Keeping streets safe at night: Navigating jurisdictional boundaries between the police and the private security industry

Cant, S. and Makinde, M.

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MANUSCRIPT DETAILS

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ABSTRACT:

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Focus groups with 19 police officers and four private security guards were conducted in one city in the Southeast of England, UK, during 2023, to elicit their narrative accounts of working at night and their attitudes towards one another.

The study revealed the importance of non-statutory agencies in maintaining order in the city centre at night, often in the absence of a police presence, at the expense of their own safety, and without legal and physical protection. However, private security guards recognised that they sometimes traversed their jurisdictional boundaries. This practice concerned the police as it compromised formal investigation and blurred lines of responsibility. Both the police and security guards identified training needs, experienced violence themselves, felt unsupported in their work, and recognised that more could be done to build collaborative working relations.

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The findings suggest several practical strategies that would enhance statutory and non-statutory collaboration, particularly through strengthening the understanding of where jurisdictional boundaries should be drawn. Specifically, the instatement of formal channels of communication between formal policing and private security, alongside joint training, would be beneficial.

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This study explores a gap in our current knowledge and understanding about how order is maintained at night. There is limited research into the role of private security and our understanding of police experiences of night working is nascent. By holding focus groups simultaneously with both agencies gave new insights into the current working relationship and views of one another. The respondents articulated mutual respect but also significant levels of distrust and misunderstandings, leading to risks for both groups and users of the NTE. The findings provide recommendations to strengthen collaborative working.

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Abstract

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Keeping streets safe at night to protect users of the night-time economy (NTE) is a responsibility shared by the police and private security companies, yet little is known about this collaboration in practice. The study sought to explore the experience of both agencies to reveal examples of good practice as well as any tensions and risks that emanate from this partnership.

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The study revealed the importance of non-statutory agencies in maintaining order in the city centre at night, often in the absence of a police presence, at the expense of their own safety, and without legal and physical protection. However, private security guards recognised that they sometimes traversed their jurisdictional boundaries. This practice concerned the police as it compromised formal investigation and blurred lines of responsibility. Both the police and security guards identified training needs, experienced violence themselves, felt unsupported in their work, and recognised that more could be done to build collaborative working relations.

Practical Implications

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Key Words, Night-Time Economy (NTE), Police, Private Security Guards, Violence, Violence Against Women and Girls.

Paper type: Research Paper

Introduction

The Night-Time Economy (NTE), which includes work that takes place between 6pm and 6am, is a lucrative industry (NTIA, 2024). The '24-hour city' and the businesses of 'booze' generate significant revenue (Hollands and Chatterton, 2023) but are simultaneously associated with criminal activity and violence. Keeping private venues and public spaces safe at night is a responsibility shared by statutory and non-statutory agencies, a result of wider political and economic shifts (Hansen Löfstrand, 2024; White and Diphoorn, 2024). This collaborative model constitutes a nuanced, but little understood, combination of formal and informal governance. In this paper, to respond to this lacuna, we utilised focus groups to explore the experiences of both police and private security guards as they seek to prevent crime and maintain order, as well as navigate each other's area of jurisdiction. Hearing and cross-referencing accounts from both groups enabled the identification of good practice as well as risks and tensions associated with shared responsibility to keep streets safe at night.

Background

Keeping streets safe at night, including the prevention of NTE-related sexual violence and predatory behaviour, is a responsibility shared between the police and the private security industry (Koeppen and Hopkins, 2022), a global development explained by neoliberal forces (Manzo, 2011). There has been a growth in privatised security (Pazzona and White, 2024), with estimates suggesting that 218,200 security guards were employed in the UK in 2022, an increase of over 40,000 since 2010, but with some significant fluctuation during the pandemic (SIA, 2022). As such, these employees are often first on the scene when disturbances erupt, and have, for many years, been central to informal policing (Hobbs *et al*, 2003). Moreover, their presence is deemed to reduce crime and increase feelings of safety (Brands *et al*., 2015). Indeed, Hobbs and colleagues (2007) showed the specific importance of female bouncers in safeguarding female customers, through identifying predatory behaviour, and de-escalating violence. This level of responsibility indicates the importance of better understanding the experiences and jurisdiction of security guards.

It is especially important to understand the role of private security as the NTE is linked to so-called urban crime 'hotspots' (Philpot *et al*., 2019). Norton and colleagues (2018) showed specific locations, known as 'harm spots', make up only 1% of all places but are responsible for almost 50% of harmful crimes, including sexual offences. These 'harm spots' are typically concentrated near licensed premises, where private security guards are employed. As most violent incidents tend to occur in streets in city/town centres, peak on Friday and Saturday evenings (Haleem *et al*., 2021) with alcohol consumption linked to general violence and violence against women and girls (VAWG) (Quigg *et al*., 2020), the importance of investigating how the police and private security guards can best partner to reduce such harms is imperative.

The extant literature suggests that while security guards are central to street order, they are themselves under-policed. Seminal work (Lister *et al*, 2000) established that while bouncers are subject to violence, they are sometimes perpetrators themselves and often eschew prosecution. Therefore, vesting responsibility for informal policing and the protection of consumers in private security is not without critique and Lister *et al* (2000) called for greater police scrutiny at the turn of the century. This study provided the opportunity to explore security guards' perceptions of police support as well as police views about the value and risk of vesting responsibility in non-statutory agencies in the contemporary era.

More recent scholarship, focused on the perspective of the security guards, has established that they are seeking professional recognition in an industry characterised by precarity and risk (Dölek and Rigakos, 2020; Lister, 2009). Tutenges and colleagues (2015) found most bouncers reported that they had been physically assaulted, and Keoppen and Hopkins' (2022) established such violence has far reaching physical and mental consequences. Indeed, many security guards attend self-defence classes, in the absence of formal training and support, which they pay for themselves (Koeppen and Hopkins, 2022). However, little is known about how the security guards who work at night manage their exposure to risk or their training needs, all gaps this research sought to explore.

Research suggests that security guards are keen to professionalise and shift the perception they are simply 'burly thugs' (Berndtsson and Stern, 2015). Yet, this idea is hard to shake off in both public and police imaginations, not least because of widely publicised scandals (Hansen Löfstrand *et al.*, 2018). Terpstra (2016) argues that lower levels of education and training for security guards sit behind this supposition, accounting for their lower status. There are practical ramifications. Van Steden and colleagues (2015) suggested that police officers tended to 'look down' on private security guards, where the private security guards 'look up' to the police. Similarly, Gill (2015) identified a range of attitudes held by senior police towards private security, from scepticism, through pragmatic acceptance, to a positive embracing of their role; differentials that arguably have repercussions for collaborative working. The study enabled the exploration of police officer and security guards' views of one another.

These views are shaped by the complexity of negotiating the boundary between policing the *private* space of the pub/club and the *public* street. When preventing entry, identifying vulnerable individuals and predatory behaviour, removing patrons from an establishment and managing 'closing time', security guards must exercise their judgement outside the premises that constitute their jurisdiction. This tension in their role has been globally recognised. As Rigakos (2002) suggested, bouncers become responsible for managing *public* nuisance, acting as 'parapolice'. Again, considering that this research is dated, it is important to understand how the contemporary division of labour for ordering the NTE is conducted and experienced.

Certainly, security guards straddle the boundary between the legal and illegal aspects of nightlife, both dealing with violence against themselves, as well as regulating and managing the violence that others experience. In 2005, Hobbs and colleagues were already suggesting that it would be unlikely that the police could manage the disorder of the night without the

support of bouncers. More recently, Kammersgaard's (2019) study in Denmark showed that while security guards largely exercise 'soft power' by giving orders, moving people on, and using threats of calling the police – a form of governance derived not from overt coercion but persuasion - they were still intervening where they did not have legal authority, for instance, moving on homeless people. However, little is known about private modes of 'police-like' work in the UK, not least because it is unregulated and thereby often invisible.

In contrast, research into formal uniformed policing is more extensive covering, amongst other themes, professionalisation, culture, vulnerability, ethics, and training (Martin and Tong, 2023). Despite the larger research interest in the police, work on their collaboration with the private security industry, in the UK, and especially at night, is nascent, as is work that explores the everyday role of the police in night-time street disturbances. To supplement work in other countries (e.g. Buvik, 2014) and reviews of existing data sets (McGuire *et al*, 2021), this qualitative study garnered the voices of both police officers and security guards to understand their modes of collaboration and to identify where improvements to joint working might be made.

The aim of this study was to elicit insights into the experiences of police officers and private security guards who work at night in order to gain an understanding of the challenges facing both groups when maintaining order at night, including efforts to address violence against women and girls (VAWG). Research questions specifically focused on both groups experiences of working in the NTE and whether they encountered violence and how they responded. The questions also sought to draw out accounts of personal risk, training needs, staffing levels and views of one another.

Methodology

This article draws data from a wider study of the experience of night-time economy workers (XXXXX). In line with a general trend of qualitative research into private security guards (White and Diphoorn, 2024), we used focus groups to elicit the everyday and dynamic experiences of night-time work, and to understand how police officers and security guards viewed their collaboration. We focused on a major city in the Southeast of England with a large university population and vibrant night life.

One major security guard company dominates the provision of support for licenced venues in the city and we secured a focus group with four current members of staff. In addition, we established six separate focus groups with police officers. The size and gender make-up of the focus groups were as follows:

Table 1:	Focus groups and the associated number of participants	
Profession	*Number of participants*	*Gender (Female: Male)*
Security/Door Staff: SG	4	2:2
Police: Police FG1	4	1:3
Police: Police FG2	4	0:4
Police: Police FG3	3	0:3
Police: Police FG4	3	1:2
Police: Police FG5	3	1:2
Police: Police FG6	2	0:2

Ethical approval for this research and the wider study was granted by XXXX.

Focus groups took place between July and September of 2023. Each focus group lasted approximately one hour, covering questions about work experience, understandings of work responsibilities, strategies used to reduce harm, training, and personal risks. The focus groups were conducted by two researchers to enhance reliability and were also audio recorded. During transcription all personal details were removed to ensure anonymity. Thematic analysis was undertaken separately by each member of the research team and then cross-referenced to assure reliability and validity. The consistency of accounts across all six police focus groups reinforced the credibility of our findings and the researchers shared the final research report with all groups to secure their corroboration. It would have been preferable to have secured additional focus groups with the security guards, however, the findings chimed with previous research, pointing to the trustworthiness of the accounts.

The findings first detail the current division of labour between private security guards and the police when maintaining order in the streets at night, followed by a review of the risks that night-time work posed for our interlocutors. We then draw out some of the interpersonal tensions that emerged from collaboration between statutory and non-statutory agencies as well as their training needs. Respondents are identified by focus group, respondent number, and gender.

Findings

Policing Streets at Night – Whose Responsibility?

The focus groups established that security guards are usually first responders to altercations in the street at night, filling in when a police presence is unavailable, endorsing previous research (Hobbs *et al*, 2005). Indeed, while security companies ostensibly provide support for venues, covering the doors and internal premises, the study showed that their jurisdiction often extended beyond the spatial confines of the setting, into the public domain. The security guards detailed how they were regularly called to street brawls and how they radioed one another to provide back up in public spaces.

The security guards were quick to acknowledge that they were overstepping their jurisdiction, but they drew on moral and ethical reasons to explain why they felt obliged to protect vulnerable customers, and challenge disorder when no one else was available or prepared to intervene – an almost vigilante-like role:

> SG (1M): 'I've always had the attitude, and I've always said… that if there's something within the vicinity of where you are and you can help go and deal with it… do what you have got to do… if something's happening and you can put a stop to it safely, then do that… We've often been criticised for that, because they're saying well it's not in your remit you shouldn't be on that, but I think this is the wider problem that people are committing crimes... doing these things because no-one challenges them.'

The police were cognisant that they could not always be quickly on the scene, with officers emphasising that their night-time work was compromised by understaffing and cuts:

Police FG2 (1M): 'Sometimes it's down to staffing... the night staff are so understaffed … They have no one, so there's no one on the street...'

Moreover, the police often found themselves responding to incidents alone as single-crewed officers, and as such they valued any back up.

As this sergeant explained:

> Police FG1 (1M): 'There have been occasions where they've (officers) been single crewed… if we attend something single crewed, we are in for a tougher time... there's no doubt about it because they will identify you on your own and, actually, they can have a bit of fun…'

Understaffing left the police feeling anxious during the early hours, as this female officer explained:

> Police FG4 (1F): 'I've been single-crewed a couple of times. I just don't like it. I don't mind going out by myself, that's not an issue. Sometimes it's quite nice to be by yourself. But when it gets dark and you're driving around, I don't know what it is, I can't really explain it, I just feel quite uneasy, a bit on edge.'

Overall, the study revealed that the traversing of jurisdictional boundaries by security guards was often a spontaneous, emergency but welcome response to need. These interventions resulted from the blurring of the lines between private and public spaces, especially when violence occurred after customers had exited a venue, and when a police presence could not be assured.

The importance of security guards in the reduction of VAWG was also emphasised. Indeed, they explained how they had taken the decision to set up their own safety hubs for customers who felt threatened, and they had advertised these through the production of posters which detailed strategies on how to stay safe at night and where to go to find a security guard. However, these hubs existed alongside official safe havens advertised by the

police and local authorities, leading to duplication. Overall, security guards reported that they combined the functions of surveillance, guardianship, first-aid, and intervention.

The police generally welcomed such safeguarding interventions; however, concerns were raised about over-reliance on private security with some deleterious consequences, providing new insights into the reality of such collaboration. For example, decisions made by security guards were sometimes seen to have a detrimental impact on subsequent police investigations and limit opportunities to secure forensic evidence:

> Police FG4 (2M): 'We would lose people and opportunities to collect evidence because they'd be sent home by door staff… they [security guards] didn't understand different forms of spiking and that they could appear drunk…so we wouldn't know about victims'

Nevertheless, both the police and the security guards acknowledged the critical role that security guards played in recognising and disrupting disturbance at night. Both groups also exalted the increased employment of female security guards who provided an important and different role, able to deescalate male violence and provide important support for women users of the NTE.

For instance, private security guards suggested that women were more successful in breaking up male to male altercations, and often drew on gendered behaviour to de-escalate:

> SG (2M): 'I think it really helps having the opposite sex dealing with an incident - fluttering your eyelashes at a bloke.... it does work … and when there is a woman in the middle [of a fight], it's quite successful... they think...I don't want to hurt a woman.'

In contrast, men were seen to be better placed to deal with disruptive females.

> SG (3F): 'If I [female] was working with [a male colleague] and a female kicks off, it's better for him to go in and deal than me, whereas if a bloke is kicking off, it's easier for me to go in and diffuse it that way, and you know, take them to one side. It does diffuse situations by having the opposite sex dealing with you'.

In terms of VAWG, female guards were described by their male colleagues as offering an intuitive and empathetic presence.

> SG (1M): 'Having a female security guard who's in charge of everyone tends to be a bit more comforting in my opinion, and I think other people probably agree on …there's certain things that [names of male Security Guards] are not able to understand…as a male… we could potentially pick up on and take a bit more seriously.'

Overall, the study showed that private security guards, both male and female, have an important role in keeping streets safe at night, and are often first responders, providing essential cover and back up for formal policing, albeit sometimes compromising formal investigations.

Risky Work

As the literature establishes, keeping streets safe at night comes with physical and emotional risks. Both the police and security guards described myriad negative experiences. Whilst there was evidence that officers often choose to accept grievous behaviour when in uniform, the security guards felt especially compromised and under supported. Moreover, there was evidence of gendered differences.

First, both the police and security guards described how they had been personally subjected to sexual violence, a new insight derived from the study. For example, being in police uniform both attracted attention and curtailed responses:

> FG1 (1M): 'Yeah, I've had my arse slapped before… Personally, I couldn't do anything about it. I just had to walk away. Um, but yeah… they were drunk as well… I think if I wasn't in uniform... I would probably stick up for myself… I don't know why, why I wouldn't in uniform, it's just I felt very uncomfortable at the time because I didn't know how to react as a Police Officer, I did know how to react as me... before being in the police.'

Another male officer, also spoke about the hassle of reporting such incidents:

> FG2 (4M): 'I can't speak for everyone, obviously. But I know a lot of officers, unless it's a really bad assault... you bled or somebody spat on you, they won't bother reporting it because it's just not worth the ******* paperwork. If we were to go out tonight, I was grabbed by someone, punched me in the face, even if getting… assaulted, I can't be ******* to write a statement... get somebody else to investigate in the morning. That will take their mate hours... It's not worth your ****** time.'

Overall, for the police, there seemed to be an acceptance that unpleasant and sometimes violent exchanges were part of their working lives. The same applied for security guards, although their experiences intersected heavily with gender. Male private security staff suggested that if they denied someone entry to a venue, they might be threatened with physical assault. In contrast, the two female guards explained how they were regularly threatened with rape:

> SG (3F): 'The abuse you get as a woman is very different, it's very sexual... I've had a male threaten to rape me and come back and they're going to rape me and they're going to do this and they're going to do that, like it's not the same abuse that you would get if you were a man because, for some weird reason, it's almost like it's weird for them to threaten to hit a girl, but it's OK for them to threaten to rape a woman, like it's very weird.'

> SG (4F): 'Yeah… I would much rather be punched in the face than have a man tell me he is going to rape me, that sort of thing is really creepy.'

What was striking was not simply the level of abuse that was reported, but the acceptance that such experiences were to be expected. For the security guards, corroborating the work of Keoppen and Hopkins' (2022), this experience was described as having long-term effects, not least because they felt they dealt with the brunt of violence on the streets. In other words, by being first responders, they were a buffer, absorbing much of the shock of violence, but without any formal support services to turn to:

> SG (3F): 'I do not think we account properly for the trauma... not like the police... what security and door staff actually deal with has a huge impact.'

This view was corroborated by an interjection from another male member of the group:

> SG (3F): 'I think the big thing that I've seen is... we deal with a lot of quite traumatic situations... I don't think the mental health aspect... the trauma... I don't think that's ever accounted for... we're not the police force, but I don't think they look at that and see what security and door staff actually deal with and the impact it actually plays on them.'

These risks were exacerbated by the fact that security guards often had to wait for police back up and could not exert physical methods to protect themselves. There was much discussion, for instance, about the lack of training, physical injury, fear of intervention in the context of filming and counter allegations, and a lack of support from formal policing agencies:

As one emphasised,

> SG (2M): 'We don't have the assistance that the police have, you know, we don't have a magic button which calls, you know, as many police in the area... We don't have a spray, batons, handcuffs.'

In sum, the study vividly revealed that keeping streets safe at night compromises the safety of both the police and security guards, the latter feeling especially exposed to violence which in turn can be dismissed by the police, an issue further developed below.

Professional Misunderstandings and Tensions.

Conducting focus groups with both parties served to reveal a mismatch between the perceptions of the role and status of each group, an insight that might arguably be missed if the research had concentrated on one group alone. From the security guards, a very strong narrative about the desire for greater professional recognition was articulated. They were very keen to distance themselves from the dated stereotypes of burly, aggressive bouncers, and instead emphasised their professionalism:

> SG (1M): 'It used to be, who's the biggest, 'baddest' guy in the bar and he can have a door licence... you know, you had that like Ray Winston type of thing at the door... but now we are well tuned to customer service, and we know how to talk to people... we have to use our communications skills, you cannot just get stuck in... our job has many different facets to it.'

However, one of the barriers to securing greater respect and status was deemed to be the attitude of the police. For instance, the security guards reported that while they respected the police, they did not feel they garnered the same response from officers, often feeling unsupported and critiqued.

> SG (2M): 'You know what we have to do... and I think they, the police, when they do turn up [are] quite quick to criticise. Why are we dealt with in that way? I think this is the problem that I've sort of always had an issue with for a while... we're often held to account far beyond... what we should be... If the government agencies expect us to perform that way, then they should also support us.'

Moreover, respondents felt they often had to account for their actions, even though the police might have been slow to respond to their calls for support:

> SG (1M): 'Now quite often, they [police] get here and ask why someone is restrained, and you've got to explain the process of why you've ended up in this situation as opposed to 'thanks for doing our job for us and we will get rid of them for you.'

Indeed, this seemed to bolster a general view within this focus group that calling the police was not always worthwhile:

> SG (1M) 'It seems like there is a lot of reluctance to get things sorted and I think this puts us in positions where we think – what is the point – nothing is going to come of it.'

> SG (2M): 'You basically lose faith.'

This lack of faith extended to cases where they were considering reporting violence or abuse that they had personally experienced, not least because the response was expected to be tardy:

> SG (3F): 'I would never bother reporting any abuse to the police, if I were abused at work, there is no point … I might get a call at 8am in the morning when I have finished work at 3.00 - they have no sense of time...'

However, the reluctance to call the police was also explained by the fact that the guards felt their claims would be disregarded:

> SG (1M): 'It's almost like you're expected to take that kind of abuse... it's something that we all experience, and we all see it but and don't get me wrong, we're not trying to disregard the police, but it's like... it's the general attitude... I believe they have towards security and especially door supervisors that we are expected to take a certain amount of abuse whether that be racial, sexual, whatever it is, we're supposed to tolerate that...'

In considerable contrast, when asked about their relationship with security guards, the police officers emphasised the positive relationships they enjoyed, noting that while they shared a common goal, each had distinct roles to fulfil, with clear parameters:

> Police FG1 (1F): …working on the door is a different job from being a police Officer… you are there to help the nightclub, or club, pub adhere to their licencing conditions… make sure nobody in there is too drunk. If issues start, if fights breakout separate that fight.'

Overall, working relations were described positively, even if room for improvement was acknowledged:

> Police FG1 (3M): 'Our working relationship with the door staff and with night clubs is very, very good… I know I have had conversations with local businesses, local night-time venues where we've agreed that it would be good to work better together… It's how that looks… police aren't trained to train… And door staff have got a job to do and it's independent of the police much of the time until it goes mildly wrong… so I'm going to say probably in an ideal world, yes better relationship, but, in reality, challenging.'

The study indicated that both the police and security guards felt they had an insufficient understanding of one another. Significantly, a clear mismatch between how the security guards felt they were viewed and judged by the police and how the police described their collaboration was revealed. These findings provide new insights into where tensions may emanate and how joint working and trust might be enhanced.

Informal Knowledge and Training Gaps

The focus groups explored the practical knowledge that the police and private security guards held about how to identify potential risky night-time situations, and especially those where VAWG was implicated. It became clear that both groups relied upon existing knowledge, some of it secured through formal training, but more usually 'picked up' by doing the job in the case of the police or generated through gut instinct for security guards. As a police officer explained:

> Police FG1(3M): 'The training the officers receive is generally through experience and during their initial two years' probation. So, when they are on that two-year probation, although it has changed in recent years, you will go out with experienced officers. That experience will teach you what to look out for in the nighttime… I suppose, really, it's training on the job as opposed to training in the classrooms.'

Moreover, specific formal training relating to VAWG was limited, as outlined in the conversation between officers in FG3:

> 2M: 'No specific training in relation to violence against women'.

> 1M: 'It's one of our force priorities. So, on our home internet thing, there's always a spotlight which we call them sort of providing information about violence against women and girls. I'm just trying to think if we've had any… An online training package against it, but I don't know that we have to be honest. It's basically highlighted through our internet as a priority that we have to pay attention to.'

> 3M: 'it's more general investigative training than anything specific.'

Similarly, in FG1, the police respondents suggested the need for practical and focused training:

> M2: 'Yeah, I mean the initial training that all police officers do is very much legislative training. So, you understand the law and the various aspects of the law. And that will include elements of sexual offences in terms of VAWG and street crime if you like, and misogyny and those offences you get over the nighttime economy, such things as drink spiking, … but we don't really deal with the day-to day… Then I would say that the level of training we receive is... ahh, little to none...'

Whilst security guards were pleased that their own training had increased from two to six days, it was deemed woefully inadequate for dealing with the complexities of their job and, as previous studies have shown, some participants sought and resourced their own training:

> SG (1M): 'I think very little training really is given, you know, when you look at what they expect door staff to deal with, it is effectively the first thing that the police would deal with. You know, the police spend a year, maybe training before they actually go out... whereas we spend 6 days and then we're expected to deal with knives, drugs, weapons, people trying to kill themselves, all kinds of different aspects of this job that... that realistically you can't contain in six days.'

Importantly, there was a recognition that VAWG was not a formal component in any of their training, and instead they drew on their common sense and gut feelings when deciding if a woman was at risk. Thus, formal training on understanding cues and body language was desired:

> SG (2M): 'Profiling people and characterising certain behaviours, looking more extensively into the why someone might be acting in that way…how are you ever going to catch someone spiking someone unless you have razor eyes… I know there's some kind of training…where you can... it teaches you certain things about people's body language, and demeanour... that's a bit more extensive than what we get taught and might be a good way of being able to get the guys to understand that there is someone that we need to look out for.'

Again, corroborating previous research, security guards chose to pay for courses themselves to fill their knowledge gaps:

> SG (3F): 'I did a workshop around women's personal safety… I was looking at like studies about… people who have been convicted for like sexual things… and… how they profiled their victim… and I gained a better understanding from doing that, but I shouldn't have to go and do that myself. It's a massive part of doing this job.'

Overall, whilst we might have expected police officers to be better trained than security guards, the study showed that both groups described knowledge gaps and the importance of contextual learning.

Discussion

Conducting focus groups simultaneously with the police and security guards not only gave rich accounts of their experiences of working at night but also their practical collaboration. Several significant implications flow from this study.

First, the study gave insight into the division of security and policing labour at night. Both agencies recognised there needed to be a partnership. Where Gill (2013) found a range of views, the police in our study were unanimously positive about joint working. However, the focus groups revealed some tensions. Like, Kammersgaard's (2019) study in Denmark, which suggested that security guards provide important interventions but often without authority and beyond their job descriptions, we found a similar situation in England. Our study showed that security guards, reliant on their gut instinct, often made personal judgement calls about when and how to intervene – an ambiguous and liminal responsibility, that sat somewhere between the law, subjective knowledge, and the interpretation of context. They did so based on a moral and ethical decision to intervene in the absence of a formal police presence. In other words, this felt like an obligation, a forced hand, rather than a deliberate traversing of their jurisdiction.

Considering that the police found these types of interventions sometimes problematic, where evidence for formal prosecution could be compromised, the study points to an urgent need to review and formalise a shared understanding of the respective jurisdictions of these two groups. Moreover, our finding that the security guards were providing unofficial safety hubs, albeit well-intentioned, produced an inadvertent duplication of service, which can only be confusing for customers. Overall, there is a need for better communication to improve mutual understanding, enable shared intelligence and a clearer appreciation of where working boundaries should be drawn. There is evidence in some parts of the UK that concerted efforts to improve communication lines are effective. For example, the establishment of door liaison police officers can foster stronger working relationships with the security industry (Lister, 2009).

Second, the study provided new insights into the interpersonal experiences of working at night and the consequences for safety and reporting. Both police and security guards reported myriad emotional and physical harms. While previous research has shown private security to be risky (Keoppen and Hopkins 2022), the revelation of sexual violence is new. Moreover, the sexual harassment of the police, by the general public, is a previously undocumented finding. The research points to the need to review the occupational norms of both groups as the prevailing culture - 'it's all part of the job' mentality – serves to conceal the magnitude and multi-faceted nature of risk and sexual violence that both groups endure. At present, there are deleterious consequences for both groups: security guards feel that the police do not take their allegations seriously, and the police feel there is little point in reporting what happens to them. In both cases, the reporting of, and the response to, crimes are stymied.

Third, the study points to an urgent need for bespoke and tailored training for night-time workers who tend to rely on gut instinct or previous experience. For security guards,

training was not only desired to enhance their effectiveness but was seen as central to enhance their professional standing. While the SIA could be tasked with this offer, the value of joint training packages is suggested by this study as this would enhance not just knowledge but greater mutual understanding.

This small qualitative study provided new and rich insights that could be enhanced by additional research with security guards. Future research could also hold joint focus groups with security guards and the police to draw out their shared understandings and the areas of disagreement. Moreover, quantitative research utilising surveys would enable larger samples to extrapolate from this small study and garner a nationwide understanding of collaborative working.

Conclusion

Maintaining, and where necessary reinstating, order at night has long been shown to be the responsibility of both the police and 'informal commercial policing' (Hobbs *et al.,* 2007). However, there is little contemporary work that examines this relationship. This study, which drew on the experiences of both police officers and private security guards, revealed an intricate performance of thin blue and thin black security lines, rather than a simple separation of jurisdiction. Lines of responsibility were shown to be shared, but also blurred, contested, and negotiated on the ground, and lacked formal support or audit. While the study showed that there is mutual recognition of the work of both agencies, the possibilities for misunderstanding, disrespect and loss of evidence emerged.

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Keeping streets safe at night: Navigating jurisdictional boundaries between the police and the private security industry.

Table 1

Table 1:	Focus groups and the associated number of participants	
Profession	*Number of participants*	*Gender (Female: Male)*
Security/Door Staff: SG	4	2:2
Police: Police FG1	4	1:3
Police: Police FG2	4	0:4
Police: Police FG3	3	0:3
Police: Police FG4	3	1:2
Police: Police FG5	3	1:2
Police: Police FG6	2	0:2

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