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To cite this article: Toby Miles-Johnson & Carol Cox-Forshaw (17 Jun 2026): Officer retention: a comparative analysis of online company reviews by Australian and English police officers, Policing and Society, DOI: [10.1080/10439463.2026.2690008](https://doi.org/10.1080/10439463.2026.2690008)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10439463.2026.2690008>



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Published online: 17 Jun 2026.



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Officer retention: a comparative analysis of online company reviews by Australian and English police officers

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ABSTRACT

Across the globe, police organisations face a staffing challenge. Using 254 online company reviews downloaded from an international online employment site, a comparative analysis of Australian and English police officers' experiences of employment was conducted. Written by current and former employees, the information contained within the reviews outlines positive and negative aspects of employment. The findings indicate that challenges affecting retention are shared across international contexts and are influenced by several factors. New findings suggest that officers' employment is highly affected by intensified political pressures and that lack of officer retention is a progressive process built by tension over time. The study upholds the premise that police organisations across the globe must recognise the importance and relevance of content within online company reviews and, accordingly, utilise it to understand why officers leave the profession.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 6 April 2026
Accepted 10 June 2026

KEYWORDS

Police; retention; staffing; international

Introduction

Across the globe, police organisations are challenged by a lack of retention of officers (Miles-Johnson 2026a). Many police organisations are in a difficult position regarding employing the number of officers required to do the work, with high rates of officers leaving the profession due to changing workloads, performance expectations, budgetary changes and constraints, and working conditions associated with policing and employment as an officer (Cox *et al.* 2025). Research suggests that reputational negativity associated with their role, the interchangeable nature and dangerous conditions associated with police work, as well as shift work rostering, negative perceptions regarding applicant 'lack of fit', lack of perceived diversity and inclusion, poor public perception and scrutiny regarding police–citizen interaction (particularly interaction between officers and civilians that is perceived as being underpinned by racial bias and excessive force) also affect retention of officers (Rossler and Scheer 2025). Organisational challenges regarding recruitment and operational processes in conjunction with increasing resignations put many police organisations in a difficult position regarding employing the number of officers required to do the work (Wilson *et al.* 2023). For example, the Police Federation of Australia Annual Report (2025) states that between 2022 and 2023, all Australian police organisations experienced an increase of up to 8.3% of officer resignations. In 2023, the Police Federation of England and Wales Report (2024) stated that in England and Wales, there was a 32%

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increase from the previous year in the number of officers who resigned. In 2025, the United Kingdom Home Office reported that in 2024, 9,080 full-time officers left the 43 police forces, equating to a 6.2% increase in officer resignations. Research by Jones *et al.* (2025) reports that the Home Office began recording officer attrition in 2003, and since records began this is the second highest rate of resignations across England and Wales. Similarly, in the United States, between 2019 and 2024, officer resignations increased by 18% with the number of officers leaving the profession contributing to a decrease in staffing (US GAO.gov 2026). While each country is unique in its experiences regarding officer resignation and has its own operational challenges in relation to staffing outcomes and how they affect policing and police work, the fact that many countries across the globe are experiencing increased rates in officer resignation is concerning. To determine factors affecting retention of police officers a comparative analysis of online company reviews outlining the employment experiences of Australian and English police officers was conducted. Examining data that is often overlooked (Zhang *et al.* 2022, Morgan and Chapman 2024), this research contributes original research arguing that an analysis of online company reviews can enable police organisations to identify reasons why officers have or are thinking about leaving the profession.

Literature review

Police retention

Research suggests that lack of retention in policing is complex and attributed to numerous factors (Wilson *et al.* 2023, Cox *et al.* 2025). Attributing the global staffing crisis in policing to retention certainly oversimplifies a complex problem, but the practical implications regarding the number of officers required to do the work suggest that retention factors determining careers in policing must be considered (Wilson *et al.* 2023). Lack of retention is often associated with officer exclusion (such as police officers being attributed to or identified as being from a minority group or being deemed less capable than officers from a majority group), lack of organisational support, officer transition within different units of command and geographical areas, and high stress associated with the profession (Davies *et al.* 2024). Stress, PTSD, health-related issues and burnout are also known factors that contribute to officer resignations, as well as an inability for some officers to balance work-life challenges, children and family commitments, and other personal factors (Davies *et al.* 2024).

Research from Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States suggests that retention solution strategies addressing these problems have been criticised because they are inconsistently applied, with many police organisations failing to focus on one element or influencing aspect that is a key component affecting officer resignation (Charman and Tyson 2024, Rossler and Scheer 2025). In the United States, research by the 'Police Executive Research Forum' identified the need for law enforcement agencies to proactively take steps to retain officers by enhancing benefits and compensation and diversifying recruitment techniques (US GAO.gov 2026). Critics evaluating organisational responses, however, suggest that most retention responses enacted by police organisations are implemented as singular responses to resolve retention, such as increasing wages or changing shift patterns of officers, rather than focusing on inclusive collective responses applied across an entire organisation (Charman and Tyson 2024). Critics also identify that most retention responses by police organisations do not make a significant change to workplace culture and organisational practices and do not accordingly increase retention (Australia New Zealand Policing Advisory Agency 2019, Police Federation of England and Wales 2024). For example, across the United Kingdom and Australia, police organisations are affected by rising staff complaints in relation to mistreatment, staff shortages, overworked employees, workplace litigation, discrimination, workplace bullying and harassment, and a lack of promotional opportunities specifically affecting women officers and officers identifying as members of diverse groups (Keddie 2023, Police Federation of England and Wales 2024, Police Association of New South Wales n.d.). The complexity of service provision regarding citizen demands, overly long shift work, increased workload, low wages, lack of leave entitlement, and increased media scrutiny

regarding police practice and the profession, and police-citizen hostility is also thought to be an additional factor influencing officer resignation (Keddie 2023).

Research by Steel *et al.* (2021) found that occupational factors in policing increase the odds that police officers are at risk of experiencing high levels of stress-related symptoms because of their work. Their findings suggest that heightened stress is more likely to increase the odds that officers will experience trauma in the workplace and as a result are likely to resign. When officers resign, research from the United States suggests that law enforcement agencies often address this problem (and low staffing levels) by increasing overtime for current employees (US GAO.gov 2026). Yet this type of response has a negative impact on the remaining officers' mental health and contributes to burnout and a potential increase in resignations in the long term. For example, nine police agencies in the United States reported that burnout or mental health concerns were significant contributing factors to officer attrition among officers carrying additional workloads (US GAO.gov 2026). Research across the globe determines that the impact of officer resignations has a cascading emotional and physical effect on the officers who remain, and this frequently leads to heightened stress and workplace burnout, diminished morale and potentially compromised public safety (Steel *et al.* 2021, Wilson *et al.* 2023, Charman and Tyson 2024, Cox *et al.* 2025, Rossler and Scheer 2025). This is particularly problematic if fewer officers are on patrol and delayed response times occur or exhaustion-related errors compromise decision-making (Steel *et al.* 2021, Wilson *et al.* 2023, Charman and Tyson 2024, Cox *et al.* 2025, Rossler and Scheer 2025). Thus, psychological and physiological health problems are identified as being equally important factors that shape health-related outcomes in officers, with trauma and burnout-related symptoms being identified as factors likely to increase attrition rates of officers leaving the profession (Steel *et al.* 2021).

In addition, research suggests that there are numerous factors relating to officer exclusion and lack of organisational support that can also explain the lack of retention of officers (Rossler and Scheer 2025). Although exclusion and lack of organisational support can affect all officers, research suggests that exclusion and lack of organisational support intrinsically affect women police officers and officers from diverse groups at every stage of their career, with many police organisations across the globe being criticised for being less healthy and less functional workplaces for these officers (Rossler and Scheer 2025, Miles-Johnson 2026a). This includes criticisms regarding workplace dysfunction, sexism and misogyny, homophobia, and racism (Murray 2021). While these problems are not necessarily new in terms of the challenges they present to police organisations, public awareness of these issues (driven by media coverage and technology) has increased. The availability of formal and informal knowledge and insight regarding employment as an officer is widely publicly available, and although the legitimacy of the information may be contested by the format in which it is presented, the consumption of this information (and how it contributes to perceptions of employment as an officer) cannot be ignored.

Online company reviews and police employment

A useful tool for prospective applicants when determining career suitability and deciding whether to pursue an application is to read online company reviews (Zhang *et al.* 2022, Morgan and Chapman 2024, Miles-Johnson 2026b). According to Yao *et al.* (2026), the rise of engagement by reviewers and readers in online company reviews has emerged as a novel data source. Typically providing first-hand accounts about the quality of a company, its products and or service provision, online company reviews aid consumers in making safe purchasing decisions and provide feedback to the respective company regarding consumer experience (Yao *et al.* 2026). In relation to online company reviews and employee satisfaction, this type of review offers valuable comprehension about the organisation or employer, as well as acting as a critical tool for job seekers regarding employment information (Zhang *et al.* 2022, Morgan and Chapman 2024). While a small number of studies have analysed online company reviews to explore employee satisfaction (see Shi and Chen 2021, Vinay *et al.* 2021, Yao *et al.* 2026), the use of online company reviews to analyse

employment in police organisations, and firsthand accounts of experiences of police officers within a respective organisation is still in its infancy (see Miles-Johnson 2026b).

Other sources of data are frequently used to measure police officers' levels of employee satisfaction, efficiency and overall effectiveness, such as information collected in interviews or surveys (from current or exiting employees), and workforce studies or organisational-evaluation reports (systematically sent to officers to determine the workplace culture of an organisation) (see Lumsden 2017, Stirling 2022). An analysis of the content within online company reviews, however, offers an effective way to determine current or former employees' experiences that may be more candid or unfiltered in terms of employee experiences (Fileri 2015, Morgan and Chapman 2024, Yao *et al.* 2026). The content in online company reviews, therefore, is likely to contain uncensored information regarding employee satisfaction or dissatisfaction (Shi and Chen 2021, Vinay *et al.* 2021, Yao *et al.* 2026).

Having insight into additional knowledge regarding a specific career (particularly knowledge that is not necessarily communicated by an organisation) gives applicants an insider perspective regarding employment. Possessing this knowledge not only enables them to make informed decisions but also assists in employment preparation and discloses employment practices that may not have been identified until starting employment (Zhang *et al.* 2022, Miles-Johnson 2026b). This is important because, as stated, the completion of an online company review gives current and former employees the opportunity to share content within the review that is not necessarily shared during other data collection processes (such as in employee surveys or exit interviews) (Zhang *et al.* 2022, Morgan and Chapman 2024). Thus, when content in a review imparts information that was previously unknown to the applicant, goes beyond information contained within marketing materials, is personally relevant to the applicant and connects with them emotionally, then this information is likely to trigger a response in an applicant (Falk and Scholz 2018). It is also likely to intrinsically shape the outcome of their actions regarding application submission (Falk and Scholz 2018). The information contained within online company reviews, therefore, is insightful because it may enable police organisations to identify potential predictive factors that shape applicant decision-making (Koncar and Helic 2020) and then use this information to enhance recruitment practices and increase interest in careers in policing (Miles-Johnson 2026b).

While it may be difficult to determine whether an applicant is ultimately persuaded or dissuaded from applying for a position based on the information contained within an online company review, research by Morgan and Chapman (2024) argues that 70% of applicants reading online reviews deduce attributes about an organisation and (upon being informed) are influenced specifically by the positive or negative sentiments within the review. Research suggests that decision-making processes are constructively influenced by positive reviews, but negative reviews have been identified as being more diagnostic in terms of how they impact a person's information processing (Wang *et al.* 2019). They also act as a protective barrier that prevents a person from being affected by consequences associated with employment in a specific company (Wang *et al.* 2019). In addition, career-relevant decision-making is intrinsically underlined by a person's quality of life and the need to make changes to it (Falk and Scholz 2018, Morgan and Chapman 2024).

When lifestyle changes are required and individuals engage in job seeking behaviour, evidence suggests that a large number of applicants abandon an employment submission after reading a negative company review (Zhang *et al.* 2022). It is argued that this abandonment is likely to occur if an applicant reads negative reviews that offer insight into the workplace culture, compensation and benefits, salary, work-life balance, career advancement, management and organisational practices (Morgan and Chapman 2024). Research by Zhang *et al.* (2022) also determines that if a company is awarded an overall (collective) rating, such as being awarded a number of stars out of a determined number (such as in a 5-star rating system, with one star being negative and five stars being positive) and the rating given to a company is poor, when this rating is processed in conjunction with the information contained in a negative review, then an applicant is more likely to abandon their submission.

Considering this premise, it raises questions about the control companies have over their image and reputation, and how online company reviews oppose that control (Morgan and Chapman 2024, Miles-Johnson 2026b). All companies employ differing levels of resources to enhance their professional reputation, yet when information about a company appears on a third-party platform (such as on an employment site), it has the potential to cause reputational harm (Miles-Johnson 2026b). This is because applicants are likely to read all the reviews and acknowledge the collective rating of a company rather than relying on a single piece of information (or review) that only depicts a company positively (Zhang *et al.* 2022). If the reviews are favourable, then an organisation's reputation is enhanced, and accordingly, applications are likely to increase. When the reviews are unfavourable, however, applications are likely to decrease, as the information is processed and the reputation of the company is perceived negatively (Zhang *et al.* 2022).

Negative reviews, therefore, have the potential to be problematic for organisations if they struggle to overcome reputational damage contained within a review, and may be increasingly taxing for organisations that, by nature of their responsibilities, employees, social status or reputation, are already challenged by negative public perception (Wang *et al.* 2019). Police organisations, for example, struggle with public perception regarding reputation and struggle to overcome reputational damage because of negative publicity (Miles-Johnson 2026b). This is important because increased numbers of officers leaving the profession have been attributed (in part) to negative public perception regarding police officers and police employment and how officers and police organisations are portrayed in the media (National Police Chiefs' Council 2025, Police Federation of Australia 2025).

Practitioners, academics, researchers, policymakers and senior police officers argue that media-related reputational damage has contributed to the global staffing crisis whereby officer attrition outpaces hiring (Wojslawowicz *et al.* 2023, Quick and Wolff 2025, Rossler and Scheer 2025). While attributing the crisis solely to reputational harm, media portrayal and public perception may also oversimplify a complex situation; it is underpinned by many contributing factors. These include significant events such as the Covid-19 pandemic and public complaints regarding 'over-policing' (Harris *et al.* 2023, Russell *et al.* 2024), heightened public scrutiny following highly publicised police misconduct such as the policing of riots and public protests (Brunson 2020, Diab 2022), the murder of George Floyd in the United States in 2020 and subsequent protests across the globe regarding police brutality (Koslicki 2022, Lewis and Usmani 2022, Roman *et al.* 2025), declining trust and confidence in police in relation to differential policing (Dawson *et al.* 2023, Albrecht 2025, Ramshaw 2025) and targeted policing in specific geographical areas, neighbourhoods and communities (Wendel *et al.* 2022, Morris and Shoub 2024, Weisburd *et al.* 2024).

The subsequent legitimacy crisis that police officers and police organisations face raises questions regarding the importance of overcoming reputational harm and how this can be mitigated in terms of its effect on retention and potential recruitment. This is particularly important given that policing is heavily scrutinised and receives critical media coverage (Wojslawowicz *et al.* 2023, Quick and Wolff 2025, Rossler and Scheer 2025). This begins by analysing the influences and differing factors affecting officer retention and the effect this may have on applicants. An analysis of Australian online company reviews and police employment conducted by Miles-Johnson (2026b) found that the information contained within online company reviews is likely to affect potential applicants and increase disinterest in policing careers. Building on this research, and to determine *to what extent online company reviews can be used to identify factors influencing police officer retention*, a comparative analysis of 254 online company reviews by current and former officers employed in three English and three Australian police organisations was conducted.

Methods

Online company reviews evaluating employment in three English and three Australian police organisations were extracted from one of the largest international online employment sites. The site was chosen because it offers identical content and review processes for English and Australian users, and

it is consistent in terms of the protocols followed by English and Australian users when writing reviews. Whilst the English and Australian police organisations chosen to be evaluated in this research are de-identified as per the ethics requirements and agreement (#H16045); each organisation is different in terms of its centralised, State/Territory-based structure (the Australian police organisations) or decentralised, major city, and smaller municipal structure (the English police organisations). All police organisations, however, follow a historical British foundation regarding implementing the notion of a constabulary, as well as policing practices performed in culturally similar contexts, they have comparable terminologies and ranks, and are in many ways operationally alike in terms of evidence-based policing and professional officer development. In addition, each police organisation currently faces a staffing challenge regarding officer retention and during the data collection period (2022–2025), it has been criticised for being bureaucratic and oftentimes authoritarian in its approach to citizen engagement and treatment of staff (National Police Chiefs' Council 2025, Police Federation of Australia 2025).

The data extraction included online company reviews submitted between 2022

and 2025 (post-Covid lockdown periods) by current and former sworn police officers. This is because research suggests that the global police staffing crisis (particularly in Australia and Great Britain) is believed to be a result of post-COVID challenges regarding employment (Charman and Tyson 2024, National Police Chiefs' Council 2025, The Police Federation of Australia 2025). In addition, data extracted between 2020–2022 would be inconsistent regarding how Covid-19 impacted each country. For example, whilst lockdown restrictions were similar in Australia and England, in Australia, the Covid-19 national lockdown took place in March 2020 and lasted 6 weeks, with further lockdown periods varying between Australian states in terms of timing and length of duration. In England, the national lockdown was between late March and October 2020, and then extended until December 2020, and again implemented between January and March 2021.

Similar to the research methods applied by Miles-Johnson (2026b), each review was checked in terms of its content and critique, and to decrease the likelihood that the data could be interpreted as a 'rant' or that it was posted online with malicious intent to trigger reputational harm to each respective police organisation (this awareness underlined the coding process and data analysis). Company reviewers in each country are encouraged to give the review a headline, and, depending on the reviewer's discretion, can write a positive or negative review (limited to 500 words). The international employment site captures demographic information from each reviewer that is restricted to the employment status of the reviewer (current or former employee), and, where applicable (and at the discretion of the reviewer) the current or former position held within the company, the city or town where the organisation is based, and the date that the review was submitted. In each country, the reviewer's name, age, gender, racial and ethnic identity, and any other identifying information are not collected during the review process. As part of the ethics agreement regarding anonymity, the title and rank of each English and Australian reviewer were deleted from the data set, as well as any other identifying information such as current or former employment in a specific police unit of command. Finally, all reviewers participating in the site are encouraged to rate the respective organisation out of five stars, with one star being the lowest rating and five stars being the highest rating awarded. The star-rating for each police organisation by company reviews per year is shown in Table 1.

In total, 254 company reviews were submitted online between 2022 and 2025, with company reviews by current or former officers ranging from one company review (Australian Police Organisation 2 and English Police Organisation 1) to 51 company reviews (English Police Organisation 3). The number of reviews for each police organisation is shown in Table 2.

As shown in Table 2, there was an imbalance in the number of online company reviews across the police organisations, with the English Police Organisation 1 having the least number of reviews (12) and the English Police Organisation 3 having the greatest number of reviews (147). While the numbers of online reviews are different between each of the police organisations and fluctuate in

Table 1. Star-ratings per police organisation.

Police organisation	Average star-rating 1–5 per year			
	2022	2023	2024	2025
Australian Police Org 1	2.78****	2.86****	1.33****	2.0**
Australian Police Org 2	3.44****	3.13****	1.0**	4.0*
Australian Police Org 3	3.3***	2.45****	2.14****	2.0**
English Police Org 1	5.0*	3.0*	3.5***	3.4***
English Police Org 2	1.67****	2.44****	2.78****	2.34****
English Police Org 3	2.47****	2.47****	2.70****	2.2***

* = one company review per year.

** = two company reviews per year.

*** = three to five company reviews per year.

**** = six or more company reviews per year.

number between 2022 and 2025, the researchers were unable to identify *specific* reasons why this fluctuation occurred. None of the data revealed information that could help identify this difference, and no definite determination could be made from potential internal or external factors affecting each police organisation. Given that the comparative research is about an analysis of the content of the online company reviews and not the number (or total) of reviews in each country, it was determined that there was enough data to conduct a comparative analysis of the individual officers' reviews within each country. It was also determined that the number of reviews could be compared individually, and comparatively between countries. Although the online employment site chosen for the data extraction stipulates its reliability in terms of inspecting each online company review for inappropriate content. This awareness also underlined the coding process and data analysis.

Like the research conducted by Miles-Johnson (2026b), an inductive coding process was applied to the data, whereby the identification of each theme was data driven. Accordingly, the data would not be affected by pre-existing analytical preconceptions (Miles-Johnson 2026b). By applying an inductive coding process, the researchers determined that this process would enable them to identify specific themes in relation to experiences of employment as a police officer, and how this may affect retention. During the analysis, the researchers were aware of their subjectivity as citizens (and not as police employees) and how their interpretation bias may influence the data analysis. As the data analysis progressed, each of the researchers was aware of the ongoing need to be reflexive in terms of critically examining the lens being applied to the data and how their background, biases and positionality as civilians may shape the interpretation of the data.

The identification of codes and themes was developed inductively from interpretations in the data. This enabled the researchers to identify factors shaping officer decision-making in relation to employment similarities and differences in Australia and England, and to identify specific codes relevant to police employment in each country that could enable the organisation of the raw data. This included identifying codes within the online review content. For example, the researchers identified content such as *helping people or not making a difference* and (ensuring that these codes were present in both the Australian and English online review content) grouped them together to form a theme (such as 'Job Satisfaction'). To strengthen the findings, both researchers consulted

Table 2. Total Reviews per police organisation, 2022–2024.

Police organisation	Company reviews				Total
	2022	2023	2024	2025	
Australian Police Org 1	9	7	6	2	26
Australian Police Org 2	8	8	2	1	19
Australian Police Org 3	3	11	7	2	23
English Police Org 1	1	1	4	5	12
English Police Org 2	6	9	9	3	27
English Police Org 3	34	51	43	20	147
Total company reviews					254

on the initial findings, with each researcher acting as the primary and then secondary coder (reversing co-rater roles consistently throughout the process). As the co-rating process progressed, it enabled the researchers to review and refine the process, thereby enabling the identification of the final overarching themes.

To ensure that the analysis process was rigorous, to ensure consistency, to limit the potential for bias, and to produce a plausible and coherent explanation of the data being analysed, the researchers used an Excel worksheet (analysis by hand) to explore the data, and NVivo software (as an additional tool) to confirm the identification of each theme. Once it was determined that no new information would be discovered, the researchers assessed each of the themes in relation to how they comparatively explain the lack of retention of police officers in each Australian and English police organisation, and to analyse and better understand why officers in each country are leaving the profession. This collaborative mapping resulted in nine themes being identified that best represented the data. The nine themes identified were:

- Job Satisfaction
- Pay and Employee Benefits
- Job Security.
- Career Development and Promotion
- Organisational Management
- Workplace Culture
- Work-life Balance
- Political Pressures
- Public Opinion

Findings

Although 254 online company reviews were analysed, the selection of quotes included in this paper represent the positive and negative evaluations submitted by each reviewer. All the quotes were given an identifier such as being from an Australian or English police organisation (APO or EPO), a number to correspond to the organisation (for example, APO1 or EPO3), whether the review was written by a current police officer (CPO) or former police officer (FPO), the star rating (SR) it was awarded (for example, 3SR), and the year it was submitted. Analysis of the data indicated that the majority of reviews (78.3%) awarded star-ratings below a score of three with only 55 (21.7%) of reviews awarding a score of 4 or above. Examination of the data determined that 7% of reviews were positive in their written evaluation and star-rating, with 91.4% of reviews being highly critical of the respective organisations being evaluated. Four reviews (1.6%) contained conflicting information regarding the star rating awarded and the written evaluation of the review. For example, one reviewer awarded their organisation five stars yet wrote 'Great organisation but they kick you out once you have a PTSD' (CPO, APO1, 5 SR, 2024). Another reviewer awarded their organisation a four-star rating yet wrote 'The job's fucked, think long and hard, and ask around before joining' (CPO, EPO1, 4SR, 2025). While positive Australian and English reviews regarding overall job satisfaction were fewer in number than negative reviews from each country, all the reviews evaluating role fulfilment and employment as an officer contained similar information regarding employment and police work, and the impact of each on job satisfaction.

Job satisfaction

The reviews suggest that Australian and English police officers are alike in their paradoxical experiences and perceptions of police work and how this shapes notions of job satisfaction. The Australian and English reviews contained information that similarly outlined the value that officers place on police work itself and the purpose of the work. This included whether an officer liked the job or

their role, and accordingly, the links made between this perception and the transitory nature of police work, the lack of routine officers can expect when responding to different jobs or calls for service or emergency response, 'Helping people at their worst times' (CPO, EPO2, 3SR, 2024), as well as the interchangeable challenges that affect officers' daily lives.

The majority of Australian and English reviews stipulated high levels of dissatisfaction regarding job satisfaction and the reality of police work and how this affects the overall level of enjoyment that an officer derives from their job. This included reviews detailing frustration over having to complete work-related tasks not associated with being a police officer, 'You're not a Police Officer; you're a social worker' (FPO, APO3, 3SR, 2023). Reviews also contained information contradicting interchangeable work situations, outlining that low levels of job satisfaction are associated with frustration over the lack of excitement and change, and at times, the lack of responsibility due to being lower in rank than other officers, 'Would have been better pursuing a career in lawn mowing for more excitement, but at least it was steady pay' (FPO, APO1, 2SR, 2023). Interestingly, none of the reviews written by Australian or English officers associated job satisfaction with pay and employee benefits other than police employment offering a steady, consistent wage. The analysis of the reviews indicated that Australian and English officers (current and former employees alike) are frustrated by remuneration and the scarcity of employee benefits available to police officers.

Pay and employee benefits

Analysis of the data indicated that none of the reviewers (regardless of country) was satisfied with their pay. The only employee benefits associated with police employment were outlined in a few of the reviews by Australian police officers who stated that they received an additional allowance for having to complete shiftwork rather than working consistent hours over a prolonged period 'The pay is low, but officers receive a shift allowance' (CPO, APO1, 3SR, 2025). All of the reviews detailing pay contained negative content. None of the reviews specified the amount of remuneration police officers receive, and none of the reviews specified any other type of employee benefits that officers could receive at their respective organisation such as superannuation, retirement plans or health support. For example, the Australian and English reviews similarly evaluated pay as being not proportionate to the amount of hours worked: 'Pay is not great and is very low for the amount of hours we work' (CPO APO2, 3SR, 2025).

Some of the reviewers associated poor levels of pay as being disproportionate to levels of risk associated with police work. Most of the Australian and English reviewers were explicit about the lack of pay and employee benefits associated with police employment and clearly expressed their opinion (and issued warnings to readers) about not seeking employment if a potential applicant is seeking a fair wage. Whilst some reviewers did mention that police employment can offer a steady, consistent wage, none of the Australian or English officers' reviews linked pay and employee benefits to job security. Job security, whilst mentioned in many officers' online company reviews, was evaluated in relation to a lack of organisational support and how mistakes in the workplace and whilst performing as an officer would contribute to job insecurity and the ending of a policing career.

Job security

Job security and insecurity were included in many Australian and English officers' reviews, with job insecurity being attributed to mistakes made by officers in the workplace and while performing their roles. Job security was associated with compliant behaviour and officers accepting that in order for the job to be considered secure (and long term) they must obey normative behaviours related to police culture, workplace practices and conduct. This included reviewers outlining that prospective job seekers looking at police employment must 'accept things out of their control' (CPO, APO1, 4SR,

2023) and to ‘think long and hard, and ask around about how long the career lasts’ (CPO, APO2, 2024) before applying.

A few of the Australian and English reviews contained information about job insecurity in policing relating to the changes in the compositional makeup of police organisations: ‘They’re favouring officers from minority groups, if you’re one of them you’ll be recruited and have a great career’ (CPO, EPO2, 2SR, 2022) and ‘Favouritism happens. If you’re not White you’ll be supported and more likely to succeed’ (CPO, APO3, 3SR, 2025). Yet the majority of Australian and English officers evaluated job security in relation to officers being from majority groups and not minority groups, with opposing opinions expressing job insecurity for non-white officers and, at times, security for white officers due to inequitable practices and discrimination: ‘It’s only a secure profession if you’re white or male’ (FPO, APO2, 1SR, 2022).

Lack of job security was also contained within reviews which outlined that if officers’ experiencing mental health-related problems disclose such challenges, then the disclosure is likely to lessen job security, particularly if the information shared is associated with burnout and stress, and officers have to take time off work. This is because ‘Officers are heavily disciplined for being off sick, so people tend to work until they feel even worse’ (CPO, APO1, 1SR, 2024). The reviewers also outlined that in all the Australian and English police organisations officer mental health is at an all-time low, with all the organisations being severely understaffed and many officers resigning from the profession due to being overworked and being unable to progress in their careers.

Career development and promotion

Specific information relating to career development and promotion was lacking in all the reviews from officers in Australia and England. Only two Australian officers and two English officers reviewing their respective police organisations included information about career development and promotion opportunities, but the information contained within their reviews was vague and did not specify how prospective applicants could explore career-related opportunities once employed as an officer, such as ‘Excellent opportunities for advancement. Genuine learning in a technical environment’ (CPO, APO2, 5SR, 2023). Career development and promotion opportunities, however, were associated with nepotism, bias, discrimination and favouritism, with Australian and English officers similarly evaluating their respective organisation negatively in relation to unfair organisational processes regarding job progression. Similar to the findings by Miles-Johnson (2026b), many of the reviewers outlined that unless an officer had specific contacts within the organisation or was considered a ‘good fit’ within the organisation, then it was likely that inequitable workplace processes would occur.

In addition to these challenges, Australian and English officers wrote about aspects of police work that prevent career development and promotion from occurring, such as the way junior officers are treated in the workplace, the types of jobs junior officers and those working in general duties attend, and promotional practices regarding officer recognition in relation to achievement: ‘You can’t progress because as a constable you’re treated like a child’ (CPO, APO2, 1SR, 2023). In addition to detailing many issues that prevent career development and promotion, the reviews by Australian and English officers also attributed these problems to a lack of support from management as well as poor operational practices being implemented by ineffective policies. Content regarding organisational management and how it is or was perceived or experienced by Australian and English officers consistently appeared in many of the company reviews within the data set. Like previous research by Miles-Johnson (2026b), organisational management was recognised as being an intrinsic aspect of employment that determined if a review was positive or negative.

Organisational management

The reviews evaluating aspects of organisational management were generally short in content and detailed similar problems that appeared in both Australian and English reviews. Much of the

negative evaluations focus on people in management roles rather than operational policies and practices, and when these were mentioned there was a consistent message shared regarding management and senior officers being untrustworthy and only interested in their own career progression. For example, consistent phrases such as ‘don’t trust them’, ‘back-stabbing’ and ‘poor management’ appeared frequently in Australian and English reviews. Several reviews were explicit in their criticism of senior officers, leadership and management, outlining in reviews that the management in their respective organisation ignore important operational procedures such as health and safety practices or engage in misconduct related activities, ‘management belittle you and proactively cover up abuses of power/internal problems, everyone is out for themselves’ (FPO, EPO2, 1SR, 2024).

Australian and English reviews mentioning organisational management contained commonalities regarding officers having to be mindful of underhand activities by senior officers and managers and the phrase ‘watch your back’ appeared numerous times in the data analysis. Most of the reviews evaluating management identified problematic workload divisions, with senior officers and managers offloading work (particularly paperwork) onto junior colleagues, with Australian and English reviews similarly flagging bullying behaviours by management. Bullying behaviour by management was also linked to workplace culture and ineffective leadership: ‘Management has morphed into a hive of bullying and maligned practices’ (CPO, EPO3, 1SR, 2024).

Workplace culture

Information about workplace culture appeared in almost all the Australian and English reviews. Similar to research by Miles-Johnson (2026b), which identified how aspects of workplace culture shape positive and negative reviews, the data analysed in this research suggest that the reviewers refer to notions of culture within the workplace as being highly influential on their employment experience. Like the findings that emerged from the study by Miles-Johnson (2026b), the reviewers in this research also refer to workplace culture rather than police culture per se, which is itself a widely researched policing concept (Fielding 2023). Positive and negative experiences of workplace culture were identified as being strongly shaped by how colleagues and management treat each other. Positive evaluations in this regard, however, were few in number, with only one Australian reviewer and one English reviewer offering positive content regarding workplace culture and employment as an officer.

The majority of reviews evaluated workplace culture negatively and associated it with poor decision-making by senior officers, disloyal colleagues, low morale, lack of support regarding health-related issues, and bullying and harassment. Phrases such as ‘toxic culture’, ‘lies and bullying’ and ‘worst workplace’ appeared consistently throughout the data. A few Australian and English reviewers mentioned ‘staff shortages and lack of retention’ as being contributing factors affecting the negative workplace culture, as well as blaming the organisation as a whole for negative workplace experiences. During the analysis it was determined that there is a strong link between the officers’ experiences of workplace culture and their ability or inability to manage work and life. Interestingly, all the reviewers negatively evaluated this connection, with Australian and English officers identifying similar aspects of employment that negatively affect their work-life balance.

Work-life balance

Lack of work-life balance and subsequent negative outcomes (such as the development of stress and other related health and well-being problems) appeared frequently in the Australian and English reviewers’ commentary about employment as an officer. Common phrases consistently emerged during the data analysis, such as ‘workload overload’, ‘too much paperwork’, ‘long shifts’, ‘working Christmas Day’ (and other public holidays), and ‘hours of admin work’. The amount of paperwork that police officers have to complete was intrinsically linked to officers’ experiencing poor work-

life balance, with none of the Australian or English reviewers offering any positive feedback regarding how they or other officers (or prospective officers) could manage this other than advising potential applicants to 'think long and hard before applying' (CPO, APO2, 3SR, 2025). Whilst some of the findings regarding lack of work-life balance reflect similar findings by Miles-Johnson (2026b), data emerged detailing the experiences of officers as parents, and how being a parent is not considered by Australian and English police organisations to be important in relation to officers balancing work and life and police employment, 'If you're a parent you have to suck it up and get on with whatever shift they give you. Being a parent is not considered' (CPO, APO1, 3SR, 2022). New data (hitherto not found in the study by Miles-Johnson 2026b) also emerged regarding how officer employment in Australia and England is similarly shaped by political pressures, particularly political pressures that manifest as internal organisational politics and politics that are externally placed on police organisations and how these affect experiences of police work.

Political pressures

A constant thread appearing in the Australian and English officers' reviews was the negative effect of politics (internal and external) on the experience of officers. The analysis revealed that police officers' employment is highly affected by intensified political pressures. When this appeared in the reviews it was always negatively contextualised as being an important influence on management and decision-making action and inaction. Accordingly, it was frequently detailed in relation to how it affects or affected the experience of the reviewer. Australian and English reviewers identified similar negative outcomes regarding the influence of internal and external politics on operational procedures. Phrases such as 'budget cuts' and 'constant review processes' appeared throughout the data, with all officers regardless of the location of their review identifying the negative influence of politics on policing.

Some officers used similar phrases such as 'rotten at the top' (CPO, APO2, 1 SR, 2023 and CPO, EPO3, 3SR, 2024) to refer to top-down political influences on their respective police organisation. Other officers used similar expressions to express the perception that 'management have lost their way' (CPO, APO3, 2 SR, 2024 and FPO, EPO2, 1 SR, 2022) due to the influence of internal and external politics. Both Australian and English reviews negatively evaluated the outside interference of external agencies and how this intrusion affects officers with one reviewer stating that this constant input 'becomes soul destroying after a while' (CPO, EPO3, 1 SR, 2024). Australian and English reviews also identified how internal and external politics differently affect police work in urban and rural areas and the allocation of resources. Whilst this was mentioned in holistic terms, it is interesting that Australian and English police officers are aware of the differences in urban and rural policing and how internal and external politics affect policing in each context, 'It's become political and full of people with a 'can do attitude' who can't tie their own shoelaces, but you get more resources than the stations in the country' (CPO, EPO3, 3SR, 2024). The data analysis also determined that it is not only the influence of politics that shapes the experiences of officers, but also the perception of the public. Specifically, it was mentioned how public opinion can positively or negatively affect police officers and whether they stay in the profession or resign.

Public opinion

Public opinion and how this is experienced or perceived is an extremely influential factor regarding whether an Australian or English officer writes a positive or negative review of police employment. Perceptions and experiences of public opinion appeared in many Australian and English reviews, with officers in both countries outlining negative and not positive opinions regarding interaction with members of the public. Phrases such as 'it's a continual battle with difficult people' 'people hate us' and 'lack of support from the public' appeared numerous times throughout the data. This also included acknowledgment that officers in Australia and England are affected by 'constant

negative media attention' (CPO, APO1, 4SR, 2024 and CPO, EPO2, 3SR, 2022) and that negative media attention affects an officer's confidence as well as their ability to perform their role assertively.

Whilst the decision to resign from a police organisation is often complex and not necessarily attributed to one single factor, some of the Australian and English reviews by former police officers contained information that linked aspects of public opinion to their resignations. Although it is unclear whether negative public opinion (and or negative interaction with citizens) may have been the deciding factor that influenced the resignation, it is clear from the data analysis that negative public opinion has an impact on Australian and English police officers' experiences of employment. Accordingly, this must be carefully considered when Australian and English police organisations consider officer wellbeing and reasons why their officers resign: 'I joined wanting to help the public, and after 2 years, I left hating the public' (FPO, EPO3, 3SR, 2023).

The analysis of the data indicated that none of the Australian or English reviewers offered solutions to the problems or challenges outlined in their respective review. None of the reviewers suggested answers to the issues or proffered strategies that potential applicants could use to overcome similar problems should they become employed as an officer. In addition, neither the Australian nor English officers evaluating their respective police organisation expressed encouraging words to increase the likelihood that an applicant would pursue a policing career after reading the review. This was interesting given that most people enter a career in policing with altruistic intentions and or because they are vocationally inclined in terms of having a natural aptitude, interest, or preference for practical, hands-on work that is focused on helping others, working in a specialised role or wanting to be involved in outcomes of justice (Cox *et al.* 2025). Yet none of these factors was expressed explicitly as words of encouragement in any of the Australian or English reviews evaluating employment as a police officer. They were notably absent from the evaluations available for prospective applicants to read.

Limitations

Reviewer demographics were not collected during the online submission process. A comparative analysis of company reviews by reviewers' specific identifiers (such as rank of officer and gender), therefore, was not possible. While there are only eight Australian police organisations, there are 43 police organisations in England and Wales, and accordingly, a comparative analysis between all police organisations from each country would offer very skewed results. It was for this reason that three police organisations from each country were selected for inclusion in this research. Detailing the size and location of each police organisation would identify them, and given that this information was excluded as part of the ethics agreement, specific comparative analysis on a micro level could not be conducted. While it is likely that in each country officers may have moved between organisations (such as between the eight organisations in Australia or between the 43 police organisations in England), the absence of reviews comparing police organisations and or officers' experiences between the different police organisations in each country was notable. Future studies examining online company reviews and the employment experiences of officers must, therefore, be mindful of this issue and identify it where possible. It must also consider whether officer mobility between organisations has a considerable effect on the content within the reviews and whether this affects officer retention. Although the impact of such reviews on retention has not been analysed, given that the use of online company reviews to understand factors influencing police officer retention is growing, future research must consider whether police officers leaving the profession are influenced by other online company reviews and whether police organisations acknowledge the information contained within them in order to identify reasons why officers have or are thinking about leaving the profession.

Discussion

The findings showed a strong similarity in the views and experiences of officers from both countries, indicating that many of the factors influencing retention are common across the two international

policing contexts. The findings regenerate our comprehension of officer retention and uphold the premise that the lack of officer retention is a progressive process. The findings suggest that the lack of retention of Australian and English police officers is affected by dwindling levels of job satisfaction, low pay and employee benefits, reduced job security, poor organisational management, meagre opportunities for career development and promotion, negative workplace cultures, a lack of work-life balance, and hostile public opinion from citizens and the media. The finding that police officers' employment is highly affected by intensified political pressures emerged as a new finding not found in previous research analysing online company reviews (see Miles-Johnson 2026b).

The challenge for police organisations

None of the former employees wrote about a singular event or phenomenon that underpinned their resignation and most of the current employees wrote about conjoint factors affecting employment. None of the reviews identified differences between police organisations and the wider profession or compared employment in different police organisations in each respective country. In addition, given the likelihood of officer mobility and the fact that some officers may have moved from one police organisation to another, the absence of reviews containing information regarding the effect of mobility on retention was notable. It is reasonable to determine, therefore, that the findings suggest that while the factors identified in this research may be singular or conjoint influences affecting retention, they are not simply discrete events affecting decision-making but are factors that build tension over time. The lack of retention of Australian and English police officers can be understood by the number of reviewer evaluations that contain negative comments, and the information offered regarding the experience of working as an officer in an Australian or English police organisation. The analysis of data also demonstrates the presence and potential sway of the concept of negativity bias, and the subsequent influence the reviews will have on an applicant's decision-making process. It is highly likely, therefore, that the persuasion of the content of the reviews will influence an applicant not to pursue employment as a police officer.

This is a significant finding because when information in an online review triggers an emotional response and is internalised, job seekers (typically) will reject the idea of working for a company in order to protect their wellbeing and to prevent them from making the wrong decision (Morgan and Chapman 2024). Although positive reviews mitigate negative reviews in some circumstances, it is negative reviews that inherently affect decision-making processes (Miles-Johnson 2026b). The power this has on decision-making processes has intrinsic value when considering that a job seeker will evaluate whether employment as a police officer is deemed attractive or unattractive (Wang *et al.* 2019). While the effect of the Australian and English reviews in this study has not been analysed in relation to recruitment outcomes, it is reasonable to determine that many people considering employment as a police officer will be discouraged or dissuaded in terms of submitting an application. A challenge for Australian and English police organisations, therefore, is to recognise how these reviews negatively impact their reputation and to identify factors within them that are likely to diminish recruitment. Another challenge is for the police organisations in Australia and England to utilise the information contained within the reviews to understand aspects of employment and the experiences of working as a police officer that affect retention.

Employment experiences and retention

Although some of the reviews by Australian and English officers may be perceived as either a rant or a credible critique, the information contained within them regarding the employment experience of the officers should not be overlooked when determining the reasons underlying resignations and why officers are leaving the profession. As a strategy, when organisations acknowledge the depth of information contained within the reviews and compare it against information gleaned from employee surveys and exit interviews, it is likely that they will be able to identify the challenges

affecting employment and take action on retention strategies to retain staff. This is important when considering all the themes that emerged in this research, and in particular, three new themes that emerged from the analysis, which, hitherto, were not present in research that examined similar online company review content (see Miles-Johnson 2026b). For example, dwindling levels of job satisfaction and the dominant absence of information from current and former officers in their ability to identify a feeling of fulfilment or enjoyment that they derive or gained from their employment as an officer. This certainly suggests that lack of job satisfaction is having an impact on retention and officer resignations.

Rossler and Scheer (2025) argue that level of job satisfaction is a predictor of subsequent intention to stay or leave police employment. Poor working conditions and related employment outcomes (such as those found in the Australian and English review data) have a direct effect on intention to leave the profession, particularly when employment outcomes act as a multidimensional influence rather than as a response to a single or compelling event. This premise is supported by Tyson and Charman (2025), who argue that officers resigning from the profession frequently report multiple factors relating to lack of job satisfaction. Job satisfaction in policing is enhanced when individuals feel that they work in a supportive workplace atmosphere and are able to complete occupational tasks (Charman and Tyson 2024). When internal and external influences and subsequent change affect task completion research suggests that the intensified sense of illegitimacy, lack of order and loss of control over expected or normative workplace tasks results in a complex set of factors that are likely to affect officer retention (Charman and Tyson 2024).

The new finding regarding internal and external political pressures that contribute to the sense of displacement and disorder that Australian and English officers experience within their respective organisation may have shaped the decision-making processes of former officers in each country regarding resignation. Denny (2024) found that most officers believe that political fallout (as a result of internal and external politics) causes police organisations to be less proactive, and accordingly, less likely to support their officers. Lack of organisational support is known to be an attributing factor in the number of officers leaving the profession (Miles-Johnson 2026a). This is problematic because many officers join the profession with the desire to help others during times of crisis and victimisation and to make a difference in citizens' lives and fight crime (Cox *et al.* 2025, Miles-Johnson 2026b). When a disconnect occurs between being perceived as helpful and trustworthy or unhelpful and untrustworthy, and officers experience hostility from the people they joined up to serve (and are employed to help), it is unsurprising that officers reconsider their motivation for employment (Miles-Johnson 2026a).

Continuous (negative) public and media pressure distracts from organisational and individual officer management of workforce morale (Rossler and Scheer 2025). The accompanying fallout regarding public opinion has been found to be at the forefront of officers' minds when considering resignation (Glascok 2023). The need to better manage officers' coping mechanisms regarding negative media and public perception must, therefore, be a focus of operational management as a way to diminish the likelihood that this will be an intrinsic component influencing resignations. Wilson *et al.* (2023) argue that it is these types of issues (alongside improper decision-making, loss of institutional workplace cultures, less individual and organisational ability to problem-solve these challenges) that affects officer retention. If police organisations want to maintain their workforces and retain officers, then acknowledging the information contained within online company reviews (and conceding that negative company reviews add complexity or additional factors that may explain an officer's decision-making process regarding resignation) will inform intervention and prevention strategies addressing retention. Although use of this type of data source to analyse differing factors affecting officer retention is still in its infancy, failure to acknowledge the information contained within online company reviews may increase the number of negative company reviews published on online employment sites and will diminish the likelihood that police organisations will better identify reasons why officers have or are thinking about leaving the profession. Given that most officers enter a policing career with long-term career goals in

mind, this will enable police organisations to deal with such problems before or as they arise, and not after or when officers resign.

Author contributions

CRediT: **Toby Miles-Johnson**: Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing; **Carol Cox-Forshaw**: Formal analysis, Methodology, Validation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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