

Security guards struggle with PTSD and lack mental health support

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New research shows that thousands of security guards in the UK are suffering Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), having been exposed to frequent episodes of verbal and physical abuse.

Researchers at the University of Portsmouth have just released the results of the largest study to date of mental health amongst British private security operatives. They interviewed 750 workers and found that almost 40 per cent of them were showing symptoms of PTSD. Another key finding of the study shows a real lack of provision by security companies for employee mental health and wellbeing services.

The research has been led by Dr. Risto Talas and Professor Mark Button, Professor of Criminology in the Institute of Criminal Justice Studies at the University of Portsmouth. Professor Button said: "With almost 40 per cent of those surveyed exhibiting symptoms of PTSD, it leaves a very clear message that the issue of mental health is not currently being taken seriously by security managers. There is an emerging picture of a failure by the security industry to address these issues."

The private security industry has transformed in the last 50 years from a small niche sector to a huge global industry. In the UK alone, there are more than 350,000 licensed security guards, with many others working in the sector who don't need a license.

Security guards play a valuable part in many aspects of our daily life. They patrol public streets, shopping areas and transport hubs; police night-time and entertainment venues; guard sensitive and important infrastructure such as [government buildings](#), courts, social security offices, airports and ports; they also transport valuables and prisoners.

Contact with the [general public](#) is a key factor in most of the roles. Researchers found this often produces conflict, leading to many challenges. This could be anything from verbal abuse through to violent assault. In extreme cases, security operatives have been killed in the course of their duties.

The research showed:

- 64.6 per cent of [security guards](#) suffered verbal abuse at least once a month. (50 per cent of these were as regular as once a week).
- 43 per cent of respondents reported threats of violence at least once a month (10 per cent were getting threatened on a daily basis)
- More than 30 per cent of those surveyed reported some kind of physical assault in the workplace once a year. (Almost 10 per cent reported a minor physical assault at least once a month).

Professor Button said: "The research has revealed a worrying lack of support provided by the security companies. This must change and more research is required on what the [security](#) industry as a whole

must do to address this issue before it becomes a larger societal issue, with added pressure on the limited mental health and wellbeing services provided by the NHS."

More information: Risto Talas et al, Violence, abuse and the implications for mental health and wellbeing of security operatives in the United Kingdom: the invisible problem, *Policing and Society* (2020). [DOI: 10.1080/10439463.2020.1739047](https://doi.org/10.1080/10439463.2020.1739047)

Provided by University of Portsmouth

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