UNIVERSITY OF WEST LONDON
The Career University

UWL REPOSITORY

repository.uwl.ac.uk

Investigative private policing beyond the police: an exploratory study

Button, Mark, Kapend, Richard and Stiernstedt, Peter ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0824-8396 (2022) Investigative private policing beyond the police: an exploratory study. Policing and Society. pp. 1-20. ISSN 1043-9463

http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10439463.2022.2071894

This is the Published Version of the final output.

UWL repository link: https://repository.uwl.ac.uk/id/eprint/9161/

Alternative formats: If you require this document in an alternative format, please contact: open.research@uwl.ac.uk

Copyright: Creative Commons: Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy: If you believe that this document breaches copyright, please contact us at open.research@uwl.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Policing and Society

An International Journal of Research and Policy

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/gpas20

Investigative private policing beyond the police: an exploratory study

Mark Button, Richard Kapend & Peter Stiernstedt

To cite this article: Mark Button, Richard Kapend & Peter Stiernstedt (2022): Investigative private policing beyond the police: an exploratory study, Policing and Society, DOI: 10.1080/10439463.2022.2071894

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/10439463.2022.2071894

© 2022 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

Published online: 15 May 2022.

Submit your article to this journal

Article views: 485

View related articles

View Crossmark data

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at
https://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?journalCode=gpas20

POLICING AND SOCIETY
https://doi.org/10.1080/10439463.2022.2071894

RESEARCH ARTICLE

OPEN ACCESS Check for updates

Investigative private policing beyond the police: an exploratory study

Mark Button [a], Richard Kapend[a] and Peter Stiernstedt[b]

[a]School of Criminology and Criminal Justice, University of Portsmouth, Portsmouth, UK; [b]School of Human and Social Sciences, University of West London, London, UK

ABSTRACT

This paper is based on a survey of 331 private investigators predominantly based or working in the UK. It offers findings on the background, roles undertaken, tools used and outcomes of their work. It divides the investigators into four main groups: private investigators (or detectives), investigators working for forensic accountants, in-house private investigators and in-house public investigators (non-police). Given the lack of research on this segment of private policing, important exploratory findings are presented which can be used as the foundations of further research in this rarely investigated sector. The paper illustrates the dominance of older men in second careers among private investigators, the dominance of fraud investigation as the most common work undertaken and limited involvement in surveillance. The paper also presents significant findings on the number of persons who face some form of justice as a result of their investigations.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 15 December 2021
Accepted 26 April 2022

KEYWORDS
Private investigators; private detectives; in-house investigators; investigation; private policing

Introduction

Since the work of Shearing and Stenning (Stenning and Shearing 1979, Shearing *et al*. 1980, Shearing and Stenning 1987) in the late 1970s and early 1980s began to expose the important contribution of private security to policing, there has been a growing scholarship on the subject (see for example, South 1988, Johnston 1992, Jones and Newburn 1998). This body of work, however, has been largely directed at the uniformed aspects of private policing (Rigakos 2002, Wakefield 2003, Crawford *et al*. 2005, Thumala *et al*. 2011, Löfstrand *et al*. 2016, Nalla *et al*. 2017). The private security sector is a very large and diverse industry with many sub-segments, some of which have escaped extensive academic scrutiny (Cunningham *et al*. 1990). One of these is investigation services provided for fees and in-house within organisations.

Given the commercial side of private investigation (often referred to as private detectives and investigators) has had a long history of controversy, this lack of attention would seem surprising (see for example Weiss 1978). In the UK, there have been a series of scandals that have involved private investigators, most notably, the use of illegal surveillance and blagging methods to secure private information for the tabloid press and for clients (Information Commissioner's Office 2006, Serious Organised Crime Agency [SOCA] 2008, Home Affairs Committee 2012, Leveson 2012). The controversy surrounding this function, one should have thought, would have stimulated more academic interest. Unfortunately, this is not the case. The most significant studies to date in the UK were

CONTACT Mark Button mark.button@port.ac.uk

© 2022 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

led by Gill *et al*. and conducted in the late 1990s, almost 25 years ago (see, Gill and Hart 1997a, 1997b, 1999). This research also focused exclusively on private investigators and did not explore the substantial in-house sector and other specialist providers of investigative services, such as investigators working for forensic accountants.

This paper seeks to try and fill the gap in knowledge on the activities of those engaged in private investigation. It is an exploratory study with the aim of providing baseline data that can be used by authors and other researchers to develop further ideas for research from some of the very interesting findings uncovered. Drawing upon a survey of 331 investigators, this paper seeks to offer insights on who are private investigators (in the broader sense), who they work for and what they do, the tools they use and who they work for, to name some. The paper will begin by briefly exploring some of the limited research which has been undertaken, before setting out the methodology and then presenting some of the main findings from the survey.

Private investigators: what we do know?

Button (2019) distinguishes three main groups of investigators that are involved in private investigation: private investigators who charge fees to clients for investigative services; professional service practices based in the accountancy and legal sectors who also offer investigative services for fees; and in-house investigators of private and public organisations.

The public in-house contribution is also important to be considered because they conduct many investigations for the organisations they are employed by. Some might argue their location in the public sector should exclude them from this paper. These investigators, however, are predominantly serving their organisations to protect their revenues and expenditure. They are not like the public police where any member of the public can call them with an issue and expect some form of response. In the UK, there are some in-house public investigators who have special powers in relation to securing information (such as DWP/HMRC), but most do not have any special powers (Gilbert and Wakefield 2018). They are essentially providing an in-house and private function for their employer who just happens to be located in the public sector, which is very different from the public police or other policing bodies like trading standards officers, regulators, etc., who are not only located in the public sector, but also serve the public responding to their complaints and queries. Drawing the line in dividing public from private policing is also a contested area with no clear consensus (see Johnston 1992, Jones and Newburn 1998, Button 2019). It is, therefore, important to explore their contribution and even if you are not convinced, they are part of the private sphere; they at least serve as a point of comparison, whether 'private', 'hybrid' or 'public'.

Of these three groups (private investigators, in-house private and in-house public), private investigators have secured the most academic attention (see, e.g. Stiernstedt 2022), but are still relatively less. These agents are often also known as 'private detectives', 'private eyes', 'gumshoes' or 'enquiry agents' to name some (Prenzler 2006, p. 423). There is much debate on the definitions and boundaries of this group, but most would regard it as a distinct sub-sector of the private security industry (Cunningham et al. 1990, George and Button 2000). Gill and Hart (1999, p. 247) defined them simply as, 'an individual who either runs or is employed by a business which provides investigative services for a fee'. Prenzler (2006, p. 423) offered something similar, 'individuals operating a business that conducts inquiries for a client for a fee, or an employee of such a firm'. The simplicity of some of these definitions provides for a much broader range of potential activities such as market researchers and even journalists.

There are also investigators employed in-house in organisations, in both the private and public sectors. In the former, many financial services companies employ investigative staff to deal with fraud, but other large organisations may also employ investigators to look into a wide range of workplace crimes and deviance (see Ericson *et al*. 2003, Williams 2005, Stenström 2018). There has been research on in-house corporate security/investigation (Nalla and Morash 2002, Petersen 2013, Walby and Lippert 2014) and in-house public investigators, particularly dedicated towards welfare fraud

(Cook 1989, Button *et al*. 2007, Prenzler 2017, Gilbert and Wakefield 2018, Wilcock 2019, Headworth 2021). The professional service practices based in the accountancy and legal sectors have received virtually no serious scholarly interest (Digabriele 2008, Hegazy *et al*. 2017) and broader studies exploring the nature of their investigations (Gottschalk 2017, 2020).

In the UK, there have been few systematic attempts to estimate the size of the sector. Research commissioned by the UK regulator, the Security Industry Authority, estimated 2968 private investigator organisations employing between 4400 and 10,000, but with a possibility of 17,000 (Judes 2010). The Cabinet Office estimates there could be as many as 15,000 employed in central government countering fraud, many of which conduct investigations (some might be in intelligence and prevention work) (HMG, n.d.). There are also charities, local government and in-house investigators in private organisations. A conservative estimate based on this would be around 30,000 investigators in the UK, although this is clearly a punt – although a reasonable one – and an area in need of more research.

Given the central aim of this paper is to offer insights on who the investigators are and what they do, the focus here will be on past research which has examined this in the UK, although there is some research in Australia and other countries (King 2012, 2020, Prenzler and King 2002, 2021, Prenzler 2006; Walby and Monaghan, 2011). Gill and Hart (1997a, p. 553) in their survey of 206 private investigator agencies found that the following services have been provided in the previous 12 months:

- Process serving 90.3%.
- Road traffic accident enquiries 80.6%.
- Claims investigations 71.8%.
- Matrimonial enquiries 68.4%.
- Criminal investigations 53.4%.
- Fraud investigations 50%.
- Asset tracing 50.5%.

The Gill and Hart research did not offer much on the profile of the actual investigators other than some of the traits that were sought in persons they recruited (Gill and Hart 1997a). Gottschalk (2017, 2020) has provided useful case studies of actual investigations conducted, largely by those employed in accountancy firms, but did not provide a profile of investigators. Regarding counter fraud specialists largely operating in the public sector, Button *et al*. (2007) found:

- Near gender parity: 54.5% male, 45.5% female.
- Middle -aged dominance: 69% 35–54 and only 22.3% 34 or less.
- Education: 26% graduates or postgraduates and 74% educated to 18.
- Past experience: 19.5% ex-military or police.

We can, therefore, conclude on the literature examined:

- There are data on what private investigative agencies do (but it is dated)
- There is very little data on who private investigators are.
- There are data on who in-house investigators in the public sector are, but focused on fraud and also dated.
- There are no data on who in-house private investigators are and what they do.
- There is limited data on who professional service investigators employed by forensic accountants are and what they do.

This paper will seek to fill this gap by offering exploratory findings on the profile of these investigators. It is important to also note the aim of this paper is not to provide a definitive set of findings, but rather to offer a broad up-to-date picture, which provides clues for other researchers to develop

research ideas in this under-developed area. Before the findings from this research are presented, the methods for the paper will be outlined.

Methods

Data collection in a professional and/or business setting is commonly done by distributing a survey, and was so in this research project. It is, however, important when undertaking a survey to understand who the participants are and how to survey these particular participants, i.e. what to ask to elicit rich data (see, e.g. MacDonald and Headlam 2008). This first challenge meant that the survey had to be designed in a way such that it would minimise the chance of potential misunderstandings or ambiguities (see Gadd and Karstedt 2011) which will lead to an emphasis on clear, understandable, and professional questions (see Bryman 2012). Practically, this was operationalised in a three-step process. The first step entailed the research team designing survey questions, in the second step those questions went out for consultation to colleagues with significant experience in survey design. This led to several of the questions being reformatted. The third step occurred after the survey was uploaded to the online tool JISC Online Surveys, where another round of review was undertaken to ensure the clarity of the questions and survey.

The invitation later stated that 'the study aims to understand the background of non-police investigators, the types of investigations they engage in, the tools and strategies used and your views on some important issues such as regulation and privatisation'. The survey, thus, was divided into four corresponding sections, where the first contained some demographic questions. The second explored investigators' backgrounds and status. This covered both individual aspects such as academic qualifications and professional associations, as well as organisational such as annual turnover and country(-ies) of operations. The third section covered the work of private investigators. The questions revolved around caseload and the different types of investigations, techniques, tools, and clients. There were also many free-text questions where participants were asked to enter percentages. Since there was no fixed formatting of these questions, the data format of the answer varied to an extent, but was nevertheless easy to code once collated. For example, in the analysis entries like 'zero' and 'all' were transformed to '0%' and '100%', respectively. The fourth and final sections of the survey examined the views held by private investigators. These views mainly revolved around the regulatory environment in which they operate.

Unlike some occupations, there is no easily accessible list of investigators to send the questionnaire to. However, private investigators – as concerns offering their services for hire – generally publicise themselves, including an email contact. The researchers used the following lists:

- Association of British Investigators (https://www.theabi.org.uk/).
- UK Professional Investigators Network (https://www.ukpin.com/index.html).
- General Google search.

From these sources, the researchers built a database of 460 firms in the UK offering investigation services with a contact email to which a questionnaire was sent. The UKPIN was also supportive of the research and sent an email encouraging the members to respond. To secure forensic accountants, researchers targeted the top 20 accountancy firms, which listed forensics as an area of expertise and also used the contacts on the Network of Independent Forensic Accountants (https://nifa.co.uk/), although only 33 were listed. Generally, the top 20 firms would have only one contact listed, so reaching their staff beyond the named contact was purely at their goodwill. To secure in-house investigators, the researchers used their professional networks and secured the distribution or publicity of the survey link among the following:

- University of Portsmouth database of fraud contacts.
- Midlands Fraud Forum.

- Cabinet Office Knowledge Hub.
- ACFE (UK).
- Security Institute.
- Researchers' Linkedin networks.

Some of these networks also cover private investigators and forensic accountants. The distribution encouraged participants to share. Securing in-house private responses was a much more challenging task because of the lack of a relevant association and co-ordinating body. Public investigators in central government, particularly fraud-related, were much easier to target due to the Cabinet Office infra-structure professionalising and co-ordinating them. The researchers are, therefore, confident that the survey reached a good proportion of private investigators listed in the UK, public in-house investigators, but are less confident of the private in-house investigators and forensic accountants' staff. A total of 339 responses were received, of which, after scrutiny, eight were excluded for limited responses and/or not relevant. It is also important to note that the nature of distribution meant some responses were from investigators based beyond the UK, with 87% of respondents primarily based in the UK. However, some of the remaining investigators often worked in the UK, even though based in another country, and for this reason, the researchers have assessed the total sample. It is also important to note that because of the methods used to target investigators, only descriptive statistics will be presented as more sophisticated analysis would have been pointless. The findings should be considered as exploratory and a basis for further quantitative and qualitative research.

Ethical considerations

This research has an aspect of ethical considerations where the methodological approach to the research ethics is based on the guidance issued by the British Psychological Society [BPS] (2018). The approach was further guided by the work of Israel and Hay (2011, pp. 502–508) outlining research ethics in terms of (a) informed consent about the purpose of the research; (b) maintaining confidentiality of research participants' identity and personal data; as well as (c) preventing participants from harm; and (d) at the same time, maintaining research integrity.

The main objective from an ethics perspective is that disclosures do not cause harm to the participants and their organisations. Further, as argued by Oliver (2009), research does not exist in a 'moral vacuum', and while research aimed to enhance the body of knowledge, and in a sense, doing good, it follows that the facilitation of research or its results should not have detrimental effects on the participants, researcher or any other third party. Therefore, participation in this research is completely anonymous. Note the difference between data being anonymised and the data being intrinsically anonymous – also to the researchers. There were, however, free-text answers as part of data collection, where potential identifiers could be entered. This risk was, nevertheless, mitigated by the fact that all participants were experienced professionals operating in a field where they would be accustomed to maintaining confidentiality. Ethical approval was secured from the University of Portsmouth Ethics Committee, Number: FHSS 2020-044.

Findings

In the original questionnaire, private investigators could indicate if they were sole traders or working as more than one. These were combined for analysis and the small number of those working for private security companies were also added to create this private category. These are all agents charging fees for investigative services. Forensic includes those working for accountancy/consultancy firms (usually described as forensic accountancy), who also charge fees for investigative services. Given accountancy or limited liability partnerships (LLPs) are a clearly established sector in their own right, these were treated as a different category. There are also investigators working in-

house for either the public or private sectors and each has separate categories. As noted earlier, we made the case for including in-house public investigators, which, even if this is debatable to some, at the very least, provides a point of comparison. Finally, there was a small number that did not fit into any of these categories, such as those working for lawyers, other enforcement agencies, international bodies to name some. Table 1 illustrates that 37.5% of our respondents were private investigators working for fees, 8.8% working for forensic accountants, just short of 30% in-house public investigators and just short of 20% private in-house (Table 1).

Demographics of investigators

The demographics of the investigators in the sample produced some interesting results. Among all investigators, it is a male-dominated occupation with around three-quarters male and a quarter female. However, for in-house public investigators, the balance was closer with 59.2% male and 38% female. This is similar to what Button *et al*. (2007) found among counter fraud specialists, who are largely public in-house investigators of fraud. Male dominance was highest among private investigators at almost 90%, with lower rates – but still, a clear dominance among forensic accountants (72.4%) and in-house private investigators (76.9%) (Table 2).

Those same male-dominated private investigators were also older too, with around 86.3%, 41 years or over, and almost three-quarters 51 and over. Also, 37% of private investigators were 61+, which was under 9% for the other three main categories. Across the whole sample of investigators, an older profile was the norm with just under 80% being 41 and over. The youngest profile was among forensic accountant-based investigators with almost 45% being 40 or under. In-house private investigators also had around a third in this age category. For the in-house public investigators, the age profile was dominated by the 41–60 with almost three-quarters in this age group (Table 3).

The investigators in the sample were generally well educated with just over 62% educated to a degree or postgraduate level. The most educated groups were the forensic accountants and private in-house investigators with around 83% and 78%, respectively, educated at least to the degree level. The least educated were the private investigators, with 31.5% who left education at age 16, and a further 21.8% at age 18. Also, just over 37% of in-house public investigators left education at the maximum age of 18 (Table 4).

The respondents were also asked about their previous employment and membership in any professional associations. From the 331 responses, the most common association that respondents belonged to was the Association of British Investigators (ABI) with 59 indicating this association, which, given the methodology is not surprising. The second most common was the Association of Certified Fraud Examiners (ACFE) with 47 responses and 35 were members of HM Government Counter Fraud Profession. Given there were 331 respondents and the numbers who were members of associations was relatively low, no sub-analysis was undertaken for this question by types of investigator (Figure 1).

The respondents included a large number of former police officers (uniformed and detective); of the 331, 73 had served as uniformed police officers and 80 as police detectives, with a total of 102 or 30% having any police background (served as a uniformed officer and/or detective). For private

Table 1. Survey responses by the category of investigators.

Category	*N*	%
Private	124	37.5
Forensic	29	8.8
In-House (IH) Public	98	29.6
In-House (IH) Private	67	20.2
Other	13	3.9
Total	331	100

Table 2. Gender of investigators.

	Male		Female		Prefer not to say		Total	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Private	108	87.8	13	10.6	2	1.6	123	100
Forensic	21	72.4	8	27.6	0	0.0	29	100
IH Public	58	59.2	38	38.8	2	2.0	98	100
IH Private	50	76.9	13	20.0	2	3.1	65	100
Other	8	61.5	5	38.5	0	0.0	13	100
Total	245	74.7	77	23.5	6	1.8	328	100

investigators, 58 of the 124 participants had some police background – almost half. This was much higher than the other segments, where only 15 of the 98 public in-house investigators were ex-police and 18 of the 67; a quarter was in-house private, with a similar proportion among the forensic. For private investigators, there were also 38 from other in-house private organisations, 26 from ex-military backgrounds and 13 from other in-house public, who were private investigators. The sample also included 18 former security services (MI5, MI6, etc.) employees, the vast majority of which (11) were working as private investigators (Table 5).

What do investigators do?

Based on a previous research of what investigators do and an assessment of some private investigator's offers on their websites, the researchers asked respondents to rate how often they undertake a variety of different functions on a scale of 1–4, where 1 is frequently, 2 is occasionally, 3 is rarely and 4 is never. The responses were turned into mean responses to give an indication of the most common activities undertaken. The closer to 1 is the score, the more often they are undertaken; the closer to 4, the less they are. Table 6 provides an analysis of these responses by all and the four main sub-groups.

Across all four sub-groups, fraud investigation was the most commonly undertaken function scoring 1.44 across all, 1.69 for private investigators, 1.14 for forensic accountants, 1.28 for public in-house and 1.29 for in-house private. Given there has been a substantial increase in fraud in the last two decades and the police response has been limited, this is arguably not surprising (Loveday 2017). The results make for an interesting contrast to the Gill and Hart (1997a) research on private investigators which found that fraud investigations were the sixth most common activity, with process serving and road traffic accidents coming second and third, respectively. The nature of the distribution used – where fraud networks were targeted – could explain the dominance of fraud for in-house public and private, but this would not be the case for private investigators and to a lesser extent, forensic accountant investigators. It is clearly an area in need of further research.

In this research, private investigators' second most common activity was open source intelligence investigations scoring 1.79, third was due diligence investigations scoring 2.36, ranking the same as missing person investigations, process serving was fourth with a score of 2.38, staff theft and

Table 3. Age of investigators.

Age-group	18–30		31–40		41–50		51–60		61+		Total	
Category	*N*	%	*N*	%	*N*	%	*N*	%	*N*	%	*N*	%
Private	8	6.5	9	7.3	16	12.9	45	36.3	46	37.1	124	100
Forensic	3	10.3	10	34.5	8	27.6	6	20.7	2	6.9	29	100
IH Public	3	3.1	14	14.6	33	34.4	38	39.6	8	8.3	96	100
IH Private	4	6.1	18	27.3	18	27.3	21	31.8	5	7.6	66	100
Other	0	0.0	1	7.7	6	46.2	5	38.5	1	7.7	13	100
Total	18	5.5	52	15.9	81	24.7	115	35.1	62	18.9	328	100

Table 4. Education of investigators.

Highest level of education achieved	Left school at 16		Left school at 18		Educated to degree level		Educated to postgraduate level		Total	
	N	%	*N*	%	*N*	%	*N*	%	*N*	%
Private	39	31.50	27	21.80	31	25.00	27	21.80	124	100
Forensic	2	6.90	3	10.30	8	27.60	16	55.20	29	100
IH Public	15	15.30	22	22.40	36	36.70	25	25.50	98	100
IH Private	8	11.90	7	10.40	22	32.80	30	44.80	67	100
Other	2	15.40	0	0.00	5	38.50	6	46.20	13	100
Total	66	19.90	59	17.80	102	30.70	104	31.30	331	100

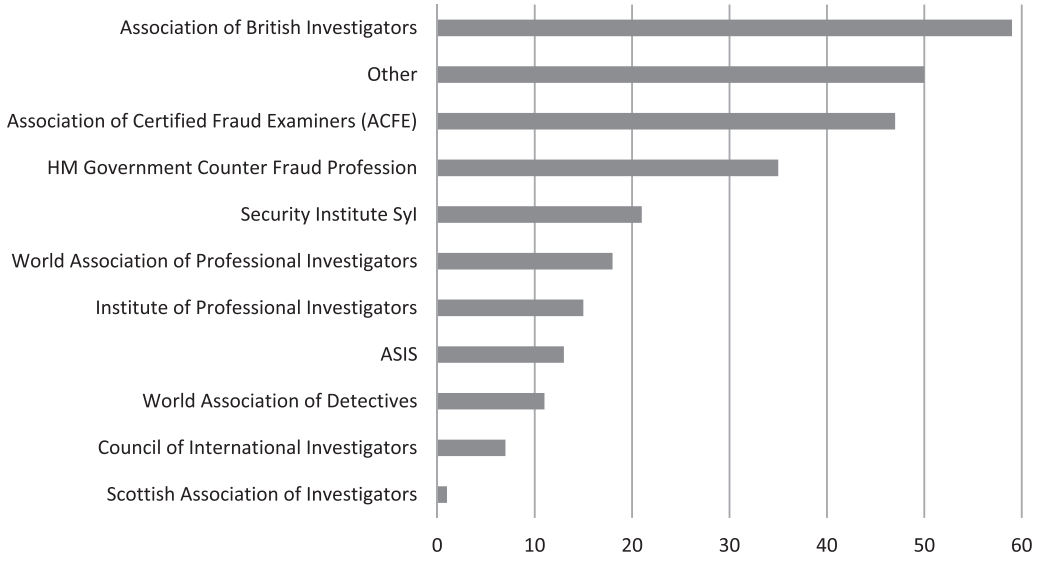

Figure 1. Membership in a relevant professional association.
Note: Total numbers not percentages.

misconduct scoring 2.45 and 2.48, respectively. The least undertaken activities were electronic counter measures at 3.34, genealogy at 3.16 and corporate espionage at 3.04.

Open-source investigations were the second most common activity across all four sub-groups, perhaps illustrating the growing ubiquity of the internet and associated resources that can be used to exploit for information gathering. Forensic accountants scored highly on this at 1.93 and were the most likely to conduct bribery/corruption investigations scoring 2.04, which compared to 2.82 for private investigators, 2.97 for in-house public and 2.37 for in-house private. Gottschalk (2017, 2019) has also illustrated corruption-related investigations conducted by firms of forensic accountants.

In-house public investigators follow a similar profile at the top, with fraud and open source investigations first and second, but third was staff misconduct at 2.69, followed by staff theft, corruption and money laundering with scores of 2.93 and 2.97, for the latter two. All other activities scored 3+. In-house private were slightly more diverse in activities scoring: fraud, 1.29; open source, 1.89; staff misconduct, 2.09; staff theft 2.25, corruption 2.37, cybercrime 2.76, third party 2.9; and money laundering 2.93.

Surveillance is an important function of many state police and security agencies (Newburn and Hayman 2012). There are lots of anecdotal evidence of non-state agencies conducting surveillance (Information Commissioners' Office 2006, SOCA 2008, Leveson 2012). Respondents were asked to

Table 5. Former occupations of investigators .

	Uniformed police officer		Police detective		Any police background		The military services		MI5, MI6 (Security Services), etc.		In-house investigator for state body which is not the police/military		In-house investigator for a private organisation	
	Count	% Of 331	Count	% Of 331	Count	% Of 331	Count	% Of 331	Count	% Of 331	Count	% Of 331	Count	% Of 331
Private	41	12.39	46	13.90	58	17.52	26	7.85	11	3.32	13	3.93	38	11.48
IH Public	11	3.32	12	3.63	15	4.53	8	2.42	3	0.91	34	10.27	9	2.72
IH Private	14	4.23	12	3.63	18	5.44	14	4.23	4	1.21	12	3.63	27	8.16
Forensic	4	1.21	7	2.11	8	2.42	5	1.51	0	0.00	10	3.02	3	0.91
Other	3	0.91	3	0.91	3	0.91	2	0.60	0	0.00	2	0.60	3	0.91
Total	73	22.05	80	24.17	102	30.82	55	16.62	18	5.44	71	21.45	80	24.17

Table 6. Investigations conducted in the past three years.

	Private		Forensic		IH Public		IH Private		Other		Total	
	Mean	*N*	Mean	*N*	Mean	*N*	Mean	*N*	Mean	*N*	Mean	*N*
Fraud investigations in the last three years?	1.69	121	1.14	29	1.28	97	1.29	66	2	11	1.44	324
Corruption/bribery investigations in the last three years?	2.82	108	2.04	28	2.97	88	2.37	64	3	9	2.7	297
Cybercrime investigations in the last three years?	2.93	107	2.75	28	3.26	84	2.76	63	2.89	9	2.97	291
Staff theft investigations in the last three years?	2.45	113	2.28	29	2.93	86	2.25	64	2.6	10	2.53	302
Money laundering investigations in the last three years?	2.95	106	2.79	29	2.97	88	2.93	61	2.78	9	2.93	293
Intellectual property investigations in the last three years?	2.68	106	3.75	28	3.76	83	3.16	63	3.5	8	3.22	288
Corporate espionage investigations in the last three years?	3.04	108	3.75	28	3.84	82	3.53	62	3.38	8	3.45	288
Criminal defence investigations in the last three years?	2.96	107	3.63	27	3.61	82	3.41	61	3.11	9	3.31	286
Electronic counter measures investigations in the last three years?	3.34	104	3.86	28	3.81	81	3.55	60	3.63	8	3.58	281
Road traffic investigations in the last three years?	2.85	110	3.93	28	3.71	82	3.49	61	4	8	3.36	289
Vetting of staff investigations in the last three years?	2.62	107	3.14	29	3.45	82	3.1	61	2.67	9	3.01	288
Third party due diligence type of investigations – competitor/collaborator investigations in the last three years?	2.36	108	3.03	29	3.53	83	2.9	62	3.11	9	2.9	291
Process serving/ligation investigations support in the last three years?	2.38	113	3.39	28	3.76	82	3.4	60	3.63	8	3.11	291
Staff misconduct investigations in the last three years?	2.48	109	2.34	29	2.69	84	2.09	64	2.4	10	2.44	296
Tracing missing persons investigations in the last three years?	2.36	114	3.89	28	3.76	83	3.78	60	3.75	8	3.23	293
Open source intelligence investigations in the last three years?	1.79	110	1.93	29	2.28	86	1.89	62	2.5	8	1.99	295
Matrimonial enquiries investigations in the last three years?	2.76	113	3.61	28	3.96	82	3.87	61	3.44	9	3.43	293
Genealogy (family history and lineage tracing) investigations in the last three years?	3.16	109	4	28	3.93	81	3.87	61	3.63	8	3.62	287
Other investigations in the last three years?	2.64	59	3.84	19	3.55	64	3.28	36	2.38	8	3.19	186

Table 7. Types of surveillance undertaken by investigators.

	Private		Forensic		IH Public		IH Private		Other		Total	
	Mean	*N*	Mean	*N*	Mean	*N*	Mean	*N*	Mean	*N*	Mean	*N*
Directed surveillance (on foot, in vehicles, etc. using cameras)	2.17	122	3.93	28	3.25	92	3.17	64	2.89	9	2.87	315
Covert surveillance (use of hidden cameras, listening devices, etc.)	2.83	119	3.96	28	3.45	88	3.42	62	2.89	9	3.24	306
Covert surveillance using computers/ smartphones (monitoring emails, website usage, phone calls, etc.)	3.42	113	3.5	28	3.4	86	3.13	63	2.9	10	3.34	300
Surveillance using drones	3.72	114	4	28	3.99	86	3.97	62	4	9	3.88	299
Covert investigations (non-cyber) (going undercover)	2.9	120	3.96	28	3.95	86	3.6	63	3.33	9	3.45	306
Covert investigations cyber (pretending to be another person online)	3.24	115	3.96	28	3.8	85	3.25	64	3.33	9	3.47	301
Other please specify	3.8	50	4	17	3.92	64	3.91	35	4	7	3.9	173

rate how often they do this on the same four-point scale used for this type of activity. The responses in Table 7 show that most in the sample conducting surveillance were something they either never did or rarely did. The most common form of surveillance was directed (such as following people on foot or in vehicles), which scored 2.87 across the whole sample. It was more common among private investigators, where the score was 2.17, which compared to 3.93 among forensic accountants, 3.25 in-house public investigators and 3.17 for in-house private. Covert surveillance (hidden cameras/listening devices) – which, depending on the context could also be illegal for some – was rarer with an overall mean score of 3.24, but again, private investigators used this technique the most with a mean score of 2.83. Covert surveillance involving computers/smartphones was marginally less common in the total sample – scoring 3.24, but generally among the sub-groups, all scoring in the 3 s indicating a rare or never used tool. Covert investigations involving either physical or cyber impersonation of another person in the total sample were also either rare or not undertaken by most scoring 3.45 and 3.47, respectively. However, private investigators going undercover scored 2.9, indicating more involvement in this type of activity. The use of drones for surveillance was something most never did across all four groups, with the group using the most private investigators, scoring 3.72.

These results indicate that for most non-police investigators, surveillance is either rare or not something they do. Private investigators are an exception with greater involvement in directed and covert surveillance and going undercover. Forensic accountant based investigators are the least likely to use surveillance in general, but it is also something in-house investigators in the public and private sectors use rarely, if ever. Surveillance is a skilled function and evidence suggests there is a small pool of investigators who hire themselves to others when this activity is required in an investigation.

As well as asking what the investigators investigate and the type of surveillance used, data was also sought on what they do. Table 8 offers findings on the use of interviews of persons under caution. For this type of question, more accurate data on usage was sought which related to never, rarely, monthly, weekly, and daily. A third of the sample never did this, with private investigators using it the least, with nearly half of them never using it. Only 12% of in-house public investigators never did this, around 21% of forensic and around 37% of in-house private. If at least monthly is considered, over half of the in-house public investigators did so, just over a third of in-house private investigators, but only around a fifth of forensic investigators and private investigators. Other research has found that public bodies are more likely to pursue criminal sanctions and private bodies are a much greater mix (Button *et al*. 2015, 2018). As interviews under caution are necessary for criminal prosecutions, these findings further support this. However, a third of in-house private doing this, at least monthly, illustrate that many private organisations wish to keep all options open, including criminal prosecutions.

Table 8. Frequency of interviews, individuals under caution (police regulations such as PACE) or equivalent.

		Interview individuals under caution (police regulations such as PACE) or equivalent.					
		Never	Rarely	Monthly	Weekly	Daily	Total
Private	Count	58	37	15	5	5	120
	%	48.30	30.80	12.50	4.20	4.20	100
Forensic	Count	6	17	4	0	1	28
	%	21.40	60.70	14.30	0.00	3.60	100
IH Public	Count	12	34	36	12	5	99
	%	12.10	34.30	36.40	12.10	5.10	100
IH Private	Count	24	18	17	5	1	65
	%	36.90	27.70	26.20	7.70	1.50	100
Other	Count	4	1	1	3	1	10
	%	40.00	10.00	10.00	30.00	10.00	100
Total	Count	104	107	73	25	13	322
	%	32.30	33.20	22.70	7.80	4.00	100

Table 9. Frequency of use of social engineering.

		Social engineering					
		Never	Rarely	Monthly	Weekly	Daily	Total
Private	Count	46	28	16	9	12	111
	%	41.40	25.20	14.40	8.10	10.80	100
Forensic	Count	23	4	1	0	0	28
	%	82.10	14.30	3.60	0.00	0.00	100
IH Public	Count	59	19	6	6	4	94
	%	62.80	20.20	6.40	6.40	4.30	100
IH Private	Count	24	18	9	7	6	64
	%	37.50	28.10	14.10	10.90	9.40	100
Other	Count	5	2	3	1	0	11
	%	45.50	18.20	27.30	9.10	0.00	100
Total	Count	157	71	35	23	22	308
	%	51.00	23.10	11.40	7.50	7.10	100

A tool often linked with private investigators is social engineering or blagging. This is where investigators pretend to be a person or an official to secure information. Over 80% of forensic employed investigators never did this, almost two-thirds of in-house public investigators, but for private in-house, it was 38%, and private investigators 41%. Indeed, around a third of private investigators and in-house private investigators were doing this on at least a monthly basis (Table 9).

An important objective of this research was to understand the tools investigators use. Tables 10–18 illustrate the frequency at which various investigators used different tools. Both Tables 10 and 11

Table 10. Frequency of use of specialist databases.

		Access specialist databases such as Cifas, National Hunter, Synectics Solutions, Insurance Fraud Register, etc.					
		Never	Rarely	Monthly	Weekly	Daily	Total
Private	Count	56	32	9	12	11	120
	%	45.20	25.80	7.30	9.70	8.90	100
Forensic	Count	12	9	4	2	1	28
	%	41.40	31.00	13.80	6.90	3.40	100
IH Public	Count	50	18	10	11	6	95
	%	51.00	18.40	10.20	11.20	6.10	100
IH Private	Count	30	15	11	3	8	67
	%	44.80	22.40	16.40	4.50	11.90	100
Other	Count	9	0	1	0	1	11
	%	69.20	0.00	7.70	0.00	7.70	100
Total	Count	157	74	35	28	27	321
	%	47.30	22.30	10.50	8.40	8.10	100

Table 11. Frequency of the use of data-mining/matching applications.

		Datamining/matching applications used to guide decisions in investigations/service provision such as Threatmetrix, Cybersource, Pindrop, etc.					
		Never	Rarely	Monthly	Weekly	Daily	Total
Private	Count	79	18	6	10	8	121
	%	63.70	14.50	4.80	8.10	6.50	100
Forensic	Count	13	13	2	0	0	28
	%	44.80	44.80	6.90	0.00	0.00	100
IH Public	Count	56	22	5	7	3	93
	%	57.10	22.40	5.10	7.10	3.10	100
IH Private	Count	32	9	8	10	8	67
	%	47.80	13.40	11.90	14.90	11.90	100
Other	Count	10	0	2	0	0	12
	%	76.90	0.00	15.40	0.00	0.00	100
Total	Count	190	62	23	27	19	321
	%	57.20	18.70	6.90	8.10	5.70	100

Table 12. Frequency of the use of cameras.

		Use of camera					
		Never	Rarely	Monthly	Weekly	Daily	Total
Private	Count	19	28	17	30	30	124
	%	15.30	22.60	13.70	24.20	24.20	100.00
Forensic	Count	19	9	0	0	0	28
	%	65.50	31.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	100.00
IH Public	Count	44	29	10	7	5	95
	%	44.90	29.60	10.20	7.10	5.10	100.00
IH Private	Count	27	18	5	10	7	67
	%	40.30	26.90	7.50	14.90	10.40	100.00
Other	Count	2	4	3	0	1	10
	%	15.40	30.80	23.10	0.00	7.70	100.00
Total	Count	111	88	35	47	43	324
	%	33.40	26.50	10.50	14.20	13.00	100.00

illustrate the generally rare use of specialist databases and data-analytical tools among these investigators. The largest use was the private investigators' use of specialist databases with almost a fifth using them at least weekly and in-house private investigators' use of data analytics with over a quarter using them at least weekly.

Private investigators have a popular image of the use of specialist equipment such as covert recording and CCTV devices, the use of cameras to name some (Bunyan 1976, Draper 1978, Gill and Hart 1997a). Evidence from the survey found that such tools were rarely used in general, but there were some important differences between the different types of investigators. For almost

Table 13. Frequency of the use of radio.

		Use of radio					
		Never	Rarely	Monthly	Weekly	Daily	Total
Private	Count	55	30	10	10	13	118
	%	44.40	24.20	8.10	8.10	10.50	100
Forensic	Count	27	1	0	0	0	28
	%	93.10	3.40	0.00	0.00	0.00	100
IH Public	Count	63	15	5	5	6	94
	%	64.30	15.30	5.10	5.10	6.10	100
IH Private	Count	51	10	1	3	2	67
	%	76.10	14.90	1.50	4.50	3.00	100
Other	Count	5	0	1	0	4	10
	%	38.50	0.00	7.70	0.00	30.80	100
Total	Count	201	56	17	18	25	317
	%	60.50	16.90	5.10	5.40	7.50	100

Table 14. Frequency of the use of covert cameras.

		Use of covert cameras					
		Never	Rarely	Monthly	Weekly	Daily	Total
Private	Count	43	32	18	19	9	121
	%	34.70	25.80	14.50	15.30	7.30	100
Forensic	Count	27	1	0	0	0	28
	%	93.10	3.40	0.00	0.00	0.00	100
IH Public	Count	67	15	3	3	4	92
	%	68.40	15.30	3.10	3.10	4.10	100
IH Private	Count	41	16	3	3	3	66
	%	61.20	23.90	4.50	4.50	4.50	100
Other	Count	7	1	0	0	1	9
	%	53.80	7.70	0.00	0.00	7.70	100
Total	Count	185	65	24	25	17	316
	%	55.70	19.60	7.20	7.50	5.10	100

Table 15. Frequency of the use of covert listening devices.

		Covert listening devices					
		Never	Rarely	Monthly	Weekly	Daily	Total
Private	Count	76	24	8	6	3	117
	%	61.30	19.40	6.50	4.80	2.40	100
Forensic	Count	28	0	0	0	0	28
	%	96.60	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	100
IH Public	Count	77	10	1	2	2	92
	%	78.60	10.20	1.00	2.00	2.00	100
IH Private	Count	54	11	0	0	1	66
	%	80.60	16.40	0.00	0.00	1.50	100
Other	Count	7	1	1	1	0	10
	%	53.80	7.70	7.70	7.70	0.00	100
Total	Count	242	46	10	9	6	313
	%	72.90	13.90	3.00	2.70	1.80	100

Table 16. Frequency of the use of tracking devices.

		Use of tracking devices					
		Never	Rarely	Monthly	Weekly	Daily	Total
Private	Count	60	19	21	13	7	120
	%	48.40	15.30	16.90	10.50	5.60	100
Forensic	Count	27	1	0	0	0	28
	%	93.10	3.40	0.00	0.00	0.00	100
IH Public	Count	77	7	3	2	2	91
	%	78.60	7.10	3.10	2.00	2.00	100
IH Private	Count	50	17	0	0	0	67
	%	74.60	25.40	0.00	0.00	0.00	100
Other	Count	6	1	2	0	0	9
	%	46.20	7.70	15.40	0.00	0.00	100
Total	Count	220	45	26	15	9	315
	%	66.30	13.60	7.80	4.50	2.70	100

Table 17. Frequency of the use of bug detectors.

		Use of bug detector					
		Never	Rarely	Monthly	Weekly	Daily	Total
Private	Count	71	28	10	5	3	117
	%	57.30	22.60	8.10	4.00	2.40	100
Forensic	Count	28	0	0	0	0	28
	%	96.60	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	100
(IH) Public Investigator	Count	85	2	1	1	2	91
	%	86.70	2.00	1.00	1.00	2.00	100
(IH) Private Investigator	Count	63	2	1	0	0	66
	%	94.00	3.00	1.50	0.00	0.00	100
Other	Count	8	1	0	0	0	9
	%	61.50	7.70	0.00	0.00	0.00	100
Total	Count	255	33	12	6	5	311
	%	76.80	9.90	3.60	1.80	1.50	100

half of the private investigators, the use of cameras was at least a weekly occurrence, but forensic accountant investigators never used them, and in the public sector in-house, three-quarter never or rarely used them. Private in-house used them more with a quarter using them at least weekly.

Table 13 illustrates that radios were rarely used by all the investigators, with private investigators using them the most with almost a fifth at least weekly. Similarly, covert cameras were also rarely used by private investigators – using these the most with almost a quarter using them at least weekly. All other categories largely never or rarely used them.

Table 18. Frequency of the use of drones.

		Use of drones					
		Never	Rarely	Monthly	Weekly	Daily	Total
Private	Count	94	16	4	1	2	117
	%	75.80	12.90	3.20	0.80	1.60	100
Forensic	Count	28	0	0	0	0	28
	%	96.60	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	100
IH Public	Count	88	2	0	0	2	92
	%	89.80	2.00	0.00	0.00	2.00	100
IH Private	Count	61	5	0	0	0	66
	%	91.00	7.50	0.00	0.00	0.00	100
Other	Count	9	0	0	0	0	9
	%	69.20	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	100
Total	Count	280	23	4	1	4	312
	%	84.30	6.90	1.20	0.30	1.20	100

Covert listening devices are a very sensitive tool to use, as in many contexts, their use would be illegal. Forensic accountant investigators never used them and they were very rarely used in the in-house public and private sectors. There were around a third of private investigators who used them, ranging from rarely to daily. Tracking devices were used slightly more than covert listening devices – but still, generally for most, it was rare or never.

The sweeping of locations for potential bugs was also a very rarely used tool, with most either never or rarely using such tools. Even for private investigators, their use of at least a monthly level was less than 15%. Similarly, drones are also rarely used. These findings suggest that the use of tools, such as drones, bugging detectors, covert CCTV and listening devices, is in the hands of a few investigators, with most generalists rarely using them.

The clients of investigators

As it is only the private investigators and forensic accountants who have a diversity of clients, the data will focus on them. The responses revealed differences between the two groups. For this, the four-point scale of 1 = frequently, 2 = occasionally, 3 = rarely and 4 = never was used. Forensic accountants who work for public sector organisations are 1.57, SMEs 1.85 and large companies 1.88, the most. Private investigators by contrast work for large companies 1.53, SMEs, 1.56, lawyers 1.71, the most. They also work much more for individual clients scoring 2.08 compared to 3.19 for forensic accountants. The latter work more for charities scoring 2.35, compared to 3.1 for private. Although both groups do occasionally work for the police and security services, it is fairly rare (Table 19).

Table 19. Who private investigators and forensics work for.

	Private		Forensic	
	Mean	*N*	Mean	*N*
Individual citizens	2.08	118	3.19	26
Large companies	1.53	110	1.88	26
Small and medium sized companies	1.56	111	1.85	27
Charities/NGOs	3.1	97	2.35	26
Public sector organisations	2.5	105	1.57	28
International organisations	2.47	100	2.56	25
Firms of lawyers	1.71	115	2.88	26
Journalists	3.64	98	3.92	25
The police	3.52	100	3.6	25
Security services	3.66	97	3.92	25
Other please specify	3.42	53	4	17

Outcomes of investigations

The researchers also sought data on the outcomes of the investigative work of the respondents. There were outliers for some of the categories, but taking into consideration the selected measures of central tendency, in this case, mean, median, minimum and maximum, to be specific, the following can be said. The 78 in-house public investigators who responded to this question reported that an average of around 31% of cases they investigated led to criminal prosecution. The median percentage was 10% – meaning, there were 50% of cases with a percentage value smaller than the median (10%) and 50% of cases with a percentage value larger than the median. The lowest percentage reported by these investigators or minimum that led to criminal prosecution was 0 and the highest reported percentage or maximum percentage was 100%. For the 27 forensic investigators who responded to the question, an average of 27% of cases they investigated led to criminal prosecution with a median percentage value of 5%, a minimum percentage of 0 and a maximum percentage of 100%. The 75 private investigators had similar results with a mean of 24.5% and a median of 10%. The 52 in-house private investigators also had similar results to those derived from the forensic investigators (Table 20).

Alternatives to criminal prosecution such as civil, regulatory or internal discipline are well known as common strategies to deal with some deviant acts (Button *et al*. 2018). Again, because of the distortion of high and low scoring cases, it is better to focus on the median. In all four sub categories, around a third to half of the respondents' caseloads resulted in such outcomes, with it being least used in the public sector at just under 30%. All three other categories were around a half (Table 21).

To get a picture of the total number of persons experiencing a conviction or loss of job, the survey also sought information on this (Table 22). An important caveat is that it was possible that respondents from the same firm responded about the same cases, which could lead to double counting. Therefore, at best, this is a rough indicator. For criminal convictions, this sample indicates that as many as 2762 were convicted in the courts for a criminal offence as a result of an investigation by the investigators in this survey (mean of 11.51 times 240 who responded to this question). The median number of convictions was highest among public in-house investigators at 3.5, followed by 3 for in-house private investigators, 2 for private investigators and 1.5 for forensic accountant

Table 20. Percentage of cases that led to a criminal prosecution.

Regarding investigations you have undertaken in the last three years involved acts which could be considered criminal? Approximately what percentage of cases led to criminal prosecution?					
	Mean %	*N*	Median %	Minimum %	Maximum %
Private	24.52	75	10	0	100
Forensic	12.22	27	5	0	80
IH Public	30.9	78	10	0	100
IH Private	14.54	52	5	0	90
Other	31.22	9	15	0	100
Total	23.3	241	10	0	100

Table 21. Alternative sanctions.

Regarding investigations you have undertaken in the last three years which involved acts which could be considered criminal (for example an investigation into theft or fraud by a staff member). Approximately what percentage of cases could have led to criminal prosecution, but which were dealt with by other means such internal disciplinary, civil, or regulatory sanction?					
	Mean %	*N*	Median %	Minimum %	Maximum %
Private	46.67	79	50	0	100
Forensic	52.04	27	50	0	100
IH Public	29.97	76	30	0	100
IH Private	47.4	55	50	0	100
Other	17	9	3	0	85
All	41.18	246	40	0	100

Table 22. Total convictions in courts.

In the last three years approximately how many persons have been convicted in the criminal courts as a result of facts established by an investigation you were part of?

	Mean	*N*	Median	Minimum	Maximum	Sum
Private	16.75	72	2	0	750	1206
Forensic	2.27	26	1.5	0	20	59
IH Public	8.36	78	3.5	0	75	652
IH private	14.5	56	3	0	157	812
Other	4.13	8	1	0	18	33
Total	11.51	240	2.5	0	750	2762

investigators. Given some respondents did not answer this question, the median figure might be more prudent to use. If this figure of 2.5 was applied to an estimated number of investigators of 30,000 (which was discussed earlier), 75,000 persons could be convicted in the criminal courts over three years as a result of non-police investigations, so possibly 25,000 per year.

For people who had lost employment as a result of a private investigation, the figures were much higher (Table 23). A total of 4325 persons had lost their jobs – with medians of 10 for in-house private investigators and forensic accountant investigators. For private investigators, the figure was 6 and 2 for the in-house public. Again, if the median for all of five was applied to a notional 30,000 investigators, a total of 150,000 persons would have lost employment over a three-year period, giving a figure of 50,000 per year.

Using the Ministry of Justice offender outcome tool (which is an Excel file with extensive outcome on the outcome of offences by crime type), between 2008 and 2018, the total number of offenders proceeded against for criminal offences, added up to between 1.3 and 1.6 million per year (HM Government 2019). If the focus is property crimes such as theft, fraud (as well as benefit fraud), computer misuse and copyright offences, during the same period, the same numbers proceeded against the range between 68,000 and 144,000 per year. Clearly, many of these would be the sole work of the police, but there are likely to be other offences too beyond this list, which private investigation deal with. So, the figure of 25,000 criminal convictions per year does have some plausibility.

Discussion

This paper has presented exploratory findings on the investigators drawn from clients seeking private investigators, forensic accountants and in-house private and public investigators (who are not the police). There has been very little research in this area and this paper can be considered as an opening account to better understand this aspect of private policing that has largely avoided academic scrutiny. The aim was to provide leads for the authors and other researchers to develop further. Most, but not all, of the survey data has been presented in this paper and further papers are planned to reveal some of the other interesting findings.

Table 23. Total number of persons whose employment was terminated.

In the last three years approximately how many persons have had their employment terminated due to facts established by an investigation you were part of?

	Mean	*N*	Median	Sum	Minimum	Maximum
Private	18.26	73	6	1333	0	280
Forensic	11.79	29	10	342	0	40
IH Public	6.8	79	2	537	0	50
IH private	28.49	55	10	1567	0	357
Other	54.6	10	3	546	0	500
Total	17.58	246	5	4325	0	500

The authors note several issues that arise from these findings that suggest further interesting research. The profile of older private investigators, with a significant number drawn from the police, raises interesting questions over potential networks of information sharing. Do some of the ex-police also represent officers who left the public police under a cloud? An important question to consider, particularly when we come to some of the other findings and an issue previously explored by researchers in some aspects of private policing (O'Reilly and Ellison 2006).

The most significant role for many of these investigators is the investigation of fraud. The growth of this crime has put the public police under stress with a thin response to this problem (Levi 2017, Loveday 2017). This combined with the large number of persons who eventually face criminal prosecution or some other sanction (which are highly likely to be fraud-related) perhaps illustrates that we have effectively seen the privatisation of the criminal investigation of fraud by stealth, without any informed public debate, an issue very few have identified (see Button *et al*. 2015, Gottschalk 2019).

The use of surveillance by the police has been controversial in the past and not surprisingly stimulated extensive regulation. This research shows that most forms of surveillance are the responsibility of a minority of investigators. However, such tools are used and it is clear that more has to be understood about how this is used, particularly post Leveson, and excesses that were exposed.

Finally, re-enforcing the point about privatisation in this research illustrates investigators' involvement in a significant number of cases that result in significant sanctions. They are involved in facilitating criminal prosecutions (which, often the police claim credit for, i.e. the case is handed to them ready to pursue), pursuing other sanctions through civil courts and regulatory bodies, and private sanctions through the employment justice of organisations. If the median caseloads are multiplied by the number of investigators, the extent of cases is significant. The police role in justice has been subject to extensive scrutiny and regulations, but for this sector, there has been very little. Indeed, given the scandal in the UK of the in-house private investigation (and prosecution) by the Post Office (a private company in the UK) of 736 postmasters for fraud – of which, at the time of writing 72 have had their convictions overturned (with more expected) and 555 who have received a settlement following civil litigation – it illustrates how miscarriages of justice do not just occur in the public sector (BBC News 2022). These findings alone point to the need for greater research to understand how these private actors work in this field and where there might be issues of concern, which require further scrutiny and reform.

Conclusion

This paper has presented the findings of an exploratory study on investigators beyond the police, employed as private investigators for forensic accountant firms, for in-house public and private bodies. It has illustrated the profile of them showing generally older males and a second career-orientated group. It has demonstrated what they do showing the significant role in fraud investigation and open source investigations. It has also shown some of the tools they use and the nature and extent of the use of surveillance. The paper has also shown the significant involvement in cases that result in criminal prosecutions and other forms of sanction. Finally, the paper offered some discussion of these findings and suggested some priority areas for further research.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

ORCID

Mark Button http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4169-2619

References

BBC News, 2022. Post Office scandal: what the horizon saga is all about. Available from: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-56718036.

Bryman, A., 2012. *Social research methods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

British Psychological Society, 2018. *BPS Code of Human Research Ethics*. British Psychological Society.

Bunyan, T., 1976. *Political police in Britain: history and practice*. London: St. Martin's Press.

Button, M., *et al*., 2007. New directions in policing fraud: the emergence of the counter fraud specialist in the United Kingdom. *International journal of the sociology of law*, 35 (4), 192–208.

Button, M., *et al*., 2015. Confronting the 'fraud bottleneck': private sanctions for fraud and their implications for justice. *Journal of criminological research, policy and practice*, 1 (3), 159–174.

Button, M., 2019. *Private policing*. 2nd ed. Abingdon: Routledge.

Button, M., Shepherd, D., and Blackbourn, D., 2018. 'The iceberg beneath the sea', fraudsters and their punishment through non-criminal justice in the 'fraud justice network' in England and Wales. *International journal of law, crime and justice*, 53, 56–66.

Cook, D., 1989. *Rich law, poor law: different responses to tax and supplementary benefit fraud*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

Crawford, A., *et al*., 2005. *Plural policing*. Bristol: The Policy Press.

Cunningham, W.C., Strauchs, J.J., and Van Meter, C.W., 1990. *Private security trends 1970–2000. Hallcrest Report II*. Stoneham, MA: Butterworth-Heinemann.

Digabriele, J.A., 2008. An empirical investigation of the relevant skills of forensic accountants. *Journal of education for business*, 83 (6), 331–338.

Draper, H., 1978. *Private police*. Sussex: Harvester Press.

Ericson, R.V., Doyle, A., and Barry, D., 2003. *Insurance as governance*. Oxford: University of Toronto Press.

Gadd, D. and Karstedt, S., 2011. *The SAGE handbook of criminological research methods*. London: Sage.

George, B. and Button, M., 2000. *Private security*. Leicester: Perpetuity Press.

Gilbert, M. and Wakefield, A., 2018. Tackling fraud effectively in central government departments: a review of the legal powers, skills and regulatory environment of UK central government counter fraud teams. *Journal of financial crime*, 25 (2), 384–399.

Gill, M. and Hart, J., 1997a. Exploring investigative policing: a study of private detectives in Britain. *British Journal of criminology*, 37 (4), 549–567.

Gill, M. and Hart, J., 1997b. Policing as a business: the organisation and structure of private investigation. *Policing and society*, 7 (2), 117–141.

Gill, M. and Hart, J., 1999. Private security: enforcing corporate security policy using private investigators. *European journal on criminal policy and research*, 7 (2), 245–261.

Gottschalk, P., 2017. *Investigating white-collar crime*. Gewerbestrasse: Springer.

Gottschalk, P., 2019. *The privatization of fraud investigation: internal investigations by fraud examiners*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Gottschalk, P., 2020. Private policing of white-collar crime: case studies of internal investigations by fraud examiners. *Police practice and research*, 21 (6), 717–738.

Headworth, S., 2021. *Policing welfare. Punitive adversarialism in public assistance*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hegazy, S., Sangster, A., and Kotb, A., 2017. Mapping forensic accounting in the UK. *Journal of international accounting, auditing and taxation*, 28, 43–56.

HMG, n.d. Counter-fraud standards and profession. Available from: https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/counter-fraud-standards-and-profession.

HM Government, 2019. Criminal justice system statistics publication: outcomes by offence 2008 to 2018: pivot table analytical tool for England and Wales. Available from: https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/criminal-justice-system-statistics-quarterly-december-2018.

Home Affairs Committee, 2012. Fourth report – private investigators. Available from: https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmselect/cmhaff/100/10002.htm.

Information Commissioner's Office, 2006. What price privacy? Available from: http://www.ico.org.uk/for_the_public/topic_specific_guides/~/media/documents/library/Corporate/Research_and_reports/WHAT_PRICE_PRIVACY.ashx.

Israel, M. and Hay, I., 2011. Research ethics in criminology. *In*: D Gadd, S. Karstedt, and S. F. Messner, eds. *The SAGE handbook of criminological research methods*. London: Sage, 500–514.

Johnston, L., 1992. *The rebirth of private policing*. London: Routledge.

Jones, T. and Newburn, T., 1998. *Private security and public policing*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Judes, L., 2010. *Scoping the private investigation market: stakeholder interviews summary*. London: Central Office of Information.

King, M., 2012. Field observations of Australian private investigators conducting fraud investigations. *Internet journal of criminology*, 2012, 1–15.

King, M., 2020. What makes a successful corporate investigator: an exploration of private investigators attributes. *Journal of financial crime*, 27 (3), 701–714.
King, M., 2021. Profiting from a tainted trade: private investigators' views on the popular culture glamorisation of their trade. *Journal of criminological research, policy and practice*, 7 (2), 112–125.
Leveson, B., 2012. *An inquiry into the culture, practices and ethics of the press: report. Volumes 1 to 4*. London: Stationery Office.
Levi, M., 2017. Assessing the trends, scale and nature of economic cybercrimes: overview and issues. *Crime, law and social change*, 67 (1), 3–20.
Löfstrand, C., Loftus, B., and Loader, I., 2016. Doing 'dirty work': stigma and esteem in the private security industry. *European journal of criminology*, 13 (3), 297–314.
Loveday, B., 2017. Still plodding along? The police response to the changing profile of crime in England and Wales. *International journal of police science and management*, 19 (2), 101–109.
MacDonald, S. and Headlam, N., 2008. *Research methods handbook: introductory guide to research methods in social research*. Manchester: CLES.
Nalla, M. and Morash, M., 2002. Assessing the scope of corporate security: common practices and relationships with other business functions. *Security journal*, 15 (3), 7–19.
Nalla, M.K., Paek, S.Y., and Lim, S.S., 2017. The influence of organizational and environmental factors on job satisfaction among security guards in Singapore. *Australian & New Zealand journal of criminology*, 50 (4), 548–565.
Newburn, T. and Hayman, S., 2012. *Policing, surveillance and social control*. Abingdon: Routledge.
Oliver, P., 2009. *The student's guide to research ethics*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
O'Reilly, C. and Ellison, G., 2006. 'Eye spy private high' re-conceptualizing high policing theory. *The British journal of criminology*, 46 (4), 641–660.
Petersen, K.L., 2013. The corporate security professional: a hybrid agent between corporate and national security. *Security journal*, 26 (3), 222–235.
Prenzler, T., 2006. Private investigators. *In:* M. Gill, ed. *The handbook of security*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
Prenzler, T., 2017. Reducing welfare fraud: an Australian case study. *Security journal*, 30 (2), 569–584.
Prenzler, T. and King, M. 2002. The role of private investigators and commercial agents in law enforcement. Trends and issues in crime and criminal justice. Available from: https://eprints.qut.edu.au/119458/1/119458.pdf.
Rigakos, G.S., 2002. *The new parapolice*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
Serious Organised Crime Agency (SOCA), 2008. *Private investigators: the rogue element of the private investigation industry and others unlawfully trading in personal data*. London: SOCA.
Shearing, C.D., Farnell, M.B., and Stenning, P.C., 1980. *Contract security in Ontario*. Toronto: Centre of Criminology, University of Toronto.
Shearing, C.D. and Stenning, P.C., 1987. Say 'cheese!': the Disney order that is not so Mickey Mouse. *In:* C.D. Shearing and P.C. Stenning, eds. *Private policing*. Newbury Park: Sage, 317–323.
South, N., 1988. *Policing for profit*. London: Sage.
Stenning, P.C., and Shearing, C.D., 1979. *Search and seizure: powers of private security personnel: a study paper prepared for the Law Reform Commission of Canada*. Ottawa: Law Reform Commission of Canada.
Stenström, A., 2018. The private policing of insurance claims: power, profit and private justice. *The British journal of criminology*, 58 (2), 478–496.
Stiernstedt, P., 2022. Privatizing police discretion – 'private security criminal investigations' in Sweden. *Policing: a journal of policy and practice*, 15 (4), 2210–2224.
Thumala, A., Goold, B., and Loader, I., 2011. A tainted trade? moral ambivalence and legitimation work in the private security industry. *The British journal of sociology*, 62 (2), 283–303.
Wakefield, A., 2003. *Selling security – the private policing of public space*. Cullompton: Willan.
Walby, K. and Lippert, R.K., eds. 2014. *Corporate security in the 21st century: theory and practice in international perspective*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
Walby, K. and Monaghan, J., 2011. Private eyes and public order: policing and surveillance in the suppression of animal rights activists in Canada. *Social movement studies*, 10 (1), 21–37.
Weiss, R., 1978. The emergence and transformation of private detective industrial policing in the United States, 1850-1940. *Crime and social justice*, 9 (1), 35–48.
Wilcock, S., 2019. (De-) criminalizing welfare? The rise and fall of social security fraud prosecutions in Australia. *The British journal of criminology*, 59 (6), 1498–1519.
Williams, J.W., 2005. Reflections on the private versus public policing of economic crime. *The British journal of criminology*, 45 (3), 316–339.