

TASER USE AND ITS INFLUENCES

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SECTION 1 – LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Tasers referred to as Conducted Energy Devices (CEDs), are an important component of contemporary police force strategies used globally. Tasers were first introduced as a non-lethal substitute for weapons, which were used in situations when there were threats to police and criminals (Smyers, 2024). Since Tasers are seen as an effective tool for ensuring police officer safety and countering public safety, their usage by police departments in the UK has been continuously growth however, this growing dependence brings up significant issues of safety for society, law, and ethics in general (Dymond, 2020a). Taser usage is significant from the perspective of public opinion as cooperation and confidence with the local police force depend on public views (Dymond, 2020a). This review employs secondary research methods, analysing existing studies, legal frameworks, and public opinion data from academic and policy literature. The strengths that come from the literature include accessibility to diverse perspectives, while weaknesses involve reliance on potentially outdated data; however, the limitations arise from the absence of primary data, requiring cautious interpretation of findings. Tasers have been examined as either necessary for de-escalation or as being linked to excessive force, especially when used on helpless groups (Deuchar et al., 2024; Hallett et al., 2021).

Legal frameworks like the Police and Criminal Evidence Act of 1984 and the Human Rights Act of 1998 establish their use, such as those about relational and possible abuse (Dymond, 2020b). Both the legal and public acceptability of Taser rules and practices depend on the capacity for these interactions. This literature review's objective will examine the many aspects of Taser-assisted police with an emphasis on the UK. The legal and ethical issues and Taser's strategic function with other force alternatives such as disruption control will be examined, along with public perceptions towards them. To identify current knowledge gaps and provide a foundation for evidence-based policy reforms, the review will incorporate perspectives from criminology, sociology, and psychology.

Literature Review

Public Perceptions of Taser Use

Tasers are non-lethal tools for the police force, which have gained significant improvement (like a low electrical current, temporarily incapacitating the subject). During police interventions in gatherings had increased, as the need for fewer casualties, they first conceived of the idea as a

safer substitute for weapons. In the UK, Tasers are used as a powerful tool for eliminating threats like public outrage, but they are also reviewed for the possibility of abuse (Smyers, 2024). Public perceptions and confidence in the use of Tasers have been greatly impacted by high-profile incidents like bank robberies and media representations of the device (Smyers, 2024). Public attitudes have changed in the UK as people's awareness of police accountability. The public is concerned that Tasers are overused against Black people and during mental health crises, even though they are aware that police require them as a self-defence weapon (Hallett et al., 2021). However, these concerns have also sparked discussion over whether Tasers are a police tool or whether efforts to temporary trust between communities and law force are undermined by their increasing usage (Hallett et al., 2021). In the UK, Tasers corresponded with a shift in police strategies towards de-escalation and the use of slight force (Hallett et al., 2021).

The public is uncertain of whether the Human Rights Act of 1998's requirements are regularly implemented in practice (Dymond, 2020b). Criticism of Tasers being used excessively in situations involving vulnerable people has increased (Dymond, 2020b). Although public opinions on the use of Tasers have been examined in the UK, the responses have been very mixed (Deuchar et al., 2024). For example, in qualitative research carried out in Scotland, Deuchar et al. (2024) found a difference between the viewpoints of department lists and the members of the community expressed fears that Tasers would be misused, despite officers' claims that they are a tactical requirement for personal safety and conflict resolution. The necessity to close the gap between public expectations and operational goals to this discrepancy.

Chielo (2020) provided quantitative evidence that Taser perceptions are influenced by demographic characteristics, including age, ethnicity, and previous law enforcement experience. People and members of ethnic minorities (i.e. poor and vulnerable people) who were fearful of excessive force and concerned about being racially profiled perceive Tasers as tools of oppression (Chielo, 2020). Older age defendants were more favourable, sometimes associating safety with Taser use as the findings showed that public attitudes are socially and experientially contextual rather than static towards old age people. (Chielo, 2020) Another issue is Tasers are used on mentally ill individuals, these kinds of instances often get public attention, and people tend to interpret them as a cause of systemic failure to address mental health problems (Hallett et al., 2021). As a result of these events being covered by media, there is a rising need for improved training and alternate options, as well as more accountability and openness when it comes to the

use of Tasers at the same time, noticeable events in the UK have significantly influenced public perceptions (Hallett et al., 2021).

For decades in the UK, there has been public chaos over severe monitoring in situations like rallies, protests etc., where there have been offenders who are accused of deaths or major injuries (Dymond, 2020a). However, they are crises that may trigger extensive debate over the ethics of the use of Tasers and whether it aligns with the principles of necessity like occurrences of this kind (Dymond, 2020a). A complicated historical and sociological drama has shaped the public's opinions of the use of Tasers in the UK. Although the majority of face recognition strategies' benefits are well known, worries about improper applications, discrimination, and the grave dangers of abuse and overuse persist. These issues were addressed by police force organisations, which must improve community communication, provide a better-trained police force, and uphold the moral and legal norms mentioned above. The primary stage for police departments was the establishment of a level of trust to have open and honest conversations with the public.

Legal Frameworks and Ethical Considerations

Taser use by police officers in the UK operates within a legal framework that aims to balance public safety with the protection of individual rights. The Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE) and the Human Rights Act 1998 (HRA) are applied in situations where the use of a Taser is deemed necessary, typically during life-threatening circumstances. This legal framework ensures that the use of force is carried out within proper procedures and holds officers accountable for their actions (Dymond, 2020b). The Human Rights Act enables the public to hold policies accountable by incorporating the principles of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), which further supports the necessity for the use of Tasers. Taser use should only be used to protect lives, therefore, violations of these provisions have led to calls for stricter adherence to legal guidelines (Smyers, 2024). Dymond et al. (2024) described that Tasers are used variety by the police force and it is used under the quality of training and the discretionary power of the police.

Taser use is ethical for public safety in clashes against the risk of excessive physical force in confrontational situations. Tasers are often justified as a less lethal alternative to guns, however, their use can still cause serious harm and significant psychological stress (Hallett et al., 2021). The use of Tasers on individuals experiencing mental distress is a concern, as these individuals are

often targeted, particularly when their actions do not align with the typical expectations of calm and controlled behaviour (Hallett et al., 2021). Police officers say that Tasers are used to de-escalate potentially dangerous situations. However, these incidents often highlight deeper issues within the system's approach to handling mental health crises (Deuchar et al., 2024). Deuchar et al. (2024) emphasised that alternative approaches in specialised mental health response training are necessary to become less dependent on Tasers in these situations.

Dymond (2020b) stated that police officers sometimes use Tasers as a tool for gaining compliance, rather than as a last resort. This practice raises ethical concerns, particularly regarding the potential misuse of power as Tasers are often applied to individuals perceived as threatening. Such practices undermine public trust in the police because they contribute to the perception of unjust incidents that unfairly target certain individuals. It further reinforces negative stereotypes (Chielo, 2020). Tasers are used by police force due to the inherent risks in certain situations, but they also provide a sense of security during potentially violent encounters. One must balance a sense of safety with an ethical framework for minimising harm. Boyd et al. (2023) acknowledged that Tasers are an effective way to protect officers' safety, but the use of Taser technology should always follow the rule that it should only be used when necessary.

According to Dymond (2020a), effective training is essential for police officers who are equipped with high-risk tools like Tasers. The training should also focus on helping officers make decisions that meet both legal requirements and ethical standards. Independent oversight bodies, such as the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC), investigate allegations of police misconduct to ensure accountability and transparency in law enforcement practices (Smyers, 2024). According to Deuchar et al. (2024), there is a need for such ongoing discussion between police forces and the public, as both serve a relation with historical tense. The above initiatives can fill the gaps in understanding between the police force and the public, and also increase the levels of mutual trust that are necessary for surveillance, to make policing ethical and effective.

Comparative Analysis of Taser and Other Force Options

Tasers were originally developed as a less lethal alternative to guns which allows police officers to incapacitate individuals from a distance without the need for bullets. Smyers (2024) described that Tasers have already proven themselves to be more effective than pepper spray and batons (stick-like objects) in controlling immediate threats and minimising risks to police officers. Tasers have become an essential tool in de-escalation strategies, especially in urban environments

where police must carefully balance public safety concerns with the appropriate use of force (Dymond et al., 2024). In comparison to pepper sprays, Tasers are precise, while pepper spray is less accurate but can be used in a wider range of situations.

Pepper spray is not always immediately effective because environmental factors, such as wind, can reduce its impact. In contrast, Tasers can incapacitate individuals from a greater distance and produce more predictable results (Boyd et al., 2023). For example, while Tasers offer operational benefits in controlling dangerous situations, they require police officers to undergo extensive training. Additionally, accountability is crucial to prevent their misuse and ensure they are used appropriately (Dymond, 2020a). Unlike guns, which are effective for close-quarters defence but carry a higher risk of causing serious physical injury (such as fractures or intense pain), Tasers are less likely to cause harm which makes them a more appealing option in certain situations (Deuchar et al., 2024). Like batons or other force options, the presence of a Taser can have psychological effects on individuals, which differ from the effects caused by other types of force. Tasers are less physically impactful on individuals when compared to guns generally.

A Taser delivers a high-voltage and low-current electrical shock that temporarily disrupts neuromuscular control which incapacitates the individual. While this effect is intended to minimise long-term damage, Tasers can still cause serious injuries, particularly if the individual falls or has a heart-related condition (Smyers, 2024). Although casualties from Taser use are rare, the incidents that have occurred continue to fuel ongoing debate about whether Tasers pose a safety risk to individuals with vulnerable health conditions (Hallett et al., 2021). Less likely to permanently damage the body, pepper spray causes severe irritation to the eyes, skin and respiratory system and these effects, though often temporary, can become life-threatening for those with asthma or other respiratory diseases (Dymond, 2020b).

Batons cause visible injuries (such as broken bones) that lead to physical consequences. These injuries often contribute to negative public perceptions of the police, particularly when incidents are recorded and publicised (Boyd et al., 2023). Different force options have varying psychological impacts. Even though the physical effects of a Taser are brief and transient, its use can trigger acute stress responses in individuals (Boyd et al., 2023). According to Deuchar et al. (2024), the anticipation of electric shock together with physical incapacitation, can lead to psychological effects that persist even after the immediate physical impact has worn off. However, when used in cases of physical violence, batons can cause long-term trauma, especially if their use

appears excessive or unnecessary (Chielo, 2020). The use of Tasers can also increase the perception of excessive force even when the policy governing their use is well-established. In contrast, while pepper spray and batons are also controversial, they do not attract the same level of public attention as Tasers which are more visually striking and noticeable (Dymond, 2020a). The perceptions highlight the need for transparency and education to promote the public's knowledge of the use of Tasers compared to alternative force choices.

Interdisciplinary Perspectives

The study of Taser use combines multiple disciplines, from criminology to sociology and psychology, all of which provide different insights into its consequences and best practices. For instance, criminologists look at the place of Tasers in the overall background of law enforcement and criminal justice systems, analysing how such tools have an impact on crime control policies, officer decision-making processes, and suspect encounter dynamics (Ariel et al., 2019). Sociologists focus on the social impact of Taser deployment on trust in law enforcement, public perceptions of fairness, and issues of systemic bias (Dymond, 2020b). On the other hand, Psychologists examined the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural impacts of exposure to or the threat of Taser deployment on individuals, with an emphasis on trauma-informed policing practices (Waters, 2017).

Criminological research focuses on the use of Tasers as an option in force that will minimise deaths and serious injury. At the same time, its adoption raises questions of ethics on overuse and normalising force for non-violent encounters (Boyd et al., 2023). From a sociological perspective, the increased public presence of Taser incidents, both in media reports and direct experiences; raises awareness over the issue of excessive or discriminatory use against specific racial or ethnic groups and mental illness patients (Dymond, 2020a). Generally, such publicity tends to shift the focus from being neutral weapons to symbols of unequal systems. Also, such news and reports undermine the legitimacy of the police in the eyes of citizens.

Psychological insights have revealed that just the presence of a Taser can provoke acute stress reactions in both suspects and bystanders, potentially escalating rather than de-escalating volatile situations (Deuchar et al., 2024). In addition, the psychological aftermath for people who are tasered, be it from the pain; humiliation, or perceived injustice of the experience, may lead to a long-term distrust of law enforcement and a reluctance to engage cooperatively in future

encounters (Waters, 2017). It will mean that psychological principles incorporated during training ensure that officers grasp both the emotional and psychological sides of their use-of-force choices. International case studies thus remain essential in optimising taser use while minimising harm and risk. For instance, the restrictive policy framework concerning its use in New Zealand entails exhaustion of all possibilities not involving violence before they adopt to employ the taser in response to any situation. This approach, combined with extensive training in de-escalation techniques, has greatly reduced instances of misuse and restored public confidence in law enforcement (Dymond et al., 2024).

Scotland also serves as an example of community-oriented policing that emphasises transparency and accountability. According to Deuchar et al. (2024), research indicated that Scottish police departments are engaging with local communities to address concerns (unethical and unjust use) about Taser use, focusing on the fact that it is a last option rather than a first response. This positive engagement not only fosters mutual understanding but also aligns Taser policies with community expectations, thus reducing tensions and building trust. In the United States, some jurisdictions have implemented real-time monitoring systems that track deployments of Tasers, keeping the deployments in line with established protocols and allowing for swift accountability in cases of deviation (Vaughn, Greene and Klinger, 2024).

Many of these systems incorporate footage from body-worn cameras, which is crucial to determining the appropriateness of decisions by police forces (Boyd et al., 2023). Though, such measures are resource-intensive, they reflect a commitment to transparency and continuous improvement. On the contrary, the risk of careless control has been pointed out by research in less regulated jurisdictions such as certain parts of Latin America. In those areas, Tasers are used regularly during routine stops, resulting in a greater injury rate and public turmoil (Hirschfield, 2023). Such examples prove the need for guidelines, rigorous training, and independent oversight to avoid abuse and protect public rights.

Policymakers and the law enforcement agencies have the responsibility to balance officer safety with public safety, ethical issues, and community trust. This requires ongoing dialogue with a wide range of diverse stakeholders (community and police representors), evidence-based policy reforms, and commitments to transparency and accountability. The implementation of an

interdisciplinary perspective from the jurisdictions on Taser use will allow complex challenges that ensure their utility as means to enhance safety rather than causing damage.

Conclusion

This literature review explored the role of Taser use in policing in the UK. Tasers are considered an option in less lethal force that tries to balance police safety with the expectations of the public. Their usage has continued to grow due to the perceived advantages of de-escalation in potentially dangerous situations. The use of Tasers raises a series of concerns regarding overuse and harm. Public perceptions of Tasers are shaped by media coverage and specific incidents. These perceptions indeed differ according to age, ethnicity, and personal experience with the police. Legal frameworks at play concerning the use of Tasers include the Police and Criminal Evidence Act and the Human Rights Act, which create guidelines that establish the necessity for using a Taser and ensure that its usage is accountable.

Besides such guidelines, ethical dilemmas do arise in questioning the appropriateness of Taser usage, particularly in instances that involve vulnerable individuals. For this not to happen, officers must be effectively trained. Tasers are less injurious than other forms of force such as guns, batons, and pepper spray. They can still result in physical and psychological trauma. Their presence will entail stress and fear both for the targeted individual and onlookers. Oversight independent of this is highly recommended to maintain transparency and accountability. There is a need to bridge the gap between public expectations and police practices in terms of community engagement. Interdisciplinary research in criminology, sociology, and psychology about the wider ramifications of Taser use becomes quite relevant. This review has drawn attention to the gaps in research on the long-term effects of Tasers and their consequences on public trust. These knowledge gaps could only be filled by further research in collaboration with the police, policymakers, and the public.

SECTION 2 - CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

The application of Tasers by West Midlands Police (WMP) presents a case study in examining the integration of force options into law enforcement practices (Heubl, 2020). This section employs the ABCD Framework in evaluating Actions, Background, Context, and Decisions by scholars and policymakers about Taser use in the WMP jurisdiction. Furthermore, it discusses how WMP policies are in line with national and international guidelines, particularly focusing on the balance between operational efficiency, ethical considerations, and public trust.

Review of Scholarly and Policy Arguments

The arguments presented by scholars (Boyd et al., 2023; Stenkamp et al. 2021) and policymakers about Taser use by WMP have been varied, from operational effectiveness to ethical dilemmas and community implications. Boyd et al. (2023) pointed out that the adoption of Tasers by WMP is part of a broader trend toward arming officers with intermediate force options to bridge the gap between unarmed policing and lethal weapons. According to Stenkamp et al. (2021), Tasers have been addressed as the most promising devices that may potentially de-escalate violent encounters, minimise injuries to officers and suspects, and promote public safety. This over-reliance on Tasers undermines public trust and further exacerbates perceived systemic bias if used improperly. From a policy point of view, there are national guidelines that form the use of Tasers; for example, the guidelines provided by the College of Policing, including guides for use in appropriate situations and restricting the use for compliance (College of Policing, 2013). Within the framework of National Decision Model (NDM), taser is a formalised tool for officers to assess risks and make judgments about suitable responses about its use as per the situational demand. Using this framework, Tasers are classed as "less-lethal"-only deployed where there exists a genuine risk to life or safety (Dose Police, 2024). Dymond (2020a) stated that officers should always look for any less violent alternatives before they use the Taser. This can be lined up with necessary and reasonable notions under PACE 1984.

However, critics have pointed out that these policies are often practically deficient. Hallett et al. (2021) mentioned the fact that episodes of a disproportionate number of Tasers used against people from minority ethnic groups and people with mental health issues have become causes for

public disturbance. These cases suggest gaps in training and oversight, raising questions about whether WMP's policies sufficiently mitigate risks of misuse. Deuchar et al. (2024) further argued that the visibility of such incidents, amplified by media coverage, can erode community trust and hinder efforts to foster collaborative relationships between police and the public.

Policy Alignment with National Guidelines

WMP policies on Taser use are aligned closely with national guidelines, and the aim is to ensure standardised practice (as per conduct by College of Policing) in all UK law enforcement agencies (such as Metropolitan Police) (Heubl, 2020). The College of Policing's Authorised Professional Practice details the specific criteria for Taser deployment in terms of the principles of legality, necessity, and proportionality (Stenkamp et al., 2021). These are incorporated into WMP training programs, making sure the police officers are able to act by judicious decisions in situations of intense pressure. Moreover, Independent Officer for Police Conduct (IOPC) exercises review Taser-use cases, which promotes accountability and transparency (IOPC, 2024).

In addition, at the national level, the Human Rights Act 1998 provides the legal framework to guide the policy of Tasers, with specific regards to the rights to life and freedom from inhuman or degrading treatment (Legislation.gov.uk, 2024). It is observable that WMP adheres to such standards by having a practice of documenting and reviewing all Taser use. Boyd et al. (2023) indicated that this adherence provides for internal accountability while also being perceived in the public arena as responsible and committed to ethical policing.

Policy Alignment with International Guidelines

Internationally, WMP is in line with the United Nations' Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials. These principles call for the use of force only to the extent where its use is essential in a given situation. The use must proportionate to the serious nature of the offense that is giving rise to the use of such force (Taser) (UN, 1990). WMP's use of de-escalation tactics as best practice mirrors New Zealand. Officers are trained to seek non-violent conflict resolution strategies first. This is evidence that WMP takes global standards as a benchmark in ethical policing.

However, there is still a gap between policy and practice. Dymond (2020b) and Hallett et al. (2021) found that WMP's policies are not always followed by the officers in the field, especially in situations where they are under pressure. This indicates that there is a need for continuous

training and robust monitored mechanisms to ensure consistency between policy objectives and operational outcomes.

Community engagement is at the center of WMP's policing approach, demonstrating its intent to build trust and partnership. As concerns over the misuse of Tasers grew, WMP has been taking measures such as public consultations, transparency initiatives, and enhanced training programs for officers (Punch, 2023). According to Deuchar et al. (2024), such efforts are necessary in filling the gap between police and community expectations, especially in a diverse urban setting where tensions can arise. Also, the WMP has embraced latest technological innovations such as body-worn cameras to deliver real-time documentation of Taser deployments. These technological innovations ensure accountability and contribute immensely to the review and modification of policies (Henstock, 2015). Such an approach has put WMP at the forefront of innovation, ensuring its position in harmony with national and international standards.

The role of Tasers in policing remains one of the most contentious topics, and primary and secondary data evidence provides crucial information about their use. This section looks at incident reports, interviews, and comparative case studies to analyse the deployment of Tasers by WMP and other UK forces in terms of operational effectiveness, ethical considerations, and public trust.

Incident Reports and Patterns

Incident reports from WMP indicate strategic advantages and disadvantages of Taser use. In 2023, statistics showed that Tasers were used more frequently in high-risk situations, where officers said they needed to incapacitate a person immediately to prevent harm to themselves or others (Dymond, 2020b). However, controversy arose when Tasers were used disproportionately against people with mental health issues or those from ethnic minorities. These patterns are reflected in national studies that found systemic disparities in the application of force options (Hallett et al., 2021). The Independent Office for Police Conduct investigated several cases where Taser use was found to have been in excess of procedure, which highlighted the requirement for better training and strict monitoring (IOPC, 2024). An example is a high-profile case where a man diagnosed with schizophrenia was tased multiple times, thus challenging the adequacy of the mental health training that officers receive (Ellis, 2018). This example highlights the need for ensuring that operational practices are aligned with existing guidelines to avoid misuse and to be held accountable.

Interviews with Law Enforcement and Community Members

Interviews with WMP officers reflect a more complex view of Taser use. Many officers believe Tasers are a vital tool for de-escalating volatile situations, especially in urban areas where violent crime is common (Boyd et al., 2023). However, officers also have concerns regarding the stigma associated with the deployment of Tasers, which can increase community mistrust. The officers depend on Tasers for their safety, but each and every deployment comes under intense scrutiny, outlining a tension between operational need and public perception (IOPC, 2020). The Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) has investigated several instances where Taser use exceeded the protocols, and requires better training and careful use (IOPC, 2024). For example, one case involved a man with schizophrenia who was repeatedly tased, and that raises the question of whether he received adequate mental health training from the officers (Ellis, 2018). Such incidents prove that the operational practices must be brought in line with the existing guidelines to avoid misuse and accountability.

On the other hand, community interviews showed a different story whereby more people expressed fears of being misused by Tasers on them, especially in a vulnerable population. As per the community leaders, Tasers are fired too soon, especially with those who need assistance and not harm (Stott, 2023). Such views indicate the imperative need for open communication and extensive engagement mechanisms to close gaps between police and public perceptions.

Data from other UK Forces:

Comparative analysis with forces like the Metropolitan Police and Greater Manchester Police provides more depth. The Metropolitan Police had introduced a real-time monitoring system for Taser deployment in which body-worn camera footage was integrated to increase accountability. With this, complaints of excess force decreased by 15%. This showed that there is potential for technology to bring about greater transparency in the operations (Henstock, 2015). Greater Manchester Police introduced specific mental health response units wherein the officers are trained to maximise de-escalation measures before force. The implementation allowed a significant reduction in Taser usage during mental health contact interventions, aligning actions with ethical standards and local expectations (Greater Manchester Police, 2024).

Supplementing with case studies from other UK Forces

Scotland: Community oriented Policing

Scotland's policy on the use of Tasers provides valuable lessons in community-oriented policing. According to Deuchar et al. (2024), there is an emphasis on transparency and accountability. Scottish police engage the local communities in discussing concerns about Taser deployment. This pro-active engagement fosters mutual understanding and ensures that Taser policies align with public expectations. For example, Scottish police agencies hold frequent forums to elaborate on the justification of taser use and encourage input from broad stakeholders (Dickson, 2021). This not only builds community trust but also fuels policy improvement over time. In addition, Scotland's more stringent standards for deploying Tasers, which emphasise de-escalation and non-lethal options, set the standard for ethical policing (Speakman, 2023).

New Zealand: A Global Benchmark

Internationally, New Zealand is unique in having a very restrictive policy framework governing the use of Tasers. Officers are trained to practice all options before using Tasers and are supported by extensive training in conflict resolution and de-escalation techniques (Dymond et al., 2024). This has reduced misuse to a minimum and increased public confidence in law enforcement. In independent oversight mechanisms in New Zealand, the full and serious investigation of any Tasing is provided. Such policies correspond well to the United Nations' Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms, a benchmark around which the rest of the world harmonises its ethics concerning Tasing (Shortt, 2022). The experiences of Scotland and New Zealand highlight the need to integrate community engagement, robust training, and independent oversight into Taser policies. In the case of WMP, these practices would likely help to address existing problems and increase public trust. Real-time monitoring systems, expanded mental health training programs, and open dialogue with community stakeholders are critical steps toward achieving these goals.

In New Zealand, the legal framework regarding the use of Taser requires that officers use all other non-violent options before using the Taser device, backed by comprehensive training in conflict resolution and de-escalation techniques (Dymond et al., 2024). This is in line with the United Nations' Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms, which focuses on necessity and proportionality (Shortt, 2022). On the other hand, although England and Wales are also proportionate through the Human Rights Act 1998 and the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, there have been inconsistencies in training and application, especially in mental health cases

(Dymond, 2020a). New Zealand's stricter monitoring has led to higher public trust than in England and Wales.

The findings from the case study of West Midlands Police are notable in terms of similarities and differences with other literature and policy debates in academia. Most of the literature on Taser use is framed with double perceptions (concerning both police officers and community views), both providing safety and causing controversy. Such as Hallett et al. (2021) discussed WMP's reliance on Tasers in high-risk situations, reflecting their operational necessity. In this regard, however, the concerns of disproportionate application seem to echo more general debates about systemic bias and ethical dilemmas (Dymond, 2020a).

This literature provides a wider scope to the psychological and social implications of Tasers, especially on vulnerable members of society. Boyd et al. (2023) considered Tasers for causing fewer physical injuries than firearms, they are also very vocal about the improper use of Tasers that can contribute to community unrest. In the case of WMP, this is found to be true, especially in cases involving Tasers being used on mentally ill subjects. This raises very critical questions about the adequacy of training and the prioritisation of de-escalation techniques over force. The historical development of Taser usage, which Section 1 explores, also intersects with WMP's practices. According to Smyers (2024), Tasers were first promoted as less lethal than firearms and for arming WMP officers with Tasers was justified on this approach, but the unintended effects, perceptions of excessive use and abuse-were equally dominant in the WMP's use of Taser.

Another difference exists in community involvement. While the wider literature identifies consultation with the public and transparency in the formation of public views on Taser use, Scotland and New Zealand's forward-looking approach, are contrary to WMP's reactive approach (Dymond et al., 2024; Deuchar et al., 2024). This disparity creates the need for WMP to adopt more structured and participative engagement practices to increase its legitimacy and align with international best practices. Finally, the adoption of technology for accountability, such as body-worn cameras, is part of a wider trend in policing. While the Metropolitan Police has proven the value of such technology, WMP's implementation is relatively narrow.

Wider literature suggests that these tools have been effective in increasing transparency and reducing public concerns, while this is an area where WMP needs to improve (Henstock, 2015; Dymond, 2020b; Smyers, 2024). West Midlands Police has adopted several practices (providing

training and following use of force policies) that deserve recognition for being consistent with ethical and operational standards. The documentation of Taser deployments and interaction with independent oversight bodies, including IOPC, reflect the willingness of WMP to remain accountable. However, there are urgent reforms to be addressed in areas where the practice differs from the expectation. As an example, the Tasers' overuse during mental health cases indicate inadequate specialised training. The achievements of Greater Manchester Police in their mental health response teams are inspiring and should inspire WMP to follow that example. Incorporation of such teams would not only help WMP reduce dependence on Taser but will also solve the root problem of volatile encounters (Greater Manchester Police, 2024).

The implementation of real-time monitoring systems, similar to those currently employed by the Metropolitan Police, may also improve operations and public trust. For instance, immediate accountability mechanisms may help prevent misuse while maintaining compliance with established procedures (Henstock, 2015). Improved community relations through public forums and outreach can also be an important step in restoring the lost trust between the police and the community, as revealed by both local and global analyses. Aligning with international standards will help WMP practices to be effective (Boyd et al., 2023). The strict requirements for the deployment criteria found in Scotland and New Zealand reflect an emphasis on de-escalation and non-violent alternatives, and this aspect needs a more defined stand in current policies to promote the requirements of proportionality and necessity for the use of Tasers.

Primary and secondary data combined with comparative case studies provided evidence of the opportunities and dangers of Taser use in the UK police service. As much as Tasers have become a valuable resource in enhancing officer and public safety, their use must be tempered with principles of necessity, proportionality, and accountability. Lessons from other forces and jurisdictions indicate that transparency, training, and community engagement can minimise risk and build trust. For WMP, adopting these lessons can further enhance the ethical and effective usage of Tasers to meet the national and international standards. This is possible through continuous review and stakeholder engagement with the complexity of Taser use to ensure that WMP upholds public safety and justice.

SECTION 3 – EVIDENCE-BASED RESPONSE AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

In the UK, the increased deployment and usage of Tasers among various police forces have raised serious concern over safety implications for the general public, along with some questions legal and ethical. While sections above identified how the Taser use had differently been taken by the public, on its overuse, particularly with vulnerable groups, and further concerns about the effectiveness. Legal frameworks, such as the Human Rights Act 1998 and the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, give guidelines on what appropriate use of force. Gaps in adherence continue to exist within these frameworks; hence, these are fuelling continued debate about whether the use of Tasers is necessary and proportionate, including those with mental distress cases and in minority groups. The media have shaped public trust in the police as a force that, by and large, tends to use excessive force and systemic bias against targeted groups through their reporting of Taser incidents. This calls for a balanced approach to police safety with public trust and hence this review to come up with an analysis of the Tasers' usage for further improvements in practices to surmount these challenges.

These analyses will, therefore, be used in the proposed research to evaluate the deployment of Taser in the UK, particularly by the West Midlands Police. The gaps in the existing literature identified in the above sections would thus be filled in this effectiveness, legal validity, and public perception research into Taser use. This study will adopt a mixed-methods design, combining quantitative data on Taser deployment practices with qualitative surveys to gather both community and officer perspectives. In so doing, it should also serve to offer recommendations that prove useful in the development and modification of best practice in using Tasers in a manner that meets the legal threshold, ethical consideration, and public expectations. Results from this study will also be useful in the development of policy reforms in efforts towards entrenching transparency and accountability, and consequently building trust between the police and the public.

Summary of Literature Review

Public perception in the UK is more mixed, and though Tasers have a necessary role to play in policing for some, others are concerned about the possibility of abuses, especially against the weak. For instance, people with mental health conditions are disproportionately affected when Tasers are deployed (Hallett et al., 2021). The communities of colour, too, feel that they are most likely to be subjected to Taser use and therefore fear racial profiling (Chielo, 2020). Public

confidence in police services depends on the perception of Tasers, given the increasing concerns about the excess uses of force, especially in non-threatening situations (Smyers, 2024). Public discussion often centres on the tension between police safety and concerns about excessive force (Dymond, 2020b). The media's portrayal of Taser incidents further shapes these public opinions, often focusing on high-profile cases that generate public debate (Deuchar et al., 2024).

These laws seek to strike a balance between the interests of public safety with the protection of individual rights; most of these legal provisions, however, are not enforced to actively dissuade the abuse of Tasers (Smyers, 2024). In any event, it is obedience to such laws that can play the most significant role in ensuring that the use of force applies only in an actual and serious threat of danger. On top, legal frameworks necessitate the responsibility of the officers through their actions, especially on the use of force (Dymond, 2020b). Despite the presence of these, enforcement has certain gaps, thus it adds to the reasons people are sceptical about how Tasers are used properly (Legislation.gov.uk, 2024). All of these different legal challenges beg for more substantial questions in oversight mechanisms to secure accountability sufficiently.

The use of Tasers in policing has been one of the most debated topics, especially regarding their effectiveness in de-escalating potentially violent situations. Some studies have concluded that Tasers really help in reducing physical confrontations and further reduce lethal-force options (Ariel et al., 2019). However, many are highly concerned about long-term exposure to the controversial devices for individuals with potential health diseases. Tasers can affect the individual's psychological outlook and may lead to heightened conditions among those with potential heart complications (Smyers, 2024). The perceived safety of Tasers when compared to other weapons, such as guns, is still outweighed by concerns about their physical and psychological consequences (Hallett et al., 2021). More critically, the use of Tasers can undermine trust in the public when forces use them excessively or without justification, especially in cases involving the vulnerable (Chielo, 2020). Police forces are to ensure that Tasers are deployed only when necessary to minimise harm.

In the context of West Midlands Police, the findings from the literature review reveal several challenges and areas for improvement. West Midlands Police represents an essential case study in examining Taser use in the UK context due to high usage rates and continuing public scrutiny (Dymond et al., 2024). The department has achieved developments in embedding Taser use within de-escalation strategies. However, questions concerning the overuse of force linger,

especially in situations with vulnerable individuals (Deuchar et al., 2024). For West Midlands Police to change practices, there needs to be a strengthening of training programs, making the police better prepared when handling situations where people may be in mental distress along with other complex variables (Hallett et al., 2021). For instance, the police can be more interactive with the community with respect to public anxieties and improve the relationship with communities (Smyers, 2024). In this way, West Midlands Police set the standard for effective and at the same time ethical use of Taser (Boyd et al., 2023).

Methodology

Research Approach

The study will combine qualitative and quantitative methods by engaging in a mixed-method examination to explore the uses of the Taser in the United Kingdom. Quantitative methodology will serve best for this research by providing a measurable evidence of the numbers of deployments across demographics over time, indicating how often Tasers are used, demographic trend data with regard to suspect characteristics upon Taser use, etc., and finally, describing what occurred afterwards. This will help in reducing the identification of trends and correlation for objective analysis in the deployment of Tasers. The qualitative methods of surveying and interviewing will enable the researchers to establish community perceptions and officer experiences of public trust and human consequences of the Taser use. These, according to Boyd et al. (2023), are important in understanding human experiences of public trust and human consequences of Taser use. Such a combination of approaches enables the researchers to view in greater detail the complexity of the subject matter at hand. This is because mixed methods allow researchers to investigate not just the statistical data on Taser use but also the contextual factors that surround its use which is a necessity in making such a topic relevant for policy reform.

Data Collection Methods

Surveys will be carried out to capture the attitudes and perceptions of both community members and police officers regarding Taser use. Surveys are a research tool in which data is collected from a large group in a structured and standardised nature (Rea and Parker, 2014). In the current study, community members will be surveyed about their concerns regarding the use of Tasers, perceptions of fairness, and levels of trust in the police. Police officers will be surveyed to capture their experiences of deploying the Taser and training therein. The data analysis approach will, therefore, contribute to the realisation of the police-internal perspectives beyond the public

attitudes necessary for developing wide social and operational impacts resulting from the use of Tasers. According to Groves et al. (2011), surveys help establish clear assessments of the opinion of the public more than other means in the presence of such controversies as the usage of Taser by serving a clear outline of how the different groups regard the actions of the police.

Incident records from West Midlands Police and the IOPC will be analysed to identify trends in Taser use. Incident records provide objective information relating to the circumstances of deployments, the results or consequences from those deployments, and any complaints or allegations of misconduct in relation to taser use. Incident records will thus play a crucial part when attempts are made to assess general trends in incidence and situational contexts of Taser deployments. This information will be analysed to see whether the Taser is deployed within specified guidelines and legal frameworks through an analysis of trends resultant outcomes that researchers can be able to check if there is appropriate usage of Tasers or in incidents when other ways could have proved more efficient. In this case incident records will a valid source of date to ensure the identification of operational points that could be used towards improving police practices.

Analysis of media coverage will also be important in understanding the public perception of the use of Tasers, especially in high-profile cases. Media coverage is great in influencing public opinion in most instances, especially when related to vulnerable populations, including people with mental health issues or from racial minorities (Ikizer and Blanton, 2016). Media reports will allow the researchers to discover the depiction of Tasers in the public sphere and proceed to assess the ways in which these representations affect community trust in the police. This can provide the social and emotive impact of Taser deployment that will put the figures from questionnaires and incident logs into context. Media analysis will involve news reports, social media content, public reaction to reported incidents involving the use of Tasers. According to Ikizer and Blanton (2016), media coverage often shapes the way the public views law enforcement, particularly when controversial issues like Taser use are involved.

Integration of these three methods will provide an understanding of the use of Tasers from multiple angles in the study. The survey will provide data in the form of both qualitative and quantitative information from the community members and police officers. Incident records will provide real, concrete evidence of how Tasers are used in incidents. Media analysis will add one more layer of context that of capturing public perception via the media on the use of Tasers. Such

triangulation will hence provide grounds for assurance of both objectively obtained data and public subjective perception. The collection of data from more than one source, according to Chih-Pei and Chang (2017), provides a fuller understanding of the research issue, thus making the results more robust and actionable. Integrating these methods will permit this study to give a proper and specific picture of the current status of Taser use and the impact it has on public trust and officer safety.

Research Design and Costs

The pilot project will be conducted within West Midlands Police to evaluate Taser deployment practices. The study will include 500 surveys from community members and 200 surveys from police officers. Incident records from IOPC will be analysed with a focus on 300 Taser-related incidents. The goal is to identify trends in Taser use along with assessing the effectiveness of training and examining public trust. These will add depth on perceptions of the use of Tasers about fairness and on how these affect community-police relations. Incident record analysis will then enable researchers to understand the situational context of Taser deployments and any outcomes of such Taser uses. Such a process can be accomplished by combining the quantitative reporting of Taser deployments along with the officer and community experiences in an in-depth qualitative way. The findings will be used to make recommendations for the refinement of the Taser policy and will provide greater insight and accountability from police practices.

The cost implications for this pilot project are estimated at £47,000. This will cover survey design, data collection, and analysis. The breakdown includes £15,000 for survey development and distribution and £20,000 for training police officers on Taser use and community engagement. The data analysis and reporting will cost £12,000. These costs align with the study's objectives of assessing the effectiveness of Taser deployment and improving policies. The project will be scalable to other regions in the UK depending on the findings. The research can be expanded to other forces by identifying effective Taser practices in West Midlands Police. It will also help to standardise procedures and improve public trust across the country.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations comprises serious concerns in adherence to the laws and ethics, transparency, and avoiding risk.

Adherence to Legal and Ethical Guidelines

The use of Taser has to be in terms of compliance with frameworks such as Human Rights Act 1998 (HRA) and that by the United Nations (Legislation.gov.uk, 2024). This sets out the use of force and firearms, giving rules on necessity, proportionality, and minimal harm, particularly in operational contexts. WMP shows commitment to these standards through documentation protocols, mandatory reviews, and independent oversight by bodies like the IOPC. However, equal importance to research integrity is needed to maintaining confidentiality and ensuring informed consent throughout data collection processes such as in surveys and interviews.

Mitigating the Risk of Harm and Misrepresentation

Research on the use of Tasers should focus first on the safety and dignity of participants. Vulnerable populations should be given more attention to avoid misrepresentation of experiences (Dymond, 2020b). WMP can improve on training in trauma-informed practices, focusing on de-escalation techniques as a way of reducing the harm caused. Officers will be better equipped with methods that balance operational efficiency and ethical sensitivity, especially when interacting with mental health crises or socioeconomically disadvantaged groups (Bradford et al., 2023). Moreover, transparent communication of results and limitations can avoid wrong interpretation of results and public mistrust and accountability. Policymakers and researchers must collaborate to ensure proper sharing of findings without bringing stigma to vulnerable demographics and enhanced integrity of law enforcement practice.

3.6 Recommendations and Gaps

Key Recommendations

Enhanced Training Programs: Use scenario-based simulations and trauma-informed practices designed to meet real-world needs. The programs should train officers to identify signs of distress and prepare them with techniques to de-escalate violent situations non-violently (Keeley, 2021). Deepened understanding of psychological triggers and trauma responses will result in better, more ethical, and effective decisions in situations where things get tense.

Implement Real-Time Monitoring Systems: Introduce body-worn cameras and live monitoring systems to monitor real-time deployment of Taser. The system allows real-time oversight and monitoring and facilitates quicker investigations of possible misuse (Henstock, 2015). The openness can raise public confidence and, above all, help with evaluation of policies.

Community Engagement Initiatives: Establish structured forums to help the local communities express concerns over Taser use. Establish regular meetings to discuss deployment practices and gather public feedback (Hallett et al., 2021). Through such collaborative dialogues police policies can be harmonised with community expectations and reduce tension, especially in areas with a history of strained police-citizen relationships.

Specialised Mental Health Units: Establish specialised response teams trained to respond to specific situations involving individuals in mental health crises. These units should collaborate with healthcare professionals to ensure timely, effective interventions (Dymond, 2020a). Reducing the dependence on Tasers in such cases would help address systemic issues while promoting safer outcomes for everyone.

Policy Standardisation: Standardise the policies of Taser deployment at local and national levels to avoid discrepancies between the two. All the officers should be in compliance with the principles of necessity, proportionality, and accountability. Uniformity will prevent discrepancies in enforcement in different communities and ensure fair treatment.

Gaps for future research

The guidelines aim to combine efficient performance with ethical motives. These serve to make Taser technology not a point of debate, but an instrument of safety to people. Despite the extensive study of Taser use, many areas remain unexplored that could help improve practice and policy. One gap is the long-term effects of Taser exposure. Most current studies are based on physiological impacts in the immediate, but there is little known of chronic physical or psychological effect, especially in vulnerable populations such as those with previous health conditions or those experiencing multiple exposures.

Another critical gap is public trust-building strategies. Although recommendations for community engagement initiatives have been made, there is limited empirical evidence about the most effective approaches in building cooperation and changing perceptions of fairness. It should be investigated how the effects of different outreach approaches on public confidence unfold over time (Boyd et al., 2023). The comparative effectiveness of Tasers compared to other force options, such as pepper spray or batons, is also an area of interest for further study. Research could look at the operational results, public attitudes, and long-term effects to determine whether Tasers are indeed the best less-lethal tool for contemporary policing or if alternative technologies may

provide similar advantages with fewer disadvantages (Ariel et al., 2019). Finally, accountability mechanisms should be assessed more holistically. Oversight bodies such as the IOPC are key elements in ensuring transparency but with questions about the consistency of their processes and how effectively they are carried out. Research could look at how these mechanisms actually deal with misuse, handle complaints, and lead towards systemic improvements (Dymond, 2020a). These gaps will require interdisciplinary approaches, integrating knowledge from criminology, sociology, psychology, and public health. Research in these fields will serve to provide a comprehensive understanding of Taser use, focusing on ethical standards and community needs.

Long-term Consequences: Examine psychological and physiological changes from Tasing over time as it might particularly influence vulnerable individuals.

Community Policing Innovation Methods: Find best practices that work between police and multiracial communities in strengthening trust and cooperation.

Operational Comparison: Compare taser utilisation outcomes in performance and on social levels to such alternatives as pepper spray and clubs.

Audit Measures: Examine the functionality of independent review services, IOPC, towards accountability to handle misuses or improper deployments while holding personnel transparent in their operations.

Conclusion

This study calls for a balanced and evidence-based approach in the use of Tasers in policing. Key findings have pointed out that Tasers serve as both instruments of safety enhancement and sources of public controversy, especially in vulnerable populations. These dualities need to be aligned with the legal and ethical frameworks in a consistent manner, robust community engagement, and improved officer training to reduce the risk of misuse. Future research should focus on identifying long-term effects of exposure to the Taser among marginalised and medically vulnerable populations to better their care. There is an also immense need to explore the possibilities for innovative public trust-building initiatives and collaborative engagement models by police forces and the wider community. Comparative analyses of Tasers versus alternative force options may provide critical insights into the operational and societal outcomes of their deployment and help refine the tools and practices used by law enforcement.

Finally, oversight mechanisms, such as the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC), require further scrutiny in order to assess their effectiveness in promoting transparency and accountability. Future studies can then cover these gaps by utilising interdisciplinary research from criminology, sociology, psychology, and public health.

This involves constant discussion between policymakers, the law enforcement agency, and other community stakeholders regarding navigating the complexity of Taser usage, which is aimed at keeping such tools a mechanism for enhancing public safety, all within the frameworks of justice and equity. This study underscores the importance of balanced, evidence-based policing with Taser use. Key findings indicate that Tasers have two faces: as tools for safety and as sources of controversy, particularly for vulnerable populations. With such identified gaps and implementation of recommended practices, WMP can improve ethical and effective deployment of Tasers. The next wave of studies should therefore focus on longer-term effects, trust building, and comparative analyses between options in the use of force. Continuous dialogue with policymakers, law enforcement agencies, and communities can thus better negotiate Taser-related complex issues in maintaining this valuable tool as one of enhancement for public safety without lowering standards on ethical or legal standards.

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