting more ‘stop and searches’ than the manager could imagine) when he returned.

In effect, my study provides a nuanced and contextualised account of the way that many officers cope with an absence of care for them, by becoming agents of care, and in so doing provide what most (but not all) of their managers fail to. They are resisting and actively fighting against the existing organisational culture, management models and systems that have hitherto allowed what The Care Collective describe as a ‘reigning carelessness’ witnessed in society and organisations (Chatzidakis, et al., 2022). *The Care Manifesto* (Chatzidakis et al., 2022) seeks to redress this carelessness in the contemporary and historical sense; contemporary in that neoliberal capitalism has prioritised the generation of financial capital ‘while ruthlessly dismantling welfare states and democratic ...institutions’ (2022: 3) and historical in the sense that care and its associations with the feminine, has long been devalued and seen as unproductive. In addition, the neoliberal subject is competitive and dominant in their relationships, discouraged from caring about or for others. (Chatzidakis et al., 2022). *The Care Manifesto* (2022) ‘puts care front and centre’ (2022: 5) suggesting that carelessness affects interpersonal intimacies and cannot be carried out unless *all* caregivers are supported (2020: 7). My study takes *The Care Manifesto*’s notion of reigning carelessness and applies it to the context of policing and how caregiving fathers experience that uncaring work context.

The findings of my study have generated a wealth of knowledge to fill that contextual gap and extend the work of Chatzidakis et al. (2020) by revealing that if carelessness reigns in an organisation such as the police service, it becomes viral and makes others careless. For example, as discussed earlier, the service showed its lack of care about the health and safety of

officers during the pandemic, by not ensuring that officers had adequate personal protective equipment. In turn, officers became blasé about safety and showed resentment towards the public. However, what this study also shows is that some officers, despite experiencing a lack of care, seek meaning in their work. They try to improve their self-esteem by forging relationships of care with others. This also enables a more authentic expression of their emotions and helps others to show their true feelings, which appears to be a mutually beneficial arrangement that reduces stress and symptoms of PTSD especially (Pennebaker and Seagal, 1999). This is one of the key meanings of police work for officers. They realise they can easily fall victim to the uncaring organisation, allowing carelessness to continue to reign by become uncaring towards others. Or they can mitigate this by actively finding and nurturing caring relationships within and outside of the service. This will be treated in more depth in the final substantive section of this chapter, which looks at different ways of caring in the future through caring for ‘strangers like me’ and ‘promiscuous caring’, which are concepts I’ve arrived at through my data as well as from drawing on insights from the contributions of *The Care Manifesto* (Chatzidakis et al., 2020)

**Research Question (2): How do father-carers who are frontline protective service providers experience caregiving fatherhood?**

In order to answer this Research Question, it is important to understand how and why policing is considered to be emotional dirty work. It is also important to appreciate the impact of that work on the individuals who perform it, and how police officers seek to prevent emotional dirt from spilling over into their family life. The concept of emotional dirty work was introduced by McMurray and Ward (2014) as a fourth dimension to Hughes’ (1958) original tripartite classification of dirty work as being physically, socially, or morally tainted (1958: 121).

According to McMurray and Ward (2014: 12) emotional dirty work involves working with feelings ‘that threaten the solidarity, self-conception or preferred orders of a given individual or community’. Gunby and Carline (2020: 345) discuss how occupations that ‘require the handling of difficult, burdensome or out of place emotions’ can stigmatise the worker.

Central to this particular form of dirty work is the performance of emotional labour, where workers have to suppress or induce feelings to sustain an outward countenance or performance (Gunby and Carline, 2020: 345) or what Hochschild (1983) asserted was a state of mind deemed appropriate in front of others. Mikkelesen (2022) has suggested that the concept of emotional dirty work is under-theorised and acknowledges that performing this type of work will have an impact on workers because they literally soak up the negative emotions of others they come into contact with at work. Mikkelsen (2020) draws in particular upon Brennan’s (2014) notion of transmission of affect, to explain how feelings emerge out of bodies and are transmitted to others and then absorbed by them as enhancing or depressing energies (2004: 3). Brennan challenges the belief that individuals are self-contained and discrete, and suggests instead that the emotions they absorb, which originate from others, can directly impact upon their psyche, physiology and experience. My study shows that not only are officers affected by those they come into contact with at work, but are, according to the participants, aware that they can transmit enhancing or depressing energies to their families.

A limited number of empirical studies have applied the concept of emotional dirt to policing in the UK, which is the focus of my study. McMurray and Ward (2016) use the example of a police officer who has to deliver a death message to a family and explain that this event can disrupt the preferred order of a family’s life (2016: 61). In addition the officer has to give a

certain emotional response, i.e. he or she has to offer the family emotional care of the right nature. McMurray and Ward (2016) suggest that emotional dirt is often entwined with physical dirt in policing, which I agree with after having analysed the accounts given by my participants. For example, many officers in my own study described how they had attempted to save the lives of individuals whilst working with colleagues, when members of the public were watching, or families of the deceased were nearby. One described taking turns with a colleague to perform Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) on a corpse which had open eyes and vomit around the mouth and in the beard. He recalled trying to calm an upset probationer, support the screaming mother and instruct onlookers to move away to give her privacy. Another officer described a time when working alone, he had responded to a call and found a sixteen-year-old knife-crime victim. He had tried to protect the wounded, terrified victim from further attack, whilst stemming the blood-flow until paramedics arrived. In these types of traumatic and stressful situations, officers are handling emotions involving extreme shock and suffering, i.e. the distraught and screaming mother who is being confronted by the complete disruption of the family life that was familiar to her, or the incapacitated, vomiting probationer who is unable to work in a professional capacity as he is witnessing his first death. In addition, the officer inevitably had to manage his own emotions in the heat of the moment, and to be able to perform the right kind of emotional labour in front of others, i.e., consoling the bereaved parent, aggressively dealing with those presenting an ongoing threat to life, coaching a less experienced colleague who is struggling to cope, or remaining calm and professional in front of other emergency response professionals such as paramedics.

Gagnon and Monties' (2023) study revealed that officers can develop a range of strategies to regulate their own emotions, such as adapting them to meet the demands of situations as they unfold. They also suggest that colleagues at work can offer much-needed support by

legitimising feelings of anger, for example. In this way colleagues provide a social resource that officers can draw upon (Williams et al., 2018). My own study's findings support this notion of the supportive colleague, who is sometimes imbued with the qualities of a family member. For example, many officers described feeling that they were part of a 'police family' or described 'spending more time with colleagues than family'. One described himself as being a 'father-figure to younger officers, especially those at risk of depression'.

This is important to acknowledge here because it seems to indicate (from the findings) that support is given to some officers by more experienced paternalistic managers, and that officers feel cared for when they develop family-like relationships with others on their team, including managers.

An empirical study, conducted by Wilson-Kovacs et al. (2022) and a practitioner account by Cheshire (2018) for example, have explored strategies used by police officers to separate their emotional dirty work from home. Wilson-Kovacs et al. (2022) for example, found that the drive home was an essential time for officers to do this, and explained how officers might avoid speaking about their work in social situations. Another strategy used by the participants in Wilson-Kovacs et al. (2022) study was to pretend to others, during social occasions, that they do something innocuous at work i.e. saying that they work in police training rather than the reality, which may be forensically examining indecent images of children. Similarly, Cheshire (2018) acknowledged that officers might avoid talking to loved ones about what they do and see at work in order to provide protection against the emotional distress they themselves have experienced. In another study, Wilson et al. (2019) describe the role of partners of police officers, and how they might manage interactions when the couple are out in public, steering

the officer away from talking about the more disturbing aspects of policing. Whilst Wilson's (2019) study gives insight into the management of an officer's interactions by his partner, when he is not at work, Ward et al. (2020) focus on the physical and emotional pain suffered by police officers (amongst other agents of social control) and how they manage the boundary between safety and danger 'in the moment' (Ward et al., 2020: 82) i.e. whilst at work. She also discusses their use of empathetic and antipathetic emotional labour and emotional neutrality in their dirty work.

My study develops Ward et al.'s (2020) work in that it leads to a greater understanding of how police officers with caregiving responsibilities seek to prevent emotional dirt from spilling over into family life. Ward et al. (2020) describe how Jackie, a participant in her study, experienced extreme violence when she was stabbed at work. According to Ward et al. (2020) Jackie is reported to have said that all she could think about in that moment was her two children at home. My own study concurs with Ward et al.'s (2020) findings, in that officers who had experienced pain, whether emotionally or physically, are very mindful of the vastly damaging impact that this has not only on them, but also on their family relationships and their ability to be actively engaged father-carers. One officer, for example, described policing as 'a cancer' and as 'hugely damaging to marriages and families'. Shift work plays an enormous role in physically separating father-carers from their families and can result in fathers missing out on children's milestones such as a baby's first steps, family special events such as birthday parties, or more routine everyday events such as picking children up from school. But many fathers also experience a mental or emotional separation and absence from family life because of ongoing emotional suffering caused by the 'dirty' nature of their work, for example burnout, depression and PTSD.

Four strategies used by officers to prevent emotional dirt overspill into family life are identified in the findings, and these reveal how father-carers who are frontline protective service providers experience caregiving fatherhood, which is the primary focus of the second of the three Research Questions noted above.

First, officers sometimes consciously ‘downplay’ the danger and trauma they face in the course of their work, reframing it as a safe job. For example, some officers described their work to family members as boring, heavily admin-based, or as one officer explained it to his teenaged children: ‘It’s ninety percent tedium and ten percent excitement’. Officers do this in order to protect the emotions of others, and it became apparent from the participants that this strategy is used across all age groups and family members including, for example, young children, teenagers, adult children, partners, parents and grandparents. Officers believe that their loved ones should not be exposed to the emotional trauma of policing or cannot cope with it. This is significant because it reveals that officers enact a protective form of masculinity and fatherhood, literally shielding their loved ones from the emotionally dirty reality of their work. Protective masculinity is a concept that was first introduced by Johnson (2013: 16) who studied politicians, and is a term used to describe male performances that centre around being tough and strong, protecting women, children, and sometimes other men from threats to their security.

Connell (1995) views this kind of protective masculinity as a form of hegemonic masculinity; of showing physical power, control and economic dominance that has the breadwinner identity central to it. However, my own findings indicate that officers deploy this kind of protective masculinity paternalistically, which could be understood as more nuanced than Connell



suggests, involving behaviour that is less about controlling and which is more concerned with caring for and connecting to others.

A second method used by officers to prevent emotional dirt overspill into the home is to avoid trauma triggers as far as they possibly can. Trauma triggers are psychological stimuli that prompt an involuntary recall or reminder of an event and can cause someone to have a strong emotional reaction such as panic, fear, anger, or a feeling of being overwhelmed (Foa et al., 2008). These triggers can be quite subtle and difficult for the sufferer or others around them to predict (van der Kolk, 1994; Dalton, 2020). My own study reveals what father-carers within a frontline protective role consider to be their trauma triggers and the associated negative emotional state that a trauma trigger can result in. For example, one officer would not allow his family to watch any emergency services TV programmes such as *Police 24/7* or allow his sons to play the PS4 game *Grand Theft Auto*, because it featured prostitutes being run over by cars. Others described leaving concerts or football matches fifteen minutes early, to avoid the risk of a crush as crowds leave a venue. Some try to keep the home calm, with manageable and consistent levels of noise because loud sounds such as laughing or shouting creates the kind of atmosphere that they do not want for themselves or their families. This shows that they organise routines and events in a different way to other individuals and in ways that deflect aesthetic extremes, in order to ensure that the home remains a calm place and the family stays safe.

A third method of preventing emotional dirt overspill into the home was revealed when many officers spoke about being able to rely on and depend on the immense emotional support they received from their partners. Segal (2023) discusses how individuals lean on others, depending on their support at every stage of life, which helps to surmount challenges. This is evident in

the sub-theme 'Partners as emotional anchors and protectors'. This term describes the roles fulfilled by officers' partners. They are perceived as anchors because they provide a sense of belonging and emotional safety that helps the whole family to navigate the challenges associated with his emotional dirty work. They are considered by many officers to be at the heart of the family, providing a sense of wellbeing in a comforting atmosphere. Many officers considered their wives to be protective of them, providing a steady presence, a listening ear and having the wisdom and insight into their work that enabled them to provide sound advice that helped them navigate through their working lives and handle work-related emotions. In addition, in the role of protector, many wives were viewed as protecting the family and others from emotional contamination associated with policing. Greg for example, described how his wife was 'very, very good at spotting when I'm not feeling or acting right' and Danko explained that his wife would 'never pussyfoot around, noticing and calling me out for weird behaviour'. Mariuscz explained how he 'depended on' or 'leaned on' his 'patient and skilled wife' in order to cope with the emotional transition from work to home life. She had, he explained, the ability to 'take over, find solutions and give coping strategies'. In addition Arron's wife was able to give him career advice, telling him to leave his job when the emotional toil of attending too many fatal car accidents had become too much for him to bear. These are all examples of how partners might try to manage the officers' emotions. The concepts of emotion work and emotion management were first introduced by Hochschild (1979, 1983) to describe how individuals have, and act upon, their own emotions and those of others. Hochschild (1983) suggested that emotion work involved intimate relationships in the home whereas emotional labour (discussed in an earlier section of this thesis) is performed as part of a job and is sold in return for a wage. The main function of emotion work is to 'align emotions with social norms for their expression' (Smoliak et al., 2023). What is apparent from the quotes of the participants given above is that

officers can find it difficult to regulate their own emotions at home and for this reason they depend on their partners for support with regulation.

Emotion regulation is defined by Beckes and Coan (2011: 983) as ‘changing the intensity of an ongoing or predicted emotional reaction’. According to Gross (2014) various strategies can be used to regulate emotions, including selecting, avoiding or changing situations. This is evident in the example above of Arron’s wife who advised him to leave a traumatic and emotionally depleting role in traffic. Beckes and Coan (2011) and Beckes and Sbarra (2022) suggest that close relationships help individuals to reduce the costs associated with work-related stressors. This is evident in my own findings, where Mariusz for example, describes being able to depend on or lean on his wife who helps him by sharing her ability to give advice, listen and solve problems for him.

In addition, many of the wives were described as being ‘tolerant’ or ‘patient’ regarding the officers’ emotional lows, negative attitude or hyper-vigilance for example. This is in accordance with Frith and Frith’s (2003) concept of mentalising which involves cognitively tracking one’s own emotional state or that of someone else. Hooker et al. (2008) developed this notion by suggesting that affective mentalising is used to track, anticipate and respond to an individual’s emotional state. It appears from this study that the officers perceive their partners to be adept or skilled in managing emotions. As Greg mentioned ‘She is very very good at spotting when things are not right (with me)’. This suggests that many officers’ partners already have, or develop, strong mentalising skills; the ability to be open to other’s emotional responses and be tolerant of their complexity and fluidity (Luyten et al., 2019). However, according to Dean et al. (2022) emotion work can also feel burdensome and overwhelming because of its

invisible and boundary-less nature. It is therefore anticipated that many police officers' partners might feel over-burdened and overwhelmed by performing the role of emotional anchor and protector, but the officers in this study did not discuss how their partners were affected and this could be further explored in future studies of police family dynamics.

The fourth and final method of preventing emotional dirt overspill into the home is to encourage moments of joy and peace for family members. This is the sub-theme 'Encouraging glimmers of hope and normality'. It describes how father carers might try to involve family members in activities that forge healthy and enjoyable connections between them, develop a sense of wellbeing for family members, replace negative emotions and memories with positive ones, and establish routine, everyday life habits and events that contrast with the drama of police work. This suggests that many officers are acutely aware that things could be better for themselves and their families and are not happy with accepting police work as being a cancer to families and relationships as described by Danko. They want to be and live differently.

This study has enabled greater insight into the material, embodied aspects of policing as dirty work. It brings us towards greater understanding of how a particular group of father-carers collectively, as well as in their own personal ways, experience the challenges of enacting fatherhood when working with emotional dirt. The study also gives greater understanding of the impact of emotional dirty work on workers' family life. In addition, this study brings to the fore, the methods used by officers to try to prevent emotional dirt from spilling over into family life, i.e. through downplaying their roles in order to protect their loved ones from emotional harm, by avoiding trauma triggers, by relying upon intimate partners to perform the role of

emotional anchor and protector, and by encouraging glimmers of hope and normality; moments of happiness or shared common experiences that bring the family members emotionally closer.

**Research Question (3): What could be the future conditions of possibility for frontline protective service workers who are, or aspire to be involved father-carers?**

In order to answer this final Research Question, the analysis of the study's data was guided by the concepts of 'strangers like me' and 'promiscuous care' which are described in more detail below. These concepts were originally developed by the authors of *The Care Manifesto* (Chatzidakis et al., 2020), which was published in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. This manifesto suggests what a future, radical vision of care could be like, and calls for an acknowledgement of individuals' mutual interdependence and vulnerabilities, a valuing and sharing of care, more inventive forms of collective care, and an expansion of caring kinships and care networks through mutual recognition amongst what Chatzidakis et al. (2020: 37) term 'strangers like me'. This term describes the care carried out by strangers whose lives resemble one's own. In addition, the term 'promiscuous care' is used to describe care that is shown when individuals multiply the number of people they *care for*, *care about* and *care with*, which effectively allows them to experiment with care (2020: 33).

Promiscuous care is the kind that spreads outwards from intimate relationships such as those found in a family, to more distant ones involving people unknown to one another. Chatzidakis et al. (2020: 44) suggest that concepts and practices of care should not be limited to women and mothers, but that everybody's lives are improved, regardless of gender, when they care and are cared for. Both of these concepts are relevant to this study because the findings of it show that fathers with caring responsibilities who work within an ostensibly uncaring organisation

and under very stressful conditions, can still seek to forge caring relationships at home, with colleagues and with wider society members. This section discusses how these core concepts within *The Care Manifesto's* (2020) vision of care - 'strangers like me' and 'promiscuous care' might be implemented, and to what possible effect, within a hyper-masculine frontline protective working environment such as the UK Police Service, which is the context and critical case study for this research. In addition, this section explores how caring promiscuously links to the restorative justice movement (Zehr, 1990; Shapland et al., 2011; Hobson et al., 2022)

In order to set the scene for this final Research Question however, let us first recap on what has been covered in the preceding sections which focused on the first of the three Research Questions, namely 'What does it mean to be a father-carer who wants to be involved, while working in a frontline protective service role?' and the second, 'How do father-carers who are frontline protective service providers experience caregiving fatherhood?'. Following that summary, consideration will be given to how an application and development of *The Care Manifesto's* (2020) concepts of 'strangers like me' and 'promiscuous care' can help towards answering the third of the three Research Questions, 'What could be the future conditions of possibility for frontline protective service workers who are, or aspire to be involved father-carers?'

As was discussed in the answer to the first Research Question above, most participants in this study (caregiving father-carers in frontline police roles) have experienced emotional injury in the form of burnout, stress, depression, Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Complex Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (CPTSD) as a result of what is widely recognised as emotional dirty work (Dick, 2005; McMurray and Ward, 2016; Spencer, 2019; Schneider et al., 2020).

For many, this means having to adopt a reflexively fatalistic view of society as the basis for developing a coping mechanism for the endless and inevitably dangerous, stressful and traumatic interactions that officers continually have with the public, and with victims and perpetrators of crime. In addition, many officers in this study have experienced the police service as an uncaring organisation; they feel it neglects and endangers their physical and emotional health, as well as that of their colleagues and families.

All participants cited clear examples of how they felt uncared for. For example, some described having no (or inadequate) Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) during the first months of the Covid-19 pandemic, which concurs with other empirical studies (De Camargo, 2022). Some claimed they had been forced to continue working in a public-facing role and were therefore exposed to the virus, despite their own health worries and concerns about family members with compromised immune systems. In addition, all of the participants in the study were able to bring to attention a worrying lack of organisational care shown by police managers, especially at times when an officer might be ill and need to take sick leave. For example, Charlie, a PC in Safer Neighbourhoods, described being 'left to rot at home with no welfare checks made'. As all of the participants were fathers with caregiving responsibilities, they could give detailed accounts of interactions with managers who failed to recognise or support their need and desire to care for their children and they believed that this had impacted negatively on their ability to be involved carers/parents, i.e., it limited their ability to attend important family events such as birthday parties or more routine ones such as being there for bedtime.

Those who had requested flexible working patterns in the past gave detailed examples of managers who displayed dismissive and sometimes hostile attitudes towards this, which left

these fathers with a range of negative emotions, including feeling neglected, frustrated and angry. Many attributed this lack of managerial care, lack of empathy and attitude of hostility towards those in need of support, to the organisational culture of ‘me-centrism’, whereby managers are only interested in developing their own careers, and mental health initiatives are only supported insofar as they might contribute towards a promotion application. Participants with managers of this ilk perceived a lack of human connection with their managers (Greg, Safer Neighbourhoods) and described mental health support and resources as under-funded, inaccessible, or not of the right kind (Marek, Safer Neighbourhoods). Some described police managers as being ‘completely devoid of emotional intelligence’ (Mash, Sexual Investigations Team), as being ‘emotionally incapable’ (Greg), or having ‘psychopathic’ or ‘pit bull’ qualities (Addie, Firearms). Others believed that their managers ‘enjoyed inflicting pain on others’ (Rossy, Firearms), or attributed the behaviours of senior leaders to years spent working in a toxic, uncaring environment (Taz, Inspector). A pervasive unwillingness to support others in need, described by Addie as a managerial attitude of ‘I had no support, so why should I give it to others?’ means that most officers only receive support as the exception or have to rely on luck (Mike, Counterterrorism). Typically support or care is only shown by managers who are flexible, empathetic and who have children or caring roles of their own and who therefore understand the needs of fathers and carers (Deano).

It is also important to recall at this point another key finding and discussion that was highlighted in response to the first Research Question cited above. Self-awareness about the emotional damage of their work was shown by many participants, as well as an awareness of the suffering of their colleagues within their own teams and within other more distant police teams. Participants positioned themselves as caring individuals despite the way they felt they are treated by managers, and many felt an obligation to intervene and support others through



difficult times precisely because of their perception that the organisation fails to provide this. For example, if a colleague is off work with depression, PTSD symptoms or a physical injury, they will often make contact and stay connected with them. Unfortunately, this compulsion to care is sometimes prompted by the death by suicide of a colleague. It is at this crisis point that some of the officers I interviewed realised the extent of their colleague's suffering and became acutely aware of how little support is given by the organisation. An example of this was given by Woody who reflected on the death of a colleague: 'How did we miss this?' He described how, since this tragedy, he had become more attuned to the mental health issues of others and described a compulsion to act more quickly in future to avoid other suicides happening.

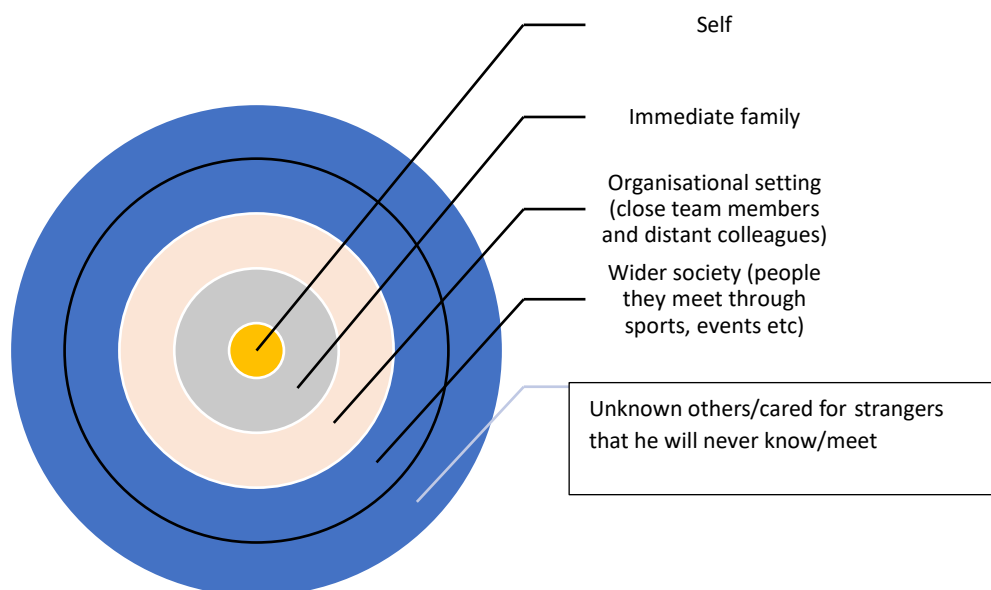
Other officers described never wanting to experience the funeral of a colleague again, and never wanting to face their bereaved parents, children or partner. It is significant that all suicide victims referred to in this study were male. This is in accordance with ONS data (2019) that reveals that men are much more likely to commit suicide than women across the general UK population (male suicide rates, at the time of writing, are 17.2 deaths per 100,000 compared to female suicide rates of 5.4 deaths per 100,000). According to the ONS (2020), 50 males in protective services occupations committed suicide in 2020 compared to 6 females in the same occupational group. This also concurs with empirical studies that assert that men working in the police service find it very difficult to ask for help because of the stigma associated with disclosing mental health problems (Edwards et al., 2021). This is thought to be largely because, within the prevailing culture of dominance and masculinity (Evans et al., 2013), there is an expectation of emotional self-control (Bell and Eski, 2016), combined with a lack of mental health training and a need for a change in attitudes towards it (Soomro and Yanos, 2018).

My response to the second of the three Research Questions above foregrounded the prevalence of emotional damage suffered by most officers as a result of traumatising police work, stressful and unhealthy working conditions, and an uncaring management culture, all of which takes a heavy toll on the officer and his family. As one described policing as ‘a cancer that spreads into the home’ and ‘destroys all relationships within it’. Many father-officers in my study admitted that they had tried to preserve their family life and relationships but found this to be very difficult. Many had been divorced and/or remarried, which they attributed to an inability to reconcile the emotional demands of their job with home-life. Many discussed the strategies they had developed to stop the spilling over of emotional dirt into family life. These strategies included downplaying and reframing the danger and trauma they face when talking about work to loved ones, which they felt served to protect them from worrying about their father’s safety at work. Officers also described a feeling of dependence upon their partners to assume the role of an ‘emotional anchor and protector’ i.e. someone who performs the emotional labour required to support the officer and the rest of the family when the emotional dirt threatens to engulf them. By avoiding aesthetic triggers that remind officers of traumatic events (crowds, loud noises, TV shows featuring emergency work - to name but a few - but see Appendix Eleven for further examples) officers report being able to feel more able to be emotionally present in family life and activities. And finally, by encouraging family-members to participate in a variety of activities together, including sports and hobbies such as fishing, gardening, road cycling, or gym-work, officers describe regaining a sense of peace, enjoyment, and connection with their loved ones through shared interests.

What then can this study tell us about the caring networks, needs and behaviours of frontline protective services roles, through this critical case study of the UK Police Service? And what can we learn from this study about the future conditions of possibility for frontline protective

service workers who are, or aspire to be, involved father-carers? It is evident from the findings of this study that many officers have begun to address what Chatzidakis et al. (2020: 19) term the ‘pervasiveness of carelessness’, which resides in the context of the police service. Officers show care for, care about and care with others according to the proximal social relationship that they have with other people, including family, colleagues, and wider society. This is illustrated in Figure Ten below, which shows concentric circles, each representing these proximal social relations and the degree of closeness to the father-carer in a frontline protective role. Each circle of care is then explained and discussed in more detail below.

**Figure Ten: Circles of care for frontline fathers**



The central circle represents the self, and the next closest to it is the officer’s immediate family. The organisational setting represents his slightly wider proximal relations, i.e., the colleagues with whom he works on the same team (closest), and those in other police teams (further away)

with whom he may come into contact less frequently and not be so familiar with. Wider societal relationships are represented in the furthest circle from the centre and includes individuals with whom the officer engages with from time to time through clubs, events and other social activities outside of work and family. There could also be an as yet non-existent, other circle of 'unknown others/cared for strangers' that he will never know/meet.

## **Self**

Many officers in this study identified that they have struggled or are still struggling with emotional difficulties as a result of their police work and conditions, including difficult emotional encounters with the public, victims or perpetrators of crime. This has led to long-lasting problems such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (CPTSD), burn-out, depression or anxiety, for example. As has been discussed previously, many officers view their managers as incapable of providing support, or as being unwilling to support them with emotional difficulties, and explained that any mental health provision, i.e., counselling, within the service has been lacking since the introduction of austerity measures. This agrees with previous literature about police wellbeing that asserts that despite a variety of wellbeing initiatives and strategies coming into place, including Oscar Kilo, and the National Wellbeing Service for example, greater insight into police trauma and stress is needed (Pythian et al., 2022). Many officers have decided to access therapy or counselling outside the organisation and have experimented with different types of it in an attempt to find one that can effectively treat emotional trauma-related conditions such as PTSD and CPTSD.

Some of those I interviewed discussed how engaging with talking therapies such as CBT (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy) had involved sharing their thoughts with a counsellor who

was trained to listen and not to judge them. However, many officers perceive that counsellors do not fully understand the specific issues facing frontline officers, especially CPTSD which comes as a result of ongoing rather than one-off exposure to trauma. Officers felt that offloading in this way did not really change anything for them. For example, Dazzer in Armed Response explained ‘I could sit and tell you I’m worried because my wife has cancer, but when I leave here, guess what... she’s still got cancer!’ Disillusioned with traditional talking therapies, some officers described then trying a course of Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing (EMDR) which is a fairly new form of therapy, developed specifically for the treatment of PTSD and CPTSD. It helps individuals to reprocess emotion-laden memories and view them in a different way, so the memories do not feel as distressing in the future (BACP, 2024; EMDR Association UK, 2024). EMDR is recognised as a treatment for PTSD by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) and the World Health Organisation (WHO). This is significant because it demonstrates that many police officers, who do not receive support from their managers or organisation, are seeking support outside it, and are willing to experiment with different forms of therapy to improve their emotional wellbeing. They view this as an important part of caring for the self because it enables them to process negative emotions and be better able to forge healthy relationships with family members, colleagues, and wider society.

### **Immediate family**

The immediate (nuclear) family is understood here as consisting of people who the fathers in this study want to care for – those in their immediate relationships but who are not necessarily blood relatives. According to Joan Tronto, ‘*caring for*’ includes physical activities (Chatzidakis et al., 2020: 21) and for the fathers in this study, this involves practical activities such as feeding

their young children and bathing them, but it is also demonstrated through the protective paternalism they exhibit. For example, during the Covid-19 pandemic, caring for the family involved police officers removing their uniforms, radios and stab-vests in the garage or outside, so as not to contaminate the home with the virus (Dazzer, Armed Response). More generally, many also expressed how they seek to protect their family members from the emotional trauma associated with their work, i.e., they do not share with their families the gruesome details of their work, or they reframe it as a boring admin-based job (as noted above). They described how they try to care for their family's wellbeing by encouraging engagement in hobbies and sports.

Chatzidakis et al. (2020: 33) point out that mothering is 'upheld in ... culture as the archetypal caring relationship, with ... "rigidly idealised" [practices]' that can burden women. In my own study, many fathers were desirous of a closer caring relationship with their children and partners, pressing for flexible working arrangements, seeking caregiving role models within their ranks, and sharing care and domestic labour with their partners however they could, even if this meant being 'ships in the night, passing a child from one parent to the other, between shifts' (Addie, Safer Neighbourhoods).

### **Organisational setting**

The organisational setting is the UK Police Service and the place of work for the participants of this study. It is also an example of a setting where *The Care Manifesto's* (2020: 33) concept of 'caring kinships' might be expanded. By this I mean that care is provided in this setting beyond the confines of the immediate family described in the previous section and is extended into caring networks of 'imagined' kinship in the context of the work organisation. For some

officers, their colleagues are described as ‘family,’ with those closest to them being ascribed the status of ‘brother’, ‘sister’, ‘work mum’, or being referred to as ‘like a dad to me’ (Jenson, Response). This aligns with du Plessis et al. (2021) and Thompson et al. (2023) in their empirical research which highlights that officers can form a brotherhood with colleagues and that the narrative of the family exists within this organisation. However, for other colleagues, the concept of ‘strangers like me’ is more appropriate and can be applied and developed in this context. What this means is that officers look after each other or care for each other because they are strangers united by their common experience of doing the same job, and because their work and family lives resemble one another’s in terms of common struggles and pressures reconciling the two spheres.

The findings of this study have also highlighted how officers care for and about each other collaboratively because of a mutual recognition of their shared, situated vulnerability in the face of the threat and trauma posed by police-work. This is evident when Deano stated that he ‘depends upon his colleagues for his safety at work’ and when a number of officers described ‘being aware of’ and ‘responsive to’ the emotional difficulties faced by their colleagues. Not only do officers mutually recognise and support their own team members, i.e. those who are closest to them at work, but they show that they can also do this on occasion for more distant colleagues who work on other teams. These colleagues might not be known very well, if at all, and are what Chatzidakis et al. (2020) term ‘strangers like me’. They share similarities but are not known to each other, i.e. are strangers who share the common experience of dirty work that is emotionally damaging. Officers describe not really knowing some officers who they have helped; they work on different teams or in different functions, but they are willing to show care to these strangers who they recognise as being ‘like them’ by listening to them, talking about

their problems, giving advice, and going out for a coffee with those who might be otherwise 'left to rot at home by the organisation' (Charlie, Safer Neighbourhoods).

### **Wider society**

Officers in this study have also expressed how they engage in caring relationships with individuals outside of work - for example, in church congregations they are a part of, in a variety of sports clubs and even in the extreme endurance events they have participated in (such as Iron Man events, Jungle Treks for charity, expeditions). They described being 'amazed and restored' by some of these human connections as they are so different to those they encounter at work and are not characterised by out of place or disruptive emotions (Ward et al., 2020) or experienced as emotionally damaging. For example, Dazzer said 'people can be very kind at charity events, they just want to help.' It is in these events and groups that officers become part of a wider network, or community whilst interacting with the outside world. They do not feel villainised by the public (De Camargo, 2022) but feel cared for and can express their emotions e.g., within a church, community group or club. Endurance events take on a significance beyond simply being a focus for fitness and stamina; they are an occasion when officers can meet strangers, i.e. people they do not know, and realise that they can depend upon their kindness, care and respect (Segal, 2023). They enjoy and benefit hugely from these types of occasions in terms of their emotional health because they are recognising 'strangers like me' (Chatzidakis et al., 2020) in these social gatherings, where individuals are drawn together by a common purpose or interest and where they share common circumstances, experiences and outlooks, which enable them to feel connected to one another.



### **Unknown others/cared for strangers**

Wider society can also include the public whom the officers serve and this relationship mobilises Chatzidakis et al.'s (2020) concept of promiscuous caring. This means caring for and with people who are not 'like me'. They are different to those we identify with and this makes it much harder to empathise with them. How then do officers *care for* and *about* individuals who are not like themselves? As an example, Greg stated that he felt most sympathy for child victims of abuse or the elderly; those who he perceived to be some of the most vulnerable or in need of protection in society. These individuals are most unlike him because they are weak or vulnerable and open to abuse. They bring out his protective paternalism, his care. On the other hand, Oshi described his feelings after finding a deceased male in his 30s who had committed suicide by hanging. Oshi described sitting with the body waiting for the family and funeral director to arrive and explained that 'this is just what young men do; they commit suicide because they have no-one to express their feelings to'. He felt less protective and caring towards this type of individual because he was too like him. The depth of psychological analysis that understanding these dynamics would require is beyond the scope of this thesis, but it does appear in the data that there are some interesting and important things to report on, that shape how the male police officers I interviewed related to child victims of abuse as opposed to a young man with serious mental health problems. It may be that officers feel able to provide paternalistic care for the former because they see themselves as very different from them and they position themselves therefore as the *carer* in that encounter rather than the *cared for*. They recognise that they are different to the innocent and vulnerable victim. Whereas when an officer is dealing with a young male who has committed suicide or has ended up in a violent altercation for example, they find it much harder to provide protective paternalism as they see themselves as more like these types of individuals.

It is also interesting that officers in this study show that they care about others they don't know, by revealing how they wish to bring about positive change in the lives of many of the victims and suspects they deal with and try to prevent further harm from being caused to victims by offenders where possible. This is not a surprise since restorative justice approaches are becoming increasingly integrated into the police service as well as other parts of the criminal justice system (Hobson et al, 2022). The restorative justice movement, which stands in contrast to punitive approaches (Hobson et al, 2022) and a retributive philosophy that characterises responses to crime in Western nations (Saulnier and Sivasubramaniam (2015) aims to repair harm caused by criminal activity through a process which involves the victim, offender and community, i.e. the objective is to restore all affected parties (Braithwaite, 2002). This is understood to empower victims through giving them a voice (Lind, Tyler and Huo, 1997; Platow, 2013), allowing them to express their emotions and receive answers or apologies from offenders (Bolitho, 2012; Zehr, 1997). It views the crime as harmful but the offender as worthy of redemption (Tyler et al, 2007), supports offenders' reintegration into society and reduces the likelihood of them re-offending. Finally, restorative justice helps to rebuild trust in the justice process through collective responsibility (Ashworth, 2002; Marshall, 1999).

The inclusive approach of restorative justice, which emphasizes the importance of involving all parties affected by crime in the justice process aligns well with the notion of caring promiscuously (Chatzidakis et al, 2022) as it an approach that ensures that care is given to all (Collins, 2016). For many police officers, community engagement involves resolving conflicts and addressing harm. Such a community centric role and approach reflects the *Care Manifesto's* (2022) principles of promiscuous care as it fosters a sense of collective responsibility and mutual aid or support According to The College of Policing (2022) it is an approach

that prioritises respect and fairness as well as empathy and healing according to Walgrave and Aertson, (1996).

Despite their commitments to *care for* and *care about* others in wider society, the findings of this research also reveal that frontline officers sometimes dehumanize the people they are working with, including alleged criminals, victims and members of the public. Some participants positioned criminals as ‘human waste’ and ‘scrotes’, with one referring to the corpse of an elderly person as ‘it’ and something to be ‘chucked in the van’ when there was a shortage of ambulances during the Covid-19 pandemic. Here, the insights from the Care Manifesto described earlier in the Theoretical Framing chapter, do not appear to help in understanding why those who purport or strive to care for and about others might behave in this seemingly uncaring way on occasion.. In addition, the dirty work literature on coping doesn’t have the theoretical sophistication needed to explain why there is such an apparent disjuncture between a commitment to caring and a call for a more caring work environment, when there is a simultaneous discourse that de-humanises criminals and the dead. In order to provide more insight into how and why this apparent contradiction might occur, I will first return to the insights revealed about policing culture in the Context chapter of this thesis, before exploring Douglas’s (1966) concepts of pollution, purity and taboo, as well as the concept of othering. This will help to explain that officers might position and view dead bodies as objects and demean or dehumanise suspected criminals in order to cope with the demands of emotionally charged situations.

As has already been discussed, the police service in Britain is viewed as being in crisis, and as racist, sexist and misogynistic (Casey, 2023). In addition, manifestations of violence and

othering are at the core of policing and leads policing approaches that can treat some individuals or communities to be ‘objects’ to be policed (Williams and Clarke, 2018; Williams et al. 2023). Officers can behave in dangerous or negligent ways and can dismiss and dehumanise the public (White and Williams, 2023). Police responses to the public can be lacking in compassion (Kersley and Townsend, 2023), and certain othered groups and communities have felt the brunt of police abuse, and disproportionate use of stop and search tactics, i.e. including those who identify as young BAME men (Keeling, 2017), black mixed-race men (Long and Joseph-Salisbury, 2020) and black men (Box, 1983; White and Williams, 2023). This had led to a lack of trust or confidence in the police by those affected (Keeling, 2017) and where young BAME men can feel victimised, humiliated and even violated. Policing can be viewed as a site of oppression and resistance (Long and Joseph-Salisbury, 2020). Muslims have experienced increased stop and search, surveillance and othering of their communities (Cohen and Tufail, 2017; Younis, 2021) with a resultant damaging impact on community relations with the police (Keeling, 2017).

Women also suffer as a result of police and other agency inaction regarding the domestic violence that many experience, where charge and conviction rates remain unacceptably low. In a recent report by the Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales, written by Dame Nicola Jacobs, victims of domestic abuse state that they want to be treated like human beings by the criminal justice system (Jacobs, 2025). One explanation for the lack of compassion, negligent and abusive behaviour in some officers comes from empirical studies that reveal that officers learn what it means to be a police officer and how to interact with the public through on-the-job socialisation (Loftus, 2008). This means they learn from and being around colleagues and managers who, as already shown in my own study’s Findings chapter, largely experience the police service as an uncaring organisation and view managers and

senior leaders as aggressive and even psychopathic in some instances. These are the types of individuals and the type of culture that surround and mould officers, and where the discourse is dehumanising. In addition, Loftus (2010) posits that officers develop a persona of pessimism, suspicion and intolerance towards any who challenge the status quo, which frames their interactions with the public, and the situations they are called to handle.

If the police culture has led to a manifestation of the othering of individuals who come into contact with the police, further examination is now required of the police officers' point of view. Why for example, might they come to think of and describe a deceased individual as 'it' (an object, not a person), a 'stiff' or suspected criminals as 'scrotes' or 'human waste' as was revealed in the Findings chapter. First there needs to be an understanding of the conditions of their work. Taking the example of attending a sudden death, a previous study carried out by Carpenter et al (2014) revealed that death investigation is viewed by officers as very time consuming and takes them away from the more exciting elements of police work. It involves a large amount of paperwork, requires being in close proximity to a dead body for long periods of time, often with associated foul smells, and disturbing sights and sounds, and is considered one of the most unpleasant aspects of police work, usually reserved for new and inexperienced officers (Carpenter et al, 2014).

The emotional labour (Hochschild, 1979) involved when dealing with the dead and engaging with grieving families and colleagues during a death investigation is also important to consider as officers can reduce or increase the amount of suffering experienced by other individuals. The controlling of emotions is a priority for officers (Aaron, 2000), and showing fear is viewed as a weakness (Carpenter et al, 2014). Inappropriate emotional reactions to

tragedy, disgusting smells and sounds associated with dead bodies have to be managed, so many officers reserve inappropriate gallows humour for interactions with colleagues after incidents or when out of sight and hearing of the public, in to cope with the emotions of fear, repulsion and stress they might have experienced (Vivona, 2014). They have to learn to separate the body from the person. This is common amongst other professions which deal with the dead or with alive human bodies, ie paramedics, coroners, surgeons. Expressions of humour when confronted by deathwork is common amongst other emergency workers for example, according to Scott, (2007).

Whilst police officers are expected to present as calm and competent in tragic, chaotic or emotionally charged situations in order to uphold professional standards, this can be difficult when a death is particularly challenging for those involved (Young, 1995). Officers in my own study expressed how difficult it was to be in contact with a grieving family, or when a child has died and they have similar aged children of their own. They can develop a 'detached and dispassionate demeanour' (Pogrebin and Poole, 1991) in order to keep a social and emotional distance from such emotionally difficult situations (Howard et al, 2000) and this constrain their ability to show compassion (Henry, 2004). Indeed emotional engagement with the families of deceased individuals is viewed as unrealistic and too demanding (Frewin et al, 2006) for officers who are young in age or service and who might not yet know how to use words of comfort or behave in a professionally acceptable way yet, due to their immaturity and inexperience (Henry, 2004). Hochschild's (1979) term 'pinch' is particularly useful here as it describes the discrepancy between what officers really feel and what they should feel. A response used by officers to deal with the challenge to the sense of order that sudden deaths bring (Young, 1995), and the emotional strain of dealing with the dead, is to talk about death and dead bodies in a nonchalant, light-hearted or humorous way (Vivona, 2014), sometimes

mocking tragic circumstances (Carpenter et al, 2014). This mockery or use of humour helps to bring about the establishment of a new sense of order, calm and control for police officers and release the tension felt by dealing with death (Loftus, 2010; Carpenter et al, 2014). However, this nonchalant or mocking behaviour or response by officers can make them appear uncaring when performing death work and dealing with grieving families. It is also a source of criticism of the police by ‘coronial colleagues’ i.e. other professionals involved in a death investigation (Carpenter et al, 2014).

Anthropologist and cultural theorist, Mary Douglas’s work *Purity and Danger* (1966), focuses on concepts of purity, pollution and taboo. Whilst she does not use the term ‘othering’ explicitly, the analysis she conducted of how societies categorize and exclude what is considered dirty or impure, or ‘matter out of place’ (1966: 44) can be related to the broader concept of othering. This is useful as it helps to understand why police officers might dehumanize and demean certain members of the public they come into contact with, i.e. by describing alleged criminals as ‘human waste’ to be removed by ‘society’s sewer’ (the police). First, by defining dirt as ‘matter out of place’, Douglas (1966: 44) implies that there is a ‘set of ordered relations and a contravention of that order.’ Criminals, according to my own participants, are viewed as ‘waste’ as they are contravening the rules and laws in place in society to protect its citizens and are therefore out of place, or as Douglas (1966) states when referring to an anomaly, it ‘does not fit a given series’ (1966: 47), ie they are resisting the rules, transgressing society’s laws and are therefore behaving unacceptably. This threatens the social structure and therefore criminals are labelled as such (they have committed a crime) and are viewed as dangerous and disgusting. In the case of the dead body being described as ‘it’ i.e. an object, or where gallows humour is used to release the tension and stress experienced by officers when handling dead bodies, Douglas’s (1966) work is also useful to

understand this. She states that any anomaly, ambiguity or transgression will elicit some kind of reaction, but is not restricted to disgust, or a sense of threat. Other reactions might include 'laughter, revulsion and shock' (1966: 37). Laughter was a common reaction from the participants of my own study, often used in conjunction with what might be considered inappropriate comments when describing particularly tense or dangerous situations, ie 'We took him outside and thought about sticking a bag over his head!' when describing a member of the public who came into a police station during the Covid-19 pandemic threatening to cough and spit at officers.

The dehumanising and demeaning descriptions of criminals are therefore tactics used by officers to position themselves as having a different status and role in society compared to the criminals they deal with. Their role is to uphold social order and they classify those who breach the rules as unacceptable in society, removing them as a threat to it. They see themselves as different to the criminals in this respect and engage in tactical othering of them. This tactical coping mechanism is used by officers to cope with dealing with the dead and grieving families. If they were to constantly try to connect with them, empathise with, or care for and about them, as advocated by the Care Manifesto (2022) and Segal (2023), they would not be able to do their job. It is not the case that police officers hate the dead, criminals, or grieving families, but by tactically othering or objectifying them in a way which minimises harm to them, they and their colleagues are able to create some of the emotional distance needed to be able to cope with and bring some order to chaotic working conditions and horrific situations.



In conclusion, this section has shown diagrammatically and through discussion of the diagram in Figure Ten above, how *The Care Manifesto's* (2020) vision of care and its concepts of caring kinships, strangers like me and promiscuous care can be applied to the police officer experience. It also shows how *The Care Manifesto* can be developed, through understanding that there are expanding circles of care to consider, from the closest (self) and family, i.e. the people we love, who are connected to us, and caring more promiscuously for the unknown other. Within those circles of care is a mid-organisational level that has been explored in this study, and I have demonstrated through the study how important that organisational level is both as a barrier to promiscuous caring but also as a vehicle for enabling it to happen.

**Future conditions of possibility: What might enable police father-carers to be more caring?**

As has been discussed in this chapter, the prevailing managerial culture of the police service perpetuates the very hegemonic masculinity within it. There is very clearly a need for a much more recognition-based and supportive infrastructure for police officers, including those with their own caring responsibilities such as parents. There needs to be a much more open discourse around the importance of and need for caring, and a change in police culture and values towards one that recognises mutual vulnerability and interdependency at the organisational level. This is when *The Care Manifesto's* concept and radical vision (2020) of promiscuous caring in a wider social sphere becomes more possible and more plausible. This is where frontline protective service roles can show that they don't just care for themselves and their immediate family but can care with colleagues at the organisational level and care about individuals in wider society, whom they recognise as being less like them, but also that we are all mutually interdependent. Yet, as this study has shown, hegemonic masculinity is part of a wider set of

factors that preclude promiscuous caring in the police service, and by/for police officers. One of the main reasons why police officers cannot be fully engaged fathers and carers is because the police service has seen its resources depleted since austerity measures were introduced in 2009 under the then Conservative Government. This has resulted in more police officers working longer hours, sometimes single crewed, with more administration to complete, which has led to them being able to spend less time with their families.

This chapter has discussed how police officers who are father-carers are unable to be as involved in their children's lives as they would like to be or feel restricted in how they care for their families, colleagues and individuals within wider society. The next section discusses why this is the case, with a view to thinking about what might be done to address it.

### **The difficulty with being an involved father-carer when working in a frontline role in the UK Police Service**

What is it about being a frontline protective service worker that makes it so difficult for a man to be an involved father and carer? Drawing on the discussions that have taken place in this chapter and key literature included in earlier chapters of this thesis, this section aims to answer that question concisely.

The Covid-19 pandemic saw workers across different occupational groups working from home and being able to spend more time with their families (Kelland et al., 2020; Burgess and Goldman, 2021). This particular time also threw into sharp relief how frontline workers, within the police service, NHS and fire service for example, were excluded from this opportunity

because of their ‘critical worker’ status (Gov.uk, 2022). Simply put, they had to continue working in their frontline roles regardless (De Camargo, 2020; Johnson and Hohl, 2023). Often with inadequate protection from the Covid-19 virus, especially in the first few months of the pandemic (De Camargo, 2022), police officers and other critical workers and their families were viewed as being at the highest risk of infection (Khan, 2021).

Aside from being treated differently to other occupational groups during times of national crisis, and perhaps with fewer rights and representation as they are not allowed to join a trade union (Home Office, 2016), police officers face a myriad of occupational and organisational stressors (Maran et al., 2022) that make it very difficult for them to fulfil their caring responsibilities. Frontline policing is, for example, recognised as an extreme form of work (Townsend and Loudoun, 2023) and as one of the most dangerous, high risk and stressful occupations (Tehrani, 2010; De Camargo, 2022) where officers have to work long shifts and handle traumatic situations routinely. Only last year (2023) the UK Police Service was the subject of a high-profile investigation, the Casey Review (2023). Amongst the key causes for concern unveiled by this review was the prevalence of enduring institutional misogyny, racism, homophobia, transphobia and poor leadership. Whilst the service attempts to repair its damaged image, reduce gender imbalances amongst its ranks and rebuild public trust through greater care for victims of crime, this remains an organisation with a hegemonically masculine culture that reproduces traditional gender roles which serve to maintain male dominance (Agocs et al., 2015; Kurtz et al., 2012) and places no or minimal value on caring for employees or their caregiving needs. This was reinforced by Home Secretary Suella Braverman’s Common Sense Policing speech (April 2023) during which she made no mention of the difficulties facing officers and did not appear to prioritise their wellbeing. Budget cuts have meant that forms of support that were once available have been drastically reduced as a result of austerity measures

(Brunetto et al., 2023). Previous studies have suggested that these measures have led to lack of support for those suffering emotionally, with a resultant decline in officer wellbeing (Brunetto et al., 2023) as well as poor employee motivation and engagement (Bakker, 2015).

My own findings concur with previous studies such as these by revealing that within what is experienced as an uncaring organisation, officers receive wholly inadequate mental health support from managers and perceive that their health and safety is often endangered. This lack of care is also keenly felt by fathers and carers, who perceive that their managers do not recognise their needs and aspirations of being involved dads/care givers and who penalise, mock and ridicule them for asking for flexible working. In addition, according to my findings, many managers are viewed as selfish individuals who take pleasure in sadistically denying others what they need. In short, life as a father-carer in the police is difficult because many managers are lacking the core characteristics of caring agents described by Tronto (2013); they are incompetent, unresponsive, and inattentive to fathers' and carers' needs. This type of management also resounds with feminist sociologist Bev Skeggs (2022) who suggested that wherever we look we see evidence of chilling cruelty from those with the greatest power and where the care-less are rewarded. According to my findings, many officers have to rely upon the exception: those few good managers who can show empathy and give support to officers with parenting and/or caregiving responsibilities.

As an emotionally dirty occupation (McMurray and Ward, 2014) which requires 'the handling of difficult, burdensome or out of place emotions (Gunby and Carline, 2020: 345), police officers are similar to other dirty workers who suffer the stigma associated with working with feelings that 'threaten the solidarity, self-conception or preferred orders of a given individual

or community' (McMurray and Ward, 2014: 12). This requires the performance of emotional labour to suppress/induce certain feelings that 'sustain an outward performance' (Gunby and Carline, 2020: 345) deemed appropriate to others (Hochschild, 1983). The stress and trauma associated with the relentless handling of difficult, volatile, unpredictable individuals can lead to a spillover of emotional dirt into family life for many officers according to this study. This is something that many seek to prevent. However as many are also suffering from PTSD, depression and anxiety, they feel unable to be the kinds of fathers they wish to be. Some dissociate from family life, preferring to keep silent or spend time alone in order to cope with the rigors of their work. Some grieve for the lost memories of the many routine and special family occasions they have missed out on due to being physically absent whilst working shifts, or emotionally absent due to having long term and inadequately treated mental health issues. So what needs to be in place, in order to improve the lives of father-carers in the police service in the future? The next section considers some possibilities that have been drawn from the insights of the *Care Manifesto* (2020) and Segal's (2023) book *Lean on Me: A Politics of Radical Care*. It represents the beginnings of my own 'manifesto' written specifically to redress the lack of care shown to frontline police officers.

### **Future conditions of possibility for father-carers on the frontline of the UK Police Service**

A more ideal and caring police service would learn from the lessons of the Covid-19 pandemic where frontline workers who were most at risk from the virus received negligible (and where it did exist) arguably negligent support (Chatzidakis et al., 2020). In future they would be given the right amount and type of resources needed, including timely distribution of sufficient PPE to protect them and their families from viral contamination. Police officers, who are still most at risk of suffering emotionally and physically because of the trauma and danger they face

would be better protected and cared for by the police service. It has been recognised that hospitals have been and remain in a state of overwhelm and crisis (Chatzidakis et al., 2020) and that other caring institutions are on the point of collapse with workers routinely exhausted (Segal, 2023) so the police service needs to be more widely recognised as being in the same situation. Indeed, Tronto suggests that there should be no caring exemptions (2013), meaning there should be adequate care for everyone. Police officers should not therefore be excluded from care. They need to be cared for because they are subjected to constant danger and trauma and are highly vulnerable to emotional damage. The current levels of this damage present a clinical and public sector crisis, without the right resources, monitoring or interventions available to help them (Brewin, 2022). In addition, they offer a protective service to the British public, where they are expected to show care for victims of crime. To respond to this call to care for others, they too must be cared for and about.

This is in line with the suggestion by Segal (2023), that vulnerability is an aspect of shared life and in order to give and receive care well we need time, support and resources (2023). Therefore, in a more caring police service, budgets would be created and used to provide mental health support for all officers. Communal areas such as staff rooms and cafeterias would be re-introduced within police stations and section houses would be re-built to provide officers with affordable housing and a place to convene and talk to other officers. Shift length and shift rotation would be managed more effectively in order to provide more flexibility and prevent officers from working excessive hours, with longer breaks given between shifts to allow better recovery from the exhausting effects of policing. Time spent serving on the frontline would be reduced to prevent burnout and PTSD and more time would be allocated to officers who have to care for victims. This research has shown that they do not currently feel that they have enough time to do this properly because of the need to complete admin or rush to endless

callouts during their shifts. If officers were given the right to strike, they could fight for improved working conditions and have a voice.

The culture of policing would work towards ‘overcoming’ gender bifurcated notions of care and vulnerability, and see the latter not as opposed to protection, but as part of it. Officers would be enabled to be less macho and display figuratively feminine traits of caring for admitting vulnerability and caring for others (Chatzidakis et al., 2020). This might involve providing them with the space and time to express their feelings. At present, due to the stigma associated with asking for help and the austerity-driven erosion of organisational mental health support, many officers pay for their own therapy or counselling in their own time. These individualised notions of resilience and self-care (Chatzidakis et al., 2020) would be recognised as a wholly insufficient solution and instead, the right kind of treatment would be offered by the organisation, at the right time, for those who need it. Particular investment should be made in contemporary therapies with proven success in the treatment of PTSD and CPTSD, such as EMDR.

All parents in the police service would be fully supported so that they can be more fully involved in family life and are able to care for their children and partners when needed. According to Segal (2023) individuals are able to care for others when they themselves receive help, support and feel cared for. So, rather than undermining, ignoring and ridiculing the care work of fathers or the requests of those who aspire to be more involved fathers, the police service would support fathers by enabling their access to flexible working arrangements for example. Providing fathers with the opportunity to care for their children and be more physically and emotionally present in family life, would allow them to fully embrace familial

care, the most intimate sphere according to Chatzidakis et al., 2020. This will also go some way to reducing gender inequality (Chatzidakis et al., 2020) amongst serving officers rather than continuing to assume that care is primarily for mothers. In addition it would enable men and women to share in care's joys and burdens in a more egalitarian way.

If care were put front and centre in organisational life within the police service, instead of allowing carelessness to reign (Chatzidakis et al., 2020) there would be a greater recognition and embracing of interdependency amongst officers, which means that they could better look after their colleagues emotionally and physically. In addition, creating a more caring police service means cultivating an ethics of care and solidarity in all relationships, i.e. where officers can care beyond their immediate kinship structures, to other colleagues in distant teams, and for strangers in society.

This pressing vision is certainly not without its challenges. It may appear too idealistic at present because it is perceived as being too different from the existing hegemonic culture or managerial models, or beyond what is currently possible given the constraints of reduced police funding. In reality however, some of these seemingly radical or revolutionary care solutions (Segal, 2023) are low-to-zero cost and could be achieved if leaders became more open to the idea of change and critical reflection. In a more ideal police service for example, it would be accepted that individuals rely upon those around them to stay human (Segal, 2023) and therefore police leaders would become more dependable, compassionate, empathetic and enabling instead of being viewed as disparaging or condescending when presented with requests for physical, mental health support, or when father-carers need help.



Compassionate leadership is needed. As a practice (Simpson et al., 2021), this style of leadership describes the ability to notice distress in others, empathise with their pain or struggle, appraise the contextual factors, then respond by building resources that alleviate the suffering (Simpson et al., 2020; Worline and Dutton 2017). An added benefit of leading in this way is that compassion breeds more compassion (Segal, 2023).

Therefore, a good place to start for the police service and other frontline protective service organisations would be learning from existing examples of caring, compassionate leadership in environments where suffering or crises have been present. Whilst such examples remain largely scarce (Croswell and Tschakert, 2020), Jacinda Ahern, New Zealand Prime Minister (2017-2023) has been described as compassionate (Wilson 2020). She was widely praised for her ability to provide protection and comfort to the people of New Zealand during a time of crisis; the Covid-19 pandemic (Maak et al., 2021). Existing and aspirant police managers could be taught the skills of compassion, empathy and understanding, as well as the language of care (Segal, 2023), and these could be permitted to co-exist alongside the existing language of police banter and macho bravado, becoming additional coping mechanisms. Finally, the development of a narrative-based culture would mean that the survival stories of father-carers and other officers who have experienced and admitted vulnerability, neglect, pain and loss could be shared, heard, learned from and reflected on more routinely. This would help to erode the stigma around vulnerability and enable future officers to be better understood and cared for.

This section has summarised the main reasons why father-carers in the police service find it so difficult to be involved fathers and what the future conditions of possibility might be for them.

The next section provides a brief summary of this chapter, before leading into the concluding chapter of this thesis.

### **Chapter summary**

This chapter has discussed the answers to three main Research Questions: i) What does it mean to be a father-carer who wants to be involved, but who also works in a frontline protective service role? ii) How do father-carers who are frontline protective service providers experience caregiving fatherhood? and iii) What could be the future conditions of possibility for frontline protective service workers who are, or aspire to be involved father-carers?

It is evident from this study that father-carers in this context are unable to be as involved in their children's and families' lives as they would like to be, or they feel restricted in how they are able to care for their families, colleagues, and individuals within wider society. The reasons for this are varied but are largely due to occupational and organisational stressors, and the wider social, economic and political landscape shaping these. Occupational and organisational level factors include shift working, extreme working, emotional dirt, the hegemonic culture of the organisation, a lack of organisational care for employees and their needs, the prevalence of poor leadership and management, and the combined impact of these factors on the individual and his family life. Wider social, economic and political factors intersecting with these include a hegemonic gender landscape, austerity measures and successive government policies that preclude union membership, and which have cut policing budgets over recent decades. In combination, these factors mean that not simply caring promiscuously, but caring at all, is extremely difficult for police officers as frontline protective service workers. A radical vision for a more caring police service was envisaged as one that recognises their vulnerability to

physical and emotional damage and works towards providing proper resources to mitigate risk of injury and alleviate their suffering. Father-carers of the future should be fully supported to become the involved parents they aspire to be. Key to shaping the police service of the future is the development of compassionate leaders amongst its ranks, the use of the language of care and the inclusion of narratives that allow stories of vulnerability, pain and loss to be shared and learned from.

## **Conclusion**

It is well recognised that the role of a police officer is one of the most stressful occupations (Tehrani, 2010; De Camargo, 2022) as well as an emotional dirty one where officers have to handle their own difficult emotions as well as those of others (McMurray and Ward, 2014; 2020). Exposure to stress and trauma in policing is known to be frequent (Irizar et al., 2022) and officers are particularly susceptible to psychological complications (De Camargo, 2019) psychosocial issues (Fielding et al., 2018; Maran et al., 2022) or emotional damage (Brewin, 2022). The emotional wellbeing of officers is an under-researched area (Deschênes et al., 2018) and has been recently viewed as a clinical and public sector crisis, without the right resources, monitoring or interventions available (Brewin, 2022). There is scant literature that explores how emotional dirt in occupations spills over into family life and how workers seek to stem its ill-effects.

The purpose of this qualitative research was to explore the lived experiences of fathers with caregiving responsibilities who also work in protective frontline roles. It has been built on feminist care ethics and emotional dirty work scholarship to elucidate answers to three main Research Questions. The theoretical and empirical contributions of this study are summarised below. The research involved interviewing twenty-seven serving police officers in frontline roles within the UK Police Service. The data gleaned from this critical case study highlighted that fathers in such a protective frontline emergency service role can find their work, and the culture to be significant barriers to their ability to be the kind of involved fathers they wish to be. However, the findings also reveal the strategies used by father-carers to mitigate the

damaging effects of policing in order to maintain healthy family lives and nurture caring relationships within and outside of the workplace.

The three Research Questions explored:

- i) What does it mean to be a father-carer who wants to be involved, but who also works in a frontline protective service role?
- ii) How do father-carers who are frontline protective service providers experience caregiving fatherhood? and:
- iii) What could be the future conditions of possibility for frontline protective service workers who are, or aspire to be involved father-carers?

First, in answering Research Question one ‘What does it mean to be a father-carer who wants to be involved, but who also works in a frontline protective service role? I highlighted some of the different meanings that officers attach to their work within frontline policing as fathers with caring responsibilities. For many officers working in a frontline role means being exposed to physical danger and difficult, emotionally charged interactions relentlessly. It is viewed as a guaranteed part of the job. This supports findings in other literature that suggest that policing is dangerous and extreme work (Tham et al., 2023; Townsend and Loudoun, 2023; Ward et al., 2020), understood as very high risk and stressful (Tehrani, 2010; De Camargo, 2022) but one where exposure to trauma is more than just frequent (Irizar et al., 2023); it is viewed as relentless and guaranteed. Other studies have shown that officers have to suppress their own feelings or perform ‘emotional neutrality’ (Jordan et al., 2019) in stressful, traumatic, emotionally charged situations such as these, and suppress authentic emotions in order to appear professional and conform to ‘display rules’ (Hochschild, 1983) or ‘official’ emotions (Grandey, 2000). This research concurs with those findings but also reveals that on occasion

officers not only have to manage their own emotions but those of multiple other parties simultaneously or in rapid succession. This can become overwhelming and can affect their relationships with family members. For example, the few partners and children of officers who participated in this research, described how officers bring their policing personality and behaviours into the home, which manifests as being harsh, blunt, judgemental, accusatory or bossy for example. Partners and children considered this to be unacceptable or out of place in the home and in need of management. Officers themselves described being pulled up about things they had said, being reminded to appear more sociable or simply not embarrass the family in public. The experiences, perceptions and strategies used by other family members, including children would be interesting and worthy of study, especially what they view as unwanted or unacceptable police officer behaviours and communication methods in the home and in wider society, for example.

It comes as no surprise that fifty percent of officers have taken sick leave in the past five years due to poor mental health (Police Firearms Officer Association, 2022) and that PTSD levels are much higher than within the general population (Bullock and Garland, 2020). In addition, the policing culture makes it hard for officers to discuss mental health with their managers (Bell and Eski, 2016), reluctant to speak up (Karaffa and Tochkov, 2013) or seek help even when feeling suicidal (Violanti, 1995). All officers in this study described their own mental health difficulties and those of colleagues. This study has revealed that reframing is used as coping strategy as it helps them to protect themselves by directing attention away from the most unpleasant aspects of their work to more meaningful parts of it (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999). Officer coping mechanisms have been explored in previous studies, including performing emotional neutrality (Ward et al., 2020), developing a warrior mindset (McLean et al., 2019) and hardening of personality (De Camargo, 2022) for example. The participants in my study however, revealed how they reframe negative emotional interactions with the public by using

a reflexively fatalistic approach towards society and crime and their role within these areas. This helped them to cope with the anxiety and tension they felt about their work. This concurs with the findings of a non-police study by Hayes et al. (2016) who suggested that a fatalistic approach can reduce fear, anxiety, or tension when in traumatic or threatening situations. Reflexivity here is a strategy of using subjectivity to examine social and psychosocial phenomena (Kuehner et al., 2016). For example, officers described crimes such as drug-dealing and theft as inevitable, enmeshed and ingrained in society. Domestic abuse was explained as being part of a cycle that will always exist as it is perpetuated within some families, handed from one generation to the next, regardless of police or social worker intervention. This reflexive fatalism shapes how officers present themselves to others both individually and collectively, to insiders such as colleagues and outsiders such researchers and family members.

Many police officers in this study experienced a significant lack of organisational care for them as individuals with caregiving responsibilities, or as individuals with health-related issues. They described emotionally charged conversations with line managers when they needed support or wanted to protect vulnerable loved ones during the Covid-19 pandemic and when they could not work from home. For many, seeking help is viewed as futile and mental health support within the police service is a purely rhetorical gesture. Lennie (2021) explains that officers avoid expressing emotions that make them look weak or unable to cope and this notion is supported in other studies which describe the service's hegemonic masculine culture (Alcadipani, 2020; Innes, 2003; Rabe-Hemp, 2009). Its stifling of emotional expression and the sense of shame and stigma follows those who seek support (Kennedy-Moore and Watson, 2001). Since all of the men in this study were father-carers, they had often wanted to work flexibly to look after children or partners or be present for family events. They did not feel that the majority of managers recognise the role and desires of involved fathers and there is little done to accommodate or support them. According to previous studies, the hypermasculine

culture that prevails in policing reproduces traditional gender roles that maintain male dominance (Agocs et al., 2015; Kurtz et al., 2012). Life as a father-carer in the police means having a perception of being managed in a way that is inhuman, incompetent, unresponsive, and inattentive. This is the antithesis of the human, competent, responsive, attentive caring agent described by Tronto (1993). In keeping with Kelland's (2022) findings, which explored fathers' experiences generally: many fathers in the police context who request flexible working feel bullied, harassed, belittled, ridiculed and mocked by managers. However, what stood out in the context of my study is that as an emotional response to this phenomenon, officers vilify their managers; some were described simply as 'selfish' or 'me-centric', but others were imbued with psychopathic qualities. Officers suggested that police managers enjoy inflicting pain on others by denying access to flexible working and that this results from years of unhealed, unprocessed trauma from policing and from being treated with no compassion during their careers. Whilst previous studies have acknowledged that poor relations exist between police staff and managers because of lack of trust, a blame culture, fear of management reprisal and lack of desire to speak openly (Mildenhall and McCann, 2022), my own study reveals that officers want a more human, relational, caring style of management. Instead they are faced with what Lennie (2020) describes as a 'relationship conflict' with managers, which my study reveals as being highly emotionally charged, confrontational, and war-like.

One of the key meanings of police work for officers is that they work within an uncaring organisation and have to go to battle with selfish and sometimes psychopathic managers. This is considered another form of emotional dirty work. Reframing was used as a coping method for this too, as a way of restoring their sense of self-worth and give their work meaning. This study has provided a highly nuanced, contextualised account of the way that many officers cope with this absence of care for them. They become agents of care, resisting and actively



fighting against the existing organisational culture, management models and systems where the phenomenon of a reigning carelessness (Chatzidakis, et al., 2022) resides.

They do this, providing care to colleagues in need of support, by encouraging authentic expression of emotions to reduce the risk of suicide in others. and in so doing they provide what most (but not all) of their managers fail to. This is one of the key meanings of police work for officers. They realise they can easily fall victim to the uncaring organisation, allowing carelessness to continue to reign by become uncaring towards others. Or they can mitigate this by actively finding and nurturing caring relationships within and outside of the service.

In Research Question two ‘How do father-carers who are frontline protective service providers experience caregiving fatherhood?’ I developed Ward et al.’s (2020) work on emotional dirty work further by revealing the strategies used by officers to prevent emotional dirt overspill in the home. Ward et al (2020), describes how workers who experience pain, whether emotionally or physically, are very aware of the damaging impact of this on them and their family relationships. Bergman and Chalkley (2004) suggest that the stigma of dirty work sticks to those who perform it and it has the ability therefore to stay with the officer after work has finished and spill over into his family life, literally infecting it ‘like a cancer’ according to one of my own participants.

Ward et al (2020) discuss how ‘Jackie the Doorperson’ thinks immediately of her sons at home after being attacked at work. Similarly, many officers in my study described policing as damaging to police families. Shift work for example leads to physical separation and the missing out on important events such birthday parties, as well as routine events such as taking

children to school. Many fathers also experience emotional absence from family life due to their own suffering with depression and PTSD which can cause them to spend a lot of time alone. Aware of the impact on family members of bringing emotional dirt home, officers in this study revealed the main ways that they enact a form of protective masculinity to ensure that their family is shielded from the emotional dirt of work that can spill over into their family life. Protective masculinity (Johnson, 2013) is a concept that describes male performances that centre around toughness, strength and the protection of women, children and sometimes other men from threats to their security. Connell (1995) suggests that this is a form of hegemonic masculinity that shows physical power, control, economic dominance and centralises the breadwinner identity. However, my findings show that officers show a more protective masculinity in their paternalism which is counter-hegemonic; it shows how parenting by fathers is not necessarily about controlling or dominating family members but rather caring for and connecting with others through protecting them from emotional dirt. The strategies revealed by this research are described below.

The first of the main strategies to protect the family from emotional dirt overspill is to downplay the danger and trauma they face at work, reframing it as safe or boring to prevent family members from worrying about them. The second method used by officers to prevent emotional dirt overspill into the home is to avoid trauma triggers as far as they possibly can. Trauma triggers are, according to Foa et al. (2008), psychological stimuli that prompt an involuntary reminder of an event and an associated emotional reaction, i.e. fear or anger, but can be difficult to predict (Dalton, 2020). This study has revealed a plethora of trauma triggers that a father in a frontline protective role might seek to avoid, including the sound of shouting or sirens, watching distressing TV shows, the smell of death, the feeling of being surrounded by people, i.e. when caught up in a crowd and so on. Not only are these a reminder of the cultural

landscape of the work they do, but they also have an aesthetic quality (sight, sound, smell, or touch for instance) that can trigger trauma responses in other contexts (relaxing watching TV at home, going shopping in a busy town centre) and are avoided where possible. It can be said that police officers, in an attempt to deflect aesthetic extremes and the ensuing emotional responses, protect their families by organising routines and events in ways that might be considered different to other fathers. Practicing an affective and aesthetic avoidance in this way is a protection mechanism.

A third strategy for avoiding emotional dirt overspill into the home is developing a dependence on a trusted partner to assume the role of emotional anchor and protector. This person is able to act as a buffer between an officer's work-related emotions and their family and this serves the dual purpose of supporting the officer emotionally whilst protecting the family from emotional contamination. Partners were described as direct in their communication style, dependable, able to find and offer solutions, be good listeners, able to monitor his moods and take control of situations to prevent further escalation of emotions. This study has shown therefore how the partners of police officer can seek to manage the officers' emotions. The concepts of emotion work and emotion management (Hochschild (1979, 1983) describe how individuals have and act upon their own emotions and those of others in intimate relationships in order to 'align emotions with social norms for their expression' (Smoliak et al., 2023). This contextualised and nuanced study reveals that officers admit to finding it difficult to regulate their emotions at home, i.e. find it hard to 'change the intensity of an ongoing or predicted emotional reaction' (Beckes and Coan, 2011: 983) or do not always know how to select, avoid or change situations (Gross, 2014). The participants in this study, who were all married with children, have revealed a perception that the partner performs a central and vital role in maintaining the emotional wellbeing of the family. She possesses regulation skills that they do

not, and through having a close relationship with the officer, the partner helps him to reduce the costs associated with work-related stressors. These findings are also in accordance with Frith and Frith's (2003) concept of mentalising which involves cognitively tracking one's own emotional state or that of someone else. Hooker et al. (2008) developed this notion by suggesting that affective mentalising is used to track, anticipate and respond to an individual's emotional state. This research has shown that many officers perceive their partners to be open to the emotional responses of others, tolerant of their complexity and fluidity (Luyten et al., 2019). Because emotion work of this nature can also feel burdensome and overwhelming because of its invisible and boundaryless nature, it is anticipated that many police officers' partners might suffer as a result of performing the role of emotional anchor and protector. The officers in this study did not discuss how their partners were affected so this could be further explored in future studies of police family relationship dynamics and the role of partners.

The final method used by officers to prevent emotional dirt overspill into the home was their encouragement of all family members to engage in activities and events that bring joy or create a sense of normality. The types of activities or events contrast with the drama of police work. This finding suggests that many officers are acutely aware that life could be better for themselves and their families; they want to live differently.

In Research Question three 'What could be the future conditions of possibility for frontline protective service workers who are or aspire to be involved father-carers?' concepts of 'strangers like me' and 'promiscuous care', originally developed by the authors of *The Care Manifesto* (Chatzidakis et al., 2020), were used to give nuanced and highly contextual insights into how officers acknowledge their mutual interdependence and vulnerabilities, and expand

their caring kinships and care networks through mutual recognition. ‘Strangers like me’ (Chatzidakis et al., 2020) describes the care carried out by strangers whose lives resemble one’s own. ‘Promiscuous care’ is used to describe care that is shown when individuals multiply the number of people they care for, care about and care with, which effectively allows them to experiment with care (Chatzidakis et al., 2020). The findings of this study have demonstrated that many officers have begun to address what Chatzidakis et al. (2020) term the ‘pervasiveness of carelessness’ in society and organisations and which, according to this study, resides in the police service context also. It has become evident from this research that officers show *care for*, *care about* and *care with* others according to proximal social relationships they enjoy with other people, i.e. with family, colleagues, and wider society. The starting point in the care journey is for many, the realisation that they are suffering and there is no care being offered by the organisation or that managers are incapable or unwilling to provide support. Austerity measures have reduced the budget for mental health support and despite initiatives such as Oscar Kilo, and the National Wellbeing Service, insight into police trauma and stress remains lacking (Phythian et al., 2022). Many therefore have to care for themselves in the form of accessing therapy or counselling, through trial and error, until they find something that works.

The officer’s immediate family consists of people for whom the participants of this study care the most. Caring for others involves practical activities (Chatzidakis et al., 2020) such as a parent feeding a child, but is also demonstrated through the examples given by this study’s participants when they spoke of their physical and emotional dirty work and how they enact a form of protective paternalism (removing their uniforms in the garage in order to avoid contaminating the family with the virus, downplaying the trauma they face at work).

The organisational setting for this study, the UK Police Service, is where Chatzidakis et al.'s (2020) concept of 'strangers like me' might be expanded. For some officers in this study, their colleagues are like family and they refer to spending more time with colleagues than their wives. du Plessis et al. (2021) and Thompson et al. (2023), in their empirical research, suggest that a brotherhood and narrative of the family can exist in this setting. However, for most officers in this study, the concept of 'strangers like me' is applied because officers look after each other or care for each other because they are strangers, united by their common experience of doing the same job, and because their work and family lives resemble one another's in terms of common struggles and pressures reconciling the two spheres. Many officers who participated in this research recognised shared vulnerabilities, i.e. in the face of threats at work or poor mental health. An interesting contribution of this study is that many officers, in addition to supporting those on their own teams, also care about and care for more distant colleagues on other teams. These 'strangers like me' (Chatzidakis et al., 2020) are those they share similarities with, i.e. the common experience of dirty work that is emotionally damaging, but who they do not know. They care for them by making contact through networks and going out for a coffee with them to talk through issues, because this is something they perceive the uncaring organisation fails to do.

This research revealed how and why officers engage in caring relationships with individuals outside of family and work, in the wider society. Many participate in community groups, are members of a church or choir, play sport at a club, and participate in fundraising or endurance events. This enables them to connect with individuals who are quite different to the members of the public they interact with at work, where emotional interactions are not experienced as out of place or disruptive (Ward et al., 2020) and therefore serve to restore the officer rather than damage them. These human connections make the officer feel embraced and accepted

rather than villainised, which is a common reaction to the police by many members of the public (De Camargo, 2022). In this respect, engaging with wider society through organised events, clubs and community groups offers huge benefits to officers because it presents an opportunity for many to make caring connections with ‘strangers like me’ (Chatzidakis, 2020), who are individuals who care about the same cause or share the same interest in a certain sport for example.

Wider society can also include the public whom the officers serve and this relationship mobilises Chatzidakis et al.’s (2020) concept of promiscuous caring, involves caring for and with people who are not ‘like me’, not those we can readily identify or empathise with. It is much harder, for these reasons. This research has shown that many officers feel most sympathy for child victims of abuse or the elderly, i.e. the most vulnerable in society and who need protection. They bring out his protective paternalism and his caring side. Many officers expressed feeling less sympathy and spending less time caring for adult male victims of crime however, perhaps because they are too like him.

It appears that when the officer is with the innocent, weak or vulnerable in society they position themselves as the carer in that encounter rather than the cared for, recognising that they are different, i.e. not weak or vulnerable. However, when many officers are dealing with young adult males who have been in a fight, or have been a victim of theft, they find it difficult to provide protective paternalism as they view themselves as more like these types of individuals.

By examining a critical case study of the UK Police Service, this thesis has exposed the difficulties facing frontline protective service workers who aspire to be involved with fathers and carers. It drew upon *The Care Collective's* (2022) manifesto and Segal's (2023) concept of 'radical care' to set out a radical vision of care for the UK Police Service that could be adopted by other organisations such as the NHS and Fire Service. This pressing vision included recognising police officers' vulnerability to physical and emotional damage and ensuring the provision of proper resources to mitigate future risk of injury as well as alleviating any current suffering experienced by them. This thesis suggests that father-carers of the future should be fully supported to become the involved parent they aspire to be and key to shaping the police service of the future is the development of compassionate leaders. The police service of the future would embrace and the use of the language of care and include the narratives of officers that allow stories of vulnerability, pain and loss to be shared and learned from.

### **Reflections and limitations**

Although the thesis is written from a Western perspective, and with a focus on the UK Police Service as a specific context and critical case study, the issues I have discussed are likely to be similar in other frontline roles in emergency services in Britain and across the globe. This is because frontline workers in emergency services (firefighters or paramedics for example) are routinely faced with traumatic and emotional dirty work which can have adverse consequences for their emotional wellbeing, family life and relationships. For example, paramedics have to attend to ill and injured individuals and administer emergency medical care whilst managing their own emotions as well as those of others. They have to handle the difficult or out of place emotions of those they are giving care to, including fear and anger, as well as the emotions of



families/friends of the ill or injured individual which may be out of place (i.e. shame, shock) and onlookers (abuse directed at paramedics for example).

Throughout this research, my positionality as a researcher has significantly influenced the study's trajectory and outcomes. As a mother of a serving officer and wife of a retired officer I have studied the challenges facing caregiving fathers on the frontline of British policing. My own lived experiences of the dynamics of police-family life have inevitably shaped my research questions, methodology, interpretations of data and choice of theoretical framework. My background and understanding of police family life along with my social contacts within the police service have enabled me to gain access to gatekeepers and a population that is recognised as one where the researcher-participant relationship presents a challenge to develop (Stephens, 2022). I have been able to quickly establish the trust and rapport needed to enable participants to share their narratives with me, as discussed in more detail in Appendix Nine. Participants knew that I could relate to their struggles and were therefore more willing to open up to me as, although I was an 'outsider' to the police service, I was an 'insider' regarding police family life. However, my empathetic connection towards my participants may have led me to emphasise the difficulties they face with their working conditions and with their organisation and to focus on the challenges this brings to family life. To mitigate this as far as possible I asked participants to review their interview transcripts and say whether they agreed with my findings and themes that arose from the data analysis. I asked them what had motivated them to remain within the police service despite the difficulties they faced there and I also kept notes in a journal throughout the research to enable me to evaluate and address some of my concerns regarding my bias.

My theoretical framework, rooted in a feminist ethics of care (Chatzidakis et al, 2020; Segal, 2023), emotional dirty work (McMurray and Ward, 2014) and emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983) guided my analysis of the data and the themes that emerged from it. The work of *The Care Collective* (2020) and Segal (2023) resonated with my personal values, which underscored the importance of highlighting the voices of marginalised communities, who in this case are the men who want to be caregiving, involved fathers but who are not supported to be so by their organisation. However, I remained aware of the need to critically engage with this theory, especially a promiscuous model of care (Chatzidakis, 2020), which is not easily reconciled with the voices of some officers I interviewed, who positioned alleged criminals as ‘human waste’. In order to understand and explain why some ostensibly caring officers might describe individuals in such a way, I turned to Douglas’s (1966) notion of othering, as was discussed earlier in this Discussion Chapter.

There are three major limitations in this study that could be addressed in future research. First, I designed this study with the intention of capturing detailed insights into the lived experiences of father-carers working in frontline roles within the UK Police Service. However, the police service is a difficult organisation to gain access to, so I had to rely on gatekeepers and acquaintances in the first instance, who could help by introducing me to individuals. Whilst this approach is commonly used in researching hard to reach populations, it took considerable time to arrange first meetings, trust had to be established, and I then relied on the snowballing method to find further participants. Eventually, after interviewing 27 participants from the MPS and two constabularies, I had reached saturation point and my findings were reliable and valid despite the length of time necessary to meet participants and conduct interviews. However, one of the negative impacts of having such a small sample is that it is hard to generalise the research findings across the whole of the UK Police Service. If I were to conduct similar research again,

I would consider using a multi-method approach and in addition to the interviews, I would send a survey out via my social media network. The benefits of doing this would be that I could access a greater amount of data from a wider variety of constabularies across the UK, which would make the findings more generalisable.

The second limitation of this research is my own biased views. I have a negative perspective on policing and the challenges facing fathers on its frontlines because I am the wife of a retired officer and the mother of a serving one. I have also spent the past 30 years surrounded by other policing families who are friends and whose children have grown up with my own. My own lived experience of policing has involved being attuned to how stress, trauma, depression, anxiety and CPTSD affects individuals and their families. I also experienced the death by suicide of a close family friend who was a serving officer whilst I was carrying out this research in 2022. I have watched several police marriages end in divorce over the past decade, as a direct result of the mental ill-health of the serving husband or wife. For these reasons I have found some interviews upsetting or difficult to listen to and realised that my own coping mechanism in these situations was to look calm whilst dissociating from the interview. I also wanted to encourage some participants to discuss less emotive topics than the suicides and divorces that they wanted to talk about. Finally, I also found myself ruminating over interviews long after they had finished and needing breaks to recharge between interviews. Despite this, the participants wanted to talk to me and were able to be honest in their accounts, as they felt that they could trust and open up to me, precisely because of my insider understanding of their issues. Some described the interviews as a form of therapy, and this is due to my ability to listen without judgement and to remain stoic as they gave rich insight into their work, its impact on them, their colleagues and their family-life.

The third and final limitation of this research was that it was designed to hear the voices of men who are fathers and who identify as being (or aspire to be) caregivers. Whilst this yielded rich data about the lived experiences of this particular population, they were predominantly heterosexual and married. The study, whilst useful in that it provides good quality insights into the experience of men as parents, has excluded the voices of other parental populations, including mothers and LGBTIQ carers who work on the frontline of policing. If I were to conduct a future study I would be interested to hear about the experiences and perceptions of these types of parents and compare the findings with what this research has revealed about men in this particular context. Of particular interest to me would be finding out how mothers on the frontline of policing experience shiftwork and the triple shift of caring for children and ageing parents.

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## Appendices

### Appendix One: Demographic table of research participants: (A) pilot study and (B) main study

#### **A: Pilot study (conducted in March 2020)**

Name	Age	No. of Children	Child age (sex)	Marital status	Ethnicity	Job role	Service	FT/PT Contract
Niko	42	2	15 (F) 12 (F)	Married	Italian	Safer Neighbourhoods Team	C1	FT
Byron	36	1	5 (M)	Divorced	White British	Response Team	MPS	FT
Pete	44	2	18 (M) 15 (F)	Married	White British	Firearms response	C2	FT

#### **B: Main study (conducted June 2021 to March 2022)**

Name	Age	No. of Children	Child age (sex)	Marital status	Ethnicity	Job role	Service	FT/PT Contract
Kris	52	3	24 (F) 15 (M) 13 (M)	Married	Black African	Youth Offender Team	MPS	FT
Deano	36	4	17 (F) 15 (M) 13 (M) 10 (M)	Married	Black/Asian	Custody Suite Officer	MPS	FT
Greg	52	3	21 (M) 18 (M) 15 (M)	Married	Black African	Safer Neighbourhoods Team	MPS	FT
Jon	48	2	13 (M) 10 (M)	Married	White British	Territorial Support Group	MPS	FT
Mash	48	2	21 (M) 18 (M)	Divorced	White British	Sexual Offences Investigation Team	C1	FT
Rossy	38	2	16 (M) 10 (F)	Married	White British	Firearms, response	C1	FT
Giles	53	3	23 (M) 20 (F) 18 (F)	Married	White British	Mounted Police	MPS	FT
Woody	44	2	20 (F) 18 (F)	Divorced	White British	Safer Neighbourhoods Team	C2	FT
Mariusz	35	1	5 (M)	Married	Polish	Safer Neighbourhoods Team	C1	FT

Danko	29	2	4(M)	Married	Greek Cypriot	Major Crimes Unit	MPS	FT
Dazzler	45	2	18 (F) 12 (M)	Married	White British	Firearms Response	C1	FT
Kev	54	2	21 (F) 19 (F)	Married	White British	Court officer	MPS	FT
Fillipe	51	3	21 (M) 20 (F) 17 (F)	Married	White British	Court officer	MPS	FT
Bradley	37	1	18 mnth (M)	Married	White British	Firearms Response	C2	FT
Mike	57	2	26 (F) 24 (M)	Married	White British	Counter-Terrorism (SO15)	MPS	FT
Andy	34	1	8 (F)	Married	White British	Domestic Abuse Investigations Team	MPS	FT
Tim	55	3	30 (F) 27 (M) 24 (F)	Married	White British	National Crime Agency	MPS	FT
Wiggy	24	1	2 (M)	Partnership	White British	Dog unit	C1	FT
Pat	27	2	3 (M) 1 (F)	Partnership	Romanian	Safer Neighbourhoods Team	C2	FT
Arron	29	2	2(M) 6 mnth (F)	Separated	Black African	Firearms Response	C1	FT
Taz	30	1	3 (F)	Married	Indian	Firearms Response	C1	FT
Mark	44	2	6 (M) 2 (F)	Married	Welsh	Firearms Response	C1	FT
Addie	53	2	19 (F) 15 (M)	Married	White British	Firearms Response	C1	FT
Marek	38	2	7 (F) 3 (F)	Married	Polish	Safer Neighbourhoods Team	C2	FT
Charlie	25	1	7 mnth (M)	Partnership	White British	Safer Neighbourhoods Team	C2	FT
Oshi	46	1	20 (M)	Married	Cypriot	Safer Neighbourhoods Team	C2	FT
Boomer	38	2	16 (F) 11 (F)	Married	White British	Domestic Abuse Investigations Team	MPS	FT



## **Appendix Two: Participant information sheet**

### **Participant Information Sheet for Research Project: “Involved professional fathers: An investigation of work-family balance dynamics”.**

#### **(Interviews with professional fathers)**

Dear participant,

I, Deborah Hamer-Acquaah, am currently carrying out a piece of research entitled, ‘Involved professional fathers: An investigation of work-family balance dynamics.’ under the supervision of Dr. Pasi Ahonen.

We are investigating how professional men experience ‘identity’ in their roles as a professional and a father. How men experience work-life balance or conflict when raising a family and what strategies men use to achieve balance as their children grow and if their circumstances change.

This information sheet provides you with information about the study and your rights as a participant.

#### **What does taking part in the research involve?**

Data will be collected about the professional vs. father role of the participants, his opinions about achieving work life balance and insights into strategies used to achieve this. Data will be collected using face to face interviews, Interviews are expected to last up to an hour and will take place at the workplace of the father or at a mutually convenient location. Interviews will be recorded

In the interviews, participants will be asked questions about his role at work and at home. How much time and energy he spends in each domain of his life, and why. He will be asked about how much time and energy he would ideally spend in each domain and why.

#### **Do I have to take part?**

Naturally, there is no obligation to take part in the study. It’s entirely up to you. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to give consent to take part. If publications or reports have already been disseminated, these cannot be withdrawn, however, these will only contain anonymised or aggregated data. If you decide to participate in the study and then change your mind in the future, you can withdraw at any point, even after the data has been collected. If you wish to withdraw from the study at any time, please contact the researcher on the details below.

#### **Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?**

All information collected will be kept securely stored by the researcher. Any anonymous raw data related to you will be archived in a public archive and will only be accessible by me and my supervisor. However, this research forms part of my studies at the University of Essex and therefore may be subject to scrutiny by other University staff in determining the outcome of my degree.

If you are mentioned individually in any publications or reports then a participant number or pseudonym will be used and identifying details will be removed. A list may be kept linking participant numbers or pseudonyms to names, but this will be kept securely and will only be accessible by those listed above. A copy of the information which we record about you, but not other participants, will be provided, free of charge, on request.

**What happens if something goes wrong?**

If you are harmed by taking part in this research project, there are no special compensation arrangements. Regardless of this, if you wish to complain, or have any concerns about any aspect of the way you have been treated during the course of this study then you should immediately inform the student and/or their supervisor (details below). If you are not satisfied with the response, you may contact the Essex Business School Research Ethics Officer, Dr Danielle Tucker ([dtucker@essex.ac.uk](mailto:dtucker@essex.ac.uk)), or the University of Essex Research Governance and Planning Manager, Sarah Manning-Press ([sarahm@essex.ac.uk](mailto:sarahm@essex.ac.uk)) who will advise you further.

We would be very grateful for your participation in this study. If you need to contact us in future, please contact me [dh17664@essex.ac.uk](mailto:dh17664@essex.ac.uk) or Dr Pasi Ahonen [pasi.ahonen@essex.ac.uk](mailto:pasi.ahonen@essex.ac.uk). You can also contact us in writing at: EBS, University of Essex, Colchester CO4 3SQ.

You are welcome to ask questions at any point.

Yours,

**Deborah Hamer-Acquaah**

### Appendix Three: Consent form – father participant:

**Participant Consent form for Research Project: “Involved professional fathers: An investigation of work-family balance dynamics.”**

Dear participant,

This research is being carried out by Deborah Hamer-Acquaah under the supervision of Dr. Pasi Ahonen.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be interviewed by the researcher.

The answers which you provide will be recorded through audio recording.

Please see the attached Participant Information Sheet for details about the study and your rights as a participant.

Yours,

*Deborah Hamer-Acquaah*

<b><u>Statement of Consent</u></b>	<b><u>Please initial each box</u></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I agree to participate in the research project: “Involved professional fathers: ‘An investigation of work-family balance dynamics’. being carried out by Deborah Hamer-Acquaah</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This agreement has been given voluntarily and without coercion.</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I have been given contact details of the researcher(s).</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I have read and understood the information provided in the Participant Information Sheet</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the research and my participation in it.</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I agree for this interview to be audio recorded by the researcher and for anonymised raw data relevant to me to be archived in a public archive.</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant’s signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## **Appendix Four: Interview schedule/plan**

### **Interview Schedule/Plan for narrative style interviews (with back-up/prompt questions)**

**General research area:** The lived experience of father-carers in the UK Police Service.

**Interview topics:** The subjective meaning of being a police officer/working for the Police Service, the motivation for joining, subjective experience of challenges faced as a father in policing, Covid-19 experience of policing, how work challenges impact family life, what strategies are used to prevent issues spilling over into family life (if any), what the police service could do better for father-carers

**Interview questions** (Agree a pseudonym first)

#### **Narrative opener:**

‘I am interested in hearing your story about how you have experienced being a father whilst serving as a police officer. You can start wherever you like. I will not interrupt you but might ask some questions later.’

#### **Back-up/prompt questions – use where/if necessary**

1. Briefly tell me about yourself and why you joined the police service.
2. How long have you been in this role? What are your impressions of working as a (role)?
3. Has there been a time/situation when you need to work flexibly because of your caring responsibilities? Tell me what happened.
4. Can you give me an example of a time when you were poorly treated/treated well as a father?
5. How do you think fathers are generally treated by the UK Police Service?
6. What was your experience of being an officer during the Covid-19 pandemic?
7. Can you give me an example of the challenges/issues you mentioned whilst working during Covid-19 pandemic?
8. How did your manager/colleagues respond in that situation?
9. What impacts does your work have on your family life?
10. Can you give me an example of a time when your work affected your family/relationships?
11. How do you cope with the challenges of work – what do you do regarding self-care?
12. How do you mitigate the effects of your police work on your family/relationships.
13. What do you think the police service needs to do to improve the experience of being a father-carer?
14. How do you imagine a more father-friendly police service of the future?
15. Is there anything you would like to add, that I have missed in this interview?
16. Do you have any further questions or requests to make about this study, your data etc?

## Appendix Five: Kohlberg's stages of human moral development.

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**TABLE 1**  
**Summary of Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Development\***

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**Level 1: Pre-conventional Moral Reasoning**

Stage 1: Punishment and obedience: Being moral is being obedient to an external authority.

Stage 2: Instrumental and relativistic reasoning: Being moral is acting in one's self-interest.

**Level 2: Conventional Moral Reasoning**

Stage 3: Group and family: Being moral is creating and nurturing long-term relationships.

Stage 4: Law and order: Being moral is upholding law and order to avert social chaos.

**Level 3: Post-conventional Moral Reasoning**

\*\*Stage 5: Social contract: Being moral is developing processes for rules, laws, or systems of laws that win the allegiance of everyone by giving each person a stake in the system.

Stage 6: Universal principles: Being moral is committing oneself to rational, abstract, self-selected universal principles for governing social cooperation.

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(Source: Summary drawn from Conry, E., and Nelson, D. (1989). Business law and moral growth. *American Business Law Journal*, 27, 1-39.)

### **Appendix Six: Key accountabilities of police constables**

Provide appropriate initial and ongoing frontline response to a wide range of incidents that may include complex and confrontational situations, assessing immediate risk, threat and harm to determine a proportionate response in line with the law, policy and guidance
Take a leading role in establishing effective localised partnerships to problem solve, engage with, reassure and support organisations, groups and individuals across communities in line with the Force's planned approach.
Effectively engage with victims, witnesses, suspects and the vulnerable, in accordance with equality, diversity and human rights considerations, to provide initial support, direct towards relevant services, establish relationships and gather information that prevents and reduces crimes.
Maintain awareness of potential and actual risks to individuals, taking appropriate action to protect and support those in need of public protection to pre-empt or effectively address safety / vulnerability issues
Conduct effective and efficient priority and high-volume investigations as requested in line with standards of investigation to inform the development of high-quality case files and initiation of criminal justice proceedings.
Gather and handle information, intelligence, and evidence, from a variety of sources, in line with legislation, policies and guidance, taking the appropriate action to support investigations, law enforcement and criminal justice proceedings.
Interview victims, witnesses and suspects in relation to appropriate crimes and investigations, to gather information that has the potential to support law enforcement objectives.
Conduct first line analysis of information, intelligence and evidence to determine significance, generate lines of enquiry, inform decision making and support evidence-based policing.
Justify and professionally account for actions to ensure adherence to legal frameworks and key working principles, policies and guidance.
Identify opportunities for and support the exploration of new ways of working and innovation in policing, applying critical thinking and problem-solving Methodologies to identify solutions to problems in line with evidence-based practice within area of work.
Support the implementation of problem solving and evidence-based policing initiatives by championing and applying relevant methodologies and approaches to area of work.

(Source: College of Policing, 2023)

**Appendix Seven: Example of field note (14 April 2021):**

*I had an interview with Charles today at a café in X Town. I arrived 15 mins early, to do a recce before my participant arrived. I chose a table for 2, near the kitchen at the back, so no-one could sit too close to us, and no-one would be walking past us. We had full view of comings and goings from here. I took the seat facing the wall. Apart from assessing noise levels, because I want my phone to record the interview clearly and not pick up background music/voices, I have come to believe as a result of their constant head-turning and sideways glances, that police officers are constantly on duty, noticing everything going on around them. As a researcher I'm causing unnecessary stress by forcing them to sit facing the wall, obstructing their view.*

*Note to self: Notice behaviours and the implications of seating arrangements for future interviews. Some officers could be hyper-vigilant. Reduce their stress by thinking about seating arrangements in public spaces.*

## **Appendix Eight: Reflection on my stages of research, inspired by Tronto's five phases of care**

### *Attentiveness.*

As a starting point, I became aware of and attentive towards an issue that concerned me as I felt it indicated that something was wrong. This issue was that police fathers in frontline roles were having to remain working and in close physical contact with the public, with an elevated risk of contracting the Covid-19 virus (De Camargo, 2022) when most of the rest of the population were in isolation at home, protected from it as far as possible. I have experienced life within a police family for 25 years and after initial interviews with three participants who described their working conditions before and during the Covid-19 pandemic, their shift patterns and exposure to other traumatic incidents in the line of duty, I became even more concerned about the effects that these factors were having on individual officers and the quality of their familial relationships. I knew that I needed to design the research in such a way that gave rich insight into this issue, and allowed police officers to frame the problem as they see it, accepting what they told me about being stigmatised and muted when asking for time off to care for their children, and drawing on the literature which supports this, and refers to the police service as a hypermasculine organisation (Silvestri, 2018), where to go *part-time* is seen as *part-committed* (Charlesworth and Whittenbury, 2007). These participants were capable of knowing and sharing with me what needed to be repaired and I acknowledged that I needed to listen. This is why a narrative approach to the interviews was appropriate. The lengthy conversations I had with participants and the stories I heard became the rich, thick data I used in the analysis stage. I was also attentive to participants' behaviours and non-verbal communication. For example, I noticed that many participants seemed on edge or hyper-vigilant in public settings such as cafes, constantly turning around to see who was coming in or walking behind them during the interview. I even noticed one using the reflection from the glass frame of a picture on the wall to keep an eye on what was going on around him. This influenced my future choices of venue, opting for quieter cafes, and arriving ahead of the participant to ensure that he could sit 'facing outwards'.

### *Responsibility:*

Here I took responsibility to do something about the need or concern I had earlier identified, as discussed earlier. I wanted to take responsibility for what I had witnessed during the Covid-19 pandemic, i.e. how police officers were being treated, and I wanted to deepen understanding about it. Responsibility is also linked to the wellbeing of those involved in the research and all who are affected by it (Brannelly and Barnes, 2022). I have had to consider for example, what the ethical way is to end an interview with participants who have recounted to me the traumatic incidents they have experienced in the course of their work, and who may be reminded during the course of the interview about the damaging effect their work has had on their own mental health or on their familial relationships. Many of the interviews ended with a brief discussion about different forms of therapy, i.e. CBT and other talking therapies, but officers who had



tried them tended to be dismissive of these therapies. In addition to this, as a responsible researcher, I think about some of the effects of this study and its findings on others when I discuss it with them. This could include fellow researchers, or audiences at presentations I may give. I often ask myself ‘Should each conversation or presentation be preceded by a trigger warning, as many of the traumatic events described (death, suicide and dangerous situations for example) may have been experienced by audience members too?’

Finally there is responsibility for ensuring that the research has a positive impact and contributes towards making changes for police officers who are fathers. To this end, I have considered how and where my research might be used to help make policy changes in the future that facilitate the childcare needs of officers.

#### *Competence:*

This is Tronto’s (2013) third phase of care and is to do with ‘competence as a moral quality necessary for care’ (Branelly and Barnes, 2022). Essentially, as a researcher I have had to be competent in order to meet the need for care, to properly understand methodological and ethical issues that might arise, and to demonstrate a sufficient understanding of the world of policing so that I conduct myself in a way that will not cause harm or damage. Competence for me means behaving ethically; not sharing details of what participants have said. On one occasion this level of competence was tested, where a participant asked if others involved with the study had experienced the same things as him. I had to remind him that I could not share details of other participants or what they had said.

Showing hospitality proved to be an extremely important part of competently building a relationship between me and my participants. One of my gatekeepers had said to some of his contacts that a ‘free coffee was on the cards’ if they gave an interview. I dutifully bought each participant a drink when we met and as can be seen later in two WhatsApp images, this made quite a positive impression on the participants, and they were very grateful for this act of generosity.

#### *Responsiveness:*

This is the fourth phase of Tronto’s care and appears in her early work on care ethics (1993). I sought to enable my participants to get involved with the research, beyond just giving an interview. I enabled all of them to read through the transcripts and make any amendments they felt were necessary. All but one of them wanted to make changes. He went to the lengths of completely proof-reading the transcript, such as amending every single typo, removing extra spaces between words. For some reason it was important for him to do so but I never asked him why. He had responded to my offer of an opportunity to make any changes to what he had said in the interview and taken this to another level of involvement. I just decided to just thank him for his attention to detail and care over the twenty pages long transcript.

*Solidarity:*

This is the final phase of care according to Tronto (2013). I found solidarity with those who were directly involved in this research; the officers who gave up their valuable time to be part of it in many ways. For example, those who expressed an interest in it and encouraged me, who found other participants for me, who spent their free time in interviews with me, who diligently amended transcripts, and who checked in with me about progress long after we had MPS. I have felt, at times, as if I am not researching them as the ‘other’ for the sole output of a PhD thesis but researching *with* them to achieve workplace changes. I am acutely aware of how I have benefited from researching with these individuals, as they are very different from me in terms of their work experiences and the conditions they are exposed to. I am also aware that some of the participants were very aware of the differences between themselves and me. See **Fieldnote\*** below:

***\*Fieldnote (August 2021) – as evidence of solidarity (see above appendix)***

*Danny met me at my London University office for the interview today. He’d jogged 5 miles across the City, as he was training to get into a specialist branch of the MPS. I popped out to get him a cold bottle of water from the vending machine. I started with my usual opening question for a narrative interview: Tell me about your experiences of working in X Dept within the MPS and raising a family. I’m particularly interested in managerial support for fathers.’ He replied, ‘Well I’ve just sat here a few minutes looking at all your books on the shelf about management and leadership, and I’m not sure you’re going to learn anything from me. I’m just a thick pig!’*

*I was suddenly and acutely aware of our vocational and educational differences and felt a bit embarrassed by my cosy little office full of books, and that perhaps he saw me as some lofty academic out of touch with the real World. An invisible barrier had been raised between us. But as we got into the swing of the conversation about his job and family I felt really grateful that he had chosen to come all this way to talk to me and be less self-conscious about my surroundings.*

As can be seen from the fieldnote above, there were occasions when I felt very different from my participants and they from me. Despite this, the interviews became a space and place to work together to understand the difficulties facing working fathers. I could not rely on my textbooks for understanding these fathers’ experiences but had to listen to and recognise the different kind of knowledge brought to me by them; they were they experts and their voices and requests for change had hitherto been largely silenced by their managers.

One of the main challenges that presented itself during this research was how to handle contradictory views (Hoggett, 2006) about the police as fathers. Police officers are not seen generally as oppressed or marginalised, and therefore many do not pity them and their circumstances, making solidarity with them difficult to achieve. However, solidarity can be arrived at when it ‘derives from a commitment, a caring about, that links to an awareness of

injustice and a drive towards action capable of repair' (Brannelly and Barnes, 2022). As the research developed and I came in to contact with more officers and heard their stories about struggling to protect their families from the Covid-19 virus and how their working conditions have such negative effects on family life, I became convinced that they were and still are as vulnerable as any other group in society. Vulnerability was once associated with women only, but according to Gilligan (2011) is a characteristic of all humankind, which supports my idea that male police officers can be viewed as such, especially during a global pandemic, where the experiences of the virus and its consequences were vastly unequal, and officers and their families were routinely exposed to it.

## **Appendix Nine: Reflexivity: Reflections on my own voice and positioning**

### **Voice**

Researching with care has enabled me to contribute to including the fathers' voices that might otherwise be lost and is my preferred approach because it enables me to ensure, as far as possible, that inclusive participation is on offer to the fathers whose relationships with their children are negatively affected by their work conditions and culture. Gilligan (1993) identified that girls and women's voices were excluded from the psychological research that led to theories about human development; she identified a different voice. Through this research I am expanding on her insights, considering how working fathers are excluded from research. In addition, Visse and Abma (2018) discuss how people notice when care is absent. This research shows how police officers notice where and when there is a lack of care for them as workers, i.e. how the police service, managers, colleagues, media and public can show disregard for their mental and physical safety, which has implications for their family life. It also explores, through their narratives how they notice a lack of care or concern about them in their capacity as fathers, and how this affects their ability to be the kind of involved father they want to be.

### **My own researcher voice and position**

As well as being a researcher, I am married to a retired police officer and am the mother of three sons, one of whom is a serving officer. I am aware that in my personal life, the experience of living with someone with Complex PTSD whilst trying to raise children together, has more than a professional meaning for me. According to Burchell et al. (2022) around twenty percent of officers suffer from PTSD, and this surprised me because I thought the level would be higher. Around thirty percent of my participants stated that they are suffering from this condition, i.e. more than would be expected.

I am aware that I am directly emotionally affected by my own topic and this personal connection to my research drives my interest in doing it. However, I am also aware that the participants involved in this study are different to me in many ways; they directly experience the work of policing, face traumatic situations at work routinely, and work shifts, whereas I do not. In addition the participants are all fathers, and I am a mother. As has been previously mentioned in an earlier section though, I am concerned, despite not sharing the same experiences as my participants, that the culture and conditions of policing prevents fathers from having a voice when it comes to flexible working or working part-time in order to accommodate childcare. I care about fathers and children who are not afforded the chance to spend time together, or who are damaged by the conditions of the fathers' work, and I want to make a difference, to create new possibilities for future fathers through this research. This is largely addressed through Research Question three which asks: 'What are the conditions of possibility for frontline fathers of the future?'

However, I accept that even with my new insights into the experiences of police-fathers and their challenges, this research might not lead to real change, as that would involve moving

beyond a critique of the current state of affairs and into some form of action. I am unsure what actions I could take that would make a real difference, or whether my voice would be heard. But like Gilligan (1993) and Tronto (2013), I think that the ethics of care offers a good framework to take this research into the world of policing and fatherhood, which is a different context to those previously associated with this approach, namely health, welfare and social care. Such an approach will also enable me to 'leave things a bit better' than when I started (Brannelly and Barnes, 2022: 4). It enables me to show care for future generations of fathers in the police and try to secure some positive changes for them as a result of this research.

**Appendix Ten: List of caring needs of police father-carers**

Reasons for child-care (health-related)	Reasons for partner-care (health-related)
<p><b>In an infant/young child:</b></p> <p>Colic, infections, chickenpox, measles, whooping cough, respiratory issues, organ failure, surgery, Covid infection, disability, hospitalisation.</p> <p><b>In older children/teens:</b></p> <p>Stress/depression/anxiety, accidents, sports injuries, hospitalisation, infections.</p>	<p><b>Pregnancy issues:</b></p> <p>Pre-eclampsia, miscarriage, foetal development issues (emotional support needed).</p> <p><b>Early motherhood:</b></p> <p>Maternal sleep deprivation/exhaustion, lack of extended family support following C-section, post-partum depression, cancer.</p> <p><b>Later motherhood:</b> Anxiety, menopause, surgery, accidents, injury.</p>

**Appendix Eleven: List of PTSD-related triggers:**

Police or other emergency service TV shows being watched by family
Being in a crowd of people, such as concerts, tube stations, busy train platforms
The sound of sirens
Raised voices
Drivers speeding/erratic driving
Sudden loud noises
Smell of death, decay or blood
Arguments with or between family members
Unexpected visitors or knocks at the door
Being questioned about their job
Children leaving the home, going to parties, staying out late
Family members driving somewhere
Not feeling in control of situations, surprise events
Not being consulted about arrangements
Children in the bath or children sleeping
Flies buzzing around windows
Individuals invading one's personal space