

Stressors or facilitators? Exploring the factors that impact police officers' abilities to respond to disablist hate crime

Jemmy Tyson, University of Portsmouth

Abstract

Purpose The purpose of this paper is to explore stressors and facilitators experienced by police officers when engaging with individuals with learning disabilities, within the context of policing disablist hate crime.

Design/methodology/approach This paper is based on qualitative data obtained from research undertaken within a medium sized police force in the south of England, and which focuses on the lived realities of service providers and service users. Using a triangulatory research approach, this research included a total of 230 hours of observations of day-to-day policing, 10 semi-structured interviews with police officers and 4 focus groups with individuals with learning disabilities.

Findings Stressors, previously identified by Lipsky (1980) – the unpredictability of situations, workload pressures, and need for rapid decision making – are discussed within the research, alongside additional stressors regarding the previous experience (internal and external to policing) held by police officers. For some officers, these have the opposite impact and serve as facilitators of positive engagements with individuals with learning disabilities. The discussion is situated within the social model of disability, with an emphasis placed on the impact stressors have on police processes. Finally, the paper suggests practical options for enhancing confidence within the interactions between these two groups, through police training.

Originality The current paper explores an under-researched area of policing and disablist hate crime and utilises a combined approach of the social model of disability and Lipsky's (1980) street-level bureaucrats.

Keywords hate crime, disability, decision making, police training, police-community relations, policing

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

In England and Wales, a hate crime is defined as “any criminal offence which is perceived, by the victim or any other person, to be motivated by hostility or prejudice towards someone based on a personal characteristic” (College of Policing, 2020). At the time of writing, there were five protected characteristics which were centrally monitored, meaning police forces are required to record such incidents: race, religion, sexual orientation, disability and transgender.

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In 2019/20, 105,090 hate crimes were recorded by police in England and Wales, (excluding Greater Manchester Police) and of this, 8,469 (8.1%) were disablist hate crimes (HM Government, 2020) – these being crimes motivated by or demonstrating prejudice or hostility towards one’s disability. This was a rise of 9% (from 7,786) in 2018/19. Comparatively, data from the combined Crime Survey of England and Wales (the largest victimisation survey within this jurisdiction) for 2015/16 and 2017/18 estimates that there were 52,000 disablist hate crimes per year (HM Government, 2018), highlighting a significant issue of underreporting. It is worth noting that this rise in recorded disablist hate crimes has occurred against a backdrop of declining police numbers. As of 30 September 2010, within the 43 police forces of England and Wales there were 142,363 police officers, 81,752 police staff and designated officers, and 16,376 Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) (HM Government, 2010). As of 30 September 2020, all three categories had seen a decrease in numbers with police officers down 7% (to 132, 467), police staff and designated officers down 9% (to 74,572), and PCSOs down 44% (to 9,115) (HM Government, 2020).

Much of the existing academic literature on disablist hate crime explores some of the potential explanations for the underreporting of this type of victimisation (Beadle-Brown *et al.*, 2014; EHRC, 2011; Quarmby, 2008; Sin, 2015), the experiences of such victimisation (Chakraborti *et al.*, 2014; Healy, 2019; Wilkin, 2020) and the challenges in recognising and identifying disablist hate crime (Mason-Bish, 2013; Roulstone and Sadique, 2013; Thomas, 2011; Tyson *et al.*, 2015). However, there is a gap in knowledge surrounding the understanding of experiences of police officers in tackling this type of crime and their ability and confidence in engaging with people with (learning) disabilities. Inspection reports such as the Criminal Justice Joint Inspection (CJJI) in 2013 and the follow up in 2015 found that officers felt awkward about dealing with and asking questions about disability and lacked confidence in identifying disabilities. In 2018, a joint inspection by Her Majesty’s Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HMCPSI) and Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Service (HMICFRS) focused on the handling of disablist hate crime cases by police and the CPS. The findings acknowledged that whilst improvements have been made within some aspects of casework, police and prosecutors were still not sufficiently considering the needs of disablist hate crime victims and that the level of adequate response varied widely across HMICFRS’s sample. Within academia, work by Sin *et al.*, (2012) and Trickett and Hamilton (2016) has explored the extent to which police services are able to deal with disablist hate crimes, from both a policy and practical perspective. Whilst both studies found that police officers are committed to the tackling of disablist

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3 hate crime, issues were identified surrounding the lack of and quality of training
4 on hate crime that is provided.
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8 This paper therefore explores the experiences of police officers, with specific
9 attention paid to factors that shape their ability and confidence to respond to
10 disablist hate crime. In a separate but relevant area of study, Hobfoll *et al.* (2003,
11 p.632) recognise these ‘personal resources’ as being “linked to resiliency and
12 refer to individuals’ sense of their ability to control and impact upon their
13 environment successfully”. For example, in the context of this current study, this
14 could refer to an officer’s confidence in speaking with individuals with learning
15 disabilities and explaining things appropriately. The final part of this paper
16 utilises and expands upon the issues raised by police officers and people with
17 learning disabilities to suggest practical options for improving police training,
18 whilst simultaneously enhancing confidence within the interactions between
19 these two groups.
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26 **Theoretical framework**

27 Mawby (2008) notes that the police is a concept that is taken for granted and
28 familiar to many, yet this is also a term that invokes inconsistencies and
29 variations. The engagement between police officers and service users (whether
30 they are victims or perpetrators) will vary from person to person. Whilst the
31 notion of police discretion has been widely explored (Chan, 1997; Charman,
32 2017; Fielding, 1991; Reiner, 2010; Shearing and Ericson, 1991) there is a need
33 to understand the role of the individual in decision making and the significance
34 of the delivery of service provision. This section presents two theoretical
35 frameworks within which this research is situated - street-level bureaucrats and
36 the social model of disability.
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43 *Street-level bureaucrats*

44 Widely recognised as an influential text (Brandon, 2005; Brodtkin, 2012; Ellis,
45 2011; Hupe and Hill, 2007; Kosar and Schachter, 2011, Rowe, 2012), Michael
46 Lipsky’s 1980 publication on *Street-level Bureaucracy* highlights the difference
47 that public service front line workers make on policies and the way in which such
48 policies are experienced. Ample literature has focused on alternative stances
49 taken in exploring street-level bureaucrats, such as the significance of informal
50 personal resources (Lavee, 2021), the role of public service gaps (Thomann,
51 2015) and the ability of officers to respond to emergency situations (Alcapipani
52 *et al.*, 2020). Lipsky (1980, p. 3) defines street level bureaucrats (SLBs) as “public
53 service workers who interact directly with citizens in the course of their jobs,
54 and who have substantial discretion in the execution of their work”, such as
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3 teachers, social workers, healthcare workers, judges, lawyers, but also police
4 officers. As such, SLBs work in critical situations where the considerable
5 discretion afforded to them is heavily scrutinised and decisions can have long-
6 term impacts (Alcadipani *et al.*, 2020; Brodtkin, 2012; Johnson and Vaughn, 2016;
7 Lipsky, 1980). SLBs are often portrayed as being policymakers, rather than
8 policy-takers (Gofen, 2014), reinforcing Lipsky's (1980) view that SLBs are "torn
9 by the demands of service recipients to improve effectiveness and
10 responsiveness and by the demands of citizen groups to improve the efficacy
11 and efficiency of government services" (Lipsky, 1980, p.4).
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18 Five conditions of street-level bureaucracies have been identified by Lipsky
19 (1980, pp.27-28): (i) inadequate resources for tasks required to perform; (ii)
20 demand for services tends to increase to meet supply; (iii) ambiguous and vague
21 goal expectations; (iv) difficulties in the measurement of such goals; (v) clients,
22 or service users, tend to be non-voluntary. In this paper, the problem of
23 resources is focused on specifically and the relevance of this to a contemporary
24 issue (disablist hate crime). Inadequate resources do not just refer to the
25 number of available officers but also the personal, individual resources of these
26 officers. Lipsky (1980, p.31) argues that "street-level bureaucrats may... be
27 undertrained or inexperienced", recognising that the level of training and
28 experience in dealing with a specific problem (such as disablist hate crime) or
29 engaging with a particular group (such as disabled people) will influence the
30 actions of an officer and consequently a victim's experience of government and
31 police force policy. This issue of personal resources is multifaceted, not least due
32 to its subjective and individual nature, but also due individual responses to
33 stress and the impact this can have on an individual's performance, with SLBs
34 experiencing their work as individuals rather than a homogenous force (Lipsky,
35 1980).
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45 A number of stressors have previously been identified by scholars (Charman,
46 2017; Kop *et al.*, 1999; Lipsky, 1980; Toch, 2002; Violanti and Aron, 1995;
47 Vuorensyrjä and Mälkiä, 2010). These are often categorised into two groups;
48 those caused by the nature of police work, and those caused by organisational
49 factors. The former includes stressors such as physical threats, exposure to
50 danger and facing the unknown and the latter consists of aspects such as the
51 lack of support, management styles and poor communication (Vuorensyrjä and
52 Mälkiä, 2010). Whilst organisational stressors have been identified as being
53 more prevalent than those associated with the nature of the work (Kop *et al.*,
54 1999), it is the latter which are more significant when understanding the
55 interactions between police officers and individuals with learning disabilities.
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Lipsky (1980) identified the unpredictability of situations as a particular stressor, with officers needing to constantly guard themselves against any threat whilst simultaneously determining whether any threat is likely to exist. The ability of individual officers to read an individual's demeanour will therefore allow officers to predict the likelihood of a hostile and threatening situation unfolding. The situations in which SLBs work, regardless of whether there is any physical harm, can also impact an individual's performance. The 2020 'Demand, Capacity and Welfare' survey (Police Federation, 2020) of nearly 12,500 police officers in England and Wales found that 33% of respondents viewed their job as very or extremely stressful. 77% of respondents acknowledged having experienced feelings of stress or other difficulties with their wellbeing, with 90% of those respondents indicating that their psychological difficulties had been caused or made worse by work. An arguably less significant stressor is the level of scrutiny that officers feel they are under by authorities or "those whose negative evaluations might be harmful" (Lipsky, 1980, p.32). Within the context of policing, this may be from superior officers or members of the public to whom police officers are accountable.

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Viewing police officers as street-level bureaucrats acknowledges the conditions in which officers work. As Rowe (2012, p.17) argues, such an approach asks the SLB to "be aware of the assumptions they make, the prejudices they carry and the ways they respond to the demands of their organisation". In the context of responding to disablist hate crime, the service provision afforded to victims is therefore less determined by the existence of hate crime policy or legislation, but rather by the actions of officers in implementing such at the point of service delivery (Bowling, 1998).

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The marginalisation and othering (an 'us-vs-them' perspective) of people with disabilities has been the subject of much research (Harpur, 2012; Murdick *et al.*, 2004; Nunkoosing, 2011; Ravoud and Stiker, 2001; Van der Klift and Klunc, 1994). The social model of disability highlights the importance of social processes and social policies in the participation and empowerment of people with disabilities (Abberley, 1996; Finkelstein, 2001; Oliver, 1990). A difference is made between the impairment that individuals have and the disablement that is derived from the rigidity of society and social processes to which people with disabilities are routinely exposed. For social model theorists, disability is created by the way society isolates and excludes those with impairments from full participation in society, rather than being caused by the impairment itself (Abberley, 1996; Finkelstein, 2001; Oliver, 1996; Porter, 2015). In other words,

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3 it is the reaction from society, and the organisation therein, that are disabling.
4 As a result, this paper uses the term 'disablist hate crime' rather than 'disability
5 hate crime'. The latter is problematic because other types of hate crime are
6 referred to by the type of prejudice that causes them, such as racist and
7 homophobic. However, 'disability' is often used rather than 'disablist' and this
8 places a focus on the disability of the victim rather than the motivating
9 prejudice, thereby positioning blame on the victim. Hence, this paper uses the
10 term 'disablist hate crime' as it is the disablist views of the offender that cause
11 the offending behaviour and subsequent victimisation, rather than the disability
12 of an individual. An importance is placed on recognising the existence of a
13 learning disability per se, rather than any clinical diagnosis.
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20 Understanding police officers as street-level bureaucrats, combined with
21 exploring the responses to disablist hate crime from a social model perspective,
22 places emphasis on the activities of individuals and organisations in determining
23 the extent of disablism experienced by people with disabilities and if the
24 practices of SLBs are conducive (or not) to successfully engaging with such
25 individuals. The social model of disability therefore allows us to understand the
26 *significance* of the individual stressors experienced by police officers.
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32 It should also be noted here that the author is conflicted as to the appropriate
33 language to use when referring to individuals with disabilities and recognises the
34 debates surrounding this (Martin, 2012; Titchkosky, 2001; Thomas, 2014). The
35 term 'disabled people' is often used to reinforce the disablement from society,
36 as per the social model of disability, however 'individuals with disabilities' was
37 the term used by focus group participants when referring to themselves and as
38 such it is the latter that is used throughout this paper.
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43 **Method**

44 *Data collection*

45 The research upon which this paper is based explored the complex nature of
46 disablist hate crime and police responses to it, from the perspectives of both
47 service users and service providers. It was therefore necessary to have a
48 methodology that allowed for, and emphasised, the experiences of these groups
49 to be obtained. A qualitative approach was employed throughout the empirical
50 research. Pure grounded theory minimises the role of reviewed theoretical
51 literature on producing a research question so that research is conducted
52 without any pre-conceived ideas (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), but Charmaz (2012)
53 argues that inductive logic gained from existing research can provide the starting
54 point for inquiries. The research did not aim to test any theoretical models
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3 described in this paper, but rather to situate meaning within given contexts and
4 to explore knowledge on how individuals make sense of their lived experiences,
5 employing a humanistic and inductive research design. Qualitative data was
6 collected using a triangulatory research approach involving semi-structured
7 interviews, participant-as-observer observations and focus groups. This was
8 over a two-year period concentrating within Brentmouth Constabulary (fictional
9 name used to maintain anonymity), a medium sized force in the south of
10 England. A total of 230 hours of observations of day-to-day policing, 10 semi-
11 structured interviews with police officers (1 female, 9 males) and 4 focus groups
12 with individuals with learning disabilities were completed.
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19 *Data analysis*

20 The process of data analysis was guided by the principles of an alternative
21 grounded theory, akin to that used by Grimshaw and Jefferson (1987) in their
22 seminal text. The data was not analysed with the use of a matrix or checklist,
23 but rather the analysis was guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) six stages of
24 thematic analysis; familiarisation, generation of preliminary codes,
25 identification, review of themes, naming of themes, write up of analysis. When
26 combined with the inductive logic of the amended grounded theory approach
27 taken, patterns and themes were identified. Whilst the authors own
28 positionality (as an academic with no disability) should be recognised here, a
29 conscious effort was made to be open-minded throughout the data collection
30 and analysis. Once the transcripts for each of the interviews were completed,
31 these were read, and notes made in the margin for each transcript regarding key
32 points that were raised. The margin notes were then grouped into themes and
33 colour coded, which were then grouped together and then re-coded. The codes
34 across the ten interviews were then analysed and organised into overarching
35 themes. A similar process was undertaken for each of the focus groups and the
36 observation notes, with the initial codes made and then recoded to reflect the
37 key topics discussed across the three stages of research. Whilst the findings in
38 this paper will focus predominantly on data obtained from the interviews, some
39 reference will be made to data gained from the observations and focus groups
40 for contextual purposes.
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52 **Findings**

53 Through the thematic analysis, four relevant areas were identified and are
54 discussed here: (i) *familiarity with situations*; (ii) *workload pressures*; (iii)
55 *previous experiences* and (iv) *immersive and collaborative police training*. Both
56 individually, and in combination, these factors shape the personal resources
57 (or ability) of officers to engage with individuals with learning disabilities, and
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3 can therefore be either stressors or facilitators for such engagements. The final
4 finding highlights the suggestions made by participants on how training can be
5 improved.
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8 *Familiarity with situations*

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10 The ability of an officer in dealing with any nervousness surrounding the
11 unpredictability of situations involving people with disabilities is shaped by their
12 familiarity with such interactions. This is closely related to the perceived
13 demeanour of an individual; for Lipsky (1980), the ability to read an individual's
14 demeanour will allow officers to predict what the likelihood of a hostile and
15 threatening situation unfolding will be. There is a variation in the perceived
16 abilities of officers in engaging with people with learning disabilities, ranging
17 from feelings of intimidation to those of familiarity. The Response and Patrol
18 (R&P) Acting Police Sergeant, Senior Officer and Control Room Inspector all
19 demonstrated strong feelings of confidence when engaging with this community
20 group.
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27 *"Completely comfortable. For me personally, completely comfortable. It*
28 *won't be everyone's cup of tea, and the reason being is because people*
29 *feel it's an awkward situation... So, I feel confident, I know that there are*
30 *barriers there and I know that that's potentially because every situation is*
31 *different and it is difficult potentially sometimes for people that haven't*
32 *had any exposure to people with disabilities"* (R&P Acting Police Sergeant).
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37 *"I think there will be a confidence issue around how people engage with*
38 *people with learning disabilities, if they're not used to meeting or talking*
39 *to people with learning disabilities... So, me personally,... I've been [a]*
40 *young carer,... so it seems a bit normal really, in relation to how to do it."*
41 (Senior Officer)
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46 *"Interestingly, I did work with people with learning disabilities before I*
47 *came in the job, but only voluntary, 'cause you know, I was at university*
48 *forever... But, I think a lot of that is me. I'm not afraid to talk to people,*
49 *and try and get on their level"* (Control Room Inspector).
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52 The R&P Police Constable, however, was more equivocal in their response and
53 highlighted the influence of the need to be ready to move very quickly from one
54 incident to the next, stating that:
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58 *"I do and I don't. Sometimes I feel comfortable that I know what I'm*
59 *doing... So, it's a really funny job where, you know, if you've dealt with two*
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4 *jobs involving vulnerable victims or anyone with autism or any other sort*
5 *of learning difficulty, if you dealt with something two days later, I think I'd*
6 *be fine, but we have so many gaps in between these different jobs, it's very*
7 *easy to forget this job because you're already thinking about something*
8 *else. You know, that's what I sort of find, I think."*
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12 The R&P Police Sergeant, however, went further than expressing discomfort and
13 heightened self-awareness and instead used the term "intimidating" to reflect
14 their anxiety, as indicated by the following quote:
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17 *"I find it really intimidating, and I don't know if I should say that, but I find*
18 *people with disabilities quite intimidating, because they're*
19 *unpredictable... Down syndrome I don't know a lot about admittedly."*
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23 This quote marks a clear difference between the earlier views of police officers
24 and completes the spectrum of anxiety felt by those who may have to respond
25 to incidents involving people with learning disabilities. Consequently, the degree
26 of familiarity can act as either a stressor or facilitator for the individual officer.
27 It is worth mentioning here that the perceptions of the general public towards
28 disability tend to be negative (Beckett & Buckner, 2012, Barnes & Mercer, 2010;
29 Jaeger & Bowman, 2005) and given police officers are derived from the public,
30 it is perhaps to be expected that there is some level of anxiety.
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35 36 *Workload pressures*

37 Lipsky (1980, p.32) argued that levels of stress are increased by the wider
38 context surrounding the work of street-level bureaucrats. Whilst this is not
39 something that was mentioned by the officers involved in this research directly,
40 the high workload and related pressures were areas discussed by officers.
41 Officers reported the difficulties in dealing with competing organisational
42 priorities and the coping strategy of prioritising these. The Chief Officer made
43 the following comment in their interview when discussing hate crime:
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49 *"Is it an area of priority? Yes, it is, it has a strategic lead, it has a tactical*
50 *lead, and then there's a plan that is underneath that, which is trying to*
51 *develop then our service delivery around it."*
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55 Whilst no officers questioned the impact or importance of disablist hate crime,
56 four queried the extent to which disablist hate crime was a priority, with two of
57 those officers stating that there were other priorities which were "hotter" and
58 "bigger" than hate crime. The Control Room Inspector stated that:
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5 *“I think there will probably be bigger priorities for this organisation than*
6 *hate crime”*
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9 with the R&P Police Sergeant providing examples of these:

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12 *“More recently we have moved away from that [hate crime] and we’ve*
13 *gone into modern day slavery, child sex exploitation, so they’re kind of*
14 *hotter topics”.*
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17 The R&P Police Sergeant who challenged the suggestion that the people with
18 disabilities should be specifically focused upon as a distinct group:

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22 *“I may speak out of turn now – I don’t see any specific drive to target the*
23 *disabled community, because I think the disabled community is broken up*
24 *into other communities, and those communities are being engaged with.”*
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27 This highlights the prominence of characteristics such as race and religion, and
28 location of residence, with people with disabilities located through their
29 association with these other demographics. This implies that their disabilities
30 are a secondary characteristic and suggests a lack of understanding and
31 recognition of the unique needs that people with learning disabilities have. If
32 there is a reliance on locating individuals with learning disabilities through other
33 social or community groups, this will prohibit police officers from engaging with
34 those who do not associate with these other demographics. This implies that
35 any focus on learning disabilities is frequently lost from view at the expense of
36 other priorities.
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39 *Previous experience*

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41 The variation in perceptions and attitudes appears to be, in part, explained by
42 the experience that officers gain. Whilst not a stressor identified by Lipsky, this
43 can be viewed as either a stressor or facilitator depending on the types of
44 experience gained. For example:
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51 *“People I’ve dealt with, with autism for instance, sometimes they can go*
52 *from very placid to extreme violence and then back to being placid, and I*
53 *find that quite unnerving.” (R&P Police Sergeant)*
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57 Experience is gained from two types of circumstances – those involved with the
58 policing role (internal) and those outside of the policing role (external). The
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3 internal experience gained is evidenced with officers discussing negative past
4 experiences in dealing with people with autism, the large gaps between
5 attending jobs involving individuals with learning disabilities and the need to
6 always be mindful and prepared for the next job that they will be sent to. On the
7 other hand, the external experience is that obtained prior to joining the police.
8 Only two of the ten officers disclosed such experience, one through a family
9 member having learning disabilities and the other through voluntary work with
10 individuals with learning disabilities
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16 Connections can be seen here with the earlier quotations presented regarding
17 the familiarity of situations. It was also noted within the observational research
18 that no individuals with known learning disabilities were involved in any of 30
19 observation shifts and on only one occasion did the police respond to an incident
20 involving someone with a disability (in this case physical disabilities). Within all
21 four focus groups, it was discovered that local neighbourhood officers (police
22 constables and PCSOs) used to attend the disability groups but their attendance
23 had ceased in 18 months prior to the focus groups taking place. It is therefore
24 not surprising that some officers lack confidence in communicating with people
25 with learning disabilities, given the obvious lack of opportunity to do so during
26 routine activities in a working day.
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33 *Immersive and collaborative police training*

34 Whilst the previous three topics have been discussed as either stressors or
35 facilitators, police training was an area mentioned in each interview that could
36 help turn stressors into facilitators. The existing training programme was viewed
37 as being abstract and lacking impact, as explained by the R&P Police Constable
38 below:
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43 *"I think sometimes a lot of our training is very much, right, I've read that*
44 *bit, now I'm going to read it out to you and you've got to listen to it... I*
45 *think if we had someone with any sort of vulnerability or disability who*
46 *would come and talk to us and tell us about what they've gone through,*
47 *how they'd like us to act or how they'd like us to...that would be good."*
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51 Criticisms regarding the use of e-learning and passive learning environments
52 were also provided, for example by the R&P Police Sergeant:
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56 *"They're not interactive e-learning, they are PowerPoint slides that you*
57 *have to click on. The quality of delivered training, so that's where you*
58 *attend and sit in front of someone, is repetitive, it hasn't really moved on*
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3 *in the time I've been going, you still sit back and listen, every now and*
4 *again you'll get given one bit of paper and told to go out in groups and*
5 *write down something, and then you come back everyone falls asleep*
6 *while everyone else presents."*
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10 It was also perceived that good practice in some areas is not replicated and
11 applied to others. The Neighbourhood Inspector stated:
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14 *"We did a level of training some years ago for the control room and they*
15 *were trained in vulnerability, what is vulnerability and they were provided*
16 *some guidance on assessing behaviour and risk assessment and*
17 *identifying probability, and in the neighbourhood course we did some*
18 *element of what is vulnerability and identifying it... we spend time training*
19 *people to be LAGLOs, so that they can engage with the lesbian, gay and bi*
20 *community ... but we don't really do an awful lot with the other*
21 *categories."*
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27 In seven of the ten interviews, the lack of training on disablist hate crime was
28 discussed and within five of these seven interviews, suggestions were made on
29 how the training could be more useful and personal. Some of the comments
30 made by officers are outlined below:
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34 *"It needs to be more impactive, so we need to get some of our victims of*
35 *crime in; we need to get some learning from where things have gone*
36 *wrong... contextualise rather than spout out another bit of legislation,*
37 *actually contextualise that into, this person was a victim of crime and take*
38 *them through their journey and how they felt they were dealt with. Get*
39 *officers to ask questions, ask questions, it might make them think, well,*
40 *actually, yeah, I've been that officer who's turned up, half talking on the*
41 *radio, half looking at his phone, not really that interested and then left,*
42 *and that was the impact I had on them."* (R&P Police Sergeant)
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49 *"...use our training days to go and do things like this and maybe get*
50 *involved with, like I said, getting people in to talk to us about how they*
51 *want to be dealt with... I think that would be more impactive than just*
52 *reading a PowerPoint around how to deal with someone."* (R&P Acting
53 Police Sergeant)
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57 *"... we do have some speakers coming in. Again, it's a... whereas we'd like*
58 *to, we just simply don't have the time to do it."* (Police Trainer)
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5 The need for collaborative and immersive training is evidenced here. An
6 *immersive* training environment would help facilitate deeper learning, as
7 opposed to the some-what superficial content that characterises much police
8 training through ‘PowerPoint-heavy’ and e-learning training packages. Given
9 comments made by police officers in this research regarding the positive
10 examples of training they have experienced, or the activities they wished for, a
11 *collaborative* approach would allow officers to hear first-hand accounts of the
12 experiences of people with learning disabilities. The combination of
13 collaborative and immersive training is that the product delivered to officers
14 necessarily becomes more holistic – whereby officers are not only instructed on
15 what they should do in each situation but also, crucially, *why* they should be
16 doing it. The former is a long-standing characteristic of police training relating
17 to the application of legal and policy requirements, where the latter is generally
18 minimised or excluded.
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26 **Discussion**

27 The findings presented here demonstrate some support for the stressors
28 previously identified by Lipsky (1980) and highlight the relevance of these for
29 engagement between police officers and individuals with learning disabilities.
30 This research has shown that this is not dictated by one factor, but a complex
31 combination of several factors- most notably previous experience and
32 familiarity with learning disabilities. Consequently, what might appear to be
33 stressors can in fact become facilitators for better and more appropriate
34 engagement between the police and people with learning disabilities. Whether
35 stressors ultimately become facilitators very much depends upon the individual
36 officer concerned.
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43 The results of this research have implications for both theory and practice. From
44 a theoretical perspective, the research supports arguments made within the
45 existing literature that the onus is on individual officers to produce a positive
46 experience for service users, regardless of any organisational policies or
47 processes that may be in place (Bowling, 1998; Lipsky, 1980; Reiner, 2010).
48 Although other sources of support are available to people with learning
49 disabilities, access to justice can often only be achieved through the police, who
50 are the gatekeepers to the criminal justice system (Charman, 2019; Newburn,
51 2011; Ratcliffe, 2002). With varied experiences, attitudes and perceptions
52 evidenced within this sample of police officers, understanding the policing of
53 disablist hate crime through a theoretical perspective that combines the social
54 model of disability with street-level bureaucracy highlights the importance of
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3 individual service providers adapting to and ensuring that their provision is
4 appropriate and accessible. This paper therefore demonstrates the
5 contemporary relevance of both theoretical perspectives.
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9 From a practical perspective, this research demonstrates the role that police
10 training can have in helping to address some of the stressors identified. It is clear
11 from this research that an officer cannot rely on their role of being a police
12 officer to do this, as there are limited opportunities for engagement in day-to-
13 day policing. In England, the norm is for police training to be delivered by the
14 police, for the police, and therefore is somewhat generalist in nature with, as
15 this research has demonstrated, occasional inputs of a specialist nature that are
16 still delivered by police officers. The delivery of training in collaboration with
17 outsiders is therefore not common practice, and as such it is not surprising that
18 people with learning disabilities are not routinely involved in the training
19 environment.
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26 The recommendation for a collaborative and immersive research programme
27 supports the suggestions made in research by Trickett and Hamilton (2016)
28 surrounding officers' exposure to victims and improving the ability to recognise
29 and understand a disability. Furthermore, such arguments regarding
30 improvements to training have been evidenced in practice, where the sharing
31 of lived experiences has served to facilitate greater understanding and empathy.
32 One such example of this is within Surrey Police, based in southern England, and
33 their work with Dimensions, an organisation that supports individuals with
34 learning disabilities in having greater control of their lives. As part of the
35 #ImWithSam campaign to tackle disablist hate crime, over a period of seven
36 months more than 1,000 frontline police officers within Surrey Police were
37 trained by Dimensions on supporting victims of learning disability and autism
38 hate crime. A review of the training reported a 22% increase in officers feeling
39 confident or very confident in recognising that someone might have a learning
40 disability or autism and a 10% reduction in officers being concerned about how
41 to support a victim in expressing themselves fully (Dimensions, 2018). Whilst
42 such training is not standardised across the 43 police forces within England and
43 Wales, this does demonstrate the potential of such practice to influence these
44 stressors and facilitators perceived by individual officers.
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54 The findings of this paper tie in with the painful learning from high profile
55 criminal justice failures that have occurred within England and Wales in recent
56 times, namely the murder of Stephen Lawrence and the deaths of Fiona
57 Pilkington and Francessca Hardwick (see Giannasi (2015)), which have
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3 highlighted the importance of the police acting in accordance with the needs of
4 those they engage with. Of course, the high-profile failures that have driven
5 change are particular to England and Wales and other jurisdictions may not have
6 experienced similar or have changed processes in the same way, even if they
7 have experienced failure. As such, the drivers to recognise the needs of victims
8 with learning disabilities may not be present in other police organisations and
9 so the issues described in this paper may well seem alien or indeed
10 inappropriate to overseas readers, who may be more familiar with the need for
11 law enforcement rather than service provision in policing outcomes.
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17 **Conclusion**

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19 In England and Wales, recent experience has revealed the importance of the
20 assumptions, prejudices and working practices of individuals, and organisational
21 demands can have what may seem to the outsider to be a disproportionate
22 impact on service users. It is clear however that there is much to be gained by
23 police organisations in recognising how the impact of attitudes and behaviours
24 can affect the trust and confidence that people with learning disabilities have in
25 the organisation. It is therefore important that police officers are aware of how
26 their demeanour can influence an interaction in ways that they may previously
27 have not recognised or considered. On this basis, it is crucial that police officers
28 do not unwittingly disable the people they are trying to assist, aligning with the
29 social model of disability (Finkelstein, 2001; Oliver, 2013). Recognising individual
30 stressors and facilitators will inevitably help with this process.
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38 To further understand the implications of street-level bureaucracy and the social
39 model of disability on police interactions with individuals with learning
40 disabilities, future research would be beneficial. It is important to remember
41 that this research took place within one police force area in southern England
42 and to generalise the findings, it is recommended that this research is replicated
43 in other cultural settings. This research also focused exclusively on learning
44 disability, but with the understanding of this as an umbrella term. It would
45 therefore be interesting to focus on different types of learning disability, to
46 assess the extent to which experiences vary and how police officers engage with
47 different disabled groups. Moreover, there is a need to recognise
48 intersectionality and the role this has in shaping people's experiences. Future
49 research could usefully examine the engagement between police officers and
50 people with learning disabilities who have other identifiable characteristics, for
51 example along the lines of race, religion, sexuality, and gender identity, and how
52 such characteristics influence these interactions.
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4 In his review of Lipsky's (1980) text, Rowe (2012, p.17) argues that
5 conceptualising police officers as SLBs "asks the practitioner to be aware of the
6 assumptions they make, the prejudices they carry and the ways they respond to
7 the demands of their organisation." Policing organisations, processes and
8 personnel must be accessible and avoid marginalising and excluding people with
9 disabilities. Whilst this paper highlights several areas relating to Rowe's
10 statement that have largely been hidden from view in terms of academic and
11 professional understanding of disablist hate crime, a greater focus should be
12 placed on the role of police training in enabling such awareness.
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