

# Guest editorial

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## Emerging issues in the policing profession – Special Issue Journal of Criminological Research, Policy and Practice

The profession of policing is constantly changing. This is not surprising when in part the requirement of policing is to maintain social order and protect the community which involves changes in social norms and values. The central tenet of policing is preservation and protection of life, human security, where police officers are now responding to anomic conditions within society and as such needs to ensure both as an organisation and as a practice, policing is agile. As such the special issue of the *JCRPP* contributes to the examination of policing and its everchanging landscape in which it operates, through the six papers presented in this collection. There is a focus on direct operational practice such as the well-being of police officers, the contemporary role of detectives as well as the importance of volunteers in supporting the endeavours of policing practice. In addition, more structural organisational contemplations for policing, offered through the consideration of policing divided societies, trust and legitimacy in policing along with the controversial relationship with criminology and policing is considered including the idea that criminology has arguably let down policing in the latter part of the 20th century and into the new millennium. The purpose of this special issue is to stimulate academic debate, extend the research agenda of policing but most importantly, to support industry professionals and their practice by providing scientific evidence to benchmark their current practice to, whilst playing a role to inform their future practice.

This purpose commences with Associate Professor Amber McKinley (Charles Sturt University) with a paper entitled “Career survivability: navigating assault, trauma and mental illness for police”. In the paper, McKinley acknowledges that the police face constant and specific challenges each working shift from becoming a victim of assault to addressing trauma suffered by themselves. By nature, this job requires authority and control, and some officers and their command structure see vulnerability and help-seeking behaviour as weakness. In recent years, a spotlight on mental health, the COVID-19 pandemic and, an increase in family and domestic violence in Australian police forces has created a greater need for positive response to individual police surviving their career choices. As such McKinley reminds the reader of the importance of well-being in the profession of policing.

Well-being of any practitioner, not just a police officer, can be helped or hinder by workload, and in the second paper presented in this special issue Dr Ian Pepper and Professor Colin Rogers (University of South Wales) consider the vital issue of volunteers in policing. In “Valuing volunteers: the importance of initial education and training of Volunteer Police Cadet Leaders”, the authors noted that as police agencies across the world continue to provide services to communities in challenging times, the role of the volunteer is even more important. Volunteers provide support and experience to police organisations but are not without cost, often requiring a uniform, equipment and other physical resources. However, such volunteers require education and training to safely and effectively perform their roles. Reflecting on data collected from Volunteer Police Cadet Leaders across several police

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forces in England and Wales, Pepper and Rogers provide insights into the current initial development of this group of volunteers which enables them to carry out their volunteer functions, whilst making suggestions as to future developments and the subsequent impact on both policy and practice.

The importance of practice is also the focus of Dr Adrian James paper (Liverpool John Moores University), Professor Colin Rogers and James Turner (University of South Wales). In this paper entitled “Whodunit: do detectives still believe they have the skills to answer”, the authors critically analyse the findings of a national survey of investigators in the 43 Home Office forces in England and Wales that asked officers to reflect on their skills and to consider whether they are appropriate and sufficient to meet the normative expectations of communities now and in the future. Moreover, the paper critically reflects on the skills gaps that officers identified and critically assess how those might be bridged. This will have resonance for planning the police workforce of the future.

The importance of knowledge and skillset of police officers is also a theme of Professor Bernhard Frevel’s (University of Applied Science for Police and Public Administration, Munster, Germany) paper entitled “Policing divided societies requirements for the civic education of police officers”. Here, Frevel reflects on the challenges policing face in the context of disenchantment with democracy which cause (for example) more activities in riot policing, protection of politicians, synagogues and mosques. Further on, the police organisations face problems with anti-democratic, violent and extremist officers in their own ranks. Civic education (political education) is suggested by Frevel as an approach to sensitise officers for the problems, to make them understand the background of operations. In addition, this type of education, it is argued, could help to prevent misuse of force, negative *esprit de corps* and strengthen police legitimacy. The paper considers how civic education in initial and further police training and education can be organised and also be delivered in collaboration with civil society organisations. Frevel’s contribution to the special issue is based on a five-year running research and development project of the German Police University, the University of Applied Science for Police and Public Administration NRW and the Federal Agency for Civic Education.

Policing in a democratic society relies upon the notion of trust, and hence legitimacy, for it to be successful. These concepts are currently under scrutiny in many western style democracies.

In the penultimate paper of this special issue, therefore, we visit the concept of police legitimacy in the work of Dr Nick Evan (University of Tasmania) in which an examination of trust and legitimacy in police practice during COVID-19 takes place, providing implications for practice for future emergency management/critical incidents. Entitled “Trust and Legitimacy for Policing”, the paper explores the idea the police response to the pandemic has raised the issue of trust and legitimacy of policing. In addition, the paper considers just what the journey of recovery means for policing in this context and for importantly, for any future critical incidents.

Finally, the special issue concludes with a paper that has considered the foundations of police practice and its relationship with academia. In a paper entitled “Reawakening Criminology: The importance of scientific method and inquiry in Policing Practice”, the authors Associate Professor Philip Birch (University of Technology Sydney), Dr Erin Kruger (Western Sydney University), Associate Professor Glenn Ports (University of New England), Professor Lewis Bizo (Charles Sturt University) and Associate Professor Michael Kennedy (University of New England) gives consideration to how criminology addresses many components relevant to policing and with the discipline’s origin, in part, located within the natural/medical sciences, criminology and policing should be synonymous. However, as the authors note, with the rise of particular factions of criminology emerging over the 20th century such as critical criminology, the chasm between criminology and policing has never been so great. This paper seeks to bridge that gap between criminology and policing by exploring

ways in which the natural sciences can support police practice, and by default re-establish an important relationship between HASS and STEM that re-imagines criminology as an applied discipline relevant to policing and that is firmly located in theoretical frameworks and evidence-based solutions.

In sum, this collection of papers brings together a wealth of academic and professional experience because of the backgrounds of the authors that speak to a range of contemporary issues facing the policing profession. What is worthy of note is how many of the issues covered in this special issue have impacted on the profession in many ways over time, signalling that many issues facing the police are iterative. Yet, what the collection of papers presented here do is offer a modern-day context and lens to such themes and practices that are just as important to the police today as they have been in the past, and will continue to be so well into the future.