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# AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF INCLUSIVE PRACTICES WITHIN THE SCOTTISH POLICE FORCE

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# Background



- Autistic people are more likely to come into contact with the criminal justice system (CJS), either as a victim/witness (Chaplin & Mukhopadhyay, 2017) or a suspect (Salerno & Schuller 2019) despite no evidence that they commit crimes at a higher rate than the general population (King & Murphy, 2014).
- A recently accumulating body of research shows that their experiences within the CJS are largely negative (Gibbs & Haas, 2020).
- It is necessary that police have relevant training, knowledge and awareness of autism to allow for inclusive practices and facilitate access to justice.

# Inclusivity Issues within the Police

- It is essential that police officers are trained at each stage of interaction within the CJS (e.g. first response, custody, interview etc).
- Recognition of autism and autistic traits may be difficult for police officers when initially attending the scene of a crime. However, there has to be opportunity for disclosure of diagnosis and for the officer to then act appropriately.
- Autistic people often feel negatively stereotyped by disclosing their diagnosis, which may be due to lack of understanding (Crane et al., 2016).
- Chown (2010) showed police officers misunderstand the differences between developmental disabilities (e.g. autism) and mental health difficulties.

# Current Study

- Aims to assess the experience and views of police officers' interactions with autistic people, within Police Scotland
- Research Question:
  - What are the main perceived barriers to inclusive practices and what supports need to be put in place?



# Method

## Participants:

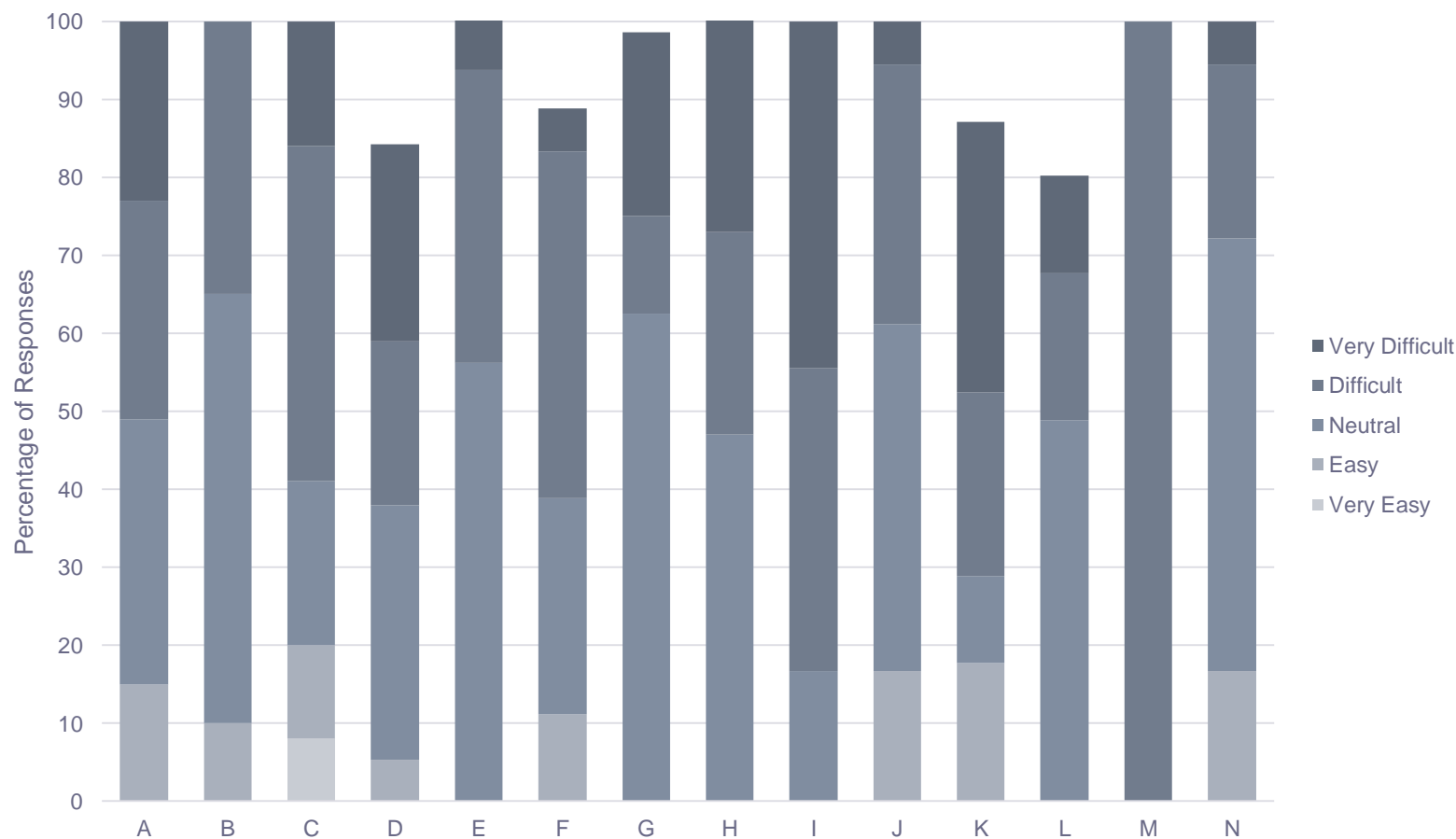
- 119 police officers from Police Scotland
  - 15 Custody Officers
  - 8 Police Inspectors
  - 8 Superintendents
  - 24 Community Support Officers
  - 10 Police Sergeants
  - 54 Police Constables

Measures: An online survey developed by Crane et al. (2016) was utilised to measure quantitative and qualitative responses



# Quantitative Results

Police ratings of ease/difficulty for their experiences with autistic people in different aspects of policing



A = Obtaining a written statement (n=58)

B = Interviewing (n=37)

C = Managing distress (n =108)

D = Managing unexpected changes to procedures (n = 115)

E = Explaining procedures (n = 68)

F = Managing sensory issues (n=42)

G = Managing memory issues (n=67)

H = Helping to focus, engage and/or cooperate (n=86)

I = Meeting communication needs (n=108)

J = Building and maintaining rapport (n=110)

K = Providing adequate interviewing facilities and environment (n=42)

L = Finding appropriate support (n=35)

M = Carrying out identification parades (n=1)

N = Understanding ASD (n=112)

# Qualitative Results: Barriers

## TRAINING

“Training seems to be mostly online, on Moodle”

“Due to cost, abstraction and training priorities, it is likely that only higher ranking officers will attend workshops which will give them an intimate knowledge of interviewing suspects/witness with ASD”.

“an ability to identify a person who has ASD allows officers to immediately consider their behaviour and skill sets needed going forward with interrogation”

## TIME CONSTRAINTS

“time pressure, awareness, access to support”

“time constraints police have to deal with incidents”

## CATERING FOR NEEDS

“tailoring of interviews when dealing with an ASD suspect, witness or victim”.

“custody suites require to be more ASD friendly”



# Qualitative Results: Good Practice

## ACCESSING SUPPORT

“awareness of support by the system available when dealing with someone with ASD”

“professionalism, it helps immensely if the police have prior knowledge that the person is affected and that they will have some form of support, whilst police are in attendance”

## AUTISM AWARENESS

“to understand the need to explain actions before they are carried out, to mitigate stress and to ask direct and literal questions”.

“an ability to recognise that distress and lack of cooperation does not represent a lack of cooperation but is likely to be said individuals reaction to the whole process”

“being taught the spectrum is wide and each individual will have varying needs and requirements”

# Conclusions



- There is widespread uncertainty/dissatisfaction when dealing with an autistic person within Police Scotland, with the majority of police finding aspects of interactions very difficult or difficult.
- The reported barriers to interactions are reported as time constraints, training and autistic accommodations. This is in line with previous research (eg Crane et al. 2016)
- There is increased recognition and a sense of support available for officers.
- The study highlighted a need for appropriate training to be given to all police officers regardless of rank in order for the development of police strategies for effective engagement and inclusion of autistic individuals with the CJS.