

Exploring the impact of TASERs in the UK

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TASER

Social Scientists at the University of Exeter have called for a greater comparative analysis of the impact of TASERs used in law enforcement. The next generation of the electric-shock weapon used by police forces in England and Wales is currently under review.

The research published in the Oxford Journal of Policing/Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice suggests that in order to evaluate the impact of TASERs, better data collection on other force, such as batons and irritant spray, used by the police would assist in providing a clearer understanding of the impact on officer safety and injury rates of civilians. This report comes less than a month after the Home Secretary, Theresa May, called for improved data reporting on use of force by the police.

The 'Policing Science: The Lessons of TASER' research is funded by the Economic Social Research Council (ESRC), via the South West Doctoral Training Centre (SWDTC).

The lead author is Abi Dymond, PhD researcher in Security Conflict and Justice at the Universities of Exeter and Bristol, who is working alongside the Association of Chief Police Officers, and various UK [police forces](#), on the research. Dymond is keen to highlight the need for comparative data, she said: "TASER clearly has a valuable role to play in policing - and precisely how valuable is a key question. Whilst much information is currently being captured on TASER use itself, limited information was collected on police use of force, officer and civilian injuries prior to its introduction, which makes it difficult to assess the impact TASER has had"

She added: "Whilst some steps are already being taken in this direction, there is an urgent need for better data collection on police use of other force such as batons and irritant spray in England and Wales to allow us to put the benefits and risks of TASER into context."

Ten years since the initial introduction of TASER, its usage remains a sensitive and controversial issue. According to the report, following the use of a TASER police officers are required to submit a seven page use of force form to the Home Office and their force. The police are under no obligation to submit any use of force forms for batons and irritant spray, limiting the ability to compare and contrast findings. In addition, whilst this system requires officers to record civilian injuries, there is no space for them to record injuries they may have sustained during the incident. This complicates any assessment of the impact of TASER on officer injury rates.

Although there has been significant research on the introduction and impact of TASER, former Chief Constable and editor of the Oxford

Journal on Policing Peter Neyroud CBE QPM is acutely aware of the need for ongoing research. He said: "The deployment of TASER into operational policing was carefully considered and based on the best available research. However, this is such a crucial part of the police use of force that it is essential that the research keeps pace with the day to day practice. The ESRC funded research based at the University of Exeter is a very important programme that is adding to our knowledge and will allow the police to learn from the most up to date evidence."

The article is appearing in the December Special Issue of the *Oxford Journal of Policing*, entitled Transforming the Police Through Science.

Professor Brian Rappert, a social scientist at the University of Exeter and co-author of the report said: "We hope the lessons identified in this article will help foster enhanced policies and practices regarding [police](#) use of force in the UK and beyond."

Provided by University of Exeter

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