



CAN YOU HELP?

The Queensland Police Service are seeking to understand how their uniform and equipment is perceived by the public.

Reason for Public Appeal

The way in which the uniform is interpreted by the public heavily influences the way the police are represented within the community (Johnson, 2005). The Queensland Police Service (QPS) requested a project that will help them to better understand how the uniform and equipment worn by officers in Queensland is perceived by the public. The research specifically focused on how **tactical thigh holsters**, **load bearing vests**, **taser placement** and **shirt colour** influence civilian's impressions of police. This project analysed how pre-existing perceptions of the police service, alongside sociodemographic factors, impact the way the QPS uniform and equipment are viewed within the community.

Items of Interest



- 1. Shirt Colour
- 2. Load Bearing Vest
- 3. Taser Placement
- 4. Firearm Placement

Points of Inquiry

- 1 How do different elements of the uniform and equipment worn by members of the Queensland Police Service affect public perceptions of police legitimacy and approachability?
- 2 How do prior interactions with, and pre-existing attitudes towards the Queensland Police Service, influence public perceptions of police legitimacy and approachability?
- 3 Do public perceptions of police uniform and equipment in Queensland vary according to different demographic and social factors (e.g. ethnic background, location, gender, age, etc.)?

Procedures

- A quantitative online survey, open for a period of 20 days, was shared through several social media platforms.
- The survey presented respondents with eight images displaying various combinations of the police uniform and equipment (as seen in the image to the left)
- Respondents' ratings of approachability, legitimacy and militarisation of each of the images were collected for data analysis, as well as pre-existing perceptions of the police and demographic information

Outcomes

- The **most approachable** variation of the uniform worn by QLD police was the light blue shirt in the absence of a load bearing vest with both the firearm and taser positioned on the hip. This uniform combination was also viewed as the **least militaristic**.
- The QPS uniform seen as **most legitimate** by the public was the dark blue shirt with a load bearing vest present.
- Legitimacy ratings were highest when the firearm was positioned in the tactical thigh holster and the taser placed on the hip.
- The taser positioned on the load bearing vest was viewed as **militaristic** and negatively impacted approachability.
- Positive pre-existing perceptions of the QPS positively impacted ratings of legitimacy and approachability of the uniform and equipment
- Females rated all images higher in legitimacy, approachability and militarisation.
- There were no differences in ratings of legitimacy, approachability and militarisation due to geographical location.
- The older the individual, the higher their ratings of legitimacy, approachability and militarisation.
- The uniform combination that was rated as the most favourable, and with the highest legitimacy-type ratings, is the dark shirt with a load bearing vest present, firearm placed in a tactical thigh holster and the taser positioned on the hip.
- This uniform combination will ensure maximum cooperation and approval from the Queensland public as high ratings of police legitimacy have been linked to public satisfaction and law-abiding behaviour (Mazerolle et al., 2013)

Future Research Directions

- To better understand the role of gender, the survey could be repeated using both male and female models.
- Focus groups could be used to unpack what beliefs shape an individual's perceptions of police uniform and equipment.
- Could examine how sleeve length and visible tattoos affect perceptions.



Public Perceptions of Police Uniform and Equipment

Research Team

Grace Kent - Sarah Brimblecombe - Sam Purhill - Molly Robinson - Gemma Davidson

Acknowledgements

Dr Emma Antrobus, Shannon Buglar (PhD Candidate), Dr Lynda Cheshire, Senior Sergeant Paul Jones, Inspector Scott McLaren, Detective Inspector Mike Newman.

References

Johnson, R. (2005). Police uniform colour and citizen impression formation. *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology*, 20, 58 – 66.
 Mazerolle, L., Antrobus, E., Bennett, S., & Tyler, T. (2013). Shaping citizen perceptions of police legitimacy: a randomized field trial of procedural justice. *Criminology*, 51, 33-63.



THE UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND AUSTRALIA