

## Canterbury Centre for Policing Research

### Problems and Solutions in UK Policing

Day 1 – 17<sup>th</sup> January 2024

#### Presenter abstracts

Dr Chris Magill & Professor Peter Squires

University of Brighton

#### **What now for VAWG? Policing Violence Against Women and Girls**

From around 2020 a series of police inspectorate and official reports (HMICFRS, 2021a; 2021b; and Home Office, 2022) began to prioritise improving the policing response to Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). The emerging focus was a welcome, if long overdue, acknowledgement of the need for the police service to dramatically improve performance in this area. It was not the first such reminder. As long ago as the late 1970s the 'Yorkshire Ripper' case exposed misogynistic flaws in police thinking and practice that hampered the effective progress of the investigation (McKay, 2015). Ten years later, Hanmer et al., (1989) repeated the critique of the ways in which such violence was policed whilst calling for 'a close study of day to day, on-the-ground-policing, and women's experiences of this policing' (1989: 4). Later still Stanko (2007) reiterated similar reasons for working – as a feminist criminologist - within the Metropolitan Police (2007: 216). She also cautioned against expecting too much change 'from the top' in an occupational culture where so much discretion, and so much supervision of that discretion, was devolved to the lowest – and public facing - ranks of the organisation. Her scepticism now seems borne out by the recent Casey Report (2023) into the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS), a report which acknowledged long-standing and widespread failings alongside a culture of denial about them. If the Macpherson Report in 1999 was the wake-up call for the MPS on questions of race and racism, then the Casey Report is its equivalent in respect of gender and misogyny. Casey certainly acknowledged many major difficulties facing policing in London. The force has seen its overall budget fall by 18% over the decade (Casey, 2023: 9). In the same decade, reports of sexual assault and domestic abuse have both doubled. Simultaneously, cuts to the CPS and courts have seriously undermined performance with rape convictions which have been falling since 2017, reaching a record low in 2019/20 with only 1.4 percent of rape cases reported to the police in 2019/20 resulting in a suspect being charged (HMICFRS, 2021b). In 2021/22, we conducted an evaluation of an innovative new approach to tackling sexual violence against women pioneered in Thames Valley – Project Vigilant (Magill and Squires, 2023). The results were highly promising, and, with much associated fanfare, the project was set to be implemented in a further fifteen other police forces. Yet at the eleventh hour the plan to roll out the project was pulled as the Cabinet Office withdrew its funding for this and several other sexual violence initiatives. Despite the momentum generated, the consistent advocacy for new approaches coming from the police inspectorates and senior figures within the NPCC, and not forgetting the urgent calls to change the culture of policing, the initiative was stalled. What now for VAWG? If, in the wake of the Casey Report, policing (and the CJS as a whole) cannot rally around an improved and universally endorsed response to such violence, what are the chances of reforming policing itself?

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Dr Carina O'Reilly, University of Lincoln and Insp. Colin Clarkson of Lincolnshire Police

### **Cultivating community: growing a police, academic and community collaboration from the ground up**

The small UK agricultural town of Boston is known for having had the country's highest vote for Brexit. Boston also presents unique challenges for Lincolnshire police. With seven major languages spoken as well as English, local neighbourhood officers can struggle to effectively engage with the public, and to build public confidence and legitimacy. This paper reports on an ongoing collaboration between Boston's local neighbourhood policing team and the University of Lincoln to enhance community engagement and neighbourhood policing. It reports on the building of relationships between academics and officers, the integration of relevant knowledge and the embedding of evidence-based policing practices, and the beginning of a longer term research project to enhance community engagement, partnership work, and perceptions of safety in Boston. Unlike many police-academic partnerships, this work was instigated by local police officers, and built from the ground up. It therefore offers lessons on the implementation of EBP and partnerships, and on how knowledge exchange and small-scale collaboration can change police practice in ways that make a genuine impact on local communities.

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Dr Katya Hallenberg, Dr David Lydon and Dr Violeta Kapageorgiadou, Canterbury Christ Church University

### **'This is not a drill': police and partnership preparedness for consequences of the climate crisis**

This scoping study investigates the state of preparedness of the police and their partners for the potential consequences of the climate crisis in a UK context. The research engaged participants at strategic, tactical, and operational levels of planning and operations, and conducted a thematic analysis of qualitative data to identify key themes: climate change impacts; why the police should care; prioritisation and preparation, and enabling and impeding factors. The results suggest that the police and their partners may be ill-prepared for the gamut of possible consequences. Preparedness appears hampered by a narrow focus on legislated requirements, short-term planning, lack of funding and resources, and limited prescience. Recommendations are made for redefining planning parameters, strengthening central government engagement, amplifying awareness and understanding of trend analyses, prioritisation of 'futures' thinking, ethical considerations, and collaborative preparedness. The study has implications for law, public policy, and professional practice in the UK, and other global jurisdictions seeking to develop risk assessment processes and preparedness for the consequences of climate change.

**Keywords** – climate crisis, local resilience, community safety, civil contingencies, police science.

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**Title of paper:** Voice of the child in policing: Bridging the gaps in vulnerability related risk and harm

**Authors of paper:** Allnock, D., Denyer, K., Brown, S. & Fernandes-Aguilera, M.

**Affiliation:** The Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme

**Corresponding author:** Dr. Debra Allnock

This paper will share findings from a survey of police in England and Wales about their understanding, attitudes and perspectives on ‘voice of the child’ practices in response and investigation, with particular emphasis on vulnerability related risk and harm. The findings are drawn from a wider study on voice of the victim carried out by the Vulnerability, Knowledge and Practice Programme, but will centre on voice of the child specifically.

Within recent years, policing has seen a significant increase in demand to respond to vulnerability-related risk, and a growing policy imperative to prioritise voice of the victim / child within the criminal justice sector. All victims, including children, have entitlements within the Victim’s Code to be kept informed and assessed for their needs, and specifically for children and young people, they have a right enshrined in the UNCRC to have a say in matters that affect them.

Despite this, practice gaps and missed opportunities within policing to engage and build trust with children and young people have been documented across research, inspections and serious case reviews. Children who have experienced vulnerability related crime and harm often report negative experiences relating to police contact. These experiences can leave children feeling disappointed, re-traumatised, and impact on future propensity to engage with the criminal justice system. A significant gap, however, is in our understanding police practices and approaches to voice of the child and the barriers and challenges to doing so effectively. It is critical to bridge this gap by understanding police perspectives, to enable practice improvements and better experiences for children and young people.

The findings from this study are drawn from a non-representative online survey, disseminated to all forces in England and Wales, resulting in 1,342 responses and representing officers and staff across all ranks from 42 forces; and qualitative interviews with 30 officers and staff from 13 forces. The survey explored attitudes towards police responsibilities in relation to voice of the victim (including children), practices deployed by police to capture and record the voice and experiences of the victim (including children) and the barriers and challenges to this work. The qualitative interviews followed the survey to help make further sense of the survey data.

Our findings suggest that the concept of ‘voice of the child’ is more recognisable within policing than ‘voice of the victim’; police participants who work regularly with children and young people expressed a good level of confidence in capturing children’s voices and experiences; and participants largely agreed that voice of the child should be a priority for the police. The qualitative findings from the interviews provide a more nuanced view of police experiences that suggest levels of confidence may be influenced by a range of personal (internal) and systems (external) factors. The paper considers these findings in light of the wider literature drawing on children and young people’s experiences to explore the connections and identifies points for operational and strategic level intervention.

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**Title of paper:** Victim-Survivor Voices in Police Service Design

**Authors of paper:** Ilett, C., Hurcombe, R., Sadullah, A., Davis, H., Allnock, D.

**Affiliation:** Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme

**Corresponding author:** Camille Ilett

This paper will explore existing practices used by police forces in England and Wales to collect the voices of victim-survivors with a view to shape service design, and the resulting changes and impact these have on victim-survivors and policing. The findings form part of a large-scale research project undertaken by the Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme (VKPP) and will be discussed within a wider understanding of participatory and collaborative engagement between public services and service users.

The needs of victim-survivors are increasingly emphasised alongside efforts made to improve their engagement with the criminal justice system. Incorporating the voices of victim-survivors in the design of police services has the potential to benefit victims and improve policing responses: victim-survivors appreciate being able to voice their opinions and contribute to change, whilst police are enabled to provide services that meet victim-survivor needs and help protect vulnerable people. Previous research has explored how to engage victim-survivors in the criminal justice system; however, little is known about how this engagement leads to change within police service design and delivery.

The VKPP sought to address this gap in knowledge through a project conducted in three phases using desk-based and primary research methods. A documentary review of open-source information was followed by an in-depth analysis of the ways in which victim-survivor voices were incorporated into local service design was carried out in five police forces, selected on the basis of geographic and other relevant variables to ensure diversity. This included semi-structured interviews with a variety of police personnel and partners ( $N=91$ ). Finally, national initiatives to collect voices of victim-survivors were identified through semi-structured interviews conducted with representatives from national working groups, national organisations representing victim-survivors and people with lived experience ( $N=18$ ). Findings confirmed victim-survivor engagement as a key component of rebuilding trust and confidence in policing. However, reactive and transactional approaches to collecting victim feedback were more common than participatory or collaborative approaches, and there was limited evidence of police forces regularly including victim-survivors of vulnerability-related crimes in their engagement practices. Necessary steps to ensure the inclusion of some of the most vulnerable victim-survivors were not always taken, thus inadvertently or actively excluding them.

To achieve effective engagement, appropriate governance structures were needed to support practices and protect them from change within services; input from partner agencies and collaborators was seen as essential for supporting forces to engage safely and achieve impact; and flexibility within and across practices is needed to meet the diverse needs of victim-survivors. Working safely with victim-survivors and diverse groups requires effective trauma-informed training repeated regularly to sustain impact. In order to improve service design, police forces may require further support to carry out engagement safely and effectively, learning from and working with other sectors and partners, which may help strengthen their engagement with victim-survivors.

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Professor Helen Beckett, UCLan

### **Journeys through Justice: Children's views on improving police responses to sexual abuse**

Speaking to the policing vulnerable populations theme of the conference, this presentation explores how children experience police responses to sexual abuse, and their views on how

these might be improved. Though drawing on children's contributions around sexual abuse cases, the findings hold applicability to the engagement of child victims who have experienced other forms of harm.

The presentation draws on 7 different studies undertaken by the presenter and her colleagues that have elicited over 200 children and young people's views on criminal justice responses to sexual abuse in the UK. Though conducted at different times and in different contexts, the studies found remarkably consistent themes in children's accounts of engaging with police, and wider criminal justice processes, following an experience of sexual abuse.

The challenges that children experience when engaging in criminal justice processes following abuse are well-documented, as are the significant negative impacts that can ensure (see, for example, Plotnikoff and Woolfson's 2019 *Falling Short* report, Beckett and Warrington's 2015 *Making Justice Work* report or Allnock et al's 2023 *Learning from the Experts* report).

Whilst recent years have seen improvements in how police engage with child victims and witnesses, children's accounts of current/recent experiences of police engagement following an experience of abuse demonstrate a clear need for ongoing improvement.

This presentation explores what such improvement might look like in relation to four areas of practice that have emerged as particularly significant in children's accounts:

- Police attitudes
- Communication by police
- Victim choice and control
- Victim wellbeing and support needs

Helpfully, most of what children and young people request in relation to how these areas might be improved are not only feasible, but recommended, within current guidance. Many are also relatively easily implemented, and the presentation will explore the small changes that can be made to practice, that can make a big difference to the child's experience and their propensity to remain engaged.

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Linda Maguire and Richard Harding  
Centre for Policing Research and Learning, The Open University

Conviction rates for rape and serious sexual offences (RASSO) in England and Wales are at an all-time low. Findings from the London Rape Review in 2019 revealed that in the capital, two thirds of victims withdrew their cases within 30 days and just 1% of cases reach trial stage. Overall, in England and Wales, 1.6% of cases result in a conviction. Drawing on initial findings from a mixed methodological study in two police constabularies involved in the Home Office funded project 'Operation Soteria Bluestone', this paper argues that whilst officers prioritise victim care as a core part of their role, their ability to effectively support victims is compromised through organisational expectations of them to achieve certain quantifiable outcomes aimed at regaining public legitimacy. The paper considers the role of Public Value in organisational legitimacy and the local strategies employed to establish public trust and confidence. The authors explore this through the lens of New Public Management and the internal strategies of measurement and target setting deployed by the



police. The paper discusses the tension between the organisational need for the police to improve victim care and subsequent conviction rates and officers' sense of credibility and personal professionalism. Finally, the paper offers suggestions as to why both internal and external legitimacy is required to achieve the transformational change needed to redress the incongruence between what the organisation values as a good outcome and what is required to provide optimal care for victims and the establishment of public legitimacy in the way police currently investigate RASSO.

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Dr Clare Rawdin, The Open University

Myriad concerns exist in relation to contemporary policing in the UK. Two key, and up to now largely separate concerns, have been issues related to the training of officers and their well-being. Arguably, these concerns are magnified in the investigation of rape and serious sexual offences (RASSO) given the complexity of these crimes and the inherent vulnerability of victim-survivors. Early research conducted within Operation Soteria Bluestone (Pillar 4) has uncovered an unexpected relationship between learning and development and well-being; namely, limited access to effective specialist learning can negatively impact on both the perceived competence and well-being of investigators. This presentation will summarise a rapid review conducted to examine 'best practice' learning and development in the RASSO field by examining approaches in comparable, public-service occupations – including social work, teaching, and nursing – that are further along the route to professionalisation. Three broad themes were identified from the 52 titles that were reviewed. One theme relates to the ideal content of specialist RASSO training, with a strong emphasis on a trauma-informed approach and the cultivation of so-called 'soft skills'. A second theme relates to how best to deliver learning and development through a range of effective strategies that are underpinned by the concept of andragogy (adult learning) and reflective practice. A final theme connects to the importance of evaluation, particularly the inclusion of appropriate outcome measures when assessing the impact of training alongside the need for ongoing learning and development. The presentation concludes with recommendations to improve the learning and development (and well-being) of RASSO investigators which aligns with a broader requirement for policing organisations to cultivate learning cultures.

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Zoe Callon, Bournemouth University

**A Qualitative Exploration of Rape and Serious Sexual Offences (RASSO) Investigators: Their experiences, socialisation, and culture.**

*Authors: Zoe Callon, Miranda A H Horvath and Kari Davies*

*Keywords: police culture; rape culture; criminal investigations*

In England and Wales, two high profile convictions of serving police officers for both rape and murder, have raised serious questions relating to the culture and legitimacy of policing. These sparked the Baroness Casey Review that concluded the Metropolitan Police have widespread "institutional racism, misogyny and homophobia" (HMIC, 2023; pp.17); spotlighting attitudes resulting from the culture that have been commented about in all corners of the countries. These attitudes can produce negative consequences within

RASSO investigations, with officers appearing cynical or suspicious leading to victims feeling that they aren't believed, and some are re-traumatised by this experience.

Research on culture more broadly suggests that an individual's culture is made up of an interaction of both their experience and the collective cultures they are part of (Bendassolli, 2019; Valsiner, 2014). Therefore, to understand police culture, it is important to explore the individuals within police; their backgrounds, motivations and other collective cultures that impact them. There is currently limited research surrounding police culture of RASSO investigators from an individualistic perspective.

By conducting thematic analysis on the data generated from semi-structured interviews with RASSO investigators, this research aims to explore (i) why individuals joined the police and their current team, (ii) how they have adapted throughout their careers and who has helped them in the process and (iii) how they feel that the convictions of serving police officers for RASSO offences has impacted their role and wider perceptions of policing.

Analyses for this study are ongoing (to be completed by the presentation), but early themes constructed surround the family role model, transitions from similar cultures and the importance of values when joining and developing their policing careers.

This research will aid in creating a more subjective picture of the police culture of RASSO investigators, through understanding the experiences, socialisation, and culture of one specialised team.

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Dr Kyriakos Kotsoglou and Professor Marion Oswald  
Northumbria Law School

### **Cops and Polygraph: Freedom of Information-based Research Exploring Opaque Uses of Lie Detection in Criminal Justice**

*Conference Themes: Police Accountability and Ethics/Digital Policing*

One of the most striking developments in the criminal justice system in England and Wales is the rapidly increasing use of the polygraph by probation and police. Proponents of the polygraph claim that its deployment is justified because even the threat of its use can encourage additional disclosures of information. This is despite the polygraph's dubious scientific validity and limitations on its use in a number of contexts and jurisdictions. Yet the fact of this increasing use in England Wales is almost unknown, even within the criminal justice system, and despite legislation that permits polygraph testing of sex offenders, domestic abuse offenders, terrorist offenders and those subject to Terrorist Prevention and Investigation Measures, which passed almost without comment. However, barristers, solicitors, even members of the judiciary are surprised (often, shocked), when they hear that police forces and the probation service are deploying the polygraph. Use of the polygraph is a relatively opaque practice, with details of testing practices limited to those involved in the training of examiners and those examiners themselves. Therefore, the public is also left in the dark about the polygraph's purpose and operation. Some Parliamentarians have indicated disquiet and requested that the use of the polygraph – together with other police uses of unproven technology - be kept under review and made subject to additional regulation and independent scrutiny (*House of Lords Justice and Home Affairs Committee, 'Technology Rules?' 2022*).



Despite the above-mentioned legislation covering polygraph testing only of sex, domestic abuse and terrorist offenders, our research - based on freedom of information requests to police forces and government departments - has revealed previously unknown uses of the polygraph that are not regulated by statutory provisions or other routes. These include polygraph testing in interviews, child protection decisions, in community sentences, and cautions issued only if individuals agree to polygraph testing, with restrictions around access to legal representation by those being tested. Our research indicates a concerning opacity around these activities and inconsistencies of approach across police forces, together with a lack of independent oversight. As we have previously predicted (see [Oswald 2020](#), [Kotsoglou and Oswald 2021](#)), our findings demonstrate that the risk of the polygraph creeping into places where its use is not prohibited or limited has already come to pass. Overall, we conclude that these hidden uses of the polygraph by the police are likely to impinge heavily on procedural and human rights of citizens, suspects and released offenders.

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Mike Neville MCSFS (Retired Met Police DCI 189325)

### **Better Use of Images & Identification Techniques to Solve More Crime**

Confidence in policing is at an all-time low. Recent reports in the media have highlighted how few volume crimes are solved and the Shadow Home Secretary has stated that “...*the charge rate is so low, it constitutes a national scandal.*”

A very simple method of increasing the number of detections for volume crime is by a systematic use of images – mirroring the processes used to ensure that fingerprint and DNA identifications result in detected crimes. This system ensures that CCTV and other images of suspects are obtained, circulated, identified, linked to other crimes and result in charges. In the Met this process produced thousands of extra detections – as many as traditional forensics, at a fraction of the cost.

During the last ten years, the number of burglaries solved has more than halved, but during the same period, up to 40% of households have invested in CCTV or Ring Doors Bells – increasing the opportunities to solve break-ins. Research in three forces has shown that only 2% of crime result in an image of a suspect being obtained, but even if this occurs, it does not mean that they will be identified - one County force found that only 7% of images of suspects captured on camera were identified (so out of a thousand crimes, only 1 or 2 have an image identification in a country with millions of CCTV cameras and other recording devices). And in a city force, a human Super Recogniser has made over 2500 identifications, but only 40% have resulted in offenders being brought to justice, as there is little supervision of image identifications and no training for detectives allocated them.

Very few forces follow the research conducted by Prof Josh Davis of Greenwich University on the use of Super Recognisers, nor do they use artificial intelligence in a structured manner. The Metropolitan Police and South Wales Police are championing the use of facial recognition systems, but their use is piecemeal (and not linked to other systems) and little, if any, performance data is available. At present, throughout the world, images are stored like data during the Yorkshire Ripper enquiry – in unsearchable files, in multiple places. My work with Bradford University has produced an image database which will make every image held by the police searchable and comparable against every other image. It utilises AI (facial, pattern

& logo recognition) and a Google-type search so that a victim's verbal description can be checked.

There are other benefits from improving identification procedures. Thames Valley Police are using their Super Recognisers in a proactive manner to target VAWG offenders on the street. The Met used them on the Novichok and Grenfell enquiries, together with murder cases, such as Alice Gross and at major events, such as the Notting Hill Carnival. Selection and training of Super Recognisers to use their natural ability in a legal manner recognises their skills and enhances their status.

The better use of images will improve performance and trust in policing, target prolific and dangerous criminals and make places and communities safer. This system is cheap and uses assets already held by each force.

### **My background**

In the Met, I established the end-to-end image system, set up the world's first human Super Recogniser Unit and had the world's first conviction using computerised pattern recognition. Kevin Hurley, a retired Metropolitan Police commander and Surrey PCC observed: *"I doubt there is another detective in the UK who has been responsible for the detection of so many criminals. The approach he took to gathering and treating CCTV evidence in the systematic way employed for fingerprints and DNA was and remains ground-breaking."*

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Ron Winch, Associate Professor in Policing, Birmingham City University

### **'Policing in the Age of the Machine.' The Ethical use of Artificial Intelligence for Policing Purposes in England and Wales**

This abstract combines *Police Accountability and Ethics* with *Digital Policing - harnessing the potential of artificial intelligence*.

AI is being increasingly applied within operational policing; for example, as a predictive tool within police 'offender management,' involving the identification of present and future high-harm serious crime and violence perpetrators. Furthermore, AI is being used within facial recognition systems, drone technology, data analytics around intelligence and predictive crime pattern analysis and risk assessment in police bail decision-making. Some individuals with no previous convictions of crime might still be identified through AI, as being at risk of committing high-harm offences. In addition, some individuals identified through AI as being at risk of high-harm offending will be under 18 years of age. The use of AI systems to frame and assess risk and to inform effective policing responses, including prevention and intervention measures, suggests a paradox. In using AI, the police have powerful new capabilities to prevent serious and violent crime, to reduce harm and deliver more effective, efficient, and economic policing services. However, there remain substantial moral and ethical questions around the use of AI and its capability to support more equitable policing services, legitimacy and maintaining the British model of policing by consent. Achieving 'AI safety' in the application of policing, given the dangers of data bias, unintended consequences and risks for community cohesion are essential areas for this presentation to address. Ethical concerns will be presented regarding data bias and disproportionality in

relation to ethnic minorities and other minority communities and include potential policing interventions that focus on persons who have not been convicted of crime. At present, within the United Kingdom, there is no specific governance in the use of AI for policing purposes. The government's National AI Strategy (2022) and subsequent white paper (2023) seeks to balance the benefits of innovation and investment with regulation and indicates the long-term nature of any fit-for-purpose legal framework and existing legislation including human rights provisions, data protection, the police code of ethics, including learning from individual case law to inform thinking within strategic and applied practice. Current central government policy remains 'light touch' in terms of regulating AI, with the ambition for individual sector regulators to govern practice in the context of the private, public, and voluntary sectors. Ethical questions remain as to the legitimacy of policing self-regulation within the use of AI and whether it is appropriate for the police to 'mark their own homework' in this regard. This presentation further focusses upon the way forward and proposes solutions leading to the ethical use of AI for policing purposes. Policing within England and Wales cannot maintain public legitimacy through the so called, 'machine age' without appropriate legal structures, governance, regulation, inspection, and quality assurance, in order to minimise risks and maximise safety within its application of AI.

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