

Understanding Public Perceptions from Confidence Surveys involving Lancashire Constabulary

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Public perceptions are important in policing (Hohl *et al.*, 2010; Jackson *et al.*, 2012), but are continuously elusive because only a few individuals come into direct contact with their local police force (Bradford & Myhill, 2015). As such, surveys are often conducted in an attempt to gauge public perceptions, but it is argued that this approach suffers from critical limitations (Brown & Benedict, 2002).

The first issue is that there is no consensus over what the ‘dependent variable’ actually is, its remit, interpretation by the public, and how questions should be worded. Consequently, numerous surveys looking to gauge public perceptions often examine ‘confidence’, ‘satisfaction’, ‘trust’, ‘effectiveness’, ‘feelings of safety’, and ‘legitimacy’, without effectively distinguishing the concepts beforehand (Cao, 2004; Luhmann, 1988). Secondly, there is also no consensus over the measurement of variables, with varying use of Likert-type scales/options for respondents, which may ultimately lead to form related errors (Albaum, 1997). The third limitation relates to issues with chronology. As public perceptions are fluid, views are likely to change over time. Because survey methodologies provide a ‘snapshot’ of a sample within a target population, care must be taken in contextualising the findings to the timeframe from which they were collected (Sindall *et al.*, 2012). Finally, care is also needed in the geography of findings. Results should be representative of the areas related to the respondents, as previous research highlights how perceptions are largely governed by individuals’ immediate environment (Williamson *et al.*, 2006). Therefore, appropriate sampling and/or weighting should be applied to ensure that the survey is generalisable and reliable (Dawson, 2016; Fotini *et al.*, 2013).

This report took account of the methodological issues highlighted in literature to contextualise how findings from surveys involving Lancashire Constabulary could be interpreted for practice.

It initially appeared that the surveys using national samples (which contained weighted responses from force areas) reported higher agreement figures in their surveys in comparison to direct samples of the Lancashire population. This formed a conflicting image of public perceptions, which may have been indicative of sampling and weighing approaches. Whilst the Lancashire only surveys sampled directly from the target population, there may have been issues with non-response bias and an uncontrolled collection of more negative views.

Conversely, the national samples applied weighting to the participants based upon demographics. Whilst this theoretically aims to make the views more representative of the population, the lower number of respondents means that the estimates may not be fully robust as positive views may have carried more weight purely on the basis of demographics.

However, a more likely reason for the difference in figures between the surveys was that the questions could be interpreted as measuring different concepts. This related back to the most critical limitation highlighted by Brown and Benedict (2002), who explain that there is no consensus over *what* exactly is being measured. Based upon the questions from the surveys, it is likely that three core concepts (confidence, satisfaction and effectiveness) may have been interpreted by the public when responding.

Overall, from the five surveys that met the inclusion criteria, it is recommended that the Her Majesty's Inspectorate of the Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) commissioned survey (conducted by BMG research) should be cautiously interpreted to gauge *public satisfaction* in 2018/19 (Dai & Johnson, 2009; Zhao *et al.*, 2014). The Office of National Statistics (ONS) estimates of the Crime Survey of England and Wales (CSEW) should be cautiously interpreted to represent *public confidence* in 2018/19 (Cao, 2015; Luhmann, 1988; Hart, 1988). In addition, both of these findings may be supported by the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) survey conducted in 2015. However, caution should be advised in the use of this survey as it was not generalisable to full population of Lancashire and may now be outdated. The Living in Lancashire (LiL) Survey and the report by the Office of the Police Crime Commissioner (OPCC) were interpreted as measuring *effectiveness*. In this instance, precedent should be placed upon the Living in Lancashire survey strand to cautiously gauge *local agency effectiveness* (Ludwig *et al.*, 2017), due to its methodological rigour. Consequently, the OPCC survey should not be considered as providing a valid evidence-base and should be used for information purposes only. This is due to limitations in the methodology and analysis of survey data.

INTRODUCTION

The decline of police budgets in the United Kingdom continue the debate around police effectiveness, officer numbers, crimes rates, and public confidence in policing (Sindall & Sturgis, 2013). Whilst each element is vital to police organisations, public perceptions are of particular importance as they have been previously linked to views on police legitimacy, as well as public cooperation and compliance (Hohl *et al.*, 2010; Jackson *et al.*, 2012; Tankerby, 2010). Previous literature exploring public perceptions of policing has argued that there are two main perceptions of the police: ‘instrumental/cognitive’ and ‘expressive/affective’ (Bradford & Myhill, 2015). Instrumental/cognitive relates more to the ideology that the police are there to fight crime and confidence is greater when the police are seen to be effective in this regard (Bradford & Jackson, 2010). However, those who are expressive/instrumental are more concerned with their treatment by the police and with wider indicators of the police maintaining order (Murphy, 2009).

As there are various ideologies and expectations of the police role (Goldstein, 1977), there is often difficulty in identifying policing priorities and issues that influence feelings of satisfaction and confidence. Whilst the police can address individual concerns through satisfaction surveys after an interaction with the service, realistically only a minority of individuals have direct contact with the police (Bradford & Myhill, 2015). As a result, difficulties arise in identifying what influences public perceptions more generally, as well as the overall rates of confidence and satisfaction with the police.

Surveying Public Perceptions of Policing

Brown & Benedict (2002) reviewed over one hundred studies and highlighted several methodological and conceptual issues associated with measuring attitudes towards the police. The issues highlight critical difficulties when considering the various sources of evidence and attempting to synthesise research findings.

Firstly, and most critically, is the “nature of the dependent variable” (Bradford & Myhill, 2015; p.6). Currently, there is no consensus over what the dependent variable is and how questions relating to it should be worded. Subsequently, numerous surveys examine public perceptions of the police by examining various key themes such as ‘confidence’, ‘satisfaction’, ‘trust’, ‘effectiveness’, ‘feelings of safety’ and ‘legitimacy’. Further complication is added when these

key concepts are worded to include specific contexts, such as confidence in the police tackling specific local issues. Whilst the key terms are arguably related and impact upon one another, distinctions should be drawn between the concepts when synthesising or contrasting research findings. This is because, as argued by Cao (2004), the first step in forming quantitative estimations is to first clearly define the concept that is to be measured. He further argues that language is a living entity that involves ambiguity and even specific words have different meanings to different people (Cao, 2015).

One of the main conceptual separations that has been identified is the difference between confidence and satisfaction. Whilst confidence is argued as being externally orientated (Cao, 2015), satisfaction is considered internal and based upon an individual's experience (Dai & Johnson, 2009; Zhao *et al.*, 2014). In applying this to a policing context, confidence would be more likely interpreted towards the policing organisation as a whole, whereas satisfaction may be interpreted as a retrospective assessment of a specific police interaction. Luhmann (1988) further distinguishes the concept of confidence from trust, with Hart (1988) explaining how trust is more likely to be based upon faith in someone, whilst Luhmann (1988) explained confidence as a reasoned, evidenced and logical deduction applied more broadly. Luhmann (1988) further extends this reasoning to explain how a loss in trust would mean a motivation to replace the untrusted individual, but to lose confidence in a broader system may likely affect the individual's feelings of safety and security. However, feelings of safety may also relate to wider concepts that also seek to measure perceptions of the police. For example, feelings of safety in this context, which would otherwise be interpreted as impacting confidence (Luhmann, 1988), may be better placed and argued as a measure for 'police effectiveness' (Ludwig *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, the distinction between confidence and police effectiveness still appears unclear, and both may be measured by specific contexts, such as individuals' perceptions on officer numbers, police visibility, levels of crime, or value for money.

A second methodological issue is the measurement of the dependent variable and whether this should be done through a 'catch-all' method or an 'attitude scale'. The latter is often used and is preferred methodologically and analytically, especially because terms such as 'trust/distrust', 'confident/unconfident' and 'satisfied/dissatisfied' are active stances that may be better captured with scale responses (Luhmann, 1979). In addition, there is no consensus over the number of points to be used in a Likert-type scale examining confidence and satisfaction, meaning that each of the responses may be affected by form-related errors (such as leniency or central tendency) (Albaum, 1997).

There are also chronological limitations to work on public perceptions, as public perceptions are undoubtedly fluid and change over time. Most of the previous research into public perceptions utilise a cross sectional design which report a snapshot of perceptions at specific points in time. This often leads to a focus on differences as opposed to a longitudinal tracking of perceptions (Sindall *et al.*, 2012), meaning attitudinal change to any practical change is often not captured. To observe this fluidity, previous research has employed methods such as time-series regression analysis (involving different techniques such as auto-regressive moving average (ARIMA) and other modelling) to examine the change in public confidence over time, using cross-sectional data points from the BCS/CSEW (Sindall *et al.*, 2012). Such methods allow for a tracking of perceptions, as well as short term predictions of future perceptions (Benson & Rasmussen, 1998).

In addition, care is also needed in the geographic and contextual reporting of figures, especially as forces have different policing issues and priorities. Empirical research into public perceptions within the UK is still limited (Kautt, 2011), with research still failing to contextualise their findings within the neighbourhoods they were drawn from (Williamson *et al.*, 2006). This is important when considering that previous research has illustrated differences in public confidence depending on the individual's perceptions of their local areas (Perkins, 2016). This subsequently causes difficulties in the implementation of any interventions across policing contexts (MacQueen & Bradford, 2015). To counteract this limitation, a survey must use an appropriate sampling method that is representative of the target population. This would mean the use of stratified or quota sampling (Dawson, 2016), or effective weighting of the data for non-response and demographic disparities once data is collected (Fotini *et al.*, 2013).

Notwithstanding the quantity of previous research into public perceptions of policing, there continues to be numerous methodological and analytical limitations within the area. This covers practical issues such as measurements and sampling, as well as important theoretical issues such as the formation of a clear and consistent dependent variable. This report, therefore, aimed to examine large-scale surveys into public perceptions of the Lancashire Constabulary to understand the level of public confidence in the force. In reporting the overall figures, it examines the context of the report, as well as an interpretation of what was potentially being measured.

METHODOLOGY

Design

The remit of the report was to examine large-scale public surveys of Lancashire Constabulary which had focused on overall public perceptions relating to the police force. The surveys were then examined based upon criteria that was identified within literature, including:

- Wording/interpretation of questions (Bradford & Myhill, 2015; Cao, 2015; Luhmann, 1988);
- Appropriate measurements – five/seven-point Likert-type scales with neutrality (Bradford & Myhill, 2015; Luhmann, 1979);
- Transparent methodology;
- Mixed methods (use of both quantitative and qualitative methods);
- Sampling, weighting and administration of survey (Fotini *et al.*, 2013; Kautt, 2011; Perkins, 2006;);
- Use of inferential analysis.

The findings relating to overall public perceptions of the Lancashire Constabulary were isolated and synthesised to create a summary of the potential evidence-base. This provided an overview of report figures, whilst maintaining the context of the reports from which they were derived. This report also examined whether certain public issues were raised within the surveys, since these elements could be argued as potential explanations for the identified levels within the survey.

Sample

This report included surveys from the year 2015 onwards and identified five main strands of surveys from various organisations, including:

- 1) Robinson, R., Edwardson, M., & Fanner, J. 2015, *Living in Lancashire: Community safety*. (Research Report). Preston: Lancashire County Council. Available at <https://www.lancashire.gov.uk/media/908509/living-in-lancashire-wave-48-report-community-safety.pdf>

- 2) Birdsall, N., McManus, M., Brian, D., & Boulton, L. 2015, *Surveying Lancashire: Expectations and experiences of Lancashire Constabulary and its associated partners*. (Research Report). Preston: University of Central Lancashire.
- 3) __. 2018, *Report for confidence in policing and local priorities questionnaire*. Lancashire: Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner.
- 4) Office of National Statistics. 2019, *Crime survey for England and Wales (CSEW) estimate of personal and household crime, anti-social behaviour, and public perceptions, by police force area, year ending December 2018* (Reference No. 009885) Office of National Statistics.
- 5) BMG research. 2019, *Public perceptions of policing in England and Wales 2018: Prepared for Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Service*. (Research Report). Birmingham: BMG research. Available at <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/news/news-feed/public-perceptions-of-policing-in-england-and-wales-2018/>

RESULTS

1. Living in Lancashire: Community Safety (Wave 48) Survey (2015)

Study context

The 'Living in Lancashire' panel is a group of residents in Lancashire who are randomly pre-selected for surveying on all topics related to Lancashire. The panel is periodically refreshed to ensure that new members are introduced and rotated. In this instance the survey was sent out to 3,411 members of the panel via postal ($n = 2,300$) and online ($n = 1,111$) methods. From this call, 2,216 surveys were returned (65% response rate). No weighting was given to account for non-response rate. However, the sample was weighted by age, ethnicity and district to reflect the demographics of residents in Lancashire.

A mixed methodology was used to analyse the responses, including a statistical analysis of the attitude questions and a thematic analysis of open questions from the survey. The survey questions were the same as a previous version administered in 2013, meaning that inferential analysis was used to compare the current attitudes and only statistically significant findings were noted. Each finding reported the total number of respondents allowing for a transparent results section.

Main findings

The dependent variable in this instance did not seem focused on police confidence, satisfaction or trust and instead asked generally about police and other local public services. This survey found that (on a 5-point Likert-type scale) 63% of respondents agreed that the police and other local public services were successfully dealing with identified issues.

However, subsequent raw data from the Wave 52 survey (not yet in report form) reported that only 47% of respondents agreed that the police and local services were successfully dealing with crime, and 43% agreed that they were tackling ASB. This appears to indicate a decrease in confidence since the Wave 48 survey in 2015; however, the Wave 52 report has not yet been written up into a full report and is expected in early 2020¹.

¹ Information on survey is available at:

<http://council.lancashire.gov.uk/documents/s149962/Response%20re%20LiL%20Panel.pdf>
(accessed 24th June 2019)

Within the Wave 48 Community Safety report, the most common reason given for feelings of unsafety were ASB or gangs of young people in the area (25%); yet, 30% reported that ‘other’ issues made them feel unsafe. Specifically examining different types of ASB, a third of respondents (35%) reported rubbish and litter to be a fairly or very big problem (this increased to 62% when considering only residents from ‘deprived’ areas of Lancashire). With regards to the biggest safety problem in the respondents’ local communities, majority of the respondents (63%) highlighted issues with theft from gardens, grounds, sheds, garages etc.

It is also important to note that 61% of respondents felt that the level of crime in their area was better than other areas of Lancashire, and 59% felt that the level of crime was better than the UK in general.

2. UCLan Survey (2015)

Study context

The UCLan survey was an online only survey, using a snowball sampling method for administration (which was controlled to Lancashire residents based on reported postcode). The total sample within the report was 1,197, with an unknown response rate due to the snowball sampling method. No weighting was applied to account for the non-response rate or to the sample to control for demographics. From the report, it is possible to determine that a large proportion of respondents were from Preston, Chorley and Blackburn, meaning that the sample is not directly generalisable to the demographics of Lancashire as a whole.

A mixed methodology was used to analyse the survey responses. With regards to the quantitative analysis, inferential statistics ($p < .05$) were used to examine demographics and other variables against satisfaction with Lancashire Constabulary. Each finding reported the total number of participants involved in each finding, allowing for a transparent results section. The qualitative analysis concerned a thematic analysis of the open questions contained within the survey.

Main findings

The report was sensitive to the difficulties involved in defining the dependent variable and the difference between police confidence and satisfaction. Subsequently the report directly

surveyed satisfaction and confidence with the Lancashire Constabulary as separate entities. The responses were spread over a 7-point Likert-type scale which allowed for neutrality (whilst also including an additional ‘don’t know’ option). The survey found that 61.8% ($n = 1184$) were confident with Lancashire Constabulary in their area. With regards to satisfaction, 57.2% ($n = 1190$) of respondents were satisfied with the Lancashire Constabulary in their local area.

There were 554 (50.4%) respondents that felt informed about the local police, with 521 (47.4%) reporting that they did not feel informed. The respondents within the survey also explained that they were worried about how the cuts to police funding were impacting upon the service the Constabulary was providing. They also had strong views on a visible police presence, since 73.7% valued foot patrols and 67.2% valued police vehicle patrols. Consequently, 75.2% reported that they wanted an increase in foot patrols and 61.4% of respondents stated they wanted an increase in vehicle patrols.

When respondents were asked to prioritise public policing issues there appeared to be a disconnect between their broader priorities in comparison to their personal priorities. When asked to prioritise issues for the police monetary budget, the respondents ranked violent crime (67.3%), gun/knife crime (58.1%) and sexual crime (55.3%) as very important. When asked to prioritise their individual issues, the highest ranked issues were theft (17.8%), ASB (17.2%), violent crime (14.7%), and drugs (14.2%). The contrast in findings highlighted a potential conflict between the broader ‘needs’ of policing versus the personal ‘wants’ of the respondents. Furthermore, the issue may also impact upon their perceptions of confidence and/or satisfaction depending on how both types of priorities are addressed.

3. OPCC Survey (2018)

Study context

The survey conducted by the OPCC was conducted online using the platform SurveyGizmo and ran between the dates 27th July – 10th September 2018. A convenience sampling method was used via an open invite to members of the public, whereby respondent inclusion was controlled to Lancashire by using the respondents reported postcode. A total of 2,980 fully completed and 611 partially completed responses were collected. As the study used a

convenience sampling method, no weighting was present to account for the non-response bias or for controlling the sample to make it representative of the Lancashire population.

The quantitative analysis involved descriptive statistics, with no apparent statistical control for random chance. Furthermore, each result does not outline the total number of people involved (reports only proportions without total n 's), meaning that it was not possible to determine actual frequencies for each result. Therefore, it is not possible to determine whether the dependent variable was based on the full 3,591 sample, the fully completed surveys only ($n = 2,980$), or a combination of fully completed and partially completed surveys. This subsequently presented a methodological limitation in interpreting the findings.

Main findings

The report used specific questions relating to confidence in the police across various contexts. However, variables were measured using inconsistent Likert-type scales. Some questions used a 4-point scale that did not allow for a neutral response, whereas other used a typical 5-point Likert scale with neutral responses. The inconsistency presented methodological limitations in comparing results between questions, as well as in interpreting the findings with other surveys. The wording of the main question pertaining to overall perceptions strayed from the terminology of 'confidence' and appeared to be more applicable to police effectiveness. Overall, the survey found that on a 5-point Likert-type scale, 47.8% of respondents reportedly agreed with the statement that "all things considered, the police do a good job around here".

The survey also found that 43.9% of respondents reported that they were confident that Lancashire Constabulary tackled crime (on a 4-point scale); that 33.2% of respondents were confident the police would be there when they needed them (on a 5-point scale); and that 50.7% were confident that the police would take action if they approached them with a problem (on a 5-point scale).

Further findings illustrated how the majority of respondents did not feel well informed about policing in their local area (65.2%) and were not confident the police would be there when they needed them (65.7%). More respondents (43.2%) believed the police could not be relied upon to respond quickly to an emergency, in comparison to those who believed they could (40.9%). Taking into account all of the above findings, however, 50.7% of the sample agreed that they would be confident the police would take action if they approached them with a problem.

4. ONS CSEW Estimates (2019)

Study context

The Crime Survey of England and Wales (CSEW) surveys individuals (over the age of 16) about their experiences of crime within the last 12 months. The survey is administered by the Office of National Statistics, whereby the responses and associated data are considered ‘national statistics’ and abide by a strict code of practice. The data used in this instance was a previous user request (requested on 25/04/2019) for estimates on personal and household crime, anti-social behaviour (ASB), and public perceptions, by police force area. The data was included as it met the criteria of being a large survey involving public perceptions of the police, which could be subsequently broken down by force area (with present data on Lancashire Constabulary).

The national sample included 33,141 respondents, of which 796 unweighted adults were used to formulate estimates for the county of Lancashire. The methodology makes clear that previous CSEW surveys were online only, so caution is advised in the interpretation of results within survey which had multiple methods of administration. Furthermore, the method also explains how the force area estimates are much less robust due to smaller sample sizes and so caution is advised in their interpretation.

The data used to formulate the estimate within the CSEW is weighted via two stages. The first stage of weighting is applied by Kantar Public to the raw data. This forms two weighted measures: household weighted responses and individual weighted responses. The second stage is calibration weighting conducted by the ONS to account for non-response rates across the data. This is done by attributing a weight based upon sex, age and region composition, in order to match the composition of collected responses to the known distribution of the population as a whole. It is important to note that all tables and data provided by the ONS provides the unweighted cases from which the estimates were developed, so that there is a representation of the number of individuals within the region that the estimates are based on. Furthermore, the estimates developed within the dataset are done within a range of estimation that is calculated using a 95% confidence interval. Therefore, in addition to the comprehensive weighting process, the estimates are considered inferential statistics and are compiled with statistical control.

Main findings

The question of focus from the CSEW that fit the remit of the current report was “Taking everything into account I have confidence in the police in this area” [POLATT7]. The question related directly to confidence in the police and was measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale that allowed for a neutral response. Estimated parameters for Lancashire Constabulary illustrate that 73% (69-77%) of respondents agreed that, overall, they were confident in the local police. This fell slightly below the confidence interval for the estimated national average (75.1-76.2%).

When examining other findings within the survey, estimates formed around the police handling of ASB generally did not fall outside of the national average. Nonetheless, the data did illustrate how some elements of ASB were considered more of an issue than others. The ASB issues that fell above the confidence interval of the national average were: using and dealing drugs; rubbish or litter lying around; and, teenagers hanging around in the street. However, when examining whether the individual had witnessed any sort of ASB in their local area, Lancs (30.2%) fell below the confidence interval on the national average (36.1-37.5%). This potentially indicated that while perceptions of ASB may have impacted upon confidence and satisfaction, this may not have been due to the direct involvement with crime and the police.

Furthermore, feelings of risk towards personal crime (3.1%) and property crime (10.5%) fell slightly below confidence intervals for the national averages (personal crime: 3.8-4.4%; property crime: 10.6-11.4%). Estimates also illustrated how the Constabulary fell below the confidence interval of the national average (57.5-58.8%) when considering police (Lancashire Constabulary) do a good/excellent job in their local area (56.0%).

5. (HMICFRS Commissioned) BMG Research Public Perceptions of Policing Survey (2018)

Study context

The survey conducted by BMG research examines a broader terminology than that of previous surveys conducted by Ipsos MORI. It provides a more comprehensive insight into public

perceptions at the national and local level, whilst also covering additional topics, such as legitimacy and engagement.

BMG state clearly within their methodology that the previous surveys commissioned by HMICFRS were with the previous provider IPSOS Mori. As they applied a slightly different methodology to the survey, they explain how any comparison to previous years should be interpreted with caution and should only be indicative of the difference in the methodological approach. In contrast to Ipsos MORI, who used an online panel only, BMG employed various methods to survey the public. This included surveys of online research panels, with a minority of surveys conducted face-to-face and via postal invites to the online survey. This was done to target demographics that are otherwise underrepresented using the online panel surveys only. In total, BMG used a stratified sampling method to collect 17,043 responses nationally, with approximately 400 responses per force area (Lancashire Constabulary $n = 400$).

The report used a mixed methods approach to analyse the survey responses. Whilst the methodology was clear for the quantitative inferential analysis, little information was given on the processing and analysis of the qualitative data. Therefore, the report is unclear on whether qualitative analysis was actually conducted. Instead, it appears that the results section is a random selection of comments belonging to participants who answered within certain categories. Therefore, care should be taken in overgeneralising the qualitative sections of the report.

The sample is weighted at national level based on age, gender, Government Office Region, Indices of Multiple Deprivation quartile and ethnicity. In addition, the survey also contains statistical control at a 95% confidence interval, meaning that differences reported in the study are statistically significant. Furthermore, the method explains how all results represent the full sample unless otherwise stated, meaning that the total number of responses for each finding is transparent.

Main findings

The survey split questions relating to satisfaction and confidence. The questions relating to confidence were specifically worded to certain policing contexts, with no overall confidence figure (i.e., “Q26. How confident are you, if at all, that the police in your local area would be effective in dealing with a non-emergency?”). However, the findings did illustrate that nationally (on a 5-point Likert-type scale, with an additional ‘don’t know’ option) 61% of

people were satisfied with their local police force. When examining Lancashire Constabulary data only, this indicated that 62% of respondents reported being satisfied with their local police force.

When examining how informed respondents felt, there was a statistically significant lower proportion of those who felt informed (30%) in comparison to national average (37%), as well as a significantly higher proportion of respondents who felt uninformed (65%) in comparison to national average (51%). Despite this, a statistically higher proportion of respondents from Lancashire (32%) stated that the police service had gotten worse in the past 12 months, in comparison to the total derived from the national sample.

The Lancashire Constabulary did not significantly differ from the national average on any categories of ASB being a problem in the local area. In addition, this was also the same when asked whether this had changed over the past year.

Regarding police visibility, there was a significantly larger proportion of respondents who stated it was important to have a regular officer or PCSO present on foot in the local area (83%) in comparison to the national average. Continuing with the theme of questions, 44% of Lancashire respondents (significantly higher than national average of 35%) stated that they had seen police less often. Consequently, there seemed to be a significantly higher proportion of people that responded using the extreme end of the scale by stating they were 'very dissatisfied' by this (27%, compared to national average of 23%).

DISCUSSION

Contrasting the studies into public perceptions of the police in Lancashire highlighted distinct differences in the methodologies used to survey the public. In addition, the five surveys also appeared to examine different ‘dependent variables’ (Bradford & Myhill, 2015). The overview of the methodologies and reported headline figures of each study are outlined in Table 1 on Page 22.

Based upon the study methodology only, a generalisable overview of public perceptions may be best sought from: The Living in Lancashire Survey (2015); the report authored by BMG research who were commissioned by HMICFRS (2018); or from the ONS estimates derived from CSEW (2018). This is because these figures were weighted for non-response bias and for the demographics of Lancashire. This weighting and sampling control makes the work more generalisable to the population of Lancashire than the survey results gathered in other reports. Whilst the ONS cautions the use of the estimates at force level (a point explicitly made within their methodology), this caution should also be placed on the use of force-level data in the BMG project. Similarly, the figures from the Living in Lancashire survey may also be outdated and suffer from non-response bias. In addition, the questions within this survey related to agencies in Lancashire as opposed to solely Lancashire Constabulary.

For insight into differences, associations and correlations occurring within a sample, the BMG research report, the Living in Lancashire survey, and the UCLan survey are arguably the most appropriate sources. This is because the surveys provide inferential analysis (statistically significant to the threshold of $p < .05$) and a transparent report of the total respondents for each question. Similarly, and in addition to the limitations of the BMG and Living in Lancashire surveys mentioned above, the UCLan survey may also be a source that is outdated and not generalisable to public perceptions for the whole of Lancashire.

In terms of methodology, the OPCC report should be cautiously interpreted. It did not have an explicit methodology, involved descriptive statistics only, and did not contain weighting or statistical control. The report falls short on providing a generalisable and statistically rigorous report into public perceptions, or insights within public perceptions. Furthermore, comparisons across the questions within the survey should also be done cautiously, due to varying measures of the Likert-type scales and the lack of reporting respondent figures across each of the

findings. Consequently, it is unclear which findings contained the full sample and which contained only a partial sample.

It is important to note, however, that the updated data from Wave 52 of the Living in Lancashire Survey 2019 (which is expected in report-form early 2020) appears to indicate a drop in public perceptions from the previous survey in Wave 48. The figures reported within this raw data indicated that 47% of respondents felt the police and other agencies are 'dealing with crime successfully'. This may reflect the figures found within the OPCC report, as this survey found that 47.8% of respondents felt that 'all things considered, the police do a good job around here'.

These figures directly conflict with the survey conducted by BMG research and the estimates established by the ONS, even though these figures represent views for 2018/19. This establishes a conflicted image of public perceptions, as the national surveys with statistical control report more positive attitudes in Lancashire, in comparison to the surveys that are directly targeted at the Lancashire population with less statistical control.

However, it appears that this discrepancy in figures may not only reflect a difference in methodology or sampling. As highlighted in literature, great care is needed in the language used to formulate a dependent variable (Bradford & Myhill, 2015; Brown & Benedict, 2002). Since confidence and satisfaction are different key terms, the figures may be measuring different concepts (Cao, 2015; p.239). This is crucial to consider since, and as illustrated in the UCLan survey (Birdsall *et al.*, 2015), there were differences in the reported levels of satisfaction and confidence. Whilst confidence is argued to apply to police forces more generally, satisfaction is more likely to relate to individual experiences (Cao, 2015; Dai & Johnson, 2009; Zhao *et al.*, 2014). This difference in interpretation appeared to translate into slightly different agreement figures, whereby confidence appeared to be higher (62%) than satisfaction in terms of overall agreement (57%) within the UCLan survey (see Table 1 on page 22). This result appeared consistent with the other surveys which examined perceptions using similar terminology. Within these surveys, the ONS estimates into public confidence illustrated a 73% agreement rate, which was higher than the reported 62% of satisfaction reported by BMG research.

Yet, the terminology becomes more important when examining the conflicting figures mentioned earlier. In this instance the Wave 52 Living in Lancashire Survey found that 47% felt the police were 'dealing with crime successfully' and the OPCC report found 47.8% of respondents felt the police 'do a good job around here'. The wording of both questions is

similar in terms of context, and arguably relates more to ‘police effectiveness’ (Ludwig *et al.*, 2017), as opposed to satisfaction or confidence directly. This may explain the difference in reported figures, as perceived confidence in the police may be consistently higher than levels of perceived effectiveness. In support of this argument, the ONS estimates of the CSEW also covered a question into police effectiveness. In this instance, the ONS estimated that 56.0% of Lancashire residents felt that the Lancashire Constabulary do a good/excellent job in their local area. This figure fell below the confidence interval on the national average (57.7-587.8%), which indicated that these views were slightly more negative than the national views of police effectiveness.

Furthermore, as noted by Perkins (2016), respondents perceptions of the police will largely depend on the individual’s perception of their local area. This may also account for the lower levels of agreement in questions that appeared to have broader wording. For example, the BMG research, ONS estimate, and UCLan survey all examined ‘confidence’ and/or ‘satisfaction’ with police in ‘the local area’. However, the OPCC report used wording that was broader, asking whether the police do a good job ‘around here’. In addition, the Living in Lancashire survey also questioned perceptions more widely, asking whether ‘the police and other local services’ are dealing successfully with crime. Both of the latter questions, therefore, seem to apply a broader context to the question wording, in addition to the focus on police effectiveness.

Table 1: Figures related to public perceptions of Lancashire Constabulary across the different surveys (in descending order of report year).

| Survey | Year | Wording | Headline Figures | Scale | Lancashire N | Transparent Method | Representative Sampling/Case Weighting | Mixed Methods | Inferential Statistics |
|--|---------|--|------------------|-------------------|---------------|--------------------|--|---------------|------------------------|
| BMG | 2019 | Satisfaction | 62% | 5-point | 400 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| ONS | 2018 | Confidence | 73% (69-77%) | 5-point | 796 | ✓ | ✓ | ✗ | ✓ |
| OPCC | 2018 | ‘Do a good job around here’ [i.e., Effectiveness] | 47.8% | 5-point | - | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ | ✗ |
| UCLan | 2015 | Satisfaction & Confidence | 57% & 62% | 7-point & 7-point | 1,184 & 1,190 | ✓ | ✗ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Living in Lancashire Wave 48 | 2015 | ‘Dealing with crime Successfully’ [i.e., Effectiveness] | 63% | 5-point | 2,170 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| ² Living in Lancashire Wave 52 – Raw Data | 2018/19 | ‘Dealing with crime Successfully’ [i.e., Effectiveness] | 47% | 5-point | 1,608 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

² Living in Lancashire Wave 52 raw data figures included for completeness. Please note this data is not yet written into a full report, which is expected early 2020.

In addition to the headline figures, the report also highlighted key issues that appeared to recur across the surveys. The first related to police visibility, with respondents in the BMG research and UCLan surveys reporting negative views towards less officers or seeing officers less often. In addition, this also appeared alongside an anxiety about the cuts to police funding.

Secondly, both the OPCC and BMG surveys found that respondents reported that they did not feel well informed about policing in their local area. The OPCC report highlighted how majority of participants (65%) directly reported that they did not feel informed. This figure was echoed in the BMG research report which found that 65% of respondents felt uninformed, which was a statistically higher proportion of respondents in comparison to the national average (51%). The UCLan survey also examined respondents' views on how informed they felt, however this indicated a roughly equal split of those who felt informed and those who did not.

Finally, the Living in Lancashire, ONS and UCLan surveys found that thefts (especially from gardens, grounds, sheds, garages etc), drug dealing and taking, and anti-social behaviour (ASB) made the respondents feel unsafe. Using the ONS estimates, ASB issues in Lancashire that fell outside of the national average included: using and dealing drugs; rubbish and litter lying around; and, teenagers hanging around in the street. With specific regards to rubbish and litter, the Living in Lancashire survey found that double the number of respondents considered rubbish or litter to be a big problem when they were from a deprived area. The BMG research survey, however, examined similar concepts with Lancashire Constabulary data and found that none of the ASB issues deviated significantly from the national average.

Conclusion

The methodological and theoretical differences between the surveys appears to, not only cause difficulty in any synthesis of research findings, but also appears to account for the differences in rates of public perceptions. Overall, the national surveys with statistical control and direct questioning found levels of public confidence and satisfaction to be around 60-70%. It is likely that the lower levels of perceptions in other reports may be due to: 1) direct sampling of Lancashire Sample as opposed to national sample that was weighted to Lancashire; 2) the measurement relating more to 'police effectiveness' than 'confidence/satisfaction'; and, 3) the broader wording of the questions within these surveys.

This means that, overall, the BMG research report should be used to cautiously gauge public *satisfaction* and the ONS estimates should be used to cautiously gauge public *confidence*. Both

could use the UCLan survey to provide further context, but as this survey was not weighted for non-responses and demographics it should not be considered representative of the full Lancashire population. The Living in Lancashire Survey, both Waves 48 and 52, should be used to gauge public perceptions on police effectiveness, which may be supported by figures in the OPCC report. However, the OPCC report should not be considered to form an appropriate evidence-base due to methodological limitations. Instead, precedent should be placed on the figures contained within the Living in Lancashire survey as an appropriate evidence-base for perceptions of *Lancashire agency effectiveness* (Ludwig *et al.*, 2017).

Issues that seemed to recur across the surveys appeared to relate more to the individuals' wants of policing, which included: visibility of police officers; feeling informed about policing in their local area; and, tackling certain forms of anti-social behaviour. Despite these wants, the ONS report illustrates how Lancashire Constabulary respondents fell slightly below the national average when reporting their feelings of risk towards personal and property crime, which may indicate that respondents in Lancashire felt safer than elsewhere in the UK. It is unclear, however, whether any of the identified issues would have impacted upon the headline figures regarding police confidence, satisfaction and effectiveness. This is because each issue (such as ASB) could have influenced none, some, or even all of the main concepts captured by the surveys (Bradford & Myhill, 2015; Cao, 2015; Ludwig *et al.*, 2017; Luhmann, 1988).

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