May the Force be With You: Furthering Fresh Futures for NSW Police Psychological Strengths, Well-Being, and Retention

An ACU-led landmark research project aims to assist the NSW Police Force in developing fresh solutions to help officers become more resilient, and support those suffering from stress-related illness.

Professor Rhonda Craven, Director of the Institute for Positive Psychology and Education (IPPE, Australian Catholic University), is heading the study which brings together representatives from the NSW Police Force and researchers from ACU, the University of Western Sydney, and three other international universities. The group has a diverse range of expertise including psychology, management, policing, and criminology.

Funded by an Australian Research Council Linkage Project Grant, the project will investigate every police command in NSW to determine how to maintain an officer’s well-being in the face of adversity. Researchers will survey serving policing staff and conduct further studies to develop, for the first time, information-based scientific analysis of the NSW Police Force.

Interviews will also be conducted with staff of varying lengths of service and rank, including civilian staff and managers and Area Commanders, in order to gain a more nuanced understanding of critical staff issues, job satisfaction, organisational management, and cultural practices. To further strengthen this holistic approach new recruits from the police academy, as well as retired officers and those on medical and disability leave, will also be interviewed.

Findings of the study will be used to further develop psychological interventions to help the entire workforce deal with stress and trauma. At the project media launch, accompanied by NSW Police Commissioner Andrew Scipione and Police and Emergency Services Minister Stuart Ayres, Professor Craven remarked ‘Every day the NSW Police Force puts their lives on the line to protect and serve all Australians — they are unsung Australian heroes. We aim to find out what factors protect and enhance the health and well-being of our NSW Police Force. This will enable research-derived strategies to cultivate the capability of and further futures for the police force’.

By emphasising a scientific understanding of what makes police officers fit and well, the aim of the project is to develop a new approach, driven by positive psychology, to prevent mental health issues arising.

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