

# Universal Precautions: A Methodology for Trauma Informed Policing

Daniel Jones, University of Huddersfield & Edmonton Police Service

## Introduction

The concept of *Universal Precautions* is taught in first aid classes across the globe and requires people to treat all blood and bodily waste as contaminated with a virus such as Hepatitis C or HIV. Using this same methodology for trauma in policing will protect the officer as well as the subject of police involvement. A true understanding of who the justice system interact with is very limited.

## Study Design and Methods

This conference paper is based on semi-structured qualitative interviews with 800 incarcerated men and women in federal and provincial jails in Canada. This paper focuses on experiences of victimization and trauma amongst this incarcerated population. The interviews were conducted as a part of the University of Alberta Prison Project (UAPP). In addition to conducting qualitative interviews, demographic information was gained from survey data and survey data about victimization, reporting victimization to police and using victim services. There is a larger data set that was researched as part of the UAPP consisting of qualitative interviews with 800 incarcerated men and women, 30 family members of incarcerated men and women as well as 200 correctional officers. Given that the prisoner population in Canada is predominately male, the great majority of the larger data set are interviews with men. As research inside of prisons is almost non-existent in Canada due to the closed and risk-averse nature of correctional ministries, our study comprises the largest independent qualitative study on Canadian prisons in the history of Canadian criminology.

We received Ministry and research ethics approval from the University of Alberta for our study in 2016 and conducted the interviews used for this article in a four-week period in 2017. The interviews took place in a Federal Prisons where people are serving over two-year sentences, Provincial Jails where people are serving sentences of less than two years and Remand facilities that differ from conventional prisons in that they house all adults awaiting trial, a group encompassing individuals arrested for impaired driving all the way to those accused of multiple murders or terrorist-related activities. People housed in remand tend to be housed there for a comparatively short time while awaiting their sentences (a few days, weeks, or months) as compared with those in the federal system, where convicted prisoners might be serving sentences of many years (Reitano, 2017).

## Challenges and Opportunities

The biggest challenges currently is trying to change police culture in understanding trauma and who the justice client is. Waning numbers of protesters since the murder of George Floyd does not mean there is no need for police to change. Taking the voices of citizens inclusive of the justice client and research that discusses wanting the police but wanting the police to interact differently is a learning from the community that must be addressed in order to rebuild our

## METHODS BRIEF

legitimacy within the communities that we serve. Using these qualitative data as a way to methodologically change police interactions to be more human centered is the biggest challenge.

### Discussion Question

- How do we address the need for cultural change in multiple systems to advance models of public health policing?
- What are the first steps that need to be taken for this model to evolve policing?