

Peacock, D. Holland, C. and Hutchinson, P. (2024) Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) in Police Custody' at BSC Annual Conference 2024 University of Strathclyde Glasgow 10-12 July

## Abstract

The police custody setting is one of the most challenging environments a person can experience in terms of communication requirements. The suspect is required to respond to complex questions with potentially unfamiliar vocabulary and rapid topic changes, while remembering and articulating an experience in sequence, against a milieu of heightened emotions. Unsupported speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) represent a significant barrier in this context where engagement is heavily reliant on effective comprehension and communication. SLCN has been described as a 'hidden' disability; with difficulties such as poor understanding and use of expressive language often not noticeable to non-experts. This paper will illustrate that people who have SLCN are more prevalent in criminal justice settings than in the wider population. Previous research focusing primarily on young people and the prison population has led to calls for early interventions and screening, particularly in youth justice settings. The paper presents data from NHS Liaison and Diversion (L&D) referrals in a single police force region in England that were screened for SLCN over a period of three months. The results indicate a need for early identification of SLCN for all age groups, and for those with no previous SLCN-related diagnoses.