

Police Traumatic Events Checklist (PTEC)

CASE STUDY:

**Using PTEC to manage trauma
exposure in teams**



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AIM

The aim of this case study is to offer some insight into experiences and areas of UK policing implementing PTEC, the value, the impact, the lessons learned, and the opportunities and challenges ahead. The intention is for this evaluation to provide forces with a user-based and realistic look at the commendable trauma management initiatives using PTEC in 2023 and beyond.

PTEC is a tried and tested tool that has the potential to change the face of trauma management in UK policing from the ground up: from individuals' wellbeing to the HMICFRS' commitment to monitoring how officers and staff are protected in their work.

The science behind PTEC's creation demonstrates that trauma exposure is common ground. It may provide forces with their first evidence of officers and staff experiencing and managing trauma successfully in within the force resources in place.

Devon and Cornwall Police has an established wellbeing strategy and mental wellbeing plan that includes mandatory manager training in mental health, which will enable managers to diffuse their direct reports after exposure to traumatic incidents.

HOW THE STUDY WAS DONE

- Senior Leadership Team (SLT) signed off PTEC for use.
- Relevant management were briefed and then required to meet with their teams of PCs for a two weekly check in using PTEC.
- Following review, the PTEC project lead conducted two focus groups with all participants with the intention to brief Occupational Health.

MAIN FINDINGS

Focus groups covered:

- What understanding people had of the basis of PTEC and its purpose.
- Proficiency using PTEC and how they would use it to facilitate a conversation in a diffusing scenario; how not to use it!
- Confidence using PTEC - did it facilitate the conversations and go smoothly?
- How did PTEC help interactions? Facilitating an empathetic conversation without revisiting the exposure; normalising thoughts and emotions in response to trauma and the job; discussing support options.
- Conducting a risk assessment for implementing PTEC as well as a risk assessment for not implementing PTEC.
- How did it support those being supervised? Assessing the value of PTEC for the officers being diffused - being trauma aware; reduced feelings of isolation; feeling empowered to seek help, if required, do they feel more supported by managers? Did PTEC help identify their resiliences as well as their vulnerabilities?

- What worked well and identifying areas for improvement.
- Assessing for continuing to use PTEC after the pilot has finished and how replicable it is in other groups.

“This is real world stuff” (Professor John Harrison)

- Conversation about the fact that individuals and teams will look at PTEC differently at any one time, that it depends on personalities as well as the wider pressure at the time in the local areas and station but also nationally. PTEC can capture all of life’s influences on how we deal with the job and gives us more objectivity and clarity, so we can get on with it.

Training supervisors in PTEC seemed relatively straightforward, but the results were mixed - “It’s simple and adaptable enough to persuade people to give it a go” (Pilot PTEC Trainer).

- PTEC improved understanding of response team trauma distribution and highlighted those who you think are trauma vulnerable or resilient might not be the case. Assumptions that individuals or pairs first allocated to incident cars at the beginning of a shift would have the most exposure to potentially traumatic incidents were challenged by PTEC which shone light on the trauma exposure of individuals who took up jobs later in the sequence of job allocation. This drew attention to supervisors’ erroneous “stereotyping” of team members as being more trauma hardy than others. PTEC added to the case for evenly distributed job allocation in the team and further consideration of trauma load differences between those single crewed and those double crewed.

“If we have the matrix, it gives structure to a conversation and to understanding what people have been to”

- Two dominant applications were an automated tally to capture trauma exposure load over time and a tool by which conversations can be started. The difference being that one was incident-only and the latter would need the matrix (situational context row).
- PTEC was useful as a live self-assessment tool for resilience monitoring information: PDRs, new roles. One supervisor suggested PTEC as a component of a PDR and for introducing an individual to a new team/supervisor: updating PTEC to show how they are becoming more comfortable with and resilient to some incidents and more vulnerable to others. PTEC was also helpful in capturing more time-sensitive vulnerabilities, such as having children at home or anniversaries becoming current triggers for difficulties.

“PTEC needs to be part of leadership input and its impact needs to be drilled home”

- Supervisors were honest about the need for pragmatism to explain the good that will come out of this in terms of escalating up the reality of trauma exposure on the front line to College of Policing and HMICFRS: PTEC could be the message that finally gets through.
- Users suggested PTEC should include a direct link to support in each force, offering reminders of what is available ranging from informal friends and family to national helplines as well as force-based support. This was considered vital as a means of ensuring individuals can help seek feeling more self-aware and informed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

“We don’t think form filling is an appropriate way to manage trauma exposure, and we don’t have the time even if we did”

- This study really highlighted how important it is to be sensitive to the workload of supervisors in response policing. The perception was that should PTEC be introduced as ‘a tick-box exercise’, this would only add to a response sergeants’ workload and its value unlikely to come into fruition. Without fully engaging and reflecting in honest and open conversation about PTEC’s potential benefits (for supporting supervisors, individuals, and trauma triage, etc) it may be difficult for some over-stretched supervisors to grasp how PTEC can actually make their role easier and help them to gain confidence in dealing with the manageability of the trauma exposure their teams face on a daily basis.
- Taking the time to acknowledge the time pressure that supervisors are already under may help to establish that the idea of implementing PTEC is to ease their pressure. By offering brief but practical training for supervisors using the guidance series provided as a manual and offering them a chance to think about how PTEC might help them in their own roles is a good way for teams to take ownership of trauma management in their own way that is most helpful for their own teams, dynamics, work flow and local priorities.
- Using the Risk Assessment is a good way of explaining how there are a lot of things to consider when using PTEC and that no one supervisor should be undertaking it in isolation but as part of a collective new approach to managing a shared issue.

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