



Vulnerability Knowledge
& Practice Programme



Victims' Voices and Experiences in Response and Investigation: A Study of Police Personnel in England and Wales in Responding to Vulnerability-Related Risk and Harm

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About the Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme

The Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme (VKPP) was formed to improve policing's collective response to the protection of individuals experiencing vulnerability from abuse, neglect, and exploitation. Working with the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC), the Violence and Public Protection (VPP) lead and Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) lead, and funded by the Home Office, the VKPP undertake a wide range of activities to reduce threat and harm, bring more offenders to justice, and improve outcomes for victims.

The VKPP identifies promising practice, practice gaps, and shares wider knowledge to shape future responses, with an emphasis on the vulnerability strands of public protection. The VKPP work with national police bodies, forces and partners to:

- Develop and drive the NPCC and College of Policing [National Vulnerability Action Plan](#) (NVAP);
- Conduct primary research to inform an overall evidence base into policing and vulnerability;
- Consolidate learning from statutory reviews into death and serious harm;
- Map, link, and promote promising practice;
- Provide a supportive Peer Review function for forces;
- Explore ways to improve data sharing, collection, and analysis;
- Support delivery of local children's safeguarding partnerships;
- Provide support and insight for policing response to VAWG;
- Track the scale and nature of Domestic Abuse related deaths.

To find out more about the VKPP's work and to see our other publications and resources please visit our website – www.vkpp.org.uk. Police colleagues can also access our content on the [Knowledge Hub](#).

Acknowledgements

The VKPP would like to extend their thanks to the numerous police personnel who took part in the survey, interviews, and focus group. We recognise the current level of demand on personnel, who told us that they experience significant challenges meeting the demands of their everyday role, regardless of participating in any further activity. We therefore value the time they put into participating in this research. Their views and perspectives will be influential in facilitating change to better support police in capturing the voice of the victim.

The VKPP would also like to thank the numerous individuals who have provided guidance throughout the project, including members of the Expert Reference Group, and [Leaders Unlocked](#) who engaged in two consultations with the research team following phase one and two of the study. Leaders Unlocked is an initiative that enables young people and underrepresented groups to have a stronger voice on the issues that affect their lives. It helps organisations across education, health, policing and criminal justice sectors to involve the people who matter and shape decision-making for the better.

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1. Executive Summary

1.1. About the Research

Victims' Voices and Experiences in Response and Investigation is a mixed-methods research project conducted by the VKPP that aimed to explore perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours towards capturing the 'voice of the victim' among police personnel, particularly those involved in safeguarding and investigative practice. Personnel is the term used throughout this report to refer to both police officers and staff and is inclusive of all roles and ranks. This research project is separate, but complementary, to a second project: Victim-Survivor Voices in Service Design (VKPP, 2023).

Within recent years, policing has seen a significant increase in demand to respond to vulnerability-related risk, and an increased focus on ensuring that victims have a voice throughout the criminal justice sector (Allnock et al., 2020; College of Policing, 2015; Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS), 2021). The prioritisation of victim voice within policing is highlighted within recent guidance and policy including The Code of Practice for Victims of Crime in England and Wales (Ministry of Justice, 2020), and recently in the draft Victims and Prisoners Bill (2023). There is, however, currently no accepted definition of voice of the victim within the policing sector.

In the absence of a nationally agreed definition, the VKPP developed, in consultation with several external stakeholders, a definition of 'voice of the victim'. The definition guides the [NVAP Action 2.4.1](#) relating to 'Voice of the Victim', and the present research:

'The perspective of individuals subjected to, or witnesses of, crime. In order to deliver authentic policing (and other agency) services, it is important that all individuals are listened to and their description of experiences taken seriously. By listening to, considering and recording the voice of the victim, police can develop a better understanding of individual's lived experiences. In turn, this can be used to help shape improvements of services delivered, criminal justice outcomes and their experiences of criminal justice processes, for those at their most vulnerable'.

Within this definition, the term victim is inclusive of all nine protected characteristics: age, disability, race, religion of belief, sex, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, and pregnancy and maternity (Equality Act, 2010).

Previous research and consultation evidence highlight that some victims report negative experiences interacting with the police and can experience challenges getting their voices heard (Allnock et al., 2021; Rape Crisis Scotland, 2021; Taylor-Dunn et al., 2018; Victims' Commissioner, 2021). However, there is a lack of complementary research that has explored practices in capturing the victim voice from the policing perspective. To address this gap, the VKPP distributed a large-scale national policing survey to all 43 police forces across England and Wales, which generated 1342 responses from policing personnel from 42 forces.

Survey respondents included police officers and staff from all ranks, and the sample was broadly representative of the demographics of the wider policing population. Following the survey, one focus group and 29 interviews were conducted with operational and strategic personnel from 13 forces. The learning from this project will provide an understanding of voice of the victim practices and approaches from the perspective of those within policing. This is a voice that has not yet been heard extensively within research. The findings will be used to drive and influence change to support personnel in their responsibilities in capturing the victim voice, particularly when responding to victims experiencing vulnerability-related risk and harm.

1.2. Key Findings

The findings are presented under the COM-B framework of behaviour change (Michie, 2011) which highlights that, in order to engage in a particular behaviour, individuals must have the Capability, Opportunity, and Motivation to do so. The COM-B framework was selected due to the project focusing on behaviour change in relation to voice of the victim within policing investigations and safeguarding and aligns with the work by the College of Policing, and the world of policing. Findings related to capability were over-represented, meaning that personnel generally identified issues related to skills, knowledge, and confidence as the primary barriers to capturing and recording the victim's voice. There was limited consensus regarding the term 'voice of the victim' and participants did not consider themselves to be appropriately skilled or trained in order to capture victims' voices effectively. The key findings from the project are presented below, along with several recommendations intended to improve the police response to vulnerability and to more holistically capture the voice of the victim within policing.

Finding One:

There is no commonly accepted definition of the 'voice of the victim' within policing. Participants outlined that it is not a widely used or a consistently applied phrase and is not perceived to commonly feature within force priorities.

Finding Two:

Relational skills are considered important to enable personnel to capture the victim's voice. Although it is recognised these skills can be difficult to 'teach', including the perspectives of those with lived experience into training could be helpful.

Finding Three:

Personnel recognised the value of high-quality training and expressed a preference for more training to support them to capture the victim's voice.

Finding Four:

Personnel wellbeing can be negatively impacted by the policing role which can impact their ability to demonstrate compassion towards victims and support them effectively.

Finding Five:

Limited resources and a high level of demand remains an enduring issue which can limit the ability of personnel to effectively respond to victims' needs.

Finding Six:

Some felt that force priorities are often understood to be associated with criminal justice outcomes, which reinforces the primary role of the police to be fighting crime. This affects the willingness/ability of some personnel to prioritise the voice of the victim.

Finding Seven:

Perceived and actual barriers between policing and communities affect the ability of the police to capture victims' voices, with recent publicised cases of police misconduct exacerbating this division.

Finding Eight:

Personnel can hold perceptions about particular communities and victims which can negatively affect their perceived credibility and impedes the willingness of personnel to capture their voice. Perceptions of victim credibility can be affected by a lack of understanding of trauma among personnel.

Finding Nine:

Personnel reported a lack of clarity regarding the boundaries of the police role and a sense that they are expected to fulfil other tasks that would traditionally be considered the responsibility of other public sectors, including health services and social care.

Finding Ten:

Police personnel consider that victims do not accurately understand the role and remit of the police. This is seen to result in unrealistic expectations among victims which the police do not have the ability or capacity to fulfil.

1.3. Recommendations

The recommendations presented below have been informed by the findings from the national survey, interviews and focus group, and consultations that took place throughout the duration of the project.

Recommendation One:

The VKPP will work with key stakeholders, including NPCC, College of Policing, Hydrant programme and victim/survivor partners to work towards a nationally agreed definition to be used within policing.

Recommendation Two:

The prioritisation of the voice of the victim should be reflected within overarching force priorities, and the Victims' Code can be used to support this. Forces should ensure that priorities related to capturing the voice of the victim are communicated clearly and consistently by supervisors and key leaders responsible for the dissemination of priorities to operational staff. The VKPP will seek to consolidate examples of good practice in this space and share learning with forces.

Recommendation Three:

Personnel need ongoing support to develop the appropriate skills, and critically the 'softer' skills and confidence to successfully engage with a diverse range of victims. Consideration is needed about incorporating this skill development across the policing career, from recruitment and early career, through on-going continuing professional development and into supervisory roles. Forces should consider how this is currently woven into their recruitment and promotion processes and VKPP will continue to work with the College and other key stakeholders to consolidate and embed these skills within the range of training on offer. The VKPP's [Action Impact Toolkit](#) relating to Recruitment and Retention provides good practice to support forces in recruiting the right people at the start.

Recommendation Four:

Forces should adopt a trauma-informed lens on their engagement with victims, using the agreed definition and good practice as detailed in the VKPP's [Action Impact Toolkit](#) relating to Recognition and Response provides good practice to support forces in implementing trauma-informed practices.

Recommendation Five:

Forces should foster a culture of support in helping officers/staff re-set thresholds of acceptability ensuring they can still respond appropriately to vulnerability. Closely connected to this is the imperative for recognising and supporting the mental health and well-being needs of officers and staff. The VKPP's [Action Impact Toolkit](#) relating to Officer Norms is a useful resource to help forces consider how they are addressing this recommendation.

Recommendation Six:

Forces should ensure they are effectively communicating police responsibilities under the Victim's Code to all officers and staff so that they fully understand their role within this. Operational personnel should ensure that victims' rights under the Code are clearly communicated to victims during early stages of engagement, and keep victims informed, including where progress is delayed. Digital methods of improving practice are in development to support practice in this space.

Recommendation Seven:

Increasing knowledge of available support services will help to reduce any anxieties personnel may experience when working beyond what they see as their role. [NVAP Action 2.1.3. Access to Services](#) suggests that ensuring personnel have knowledge of referral pathways or services they can signpost to is key, and that this can be achieved through a mixture of training, the use of apps for mobile devices, online-videos, and information on intranet pages. The requirement for victims to be referred to support services is also fundamental to Right 4 within the Victims' Code.

Recommendation Eight:

Forces should work with their local communities to ensure they feel heard and listened to with individual needs respected and responded to, removing barriers to reporting and increasing the communities' confidence in the response they will receive from the force. The VKPP's [NVAP Interim Measures](#) provide some steps and examples of practice that may be useful to draw on.

2. Introduction

The research presented in this report was carried out by the VKPP to better understand policing approaches to 'voice of the victim' within investigations - an under-researched yet high-priority area of policing practice.

This research project is separate, but complementary, to a second project 'Victim-survivor voices in service design' (VKPP, 2023). Together, the two projects offer insight into the ways in which the 'voice of the victim' is situated, hindered, and enabled at operational and strategic levels. Both projects were selected as a research focus by the VKPP in order to address cross-vulnerability thematic areas linked to 'perennial issues' in policing and which are of importance, and prioritised, by Violence and Public Protection (VPP) policing leaders. The term 'victim' was used when communicating the research to personnel and was used within the survey and interviews/focus group and is therefore the term used throughout the report, however the VKPP acknowledge that there is wider discourse about the suitability of this term and a move towards the use of different terms, including 'complainant' and 'victim-survivor', within policing and beyond (Stanko, 2023).

This report presents the findings of a mixed-methods study exploring current police understanding, attitudes, and practices in capturing the 'voice of the victim'. Within this report, the term 'voice' covers both the verbal articulation of wishes, experiences, and needs, alongside non-verbal indicators and features of the individuals' context, environment, and relationships. Whilst data was collected from a range of policing personnel, the research was specifically interested in those working within safeguarding and/or investigation, across all roles and ranks. The first stage of the research comprised of an online survey distributed to police personnel across the 43 territorial police forces in England and Wales, along with British Transport Police and the National Crime Agency. In the second stage, in-depth qualitative interviews and a focus group were conducted with operational and strategic police personnel from 13 police forces in England and Wales. A brief overview of the methodology is presented in this report for brevity, but a separate methodological report is published alongside for those interested in an in-depth understanding of how the research was carried out. Please email vkpp@norfolk.police.uk for the methodological report.

2.1. Context

In recent years, policing has seen a prolonged and significant increase in demand and complexity associated with protecting individuals experiencing vulnerability-related risk (Allnock et al., 2020; College of Policing, 2015; HMICFRS, 2021). Responding to vulnerability has become a main feature of the service English and Welsh police forces provide, with demand data now indicating that the level of need for vulnerability response exceeds that of criminal activity (Early Action Together, 2019; Muir et al., 2022). Indeed, 83% of crime and control calls relate to non-criminal activity and incidents relating to 'public safety, complex welfare and issues of vulnerability' are on the increase (College of Policing, 2015). Thus, vulnerability is, and continues to be, one of policing's highest threat, harm, and risk areas (Allnock et al., 2020).

The VKPP recognise there is a wider context that inevitably influences police capability to engage with victims, including the impact of reduced resources in the face of significant rises in the reporting of vulnerability-related crime (Higgins, 2019). Increased responses are also required from policing to wider vulnerability-related needs in the absence of sufficient health and social care access for those most vulnerable (HMICFRS, 2021). There are also further debates within policing leadership about the role and boundaries of policing in safeguarding and supporting victims of these types of crimes and forms of harm (Higgins, 2019). Notwithstanding these contexts however, there are imperatives to improve the experiences of victims and enhance opportunities to hear the voices of those who encounter the police and wider criminal justice system (CJS). This is recognised within the proposed Victims' and Prisoners' Bill which seeks to 'amplify victims' voices' and improve their experiences ([Ministry of Justice, 2022](#)), and is critical to improving trust and confidence in the police as set out in the [Violence Against Women and Girls framework](#) (College of Policing & NPCC, 2021).

Furthermore, whilst there are undoubtedly many committed, dedicated, and professional police officers and staff in service, there have been several high-profile cases of police misconduct which reveal a concerning culture amongst some personnel and are damaging to public confidence and trust (Farrow, 2022; Mynenko & Ditcham, 2022). They are recent and extreme, and as such, are firmly embedded within public and political consciousness. Previous research has demonstrated the link between police legitimacy and public confidence, highlighting that public trust enhances police legitimacy and encourages people to cooperate with, and respect the authority of, the police (Farrow, 2022; Tyler, 2004). In contrast, if the police are not trusted by communities, this affects the ability of the police to perform their role (Farrow, 2022). In the context of voice of the victim therefore, these recent cases are likely to affect the willingness of victims to provide their voice, and the encountering of perceived or actual negative perceptions from victims may further affect the attitudes of the police in capturing the victim voice.

2.2. Defining ‘Voice of the Victim’ and ‘Voice of the Child’

The terms ‘voice of the victim’ (VoV) and ‘voice of the child’ (VoC) are increasingly used across the safeguarding sector, including within policing and the broader CJS, as shorthand for a range of practices and approaches intended to put victims, including children, at the heart of safeguarding and service improvement by enabling them to have a voice. VoC is observed within policy, research, and practice guidance more frequently than VoV (see, for example, its use by Ofsted, 2011; Dickens et al., 2022). Further, the rights of the child to have their voice heard is enshrined within Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 2011), which emphasises that children should be listened to, and their views should be considered when decisions are made about them. However, no national agreed definition across the broader safeguarding sector, or more specifically within policing, exists for either of these terms.

Within policing, the term VoV is present in a variety of practices and contexts which relate to communication and engagement with victims. However, what this means, and in what contexts it applies, is often vague and other variations of the term may be utilised (Ministry of Justice, 2021; Victims’ Commissioner, 2015). Where victim voice is mentioned, it is only defined within specific policy and practice aims that endeavour to hear and/or promote voice, e.g., the provision of a Victim Personal Statement (VPS), as opposed to a specific definition outlining what voice means within the CJS (Ministry of Justice, 2021).

The draft Victims’ and Prisoners Bill emphasises amplifying victims’ voices at every stage of the criminal justice process and increasing the ‘voice of victims’ in the commissioning process. However, tangible steps of how that will be implemented are omitted (Ministry of Justice, 2022). The specific term VoV does not appear within College of Policing guidance, where instead guidance refers to ‘having a voice and being heard’, ‘giving people a voice’ (College of Policing, 2021b) or, more broadly, makes reference to building rapport and effective communication with the victim (College of Policing, 2020). Lawther (2020), when exploring voice and victims’ perception of control in transitional justice processes, suggested that voice is underpinned by four themes. Of those themes, the first two- the importance of recognising the complexity and multiplicity of voices, and the importance of hearing and acknowledging the voice of victims, have also been noted in literature examining victim voice within the sexual and physical violence arena (Koss et al., 2017). Koss et al. (2017) suggests that a victim’s voice can be regarded as an expression of needs onto which the associated field (e.g., policing) can guide future resource allocation. Within the policing context, mapping of provisions and resources based upon victims’ needs could ensure policing is victim-centred and effectively meets the needs of victims.

Voice, within decision making, is a crucial component within Procedural Justice Theory (PJT), which is an important theoretical model for understanding relations between policing and communities (Kyprianides et al., 2021). It is important to recognise that voice, within the procedural justice theory model, is accompanied by three other components: neutrality, respect, and trustworthiness (Beijersbergen et al., 2016; Tyler 2004, 2006). Thus, voice is considered to be an intersecting component that can be tempered by a victim’s perspective and/or experience with other elements of procedural justice (Beijersbergen et al., 2016; Tyler, 2004; 2006). The four components of PJT are considered to bolster the legitimacy of the police, namely the suggestion that, if communities perceive they are treated in a fair and just way, they are more likely to see the police as legitimate and cooperate with the police.

For example, experiences of racialised policing, including stop and search, unfair arrest, and excessive use of force, have been suggested to reduce the likelihood of black and other ethnic background victims calling the police for assistance or to report a crime (Barrett et al., 2014; Keeling, 2017). Language limitations can also become significant barriers to receiving an appropriate level of service, with victims who speak English as a second language often reporting unfair justice outcomes and limited access to support services, including the police ([Centre for Justice Innovation, 2022](#)). Ultimately therefore, experiences of unfair policing can lower public confidence and reduce willingness to engage with the police.

In relation to VoC, safeguarding legislation and policy in England and Wales emphasises the importance of children having a voice and being listened to (Munro, 2011; Her Majesty’s Government (HM Government), 2018). A brief analysis of existing safeguarding policy, research, and guidance documents in England and Wales suggests that VoC is understood to encompass not only what children say directly, but also many other aspects of their presentation and environment. The importance of ‘observing’ is emphasised because often children may convey what they are experiencing or thinking through their behaviour (Dickens et al., 2022).

In the absence of a nationally agreed definition, the VKPP have developed, in consultation with a number of external stakeholders, a definition of ‘voice of the victim’. The definition guides the [NVAP Action 2.4.1](#), relating to ‘Voice of the Victim’, and the present research:

‘The perspective of individuals subjected to, or witnesses of, crime. In order to deliver authentic policing (and other agency) services, it is important that all individuals are listened to and their description of experiences taken seriously. By listening to, considering and recording the voice of the victim, police can develop a better understanding of individual’s lived experiences. In turn, this can be used to help shape improvements of services delivered, criminal justice outcomes and their experiences of criminal justice processes, for those at their most vulnerable’.

2.3. Policing Responsibilities in Relation to ‘Voice of the Victim’ and ‘Voice of the Child’

2.3.1. All Victims

A central framework for policing that relates to victim voice is the [Code of Practice for Victims of Crime in England and Wales](#) (Ministry of Justice, 2020). This Code sets out the services and minimum standard for these services that must be provided to victims of crime by organisations in England and Wales. Twelve entitlements are provided to victims: 1, 4 and 12 are relevant to all victims, with the remainder relevant to victims where a crime has been reported to the police. Children under the age of 18 at the time of the offence, and those for whom their quality of evidence is likely to be affected by mental health needs (Mental Health Act, 1983) or physical disabilities, are entitled to Enhanced Rights under this Code. Vulnerable and intimidated victims are also eligible for Enhanced Rights under this Code where there is fear or distress about testifying in court. The rights clearly indicate the particular contexts within which communication and engagement with victims is central.

Despite the Code guiding policing conduct with victims, research and consultation has consistently demonstrated problems in the system which prevent police adherence to the Code, arguing the Code is process-driven rather than victim-centred (Waxman, 2019). The system has also been criticised for being fragmented and insufficient, with a call for bolstered oversight to hold agencies to account and deliver better quality services to victims (Ministry of Justice, 2021).

2.3.2. Adults at Risk

The Care Act (2014) details legislation that is in place to support adults at risk to have a voice within services. The Act focuses on the person at risk of harm and their needs, their choices and what they want to achieve. Statutory requirements of the Care Act (2014) are put into practice by ‘Making Safeguarding Personal’, which outlines safeguarding that is person-led, outcome-focused, and facilitative of choice and control (Lawson, 2017). ‘Making Safeguarding Personal’, in relation to policing practice, can pertain to wider personal safeguarding approaches, making enquiries into circumstances of abuse, or enacting a duty to co-operate with order/s. When enacting such safeguarding practice, it is important for policing to adhere to the two principles, empowerment and proportionality, under the Care Act (2014). Such adherence can ensure adults at risk are offered the opportunity to voice their desired outcomes from the safeguarding process; ensure the desired outcomes inform police decision-making; and ensure that policing works in the interest of victims. Such practice would allow for a victim’s voice to be heard in a process (safeguarding of adults at risk) that often struggles to balance this with decision-making. The Mental Capacity Act (2005) further provides guidance on engaging with adults who lack the capacity to decide for themselves due to an impairment or disturbance in the mind or brain. Whilst the Act highlights police powers to make immediate decisions to control, contain, or restrain an individual who lacks capacity, a decision which may go against the individual’s voice, Authorised Professional Practice (APP) guidance is clear that such decisions should be in the best interest of the individual and should be least restrictive (College of Policing, 2016).

2.3.3. Children

In relation to children, safeguarding legislation, policy, and guidance is clear about the contexts within which children’s voices should be particularly emphasised. The Children Act (1989) imposes a duty to ascertain ‘children’s wishes and feelings’ in court proceedings, later extended by the Children Act (2004) (s.53) to include earlier stages of social work intervention; when making decisions about services for a child in need (s.17), investigating the circumstances of children at risk of harm (s.47) and providing accommodation for children under the Act (s.20).

The police are one of three statutory safeguarding partners subject to duties under Section 11 of the Children Act (2004). English statutory guidance ‘Working Together to Safeguard Children’ (Department for Education (DfE), 2018) stipulates that the police, along with other partner agencies, should have in place arrangements that reflect the importance of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children including “a culture of listening to children and taking account of their wishes and feelings, both in the individual decisions and the development of services” (DfE, 2018; p. 59).

In respect of individual decisions, this is translated into the College of Policing’s Authorised Professional Practice (APP) guidance ‘Investigating child abuse and safeguarding children’ in its reference to ‘seeing and speaking to the child’, including those children who police may be responding to because of a concern, as well as any other children present or who normally reside at the home.

2.4. The Importance of ‘Voice of the Victim’ within Policing

The prioritisation of victim voice within policing has several recognised benefits including:

- promoting the recognition, validation, and empowerment of victims and witnesses;
- supporting victims to recognise their own status as a victim;
- aiding the development of a rapport between officers and victims;
- empowering victims to initiate and continue their engagement with the criminal justice process (Barrett et al., 2014; Bradford, Jackson & Stanko, 2009; Wedlock & Tapley, 2016) and;
- enabling recognition of crimes of coercive control, stalking, and harassment, of which identification largely depends on the willingness of victims to make a disclosure.

Throughout policing and the wider CJS, the prioritisation and recognition of voice can help to ensure that service provision is relevant, fit for purpose, and person-centred (Callaghan et al., 2018). Without this, services run the risk of being insensitive to victims’ needs, which is potentially damaging and likely to fail to meet the needs of those who are most vulnerable (Callaghan et al., 2018). The prioritisation and recognition of victim voice can further empower the police service to create and sustain practice that is inclusive of all victims; promote effective decision-making and outcomes (e.g., ensuring safeguarding decisions and plans are made on an individual basis); and encourage victim engagement with the CJS (Barrett et al., 2014; Bradford, Jackson & Stanko, 2009; UNICEF, 2011).

The prioritisation of victim needs is increasingly emphasised within English and Welsh public policy. It is also captured within updates to legislation that enhance policing responsibilities under the Victims’ Code (Ministry of Justice, 2020) and the recently launched NPCC VAWG national work and strategy (HM Government, 2021). The term VAWG refers to acts of violence or abuse that is known to disproportionately affect women and girls (HM Government, 2021). Crimes and behaviour covered by this term include rape and other sexual offences, domestic abuse, stalking, ‘honour’-based abuse (including female genital mutilation, forced marriage, and ‘honour’ killings), as well as many others, including offences committed online. The development of the VAWG strategy is rooted in acting upon the concerns women and girls have voiced pertaining to their experiences of violence (HM Government, 2021) and echoes issues previously identified within the policing sector regarding victim engagement and support. In particular, the VAWG National Framework for Delivery (College of Policing & NPCC, 2021) relating to violence against women and girls emphasises the aim of building trust and confidence in policing, highlighting the importance of hearing from those with lived experience and using these experiences to develop training and awareness raising materials. Such a framework explicitly highlights the importance of listening to the voice of victims and learning from their experiences.

Despite this, practice gaps and missed opportunities within policing to engage and build trust with victims has previously been documented across research, inspections, and serious case reviews. Adult victims of vulnerability-related harm/crime have described inconsistencies in the affordance of ‘voice’ when engaging with police and the wider CJS including police inaction, inappropriate police action, and a lack of victim care (Allnock et al., 2021; Rape Crisis Scotland, 2021; Taylor-Dunn et al., 2018; Victims’ Commissioner, 2021). Likewise, children and young people (CYP) who have experienced vulnerability-related harm/crime often report negative experiences relating to their interactions with police (Allnock et al., 2021; Beckett et al., 2015, 2016, 2019; Warrington et al., 2017). There is, however, a lack of complementary research which examines police perspectives and practices related to VoV and the barriers and enablers to capturing the victim voice.

2.5. Research Aims, Objectives, and Research Questions

The aims and objectives of the research are detailed below in Table 2a.

Table 2a: Research Aims and Objectives

Research aims	Research objectives
1. Develop a new understanding of the ways in which ‘voice of the victim’ is understood and situated within safeguarding and investigative practices;	<p>a. Disseminate a national policing survey exploring the capture of victim voice from a policing perspective.</p> <p>b. Conduct interviews and focus groups with policing personnel to understand practices regarding voice of the victim across several forces.</p>
2. Develop an understanding of the attitudes towards the practice of capturing and recording the voices and experiences of victims and witnesses;	
3. Identify perceived key barriers and enablers to practice in relation to the capture, and recording of, the voice and experiences of victims/witnesses;	
4. Identify key practice outcomes and interventions required to enable more effective approaches to capturing of the voice and experiences of victims and witnesses;	
5. Inform the development of National Vulnerability Action Plan measures;	
6. Inform future proposals for research/evaluation.	

There are three main research questions guiding the project, each with associated sub-questions (see Appendix D).

2.6. Research Questions

1. What are some of the existing attitudes held by police personnel about capturing the voices and experiences of the victim in their safeguarding and investigation work? Do these attitudes appear to vary dependent on victim/witness characteristics and contexts? Do these attitudes appear to vary based on police personnel individual characteristics?
2. What benefits do police personnel consider are gained from capturing the voices and experiences of victims in safeguarding and investigative practices?
3. How do police personnel capture and record the voice and experiences of the victim in their safeguarding and investigative practices, and what are the perceived enablers and barriers in doing so?

2.7. Methodology

The study adopted a mixed-methods approach, carried out in two phases. Phase one included an online survey of police personnel, disseminated to all forces in England and Wales, which received responses from 1342 officers and staff across all ranks from 42 police forces, however response rate was mixed across forces. Following closure of the online survey, phase two involved the conduction of online, in-depth interviews and a focus group with policing personnel. Personnel were drawn from 13 forces across England and Wales, with at least one individual from each of these forces attending an interview/focus group. 29 individuals took part in an interview, and a further 4 individuals participated in the focus group. In the findings presented below, only those that were determined as statistically significant are included.

A brief overview of the methodology, along with a description of the sample demographics, can be found in Appendix B.

2.8. Structure of the Report

The COM-B model, described below, was used as a framework to interpret and conceptualise the research findings. Identified findings are described under each of the three areas within the framework (capability, opportunity, and motivation), with each section including an overview of the findings within that theme, along with several key messages.

The messages in bold provide overarching messages synthesising the findings from both phases of the data (including quantitative and qualitative data). Phase one [survey] data is presented visually. Some practice shared stems from our research data, but the Sharing Practice boxes draw on VKPP wider practice examples received through Calls for Practice.

The final part of the report includes appendices with a description of the consultations that were undertaken throughout the duration of the project (Appendix A), followed by a detailed methodology section outlining the process of recruitment, data collection, and analysis (Appendix B). A glossary of terms is provided in Appendix C.

3. The COM-B Model

The COM-B model (Michie et al., 2011) was chosen as a framework in order to conceptualise and present the research findings. The COM-B model is a model of behaviour change with an emphasis on the role of **C**apability, **O**pportunity, and **M**otivation in promoting engagement in a particular behaviour (Figure 3a) (Michie et al., 2011). The model proposes, in order to engage in a behaviour, individuals must have the:

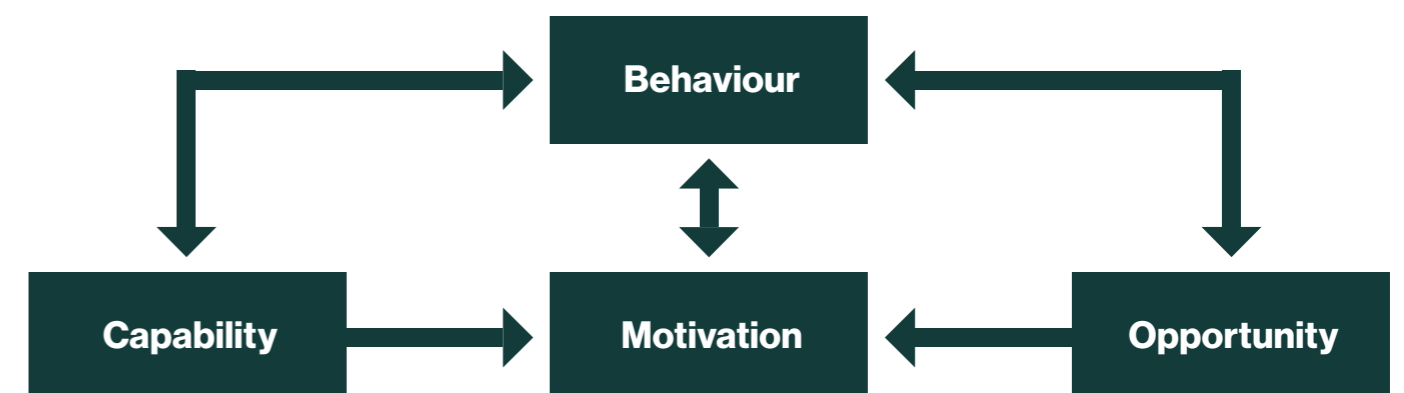
- **Capability:** psychological and physical capacity to engage in the behaviour, including possessing the necessary knowledge and skills;
- **Opportunity:** external factors which make execution of a behaviour possible; and,
- **Motivation:** e.g., brain processes which energise and direct behaviour.

Within the COM-B Model (Michie et al., 2011), **C**apability, **O**pportunity, and **M**otivation interact to generate behaviour that, in turn, influences these very same components. The single-headed and double-headed arrows represent potential influence between components (Figure 3a below). For example, opportunity can influence motivation as can capability, which can then affect behaviour which affects **C**apability, **M**otivation, and **O**pportunity.

The model was chosen as a framework to interpret our research findings due to the recognised complexity within the policing role and the recognition that there are likely to be multiple intersecting factors that underpin policing practice in capturing the voice of the victim. Further, separating out the findings into the three components is likely to provide a clearer insight into where exactly the barriers exist, and thus aid the development of recommendations to influence **C**apability, **O**pportunity, and **M**otivation as required.

Figure 3a

COM-B Framework (Michie et al., 2011)



4. Results

4.1. Capability to Capture the Voice of the Victim

Capability in effectively capturing and recording the voice of the victim is likely to be hindered by the varied understanding of the term 'voice of the victim' among police personnel and a lack of high-quality training opportunities that provide personnel with the skills and knowledge in order to enable them to effectively engage with, and capture, the voice of victims. Personnel were observed to lack confidence in their skills and considered many relational skills to be innate qualities that could not be taught. Some expressed perceptions that individuals with such qualities were not currently being recruited into policing. A detailed exploration of these themes is presented below.

Conceptualisation of the Victim Voice

Understanding of the term 'voice of the victim' was mixed, but the majority agreed that it means providing victims with choice and control over the investigative process and understanding their expectations as a result of reporting a crime.

No definition was provided to personnel regarding 'control' and so it is possible that the provision of control to victims was interpreted differently by different personnel. For some, they may have interpreted it to mean control over an investigation or control of an outcome which are often beyond the control of the police. However, for a victim, control may mean being able to exercise control over specific elements of the investigation, for example the manner and frequency at which they are contacted. The limitations to victim control was evident within the responses provided by personnel. It was noted that victims are unable to direct the investigation as sometimes decisions need to be taken to safeguard that are not aligned with their wishes; particularly if vulnerability is a present factor. There was, however, some agreement that the police should understand what a victim wants as an outcome, even if this cannot always be supported (Figure 4a).

“I take victims' wish[es] [in]to consideration but they should NEVER be given control over an investigation process as I do not expect a victim to have a balanced impartial view of the crime they are a victim of.” (Police Officer)

The disparity in how 'control' may be interpreted by personnel and victims therefore provide opportunity to consider avenues to maximise choice and control, even when specific processes need to be adhered to.

Figure 4a

Level of Agreement with Several Interpretations of the Term 'Voice of the Victim'

Personnel were asked their understanding of the term 'Voice of the Victim'.



Approximately **2** out of **3** personnel agreed/strongly agreed that 'voice of the victim' entails understanding what victims want from the police as a result of reporting a crime (**66%**), and that the term could be defined as victims having their experiences of crime listened to and recorded (**66%**).



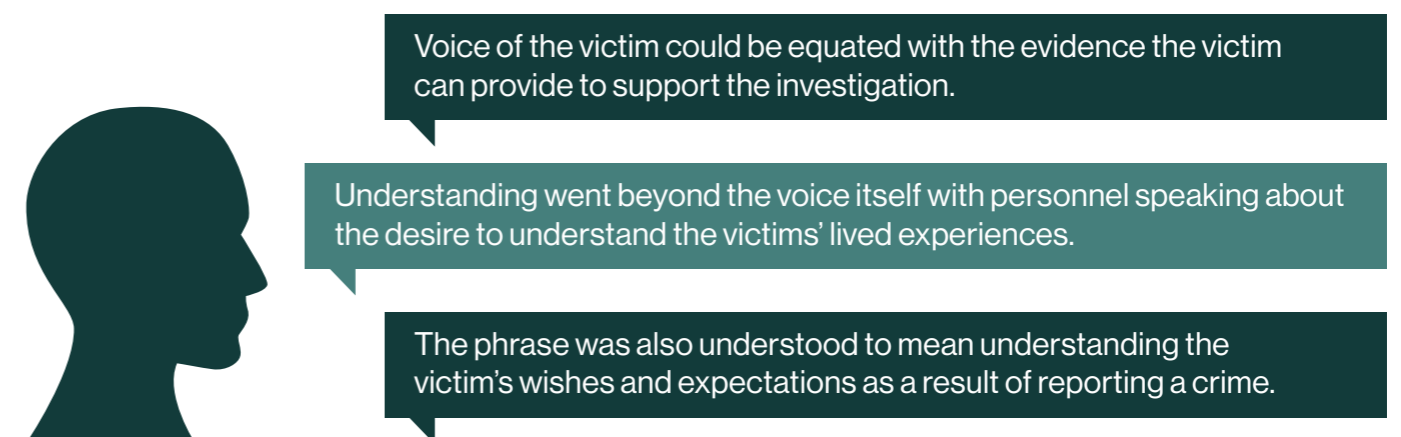
Approximately **1** in **2** personnel agreed/strongly agreed the term means providing victims with choice and control over the investigative process (**46%**).

The results not presented in the figure include: 3% who disagreed/strongly disagreed, and 8% who neither agreed nor disagreed the term means understanding what victims want from the police as a result of reporting a crime. 11% disagreed/strongly disagreed and 16% neither agreed nor disagreed that the term means providing victims with choice and control over the investigative process; and 1% disagreed/strongly disagreed and 7% neither agreed nor disagreed the term could be defined as victims having their experiences of crime listened to and recorded.

The interviews highlighted that the phrase 'voice of the victim' was interpreted in different ways by different personnel (Figure 4b).

Figure 4b

Differential Interpretations of the Term 'Voice of the Victim'



Use of the phrase ‘Voice of the Victim’

‘Voice of the child’ is more readily recognisable in policing than ‘voice of the victim’.

“Probably the phrase we use more often is voice of the child, which is certainly embedded now into the organization, probably for the last four or five years I would say.” (Police Officer)

‘Voice of the child’ is a term that many within the interviews recognised, particularly those working in child-focused and safeguarding roles. Some individuals also noted that the terminology of voice of the victim is being used. However, police personnel raised concerns that they lack an understanding of the meaning or an understanding of what this looks like within everyday policing practice. Others emphasised that personnel may not recognise their actions of engaging with victims and asking their views on what they would like to happen, as part of capturing the victims’ voice.

The terms ‘voice of the victim’ and ‘voice of the child’ were considered abstract by some strategic police personnel we interviewed, who raised concerns that it may be interpreted differently which may then lead to discrepancies in practice. Personnel also made the distinction between purely recording the victims’ voice and truly listening to and understanding, and then acting on the voice, and suggested that more needs to be done to enable personnel to understand this distinction.

“The voice of the victim for me, it’s almost becoming arbitrary because of what HMRC say about voice of the victim. When you think about what happens in National Child protection inspections. How do we record that? Recording it is one thing but listening to it is a very different thing.” (Police Officer)

There were concerns raised that the phrase may not be accessible to all and is not used within everyday policing practice, and personnel questioned whether the use of the term victim was appropriate. Personnel reflected on an increased focus on the use of person-centred language within policing and the use of terminology that is aligned with how the individual they are engaging with refers to themselves e.g., as a survivor, along with a move away from the terminology of ‘victim’.

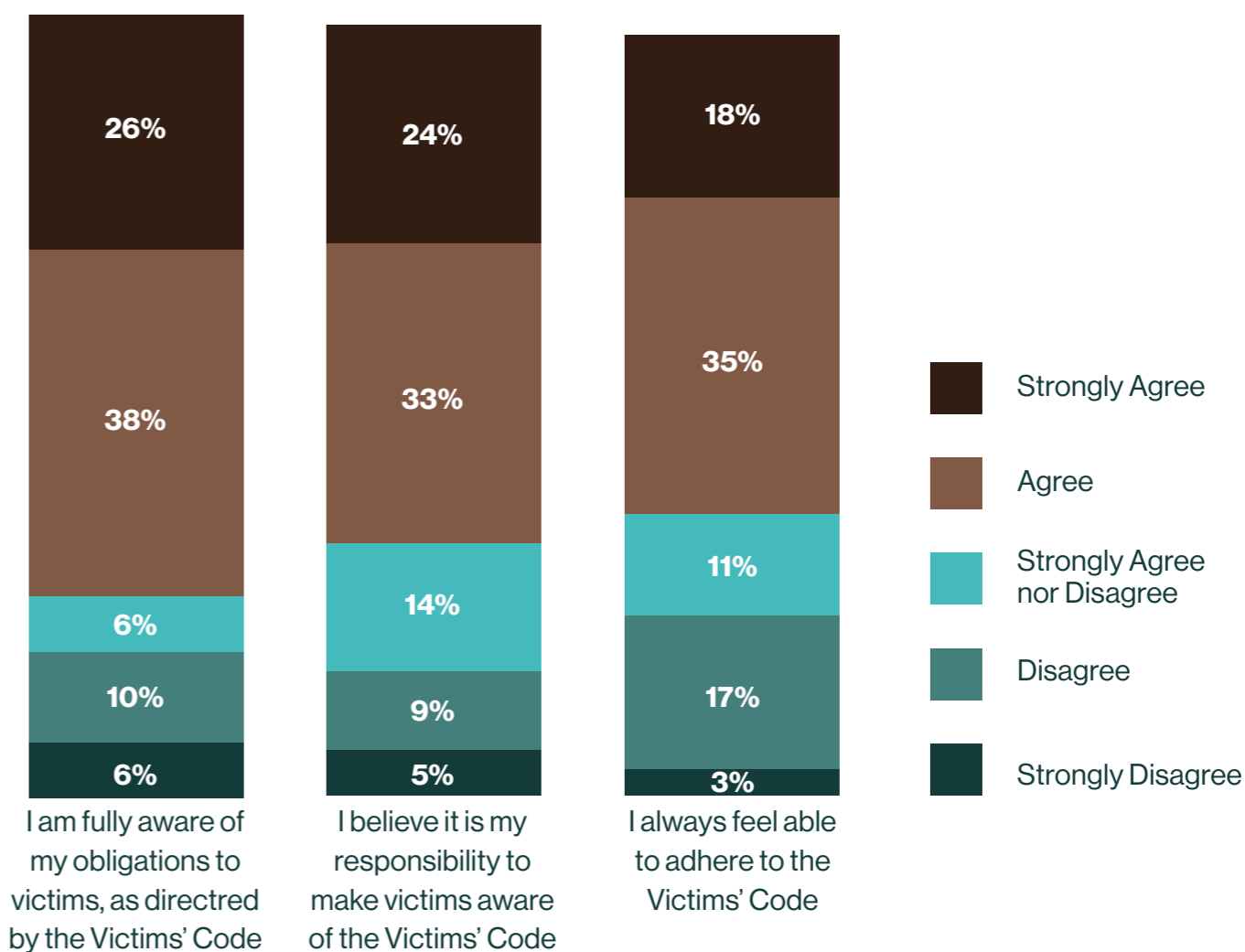
Victims’ Code

There are notable variations in how police personnel understand their responsibilities under the Victims’ Code of Practice (Ministry of Justice, 2020) and in their perceived abilities to adhere to the Code (Figure 4c).

The survey data cited several barriers that limit personnel compliance with the regularity of updates (as directed by the Code) including demand, high caseloads, and irregular shift patterns. Personnel further reported that some victims can have expectations or wants that exceed the regularity of updates within the Code and emphasised the negative impact this can have on relationships with victims when the police are unable to meet these expectations.

Figure 4c

Personnel Level of Agreement with Several Statements Related to the Victims’ Code (n=511)



Personnel within the survey also expressed challenges communicating ‘no update’ updates to victims despite this being a clearly delineated responsibility within the Code. Those in more senior roles commented that personnel can lack the confidence to acknowledge to victims that no progress has been made. Demand was also reported to influence this, as personnel reported a need to prioritise updates informing victims of change and, when demand is high, personnel do not have the capacity to update victims where there has been no progress. Some personnel also appeared to consider that victims do not want to receive an update only to be told nothing has progressed.

“You know, a victim might say I don’t want contact every week, I want every month or whenever you’ve got an update. So, listening to you know, voice of the victim. But that’s not always achievable. You know an officer might be on rest days for four days and then on training, or [they’re] simply just constantly getting turned out job after job after job, and then they’re carrying 25 investigations. It’s almost impossible sometimes.” (Police Officer)

Despite these challenges, the interviews found that many personnel recognised the need for the Code, were knowledgeable about the Code, and considered implementation of its Rights to be a priority within their daily role. Personnel also spoke of efforts to understand victims' expectations/preferences around the receiving of updates and aimed to facilitate this where possible.

Those in more senior roles emphasised the importance of personnel being clear about the expectations under the Code and reported that efforts were being made to increase understanding of these. Compliance with the Code was reported to be reviewed by supervisors, with prompts provided to officers when updates had not been made within the expected timeframe. IT systems were identified as helpful in monitoring compliance. The draft Victims' and Prisoners Bill also proposes changes that place a duty on local criminal justice bodies and Police Chief Commissioner's (PCCs) to review how their police area are complying with the Victims' Code, thus driving forward stricter Code compliance in the sector/amongst personnel ([Ministry of Justice, 2022](#)).

Among interviewees, there was a clear recognition of the need to improve compliance with the Victims' Code and the need for the police to do more to support victims in this regard.



Sharing Practice

One force highlighted the efforts they are making to ensure personnel are clear on the standards required for investigation plans, crime recording, and victim care contracts. Requirements for personnel to provide victims with a Victim of Crime leaflet; their contact details; establish a Victim Care contract; and provide victims with the opportunity to complete a Victim Personal Statement are clear within the Victim Care Log, and compliance against these actions is monitored.

Force Priorities

Overall, most police personnel reported having an awareness of their force priorities but the formality of how these are communicated varied. Further, voice of the victim was not consistently identified as a force priority.

Most police officers (81%) and police staff (79%) within the survey said that they know what their force priorities are and a majority (60% of police officers; 60% of police staff) reported that at least one of their forces' policing priorities relates to capturing the voices and experiences of victims/witnesses.

Interviewees reported being informed about priorities through force-initiated communications, for example electronic communications including briefings, emails, and resources or information held on the intranet. Personnel also referenced strategic messaging about priorities that come from supervisors or those in senior ranks e. g., Chief Constables.

Others required more self-directed education, with personnel reporting that they were aware of where the information about force priorities was located, but that it required them to take responsibility to seek out this information.

Within the interviews, there was variation regarding whether individuals identified voice of the victim as a force priority. Some reported that it was a key priority within their role, whilst others reported not being aware of voice of the victim featuring as a priority.



"I don't know whether I have seen it written or in terms of voice of the victim, obviously in terms of force priorities it really comes down to more around achieving more positive disposals when it comes to domestics and obviously achieving more from the criminal justice perspective as opposed to the voice of the victim." (Police Officer)

Interviewees expressed increased familiarity with the term 'voice of the child' in comparison to 'voice of the victim', but knowledge of force priorities related to voice of the child was also limited. No individual identified voice of the victim and/or child as a specific force priority but did identify it was a theme that crosscut multiple priorities.

Training

Training to support personnel in capturing the voice of the victim was said to be limited within this sample, and personnel expressed a desire for increased training to support them more effectively. Innate skills of personnel, rather than those developed through training, were however considered to be the most effective in capturing the victim voice.

Interviewees suggested that, largely, personnel do not receive specific training on voice of the victim. For those that did, this was largely built into other training inputs as opposed to a standalone training package. The surveys qualitative responses and interviews shed more light on the practicality of this approach. Some individuals considered this to be appropriate as they already felt confident capturing victims' voices, whilst others emphasised they did not require training as they did not consider it to be the role of the police to capture the victim's voice. 61% of personnel however agreed/strongly agreed that they would benefit from more training to support them to capture the voice and experiences of victims.

Less than a fifth (19%) of personnel within the survey reported that they had engaged in continuous professional development (CPD) to support them to capture the experiences of victims. It is however important to note that the qualitative responses highlighted that some individuals did not understand or were unfamiliar with the term 'CPD', thus these results may be an underrepresentation.



"Not all Police officers will have experiences of everything people have been through which is why we need more training on how to capture people's thoughts and feelings." (Police Officer)

Where training is provided, it varied in delivery mode and content, and there was a clear preference for face-to-face engagement with peers and the inclusion of victims' lived experience. Personnel would like training to help them navigate the realities of their role.

Of those that had received training on capturing and recording the experiences of victims (Figure 4d):

Figure 4d

Personnel Level of Agreement with Several Statements Regarding Training (n=487)

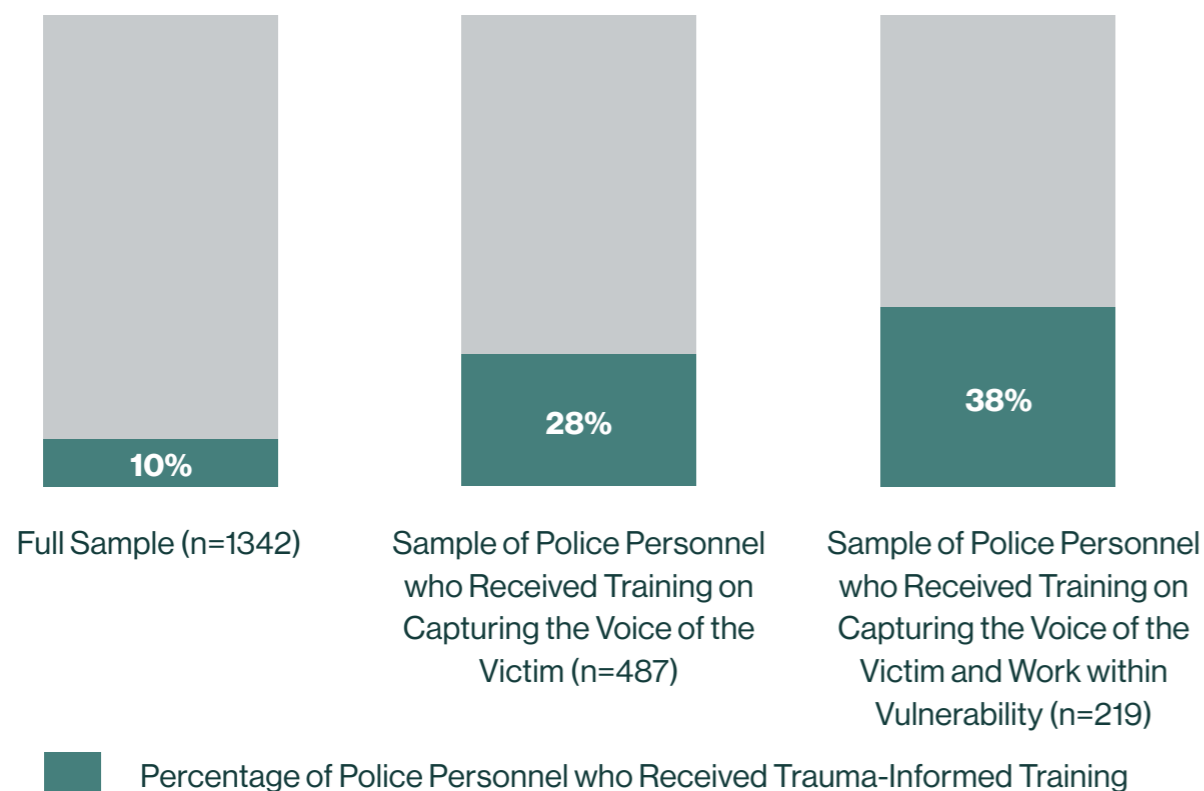


It is important to note, however, that we do not have an awareness of the specific training courses personnel have undertaken and thus we cannot denote these findings to a specific course/courses.

Of those who have received training in capturing the voices/experiences of victims, 28% reported they have also received training on trauma-informed approaches. Of those who have received training in voice of the victim and who also work within vulnerability, this figure rises to 38%. Overall, 10% of the whole sample reported having received trauma-informed training (Figure 4e).

Figure 4e

Percentage of Personnel who Reported Receiving Trauma-Informed Training



Personnel demonstrated an awareness that responses to trauma, including a blunting of emotions and difficulty with recall, may influence perceptions of victims and increase biases, and felt that trauma-informed training could help to dispel these notions. There was, therefore, an emphasis on the need for more training around how to deliver and implement trauma-informed approaches in practice. Personnel also expressed a desire for more training regarding vulnerability.

“So, I think we’ve got [the] biases in our training wrong. We should focus more on how to communicate in all ways, and if we did that, the consequence would be, we’d probably be better at capturing the voice of the victim.” (Police Officer)

Interviewees noted that most of the training that is offered is online training, and whilst online formats were recognised as appropriate for some training inputs, interviewees also specified that remote learning can be monotonous and is often completed alongside other tasks, thus limiting the learning that takes place. It is however notable that data collection took place following the COVID-19 pandemic where it is likely that training that would have traditionally been offered face-to-face was moved to an online format. The impact of COVID-19 on police learning is discussed in further detail below. Personnel also expressed that the timing of when they receive certain training can be misaligned e.g., personnel do not always receive training when entering the service or entering a new role. This has implications for personnel confidence and limits their ability to provide victims with a good service.

“Having comprehensive training led by experienced and knowledgeable people would allow me to feel more confident when engaging with victims/witnesses.” (Police Staff)

Face-to-face training was reported to be more impactful as it allowed personnel to engage with their peers and provided an opportunity for them to speak about and share their experiences. This was viewed as beneficial for learning, but also in supporting officers to develop strong peer support and resilience within the policing role. The value of incorporating victims’ lived experiences into training was also emphasised, with personnel reporting that this was highly impactful and can foster increased empathy for victims. Individuals also reported a desire to learn from other personnel and previous case examples, both where things have gone well and where they have gone wrong.

Personnel within the interviews considered that training should, but does not, acknowledge the complexity of the policing role and the capture of victim voice. There was, therefore, an emphasis on the need to situate the training within the realities of policing and a sense that the situations personnel encounter within their role are often more complicated than training enables them to deal with.

Personnel were also clear to emphasise that training should not be seen as the solution to all problems, and that wider issues, including lack of resources and time, need to be addressed to support them to capture the victim voice effectively.



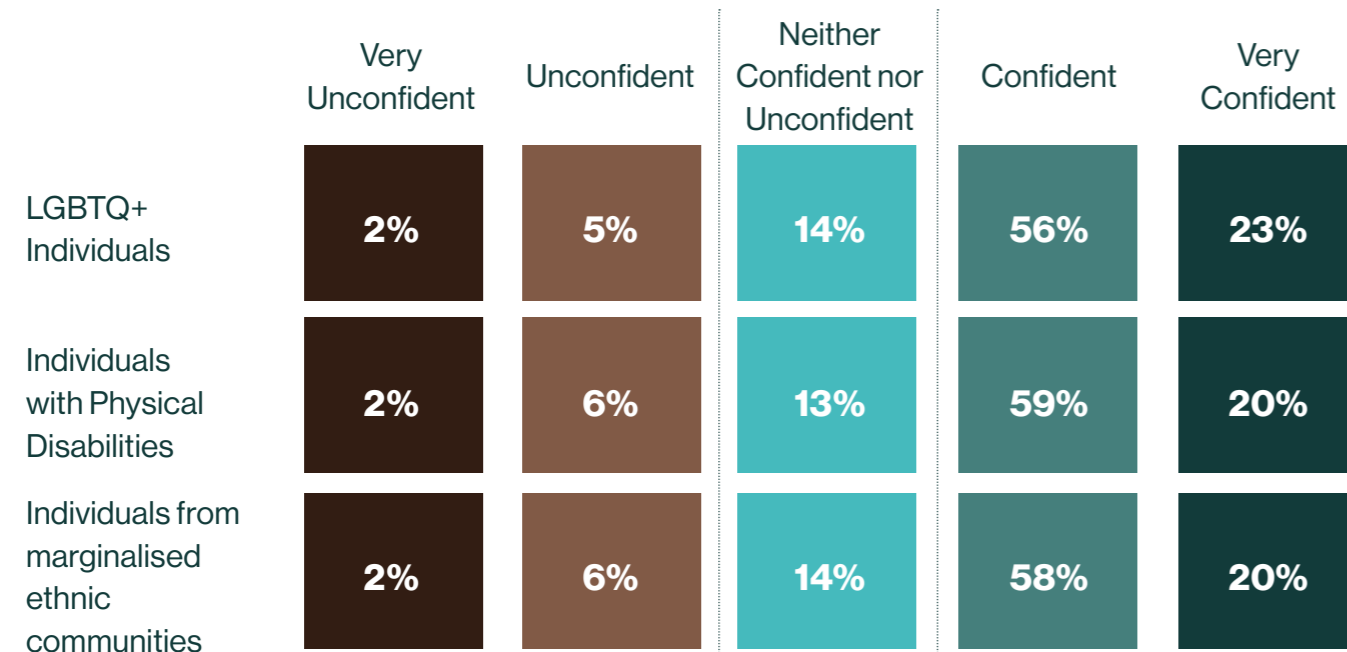
Sharing Practice

- One force introduced training on recording stalking and harassment. The training is provided to all frontline police officers and aims to educate officers on the impact of the crime as well as enable them to provide evidence-based advice to victims.
- Another force developed new guidance on the language that should be used when engaging with victims of domestic abuse. The guidance has been written in collaboration with a domestic abuse survivors' group and aims to improve factual recording which, in turn, can support the investigative process and prosecution.

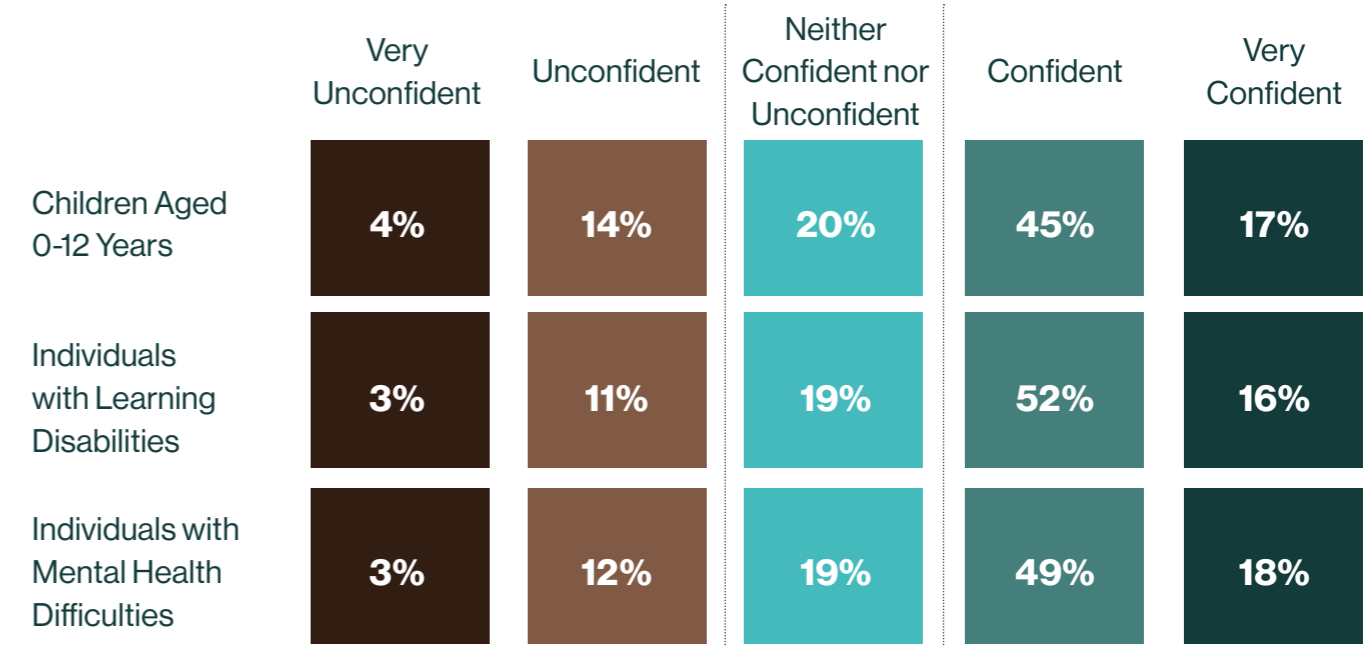
Confidence

Police personnel within the survey generally reported feeling confident engaging with individuals from diverse groups, however the interview findings revealed some differences regarding the circumstances and types of victims for whom it was more challenging to engage (Figure 4f).

Figure 4f
Personnel Confidence Levels when Engaging with Certain Groups/Communities (n=643)



Survey respondents reported the **highest levels** of confidence when engaging with individuals from the above groups.



Whilst most personnel still reported feeling confident, survey respondents reported feeling **less confident** when engaging with individuals from the above groups.

Personnel interviewed and surveyed spoke of particular challenges engaging with children and adolescents, and perceived that many within policing lack the confidence to engage with children (Figure 4g). Personnel who reported confidence generally considered this to come from their own experiences having children or interacting with children within their personal life, and there was a sense that younger recruits, or those without children, were likely to particularly struggle in this regard. It was not explicit within the interviews whether discussion of the young workforce related to personnel who were young in age or whether this was used to refer to individuals with a shorter length of service. Indeed, both factors were discussed, often interchangeably. Discussions on the young workforce may be considered to reflect an ageism bias, with age a protected characteristic under the Equality Act (2010). Whilst not explicitly mentioned within the interviews, such biases may also transcend to perceptions of victims.

When asked how they capture the voice of victims from marginalised groups, personnel spoke of educating themselves on diversity issues to understand the experiences of diverse communities, along with potential barriers to engagement with the police. These self-education strategies included: reading, speaking to others, research, seeking out training, however personnel were not specific when identifying the resources used for this education. As a result, it is not possible to determine the credibility/validity of these sources. There did, however, appear to be a focus on self-directed as opposed to force directed education. Responses also appeared to suggest that personnel did not perceive that marginalised groups require specific approaches. This may speak to a lack of appreciation for their lived experiences, and neglect of the specific barriers/crimes that may be experienced by individuals from these groups.

““” “I feel like this is a bit of a silly question. Ultimately I treat everyone equally and equal to their needs and always put in 100% effort with everyone I speak to.”
(Police Officer)



Sharing Practice

One force has developed a video around voice of the child, identifying opportunities for personnel to speak to children and young people when attending incidents where children are present, but the incident is not child centric. The video demonstrates appropriate ways for personnel to engage with children e.g., getting down on the child's level. The initiative aims to encourage professional curiosity and encourage personnel to speak up and/or make a referral if something does not feel right.



- **Young people from Leaders Unlocked (Appendix A) felt it was positive that 77% of personnel within the survey agreed it is the police's responsibility to capture the experiences of children. However, they were concerned that 23% did not agree with this and questioned how those that did not agree would interact with young people and whether they would listen to their voice.**
- **The young people were dissatisfied that only 76% of personnel agreed it is as important to capture the voices of young people as it is to capture the voices of adults, and felt strongly that the voices of children and young people should be equal to that of adults.**
- **They also felt that 100% of personnel should feel confident engaging with children and young people.**

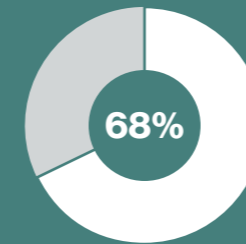
Figure 4g

Personnel Confidence Regarding Capture of the Voice of the Child

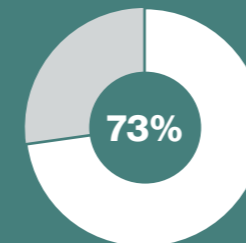
Voice of the Child:

Personnel Confidence

Overall, of 643 personnel

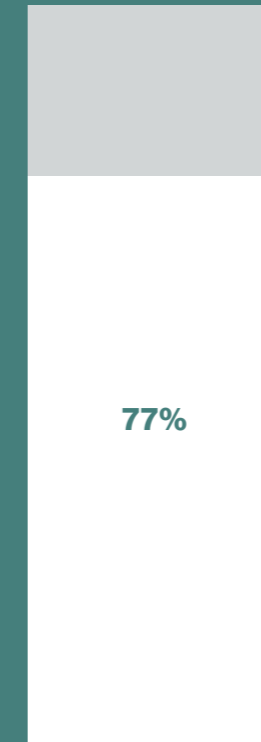


Felt confident/very confident when working with children.

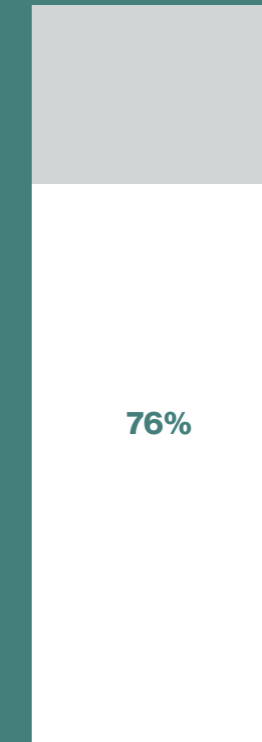


Felt confident/very confident when working with adolescents.

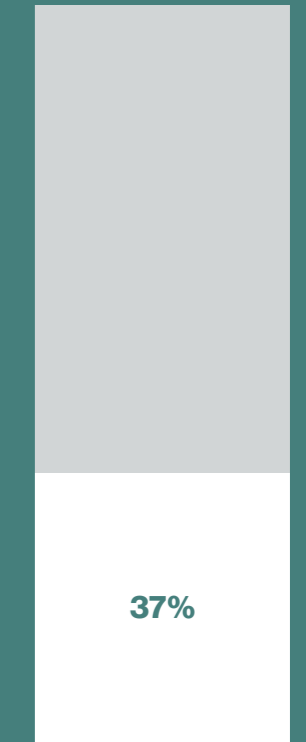
Of 285 personnel who reported working with children on a regular basis:



Agreed that voice of the child should be a police priority



Agreed that the voice of the child is as important as that of the adult



Agreed that they can get information about a child's experience from a parent/guardian

Police personnel who received specialist or enhanced training for working with children (n=275 personnel) were more likely to acknowledge the importance of capturing voice of the victim, compared to personnel who did not receive the training.

Individuals considered that some personnel can lack the understanding of when, and in what contexts, it is appropriate to speak to a child and ask them questions and reinforced the importance of speaking directly to children, without fear this will prejudice an investigation.

Relational Skills

A complex mix of skills are required to work within policing. While empathy and compassion were highlighted as particularly important, participants felt these skills were not prioritised in recruitment.

Personnel within the interviews spoke about the importance of connecting with victims on a 'human level' by demonstrating empathy, compassion, and developing a rapport with victims through face-to-face/direct engagement. Individuals also discussed the use of self-disclosure in order to facilitate rapport with victims and break down barriers between police and the public.

Individuals emphasised the importance of honesty and transparency with victims by providing them with information about the criminal justice process and a realistic explanation of likely outcomes, thereby allowing victims to make informed choices (Ministry of Justice, 2020). However, personnel did express concerns that the timing of information and the level of detail may be off-putting to some victims, suggesting there needs to be a balance between the timing of information provided to victims to avoid overloading them, whilst ensuring they are fully informed about the criminal justice process.

There was an emphasis on the diversity of skills required to work within policing, in that personnel need to be both compassionate and empathic whilst also able to deal with challenging and violent situations. It was largely considered to be challenging for personnel to possess both sets of skills, and personnel reported that abilities to deal with violent situations were overrepresented and prioritised over skills such as empathy and compassion. These findings suggest there is a need to balance public-protector focused orientations and skills, for example those focused on community support and a focus on developing relationships with communities, alongside those more focused on, or suited towards, crime fighting role orientations, in order to conduct police practice successfully.

““” “Because ultimately, I think that the person has got to be both because ultimately, we want those compassionate people... But then I also want them to have the resilience and the ability to go and deal with the offender.” (Police Officer)

Concerns were also raised about individuals currently being recruited into policing from policing degrees who tend to be young individuals with a lack of previous job experience. Some personnel considered that individuals on such degrees lack the required life experience and are not being trained appropriately to interact with victims. Concerns about the young workforce was also extended to supervisors, with personnel noting that many supervisors are young in service and age.

““” “It does concern me as a senior leader within the police that the landscape has changed somewhat over a number of years, with people coming into the police and how people manage and deal with things, as I said before, their age, their profile, their life experiences, I do feel in policing we have very much gone down the academia route and don't get me wrong, absolutely there is a place for that. But I do feel we're missing out on a real key element in society of people, for example and people who've got real life skills, people who understand and can empathize and all that type of stuff.” (Police Officer)

It is however important to note that the sample who participated within the interviews were predominantly individuals with a long length of service. Such reflections may therefore only reflect the perceptions of new recruits by older officers/those with greater length of service, as opposed to an accurate representation of their skills and abilities.

Personnel Wellbeing

Personnel recognised that repeated exposure to trauma had had an impact on their own wellbeing, with some feeling desensitised and fatigued.

Personnel within the interviews spoke of the impact the role had on their personal wellbeing and reported desensitisation, perceptions of failure, and emphasised the cumulative effect of repeated exposure to trauma. There was a sense that individuals outside of policing, particularly victims, do not recognise the humanity of personnel and personnel reported feeling as though others expect them to be immune to experiencing difficulties. The 'man mentality'/'boys club' was reported to perpetuate this, leading to male personnel failing to recognise the impact of the role on theirs and other's mental health and wellbeing.

““” “Officers go to the most horrific things and walk back without a care in the world, and those same officers will go to a very, very minor instances where it wasn't a big deal and will be hugely impacted and usually it's because of that sort of avalanche effect.” (Police Officer)

Interviewees also raised the important issue of vicarious trauma that police personnel can experience as a result of their engagement with victims. Personnel emphasised the need for appropriate support, including regular team meetings and catch-ups, formalised employee assistance programmes, and inputs from individuals that cover mental health. There was a recognition that good policing is delivered by supported and well-prepared personnel and, whilst some personnel reported that their force were effective at supporting officers who are struggling, others reported that early identification of difficulties and/or trauma was lacking.

Within both phases of the research, personnel recognised that current demand and challenges within policing fostered an inability to meet victims' needs effectively. The negative impact this had on wellbeing was emphasised, with personnel reporting feeling as though they were letting victims down and thus failing in their role. Personnel also emphasised the reciprocal role of officer wellbeing and victim care and recognised that poor wellbeing can limit their ability to experience or display compassion and empathy towards victims and thus, reduce the care that victims receive.

““” “I think sometimes that's why people think that the police have got really woke because actually they're talking about stuff like this all the time. But this is more about looking after ourselves so we can do a better job for the public.” (Police Officer)

Impact of COVID-19

Personnel emphasised the impact the pandemic had on training and wellbeing (Figure 4h).

Figure 4h

Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Police Training and Wellbeing



Within the interviews, personnel emphasised the effect of the pandemic on training quality and opportunities to engage in training. They highlighted that new recruits had predominantly been trained remotely and at home which was considered to affect the ability of personnel to develop peer relationships and support systems. It is therefore important to recognise the long-term impacts of COVID on training and staff wellbeing. The impact of the pandemic on wider staff wellbeing and training is recognised within the Casey Review (Casey, 2023), however the data presented here suggests that those newer in service may be particularly vulnerable to such negative impacts.

““” “I wouldn’t be at all surprised if one of the consequences of the pandemic where everybody went to online learning, is that we end up with people, police officers, being less resilient because they haven’t built the networks of people they could trust to have a chat with.” (Police Officer)

Responsivity to Individual Need

Personnel emphasised the need for victims to receive a response that is tailored to their individual needs, however recognised the challenges in practice in meeting such a diversity of needs.

Personnel across both phases demonstrated an awareness of victim diversity and a recognition of the need to tailor the response to that individual victim’s needs. They referenced the impact of mental health difficulties, substance abuse, cultural differences, and the age of the victim on engagement with victims and reflected that such diversity and vulnerability can make it harder to capture their voice. Personnel therefore emphasised the importance of being responsive to individual victim needs, including modifying language to ensure it is easily understood and utilising other support agencies, external professionals, or other police personnel to capture the victim’s voice.

““” “You’ve got an individual victim, so it should be a tailored, a tailored service to whatever that job is needed or whatever they need, but it’s not. We have blanket policies that very often create extra, utterly pointless work that don’t [doesn’t] benefit the victims.” (Police Officer)

Personnel spoke of offering alternative methods of capturing the victim’s evidence as a means of being responsive to their needs. They spoke about the use of written statements, pictures and drawings, video recorded interviews including Achieving Best Evidence (ABE) interviews, and body worn video as helpful in capturing the victim’s voice. This appeared to be particularly useful when engaging with child victims and witnesses. There was, however, an emphasis on the need to avoid assumptions about what victims will require based on certain characteristics, and a focus on the importance of speaking directly with victims to understand their individual needs. Specifically, when working with children, personnel highlighted the importance of explaining the available options of providing evidence and the likely implications and expectations around each. This was considered important in allowing individuals the opportunity to make an informed choice about the method through which they choose to give their evidence.

““” “Some go on to do a video interview. There’s times when they’ve said I don’t want to give a video interview, I don’t want to be on a camera, I’ll give a statement. We’ve covered that. We’ve done statements...so there’s always something that you can glean from a child especially if they’ve come to our notice, and depending on what that is, there’s many ways to capture what they’ve got to say and give them that voice and explaining what you may have to do with it.” (Police Officer)

There was an acknowledgement that due to demand and the diversity of victims, the police can struggle to have detailed knowledge of all aspects of diversity and thus cannot meet each individual need.



Sharing Practice

- One force, using learning from Operation Soteria Bluestone, has introduced a new approach where victims can disclose information about rape when they are not ready to officially report this to the police. When a rape is disclosed, police personnel focus on providing victims with support and the opportunity to recover, rather than going via the investigative route. Victims are still assigned an officer as a single point of contact as would be the case if they formally reported.
- This approach was introduced with the aim of building trust among victims, and it is hoped to lead to increased reporting of rape crimes in the future.

Capability

Key Messages

- 1 Voice of the victim is not currently a widely used or understood term within policing, however differences in interpretation need to be understood in the context that there is no definition of this term currently accepted within policing. Voice of the victim does not commonly feature within force priorities.
- 2 Relational skills are viewed as important in capturing the victims' voice and personnel largely consider these skills to be innate qualities that cannot be taught to personnel.
- 3 Whilst recognising the importance of innate qualities, personnel also emphasised the role of high-quality training and expressed a preference for learning from the victims' lived experience. Personnel did however express that training alone should not be seen as the primary solution to improving the capture of the victims' voice.
- 4 Personnel experience challenges keeping victims regularly updated on their case, particularly when demand is high, and no progress has been made on an investigation.
- 5 Personnel wellbeing can be negatively affected by their role which has the potential to negatively influence their ability to demonstrate compassion towards victims and support them effectively.
- 6 Due to demand and victim diversity, the police are unable to tailor their response to individual victim need which results in victims not receiving the most appropriate care or support.
- 7 The pandemic has had an adverse impact on police learning and wellbeing, with the effects likely to be felt for a significant period.

4.2. Opportunity to Capture the Voice of the Victim

Opportunities to effectively capture victims' voices are limited by the high level of demand on police personnel and a focus on criminal justice objectives, as opposed to a focus on victim care and capturing the victim voice. Personnel considered there to be a divide between themselves and wider communities and victims, affecting victims' trust in the police and, therefore, opportunities to engage with them. Negative perceptions of the police were observed to be further compounded by the impact of recent publicised cases involving police misconduct. A detailed exploration of the external factors which help/hinder the police in capturing victims' voices is presented below.

Visible and Invisible Barriers between Policing and Communities

Perceived barriers between policing and communities are believed to affect the willingness of victims to engage with the police, and the willingness of the police to engage with certain victims.

Around two thirds (67%) of personnel within the survey reported that victims' non-engagement with the police can limit their ability to capture victim experiences.

Within our interviews with personnel, there was a perceived unwillingness, or inability, for some victims to engage with the police which limits the ability to capture their voice. Negative perceptions or previous negative experiences with the police were seen as factors which limit victim willingness to engage. Personnel reflected that often cases are not progressed or do not result in an outcome that is aligned with the victim's wishes, which can reduce the trust victims have in the police service as a whole. Individuals also noted that certain communities lack trust in the police service and noted the impact of recent publicised 'failings' by the police on public trust. Lack of trust and confidence in the police was seen by some to reduce police opportunity to engage with victims, despite individual efforts.

Cases involving domestic abuse were prominent within the examples provided by interviewees who reported that often victims call the police to stop the abuse but that, when the immediate danger is over, they disengage from the process. Personnel appeared to express a sense of frustration about this conundrum and the perceived limitations of the police to elicit change for such victims.

Personnel reported challenges overcoming non-engagement, and either do not know how to do this or did not have the time. Others reported they did not consider that the police should be responsible for trying to encourage reluctant victims to engage.

Within the interviews, there emerged a sense that personnel perceived there to be a divide between them and the wider community. Personnel made overt references to an 'us vs them' mentality and there was a perception that the role itself can dehumanise the police to some communities. Whilst such findings highlight limits to police personnel opportunity to interact with victims, such negative perceptions of the police are also likely to affect motivation to interact with such victims and the capability of the police to develop relationships and rapport with communities. Such findings suggest there is a need to support the police to overcome challenges of victim engagement.



“It’s almost like I suppose there’s an us and them. There’s us as the police, and then there’s them as the victims. But I think sometimes you need to park that and put that to one side and think, you know what, the one thing that we’re all united in is the fact that we’re all human and that we’ve all had experiences and that we’ve all got feelings.” (Police Staff)

Personnel further noted wider issues around access to victims, reporting they can struggle to find opportunities to engage with victims when they are alone and away from the individual causing them harm. They noted the limitations to police powers where they are unable to remove individuals from environments unless there is a disclosure of harm. Interviewees also reported that victim engagement may be influenced by other individuals, particularly young people who do not want to be viewed by their peers to have contact with the police.

Communication differences were also seen to restrict the ability of the police to engage with victims and capture their voice. Personnel referred to language barriers and, whilst recognising that external professionals such as interpreters can support in these situations, they identified challenges accessing these professionals and reported delays in securing this provision for victims. Concerns were expressed that evidence can be lost because of this delay, affecting victim recall or resulting in victim withdrawal from the process.

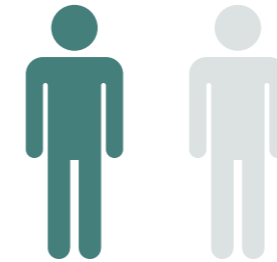


Young people from Leaders Unlocked emphasised the importance of the police prioritising young people’s voice. They noted that, for them, prioritising their voice meant being heard and giving their voice the same weight as the voice of others within the community, reflecting a strong desire to be ‘seen’ by the police. This was considered to influence trust and confidence in the police, with a lack of prioritisation of their voices negatively influencing perceptions of the police among young people.

Force Priorities

Personnel reported that force priorities are not always aligned to the victim’s wishes, and that certain priorities, and policing procedures related to this, do not benefit victims (Figure 4i). This can limit opportunities for police personnel to provide victims with the best service.

Figure 4i



Approximately **1 in 2** officers agreed/strongly agreed that regularly engaging with victims/witnesses is prioritised by their team members (51%) and supervisor (48%).



Nearly **1 in 2** officers agreed/strongly agreed that they feel supported to record victims’ experiences by their team members (44%) and supervisor (50%).



However, approximately **1 out of 5** officers disagreed/strongly disagreed that recording the experiences of victims/witnesses is important to their team members (22%) and supervisor (21%).

These questions for Figure 4i (above), apply to such instances where this may be applicable for footnotes added within text and relating to figures.

These questions were scored on a scale from Strongly Disagree - Strongly Agree. The percentage of those who strongly disagreed/disagreed, and those who neither agreed nor disagreed to the following statements include: regularly engaging with victims/witnesses is prioritised by your team members (22%; 22% respectively); regularly engaging with victims/witnesses is prioritised by my supervisor (22%; 25%); I feel supported by my team members (19%; 32%) or supervisor (19%; 25%) to record victims’ experiences; recording the experiences of witnesses/victims is important to my team members (44% agreed/strongly agreed; 28% neither agreed not disagreed) or supervisor (44% agreed/strongly agreed; 29% neither agreed nor disagreed).

Despite knowledge of where to access information about their force priorities, personnel did report challenges related to this, outlining that often they do not have enough time, or demand is too high, to access or pay significant attention to this information. Individuals also reported a need to prioritise day-to-day tasks over reviewing their force priorities, whilst others reported that the volume of messaging is so high that some information gets lost. Personnel further considered that detailed knowledge of force priorities was only important for first- or second-line supervisors as they have specific targets related to the force priorities, whilst those at the constable level appeared to consider this information less relevant to themselves and their daily work.

Personnel noted that the policing response was differentiated by force priorities, with higher priority areas often associated with a drive towards increased arrests e.g., positive action. Personnel reported that such policies can present a barrier to supporting the wishes of victims, for example, in the case of domestic abuse where the force policy is positive arrest which often is not aligned with the victim's wishes. Others expressed frustration regarding the broad scope of how such policies are implemented which can lead to some crimes being miscategorised and receiving an inappropriate police response, and concern about 'blanket policies' that are applied as opposed to taking each case on an individual basis. Personnel expressed concern that such uniform policies may not benefit victims.

Individuals were forthcoming in recognising the need to improve their approach to victim care and wellbeing, and victim voice. The importance of recent high-profile cases, for example the murder of Sarah Everard at the hands of a serving police officer, and the effect this has had on encouraging forces to look inwardly to assess where improvements are required was recognised.

The presence of multiple priorities can constrain the ability of personnel to respond appropriately to victims.

It was identified that priorities change but often this results in more priorities being added, as opposed to newer priorities replacing older ones. There were also concerns raised that the prioritisation of certain crime types can cause the police to neglect victims of other crime types. Personnel emphasised the significant impact volume crime, including burglary, can have on victims, though recognised that victims of these crimes were unlikely to ever receive an outcome or policing response. This was considered to adversely affect perceptions of the police.

““” “The effect that has on the force is that police officers and the frontline staff don't think all these things are important because they're all priorities. What they think is everything's priority, then they you go nothing is a priority really and nothing is important.” (Police Officer)

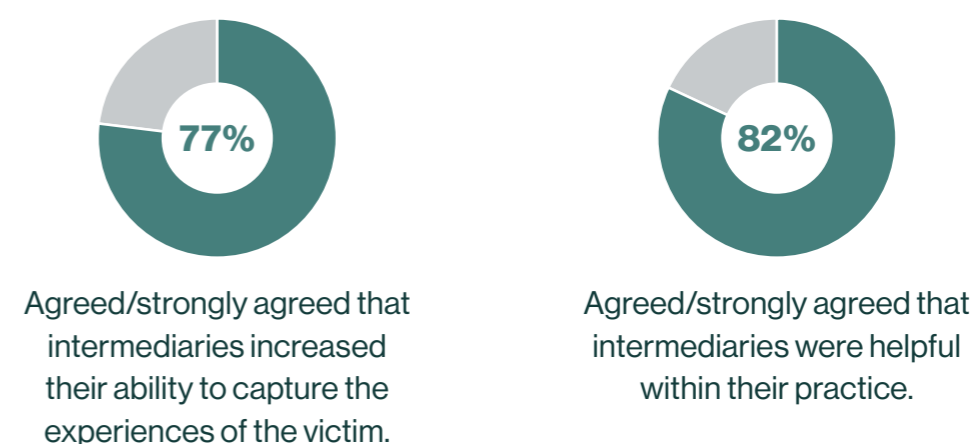
Working as Part of a Wider System

The use of intermediaries and interpreters was reported to be beneficial in supporting communication with victims and capturing their voice (Figure 4j). However, personnel identified some challenges when accessing this provision.

27% of personnel within the survey reported that they regularly seek the support of intermediaries within their daily role. Of those that used them:

Figure 4j

Percentage of Personnel who Agreed with Statements Regarding the use of Intermediaries (n=234)



70% of personnel who regularly work with victims and witnesses agreed that it is important for the police to signpost victims to other support services if needed.

Personnel did however highlight challenges in being able to secure the provision of an interpreter or intermediary, which can delay the capture of the victim's voice. It is possible this may be why less than a third of personnel regularly access intermediaries. Personnel also spoke about utilising individuals known to the victim, including friends and family, to facilitate communication. It is important to note, however that there are issues identified with using individuals known to the victim as a means to facilitate communication, and concerns that this can obstruct or discourage the reporting of abuse (College of Policing, 2022).

Interviewees further noted challenges working with other agencies, in that there can be a tendency to pass over or deflect certain responsibilities to other agencies and there can be a lack of clarity about specific roles within a multi-agency response. Personnel also noted challenges working with other policing personnel, including challenges with cross-border working with other forces and difficulties communicating with other teams and departments.

Personnel did however report positive views about a multi-agency approach. The value of engaging with victims through third parties, including Independent Sexual Violence Advisors (ISVAs) and schools, was acknowledged, with some victims believed to be more likely to engage with such agencies as opposed to the police.

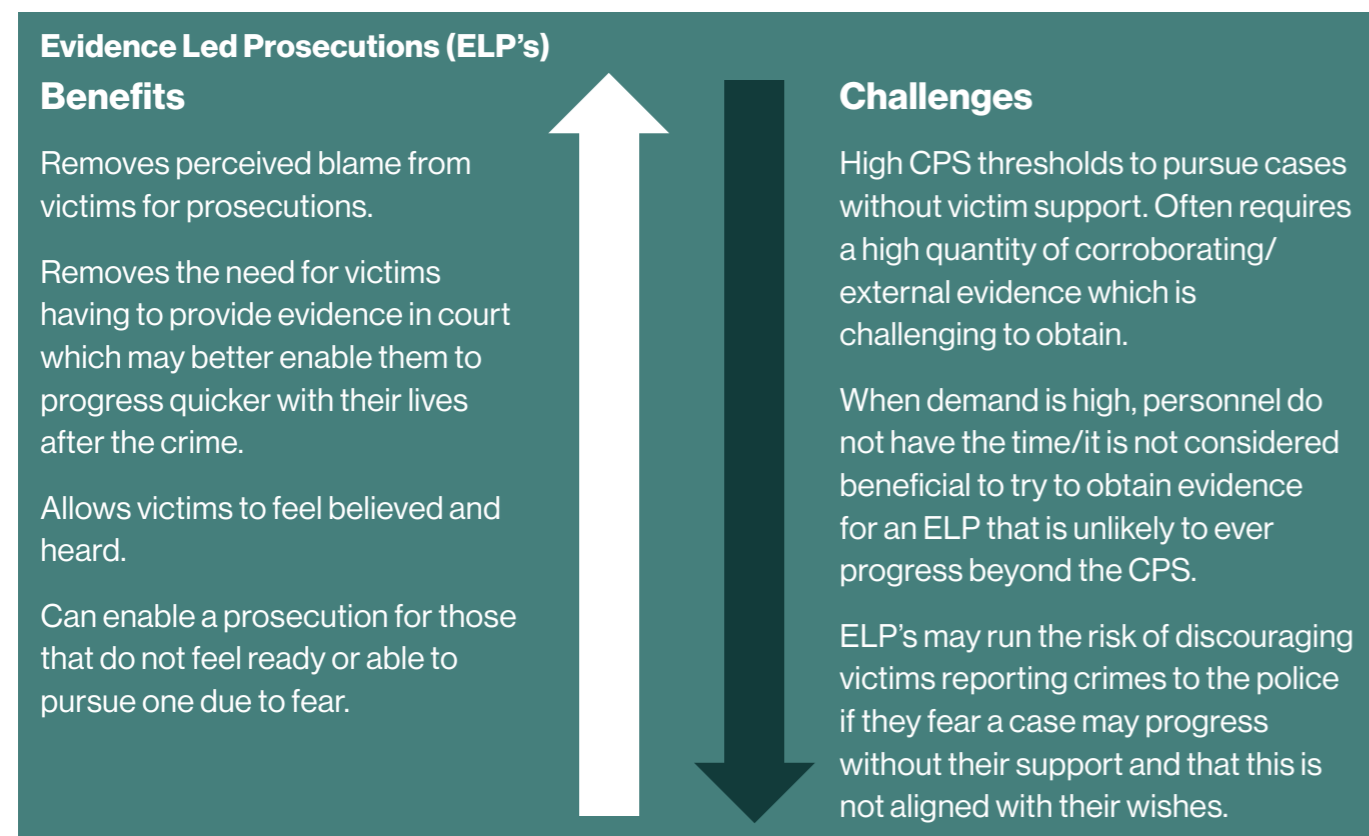
“That’s one of the main things that then gives them another voice is just another agency is being able to step in that aren’t police officers.” (Police Officer)

The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) was identified as a barrier to case progression and the use of Evidence Led Prosecutions.

Within both phases of the research, personnel reported that the CPS, alongside other barriers within the wider CJS, can delay case progression. Personnel noted that often the criminal justice outcome is poor for victims and referred to the high thresholds in place to refer a case to the CPS. Such aspects were considered to be incorrectly attributed to the police by victims which, in turn, was considered to negatively influence perceptions of the police among individual victims, wider communities, and the public. Figure 4k outlines benefits and challenges perceived by personnel of Evidence Led Prosecutions (ELPs).

“Experience shows in recent years, you know, 3, 4, 5 years ago, if we didn’t have a victim on board, then the CPS weren’t interested. I’m talking anecdotally, we’re never going to get it through. It hits our prosecution rates. We’re just going to stop now. And that was frustrating because officers knew in their hearts what had occurred because they viewed the body worn video. They’ve seen their injuries. They’ve done this, done that, done whatever. But if they’re never going to get it through the CPS.” (Police Staff)

Figure 4k
Benefits and Challenges, reported by Personnel, Regarding the use of Evidence Led Prosecutions



Resourcing and Demand

Capturing the voice of the victim was seen as resource and time intensive, and personnel reported they either do not have the resources or, alternatively, should not be expected to do this.

“I’m thinking about my officers and I’m thinking the demand on their on their [sic] time. You’re never at a job and thinking right, I’ve got as long as I need to do this job. You’re thinking, what have I got to do when I leave here to write this up? What is the next job? ... But I guess we are responding to people in crisis and responding to people that desperately need that first interaction to be, you know, absolutely perfect. And I don’t think it always is.” (Police Officer)

Personnel emphasised the prioritisation of critical situations over capturing the victims’ voice or providing updates to victims. Specifically, they reported the need to balance responding to critical incidents, alongside the allocation of new cases, changing shift patterns, attendance of training, alongside the requirement to update victims. This can often result in updates not being provided or being delayed. In this regard, the capture of victims’ voices was viewed as aspirational and not something that was currently being achieved/adhered to well.

Guidance from supervisors and supervisor prioritisation of victim engagement was reported to enable personnel to update victims. Personnel reflected that regular updates to the victims are possible and much more likely to occur if supervisors support allocation of time to this particular task, as well as providing support and guidance to police officers. For those who spoke about individual efforts to put aside time to update victims, they often reflected that other more critical responsibilities often took priority at this time and thus they were unable to update victims. This suggests that supervisory prioritisation and protection of this time is important.

“And you know you cannot meet the expectations that are set...you just cannot do it. It literally cannot be done, but that’s the line you’re measured against, and the line you’re set against to measure yourself against, and it’s becoming, it’s very challenging.” (Police Officer)

Ineffective or inadequate resources, including a lack of staff numbers, poor IT systems, and poor equipment, were considered to adversely affect the capture of victim voice.

There was a clear sense that issues related to resourcing and demand were an overarching challenge that influenced nearly every aspect of policing and resulted in a reduction of skills. Personnel referenced high work and caseloads, along with the complexity of their caseload, that limits their ability to engage with victims. They also reported feeling pressure to move onto other jobs at the expense of prioritising the victim voice, which affects the quality of the service that is provided to victims. Personnel expressed a sense that they can have the appropriate skills and training to enable them to effectively engage with victims, however demand limits their capacity – and simultaneously their opportunity - to engage with victims compassionately and capture their voice. Demand further limits the ability of personnel to access appropriate and relevant training related to capturing the victim’s voice. This highlights the interaction between capability and opportunity factors. Reduced resources and a high level of demand could also have a negative effect on police wellbeing and, subsequently, their motivation to effectively engage with victims.

Proactivity vs Reactivity

Personnel expressed a sense that, due to current demand, the police are no longer proactive in responding to and reducing crime, instead they are largely reactive.

Within the interviews, personnel considered the policing role to be predominantly reactive as opposed to proactive in reducing crime. This was tied to high levels of demand and the changing nature of the police role in which the police are expected to respond to situations not perceived to be a part of their role. The reactive policing approach was considered to negatively affect capturing the victim's voice and engaging with victims.

Where elements of proactivity and reactivity were discussed, there emerged a sense that personnel desired a greater ability to be more proactive in their approach.

“Anything over and above, like almost firefighting policing, is very, very difficult at the moment and the will to be proactive has been beaten out of people... Everything, and it sounds like I'm being super negative, but everything has got harder. None of the changes that have been made across the last 13 years, none of them have been for the positive.” (Police Officer)

The need to adopt a proactive approach was also amplified within police personnel attitudes and perceptions about their role. 85% (n=1119) of police personnel agreed that police should be working with communities to solve problems in their areas and said that police should focus on the causes of crimes, rather than only the consequences of crime.

Disparity between Police and Victims' Expectations

Most interviewees agreed that there can be discrepancy between what a victim wishes as an outcome, and what the police can realistically achieve.

Personnel highlighted situations in which they must go against the victim's wishes, such as domestic abuse situations where the victim may not wish to progress with a police investigation, but the police have a responsibility to investigate, due to risk. They were aware of the negative effect this has on victim confidence and victim safety, as such experiences can cause victims to disengage or be reluctant to report future crimes.

Victims were seen by some personnel to have unrealistic expectations about their engagement with the police, and personnel considered that the inability of the police to meet these expectations can negatively impact victim confidence in the service. They therefore emphasised the importance of being transparent with victims from the outset.

“Things like that make me feel like how on earth am I going to be able to do my job? How can I make her life better? I failed because we've got one victim that doesn't feel like we've done what she expected us to do.” (Police Staff)

One of the most frequently cited reasons for the large disparity between police and victims' expectations was a perceived unrealistic perception held by the public about what the police can do. Interviewees subsequently emphasised the need for community outreach programmes which would help to educate the public about the remit of police work.

“Obviously it's a difficult situation to manage when there may not be the evidence there to successfully prosecute somebody, and obviously that's difficult for people to understand and to hear because they've experienced a traumatic event and they know what's happened. But obviously the criminal justice system works on evidence.” (Police Officer)

Personnel recognised that the needs of victims differ depending on the crime but in most cases, victims want to be believed, understood, and listened to when reporting a crime.

Voice of the Child:

Challenges

Personnel discussed challenges working with parents, drawing attention to the need to balance the wishes of the parents with the wishes of the child, along with challenges of working with parents who will not allow the police to speak to the child.

Personnel had concerns about placing responsibility on children, particularly in the case of domestic abuse between parents. Interviewees described having to make judgements as to the necessity of capturing evidence from a child, appearing to reserve this for the most severe cases. Impacts on children were a concern if they were to provide evidence that may result in a conviction. Police shared anxieties that they may be placing children in the middle of their parents.

Personnel recognised that some children will not engage with the police, particularly where they may be exposed to threats and manipulation from perpetrators or where children lack trust in them. Interviewees also showed an awareness that some children are exploited and may be involved in criminal behaviour themselves and that this can present a barrier to victim engagement.

Resourcing challenges featured in the study in relation to voice of the child. Interviewees described insufficient staffing in specialist child-focused roles, referencing the challenges in recruiting to these roles. Swift reallocation of personnel was described to result in officer inconsistency, which had resulting negative impacts on relationship building between officers and children. It was suggested that this could also potentially reduce officers' investment in cases as they are aware they are unlikely to see a case through to the end.



Young people from Leader's Unlocked reflected on how the police can make sure they hear the voice of the child when parents are/need to be around. The group suggested:

- **accessing and communicating with children and young people through/at partner agencies (e.g. schools) or trusted support groups;**
- **speaking to a child alone from the parent;**
- **the use of technological resources for children and young people to note thoughts and answers down when parents are present in the wider environment (and can overhear conversations);**
- **considering the impact of police engagement with the child (e.g., the child returning home to that parent after having spoken to the police which may result in that child experiencing negative ramifications from said parent) and continued engagement.**

Opportunity

Key Messages

1

Perceived and actual barriers between policing and communities affect the ability of the police to capture victims' voices, with recent high-profile cases of police misconduct exacerbating this division.

2

Force priorities are often understood to be associated with criminal justice outcomes which can lead to decisions being taken that are against victims' wishes. The presence of multiple competing priorities can constrain the ability of personnel to respond to any appropriately.

3

The use of external professionals, including intermediaries, ISVAs, and school staff, was recognised as beneficial in supporting capture of the voice of the victim. However, personnel can experience delays in accessing support from these professionals which can lead to information being lost and victim withdrawal.

4

Personnel perceived the CPS to present a barrier to case progression and the use of evidence-led prosecutions, due to a reluctance to progress cases without victim support.

5

Limited resources and a high level of demand remains an enduring issue with can de-skill personnel and limit their ability to effectively respond to victim needs.

6

Police personnel do not consider victims to be accurately versed on the policing role. This can result in unrealistic expectations among victims which the police do not have the ability or capacity to fulfil.

4.3. Motivation to Capture the Voice of the Victim

Whilst challenges and barriers to capturing the victim's voice were predominantly associated with capability and opportunity factors, the motivation of personnel to capture the victim voice was also identified to influence practice. In particular, perceptions and biases in relation to some victims could negatively affect willingness to capture their voice. Such perceptions may disproportionately affect victims who are experiencing vulnerability, with aspects related to trauma observed to influence perceptions of victims. Some personnel further emphasised the primary role of the police to be targeted towards criminal justice objectives which affected their motivation to capture the victim voice. A detailed exploration of themes relating to personnel thoughts, perceptions, and attitudes towards victims, and their perceived responsibility to capture the victim's voice, is presented below.

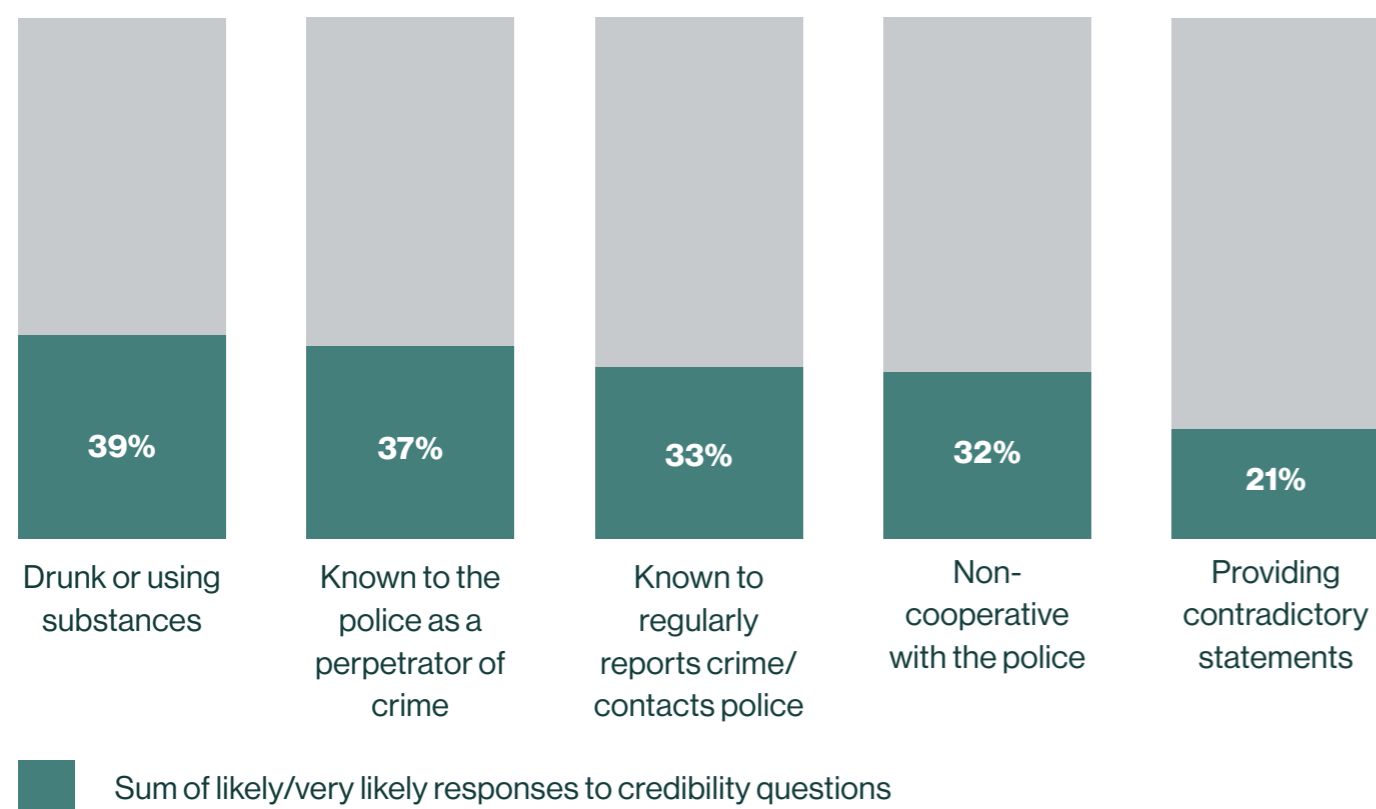
Victim Credibility and Biases

Certain victim characteristics/behaviours, some of which may result from trauma or vulnerability, were observed to influence perceptions of credibility.

Victim credibility was found to be situational and depended on the circumstances. The providing of contradictory statements by victims was found to most likely impact perceived victim credibility. Only 21% of police personnel were likely to see the victim as credible in these circumstances (Figure 4).

Figure 4

A Comparison of Factors influencing Perceptions of Victim Credibility (n=1176)



Where personnel spoke of using vulnerability assessments, these were described to be effective in enabling personnel to understand victims' actions and behaviours, including the providing of conflicting accounts and blunting of emotional expression. Personnel reported that the recognition of vulnerability helped to reduce biases and misinterpretations of victim behaviour and increased the recognition of individuals as victims.

“It can account for discrepancies and conflicting accounts. Victims of domestic abuse and coercive control for example will purposefully lie to protect themselves. Understanding the history and vulnerability makes that incident more of a risk rather than less. And perpetrator manipulation is better understood in the context of a vulnerability assessment.” (Police Officer)

Vulnerability assessments were also reported to be useful in understanding risk and enabled personnel to understand the process of victimisation and the ability of the victim to protect themselves from harm.

Personnel were less likely to feel responsible for capturing the victim voice when they perceived victims were less credible.

The age and sex of the police personnel dealing with the victim was observed to influence credibility. Victim credibility was assessed using a 5-point Likert scale. Personnel were asked to indicate how likely they were to perceive a victim as credible dependant on several factors including engagement with the police, use of substances, and victim-offender overlap. Female personnel were more likely to perceive the victim as credible. Older personnel were, in contrast, less likely to perceive the victim as credible in situations where the victim was known to the police as a perpetrator of crime, or if they provided contradictory statements to the police.

“Sometimes the other victims that you know may have been involved in drug deals or they have also been there with knives and, you know, it's all a bit of six of one, half a dozen of the other. And trying to capture their voices is a different thing altogether.” (Police Officer)

Figure 4m

Personnel Level of Agreement with a Statement Regarding Victim Culpability (n=1181)

I find it hard to understand why some victims continue to place themselves at risk of harm/ remain in abusive environments.



Half of the survey respondents (51%) agreed with the statement that 'there are some victims who do not do enough to help themselves/protect themselves from being a victim of a crime'.

Within the survey and interviews, there were a small number of overt references to victim deservedness or victim credibility, with individuals using terms such as "true victim of crime", "genuine", and "legitimate victim", along with the use of the word victim in quotation marks that seemed to indicate some questioning about whether the individual should be considered as such. Individuals reported challenges:

“Discerning between and [an] actual victim, or someone who has been led to believe [believe] they are a victim is difficult.” (Police Staff)

They also expressed a sense of frustration that policing time is taken up by:

“Dealing with repeat victims who simply do not accept the consequences of their own actions and we are forced to engage with them.” (Police Officer)

Individuals also expressed concern about the term 'victim' and suggested that this can bias investigations as it implies guilt of the suspect, with individuals referencing cases where perceived victims have been found to lie and falsify accounts. Individuals spoke of the role of compassion fatigue in influencing their perceptions of victims and expressed a sense of futility over the limited capacity of the police to affect real change for certain individuals. This was reported to increased cynicism towards such victims and was particularly notable for individuals that experienced repeated victimisation.

“I'm sorry to say that I will do the best I can for someone I consider to be a true victim of crime and that my own biases and experiences have impacted this over many years. The more time I spend away from working frontline, the better my victim care is. Fatigue will impact on your ability to deliver.” (Police Officer)

Respondents also expressed perceptions that victims can use the police for ulterior motives and expressed a belief that victims can be responsible for their own victimisation through leading 'chaotic lives' which suggests a lack of understanding of trauma. Personnel further noted that gender norms and stereotypes can affect the recognition of certain victims, for example male victims of domestic abuse.

“I think not all victims are the same. Some have different needs and some lie to us and are not victims at all. And I think that does detract from the genuine victims. But the reality is you can't always prove that somebody's lying.” (Police Officer)

Personnel were less likely to feel responsible for the capture of victim voice when they held perceptions of victims as 'undeserving'.

Male personnel, those active in investigations, respondents who had daily contact with victims, and respondents who do not work within vulnerability were more likely to agree with statements that appeared to question the deservedness of some victims.

Perceptions Towards Capturing the Victim Voice

Most personnel recognised that the police had a role in capturing the victim's voice, however there was an emphasis on the role of multi-agency partners within this (Figure 4n).

Figure 4n

Personnel Level of Agreement with Several Statements Regarding the Role of the Police in Capturing the Victims' Voice



3 out of **4** personnel agreed/strongly agreed that recording the experiences of victims/witnesses should be a priority for the police (75%).



Approximately **2** out of **3** personnel disagreed/strongly disagreed that the police are expected to spend too much time speaking to victims and witnesses, beyond taking their statement (64%).



Approximately **2** out of **3** personnel agreed/strongly agreed that it should be the responsibility of other agencies to meet the needs of victims/witnesses that do not relate to the investigation (62%).

Those in non-investigative roles displayed a higher level of endorsement of their role in capturing the voice of the victim and were more likely to agree that victims should be given the opportunity to share their experiences and wishes, and these should be taken into account by police when conducting investigations.

“So I think there’s probably a bit of legacy there. I think officers perhaps frontline officers feel like it’s not up to them really to capture that or they might feel like that’s not part of the investigation.” (Police Staff)

Personnel can consider policing targets to be opposed to the capture of the victim voice.

Personnel emphasised that policing is very target driven and that largely these targets focus on criminal justice outcomes e.g., arrest rates, as opposed to victim voice and care; and further reported that such a focus often does not align with the victim’s wishes. In these situations, this can alienate victims and inhibit engagement and future reporting. There was some concern expressed that this can be challenging to manage, as some actions taken by the police may inadvertently place victims at higher risk. When demand is high and time is limited, police personnel and their supervisors reported having to prioritise things that they are measured against. This is often not capture of the victim’s voice.

“For years, policing has been very outcome focused. It’s been about people getting convictions and actually a lot of our victims aren’t interested in that. They want a resolution to a problem. That’s why we get called. Ultimately the conviction element is one way of measuring our outcomes, but it isn’t the be all and end all.” (Police Officer)

Individuals also reflected on the requirement to balance the wishes of the victim against the police’s investigative and safeguarding responsibilities.

Role Orientation

Respondents who had an active role in investigations were more likely to endorse crime fighter role orientations, whereas respondents who were working within vulnerability were more likely to endorse public protector role orientations.

Whilst within the interviews and surveys there was widespread endorsement of the role of the police in capturing the victim voice and engaging with victims, there were a small number of personnel who expressed perceptions that capturing the voice of the victim should not be the role of the police and that they saw the primary role of the police to be the prevention and detection of crime. Some personnel also reported that their peers failed to recognise the importance of capturing the voice of the victim.

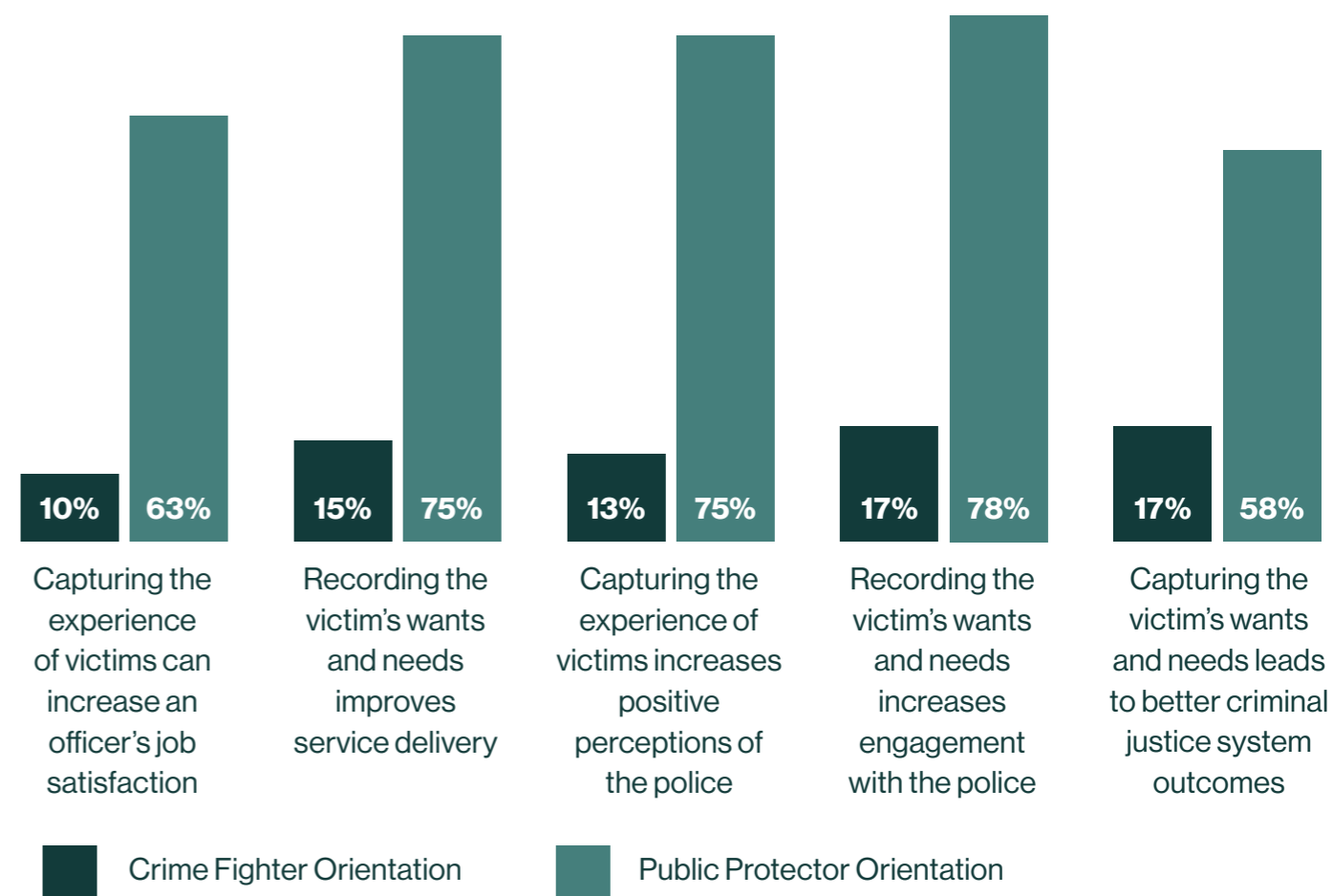
Individuals expressed some concerns about a potential blurring of the police role and their responsibilities when capturing the victim voice. Respondents emphasised the requirements of the police in being neutral and impartial investigators and expressed concern that too much emphasis on the voice of the victim can blur these lines and give the impression that guilt of the suspect is assumed.

“I think there may be some conflict between role of impartial, objective investigator and that of gathering information about victim/witness experiences.” (Police Officer)

Figure 4o displays the percentage of police officers who strongly agreed/agreed to the statements, differentiated by their scores on the role orientation scale.

Figure 4o

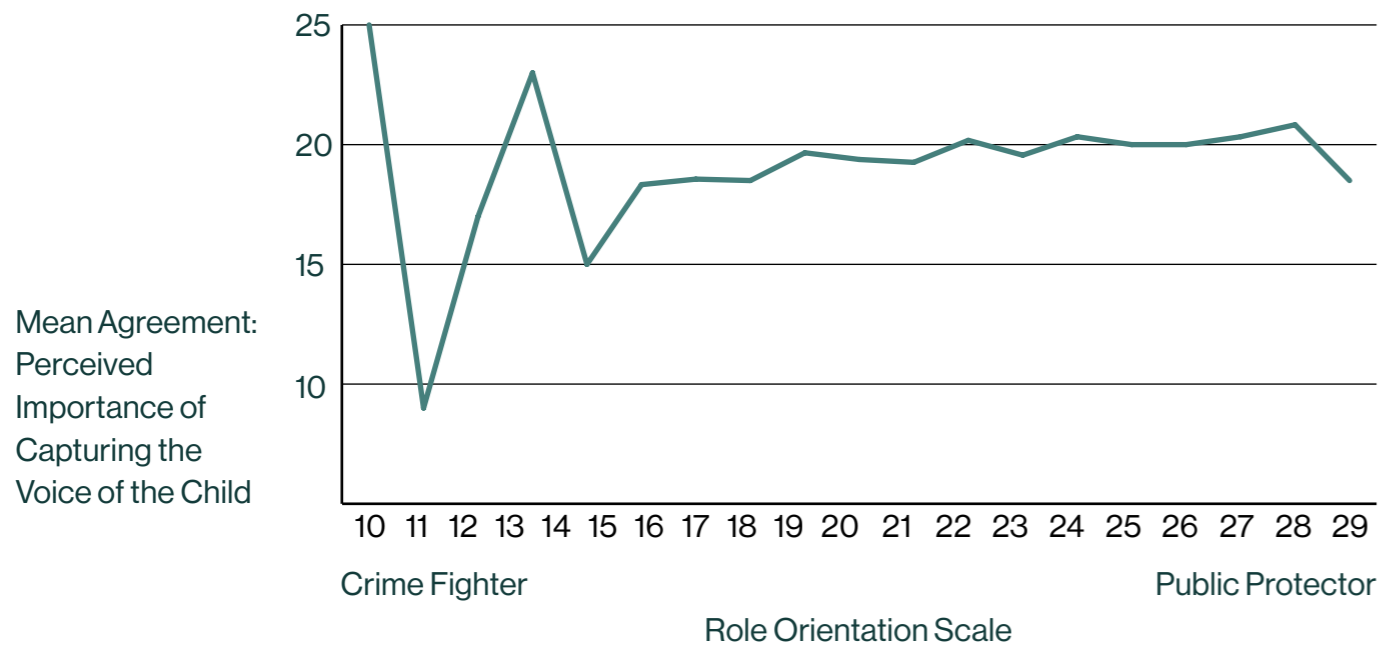
Personnel Level of Agreement with Several Perceived Benefits of Capturing the Victim Voice (n=763)



Police personnel who worked with children on a regular basis, and identified with public protector role orientations, were more likely to perceive capturing the voice of the child as important (Figure 4p).

Figure 4p

The Relationship between Role Orientation and the Perceived Importance of Capturing the Voice of the Child (n=265)



Personnel demonstrated an awareness of the role of the police in supporting referrals to social services and child protection, and the role of the police in safeguarding.

There was also some discussion on role orientation:

“It goes back to how much weight and emphasis are we as the [redacted] putting on that against our other primary function which is to solve crime effectively and we should be doing both, but at the minute it might be an either or until we get one right...at the moment we’re not doing either right or particularly well.” (Police Officer)



Young people from Leaders Unlocked discussed their views on what the police could/should do as part of their role to listen to and capture the child’s voice. They reported that a mix of personal engagement (personnel speaking to CYP and running workshops in schools, primary schools in particular) and the use of social media (as a means of contacting the police) can improve how police listen to and capture the child’s voice.

Boundaries of the Policing Role

Personnel highlighted concerns that often the police are left to ‘solve everything’ and are placed in situations where they are expected to meet victim needs that they are not equipped to deal with (Figure 4q).

Figure 4q

Personnel Level of Agreement with Statements regarding the Police Role



20% of personnel disagreed/strongly disagreed and 18% neither agreed nor disagreed that other agencies should be responsible for meeting the needs of victims that do not relate to the investigation. 17% disagreed/strongly disagreed and 2% neither agreed nor disagreed that it is important for the police to signpost victims/witnesses to support services when needed. Based on responses from the sample of n=1336 and n=511 of police personnel.

Personnel reported that wider public service failings/limitations can result in the police being left with responsibilities beyond the scope of their role. Notably, personnel reported feelings of being left to support victim wellbeing or individuals in mental health crisis and emphasised they did not feel able to do this effectively, resulting in victims not accessing the most appropriate care. The continued demand placed on the police to attend mental health incidents, paired with a lack of appropriate resourcing, has led to the introduction of the Right Care, Right Person model. This has currently been adopted by a small number of forces, and there is a view for all forces to adopt the approach by the end of 2023. The model outlines procedures which the police will follow in relation to more complex mental health needs of vulnerable people, to ensure the right support provider is in place for people who are vulnerable but not direct victims of crime. The effect of this on policing, victims, and the wider public protection sector is yet to be realised however, to make such an approach successful, it will require strong partnership working and monitoring with clear messaging about specific roles and responsibilities.

Officers reported they can feel hindered by the boundaries of the policing role and can feel limited in their ability to enact change for some victims, when referrals to other agencies are not accepted and victims lack an ability to protect themselves from harm yet are unable/unwilling to engage with the police. This suggests that the police need support and help in understanding how to better support and engage with victims who have complex needs, particularly when multi-agency support is not available. Personnel were clear in where they saw the role of the police, and many felt they were expected to overstep this boundary due to limitations within other services and a lack of appropriate resourcing across the wider sector.

“To me that question is asking, “Is the police overstepping their role?” And we have done, we have done for years and years. If it isn’t on fire, call the police. We have seen ourselves as being in charge of pretty much every situation that we’ve gone to and that just isn’t the case. We certainly don’t have the resources, and nor should we, but the people have responsibilities.” (Police Staff)

Benefits of Capturing the Voice of the Victim

Personnel recognised the benefits of capturing the voice of the victim, as it increases positive perceptions of the police, improves service delivery, and increases victim engagement with the police.

Capturing the voice of the victim was also perceived to increase empathy for victims, support relationship building between the police and victim, increase job satisfaction, and increase perceptions among personnel that they are making a difference.

Personnel emphasised the importance of victims feeling as though they have a voice and that they are being listened to and believed. Individuals emphasised this can be crucial in supporting victim recovery/closure and can support victims to regain a sense of control.

“This can be part of the victim’s strength in coming to terms with what has happened, their recovery / counselling, the need to be believed and listened to.” (Police Officer)

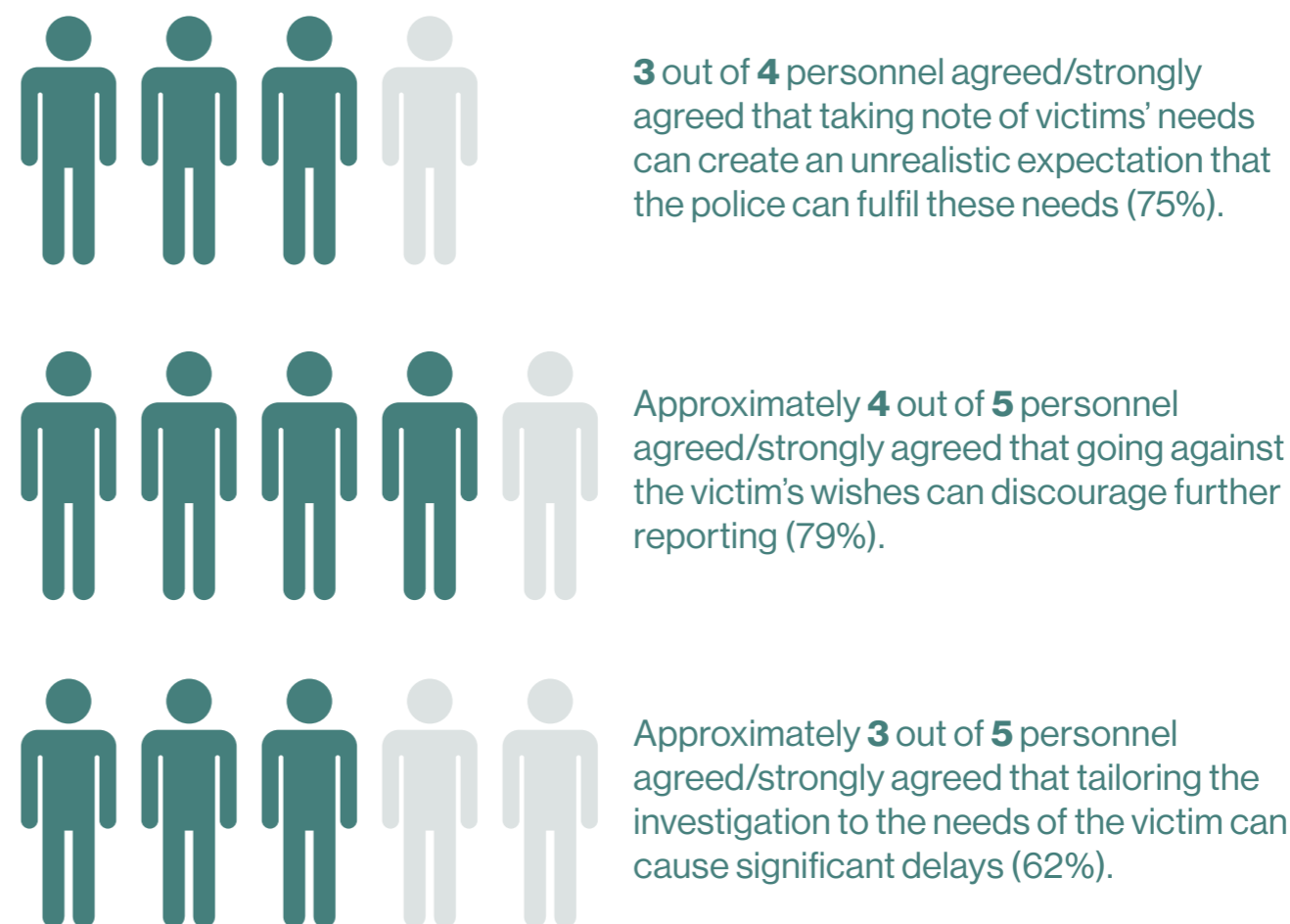
Greater endorsement of public protector role orientations was associated with increased recognition of the benefits of capturing the victim voice among police personnel.

Negative Impacts of Capturing the Voice of the Victim

Most survey respondents identified some negative impacts of capturing the victims’ voice (Figure 4r), such as in incidents where the police must go against the victim’s wishes. This can lead to possible disengagement and discourage further reporting.

Figure 4r

Personnel Level of Agreement with Several Perceived Negative Impacts of Capturing the Victim Voice



Respondents disagreed/strongly disagreed or neither agreed nor disagreed that: taking note of victims’ needs can create an unrealistic expectation that the police can fulfil these needs (15%; 8% respectively); it can be disheartening to hear that victims’ experiences with the police are poor (14%; 9%); and that tailoring the investigation to the needs of the victim can cause significant delays (16%; 21%).



Sharing Practice

- **One force has developed a Child Vulnerability App to support personnel to identify signs of child abuse, understand the actions to take, and detail how to capture voice of the child when attending incidents, including how to interact with the child. The app is available to personnel on their mobiles.**
- **The app includes an acronym outlining the considerations personnel need to make when interacting with children.**

- V** views and values: what are the views and values of the child at risk;
- O** the outcome: what does the child want to happen;
- I** involve and inform the child: understand the impact of the incident and inform them of the actions the police will take and next steps;
- C** capacity and choice: is the child able to make and understand the implications of their decision;
- E** evidence: record evidence from NICHE, professionals, family, and carers. Record everything and don't look at investigations in isolation;
- S** safeguarding and wellbeing: identify the level of vulnerability, risk, and harm, and record immediate safeguarding concerns and the actions taken.

Motivation

Key Messages

- 1** Personnel can hold biases towards, or perceptions about, certain victims which can affect their perceived credibility and the willingness of personnel to capture their voice.
- 2** Perceptions of victim credibility can be affected by a lack of understanding of trauma among personnel.
- 3** Some personnel were clear in where they saw the role of the police and considered the primary responsibility of the police to be targeted towards criminal justice outcomes, as opposed to capturing the victim voice.
- 4** Police targets and outcomes reinforce the primary role of the police to be crime fighting and this affects the willingness/ability of personnel to prioritise the voice of the victim.
- 5** The boundaries of the police role can be unclear within a multi-agency approach, and many personnel feel the police are expected to overstep this boundary.
- 6** Capture of the voice of the victim was considered to have benefits for the police, victims, and wider communities, but personnel also identified a number of negative impacts.

5. Conclusion

'Voice of the Victim' and 'Voice of the Child' are increasingly prioritised within person-centred approaches across all agencies who engage with individuals experiencing vulnerability. Within policing and the wider CJS, the prioritisation of the victim voice is considered to promote the recognition and empowerment of victims and support victim engagement with services (Barrett et al., 2014; Bradford, Jackson & Stanko, 2009). Whilst within recent years there has been an increased focus on the experiences of victims, there are imperatives to increase opportunities to hear the voices of those who encounter the police and CJS, particularly those experiencing vulnerability. This focus is welcome, particularly when considering multiple data sources which indicate that vulnerability needs exceed criminal activity (Early Action Together, 2019), and that individuals experiencing vulnerability are more likely to be victims of crime (Hughes et al., 2012; Nosek et al., 2001).

Considering the emphasis on voice of the victim within policy and safeguarding practice, the present study aimed to develop an understanding of the ways in which 'voice of the victim' is understood within policing, particularly within safeguarding and investigative practice. The findings presented within the report are drawn from a national survey disseminated to policing personnel from 42 forces across England and Wales, along with 29 interviews and one focus group with 13 English and Welsh police forces. The study aims, and key findings, were as follows:

1. Develop a new understanding of the ways in which voice of the victim is understood and situated within safeguarding and investigative practice

Although understanding of the term 'voice of the victim' was mixed, most personnel agreed that the term means providing victims with choice and control over the investigative process and understanding their expectations as a result of reporting a crime. There was also some emphasis on the need for victims to feel listened to and understood. Notably, personnel were more familiar with the phrase 'voice of the child', especially when used in the context of domestic abuse and child sexual abuse. There was no evidence of including the practice of capturing the voice of the victim/child explicitly within force priorities, however individuals reported that often priorities are underpinned by victim care principles which would include voice of the victim.

2. Develop an understanding of, and attitudes towards, the practice of capturing and recording the voices and experiences of victims and witnesses

Most personnel recognised that the police had a role in capturing the victim's voice, however there was an emphasis on the role of multi-agency partners within this. Police personnel who aligned more closely with public protector role orientations were more likely to acknowledge the importance of capturing the voice of the victim. Whilst there was an acknowledgement that the police have a responsibility to engage with and capture the voice of victims, some participants expressed concern about the ability of police personnel to do this, with such an ability considered to be dependent on innate relational skills, rather than taught practices. Victim credibility and the perceived deservedness of victims were also observed to be significant factors in capturing the voice of the victim, with victims perceived as credible and deserving of the victim status more likely to have their voices acknowledged during the investigative process. This is consistent with previous literature which indicates that non-ideal victims experience perceived lower levels of empathy from police officers (Inzunza, 2022).

3. Identify perceived key barriers and enablers to practice in relation to the capture, and recording of, the voice and experiences of victims/witnesses

Police personnel recognised the benefits of capturing the voice of the victim and agreed that this can increase positive perceptions of the police, improve service delivery, and increase victim engagement with the police. There was an emphasis on the importance of relational skills in facilitating communication between the police service and victims. Participants further highlighted the positive impact of the multi-agency approach and the support of partner agencies in capturing the voice of the victim but reported some challenges regarding resourcing and demand. The Victims' Code of Practice was considered useful in capturing the victim voice, but the level of compliance was mixed and often relied on supervisors' dedication to support their teams in following the guidance from the Code.

Police personnel also spoke about multiple barriers to capturing the voices of victims, including the presence of performance measures based on conviction rates, the absence of well-established relationships with communities, and reduced personnel confidence when engaging with diverse communities which was attributed, at least in part, to the experiences of poorer quality of training during the Covid-19 pandemic. Participants discussed their own wellbeing, including the impact of burnout, compassion fatigue, and vicarious trauma, and the negative effect this has on their ability to capture the voice of victims. This was especially relevant where there is lack of readily available and appropriate provisions to support the mental health and wellbeing of police personnel. Such findings similarly echo the emerging learning from Op Soteria (Stanko, 2023).

4. Identify key practice outcomes and interventions required to enable more effective approaches to capturing the voice and experiences of victims and witnesses

The findings identify several factors that limit capability and opportunity to capture the victim's voice, and several limitations regarding the motivation of some personnel to do so. Addressing such factors is therefore a key component in eliciting behaviour change to ensure that police personnel feel confident, supported, and able to capture the voice of the victim.

The findings from the present study suggest a need to ensure clarity in how 'voice of the victim' is understood among personnel from all ranks, and a need to address how victim voice is communicated and prioritised within forces. Some further work that aims to support personnel to endorse their role in capturing the victim's voice would also be beneficial, as would a widespread adoption of a trauma-informed approach to better support both officers and victims. The research also emphasises the value of appropriate and effective recruitment strategies and offers considerations about the types of skills and qualities that should be prioritised within recruitment. Some personnel cited the need for more specialist training which would provide police personnel with skills to support victims.

Most participants agreed that an individualised approach to victims is the most effective, however they emphasised the limited ability of the police to utilise such approaches due to resourcing and demand. Finally, personnel expressed a need to define the boundaries of the policing role. Participants emphasised that they should be supported by the provision of tools and the development of skills which can support the police to engage with vulnerable victims, however considered there needs to be a clear boundary delineating where the competency of the police ends.

The findings from the present study will further broaden our understanding of police personnel attitudes and experiences against a number of measures within the NVAP, with the proposed recommendations influential in driving forward efforts to support effective police engagement with individuals experiencing vulnerability.

Limitations

Whilst the research was guided and informed by previous research and consultation evidence that has explored what victims report from their interactions with the police, the VKPP are mindful that the project only involved police personnel and is, therefore, only representative of the policing perspective. The language used within this report, when discussing the results, is reflective of the language and terminology used by individuals who took part and may not reflect the reality of the experiences of the victim when interacting with the police. Furthermore, it is important to note that this research project was conducted at a time of intense scrutiny of the police, where a number of high-profile cases of police misconduct dominated media commentary. Such cases have been found to negatively impact public perceptions of the police and result in a breakdown of trust between policing and communities, particularly communities affected by structural inequalities and thus may have had some bearing on the present findings.

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7. Appendices

7.1. Appendix A

Consultations

Throughout the duration of the project, numerous consultations were conducted to inform the national survey, the interviews within forces, and the creation of the final output.

The consultations included:

1. Forces across England and Wales - numerous forces were approached to provide feedback on the survey question. As a part of this consultation, a survey pilot was run. Details of the survey pilot can be found in the full Methodological Report.
2. Expert Reference Group - a multidisciplinary group of experts in the field of research and policing which provided support in the formulation presentation of findings from the national survey and interviews.
3. Leaders Unlocked - an initiative that enables young people and underrepresented groups to have a stronger voice on the issues that affect their lives. It helps organisations across education, health, policing and criminal justice sectors to involve the people who matter and shape decision-making for the better. The group provided and insightful feedback on the finding from the national survey and interviews.
4. Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Consortium - a police-based group working on diversity and inclusion in policing and community engagement. The DEI Consortium provided valuable feedback on the findings from the national survey and interviews, along with supporting with bringing awareness to the research to individuals from underrepresented groups within policing.

7.2. Appendix B

Phase 1: The survey

The information presented here is a brief overview of the methodology and demographic information about personnel who took part within the research project. A detailed technical report is available upon request from vkpp@norfolk.police.uk.

The research team submitted a request for ethical approval of the study to the Institute for Applied Social Research (IASR) Research Institute Ethics Committee (RIEP) at the University of Bedfordshire on 6th of September 2021. Ethical approval with minor advice was granted on 15th of October 2021 (IASR_02/21).

All analysis conducted for this data followed bivariate procedure of testing. Descriptive analysis was conducted to outline the sociodemographic characteristics of the sample. Frequencies were used to establish endorsement of stand-alone responses. Pearson correlation was used to determine relationships between variables and their strength and direction. ANOVA analysis of variance and t-test analysis were employed to conduct the between groups comparison, whereas regression analysis was used to determine predictors. A priori G* Power analysis was conducted ahead of analysis to estimate if the sample size is sufficient for the analysis to detect meaningful effect with consideration of minimum acceptable power of 0.80 (Kang, 2021). The final sample size exceeded the minimal required sample size of n=400 participants.

The respondents invited to take part in the survey were any police officer (of any rank) and police staff across the 43 territorial forces of England and Wales, and the British Transport Police and National Crime Agency. The survey was open between the 22nd November 2021 and the 28th January 2022 and was accessed through an online platform (SmartSurvey). The survey was embedded within a flyer and was distributed across all forces through a range of networks (e.g. national police associations), accompanied by a letter of support signed by relevant VPP Chief Officers. Respondents were informed that the survey was anonymous and voluntary. A total of 2,065 personnel opened the survey, with 1,342 surveys completed and available for analysis. Completed surveys were received from 42 territorial forces in England and Wales, however representation was mixed across forces. A description of the sample is provided below.

The survey explored:

- Police personnel awareness of their responsibilities in capturing the victims voice and their attitudes towards this.
- Personnel understanding of their force priorities, and their ability to adhere to these, alongside understanding of the Victims' Code.
- Attitudes towards victims, including perceptions of credibility and deservedness.
- The perceived benefits to capturing the victims voice, alongside the perceived barriers, enablers, and impacts of doing so.
- Training personnel had received in capturing the voice of the victim, alongside experiences of this training.
- Personnel confidence in capturing the voice of the victim.
- Engaging with victims and witnesses from diverse groups and working with victims who are unable, or who do not want to, engage with the police.
- Experiences working with other professionals, including intermediaries.
- Experiences and attitudes towards capturing the voice of the child.
- Understanding of the term 'voice of the victim'.

Phase 2: In-depth interviews and Focus Group

Twenty-nine interviews and one focus group with police personnel was conducted online (via Microsoft Teams) between 11th May 2022 and 27th September 2022. The focus group comprised of four police personnel who worked in frontline roles across two forces. Ethical approval with minor advice was granted by the University of Bedfordshire on 14th of December 2021 (IASR_05/21) and all participants provided informed consent prior to taking part.

All police forces were initially contacted to seek permission to conduct focus groups and interviews with personnel. Personnel were then recruited through volunteer, purposive sampling, with senior personnel supporting with the dissemination of a flyer advertising the research project. The flyer included a link to a survey where personnel could express their interest in taking part and provide their demographic information.

The interviews and focus group allowed for a more detailed exploration of the topics and themes identified within the survey and explored:

- The understanding and use of the term ‘voice of the victim’ within forces.
- Personnel knowledge of the priorities of their force and whether these priorities incorporated voice of the victim.
- Practice regarding capture of the voice of the child.
- Exploration of the training personnel had received to support them to capture the voice of the victim.
- The use of evidence-led prosecutions.
- Perceptions of victims’ expectations as a result of reporting a crime.
- Barriers and enablers to capturing the victim’s voice.

Interview questions were differentiated by role, with those working at the rank of Chief Inspector or above asked questions regarding how they support personnel to capture the voice of the victim, and those working at the rank of Inspector or below asked to comment on their personal experiences capturing voice of the victim. Allocation of personnel to strategic and frontline roles was informed by the College of Policing Professional Profiles which categorises officer and staff roles against five organisational levels. Fifteen police forces provided permission, with personnel from 13 of these forces taking part in an interview or focus group. Analysis of the data was conducted on NVivo using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Respondents

The survey - demographic characteristics

A total of 1,342 surveys were completed and included in the analysis. The average age of the respondents was 43 years-old, ranging between 19 and 69-years-old. Just over half of respondents identified as female, and slightly fewer than half identified as male. Only a small proportion of respondents identified as a gender other than male or female (Table 7a). The sample was predominantly White British (Table 7b) and most of the sample identified as either Christian or secular (Table 7c). Only a small proportion of the sample reported a disability (Table 7d). Finally, the majority of the sample identified as heterosexual (Table 7e).

Participants were specifically asked to report their gender identity as opposed to their sex. The options provided to personnel were informed by guidance from Equality and Human Rights Commission, available at: https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/rr75_final.pdf

Table 7a

Gender Identity	%*
Female	53%
Male	42%
Non-Binary	0%
Other	0%
Prefer not to answer	4%
Missing	1%

Table 7b

Ethnicity	%*
Asian/Asian British	2%
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British	1%
Mixed/Multiple Ethnic Groups	3%
White	90%
Other Ethnic Group	3%
Missing	2%

Table 7c

Religion	%*
Buddhist	1%
Christian	44%
Hindu	0%
Jewish	0%
Muslim	1%
Sikh	1%
No Religion	42%
Other	3%
Prefer not to answer	8%
Missing	1%

*all numbers rounded to whole numbers.

Table 7d

Disability	%*
Yes	13%
No	83%
Prefer not to answer	4%
Missing	1%

Table 7e

Sexual Orientation	%*
Asexual	1%
Bisexual	3%
Gay Man	1%
Gay Woman/Lesbian	3%
Heterosexual	80%
Pansexual	1%
Prefer to self-describe	0%
Prefer not to answer	9%
Missing	1%

The survey – professional characteristics

Nearly half of the respondents entered the police service via direct application to a police force (Initial Police Learning and Development Programme, IPLDP), with others joining through apprenticeships, pre-join degree's, degree holder entry programmes, and direct entry initiatives (Figure 7a below). A significant proportion (40%) were educated to an undergraduate degree level (Figure 7b). The majority were also police officers (Figure 7c), with most serving at the rank of Constable/Detective Constable (Table 7f). Length of service ranged from 0-51 years, with a mean length of service of 15 years.

*all numbers rounded to whole numbers.

Figure 7a
Point of Entry*

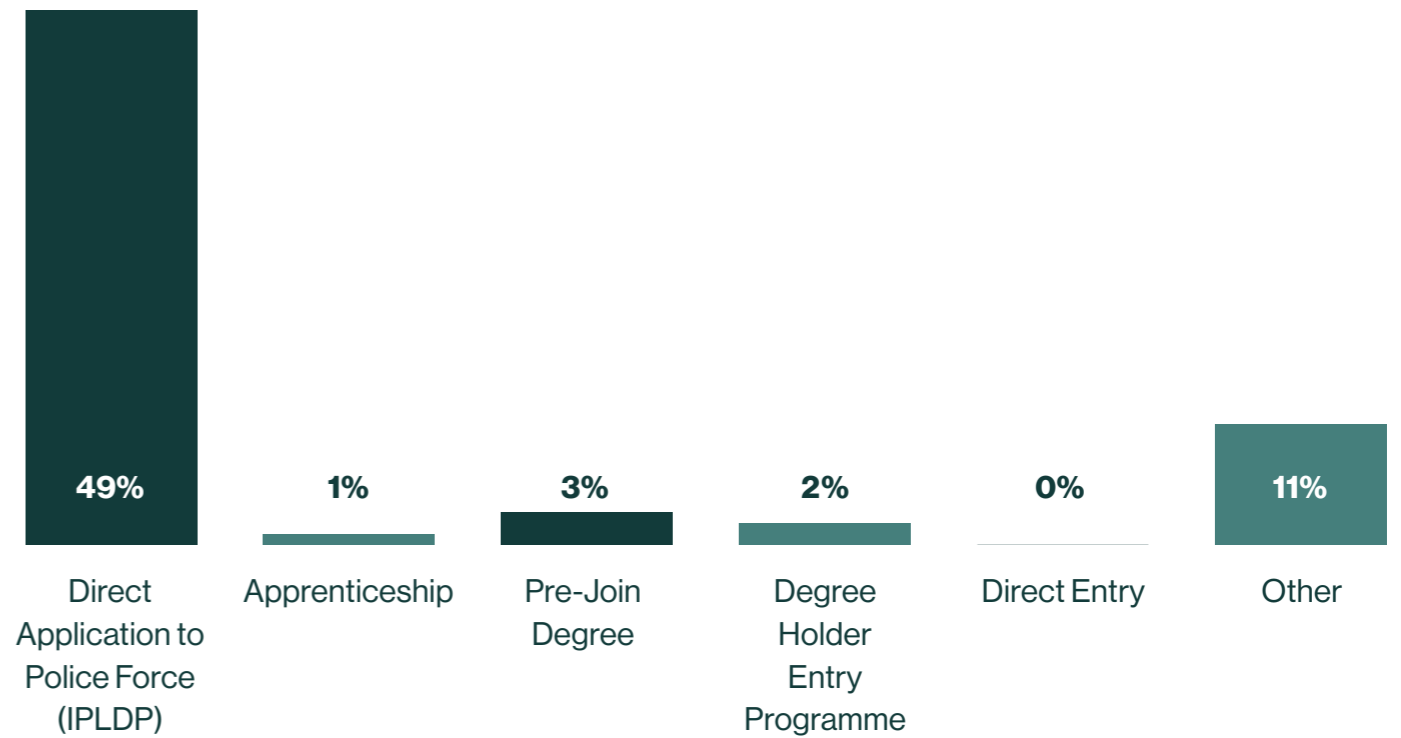
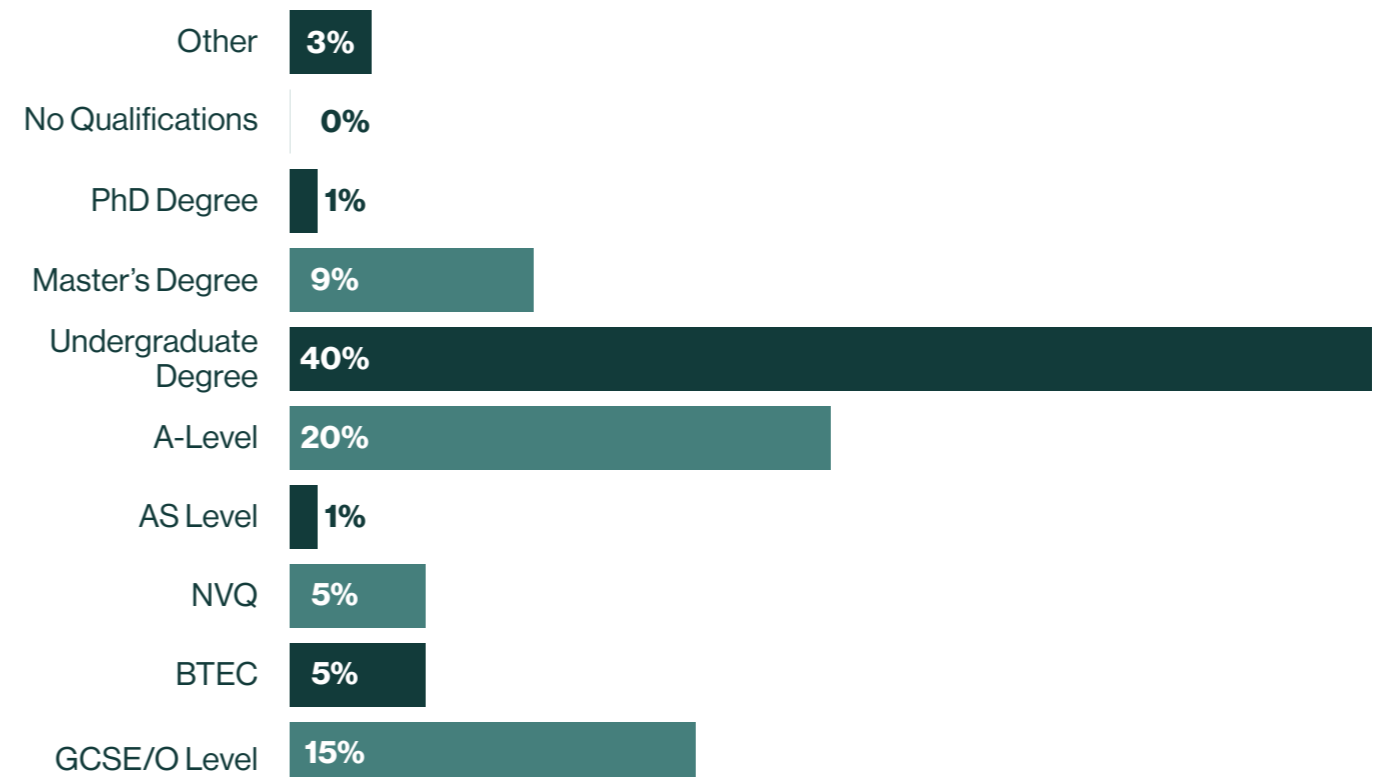


Figure 7b
Educational Level*



*all numbers rounded to whole numbers

Figure 7c

Job Role*

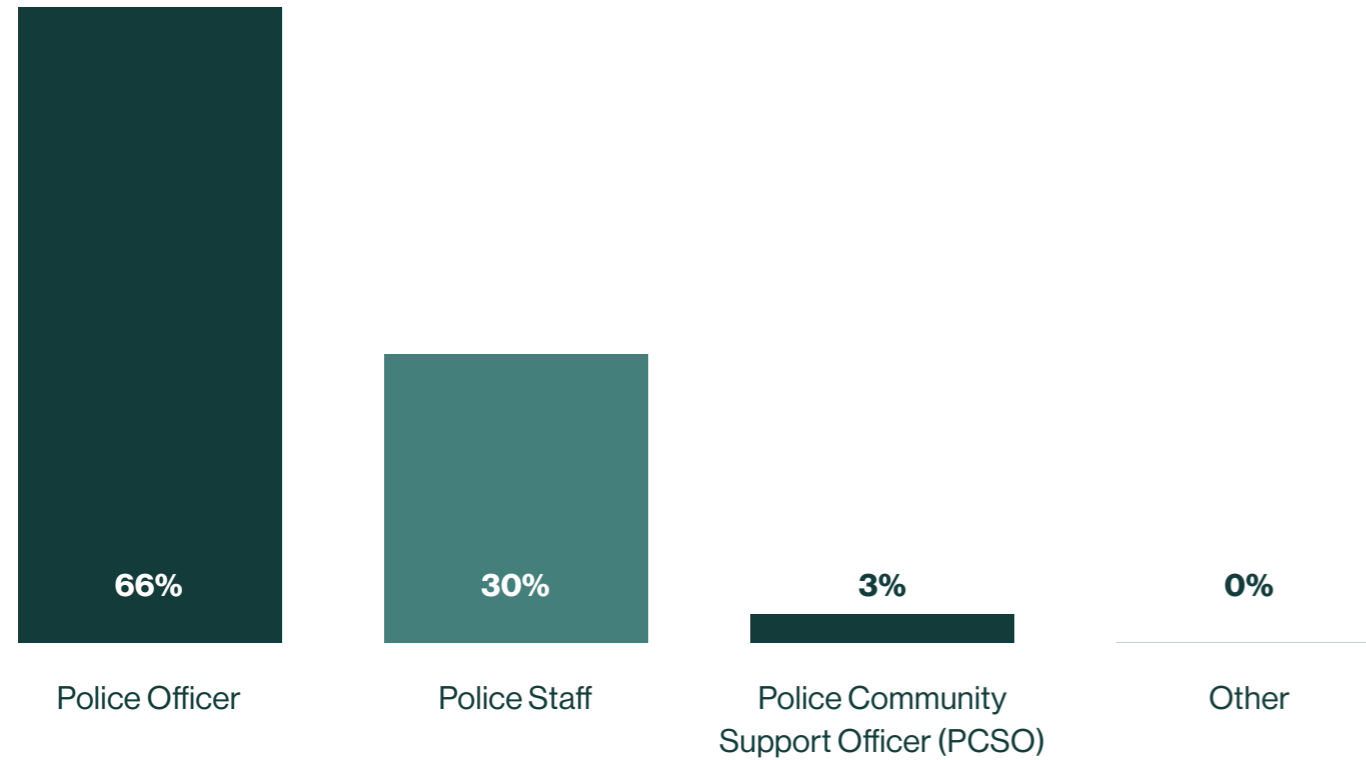


Table 7f

Rank	%*
Constable/Detective Constable	43%
Sergeant/Detective Sergeant	12%
Inspector/Detective Inspector	6%
Chief Inspector/Detective Chief Inspector	3%
Superintendent/Chief Superintendent	2%
Chief Superintendent/Detective Chief Superintendent	1%
Assistant Chief Constable	0%
Chief Constable	0%
Other	0%

*all numbers rounded to whole numbers.

Areas and Type of Work

Of the police survey sample, the most common area for personnel to work in was rape and sexual offences, followed by child abuse and domestic abuse (Table 7g below).

Table 7g

Areas of Vulnerability	%*
Rape and Sexual Offences	22%
Adults at Risk	22%
Child Abuse	21%
Domestic Abuse	19%
Child Sexual Exploitation	17%
Stalking and Harassment	14%
Forced Marriage and Honour-Based Abuse	12%
Modern Slavery	10%
Female Genital Mutilation	10%
Missing Persons	9%
Sex Work and Prostitution	7%
Gangs and Youth Violence	6%
Operation Hydrant	5%

Please note that police personnel could indicate that they worked in more than one vulnerability area.

Most of the survey sample had an active role in investigations and had daily contact with victims but did not have supervisory responsibilities or work within vulnerability areas (Table 7h, below).

*all numbers rounded to whole numbers.

Table 7h

Job Type and Responsibilities	Yes	No
Supervisory Responsibilities	33%*	67%
Active Role in Investigations	59%	41%
Daily Contact with Victims	63%	37%
Work within Vulnerability	39%	61%

Qualitative interviews and focus group

Personnel were drawn from thirteen English and Welsh police forces, with 33 personnel taking part. Most personnel were police officers working at the rank of constable who worked in operational roles. Most worked within vulnerability and had an active role within investigations (Table 7i below).

Table 7i

Job Type and Responsibilities	%*	
Role	Police Officer	85%
	Police Staff	12%
	PCSO	3%
Rank	Operational	73%
	Strategic	27%
Job Responsibilities	Works within Vulnerability	64%
	Does not work within Vulnerability	36%
	Works in a role involved in Investigation/ Safeguarding Practice	94%
	Does not work in a role involved in investigation/safeguarding practice	6%

Just over half of the sample reported their sex as female and the sample was predominantly white (Table 7j).

Table 7j

Demographic Information	Yes	No
Sex	55%* Female	45% Male
Ethnicity	97% White	3% Not Disclosed

*all numbers rounded to whole numbers.

7.3. Appendix C

Glossary of Terms

Term	Meaning
Achieving Best Evidence (ABE) Interviews	The interview guidance set out in ABE includes video-recorded interviews with vulnerable and intimidated witnesses where the recording is intended to be played as evidence-in-chief in court. ABE promotes a strong victim-centred and trauma-informed approach throughout the guidance.
APP	APP guidance is produced by the College of Policing and is the official source of professional practice for policing in England and Wales.
Child	A person under the age of 18.
College of Policing	A professional body established in 2012 for the police in England and Wales.
Compassion	Compassion is defined as the feeling or emotion, when a person is moved by the suffering or distress of another, and by the desire to relieve it (Oxford Dictionary). Compassion often allows for greater emotional distance between you and the suffering you are observing and requires action.
Correlation	A statistical measure for exploring whether there is a relationship between two variables.
Criminal Justice System	The system which investigates, prosecutes, sentences and monitors individuals who are suspected or convicted of committing a criminal offence. This also encompasses institutions responsible for imprisonment, probation and sentences served in the community.
Domestic Abuse	Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members ¹ regardless of gender or sexuality. This can encompass, but is not limited to, the following types of abuse: • psychological • physical • sexual • financial • emotional 'Controlling behaviour is: a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour. Coercive behaviour is an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim.
EDI	Equity, diversity and inclusion.

Term	Meaning
Empathy	Empathy is defined as the ability to understand another person's feelings or experiences (Oxford Dictionary).
Ethnicity	Refers to aspects of culture that are shared, such as language, clothing and dress, religion, and foods, and influence a way of life.
Evidence-led prosecutions	A prosecution where the victim decides to not support a prosecution, and in turn, prosecutors need to decide whether it is possible to bring forward a case without that support.
Focus group	A small group of people that are brought together to discuss a particular topic. Focus group discussions are usually facilitated.
HBV	Honour-Based Violence. Also described as 'so-called Honour-Based Abuse'.
Intermediary	Intermediaries are communication specialists who assist vulnerable victims, witnesses, suspects and defendants with significant communication deficits to communicate their answers more effectively during police interview and when giving evidence at trial' (Department of Justice, 2022).
ISVA	Independent Sexual Violence Adviser.
Leaders Unlocked	An initiative that enables young people and underrepresented groups to have a stronger voice on the issues that affect their lives. They help organisations across education, health, policing, and criminal justice sectors to involve the people who matter and shape decision-making for the better.
LGBTQIA+	Lesbian, gay, bi, trans, queer, questioning, ace.
Likert scales	Likert scales are linear rating systems designed to measure people's attitudes, opinions, or perceptions. Commonly used in surveys and questionnaires, the respondent is asked to choose from a range of possible responses to specific questions or statements. Across victim satisfaction survey questions, responses typically included "extremely satisfied", "dissatisfied", "neither dissatisfied nor satisfied", "satisfied" or "extremely satisfied".
Lived experience	Personal knowledge about the world gained through direct, first-hand involvement of everyday events rather than through representations constructed by other people.
Minoritised groups	Individuals and populations, including numerical majorities, whose collective cultural, economic, political and social power has been eroded through the targeting of identity in active processes that sustain structures of hegemony (Selvarajah et al., 2020)
Marginalised ethnic communities	Referring to racial and ethnic groups that are in a minority in the population.

Term	Meaning
Mixed-methods approach	This approach combines qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis in one study. This approach can provide more in-depth findings.
NPCC	National Police Chiefs' Council
NVAP	National Vulnerability Action Plan
Participant(s)	Within the context of this report, 'participant(s)' refers to any individual(s) interviewed by the research team.
Partner Agencies	Staff from the Office of Police and Crime Commissioner, local authorities or other statutory agencies.
PCCs	Police and Crime Commissioners
Personnel	For this report, the term personnel is used to refer to police officers and staff and is inclusive of all ranks and roles.
Perennial Issues	The College of Policing undertook research to obtain a view of priorities for improvements in, or providing support to, policing over the short and medium term. The 'perennial issues' identified refer to ten recurring areas where action is needed to drive improvement for the public across a range of contexts, rather than for a particular crime type or operational area of policing. Victim Engagement and Care is one of those areas.
Procedural Justice Theory	According to procedural justice theory (Tyler, 2004), if people feel they are treated in a procedurally fair and just way, starting from the very first contact, they will view those in authority as more legitimate and respect them more. They are more likely to comply and engage, even when the outcomes of the decisions or processes are unfavourable or inconvenient. Procedural Justice Theory combines 4 key principles: voice, neutrality, respect, and trustworthiness. Voice is defined as providing communities with the opportunity to have a voice in the decision-making process and listening to them; neutrality is defined as the absence of bias and prejudice in police procedures, conduct, and decisions; respect is defined as behaving in a way that protects citizens' rights, treats individuals with dignity, and values input from the public; trustworthiness is defined as showing care and concern for the safety and wellbeing of communities and acting on their behalf to provide reassurance and solve problems (Police Now, 2020).
Qualitative data/research	Qualitative research uses words and themes, rather than numbers, to answer research questions. Qualitative social research seeks to observe and understand social situations without measuring them using numbers, for example, through interviews with people.

Term	Meaning
Quantitative data/ research	Numerical data that can be counted or measured.
Relational skills	The capacity of an individual to interact with and relate to other people, including the ability to communicate effectively, convey messages, and engage with others.
Role Orientation	Police officer role orientations have traditionally been focused towards crime fighting orientations, however a focus on community policing has promoted a broader role orientation of order maintenance and public protection. For the purposes of the present research, the research team developed a scale that explored police personnel's alignment with public protector and/or crime fighter role orientations. Those scoring 15 or less out of a possible score of 30 were assigned to the crime fighter category, whereas those scoring 16 or above were assigned to the public protector category.
Semi-structured interviews	Qualitative research method using a pre-determined set of open questions.
Sexual violence	Any kind of sexual activity or act that takes place that is unwanted and without consent.
Serious crimes	According to the Serious Crimes Act 2015, serious and organised crime includes drug trafficking, human trafficking, organised illegal immigration, child sexual exploitation, high value fraud and other financial crime, counterfeiting, organised acquisitive crime and cyber crime
Structural inequality	A condition where one category of people are attributed an unequal status in relation to other categories of people. This relationship is perpetuated and reinforced by a confluence of unequal relations in roles, functions, decisions, rights, and opportunities (UNESCWA). Victims affected by structural inequalities can face greater barriers to making their voices heard, and these effects can be compounded when individuals belong to multiple, intersecting marginalised groups
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls
Victim/victims	Those who have been subject to, or have witnessed, a crime. The term victim is inclusive of all nine protected characteristics: age, disability, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, and pregnancy and maternity (Equality Act, 2010).
Victims' Code/Victim Code of Practice	The Code of Practice for Victims of Crime is a statutory guidance that sets out the minimum level of service that victims should receive from the criminal justice system.

Term	Meaning
VKPP	Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme.
VKPP Research Expert Reference Group	A group of experts within the policing sector, comprised of academics and practitioners, who offer guidance and feedback to the research strand within the VKPP.
Voice	The term 'voice' covers both the verbal articulation of wishes, experiences, and needs, alongside non-verbal indicators and features of the individuals' context, environment, and relationships. Voice not only means capturing and recording wishes, experiences, and needs, but also listening to and considering voices to influence and inform decision making.
Voice of the victim	The perspective of individuals subjected to, or witnesses of, crime. In order to deliver authentic policing (and other agency) services, it is important that all individuals are listened to and their description of experiences taken seriously. By listening to, considering and recording the voice of the victim, police can develop a better understanding of individual's lived experiences. In turn, this can be used to help shape improvements of services delivered, criminal justice outcomes and their experiences of criminal justice processes, for those at their most vulnerable.
VPP	Violence and Public Protection.
Vulnerable	The College of Policing (2021b) states that: "A person is vulnerable if, as a result of their situation or circumstances, they are unable to take care of or protect themselves or others from harm or exploitation." Within this report we also recognise the intersectionality of vulnerabilities and the wider structural issues that result in inequalities and can lead to vulnerability.
Vulnerability	The quality or state of being exposed to the possibility of being attacked or harmed, either physically or emotionally.
Vulnerability-related crime	Crime types recognised as having barriers to reporting, require specialist support, are sensitive and complex in their nature and often have a long term psychological and emotional effect on victims.

7.4. Appendix D

What are some of the existing attitudes held by police personnel about capturing ‘voice of the victim’ in their safeguarding and investigation work and do these attitudes appear to vary dependent on victim/witness characteristics and contexts?

- Do attitudes towards ‘voice of the victim’ vary in relation to vulnerability, characteristics of victims/witnesses or response contexts?

What are some of the existing attitudes held by police personnel about capturing ‘voice of the victim’ in their safeguarding and investigation work and do these attitudes appear to vary dependent on their own characteristics?

- How far do personnel consider capturing the ‘voice of the victim’ to be an essential part of their role? (e.g. depending on role orientation)

What benefits do police personnel consider are gained from capturing the ‘voice of the victim’ in safeguarding and investigation practices?

- What benefits (to victims, to investigations, to CJS outcomes, to officers) have police personnel observed from capturing the views of victims within safeguarding and investigative processes?
- Are there any negative impacts that police personnel have observed in gathering the views of victims in safeguarding and investigative practices? (for example, police may need to act in opposition to the wishes of victims and what are the perceived impacts to victims and/or self?)

How do police personnel capture and record ‘voice of the victim’ in their safeguarding and investigative practices and what are the perceived enablers and barriers in doing so?

- How is ‘voice of the victim’ captured and recorded in safeguarding and investigation? (When? Who by? Where? What purpose?)
- How is learning from capturing voice of the victim in safeguarding and investigative practices recorded and used to shape on-going / broader service design? (to enable us to identify crossover with Strand 2 of the research).
- How well aligned with the Victim’s Code is current practice?