



# MENTAL TOUGHNESS AND POLICE STOP AND SEARCH BEHAVIOUR

## Background

Police performance and behaviour is of continued critical interest. Of particular interest is police officers willingness to participate in stop and search activities, regardless of the risks involved in such actions. This study assessed police officers stop and search behaviour whilst on the beat. Stop and search responsibilities and actions are a key performance criterion for the beat police officer. Such actions are difficult to perform and are often carried out in difficult and dangerous settings. As such, there have been concerns that some officers may be avoiding this activity to reduce their stress levels.

## The Study

The study followed 110 police officers on their beat activities. All completed the MTQ48 prior to a period of beat shifts. During shifts, officers automatically report stop and search activities, but they were also asked to record their desire to participate in such activities. Anxiety levels were also recorded for consideration.

### *Relationship between the MTQ48 and the desire and usage of stop and search*

|                            | Overall Desire | Overall Use | Overall Anxiety |
|----------------------------|----------------|-------------|-----------------|
| Total Mental Toughness     | 0.19*          | 0.24*       | -0.59*          |
| Challenge                  | 0.15           | 0.21*       | -0.53*          |
| Commitment                 | 0.18           | 0.18        | -0.40*          |
| Control                    | 0.15           | 0.19*       | -0.51*          |
| Confidence                 | 0.18           | 0.26*       | -0.60*          |
| Emotional Control          | 0.16           | 0.14        | -0.29*          |
| Life Control               | 0.10           | 0.19        | -0.59*          |
| Confidence (abilities)     | 0.11           | 0.15        | -0.61*          |
| Confidence (interpersonal) | 0.22*          | 0.33*       | -0.42*          |
| Overall Desire             |                | 0.81*       | -0.15           |
| Overall Use                | 0.811*         |             |                 |
| Overall Anxiety            | -0.11          | -0.15       |                 |

\* Significant correlations

Firstly, it is important to note that actual use of stop and search activities was associated with an increased desire to carry them out. In relation to Mental Toughness: Higher levels of overall mental toughness was associated with increased desire to carry out and actual use of stop and search activities, as well as reduced levels of anxiety. Additionally, desire to stop and search was associated with high levels of interpersonal confidence. Overall use of stop and search activities was associated with higher levels of challenge, overall control, overall confidence, and interpersonal confidence. All Mental Toughness components were associated with lower levels of reported anxiety.

## *Conclusions and Implications*

Increased mental toughness is associated with increased desire to use and actual use of stop and search activities. Total mental toughness and interpersonal confidence is associated with increased desire to stop and search, whereas Total mental toughness, challenge, control, confidence and interpersonal confidence is associated with increased use of stop and search. As such, mental toughness seems to be a key factor in the beat officer's ability and willingness to perform their activities. A finding further emphasised by higher mental toughness is associated with lower anxiety.

The results reported here demonstrate that although mental toughness is strongly associated with anxiety, anxiety does not seem to influence stop and search desire or use. This suggests that it is not anxiety, but the individual's personal characteristics that influence their behaviour in these settings.

There are implications outside of the police force. It seems that highly mentally tough individuals seem better able to work in stressful settings and carry out seemingly stressful and tough jobs compared to their lower mentally tough counterparts.

These findings add further weight to the argument that increased mental toughness is associated with improved ability to deal with stressors and perform under pressure. This further demonstrates that the MTQ48 is a specific and occupationally relevant measure of personal characteristics.

As a result of the findings of this study the organisation set about developing a programme to improve personal confidence and applied it to all officers who were required to carry out this activity.

## *The Result*

This Police Force is now complying with the requirement to carry out "Stop & Search" activity to a predetermined standard.

There is no evidence of increased stress or anxiety amongst officers required to carry out this duty.