Operationalising 'vulnerability': how the police are informed about, identify and respond to individuals categorised as 'vulnerable'

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Abstract

'Vulnerability' has become an increasing area of business within contemporary policing, (HMIC, 2015; HMICFRS, 2016). What 'vulnerability' means within a police framework and policing practice, however, has been elusive (Keay & Kirby, 2018). Researchers across the disciplines have weighed in on the concept, definition and measurement of 'vulnerability' within their respective fields without much success: the fluid and ambiguous nature of 'vulnerability' frequently prevents precise definition (Delor & Hubert, 2000:1558). Whilst some researchers have championed 'vulnerability' as critical for advancing agendas concerning social and criminal justice (Bartkowiak-Theron & Asquith, 2015; 2017), others have argued that the term is loaded with both moral and political implications (Brown, 2011; 2017).

This thesis investigates how the police are informed about, identify and respond to individuals categorised as 'vulnerable'. Non-participant observation and semi-structured interviews with police officers and staff from an anonymous English force permitted the generating and gathering data for analysis. The findings highlight the significant difficulties concerning how 'vulnerability' is 'operationalised' within policing, and the implications for policy and practice. Inclusion and exclusion are emphasised within the data, with assumptions and biases underpinning police understandings and applications of the term, creating a conceptual hierarchy of 'vulnerability' that can influence decision-making. Limitations in police response speak to wider systemic problems. There is also reflection on the 'vulnerability of the police themselves, within the context of their everyday practice, as well as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. This thesis asks serious questions concerning the cultural and practical role of the police, as well as 'vulnerability', in our society going forward.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to people without whom this thesis would have been impossible:

William Blanchard

Dr Samantha Weston

Diane Malkin

Professor Sandra Walklate

Mum, Dad and Sara

And Sophie

Thank you for not giving up on me.

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Introduction: "Why are the police doing vulnerability?"

Introduction

'Vulnerability' has become an increasingly prominent focus within contemporary police business (Bartkowiak-Theron & Asquith, 2015; Keay & Kirby, 2018). Identification and response to 'vulnerability' has become embedded within police work as a key indicator of their performance and effectiveness (Aliverti, 2020, Asquith et al., 2017; Dehaghani, 2017; HMIC, 2015). In 2016, £1.9 million in funding was announced by the then-Home Secretary for the College of Policing to develop training around 'vulnerability' for leaders (Rudd, 2016), encouraging officers and staff to 'look beyond the obvious' and using 'professional curiosity' (College of Policing, 2017b). The rise of 'vulnerability' within policing reflects changes in contemporary practice, with an increasing shift away from volume to more complex forms of offending (Menichilli, 2019; Aliverti, 2020). The emphasis on 'vulnerability' requires the police to strike a balance between public safety alongside safeguarding accommodations (Whitehead & Statham, 2006; Aliverti, 2020).

Expectations that the police should be responsible for individuals considered 'vulnerable' appears to be a reasonable assumption rooted in common sense. There are historical, semantic and social understandings of 'vulnerability' that are underpinned by expectations of protection (Burghart, 2013: 556). The core purpose of policing can be framed around protection (Reiner, 2010:119), with 'vulnerability' framed as a vehicle that permits the naming of crimes (Brown & Saunders, 2017).

Issues such as child sexual exploitation have risen to the top of the political and public sector agenda in the UK, primarily framed through the concept of 'vulnerability' (Brown, 2019). This rise occurred in tandem with criticism of how the police have investigated and responded to serious crimes concerning 'vulnerability'. Historical child sexual abuses in Rochdale, Rotherham and a dozen other locations highlighted the failure of the police to not only protect children and victims but actively looked the other way (Jay, 2014), with victims frequently blamed for their own victimisation (Rogers et al., 2017). Institutional abuse in the Catholic church, the BBC and the NHS replicated this pattern of failure (Greer & McLaughlin, 2013; Bohm et al., 2013; Naughton, 2013; Inckle, 2016). These high-profile incidents occurred alongside routine police maltreatment of people victimised by sexual and domestic violence (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Edwards, 1991; Williams et al., 2009; HMIC, 2014). The police were also blamed for their role in partnership approaches to child

protection, highlighted by media coverage and inquiries concerning children murdered by abuse (Goddard & Liddell, 1995; Houghton, 2011; Marinetto, 2011; Boulton, 2017). Inquiries concerning specific individual challenges such as mental health and learning difficulties again pointed to failure, ignorance and a lack of care (Bradley, 2009; HMICFRS, 2018).

The police, rather than necessarily being responsible for "lessening, ameliorating and compensating for vulnerability" (Fineman, 2010:269), appeared to be ill-equipped to identify and protect 'vulnerable' people effectively. The emerging picture undermined the police narrative that specific incidents were solely a result of poor training or specific 'bad apples' (Thomas & Cooper, 2020; Griffin, 2020), rather than perennial institutional problems at the heart of contemporary policing.

Introducing the concept into sharp focus within contemporary policing seemed to be an obvious antidote to past institutional failure. Vulnerability' is a term that, broadly speaking, applies to how an individuals personal characteristics (such age, race, gender, sexuality, class, disabilities, mental health) alongside situational factors (such as environment, poverty, family circumstances) can increase the likelihood of them being harmed (Bartkowiak-Theron & Asquith, 2017; Dehaghani, 2017; Jay, 2014; Chakraborti & Garland, 2012). 'Vulnerability' can be considered an inherent presence in the criminal justice system and key to understanding the most appropriate avenue to support civilians, whilst the police sit at the front door of said system and the wider public sector (Bartkowiak-Theron & Asquith, 2017).

Problems with 'vulnerability' and policing

The contemporary focus on 'vulnerability' within policing is not without challenge. The first is with the term 'vulnerability' itself. The word most associated with the concept of vulnerability is "ambiguous" (Delor & Hubert, 2000:1558; Fineman, 2008:9; Fineman, 2010; Peroni & Timmer, 2013:1058; Keay & Kirby, 2017:428; Thomas & Warner, 2019). Some academics have attempted to deal with the term neutrally, describing it as "cumulative" (Stewart, 2005:500); "context-dependent" (Fatemi et al., 2017:219); "multi-layered" (Watts & Bohle, 1993:46); multi- dimensional" (McLaughlin & Dietz, 2008:100); "context-specific" (Lee, 2014: 32) ; "dynamic" (Alwang et al., 2001:30; Shah et al., 2013:125); "interactional" (Vettenburg et al., 2013:445); a form of "social categorisation" that is "synonymous with diversity" (Bartkowiak-Theron & Asquith, 2015:93-4); "a diverse range of individual and situational factors that can intersect" (Keay & Kirby, 2018:430). Others have been more

blunt: "nebulous" (Brown, 2011:313; Ecclestone & Goodley, 2016:180); "confusing" (Solbakk, 2011: 228-9); "vague" (Ruof, 2004: 211; Brown, 2011:313); "ephemeral" (Cheney, 2010:4); "pernicious" (Roulstone et al., 2011:357) and "amorphous" (Munro & Scoular, 2012: 194). The term is generally accepted across the disciplines as attempting to highlight an individual or group "in a way that generates requirements to pay extra attention to their wellbeing" (Wrigley, 2015:478).

There is, however, no definitive agreement, in policy or law, concerning which groups can be or should be considered as 'vulnerable' (Moyle, 2019). Policy and political agendas frequently de-emphasise the role of structural factors and inequalities in issues of social and criminal justice, preferring to focus on the "control of 'undesirable' populations rather than wider transformations" (Brown, 2019:622; Garland, 2001; Flint, 2006; Harrison & Saunders, 2014). Framing an individual as 'vulnerable' inherently invites comparison with 'the norm' (Burghart, 2013; Brown, 2015; Clough, 2017). This binary approach - 'vulnerable' versus 'the norm' (taken for granted as 'not vulnerable') perpetuates and replicates rigid social hierarchies concerning gender, race, disability and wider social inequalities - including the intersection of these characteristics (Cole, 2016; Trustadotti & Rice, 2012).

There are challenges to the exceptional nature of 'vulnerability, with some researchers arguing "human life is conditioned by vulnerability. By virtue of our embodiment, human beings have bodily and material needs; are exposed to physical illness, injury, disability and death; and depend on the care of others for extended periods of times during our lives" (Gilson, 2013:1; Butler, 2006; Fineman, 2008; 2010). However, the framework of exceptionalism prevails within the public sector and criminal justice system: 'vulnerability' is a problem to be solved, with identification and interventions targeted around managing individual behaviour and removing the 'vulnerability' (Brown, 2015; Brown & Saunders, 2017; Scoular & O'Neill, 2007; Sagar, 2010). Policy and practice may deploy humanitarian narratives of protection from 'vulnerability' to harm to enable increasing state power and coercion (Aliverti, 2020; Aas & Gundhus, 2015; Bosworth, 2017).

The police, as representatives of the State, therefore present a problem concerning 'vulnerability'. Policing can be "an inherently conflict-ridden enterprise" (Reiner, 2010:69), with encounters often fraught with uncertainty (Dehaghani, 2017). The power dynamics between police and citizens are significantly unequal (Goodin, 2013:26; Goodin, 1985), as the powers of police include the capacity to impose legal sanctions on individuals and groups

- including force (Reiner, 2010:70). 'Vulnerability' is heavily associated with powerlessness and marginalisation (Furedi, 2007; Bartkowiak-Theron & Asquith, 2015).

As enforcers of the law, the police can support the status quo (Galliher, 1971), with their interpretation and application of both law and policy inherently malleable and subjective (Dehaghani, 2016). Policing "bears down most heavily on the most marginal and least powerful groups in our society" (Reiner, 2010:33; Aliverti, 2020; Waddington, 1999a). Individuals in possession of marginalised personal characteristics - Black and ethnic minorities, poor mental health, neurodiversity, LGBTQ+ - can also be considered marginalised, and frequently not only encounter the police, but experience discrimination in these encounters (Akintoye et al., 2022; Siberry, 2022; Smith, 2022; Parmar, 2021; Bustamante et al., 2019; Long & Long, 2018). The focus on 'vulnerability', therefore demands the police now recognise and protect the individuals with characteristics and from communities with whom the institution has perennial conflicts (Reiner, 201:95).

Other challenges include the wider economic and political context in which the police are attempting to identify and respond to individuals considered 'vulnerable'. Police resources have been significantly impacted by the effects of austerity, with a decrease in funding but an increase in partnership and public expectation for the police to intervene in incidents concerning social care and welfare rather than criminal justice (HMIC, 2017; NPCC, 2018; Walley and Adams, 2019).

Previous literature and the project's 'operationalisation' of 'vulnerability'

The complexities and challenges of 'vulnerability' and its increasing focus in policing has drawn in researchers from a wide range of disciplines (Brown et al., 2016), resulting in a patchwork of research and literature across criminology. In Australia, criminologists Bartkowiak-Theron and Asquith have been prolific in their investigation of how the concept is understood and deployed by the police, with themes including the siloed approach to 'vulnerability' and the mission creep of multi-agency working (Bartkowiak-Theron & Asquith, 2012; 2015; 2017).

Previous research has mainly focused on what can be referred to single issue 'vulnerabilities', such as victims (Walklate, 2011; Williams et al., 2009; Green, 2007) and

child sexual and criminal exploitation (Ellis, 2018; Moyle, 2019). Other researchers have focused on specific operational units within policing, such as custody (Dehaghani, 2016; 2017; 2021), contact services (Black & Lumsden, 2020) and immigration control (Aliverti, 2020). Investigating precisely what is meant by 'vulnerability' within policing has been the focus on smaller projects concerning focus groups of officers and staff (Keay & Kirby, 2018).

This current project investigates a broader view of 'vulnerability' within contemporary policing. The 'operationalisation' of 'vulnerability' within the thesis itself attempts to avoid the silos of 'vulnerability' that focus on specific types of 'vulnerable people' or incidents. There is the recognition that 'vulnerability' can be an unconditional feature of human life, owing to our material and bodily needs, as well as our interdependency with others. The former can leave us exposed to injury, illness, disability and death (Gilson, 2013), whilst the latter can increase the likelihood of exclusion, loss, abuse, neglect and exploitation - whilst the absence of interdependency is also identified as a harm owing to our social natures (Gilson, 2013; MacIntyre, 1999; Nussbaum, 2006).

Whilst 'vulnerability' can be considered a human universal, there is the need to understand that the experience of 'vulnerability' is emphatically not universal, and so a balance is required in order to recognise and respond, effectively and ethically, to specific contexts of individuals and groups (Gilson, 2013:19; Macklin, 2003; Hurst, 2008; Luna, 2009; Schroder & Gefenas, 2009). 'Vulnerability' can be deployed to investigate inequality and marginalisation, as well as hierarchies within society that can be tacitly perpetuated by institutions (Ford et al., 2024; Coyel & Atkinson, 2019).

'Vulnerability' can be a by-word to alert us to need or harm, experienced either by individuals, or as wider problems in society (Gilson, 2013), a framework for the State's responsibilities towards its citizens (Fineman, 2011; Peroni & Timer, 2013). The police, as actors of the State, encounter and engage with individuals within the context of criminal justice and social issues that frequently involve different forms of harm and are expected to provide the response (Bartkowiak-Theron & Asquith, 2012; 2015). 'Vulnerability' can speak to the nature of these social issues, as well as the suitability of the police to respond to them (Gilson, 2013; Bartkowiak-Theron, 2015; 2017).

When investigating how 'vulnerability' is operationalised by the police, there is consideration of what assumptions, biases and hierarchies underpin policing understandings

of 'vulnerability', and how this affects identification and response. The framework aids in understanding the role that marginalisation and inequality are visible, or invisibilised, by policing conceptualisations, and how 'vulnerability' can be effectively weaponised to suit particular moral and political agendas within policy and practice (Carlson, 2014; Brown & Saunders, 2017). This approach is mindful of the cultural and historical role of policing, and how it can reflect "the conflicts and contradictions of the wider social structure, culture and political economy" (Reiner, 2010:140). Finally, there is a challenge to the police role concerning 'vulnerability', including their responsibilities, as well as the current issues the institution is facing.

The project

 The project was a CASE studentship, which promoted direct collaboration with the local force. The force was graded as 'inadequate' by HMIC in a 2015 inspection concerning police effectiveness in protecting 'vulnerable' people, with later inspections noting improvements but with significant and persistent gaps in practice. The project was developed to investigate how officers and staff understood 'vulnerability' and how the term was used in their everyday activity. Whilst enough improvement occurred for the force to be considered effective in terms of its response to 'vulnerability' by 2020, two years later the force was placed in special measures, involving targeted inspections and oversight, with a lack of governance concerning 'vulnerability' cited as a crucial factor. After another two years, special measures were lifted.

 I worked closely with a police liaison, who had significant experience of working with academics and collaborating on research, who supported the implementation of the data gathering and collection. Our relationship receives further elucidation in the third chapter, concerning methodology. The collaboration with the police through the liaison was a critical entry point for investigating the research questions and gathering data. Whilst my experience was mostly positive, there was difficult ensuring that other members of the force took the project - and more crucially, its findings - as seriously as my liaison.

The thesis has three core research questions to ultimately answer the question: how do the police operationalise 'vulnerability'?

1.   How are the police informed about 'vulnerability'?

2. How do the police identify 'vulnerability'

3. How do the police respond to 'vulnerability'?

The core research questions were intended to address several issues: how the police understand their own role in relation to 'vulnerability'; how the police understand 'vulnerability' as a term and from where the understanding is drawn; how the concept is understood and applied in practice; how 'vulnerability' is linked to other concepts, such as 'risk'; how are 'vulnerable' people and incidents prioritised in practice; how the label of 'vulnerability' is applied and used by the police. I also wanted to understand the role of multi-agency working in relation to 'vulnerability', including barriers and obstacles to policing practice, including those facilitated by the focus on 'vulnerability'. The multi-agency angle was not expected to gain an accurate picture of demand and partnership collaboration, but to examine police perspectives of partnership working in relation to 'vulnerability', as well as insight into how the police can be perceived by partners.

To answer the research questions, I used two methodological avenues. The first was non-participant observation: observing practice, process and procedures rather than individuals. During the first year of the project, I visited multiple different police units and spoke with staff to investigate where I would be best placed to observe the operationalising of 'vulnerability' and investigate the research questions. I selected four in total: contact services, custody and two harm reduction hubs. Harm reduction hubs had operational oversight of safeguarding across their specific areas and worked closely with other agencies to support individuals identified as 'vulnerable'. In my view, these four units provided the best oversight into 'vulnerability' within policing as they were brought into contact with multiple people and different types of 'vulnerability'. This sidestepped the potential to focus too narrowly on one type of 'vulnerability'.

Semi-structured interviews were used to examine 'vulnerability' in greater depth with participants. There was a significant emphasis on the frontline, such as response officers, as observing these practitioners had been ruled out for safety reasons. Fifteen individual interviews occurred, with participants including response officers, police community support officers, custody sergeants, call handlers, custody detention officers, a chief inspector and a mental health nurse. There was also a group interview with individuals who held critical roles in the force's operational and strategic oversight of 'vulnerability'.

Overview of chapters

The thesis begins with a review of the literature concerning 'vulnerability', including how it is defined, measured and conceptualised within policy, whilst previous research concerning the police and 'vulnerability' is explored. The second chapter examines policy, legislation and police history to understand the increasing emphasis of 'vulnerability' within policing, and vice versa. The third chapter concerns methodology. elucidating on how I gathered the data to answer the research questions, as well as exploration of my experience collaborating with the police.

The fourth chapter investigates how the data highlights how the police are informed about 'vulnerability'. The chapter has three overarching themes. The first is concerned with how the police understand 'vulnerability': the difficulties of defining 'vulnerability', and the conceptual definition of 'vulnerability' in relation to 'need'. The second theme is concerned with where the police gain this understanding of 'vulnerability': institutional knowledge, and experiential learning. The third and final theme explores how the police understand 'vulnerability' in relation to pre- existing concepts like 'risk' and the interchangeability of language.

The fifth chapter explores how the police identify 'vulnerability', with two overarching themes. The first theme examines how the police frame and assume 'vulnerability' through the lens of age, mental capacity and victimisation. This focus draws out elements of 'vulnerability' such as the dichotomy of inherent and situational 'vulnerability' and the theoretical hierarchy of 'vulnerability', suffering and victimisation within policing. This theme also highlights elements of inclusion and exclusion, elucidating what and who are missing from the previous conceptualisations of 'vulnerability'. The second theme is concerned with identification of 'vulnerability' in practice: the pragmatic processes of identification and obstacles; the concepts of 'vulnerability' and 'risk' in practice; the operational hierarchy of 'vulnerability' in practice; the role of the police as gatekeepers of 'vulnerability'; and interlocking notions of deservedness.

The sixth chapter studies how the police respond to 'vulnerability'. There are again two themes. The first explores how the police can respond to 'vulnerability' by initially exploring the emerging hybrid nature of policing in organisational practice; how the police react rather than response to 'vulnerability'; presence and absence of the police uniform; safeguarding, soft skills and referrals as possible avenues of response; and the need for effective policing

relationships and multi-agency working. The second theme elaborates on barriers and obstacles to the police response: pragmatic barriers such as operational hours and organisational thresholds; how the police can be considered the agency of first response for agencies, and the agency of last resort for service users; and the practice of mission creep in relation to 'vulnerability'.

 The seventh chapter examines unexpected 'vulnerability', themes and circumstances that generated new ideas and contributed to pre-existing ideas about 'vulnerability' within the context of policing. The chapter has three overarching, if overlapping, themes. The first is concerned with the vulnerability of the police themselves, and whether said 'vulnerability' is the cost of doing police business. The chapter then reflects on the perceived 'vulnerability' within the police as an institution, alongside the gap between expectations and reality, followed by the 'vulnerability' of external stressors such as austerity. The second theme is concerned with the police and 'vulnerability' within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic: changes to police responsibilities in response to 'vulnerability'; restrictions and barriers to 'vulnerability'; positive shifts in police working; the physical 'vulnerability' of frontline staff and their families; and the deployment of 'vulnerability' in narratives surrounding the pandemic. The overlapping themes of this chapter include how institutions themselves can create and perpetuate 'vulnerability' for staff and service users alike, and the hierarchical and relational nature of 'vulnerability'. The chapter closes with a meditation on how 'vulnerability' can be masked and obscured within the context of policing and the motivations for this process.

The thesis confronts the difficulty of operationalising 'vulnerability' in policing practice, primarily owing to the nebulous, complex nature of 'vulnerability' itself. The complex nature of 'vulnerability' as concept receives investigation within the opening chapter, drawing themes from previous literature to review how other researchers have tackled 'vulnerability' in terms of definition, conceptualisation and application in practice.

Chapter 1 - 'Vulnerability' and the police: a review of the literature

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the term 'vulnerability' itself. The definition and meaning of 'vulnerability' can often be taken for granted or assumed to be common sense (Cunniff-Gilson, 2016): when examined closely, however, it can be perceived as "elastic and seemingly multi-purpose" (Cole, 2016: 263). The literature was selected after drawing from a wide range of disciplines, to fully inform the scope of how 'vulnerability' has been defined and conceptualised. It permitted a deep dive into the complicated nature of 'vulnerability', with themes necessarily narrowed over time to specifically address the problems concerning 'vulnerability' within the context of policing. The challenge of 'vulnerability' in terms of definition, concept and application has attracted researchers across disciplines (Brown et al., 2016), such as anthropology, sustainability studies, the geosciences, criminology, psychology, philosophy, ethics and law, with literature also drawn from interdisciplinary studies of disabilities and feminism.

The chapter begins with an investigation of how 'vulnerability' has been defined across the disciplines: the challenges of definition; the many types of 'vulnerability' at researchers' disposal; and the paradox of 'vulnerability' as an exceptional state versus a universal norm. The chapter then explores how 'vulnerability' may be measured, the drawbacks of this approach, and the concept's relationship with other terms such as 'risk' and 'resilience'. This is followed by an appraisal of the challenges involved in translating 'vulnerability' from academic concept to organisational policy - as well as the consequences of mistranslation, and of being labelled as 'vulnerable'. Finally, the chapter examines the consequences of 'vulnerability' for both service users and for the police.

'Vulnerability': in search of a definition

'Vulnerability' comes from the Latin 'vulnerabilis', derived from the verb 'vulnerare': "to wound" (Peroni & Timmer, 2013:1058; Twigg, 2014:465; Wrigley, 2015:480). Therefore, it is perhaps unsurprising that many attempts to define "vulnerability" centre around themes of

susceptibility to loss, harm and suffering (Dehaghani, 2017; Gilson, 2013: 17; Peroni & Timmer, 2013:1058; see Butler, 2006: xii; Goodin (1985:110).

In the social sciences, the focus of the definition tends to be 'harm' and 'suffering'. Harmon (2015:1) considers vulnerability to apply to individuals who are "easily harmed physically, mentally or emotionally." Other research mirrors this definition: "those who can be harmed or put themselves at risk" (Walklate, 2011:181: from Sparks, 1982). In the care sector it concerns "open to exposure to harm" (Twigg, 2014:267). Criminology brings the interplay of 'loss of control' and 'victimisation' into its own consideration of 'vulnerability', as 'vulnerability' can be a vehicle that permits the naming of crimes, injustice and inequality (Brown & Saunders, 2017). Killias (1991) considers three dimensions when examining 'vulnerability' and fear of crime: (1) exposure to risk, (2) seriousness of consequences and (3) loss of control. For Cops & Pleysier (2011:59), it is "the perception of exposure to danger, a loss of control over the situation and a perceived inadequate capacity to resist the direct and indirect consequences of victimisation".

There are also multiple 'types' of vulnerability that have splintered from the overall term. Physical 'vulnerability' is the perceived heightened risk to be physically harmed, whilst 'social vulnerability' is the perceived exposure to psychological victimisation owing to multiple pre- existing factors (Franklin et al., 2008). Climate change studies also utilise the phrase 'social vulnerability', mirroring this previous definition: "pre-existing characteristics of groups…. which make them more susceptible to hazards, or…. the social burdens of risk" (Schmidtlein, 2011:271). 'Personal vulnerability' also refers to the perception of particular social groups that at a heightened risk of victimisation (Cossman & Rader, 2011:142), whilst 'psychological vulnerability' is caused by mental health problems or intellectual disabilities (Herrington & Roberts, 2012).

It can be useful to consider different forms of 'vulnerability', such as inherent versus situational. Inherent 'vulnerability' concerns characteristics that are intrinsic to an individual, such as disability, mental illness or age. There is an argument that inherent 'vulnerability' "arises from our corporeality…our dependence on others, and our affective and social natures" (Gilson, 2013:20). Situational 'vulnerability' is context-specific, "caused or exacerbated by the personal, social, political, economic and environmental situations of individuals or social group" (Gilson, 2013:20). However, in many scenarios, "sources of situational vulnerability are social and relational", as said sources play a significant role in

coercion, abuse and exploitation (MacKenzie & Rogers, 2013:37). For example, disasters, such as floods or pandemics, may affect on the 'vulnerability' of all affected individuals, but the overall impact will be mitigated or worsened by their unique social contexts (Gilson, 2013:20). These distinct types are interrelated, with the understanding that wider structural 'vulnerabilities' can be a driver behind an individual's situational 'vulnerability' (Frerks et al., 2011). Structural 'vulnerability' involves societal problems of inequity, inequality and marginalisation (Virokannas et al., 2020; Team & Manderson, 2020; Hing et al., 2018). This understanding also significantly stresses the temporal nature of 'vulnerability', avoiding connotations that it is a fixed or irreversible state (Virokannas et al., 2020).

A problem with the term 'vulnerable' is that it implies an exceptional state rather than the norm (Asquith & Bartkowiak-Theron, 2012). Various researchers have conceptualised vulnerability not as an attribute to be pinned on already stigmatised and marginalised minorities, but one that is an inherent component of humanity (Carlson, 2014:65). Gilson argues that "human life is conditioned by vulnerability. By virtue of our embodiment, human beings have bodily and material needs; are exposed to physical illness, injury, disability and death; and depend on the care of others for extended periods of times during our lives" (2013:1). By deploying 'vulnerability' as a universal attribute, it "raises new issues, poses different questions and opens up new avenues for critical exploration" (Fineman, 2008:9). For these researchers, approaches to 'vulnerability' lie not necessarily in the precise - or even consistent - definitions of the term, but in its deployment as a practical and critical concept. This universal approach positions 'vulnerability' at the heart of the human condition, which is then utilised by some researchers to highlight the structural origins and perpetuations of disadvantage and precariousness (Brown, 2011:317; Butler, 2006). 'Vulnerability' can be conceived of as an entry point to investigate marginalisation, inequality and adversity, both social and economic (Brown et al., 2015). For Fineman (2008:9) in particular, 'vulnerability' is a particular critical lens through which researchers can examine and challenge specific power relations and responsibilities - a tool to "examine hidden assumptions and biases". The feminist lens on 'vulnerability' permits a critical focus on historical inequalities and structural hierarchies, particular of gender and race, and how they have "shaped relationships of dependence and obligations of care" (Gilson, 2013:27). The concept has the power to transcend the material and immaterial: "bodies carry the marks of culture. We come to know our bodies through available discourses, ideas and images that abound in the immaterial world. Simultaneously these cultural formations cultural formations embedded in the material

practices of capitalism" (Ecclestone & Goodley, 2016:198). This notion of how "bodies carry the marks of culture" is evidenced in Butler (2006)'s conceptualisation of 'corporeal vulnerability'. 'Vulnerability' is an intrinsic part of what it means to be human, embodied by our physical selves and our responses to harm (Butler, 2006). Some disability scholars have advocated that the fixture of the tensions at play within the concept of 'vulnerability', can be achieved by taking advantages of its complexities to explore and give voice to a more willing, accepting, generous and honest understanding of what it means to be human (Ford et al., 2024; Ginsburg & Rapp, 2020). Some researchers assert that "vulnerability could be used to insist on relational, context-specific understandings of disease and disease-risk" (Ford et al., 2024:125). Understanding 'vulnerability' as a shared component of being human can provide an ethical responsiveness to inequality, which can be gained through listening to and reflecting on experiences of other people's 'vulnerability' to reckon with our own (Cunniff-Gilson, 2016).

The universal conception of 'vulnerability' has been criticised for being too broad, rendering the concept as impotent in meaningfully respond to specific 'vulnerabilities' as it "obscures rather than enables the identification of the context-specific needs of particular groups or individuals within populations at risk" (Gilson, 2013:19; Macklin, 2003; Hurst, 2008; Luna, 2009; Schroder & Gefenas, 2009). Whilst all individuals are potentially 'vulnerable' to threats and/or harm from other people, ultimately what impacts individuals and groups is a decrease in capacity and/or resources for them to protect themselves (Goodin, 1985).

However, some disciplines have neatly side-stepped the issue of defining 'vulnerability' by not defining it at all, nor using it as a critical lens. 'Vulnerability' is adopted without contesting or elucidating on what such a term means in context. It is not a stand-alone term to be questioned, but one with a "taken for granted" nature that appears to need no further explanation (Stanford, 2012). Psychology and Psychiatry are particularly guilty of this practice. Researchers in this area investigate predictive risk factors for a variety of issues, with 'vulnerability' used as another term for 'susceptibility' or 'likelihood' (Strauman, 1992; Gunns et al., 2002; Miller et al., 2011; Reid, 2011). Such an application removes the subjective and potentially political nature of the concept, leaving only objective, pragmatic parameters (or, at least, the perception of such).

Others have argued that a definition of 'vulnerability' is inappropriate - that any definition would be simplistic and obscure the complexity of the issues at play (Keay & Kirby,

2018:429; Wrigley & Dawson, 2016). The parameters of the definition create thresholds and therefore obstacles for individuals and groups to jump over to 'earn' the label of vulnerability at the discretion of institutions - be they political, economic or academic. Chakraborti & Garland have highlighted how current definitions and ideas of vulnerability "tend to centre around relatively narrow conceptualisations of identity and community" (2012:2).

When creating a consistent definition of vulnerability, the only consistency is a paradox: widen the definition, and it becomes too vague for practical use. Narrow it, and risk excluding already marginalised groups. Despite these issues, some disciplines have drawn on understanding 'vulnerability' as a form of loss or likelihood to loss to create not only definitions, but measurements of 'vulnerability' that can be applied in a practical sense (Alwang et al., 2001). Such attempts to measure the fluid concept can however amplify problems.

How might 'vulnerability' be measured?

The geosciences and sustainability studies focus on loss as an essential part of 'vulnerability', as these fields typically utilise quantitative methodologies to 'measure' and study a particular issue. Within this context, 'loss' is considerably easier to measure than 'harm' or 'suffering' (McLaughin & Dietz, 2012; Clark et al.,2000). Measurement is achieved in two ways: the use of benchmarks, and of 'vulnerability' indicators.

Benchmarks in this context are used to measure livelihood, economic or household loss. The benchmark generates an average calculation for which an individual or household is considered average, or stable. To fall below that benchmark is to be 'vulnerable'. Alwang et al. (2001:29) insist that benchmarks are needed in the research context of sustainability, as without them the concept of 'vulnerability' is "too imprecise for practical use". Indicators are a method that measures 'vulnerability' over time and space by environmental and climate change studies. This method also examines and identifies structural processes which facilitate situational vulnerabilities (Shah et al., 2013:213).

There is dissention here too. Hinkel (2011:198) considers the term 'measuring' of 'vulnerability' to be "misleading", with the potential to cause at best confusion, and at worst "false expectations" from policy makers and the public. This problem can be traced back to a familiar issue: the lack of definition and inconsistent application. If the meaning of

vulnerability is unclear; then how exactly can a concept be measured pragmatically? The concept is not necessarily an "observable phenomenon" but more a social, theoretical concept (Hinkel, 2011:199-200). Some other authors assert that it cannot be measured at all. Instead, researchers should consider how to operationalise the concept, with 'vulnerability' indicators a potential way forward (Hinkel, 2011:200: Moss et al., 2001; Patt et al., 2012).

The social sciences frequently introduce more subjective factors into the mix, with 'vulnerability' used as a term to highlight the "heightened level of risk posed to certain groups or individuals that can arise through a complex interplay of different factors: hate, prejudice, hostility, unfamiliarity, discomfort or simply opportunism or convenience" (Chakraborti & Garland, 2012:8). These factors are considerably more difficult to navigate and measure. Green (2007:94) also points out that we risk falling "into a positivist trap": even if 'vulnerability' could be measured, it has the potential to ignore the sociohistorical and socio-political processes by which we label individuals and groups). 'Vulnerability' does not exist in a socio-political or socio historical vacuum: the term carries cultural meaning. The weight of the term is compounded by its connections to other concepts and terms within our cultural lexicon – primarily, its relationship with 'risk' and 'resilience'.

A conceptual family reunion: vulnerability, risk and resilience

'Risk' and 'vulnerability' are "conceptual cousins" (Brown, 2011:319): they are "two sides of the same coin" (Beck, 2009:178). Most definitions of 'vulnerability' refer to 'risk': 'risk' can be the key to both understandings and conceptualising 'vulnerability' (McLaughlin & Dietz, 2008:100; Brown, 2017:425). Like 'vulnerability', 'risk' can be found "everywhere and nowhere" (Sibley, 2018:1469): precise definition can be skipped over by virtue of a meaning that is taken for granted (Stanford, 2012). There are often significant issues with this practice, primarily that the assumption itself is natural to have and to hold. When we take the meaning of the terms for granted, we are assuming who and what is 'at risk', and who is not – and that this assumption is both obvious and natural (Stanford, 2012). Regardless of objective attempts to utilise 'risk' as a neutral term, it can still be permeated with cultural and "value laden" assumptions (Fawcett, 2009:475; Webb, 2006).

In social care, policy and criminal justice, risk equates to the probability of harm (Daniel, 2010:233). This contributes to the design and practice of risk assessments, which aim "to identify, measure and prioritise risk" (Fawcett, 2009:475). The intertwining of these concepts

is infused again with value-laden assumptions: risk becomes "both inevitable and non-negotiable" (Sibley, 2018: 1463). The proliferation of this type of language is "deployed normatively" within criminal justice and legal discourses, reinforcing cultural assumptions about the terms and their deployment as labels (Sibley: 2018: 1462).

Neither term can be referred to as neutral: both are permeated with cultural notions of legitimacy, responsibility, choice and blame (Brown, 2011: 319). 'Vulnerability' is constructed in terms of 'risk', which manifests as labelling individuals and communities as a risk or at risk (Warner, 2007). The risk to others can stretch across a spectrum enveloping either a risk to directly harming others or a risk to community norms; someone can be 'at risk' from being harmed by others or from the consequences of illness or disability (Hunter, 2011; Murray et al., 2015).

How then does 'resilience' link to 'vulnerability'? Some scholars unite the two: both are relational to "risk from and exposure to adversity" (Walklate, 2011:185). Others assume a symbiotic relationship, that one cannot exist without the other (Hamdy, 2012). The two terms can be positioned as opposing forces (Newsome et al., 2016), with resilience championed as the antidote to 'vulnerability' (Brown, 2017:425; Fineman, 2014:113). Unfortunately, in this scenario, if vulnerability is present then "resiliency is impossible" (Sibley, 2018: 1468). This framing contributes to a "strategic homogenization" of individual and group experiences, obscuring adaptive mechanisms that individuals and groups deploy to navigate their daily lives and situations (Sibley, 2018:1468; Jackson et al., 2012:142; Lowman, 2000). Like 'vulnerability', 'resilience' cannot be considered a mere attribute, but "manifestation of a social condition" (Walklate, 2011:180). There are individual, social and structural dimensions at play: it cannot be measured or defined concretely.

The conceptual cultural medley of 'vulnerability', 'risk' and 'resilience' can further complicate academic and policy attempts to both define and measure 'vulnerability' as a standalone factor. The debates and issues within the literature have spilled over into the experiences of practitioners and policymakers. The challenge for those who create policy to guide the identification and response to 'vulnerability' is that there can be a significant gap between policy expectations and pragmatic reality. This next section also introduces the role of the police, and the research previously conducted to understand their relationship with 'vulnerability'.

The translation of 'vulnerability' from academic concept to organisational policy

'Vulnerability' presents clear difficulties in its definition and conceptualisation - being ambiguous, complex and fraught with tension - that does not permit straightforward analysis or operationalisation in practice (Cunniff-Gilson, 2016). The lack of a consistent definition and a lack of interrogation of 'vulnerability' as a term is the primary obstacle to the concept's translation into policy. Cultural conceptions of both 'vulnerability' and related terms, such as 'risk', muddy the waters further. 'Vulnerability' and related terms are frequently deployed politically and legally in practitioner environments (Munro & Scoular, 2012:191; Mythen & Weston, 2022). Practitioners have frequently been shown to be uncertain of both the meaning and the application of vulnerability, worsened by researchers and policymakers' skittishness about defining precisely what they mean by the term (Appleton, 1999; Brown, 2011). Translating a theoretical and social concept to the practical reality of responding to service users is increasingly challenging, with little consistent guidance on how 'vulnerability' should affect procedures or ethics (Coleman, 2009:12-3; Delor & Hubert, 2000). Further, 'vulnerability' is a contentious topic in some disciplines, such as disability scholarship, as there is a "tension surrounding…the phenomenological reality of living with impairment, and the idea that vulnerability is a socially constructed entity that oppresses people with disabilities" (Burghart, 2013:556). Practitioners frequently resort to bringing their own meaning to the term and to their work (Twigg, 2014:267). It is therefore possible that 'vulnerability' is "little more than a linguistic marker" to signal a need for our attention to issues that are already culturally understood (Wrigley, 2015:479).

Researchers possess significant power in challenging assumptions that can be embedded in policy and practitioner essentialist interpretations and biases concerning 'vulnerability' (Brown et al., 2016). Researchers, unfortunately, can also contribute to mistranslations and lack of understanding concerning 'vulnerability' in both research and policy. Researchers contribute not only to knowledge but to discourses that "construct the vulnerable individuals" (Coppock & McGovern, 2014:256). Behavioural scientists, like their colleagues in the disciplines of sustainability and the geosciences, have investigated indicators to gauge risk behaviour and harm. They have provided institutions like the police with an alleged 'scientific basis' to intervene in the lives of citizens. Such risk indicators can reinforce dominant political narratives, with individuals who challenge that narrative or speak to a

differing experience considered "vulnerable" not to harm, but to becoming a potential threat to the state (Coppock & McGovern, 2014:246).

There is a significant lack of appreciation within policy for the connotations of 'vulnerable' as a term used by the police and the wider public sector. Despite the assertions of vulnerability's potential as a mechanism for social justice and equality, other scholars have been more circumspect, sceptical and critical. Some political philosophers have argued how structural vulnerabilities, such as health, are dominated by power relations, with medical practice exacerbating rather ameliorating than experiences of 'vulnerability' (Ford et al., 2024; Coyel & Atkinson, 2019). Brown (2011:314-5) argues that the term is far from empowering and the potential mechanism for oppression rather than freedom. This mechanism, unfortunately, is ultimately underpinned by the predominantly negative connotations of 'vulnerability'.

The consequences of mistranslation: the drawbacks of being labelled as 'vulnerable'

There are social and practical consequences to being considered or labelled as 'vulnerable': high needs have been identified, and intervention is required, whilst simultaneously the person with said needs are barred from participating in decision-making (Burghardt, 2013). Applying the label of 'vulnerability' can often default to monolithic and uncritical cultural tropes based on static personal characteristics (Aliverti, 2020; Moyle, 2019; Gilson 2016). There are concerns from both academics and practitioners that vulnerability is "presented as (an) objective, uncontroversial fixed meaning, with universal validity and applicability" (Fawcett, 20090:473). This presentation risks reducing the term to no more than a "technical category" (Brown, 2011: 314) or a "social categorisation exercise" (Bartkowiak-Theron & Asquith, 2015:93). The concern is that said 'categorisation exercise' hands the power of decision making to institutions, weakening rather than strengthening individual rights (Roulstone et al., 2011:357). The momentum of 'vulnerability' often side steps or is oblivious to the political nature of the concept, including how it can be a facilitator for the state's increasing intervention in the lives of citizens (Brown et al., 2015).

In the social sciences, the implication of weakness is by far the most cited criticism (Brown, 2011: 314; Roulstone et al., 2011; Jackson et al., 2012:142; Chakraborti & Garland, 2012:507; Keay & Kirby, 2018:429). Within the literature for disability and social care,

'vulnerability' is eyed with distinct suspicion for its synonymy with weakness, powerlessness and inability (Clough, 2017; Thorneycroft, 2017; Furedi, 2007). The notion of weakness is considered highly problematic as it simultaneously assumes that strength is inevitably absent (Fawcett, 2009:474). It has been criticised as both politically and legally paternalistic, reinforcing patriarchal hierarchies (Brown, 2011: 315; Bartkowiak-Theron & Asquith, 2015:93); fragility and passivity (Burghart, 2013: 556; Fawcett, 2009:474); flaw, failure, debility (Jackson et al., 2012:142); and a fault (Calderbank, 2000:525). There is an emphasis on limitations and inabilities, defining individuals by their weaknesses and structural marginalisation, rather than a holistic appreciation of their individual attributes (Wishart, 2003; Brown, 2011:316). The 'vulnerability' of a group can be generated by stigma and prejudice perpetuated by institutions and wider culture (Brown & Saunders, 2017; Sanders & Campbell, 2007; Carline, 2009). 'Vulnerability' also carries the implication that individuals within certain group categories somehow "don't know what is best for them" (Brown, 2011:316; Dunn et al., 2008).

Aside from the questionable mask of neutrality through administration and bureaucracy, this static and rigid application has further and more serious implications. People, both individually and as a society, tend to label others - as demonstrated in law, policy and practice (Campbell, 2004:58). However, the application and adoption of these labels in the context of vulnerability also "changes the meaning and structure of the vulnerability itself" (Butler, 2006:43). The supposed neutrality of the term within the public sector does not fully obscure how the term is loaded politically, morally and practically (Brown, 2011:313).

'Vulnerability' is not a standalone concept within a vacuum but is understood relationally: by comparison (more or less 'vulnerable'), or the relationship between innate 'vulnerabilities' (for example, disabilities), and circumstantial and structural barriers (Burghadt, 2013). 'Vulnerability' can be recruited into binary conceptualisations of lived experiences as a result: male/female, disabled/able-bodied, ill/well, capacity/incapacity (Cole, 2016; Clough, 2017; Ford et al., 2024). Dichotomies - vulnerable/not vulnerable - can become the prevailing method of identification, as well as intervention - care or control, protection or discipline (Brown, 2015). Dichotomies reinforce our culture understandings of what it means to be productive, independent, right and good - encapsulated in our understandings of 'normalcy' - in juxtaposition to parasitic, bad, wrong, monstrous or deviant (Pieri, 2022). 'Autonomy' and 'vulnerability' are currently framed as opposing forces, in a trend of dichotomies favoured historically within criminal and social justice policy and practice (Gilson, 2013). Further,

from a historical standpoint, binary approaches attach moral values to the social hierarchies, valuing whiteness, masculinity, able-bodiedness and heterosexuality above the intersections of all other identities, realities and experiences (Pieri, 2022). Rather than necessarily providing effective protection or support, 'vulnerability' has historically instead been used to stigmatise and regulate individual behaviour, regardless of which side of the dichotomy an individual is placed (Cole, 2016). The complexity of the crimes associated with 'vulnerability' - especially those involving children, such as CCE or CSE, who can be both victims and perpetrators - may not meet traditional practitioner understandings of being 'vulnerable' (Moyle, 2019). This blurring or erasure of the line that separates conceptualises victims and perpetrators, "unsettling and complicating binary criminal justice categories", as the fondness for the victim/perpetrator dichotomy lies in the lack of moral ambiguity and emotional contentiousness around decision-making (Aliverti, 2020:1117).

Assumptions about 'vulnerability' are often framed in terms of biology, such as disability, capacity and age, emphasising that 'vulnerability' has a presumed foundation within nature, rather than culture (Brown et al., 2016). Feminist theorists have argued that those responsible for responding to 'vulnerability' must avoid "biologically reductive assumptions or perpetuating historically unjust distributors of caring labour" (Gilson, 2013:27). 'Vulnerability' is a feminised concept, with the gendered nature of 'vulnerability' considered "vexing" in how it is "associated both with femininity and with weakness and dependency" – and both are to be avoided (Cunniff-Gilson, 2016:71; Cole, 2016).

Whilst 'vulnerability' can be deployed by practitioners and policymakers with the intention of protecting individuals who need it, in practice the term can "problematise behaviours" (Mythen & Weston, 2022:11). The individual pathologizing of 'vulnerability' suggests that there is a standard pathology for "normative" behaviour. This has arisen through increasing reliance on risk calculation and medicalisation of social issues (Skolbekken, 2008). It "begins with the construction of the statistically deviant as pathological and leads to defining the statistically normal as pathological" (Fawcett, 2009:478). In attempts to recognise marginalised and stigmatised individuals and groups by invoking the 'vulnerability' label in the name of protection, the label still ultimately emphasises that there is something non-normative about said individual or groups' attributes and behaviour - there is an inherent comparison with 'the norm' or normative expectations, and automatically relegates the 'vulnerable' individual to the margins often of their own lives as well as society (Burghart, 2013). The issue of 'vulnerable' equating 'non- normative' at best, 'deviant' at worst, has

further implications for the hierarchy of individuals and groups categorised as "vulnerable". When the umbrella of 'vulnerability' is mentioned, the image implies an embrace of all individuals and groups. Further, we participate in a legal and political system which "celebrates independence and active citizenship": vulnerable people are "antithesis" of this approved way of being (Brown, 2017: 425; McLeod, 2012). It appears that very few lessons have been learned from critical psychiatry's arguments concerning the use of labels by practitioners and the medicalisation of social issues, which draws attention away from wider structural problems that can be propagated by institutions themselves (Bracken & Thomas, 2010; Foucault, 1988; Goffman, 1961). However, our culture's priority of "prizing and pursuing invulnerability involves a set of dispositions and attitudes centred on fear, the threat of persecution and anxiety about loss and harm" (Cunliff-Gilson, 2016:76).

This celebration of independence is the dominant narrative driven throughout our culture, which creates further obstacles for people considered 'vulnerable'. Butler (2006) and Fineman (2008) have challenged how vulnerability has been appropriated by dominant political discourses, who frame what it means to be 'vulnerable' or 'victimised' in highly specific framings. Feminist theory highlights how the concept the concept of victimisation "is predicated on a reductively negative sense of vulnerability" (Cunliff-Gilson, 2016). This can appear common sense, as victimisation involves a form of harm, as does 'vulnerability'. As noted, conceptualisations of 'vulnerability' can be based on assumptions of common sense. How our cultural and historical venn diagram of 'vulnerability' and 'victimisation' can result in narrowly defined understandings of what it means to be 'vulnerable' and a 'victim', which performs as a social and institutionalised foundation for "moralising and normalising judgements about victims themselves" (Cunliff-Gilson, 2016:79). These narratives alienate and exclude the historically and politically marginalised in order to "reproduce social privilege" (Carlson: 2014: 64). If 'vulnerability' is deployed as an attribute embodied in every member of humanity, however, it cements certain rights and protections for all (Ecclestone & Goodley, 2016:177). A flat, smooth, levelling of cultural barriers that endeavours to treat every possible individual or group categorised as "vulnerable" the same way.

However, those barriers are not so easily broken. 'Vulnerability' also has a political currency: its application can generate claims to resources with the intention of "empowering individuals" (Munro & Scoular, 2012:196). 'Vulnerability' can be weaponised to "advance particular ideologies and interventions" (Brown & Saunders, 2017: 429). The inescapable issue is that 'vulnerability' is conceptualised through historically and politically dominant

understandings of the term, which are frequently related to patriarchal constructions of crime (Carlson, 2014:61; Fineman, 2010). The crucial correlation between economic and social marginalisation with criminal justice encounters has repeatedly drawn well-meaning individuals and institutions into the arena of diverting individuals from crime, with both oppressive and compassionate measures (Platt, 1969; Aliverti, 2020). Therefore, these dominant understandings frequently both overshadow 'vulnerabilities' that do not fit within its parameters and simultaneously sustains ignorance towards said 'vulnerabilities' (Fineman, 2010: Carlson, 2014:65). During the pandemic, discourse on 'vulnerability' shifted from the particulars of disability and illness to universally applicable, which served to invisibilise the former and play-out a familiar tale of privileged voices hijacking the concept (Pieri, 2022; Carlson, 2014). Simultaneously, discourse surrounding 'pre-existing/underlying conditions' and 'risk group' served to "reinforce already existing forms of oppression" against those with disabilities and chronic illness (Pieri, 2022: 105). As 'vulnerability' is socially constructed, it is also constructed to appeal to our cultural understanding of 'suffering'. Not only who do we consider vulnerable, but who do we consider suffering as a result of that vulnerability and therefore necessitates a response (Walklate, 2011:189; Chakraborti & Garland, 2012:507). This decision is made by "us", the normative - institutions, the public, the state and researchers.

The hierarchy of recognised marginalised or "vulnerable" groups therefore frequently treads culturally familiar paths of inclusion and exclusion (Munro & Scoular, 2012:201). Cultural understandings of who is 'vulnerable' often mirrors cultural understandings of who is most likely to be victimised by crime, regardless of the divergence from statistical evidence such as crime surveys (Green, 2007). The social pyramid of our culture is replicated in our conceptualisations of 'vulnerability': dominant hierarchies of race, class, age and gender are reinforced in hierarchies of 'vulnerability' within wider cultural discourses (Green, 2007). The politicisation of 'vulnerability' can situate different 'vulnerable' groups in competition with one another, competing for similar resources, which often divert sources away from those experiencing more serious forms of social harm that are invisibilised owing to their position further down the social hierarchy (Brown et al., 2016).

Finally, there is a "tragic quality" to the concept of the vulnerable individual, as sense of inevitability to harm that insidiously both blames the victim and removes state responsibility (Wishart, 2003:20). This envelops the term in cultural notions of blame, responsibility, choice and legitimacy (Brown, 2011). 'Vulnerability' is linked to passivity, fragility and inability,

and subsequent assumed need for protection is heavily embedded within traditional medical, as well as tragic, models of disability (Burghart, 2013). This is a further paradox of vulnerability; that a term with the initial primary aim of protection can instead be deployed as a tool of deprivation. This 'tragic' quality is often significantly embedded within conceptual models for specific groups assumed to be 'vulnerable', such as people living with disabilities (Burghart, 2013).

Mistranslations concerning 'vulnerabilities can therefore have serious consequences for service users. Gilson highlights "pathogenic vulnerabilities" as an "ethically troubling" subset of situational 'vulnerabilities' that "arise when a response intended to ameliorate vulnerability has the paradoxocial effect of exacerbating existing vulnerabilities or generating new ones", which can be facilitated by "sociopolitical oppression or injustice" (Gilson, 2013:22). The next section explores these consequences further by drawing on the real-life impact on service users that encounter the criminal justice system and are labelled as 'vulnerable'.

'Vulnerability' and the consequences for service users

The focus on 'vulnerability' can result in a cluster of individuals lumped together within a practitioner context by virtue of a recognised attribute and "afforded the same mandatory provisions", with little consideration of their efficacy or necessity (Bartkowiak-Theron & Asquith, 2015:94). There is also the expectation that all those considered 'vulnerable' have a monolithically experience of 'vulnerability' (Cunliff-Gilson, 2016). 'Vulnerabilities' intersect rather than operate in isolation. For example, individuals with disabilities can be at increased 'vulnerability' to poverty owing to systemic and oppressive barriers, whilst poverty can increase the 'vulnerable' circumstances of those living with disabilities (Trautadotti & Rice, 2012). Crime control discourse in our contemporary neoliberal society has normalised "conditions of individual insecurity and responsibility.... diverting attention from root causes of social problems" (Monahan, 2009:155). Discourses concerning 'vulnerability' and 'vulnerable' individuals follow a similar politically discursive path. It is generally accepted and expected that the public sector is tasked with the goal of "changing individual choices and behaviour" (Holmes, 2011:447). The state response to 'vulnerability' aims "to reduce exposure, enhance coping capacity, strengthen recovery potential and bolster damage control (i.e., minimise destructive consequences) via private and public means" (Watts & Bohle, 1993:45-6).

The fixation on individual responsibility "draws critical gaze" (Munro & Scoular, 2012:201; Brown, 2019:622; Garland, 2001; Flint, 2006; Harrison & Saunders, 2014) from the "larger context, the situations, the chains of influence, within which their vulnerability is created, we might even say, produced, maybe perpetuated" (Philo, 2005:443). The medical and tragic model of disability relies heavily on cultural understandings of 'vulnerability', as well as focusing attention on the individual, discouraging any challenge or deconstruction to the social structures that facilitate 'vulnerable' or precarious circumstances (Burghart, 2013). The attention is fixed completely on the individual or group deemed 'vulnerable', with their attributes and characteristics highlighted as both intrinsic and problematic (Munro & Scoular, 2012:201). It belies the "subtle assumption" the 'vulnerable individual' themselves alone are responsible for their 'vulnerability' - and therefore any suffering as a result is a choice (Holmes, 2011:447; Lakoff & Klineberg, 2010).

Such characterisation neatly and "conveniently sidesteps contradictions and complexities" of the social conditions that engender social problems, leaving no space to interrogate or challenge said conditions (Munro & Scoular, 2012:192-3). Furthermore it "absolves" the State or even other powerful parties of responsibility, as the individual is presented as having a choice of their own free will to participate in inherently or inevitably risky practices (Sibley, 2018:1467). Interventions focus on removing the 'problem', decreasing the 'vulnerability' and/or stopping the individual behaviour altogether, with support often conditional on the individual's engagement with practitioners (Brown & Saunders, 2017; Scoular & O'Neill, 2007; Sagar, 2010). The goal becomes self-governance and behavioural compliance rather than examining the structural inequalities at play, including those perpetuated by institutions themselves (Ford et al., 2024; Filipe et al., 2021b; Brown & Saunders, 2017; Shakespeare, 2017; Scully, 2013; Mounro & Scoular, 2012).

However, said focus on the individual is oddly paradoxical. For even though the attention is fixed on the individual as the "problem", the individual themselves is frequently ignored in favour of institutional decision making and interventions. For example, people who are disabled or ill are frequently depicted as "objects of cure and not subjects of care" (Pieri, 2022:106; Kafer, 2013).There is little consideration for individual nuances, their agency and resilience, their narrative and wants in decision making during encounters with criminal justice (Munro & Scoular, 2012:201; Bartkowiak-Theron, 2015:94; Bartkowiak-Theron & Crebo Crehan, 2012). There is also the assumption that if an individual possesses a shared group attribute, then those within said group experience their lives and 'vulnerabilities' in the

same way. There is little respect or space for the intersectionality of cultural or socioeconomic capital, which can directly and indirectly influence an individual's ability to navigate their personal circumstances (Sibley, 2018:1463). Crucially, both researchers and practitioners still have very little knowledge overall about how service users may view or feel about being labelled 'vulnerable' (Brown, 2011:319), or indeed how they might embrace and 'own' the label (Twigg, 2014:267). There are concerns that the label itself denies an individual the right to self-determination, to make sense of their own identities and experiences on their own terms (Parley, 2011).

The discourse and language concerning 'vulnerability' emphasises sympathy, care and compassion within public sector and political agendas (Aliverti, 2020). However, the experiences of civilians identified as 'vulnerable' suggest a much different experience, one which enhances exclusion from their own agency and decision-making (Brown, 2019; 2015). Despite 'vulnerable' populations occasional inclusion in policy consultation, they still find themselves marginalised in the final product, with preference given to professional 'experts' (Brown & Saunders, 2017; Geymonat & Macioti, 2016). Responses and interventions can be conceived of practices to be 'done to' the 'vulnerable' by policymakers and practitioners alike (Brown & Saunders, 2017; Brown, 2015). Individuals identified as 'vulnerable' are rarely consulted about this designation, or the interventions that may follow, often rejecting the label outright (Ellis, 2018). 'Vulnerability' primarily has been historically utilised as a categorisation for organisational purposes (Burghart, 2013), rather than necessarily embraced by the people who are affixed with the label. Whilst we may conceive of the state or our society as having special obligations to support or protect individuals categorised as 'vulnerable', as Brown (2015:2) succinctly notes, "we don't really ask them".

Individuals may need to 'perform' their expected 'vulnerability' for practitioners to avoid the withdrawal of support - or punitive action (Brown, 2015; 2019). Individuals, especially teenagers, who are perceived to transgress traditional ideas of gender and class may find themselves excluded from effective responses under restrictive policies and practices (Brown, 2019; Melrose, 2013; Phoenix, 2012a). If individuals are considered both 'vulnerable' yet challenging, the need for care quickly gives way to a need for control, framed as being necessary for 'protection' but can instead exacerbate 'vulnerability' (Brown, 2019; Ellis, 2018). Whilst policies concerning the protection of 'the vulnerable' concerning, for example, county lines and crime exploitation, children in practice may not always be recognised as

'vulnerable' and receive punitive interventions (Moyle, 2019; CSPRP, 2024). Taken together, this treatment promotes tension between practitioners and citizens (Ellis, 2018).

When 'vulnerability' is highlighted, its "shadow and antithesis - threat" closely follows (Burghart, 2013:558): the "vulnerability/dangerousness" axis (Warner, 2000:241). This is a tension between an individual's perceived 'vulnerability' and potential dangerousness - towards themselves or others. 'Vulnerability' can therefore simultaneously indicate how an individual is a risk rather than at risk (Brown, 2011:316), which poses everyday dilemmas for decision making in the public sector – particularly the police (Menkes & Bendelow, 2014:3). Young Muslims in the UK are constructed as being 'at risk' of radicalisation and therefore 'a risk' to the rest of the population (Coppock & McGovern, 2014:246). The police are active participants in this construction and application (Murray et al., 2015). Another example is the provision of mental health provision to young, black men in our society. This group is frequently constructed as being a threat and a danger to communities. They, an already marginalised group, are excluded from the 'vulnerable' label and in tandem excluded from mental health provisions (Warner, 2008; Fawcett 2009). The "juxtaposition of threat and vulnerability" is unfortunately common within mental health provision and youth criminal justice (Moon, 2000:241; Walklate, 2011:182). There can be heavy emphasis on the 'other' within 'vulnerability' discourses, for 'good' victims that need protection, and 'bad' villains from which we all need protection (Aliverti, 2020), which often reproduces racialised stereotypes and hierarchies (Stanford, 2012; Carlson, 2014; Long & Long, 2018).

The deservedness/dangerousness assignments of 'vulnerability' also impact on individual rights. There is the denial of rights to provisions and resources (Moon, 2000:241: Walklate, 2011:182). The notion of 'deservedness' is also deployed as a justification for intervening in the lives of citizens who are considered in need of 'rescue' or 'saving' (Munro & Scoular, 2012:193). What can mark the distinction between cultural binaries - men and women, able-bodied and disabled - is perceptions of 'vulnerability', which simultaneously equate to attributions of being less than worthy or deserving (Pieri, 2022; Cole, 2016). The interventions employed through this narrative of 'rescue' frequently involve coercive measures and tight surveillance. Legislation and the criminal justice system are frequently used as a threat to compel those in need of 'saving', married to the insistence that said individuals both need and want the 'saving' (Munro & Scoular, 2012:193-7). What has received less examination is the default set by this assumption: it positions the police and similar agencies as saviours.

The 'saving' - through the framework of 'safeguarding' - often "dovetails with punitive rationales and practice" (Aliverti, 2020:117). Personal and institutional values permeate judgements and decision making, resulting in uneven and inconsistent responses to those considered 'vulnerable' (Menkes & Bendelow, 2014: 3). Ideas about 'dangerousness' and 'deservedness' replicate gendered and racial hierarchies, which the police as an institution have a history of perpetuating. The framework of 'vulnerability' sadly in some cases may be no more than a reiteration of our culture's love affair with social Darwinism – making judgements on the 'drowned' and the 'saved' (Levi, 2017; Mason-Bish, 2013; Asquith & Bartkowiak-Theron, 2021).

Green (2007:94) asserts that the label of 'vulnerability' can "ignore sociohistorical and socio-political processes" inherent within the label. It can also ignore the social and political history of the police as an institution. 'Vulnerability' can be a lever of social control operated under the moral agenda of the governments of the day (Hunter (2011). The police are the law enforcement arm of the State. Rather than necessarily protecting individuals and communities without power, the police collude with the State to deprive said individuals and communities of that very same power (Munro & Scoular, 2012). Abusive policing can become policy and practice by implementing specific moral agendas, which inherently target the marginalised (Asquith & Bartkowiak-Theron, 2012). Previous broad, fluid terms have been created and deployed in exercises of social control, such as 'anti-social behaviour' (Ramsay, 2008b). The term 'reasonable suspicion' - a cornerstone of policing – is a notoriously flimsy and confused term used to justify police action (Farrow, 2020). The 'vulnerabilities' of victims are already considered to be justifications for cases of sexual violence being dropped, suggesting that the term's deployment is depriving some of justice, rather than improving or empowering the criminal justice system (William et al., 2009). It is not unreasonable therefore to be vigilant in terms of how "vulnerability" is understood by the police: how it is 'operationalised' in everyday practice - and exactly what it is used to justify.

The consequences and implications of 'vulnerability' as a contested term however are not experienced by service users alone. The police themselves are also forced to grapple with the implications and consequences of identifying and responding to 'vulnerability' in practice, which is the focus of the final section in this chapter.

'Vulnerability' and implications for the police

There is an argument that "the duty to protect the vulnerable falls on anyone who is in a position to assist but most especially on those to whom a person is most vulnerable" (Gilson, 2013:26; Goodin, 1985). The power dynamics of police and civilian are unequal,, particularly as the police have the authority to "exercise discretionary control over resources" (Goodin, 2013:26; Goodin, 1985). Frontline staff of the criminal justice system can be bound by their safeguarding obligations, facilitated by the increasing awareness and recognition of 'vulnerabilities' that they encounter (Aliverti, 2020; Cooper & Horton, 2017).

The conceptual relationship between 'vulnerability' and 'risk' was discussed previously in this chapter. The police have a long history of association with risk and risk management (see Ericson & Hagerty, 1999). The emphasis on risk however can result in 'risk aversion': "behaviour (that) puts resources into bureaucratic procedures designed to avoid litigation and safeguard reputations, at the expense of entrepreneurial, proactive work aimed at fulfilling core functions" (Heaton, 2011: 75). Encounters with the police, especially through criminal investigations and custodial detention, can be fraught with uncertainty (Dehaghani, 2021). Risk assessments are identified as an effective starting point to identify 'vulnerabilities' - but also act as bureaucratic safeguard to justify decisions, rather than effective and appropriate response (Dehaghani, 2016; Black & Lumsden, 2020). Custody officers, for example, may approach a task in a manner which primarily serves their own personal needs, with professional needs secondary (Dehaghani, 2017). The subjective nature of both concepts can cause confusion and inconsistent approaches to risk assessments themselves (HMICFRS, 2020).

There can be a linguistic and conceptual 'lumping' together of 'vulnerability' and 'risk' within a policing context, with both concepts being used interchangeably within the wider context of social care (Mythen & Weston, 2023). Risk has become part of actuarial science, affixed at the heart of models of uncertainty, whilst 'vulnerability' is more qualitative in its application owing to its subjectivity (Ford et al., 2024). The police identify and respond to incidents through the THRIVE framework: assessment of Threat, Harm, Risk, Investigation, Vulnerability and Engagement (HMICFRS, 2021:23). However, it is not entirely clear what is the conceptual or pragmatic difference between 'vulnerability' and 'risk' in this context. During the COVID-19 pandemic, HMICFRS reported "additional risks" of the pandemic: "these risks made people more vulnerable than before" (2021:25). It does suggest,

linguistically, that 'risks' are an outside, imposing factor, whilst 'vulnerability' is a quality or experience possessed by individuals. The construction of the relationship mirrors the policy construction of the 'vulnerable' by Munro & Scoular: 'vulnerable' service users become "risk managers" tasked with behaving in a responsible and agency sanctioned manner to reduce their own 'vulnerability' (2012:189). The individualisation of 'risk' and 'vulnerability' fails to compassionately and critically understand the complexities involved in crimes such as child sexual exploitation, especially concerning the victimisation experience of Black and Ethnic Minority children (Brown, 2019; Sharp, 2013).

The police play a significant role in the surveillance of groups considering to be a risk – whether these be a risk of violence within the community, or simply a risk to community norms (Murray et al., 2015). Categorisations of 'vulnerability' can highlight that an individual is at risk of harm, but simultaneously positions them as possibly posing a risk to others, which necessitates intervention, control and surveillance (Brown & Saunders, 2017). 'Vulnerability' can signal a need for scrutiny of already marginalised groups under the guise of precaution and community safety (Bartkowiak-Theron & Asquith, 2015). Policies concerning 'vulnerability' and 'risk' are operationalised by the police, often with regressive and harmful moral agendas that perpetuate inequality (Munro & Scoular, 2012).

There is a theoretical preference for 'operationalising' vulnerability, rather than adhering to a strict measurement, mirroring the agreement of prior research (e.g., Hinkel, 2011:200; Moss et al., 2001; Patt et al., 2012). However, in practice this can manifest as 'vulnerability management' (Brown, 2019), a preferred form of governance across public sector policies and interventions (Brown, 2015). This operationalisation occurs by identifying 'risk factors' that directly link 'vulnerability' with 'harm' (College of Policing, 2021: 20; Sanders et al., 2021; Black & Lumsden, 2019). The problem with the focus on 'risk factors' is that they may provide an explanation for social issues but contain little investigation of the role of structural inequalities and disadvantage (Brown, 2019; Webster et al., 2006; Phoenix, 2012a).

But in practice, police reliance on risk assessment and calculation manifests as a blanket response to 'vulnerability'. Such practices may be an attempt to simplify and quantify an incredibly complex topic, as 'vulnerability' carries numerous meanings (Munro & Scoular, 2012). Practitioners tend to bring their own (Twigg, 2014:267). There is little room for negotiation with service users concerning their designation of 'vulnerable', 'at risk' or 'a risk' - the police ultimately are the gatekeepers to the label (Black & Lumsden, 2020).

The police reliance on risk calculation and assessment can also lead to the continuing medicalisation and pathologisation of social issues under the guise of 'vulnerability' (Skolbekken, 2008; Black & Lumsden, 2020). Fluid and complex concepts like 'vulnerability' can often result in the police relying on their own experience and knowledge to make decision making judgements, rather than necessarily relying on policy or training alone (Twigg, 2014; Weston & Mythen, 2022). Judgements on mental health, for example, often rely on officers' personal classification of implicit values and judgements concerning mental health, rather than adhering to a diagnostic criterion or understanding of wellbeing (Menekes & Bendelow, 2014).

A further issue for the police is that the nebulous concept of 'vulnerability' promotes mission creep. The fluidity of the concept in practice has led to blurred boundaries between agencies and ownership of specific 'vulnerabilities'. Some researchers assert that this is a positive: that police are public health interventionists as much as health practitioners are public safety facilitators (Bartkowiak-Theron & Asquith, 2017). There is no doubt that there must be a multi-agency approach to 'vulnerability' and to criminal justice. What that looks like in practice however is just as fluid, nebulous and context specific as the nature of vulnerability itself.

There have been attempts to use the vulnerability framework in order for the police to recognise "categories of disadvantage" (Asquith & Bartkowiak-Theron, 2012: 3; Paterson & Best, 2014; Bartkowiak-Theron & Asquith, 2015). This is an attempt to create "inclusive policing", policing for all (Julian et al., 2021). However, an inclusive approach does not erase the exclusive approach in the past – or even the present. The administration of justice is impacted by inequalities of social power: the "impact of law and its enforcement in an unequal society will be objectively political, even in the narrower sense of partisanship, favouring some groups at the expense of others" (Reiner, 2010:33). The police often support the status quo (Galliher, 1971), whilst civilians with the highest rates of police encounters have historically and contemporarily been from the most economically and socially disadvantaged in our society (Aliverti, 2020). 'Vulnerability', as highlighted previously, has also been used to justify increased surveillance of communities that have a long and contentious history of said surveillance by the authorities (Coppock & McGovern, 2014; Murray et al., 2015; Aked et al., 2021). The 'universal' approach therefore replicates the social hierarchies as asserted by Carlson (2014) - and appropriated by dominant discourses

(Butler, 2004; Fineman, 2008). Further, legislation and policy can be malleable, shaped in accordance to suit the police and their aims (Dehaghani, 2016).

The humanitarian focus of 'vulnerability' can humanise the individuals with whom the police encounter, but as a result complicate the moral dilemmas of their role (Aliverti, 2020). Empathy and compassion can be facilitated by physical closeness to the suffering of others, and the often shared experience of pain (Aliverti, 2020). Empathy and compassion do not, however, exist separately from suspicion and worries about order (Aliverti, 2020; Heyman, 2002; Aas & Gundhus, 2015). The development of cynicism towards the public can be framed as a by-product of the policing role (Galliher, 1971). Scepticism around mental health has been highlighted within the custodial environment, with depression and anxiety considered overused terms in research concerning custody, with the belief that people were simply struggling with life in a 'normal' way, rather than considering it a mental health issue or indicator of 'vulnerability' (Dehaghani, 2016). There are ongoing problems with disproportionate stop and search practices, building on decades of institutionalised racism by the police towards predominantly black communities (Akintoye et al., 2022; Aked et al., 2021). The police response to mental health problems heavily relies on the medical model of psychiatric disability, which pathologises the individual and can limit the range of presponses by the police (Thatcher, 2024). There is documented poor treatment of citizens who are neurodiverse (Smith, 2022), poorly understood and conflated with 'mental health' and related 'vulnerabilities' by the police, rather than a condition in its own right (Siberry, 2022).

Research has yet to examine the hierarchy of vulnerability within a policing context. There is evidence, however, that an individual's 'vulnerabilities' can influence policing decisions negatively, suggesting a deployment of pre-existing dominant social hierarchies (Williams et al., 2008; Ewin, 2021). Rather than operating through a framework that places 'vulnerability' at the heart of all criminal justice encounters, evidence is emerging of a "competition of suffering" between the vast array of intersectionality, as well as marginalised individuals and communities (Bartkowiak-Theron & Asquith, 2021; Mason-Bish, 2013). Assessments of 'vulnerability' in custody and the application of the threshold for assignment of an appropriate adult is highly subjective (Dehaghani & Bath, 2019; Dehaghani, 2019). Rather than suspects not being 'vulnerable' until proven otherwise, Dehaghani (2021:251) argues that all suspects should be considered 'vulnerable' owing to the custodial environment, and attention should "be focussed on how resilience is depleted, reduced or removed".

Finally, there has been considerations of the 'vulnerability' of those within the criminal justice system, such as custodial officers and defense lawyers. Their 'vulnerability' however manifests differently, primarily owing to their role and attendant difference in power dynamics with their clients: they are powerless to perform their role to the best of their ability, compromised by austerity and decreasing resources (Dehaghani & Newman, 2017). As a result of these compromised standards, citizens are left 'vulnerable' to miscarriages of justice.

'Vulnerability': conclusions

It is necessary for the police, agencies and academics to recognise their own constructions of 'vulnerability' - and their impact in both theory and practice. Attempts to define and measure the term are complicated by how 'vulnerability' is morally and politically loaded with cultural expectations and assumptions (Brown, 2011; 2017). The issue is compounded further by the concept's relationship with other convoluted terms such as risk and resilience, which have their own cultural baggage.

Despite the focus on 'vulnerability' within policing, there are a significant number of problematic implications encapsulated by the term, which then impact service users that encounter the police. There are presumptions of dependency, weakness and inability; of some people deserving the protection of the label over others; and the scrutiny of the individual to avoid examination of structural inequalities and institutional responsibilities. Narratives, assumptions and discourses around 'vulnerability' frequently overlap, but there is currently only an academic critical understanding of how personal characteristics intersect, and how such intersectionality impacts not only the relative 'vulnerability' of the citizen, but their treatment by practitioners and institutions (Brown & Saunders, 2017).

That is not to say that analysis of 'vulnerability' is necessarily negative across the board. For Fineman in particular, 'vulnerability' is a critical lens through which researchers can examine and challenge specific power relations and responsibilities. In doing so, her approach to 'vulnerability' is concerned with privilege and lack of access to rights and protection (Fineman, 2011:58), as well as a tool to "examine hidden assumptions and biases (Fineman, 2008:9). Further, she asserts that this universal, "inevitable, enduring aspect of the human condition" approach creates a blueprint - the 'is and the 'ought' for the state's responsibilities towards its citizens (Fineman, 2008:8; Peroni & Timmer, 2013:1059). Similarly, Munro &

Scoular position 'vulnerability' as a concept that both challenges and compels the states "response to a universal of precarious dependency" (2012:189). Finally, Cunniff-Gilson (2016:72) asserts that "it is because we are vulnerable that we need ethics and social justice, but it is also because we are vulnerable—because we can be affected and made to feel sorrow, concern, or empathy—that we feel any compulsion to respond ethically or seek justice."

Further issues with 'vulnerability' deployed as a label in the criminal justice system are linked to its hierarchical application and political malleability. To receive the political legitimacy of being 'deserving' vulnerable individuals, said individuals must conform to already culturally accepted notions not only of 'vulnerability' but victimhood, suffering and innocence (Brown, 2011:317). Our society already possesses a cultural blueprint of attributes and behaviours that recognise and emphasise who and what is 'vulnerable'. This blueprint is drawn together from social constructions of crime, which is primarily founded on patriarchal conceptualisations of 'vulnerability' and victimhood (Carlson, 2014:61) Further, it emphasises whose suffering of 'vulnerability' deserves recognition, emphasis, empathy - and response (Walklate, 2011:189). The response is also socially constructed by "subtle symbolic demarcations of hierarchies" (Bourgois et al., 2017:3). This contributes to the persistent reinforcement of stigma. For if who deserves help is socially constructed, then said construction must also illuminate - whether implicitly or explicitly - who is not. Further, criminal justice interventions, including those employed by the police, are presented as a benevolent opportunity for help. But that is a blanket assumption. The appropriation of 'vulnerability' can be generated, rather than reduced by the policing interventions, owing to an institutionally and culturally sanctioned level of scrutiny (Phoenix, 2008; Cheney, 2010: Munro & Scoular, 2012:199). As noted by Brown et al., 2016: 50: "vulnerability is becoming a pervasive and problematic defining feature of the state's relationship to the individual."

The next chapter examines the development of this relationship between the State and the individual. The history of 'vulnerability' in policy and policing history is investigated how 'vulnerability' came to be "conceived as a problem to be solved" (Brown, 2015:13) - and how the police came to be conceived as the solution.

Chapter 2 - 'Vulnerability' creep into policing, police creep into 'vulnerability': an examination of policy

Introduction

'Vulnerability' has become an emerging area of core business in contemporary policing. This emergence has been institutionally recognised by inspections concerning 'vulnerability', conducted yearly across all forces by HMICFRS since 2015. This inspection, known as PEEL, considered the effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy of police forces identification and response to 'vulnerability'. The first PEEL report investigated force responses to domestic abuse, missing persons and mental health incidents alone (HMIC, 2015). Since then, the scope of 'vulnerabilities' has widened to include force responses to anti-social behaviour, re-offending, serious organised crime, supporting victims and protecting 'vulnerable' people from harm (HMIC, 2016; HMICFRS, 2017; 2018, 2019; 2021). This project was initially born from the PEEL inspections, with the studied force initially graded 'inadequate' at protecting 'vulnerable' people.

This chapter investigates how this emergence occurred by examining policies and policing history to shed light on expectations of the police and their responsibilities concerning 'vulnerability'. I began the project by examining the 'genealogy' of 'vulnerability' through legislation, policy and contemporary historical events, originally from 1969 (to cover fifty years of 'vulnerability' from the start of the project), although by the end of writing the thesis, I was encouraged to look back further, to the very beginning of formal policing. I discovered that whilst tangents began to appear that would later create the foundation for 'vulnerability' in its present form, 'vulnerability' as a concept emerged more visibly around 1999 within a criminal justice and policing context, revolving initially around the themes of child protection, domestic abuse, victims' rights and stalking and harassment. Simultaneously, this time covers approximately twenty years leading up to the beginning of the project in 2018, and data gathering in 2019. It

Two interlinking questions are posed here: how did the police creep into 'vulnerability', and how did 'vulnerability' creep into policing? This chicken-and-egg scenario cannot be answered definitively, with both 'vulnerability' and policing increasingly intruding on one another as the years have progressed.

The chapter begins with an examination on policing role from their formal inception in 1829 to the turn of the 21st century, and what role they played in 'vulnerability' before 'vulnerability' became an overt operational focus. There is then an examination of the police's turn to 'vulnerability' between 1999 and 2014, focusing on the developing definitions of 'vulnerability' that escalated over that time period. The year 2014 is highlighted as the year that 'vulnerability' became a prominent feature in policing and partner frameworks. Three overarching themes drawn from policy are then examined, owing to their role in 'vulnerability' creep into policing and their appearance in the later analysis chapters: assumptions and expectations of 'vulnerability' encapsulated in policy; the sharing of the burden but the expansion of the load for the police triggered by the need for multi-agency working in responding to 'vulnerability'; and finally, the increasing role of the police in contemporary health and social care.

The police and 'vulnerability': 1829-1980

Before the official state formation of the police, those that held similar duties were considered watchmen, with observation their primary task (Emsley, 2021). The professional police service was created in 1829 by Home Secretary Robert Peel, originally operating in London alone, with the concept introduced nationwide by the 1850s. The Peelian principles of policing are founded on the notion that the success of the police cannot be determined by arrests, but by a lack of crime. The efficacy of the police would also require trust and accountability (Lentz & Chaires, 2007). The police initially performed watchmen-like duties, whilst the Central Investigative Division was created in 1877 (Reiner, 2010:76). The prominent presence of the police on the streets has been more effective in theory than in practice, a symbol of public expectations of the police role in the community (Walker, 1996).

The police mandate is founded on the preservation of life and property. However, this was not an egalitarian endeavour: the life and property to be preserved were primarily those of the upper and middle classes, framed as needing protection from the 'dangerous' lower classes (Reiner, 2010). Police officers played a role in the capitalist economic functions of society, and reinforcing traditional gender roles, with arrests occurring for failing to pay 'poor' rates, failure to support a family and breaking work contracts (Emsley, 2009:138). The police from the very beginning have been an institution founded on the practices of inclusion and exclusion - a concept significantly attributed much later to 'vulnerability' (Munro & Scoular,

2012). In the 19th century, prevention of crime remained a core principle of policing - alongside an expectation that officers would enforce "new levels of public decorum" (Emsley, 2009:126). The 'crimes' to be prevented were predominantly minor: begging, drinking, petty theft, sex work and violation of street regulations, which included moving working class men who gathered in the street (Emsley, 2009:130).

Concerning structural 'vulnerability', police officers in the 19th century also performed the role of 'assistant poor relief officer'. The police occasionally ran community events and organisations, such as soup kitchens and picnics, the provision of food, clothing and shoes for the poorest children (Emsley, 2009:168-9). Poor relief officers were instructed to be firm in their decisions to whom they gave relief tickets – those considered "persistently and actually destitute" – but officers were not given any formal guidance in this endeavour, feeling like they had to "grope their way in the dark…to sort out genuine cases of want" (Emsley, 2009:720). Almost a hundred and fifty years later, police officers would find themselves in a similar position with 'vulnerability' (Keay & Kirby, 2018). The poor law relieving officer also permitted a far more insidious practice: supervising social groups who were perceived to be the principal perpetrators of crime – the working class, those with addiction, the poor, sex workers - with the role motivated by social control rather than acting in good faith (Emsley, 2009:168), emphasising an organisational culture geared towards surveillance early on (Reiner, 2010).

Women were first introduction into official police business in 1883, employed to visit female convicts released on license. Five years later, in 1889, fourteen women were formally recruited as police matrons to search and supervise female detainees - as well as sit in interviews to ensure false accusations were not made against male officers (Emsley, 2009:179, 210). In 1907, the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police Service recruited to look after and take statements of women and children victimised by sexual assault (Emsley, 2009:179). The first WPOs, introduced in 1915, would be given this official duty, as well as statements of women who had been victimised by the ambiguous crime of "indecency" (Emsley, 2009:210). Women Police Officers did not have the powers of arrest afforded to their male colleagues: their work duties were separate, with WPOs mainly responsible for supervising other women, children and families (Emsley, 2009:188; Jackson, 2000).

Despite the introduction of women into the ranks of policing, paternalistic ideas about women persisted. After the outbreak of the first world war, the police were dispatched to counter

anxieties about the 'vulnerability' of young women and girls 'loitering' close by large army camps, as well as women employed in munitions factories - both considered 'vulnerable' to "new and dangerous temptations", far from the protection of family and friends (Emsley, 2009:179). A more insidious police activity concerning the 'vulnerability' of women arrived during the interwar period, with officers tasked to check the conduct of war widows: if they were discovered to be living with a man, their pension or separation grant would automatically be withdrawn (Emsley, 2009:190). Police activities were therefore closely tied to particular moral agendas, rather than active harm or suffering (Munro & Scoular, 2012).

There was significant resistance within the male rank and file towards the concept of WPOs during peacetime, believing women should only be responsible for auxiliary and administrative roles (Emsley, 2009:270). However, during the wars, the police were charged with the apprehension of deserters, the administrative duty of billeting troops, and occasionally the supervision of POW camps (Emsley, 2009) - more mundane bureaucracy and the exercise of state power, rather than crime fighting or public protection. During the same period, London police stations resembled a "mixture of citizens advice bureau and community centre", providing a first aid post for children and even delivering babies for women in labour (Emsley, 2009:224), demonstrating the significance of a welfare role for the police.

Reiner highlights how "conflicts between socially marginal and police are perennial" - and those who were socially excluded rapidly increased during the period after World War II (Reiner, 2010:95). This period saw the growing use of recreational drugs, creating both a market for crime, and a market for policing (Emsley, 2009:255). In the 1960s, the main policing priorities were crimes based on conceptions of male desire: gambling, sex work and drugs (Emsley, 2009:247). More formalised procedures and policies concerning crime prevention took shape as a result, operationalised by uniformed patrol ((Reiner, 2010; Hughes & Edwards, 2013; Byrne & Pease, 2012). The media and the wider public also expected the police to step in to confrontations and disorder - whether real or perceived - concerning gangs and hooliganism that were making headlines (Emsley, 2009:248).

In terms of structural inequality and 'vulnerability', the police were the lone standout in resisting the post-war acceptance of immigrants into public sector employment, despite vacancies (Emsley, 2009). There was strong, unfounded inclination within policing to link immigration and criminality (Emsley, 2009:262). The idealised vision of the police officer

was a white man, an image that became more heavily entrenched through depictions of the police in pop culture that began to increase from the mid-twentieth century to the present day (Emsley, 2009:266; Reiner, 2010).

The concept of 'discretion' has always been available to beat officers, with the 1970s seeing further 'discretion' permitted in how they carried out their patrol (Emsley, 2009:276). In the 1970s, plain clothes detectives were given the discretion to find and pursue their own cases concerning drugs, porn and sex work (Emsley, 2009:277). Discretion can be considered a vital part of policing, with previous iterations of the practice negotiated with the community itself: "to deal with crime did not involve a rigid imposition of police control; furthermore, policing itself was only the first step…a holding operation until the social changes which would engender a more stable society would hopefully be instituted" (Young, 1999:124). However, such 'discretion' disproportionately affects People of Colour in terms of arrest, perpetuating state-sanctioned racialised practice (Bustamante et al., 2019; Long, 2018), despite the police and wider criminal justice system having contact with young black men disproportionately as victims of crime (Reiner, 2010:165). The further disproportionate patterns of treatment of black communities - including stop and search, as well as death in custody - can mobilise 'discretion' as the explanation for these patterns, focusing on the often "notoriously amorphous and inscrutable" 'discretionary practices' as 'the problem', shifting neatly away from institutionalised racism (Parmar, 2021; Long, 2018; Reiner, 2010:165). A significant issue that is often ignored is that policies such as stop and search - as well as policies across the board - are approaches and explanations written by, and for, white men (Long, 2018).

WPOs began to be integrated with the male service in 1973 as a result of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 (Emsley, 2009:245). WPOs were expected to solely handle traffic problems, minor offences and supervising "idle" children during school holidays, as well as reassuring elderly citizens about suspicious callers (Emsley, 2009:273). Male officers preferred to leave victims of sexual assault to be handled by female officers, with women being found in increasing numbers within crime prevention units - often referred to disparagingly as "cardigan squads" (Emsley, 2009:274). Police performance of activities more akin to social work has been present since the 1970s - covert, unacknowledged and disliked (Reiner, 2010: 142; Punch, 1979b).

However, gender and racial inequalities were not necessarily considered yet a problem. The most significant concerns surrounding both policing and 'vulnerability' was the issue of confessions being forced from suspects, a public scandal building throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s (Emsley, 2009:278). As a result, the single most significant piece of legislation in the development of modern policing was created (Reiner, 2010:212).

PACE and Partnerships: the police and 'vulnerability' from 1980 into the 21st century

The Policing and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 arose from increasingly vocal concerns around the violation of rules concerning the collection of evidence, and was introduced to balance the "codification of police powers and safeguards over their exercise" (Reiner, 2010:84). Born out of recommendations for the Royal Commission for Criminal Procedure, the legislation intended a "balancing of powers and safeguards" of tensions between the rights of individuals versus the security of a community - an assertion that has been significantly rebuffed and criticised (Reiner, 2010:212). Prior to PACE, the Judge Rules specified how evidence should be collected and secured by the police, as well as treatment of suspects in custody - however, multiple miscarriages in justice demonstrated the deficiencies within this guidance (Dehaghani, 2021).

The legislation decrees that individuals must be informed of the rights, including the right to legal advice, the maintenance of a custody record, a complex timetable of review and detainment up to 96 hours (Reiner, 2010:214). The act also introduced a legal foundation for stop and search, and mandating the recording of interviews (Emsley, 2009:287). PACE is set out in five codes, and a failure to comply is a disciplinary offence (Reiner, 2010:213). The legislation also created the role of the appropriate adult as a safeguard for suspects deemed 'vulnerable' (Dehaghani, 2021).

The overturning of convictions that occurred both before and after PACE highlighted how the legislation was not only needed, but needed to go further, which was particularly evidenced by the corruption uncovered within and subsequent disbanding of the West Midlands Serious Crime Squad (Reiner, 2010:84). PACE did not prevent, but certainly hindered, the legally dubious tactics of interviewing suspects - including those considered 'vulnerable', as those with learning disabilities and mental health problems - leading to false confessions (Irving & McKenzie, 1989; Reiner, 2010:154). Until 2018, code C of PACE recognised that

'vulnerability' included those under the age of 18, mental 'vulnerability' (difficulty with understanding 'the significance of what is said, of questions or of their replies' due to issues with mental state or capacity) and mental disorders (any disorder or disability of the mind) (Home Office, 2017: Note 1G; Dehaghani, 2021).

Code C of PACE currently asserts that an individual's 'vulnerability' relates specifically to a mental health condition or mental disorder, rather than general mental health (Dehaghani, 2021). The police also have a long history of involvement in mental health incidents, primarily owing to the policies of deinstitutionalisation that began in the 1960s, formalised within the Mental Health Act in 1983 (Bittner, 1967; Trebilcock & Weston, 2020).

Elsewhere, during the miners strikes in the 1980s, the police were framed as being "a strong armed instrument of an oppressive central state" (Emsley, 2009:278), bringing the relationship between class and the police into public frame. The role of Her Majesty's Investigate Constabulary was enhanced in the mid-1980s to centralise and co-ordinate standards and procedures, with publication of inspection reports beginning in the 1990s (Reiner, 2010:230). Under the Conservative government of the 1980s and 1990s, despite crime prevention being positioned high on their political agenda, this manifested as a preference for situational crime prevention over investigating and addressing social causes of crime (Gilling, 2007). Multi-agency working concerning crime reduction was an increasingly articulated approach by the 1980s within the police (Houghton, 2011).

Public protection panels began to appear in the 1990s, bringing together experts from a variety of disciplines - police, probation, prisons, social worker, psychiatry and housing, amongst others - to evaluate the level and nature of 'risk' posed by serial and/or violent offenders moving into an area, facilitating joint safety plans to 'manage' said 'risk' (Maguire & Kenmshall, 2004). There were multiple partnerships during the late 1980s to 1990s, with joint action groups, local area agreements, local strategic partnerships, drugs harm index, key performance indicators and national indicator sets (Emsley, 2009:288). Multi-agency approaches appeared in the arena of child protection, with Area Child Protection Committees created under the Children Act 1989 (Maguire & Kemshall, 2004).

The Morgan Committee was established by the Home Office to investigate these multi-agency approaches to crime prevention (Gilligan, 2007; Hughes et al., 2022). In 1991, the Morgan report proposed a multi-agency approach that reconceptualised traditional 'crime prevention' as 'community safety'(Reiner, 2010:107): a more holistic approach to crime

prevention through the prism of community safety, with collaboration founded on statutory, rather than voluntary, partnership involvement (Houghton, 2011; Gilligan, 2007; Phillips, 2002). Despite the apparent benevolence and friendly overtones to 'community policing', police activity of surveillance and intelligence gathering within the community highlights its potential to be a mechanism for encroaching state power (Gordon, 1984; Reiner, 2010).

The recommendations of the Morgan report were, however, in conflict with the Conservative agenda owing to their emphasis on holism and local democracy - in opposition, the Labour party were in favour of them (Gilligan, 2007). Amidst the handover of power after 1998 election, there was also the fall-out from the MacPherson inquiry, which decreed that the Metropolitan Police Service were institutionally racist, leading to some soul-searching and much defensiveness over the inclusive and exclusive nature of policing (Bartkowiak-Theron & Asquith, 2015; Reiner, 2010:163).

Worsening the issue was the rise of zero tolerance policing, created by the New York Police Department in response to rising crime rates (Punch, 2007). Zero-tolerance policing does not, however, concern the rigorous enforcement of all laws, but discriminatory enforcement against specific marginalised groups, usually within public spaces (Crawford, 1999). Such practices are a common tactic in county lines and child criminal exploitation (Moyles, 2019), and are underpinned by an ideology of exclusion (Young, 1999:27). Zero-tolerance policing "embodies conspicuous dynamics of social exclusion….a nostalgic reassertion of moral authority through more aggressive and assertive policing" (Crawford, 1998:237). Rather than aggressively tackling difficult problems - poverty, homelessness, domestic violence - zero-tolerance policing instead offers an aesthetic, voter-pleasing solution, than emphasises 'selective intolerance' (Crawford, 1998:238). Zero tolerance policing can be a response to mere 'incivilities', with the police expected to "sweep the streets clean of deviance and disorder…to deal with aggressive beggars, loiterers, drunks and prostitutes" (Young, 1999:123) - the same 'incivilities' which the police were required to sweep away over a hundred years earlier (Emsley, 2009:126).

The recommendations and principles of the Morgan report would manifest in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, as New Labour had promised during the 1997 election (Gilligan, 2007). The act positioned crime prevention as the main aim of the police, placing their remit far beyond the investigation, arrest and processing of offenders (Loveday, 2000). It also attempted to centre crime prevention as the normal 'business' of local authorities more widely

(Hughes et al., 2022). Despite the expectations of 'community' policing, some researchers have argued that the 'service' ethic necessary to tackle crime prevention was antithetical to the 'habitus' - that is, the "institutionalised perceptions, values, strategies and schemas" (Chan, 1997:92) - of police work and culture (Hughes et al., 2022:115).

After their election win, however, Labour handicapped the partnerships by sticking to the spending plans of the Conservative party, which "undermined capacity of services to perform as intended..[and] exacerbated pressures leading younger people to crime" (Reiner, 2010:252). Funding was later granted through the Crime Reduction programme, but attainment was closely tied to meeting the Home Office's Public Service Agreement targets. Partnerships therefore had to straddle two competing aims: local consultation, but alignment with the national agenda (Hughes et al., 2022:118; Gilligan, 2007). Efforts were evaluated and expected to lead to dissemination of evidence-based strategies (Reiner, 2010: 107).

The Crime and Disorder Act 1998, and resulting partnerships, embodies the principal dynamics of community, managerialism and inter-organisational collaboration - however, the definition and conceptualisation of these dynamics were ambiguous, and risked promoting further social inclusion rather than amelioration (Crawford, 1998). Ideas around crime prevention and 'vulnerability' were predominantly focused on young people being 'vulnerable' to delinquency, 'vulnerable' to committing vandalism in the community (Hughes et al., 2002:93). Further, the act itself was moralising in tonic and logic, founded on the problematic ideology of reforming so-called 'disorderly' people (Hughes et al., 2022:129). These types of 'disorder' were considered more easily achievable aims in terms of reduction than, for example, domestic violence or hate crime - which may be more harmful to individuals, but strategies for prevention could easily see an increase in reporting statistics (Hughes et al., 2022). There was an "obsession with managing measurable reduction of certain types of crime and disorder" - primarily vehicle crime, burglary and violent crime (Hughes et al., 2022:128). Despite ongoing pressures for results, evidence of long-term change remained scarce (Skinns, 2005). CDRPs' preference for managerialism facilitated short-term interventions that prioritised performance measurement over long-term effective responses for those who had been victimised, with perpetrator initiatives championed, especially concerning domestic violence (Harvie & Manzi, 2011).

The effective inclusion of communities in partnerships has been more symbolic than implemented in practice (Skinns, 2005). The partnerships were encouraged to consult bodies

that represent or promote the interests of, or provide services to, a myriad of individuals within the community that would later overlap with our understandings of 'vulnerable people': women, the young/children, the elderly, the physically and mentally disabled, and those of differing ethnic groups (Hughes et al., 2022:110). Partnerships were also encouraged to facilitate engagement with 'hard to reach' groups, which was often limited in practice (Hughes et al., 2022:110) - and is another term synonymous with 'vulnerability' and marginalisation (Ellard-Gray et al., 2015; Gombert et al., 2016). Guidance for crime and disorder partnerships specify that 'hard to reach' groups specifically mirrors list of potentially 'vulnerable' populations: young men, the homeless, those using drugs, those who are gay, ethnic minorities, children, victims of domestic abuse and the elderly (Hughes et al., 2022:111).

'Risk', reassurance and rubbish: Police and 'vulnerability' at the turn of the 21st century

The next section investigates more closely the formalisation of 'vulnerability' within policy. However, other concepts and types of crimes were emerging alongside it, some with strong relationships to 'vulnerability'. By the turn of the twenty-first century, the police were conceived as knowledge workers and holders of 'risk' (Ericson & Haggerty, 1997): "brokering information to public and private organisations concerned with regulating sundry kinds of risk" (Reiner, 2010:239). Police databases contained "individual profiles in terms of trustworthiness, creditworthiness and physical vulnerabilities", with information that is both "precise and plentiful" (Young, 1999:191).

The "soft machine" of social control expanded CCTV visual surveillance, with the criminal justice system increasing "acturial assessment" of individuals, targeting the 'vulnerable', who can also be interpreted as being the "disorganised, underproductive and idle" (Young, 1999:191). Public support for the enhancement of police powers, without corresponding safeguards and the downplaying of those currently in place, often occur in political climates where 'vulnerability' and insecurity are prominent within the population and therefore on the political agenda (Reiner, 2010:100). There was a "pervasive sense of crisis", exceptionalism and 'vulnerability' in the aftermath of the 9/11 and 7/7 terror attacks (Reiner, 2010:101). Terrorism is also an example of the globalisation of crime, alongside trafficking, which saw the police "pulling away from local roots" to tackle them (Emsley, 2009:289).

Granting the police further powers to counter feelings of 'vulnerability' can perform as a form of reassurance. Providing reassurance has to some extent been a consistent policing activity, with Women Police Officers expected to provide reassurance to citizens as part of the routine duties (Emsley, 2009:273). Police Community Support Officers were introduced in 2002 to replace the traditional role of the 'bobby on the beat', performing activities focused on protection, as well as reassurance (Reiner, 2010:106). There was also more paperwork - more bureaucracy to safeguard decisions, based on the belief that such processes facilitate transparent practice and restrict abuse (Emsley, 2009:289). Activities were underpinned by the dominance of managerialist ideology embedded within expectations of effective crime control (Reiner, 2010:239).

The pluralisation of policing provision has replaced the Peelian model of state police, "increasingly cooperating and competing with a variety of other policing agencies…with functions becoming increasingly diverse" (Reiner, 2010:239). The jigsaw pieces of the future role of the police concerning 'vulnerability' - as well as pertinent themes concerning the problematic nature of the term - were present but disconnected.

A key theme of this section has been the people who often encountered the police through their activities - people who were often marginalised, stereotyped and oppressed by policing (Reiner, 2010). Many of these characteristics would later become indicators of 'vulnerability' which the police were expected to identify and respond. Prior to the 21st century, entire groups of people were considered 'police property': the homeless, alcoholics, addicts, the unemployed, youth who had "adopted a deviant lifestyle", ethnic minorities, the LGBT community, sex workers and radical political organisations (Reiner, 2010:123). 'Rubbish' was another term used historically to describe people who encounter the police, framed as "messy, intractable, unworthy of attention or complaints own fault", with domestic violence - framed as 'domestic disputes' - frequently characterised as such (Reiner, 2010:124). Once formal recording was introduced, domestic violence would be categorised as 'service' incidents, rather than as 'crimes' by both police and researchers (Reiner, 2010:146). Domestic violence appears rarely within the history of policing mandate with any meaningful analysis, labelled 'domestic disputes' rather than as a serious crime (see Emsley, 2009:228). Domestic violence has therefore always been a part of the police workload, but responded to without criminal justice interventions - even when assault was present (Reiner, 2010:172).

Women, broadly speaking, were historically placed into two categories - wives or whores (Reiner, 2010:172). Sex workers and exploited children were conceptualised through the paternalistic and pejorative image of the 'fallen women' (Emsley, 2009:133). Girls who perceived to behave 'promiscously' and/or 'suspiciously' entered into the criminal justice system by the police, either as a punitive response for their violation of the gendered codes concerning acceptable behaviour, or paternalistically as requiring protection (Reiner, 2010:172). Rape victims have historically received "insensitive and even hostile treatment", and contemporary practices remain deeply problematic (Reiner, 2010:172). There is historic and contemporary poor treatment of the LGBT community as victims, suspects and as police officers and staff (Rusell, 2019; Dwyer & Tomsen, 2916; Reiner, 2010:173), with LGBTQ+ activity criminalised long after legal de-criminalisation (Goldberg et al., 2019).

Whilst the specific terms of 'rubbish' and 'property' may no longer appear in policing linguistics, and there is more focus on sexual violence and domestic abuse, how the police respond to incidents and individuals with these characteristics remain problematic (Casey, 2023; HMIC, 2015). These characteristics, alongside race, ethnicity and disabilities, still carry low status, can often be powerless in the face of structural inequality, and whom the dominant majority can frame as 'others' or 'different', and a result are "problematic or distasteful" - and so are comfortable leaving the police to manage these categories of social 'problems', frequently turning "a blind eye to the manner in which this is done" (Reiner, 2010:123; Lee, 1981). Most personal and circumstantial characteristics of those historically considered 'rubbish' or 'police property' are now adopted under the umbrella of 'vulnerability' (Brown, 2011; 2019; Bartkowiak-Theron & Asquith, 2012; 2015; Walklate, 2011; PEEL, 2015). The police now are expected to identify, respond and protect this section of the population, conceptually recognising their personal and circumstantial 'vulnerability'.

In 1997, however, such considerations were in the distant future, as the Lord Chancellor's department attempted to create a cohesive term to be applied to individuals and their mental capacity - a realm where, at the time, the police were not expected to tread.

The turn to 'vulnerability' (1999-2014): definitions of 'vulnerability'

Throughout the 1998-2010 Labour governments, who counted as 'vulnerable' under various pieces of legislation and policy included individuals prescribed medical, counselling or pallitative care (Care Standards Act 2000); worklessness; poverty; poor or overcrowded

housing; parental lack of academic or vocational qualifications; mothers with mental health problems; family members with disabilities or long running illness; income at 60% below the median; and inability to afford certain food and clothing items (Ecclestone & Rawdin, 2016). There was therefore an expansion of the 'vulnerability' criteria – and an expansion of state and practitioner power into the lives of citizens (Brown, 2015).

In 1997, as noted, the Lord Chancellor's department was one of the first public organisations who attempted to create coherence through its white paper, 'Who decides?', which concerned decisions made on the behalf of mentally incapacitated adults. The paper defines a 'vulnerable adult' as someone "who is or may be in need of community care services by reason of mental or other disability, age or illness; and who is or may be unable to take care of him or herself, or unable to protect him or herself against significant harm or exploitation" (Lord Chancellor's Department, 1997:68). This definition reappears in 'No secrets' - guidance published by the Department of Health and Social care concerning multi-agency protection of 'vulnerable' adults from abuse. This definition was the foundation for the future THRIVE framework used primarily by contact services, which was later adopted by the College of Policing: "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" (College of Policing, 2021:6).

The Home Office also created its own definition of 'vulnerable people, concerning witnesses within the criminal justice system. The interdepartmental report, 'Speaking Up for Justice' (1998) would facilitate the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999. This legislation created special measures to support 'vulnerable' witnesses when testifying, defined as: "the mentally and physically disabled, those in fear of intimidation such as the complainant of racial or domestic violence, and of course children" (Macpherson, 2001: 230). Such groups are often considered 'vulnerable' by both literature and policy (Munro & Scoular, 2012; Bartkowiak- Theron & Asquith, 2017; Dehaghani, 2017; Keay & Kirby, 2018). Personal factors like age, social and cultural background, religious or political beliefs are considered within the legislation's framework, alongside situational factors such as the nature of the offence (Macpherson, 2001).

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary drew their definitions of a 'vulnerable adult' from both the 1997 white paper and the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999. A 'vulnerable victim' was specified as being "an individual who was under the age of 18 at the

time of the offence, or whose quality of evidence is likely to be affected because of a mental disorder, another 'significant impairment of intelligence and social functioning', or who has a physical disability or is suffering from a physical disorder". 'Vulnerability' was defined as a "condition of a person who is in need of special care, support or protection because of age, disability or risk of abuse or neglect" (HMIC, 2015: 23). By 2017, 'vulnerability' and 'vulnerable victim' had been amalgamated into a 'vulnerable person', which was defined the same as 'vulnerability' in previous reports (HMICFRS, 2017: 118).

The Safeguarding of Vulnerable Groups Act 2006 attempted to set out some legal definitions of who can be considered 'vulnerable'. For adults, there is an extensive list, whilst children (defined as being under the age of 18) were included as a default owing to their age. The list for adults is dependent on circumstances: living in residential accommodation or sheltered housing; receiving domiciliary care, healthcare or any welfare service; in lawful custody; or requires any assistance with their affairs. Any adult could be experiencing these circumstances at any point during their lifetime: under the act, therefore, any of us can be considered 'vulnerable'.

To fully understand how and why 'vulnerability' has become such a focus within contemporary policing at present, the year 2014 is significant. This is the year that produced the most policies concerning 'vulnerability': the year that 'vulnerability' stepped out of the shadows, and into contemporary police practice.

2014: 'vulnerability' emerges into the light

The Conservative government has seen widespread cuts in welfare provision after 2010, but failed to see a similar curtailing of the criteria and discourse around 'vulnerability'. A much wider range of problems, from the very serious to the everyday mundane now considered under the umbrella of 'vulnerability' (Ecclestone & Rawdin, 2016). A significant number of policies and inspections relating to 'vulnerability' were published in 2014 - considerably more than any other year by comparison. Most are listed here (for future details on each document, please see appendix I):

- **Making Safeguarding Personal 2013/14: summary of findings (LGA/ADASS)**

- **Core business: An inspection into crime prevention, police attendance and the use of police time (HMIC)**

- **Children and Families act (2014)**

- **A joint inspection of the treatment of offenders with learning disabilities within the criminal justice system (Criminal Justice Joint Inspection)**

- **Care Act 2014**

- **Independent inquiry into child sexual exploitation in Rotherham – 1997-2013 (Jay)**

- **Policing in austerity: meeting the challenge (HMIC)**

- **Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or from care (Department of Education)**

- **Code of Practice - Mental Health Act (2014 Revision) (Home Office: Mental Health Crisis Care Concordat)**

- **'Would they actually have believed me?' A focus group exploration of the underreporting of crimes by Jimmy Savile (NSPCC)**

- **Joint thematic inspection of Integrated Offender Management (HMIC & HMPS)**

- **Everyone's business: Improving the police response to domestic abuse (HMIC)**

- **Anti-social behaviour, crime and policing act 2014**

- **Multi-agency practice guidelines: handling cases of forced marriage (HM Government)**

- **Multi Agency Working and Information Sharing Project Final report (Home Office)**

- **Helping the police to support people with vulnerabilities (Home Office):**

- **Supporting vulnerable people who encounter the police: A strategic guide for police forces and their partners (Home Office):**

- **Crime recording: making the victim count (HMIC)**

- **Serious and organised crime local guides: a guide (HM Government)**

- **Achieving Best Evidence in Child Sexual Abuse Cases (Joint Inspection, HMCPSI/ HMIC)**

- **Girls in the Criminal Justice System (Joint Inspection by HMI Probation, CSSIW, CQC, HMIC, HMI Prisons, Ofsted, HMI Probation)**

The trigger for the creation of so many policies concerning 'vulnerability' directly and indirectly was born from a series of high-profile cases concerning victimisation and institutional failure. The turn of the twenty-first century unveiled decades of child sexual abuse and its cover up within the Catholic church. Not solely in one church, one area or one county: this was systematic practice and knowledge across the world (Bohm et al., 2013). Ten years later, more scandals and revelations began to be uncovered. The most prominent was Jimmy Savile, a celebrated broadcaster and celebrity, was revealed in 2012 to be one of the worst serial sex offenders in British history. Like the Catholic church, many institutions had known or suspected his crimes, but covered them up, either deliberately or through ignorance. These institutions included the police, the NHS and the BBC (Greer & McLaughlin, 2013). Damning reports and reviews of said institutions arrived in the fallout, including Operation Yewtree, a police investigation into historical sexual abuse at the BBC that led to several publicised trials (Greer & McLaughlin, 2012; NSPCC & MPS, 2013). The entire saga prompted a decline in public trust of these public institutions (Greer & McLaughlin, 2013; Furedi, 2013).

At the same time, inquiries into child sexual exploitation in areas across England revealed not only that such practices existed, but agencies from the police to the local authorities had known of these occurrences and did nothing (Jay, 2014; Ansbro, 2014). The racialised narrative of the media aided in drawing these cases, and attendant 'vulnerabilities', into the spotlight (Patel, of 2018).

The revelations, whilst shocking, were not strictly a surprise: child sexual abuse as a topic has cycled through periods discovery, ignorance and re-discovery within our culture since the 1970s (Furedi, 2013; Powell & Scanlon, 2015; Serisier, 2017). I would suggest that a partial trigger for change, and the avalanche in policies, was sparked by not by the number of victims involved, but the number of institutions involved in the facilitation and cover up of systemic sexual abuse of children (Powell & Scanlon, 2015).

Crimes that contained other elements which would fall under the policing umbrella of 'vulnerability' had come to public and political attention in the years prior. Police attitudes, understanding and responses to domestic violence continued to be a significant problem (Dolon, 1986; Stark, 2012; HMIC, 2014). Inquiries into the murder of children by abuse

repeated the same failings of the police and partner agencies (Marinetto, 2011; Sim, 2014). Hate crimes towards those with disabilities and honour crime were also increasingly prominent - alongside police failure to protect those same individuals (Shakespeare, 2012; Wallis, 2010; Payton, 2010). The prominence of these incidents prompted a sociopolitical shift that demanded the police identified and responded to low volume, high harm crimes, rather than the traditional high volume, low harm crimes (Menichilli, 2019; HMIC, 2014; HMICFRS, 2018). The police focus shifted from chasing after bad guys to chasing after victims.

An emphasis on 'vulnerability' in policing policy and practice appeared to be the answer: encouraging and empowering the police to look deeper into reporting of crimes, to understand better why an individual may or already had come to harm. 'Vulnerability' permitted a framework for police to investigate and understand why an individual was victimised. Rather than the individual being at fault owing to their own choices, but because they were 'vulnerable' owing to their circumstances – or perceived as such by perpetrators (Chakraborti & Garland, 2012). The framework asserted that anyone, anywhere, could be 'vulnerable' – and usually were, if they had encountered the police.

Whilst policies can attempt to define 'vulnerability', such a definition can remain elusive in the face of the concept's nebulous nature. There are numerous possible 'vulnerabilities' of which the police must be aware, demonstrated by the numerous policies produced in 2014 alone. But policy does not necessarily provide a framework to interpret or identify 'vulnerability' in practice. As a result, practitioners can bring their own meaning to the term based on prior assumptions (Twigg, 2014). The following sections move away from the historical and cultural development of 'vulnerability' within police policy and practice, and towards emerging themes within this development concerning how the term is conceptualised and operationalised in practice.

Assuming and expecting 'vulnerability' in policy

Embedded within policy and strategy are common sense attributions of 'vulnerability' (Brown, 2011; 2017). 'Children', for example, are a group frequently assumed to be vulnerable (Cheney, 2010). The Safeguarding of Vulnerable Groups Act 2006 lays out which members of the adult population may be considered 'vulnerable', similar to the definition of the 'vulnerable adult' in 'Who decides?' Children, however, are included as 'vulnerable'.

Why children are included receives little elucidation beyond defining a child as an individual under the age of 18.

The problem with the general assumptions of children being 'vulnerable' is that such an assumption does not necessarily apply to all children in practice. Intersectionality such as gender, race and class creep in, influencing expectations of what it means to be a child. Children of colour can often be subject to adultification, which is a racialised process that assumes said children to be older and more mature - and as a result are more likely to be ascribed malicious intentions or framed as 'dangerous' (Dancy, 2014; Goff et al., 2014). Children of colour are therefore not afforded the protections granted by the 'vulnerable' label applied to children more widely (Davis & Marsh, 2020). Children who fail to conform to desired social expectations can also expect to fall under scrutiny, especially if they are children of colour (Coppock & McGovern, 2012). Policy makers and researchers have begun to address the issue of adultification and loss of perceived 'vulnerability' of certain children as a serious issue in safeguarding and wider criminal justice (Davis & Marsh, 2022; HMIP, 2022). How much these assumptions and expectations have been addressed in practice remains to be seen.

A similar problem is faced in the recognition of individuals with mental health problems and learning disabilities. There is a blanket, homogenous approach that fails to take individual contexts and differences into account (Fawcett, 2004). Guidance for the police simply makes note of the difficulties experienced in their lives, the need for the 'vulnerability' to be recognised and the complexity of the needs involved (Home Office, 2014; Home Office, 2014). The guidance does acknowledge that these issues alone do not necessarily make an individual vulnerable – but that the criminal justice system can generate or compound 'vulnerability' for these individuals. How exactly this occurs receives no elucidation in policy, despite the criminal victimisation of those with mental health problems as a significant historical and contemporary issue (Mind, 2013).

Policy can therefore encourage assumptions around 'vulnerability' – who is 'vulnerable', and a homogenous approach to support. The list of 2014 policies relating to 'vulnerability' demonstrates numerous multi-agency policies, suggesting a turn towards a more heterogeneous and holistic approach to 'vulnerability', as agencies are encouraged to avoid working in their pre-existing silos.

Multi-agency working and the silos of 'vulnerability': sharing the burden and expanding the load

Embedding 'vulnerability' into practice required a multi-agency approach, demonstrated by the list of policies from 2014 that involved multiple public sector agencies. Crime Reduction programmes have been replaced "by a series of initiatives aimed at community safety and reassurance but constantly mitigated by political short termism" (Reiner, 2010:107). The multi-agency approach encourages the police and other partners to work outside of their operational silos and avoid the often-siloed approach to 'vulnerabilities' themselves: mental health, domestic violence, child abuse, hate crime and all other possibilities under the 'vulnerability' umbrella are handled as distinct, separate issues (Bartkowiak-Theron & Asquith, 2015). Partnership working is founded on not only the acceptance that the problem of crime cannot be tackled by the police, or any single agency, alone (Phillips, 2002). The problems that face the public sector are multi-dimensional, and therefore root causes cannot be solved by single solutions (Hughes et al., 2022:108).

As notions concerning who counts as 'vulnerable' can rely on assumptions of common sense (Brown, 2011; 2017), approaches to 'vulnerability' can also contain assumptions of common sense. The emphasis on multi-agency working in policy, which attempts to guide this approach in practice, assumes that multi-agency working is the most effective and appropriate response to 'vulnerability'.

There are several issues with this assumption. The first is that multi-agency working expands the opportunities for agencies to identify and respond to 'vulnerable' people, which in turn expands the number of agencies intimately involved in the life and decision making of that person (Weston & Mythen, 2022), with the 'responsibilisation' of citizens prioritised (Garland, 2001; Reiner, 2010:107). Gilligan (2007) suggests that the failure of Labour's 'tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime' rhetoric was underpinned by moral agendas advocating individual responsibilities and authority, rather than consideration of structural inequalities. The second is that the approach also expands the different interpretations of concepts like 'vulnerability', relying on the practitioners' personal views concerning issues such as morality, and misunderstanding of the issues at play (Wells, 2017; Bedford, 2015). Both issues can accumulate into a significant loss of agency and voice on behalf of the individual conceived as 'vulnerable', expanding multi-agency - and by extension, police - control (Weston & Mythen, 2022). There is the sense that safeguarding agencies and keeping order takes precedence over the safeguarding of individuals (Menichilli, 2019).

Multi-agency working and the need for information sharing has been a consistent theme of effective public sector response (Menichilli, 2019). The police can share the load of their demand concerning 'vulnerability' with other agencies, and vice versa. However, it may be a case of not sharing the load but expanding the burden. The police were already expected to play a role in mental health and child protection, for example. Under the umbrella of 'vulnerability' and multi- agency working, their role has expanded further into other areas. The number of agencies that work with the police include, but are not limited to schools, universities, GPs, health trusts, hospitals, prisons, probation, CPS, social services, drug and alcohol services, mental health services, housing, local authorities and transport. This list demonstrates not only how many agencies the police can work with and receive support from: but also, how many agencies can draw them into areas outside of police knowledge and prior experience.

There can be a "level of idealisation of multi-agency as the way forward" that has not entirely manifested in practice (Hughes et al., 2022:168). The perception of partnership approaches took a significantly negative turn in the aftermath of the child abuse deaths of Victoria Climbie and Baby P, and the subsequent Laming inquiry, which found systemic issues with multi-agency co-operation, communication and cultural apathy (Houghton, 2011). Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships failed to address or decrease either inequality or social exclusion, with the Crime and Disorder Act (1998)'s "laudable aims[were] sacrificed…on the altar of short term results" (Reiner, 2010:107; Hough, 2004; Hope, 2004; Maguire, 2004). Emphatic faith in multi-agency approaches to issues such as domestic violence has recently received challenges as to its efficacy (Davies, 2022)

There are also tensions between the police and their partners. Partnerships working can be viewed within police circles as limiting the institution's autonomy, undermining the police mythos that only the police can 'solve' the problem of crime, disregarding the need for the police to have the trust of the local communities and other agencies (Crawford, 1999). Policing mostly occurs in response to immediate demands, and therefore consensus building in collaboration with other agencies can be hard to plan (Hughes et al., 2022:114). Structural power differentials between different agencies can impact on collaborative dynamics (Phillips, 2002). Other agencies can be hesitant to respond to incidents and can draw clear boundaries on their involvement (Heyman & McGeough, 2018). This can lead to mistrust and frustration between partner agencies, perceiving a lack of mutual support, often compounded by a failure to share relevant information (Noga et al., 2015). There can be the perception that

the police are the only public sector agency actually willing to take on the task of responding to complex and multifaceted social issues (Bean, 1999:42). Team dynamics can be impacted by expectations to be 'the expert' in specific areas, with different motivations, methodologies and approaches to intervention causing friction and 'turf wars' over responsibilities (Williams, 1999).

There have been significant repercussions of the emphasis on multi-agency working, alongside external shifts in governance, such as austerity. This final section examines how the focus on 'vulnerability' within the policing framework has expanded the contemporary policing role.

Police role in welfare and social care

Whilst the police may prefer to emphasise that their role in to chase and catch criminals, they can simultaneously insist that they do much more than this, evidenced by the requests made to them by the general public (Emsley, 2021: 9; Reiner, 2010; Wolff, 2005; Reiner, 1978). American research of police calls in 1965 found that approximately half of the callers were requesting help and support for personal and professional problems, with the police positioned as "philosophers, guides and friends" (Cumming et al., 1965:276; Reiner, 2010:141). The findings were mirrored in 1973 research of three Essex towns, asserting that the police were essentially a social service, if a secret one (Punch & Naylor, 1973; Punch, 1979b). Policing culture at street level, however, rests on a belief in their role of action and crime fighting (Reiss, 1971; Reiner, 2010). In 2016, a study of English police force control room highlighted how only a fifth of calls from the public concerned crime: an "increasing proportion of the remainder" concerned suspicions of abuse, traffic problems and requests for help concerning mental health (Emsley, 2021:9; Kenny, 2016). 'Vulnerability' as a core component of contemporary policing has, to a certain extent, simply emphasised the quasi-welfare aspects of their role.

The Mental Health Act 1983 also firmly established the police as responsible for making judgements concerning risk and mental health, with the process of deinstitutionalisation and emphasis on care in the community making further demands on the police force (Trebilcock & Weston, 2020:117). Through this mandate, the police are held responsible for making decisions relating to a topic area with which they have little training or understanding - mental and physical health. Whilst the legislation mainly stresses the police's need to make

decisions based around risk alone, the practical reality is that the concept cannot be easily disengaged from professional knowledge of the presenting issues (Trebilcock & Weston, 2020:117; Prins, 2011).

The policing powers to arrest and detain place them in prime position to control individuals in particular situations. It is a power not held by any other agency. However, mental health is now part of the core business of the police owing to the significant number of calls they receive from service users, the public and other agencies (HMICFRS, 2018). The failure of the NHS and specialised services to effectively deal with mental health problems has been pinpointed as a significant factor in this increase (Dodd, 2017).

These issues have facilitated an expansion of expectations on the police role has seen practice shift from an emphasis on law enforcement to a hybrid role of police-slash- mental health worker - a role for which they are ill-equipped in terms of awareness, training and knowledge (Jachimowski & Cooper, 2020; Hendy et al., 2022). But just as the police cannot currently escape their responsibilities towards incidents involving mental health, they cannot escape their role in law enforcement and order maintenance. Their identification and response to the 'vulnerabilities' of mental health incidents are based around notions of risk and dangerousness, rather than mental health treatment and wellbeing (Trebilcock & Weston, 2019). The police are positioned both as gatekeepers and carers for mental health issues (Trebilcock & Weston, 2020:117; Heyman & McGeough, 2018; Menkes & Bendelow, 2014; Prins, 2011). As a result, the police have become the chimaera of our public sector - a 'polipsy', half police, half mental health provision (Trebilcock & Weston, 2020:138).

The blurring of boundaries concerning the system of criminal justice and the system of social care is not new. In the 1990s, changes in probation policy led to an expansion of the probationary officer role outside of criminal justice and the community reintegration of prisoners (Wolff, 2005). Despite the recommendations of the Morgan report were followed, youth crime prevention was allocated to Youth Offending Teams rather than the CDRPs, with YOTs statutory role in offender management a barrier to fulfilling their role in prevention (Gilligan, 2007). The shift to inter-agency Youth Offending Teams under Labour and the Crime and Disorder Act (2008) also represented an ideological shift, with a familiar managerialist approach that demanded inter-agency accountability (Williams, 1999).However, it was not clear whether the change in tactics was aimed at reducing crime, promoting rehabilitation or providing justice (Raynor et al., 1994). The teams now included

representatives of statutory agencies that previously did not play a role in youth justice - social workers, as well as staff from health and educational provision – demonstrating a desire to tackle the root causes of youth offending, such as peer pressure, poor parental supervision, domestic abuse, school exclusion, poor mental health and substance misuse (Williams, 1999). Youth Offending Teams found themselves thrown together with little guidance concerning how collaboration would manifest in practice, with the model lacking clear language and philosophy (Barratt, 2006; Williams, 1999).

Repeat demand callers are also a significant challenge in contemporary policing, as the majority of these calls relate to other social issues and 'vulnerabilities' unrelated to crime (Walley & Adams, 2019; Kirby, 2020). The police are now invested in channelling resources towards innovations to reduce this type of demand (Metcalfe, 2016; Walley & Jennison-Phillips, 2020). The 'vulnerabilities' are multi-faceted, relating to housing, overall health, poverty, homelessness and similar issues that would be more appropriately handled by other agencies (Boulton et al., 2017).

But those agencies are increasingly unavailable. Austerity hit the police badly but hit other agencies worse: multi-agency working can often be founded on reconciliation with budget constraints rather than effective response to 'vulnerability' (Menichilli, 2019). Over the last ten years, the police have increasingly become the first agency of response for other agencies – and the last resort for service users (Briody et al., forthcoming). The police are confronted by an increasingly broad set of social problems, with other agencies hesitant to respond (Trebilcock & Weston, 2020; Heyman & McGeough, 2018). In a bizarre and unexpected twist, some service users reported the belief that they were treated better by the police than by specialist services (Care Quality Commission, 2015).

'Vulnerability' has expanded the role of the police rather than narrowing it. There is a need to place victims at the forefront but still consider the needs of offenders; accepting and acknowledging the wide and diverse ways in which an individual can be vulnerable; all signifying a firm shift in policing business towards social care rather than law enforcement. 'Vulnerability' has permitted a widening reach of the State via the police into people's lives and simultaneously sent the message that it is the role of the police to protect anyone and everyone, regardless of effectiveness or appropriateness.

Conclusions

The police play numerous roles in our society: law enforcement, crime prevention, investigation and order maintenance. As much as this chapter has been concerned with 'vulnerability' within policing history, the investigation has also exposed various mythos about the police and their role. Their role can be considered across a wide variety of framings: protection of people, law enforcement, public order maintenance, and social control (Reiner, 2010:119). Public order maintenance in particular is heavily linked to notions of civility and processes of civilisation (Emsley, 2014), with many of the examples included in this chapter focused around control and management of people perceived to be 'disorderly' or simply 'different'. The institution and its officers possess more legal and social powers than any other agency or citizen (Reiner, 2010). These attributions place them in prime position for oversight on 'vulnerability' as it emerged into public and political consciousness during the 21st century. 'Vulnerability' can be related to crime, but also to wider social and structural issues. The police have had a long history as a service for help, regardless of their appropriateness – and regardless of their chagrin (Reiner, 1978; Punch, 1979b; Reiner, 2010). Misaligned expectations between the police and their service users therefore have a long and contentious relationship.

Policy also demonstrates expectations of the police: what powers they possess; their operational business and how they must work with other agencies. However, there can be a gap between policy and practice. Policy can define who counts as a 'vulnerable' person, but the complex nature of the term gives the police wiggle room to bring their own interpretations (Twigg, 2014; Keay & Kirby, 2018). The mandate of multi-agency working practice encourages collaboration but can also draw the police into areas where they have little business. The loose police mandate concerning preservation of life, crime prevention and order maintenance positions the institution perfectly as a catch-all service for 'vulnerability' (Reiner, 2010; Bartkowiak-Theron & Asquith, 2017). Reiner (2010) posits that the policing role is not one of law enforcement nor social work, but order maintenance. Their role in identifying and responding to 'vulnerability' may be dependent on governing and keeping order over individuals and communities, rather than necessarily protecting or helping them (Menichilli, 2019). Similarly, police powers - in legislation and practice - has been a focal point of this chapter, which calls into question the appropriateness of the institution's core role in identifying and responding to 'vulnerability'. As far back as the Magna Carta in 1215, those performing what would much later become the formalised institutional police

role - sheriffs, bailiffs and constables - the same complaints of oppression, apathy, false arrest and abuse of power were reported (Niederfhoffer, 1968). The same solutions were also proposed: more effective recruitment, higher penalties for misconduct and creation of civilian boards for external oversight (Niederhoffer, 1968). Further, as Reiner asserts, "the problem in liberal democracies is less how to protect the majority, i.e the public…than to protect vulnerable minorities" (Reiner, 2010:210). The purpose of the police is to protect the status quo above all else (Emsley, 2013).

The intrusion of 'vulnerability' into contemporary policing – and the police's intrusion into 'vulnerability' - was a slow and steady, if disjointed, process until 2014. The scale of abuse against those considered the most 'vulnerable' in our society, and the police's failure to respond either effectively or appropriately, opened Pandora's box. Almost ten years later, 'vulnerability' is not going away: austerity and the COVID-19 pandemic have only compounded its role in contemporary policing (Menichilli, 2019; Farrow, 2020; Laufs & Waseem, 2020). Policy can dictate expectations for the police but cannot guarantee their adherence. Policy also can guide the police in who is 'vulnerable', how to identify 'vulnerability' and how to the respond. It cannot guarantee that the guidance will be followed or that it will be useful to serving officers and staff. Policy cannot effectively guide the police on how to perform their contemporary role as street level experts on complex social issues, nor support the public when other agencies cannot (Trebilcock & Weston, 2020:138; Morgan & Paterson, 2017).

This chapter has examined how, and why, 'vulnerability' emerged as a core component of contemporary policing, as well as a brief history of policing's encounters with the concept in practice. The next section shifts to focus on the research project that the rest of the thesis will explore, examining the methodology of how the data from the later analysis chapters was achieved.

Chapter 3 - Researching 'vulnerability': Methodology

Introduction

This chapter outlines how the research questions were investigated and how the data in the following analysis chapters was gathered. The research questions are:

1. How are the police informed about 'vulnerability'?

2. How do the police identify 'vulnerability'?

3. How do the police respond to 'vulnerability'?

The chapter begins with a reflection on the methodological epistemology of critical realism, before moving onto a description of the police force from which the data was gathered. The research stages are then discussed. The first stage, non-participant observation, includes a reflection on the decision-making process, the timeliness, the method of data gathering and rapport-building. The second stage, semi-structured interviews, includes an examination concerning the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and changing technologies, as well as rapport. The ethics of the project are discussed, followed by reflections on the wellbeing and the positionality of the researcher. The protocols for data protection and data management are then detailed. The final section includes how the data was analysed, the limitations of the project, and a reflection on the collaborative nature of the research project.

Methodological epistemology: critical realism

Before I received the opportunity to study criminology, I completed an undergraduate degree in psychology and social anthropology. My love for anthropology was immediate, owing to its mindful, non-judgemental focus on the way that culture shapes thinking. I had a lecturer who emphasised that anthropology is, first and foremost, the study of ideas. Whilst I enjoyed some parts of studying psychology, I struggled with the seeming desire for rigid categories to label individuals and behaviour, alongside a failure to appreciate the wider environment in which research occurs. I would come to discover that the police themselves can be guilty of such a practice, with procedures like risk assessments based on policing knowledge and experience alone, without outside critical insight (Black & Lumsden, 2020). When I began

my PhD, I wanted and needed a framework that permitted a critical examination of policing ideas: to quote Sayer (1997:474), "'Criticism' becomes critique when we not only show that certain beliefs are salient but explain why they are held, and what produces them".

My affection for anthropology continued through my masters degree on the subject, which also educated me on research methodology[1]. Anthropology as a discipline primarily relies on ethnographies for data collection and analysis, with the researcher immersing themselves within the environment or culture being studied to gain a more nuanced insight into the research questions. Ethnographies encourage the researcher to observe and reflect on how things are, not how they should be or might be. Critical realism also encourages this standpoint (Fairclough et al., 2002). During my period working directly with the police, and analysing the data afterwards, a consistent theme was expectations of what the police 'should' do, rather than what the police 'can' do. Critical realism also informed my feedback to the police, as the mindset allowed me to observe and gather data objectively, with reflection on areas for improvement conducted at a later date.

Further, anthropology draws inspiration from other disciplines, such as law, sociology, religion, philosophy, economics and history to understand the cultural context of the research questions. An example of this approach can partially be seen in the policy chapter, which originally approached the issue of 'vulnerability' from a much wider socio historical standpoint. This background led to a desire to immerse myself and observe the working environment of the police, providing a contextual and nuanced approach to the research. I felt strongly that this would, in turn, provide a holistic approach to data collection and later analysis.

Critical realism distinguishes between three distinct elements: the real; the actual; and the empirical (Fairclough et al., 2002: 3):

- The 'real' concerns objects, which possess causal powers. In the project, 'objects' can be institutions like the police, whose staff possess causal (amongst other) powers.

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[1] I made the shift from anthropology to criminology owing to my interests in criminal justice. Both my undergraduate and masters dissertations focused on subjects such as the myth of the ideal victim and the politics of child sexual abuse. The topics received mixed encouragement in the anthropology department. Whilst supportive, my masters supervisor encouraged me to shift to criminology, believing it would suit my interests best. She was correct.

- The 'actual' concerns scenarios where these powers are deployed and develop change: here, this refers to policing practice and environment.

- The 'empirical' concerns how the 'real' and the 'actual' are experienced by actors, who in the present scenario are the police officers and staff, and their reflections.

Objects possess "structured, causal powers" (Fairclough et al., 2002: 3) that are inherently present in everyday life. The powers of policing are conceptually associated with the institution and awarded by the State: embedded in their uniform, organisational hierarchy, culture, and practice (Reiner, 2010). These powers can be observed empirically through an understanding of policing both in context of working practice and in critical reflection.

I also appreciated that critical realism accepts that "much" of the physical and social worlds occur regardless of the researcher's observation or the actors' experiences (Fairclough et al., 2002). A significant cause for concern was that my findings and feedback may quickly become out of date, owing to how quickly policing can change. Critical realism - alongside advice from my supervisor - aided me in understanding that my findings were situated in a specific time and place. This advice also served me well in remembering that a PhD project - like all research - can only account for so much. I would not be able to capture all the experiences and ideas of those working in the police force - or even every insight of my interview participants. Such a mindset was useful in grounding me firmly in reality, tempering my ambitions[2].

The police: CASE partner and object of study

The police force being studied was in the middle of England, with a population of approximately 800,000 people. The county was predominantly rural, which presented an issue in terms of service user access to agency provision, and the police themselves travelling between incidents. The police force had approximately 3,500 operational staff, with an almost even split between officers and civilian personnel. The force was comprised of three main neighbourhood policing teams, which included response officers, neighbourhood policing officers and PCSOs. There was, however, a distinct divide between the north and south of the county, which had two different local authorities. There were custodial suites in the north and in the south of the county, whilst the mental health triage scheme mostly operated in the north. In the south, the triage scheme fluctuated owing to funding from the Local Authority.

The control room, or contact services, served the whole of the county but was based in the south, at the force headquarters.

In 2015, the force was graded as 'inadequate' in its protection of 'vulnerable' people, especially victims of crime identified as 'vulnerable'. From 2016 to 2019, the force saw improvements in this area, but still had noted work to do, especially concerning crucial delays in responding to victimisation. Just before the pandemic hit, the force was considered to have improved its responses enough to be considered effective. However, by 2022, the situation had completely reversed and the force was placed in special measures, an enhanced programme of monitoring and inspections. In particular, the force was criticised for using professional judgement and personal experience for identifying 'vulnerable' people (which mirrors the findings). The decision to take the force into special measures included a critical lack of governance concerning 'vulnerability'.

The research stages

Data collection and generation was split into two stages:

1. non-participant observation (80 hours) – *data gathered from observing the procedures and decision making occurring within the policing environment in real time, including how policy is transformed into practice concerning the identification and response to 'vulnerability'.*

2. Semi-structured interviews (15 in total) – *an opportunity for officers to reflect on their experiences and their opinions concerning their role in responding to 'vulnerability'.*

Stage 1: Non-participant observation

Both participant and non-participant observation have been found to provide a direct and effective opportunity to gather data in working environments, specifically in relation to what is known as 'information behaviour' (Cooper et al., 2004:1). The practice is considered the optimal methodology for studying 'social worlds', as it "gives consideration to the whole scene" yet permits particular focus on specific areas (Parke & Griffiths, 2008: 3; Spradley, 1980). As Vinten asserts: "...immersed in the events in progress, the researcher hopes to be in

a position to obtain more information and a greater depth of knowledge than would be possible from the outside looking in" (1994:30).

The methodology has nevertheless been criticised for its perceived subjectivity (Wood & Griffith, 2007). However, non-participant observation provides an opportunity to gather information for other methodological stages (Cooper et al., 2004; Barker & Polson, 1999), as well as build an effective foundation to support the data from those following stages (Lomax et al., 1999; Bystrom, 1997; Lewis, 2000; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983). I found this assertion highly accurate: a significant amount of data and analysis was primarily drawn from interviews, yet I discovered that further evidence could be drawn from my observation notes.

The method of non-participant observation was chosen to observe how the police 'operationalise vulnerability' in everyday practice and observing how policy transforms into procedure. It was also an opportunity to watch decision making concerning 'vulnerability' in real time and in context. The 'non-participant' specification was primarily owing to the focus on procedures and the decision-making process alone - not the individuals carrying them out. This type of observation provides the opportunity to attain an understanding of the context and the environment in which said procedures and decision making occurs (Cooper et al., 2004:2; Lewis, 2000). The secondary reason was ethics, as participant observation would have prompted difficulty in terms of anonymity. Many of the chosen units for observation operated in open spaces – therefore, all other members of staff would have been able to see with whom I was primarily speaking.

Decision making process
Throughout the first year of the project, I visited many different operational and support units of the force. I wanted to understand the infrastructure of the force and gather information to determine which units would be the most effective for data gathering in the non-participant observation stage, and who I would like to interview.

These included:

Victim Support Services	Victims Gateway	Two sessions of CoP Vulnerability training
3 Harm Reduction Hubs	Criminal Investigative Division	Mental Health Triage
Custody	Urban Street Gangs unit	Integrated Offender Management
Counter-terrorism	Early Intervention Officers	Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs
Members from the Police, Crime and Fire Commissioner's Office	Crime Prevention Unit	Contact services

I selected four units for observation:

Contact services: 999/101 call handlers and dispatchers. I selected this unit as it is the primary contact for service users to the police. They have a significant role to play when it comes to the initial identification of an individual's "vulnerability" and the initial response. Call handlers and dispatchers were civilian staff, not police officers. Very few police officers were present at contact services, other than the Force Duty Officer, who oversaw decision-making.

**Custody**: the highly controlled environment of custody involves a significant focus on detainee's 'vulnerability'. Assessments and decisions made by officers and staff allow signposting individuals to more effective services, or 'following' the individual as they move through the criminal justice court system. My observations were of the custodial suite in the north of the county. Whilst plans to visit the custodial suite in the south were made in February 2020 for comparison, the COVID-19 pandemic initially suspended these plans indefinitely until they were dropped altogether in late 2020 as it became evident that research in the field could not take place at that time.

**Two Harm Reduction Hubs**: previously referred to as 'Vulnerability Hubs' and then 'Partnership Hubs'. These Multi-agency hubs are headed by a section of Neighbourhood policing, bringing together a variety of local services. The purpose is to assess and possibly intervene in the lives of individuals who may or may not have been involved in a crime but have been identified by one or more agencies as "vulnerable" and therefore are considered in need of support. The Early Intervention Officers, specially trained Police Community Support Officers, are located within the hub and are often deployed as an intervention for said identified individuals. The hub has ownership for safeguarding for investigation and community safety, including oversight of local care and residential homes, as well as local multi-agency operations. The hub also performs as a 'safety net' by providing oversight for specific, recent incidences, such as domestic violence and missing persons. This highlighted the unit as useful for observation, considering the wide range of duties and the nature of the unit focus primarily on "vulnerability" and safeguarding. I selected two hubs to provide a comparison between the operations and resources of an urban hub versus a rural hub. The expectation was that any difference in the hubs would be caused by the difference in environment, and therefore access to different services. There was also the possibility that the urban hub received more attention and resources than the rural hub.

These police units – Contact Services, Custody and Harm-Reduction Hubs – were selected for a variety of reasons. The first was that the very nature of the units and their practical role in the policing infrastructure brought their staff into a variety of different kinds of 'vulnerability': rather than, for example, the missing person

contact team or urban street gang's unit. That is not to say that these units do not deal with a variety of differing vulnerabilities, but that the chosen units are considerably less siloed and are exposed to the widest spectrum of 'vulnerabilities' encountered by the police.

The second reasoning was more practical and pragmatic. The three units each are in a contained space: contact services in the control room, and the custodial suite in the north of the county.

Officers and staff, even though they dealt with incidents and needed to consider issues outside of that physical space, were physically constrained to one location. The two Harm-Reduction hubs were similar, in that most of their activities were in their respective police stations. There were, however, officers based at those units that did conduct work outside of the station.

The constrained nature of the space was not solely the potential ease of observation by being in a bounded space. There were safety concerns when it came to potential observation of the frontline. Response officers are required to deal with potentially dangerous situations quickly.

The uncertain nature of policing out in the community resulted in concerns that frontline officers would have difficulty in safeguarding a PhD student whilst carrying out their duties in high-risk situations. The solution was for frontline officers to be the main target of recruitment for the interview stage, which would add their experiences to the data in the form of reflection rather than direct observation.

Timeline

The period of non-participant observation began in November 2019 at contact services, and then with custody in December of the same year. As both units operate twenty-four hours a day and seven days a week, shifts were selected based on the potential level of activity, and therefore the potential for observing procedure relating to the identification and response to 'vulnerable' individuals. There were also some constraints on the shift timings in relation to my safety, conducting data collection late at night in an area without easily available transport.

Monday morning was selected owing to its position as an 'introduction' (for lack of better words) to the week ahead. Other units (both police and multi-agency) who had been closed over the weekend would be resuming their work and responding to incidents that occurred over said weekend. Wednesday morning was also selected as another weekday morning in order to provide potential further 'morning' related data collection, and for potential comparison.

Friday and Saturday nights were both selected as anecdotal evidence suggested that these were the days with a high number of incidents: calls for contact services and detainments for custody. Wednesday night was also selected to provide data from a weeknight.

Therefore, I scheduled the non- participant observation as follows:

Unit	Day	Hours
Contact Services	Wednesday	1600-2200
	Friday	1600-2200
	Saturday	1600-2200
	Monday	0700-1300
	Wednesday	0700-1300
Total hours		30 hours

Unit	Day	Hours
Custody	Monday	0700-1300
	Wednesday	0700-1300
	Friday	1600-2200
	Saturday	1600-2200
	Wednesday	1600-2200
Total hours		30 hours

I switched the schedule – mornings shifts occurring first, then evening shifts - as the evening shifts during my time with custody had the potential to fall the week before Christmas. The Friday night that I had the opportunity to observe is referred to as 'Black Friday': the final Friday before Christmas, and when both businesses and friend groups hold Christmas parties at local hospitality businesses. I will admit that I had some curiosity as to how this time of year would play out, but it would afford a potential increase in data collection in relation to specific 'vulnerabilities'. Examples included substance misuse and abuse, domestic abuse, public disorder and sexual violence.

The two Harm Reduction hubs operate from Monday to Friday, between the hours of 0700 to approximately 1600, depending on demand. I selected Monday as the hub members would be reviewing incidents over the weekend. The other days fluctuated, depending on the operations of the hub. For example, Thursday was a much better day to observe personnel than Wednesdays, and I was discouraged from returning on Friday as it was considered a 'boring' day of preparing for the weekend. However, the decision was left to me: by the end of Thursday's observations, I had observed enough procedures and spoken to enough staff to be satisfied with ending observations. Whilst I was anxious about 'missing something', I was also conscious that over- saturation could lead to gathering data that was not appropriate or applicable in the pursuit of professional or academic FOMO: Fear of Missing Out.

I decided to observe the urban harm reduction hub on the same days as the rural, for comparison and in the name of equality. I spent approximately five hours each day with both hubs. Most of their partnership meetings and investigative activities, including identification and response to a variety of differing vulnerabilities, occurred in the mornings. The afternoon was a period for following up said activities. I learned quickly that most observable activity in the hubs primarily took place early in the morning until the early afternoon.

Unit	Day	Hours
Rural Harm Reduction Hub	Monday	0730-1230
	Thursday	0730-1230
Total hours		10 hours

Unit	Day	Hours
Urban Harm Reduction Hub	Monday	0700-1200
	Thursday	0700-1200
Tota hours		10 hours

Total observation hours: 80 hours

Method of data gathering

The method of data gathering during observation was similar, but with some understandable variance, across the units. I brought research information sheets to each unit, and I encouraged every individual that I observed to read over this sheet[4]. In Contact Services and Custody, owing to the open plan office space and the number of staff present, I placed a sign notifying them of my presence, and the research information sheet, in a prominent place. For the hubs, I attempted to do the same, with varying results. The rural hub told me it was not necessary: it was a small, enclosed space with less movement. The urban hub expressed similar sentiments – although this was owing to their desks being spread out across the Neighbourhood Policing team space. If I was introduced to any individual outside of the hub, I offered the research information sheet and emphasised I would not be recording who they were or the specifics of what they were discussing.

I adopted what are the basic central tenets of non-participant observation: "a 'unit' of data collected by watching, chatting, experiencing, comparing and contrasting in a reflective and critical cycle of enquiry for the scene in question" (Parke & Griffiths, 2008:2; Crabtree & Miller, 1992; Jorgenson, 1989). I followed a cyclical course of exploration, asking a series of similar questions relating to the procedures and decision-making processes that I was observing. Over time, I could relate back to previous questions and ask follow up questions, both for clarification and further exploration (Spradley, 1980). During quieter moments, staff walked me through risk assessments and other procedures. For example, at Contact Services, I had each staff member I observed explain the difference in call gradings, which are determined by the perceived risk by the call taker, then dispatcher, and determines how quickly an incident will receive a response. It is important to note that this only occurred

during quiet moments in observation: my role of observer needed to be secondary to that of their role as police officer or staff (Cooper et al., 2004:4).

I made handwritten notes, in separate notebooks for each separate unit. I made notes concerning the following:

- *Procedures involving identification of vulnerability*

- *Interventions available to staff to respond to vulnerability*

- *The content of and procedure for risk assessment*

- *Any issues/difficulties in identification*

- *Any issues/difficulties encountered in response*

- *The roles of other agencies*

- *The variety of roles in the unit*

- *What kind of decision-making powers each role occurs*

- *What 'vulnerabilities' appeared the most in incidents recorded and responded to by the unit.*

- *What kind of information was needed to assess a situation involving 'vulnerability'*

- *What kind of information was at the staff member's disposal for individuals involved in incidents.*

- *What kind of incidents were concerned to have a higher level of vulnerability than others*

- *The benefits of procedures, policies and related activity; the benefits of the focus on vulnerability as a concept.*

- *Any downsides or issues with procedures, policies or related activity; any downsides or issues with the focus on vulnerability as a concept.*

My primary focus concerned the procedural operationalisation of vulnerability's identification and response. Underpinning this focus was how staff are informed about vulnerability: in terms of identification and appropriate responses, as well as legislation,

procedure, policy, decision making and communication with other staff members and other agencies.

Who I observed during each visit varied. At Contact Services, I began with a 101-call handler for the first three hours of observation, and then 999 call handlers for the second three hours. I wanted to gather data from both types of calls as the nature of the callers can differ greatly between the two. 999 calls are for emergencies, which may also include the ambulance and fire services, whilst 101 calls are for non-emergencies. Often, the Control Room manager or Force Duty Officer would have some idea which member of staff would be best for me to observe before my arrival.

This also occurred in custody. I primarily observed the custody sergeants as their role had the most weight in decision making and information gathering in relation to a detainee's vulnerability. I was encouraged to also observe the Custody Detention Officers and speak to members of Liaison and Diversion Team and the Community Practitioner Nurse on duty[2].

At the rural hub, I spoke to a variety of staff members in between their activities, owing to the desks being placed in two rows, facing one another. However, I was encouraged to speak to the Missing Persons coordinator, who was located at the hub at that time, and one of the Early Intervention officers. The latter walked me through the questions and activities that clients respond to initial and ongoing assessments as part of the Early Intervention Programme.

At the urban hub, I primarily observed the hub's sergeant and observed meetings that they attended throughout the morning. I spoke with the MARAC officer, who reviews and responds (if necessary) to domestic incidents that have been recorded and actioned in the previous 24 hours[3].

Rapport and non-observation participation

Whilst non-participants observation can be a method that suggests the researcher is conducting research 'on' the participants via observation of procedure, in practice it is not so clear cut. There is still a co-production and co-construction of knowledge that occurs not only in observation but also dialogue between observer and observed: the research is conducted 'with' them (Prior, 2008:488). Observation in pure silence would be an unproductive – and

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[2] The L&D practitioners and Healthcare professionals could not be directly observed owing to patient/detainee privacy.
[3] 72 hours on a Monday to include the weekend.

tedious – methodology of data gathering. Respect, trust and consent needed to be deployed frequently during every period of observation for the sessions to be fruitful (Gubrium et al., 2012; Kuale & Binkman, 2009; Nagy Hesse-Biber, 2013; Pillow, 2003; Rubin & Rubin, 2011). This deployment occurred through the development of rapport with the staff members whose activities were being observed.

The concept of 'rapport' is highlighted, rather emphatically, as a critical and highly valued component of qualitative research: it is "assumed to further the investigatory purposes of the researcher" (Jorgenson, 1992:148). The purpose of rapport includes "free and frank answers" (Benney et al., 1956:143-152). Yet the interpretations of what rapport involves can vary widely, rarely receiving either a conceptual or empirical definition (Prior, 2018:489). It can include: "harmonious relations or friendliness" (Podell, 1955:150-155); "...a basic sense of trust has developed that allows for the free flow of information" (Spradley, 1979:78). Broadly speaking, I preferred Jorgenson's notion that rapport is a "self-validating value for its own sake rather than a means to an end" (1994:148). This definition appealed to me as it most closely resembled my approach to social interactions in other areas of my personal and professional life. Further, Hunt (1984)'s fieldwork among police officers found that rapport "develops not as a result of strategic action by the researcher" but by being "part of the intersubjective construction of reality itself" (Jorgenson, 1992:150; Hunt, 1984: 286). The development of rapport is also a familiar and omnipresent reality in contemporary policing practice, with active listening receiving particular emphasis (Vallano & Compo, 2011:960).

Previous research has suggested that a professional affiliation between observer and observed ameliorates the smoothness of the process (Cooper et al., 2000:1). I found this to be an accurate reflection: I was accepted as a professional with a similar vested interest, of supporting both the police and their service users. I was assigned with an immediate social category of "academic" or "researcher", which automatically provided a brief explanation for both my identity and presence in the unit (Jorgenson, 1992:153; Jorgenson, 1991; Wax, 1983).

At no point did I take note of any service user's personal information or personal details concerning the incident with which they were involved. Similarly, at no point did I make a note of officer or staff personal details or specify their handling of incidents that I observed in real time. I shared only small bits of personal information or opinion – and only in response to questions that I was asked. I was often asked about the project in more detail: how long I

had been working on it; where else I was observing; where else had I visited; what did academics say about vulnerability? I was often asked how I had 'ended up' in England; about my previous education; and what I was going to do in the future.

The period of non-observation aided my understanding of policing and their role in relation to 'vulnerability' more broadly. The experience provided context for their decision-making and understanding of 'vulnerability' in their working practice. The data gathered from the periods of non-participant observation laid the foundation for data I would later collect from officers and staff in interviews. Further, the process helped to humanise the police, changing and even challenging the cultural image I had in my mind.

Stage 2: Semi structured interviews

Whilst non-participant observation provided the opportunity to gather data directly from the environment in which 'vulnerability' was 'operationalised', interviews provided the space for reflection and exploration of the roles, procedures and decision-making processes involved (Cooper et al., 2004:11). Interviews can take many forms, but for the purpose of this project, semi-structured, knowledge-seeking interviews were utilised (Jorgenson, 1992:151; Werner & Schoepfle, 1987). Up until March 2020, the interviews were intended to take place face to face, as is the accepted practice in qualitative research (Weller, 2017:613).

Decision making process

The decisions concerning which units to invite for interviews were discussed between myself, my supervisor and my police liaison. It was decided that I would create a schedule of dates and times for each unit, and that the managers/supervisors for each unit would assign an individual to be interviewed during that specific shift. This was to introduce an element of random selection for interview participants – so that units could not deliberately select specific officers or staff to be interviewed. Whilst it was appreciated that this was usually done with the best of intentions, I was cautious of having participants under pressure to toe the institutional line. I was conscious, however, that deliberate selection of specific staff and not others could still occur.

Custody and Contact services were once again selected to be included in the interviews, for two reasons. The first was their intimate contact with service users and their exposure to a wide variety of vulnerabilities, as well as appropriate decision making in relation to response.

The second was owing to their participation in the observation stage, so there could be additional reflections from members of staff from the units involved.

There was a need to include frontline officers in the interviews: they were unable to be observed during the observation stage, and yet their role necessitates their identification of and response to 'vulnerable' people and situations. Response officers, neighbourhood police officers and Police Community Support Officers were included. The invitation was to include all three geographical areas of the force's jurisdiction. The resolution hubs in the north and the south were also identified as they respond to incidents that can be dealt with over the phone, involving low-level incidents. They need to be able to identify and respond to individuals and incidents that indicate a 'vulnerability' is present. I also interviewed three individuals who had operational oversight of 'vulnerability', which permitted insight into an overview into strategy within the force and reflections from those high up within the organisational hierarchy.

Both North and South Criminal Investigative Divisions were identified to include the investigatory side of vulnerability. The Harm Reduction Hubs observations included the safeguarding aspects, whilst interviewing police staff at the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub would also include the safeguarding elements of vulnerability.

Mental Health triage nurses that operated in the north and the south of the county were also identified as possible participants for interview, as they often accompany response officers to incidents involving mental health problems. Mental health is considered a priority by the police owing to the number of incidents called in and responded to, however it is recognised that the police are not usually the most effective or appropriate agency to respond to these incidents.

Researching 'vulnerability' during the COVID-19 pandemic

By March 2020, I had an interview schedule written up and circulated to the appropriate units. The COVID-19 pandemic arrived in the United Kingdom that same month. The country went into lockdown and all research was suspended until further notice. In discussion with my supervisors and police liaison, it was decided that the interviews should take place via online platforms. I submitted an ethics amendment to change the procedure from face-to-face interviews to online interviews, with only audio being recorded. I was awarded this

amendment in July 2020 and interviews were tentatively scheduled for September, in the hope that some kind of 'normality' could be achieved for the service by that time.

By September, several issues were discovered that hampered the interview process. Online platforms such as zoom and google meet were quickly ruled out owing to the intense security firewall for the force. It was also discovered that most computers on site did not have cameras or microphones, again for security reasons. Whilst I offered up the use of Teams on force tablets, it transpired that Teams was inaccessible for most participants. This was again owing to the intense physical and online security necessitated by the force, and most participants had no access to force laptops or tablets. I was able to carry out three interviews online via Teams with participants that had access to personal or force laptops. Three other interviews had to be postponed/rescheduled owing to the officers being called away on work matters.

I then changed tactics back to face-to-face interviews, as the numbers of infections dropped. However, I would only be able to carry out face-to-face interviews with participants who were based within a five-mile radius of where I lived, as I could easily access their locations without needing public transport. I was able to carry out three more interviews successfully face to face.

By October, cases were once more on the rise and restrictions began to be put back into place. I had created a third interview schedule regardless - promptly cancelled when England entered a second lockdown during November. My police liaison confirmed that a significant number of staff were missing owing to self-isolation, compounded by this second lockdown which led to an increase in demand for frontline officers.

In discussion with my supervisors and police liaison, January was offered a tentative re-start date. By this point, I had investigated conducting interviews over the phone and appropriate recording technology for this purpose. A new schedule was created and circulated several times to the appropriate units: this time officers who were working from home and those self-isolating were highlighted as the most appropriate participants, given the reduction in active frontline officers. I was able to conduct nine more interviews, bringing the total of interviews to 15.

The roles of those involved in the final interviews included: PCSOs; response officers; custody detentions officers; custody sergeants; mental health triage; contact services; a Force Duty Officer. In the analysis chapters, I have provided each participant with a pseudonym and

the name of their working role. As noted, I was able to interview individuals who had operational and strategic oversight of 'vulnerability' within the force. As a result of their unique positions, in the interest of protecting their anonymity, I have not included their identifiable role within the organisation. Instead, I have assigned them the broad role of 'executive management'.

Changing technologies

The tools of producing scientific knowledge are often taken for granted, with the recording device viewed as a simple, perfunctory device – a mere means to an end in terms of its role in methodology (Lee, 2004:869). This was highlighted during the pandemic owing to the need to shift the approach of interviews from face to face, to online, to phone interviews. The recording device became "less as a device for recording sound, and more as a means of producing text", with both the recordings and transcripts becoming as precious to me as my original fieldnotes (Lee, 2004: 881).

The recording device necessarily changed with the technology used to facilitate interviews. Even before the pandemic, different interviewing and recording technologies had been emerging to expand the toolkit of the qualitative researcher (see Weller, 2017:613). Online interviews are highlighted as a mitigation for research involving geographically dispersed interviewers and participants (Sedgwick & Spiers, 2009:6). Other advantages included efficient use of time and monetary cost, especially if the interviews were one-off visits (Weller, 2017:614; Hewson et al., 2003; Fielding & Fielding, 2011). This mirrored the geographical issues faced during the pandemic as the restrictions were tightened and loosened over the course of the year. Like non- participant observation, online interviews have been found to complement the data gathered in the offline research stages (Heese-Biber & Griffin, 2013:43; Davis et al., 2004).

Phone interviews were also used in the project to mitigate effects of the pandemic, as they have been previously found to be effective in research involving multi-stage methodologies (Burke & Miller, 2001). Whilst phone interviews are considered effective and acceptable in quantitative methods (Aday, 1996; Bernard, 2002), this form of interviews are considered "less attractive" to qualitative researchers (Novick, 2008:391). They have, however, been considered optimal for

researcher safety (Bernard, 2002), which naturally became a key motivating factor for their use during the interview stage of the project during the pandemic.

Rapport and interviews

Despite changes in technology pre-pandemic, interviews in person have long been considered the gold standard of qualitative research: providing "thicker" information and efficient communication (Rettie, 2009:422). A core tenet of this golden sheen is the belief that it promotes the "established quality" of rapport (Weller, 2017:614; Oakley, 1981; Keegan, 2009; Kvale & Brinkman, 2009; Duncombe & Jessop, 2012).

The ambiguous definition of rapport has been discussed previously in relation to non-participant observation. In interviews, it is considered "essential to ethical practice" as it creates a foundation for respect (Weller, 2017:614; Guillemin & Heggen, 2009), and is therefore the "traditional starting point" in the "pursuit" of interview data (Jorgenson, 1992:149). However, as the technological approach to the methodology changed, there was some concern that this starting point would be removed, with the phone interview starting from a more uncertain position. I had concerns that online interviews would affect rapport negatively, previously highlighted in the relevant literature (Jenner & Meyers, 2019).

I approached interviews with an understanding that rapport "exists when the respondent accepts the research goals of the project and helps the interviews reach these goals" (Goudy & Potter, 1975:530; Goode & Hatt, 1952:190). It is important for the interviewer to be "supportive, cordial, interested, non-argumentative, courteous, understanding, even sympathetic" to achieve the most detailed and appropriate data (Loftland & Loftland, 1984:38; Jorgenson, 1992: 152).

The police themselves understand that rapport needs to be developed in order to communicate with service users and investigate issues effectively (Abbe & Brandon, 2013; Shawyer et al., 2009).

The measures of interview rapport are even murkier, varying so widely that they "make the whole concept ambiguous or even directly in conflict" (Goudy & Potter, 1975:529; Weiss, 1970: 18-19). I broadly followed Weiss' suggestions of how to achieve a foundation of rapport when interviewing, including: the rate of eye contact; frequent smiles, nods and approving gestures; degree of researcher embarrassment or reluctance to ask specific

questions; respondent willingness to be interviewed at all (Weiss, 1975:18-19). I adopted a similar approach to rapport in interviews as I did with non-participant observation, wishing to approach it as a shared encounter "...experienced with ease, comfort and perhaps enjoyment" (Weller, 2017:614; Jorgenson, 1992).

For online interviews, I maintained the same measures of rapport: even though I could not see participants as their camera would be turned off to ensure only the audio was recorded, they still could see me reacting to their responses. For phone interviews, I had to take a new approach to rapport as many of Weiss' suggestions were not possible, as non-verbal cues were lost overall (Hesse-Biber & Griffin, 2014:43). I did however continue to nod and smile, especially as there is some evidence that one can 'hear' a smile even with no visual cue (Tartter & Braun, 1994; Drahota et al., 2008).

Despite concerns, I found relatively few issues with developing rapport during online interviews (Jenner & Myers, 2019). The groundwork for rapport during the interviews began via e-mail, as I contacted the nominated parties personally with a broader explanation, repetition of time and dates, and the research information sheets and consent forms. I found the groundwork more firmly laid for the phone interviews – perhaps surprisingly – far more than those held online or face to face. There was often a negotiation around phone numbers, who would call who and the best time to phone: all of which helped to foster the beginnings of rapport before the interview (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014; Seitz, 2015; Weller, 2017). It seemed that merely a visible co- presence (online interviews) or even a feeling of co-presence (phone interviews) was necessary to generate rapport, casting doubt on the assumed superior need for physical proximity to generate data (Weller, 2017:618; Fielding & Fielding, 2011). Similar findings were highlighted in a study by Sturges & Hanrahan, a project that also necessitated a switch from in person interviews to phone interviews, with no significant differences found in the generated data (2004). This is perhaps unsurprising, as the police themselves frequently speak to both partners and service users over the phone, often about serious and complex issues.

Racial and gender of participants and local area

The vast majority of participants encountered in non-participant observation were white, with only one member of staff with whom I spent time being from an ethnic minority background.

All fifteen participants in the interviews identified as White British. There were nine women interviews and six men. Six participants were police officers and nine were civilian staff.

The racial diversity of the participants in both stages of data collection mirrored the wider population of the county, with close to 94% of the county identified as White, which almost precisely mirrored in the force's statistics on ethnic diversity. Despite the small number of individuals from ethnic minority communities, they are disproportionately represented in the forces' statistics concerning stop and search. Therefore, there are some limitations to the interpretation of the data through the lens of race, as will be discussed in chapter five concerning sections of the population who were consistently absent from discourses on 'vulnerability', such as race and ethnicity. How racial, ethnic and cultural identity impacts on how the participants are informed about, identify and respond to 'vulnerability' is therefore absent from the data and analysis. Future research will need robust evaluation in this area.

Ethical protocol

Non-participant observation

During observations, no written recordings of personal details concerning either service users or staff were made. I was offered the possibility of wearing headphones at contact services so I could listen to calls. This was ruled out early for two reasons: (1) serious ethical concerns, as it would not have been feasible to warn the caller of my presence and ask for consent, given the often high-stress nature of calls to contact services; (2) ultimately, the focus of the observation was on policing procedure, practice and decision making, so listening to the exact content of calls was not necessary. These avoided concerns relating to the boundaries between the public versus the domestic sphere (Cooper et al., 2004:4).

There were no direct risks to participants of non-participant observation. Observation of procedure and practice rather than participants determined that consent did not need to be sought from those on observed shifts. Similarly, those observed could not withdraw from the project (Cooper et al., 2004:4). I did display notices in the common areas to alert staff to my presence and included a research information sheet for them to use. Every individual that I observed was also provided a verbal explanation of the project: the purpose of observation, emphasis on procedure and practice rather than them as participants, and emphasis on anonymity. I also directly invited them to view my notebook if they were uncomfortable or uneasy with me taking notes: none of the observed staff asked to do so. Like the interviews,

there was a laidback and laissez faire attitude to my presence and observation: responses to this invitation were frequently (paraphrased) 'that's alright' or 'don't worry about it'.

Semi-structured interviews

Whilst no direct risks to interview participants were identified, it was acknowledged that all the participants worked on the frontline of the public sector and that their interactions with service users often involved events of heightened emotion, anxiety and trauma. It was also acknowledged that some officers and staff may express negative views towards their own organisation, or express views that could harm said organisation if taken out of context. Strict confidentiality was applied to participant's identities at each stage. During communication to greet individuals participating, I stressed the importance of the consent form, and consent to quote form. I stressed that even if I used their quotes in the final thesis, the report for the police or other work, their identity would be kept anonymous. I did however highlight that there still was the potential for them to be identified, as they had been nominated by their operational unit via e-mail that often copied in other individuals. Before turning on the recording for each interview, I reminded the participant that they would withdraw from the project at any time up until the transcript was sent to them for approval.

I had two individuals, call handlers, refuse consent for quotes. It was expressed that this was to do with their words being taken out of context and used against the police by third parties, rather than any issues with myself or the project. The other participants – especially police officers – had a far more laissez faire attitude towards consent and anonymity. A couple directly told me "You can quote me on this", while most responded (paraphrasing) "I don't really mind" or "that's not a problem" when I reminded them of consent and anonymity at the beginning and end of the interviews. Whilst I did not inquire into this attitude, I suspect this may be a result of police officers routinely being scrutinised in their role and therefore perhaps being more at ease with justifying attitudes and decisions.

The wellbeing of the researcher

Two areas of concern for the researcher were identified. The first was the nature of police work, which can involve upsetting, disturbing and problematic scenarios. Contact services and custody in particular deal with scenarios that can be emotionally raw and involve various

elements of trauma on the part of service users. The risk therefore was one of vicarious trauma and an effect on the mental health of the researcher.

This risk was mitigated through a variety of factors. I contacted the counselling offered by student services early in my first year of the PhD, a year before the observations began. This was to develop a relationship with the service and to prepare for issues encountered in the field. The information gathering visits carried out that year also helped to expose me to potential issues that I could encounter, permitting me to learn and prepare techniques to manage any arising issues. I was also in contact with the service during the observation period, and with the local Wellbeing service for several months afterwards for personal reflection.

The second risk related to the aspect of lone working involved in observation. Some shifts for observation began early in the morning or ended late at night. Following the university's lone working policy, I contacted my supervisor every 2-3 hours via text, including when I left the unit and when I arrived back at my home (or the University, in some cases). For early mornings and late nights, a car service was used where public transport was not available.

Semi-structured interviews (pre-COVID) were scheduled to occur during working hours of weekdays, taking place at the participant's operational unit.

A related risk aspect was my position as a lone female working in a male-dominated organisation. Women face more challenges when working in male dominated environment (Martin & Barnard, 2013): female police officers in particular face "persistent barriers" in their role in terms of their employment and promotion (Chan et al., 2010:425). The police do not have the most positive track record when it comes to women, owing to the perceived "cult of masculinity" within the force both historically and culturally (Reiner, 2010: 128; 172; Silvestri, 2017; HMICFRS, 2022). I was not to be alone with a male police officer or member of staff for any reason outside of the boundaries of semi-structured interview times. Observations took place in open office spaces, so there was no potential for this scenario to occur.

Data protection and management

Any electronic data – interview recordings, interview transcripts, observation notes – were stored on a password protected file on the researchers' university computer (pre-covid) and a

password protected files on the researchers' personal computer (during COVID, transferred on return to campus). Codes were used to identify participants on audio recordings, with personal details redacted and only the researcher has access to these files.

All data contained on paper (such as consent forms) were stored separately from any interview data. Pre-COVID, this was on a locked filing cabinet to which only the researcher had keys.

During COVID, they were kept in a locked file box to which only the researcher has access, in the home where the researcher lives alone. Consent forms were sent via e-mail during COVID and were saved onto a password protected file. They were transferred to the locked filing cabinet once a return to campus was permitted.

All the data collected will be kept on the researcher's university drive for a period of 5 years, after which it will be destroyed.

Analysis

In order to analyse the data effectively, I used NVIVO to highlight a variety of different themes that emerged from said data. There were around fifty themes in total, which provided a foundation to build those explored in the analysis chapters. Some themes revolved around specific types of 'vulnerable' incidents, such as mental health, child sexual exploitation and domestic violence. Other themes related to 'vulnerability' as a concept, such as its definition and mentions of 'risk'. I was able to link several themes together in the data in order to build more concentrated themes of analysis, elucidated later in this thesis.

I used discourse analysis in order to prepare and investigate the emerging themes. Discourse analysis is primarily concerned with "studying and analysing the uses of language" (Hodges et al., 2008:337). Before moving to criminology, I had completed degrees in social anthropology, including two dissertations that relied heavily on discourse analysis owing to my interest in sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology. I used NVIVO to code multiple words in order to highlight multiple themes emerging from the project data. I then compiled all the participants' answers to one specific question in one document. This allowed for another, less rigid approach to analysing the data. Rather than solely focusing on the coding of the data, I was able to look for themes that mirrored – but also diverged - from the many

themes highlighted via NVIVO. I was able to examine in context how language surrounding 'vulnerability' was deployed and the patterns that emerged (McHoul & Grace, 1993).

Michel Foucault is a key theorist of discourse analysis. In his view, discourse analysis reveals institutionalised patterns of knowledge – and it was these patterns of knowledge that I wished to learn from the police in relation to 'vulnerability'. Foucault also stresses the nature of power relationships through language (Given, 2008). The police have a significant amount of legislative and social power in relation to 'vulnerability', with their decisions having a serious impact and power over citizens. Further, 'vulnerability' as a standalone concept has been pinpointed as demonstrative of power relationships within our society (Butler, 2004). Discourse analysis supported my investigation of multiple pathways concerning the shaping of understanding 'vulnerability' in policing through language (Ferreirinha, 2008; Magalhaes & Sanchez, 2009).

Limitations of the project

The data from this project is drawn from only one of the forty-three police forces across England and Wales, and so cannot be used to generalise the policies and procedures. There are also approximately 3,500 police staff in the studied force: I observed approximately fifty staff members and interviewed fifteen. Therefore, the findings cannot necessarily be generalised for the force in question, nor can they be assumed to mirror the opinions of forces elsewhere.

The project was able to capture data from several different units, including the frontline. There was no data drawn from CID: the investigation of 'vulnerability', so to speak, is therefore missing. This was owing to the pandemic. Interviews were scheduled with CID before the pandemic, rescheduled several times as restrictions changed but ultimately had to be abandoned. There was no data drawn from the resolution hub, a unit composed mainly of civilian staff that respond to incidents that can be handled over the phone and require no officer involvement.

Neighbourhood policing is also absent from the data. There was only one police partner, a mental health nurse, that could be interviewed owing to the pandemic. Any future projects on a similar topic would need to consider these other units and involve more partners that work in daily collaboration with the police.

The positionality of the researcher and shifting perspectives on policing

Prior to the research project, I had limited contact with the police, and most of my information about the police came from mass media. On a personal level, a handful of encounters with the police left me feeling ambivalent and uncertain. Pop culture, however, persuaded me that the police were, generally speaking, the 'good guys' and were in charge of protecting people. My opinions were challenged over time as I became more aware of the Black Lives Matter movement, around 2015.

I attempted to place myself in a position of willing ignorance concerning the project. Rather than trying to form opinions, I listened to a wide range of individuals and read from a wide range of sources on 'vulnerability' and policing. When I told people about my research, I found that there was a tendency to 'take sides' - and I felt under pressure to take a side too. However, in terms of the project, I would return to research questions, and my search for the evidence, rather than build a case to praise or condemn the police. This was challenging, as I had over time become acutely aware of systemic problems within policing, from failures to robustly respond to domestic abuse, investigate sexual violence, institutionalised racism and mistreatment of marginalised groups. This knowledge and awareness concerning the harms of policing began to accumulate from the beginning of the project as I read about 'vulnerability', the police and the crossover of the two. The mythos that I had, perhaps naively, held onto from a childhood and young adulthood of watching the good guys in police procedurals was sharply contrasted with the evidence base for the oppressive nature that policing can possess.

I was also acutely aware of being a young woman within a male dominated institution, conscious of its organisational sexism and misogyny, long before the Casey review (2023). I was also hyper-conscious that the ethics protocol had underlined my gender as a risk factor that required safety measures, which I found frustrating and demeaning – a frequent experience of individuals labelled as 'vulnerable' (Ellis, 2018).

There were elements of privilege to my positionality, however. Whilst disabilities can be considered a 'vulnerability' (e.g Burghart, 2013), my personal disabilities are invisible. Alongside my role as a researcher, and my interest in policing, many officers and staff assumed that I was 'not vulnerable' - as they saw themselves. In an interview with a call

handler, who did not wish to be quoted, specifically assigned the 'not vulnerable' label to both themselves and me, despite knowing very little about me. I am also conscious that being a young woman had its advantages. I can only speculate, but I suspect that many officers and staff let their guard around me to an extent as I did not appear as an authority figure. I was not there to inspect or critique them. I was a PhD student, so had little power and status - and I believe there is a paradoxical privilege at play here. I suspect race played a role here too: that my reception and potentially even the ability to build rapport and gather data would have been impacted if I was from an ethnic minority. The force itself and the community that they served were a white majority, with an extremely small percentage of individuals from ethnic minorities. All of the participants I interviewed were white, whilst only one member of staff that I met in observation were not white.

I found that my feelings towards the police as an institution went in cycles during the project. During fieldwork, I spent time with police officers and staff: building rapport, building familiarity, and observing the activity around me. It was difficult not to empathise with the challenges that they faced in their everyday role, and empathise with them as individuals. I was permitted a view behind the uniform and their role, to see a human and all their attendant vulnerabilities. In the same vein, a similar occurrence happened during interviews, especially owing to the level of intimacy generated by the circumstances of interviews between researcher and participant.

However, negative opinions could cycle around again. Further evidence of institutionalised racism and misogyny continued to be highlighted within policing. I was disappointed and frustrated when the force was placed in special measures in 2022. I had met many individuals who were so committed to delivering change within the force, and who cared passionately for policing. A sense of apathy and cynicism set in, with questions about the purpose of what I was doing and if change was really possible. Upon reflection, there was an element of misunderstanding my role and the role of the project, assigning myself a power and authority that I did not possess.

The stages of analysis and writing initially left me feeling muddled and pulled in both directions: each 'side' seemed to have good points as to the positive/negative role of policing. However, as both processes continued, my focus was absorbed in the ideas that I was developing and provided distance from the actual stages of data collection. Re-analysing and

re-writing my ideas a year after the initial process allowed me to explore new ideas, and my confidence started to grow in my own knowledge, and then my own opinions.

Strangely, I find myself in a similar emotional position towards the police as when I started: cautious and ambivalent. I have a much greater appreciation for balance - one can empathise with the challenges facing the individuals who work in the police, yet be sceptical and critical of policing as an institution, its mythos, practice, culture and behaviours. My opinions are more loaded concerning the lack of accountability, but also the lack of willingness and humility that I have witnessed on a personal and national scale in policing. I consider the police now to be an uncomfortable necessity, in the sense that pragmatically, the police are not going anywhere as an institution. I have come to believe that the purpose of policing is primarily public order maintenance, rather than public protection or crime prevention.

Collaborating with the police

Before the chapter concludes, it is necessary to address the role of collaboration with the police in the pursuit of the project. The project was a CASE studentship, which promoted direct collaboration with an institution for the purposes of research. My CASE institution was a specific police force, with my CASE partner a civilian member of executive management who had twenty years of experience with the police. I greatly valued their contributions to the design of the project, research questions and methodology. We had excellent communication, usually speaking every few weeks at the beginning of the project and during the data gathering stage.

They invited me to numerous police events, encouraging me to present my research to the police from the very beginning of the PhD and travelling together allowed us to form a good relationship. We each had profound respect for the other's background, knowledge and ideas, whilst our overlapping values and passion for both policing and protecting those in the community provided a foundation of mutual trust (Crawford, 2020). My police liaison had previous experience working with academics, though not for such a long period of time, and so had some familiarity with the academic approach to research. They strongly emphasised the desire that this longer-term project would provide insight and progress where short term projects had failed, left to sit on a shelf and forgotten - a common problem in organisational learning in the police (Crawford, 2020). My liaison provided me with a significant amount of knowledge, drawn from their own experiences, but allowed me enough scope to draw on my

own ideas - and, crucially, avoid a particular narrative developing from the research (Crawford, 2019; 2020).

The difficulty of collaborative projects such as the CASE studentships is the potential for those who liaise with researchers can quickly transform into gatekeepers, with permission only granted if particular views or ideology is promoted. I was wary of this possibility, and I am conscious that my experience was startling in its uniqueness. My liaison was a civilian staff member who had worked in the force for twenty years, with more recent roles concerning how to support 'vulnerable' people in the local community. They were an individual keenly invested in continually improving the force's practice and service to the local community. They presented as clear minded concerning the perennial problems within policing. During the period of observation and interviews, they would put me in contact with the head of a unit to organise interviews and the specifics were left up to me. We co-ordinated less once this stage was over, and I began writing and analysis. At no point was I asked what specific units had to say, what I observed or made suggestions about themes I could investigate. They were keen to learn about my ideas and analysis. They, alongside other senior management, acknowledged their disappointment in the PEEL findings concerning protection of 'vulnerable' people as inadequate. Their goal going forward, they asserted, was how to deliver an improved service and they were keen on ideas about how to do so. I was never given any impression that this desire was dishonest.

My liaison, and many of those senior management figures, have now however left the force but continue to work in roles dedicated to improving policing through research. Whilst I had the support of the Acting Assistant Chief Constable, they were replaced, and I was faced with new faces in new roles. These individuals did not appear to understand the purpose of the project and I did not feel my findings were taken seriously. The relationship soured considerably when I was asked if I could hand over my data to them for review, which I had to decline for ethical purposes. After this, I was no longer invited to Vulnerability Strategy meetings, where I previously had been a frequent guest. This was a disappointing turn of events concerning the force, but gave me a swift, if brutal, education on perhaps a more 'normal' experience of researching in policing.

The project therefore allowed for a significant co-production of knowledge, with those that were to use and apply the project evidence in practice crucial to designing and gathering said evidence (Crawford, 2017; 2020). The police as a stakeholder permitted significant

engagement with the research, from presentations to participation in the data gathering (Rycroft-Malone et al., 2016).

The collaborative nature highlighted the cultural, political and contextual dimensions of the different knowledge at play, providing insight not only into what we each knew, but how we knew it (Janasoff, 2004:275). Further, I appreciated the mostly equal flow of knowledge between myself and the police, avoiding any presumption of a knowledge hierarchy. Power was however still present: I alone would decide what data to include in the thesis, and what to exclude.

Similarly, they had the power to exclude me from their environment and refuse to participate. Co-production occasionally meant walking a tightrope of power relations, especially concerning challenges to assumptions about 'vulnerability' and policing alike (Crawford, 2019; 2020).

I also felt that there was a co-production of knowledge during my visits to police units during the information gathering stage of the first year, during non-participant observations and semi- structured interviews. My conversations with officers and staff opened my eyes to the wide range of issues at play in relation to 'vulnerability' and its operationalisation in practice. Crawford (2020:506) argues that co-production involves parties that have distinct priorities and interests, but shared goals. I would argue that our priorities, interests and goals were often in alignment - the efficacy of the police in protecting individuals in need of help. It was our avenues for channelling activity towards these priorities that differed, as well as our knowledge, experience and skills - vital for co-productive research to be impactful in practice (Crawford, 2020).

As noted, I presented my research and ideas to the police on numerous occasions, from the frontline to executive management. This allowed me to discuss complex ideas with a non-academic, practitioner audience. This involved the lack of academic language, which can be exclusive and alienating, but still underpinning the issues at play with clarity and without patronisation. Research in policing lags behind that in other public sectors, "characterised by mutual misunderstanding, suspicion, distrust and disengagement" (Crawford, 2020: 508). I initially presented to the evidence based policing panel, recently replaced by the strategic vulnerability board. Alongside the ideas drawn from my research, I was able to provide constructive feedback on their processes and make pragmatic suggestions for improvement. My experience in the policing environment permitted this strategy, as I could appreciate what

would and would not be possible in practice. A significant number of possible suggestions simply required more money and resources, of which the police were already aware. I suggested several ideas that have been adopted into practice, such as trauma informed practice (though this has been a concentrated effort within public sector research). I suggested working with the Samaritans charity to train call handlers in crisis communication, as they had little knowledge on this topic but consistently encountered this issue in practice. I also encouraged reflective practice for staff to disentangle many of the issues facing them in terms of 'vulnerability', and a shift in language from 'attention seeking' behaviour to 'help seeking' behaviour. My liaison asked me to provide constructive feedback on their multi-agency training on 'vulnerability', which was specialised for their county. Further, I advised on the design of the force's 'vulnerability' advertising campaign, based on my knowledge and experience: 'See Me. Hear Me. Protect Me. Think Vulnerability'. My police liaison, supervisor and I collaborated on a review of the Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme and College of Policing's National Vulnerability Action Plan (2022), reflecting on how the plan could be pragmatically applied to the force. We considered what good practice already existed, what had been achieved elsewhere and what needed focus for the future. I was therefore permitted the role of both 'problem raiser' as well as 'problem solver' (Crawford, 2020) - though over time, I embraced the former role with greater emphasis, owning a role that permitted influence and negotiation, not one of saviour (McAra, 2017).

There were significant benefits to collaboration, primarily through access to the police. My police liaison organised my meetings and observations with police units - and gave departments a nudge when I was waiting for responses to interviews. It gave me a thorough understanding of contemporary policing in practice, the challenges that they face and experience of 'vulnerability' in context, which I was able to carry forward into the data analysis and presenting feedback (Crawford, 2019).

There were some drawbacks. There were institutional politics, of which I had little knowledge, often at play behind the scenes. After presenting, I was often approached by heads of specific units or services, wanting me to visit them and include them in the project. This often cut my liaison out of the loop, and risked the project being used to spotlight particular services and people. The chaotic and unpredictable working environment of the police was also difficult, as there was no effective method to ensure that individuals would respond to emails for interview, for example, or would cancel on the same day, but not reschedule. As noted previously, the COVID-19 pandemic worsened the issue.

The institution of policing itself provided some difficulty. The police can be intimidating, and the police's long history of misogyny within its own ranks was rarely far from my mind. The police wield significant power and authority, often edging out dissenting or marginalised voices (Crawford, 2020). I knew that feedback needed to be handled with care, lest my findings be discarded and hope for effective progress disappearing (Rycroft-Malone et al., 2016). The police are often under the scrutiny of the IOPC, the media, politicians and the public. I witnessed the paranoia that this can engender, and I was concerned of being doomed to the 'dialogue of the deaf', a fate of so many police researchers before me (Bradley & Nixon, 2009). Whilst I found myself welcomed by the vast majority of officers and staff, there were some whose behaviour I found unacceptable and uncomfortable to witness. To me, this is part of the 'messiness' of co- productive research alluded to by Crawford (2020). My discomfort was worsened when those around them appeared to tolerate this behaviour. I was able to speak to my police liaison about one specific incident that I was disturbed to witness, as well as a police trainer who was present. But I was also conscious that I did not have carte blanche to report every indiscretion. I needed the trust of individual officers and staff to be present so that the research could be conducted, which could be lost if I came across as abrasive or meddling. Criminology as a discipline is inherently bound up in ideas about values, which invariably becomes bound up in politics and 'sides' (Crawford, 2020), which can result in polarisation. I embraced the lens of critical realism but appreciated that both institutions and individuals can have difficulty taking feedback - regardless of how constructive - and can be resistant to change. I was always aware of my position as an outsider: I had my foot in the door as a researcher in criminal justice, but I needed their permission to stay.

Conclusions

This chapter has set out how the research questions posed by this thesis will be answered. The two stages had different methods, which permitted a more holistic approach to investigating the questions. Non-participant observation permitted the gathering of data in context of working police practice, whilst semi-structured interviews allowed for reflection and discourse between researcher and participant. I have been precise in how I prepared for and carried out this research, including the steps taken to ensure that the project adhered to ethical standards and sharp changes needed when circumstances changed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The data was reviewed using discourse analysis and coding in order to draw out themes to be investigated. The next chapter opens the analysis of the rich data, exploring how the police understand 'vulnerability' - and how they are informed about that understanding.

Chapter 4 - How are the police informed about 'vulnerability'?

Introduction

The police have a significant role to play in the identification of and response to 'vulnerability' within their everyday roles (Keay & Kirby, 2018). The term is fluid, nebulous and loaded with moral implications (Brown, 2011). How, therefore, do the police understand 'vulnerability'?

This chapter addresses three overarching themes: how the police understand 'vulnerability'; from where they draw this understanding; and the role of other concepts such as 'risk' and 'safeguarding' in relation to understanding 'vulnerability'.

The first theme opens with the difficulty that officers and staff had defining what they understood by 'vulnerability', mirroring difficulties highlighted by previous research on the police (Keay & Kirby, 2018). This is followed by an examination of how 'vulnerability' can be conceptualised through the lens of 'need'. The second theme investigates from where the police drawn these understandings, beginning with a focus on institutional knowledge and training, followed by an exploration of experiential learning. The third and final theme is somewhat of an overlap of the prior two: how the police understand 'vulnerability' in relation to other concepts like 'risk' and 'safeguarding' and drawn on their pre-existing knowledge of said concepts to understand 'vulnerability'.

'Vulnerability' can be incredibly difficult for academics and policy makers to define (Wrigley & Dawson, 2016). Therefore, in order to learn how the police understand 'vulnerability', there must first be an exploration of the difficulties that they face in defining the term.

Theme 1: How the police understand 'vulnerability'

The difficulties of defining 'vulnerability'

The first questions participants were asked concerned their own definition of vulnerability. Many initial answers demonstrated difficulty in doing so, mirroring prior research (Keay & Kirby, 2018; Mythen & Weston, 2023):

"It's such a wide-ranging term, I can't really give you a specific answer to that one." (Kit, Custody Sergeant)

"I think it can mean a whole range of things. I think you can be vulnerable in so many different ways." (Sandy, CDO)

"Gosh, it's very difficult to put it into words, really." (Robin, PCSO)

"And there's so many, because in my mind, vulnerability is not just one thing, it's hundreds of things." (Sunny, Chief Inspector)

Even police partners had a hard time specifically outlining their understanding:

"...I suppose it is really difficult because everyone's vulnerable and anyone can be vulnerable, it's not – you don't get like a stereotypical vulnerable person." (Blair, Mental Health Nurse)

A call taker asserted that 'vulnerability' is not one set thing but is instead fluid and changing over time, mirroring prior research (Lee, 2014: 32; Alwang et al., 2001:30; Shah et al., 2013:125).

One of the prevailing difficulties, in retrospect, was that the force did not have their own definition of 'vulnerability'. I was encouraged to examine force policy, alongside government policy documents (e.g guidance on Forced Marriage, FGM - HM Government, 2014), which frequently mentioned 'vulnerability' or 'vulnerable' people - yet no definition of what constituted 'vulnerability'. The force policies and protocols were identified by my liaison as falling under the category of 'vulnerability', defined by crime types and incidents, rather than a definition of 'vulnerability' itself. Whilst executive management emphasised the College of Policing definition, as will be examined more thoroughly later in this chapter, it appears that those on the frontline were left in the dark as far as how to define 'vulnerability' in operational practice.

There was a strong sense that 'vulnerability' could apply to any individual by virtue of their contact with the police:

"So, I've got no definition of vulnerable. So, everyone who's vulnerable in their own way, some people more so than others, that's it for me." (Ainslie, PCSO)

The paradox of 'vulnerability', being a term that can be applied so widely and yet so narrowly, also appeared:

"Perhaps vulnerability is generalising in many respects, because it's all so unique, isn't it." (Sunny, Chief Inspector)

The two call takers had similar sentiments to both Ainslie and Sunny. 'Vulnerability' can be used as a general term within policing, to denote someone that warrants police attention. The label may be applied to an individual and their own unique situation, drawing them under a much larger umbrella by practitioners. This application can generate attitudes and procedures which then treat individuals as a homogenous group that require a homogenous approach (Fawcett, 2004). The quotes above however suggest numerous heterogenous possibilities of what it means to be 'vulnerable' and 'vulnerability' itself is unique to the individual. There is a wide spectrum to consider':

"It might be this (place hands close together) vulnerable or this (places hands far apart) vulnerable to what we have to do about that, and that's the bit we've got to get right – about recognising why we are saying someone's vulnerable, of what we've got to do about it." (Charlie, Executive Management)

There is an elucidation here on the necessity for officers and staff to understand the term. Why exactly do they consider this person to be 'vulnerable' - and from there, what is the role of the police? The multiple problems that 'vulnerability' confronts in practice echoes the criticism of researchers stated in the literature review: 'vulnerability' is "confusing" (Solbakk, 2011: 228-9); "vague" (Ruof, 2004: 211; Brown, 2011:313); and "amorphous" (Munro & Scoular, 2012: 194).

A significant issue with defining 'vulnerability in theory and assessment in practice was its temporal nature:

"A vulnerable person could be a 'normal' person who is in a situation that by its sheer nature, makes them situationally vulnerable too. It could be your average person who has gone through a traumatic event or situation or has taken a substance which causes them to enter a crisis and renders them unable to look after themselves or protect themselves from harm." (Leslie, Response Officer)

"I think it can mean a whole range of things, depending on the person and their kind of background, that kind of thing." (Sandy, CDO)

"Vulnerability, I think, is a range of issues, really, I'm not sure if it has a specific definition, it may have certain criteria." (Sunny, Chief Inspector)

"So, loads of different things can make people vulnerable, even if it's just a passing vulnerability, if that makes sense. Like, somebody being drunk. They're not normally vulnerable. But for that moment in time, they will be considered vulnerable." (Lou, Response Officer)

"So, everyone we come into contact with is vulnerable, sort of chance meeting in the street type stuff. Again, they're very vulnerable for a certain section of time, not long, others for longer, so it's difficult to actually get a true measure of what our demand is." (Bobby, Executive Management)

'Vulnerability' can envelop an extremely wide range of different issues and different circumstances: physical and mental health, disabilities, ages, gender, ethnicities and socioeconomic statuses, as well as different types of harm such as sexual violence, domestic abuse, exploitation and personal crisis. These issues range from the personal, to circumstantial, to structural - and can intersect (Keay & Kirby, 2018:430). Call handlers described these multiple possibilities of 'vulnerability' that they encountered every day. There was an assertion, also voiced during observation, that any individual who contacts the police can be considered 'vulnerable' by virtue of said contact. It is the situational 'vulnerability' that appears to be examined primarily by the police in theory - which will be examined further in the chapter when there is a closer study of institutional learning.

There was a preference for keeping the term as general as possible to encapsulate the conditional, temporal nature of vulnerability. One participant, however, expressed a desire to have a more concrete process:

"Sometimes I'd just like an easy checklist, just one bit of paper with key words about vulnerability, what to look for, and tick them off your list, just to make sure that you've done everything." (Sam, PCSO)

Such a fluid concept can generate a desire for concrete methods for easy assessment in working practice. It can ensure that the officer or staff member has done their job: a personal sense of accountability, but also an objective paper trail to protect themselves against possible ire (Black & Lumsden, 2020). I referred to this practice in my notes on observation as 'bureaucratic safeguarding': a guide for the police to follow but also a way to safeguard their

decisions, rather than safeguard individuals (Black & Lumsden, 20202). A checklist also attempts to create an objective, positivist framework to a subjective, fluid term. The attraction of such assessment frameworks is demonstrated by risk assessments' consistent use within the policing environment (Black & Lumsden, 2020), and so the police are familiar with the format and practice. Later in the chapter, when discussing the College of Policing definition of 'vulnerability', Bobby and Charlie, members of executive management, describes how the definition initially contained multiple bullet points, demonstrating an almost diagnostic, prescriptive approach.

'Vulnerability' indicators are not a new concept, with sustainability studies using them to measure 'vulnerability' and are considered a significant avenue for operationalising the concept in practice (Hinkel, 2011:200: Moss et al., 2001; Patt et al., 2012). In the context of policing, the behavioural sciences deploy similar indicators to justify intervention in the lives of those considered 'vulnerable' to radicalisation (Coppock & McGovern, 2012). Whilst indicators can provide a quasi-scientific method to understanding 'vulnerability', such a practice ignores the socio-historical processes of 'vulnerability' as a label, perpetuating the marginalisation of specific voices and communities (Green, 2007; Fineman, 2008; Carlson, 2014). Like risk assessments, indicators facilitate the police's ability to rank and prioritise incidents, determining where their response is channelled.

The universal approach (Fineman, 2004; 2008) includes the possibility of every individual being 'vulnerable' by virtue of their contact with the police. However, this approach can prompt overuse of 'vulnerability' as a term, reducing it to jargon, empty of reflection (Mythen & Weston, 2023):

"...we've actually got to drill down to exactly what is the vulnerability, so we don't get caught up in this 'everyone's vulnerable' - what is the vulnerability and what do we need to do about it?" (Charlie, Executive Management)

Charlies's comment - 'what needs to be done' - ultimately emphasises the police role – what do they *need* to do about it? It does not necessarily offer what *can* reasonably be done. 'Need' can translate to obligations, requirements and necessities. For the police interviewed, 'vulnerability' interlinked closely with 'need' - both for service users, and for themselves.

'Vulnerability' as need

During my observations, I noted that the term 'vulnerable' appeared to be a short-hand translation for someone in need. What that individual needed fluctuated as much as the differing definitions of 'vulnerability': for example, a need for response officers owing to a physical threat; a need to be referred on to other agencies; or a need to know what to do in a situation that was causing them distress, amongst many others.

Participants' reflection of 'vulnerability' demonstrated a similar theme of 'vulnerable' translating to being 'in need':

"A vulnerable person is somebody who is unable to look after themselves and may need extra care or support." (Leslie, Response Officer)

"That could be a whole range of things, it could be that someone can't look after themselves financially or it could be physically, so people that depend on other people to come round every day you know, with cleaning or feeding and that kind of stuff." (Sandy. CDO)

"People who are struggling, people who are there that need the help, security for those people, protecting. And just being there for somebody as well, to pick up any neglect, exploitation, abuse." (Sam, PCSO)

"That somebody needs, perhaps, a little bit more help or support." (Terry, PCSO)

"Someone that needs support. Someone that is struggling with the day-to-day functions and running of their life, their home, their family, and their situation." (Robin, PCSO)

"Once I've identified a vulnerability, it means do I need to treat that person in a specific way? Is there any additional help that I can get them? It's how I am going to care and look after that person that has subsequently been identified as vulnerable, and what that vulnerability is." (Kit, Custody Sergeant)

Institutional framing of 'vulnerability' encourages this understanding, with HMIC defining the term as a "condition of a person who is in need of special care, support or protection because of age, disability or risk of abuse or neglect" (2015: 23). Prior research also aligns with this sentiment, with 'vulnerability' highlighting individuals and communities "in a way that generates requirements to pay extra attention to their wellbeing" (Wrigley, 2015:478). In the context of normative expectations and need, 'vulnerable' can apply to lacking or

possessing less than expected, mirroring the definitions within the sustainability studies (Alwang et al, 2011). The quotes above demonstrate the wide range of support needed: personal, emotional, professional, familial, financial. The vague nature of 'need' - like 'vulnerability' - also demonstrates the wide range of possible, often complex, needs that the police can encounter in service users. The same quotes strongly suggest that the police role is assessing need through the lens of 'vulnerability'.

The above quotes from participants suggest an empathy for said individuals, rather than judgement for failure to meet expectations. The role of the police is instead to find ways to support that individual and remove or supply said need or protect them from harm. The issue is that terms like 'need', 'help', 'protection' and 'harm' are possibly just as fluid, complex and reliant on subjective interpretation as 'vulnerability' (Hilyard & Tombs, 2007). Whilst searching for literature reviews on these terms, there exists very little on their overall definition and conceptualisation, suggesting that there be a similar practice of taking their meaning for granted, as is seen with 'vulnerability' (Stanford, 2012). However, like 'vulnerability', in some scenarios 'protection' can be institutionally and subjectively framed to justify police overreach and surveillance (Coppock & McGovern, 2012; Mythen & Weston, 2023).

Whilst some of these participants' thoughts on 'vulnerability' relate to crime in the form of abuse and exploitation, most refer to the wider environment of an individual. Call handlers described how their understanding of 'vulnerability' related to an individual's ability to cope in the moment, regardless of the incident itself. Call handlers used inquiry to determine what the caller needed, as not every individual was specific about their reason for calling. Call handlers often used different words to ask the same question to investigate why the individual was calling. One call handler emphasised that their understanding of 'vulnerability' was based on their assessment of how well a person was coping with their circumstances at that moment in time, by comparison to a 'reasonable person'. The 'reasonable person' threshold is deployed in the UK legal system to define normative standards (Miller & Perry, 2012; Gardner, 2015). Using the 'reasonable person' threshold to assess 'vulnerability' highlights the assumption that to be 'vulnerable', an individual has deviated from the expected norm (Munro & Scoular, 2012). Further, the threshold for a 'reasonable person', like the liberal legal subject, is dependent on cultural expectations of race, gender and class - and positioned in direct opposition to those considered 'vulnerable' (Peroni & Timmer, 2013; Liberto, 2014; Fouladvand & Ward, 2019). Use of the 'reasonable person' standard to assess 'vulnerability'

in a policing context is therefore problematic, as it is based on narrow and subjective cultural assumptions and repeating a familiar path of institutional exclusion.

This conceptualisation of 'vulnerability' illustrates how the term highlights an individual's departure from the expected 'norm' (Chakraborti & Garland, 2012; Peroni & Timmer, 2013). This framing is also embodied in institutional definitions of 'vulnerability', created primarily by the College of Policing, which introduces the next theme of the chapter: from where do the police draw their understandings of 'vulnerability'?

Theme 2: Where police gain their understanding of 'vulnerability'

Institutional knowledge of 'vulnerability'

The College of Policing created its own definition to support its officers and staff in identifying and responding to the term:

"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." (College of Policing, 2021)[4]

Again, being 'vulnerable' encompasses a significant number of potential people and scenarios in a policing context. According to police management, the initial consultation on the definition was geared towards a different approach:

"But...that first draft definition came with bullet points – as if 'if they can't do this, if they can do that' and we actually fed back that that was getting a bit prescriptive and not what we were heading to, because when you work in vulnerability, you will stick rigid to that - 'well they weren't this and they weren't that' - and that will inform your decision, so you have to be very careful that it could be a general, useful definition, not 'it's there and I'll acknowledge it but I'm never going to use it and refer to it." (Charlie, Executive Management)

"The difficulty I think we've got, other forces have got, etc., is because it's not got seventeen bullet points beneath it, it's very difficult to measure. 'Cause it's more a very general, needs

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[4] I first encountered the College of Policing definition in 2018: I received mixed answers upon inquiring when exactly the current definition. The current citation relates to documentation with the quoted definition that was produced in 2021. No current documentation from 2018 currently exists, owing to the consistently updated nature of policing policy.

more narrative, there's a little bit more professional judgement, etc., within it. So, it's more difficult to measure.'' (Bobby, Executive Management)

The avoidance of a checklist simultaneously avoids generalising specific groups and excluding others. But there is a trade-off: a general, wide-ranging definition that depends on subjective interpretation. The comments also highlight a desire for prescriptive, binary approaches to 'vulnerability', which is also highlighted by in the previous section, with policies and protocols relating to specific crime types and incidents considered to fit under the umbrella of 'vulnerability'.

In line with an open-minded perspective, anti-prescriptive approach, the College of Policing also created a visual aid to guide officers and staff in their understanding of 'vulnerability'.
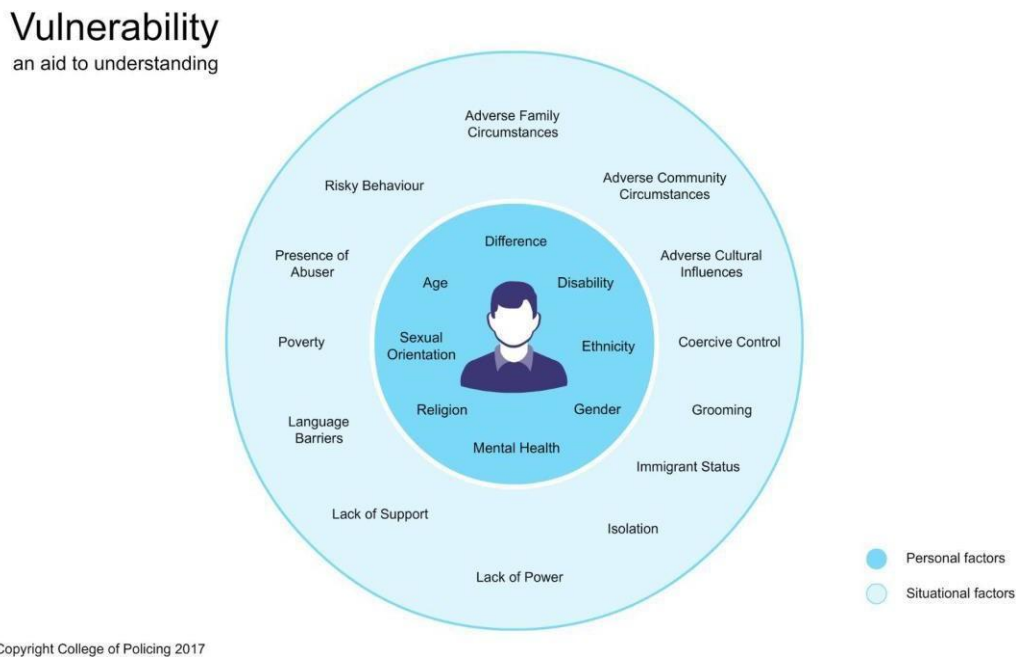
The personal characteristics, in the centre of the aid are age, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, disability, mental health, gender and difference. The circumstantial characteristics are adverse family circumstances, adverse community circumstances, adverse cultural influences, cursive control, grooming, immigration status, isolation, lack of power, lack of support, language barriers, presence of an abuser and risky behaviour. There are numerous combinations for the police to consider for each potentially 'vulnerable' individual they encounter.

The aid, like the College of the Police definition, emphasises that there is a wide range of possible people and circumstances that can be considered 'vulnerable' within a policing framework. Further, no personal characteristics are inherently indicative of 'vulnerability' - it is the circumstances that demonstrate the 'vulnerability'. For example, being inherently a female child with a disability does not necessarily equate to 'vulnerable' - it is these characteristics with the addition of, for example, adverse family circumstances and/or grooming, and/or language difficulties, that create the formula for 'vulnerability' within a policing context. As discussed previously, this wide range of possible circumstances for 'vulnerability' and the situational nature of 'vulnerability' is accepted by the interview participants - in theory. The next chapter, on identifying 'vulnerability', highlights how there is a significant divergence in practice.

The usefulness of either the definition or the aid is debatable. The definition was rarely mentioned by participants in interviews, with them creating their own ideas based predominantly on their personal and professional experience. Neither the definition nor the aid was mentioned by any participants during non-observation. Those that did mention the definition did not generate much encouragement concerning whether it is fit for purpose:

"Never heard of it, officially. Although I've probably seen it on an email somewhere..."
(Alex, Response Officer)

"I would say that there probably are a number of definitions out there, regarding vulnerable people. I probably also define it by my own personal experiences, policing experience, personal experiences." (Sunny, Chief Inspector)

Therefore, Charlie's earlier prophecy - "*so you have to be very careful that (the definition) could be a general, useful definition, not 'it's there and I'll acknowledge it but I'm never going to use it and refer to it'*" - has materialised, despite her belief that a more general definition would encourage officers to use it. Others preferred to draw on previous legislative definitions instead, such as the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence act 1999:

"I base vulnerability really on what we would use for our special measures." (Lou, Response Officer)

It is difficult to know how much of an impact the College of Policing definition and 'vulnerability' aid has had. However, whilst executive management emphasised the College

of Policing definition, this was not mirrored in policy or protocol, nor had it trickled down to the perspectives on the frontline.

Both attempts by the police to sum up the sheer number of possibilities that the police encounter daily. It is here that I must emphasise the word 'possibilities': a significant number of the quotes used so far referred to 'vulnerabilities' as conditional. There is a need for flexibility in language, which reflects a flexibility in how the police identify vulnerability. This impacts how they respond in kind. Instead of a narrow prescription for vulnerability, this flexibility encourages and permits the police to approach each incident on its own terms, at least theoretically. The narrowing comes later, through information gathering, sharing and effective communication with those involved. There are numerous issues with said narrowing, which will be explored in the following chapters.

Another issue is how to effectively train officers and staff in this process. If the definition is hard to pin down, then how can one be trained in its identification and response?

Training

Training is a concrete, controllable method by which officers and staff learn how to do their job. Training can relate to policy, procedure and a wide range of issues with which the police come into contact. The College of Policing launched training on 'vulnerability' identification after the PEEL effectiveness and vulnerability review in 2016. Most participants only had a vague recollection of the training when asked: the memories had been obscured by other training sessions. The participants that did recall the training described the creation of a framework for 'vulnerability':

"...we've moved forward with this training because it was about people understanding what vulnerability was, what it meant to us as a force, and what that meant to individuals within respective units." (Charlie, Executive Management)

"What did I think of the training? Well, it shows something that I can remember it for a start, three years ago. So, the training is comprehensive. People will slag it off but we do have good

training, it' well thought out, it's good training, it's thought-provoking, it sticks in your mind. And it gives you something to refer back to. And also, refreshers are available for it." (Ainslie, PCSO)

"Some of this is a bit like sucking eggs, but then, a lot of it has been quite good, and has challenged my thought processes and views." (Robin, PCSO)

Rather than creating a checklist of 'vulnerable' and 'not vulnerable', the training was an opportunity to explore what 'vulnerability' meant to individuals, and the wider force. Training offered a space for reflection and challenging previously held beliefs on the concept, rather than solely increasing and improving knowledge of 'vulnerability'.

I was able to attend two of the College of Policing 'vulnerability' training sessions during the first year of the project, which was mandatory for all officers and staff, and had been running for approximately the previous two years across English forces (for an in-depth exploration of the training, please see appendix J).

Training is not always well received – Robin mentions that the sessions can feel like 'sucking eggs'. Similar observations were made by other interviewees:

"Obviously, when we first started, we went over the vulnerability framework, that was three years ago now. We don't really have up-to-date training, it's all e-learning, so when we do have time to down at a computer and do e-learning then I'd re-jig my memory…I think sometimes four hours of training isn't enough, and then they leave it for 12 months sometimes." (Sam, PCSO)

"We get death by PowerPoint presentations, and that kind of thing. So, we do get training, like I say, it's a big thing at the moment for staff." (Lou, Response Officer)

"The training, whilst useful in terms of broadening our knowledge, is rather basic and the online training is not exactly ideal or engaging. I know enough to get by and that has always served me well I suppose." (Leslie, Response Officer)

Training is static, siloed into one time period. The lack of updated training is of concern: the emergence of different types of crimes and vulnerabilities emerge over time. Training may offer a flag for issues, alongside ways to identify them that officers and staff may have yet to knowingly encounter. Updates come in the form of e-learning – and are not particularly engaging.

The balance between training and experience can create tension: the need for expansion of knowledge, undermined by poor delivery. Ultimately, the training provides an initial framework. Professional experience is the preferred method of developing this learning.

The role of experiential learning

Whilst training and policy can be designed to aid officers and staff in the definition of 'vulnerability', experiential learning in the police was considered the leading contribution to their identification and response:

"So, we have vulnerability training and there are things that you're given to look out for, which is great when you first start. But once you get a feel for people, then you go on, instinct is the wrong thing, improved experience powers you...once you've done it for a while, you get to know who is vulnerable and who isn't." (Ainslie, PCSO)

"It can be something that comes with experience in the role...as I have become more experienced in the police, my confidence has increased in decision making when dealing with vulnerable persons." (Leslie, Response Officer)

"I think the more experience you have around it, the easier it is to identify it." (Lou, Response Officer)

"So, not specific to myself, obviously I do use my own experience, I've worked here a long time, I have come across a lot of different vulnerabilities from across the spectrum." (Kit, Custody Sergeant)

"...eight years down the line in this job, you kind of see it all, really, in (custody)." (Jamie, CDO)

"A lot of the knowledge I have, and experience has come from that, experience. I think that as you get exposed and experienced and older, that understanding and interpretation changes." (Sunny, Chief Inspector)

The nebulous nature of 'vulnerability' facilitates the need for lived experience and learning on- the-go. The concept of 'vulnerability' has been highlighted previously as varied, fluid, multi- faceted, generalising yet unique – and so too it seems are the experiences of the police and their encounters with service users. Other aspects of learning – training, book-learning, discussions and debates – have a place in educating and engaging police officers and staff on

the topic of "vulnerability". However, exposure through their day-to-day role builds confidence and knowledge in "operationalising vulnerability".

Training, policy and other avenues of traditional learning are to an extent controllable: what is the focus, who is included, what information is included. 'Experience' is a far more uncontrollable pathway for learning, as there is no guarantee as to what an individual will experience. It also is a far longer pathway to learning, taking years, versus the limited nature of training sessions that may only last a few hours. But the preference for experience and limitations of training are clear:

"I think it's changed through experience. Not in terms of particular knowledge or particular training. Just the amount of people that I see." (Kit, Custody Sergeant)

"I don't think it would be classed as vulnerability specifically when you have, you're initial training here, you do touch...on the kind of issues that you're going to see and how to deal with them as much, but I think until you get the experience of actually talking to people, you can't really train that until you've actually experienced it." (Sandy, CDO)

"So, again, it's not a textbook cut and dry thing, you can give people training, but the training is no substitute for experience in dealing with people." (Ainslie, PCSO)

The notion of there being no 'book' or 'textbook' to dictate participants' assessment and handling of 'vulnerability' underlined a general avoidance of a prescriptive threshold for individuals to meet. Like a square peg in a round hole, such an approach would simply be incompatible with the reality of the contemporary policing role. Ainslie's thoughts demonstrate the limitations of traditional, classroom-based teaching and training. The dissuasion of a 'textbook' policing approach underlines the limitations of academic or scholarly perspectives when it comes to both policing, and 'vulnerability'.

There are issues with the emphasis on experience: a particular police role may mean that an individual only has exposure to a small amount of people or criminal activity. What happens if an officer or staff never or rarely encounters these areas?:

(In response to the question "What vulnerabilities do you feel less confident identifying?")
"... the terrorism stuff, so the PREVENT stuff, the radicalisation." (Ainslie, PCSO)

"My history…police officers tend to channel their service around a certain area of policing, so I've been involved in policing for (redacted), and you put me in a riot, and I'll put my public order gear on and I'll command that incident with a good level of confidence, and a lot of experience. If you give me an investigation, a rape investigation, out of my depth   " (Sunny, Chief Inspector)

Whilst experience can fill in an individual's framework of identifying and responding to 'vulnerability', the need for experience can simultaneously leave gaps in knowledge and awareness. This knowledge may not be strictly necessary across the board, based on the differing roles within the police.

The specific role of each participant seemed to play a part in their experience, and therefore understanding, of 'vulnerability'. The roles that emphasised this trend tended to be civilian staff and partners rather than police officers:

"For me, as a first aid trainer, it's medical issues. So, I identify, if someone's struggling with alcohol withdrawal the most. Because that's...we do get a lot of those in that are struggling with alcohol withdrawal. And it's the most dangerous as well, so, that's why I think I identify with that. Because it can kill you." (Jamie, CDO)

"You do generally tend to chat about, you know, people's lives and stuff, and people, and I think people open up to us more than they say, more than say the sergeants or the officers because I don't think they really associated us with being in police if you know what I mean, we're just there to look after them." (Sandy, CDO)

"It's not to be cocky, but anything to do with any sort of vulnerability, my part is rough, so I've been exposed to everything." (Ainslie, PCSO)

"But I think the early intervention role helps me a lot with vulnerability." (Sam, PCSO and EIO)

Civilian members of police staff often had distinctly different role expectations than officers. Their roles involved supporting police officers and their decision making. Their roles involved more explicit expectations of support and care concerning the individuals with whom they came into contact. Some had specific training in other areas that assisted their understanding of 'vulnerability', such as Jamie. Early intervention officers also had role-specific training that changed and supported their understanding of 'vulnerability' concerning

identification and response. These roles bring additional avenues of understanding to policing incidents - and additional pathways for response.

The participants' role within policing broadly facilitates not only an understanding of 'vulnerability' in the first place, but a wider understanding of structural 'vulnerabilities' within society. During interviews, I explored whether participants' understanding of 'vulnerability' changed over time. Some of these changes in mindset were divided between before and after their role in the police began, whilst others occurred owing to the shifting focus on 'vulnerability' as core police business:

"So, I've had to change my mindset, and I think others PCSOs have had to start changing their mindset, as the vulnerabilities have started to become more identified and look at, really." (Robin, PCSO)

"Yes. I think it probably has because within this role, it's opened my eyes to things you never thought could happen." (Jamie, CDO)

"But yes, hugely. And that's all down to this job. It's all down to training we receive and it's also down to going out and doing the job." (Ainslie, PCSO)

"I think working here just kind of opens your eyes to how many people are actually vulnerable, so I think you can read about it, you can talk about it, but until you actually see how many people come through the door that are struggling, you don't really like realise what a problem it can be." (Sandy, CDO)

"Being in the police has certainly opened my eyes. I used to think vulnerable people were those stereotypes of the old and frail, but it is nothing like that at all." (Leslie, Response Officer)

'Eye opening' was a recurring phrase, implying that their previous view had been clouded: working for the police had brought their perception into sharper view. It also demonstrated a previous reliance on some cultural stereotypes of who is 'vulnerable', a reliance that needed to be avoided to encapsulate a wider, more open spectrum of consideration[10]. Part of this eye-opening process simultaneously opened the mind, facilitating necessary gifts of empathy, and understanding:

"In the role as a police officer, because vulnerability can manifest itself in many different types of people and for many different reasons, you have to have an extremely open mind and having some empathy helps too." (Leslie, Response Officer)

"I think as you get older, get more experienced, and have more training, you become a lot more understanding of people, and what they're going through. At one time you'd be thinking, oh, here we go again. And now, perhaps it's because I've got older, you have a little more empathy and a little bit more time, I suppose, for these individuals…you become a lot more sensitive to their needs. And I think it makes you a better officer. It certainly makes you a better person, because it's seeing it from their perspective, which I think when I was younger in the service, I just wanted to go to all the Gucci jobs and drive around with my blue lights on, kind of thing." (Lou, Response Officer)

There has been a shift in mindset, and a shift in response owing to the focus on 'vulnerability'. It may not be a readily understood term with concise boundaries, but its focus has allowed for a more personal approach, with empathy and more person oriented. It also demonstrates a shift in understanding of the police's own role. Rather than solely being involved in incidents of high drama that align with cultural depictions of the police as heroes - the 'Gucci' jobs that Lou mentions - the focus on 'vulnerability' has allowed them space and time to understand what it is that a person needs. It suggests a more compassionate and empathetic role for the police going forward. Further, officers and staff can draw on their experiences of 'vulnerability' from their personal lives: themselves, and the people that they love. However, caution is needed with this approach (Twigg, 2014), especially as the police can rely on 'hunches' based on prior experience (Mythen & Weston, 2023).

Some participants volunteered that they brought their own personal experiences outside of policing to the term. Other participants drew on their experiences with mental health, and those of their families:

"So, when I started, I wouldn't have really thought anything about. If you had said vulnerable, I'd have said old person with dementia. That was my only experience, was my nan who had dementia. That made her vulnerable…. every time you go and deal with someone, you think 'oh', that could be me or could be somebody I know. Or I could be my parents, or it could be my nan. So, you want to do right by them." (Ainslie, PCSO)

"From my role, I have PTSD, as a result of doing the job. So, I have, I suppose, a better understanding of mental health and people going through certain things." (Lou, Response Officer)

"Now, somebody that might not know what (spouse) has gone through, you would still see that character but actually behind the scenes, behind that skin, there's a lot of issues...I suppose, in many respects, it's opened my eyes to not taking someone at face value." (Sunny, Chief Inspector)

A call handler discussed how they drew on their own vulnerabilities and those of loved ones to recognise them in others. This practice of empathy was a key foundation to understanding how vulnerability can manifest within the policing context. It was acknowledged by the call taker that this meant some areas of 'vulnerability' were obscured by this incidental ignorance: neither they nor their children grew up with social media, so 'vulnerabilities' surrounding it were harder to detect. Therefore, just as a lack of professional experience concerning specific 'vulnerabilities' can be a weakness, so too can a lack of personal experience.

Broadly speaking, drawing on personal experiences was considered a vital and beneficial component of understanding vulnerability. It aided in actively listening to service users and gaining from the experience of doing so:

"...they gained more benefit by listening to lived experience and understanding and almost having that element of walking in people's shoes, being able to understand it from their perspective." (Charlie, Executive Management)

The vitality of drawing on personal experience rose through the ranks above the frontline. A focus on vulnerability and a need to understand it has therefore encouraged officers and staff the tools of empathy and perspective – a need and a want to do "*right by them*". A 'need' can be a requirement and an obligation, or a privilege and an honour.

'Vulnerability' cannot be considered in a vacuum, designed by the College of Policing or similar organisations, and homogeneously accepted by officers and staff. 'Vulnerability' cannot either be considered conceptually within a vacuum: the term has complex relationships with other terms, such as 'risk' (Brown, 2011). 'Risk' pre-exists 'vulnerability' in policing history (Haggerty & Ericson, 1998). This final theme therefore examines how the police understand 'vulnerability' by drawing on their knowledge of pre-existing policing

concepts such as 'risk', 'safeguarding', and defining 'vulnerability' in relation to said concepts.

Theme 3: How the police understand 'vulnerability' in relation to pre-existing concepts

"What we focus on is the risk!": the interchangeability of 'vulnerability' and 'risk'

'Risk' has been a conceptual and operational component of policing long before 'vulnerability' entered the scene. Risk management is considered a core activity of policing, with officers and staff by extension 'risk managers' (see Haggerty & Ericson, 1998). Officers and staff were asked about their own understanding:

"Obviously, from my perspective, as a police officer, being vulnerable and being at risk,

technically, is the same thing. "With individuals that you're going and dealing with, they are different, and they aren't, in the sense that their vulnerability may put them at risk of something" (Lou, Response Officer)

"I think the difference is solely in definition, for myself. If somebody's been identified as vulnerable, do they pose an increased risk to themselves, to me, to anybody else. I couldn't think of a dictionary definition off the top of my head." (Kit, Custody Sergeant)

"Is that just a play on words? Vulnerability absolutely is a play on words." (Robin, PCSO)

As highlighted in the literature review, 'risk' is as complex and difficult to define as 'vulnerability.' During observations, the two terms were often used interchangeably (Mythen & Weston, 2023). This practice may be a linguistic convenience to communicate the same issue: an individual or incident being in need through police intervention. It also alludes to the tangled relationship between the two concepts:

"I think vulnerabilities can lead to risk. Yes, so obviously they're different, but interconnected." (Lou, Response Officer)

"I think it interlinks, doesn't it, really? Everything is a risk, and that comes under the police, under vulnerability." (Sam, PCSO)

"I'd say they're two sides of the same coin. You can't be vulnerable without being a risk to yourself or others. And with risk, there's always an element of vulnerability." (Ainslie, PCSO)

"They are certainly linked. Any incident involving a person who is vulnerable could carry risk and that is something we have to assess whilst both on route, then continually on scene." (Leslie, Response Officer)

"Vulnerability usually increases risk. Sometimes the bigger the vulnerability, the bigger the risk." (Perry, Custody Sergeant)

"I think there is a difference, but I think you can't have one without the other, I don't think you can be vulnerable and be at risk so I think there is a difference but equally I don't think one would exist, yeah, without the other." (Sandy, CDO)

Despite the lack of concrete definition for either term, there is the broad sense that one cannot exist without the other: two sides of the same coin (Beck, 1998). According to interviews, the two concepts are conceived of as proportionally linked, with one influencing the other.

However, their relationship is not necessarily conceptualised as equal. 'Risk' as a concept was correlated with activity, agency and presence, whilst 'vulnerability' relegated to a passive role on the side lines of incidents:

"But that's the difference, if somebody's identified as vulnerable in any category, do they pose an increased risk to themselves or anybody else." (Kit, Custody Sergeant)

"I think they probably go hand-in-hand, because if someone's got a vulnerability, then they can potentially be at risk of something else." (Terry, PCSO)

"Because if someone's vulnerable, they could be at risk, I suppose, to themselves or other people." (CDO)

"Vulnerability may be around how the person can comprehend the risks that are out there." (Robin, PCSO)

Risk describes an action, a sense of 'doing'. 'Vulnerable' is more of a description concerning a person, a sense of 'being'. 'Vulnerability' is already strongly associated with passivity as a concept previously, suggesting weakness and deficiency (Brown, 2011: 314; Roulstone et al., 2011; Jackson et al., 2012:142; Chakraborti & Garland, 2012:507; Keay & Kirby, 2018:429).

The participants' conceptualisation of the relationship suggests that the directionality places vulnerability first, with risk following as the expected outcome. 'Vulnerability' is a factor possessed or experienced by an individual – situationally, inherently, or both – whilst the risk is what happens to this individual to cause harm, or potential harm. Interestingly, this diverges from policing policy and training:

"...the College of Policing will tell me on one course, so vulnerability is the multiplication of threat and risk. So, vulnerability is the outcome, the threat being that thing somebody's

threatened or something is going to happen, there's a chance, the risk of that happening, has it got the capability. And that will give you the vulnerability, VR. So, they are different, but it's very difficult to define." (Sunny, Chief Inspector)

This conceptual directionality of the relationship places risk before vulnerability. However, in operational practice, the direction is reversed: 'vulnerability' precedes 'risk'. It suggests that the police conceive of 'vulnerability' as being the origin of harm and risk. This raises critical issues surrounding the term 'vulnerable': if 'vulnerability' is the origin from which risk and harm are fuelled, the shadow of victim blaming can arise (Brown, 2011). I would assert that the police training notion of 'vulnerability' as a multiplication of threat and risk is an attempt – directly or indirectly – to sidestep the implication of pointing fingers at 'vulnerable' service users. However, this has failed to be grounded operationally and conceptually into daily practice. It is possible that the police's much longer history with the term 'risk' may play a role in its placement over 'vulnerability', as well as the heightened concern over the policing trend of risk aversion:

"What we focus on is the risk! What can we do to stop everything?" (Charlie, Executive Management)

Risk aversion relates 'a combination of reputational risk to forces and disciplinary risk to officers (Heaton, 2011: 76). Fear of blame and of making human mistakes are motives for risk aversion. Officers and staff can find themselves responding to all reported incidents, or as many as possible, without questioning the appropriateness of their presence. In economics, risk aversion relates to a preference for outcomes with low uncertainty over those where uncertainty is higher (Werner, 2008). I assert that the police also prefer these outcomes: that uncertainty equates to the possibility of the individual being in harm's way. The institution avoids blame should something go wrong. The focus on 'risk' and 'vulnerability' therefore appears to only superficially to involve the prevention of harm to service users.

'Putting oneself at risk' was an unfortunately common phrase that I heard during observations. The tone and actions of police officers and staff demonstrated empathy and compassion, but this term stood out as a sore thumb in discourse. The police are not alone in this. Partners can have similar understandings of culpability, 'vulnerability' and 'risk':

"Because...what I've learned from this job, is that risk can be a choice. Like, you can put yourself at risk. You can do all these things with full capacity, knowing that you're putting yourself at risk. And often we have to put that done to lifestyle choices, that you're making these decisions, whereas vulnerability, it isn't always associated with capacity but largely. If you

struggle with capacity, you've got little insight, then you're going to be more vulnerable. And you don't have a choice in that matter, you can't help that. But then you can be vulnerable and fully aware of it, and not do anything about it or want to do anything about it. It is from situation to situation. I could say, there's a group of people who do this, there's people that do that. It's very situational." (Blair, Mental Health Nurse)

Blair conceptualises the relationship between 'risk' and 'vulnerability' through the lens of capacity and insight, and therefore is quite distinct from that of the police. The back and forth of their answer demonstrates how difficult and potentially futile it is to differentiate the two terms in operational practice. It is also difficult to draw conclusions around accountability, culpability and capacity. Blair's ideas demonstrate not only these complexities - as well as how 'vulnerability' carries connotations of 'blame' in practice (Brown, 2011; 2017) - but also demonstrates how police partners may be unable to support officers in their pursuit of defining 'vulnerability'. The police are not alone in framing 'risk' and 'vulnerability' as positions an individual chooses.

'Safeguarding' is another term in the dictionary of policing and public sector work, usually as a response to 'vulnerability' (see Keywood, 2018: see Phair & Heath, 2010; Holmes & Smale, 2018). There are similar issues with the term to 'vulnerability' - what exactly do practitioners mean by the term? Both terms are accepted without much consideration of the consequences, to the point of overuse (Daoust & Dyvik, 2022). 'Safeguarding' has a similar application as 'vulnerability': a shorthand, 'common sense' assumption with little consideration to the implications of said term (see Stevens, 2013; Keywood, 2018). It appears to relate to protection: but by the very nature of using a different word to 'protection', 'safeguarding' suggests something more, and better, than protection. Despite the wide use of

the term, the differing roles, expectations, and priorities have resulted in mistranslation and miscommunication:

"Partners see safeguarding as quite high threshold, we call everything safeguarding. And because of that, we don't talk the same language. So, us talking about vulnerability has been positive because it gives us our own terminology, shall we say, to talk about everything, as opposed to, where we'd be using a very specific term for everything, and I think that was confusing partners." (Bobby, Executive Management)

"Vulnerability" as a concept therefore can be a Rosetta stone for partner agencies and the police. Whilst there is disagreement and miscommunication over definitions of 'risk' and of operational thresholds, 'vulnerability' broadly speaks of similar traits: an individual is a priority, they need help or support. The term offers practitioners the opportunity to sing from the same hymn sheet, conceptually and linguistically, at last.

However, issues still abound. The broad and typical application of 'vulnerability', and its core linguistic role in the public sector, risks the term following in the same problematic footsteps as 'safeguarding':

"...so, I think it is a balance between 'it's great', 'cause it opens up, and we're not using safeguarding for everything or – but actually there is a danger that we may use it a little bit too much as well, without being able to recognise the vulnerability because it's so big." (Charlie, Executive Management)

Overuse of a term can lead to burnout, with the term failing to play a meaningful operational role in discourse and activity. Generalising terms can lead to attempts to control and contain the meaning in order to bring certainty to roles and priorities, a pattern witnessed with safeguarding:

"I think that's a good echo of what happened with (redacted) safeguarding for adults – very, point, point definition." (Charlie, Executive Management)

Attempts to define 'safeguarding', and 'vulnerable adults' by extension, have prompted lists of terms and expectations – lists that include and exclude by their very nature (for example, the Safeguarding of Vulnerable Groups Act 2006). Charlie describes what the police did not want to happen in terms of defining 'vulnerability' going forward. A tick box exercise is ineffective practice when it comes to the lived reality of identifying and responding to vulnerability in the policing context:

"Cause it's more a very general, needs more narrative, there's a little bit of professional judgement, etc, within it." (Bobby, Executive Management)

"Would I ever want to create a document or write a report which if somebody comes to me for help, I say 'sorry, my friend, that's not in our criteria.'" (Sunny, Chief Inspector)

The reluctance on the behalf of the police to create a list of vulnerability bullet points plays off the potential for exclusion. The issues they face are recurring. Define too widely, lose all meaning and risk the term's futility in discourse. Define too narrowly, and risk excluding both service users and partners from identification and discourse.

Interestingly, the language of 'vulnerability' as improving discourse with partners appears to be a position held by the police alone: Sunny, Charlie and Bobby were all executive management, not frontline officers. Partners who work alongside the frontline can feel differently, owing to their distinct roles and expectations leading to different understandings of who and what constitutes 'vulnerability', providing an outside perspective on police policy:

"I think one of the big problems is that the police have a very different view on what vulnerable is to what I do...the police have seen this person but haven't deemed them to warrant mental health support because they're not expressing that they're going to kill themselves but they're actually extremely unwell, they're really, really vulnerable...they may just be babbling on about something that's really delusional. But the police won't see that as being vulnerable and alert us." (Blair, Mental Health Nurse)

'Vulnerability' can be, as noted previously, drawn from professional experience and training. It is unsurprising then that the mental health practitioner quoted here will have different understandings of vulnerability through the lens of mental health, rather than policing. The policing role in mental health is concerned strictly with 'risk': the risk an individual poses to themselves or others. There is therefore a conceptual and procedural gap between policing and partner understandings of 'vulnerability', 'risk' and other related issues. It also creates a gap for service users to slip through in terms of intervention.

I would offer then that 'vulnerability' has provided an opportunity for police and practitioners to speak the same language - though that opportunity make not always be provided or accepted.

There may however be a divide between executive management and the frontline: 'vulnerability' may permit a shared language between partner agencies higher up their individual organisational hierarchies, but the practice has not reached the frontline.

The police draw their understandings of 'vulnerability' from training, policy, professional and personal experience. They are not alone in this: their partners in other agencies do likewise (Twigg, 2014; Mythen & Weston, 2023). Their differing roles carry different understandings, expectations, and priorities. To return to the hymn sheet metaphor, the agencies may be singing the same song but different harmonies. For the song to work, each must focus on their own harmony for it to contribute to wider melody – but must listen to the others singing so that the melody is in tune and in sync.

Penelope's web of 'vulnerability': conclusions

Pressing police officers and staff on what vulnerability means to them in their role was an attempt to remove the veneer of emptiness that can shadow vulnerability as a concept, digging deeper into the core of the place it holds in contemporary policing practice. This emptiness has evolved from its placement at the heart of the policing role, into its peppered appearance in discussions and debate within that wider culture (Keay & Kirby, 2018). The fluidity and variations of vulnerability in the police context cross paths with the multitude of meanings and implicit assumptions within the term. Its nebulous complexity often propels a paradoxical shift in the opposite direction: not laced with meaning, but a mere buzzword. There was hesitancy and reluctance in defining the term explicitly – not through incompetence or confusion – but more a lack of language to fully sum up and comprehend the enormity of the term and the challenges it presents to the police. Some threads of exploring the term came loose, occasionally coming back around in a circle when another meaning or idea appeared, mirroring the many possible scenarios involving 'vulnerability' that the police can encounter. Like Penelope's web from Greek mythology, theoretically 'vulnerability' is always made and then un-made within every incident.

Regardless of any official, institutional definition of 'vulnerability', any interpretation ultimately relies on the individual's experience, and so bears different meaning for different people, dependent on their experiential learning. There can therefore be gaps in knowledge,

experience and even translation between agencies - a gap which service users can slip through.

The universal, shared nature of 'vulnerability' is highlighted by participants' (Fineman, 2008; 2010; Butler, 2006). Experiential learning of the officers and staff quoted here draws on their own personal experiences of 'vulnerability' and those of their loved ones. 'Vulnerability' is therefore relational, in that it creates connections between people, and is a shared aspect of humanity. 'Vulnerability' is not an attribute that belongs to a distant 'other': it is an attribute to which we can each possess, and to which we can have a deep, meaningful connection. 'Vulnerability' was treated as a serious topic by participants in interviews and observation: a topic of significant value in their everyday work, and in wider policing. Tone cannot be adequately captured in a thesis. But some illumination can be gained from Ainslie, a PCSO, who described a desire 'to do right by' vulnerable people. This mirrors Fineman (2008:8)'s insistence that 'vulnerability' can create a blueprint for the 'is' and the 'ought' of the state's responsibilities towards its citizens: it can both challenge and compel a "response to a universal of precarious dependency" (Munro & Scoular, 2012:189; Peroni & Timmer, 2013).

Experiential learning can also impact on police understandings of similar concepts deployed in their working practice, such as 'risk' and 'safeguarding'. The relational nature of 'vulnerability' is highlighted through this exploration, as 'vulnerability' is understood in relation to these other concepts. Further, understandings of 'vulnerability' can be drawn from a priori conceptualisations of these pre-existing terms within policing.

The question then becomes how the variety of understanding 'vulnerability' impacts its identification in the complex and often chaotic environment of contemporary policing. The definitions and understandings above attempt to be as wide as possible to avoid exclusion. It demonstrates one end of the paradox concerning vulnerability: wide and inclusive, with the other end exclusive and narrow. It is to the other end of this paradox with which we concern ourselves next. Not only the way in which vulnerability is identified pragmatically – but how it is identified within the confines of assumptions and expectations, born from our culture and perpetuated by the police.

Chapter 5 - How do the police identify 'vulnerability'?

Introduction

This chapter investigates three overarching themes relating to the identification of 'vulnerability': the conceptual framing of 'vulnerability'; how 'vulnerability' is identified in practice; and how the label of 'vulnerability' is deployed by the police.

The first theme concerns how 'vulnerability' is theoretically and conceptually framed by the police as individuals and as an institution. This section explores how age, mental health, capacity and victimisation are conceptualised as 'vulnerability' and how these conceptualisations highlight specific ideas about 'vulnerability' within policing. These issues include the dichotomy and convergence of inherent versus situational 'vulnerability' (Virokannas et al., 2020); how can be 'vulnerability' framed as a choice (Brown, 2011); and the theoretical hierarchy of vulnerability (Green, 2007). This section closes with an exploration of what attributes were not mentioned during interviews. Inclusion and exclusion are consistent themes concerning 'vulnerability' (Munro & Scoular, 2012). To understand the full picture of framings and assumptions of 'vulnerability' within policing, it is necessary to explore not only who is considered vulnerable, but also who is not. A reflection on intersectionality concludes this section, with a consideration for how the framework might aid future research and frameworks for 'vulnerability'.

The second overarching theme is how these conceptualisations of 'vulnerability' are identified in practice, beginning with an exploration of how officers and staff ultimately rely on vision and communication to identify 'vulnerability'. Risk's relationship with 'vulnerability' in practice is then investigated using risk assessments, and what their use highlights about the nature of 'vulnerability'.

The third and final theme is concerned with how the police use and misuse the label of 'vulnerability' in practice. The conceptual hierarchy of 'vulnerability' is revisited, exploring how this hierarchy is deployed in practice, what this deployment suggests about the police role of gatekeeper in relation to 'vulnerability', and how both the police hierarchy and gatekeeping of 'vulnerability' are inherently bound up in ideas concerning deservedness (Walklate, 2011:189; Chakraborti & Garland, 2012:507).

The chapter begins with the first question I asked interviews: *"when I say the word 'vulnerable', what words or images come to mind?"* The intention behind the question was to

understand what, if any, stereotypes and cultural assumptions were held by participants (Cheney, 2010). To begin, there must be a brief explanation concerning the emerging nature and directionality of how 'vulnerability' can be framed by the police.

Theme 1: How the police frame and assume 'vulnerability'

In a policing context, the idea that anyone can be vulnerable can be a vast and complex idea to apply to procedure and practice (Keay & Kirby, 2018). Some participants therefore looked to personal and cultural assumptions about vulnerability as shorthand for identifying 'vulnerability' in their everyday practice.

Exploring these examples and the cultural assumptions concerning these experiences and their perceived 'vulnerability', I also consider how 'vulnerability' is framed within each identification. There are two types of framing. The first is *who* defines and decides the framing: 'vulnerability' can be institutionally framed through legislation and policy. It can also be individually framed, with individual officers and staff deciding how to frame 'vulnerability' on their own terms. The second is *how* the framing conceives of the vulnerability: whether the 'vulnerability' is conceived of as inherent to the individual, or merely as a result of the situation within which an individual finds themselves (Virokonnas, 2020). The forms of framing and types of 'vulnerability' are not necessarily distinct but play off one another – and play off cultural assumptions in tandem.

The question asked was *"when I say the word 'vulnerable', what words or images come to mind?"* The elderly and children were the highest responses to the question, with eight mentions each. Limited capacity had a variety of mentions, across mental health (six), learning difficulties (two) and alcohol dependency (one). Victims of crime were mentioned four times by participants. Finally, single parents, 'broken' families and bereaved individuals were mentioned specifically once each. This breakdown mirrors the proportional mentions of specific 'vulnerabilities' gained during the observation period.

To begin, the chapter investigates the most frequently mentioned 'vulnerable' groups, represented by the opposing ends of the age spectrum: children, and the elderly.

From the cradle to the grave: age as a 'vulnerability'

Age was the most common category of 'vulnerable' mentioned in interviews, as well as observations and conversations occurring with the police throughout the project:

"For instance, this could be an elderly person or person with a serious life altering condition such as dementia that is unable to take care of themselves   So, the stereotype would be an 'old person'. For me, it's children, a lot become vulnerable under the age of 18" (Lou, Response Officer)

"An elderly person or person with a serious life altering condition such as dementia that is unable to take care of themselves…." (Robin, PCSO)

"…elderly, with dementia, with memory loss". (Terry, PCSO)

"Young children…old people who are not security conscious and they'll get conned by the door-to-door salesmen. But then they're vulnerable because they're frail." (Ainslie, PCSO)

"An elderly person could be vulnerable. Certainly, perhaps in the policing world, a young child that has gone missing would be vulnerable, through age. A small child is fairly easy to define." (Sunny, Chief Inspector)

These assumptions concerning age mirror those within the literature on 'vulnerability' (Calderbank, 2000; Alwang et al., 2001; Fawcett, 2009; Jones & Powell, 2006; Adams et al., 2011; Brown, 2011; Misztal, 2011; Chakraborti & Garland, 2012; Keay & Kirby, 2018). There is the acknowledgement that both children and the elderly are a stereotype of a 'vulnerable' person, with stereotypes often being a serious criticism of the term (Brown, 2011:425). These opposing ends of the age spectrum can be considered part of the 'checklist' of identifying vulnerability in practice.

For these two groups, 'vulnerability' is based predominantly on presumed physical or mental frailty. For the elderly, this predominantly relates to mental frailty and dementia. This then plays into their perceived risk of victimisation, such as the example of the 'con man' suggested by Ainslie. The notion is that mental frailty may cause an individual to fall for the con, being unable to perceive the deception or the consequences.

Children are simultaneously defined by assumptions of their limitations and their dependency on adults (Fawcett, 2009:474; Wishart, 2003). The elderly can also be conceived of as dependent: on their families, communities and the public sector (Timonen & Lolich, 2020). I

suggest that this assumed dependency, despite its negative connotations, for the elderly it is broadly acceptable within society owing to their prior active citizenship. Both groups manage to conform to culturally accepted notions of who "deserve" the capital of response, despite their dependency on others that the label of "vulnerable" suggests (Fawcett, 2009:474; Brown, 2011:189; Walklate, 2011:189).

The designation of 'vulnerable' to these opposing ends of the age spectrum is not absolute, however. It is not entirely clear who counts as 'elderly', for example. A designated age for when a person becomes elderly was not referenced in policy, observations or most interviews. One call-taker did refer to the lack of consistency: they argued how some individuals aged 70 are spry and therefore not vulnerable, whilst someone around 40 could be considered elderly if they had a physical illness or disability[5]. Such argument again relies on the assumption of both physical and mental frailty.

Who exactly counted as a child was also not straight-forward. Legislation such as the Childrens Act (1989), Safeguarding of Vulnerable Groups Act (2006) and the UN's Convention on the rights of the child (1989) defines a 'child' as being under the age of 18. In practice, whilst there was preference for discretion over taking a child into custody, a 'child' in the custodial suite was aged 16 or under. As a child ages and grows closer to adulthood, their 'vulnerability' diminishes. They shift from 'children' to 'juveniles' or 'youth'. There can be disagreement as to how to class individuals under the age of 18 - juveniles, young adults, but interestingly not 'children' (Dehaghani, 2017). In custody, an individual was aged 17 and referred to as juvenile: on the custody information screen, there were different icons to indicate whether the detainee was under sixteen or exactly seventeen years old. This practice linguistically and conceptually distinguishes these individuals, and their 'vulnerabilities', as different from those of children:

"Or it could be people that are more open to risks, so juveniles for example, or even a child being exploited I'd say they were quite vulnerable". (Sandy, CDO)

"Younger people. We'd probably struggle a little bit more with trying to highlight the dangers, and the worries, and concerns that we have, potentially say with somebody that

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[5] Their point was in reference to how the police had no definition for 'elderly', whilst Fire and Rescue Services defined 'elderly' as over the age of 40. However, I could find no FARS policy confirming this.

might be at risk of exploitation. Because with them being younger, they might think that we're trying to be over cautious, overprotective." (Terry, PCSO)

These quotes help to explore the reasoning behind the assumption and framing of children as inherently 'vulnerable'. It is an assumption of 'lacking' - of experience, knowledge, awareness, capacity and understanding. Juveniles – teenagers, youths, younger people – are afforded more agency than children. But there is a trade-off: agency is handed over in exchange for the clearer identification of 'vulnerability' and the protection it can provide. Sandy's comment that young people can be more "open to risks" unfortunately has the hallmarks of victim blaming that can also be wrapped up in the concept of being 'vulnerable' (Roulstone et al., 2011; Jackson et al., 2012:142; Chakraborti & Garland, 2012:507). The individual still lacks the experience and knowledge of the risks inherent in the world: there is the assumption that adults already have said experience and knowledge by virtue of their adulthood.

The consideration of juveniles as being 'vulnerable' owing to their age alone has created a less clear picture of 'youth offending' for criminal justice practitioners (Vettenberg et al., 2013). This can demonstrate a distinct shift in how practitioners can approach offending conceptually and pragmatically:

"*I think we are, as a service having a debate as to whether, particularly youth offending - is it about youth offending or is it about youth vulnerability?*" (Bobby, Executive Management)

"*I think it has changed because instead of looking at young people as offenders, you now look at them more perhaps as a victim. A victim of the circumstances within the home... but we have to look at alternative measures to try and draw them away from the behaviour that's criminal. And recognise that they are vulnerable and that they are children, and not just offenders.*" (Robin, PCSO and Early Intervention Officer)

"*I think they're quite vulnerable because they either, when you speak to them, they're either having problems at home or they've been kind of sucked into a bigger world with older people that are kind of using them because they are juveniles, that's quite a big problem in here.*" (Sandy, CDO)

When crimes are committed by individuals under the age of 18, identifying their 'vulnerabilities' is a priority owing to their age and the presumed 'vulnerability' as a result, based on assumptions of deficiency, openness and inability. The 'vulnerabilities' overlap,

with many of them stemming from the juveniles' environment – but those very same 'vulnerabilities' are primarily facilitated by the individual's age. Operations that involve urban street gangs necessitate targeting the juveniles within said gangs. Instead of a criminal justice route, the juveniles are targeted with a safeguarding approach by local Harm Reduction Hubs to remove them from the gang altogether - and hopefully avoid criminal justice routes in the future.

Individuals are not solely one thing – either a juvenile or an offender. The two labels have two distinct meanings, especially in terms of 'vulnerability'. 'Child', or 'juvenile' involves the framing of 'vulnerability' as inherent, whilst 'offender' is primarily framed as a situational 'vulnerability'. The two framings are not necessarily distinct. For example, both can be considered institutionally framed as 'vulnerable' through legislation and policy. Neither can necessarily be considered a permanent framing either. The 'vulnerability' as an offender is subject to change owing to the environment and decisions made within the criminal justice system. The juvenile will continue to age and shift into adulthood, reducing their 'vulnerability' - at least, until they are considered elderly. But the two labels and their framing overlap in a Venn diagram of an individual and their vulnerabilities at a precise moment in time. However, youth offending is only considered a vulnerability owing to the youthful age of the individuals involved and the assumptions our culture holds concerning said age.

Framing children and juveniles as 'vulnerable' is superficially straightforward and a common sensical approach to the label. In practice, it is not absolute. In order to receive the protection that the label of 'children' - and by extension, the label of 'vulnerable' - an individual must adhere to cultural expectations and understandings of what it means to be a child (Davis & Marsh, 2020). Failure to conform to said expectations results in the loss of these protections, adultification, and scrutiny by the police (Coppock & McGovern, 2012: Davis & Marsh, 2022). The script is flipped. The individual shifts from being identified as someone the police must protect from harm, to being an individual that the police identify as someone from which others need protection.

The example of juvenile offenders demonstrates the complexity and nuance that the lens of 'vulnerability' introduces to policing. But the flipping of the script can apply to other areas of 'vulnerability' within the policing, such as mental health and capacity (Warner, 2007). Capacity can influence ideas about 'vulnerability', denoting both those who cannot help their

circumstances - and those who are conceived as making a choice to be 'vulnerable' (Brown, 2011).

Capacity and Mental Health: a 'vulnerable' spectrum

Mental health and learning difficulties were frequently mentioned together, with mental health and capacity being a frequent topic of conversation relating to 'vulnerability':

"...vulnerable means elderly, broken families, learning difficulties." (Alex, Response Officer)

"It's a full range.... somebody whose suffering from mental health. it could be somebody young in age, mental health, dementia…" (Sunny, Chief Inspector)

"They could have mental health issues or learning difficulties or may lack the mental capacity to make rational decisions…. I also see a lot of people who abuse substances such as drugs alcohol and by way of the effects the substances have on them, it makes them vulnerable." (Leslie, Response Officer)

"People, even drunk at that point could be vulnerable. Because they can't look after themselves, in the sense of they are that drunk you daren't leave them at home on their own, in case they put the chip pan on and burn the house down, or in case they choke on their own vomit." (Lou, Response Officer)

Why these individuals were considered so 'vulnerable' received little expansion. From observations, there was the sense that - like the elderly - there were limitations to their abilities which created a kind of debility in their lives (Wishart, 2003; Jackson et al., 2012:142). Mental health issues and learning difficulties were framed as a personal 'vulnerability': something inherent that could not necessarily be changed.

One significant issue was trying to understand what exactly officers and staff meant by 'mental health' or 'learning difficulties' - or even if both terms meant the same or were interlinked. This is an issue mirrored in the literature and is a significant challenge to criminal justice (Palmer & Connelly, 2005; Abela et al., 2006; Leibling, 1995; Bonner, 2006; Chakraborti & Garland, 2012). For the police, it seems, it is merely part of a broad checklist to be considered for every incident.

A contributing difficulty was the assessment and identification of said mental health problems, which was acknowledged by partners with specific knowledge and experience:

"...it's not - you don't get like a stereotypical vulnerable person. Someone that you would imagine being mentally unwell". (Blair, Mental Health Nurse)

"Sometimes it's not always obvious with mental health." (Alex, Response Officer)

The professional role can contribute significantly to a staff member's understanding of 'vulnerability' (see chapter 4). The mental health nurse highlights that there is no stereotype for individuals with mental health 'vulnerabilities' specifically, despite their education and experience in a role specifically related to this identification. Identification of mental health problems and their related 'vulnerabilities' rely on the professional role. Yet, the police receive little training and education on mental health, primarily needing to rely on experience (Weston & Trebilcock, 2020; Lamb & Weinberger, 2002).

Both types of practitioners approach the topic in a similar manner: there is no obvious individual description or stereotype to rely on, even if 'mental health problems' as a broader concept are an 'obvious' vulnerability. Within the spectrum of mental health, there was understanding of how mental health can fluctuate, with vulnerability fluctuating in tandem:

"Obviously individuals that have got varying mental health issues, whether they're just in crisis at that time... you speak to an individual that suffers from mental health and having a mental health episode at that point. Just from speaking to them sometimes you think, yes, something's not quite right here. This individual's got some issues that we need to address." (Lou, Response Officer)

"Despite the fact that we don't have any persons, can't remember the last person that came here under a section 136. That's really done us a favour that they don't come here anymore. But the amount of people that come here with mental health is…. a lot." (Kit, Custody Sergeant)

Mental health can be framed as a situational 'vulnerability', depending on the circumstances. This highlights the temporal nature of 'vulnerability': how 'vulnerable' a person is rarely set in stone. Those in crisis may need a section 136: a police decision which is less based on an understanding of mental health, and more on 'risk'. However, that was not necessary for all incidents. In custody, mental health was considered a top priority for 'vulnerability'. All detained persons were asked on admittance whether they had a mental health problem. Staff in custody told me that most individuals responded in the affirmative: anxiety and depression were the most common, with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder a recent and increasing

additional answer. All disclosures of both mental health and self-harm were taken at face value.

A disclosure of both mental health problems and self-harm would result in automatic assignation of a level 3 cell. These cells possessed cameras, and were for those who disclosed mental health issues, self-harm, suicidal thoughts, or demonstrated aggressive or distressed behaviour to staff. But such a broad assignment was not absolute. For example, a detained person disclosed a diagnosis of schizophrenia. The individual was calm, taking medication and displayed no symptoms. They were assigned to a level 2 cell, where they would be roused by staff every thirty minutes. Another individual disclosed no mental health problems but became distressed and started to cry during the risk assessment. They were assigned to a level 3 cell so staff could keep a close eye on them.

Staff understood the fluctuating nature of mental health, as the custodial environment can affect even those with no diagnosed issues. A diagnosis was not the sole designator of 'vulnerability': the situational vulnerability was considered in tandem. According to the findings, the police may not always be discussing mental health in relation to a specific diagnosis but to a state of mind at a particular point in time – and the relevant circumstances (Trebilcock & Weston, 2020). This is not a new issue: the role of policing in determining the risk and vulnerability of mental health incidents has drawn them into the role of 'street corner psychiatry' (Teplin & Pruett, 1992).

Within the context of observations and interviews, 'mental health' and 'learning difficulties' as vulnerabilities hinted at concerns relating to capacity. An individual with a mental health issue was considered 'vulnerable' as they had challenged capacity. It was not clear, however, what officers and staff understood exactly as capacity. A call taker conceptualised capacity as the ability to cope with difficulty and stress. Capacity was also referred to explicitly by a mental health nurse as relating to 'vulnerability':

"If you struggle with capacity, you've got little insight, then you're going to be more vulnerable" (Blair, Mental Health Nurse)

Again, challenged capacity is framed as being an inherent vulnerability and can only be mitigated, rather than removed or changed. Further, Blair is a mental health nurse, and so has a different conceptual and operational framework for capacity and the issues at play by comparison to police officers. Unlike the temporal and conditional nature of mental health

and 'vulnerability' highlighted earlier, capacity is a more personal, affixed determination of 'vulnerability'.

Despite attempts here to frame capacity as a sign of 'vulnerability, there was some divergence. Individuals with substance abuse problems can be framed as 'vulnerable', but such consideration is limited. They can be considered as situationally 'vulnerable', but not afforded the same empathy and considerations as others that lack inherent capacity:

"...when you look at some people and think, you're in this state. You've made yourself vulnerable. And it's all your own doing, as in people taking drugs and that kind of thing" (Lou, Response Officer)

The sympathy elicited by the 'vulnerable' label can also be conditional, with individuals blamed for their own 'vulnerabilities' (Brown, 2011; 2017). The individual can be framed as 'vulnerable' superficially in the sense that they need help - requiring intervention from the police and similar agencies, as Blair suggests. But, as demonstrated by Lou, the individual is conceived of being responsible for police involvement through their own choices - choices which made them 'vulnerable'. Some pragmatism is understandably needed to determine priority. But seeing 'vulnerability' as a choice more broadly can allow practitioners to pick and choose who they deem worthy of intervention and response – and who they do not. The choice to be vulnerable can nullify the rights and protections afforded to the individual by the vulnerable label, which is predominantly observed in relation to children (Davis & Mahon, 2020; Coppock & McGovern, 2012).

Conceptualising 'vulnerability' as a choice facilitated by the relational nature of 'vulnerability' (Ecclestone & Goodley, 2016), borne of comparison with the attempt to prioritise and respond to other incidents:

"You know, you listen to all these other calls that are coming in over the air, and it's well I can't go and deal with that   because I'm having to sit here and deal with you that you've brought on yourself." (Lou, Response Officer)

Through this lens, one incident presents more 'vulnerability' than another - or one incident is more deserving of the 'vulnerable' label and police attention than another. The responses mirror the stigma and ignorance surrounding substance misuse and addiction as lifestyle choices, rather than illnesses or symptoms of wider issues (Corrigan et al., 2017; Matthews, 2019; McGinty et al., 2019). The police may deal with substance misuse and addiction, but as

a secondary issue in relation to crime. Substance abuse and addiction as standalone issues are conceived as not being under the umbrella of policing responsibility, and 'vulnerability' by extension. The individual may be 'vulnerable' in the moment, owing to incapacity brought about by substances. But in sobriety, addiction ultimately as an illness is not conceived of as a 'vulnerability'. Further, said incapacity can be conceived by police officers and staff as a conscious choice, rather than symptoms of an illness. Considerations of capacity as a sign of 'vulnerability' are therefore limited and circumstantial within the policing framework. 'Vulnerability' does not have a fixed meaning within this identification framework but is fluid and dependent on individual interpretation and circumstances.

An individual may also be in a 'vulnerable' situation but said 'vulnerability' is framed as being their own choice. Within this conceptualisation, the individual's 'vulnerability' matters less within a policing context. This conceptualisation of mattering highlights the comparative and relational nature of 'vulnerability', with the notions of 'more' or 'less' creating the implication of a hierarchy. This next section explores the situational nature of 'vulnerability' and how circumstances can influence the determination of a person's positioning within the conceptual policing hierarchy of 'vulnerability'.

Victimisation as inherent and situational: theoretical hierarchies of suffering and relational 'vulnerability'

The preservation of life and prevention of harm can be considered a core element of policing. Therefore, police officers and staff frequently encounter victimised individuals. Despite this, there is an unfortunately long and grim history of failures, particularly regarding victims of domestic and sexual violence, that haunts contemporary policing:

"Yes, policing has shifted completely away from what we used to do, to what we do now, which I think we respond, and deal with vulnerabilities better. Victims of domestic violence, we deal with far better. We treat them far better the victims of sexual assault and things. We deal with far, far better than we ever did. It was atrocious the way that we used to treat some victims of sexual assault. And I don't just mean (redacted). I mean just policing in general, just the ethos and the criminal prosecution service and everything else. We're just very poor with how we deal with those vulnerable victims. So, and I think perhaps society, and social media, and the press has put some pressures on organisations to do things differently and do things better, which is good." (Lou, Response Officer)

There has been a historical shift in how domestic violence and sexual offences are treated, demonstrated through guidance such as the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act (2004). There is therefore an institutional framing of victims as 'vulnerable', most likely to emphasise the need for an effective and appropriate police response, and to turn away from previous operational practice.

There is an emphasis on 'harm' within the conceptualisation and definition of 'vulnerability' (Peroni & Timmer, 2013:1058; Twigg, 2014:465; Wrigley, 2015:480). As noted previously, the word 'vulnerable' itself originates from the Latin term 'vulnerabilis': 'to wound' (Peroni & Timer, 2013:1058). It is unsurprising, therefore, that contemporary policing understandings of 'vulnerability' align with individuals who have been on the receiving end of harm:

"A victim of crime could be vulnerable, you know, if, that whole spectrum of crime. Somebody whose being harassed, or been subjected to harm, putting that into some sort of context". (Sunny, Chief Inspector)

"If you're going to a job with sexual offences, you'll always go in there straight away   A victim of sexual offence, they're always going to be a vulnerable victim." (Lou, Response Officer)

There is a sense of inevitable vulnerability to victimisation, a sense of urgency on the behalf of the police to respond. Their vulnerability is interlinked with a sense of tragedy, with little room to negotiate the label or suitable recourse on their own terms (Sibley, 2018:1463; Wishart, 2003:20). There is something uniquely awful about sexual offences that separates them from other types of crimes – simultaneously separating those victims from 'other' victims. Their 'vulnerability', harm and suffering are somehow more acute and more deserving of recognition by comparison (Walklate, 2011). And so, the hierarchy of 'vulnerability' begins to emerge.

The institutional framing of specific vulnerabilities - and by extension an institutional hierarchy of 'vulnerability' - manifests through legislation, policy and practice. A response officer elucidates on the protections automatically available to specific victims in court:

"…vulnerable and intimidated witness, which is a child, which is a victim of domestic violence, or a victim of sexual assault. They will automatically qualify for what we call special measures, which would mean at court, you can apply for screens, so that you can't see

the offender. You can apply to have your evidence given via a video link, so you're not in the same room." (Lou, Response Officer)

The assignation of the label is concerned with protection and minimisation of the harm already done. This suggests that vulnerability through victimisation can be framed as inherent, rather than situational – and such framing comes from both institutions and individuals. It is the circumstances that result in the victim's 'vulnerability' - but the circumstances transform the individual into a 'victim', to whom the label of 'vulnerable' is now inherently attached by institutions. Whilst the temporal nature of 'vulnerability' is highlighted here - a sense of 'before' and 'after' harm - the situational 'vulnerability' of victimisation has, from that moment onwards, rendered the individual permanently 'vulnerable' owing to said victimisation.

But Lou explains that there is an application process: these measures are not automatic guarantees for every victim of these crimes. There is an administrative process needed that will need to justify the use of protection, which in turn requires a justification of the victimisation and 'vulnerability' involved. This procedure demonstrates the hoops created by the public sector and criminal justice system for the individual to overcome to have their vulnerability legitimised by those same systems (Chakraborti & Garland, 2012). Despite institutional and legal framings of victimisation via domestic and sexual violence as a 'vulnerability', this framing has more theoretical than practical applications. Such processes can result in the replication and perpetuation of social hierarchies and expectations of 'vulnerability', which risks perpetuating exclusion based on intersectionality (Green, 2007; Walklate, 2011).

For policing procedure, the lens of 'vulnerability' has shed light on the lived experience of victimisation, improving the identification of both 'vulnerability' and victimisation:

"So, there are some offences where we wouldn't have been as forthcoming or pushy around investigating them, 'cause there was no real complaint. But we are seeing those because the person is vulnerable and not really putting themselves forward as a victim, actually we're recognising that within that case, there's a vulnerable person so we need to do an extra level around it." (Bobby, Chief Superintendent)

Here is again a recognition of historical institutional failings and an attempt to 'correct' them in the present. However, similar the court measures, there is again little negotiation with either label. There are suggestions of a better understanding concerning the dynamics of

reporting crime and victimisation. But in the rush to identify victimisation as a 'vulnerability' - and possibly to avoid victim blaming - the label of 'vulnerability' can simultaneously remove agency from victimised individuals. Their safety and wellbeing are considered a priority, but what that looks like is determined by practitioners (Chakraborti & Garland, 2012).

The 'vulnerability' - inherent, situational or both - of victims can therefore fluctuate, dependent on the circumstances, and dependent on the practitioners involved. There is also the sense that this 'vulnerability' is relational, determined by its comparative position within the policing conceptual hierarchy. For example, Lou asserts that a victim of a sexual offence is *"always a vulnerable victim"*, and that there are court measures for specific victims (children, and victims of domestic and sexual violence). This inclusion also speaks to exclusion. Victims of, say, burglary, robbery and fraud, are implied to be less 'vulnerable' within the criminal justice system by comparison. This practice also suggests that the moment an individual turns eighteen, an arbitrary calculation of time, they become less 'vulnerable' somehow (only to become 'vulnerable' once again when they achieve another arbitrary calculation of time).

This suggests that the 'vulnerability' of an individual is not identified and assessed holistically and on its own merits, but by comparison to other 'vulnerabilities' in a competition of suffering and harm (Walklate, 2011). The harm done determines how much 'extra', as Bobby suggests, an individual needs to reduce the 'vulnerability' in terms of support. This 'extra' support is defined in relation to the pre-existing level of support offered by the police - which may or may not be adequate.

Whilst police officers and staff in interviews and observations asserted that victims can be considered 'vulnerable', once again there is the possibility of friction between theory and practice. Discussing the concept of 'vulnerability' in broad, general terms can be simpler, as it affords space for reflection and there are no real-world consequences necessarily. The victim is nameless and faceless, simply an abstract concept, afforded with accepted traits of innocence and tragedy (Wishart, 2003:20; Brown, 2011: 317). The victim is fleshed out with context - and attendant intersectionality. Both they and the police may be unaware of the sociohistorical baggage each of them brings to the table, a fruitless endeavour to find the "ideal victim" (Christie, 1989). It is possible that the framing of vulnerability as situational through the hierarchy of vulnerability within distinct units may be a pragmatic attempt to

sidestep this sociohistorical baggage and approach each incident on its own terms. The operational hierarchy will be explored in the 'identification' section of this chapter.

Outside of the institutional framing of 'vulnerability', individual officers and staff can also possess their own ideas about who is 'vulnerable' (see Informed about chapter). This next section explores the inclusive and exclusive framing of 'vulnerability'.

"People who are struggling, really": inclusion and exclusion

Officers and staff had additional groups of individuals that they personally framed as being 'vulnerable':

"Because they've had something that's happened previously, they had a divorce or something. They've suffered a bereavement, and that's a vulnerability as well...So, we get a multitude of training for each subject, old people, young people, homeless people." (Ainslie, PCSO)

"...the elderly, and then probably mental health, single mums, single dads, people who are struggling, really." (Sam, PCSO)

"...vulnerable means elderly, broken families, learning difficulties." (Alex, Response Officer)

"Those persons with serious life limiting / life changing conditions that are unable to protect or take care of themselves are extremely easily to identify." (Leslie, Response Officer)

The examples given by Ainslie, Sam, Alex and Leslie flesh out the incredibly dynamic spectrum of vulnerability within both policing and our wider world. It highlights the number and variety of difficulties an individual can encounter throughout their life. These different categories highlight the universal nature of vulnerability (Fineman, 2008). The data also demonstrates the sheer number of possible 'vulnerabilities' that the police must consider with every incident, as has been highlighted in the previous chapter. In this context, the police appear to perform less as the primary law enforcement arm of the State, and more an agency akin to social care.

Yet not all societal strata have been discussed here. Evidence for who is considered vulnerable can also provide evidence with who is not: the discourse concerning "vulnerability" is fraught with well-known and recognised "paths of inclusion and exclusion" (Munro & Scoular, 2012:192). The examples discussed and analysed so far in this chapter are

examples of cultural tokenism - groups in society that fit a priori understandings of 'vulnerability' (Green, 2007). These understandings are not even necessarily positive for the individuals within those groups. The labelling as 'vulnerable' presumes an individual to be inherently weak, deficient, at fault and all the other negative associations that the term carries (Black & Lumsden, 202:69). However, some groups receive these negative attributes without the 'vulnerability' label that can at least lever some capital and resources in their direction (Warner, 2007).

For example, adults were also broadly implied to be excluded from the vulnerable label by virtue of the emphasis on children and the elderly. An interviewee highlighted this exclusion when discussing criminal exploitation:

"...if I applied that rule to a child or young person, there would be no hesitation to everybody having that discussion. But because its being applied to an adult or an older person, it's - it's understanding - and again, that's around our training, our use of language, which is so powerful" (Charlie, Executive Management)

Children, through their assumed deficiencies owing to their ongoing development, are understood to be more susceptible to exploitation. Adults are conceived of as the standard for normative existence: ergo, they should know better than to get involved in criminality, even if they are victims of exploitation. Adults cannot be vulnerable. If an adult is victimised, then they must be at fault, highlighting the inference of blame and responsibility inherent to discourse on 'vulnerability' (Brown, 2011). Adult vulnerability can only be conceived of through additional factors: learning difficulties, mental health and specific forms of victimisation.

The question that facilitated the first discussions of this chapter was "Who is vulnerable?" From the answers given, who is not vulnerable can be inferred from their absence. This section attempts to address who is missing from this discourse – and why.

The Missing Pieces: Offenders

Offenders can be institutionally framed as vulnerable through policy and legislation (see Safeguarding of Vulnerable Groups Act, 2006). The group could also be considered vulnerable by those in the police tasked with the management of offenders, such as a Chief Superintendent, the lead for offender management oversight:

"I think within the offender management we've got different cohorts of those, the pathways, which is around dealing with the root causes not the presenting issue." (Bobby, Executive Management)

Offenders were absent from conversations in interviews regarding who was considered a 'vulnerable person'. The exception was, perhaps unsurprisingly, staff working in custody. However, these conversations primarily revolved around the 'vulnerabilities' of an individual in the context of the custodial environment. When discussing what kind of person or issue signalled 'vulnerability', offenders were again absent from consideration. It is possible that offenders fall on the dangerous end of the 'vulnerability' spectrum and are excluded from considerations of who is 'vulnerable' as a result (Warner, 2008).

For custodial staff – sergeants, custody detention officers, as well as Liaison and Diversion services – the individual's 'vulnerabilities' were strongly considered in relation to offending behaviour. The response to the identification was mainly handled by Liaison and Diversion staff[6], not the police. Being arrested does not negate the 'vulnerability' of an individual. The individual is also not necessarily an offender, in that they have previously been convicted and sentenced. Prior convictions were relevant to custodial staff only as far as providing information from previous arrests. Examples included violence towards staff, addiction, self-harm and suicidal tendencies. The relationship between 'vulnerability' and 'dangerousness' was largely absent from observations - unless the detained person had a history of violence against police officers.

Offenders (Johnston, 2013), suspects (Herrington & Roberts, 2012; Dehaghani, 2017) and prisoners (Perry & Olason, 2009; Morash et al., 2012) have been placed under the umbrella of 'vulnerable' within the academic literature. Prisoners were also absent from interviews. From observations, the Harm Reduction hubs were included in decisions relating to MAPPA: Multi- Agency Public Protection Assessments, which were held when prisoners considered to be high risk to the public were released. 'Risk' was the primary focus of the hub discussions: the 'vulnerability' of the offender related to their 'vulnerability' to re-offending and therefore the 'risk' they posed to the wider community. The focus on 'risk' and the sidelining of 'vulnerability' simultaneously suggests a priority on related concepts like 'harm' and 'dangerousness' (Warner, 2008). The 'vulnerability' within this framework belonged to the

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[6] Liaison and diversion are civilian staff from a wide variety of professional backgrounds that envelop all the possible 'vulnerabilities' that can be encountered in custody: their role receives further expansion on later in the chapter.

wider community. Therefore, 'vulnerability' was obscured by its conceptual cousin of risk - who is 'a' or 'the' risk (Brown, 2011).

The Missing Pieces: men and gendered 'vulnerability'

Women make a frequent appearance in the literature covering "vulnerability", with the assumptions embodied within the label often simultaneously criticised (Calderbank, 2000; Hollander, 2002; Thorton & Voight, 2002; Gloppen & Kanyongolo, 2007; Bartkowiak-Theron & Crehan, 2010; Munro & Scoular, 2012; Bartkowiak-Theron & Asquith, 2017). The situational vulnerability of specific female groups has also been reviewed: households headed by a woman (Alwang et al., 2001) and pregnant women (Coleman, 2009).

Gender was an infrequent topic brought up during observations and interviews. Conversations during observations revealed that officers and staff considered women more likely to be victims of domestic violence, but that any gender could be victimised. A call taker asserted that they paid greater attention to female callers who mentioned a partner. They had learned that an abused woman attempts seven times on average to leave an abusive relationship, which facilitated a greater awareness and focus to potential female victims of domestic violence. During observations, an officer at the urban Harm Reduction Hub reported that they had experienced a rise in male victims of domestic abuse over the previous years (2018-2020). Such an increase had prompted the introduction of male Independent Domestic Violence Advocates: prior to the year of observation, 2020, all IDVAs had been female.

The unit that significantly considered gendered 'vulnerability' in identification and response was custody. Liaison and diversion, a partner agency, operated on a 12-hour basis in custody. They aided sergeants with assessments and provided support opportunities for the needs of detained persons outside of custody. As civilian members of staff, they were considered to be specialists on all types of 'vulnerability': mental health, disabilities, asylum seekers, immigration issues, former veterans, addiction, homelessness, amongst others. There were three main categories of detained persons automatically referred to L&D: those with mental health problems; those charged with sex offences; and women. L&D services were created with the broad task of identifying and responding to multiple vulnerabilities of detained persons in custody (Bradley, 2009):

"So, for anybody coming through the criminal justice - and that's not just around mental health, that's wider vulnerability, where it's identified, they get an option to engage, to prevent them coming back into criminal justice...a great opportunity to test our arrests...about people's usage or why they're using it and being able to signpost them to services." (Charlie, Executive Management)

The intention was to catch 'vulnerabilities' in custody. The introduction of L&D was prompted by the Lord Bradley report (2009), which primarily concerned mental health issues in custody alongside other 'vulnerabilities'. There was also recognition that the criminal justice system meets out harsher treatment to women than their male counterparts - whether it relates to the charges, the trial itself or sentencing (Bradley, 2009). During observation, both sergeants and the L&D team recalled incidents where females in custody had been arrested owing to activities that involved exploitation of their 'vulnerabilities': learning disabilities, drug addiction, poverty, coercive control relationships and prior history of sexual victimisation as juveniles.

The decision to designate women as 'vulnerable' was decided primarily by L&D, not the police. There are significant issues with assigning 'vulnerability' to one gender and not the other. The designation of women as 'vulnerable' is couched in benevolent sexism. This form of sexism is often dismissed or not immediately recognised as such, as both the intention and subsequent treatment is considered positive or beneficial to women (Becker & Wright, 2011). This is however inaccurate. Benevolent sexism is predicated on societal gender norms and expectations of women. Women are considered weak both physically and mentally, and therefore in need of protection or care - usually in the form of men, whether it be an individual, the gender group as a whole or patriarchal institutions (Becker & Wright, 2011). As noted previously, the police can be guilty of perpetuating their own mythos as 'saviours' under moral agendas framed by 'vulnerability' (Munro & Scoular, 2012).

Such a designation simultaneously asserts that men are not 'vulnerable' - indeed, men may fall at the 'dangerous' end of the 'vulnerability' axis and so are excluded from consideration altogether (Warner, 2008). Men make up a significant percentage of detained persons, offenders and prisoners (Ministry of Justice, 2019). Male mental health and suicide has also been a recent topic of concern (Mind, 2017; Mental Health Foundation, 2021). Married together with the statistics and the significant focus on mental health for the police, this section of the population is neglected from considerations of 'vulnerability'. Men can also be

at risk of exploitation, addiction, learning difficulties and the other issues in a similar way to women.

The potential 'vulnerability' of men was acknowledged in conversations with custody staff over the labelling of only women as 'vulnerable'. They took issue over the labelling of women as 'vulnerable', as they personally experienced many more men with vulnerabilities in the context of custody. Many reflected on the assumptions about gender within policing and the criminal justice system, which usually split between two competing ideas that demonstrated the split between benevolent and hostile sexism (Becker & Wright, 2011). Women were perceived as being justified or having a valid excuse for committing crime, which usually applied to lifestyle crimes of sex work, exploitation and shoplifting. However, women were expected to somehow know better when arrested for violent crime.

These opposing conceptions also reflect opinions concerning men. Women are held to a higher standard of behaviour and perceived morality than men (Kennedy, 2011; Kennedy, 2018).

However double deviance can affect men, as they are conceived as not ever being in the position to justifiably commit a crime - whilst simultaneously expected not to know any better in relation to violence. These conceptions suggest that 'vulnerability' has permitted a closer examination of women's motives in committed crimes and a reflection on sexist standards and double deviancy – yet simultaneously obscures the 'vulnerability' of men (Saulters-Tubbs, 1993; Malon, 2020; Kane, 2021).

Women, therefore, are institutionally framed as being inherently vulnerable within the context of criminal justice and the wider world. Men, however, are framed as only situationally 'vulnerable': their 'vulnerability' is conditional on the state of their mental health in custody and the crime for which they have been arrested.

Missing pieces: intersectionality

While gender was a rare personal feature to be discussed in relation to vulnerability: race, class and sexuality received no explicit mentions. Personal features did not appear to be an explicit factor in identifying and framing an individual's vulnerability. However, the quotes discussed in this section arose during an interview - there is the possibility of unconscious bias influencing identification in practice.

There is a long history of racism within policing, including into the present day (Casey, 2023). Race can play a meaningful role in the context of crime and policing (Long, 2018). Its absence within the findings concerning 'vulnerability' therefore cannot be ignored.Well-intentioned attempts to promote 'colourblind' approaches avoid or invisibilise the structural inequalities and oppression at play that create conditions for crime, victimisation and 'vulnerability' within the context of the disparities evidenced in the criminal justice responses to racialised groups (Long, 2018).

There can be a default assumption of race, gender and class when considering 'vulnerability', as highlighted in previous research (Warner, 2007; Fawcett, 2009). 'Intersectionality' is a concept that highlights and investigates the multi-faceted relationships between gender, race and other systems of disadvantage and inequality that collude to oppress some individuals, whilst simultaneously permit privilege for others (Crenshaw, 1995; 2013). The emergence of intersectionality challenged conceptualisations of gender and race as monolithic categories (Hooks, 2014). There is familiarity here, as 'vulnerability' can also be framed around very narrow conceptualisations of personal identity and associated characteristics (Chakraborti & Garland, 2012). Gender and race are no longer alone in the study of intersectionality, with ethnicity, religion, ability and disability, income and other components of an individual's identity shape their life, how society and institutions treat them, including how they are both privileged and oppressed (Shields, 2008). These elements of identity are frequently now considered in the context of 'vulnerability' (Brown, 2011; Chakraborti & Garland, 2012). Most significantly, the intersections of categories, like 'vulnerability', cannot be considered in isolation from one another: the category is defined by its relationship to other categories (Shield, 2008).

This will, however, need to be the focus of future research, as the present findings simply highlight its absence from the discourse on 'vulnerability', which offered analysis only speculative as a result. I would suspect that Crenshaw, and similar contemporary black feminist scholars, would be critical of, but unsurprised by the lack of consideration of intersectionality within the findings concerning 'vulnerability'. Whilst gender has been discussed previously, as has victimisation, it is currently unclear how the intersection of these elements alongside race, class or disability would influence the police identification of 'vulnerability'. In terms of gender, it must also be acknowledged that policies, laws and practices intended to increase equality have only visibly done so for a small minority of predominantly white women, whilst simultaneously invisibilising the oppression experienced

by non-white women (Crenshaw, 1991). The absence of intersectionality within the findings leaves a significant vacuum in terms of the extent to which structural hierarchies - of race, gender and their intersection, for example - are actively considered by the police in terms of how they understand, identify and respond to 'vulnerability'. The reflections here are of course not limited solely to race and gender: there is a recognised need to "account for multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed", including race, gender, sexuality and class (Crenshaw, 2013:93).

The next section shifts from conceptual reflection operational practice, and how the framing of 'vulnerability' affects the concept's identification. The first section addressing this theme deals with what practices are deployed pragmatically by the police in their everyday environment to identify 'vulnerability' - and what obstacles they face.

Theme 2: How the police identify 'vulnerability' in practice

Pragmatic identification of 'vulnerability' and its obstacles

In interviews, participants were asked how they identified 'vulnerability' within the context of their role. Most chose to answer pragmatically:

"Just through communication, really." (Alex, Response Officer)

"So, I think maybe it's just like talking to people. When you do your checks and stuff, I think you can tell a lot about people with how much they're willing to engage with you." (Sandy, Custody Detention Officer)

"Sometimes you can resolve situations with vulnerable people just by talking to them." (Leslie, Response Officer)

"So, we go through a whole range of issues. And then, we talk to them and help them to score how they feel those issues are." (Sam, PCSO)

"Just from speaking to them sometimes you think, yes, something's not quite right here. This individual's got some issues that we need to address." (Lou, response officer)

"So, it's just communicating with the people that you're speaking to. Just try and communicate with them and talk to them and listen to them as well, really." (Jamie, Custody Detention Officer)

"Through the question set, again usually through speaking to people. That's the best way - asking them." (Kit, Custody Sergeant)

With a concept as complex as 'vulnerability' can be, it can be tempting to believe that the process of identifying the concept in policing practice is just as complex. However, a great deal of 'vulnerability' is identified by officers and staff speaking to individuals. This can offer a wider range of agency on behalf of service users, a section often forgotten about in terms of 'vulnerability'. This practice also speaks to the fluid, nebulous and complex nature of identifying 'vulnerability' in practice, and the futility of attempting to quantify or prescribe the 'symptoms' of the concept (Green, 2007). Interestingly, this finding somewhat contradicts the notion from previous research that 'vulnerability' is not "an observable phenomenon" (Hinkel, 2011:199- 200). Whilst this may not be accurate for all 'vulnerabilities', the reflections of the participants clearly demonstrate that 'vulnerability' broadly, or some specific 'vulnerabilities', can be observed.

Observation of police officers and staff greatly enhanced my ability to investigate how they were informed about, identified and responded to 'vulnerability'. Interviews revealed that observation was also a key practice for officers and staff to identify 'vulnerability' in everyday practice:

".... so vulnerable... if they've got no money, if they're struggling with money, if they've got nothing in the cupboard. Sometimes we go to jobs and I'm like, right okay, I can see you've hardly got anything around, how do you cope, who does your shopping?" (Sam, PCSO)

"The state of the property when you attend, if you attend... I think that's the way we initially identify vulnerability." (Robin, PCSO)

"Perhaps if I went out and did a home visit, I might notice somebody who's got vulnerabilities, by the way that they appeared and what they told me. The information that they gave me, perhaps they highlighted that family members had been taken money etc, by the look and the appearance of their house, whether they've got food and warmth." (Terry, PCSO)

"You pretty know much straight away when you meet them that sometimes they can be leading a chaotic life." (Jamie, Custody Detention Officer)

"The ones that are very obvious to the eye. Like, for instance, vulnerabilities with memory loss, or the state of somebody's house, or their appearance, so their physical vulnerabilities,

for instance. If they were unable to wash and clean themselves, or unable to feed themselves, or like regularly going to the shops and preparing meals." (Terry, PCSO)

"It could be their external situation, so their housing, the people they've got around them, whether they've got any people around them. Whether they've got access to food, water, warmth." (Blair, Mental Health Nurse)

"It can be something that comes with experience in the role. Sometimes it is glaringly obvious if somebody it vulnerable, but other times it can be extremely subtle points that can lead to you coming to the conclusion that this person may be vulnerable and need support." (Leslie, response officer)

Numerous different roles within policing, including the mental health nurse, consider the individual's environment as a keyway to identify vulnerabilities. In custody, Liaison and Diversion services also considered the family environment and wider support: specifically, how much the environment may be contributing to offending behaviours.

Another avenue for identifying 'vulnerability' comes through information gathering and multi- agency working. The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) is made up of police officers, social services and other partner agencies, like the Harm Reduction Hub. The HR hub, however, is localised to a particular area; MASH has oversight for the whole county. They primarily engage in information gathering and sharing, reporting back to hubs, contact services and other units regarding information relevant to safeguarding (Jeyasingham, 2017). Again, the police can observe 'vulnerability' through examining the information that they have received from service users and other agencies to identify the concept in practice. Information sharing has been pinpointed as an effective practice that has greatly improved safeguarding outcomes (Home Office, 2014).

But there are obstacles to this process of identification, as communication can be hampered by numerous complicating factors:

"Sometimes you deal with people who know how to say all the right things and tell you what they think you want to hear" (Leslie, Response Officer)

"The person themselves maybe isn't a reliable source, so they're giving you false information or they're lying to you, essentially." (Robin, PCSO)

"When you're dealing with people who have personality disorders. That's really difficult, because they're obviously very vulnerable - very, very vulnerable. But they give you, like, snippets of information to go with crumbs." (Blair, Mental Health Nurse)

"Yes. Sometimes they just don't want to talk about it. And that makes it difficult then." (Jamie, Custodial Detention Officer)

"I think, yeah, people can be quite stubborn, I think very much like 'oh I've been arrested, I don't want any help from you, you're just here to punish me' kind of thing." (Sandy, Custodial Detention Officer)

Communication is therefore not straightforward, which can complicate the identification process for officers and staff (Ames & Busch, 2013). Discerning the reliability of an individual's answers can be achieved through computer systems such as the Policing National Computer and STORM (which records all policing incidents). However, the judgement and interpretation of an individual, their reliability and by extension their 'vulnerability' is still left up to staff. This flexible discretion can permit officers and staff to bring their own interpretation of behaviour and motivations, demonstrated by the reflections on 'playing the vulnerability card' in the next section.

The difficulty is not solely in communicating and identifying 'vulnerability'. Obfuscation and lack of clarity can cause confusion as what the person wants and needs:

"However, it is important to remember that we are dealing with human beings who are crying out for help and reassurance a lot of the time. It is important to remain open minded and show genuine empathy where it is required to help those that we are called to." (Leslie, Response Officer)

"And I know that we have had people in here before that have kind of got arrested as a way of speaking to someone, like as a cry for help." (Sandy, Custody Detention Officer)

There is some recognition here that individuals may interact with the police and/or use the language of 'vulnerability' to seek help. 'Help', however, can be just as vague and difficult to define as 'vulnerability':

"Sometimes they don't want the help, even though they're sort of asking for help, they don't want to take it on themselves…" (Sam, PCSO)

The individual may want help, but it is an unspecified help. The help may be temporary or situational, short term or long term. This flexible interpretation of 'vulnerability' (a flexible term in its own right) mirrors the flexible, uncertain and unspecified understanding of 'vulnerability' as a form of need. The 'vulnerable' individual is identified as someone in need of help - but what specific help can be left a mystery.

Communication can be streamlined for officers and staff using risk assessments. Risk assessments are conceived as necessary decision-making tools in identifying 'vulnerability' (Black & Lumsden, 2020). The next section explores this assumption, and how assessments demonstrate further assumptions about 'risk', 'vulnerability' and their relationship.

Operationalising 'vulnerability', operationalising 'risk'

Despite researcher queasiness concerning the quantification of 'vulnerability' (Green, 2007), the police use risk assessments to 'measure' the 'risk' and 'identify' the vulnerability of incidents (Black & Lumsden, 2020). The assessment in turn identifies the priority of the incident to relevant officers and staff - and the appropriate response.

The DIAL is a risk assessment that provides a key demonstration of the difficulty involved in the measurement of both 'risk' and 'vulnerability' in practice. DIAL refers to Domestic Incident Action Log, completed by the response officer attending domestic violence incidents[7]. During observation of the harm reduction hubs, staff reviewed the DIALs completed within the previous 24 hours[14]. The DIAL contains questions about the victim, the perpetrator and any children in the home (regardless of their presence during the incident). Officers were unclear what the total score of the risk assessment was, estimated to be between 20-22. The most significant number to the police was ten. If a DIAL generated a score of 10 or higher, the incident was automatically referred to the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC), where high-risk incidents are discussed, and interventions decided by the police and other agencies. The risk assessment provides a simple tool to prioritise incidents concerning 'vulnerability', which determines a response from the police and other relevant agencies.

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[7] A domestic incident includes any incident that occurs in the home and involves people currently or formerly in a relationship, as well as including parents, children, stepparents, stepchildren, grandparents and in-laws.

The rule of ten, however, is not a hard and fast rule. Incidents that received a score of less than ten can be referred to MARAC manually by the officers in the Harm Reduction hub if their review finds that the score does not adequately represent their own personal assessment of the 'risk' and 'vulnerability' of the incident. For example, I observed the review of a DIAL scored less than ten but still was escalated to MARAC. The incident involved blackmail, coercion and sexual violence – factors which do not appear on the DIAL. The responding officer had noted on the report that the score did not accurately reflect the seriousness of the incident, the 'vulnerability' of the victim and the need for further intervention. The risk assessments attempt to separate incidents quantitatively to prioritise response. However, there is recognition that there can be a significant gap between a score and reality. Qualitative data provided by response officers, and their judgement, take precedence in terms of deciding on an appropriate response. It also reflects how attempting to use positivist methodology to apply concrete measurements of 'vulnerability' is unhelpful when it comes to multi-faceted incidents faced in the context of policing (Green, 2007).

The DIAL as a risk assessment provides further insight into police understandings of both 'risk' and 'vulnerability', and their identification in practice. The DIAL places significant weight on two specific factors: physical violence, and the presence of children. Sexual violence is not included in the DIAL, despite being a common factor in domestic violence (Stermac et al., 2001; Tanha et al., 2010). The focus on physical violence also implies that sexual violence somehow does not involve either physical violence or physical harm.

The consideration of children on the assessment highlights the reoccurring theme of children's 'vulnerability'. Exposure to domestic violence is considered a form of child abuse (Moylan et al., 2010; Rogers, 2012). However, there is the implication that the existence of children in a relationship provides more weight to a victim's 'vulnerability' and the need for extra support. It can be more difficult for an individual to leave an abusive relationship if children are involved (Wuest & Merrit-Gray, 1999; Hendy et al., 2003). But another interpretation is that an individual - usually a woman, if we consider domestic violence statistics (ONS, 2022; Berns, 2001) - and their 'vulnerability' may somehow matter more to agencies owing to the children, rather than the woman as an individual in her own right (Hester, 2011).

Cultural assumptions about physical harm, violence and victims can therefore bleed into the creation of risk assessments, highlighting societal and institutional ideas concerning

'vulnerability'. This insidious element of risk assessment can also occur during the everyday practice of risk assessment within the policing environment. Whilst the DIAL provides some guidance in terms of assessing risk, those completing said assessment still must rely on their own experiences and judgements based around ideas of 'risk' and 'vulnerability'. There are also elements of connected terms such as 'harm' and 'dangerousness' at play too - alongside institutional and personal assumptions of both.

During observation of contact services, how call handlers and dispatchers prioritised incidents was a consistent topic. An immediate response to every call was not possible, owing to the number of calls vastly outweighing the number of police officers available.

However, if reported incidents were missing that immediate threat, prioritising incidents became a lot harder. During interviews, a call taker described a recent scenario where a woman had called, explaining that she was locked in a room with her toddler. Her partner was in another room with their other child, a baby. It was clear that the woman was afraid of the unfolding situation and of her partner. It was not clear what he had done, or what she was afraid he would do. The instinct and experience of the call taker was that an immediate response was necessary: the woman must be frightened if she had only one child with her but could not risk leaving to get the other. When insisting on an immediate response, the Force Duty Officer viewed the situation in a different manner: that the woman must have felt safe enough to leave her baby with the partner she apparently feared. Further, the child was with its father and so did not present any risk. Whilst the Force Duty Officer usually has final say on decision making in terms of response, the call-taker still pushed back for an immediate response. The Force Duty Officer agreed to grade the incident as a 1, which demanded an immediate dispatch of response officers. This was the correct decision. Response officers later shared with the call-taker that if immediate response had not been taken, it is unlikely that the baby and the father would not have survived the night. Instead, the force could have been dealing with a murder-suicide, if not a familicide.

This example highlights how incidents that involve 'vulnerability' can be interpreted from different angles, with different explanations for behaviour and context. The same practice can be applied for related terms of 'risk' and 'dangerousness' - there is a wide spectrum of understandings, assumptions and expectations at play. These interpretations involve different training, work and life experiences. This case also demonstrates how bias can filter and cloud decision making. The cultural assumption that the child must be safe if with a parent is a notion that has been undermined time and time again in the context of criminal justice

(Brandon et al., 2013). It could be reasonably argued that the police should know this better than anyone – but it also demonstrates again how expectations and reality seldom meet.

Even if the threat is not immediately apparent, situations involving an individual's risk of harm can escalate rapidly. The practices described above also highlighted the precedence of 'risk' over 'vulnerability' - that risk assessments can lead to identifying and responding to 'vulnerability'. 'Risk' is the priority as it is conceptualised as active, whilst 'vulnerability' is conceived of as passive.

Risk assessments can be a stop-start process, where movement within the police system itself is governed by administration with a focus on risk at its core (Stanley et al., 2014). The assessments are an attempt to manage such fluid and nebulous concepts in a concrete manner, through quantitative and qualitative determinations (Robinson, 2010; Kebbell, 2019). Risk management is a broad core element of policing: risk assessments are how this management plays out in daily activities. 'Risk' was also a core element long before 'vulnerability' arrived on the scene (Haggerty & Ericson,1997). However, there is an assumption that the label transfers from organisation to service user, with little to negotiation between the two. Risk assessments prompt the question of whether risk is being assessed *with* the service user, or *to* them (Stanley & Humphreys, 2014). It demonstrates an attempt by the police to control the insecurity of the situation with which they have been presented, and to control the insecurity of both risk and vulnerability as concepts in operational practice. But this need for control can override service users' experience and assessment of their own risk (Barlow et al., 2021). 'Risk' is therefore the dominant factor rather than 'vulnerability', which appears to take a passive backseat.

Risk assessments imply a hierarchical relationship between 'risk' and 'vulnerability', with the former outranking the latter operationally. This chapter now returns to the hierarchy of 'vulnerability', and how it is deployed in the practice of identification.

Hanging off a ledge: the operational hierarchy of 'vulnerability' in policing

Within the 'framing' section of this chapter, the theoretical hierarchy of 'vulnerability' was explored. This present section returns to the topic of hierarchy, investigating the hierarchies of operational practice.

As discussed in the previous chapter, a great deal of police understanding of 'vulnerability' can be dependent on the presenting situation. Even if an individual did not 'fit' any of the

traits framed as a sign of 'vulnerability', if they were in immediate danger then they were immediately identified as 'vulnerable'. The easiest decision-making involved incidents of physical threat: the perpetrator was still present and/or someone has been physically hurt. A call-taker explained that someone could be in peak physical and mental condition – but if they were hanging off a ledge, then they were 'vulnerable' in that moment. This requires an immediate response, with little debate. 'Dangerousness' once again enters the picture for consideration - the need for an immediate response is needed owing to the individual's 'vulnerability' to danger.

Physical vulnerability therefore sits at the top of the conceptual and operational hierarchy of 'vulnerability' for the police. Such a position highlights a belief that physical harm is the most serious of possible harms, owing to the significant relationship between 'harm' and 'vulnerability' (Peroni & Timmer, 2013:1058; Twigg, 2014:465; Wrigley, 2015:480). This links directly to Butler's notion of 'corporeal' vulnerability: "in a way, we all live with this particular vulnerability, a vulnerability that is part of bodily life" (2004a: 28- 29). 'Vulnerability' can be an embodiment of humanity and represented by the physical self. However, Butler and the police do dramatically diverge after this starting point. Whilst Butler posits corporeal vulnerability as a responsiveness to harm, the police are more closely aligned with 'vulnerability' as susceptibility to harm (Cousens, 2017).

Ocular centrism is a prominent factor in the policing priority of physical 'vulnerability' and harm over others. The police do not exist in a vacuum: western cultures have an epistemological and perceptual bias for vision over the other senses (Kavanagh, 2004). There can be a preference for what we can see in terms of harm, and vulnerability, demonstrated by the body: this was demonstrated earlier by the stereotypes of gender and age being underpinned by assumptions of physical frailty. Emotional or psychological harm, however, are much less likely to have indicators that can be perceived through sight alone. For an ocular centric culture, 'seeing is believing' (Geddes, 2020). However, there are many different crimes that may not necessarily be obvious to the policing eye. Coercion, abuse, neglect and exploitation may not necessarily leave physical traces on the bodies of victims, instead scarring their neural pathways and souls (Dominelli, 1989; Kent & Waller, 1998; McCallum & Lauzon, 2005; Varma et al., 2007; Hallett, 2017; Doychak & Raghovan, 2020).

Ocular centrism is also highlighted by the previous discussion on how officers and staff pragmatically identify 'vulnerability' by observing the individual and their environment,

rather than necessarily relying on what the individual themself has to say. There is a transferral of an individual's agency, which is ignored, and the police handed the power to pass the judgement. Further, the police risk assessments score incidents with physical, visible harm as higher 'risk' and identify a greater 'vulnerability' by comparison to those that do not.

During observations, 'seeing' vulnerability was evident. I observed staff scouring incident reports and risk assessments, looking for any signs of vulnerability. Call handlers spoke of their limitations by the reliance on sound alone: loud noises, such as screaming, shouting or crying, were considered signs of physical harm and vulnerability. During the pandemic, custody officers complained of the difficulty in assessing detained persons as they could not read an individual's face owing to the wearing of masks. The College of Policing vulnerability training placed a heavy emphasis on the sense of seeing and looking for 'vulnerabilities', demonstrated in the training's tagline: "if you don't look, who will?"

The hierarchy of 'vulnerability' can however be pragmatic. During observations, I noticed that the hierarchy of each unit shifted depending on the unique purpose of said unit. Mental health was the top consideration within custody. This priority was facilitated both by the nature of the custodial environment and the contemporary focus on mental health in custody (Dehaghani, 2017). For contact services, the main priorities were spread across a wider spectrum: domestic violence, stalking and harassment, mental health, drink driving and missing persons. This spectrum was facilitated by the amount of phone calls relating to these types of potentially vulnerable incidents. Contact services is often the first point of contact for service users with the police (Lunsford & Black, 2012). Domestic violence, stalking and harassment, and missing persons were the main aspects of 'vulnerability' assessed by the first PEEL report (2016).

The harm reduction hubs also had a range of priorities to consider. Incidents of Domestic violence, missing persons and stalking and harassment were the first to be reviewed every day, with one officer committed to reviewing domestic violence alone. Anti-social behaviour, hate crime and burglaries were reviewed next. The purpose was to search for patterns of 'vulnerability' in both offending and victimisation: the pattern could be found in relation to a particular person, group or location.

This operational hierarchy of 'vulnerability' within particular units identifies 'vulnerability' as dependent on the circumstances, but also non-negotiable. All incidents of domestic abuse

were identified as 'vulnerable' situations by contact services and therefore demand a quick response. But when reviewing the incidents with the harm reduction hub, these incidents tended to fall into two vastly different camps across a wide spectrum. The first was that an immediate threat (to life) was identified: an individual had already been physically harmed or was under severe physical threat. The second was that two individuals in a relationship were under the influence of a significant number of substances, had a severe argument and one had kicked the other off the property. The first scenario usually hit the indicators on the DIAL risk assessment and warranted further intervention. The second scenario was not deemed as serious, with less indicators of domestic violence, and the police were usually called in an effort by the individual who had been kicked out to force their former partner to let them back or take back their share of substances.

So, whilst domestic abuse sat high on the hierarchy of 'vulnerability' both broadly and for individual units (contact services and harm reduction hubs), each scenario was different. Regardless of exactly why the police had been called, any incident involving individuals in a current or former romantic relationship was labelled a 'domestic incident'. This label had a wide reach, including parents, children, grandparents, in-laws and cousins.

Therefore, an incident's position on the hierarchy is dependent on identification, which in turn identifies an appropriate policing response. The hierarchy itself is dependent on a multitude of different factors, demonstrating the cumulative nature of 'vulnerability' (Stewart, 2005). Factors include policing operational practice (physical vulnerability), wider force policy (domestic abuse) and the individual unit's operational purpose (for example, mental health in custody).

These factors are then blended with the individual judgements of officers and staff, which can also be complicated by an emphasis on 'risk' rather than 'vulnerability'. Factors can also be influenced by the sheer amount of demand driven by a specific 'vulnerability', such as mental health (Dodds, 2017; Trebilcock & Weston, 2020).

The hierarchies of 'vulnerability', whether they be conceptual, operational or both, speak to more than just policing priority and demand. Hierarchies reveal preferences, expectations, assumptions and comparisons. They can speak to inclusion and exclusion, of a pecking order that determines legitimacy (Chakraborti & Garland, 2012).

The police's deployment of the hierarchy also speaks to their role in identifying 'vulnerability', the gatekeeper of the concept within the public sector. The police have long

been positioned as gatekeepers of 'risk', owing to their role reliance on risk management (Ericson & Haggerty, 1997). It is therefore unsurprising that they now play a role in gatekeeping risk's conceptual cousin, 'vulnerability', at the front door of both the criminal justice system and the wider public sector (Stewart & Smith, 2004; Bartkowiak-Theron & Asquith, 2012; Twigg, 2014; Morgan, 2021). Despite the notion that anybody can be conceptualised as 'vulnerable' (see Informed about chapter), gatekeeping 'vulnerability' in practice can transform into a process of inclusive and exclusive, genuine versus non-genuine 'vulnerability' (Munro & Scoular, 2012). How the police deploy the label of 'vulnerability' in their role as gatekeeper and the consequences are explored next.

Playing the vulnerability card: the police as gatekeepers of 'vulnerability'

In interviews and observations, participants spoke of a practice known as 'playing the vulnerability card', or occasionally 'the mental health card'. These service users assert their 'vulnerability', explicitly using the term 'vulnerable' as a self-descriptor. This practice is conceived by officers and staff as 'playing the system', with these users deploying police linguistics to facilitate a police response:

"A lot of the time, it's just so they can get a quick response from ourselves, which makes it quite frustrating, really" (Alex, Response Officer)

"I don't like using the word needlessly. But repeat callers that don't actually need the support, that's they're outlet, ringing the police." (Lou, Response Officer)

Such service users often have repeated contact with the police and learn what language is most likely to trigger a response. Knowledge of public sector environments and procedures gives some an advantage in personal matters that is conceptualised as 'playing the system' (Ricardelli et al., 2008). Accusations of 'playing vulnerability card' were both observed and discussed primarily by those on the frontline. Both call handlers mentioned callers that identified themselves as 'vulnerable' immediately, to which they expressed scepticisms as to the 'genuine' nature of the caller's individual 'vulnerability'. For example, two teenage girls rang the police as they had ended up in an unexpected place and wanted the police to give them a lift home: the girls described themselves as being 'vulnerable' as justification for their request. Service users calling the police for transport, like a taxi, was a regular occurrence during observation of contact services. This creates a frustrating double bind for the police:

"It can be hard to deal with those persons because the Police have naturally always had a culture of 'what ifs and buts'" (Leslie, Response Officer)

The individual has identified their own 'vulnerability', which within the policing framework signals a need for a response. The risk averse nature of contemporary policing can also be a barrier to refusing help, especially if 'vulnerability' is seen to be involved. There can be a hesitation and caution, therefore, around incidents where officers and staff feel that an incident does not necessarily require their response, but 'vulnerability' has been highlighted or volunteered by the service user, and so usually warrants a response.

When individuals assign themselves the label of 'vulnerable', there can be mistrust and cynicism on behalf of police officers and staff. It appears to be an affront to their authority and their role as gatekeeper: the authority to identify and label individuals as 'vulnerable', and deploy a response based on their identification. The police perform the role of gatekeeper, of making judgements and making decisions - not service users utilising self-determination. Service users assigning themselves the label and asserting the associated rights is a usurpation of both police authority and expectations, including the expectation of police power over service users. It is a disruption of the perceived natural order and fuels a defensive reaction that manifests as scepticism. Service users who claim the 'vulnerable' label for themselves are automatically denied the assignation by some officers and staff as a result of this challenge.

The police themselves can 'play the system' in their working role (Kyprianides et al., 2021). But that is conceived of as justifiable, owing to the authority of their role as gatekeeper. The police role in gatekeeping 'vulnerability' and similar issues places them as the active subject with agency: service users are conceived of as often passive, if unpredictable, pawns.

Within the public sector and criminal justice system, the assignation of the 'vulnerable' label is based on the taken for granted assumptions that practitioners know what is best for service users - much better than the service user themselves (Brown, 2011; Pupavac, 2008; Dunn et al., 2008). As gatekeepers of 'vulnerability', the label can be appropriated by officers and staff to engineer the outcome that they consider to be best for the individual - or the best outcome for the police and other partners.

A clear demonstration of this practice is the use of Deprivation of Liberty Orders. I was introduced to this intervention during an observation of one of the Harm Reduction Hubs. These orders can be used as an intervention for children who are being groomed or exploited,

and who have a history of going missing as a result. These children are considered extremely 'vulnerable' (Biehal et al., 2003). The order sanctions physical restraint of the child, physically stopping or removing them from locations, enforced by the police and social services. There have been incidents of children kept in solitary conditions, far from home, with only assigned staff, under these orders (BBC News, 2020). The prevailing belief is that the child is 'vulnerable' and therefore needs such interventions for protection (Liefarrd, 2019; Griffith, 2021). The label of 'vulnerability' here demolishes the other civil rights of the individual, under the guise of their right to protection. In a more cynical framing, the 'vulnerable' individual has failed to conform to a standard, expected norm, and therefore are handled the 'vulnerable' label. This label signals that said individual does not know what is best for them, which hands decision making power to the police and related agencies. It presumes that the police and said agencies do know what is best for the individual. There appears to be little consideration of the individual's human rights or opinion. Further, there is a strong element of punishment in the practice of Deprivation of Liberty Orders. The child is being punished for their 'vulnerability' - even if they are victimised or at risk. Ultimately, they are positioned as failing to conform to norms associated with appropriate childhood.

Both 'vulnerability' and 'risk' can be used to coerce individuals to nullify their own rights. The vulnerable role and the label of 'vulnerability' can be deployed for any reason by police officers and staff - but it can also be removed. There is less consideration of the individual's 'vulnerabilities' in this scenario, with the concept manoeuvred to justify policing practice.

In custody, an individual that refuses to speak or engage with officers was considered 'vulnerable' or 'a risk' owing to the lack of information. Police logic dictates an accurate picture of the individual is necessary to determine their 'vulnerability' in the custodial environment, which includes any risk to themselves or police staff. The absence of this accurate picture is conceived of as an increased risk to the individual or to the police:

"I don't think it's a specific type of vulnerability, I think it depends on how the person interacts with you, I think if you don't build up a rapport with someone from the offset, it's quite hard to identify their vulnerabilities if they aren't engaging with you" (Sandy, Custody Detention Officer)

"...arrested persons sometimes present under the influence of alcohol/drugs and will not communicate vulnerabilities" (Perry, Custody Sergeant)

"But that's yeah what I find really difficult. It's the people that don't speak to me. Because then I find it harder to gage them." (Kit, Custody Sergeant)

There is no obligation for detainees to answer questions, conferred by the right to remain silent (Criminal Justice and Police Order, 1994). However, if an individual refuses to answer questions, they are considered high risk and assigned to a level 3 cell. These cells contain cameras to observe the individual continually. Failure to communicate 'vulnerabilities' to the police results in punishment: the detained person is positioned on the 'dangerous' end of the 'vulnerability' spectrum (Warner, 2008). Their actions, or rather inaction, are used against them through a 'vulnerability' lens to justify surveillance: after all, if there were no vulnerabilities, then the individual can engage and attest to the fact. Uncertainty breeds a need for control, under the guise of 'vulnerability' and 'helping'. Service users are held responsible for police intervention and surveillance in these scenarios as they can be conceived of refusing to cooperate. There is also the element of punishment here, however indirectly.

Depending on the behaviour of the individual, the police in their role as gatekeeper can circumvent the 'vulnerability' label and pursue a criminal justice avenue. In this scenario, management discussed an individual who consistently came to their attention owing to multiple, public suicide attempts:

"Provided lots of support, lots of opportunities for him to engage, etc. but didn't. And it when we charged with public nuisance, which was crime we didn't have to chase, we didn't have to record, didn't have to do anything - but actually the charge was a way of gaining some control to get them into treatment, as opposed to we want the charge to get them punished." (Bobby, Executive management)

Criminal justice avenues can provide some control over the situation for the police. Like the Deprivation of Liberty Orders, the individual may be 'vulnerable', but any conceived right to a response can be twisted into response as the police deem fitting. But in this scenario, it is the refusal to engage in avenues to minimise one's identified 'vulnerabilities' that results in the removal of the label, and any afforded protection.

The need for control can therefore play a crucial role in decision making. The need for control can relate to the individual and their circumstances, or the control over the police's time and professional role:

"Sometimes, we as officers will go down the route of find a criminal offence to deal with to get them into custody, which then resolves the problem, if that makes sense" (Lou, Response Officer)

"...the difficulty is, when you've got somebody who is not an offender, not going through the criminal justice - that your options can become more limited, but it's down to consent and that person might not always recognise that they are 'vulnerable' or that they need that support, therefore we can't force that as far as the criminal justice process." (Charlie, Executive Management)

Officers can be indirectly detained by an individual's 'vulnerability' in relation to mental health. Section 136 incidents can keep officers at a psychiatric hospital for several hours, even an entire shift, as they wait for the individual to be assessed and then for a decision to be made by an appropriate professional. The problem is that more appropriate services – the NHS, General Practitioners, social services and similar – are rarely available when these incidents occur, during the night or weekends. Charging criminal offences can be a loophole for officers, as custody is considered to take less time. Arrest may be viewed as closer to the policing role and its responsibilities, than hanging around a psychiatric hospital. Police officers and staff therefore can remove the label and its protection from an individual to engineer a scenario that better suits their own purposes.

There is a disingenuous element, therefore, within the policing process of identifying 'vulnerability' in the name of protecting people. Warner (2007)'s 'vulnerability/dangerousness' axis demonstrates the wide spectrum across which service users are positioned by the police. A significant number of examples explored in this chapter - deprivation of liberty orders, the experience of the law professor and the treatment of individuals with mental health issues - position the service user as 'dangerous' in some way. In Warner (2007)'s conceptualisation, the danger is conceived of as directed towards other people, rather than the individual themselves. Perhaps uncharitably, I would assert that the conceived danger was not to the police physically - but, like those who 'play the vulnerability' card, the danger is a threat to police power, accountability and legitimacy. This identification and response are more aligned with the police regaining, both operationally and conceptually. The policing role of gatekeeper to 'vulnerability' - and by extension, the wider public sector and criminal justice system (Bartkowiak-Theron & Asquith, 2012) - may be conceived of as more worthwhile protecting than citizens.

The assignment of the 'vulnerable' label is therefore not unconditional. The gatekeeping role of the police permits them to use the label liberally to engineer the outcome that best suits them, under the guise that it is the service user who does not know best (Brown, 2011; Dunn et al., 2008). Regardless of whether the label is assigned, refused or removed, the familiar spectre of blame and responsibility arises in the identification of 'vulnerability' in practice. Service users are to blame for their 'vulnerabilities' being present; they are also to blame for any failure to disclose or minimise 'vulnerabilities'. Service users also may not claim the term for themselves: the police as gatekeepers therefore know best, and so the identification process is better left to them.

This role in the gatekeeping of 'vulnerability' also positions the police in the role of 'saviour'. This saviour role is performed through the emphasis on safeguarding 'vulnerability', which can merge with "punitive rationales and practice" (Aliverti, 2020:117). Judgements concerning 'vulnerability', safeguarding and saving are also infused with conceptualisations of deservedness. Who deserves attention, to be saved from their 'vulnerability', also by its very nature defines who does not (Walklate, 2011; Mason-Bish, 2013; Asquith & Bartkowiak-Theron, 2021). This next section explores this underpinning of 'vulnerability' further, drawing across the chapter to investigate how the police identification process relies on comparison, deservedness and a competition of 'vulnerabilities'.

Deservedness and 'vulnerability'

Those considered 'vulnerable' can be conceived as needing protection owing to the negative implications of weakness inherent in the label, which emphasises inabilities and limitations (Wishart, 2003; Brown, 2011; Roulstone et al., 2011; Jackson et al., 2012; Chakraborti & Garland, 2012; Keay & Kirby, 2018). The police as gatekeepers of 'vulnerability' are empowered to identify not only who is 'vulnerable', but who is deserving of the label and the protection it can afford. Like 'vulnerability', notions of 'deservedness' are socially constructed to fit within cultural notions of 'suffering': not only who is considered to suffer, but whose suffering is deserving of recognition (Walklate, 2011:189; Chakraborti & Garland, 2012:507).

Within this context, the police are permitted to decide whose suffering owing to 'vulnerability' deserves to be recognised. To do so, the police often engage in a game of

comparison, as demonstrated by two response officers discussing how they are often diverted to incidents relating to mental health and substance misuse:

"I'm in the middle of dealing with potentially, a vulnerable elderly female that lives alone, that's been burgled. We're getting diverted from the people that actually need us and it's frustrating." (Alex, Response Officer)

"…when you look at some people and think, you're in this state. You've made yourself vulnerable. And it's all your own doing, as in people taking drugs and that kind of thing" (Lou, Response Officer)

In the previous section concerning the framing of 'vulnerability', service users incapacitated by substance misuse were considered 'vulnerable' owing to their circumstances - but not as 'vulnerable' by comparison to other individuals, as the circumstances were brought by their 'choice' to be 'vulnerable'. Therefore, these service users were less deserving of being identified as 'vulnerable', and afforded the same, more empathetic treatment as those considered deserving. 'Vulnerability' is therefore relational, defined by comparison. Usually, this comparison positions the 'vulnerable' contrary to the expected norm (Fawcett, 2009). These two positions are placed in opposition to one another, deployed by practitioners and policymakers to "problematise behaviours" (Mythen & Weston, 2022:11) and ultimately medicalise social issues (Skolbekken, 2008), rather than address deeper systemic issues. By positioning 'vulnerability' as a state in comparison to a pathologised, expected standard of existence, those labelled 'vulnerable' are positioned as 'less than' at best, 'deviant' at worst (Fawcett, 2009). Assigning and removing the 'vulnerable' label pins the presenting problem as being the individual, rather than wider social inequalities and marginalisation that can create and perpetuate said 'vulnerabilities' (Munro & Scoular, 2012; Philo, 2005).

Further, within the context of legitimised suffering, those who are only situationally 'vulnerable' owing to substance misuse make the choice to suffer (Holmes, 2011; Lakoff & Klineberg, 2010). Identifying 'vulnerability' as a choice positions these individuals in comparison to those with other, more deserving 'vulnerabilities'. After all, if we need to protect those who are not 'normal', then we should protect those who are unable to protect themselves through no fault of their own - who are victims of happenstance and misfortune, rather than poor choices. Such identification also pins responsibility on the service user, absolving the police and other agencies (Sibley, 2018).

There can also be the sense that those who make the choice to be vulnerable, play the vulnerability card or are conceived as less deserving of attention are not just a standalone problem for the police, but impact on the suffering of individuals positioned higher up the conceptual hierarchy:

"Whereas the ones that genuinely do have the mental health issues, we're probably not getting to them as often now." (Alex, Response Officer)

"You know you listen to all these other calls that are coming in over the air, and it's well I can't go and deal with that. And they need me. They've been a victim of something that they can't help..." (Lou, Response Officer)

Not only is 'vulnerability' conceived by comparison to other 'vulnerabilities', so too is the relative suffering compared. If 'vulnerability' is conceived of as a choice, then there is less suffering involved, as Lou put it earlier, because 'it's all your own doing'. No other person is at fault. The absence of another person also suggests that the hierarchy of 'vulnerability' and attendant suffering is determined by the presence or actions of another person. The suffering caused by one's own 'vulnerability' alone is considered less important by comparison. There is also a strong sense of agency in alignment with identifying the deservedness of one's 'vulnerability'. Lou describes the 'vulnerable' victim as being harmed by 'something that they can't help', whilst the individual abuses substances is framed as being able to 'help' themselves. For the 'vulnerable', deservedness simultaneously removes any agency that the individual may have. For those not considered deserving, they possess agency: but with agency comes blame and responsibility for their 'vulnerability' (Brown, 2011).

From the perspective of some officers and staff, 'playing the vulnerability card' or calling the police for a 'vulnerability' not conceived as belonging within the operational framework is an improper demand for police attention. The service user is conceived of as not deserving this attention by the very nature of appropriating the term. This practice, especially if mental health problems were cited, were often referred to as attention-seeking by contact services during observation and interviews:

"... personally, I think a lot of people are using (mental health) as an excuse, now, I find…. because *it's been so publicly advertised, I think everybody's just saying that they've got (mental health problems), when we can go to an incident and clearly, there's no issues but they're jumping on their bandwagon with their anxiety, depression."* (Alex Response Officer)

Alex's response suggests the belief that some service users are playing the 'vulnerability' card in relation to mental health in an attempt to avoid accountability or make excuses for their circumstances. This opinion conceives of said service users in a particularly negative light. The belief that some individuals are manipulating the police for their own ends reinforces the dichotomy of genuine versus not genuine 'vulnerability'. Such a belief also reinforces the subjectivity of identifying 'vulnerability', as such a practice relies heavily on the interpretations and knowledge of police officers and staff. Motivation can be assigned out of frustration, ego and defensiveness, as highlighted in the section exploring the role of the police as gatekeeper.

Alex also demonstrates how the police make this determination based on assumptions, drawn from their own personal framework concerning 'vulnerability' and mental health (Twigg, 2014). Individuals identified as using 'vulnerability' or 'mental health' are removed from consideration of deserving police attention. This practice reproduces social hierarchies of 'vulnerability' and legitimacy, owing to our culture's long history of stigmatising mental illness (Trebilcock & Weston, 2019; Carlson, 2014; Stanford, 2012).

The practice of assuming motivation during the process of identifying both 'vulnerability' and proportionate 'deservedness' can also be demonstrated by discussion relating to repeat demand callers. Repeat demand has been noted as a significant economic and social cost of policing in recent years (Boulton et al., 2017; Kirby, 2020). Repeat demand was a consistent focus of discussion in observation and interviews:

"I don't like using the word needlessly. But repeat callers that don't actually need the support, that's their outlet, ringing the police…. They don't need any help from the police." (Lou, Response Officer)

"Because we're so short staffed as well, I've got our control in there, saying to me, yes, you've got to go from this job because somebody wants to kill themselves. Bearing in mind, we've got 16 previous reports of this person doing it, but we still have to go. So, I'm now leaving this old lady, saying oh sorry, I might not be able to come back and help you out and then, I'm going to this person, basically saying, stop being a dick." (Alex, Response Officer)

Repeat demand callers are positioned further down the hierarchy from callers that have experienced crime. There is an overlap between repeat demand callers and those experiencing mental health, as highlighted by Alex. 'Vulnerability' as a translation for 'need' reemerges: deservedness can be based on how much an individual is conceived of as needing the police's

help and protection. There is a circular motion to the argument, however, as conceptualisations of needing the police are then based on deservedness and 'vulnerability'.

For frontline staff, repeat demand caused extreme frustration - as demonstrated by Alex - or dismissiveness, as demonstrated by Lou. Like those that play the vulnerability card, these calls can divert police resources away from incidents that directly involve a criminal element. In my notes concerning observation of contact services, I reflect on my reluctance to consider repeat demand 'non-genuine' in relation to 'genuine' calls: 'non-genuine' suggests that the calls are hoaxes or not a problem. The introduction of the Early Intervention Officers demonstrates that repeat demand callers do suggest problems on behalf of the individual – but not necessarily a criminal element or an issue that requires a police response. But the introduction of the Early Intervention scheme appeared to be more emphatic on reducing these calls to the police than necessarily a recognition that these individuals were 'vulnerable' and deserving of help.

The relative deservedness of service users depends on their circumstances' position within both the institutional and personal hierarchy of 'vulnerability' within the policing framework. There is a cyclical nature of the process: the higher up the hierarchy position of an individual and their circumstances, the more likely they are to be identified as 'vulnerable'; the more likely they are to be identified as 'vulnerable', the more likely they are to be considered deserving of policing protection. Their blessing of deservedness is then justified by the position on the hierarchy, and the cycle begins again. The position of the individual on the hierarchy determines their treatment by the police. If comparison is the thief of joy, within the police's framework of 'vulnerability', comparison is the thief of recognition.

Returning to the gatekeeping role of the policing in 'vulnerability', the attendant positioning of the police as saviours is tainted with a dark undercurrent when highlighted in the context of 'deservedness'. Decision making and judgements made in the pursuit of gatekeeping 'vulnerability' can be based on both personal and institutional values, which can reinforce both social hierarchies and wider moral agendas, which historically disproportionately affect those who are marginalised (Asquith & Bartkowiak-Theron, 2012; Carlson, 2014). The hierarchy of 'vulnerability', aligned with cultural values of deservedness and saving, suggests that some people - 'the vulnerable' - deserve saving. By definition, the operationalisation of this hierarchy suggests that others - those with substance misuse problems, addictions, those who play the vulnerability card, repeat demand callers - do not deserve saving in the same

way. Rather than identifying 'vulnerability' in order to effective and appropriately respond, the police regress into social Darwinism to perpetuate stigma and oppressive social hierarchies (Mason-Bish, 2013; Asquith & Bartkowiak-Theron, 2021).

Conclusions

This chapter treads familiar paths of marginalisation – individuals of groups that are frequently excluded from dominant political discourses (Butler, 2004; Fineman, 2008). There is a theoretical and conceptual policing approach that frames anyone and everyone as potentially 'vulnerable'. However, through this lens, the police are faced with the enormous task of identifying any number of potential vulnerabilities for every individual and each incident. Yet 'vulnerability' is not a value-free term (Brown, 2011). The label carries socio historical baggage: it is unsurprising that the police can rely on cultural assumptions concerning what it means to be vulnerable.

These assumptions can be applied in a general sense to a wide range of people, unified by one identifying feature. This approach risks a homogenous approach to identification, which can then create a homogenous response (Stalsett, 2006; Munro & Scoular, 2012). There is an assumed homogeneity of experience, knowledge and even strength. Being considered a 'vulnerable' is a double-edged sword: it conceives of being vulnerable as a state where something is lacking, cursed by debility and flaws (Brown, 2011).

From observation and interviews, the police can frame vulnerability across a spectrum of personal and situational factors. These factors are not necessarily distinct but are relational and can interlink. Some groups are institutionally framed as more vulnerable than others, manifested by legislation and policy. Young offending highlights the complex nature of these conceptualisations: the 'vulnerability' of youth takes priority over the 'offending' to be legitimised within policing. There are also attempts to prioritise situational vulnerability through the hierarchy of vulnerability, which in turn prioritises specific high harm incidents over others.

The role of personal factors such as race and class for the identification of 'vulnerability' is much harder to determine. The absence may have several complex explanations and speculations: conscious avoidance in the name of political correctness; default assumptions

surrounding gender, race, class and sexuality; or because personal features do not consciously factor into decision making for some officers and staff.

Absence can speak loudly when trying to understand how the police identify and frame 'vulnerability'. For example, offenders and their vulnerabilities were mainly only of concern to those tasked with their management: even then, said vulnerabilities were only understood through the lens of 'risk'. The absence of men as 'vulnerable' may be linked to the police's own patriarchal culture (Reiner, 2010). The male dominated culture is the opposite of 'vulnerable': the concept is loaded with illusions of weakness, deficiency and moral failing (Brown, 2011).

The patriarchal nature of policing as an institution can also provide some context for the paternalistic and patronising approach to 'vulnerable' people (Dunn et al., 2008). If men are to be considered vulnerable, it suggests that the police as individuals and institutions may also be vulnerable. Reflecting on the assumptions made about vulnerability throughout this chapter, to be vulnerable is to be deficient. As the law enforcement arm of the State, the police cannot afford to be perceived as lacking or deficient. In the same way that the police can label some people and not others, the police can also avoid labelling themselves.

A significant issue with 'vulnerability' is that to label others – as 'vulnerable' or not – is a long- term process (Green, 2007:94). Said labels and their relationship with the vicious cycle of marginalisation is a sociohistorical and socio-political process that currently is being sidestepped – regardless of good intentions – by the police and related public sector agencies. The second half of the chapter examines how the reliance on institutional and cultural assumptions about 'vulnerability' plays out in practice. The police do use practical processes for identifying 'vulnerability', such as communication, active listening and observation. Risk assessments can also be conceived of as a practice method to identify 'vulnerability' (Black & Lumsden, 2020). But assessments are not necessarily an objective metric: their content is based on institutional and cultural understandings of 'risk', 'harm' and 'vulnerability'. Risk assessments, by their very name and nature, position 'risk' as a more significant factor for consideration than 'vulnerability', even within the identification of 'vulnerability' itself. Despite an attempt to create a quantitative, positivist methodology for identifying 'vulnerability' in practice, assessments instead are based on qualitative, subjective judgment, that fails to appreciate the sociohistorical processes of the labels involved (Green, 2007). The alleged quantitative nature of risk assessments can also lead officers and staff to assume that

processes like risk assessments are the best or most appropriate way to identify and prioritise 'vulnerability' (Black & Lumsden, 2020).

The need for prioritising incidents pragmatically can influence the hierarchy of 'vulnerability', both conceptually and pragmatically. Age, capacity and victimisation are all significant influences on an individual's positioning on the police hierarchy of 'vulnerability', which in turn determines the likelihood of response. But the hierarchy means more than that. The hierarchy determines who deserves the label of 'vulnerability', and all that applies: deserving of a policing response, police time and police effort. It also determines who is conceived of as being most in need, whose suffering is recognised and who deserves to be protected.

Physical 'vulnerability', or physical threat of harm, is the highest priority for the police, sitting at the top of their 'vulnerability' hierarchical framework. But there are strings attached: ultimately, the harm must come from another person, not from the individual. If the individual is a harm to themselves, owing to mental health and/or substance use, then the individual topples down the hierarchy. They are conceived of as having chosen to be 'vulnerable' by the consumption of substances. They are situationally 'vulnerable' in that they are incapacitated, but not as 'vulnerable' as individuals harmed by another person. The hierarchy in conception and practice therefore highlights the highly relational nature of 'vulnerability' within policing: a person is 'vulnerable' - or not - by comparison to another, real or hypothetical, individual. From this relational position, individuals can then be conceived of as more or less deserving that a threshold set by the police as individuals and as an institution.

This threshold for 'vulnerability' demonstrates the gatekeeper role of the police in 'vulnerability'. As 'vulnerability' can be based on cultural assumptions and expectations, and the police are left to make their own judgements, this empowers the police to deploy the label of 'vulnerability' based on their own beliefs, often ignoring yet perpetuating marginalisation (Charkraborti & Garland, 2012). The police can also use the identification of 'vulnerability' for their own purposes. Under the guise of protection, 'vulnerability' can be deployed in practices that remove an individual's civil rights. The label of 'vulnerability' can be used to coerce individuals, justify police intervention and framed to suit the purposes of the police, rather than the service user. The label can also be denied and removed for the same reasons, channelling the service users into a criminal justice pathway - a pathway that allows the

police far more control over the circumstances of 'vulnerability'. Both the gatekeeper role and expectations around deservedness underline the belief that some individuals are worth saving - and others are not (Munro & Scoular, 2012). Further, the gatekeeping role emphasises that the police are appropriate and effective saviours of service users, who do not know what is best for themselves (Brown, 2011; Dunn et al., 2008). The police therefore wield a significant amount of power in identifying (or not identifying) 'vulnerability', and their use (or misuse) of the label can have serious consequences for service users.

Notions of deservedness, suffering and comparisons determine an individual's circumstantial position on the hierarchy, which is conditional and subject to change. Identification of an individual's 'vulnerability', and their position on the hierarchy, in turn can influence a response. The thesis so far has only touched on themes of multi-agency working, which receives significant focus in the next chapter. This chapter has carefully examined the spectrum of issues faced by the police in the identification of 'vulnerability' in their working practice. The next question that must be considered is: if 'vulnerability' is complex to identify in practice, how can it be effectively and appropriately responded to by the police?

Chapter 6 - How do the police respond to 'vulnerability'?

Introduction

After officers have identified 'vulnerability' they then must respond to it. This chapter examines how the police can respond to 'vulnerability' and the barriers to this response.

The chapter opens with the dichotomy between frontline versus community policing and the different avenues they offer to the police response. Expectations around the frontline role specifically leads to a consideration of how the police can react to 'vulnerability', rather than effectively responding. Pragmatic avenues for police response are explored through the presence and absence of their uniform, followed by referrals to partner agencies and the early intervention scheme. More malleable concepts, such as 'safeguarding' and an emphasis on soft skills, are then examined. Finally, the section reflects on the role of relationships in response: relationships between different police units, and collaboration with partners through multi-agency working.

The theme of barriers to police response opens with an exploration of the obstacles facing the relationship between the police and partners, including the limited operating hours of partners and the flow of information. Partner agency thresholds for 'vulnerability' and 'risk' are then investigated. The chapter then moves onto the operational impact of these obstacles: how the police are used as first resort by partner agencies to pick up slack; and how the police are used as a last resort by service users owing to the failures of other partners. The chapter closes with a reflection on how such practices, alongside wider structural 'vulnerabilities', have contributed to police mission creep.

To begin, there is an investigation into participants' attitudes towards 'vulnerability' in terms of what they consider to be police business - and by extension, to what 'vulnerabilities' should respond.

Theme 1: Options available for the police to respond to 'vulnerability'

Frontline versus community policing responses to 'vulnerability'

Expectations of the police as a short-term solution were expressed broadly across observations and interviews. Again, these expectations sprung from the experience of the individual's particular role in the police as an organisation:

"With me being response, my long-term involvement is very, very thin. I'm like the quick hit type thing, if that makes sense" (Alex, Response Officer)

"If it's immediate and happening and it's new, then fair enough" (Lou, Response Officer)

Similar sentiments were expressed by call handlers at contact services. These two groups constitute the frontline of policing. These officers and staff expect that the boundaries of their role do not extend past the short term: their responsibility is immediate response and intervention to presently occurring harm and 'vulnerability'. The same authority, power and resources that permits a short-term response simultaneously can preclude them being involved in the long-term:

"If we charge them, we can put conditions on them to try and protect the victim as best we can but those conditions only last up until they go to court, which could be anything within two weeks of them going to court. It's then down to the courts...We've only got very limited powers to deal with certain things." (Alex, Response Officer)

"Do I think I should be responsible, as an agency? No. That long term care management, I've got a part to play and that's to refer to get someone to that individual." (Sunny, Chief Inspector)

The police are only the beginning of the chain of responses by the criminal justice system and wider public sector. The aftermath of identification and initial police response, however, is expected to be handled by other agencies. Referrals are the primary responsibility of the police, and another demonstration of their short-term involvement with incidents. Long term care management of 'vulnerable' people and their circumstances is a complex area, with the police as an organisation ill-equipped to respond to what one might call 'chronic' 'vulnerabilities'.

The role of the PCSOs and the harm reduction hub, however, suggests an attempt by the police to extend their responsibilities in relation to 'vulnerability' as a longer-term response.

Unlike their frontline counterparts, PCSOs and Early Intervention Officers do not play a short-term role. Rather, attempts are made to establish longer term relationships and embed themselves within the community:

"We do community policing, so we are not the police officers, so we don't go around arresting people. However, we're the ones that do deal with some crimes, but we spend a lot of time in the community working with all different members of the community, from the councillors, all the way down to the bottom of the homeless people." (Ainslie, PCSO)

During observations, an EIO walked me through a service user assessment. The assessment includes an image of a gingerbread man used to embody the feelings of 'vulnerability' experienced by the service user. Their wants, needs and expectations were also discussed, to get to the bottom ultimately of why the individual is repeatedly calling the police. The depths of a life and experiences explored between the EIO and service user are significant. The issues with the Early Intervention scheme are not necessarily in its approach or content. The problem is that the scheme closely mirrors the practices within social work and care – far away from the expected responsibilities of the police force. The police are therefore taking on the responsibilities and practices of other agencies to solve. How much police officers and staff should be concerning themselves with the wants, needs and feelings of service users is debatable: this process has strong similarities to counselling and therapy practices. It is problematic and concerning to have an institution such as the police to possess so much intimate knowledge of a service user. There is no guarantee that this knowledge will be kept confidential. Whilst the information that the service user shares is protected by GDPR, information can be shared without consent if the individual is judged by the EIO to be at risk to themselves or others[8]. Instead, there is a strong element of intimate surveillance in the name of effective governance and response to 'vulnerability' (Menichilli, 2019). The Early Intervention scheme does also carry implications of individuals that need to be 'fixed' - and by extension that the police are the organisation to do the 'fixing'. 'Vulnerability' is once again deployed as justification for police intervention in scenarios where an individual has committed no crime but are considered to be deviating from expectations of the norm (Coppock & McGovern, 2012).

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[8] I was able to confirm this with my police liaison in August 2023, as they were instrumental in the EI scheme's creation and implementation.

It may be necessary to silo responses to 'vulnerability' depending on the circumstances of the incident, necessitating a split between frontline policing versus community policing. Both fall under the broad umbrella of policing, like 'vulnerability'. However, their responses permit for a variety of approaches to different types of 'vulnerability' - the immediate short term, and the long term.

Despite this emerging hybrid system, the image of the police charging in to prevent danger is a prevalent cultural touchstone for the public and the institution alike (Reiner, 2010). This desire for a hands-on, guns blazing approach - whether it be literal or metaphorical - can lead to the police reacting, rather than necessarily responding to 'vulnerability'. This next section explores this idea further, by examining the need for control of 'vulnerability' through the wielding of police authority, and police assumptions about their own authority.

Police reacting versus responding to 'vulnerability'

The police, rather than responding to 'vulnerability', can instead be guilty of reacting (Scott, 1998). There can be a strong sense of performance in reactive policing, with the belief that it is better to do (or be seen to do) something rather than nothing (Scott, 1999):

"I think policing's always seen itself as a 'can-do' organisation. I think we frustrate the hell out of partners because we bang the table, raise an issue and run off to try and do something about it. Not necessarily concerned with whether it's the right thing to do, just to be seen to do something and then we have to undo the bits that were wrong." (Bobby, Executive Management)

"Historically, we would run in and get hands on, I think people have got more alive to the thing that, let's just see what we've got, let's just calm down a bit really and see what we're dealing with." (Sunny, Chief Inspector)

There can be a desire to fix problems immediately to exert a form of control, and a need to be seen to do something rather than nothing. There is also a hint of arrogance mixed with martyrdom within this mindset: the police alone are both the only ones capable of fixing the problem, and ones responsible for doing so. Such an approach can have issues, like the proverbial bull in a China shop. Through the lens of 'vulnerability', however, the police are offered a different way of operating. Rather than charging in – literally or metaphorically – considering the 'vulnerability' within their response can lead to more effective outcomes:

"Actually, as time has gone on, certainly if I was being in command, what is the rush? Let's get that time and space, put some containment around the premises, can we, depending on the relationship, can we, is there a social worker, is there a care worker, is there somebody that we can have onboard, just to explain what we're doing, either with communication barriers."
(Sunny, Chief Inspector)

The focus on 'vulnerability' has opened previously narrow mindsets on responding to incidents. As highlighted in the 'Informed about' chapter, the focus on 'vulnerability' has encouraged some officers and staff to be open-minded. Rather than the police shouldering the burden of responsibility alone, other partners are brought in so their experience and knowledge can assist decision making. There is the recognition here that the traditional policing approach is not necessarily the most appropriate for any given situation. 'Vulnerability' providing a variety of avenues rather than a one size fits all approach.

However, the nebulous nature and the extreme focus on 'vulnerability' can combine into a nebulous response. This response from a mental health nurse offers an outsider's view on the force's attitude towards 'vulnerability':

"This force get very embroiled in it, and they send police to every job where it looks like someone is vulnerable, whereas in (other), it's ambulance because ambulance are better equipped at dealing with vulnerable people than the police, because sometimes police can make the situation - it's not their fault, it's just that their presence can make the situation more tense, and hostile, whereas you don't hear - it doesn't really happen that much with paramedics, because they're there for a different purpose and there for the caring role."
(Blair, Mental Health Nurse)

Partners within the studied force can become frustrated with the reactive policing approach. The presence of the police and their hands-on approach can be interpreted as interfering and hostile rather than helpful. The police react, rather than respond. There is also the suggestion that the police do not perform a caring role, with that responsibility better placed with other agencies instead. The desire for an immediate, short-term response can 'embroil' the police in scenarios where their presence is not appropriate nor needed.

The vague definition of 'vulnerability' as a concept can facilitate confusion and misapprehension of the police's responsibilities in practice, which in turn can facilitate a confused and misapprehended response. There is the implication that the police can therefore respond to all 'vulnerabilities' simply by default. Whilst the police may hang back in some

scenarios and let other agencies take the lead, Blair suggest this approach is inconsistent. Her thoughts also highlight that whilst the police may be aware of their authority and institutional associations in theory and upon reflection, this awareness again may not be recognised consistently in practice.

The complex and varying nature of 'vulnerability' may require the police to press pause on their own desires to immediately react, and instead search for a more effective response. The early intervention scheme for repeat demand callers provides an example of a response to complex vulnerabilities – rather than necessarily pursuing a criminal justice avenue, a reaction which could worsen the situation for the individual.

There is the recognition of the authority and power that officers and staff carry with them by the very nature of their role:

"...we're the voice of the voiceless" (Alex, Response Officer)

There is the implication of the white knight here, which is problematic given the patronising nature of 'vulnerability' as a term (Campbell, 1991; Dodds, 2007). An early intervention officer I spoke with during observations had a similar perception of their police role. In their experience, some service users needed a voice louder than theirs to be heard by agencies and the EIO can fulfil that role. The police can be an 'annoyance' to other agencies in order to arrange meetings for the service user. The EIO can use their authority to facilitate interventions from other agencies to address the individual's 'vulnerabilities', which may have previously fallen through the cracks in the system. Theoretically, the use of their authority is meant to empower the individual rather than simply lead them along. Whether the theory matches practice is unknown. There is little reflection that the police's assignation of the EIO, and that officer's allegiance to the institution, may be enough to compel individuals to co-operate (see Innes, 2005)

The 'voice of the voiceless' may be a romanticized but understandable responsibility taken on by some members of the police. There is, however, a sticking point when considering the police as an institution's long history of marginalising those same groups and silencing those same voices (Bartkowiak-Theron & Asquith, 2017). The institution of the police is ultimately the law enforcement arm of the State. The role of the State is to coerce the shaping of individuals into an economically viable, law-abiding and obedient citizen (Hunter, 2011). To be responsible as the voice of the voiceless risks speaking for the vulnerable. It risks miscommunication, mistranslation – and manipulation for political purposes. Discourses on

'vulnerability' more often not are leveraged by pre-existing power dynamic (Butler, 2006; Fineman, 2008; Munro & Scoular, 2012). Further, those who feel 'vulnerable' or are 'vulnerable' should preferably be given the space and the platform to speak for themselves. The Early Intervention scheme may facilitate this provision in the short term.

The authority carried by officers and staff by the nature of their role can be used to benefit the 'vulnerable' service users with whom they are in contact. There is the recognition that the police themselves are not always best suited to lead the response to 'vulnerability', but said recognition fails to be carried over consistently into practice. The nature of policing practice itself can be an obstacle to responding effectively to 'vulnerable' situations:

"So, I'm turning up and there's loads of police officers and then there's just me, and police officers can be intimidating, not for any fault of their own, it's the uniform, it's the police cars, it's the way that they are, they're police, it's intimidating, it can be scary." (Blair, Mental Health Nurse)

The police are not considered at fault by Blair for the emotions that they can stir - it is the nature of their work, their culture and the history of the institution. Rather than presenting as an individual, the uniform can remove personal features and align them firmly with the State (McCarthy, 2013). There is a growing recognition that the authority embodied within the uniform can be utilised to facilitate a response, as discussed previously – but can also be put aside in order to facilitate a more appropriate response, depending on the 'vulnerability' of the circumstances.

Putting on the role: the presence and absence of the police uniform in response to vulnerability

Observations in the Harm Reduction Hubs provided insight to decision making concerning discretion and self-presentation. Appropriate clothing played a discretionary role. The policing uniform carries the cultural idea of the institution, embodying the legitimacy and authority as the law enforcement arm of the State (McCarthy, 2013). The uniform, however, can carry much more than that: the troubled and controversial historical legacy of the police, particularly for certain individuals and communities. The uniform can inspire trust - but also coerce behaviour (Mauro, 1984).

Both the MARAC officer and officer responsible for offender management in the hub preferred to wear their own clothes instead of uniforms when paying home visits. Despite the dichotomy of individuals that they were responsible to respond to - offenders and victims - there was recognition that both groups had some things in common. Specifically, this subset of individuals may be more likely to have had negative interactions with the police, represented by the uniform. Victims of sexual violence and domestic abuse may have last seen the uniform on the night they called for help, which may be the same night of an assault and associated trauma. The officers explained their understanding that the individual may therefore have trauma associated with the uniform (Robinson, 2017). Wearing one's 'street' clothes presents them as another human being first, and a police officer second. As much power as the uniform can carry, it can also be dehumanising as a costume representing an institution. Putting the uniform aside can simultaneously put aside a cognitive wall that can be placed between police and service users.

Similarly, there is a need to work with offenders and the uniform can counteract that. Working with an offender involves building a relationship and providing relevant services so that they do not re-offend.

Consideration of the experiences and feelings of those with whom they interact demonstrates the recognition of intersubjectivity and need for discretion through the lens of 'vulnerability'. 'Vulnerability' permits different ways of communication, including discretion. Discretion highlights the choices available to police officers in their responses and decision making. For example, the officer reviewing DIALs was also responsible for speaking to service users experiencing abuse - and making choices concerning how that communication occurred. The officer needed to ensure that a potential victim of domestic abuse is alone during their visit, whether their interaction occurs over the phone or face to face It also signifies an acknowledgement that the police carry the history of the institution with them – and that history can be an obstacle to responding to individuals effectively. The need for discretion when responding to domestic abuse demonstrates an understanding that the police themselves can increase the 'vulnerability' of an individual or incident by their very involvement. Discretion, through the 'vulnerability' framework within policing, can enhance the services that the police provide to those in their communities.

In order to counteract the 'vulnerability' of offenders, victims and other service users, the policing response can be broadly described by one word - 'safeguarding'. This next section

evaluates 'safeguarding' as a term within policing: its definition; how it operates in practice; and how it is assumed to link to 'vulnerability'.

Safeguarding as a response

'Safeguarding' was a term that repeatedly occurred during observations specifically. There are several different definitions that attempt to pin down what the term means in practice. In 'Working together to safeguard children' (Department of Education, 2015), 'safeguarding' is defined as:

- protecting children from maltreatment;

- preventing impairment of children's health or development;

- ensuring that children are growing up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care;

- taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes For adults, the Care Act (2014) defines the practice as:

- protecting the rights of adults to live in safety, free from abuse and neglect

- people and organisations working together to prevent and stop both the risks and experience of abuse or neglect

- people and organisations making sure that the adult's wellbeing is promoted including, where appropriate, taking fully into account their views, wishes, feelings and beliefs in deciding on any action

- recognising that adults sometimes have complex interpersonal relationships and may be ambivalent, unclear or unrealistic about their personal circumstances and therefore potential risks to their safety or well-being

'Safeguarding' is therefore a broad term to describe the appropriate police response to 'vulnerability'. Safeguarding is also the responsibility of other organisations: social services, schools, the NHS, religious organisations, universities, amongst others (Department, of Education, 2015; Care Act, 2014). Everyone, it appears, is responsible for safeguarding. None of the definitions effectively define which agency is responsible for which aspect of safeguarding.

The operationalisation of safeguarding as a response to 'vulnerability' was mainly gleaned through observation. The most demonstrative examples of safeguarding came from the harm reduction hubs, where the 'ownership' of safeguarding was a prominent responsibility. For example, their aforementioned role in reviewing the DIALs and MARAC is focused on safeguarding those involved. MARAC is also primarily focused on safeguarding interventions in cases of domestic violence, not investigations (which are owned by CID). The hub has ownership of safeguarding relating to incidents involving homicides, sexual violence and child abuse. Those in the hub explained to me that their priority is not solely safeguarding the victims: they were responsible for the safeguarding of the victim's family, as well as the alleged perpetrator and their family in case of reprisals. Safeguarding the community was also of wider concern in cases of homicide and wider public violence, as such incidents can negatively impact the local community. Funerals also fell under the remit of the hub: if the deceased was a gang member, high profile or a child. It was rare for the police to play an active role in these scenarios, but to provide a background presence – just in case, which was a frequent justification provided during observations.

The protection element of safeguarding as a response to 'vulnerability' was observed as an embedded practice whilst at the hub. The first meeting of the day involves the hub staff discussing 'vulnerable' individuals that have come to their attention, usually through a referral from another police unit or agency. The primary question that needed to be answered during these meetings was 'are we worried about this person?' The answer was usually yes – and then discussion would begin on the most appropriate response to the identified vulnerabilities of the person.

I witnessed a similar practice in custody. The risk assessment that the sergeants completed based on the answers of the detained person was also referred to as the individual's care plan. The explanation for the care plan was described as a method 'so we know how to look after you'.

Rather than an explanation that used the official and clinical policing language of safeguarding, risk and 'vulnerability', officers and staff chose to communicate about and with service users with less formality. The language chosen also highlights the care aspect of the policing responsibility towards 'vulnerability' in practice. 'Vulnerable' or 'vulnerability' was a term that I rarely heard used when staff were in direct communication with service users. Such an absence is a reminder that the label of 'vulnerable' or 'vulnerability' is for police

officers and staff as gatekeepers – not for service users. Language and labels can also create distance between people. The avoidance of clinical police-speak with service users may be an attempt to close that distance, facilitating more effective rapport and communication with service users.

The responsibilities for safeguarding range far beyond the walls of the unit's environment. Detained persons were asked about their dependents during the risk assessment. The motivation was to ensure that their dependents are not seriously affected by the detained person being in custody. For example, details of a detained person were sent to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub when the individual reported that they had small children, who were presently staying with their partner. The referral to MASH revealed that the detained person's partner did not have permission to see their children, owing to an investigation by social services and a ruling by Family Court. Learning this information triggered a call to social services, in order to remove the children from the partner's presence.

The responsibility for safeguarding as a response operates across a wide spectrum within policing. 'Vulnerability' simultaneously operates across a wide spectrum, hence the need for a response that mirrors the identification of the concept. Safeguarding as a response to 'vulnerability' demonstrates the demand for consideration of numerous scenarios relating to harm or potential harm within everyday policing practice. The response also demonstrates the need for multi-agency communication, alongside the promotion of caring and protective language to facilitate effective communication.

Communication as an effective practice for identification was demonstrated elsewhere (see previous chapter). In this next section, attributes of soft skills deployed in communication are examined as a response to 'vulnerability'.

Active listening, validation, reassurance: soft skills as a response to 'vulnerability'

Not all incidents where 'vulnerability' was identified required an official procedure for intervention. Instead, I observed that a proficiency in soft skills were an effective response in some scenarios:

"...because vulnerability can manifest itself in many different types of people and for many different reasons, you have to have an extremely open mind and having some empathy helps too" (Response Officer)

The attitude of officers and staff were an essential component of an effective response. This was demonstrated consistently during my observations of contact services. Information gathering is a significant priority for this unit. However, callers can often be emotional, causing issues with communication (Ames & Bousch, 2013). The initial response of call handlers involved validation and reassurance. Whilst this practice was motivated by a need to gather and clarify information, many call handlers told me they considered such an approach part of the help that they provide in the role. Validation of emotions, especially distress, did appear to be effective in mitigating the 'vulnerability' of said emotions. Feeling 'vulnerable' is an area of the literature that has yet to be explored: the focus has been on its definition, conceptualisation and application as a term.

Call handlers and dispatchers assigned different gradings to incidents, prioritised by the assessed risk involved. Grade 1 was the highest assignment, indicating high risk of harm and requiring an immediate response by police officers. During observations, I witnessed call handlers offering to stay on the phone with the caller until response officers arrived on the scene. Call handlers offered validation of whatever emotion the caller expressed, providing reassurance by updating them with the location of the response team. Call handlers would also attempt to distract the caller and fill in any silences by asking neutral questions concerning hobbies, interests and weekend plans. This practice demonstrates how emotions, and their mitigation, are closely tied to expectations concerning the 'vulnerability' of the caller – not necessarily their vulnerability to harm, but their feelings of 'vulnerability' owing to the uncertainty surrounding the incident.

Some policing roles are directly deployed to mitigate emotions and feelings of 'vulnerability'. I was told how PSCOs can occasionally be deployed in what was described to me in observation as a 'there, there' exercise for incidents that do not necessarily involve violence and may not be investigated by CID owing to resources. Examples included burglaries, or cars stolen from driveways. The purpose of this practice was to give validation and reassurance to the community.

The tone of this explanation, however, suggested that some officers and staff disliked this practice and found it to be a waste of time. This highlights the prioritisation of violent crime and physical crime over others that may involve financial or emotional harm alone. Such prioritising again suggests that 'vulnerability' mainly relates to physical harm, with the tools of reassurance and validation required for these incidents alone rather than across the

spectrum of policing incidents. Reassurance and validation may therefore be a means to an end for some officers and staff, a public relations technique, rather than a vital tool for an effective response to 'vulnerability'.

The link between feelings and 'vulnerability' was also highlighted in discussions with the PCSOs who are involved in the Early Intervention scheme for repeat demand service users. The officers use the 'vulnerability' aid provided by the College of Policing in order to explore the experiences and feelings of the service user. The EIOs that I spoke with asserted the usefulness of the aid: that many of their clients had never been asked about their problems or feelings. The aid allowed both the service user and EIO to pinpoint issues, emotions and experiences in order to gain a better understanding of what the service user needed going forward. Active listening was a significant part of EIO training, with an introduction to the practice included in the College of Policing training on 'vulnerability'. Active listening has had significant support in literature concerning work that directly involves supporting others (Beune et al., 2011). The practice has also received support as an appropriate and effective tool in some areas of policing, particularly crisis communication (Royce, 2005; Rojano, 2005).

'Vulnerability' can therefore be responded to through the attitudes and interpersonal approaches of police officers and staff. Validation is the acknowledgement of feelings and distress, whilst reassurance is an attempt to give comfort and security. Both are social tactics to mitigate feelings of 'vulnerability' that the individual is assumed to be experiencing, owing to the nature of the inciting incident. Soft skills aid communication by gathering and imparting information that can impact on the situational 'vulnerability'. This approach, however, risks being limited to certain individuals and related incidents over others, falling in a similar hierarchy to that examined in the previous chapter - rather than being deployed as an effective tool embodied within all policing responses.

Alongside this approach to 'vulnerability', referrals resulted in a more procedural response. Referrals ensured that information was passed on to more appropriate partner agencies, or as an extra measure alongside other responses. Referrals can also be an indirect method of transferring the responsibility for the individual, as the 'ownership' of the incident is moved on.

Information gathering and exchange: referrals as a response to 'vulnerability'

Referrals could be made to other police units, such as the harm reduction hub, or other relevant agencies:

"So, you can always refer somebody." (Ainslie, PCSO)

"But again, I would probably pass all that information on to another department and say, this is my recommendation. Please look into it." (Alex, Response Officer)

Referrals highlighted a particular individual and their circumstances, or 'vulnerabilities' to both police and their partners. Daily management meetings of the harm reduction hubs involved both the police and representatives from other agencies. The initial investigation involved past referrals, if any: for what reason, how it was resolved and what was the last action taken.

Updates from other agencies were requested, whether they were present or not, and decisions were made concerning which agency was best placed to respond. In some cases, several different agencies needed to respond, which were based on the identified 'vulnerabilities' of an individual.

The police were not always the lead agency. The responsibility of the police for referrals was determined by their role. The harm reduction hub officers were primarily responsible for the oversight of other agencies' response to 'vulnerabilities'. Response officers, custody sergeants and call handlers are responsible for making referrals themselves:

"It's like, we set it in motion and it's like us literally saying, there you go, over to you, sort it." (Alex, Response Officer)

A referral therefore hands responsibility of the response over to the next relevant agency. The initial referral is the responsibility of the police as part of their role. In observation, I noted the wide range of agencies with whom the police refer to: the police appeared to be given the responsibility of getting the individual the most effective and appropriate support via referrals. Referrals signal that the identified 'vulnerability' of the individual or circumstances are not within the police's remit for response.

The use of referrals as a response to 'vulnerability' lays the foundation for an understanding of how embedded multi-agency working is within policing and its response to 'vulnerability':

"We seem to work with that many different agencies now, where we turn up, we make an evaluation and we're making evaluations within 10, 15 minutes of just knowing somebody. Then, we refer them onto another agency." (Alex, Response Officer)

The reactive nature of frontline policing's response to 'vulnerability' results in little time to dive deeply into the circumstances of the incident – judgements and decisions can be made within this short window of time. This could be problematic for both service users and the police if 'vulnerabilities' are glossed over or ill-judged. The referral passes the judgements, rather than the 'vulnerabilities', over to another agency – which now holds the responsibility.

Relationships between officers and staff in their local neighbourhood policing team are significant in terms of policing ownership of particular 'vulnerabilities'. In observation and interviews, the strength of their relationships appeared to ensure effective and appropriate identification and response to 'vulnerable' individuals and situations. Sharing information, knowledge, experience and opinion is common between team members:

"And if I was unsure about something, I'd go to a supervisor at the time. So, I don't think there would be anything that I wouldn't feel comfortable in necessarily addressing" (Terry, PCSO)

"If I'm unsure though of certain things then I would come back to my colleagues, and say, this person's got an issue with this, should I be concerned about that, and just get their advice, really. Some of my colleagues have been here years and years, and sometimes I find myself, oh, I haven't come across that before, so yes, I do always check." (Robin, PCSO)

"So, everything that we've just covered between me and my colleagues, we would have dealt with something similar in the past, and if we haven't, which I can't imagine a situation where we haven't dealt with something similar, we've got a multitude of backup within the police force." (Sam, PCSO)

"It is just having that availability of somebody as I've said earlier in the interview, just to phone up and go 'you know what, I don't know what I'm doing here, help' really." (Sunny, Chief Inspector)

The police can be considered knowledge holders of 'risk' (Hagerty & Ericson, 1998): it is fair to say that they are now considered knowledge holders concerning 'vulnerability' too. However, different officers and staff members have different knowledge concerning 'vulnerability' depending on their experiences and roles. Policing partners are also knowledge

holders of 'vulnerability'. In observation, I witnessed team members across each unit discuss incidents and options for decision making at length. These discussions were usually neutral, each member weighing in, regardless of rank. The final decisions were left to police officers: sergeants (custody), sergeants (Harm Reduction Hubs) and Force Duty Officers (Contact services). In contact services, there is also a civilian Control Room manager, who holds a powerful position in decision making. For example, both individuals must be consulted in decision making surrounding the grading of domestic violence incidents. Ownership of final decisions are sprinkled across the roles and ranks, increasing proportionally to the unit hierarchy. There is a responsibility on behalf of the team to share experiences and knowledge of 'vulnerability' in order to support the decision making in that role (Pinkney et al., 2008)

The harm reduction hub and the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub can be considered to possess the most 'knowledge' in terms of 'vulnerability', concerning not only specific crimes but local areas. Not only can they offer insight into identification, both hubs can be a mechanism for response on behalf of other officers and staff:

"We have a (Harm Reduction) Hub mechanism that's two police officers, one member of staff who's a coordinator [unclear] and a sergeant. And they're dedicated to dealing with vulnerable people in the [Name] area. So, you can always refer somebody to them if you want. And they'll pick the person up, pick the case up as such and then pass it to the appropriate people, organisations..." (Ainslie, PCSO)

The way in which 'vulnerability' is responded to often relies on who you know, rather than what you know. Some response officers appeared to be unsure what the harm reduction hub was or how it operated. The name of the hub also changed several times, initially named a 'Vulnerability hub' - and no one could explain whether it was a physical unit, a row of desks in a police station or online. By the end of my first year, it was changed to the Partnership Hub. By the time observations rolled around, it was called the Harm Reduction hub. Confusion over the operational purpose of the hub within the police itself was not surprising.

Relationships were also highlighted as a significant contributing factor to multi-agency working, a practice that has been emphasised as necessary whilst responding to 'vulnerability' (Menichilli, 2019). This next section delves into multi-agency working as a response, and the conditions that are needed for positive collaboration.

Multi-agency working as a response to 'vulnerability'

Some individuals have multiple 'vulnerabilities' requiring agencies to work together. Some agencies can have clear boundaries, such as CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health services), New Era (Domestic Violence services for victims and perpetrators) and Housing. Liaison and diversion services in custody were tasked with detecting and responding to a variety of different 'vulnerabilities': physical disabilities; mental health; learning disabilities; cognitive disabilities; homelessness; immigration status; asylum seekers; juveniles; drugs; domestic abuse; sexual exploitation; personality disorders; homelessness; unemployment; gambling addiction; veterans; self-harm or suicidal behaviour. During observation, L&D staff asserted that they tackle anything and everything: they never said an issue did not belong with them. The services successfully removed a considerable amount of the workload and responsibility for identifying and responding to 'vulnerabilities' from the police officers working in custody.

The purpose of multi-agency working as an avenue to find the root of an individual's or incident's issue can be related to demand:

"...we've got mental health involved, and we've got housing involved. We can get to the root of the problem. And try and get them stabilised, which then reduces the calls to us, reduces the need for the other agencies." (Lou, Response Officer)

L&D had a particular focus on reducing repeat offending, just as the Early Intervention scheme was tasked with reducing repeat callers to contact services. There is a pragmatic purpose to these approaches, as such schemes attempt to reduce overall demand for the police.

L&D were based in custody alongside police sergeants and custody detention officers. From observation, this built a solid foundation of relationships between the partners, facilitating conversations concerning the 'vulnerabilities' of a specific individual. Good working relationships were highlighted as a vital component to effective multi-agency working:

"...all the partner agencies we've got close links with because we work with them all the time, speak to them every day. So, we've got good personal relationships between us and social services and accounts and housing associations, that's another one we work with a lot."
(Ainslie, PCSO)

"Well, we've got a lot of contacts, so I'd drop them an email, I'd sit with the vulnerable person, phone different services. We do have a (Harm Reduction) Hub, so if I'm really concerned about different areas of their life then I would refer them on to that. It's basically a panel, like housing, council, mental health, New Era, that sort of thing, and they all sort of come into one and make a decision about what to do, so that's a good connection." (Sam, PCSO)

Knowing who to speak to and how can be a straightforward necessity of responding to 'vulnerability'. Working closely with partners can facilitate those relationships with the police, which in turn can facilitate more knowledgeable and effective decision making in relation to 'vulnerable' people and their circumstances:

"I just get as much information as I can, largely, from the person that I'm speaking to. From the systems that we have in place obviously I can gain information, the people that they've spoken to, we have a nursing team here, a liaison and diversion team. Basically, I get as much information as I possibly can to be able to formulate opinions that I might have of that person, to best help them, how I best proceed with them as well." (Kit, Custody Sergeant)

Partners can be physically located in the same building as police officers, or close by. Contact services were in the same room as the Missing Persons Investigative Team, which permitted smoother communication between staff. The urban harm reduction hub was in the same building as most of their partners. The more remote harm reduction hub struggled with partner meetings owing to the location, with some agencies have strict localised boundaries of operation. But the hub was located on the same corridor as New Era, an agency for victims and perpetrators of domestic violence. I observed colleagues from both agencies interacting frequently, and their close locale was highlighted as a boon for their working relationship.

Healthcare professionals (HCPs) are another partner located in custody alongside L&D. HCPs have access to the NHS service, which permits the police a further pathway for gathering relevant information concerning the health and potential vulnerability of a detained person. The HCP cannot give the police access to the system, nor share any other information, deciding what is relevant to share with the police. The mental health triage operates with the same protocol.

This process sidesteps significant issues with privacy and consent, specifically the alarming implication of police oversight into the healthcare sector. This practice is reciprocal: the

police can check the Police National Computer but can only share relevant information with partners.

There is a clear delineation of responsibilities concerning the partner systems and their knowledge. Working alongside partners demonstrates a willingness not only to share information but to share responsibility:

"You also started to see internally, other units coming together to start to have collective conversations instead of isolated conversations in respect of their - and that joint ownership" (Charlie, Executive Management)

During observations, I witnessed numerous conversations between the custody sergeants, healthcare professionals and L&D staff. For example, a sergeant was confident that the individual could be released on police bail, and the L&D staff member was confident that the individual would co-operate with counselling options. There were concerns, however, from the HCP about the physical health of the individual as they were elderly and quite frail. All three staff members discussed options for helping the individual get home and ensure that they were safe there. It was decided that they would just talk to the individual to explain their concerns, the options they had and see what they themselves thought. Whilst the police can certainly use the information provided by L&D and the HCP, the responsibility for decision-making remains with custody sergeants alone.

Partners can provide further knowledge from their training and experience, and be privy to different information owing to the very nature of their role – the role of not being the police:

"You do generally tend to chat about...people's lives and stuff, and people, and I think people open up to us more than they say, more than say the sergeants or the officers because I don't think they really associate us with being in police if you know what I mean, we're just there to look after them." (Sandy, Custody Detention Officer)

The health checks performed by the healthcare professionals and the assessments by L&D in custody can operate as another opportunity to gather information on individuals and their 'vulnerabilities'. Some individuals do not wish to engage with police officers. During observation, the healthcare professional told me that private assessment allows the individual to disclose any other issues that they are having but may not wish to disclose to the police. Like the use of systems to pass on information, the decision to inform police staff is

determined by the HCP. They also asserted that individuals are considerably less likely to be hostile to custodial staff than to police officers.

'Vulnerability' is therefore rarely seen in isolation, but in multiples. The crossover of 'vulnerabilities' demands more agencies to be involved other than the police in a single incident. The most prominent example was the introduction of the mental health triage scheme. This scheme employed mental health nurses to work alongside police officers attending mental health incidents: the mental health nurse takes the lead by assessing the individual, with the police performing more of a secondary, quasi-detainment role unless a section 136 is needed. The mental health nurse can aid the section 136, and can aid police understanding of mental health more broadly:

"I have been able to work with these nurses over the years which has dramatically increased my confidence in dealing with vulnerable people because I have been able to learn from their skillset and take on their valuable advice." (Leslie, Response Officer)

"So, there will always be knowledge gaps, we won't know everything, certainly, not so much now, now we've got services such as mental health triage car, that has bridged a massive gap" (Sunny, Chief Inspector)

The contribution of different knowledge from experience and role-specific education has been highlighted as a positive aspect of training partners together:

"But there is something really rich in doing partnership training, where teams can learn from each other." (Bobby, Executive Management)

Partners have multiple opportunities to learn from each other on the job concerning specific 'vulnerabilities'. Each role still has its responsibilities: in this case, the mental health nurse is responsible for assessing mental health, with the police responsible for assessing risk. The triage is not only used for incidents relating to mental health alone, but for when mental health and crime crossover:

"About eighty percent of our job is domestic violent related. I mean, it depends. The police get there, they deal with the domestic. And then following the domestic, they'll - one of the partners - will potentially say 'I feel suicidal', and then we go in after that point and deal with it." (Blair, Mental Health Nurse)

Despite the need for an immediate, short-term response on behalf of frontline policing, the aftermath of incidents can carry 'vulnerability' for those involved in incidents. The mental health triage scheme immediately attends to that new and emerging 'vulnerability', once the criminal element has been handled by the police. Some reflections from the frontline included in this thesis suggest that there is a distinct difference between 'vulnerability' in relation to crime, and 'vulnerability' in relation to mental health. The experience of the mental health nurse subverts this dichotomous expectation, and simultaneously demonstrates how the police can slip easily into embroilment with mental health more generally.

The first analysis chapter highlighted how the police primarily conceive of the term through work-based experience. Their education on 'vulnerability' comes from their working practice, which now can include the knowledge and experience of their partners. An expansion of knowledge concerning 'vulnerability' is not the only avenue opened by partnership working. The practice also provides the police with more appropriate and effective responses to 'vulnerable' people and scenarios:

"…the police are so limited in what they can do at the house, they can't do anything - if they don't have a service like [the mental health triage scheme], then they can't do anything."
(Blair, Mental Health Nurse)

"Now, and like I say with the CPN that we have, it's fantastic, because the CPN that we have has got all the numbers. And they will get answered by their colleagues quicker than we will if the police ring it in, because it always seems this battle between us and other agencies."
(Lou, Response Officer)

Working with partners can overcome the boundaries of police limitations – not by handing the police more powers, but by bringing in partners that are more appropriate and effective in their response. Other than section 135/6, there is very little that the police can do in terms of mental health incidents. The chapter on appropriate and appropriated vulnerability has described their decisions to pursue criminal justice pathways as a more pragmatic approach – but within the context of policing, rather than an individual's wellbeing. The mental health triage scheme achieves both.

The first half of this chapter explored the different options available for the police to respond - even if some of these options are problematic reactions, rather than effective intervention. This section shifts expands on the problems of police responses by investigating the barriers

that can blockade them, including barriers erected by the same partner agencies with whom they are required to work closely.

Theme Two: Barriers to police responses to 'vulnerability'

Barriers to frontline responses to 'vulnerability'

The short-term nature of frontline policing, that requires immediate involvement, can collide with partnership working. A significant number of agencies operate 9 to 5, five days a week. The police are open 24/7, every day of the year. The difference in operating hours prevents the police from accessing relevant information to make immediate decisions relating to 'vulnerability'.

Custody can rely on HCPs and L&D, whilst the mental health triage has offered some relief to the frontline. But the scheme only involves one nurse per shift and can be limited to certain areas. The lack of information therefore can be a consistent problem for the frontline:

"Yes, sometimes we don't get. the correct information when we're going to a job, or responding to a job, or with an individual. We could be going out and dealing with somebody for something. if an individual is known to us for mental health, which means that if they come off their medication they then decide to run down the street with no clothes on. But if we haven't identified that he's come off his medication, which then makes you do crazy things like running around the street naked, or something like that. That then, like I say, we haven't identified his vulnerability, which has caused the action that we're dealing with." (Lou, Response Officer)

"Sometimes, the immediacy to attend an incident outweighs the desire to wait for further information from mental health teams about a person, which can take some time. This can cause problems because sometimes a person's behaviour can be the result of something that may be on their mental health record and would be extremely useful information to have on route to an incident" (Leslie, Response Officer)

",,some of the real barriers are out of hours, getting somebody's history, getting an understanding for that individual because the police system only holds so much. So, it's that free passage, that free flow of information." (Sunny, Chief Inspector)

The exchange of knowledge and information is clearly of significant importance to the effectiveness and appropriateness of a police response to 'vulnerability'. But the different operating hours and limited resources of other agencies can obstruct decision making. Ignorance of 'vulnerabilities' involved can cause officers and staff to make ineffective or inappropriate decisions that would have been avoided if the information was accessible. The officers and staff are held responsible for those actions - lack of information may not be considered a good enough excuse.

A further issue is legislation. General Data Protection Regulation (2016) fines agencies for sharing information without the explicit consent of individuals. Awareness of GDPR, and misunderstanding the legislation, can cause problems:

"Alongside each force is then each partner, each organisation, and I think we're doing things for the right reasons, and I don't think it's the willingness of organisations not to share information, it's the fear of organisations getting a bill from data protection and Information Commissioner's Office. That stops us sharing information." (Bobby, Executive Management)

GDPR was considered a significant issue by contact services during observation, as call handlers were unclear what information they could or could not share. The legislation does not lend itself to policing, which can require immediate action. Police officers and staff may not be highly concerned with consent and privacy in the pursuit of information to make immediate decisions regarding 'vulnerable' situations or people. Agencies have sidestepped the legislation by working together explicitly and sharing information from their respective systems.

The different working hours were compounded by further multi-agency issues, such as the distinct thresholds that partners have surrounding 'vulnerability' and 'risk'.

Thresholds as a barrier

Most agencies have a narrow set of parameters for 'vulnerability' to determine service provision for their users. The police have the lowest threshold of any agency, primarily owing to their powers relating to arrest and detainment. The expectation of an immediate response and intervention via the frontline plays a role here too. The police have significantly fewer official parameters to determine a response, as they provide 'front door' for the criminal justice system and the wider public sector.

The concept of 'vulnerability' has somewhat permitted partners to more closely speak the same language, as highlighted in an earlier chapter. But differing thresholds can prevent partners agreeing on when and how an individual becomes 'vulnerable' enough to warrant agency's response:

"Now - it has to go hand in hand, but again when you do partnership working, that can be really tricky. It's very heavily risk-based, and vulnerability is the ten questions, whereas with another organisation that you may be having a conversation about the same person, they'll be twenty questions on vulnerability and ten on risk." (Charlie, Executive Management)

It is 'risk', not 'vulnerability', that is the contested definition and conceptualisation here between agencies. Different priorities of different agencies can also lend more weight to the significance of one concept over the other. This can prevent individuals from accessing the most appropriate support:

"It's particularly hard with children with mental health issues that are verging on needing help, there's not much out there for young kids. There's CAMHS, Child Mental Health Adolescent Services, but their threshold's very high, so it's quite difficult with children." (Sam, PCSO)

"Lack of interventions is that they haven't met the criteria. If you put a family forward without knowing the ins and outs of the services that you're going for, perhaps a regular PCSO wouldn't know how to word things maybe. So, they don't meet the criteria. And one of the biggest things for that is CAMHS. Sometimes you can do an application and it doesn't meet the criteria." (Robin, PCSO)

Whilst the police can be gatekeepers of the 'vulnerable' role, partner agencies can also be the gatekeepers of 'vulnerability' within their specific area of responsibility. Partner responses to referrals can demonstrate this practice of gatekeeping. Police officers on the frontline can pass on the details of an individual to a service that would be more appropriate to address their relevant 'vulnerabilities' (see previous chapter). But referrals are unfortunately not always a silver bullet in practice:

"You can struggle with procedure because the referral process can be quite onerous, and send the referral off and it just disappears into the aether, and you never hear anything back and you can forget about it." (Ainslie, PCSO)

"…but we never really get to see what the outcome is, from (referrals). I mean, it doesn't have to be War and Peace. Just a quick email, something to say look, thanks for your referral. This is what we did for them. We'll keep monitoring. Something like two, three lines is all we, as response officers, need." (Response Officer)

Police officers and staff can be left in the dark as to whether the identified 'vulnerability' has been addressed by the relevant agency. Agencies have no requirement to reply to the police or confirm the referral. There is an expectation that the other agency will respond to the individual effectively, and the police no longer need to be involved. That assumption is not necessarily accurate:

"I find that some agencies, partnerships, you tell them what's going on, and then they're like, well, we can't help, go somewhere else. And then they send you from pillar to post and you're not getting anywhere." (Sam, PCSO)

"There can be a feeling of disconnect between the large organisations and the council, social services and schools. And it can feel like a struggle and then you refer someone to a partner

agency, [unclear] partner and then they say no, that's so and so's problem. And then refer back to you, and you end up going around in a loop." (Ainslie, PCSO)

Agencies pass the parcel, refusing to accept responsibility for an individual and their 'vulnerabilities'. Whilst thresholds can play a role, agencies can outright refuse referrals if they decide that the service user and the circumstances do not 'fit' within the agency's remit – even before the individual is assessed within the context of the agency threshold. The service user is therefore passed back to the police, who retain responsibility for said individual and must find another avenue for their 'vulnerabilities'. During observation, the contentious practice of pass the parcel between mental health services and drug service received frequent complaints. Mental health services asserted that they cannot help if the individual is misusing or addicted to drugs – but drug services can insist that the primary issue is mental health and not drugs. Another round of pass the parcel begins.

This partner practice can impact negatively on police officers by closing off avenues for appropriate response. Earlier in the chapter, there was a description of partners' annoyance at the police mentality of being hands on and in control, the practice of passing the parcel can ironically fuel the police mentality:

"…if you just hand it off to a different organisation and then leave it at that with them, it might not make any difference…however, I tend to keep hold of them myself, I work with them, but I tend to keep hold of them myself so I can keep an eye on that person." (Ainslie, PCSO)

There can be a breakdown in trust between the police and other agencies when one is perceived not to be pulling their weight in responding to 'vulnerable' individuals. There can then be the desire to control the response and assign responsibility to oneself. The mentality that only the police can handle 'vulnerability' creeps in, with the feeling that the police may be the only ones left to do so.

This sentiment is fuelled by the perceived use and abuse of police resources by other partner agencies. The police are expected to provide back-up, emergency or not, for partners and their workloads.

"I think we get used, and abused, more than we should": the police as the first resort for response

During observation, contact services often received phone calls from other agencies regarding their clients. These calls usually referred to the welfare of either the client, the staff or both. For example, an agency called about a client, and another agency had called about the same individual approximately an hour beforehand. Both agencies wanted the police to check on said individual. The call handler inquired why the level of concern, and why these agencies could not help. It was revealed that the individual had been turned away for being under the influence of alcohol. However, there was little clarity concerning how the agencies expected the police to respond. The scenario suggested that the agencies wanted to do something, rather than nothing, but without necessarily compromising their own responsibilities. Such a mindset appeared to be common:

"And it was always a case of, well, you're the police, deal with it. We're not the right people to deal with it." (Lou, Response Officer)

There is again the need to do something rather than nothing, and the gap between reality and expectation. Agencies want the police to intervene but are not necessarily clear on what that intervention means pragmatically. There is also the expectation that the police can, and should, do something – regardless of the circumstances. It is a knee-jerk response to an

uncertain, insecure and indeed 'vulnerable' moment by all involved (Cresswell, 2020; Loughran, 2018). The appropriateness or the effectiveness of police involvement did not appear to be a priority. Rather, the priority was offloading the workload, and attendant responsibility, elsewhere.

The police have become the first resort for agencies when faced with problems that other agencies decide are not within their remit:

"I think for the whole sometimes police get used for the wrong reasons. And it's to make it easier for other agencies, specifically social services, sometimes can be a bit of a nightmare. And it's a case of, can you just go out and do a check on A.N. Other, because they've rung us saying they want to kill themselves. Okay, that's fine. But you're a social worker. Why can't you go out and see how he is?" (Lou, Response Officer)

"I think there's probably lots that shouldn't be police business. But... we tend to be the fall-back emergency service." (Kit, Custody Sergeant)

"...it can be annoying, and it can feel like a Friday at half past four social services are away and go we're all going home for the weekend now. Just dump everything on the police and then we're stuck over the weekend with a load of missing high-risk kids, vulnerable people that we've got no support from the social services." (Ainslie, PCSO)

Calls for welfare checks were a source of considerable frustration for contact services and response officers. There is the consistent belief that frontline policing is used as a fallback service for the jobs – and responsibilities – which other agencies do not want to respond. There is also a distinct lack of reciprocity concerning the support that partners give each other (Cummins, 2018). Whilst there was an appreciation for a lack of resources, call handlers speculated that some agencies use this as an excuse to offload the burden of their roles and responsibilities onto the police. During the COVID-19 pandemic, a call handler speculated that other agencies were taking advantage of the unprecedented nature of the situation to avoid responsibility and take advantage of the police remaining open. The lack of real or perceived support in social services and similar agencies also signals the lack of a solid foundation for trust between agencies (Noga et al., 2014). The attitude demonstrated during my conversations veered between frustration and cynicism. It highlighted that some policing responsibilities are willingly embraced by those in the role, whilst others are simply shoved onto their plate by other agencies.

A past practice that caused tension involved partner agencies phoning the police to request a welfare check on a particular client. The request was usually triggered by a client missing an appointment earlier in the week. According to conversations during observations and interviews, these requests for a welfare check usually were phoned in around 4 o'clock on Friday afternoons, an hour before social services and similar agencies closed for the weekend. The police were then handed the responsibility to make sure that the individual was safe.

By the time I had begun observations, the police had stopped this practice. The police were able to draw a line in the sand, asserting their responsibility of responding to concerns for safety rather than concerns for welfare. Concerns for safety involved 'vulnerabilities' that had been flagged by either other agencies or the police themselves: sobriety, emotional state, previous incidents, mental health, indication of plans and communication with others. A welfare check had fewer concrete boundaries – but checking on someone who had simply missed an appointment was deemed not to be the responsibility of the police. The police do not have the resources to perform this specific function - nor the inclination:

"But a lot of the time, we're getting calls because somebody's phoned the crisis team and they're feeling a bit down and next minute, they're asking us to do a safe and welfare check on them. For me, I think well, that's not really my job. I joined the job to deal with crime..."
(Alex, Response Officer)

The rationale for the end of welfare checks went further, as they caused more harm than good. Service users would be interrupted by response officers turning up on their doorstep, solely because the individual missed an appointment with a different agency. The result was extreme distress on behalf of the service user, with the responding officers detained for several hours of their shift, tasked with calming them down. The checks demonstrated an unnecessary deployment of the police to carry out the work of other agencies. There is also a distinct sense of State overreach here, with service users being effectively punished for missing an appointment - which can happen for many reasons. Both the police and the agencies were therefore perpetrating and perpetuating the 'vulnerabilities' of their service users by unwarranted intrusion into their daily lives. Such tactics risk distressing and alienating service users to the point that they refuse to engage with agencies further. Any 'vulnerability' of the service user will then be missed by involved agencies.

The police were able to recognise that they themselves were making service users 'vulnerable' through this practice. There is recognition that the police are not always the most appropriate agency to respond, but they are unable to stop the practices of other agencies:

"... ambulance can be a bit naughty with that sometimes. They've got their own powers with Mental Capacity Act and stuff. And they choose not to evoke that. And we as the police can use it. We don't really. We say that's a power really for you, you use that. And they're a bit naughty that they'll ring us to try and get us to evoke our powers like the 136 and stuff, because it takes the responsibility away from them. So, yes, we do get used, and abused, sometimes for stuff that we don't need to, because other agencies won't use their own powers." (Lou, Response Officer)

The powers of ambulance permit the assessment and response to individuals who may not be able to make decisions for themselves, including mental illness (Mental Capacity Act 2005). Ambulance drivers do not have the power of section 136. I was told in observation that Ambulance services had been offered the opportunity to team up with the police and mental health nurses as part of the triage, but this was turned down[9]. However, officers and nurses reported that ambulance was encouraging service users to phone the police instead of them, informing them of the nurse's presence. Ambulance circumvented bureaucratic policies and procedures – as well as the cost of the scheme – and avoid responsibility for treating service users with mental health issues. However, the police are considerably less qualified to do so (Dehaghani, 2017). Self-harm, suicide attempts, drugs overdose and alcohol issues are manifestations of mental health and psychological issues, but the primary concern in the immediate situation is often one of health (Duncan et al., 2019; Rees et al., 2017). Whilst the police can certainly respond to the situational 'vulnerability', their efficacy in an emergency health situation is low.

Partner agencies can therefore refuse to use their designated powers in 'vulnerable' situations. Using designated powers involves taking responsibility for said powers: refusing to do so simultaneously refuses the responsibility. The police do not have that same right of refusal. The 'vulnerability' of the situation, in terms of uncertainty combined with decision making, is pushed onto them. This practice highlights the theme of agencies 'carrying' the 'risk' of the situation.

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[9] When I asked why Ambulance turned down the opportunity, I was only told 'politics' and nothing more.

Previously, the 'vulnerable' individual was pinpointed as carrying the 'risk' (Delor & Hubert, 1998). The tension between agencies suggests that practitioners can also carry the risk:

"I get that if you go out and you can't get a response then involve us. But he's obviously rung you for a reason kind of thing. So, that kind of thing is a bit frustrating, because we've all got the same training. We've all got the same sort of responsibilities. And it's like, I say, it's that knock on effect of putting the risk onto somebody else. So, yes, that kind of thing is a bit annoying." (Lou, Response Officer)

Agencies 'putting the risk' onto the police was a recurring complaint in both observations and interviews. The 'risk' or 'vulnerability' put on the police relates to the responsibility for decision-making – mainly if something were to go wrong. When other partner agencies refuse to perform their roles or use their responsibilities, they relinquish responsibility for the 'vulnerable' individual or incident should harm occur. The police are left holding the 'vulnerable' bag of responsibility.

Another example concerning this nonconsensual transfer of responsibility involved more calls to contact services. These calls usually involved a third party reporting an individual threatening to commit suicide. The third parties were often General Practitioners concerning patients, or staff at energy companies contacting customers in relating to the non-payment of bills. The individual mentioning of suicide prompted calls to the police.

For staff of energy companies, using the police as a response is understandable. The staff are not trained for those calls. The staff may not consider ambulance to be the appropriate response – again, there is the expectation that everything must go to the police for intervention. General practitioners, however, have a duty of safeguarding under their role within the NHS (Parekh-Hill et al., 2022; White & Alton, 2022). GPs encounter mental health problems regularly as part of their role (Fleury et al., 2020). An above quote highlights how the service user has phoned to speak to a specific practitioner, suggesting a need for support from that person. The service user has not phoned the police. When things do go wrong, the blame game starts (Mortensen, 2013; Jones, 2018). Other agencies can avoid blame all together by ringing the police. Rather than taking ownership of the situation and their own role in it, GPs and other services instead push the responsibility onto the police. Many members of the public sector have more appropriate training and knowledge, including a personal connection with the service user, to deal with the 'vulnerability' of the situation. The

police are instead used as an immediate default, rather than the final option (Weston, forthcoming).

There is therefore an overreliance on the police by other services to fill the gaps in their own service provision. This reliance passes the mantle of responsibility for vulnerable individuals that are ultimately under the care of these same services. The police are the law enforcement arm of the State: it is inappropriate for them to be involved in the management of service users by a completely different agency, demonstrating a severe lack of clarity surrounding the boundaries of agency roles (Neville et al., 2016)

The police can be roped into managing the service users of other agencies through a second avenue of demand: service users bypassing other agencies and coming to the police as last resort for help.

The police as a last resort for response by service users

The restrictive opening hours for services other than the police can cause significant problems for service users as a result:

"There's drug and alcohol services. But they're Monday to Friday, 9 to 5, there is no out of hours for drug and alcohol….and people are at ten times more risk of committing suicide when they're under the influences of substance, so that's where we come in, try and prevent that if we can." (Blair, Mental Health Nurse)

"(An individual close to the participant) works social services, I know (they're) 9 to 5, Monday to Friday. (They) work with vulnerable people from the physical side of things, and does a lot of work, but - (their) phone gets switched off at 5pm on a Friday." (Kit, Custody Sergeant)

Service users that need help outside of office hours are limited in who they can turn to, and so may turn to the police. As Blair explains, the time when individuals are most 'vulnerable' to suicidal ideation and behaviour is when the most appropriate practitioners are off the clock. This is a serious operational problem for practitioners, service users and the police alike. It also suggests a serious lack of both insight and oversight by the practitioners directly responsible for supporting this section of the population. The burden – and the responsibility – are therefore placed on the police, who are ill-equipped to respond effectively, but are legally required to do so (Mental Health Act, 1983).

Evidence has appeared that the operating procedures and treatment are also contributing to the stream of people reaching out to the police, rather than more suitable services:

"Mental Health services in the community have also been cut to the bone and this is having a huge impact on Policing. I find a large proportion of people I deal with have a mistrust or dissatisfaction with Mental Health Services and therefore would ironically call the Police to ask for help rather than a team that specialise in their needs." (Leslie, Response Officer)

"I'm going to be sitting here, and I'll use the word babysitting in inverted commas, this individual, because the other services weren't there, or just didn't care." (Lou, Response Officer)

"I hear the officers griping at we're the fall-back service, nobody else can help out, sometimes it falls back to the police" (Kit, Custody Sergeant)

"Numbers are declining within the police, as they are everywhere else. The frontline's getting a lot thinner" (Sunny, Chief Inspector)

There is a perception that other agencies do not care about service users, their own roles or the knock-on effect of the police. Whilst the police can be used as the agency of first response for partners, they are the last resort for service users. These service users have reached the end of their rope with other agencies, with the police the last refuge for potential help and support (HMIC, 2018: 8; Weston, forthcoming). In observation, I was told that repeat demand callers had often been let down or turned away from other services. The Early Intervention scheme was partially conceived in response to the significant cuts to mental health and other community services. The police are open 24 hours a day and 7 days a week – the prime agency to call at any hour, regardless of the circumstances.

A worryingly similar pattern emerged in observation and interviews with custody staff:

"...I think sometimes being in here is the only way for some people to get help because I know, we see a lot of people who've got mental health issues, I know there's a huge waiting list on the outside for them to get help whereas if they come in here, it's kind of a bit of a fast track because we've always got, not always, but someone's in here, eight till eight, from a mental health team that they can speak to. And I know that we have had people in here before that have kind of got arrested as a way of speaking to someone, like as a cry for help" (Sandy, Custody Detention Officer).

'Someone in here, eight till eight' refers to the members of Liaison and Diversion team, practitioners who specialise in a range of issues including mental health, personality disorders, homelessness, asylum seekers and autism (amongst many more). Liaison and diversion services are therefore a competent professional from which an individual can seek help. Those detainees who report mental health problems are automatically referred to L&D. However, meeting with L&D is still voluntary, so an individual may still choose not to seek help.

The cutbacks and lack of resources for relevant agencies outside custody are noted as having a significant impact, with waiting lists holding off assistance and documenting increasing need in mental health across society (Cummins, 2018; Olmstead, 2020). In custody, detainees can see a trained practitioner who can identify and help with their problems. This scheme may play a factor in mental health incidents and repeat demand calls, as it provides the opportunity to speak to a practitioner. The individual can speak to someone in authority, who has the power to make specific and specialised referrals that civilians ordinarily must do themselves and wait for longer. Individuals with mental health issues are considerably more likely to call the police and other authorities if there is a lack of family support (Olmstead, 2020).

This 'fast track' is problematic, owing to the implications of custody and arrest:

"But it is hard to say because you do see people that you can see are vulnerable, and they are struggling, and you think, is it really fair for them to have a criminal conviction? Because they're just trying to seek help" (Sandy, "Custody Detention Officer").

Individuals are risking a criminal conviction and entering the criminal justice system as an offender – a system that is not well placed or well known for improving mental health to those in its care (Bradley, 2009). There is significant risk in this scenario, manifesting as desperate unintended consequence of cuts to agencies and lack of resources broadly. The individual may 'jump the queue' in the short term, but risk long term unemployment and distress if it results in criminal proceedings, conviction and/or sentencing. Service users are placed in a position where they risk a great deal solely to receive help that is not available otherwise. Furthermore, it risks the police, the criminal justice system and the society shifting back to a path that many have worked hard to move us off – the criminalisation of mental illness. This practice also risks the stigmatisation and criminalisation of 'vulnerability',

fuelling the practice of state intervention and intervention in the lives of citizens (Coppock & McGovern, 2012; Menichilli, 2019).

Austerity cuts fuel these issues for services and users alike. Both were named during observation as considerable barriers to the police and partners in responding to 'vulnerability'. Since 2010, austerity measures have seen significant cuts to the public sector and the police alike, with the latter institution losing over 21, 000 officers and staff (Rogers, 2014). Demand then diverts to the police, who are ill-equipped to deal with vulnerabilities such as mental health. The police do not have a positive history effectively dealing with mental health incidents (HMICFRS, 2018). It is deeply alarming, therefore, to recall Leslie's earlier quote: "*I find a large proportion of people I deal with have a mistrust or dissatisfaction with Mental Health Services and therefore would ironically call the Police to ask for help rather than a team that specialise in their needs".* Some individuals have encountered such difficulty with their local mental health services that *the police* are considered preferential (CDC, 2015). These issues can be further compounded by different councils having different funding and priorities for resources. For example, at the time of observation, mental health triage cars were cut in the south of the county owing to Local Authority budgets but remained in the north: a lack of support for mental health in the south of the county and a lack of information gathering for agencies. Further, one harm reduction hub was based in an urban area, which had access to numerous different agencies to support their response to 'vulnerable' people. The second harm reduction hub was more remote and had significantly less agencies to appeal for support. Responding to 'vulnerability' can therefore be a postcode lottery for the police and service users alike.

The use of the police by partners and service users draws the police into areas of 'vulnerability' that they may struggle with response, such as mental health. This next section investigates this expansion of expected police business and their boundaries within the 'vulnerability' framework more widely.

The police as first and last resort for 'vulnerability': mission creep

The experiences of police responding to mental health 'vulnerabilities and the early intervention scheme for repeat demand callers provide examples of mission creep within contemporary policing. Mission creep had been a concern within UK policing over the last ten years, with austerity measures a significant contributory factor (Marnoch et al., 2010).

During observations and interviews, I observed numerous examples of explicit mission creep through police officer and staff response to 'vulnerability':

"...if I was running out of stock (of alarms), then I would send the local neighbourhood team to go and kit their house out. If it was housing association, I'd probably look at housing and say, look, can you do something with them? Unfortunately, I can't go around and say I'd love to get you a decent door lock, but I can't because we haven't got any money, I'll have to ask the council to do it and that's going to take three weeks." (Alex, Response Officer)

"They might be responding to a parent who's just come out of prison, or who is on a methadone programme, or they may have issues with school, being picked on. Lots of issues. So, that needs to be worked out with different agencies, as well as working with that child." (Robin, PCSO)

"I've had cases where people have nicked stuff because they're just starving hungry, and they can't help. Their benefits have been stopped and the heating's off and you work with the social services, housing again. I've made phone calls to the benefits people myself, sorting out payments, emergency payments, that kind of thing, money, so people can actually go buy some food. We arrange for food parcels, another thing we do, that kind of thing." (Ainslie, PCSO)

In custody, healthcare professionals who can provide food bank vouchers if the detained individual wants or needs them. There is significant mission creep here, with the police tasked with buying and setting up alarms for citizens. In attempts to reduce repeat demand and 'vulnerability', the police can place themselves in the position of completing tasks well outside of their remit.

The responsibility of individual staff members and the police as an institution have wandered far outside the recognisable landscape of the policing role. The previous chapter concerning how police officers and staff can understand 'vulnerability' through the lens of 'need' is relevant here. The above examples demonstrate individuals in need, primarily related to finances. Like 'vulnerability', 'need' can embody a wide spectrum of the human experience: physical, emotional, financial, sexual, psychological. But the equation of 'vulnerability' with 'need' opens Pandora's Box for the police and their responsibility towards 'vulnerable' people. If the police are responsible for responding to 'vulnerable', and 'vulnerable' simply equates to 'need' - any need could be conceived of as a responsibility for the police.

The examples of mission creep above directly relate to wider structural 'vulnerabilities' within our society.

"...if you look at the way things are now - poverty is a big risk for us as well, because that will impact on children in care also. I think headlines today, what was it, 14 million people in poverty in the UK? If you think about a 60 million population, that's a significant amount, on that basic threshold. So, poverty is an impact for us." (Bobby, Executive Management)

"I think a big problem that we have is with homelessness, I think if people don't have a fixed address, that can cause quite a lot of problems from them, for them, sorry. I think a lot of people that we get in here, sometimes they'll only come in here just so they've got somewhere to sleep and have something to eat, which I think is really sad." (, Sandy Custody Detention Officer)

"*A modern police officer today is like a social worker, mental health worker, counsellor, confidant…the list could go on." (Lou, Response Officer)*

Call handlers discussed how many different structural vulnerabilities with which they came into contact through their role. Education, poverty and housing were the three main issues. During observations in custody, L&D were tasked with responding to these issues, alongside mental health, disabilities, immigration and asylum status. All these 'vulnerabilities' can impact policing as they relate to crime - but the police as an agency are not able to fix or solve those structural issues. Officers and staff can respond on an individual basis. But the practical reality is that responding to these issues is not within the policing remit, nor pragmatic to continue in the long- term.

The recognition that these structural issues impact 'vulnerability' has been factored into how the concept is assessed, specifically in relation to the early intervention officers:

"Within early help, once it triggers an early help intervention, we do an early help form, which looks at nine aspects of the setting. It's mental health, its physical health, it's any antisocial behaviour, any addictions, the money situation and financial problems, and also schooling and whether they're attending schooling." (Robin, PCSO)

When I began the project, the EI scheme was targeted at repeat demand callers, who were primarily adults. Two years later, during an interview, Robin revealed to me that the scheme had been expanded to include children and families that were repeatedly in contact with the police. The expansion was related to cuts to Families First and social services, who were now

unable to fulfil their remit (Menichelli, 2021). It is problematic to consider the role of the police in gaining access to intimate knowledge of a family's, including their finances, where there is no criminal element. Again, the practice detailed here is more akin to social work than policing. The mission creep of the police has simultaneously expanded their oversight into the private lives of cit izens, under the premise that the police are required to do so when an individual is labelled 'vulnerable' (Bartkowiak-Theron & Asquith, 2010).

Conclusions

'Vulnerability' is a nebulous, complex and wide-ranging concept (Brown, 2011; Delor & Hubert, 2000; Keay & Kirby, 2018). It is perhaps unsurprising then that officers and staff have complex, conflicting and distinct ideas about what their role is concerning an effective response in everyday practice. Responsibilities in the long and short term are dependent on the policing role, divided between the frontline and community policing. This division highlights the hybrid nature of policing, which can conflict with the cultural and institutional image of the police as first responders alone (Reiner, 201). The role and working environment determine both responsibilities and priorities for 'vulnerability' in the context of everyday practice. The nebulous and vague nature of 'vulnerability' and chaotic nature of policing combines into blurred responsibilities, and a nebulous response.

The responsibilities of the police in responding to 'vulnerability' include effective communication, referrals and safeguarding. The emphasis on soft skills, including active listening and empathy, as an effective response to 'vulnerability' highlights an increasing feminisation of contemporary policing (Paterson & Paterson, 2021). This emphasis on the 'feminine' soft skills stands in stark contrast to the cultural machismo within policing (Reiner, 2010) and toxic institutional misogyny (Casey, 2023). The emphasis on 'vulnerability' appears to offer officers and staff not only a different way of looking at individuals and issues - for example, outside of the institutionally masculine mindset - but also offers a different way of responding. There is a growing recognition that the police can carry the authority and problematic history of the police within their uniform, and so it is often appropriate to put that uniform and authority aside. Rather than deploying their authority as a coercive tool, there appears to be an understanding that this avenue is not necessarily always appropriate in relation to 'vulnerability'.

The consistency of this response, however, is unclear. The police can still react to 'vulnerability', defaulting to cultural and their own institutional expectations of what the police 'should' do and be. A significant issue highlighted in this chapter is not necessarily the appropriateness of the police response alone, but the appropriateness of police involvement at all. The emphasis on multi-agency has also opened different avenues for police responses to 'vulnerability', with an understanding that the police are not necessarily always the most effective agency.

Multi-agency working is sanctioned in policy and practice as an effective response to 'vulnerabilities'. There are clear benefits: the sharing of knowledge and experience; some drawing of professional boundaries in terms of response; avoidance of bureaucratic pitfalls; overcoming the practical limitations within policing; mutual beneficial working relationships; and ultimately a more effective and appropriate response to the 'vulnerabilities' of service users.

There are significant drawbacks in practice, however. Close and consistent collaboration with partners in everyday practice produces a consistently appropriate response, as demonstrated by the harm reduction hubs, custody and the mental health triage scheme. Partners that work more independently of one another can be guilty of channelling demand away from themselves and placing the burden onto other partners. The fallback agency in this scenario is usually the police.

The mission creep of 'vulnerability' into policing can be facilitated by the expectations and actions of other partners. Partners have more authority to refuse referrals and turn away service users through their strict adherence to their thresholds, remits and their resources. Partners can also legitimately rely on the police to provide emergency backup for their practices.

Dissatisfaction and failures of these partner agencies can create a secondary channel of demand to the police, with service users left with the police as the last resort for help[10].

Who are the police now? This chapter would suggest that the police have become a 'vulnerability' assessment tool; a fallback service when other agencies fail to deliver; and a

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[10] By July 2023, the Met police had followed the example of Humberside police and instigated the 'right care, right person' model to tackle mental health - essentially mandating a police response only for incidents where there is a risk to life. Whether or not other forces will follow and how successful the model will be in halting or redirecting service users to more appropriate services remain to be seen.

partner back-up for emergencies. The police can be a reliable organisation to assign responsibility and blame, with partners able to sidestep such accountability. This practice can leave the police 'vulnerable', as they are left open to being used by other agencies and face the wrath of blame when things go wrong. But the police are the gatekeepers of 'vulnerability': as the law enforcement arm of the State, they have authority over the term.

'Vulnerable' is a term that is overwhelmingly applied to marginalised individual and communities, to people who have little power within society. The police have significant legal, political and social power. However, some researchers have asserted that 'vulnerability' is an inherent aspect of being human (Fineman, 2008; 2010). The inherent 'vulnerability' of human life became an increasingly fraught concept during the data gathering stage for the thesis, as the COVID-19 pandemic hit the United Kingdom in 2020. The police in tandem can be expected to fall under this much wider umbrella of 'vulnerability'. The next chapter investigates these two themes: the 'vulnerability' of the police themselves, and themes of 'vulnerability' that emerged in the data owing to the COVID-19 pandemic. Both themes overlap with each other, as they both contribute to and challenge pre-existing conceptualisations of 'vulnerability'.

Chapter 7 - *"A complete gamechanger":* unexpected 'vulnerability', the police and the COVID-19 pandemic

Introduction

In December 2019, I arrived at the custodial suite to discover that one of the five custody wings was closed. Upon inquiry, I was told that a detained individual had claimed to have bird flu and so the wing was closed to avoid possible contamination (the claim later transpired to be inaccurate). However, the incident stuck in my mind. The 'vulnerability' of the police was not necessarily a new consideration for me. On my first visit to the force's headquarters, I had paused to read a memorial plaque for officers killed in the line of duty. Two officers from other forces were killed whilst on duty during the five years of the project. During observations, I witnessed officers and staff on the receiving end of verbal abuse, threats of violence and (in custody) actual violence. The 'bird flu' incident introduced a further 'vulnerability' that I had yet to consider: what would happen if the police had to deal with a pandemic?

Of course, those reflections became eerily prescient only a few months later, when the COVID- 19 pandemic hit the United Kingdom in March 2020. This final chapter addresses unexpected 'vulnerability': ideas that arose from the data and the context in which it was gathered that were not foreseen and originally addressed by the three research questions. The examination of these emerging themes includes how they contribute to pre-existing ideas about 'vulnerability' within the context of policing - and how they challenge them.

'Vulnerability' promotes exclusion just as heavily as it affects to promote inclusion (Munro & Scoular, 2012). The police, handed the role of gatekeeping 'vulnerability', therefore "patrol the lines between belonging and exclusion" (Loader, 2020: 405). It may seem antithetical to consider that the police themselves can be 'vulnerable'. The police have a significant range of coercive powers, more than any singular citizen or any other agency possesses - and receive significantly more protection as a result (Loader, 2020; Reiner, 2010). The police as an institution alone can present just as significant a paradox as 'vulnerability' (Peroni & Timmer, 2013): "guarantor of citizens and an ever-present threat to their liberty" (Loader, 2020: 404). But the COVID-19 pandemic opened an expanding avenue to explore the 'vulnerability' of the police, even if we use the most basic of the concept's many definitions: susceptibility.

The first theme of the chapter explores the 'vulnerability' of the police: the different ways in which the police role can create 'vulnerability' for the staff, and the notion that this is the cost of doing (police) business; 'vulnerability' within the police as an institution in terms of accountability and blame; and police 'vulnerability' to external policies such as austerity.

The second theme explores policing and 'vulnerability' within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. It covers the changing responsibilities - and burdens - of the police, including how restrictions and barriers of the pandemic that created obstacles to identifying and responding to 'vulnerability'. There is an investigation of the positive shifts in working police practice concerning 'vulnerability', followed by the physical threat of the pandemic to police staff and their families, alongside officer wellbeing. Finally, there is a reflection on the deployment of 'vulnerability' in narratives of the pandemic.

The two sections provide additional ideas for future explorations of 'vulnerability' within policing and our society, and both contain overlapping themes. These include the temporal and fluid nature of 'vulnerability', as well as the relational and hierarchical nature of 'vulnerability'. Another theme is how interventions to reduce one type of 'vulnerability' proportionally increasing others, and how institutions like the police and the government can create and perpetuate 'vulnerability'. Finally, notions of sacrifice, and the paradox of both masking and deploying 'vulnerability' in political narratives.

Theme 1: the 'vulnerability' of the police

The 'vulnerability' of the police and the cost of doing business?

There is little research concerning how it feels to be 'vulnerable', with prior research on 'vulnerability' focusing primarily on its conceptualisation and application as a label (see Bartkowiak-Theron & Asquith, 2010; Brown, 2011). The lack of focus in this area encouraged me to explore police ideas about their own 'vulnerability'. The broad consensus was that, yes, the police can feel 'vulnerable' in their role:

"When you're going single crewed to a domestic, where he is known for assaulting PCs etc., and you're there on your own and you've got to deal with it, because she's screaming. At that point you feel very, very, very vulnerable, and very at risk. But you've still got a job to do."
(Lou, Response Officer)

"So, I do feel vulnerable as well, mentally not, physically yes, professionally yes." (Ainslie, PCSO)

"You know, vulnerable in the sense of - I got to incidents now, not so much in my current role, but my colleagues are, as one officer, or two officers. Where before, you know, you would have sent out dozens of officers." (Sunny, Chief Inspector)

These responses demonstrate previous themes of 'vulnerability': it is temporal and temporary, not fixed; it is conditional, based on outside circumstances. 'Vulnerability' is also multi-faceted, and takes many forms, such as physical, professional and emotional 'vulnerability'. The examples from Lou, Ainslie and Sunny also demonstrate how this 'vulnerability' is part and parcel of working in the police. 'Vulnerability' experienced by the police can therefore be considered a part of doing business.

The police are frequently deployed to intervene in violent incidents, so it is unsurprising that they consider themselves 'vulnerable' to physical harm:

"So, physically I feel vulnerable in that one day I'm going to get my head kicked in. I know I can press the button on the radio, and everyone would come. But I've had to do it in the past and two minutes can seem like a long time when something's going on." (Ainslie, PCSO)

"Dealing with vulnerable people certainly carries its risks due to the way in how that vulnerability manifests itself. We deal with a lot of people who can be violent toward us and try to assault us. They may for instance want to self-harm, and therefore may carry sharps or knives that they then can go on to use against others, or us." (Lesley, Response Officer)

"Vulnerable in the sense of officer safety. There are fewer of us, the demand is still there. Whereas before when you would press help, or you would ask for help, you would get resources very quickly." (Sunny, Chief Inspector)

"If the worst case happened, I suppose, physical confrontation, I know I've got the back up from a number of members of staff which perhaps the south of the county hasn't got, there is that aspect of physical confrontation." (Kit, Custody Sergeant)

The concern is not solely immediate physical harm, but a 'vulnerability' in the lack of resources that may prevent immediate help. I found that the level of this concern, however, is determined by the policing role and assigned unit. Ainslie, Sunny and Lesley are officers on the frontline, who are more exposed to physical harm by the virtue of their working

environment. Kit is a custody sergeant, an environment that is far more limited for service users and controlled by custody staff. Custody resources are therefore more immediate in their responses to physical harm because their working environment facilitates said response.

Custody staff, however, are not always protected from harm. In 2020, custody sergeant Matt Ratana, was shot dead in Croydon Custody centre (BBC News, 2020; The Times, 2020). The perpetrator, Louis de Zoysa, had been arrested for drug possession and possession of ammunition. The gun that he was carrying had been missed by the initial pat-down by arresting officers and was handcuffed when the incident occurred (BBC News, 2021). I interviewed participants from custody several weeks later, and asked them how the incident had affected them:

"Custody Sergeant shot in Police custody last year. Policing is inherently dangerous and even when an arrested person has been searched, they can still produce a weapon." (Perry, Custody Sergeant)

"It occasionally gets mentioned. In respect of, has that impacted on my work, no, not at all and that hasn't played on my mind. What they have introduced is the fact that they try to ensure that people are been searched now before even getting into the place, obviously we search them again, once they arrive, but no that hasn't played on my mind at all." (Kit, Custody Sergeant)

The responses highlight an acceptance that policing can be dangerous and the safety of staff can never be guaranteed (Bullock & Garland, 2018). There were more than two million unarmed assaults on officers between 2021 and 2022: during the same period, there were 302, 842 armed assaults (Police Federation, 2022). These numbers emphasise why officers consider their jobs to be inherently dangerous. Police officers and staff make a choice of employment that directly and indirectly involves proximity to distress, crisis and danger. The term 'vulnerability' has been criticised for the inference of 'blaming' service users, insinuating that their 'vulnerabilities' are a choice (Brown, 2011). I believe a similar approach must be deployed, that the choice to work for the police and knowing the danger does not negate the 'vulnerability' inherent to the role.

During observations, I noted how the police are exposed to the dark side of both human nature and our society – and how 'vulnerabilities' can be perpetrated and perpetuated. I was keen to explore how the police not only felt 'vulnerable', but also how they felt dealing with 'vulnerability' as part of their role, and its impact on them. Therefore, I asked participants

during observations and interviews how they felt about dealing with 'vulnerability'. Many responses were negative:

"I get a lot more frustration than I do gratification." (Alex, Response Officer)

"Frustrated." (Lou, Response Officer)

"Three steps forward, and four back. You're constantly chasing fires or putting out fires. You quite often feel as if you're wasting your time. Frustrated. Very frustrated. Little reward most of the time, really." (Robin, PCSO)

"Some days can feel like Groundhog Day, because you deal with the same things day in day out." (Leslie, Response Officer)

Sources of frustration include many recurring themes identified in the thesis: misaligned expectations of service users; multi-agency working; cuts to resources; and ineffective responses on their behalf. Frustration can be linked to cynicism, fuelled by a clash between expectations of a role versus the practical reality (Jorden et al., 2022). Cynicism can be strategic as a method of detachment and disengagement from emotional scenarios (Mantere & Martinsuo, 2001). Employee cynicism can be the result of frustration, hopelessness, and disillusionment (Andersson, 2001). Cynicism, frustration and other negative emotions were not limited to the police role and experience. These feelings were also expressed concerning the structural nature of 'vulnerability' within society more broadly:

"I have also become more cynical over time as I realise that care in the community needs to improve so much, and we are so far behind where we need to be in the UK to cater for the needs of the vulnerable." (Leslie, Response Officer)

"I think the short answer is I've got used to it. Which is a bit sad. Because the vast majority of people that we deal with in here, as I've already said." (Kit, Custody Sergeant)

"Sometimes sad. You go into these people, and you're like, oh my gosh, it opens your eyes." (Sam, PCSO)

"It makes me feel sad sometimes because I think as a society how we let it come to this. Why aren't people being looked after?" (Ainslie, PCSO)

One call-taker expressed severe disappointment with society that was mirrored in conversations during observation. There is a sense of hopelessness and disillusionment with wider society's progress encapsulated within these responses – which again can promote cynicism as a strategy for detachment (Andersson, 2001). The police can be limited in how effectively they can respond to some 'vulnerabilities' (see Response chapter). Structural 'vulnerabilities' that are chronic within society cannot be challenged or changed by the police alone – if at all.

The combination of frustration, cynicism and sadness can be summed up in one phrase – soul- destroying:

"Sometimes it's quite soul destroying to see individuals going through certain things that they can't help, and that you can't change. That's not very nice." (Lou, Response Officer)

"I personally - and you can use this quote, I know I said you couldn't use my quotes; I

personally say with this job it takes a part of your soul. That you don't get back. Sadly, and it

doesn't matter how much money you get paid, you'll never get that bit of your soul back because things stick with you." (Sidney, Call handler)

The notion that police work can be soul-destroying is not necessarily unexpected. Those experiencing the 'vulnerabilities' confronted in policing have also been called 'soul-destroying,' such as hate crime (Dinisman, 2021), mental health incidents (Burns, 2013), addiction (Brook & Stringer, 2005), as well as poverty and homelessness (Friedman, 2012). 'Soul-destroying' may be a code for compassion fatigue and emotional burnout: it speaks to a fundamental effect on police officers and staff that may leave them in a 'vulnerable' state of wellbeing.

The responses, however, were not all negative. Positive expressions were just as common:

"It can be very rewarding to help people and that is something I remind myself that I am lucky to be in a role where I can do that daily." (Leslie, Response Officer)

"I think probably quite good, especially if I know that I've done a good job. That I've helped somebody to get the correct support and help, then it makes me feel that I've done my job well, and I've helped somebody. So, probably quite, yes, happy." (Terry, PCSO)

"Yes. There's the odd occasion where it's gratification because like I said, once in a blue moon, you get what we call a genuine job, where somebody actually does need us for the right reasons." (Alex, Response Officer)

"And it also makes you grateful for what I've got in my own personal life. And it's changed the way I am with my relationships with my parents, my friends. It's made me a more understanding person definitely for sure. And grateful as well." (Ainslie, PCSO)

"I feel like I have empathy with people because I know. Even people that I work with, I feel like I can be quite… Have a lot of empathy with people. And its only life experiences that have taught me that, really." (Jamie, CDO)

"I feel like it makes me quite empathetic." (Sandy, CDO)

"I think if you do it, if you deal with it right, it makes you feel…. right." (Sunny, Chief Inspector)

The focus on 'vulnerability' might be considered a gift for some officers and staff. This is keen juxtaposition to the predominantly negative tone that can permeate discourse on 'vulnerability' within policing and wider society (even if justified!) (Brown, 2011; Walklate, 2011; Stanford, 2012; Sibley, 2018). The focus has provided personal and professional development in the form of empathy, an attribute considered vital to the success of contemporary policing (Posick et al., 2013; Bloksgaard & Prieur, 2021). Gratitude was displayed across the spectrum of personal and professional life, especially to having a job that has such a direct impact on helping others.

Gratitude can be an important component of mental health and overall wellbeing, a potential obstacle to 'vulnerability' in this context (Emmons et al., 2019; Valikhani, 2019). Gratitude can also improve overall work satisfaction and prevent workplace burnout in mental health professionals (Lanham et al., 2012). Effectively supporting individuals through their policing role – and gratitude for said role – can also provide insight into why some officers and staff choose to join the police in the first place.

The complex nature of 'vulnerability' and the melting pot of emotions surrounding its focus within contemporary policing can impact the mental wellbeing of officers and staff. Some interviews participants mentioned specific diagnoses of mental health problems within the context of their own 'vulnerability', whilst others reflected on the mental effect of the job more broadly:

"From my role, I have PTSD, as a result of doing the job." (Lou, Response Officer)

"And mentally, there've been times where I know I've been up at four o'clock in the morning, trying to find accommodation for a 16-year-old who is walking the streets and is homeless. And I've thought, why am I doing that for? Because it is difficult to switch off." (Robin, PCSO)

"Going back to what I said earlier, sometimes you can have somebody that you've dealt with that's stuck in your head. So, then you can feel a little bit vulnerable because you think, have I done… Did I do enough?" (Jamie, CDO)

Post-traumatic stress disorder in police officers is a common issue (Long, 2000; Dussich, 2003; Paton, 2006; Foley & Massey, 2020). A participant described how their spouse, a fellow officer, had a PTSD diagnosis; in observations, I met individuals who had PTSD, and others knew someone who had it. The policing role involves repeated exposure to trauma owing to the nature of their employment. Abusive treatment of staff can also have a significant impact on mental health. During observations of both custody and contact services, verbal abuse of officers and staff by service users was common. Hostility manifested through swearing, threats of violence, and spitting. The 'vulnerability' to experiencing mental health issues is therefore increasingly likely for both officers and staff.

Some participants identified this exposure and put forth their tactics for dealing with such proximity to distress and violence:

"When I go to a job, I will deal with that job, 110%, I'm committed to everything when I go to a job but as soon as I'm out of that door, I don't care. I'm not interested. I completely shut down because I'd rather focus on my life and my family." (Alex, Response Officer)

"But you just have to try and put a bit of a wall. And remember you're doing a job and you're looking after them and that's your role." (Jamie, CDO)

Detachment and disengagement from work after the shift has been completed appears to a tactic to avoid being 'vulnerable' to mental health problems. The policing environment encourages this detachment – but such practice can be a significant problem (Ranta & Sud, 2008). The technique fuels detachment not only from other people, but between the individual and their own emotions (Blackmore, 1978). The depersonalisation of emotions can backfire, and instead significantly increase 'vulnerability' to burnout (Lennie et al., 2020). Soft skills, such as reassurance and validation, are necessary tools in contemporary policing.

But both practices involve a great deal of emotional labour that can also contribute to workplace burnout in the police (Lumsden & Black, 2018; Black & Lumsden, 2020).

The policing environment itself may not be conducive to emotional support for officers, increasing the 'vulnerability' of those who work in said environment. The institutional culture itself can therefore create and perpetuate 'vulnerability' of staff - a phenomenon previously assumed to impact service users alone (Bartkowiak-Theron & Asquith, 2015; 2017; Menichilli, 2019). The police as an institution are male dominated, with an emphasis on masculine traits and machismo creating a 'cult of masculinity' (Silvestri, 2017: 289; Reiner, 2010). The equality agenda, collaborative working and the emphasis on soft skills has introduced styles of working that may be considered culturally feminine in nature: but the masculine ethos in policing persists (Brown, 2007: HMICFRS, 2022). Toxic forms of masculinity within individuals and our wider society have already been pinpointed as significant barriers to seeking mental health support (Kupers, 2005; Grewel, 2020). Toxic elements of the masculinity embedded in policing culture may prevent officers and staff, regardless of gender, from seeking help. There is an intertwined policing culture of 'invincibility' (Turner & Jenkins, 2018). Such barriers may also prevent managers from intervening in scenarios where an employee is suffering from burnout. Burnout can lead to police mistakes and errors in their everyday work, including the identification and response to individuals considered 'vulnerable' (Foley & Massey, 2020; Turgoose et al, 2017; Paton, 2006; Dussich, 2003). Officer wellbeing is therefore a 'vulnerability' on multiple counts: for individuals, their colleagues, service users and the wider institution. This is another example of how institutions themselves can create and perpetuate 'vulnerability' through their practices and culture, engendering the 'vulnerability' of their own staff.

The use of the term 'officer wellbeing' in College of Policing documents relating to 'vulnerability' (such as the National Vulnerability Action plan, 2022) also highlights a linguistic quirk that makes a distinction between the police and service users. Mental health has been a significant topic of conversation in relation to 'vulnerability' throughout this thesis. For service users, problems with mental health fall under the umbrella of 'vulnerability'. For the police, their mental health falls under the umbrella of the less conceptually problematic - and more optimistic-sounding - umbrella of 'wellbeing' (see NVAP, 2022). The power dynamics within the conceptualisation of 'vulnerability' are once again at play. The police as an institution have the power as gatekeepers of 'vulnerability' to assign or erase the label from themselves and their staff. This linguistic distinction sidesteps

the notion that the police themselves can be 'vulnerable' in the same way as service users - and sidestep the negative inferences inherent to the term.

The institutional creation and perpetuation of 'vulnerability' concerning its own staff further fuels the 'vulnerability' of its own service users. The distressing nature of their work can have several different facilitate compassion fatigue and burnout, wringing them dry of the skills needed to effectively identify and respond to 'vulnerabilities' of service users (Burke, 1993; Long, 2000; Paton, 2006; Heaten, 2011; Turgoose et al., 2017; Lennie et al., 2020). This can create a twofold 'vulnerability' for service users: primarily, cynicism can facilitate hostile interpretations of service users' motives. Service users' risk having their 'vulnerabilities' mislabelled, dismissed and overlooked by the police. The second issue is that frustration has a direct link with aggression (Bruer & Elson, 2017). The police have a long history of aggression, towards both their loved ones and to the communities that they are elicited to protect (see Griffin & Bernard, 2003; Violanti, 2017; Kishore et al., 2022). The police therefore can be considered responsible for how they themselves can be identified and responded to as a 'vulnerability' to communities.

The impact that police decision-making can have on service users demands scrutiny. As noted elsewhere, the police can compound the 'vulnerability' of individuals. The environment and culture of policing has already been highlighted as conducive to unhealthy ideas concerning trauma, depersonalisation and emotional burnout. This next section further expands on how decision-making within the institution of the police itself can leave officers and staff 'vulnerable' within the context of force failures and blame.

'Vulnerability' within the police as an institution

The issue of communication throughout the hierarchy was considered a significant issue for one interviewed frontline officer. Communication between colleagues and partners is significant to effective police working. But the lack of direct communication throughout the hierarchy can leave both the frontline and upper management 'vulnerable':

"I also get frustrated because I don't think the senior command team want to listen to us. What I've found out, over the years because there's been a lot of them but in the over 20 years that I've worked, basically, us as the frontline, as the constables, we will say to the sergeant, for example, this isn't working. We're not happy. The sergeants will go to the inspectors, and they'll say, inspector, the troops aren't happy. It's not working. They'll go to the chief

inspector and say, they're not really happy. They've got a few issues. The chief inspector goes to superintendent. There are a few leaks, but everything seems to be working. Superintendent, to chief superintendent. I think everything's going okay. Chief superintendent, to the top. Yes, everything's great. I think a lot of the time, that's the chain of command." (Alex, Response Officer)

Knowledge of the experiences on the frontline can leave those officers and staff vulnerable to feelings of frustration and of being unheard. The Chinese-whisper-like style of communication up the hierarchy can cause issues to be lost in translation. Upper management can then be left ignorant to what procedures and policies are working – and more crucially, which are not.

Concerns from the frontline are believed to be ignored or invalidated by those higher up in the organisation. This can create issues surrounding weaknesses – 'vulnerabilities' – in policy and practice. Information in hierarchical institutions, especially ones with the political history of the police, tend to flow downwards (see Reiner, 2010: 95; Cheney, 2010).

This disconnect can also contribute to officers and staff feeling 'vulnerable' to blame when things do go wrong. On the surface, the problem appears to be less about accountability and more about scapegoating:

"The other thing is, I think in terms of the way the police approach learning, through the IOPC, we are very risk averse and there is a feeling within our staff that the IOPC is out to blame, not learn...we'll sit with a clinical professional will say 'do this' and our cultural forces, our officers will think…'yeah, but if it goes wrong, they're going to come and blame me'. So, they'll make a decision based upon the fear of punishment as opposed to the professional judgement that's out there..." (Ali, Executive Management)

"I think a lot of it is because people are worried about if they did to something to themselves because yes, potentially, you've always got that. We'll get the blame and a lot of people, higher above me, my opinion is, they're too scared to actually say to us, no. You tell this person; we're not going to them." (Alex, Response Officer)

The issue of blame is a well-documented obstacle to accountability, and a source of fear, within the public sector (Goodin, 1985; Jones, 2010; Mortensen, 2013; Metcalfe, 2017; Resodihardigo, 2018). Fear of blame can encourage officers and staff to choose specific avenues of response – even if they know that said avenues are not necessarily effective or

appropriate. Fear can override professional judgement and learning, primarily owing to the perspective that accountability is not geared towards learning but to finger pointing. This 'vulnerability' can influence identification and response to service users considered 'vulnerable' - further compounding 'vulnerability' for both sides.

There is a pervasive notion here that upper management are more interested in protecting the institution than their staff. This was brutally highlighted by one interview participant:

"I feel vulnerable that as an organisation, the police force is quick to point the finger of blame and they do not protect their staff. In that if people do something wrong, the people who have made a decision and the outcome hasn't been as expected or as desired, they will hang you out to dry and you can quote me on that. They won't look after you, you're on your own." (Ainslie, PCSO)

Whilst officers and staff are granted the power of the police through their roles, they may not always be granted protection by the institution. The individual is left 'vulnerable' to being scapegoated for failure by their own institution. Blame and responsibility are two concepts tied up in conceptualisations of 'vulnerability' (Brown, 2017). In this context, however, the individual police officer or staff member may be to blame for leaving the police as an institution 'vulnerable' to outside scrutiny. Similarly, criticism of the term 'vulnerable' asserts that when 'vulnerability' is individualised, the focus on the individual shifts attention from the wider structural context and inequalities (Holmes, 2006a; 2011; Quesada et al., 2011; Coppock & McGovern, 2014). A similar phenomenon occurs when an individual officer or staff member is scapegoated by their institution: this practice follows the 'bad apple' narrative often pushed by the institution of policing, ignoring wider structural problems within the force (Metcalfe, 2017)

The accuracy of this perception is up for debate and further scrutiny. The police themselves do have a long history of scapegoating – but usually of marginalised communities, not their own staff (Bennett, 1996; Lewis, 2008; Nacu, 2012). Institutional mistreatment of staff again predominantly targets those from marginalised communities (HMICFRS, 2022). It has been well documented how rarely police officers and staff are prosecuted for crimes relating to a death in custody: there has not been a related conviction for manslaughter since 1986 (Loader, 2020).

This absence of accountability and justice sends an incredible dangerous message: the police are the only actors who possess any legitimate right to violence (Loader, 2020). By extension,

they can be conceived of as the only actors who possess the legitimate right to make an individual 'vulnerable'.

A significant challenge to police accountability is a failure to define exactly what the police are accountable for (Yesefu, 2021). Different areas have different procedures for complaints, leading to a postcode lottery in terms of civilian oversight (Seneviratne, 2004). Perceptions of police accountability are tied to public satisfaction with the police (De Angelis & Wolf, 2015). In England and Wales, public satisfaction with the police has been on a significant decline over the last three years (RUSI, 2022).

It is possible that two things can be true simultaneously. The police may pin blame on individual officers and staff to avoid wider institutional blame, whilst also failing in other circumstances to hold officers and staff accountable. In the latter scenario, it may be argued that failure to hold their staff accountable may make the institution 'vulnerable' - to blame and to scrutiny, but more crucially to failure in its role to protect and support the 'vulnerabilities' of service users.

The rise of social media and digital documentation of interactions also can put officers and staff in a 'vulnerable' position: being exposed to public scrutiny. 'Vulnerability' is conceptualised here as a susceptibility or exposure generally, rather than harm specifically:

"...we've created that, through our own fault, through media, the way some officers behave, and they're caught on camera. They don't do themselves any justice. There are cameras everywhere. Everybody's got a mobile phone that can record you. Nobody wants to end up on YouTube or Facebook for getting it wrong. So, I think because of social media's massive, because of that, people's awareness of things. People's tolerances are different." (Alex, Response Officer)

The 'vulnerability' of officers and staff being filmed is only in the broadest sense: there is a chance that some filmed incidents may be taken out of context or edited. These officers and staff open the door for the institution's 'vulnerabilities' to be scrutinised – it is the exposure, not necessarily the filmed misconduct, that can provoke ire. The use of phones to document the police can be interpreted as a way for service users to simultaneously document their own 'vulnerability' at the hands of officers. The use of social media can be a tactic for retaliation and for holding the police accountable for how they respond to 'vulnerable' people more broadly (Goldsmith, 2015; Odeyemi & Obiyan, 2018; Ellis, 2021).

Further, the use of social media can document how the police themselves can be responsible for making an individual 'vulnerable'. The power of the police as individuals and an institution demands a level of scrutiny around their behaviour in order to hold them accountable and ensure that 'vulnerabilities' of service users are not being exploited. The efficacy of practices and attitudes concerning accountability are, however, unclear: the same issues can be raised time and time again, with the police making empty promises of change, and the cycle of the police rendering citizens 'vulnerable' continues (Loader, 2020). For example, recent inquiries into the police vetting process showed that individuals charged with domestic violence and investigated for sexual assault were still being enrolled as officers (HMICFRS, 2022). There are also serious concerns concerning the levels of domestic violence in policing relationships, with officers more likely to be the perpetrators (HMICFRS, 2022). It is possible that accountability that Ainslie speaks of, if it does occur, is handled internally, rather than externally - which unfortunately deprives the public of transparency.

Other outside factors can also play a role in making the police 'vulnerable' as an institution and as individuals. Lack of resources and staff has been previously highlighted as a significant factor in police 'vulnerability', particularly to physical harm The government of the day can have an enormous effect on policing mandates and budgeting, demonstrated by the Conservative policies of austerity since 2010 (Lumsden & Black, 2018).

The police, 'vulnerability' and austerity

Individuals can be left 'vulnerable' by wider structural issues that they cannot change (Team & Manderson, 2020). Police officers and staff can similarly be left 'vulnerable' when money is removed, and resources are taken away. Austerity has had a significant impact on this area of 'vulnerability', with a 25 percent cut to resources spanning across ten years of austerity under a Conservative government (Stuckler et al., 2017; Mann et al., 2020; Giuletti & McConnell, 2020):

"Yes, lack of resources is a big one, can moan about cuts etc., there's been a massive reduction in funding over the last decade or so, 15 years. So, yes, a lack of resources is big, especially if you count our local staff resources. They do like to call us resources, so lack of that is the main thing." Ainslie, (PCSO)

"There are certainly issues around lack of resources. It is widely known that there are 20,000 less Police Officers than we used to have around a decade ago. Although recruitment is in place, it will still be a number of years before we feel the benefit from this." (Leslie, Response Officer)

"I think one issue that we do have in here that can't really be solved that easily is that we're so short of staff sometimes, you don't have time to sit and speak to people." (Sunny, Chief Inspector)

Lack of staff can significantly impact the 'vulnerability' of existing employees. Less officers equates to less physical security at incidents. There are less staff on the frontline to handle incidents that require an immediate response, less staff to investigate and less staff to safeguard. The lack of staff, but the increase in demand, can result in staff being unable to take their time when talking to service users – a significant pathway to identifying 'vulnerabilities' (see previous chapter). Overall, there are less opportunities for 'vulnerabilities' to be identified.

Response can also be a significant issue. The real or perceived failures of other agencies, such as mental health, creates demand for the police (see previous chapter). The cuts to other agencies also reduce the avenues of response and support for both the police and service users alike:

"…we lack potentially the support, not because people aren't willing to, there's fewer of us in all walks of life." (Sunny, Chief Inspector)

"The hard bit I think we're going to have coming forward is at the same time that we're pushing on with this, there is still austerity within there and some of our key links into those are still struggling financially. Particularly local district authorities, county councils, etc., because the bill for picking up, particularly adult safeguarding and child safeguarding at a county and district level is having to be pulled from other services because their budgets are still going down." (Bobby, Executive Management)

"And the lack of funding to make changes to people's lives, to their homes, to supply them with things. To meet their needs. Because there isn't money in the pot anymore, unfortunately." (Ainslie, PCSO)

Less money in the pot equates to less resources - but not less demand. The passing of responsibility between agencies may not simply be a passing of the 'vulnerability' between agencies, but a passing of the bill. The police are left 'vulnerable' as they are expected to handle an increasing demand for issues that they as an organisation are not equipped to handle (se previous chapter). This in turn can compound the 'vulnerabilities' of service users by driving them down a narrowing avenue for appropriate and effective support. When things go wrong, however, the police are still vulnerable to blame whilst policies of austerity – and the politicians that enact them – are insulated.

Austerity and budget cuts are a problem that is not going away. At the time of writing, the UK was amid an energy crisis, a cost-of-living crisis and a long-term recession (The Guardian, 2022; BBC News, 2023). Budget cuts to the public sector are again in political favour for somehow minimising the damage of these crises (The Guardian, 2020). Whilst 20,000 police officers have been installed in police forces across the country, these new officers merely replace the 21,000 staff cut owing to austerity. Further, other agencies that work with the police have received no such influx of staff and resources - which will only fuel the drive-in demand for the police as the agencies of first and last resort.

Government policies like austerity demonstrate how external factors to the police can influence their own 'vulnerability', and structural 'vulnerability' more widely across the population. The COVID-19 pandemic was a further example of how 'vulnerability' can be compounded and increased by the sociohistorical context in which it occurs - and just how many 'vulnerabilities' that an individual can face.

Theme 2: 'Vulnerability' and the COVID-19 pandemic

Changes to police responsibilities concerning 'vulnerability'

To reduce the physical 'vulnerability' of police staff and service users to the virus, pragmatic changes were needed to everyday practice:

"To start with, we were saying we're not coming in your house, we'll talk to you by your front door. And we only go into houses now which we'd need to talk in private, or if we can do jobs over the phone, then we'll do that over the phone." (Sam, PCSO)

"It doesn't mean that we wouldn't stop going in, to ensure that somebody wasn't safe and well. However, when we would normally just turn up at an address, and go straight into their

home, we now have to make sure that we're not putting them at more risk, by us carrying something, or them passing anything to us" (Terry, PCSO).

"I'd say it's made us not less effective, but less capable. Before, I could wander around without my mask on, I go around to see all my dudes, I'd go walking down the street, I go knock on people's doors. But now I can't." (Ainslie, PCSO)

The hierarchy of 'vulnerability' therefore needed to change: the threat of harm from COVID-19 infection became the top priority concerning 'vulnerability'. The pandemic added an extra layer of 'risk' to police encounters, already heavily burdened with notions of 'risk' (Haggerty & Ericson, 1997). This change understandably affected those on the frontline, who were still interacting with members of the public in their everyday work. The 'vulnerability' encapsulated both the police and service users as they could infect each other. Prevention required a balance of honesty, transparency and care on both sides.

There was a drastic reduction in the policing community role by an absence of a physical police presence in public, primarily provided by PCSOs. Previously in the thesis, PCSOs have been highlighted as playing a significant role in identifying 'vulnerability' within the community and maintaining community relations. Their ability to identify 'vulnerability' was therefore restricted, and community relations became 'vulnerable'. The relationship between the police and their communities can become strained during emergency situations (Jones, 2020). If the police are effective and appropriate in their responses, then they achieve both public safety and public trust. If they fail, the police lose that trust and the ability to function (Bonkiewisz & Tuback, 2010). Prior to the pandemic, communicating with service users during emergencies was incredibly difficult owing to heightened emotions and often conflicting expectations (Ames & Busch, 2013). As restrictions changed and confusion reigned, officers and staff found it increasingly difficult to "explain, engage and encourage" members of the public (Laufs & Waseem, 2020:37).

Just as ideas about 'vulnerability' can appear to be common sense (Brown, 2011), there can also be assumptions about who is best to handle 'vulnerability', like the police (Keay & Kirby, 2018). The pandemic was no different. The expectation of the police to take the lead in enforcing restrictions appeared to be common sense. However, it positioned police officers in the "unprecedented" role of enforcing restrictions in what was ultimately a public health crisis (Farrow, 2020:587). Legislation created restrictions to minimise individual and group 'vulnerability' to the virus – and delegate responsibility. The overarching policing mandate

appeared to be one based on surveillance, with an emphasis on the maintenance of the politically malleable "public order" - an unclear and problematic hangover from previous policing activities during emergencies (Bonkiewisz & Ruback, 2012). There were, as previously noted, expectations for the police to perform as expected first responders. However, it was not at all clear what role – or how said role – should look like in practice (Express & Star, 2020; HMICFRS, 2021). Confusion reigned across government, forces and citizens themselves (Farrow, 2020:588). There also was dissention considering the correct course of action when restrictions were broached or broken:

"I mean, personally, I don't believe in issuing the tickets unless it's absolutely necessary, these COVID tickets. I would always give advice where I can. I wouldn't just issue tickets, willy nilly but if I go to somebody's house where there's 50 people in there, having a house party, yes, I'll give tickets for that. But somebody going out, travelling 50 miles to go and get some exercise, it would just be words of advice"" (Alex, Response Officer)

The police have some discretion in decision making. Differing interpretations and experiences of 'vulnerability' afford the police different ideas about effective and appropriate response. Alex also introduces the notion of proportionality as to how 'vulnerability' can be understood in both the policing context, and the context of the wider pandemic. One incident involves multiple people in close proximity, which raises the likelihood of exposure to the virus, raising the 'vulnerability'. The other does not, and so warrants a more tapered response. This highlights two aspects of 'vulnerability' that need reflection concerning policing and 'vulnerability'. The first is that 'vulnerability' is temporal, located within a specific time, place and circumstances. The second is that 'vulnerability' is relational as a result, with 'vulnerability' identified in relation and by comparison to other incidents of 'vulnerability'.

Alex also demonstrates how pandemic legislation and guidance burdened the police with more responsibilities in relation to the 'vulnerabilities' of the virus. This may have influenced interpretations of the guidance and response to breaches. A party, for example, may involve the police if it involves underage drinking, noise or violence – but a walk in the countryside does not. The police have been drawn into wider social issues prior to the pandemic owing to the focus on 'vulnerability'. Even prior to the pandemic, there was an argument that the police, and their role in identifying and responding to 'vulnerability', made them public health responders just as much as criminal justice practitioners (Bartkowiak-Theron &

Asquith, 2017). The pandemic facilitated this further by authorising the police to become involved in incidents that breached lockdown restrictions, and supposedly increasing the 'vulnerability' of the community to the virus. Such a mandate also drew the police into scenarios that did not involve them by individuals with ulterior motives. Call handlers described how a significant of calls related to neighbours informing on each other, claiming that restrictions were being broken. A refusal to respond would be met with anger and threats to go to the media about the police's inaction.

The changing restrictions therefore left the police exposed, and therefore 'vulnerable', to scrutiny, media attention, unmet expectations - and a great deal of uncertainty. There was significant police frustration with the lack of notice given to forces in terms of changes, which negatively impacted their ability to communicate said changes to officers and staff down the chain of command (Laufs & Waseem, 2020:4). Call handlers discussed the rage directed at them by service users who had phoned to get information about changing restrictions. The anger appeared to arise from the police being uncertain themselves about the changes, or from service users no longer being able to do an activity that they desired. This latter scenario often occurred during observations prior to the pandemic. For example, an individual was incensed to learn that it was illegal to break into his former home to gather belongings as his estranged wife had kicked him out, and he was not on any documentation relating to the dwelling. Hostility and abuse directed towards the police by service users has previously been highlighted in this chapter - the increase owing to the pandemic leaves police staff further 'vulnerable' to issues affecting their mental health, which can circle back and affect their treatment of service users (Lumsden & Black, 2018; Black & Lumsden, 2020).

The malleable nature of 'vulnerability' has been discussed throughout this thesis. Other politically malleable concepts arose as problematic as the pandemic went on. Police needed 'reasonable suspicion' in order to detain 'potentially infectious persons' - both were unclear in definition, with "reasonable suspicion" being a "notoriously slippery" concept for policing in practice (Farrow, 2020:588). How exactly police were to define and determine a "potentially infectious person" was also not clear. Like 'vulnerability', 'reasonable suspicion' and 'potentially infectious' become terms that the police are left to judge for themselves. Considering the number of issues encountered by police when attempting to assess the mental health of service users, it is baffling that they were put in the position of determining the physical health of those they encountered. Further, the legislation itself only allowed the police to detain those who had been infected with the virus – leading to several convictions

and understandable criticism (Dodds et al., 2020a; 2020b). The police did not have the power to detain or even respond to those who were breaking legal restrictions (Farrow, 2020). For example, the two-metre introduced for social distancing was in guidance only, not a legal requirement (Laufs & Waseem, 2020:35). This did not appear to be clear to the police or service users. Adding further confusion were unofficial comments made by government ministers. There was a failure to clarify whether what ministers said were instructions, guidance, opinion or the law itself (Laufs & Waseem, 2020:35). The confusion echoes research literature that astutely points out the difficulty presented to practitioners when researchers and policymakers (and in this case, legislators) are skittish about ensuring the clarity of definition and guidance on 'vulnerability' (Sibley, 2018).

There was a quick response to some public criticism. The chair of the National Police Chiefs Council swiftly conceded that errors had occurred, with the hope that the speed of this acceptance of responsibility would maintain the afore-mentioned police-community relations (Farrow, 2020:589), and highlighted the aforementioned importance of police accountability. The College of Policing published renewed guidelines that outlined in greater detail what a reasonable excuse was for leaving one's home, to enlighten both officers and citizens (College of Policing, 2020).

Changes in legislation and practice intended to curb the 'vulnerability' of the UK to the virus. These changes simultaneously created barriers and obstacles for the police in their role of identifying and responding to other 'vulnerabilities' within their remit.

Restrictions and barriers to 'vulnerability'

During the pandemic, there was a reduction of face-to-face contact between the police and service users. Those that did occur were facilitated by wearing masks, which became a part of daily life for most of the UK population at the time. The use of screens was implemented in public places such as supermarkets and were also used in custodial suites. Whilst this facilitated the face-to-face meetings happening in the first place, they were not without significant issue:

"There's no face-to-face, not for me anyway. I've had two visits during COVID, both of them I got my mask, etc. Whilst you can still have eye contact, it is very difficult to have a conversation and interact with not only the parent, but the young person." (Robin, PCSO)

"It's the people that come in with, that are very few and far between but there's a particular lad who comes in whose profoundly deaf. And I find that difficult to deal with because a lot of the time he comes in intoxicated so he's irate, and it's the language barrier, and COVID hasn't helped with it, as we're speaking now through glass screens, whereas before I was face to face, I could even smell if you were intoxicated, because you can usually smell intoxication on your breath, which I can't do now because they're on the other side of the glass screen." (Kit, Custody Sergeant)

Masks and screens served as a barrier to detecting relevant 'vulnerabilities' of an individual. These measures provided protection against coronavirus but weakened the capabilities of the police to identify and respond to issues that necessitated a different kind of protection. Masks diluted their ability to make judgements about sobriety - and by extension any related 'vulnerability' whilst in custody. The 'vulnerability' related to both the individual and the staff, for which the police would be held accountable should anything go wrong. In this way, 'vulnerability' again is conceptualised not only as relational, but as hierarchical - which can be significantly problematic in practice. As one 'vulnerability' is prioritised and therefore reduced, other 'vulnerabilities' can be missed - or, in this particular scenario - masked.

Masks and screens also provided a barricade for a necessity of policing practice – communication:

"Massively. Because of the barriers that have been put up, these things sitting between us now, we've got them on desks, it makes communication a lot harder and my job as far as I'm concerned is all about communication. I've got to get across to that person why they're here, the vast majority of the time they don't want to be here, but it's far better for me to try to explain and try to get that person to co-operate with me rather than things ending up in a physical confrontation with the police officers that are with them, or indeed myself." (Kit, Custody Sergeant)

The screens were a barricade to officers interacting with detained persons, preventing a development of rapport often deemed necessary for effective dissemination of information to the individual and gathering information on them for appropriate risk assessments whilst in custody. As noted in the Identify chapter, vision and communication are considered vital elements of the process by which officers and staff effectively identify 'vulnerability' in practice. Said practice became significantly harder - again, an example of how the

hierarchical nature of 'vulnerability' can emphasise the reduction of one type of 'vulnerability' but increase others that fall further down the conceptual hierarchy.

Other necessary pandemic measures caused further issues for staff who worked with specific individuals and families:

"*And plus, meetings really have to be arranged, and so people are on top of things prior to you arriving. So, the house will be tidier than it normally is, or the children will be dressed and clean. They're prepped for you to attend, so it gives a false impression of how the family run normally. The unannounced visits, you're not having. And things are done over the phone, really, rather than face-to-face.*" (Robin, PCSO)

Before the pandemic, meetings had been unannounced. During the pandemic, individuals and families could 'mask' issues within their environment. This could for any number of reasons, rather than ones that are necessarily nefarious. However, the pandemic compounded pre-existing issues within households, facilitating conditions of abuse, violence and neglect (Wilke et al., 2020; Xue et al., 2020). The stay-at-home orders required parental involvement in teaching their own children, teaching online and financial stress. This has led to a rise in parental burnout, which often walks hand in hand with the mistreatment of children (Griffith, 2020). Scheduling meetings handicapped the efficiency of the police. Issues were being obfuscated from their sight, along with the opportunity to offer help and assistance. Restrictions were masking communication and environments with potentially 'vulnerable' individuals. It also provided abusers with notice to prepare themselves.

Emergencies and disasters significantly increase the levels of violence towards women and children (see Yoshihama et al., 2019). The pandemic, sadly, was no different (Bradbury-Jones & Isham, 2020; Moffit et al., 2020; Usher et al., 2020; Xue et al., 2020). This has already been referred to as the shadow pandemic, a crisis lurking underneath news headlines of the health crisis (UN Women, 2020a). The uncertainty and insecurity experienced across society (and the world) during the pandemic mirrors the everyday reality for vulnerable women and children in abusive households (Walklate et al., 2021).

Restrictions became a catch 22 and demonstrate a reoccurring problem in this chapter - interventions in place to reduce one 'vulnerability' can incidentally increase another. The protection of the public increased the 'vulnerability' of individuals by confining them to abusive households. The restrictions also became weaponised by abusers to keep their victims contained: the spaces of work, schools and socialising have also been removed

completely, which provide opportunities for others to witness abuse and facilitate intervention (Pfitzner, 2020). Lockdown restrictions reduced support services across the board (see Wilke et al., 2020; Usher et al., 2020). The courts reduced services, and court-ordered provisions were also reduced or withdrawn altogether (Levine et al., 2020). Opportunities for 'vulnerabilities' to be identified and receive response were catastrophically reduced. The State could not have conceived of a more perfect trap for those in abusive households if they had tried.

Even prior to the pandemic, some officers and staff did not consider domestic violence to be police work (Matczak et al., 2011; Sherman, 2018). This attitude, with the increased risk of domestic violence, leaves a gap for those vulnerable to abuse being treated seriously by law enforcement. People are left "vulnerable" in the sense that they have no state-sanctioned avenue to turn to when in danger, compounded further by restrictions and reduced services.

The changes in practice were not all negative, however. Shifts in working practice empowered the police in some areas to draw more effective boundaries concerning their role and capabilities in responding to 'vulnerability'.

Positive shifts in policing and 'vulnerability' owing to the pandemic

Some police forces took the opportunity to be proactive. Known perpetrators and victims of domestic abuse were visited if there had been no calls from them after the first few weeks of lockdown, in order to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all involved (Walklate, et al., 2021). There were other police forces who broadcast similar campaigns to that of the Home Office's "At Home Should Not Mean At Risk" (HMICFRS, 2021:25). Some individuals and families experiencing domestic abuse came to the police's attention during the lockdowns who had never previously been on either the police or multi-agency radar before (HMICFRS, 2021:29).

Some forces took advantage of a decrease in reports and activities in some areas of business and redirected them towards increasing concerns of online child sexual abuse. Children and young people being at home more frequently gave them more opportunities to go online, putting them in the crosshairs of people who prey on those perceived to be 'vulnerable' (HMICFRS, 2021:32). There was an operational recognition that restrictions intended to reduce 'vulnerability' to the virus simultaneously increased some people's 'vulnerability' by enclosing them in their homes. Forces took advantage of the restrictions on their own

working practices to attempt to identify and respond to other types of 'vulnerabilities' that risked increasing.

Owing to the fall in staff numbers, changes in operating procedure were needed in order to effectively and appropriately respond to jobs. Masks and screens were a practical change. Another was how jobs were prioritised by the frontline:

"So, it's a case that we have to, I suppose, cherry pick the jobs that we need to go to and prioritise the jobs." (Ainslie, PCSO)

"It's because of the reduced numbers, I think the way that jobs are resourced, and the way that jobs are looked at, and prioritised, has changed. And I think that's better... Whereas now, some of those jobs, because there isn't the resources, it's like, yes, okay, it's not a job for us. We'll signpost you, you need to go and speak to highways, or you need to go and speak to the council, environment agency, and things like that." (Lou, Response Officer)

The shift aimed to reduce the physical 'vulnerability' of staff and service users to the virus and prevent further reduction in staff numbers. The police widened their activities beyond virtual meetings: social media, webchat and video calls were employed to engage with victims of crime (Walklate et al., 2021). Other forces have reported that technology has opened more avenues for children to engage with safeguarding professionals more broadly, not just law enforcement (HMICFRS, 2021:33). There were therefore new avenues for the police to respond to 'vulnerability'. Online working and speaking over the telephone helped to resolve situations more effectively and highlighted the need for this practice to continue going forward:

"What I'm trying to say is sometimes you'll get calls that'll come in that can be resolved over the phone by the call taker. It isn't a policing job. But because there's, oh, well we've got a couple of patrols there free they'd send you to it So, that's a good thing, in so far as I'm assuming that call takers have had different training to weed out the… And I don't mean this [unclear], weed out this rot [?], so that we're not getting it on the front line. And it's being deft out at the point of call, which it should have always been anyway. We can take statements over the phones now and I mean, we could do that before but 99% of the time, it's we're always going back to get a proper statement from the person, individually." (Alex, Response Officer)

The reduced numbers have finally pushed the police – specifically the frontline – to put their foot down in terms of their decision making when it comes to their response and to policing priorities. If a job can be responded to without the use of response officers, contact services should be the default. These are 'vulnerabilities' with no clear crime element: jobs that solely involve over- consumption of alcohol or housing issues, for example. The main obstacle for the police is the risk averse nature of their working environment, which ultimately demands a response (Heaton, 2011). The police may be the default agency, historically and currently (see chapter 6).

But the pandemic has demanded a significant change in how they identify and respond within the limitations of their own role:

"So, I think we're getting better at saying, no, because we've had to say no". (Lou, Response Officer)

In observations, there were conversations concerning the desire for the police to say no to both partners and service users. It seems that the colossal impact of the pandemic in terms of the reduced numbers, enormous shifts in procedure and the ongoing uncertainty have finally pushed the conversation into action. How long it will last remains to be seen. There is, of course, the concern of the hierarchical nature of 'vulnerability' playing a significant role in these judgements concerning priority (see chapter 5).

The preference for the use of phones also reduces other time-consuming duties of the police role. Online and telephone working have also improved internal administrative communication:

"I think meetings have got more efficient! If I'm truthful, because they're on the phone, they're on skype, you know, it's fairly quite to the point and you get the job done, so I think that's a real benefit". (Sunny, Chief Inspector)

Police officers and staff already have a significant amount to deal with on shift, which often involves briefing and debriefing, bureaucracy and administrative duties. The introduction of online meetings provides an opportunity for meetings to become more efficient. Perhaps post- pandemic, online and offline meetings can work in tandem to maintain personal and professional relationships.

Online working offered the opportunity for more effective operational and administrative applications in the future. It also provides the opportunity for more diversity across the

workforce itself, with those who live with physical disabilities and chronic illness potentially able to play a role thanks to online working. The pandemic has improved police use of technology, with working from home broadly considered a success (HMICFRS, 2021: 3). Other benefits include improved attendance for all agencies and a reduction in commute time. Some online innovations created as a response to pandemic restrictions are to be adopted into force procedure permanently (HMICFRS, 2021:4). Efficiency across most areas of working improved, though HMICFRS has noted that much clearer procedures and expectations are needed for guidance if to become a mainstay of contemporary policing (HMICFRS, 2021:27). Despite the problems presented by the pandemic in terms of 'vulnerability', there is the hope that some practices can be solidified into police practice, offering more and diverse avenues for identifying and responding to 'vulnerability'.

Working from home offered some officers and staff the opportunity to reduce their 'vulnerability' to the virus – but not all. The previous chapter concerning the police's 'vulnerability' explored their exposure to physical harm, which was compounded by the threat of COVID-19.

The physical 'vulnerability' of police officers and their families

Whilst all individuals were physically 'vulnerable' to the virus, the degree to which one was 'vulnerable' fluctuated. Despite police assignations of 'vulnerability' as being fixed, such as being an elderly person or a child, 'vulnerability' outside of such direct assignations are conceived of with greater fluidity. Physical 'vulnerability' is of top priority within the police framework of 'vulnerability': the risk of immediate harm to service users, and as a risk to themselves in their working environment. Coronavirus added another dimension to this physical 'vulnerability' for the police, which demanded significant changes to procedure:

"It doesn't mean that we wouldn't stop going in, to ensure that somebody wasn't safe and well. However, when we would normally just turn up at an address, and go straight into their home, we now have to make sure that we're not putting them at more risk, by us carrying something, or them passing anything to us." (Terry, PCSO)

"Negative, clearly, we are in the public domain, officers can't shield as much as we would like. You can put them in as many face masks and gloves as you would like to do but we are going to get it and we have got it." (Sunny, Chief Inspector)

"Well, for me, massively, because obviously I'm having to work from home, because of a health condition. So, speaking to colleagues and stuff, on the whole, obviously the nature of the jobs that are coming in have changed." (Lou, Response Officer)

Public sector workers found themselves stuck between a rock and a hard place: the protection of themselves and their families from the virus, and the need for service provision as part and parcel of their employment (Moller, 2021). A similar dilemma was faced by those fleeing domestic abuse, especially those with children (Moffit et al., 2020). The physical and emotional proximity to the public made police officers 'vulnerable' to the virus (Laufs & Waseem, 2020:5). There is some evidence that at least 34 officers and staff were killed by the virus by the end of 2021 (The Independent, December 2021)[18]. There is again a relational and hierarchical nature to 'vulnerability' here: frontline responders made themselves 'vulnerable' to the virus, and passing it on, to execute their working role of identifying and responding to the 'vulnerability' of others. There can be some empathy here, therefore, for the notion of the police performing the role of hero and of performing a sacrifice (Reiner, 2010).

For those on the frontline, and could not work from home, consideration of their physical safety was both a necessity and yet a barrier to their everyday working. A great deal of 'vulnerability' within their role was owing to the need to take service users at face value:

"I walk into somebody, a complete stranger's house every day and I'm saying, any COVID issues? If they say no, I've got to believe them." (Alex, Response Officer)

"Whereas now we're a little bit more cautious in ensuring that we ask the relevant questions, that you haven't got any signs or symptoms. So, that can put a little barrier up, I suppose." (Terry, PCSO)

"We had to collect a prisoner from Scotland a few days ago, and you know, you're dealing with all the other issues that you officially do, mental health, schizophrenia, alcohol abuse, so you've got all that risk assessment but then the individual throws out at you 'I've got COVID'. And it's - what do you do? Because as an employer, I can't ignore - what I think is irrelevant, because it's out here in the public domain now." (Sunny, Chief Inspector)

"I: Fair enough. Do you have people threatening, saying they have COVID?

P: Oh yeah, all the time. All the time, yeah, it happens way more than you think." (Sandy, CDO)

The police on the frontline had to trust that individuals were telling the truth about their COVID status when interacting with them. Not knowing for certain whether they were exposed to the virus introduced a 'vulnerability' that ties to the concept's relationships with insecurity and precarity (Butler, 2004). Sandy's comment adds in a further complication: individuals claiming to have the virus as an intended threat to police staff. A significant number of police officers were threatened with being spat on during the pandemic (HMICFRS, 2021; BBC News, 2021). The weaponisation of the virus reignited the use of spit hoods by the police, and discourse surrounding the controversial practice (De Camargo, 2022; Strote et al., 2021). The method intended to reduce the 'vulnerability' of police officers and staff to assault and the virus by simultaneously increasing the 'vulnerability' of service users. Spit hoods offered the police a level of control over service users and their own 'vulnerability' during the pandemic. The practice, however, is controversial (Davenport, 2019; Sheerin, 2017; Hales, 2016).

The specific role that an individual plays in the police, and their working environment, can influence ideas about 'vulnerability'. Working during the pandemic was no different, with staff in custody having a significantly different experience to their other colleagues:

"*To be honest, it hasn't been that bad. I think there was a lot of anxiety at the beginning, when we had the first person in when we thought 'oh my God, they've got COVID' but when the measures were put into place and how to deal with it, it's been fine*" (Sandy, CDO)

"*...they seem to be doing everything they can to protect us, we've never ran out of PPE, I know that was big headline news, they've done really well to protect us and things like that, and if we needed to, we'd be fully kitted up.*" (Kit, Custody Sergeant)

The measures in custody, such as PPE and screens, allowed for a more fortified sense of protection from the virus and therefore less 'vulnerability'. Sandy's explanation demonstrates a link between the feeling of 'vulnerability' with insecurity, uncertainty and precarity. At the beginning of the pandemic, when it was unclear what was happening and what protection was needed, there was anxiety. Once the screens and PPE arrived for protection, anxiety decreased as there was a sense of knowing what to do and security. It also highlights how minimising or reducing 'vulnerability' can be achieved through methods that provide officers and staff with more control over their surroundings - and over service users.

The uneven effort to provide Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) across the different police forces was highlighted as a significant issue (Laufs & Waseem, 2020). The police that I interviewed expressed unease concerning their effectiveness at performing their usual duties, incorporating new responsibilities owing to the pandemic and simultaneously protecting their staff – especially as the frontline were not being regularly tested for the virus (Express & Star, 2020; De Camargo, 2021). The uneven provision of PPE was compounded by the uneven adherence to using such measures in the first place:

"... it's surprising that hardly anyone wears PPE. I feel like we're the only ones who wear PPE. The wards are really good, the wards always wear PPE, but...it's other services that don't seem to be as vigilant at wearing it as we do." (Blair, Mental Health Nurse)

Services, including the police, increased the 'vulnerability' of their staff to the virus by failing to both provide and use PPE. This uneven practice simultaneously increased the 'vulnerability' of their service users. Such an example can highlight how leaving oneself 'vulnerable' to illness can then place other individuals in a 'vulnerable' position: 'vulnerability' can then be conceived of as relational and dependent on the behaviour of others.

The relational nature of 'vulnerability' in the context of policing during the pandemic also shed light on a previously ill-considered aspect: the effect of working in the police on their family and home life. The 'vulnerability' of their families during the pandemic was brought into sharp focus, as families were increasingly exposed to the virus owing to the nature of the frontline role:

"…that is a real concern because we all go home to our families, you know". (Sunny, Chief Inspector)

"I mean, I'm a lot more nervous about going into people's houses because I don't want to come back and infect my other half or my kids. Because if I do, then we're screwed because I look at, I can't go shopping, my wife can't go shopping. It's bad enough with the kids having to learn from home." (Alex, Response Officer)

"Because I don't want to do it because I don't want to expose anyone to risk or myself to risk. I've got my own family, so I don't want to expose them to any unnecessary risks, I'm doing this job, that's risk enough." (Ainslie, PCSO)

The risks taken by police officers and staff – as well as their families – by their proximity of their role to violence, trauma and now illness is not a new concept (Jenkins, 1997). The effect on family life, however, is an often-ignored topic (Maynard et al., 1980; Souadka et al. 2020). The pandemic has cast a new light into this 'vulnerability', with some voices calling for compensation (Duncan, 2021). Emergencies and disasters often require officers to distance themselves physically and emotionally from family members and friends, excluding themselves from appropriate and effective personal support (Stephens & Long, 2000; Adams et al., 2011).

The home lives of police officers and staff were affected by the pandemic in similar ways to other members of the public: working from home, restricted movement and children learning online. The difference was that some areas of frontline policing demanded that staff continue to work with the public, and therefore 'vulnerable' to the virus - and bringing it home. The 'vulnerability' of the police is considered part of the role mandated by their employment.

Families, however, were off-limits. The quoted PCSO acknowledges the risks and the vulnerability inherent in the role, with those being 'risk enough' - suggesting a trade-off between the known risks and the benefits of said role. COVID-19 was an unknown risk, however, and therefore 'unnecessary' to bring home to their family. This again suggests elements of police 'vulnerability' that are necessary for police officers and staff to perform their roles effectively.

Many officers and staff shifted to working from home during the pandemic, which was broadly considered a success (HMICFRS, 2021: 3). But this shift affected frontline staff numbers, already impacted by colleagues needing time off to isolate and recover from the virus:

"My shift has depleted massively, because there's a lot of people off and stuff. So, we can't go to the same amount of jobs that we were going to." (Ainslie, PCSO)

"The numbers on all the departments across the force have plummeted, because we've got people working from home. People have been off either with COVID, or having to shield, or self- isolate." (Leslie, Response Officer)

The pandemic has compounded the problems of austerity further, with less staff available on the ground to respond to incidents in person. This increases the potential 'vulnerability' of staff that do respond to physical attack and harm. Whilst working from home may be

considered a success, the success of those working on the frontline remains to be seen. Some members of the police experienced an increase in their physical 'vulnerability', during the pandemic.

The pandemic, and its compounding factors, situated the police and their families, as physically 'vulnerable'. Such stressors, referred to as extra organisational stressors as they originate outside of the institution (Biggs et al., 2014), can contribute to significant issues with officer mental health and wellbeing (Lauf & Waseem, 2020).

Officer wellbeing during the pandemic

The organisational stressors of policing during the pandemic had an understandable effect on staff wellbeing:

"Mentally, I think, this crisis has affected everybody differently. It certainly did me for a while, because of issues at home as well as coming to work, I was coming to work and showering every day before I went home because things were playing on my mind". (Kit, Custody Sergeant)

Call handlers described how they had kept working during the period of lockdown, whilst other places of employment closed. One call handler described the physical and mental exhaustion of staff after the period of the first lockdown: that the chaos had been difficult but had distracted them from the anxieties surrounding the unfolding crisis. It was the aftermath that they found difficult, with emotions such as anxiety and issues such as trauma finally surfacing.

As discussed previously, trauma, burnout and compassion fatigue were issues faced by a significant number of officers and staff prior to the pandemic (Dussich, 2003; Turgoose et al., 2017). The active encouragement of depersonalisation and suppression of emotions by the institutional culture of the police can compound burnout and fatigue (Lennie et al., 2020). The individual officers and staff are "vulnerable" to the psychological damage that can come with their role. The risks that this 'vulnerability' presents to the public are significant. Burnout, fatigue and trauma contribute to conscious and unconscious avoidance of potentially threatening incidents - contributing to a lack of response, lapses in judgement and decision-making impairments (Paton, 2006).

The wellbeing of officers and staff will have long-term effects on effective policing (Laufs & Waseem, 2021:1; Stogner et al., 2020). Staff wellbeing had already been pinned as a priority for forces across England and Wales prior to the pandemic – even if just on paper (HMICFRS, 2021:9; NVAP, 2021). Emergencies and disasters cause external stressors for first responders (Biggs et al., 2014), as well as an increase in acute stress broadly (Adams et al., 2011). Officers and staff are faced with a decrease in resources, a lack of rest and an increased exposure to trauma (Adams et al., 2014; Snell et al., 2014; Dussich, 2003). As noted earlier in this chapter, this specific 'vulnerability' of the police can impact the 'vulnerability' of service users, as said 'vulnerabilities' can be misattributed or missed altogether.

It is clear that the police recognised that restrictions intended to minimise 'vulnerability' risked increasing other 'vulnerabilities' that were less pertinent by comparison. It is also clear that frontline staff in particular felt 'vulnerable' during this period, concerning exposure of the virus to themselves and their families. I have already highlighted how frontline staff were placed in a difficult, 'vulnerable' position by the very nature of their role, which mirrors the image of heroic sacrifice often held by the police (Reiner, 2010). This section blends these ideas together to reflect on the hierarchical nature of 'vulnerability' within wider society - which usually applies to service users (Green, 2007). However, the pandemic shed new light on this concept, highlighting the inclusion and exclusion of institutions such as the police themselves under consideration of the 'vulnerable'. Usually the gatekeepers of 'vulnerability', and aforementioned concepts such as heroic sacrifice, the police found themselves on the outside looking in.

Recognising 'vulnerability' in narratives surrounding the pandemic

'Vulnerability' can be a powerful political tool that constitutes and reconstitutes itself depending on the context in which it is deployed. The pandemic was no different, with dominant discourses displaying a "significant discursive turn" in conceptualisations of the concept (Phillips, 2021:182). Previously, the concept has been contested as both a concept and a definition, owing to its core features as contextual and fluid rather than fixed and immobile (Ruof, 2004). This contested nature of 'vulnerability' permitted its appropriation in dominant narratives concerning the impact of the restrictions put in place to reduce the 'vulnerability' of the population to the virus.

One dominant narrative was concerned with group attributes. The pandemic posed 'obvious' risks to those belonging to 'vulnerable' groups, relying on pre-existing understandings of the term: the elderly and those with pre-existing medical conditions (Levine et al., 2020). The risks of infection made some individuals more 'vulnerable' by compounding pre-existing difficulties and barring them from appropriate services (HMICFRS, 2021). Physical 'vulnerability' to the virus was tied to a priori physical 'vulnerabilities', demonstrating the prioritisation of physical 'vulnerability' above all others. This narrative relied on the notion of 'dependency' and our socio-political ideas surrounding those with physical 'vulnerabilities' owing to age or illness - which also includes children. A component of their "vulnerability" is owing to a narrative that they as a group are incompetent, and so society is obligated to look after them (Levine et al., 2020). The broad dominant narrative was that the rest of the population needed to follow restrictions and reduce their own 'vulnerability' to the virus in order to protect this specific group. Whilst there is some sense to this, it is worth noting that many narratives concerning 'vulnerability' contain assumptions that appear to align with common sense (Brown, 2011). The narrative, however, is permeated with notions of dependency, and a subtle undermining of agency on behalf of the 'vulnerable' group.

The narratives deployed familiar ideas concerning 'vulnerable' groups and their related 'grievability' in life - and death (Butler, 2004). The dominant narrative was rooted in science, a familiar edict for 'vulnerability' (Coppock & McGovern, 2012). 'Vulnerability' was framed as being biological and therefore 'natural', bringing together the elderly, the chronically ill and the disabled as inevitable, and therefore less grievable, collateral damage (Mad'arova et al., 2020). This narrative was boosted by the scientific and academic communities, for example studying the biological 'vulnerabilities' of those that needed antibodies (for example, Brower et al., 2020).

The secondary narrative targeted familiar 'outsiders' to normative society as the obvious 'threat'. Migrant communities, including the Roma and recent immigrants, were carefully positioned as the weak link in the chain of defence against COVID-19. In some cases, they were not solely the weak link but the direct cause of the infection spreading across the globe (Mad'arova et al., 2020). This narrative epitomises the tired dichotomy of 'deservedness/dangerousness' that underpins discourses on 'vulnerability'. However, a new and insidious element has emerged: that even if the 'vulnerable' are deserving of protection, their death is natural and unavoidable. By extension, it is nobody's responsibility and no big deal if they die from COVID-19.

The narrative deployed by the government and scientists was easily weaponised by those with less charitable intentions. Those trapped in abusive relationships and households reported how the overarching narrative of protecting the public was used as a tactic to keep them 'vulnerable' and contained within the abusive environment (Bradbury-Jones & Isham, 2020). Institutions therefore can aid in perpetuating one type of 'vulnerability' in this scenario, in the attempt to minimise exposure to another.

The pandemic also shed light on the 'vulnerability' of workers in institutions tasked with supporting and protecting the 'vulnerable' in our society. Across the UK, rainbows appeared in windows and on t-shirts, designed by the notable artist Damien Hirst. The rainbows were embraced as a symbol of support of and gratitude for the NHS and its workers during the pandemic (Phillips, 2021:179). NHS and healthcare workers were positioned as the heroes of the pandemic: vulnerable to infection and death but continuing to risk themselves regardless (Phillips, 2021:180).

The police also continued to work during the pandemic, exposing themselves and their families to infection and death. Their 'vulnerability' mirrored that of those working in the NHS but was not recognised or legitimised in the same way. This disparity was a source of frustration and resentment:

"Everybody loves the NHS but we're facing it as well, but nothing comes back our way and again, for me, that's frustrating...it's difficult but yes, we don't get enough thanks." (Alex, Response Officer)

Healthcare workers were providing aid, relief and support to those who were sick. The police were continuing their everyday roles alongside enforcing restrictions. Unlike the NHS, however, the police were vilified (De Camargo & Whiley, 2020). Errors and lapses in judgement broadcast on social media only confirmed and reinforced these ideas:

"But at the same time, we don't do ourselves any favours because you get these dickheads that are on YouTube and everything, saying oh you can't fool me and they're making themselves sound like such idiots. We just fall foul of stuff like that but again, it's lack of training, lack of common sense from a lot of bobbies as well." (Alex, Response Officer)

It could be argued that the police lost any chance at their 'vulnerability' being recognised or legitimised through their own actions, viewed as illegitimate and inappropriate responses to restrictions and the wider public in general. The police response to the pandemic was

undermined by the confusing nature of rapidly changing legislation, and government officials commenting on guidelines implying their word was law (The Police Federation, 2022).

The police are still a powerful institution of the State, and hardly could be considered 'vulnerable' in the same way as service users. As previously discussed in this chapter, it may not be considered to be in the police's best interest to advertise their own 'vulnerability'. However, it is worth noting that the label of "vulnerable" is often a justification for increasing state intervention and surveillance (Brown, 2011). The rise of social media has facilitated increasing surveillance of the police themselves by the citizens they serve. Filmed evidence demonstrates force and individual abuses of power – which can lead to intervention by the IOPC and similar organisations. During the pandemic, the police faced other events that seriously undermined their credibility and legitimacy as an institution posed to protect the 'vulnerable'. The murder of Sarah Everard by serving Met Officer Wayne Couzens in March 2021, especially as he used the pandemic restrictions and his police power to render her 'vulnerable', prompted scrutiny concerning the culture of toxic masculinity and misogyny with the UK police (HMICFRS, 2022; Casey, 2023).

These incidents have justifiably robbed the police of legitimacy and sociopolitical capital - already arguably on the wane since the 1980s (Reiner, 2010). But such a loss also impacts individual officers and staff, robbing them of their own specific 'vulnerabilities' being recognised and legitimised by wider society. Certain groups can generate legitimacy and therefore a wide range of capital through preconceived understandings of victimhood and suffering (Walklate, 2011). The police are not one of those groups. The NHS has workers risking their lives to help others, and therefore are conceived of as legitimately deserving of related capital and recognition of their suffering. It is usually the 'vulnerability' of service users that pulls some groups into the 'deserving' spotlight, and others are pushed further back simultaneously (Munro & Scoular, 2012). That dichotomy between deserving and dangerousness plays out again here: the good and deserving healthcare workers, versus the bad and not deserving/dangerous police officers.

Heroic sacrifices, and the masking of 'vulnerability', reappears within this context - albeit it, less to do with the police. As healthcare workers push their 'vulnerability' out of the way to save lives, so too the narrative of their heroism pushes their vulnerability out of the spotlight in the public imagination (Phillips, 2021:183). Another paradox of 'vulnerability' is highlighted here: 'vulnerability' can be recognised and yet simultaneously obscured. It is

possible that this paradox occurs owing to the nature of narrative itself. Both 'vulnerability' and 'heroism' are constituted and contextualised within a political narrative, not necessarily lived experience. The police themselves utilise and perpetuate this narrative (Reiner, 2010; Loader, 2020). But the police did not find their sacrifice rewarded with gratitude. There can therefore be a divorce between expectation and reality - a pattern that has emerged consistently throughout this thesis.

How the police will reconcile the lack of recognition concerning their 'vulnerability' during the pandemic remains to be seen. The culture within policing can promote the idea of themselves as heroes and warriors in society (Reiner, 2010). The lack of recognition therefore may be a challenge to their self-image, and in some cases, their ego. But lack of recognition can lead to resentment and frustration. The Police Foundation found that officers and staff broadly found the public to be cooperative and understanding of their position concerning the pandemic and its restrictions (Aitkenhead, 2022). However, other areas demonstrates that a lack of recognition for their sacrifices during an unprecedented time have been highlighted: lack of pay, lack of consistent hours, poor mental health support and increased workloads (Police Federation, 2021).

"Oh my God, they've got COVID'": precarity, uncertainty and conclusions

In March 2020, the UK was confronted with a scenario that no one had expected or experienced previously. The closest comparison was the Second World War owing to mandated government orders that restricted the movement of the population (Team & Manderson, 2020). The restrictions brought uncertainty to the fore: uncertainty as to how long restrictions would last, and how long the uncertainty itself would last (Farrow, 2020:588). 'Vulnerability' has conceptually and theoretically linked to precarity: the uncertainty such scenarios can generate (Butler, 2006).

The police found themselves on the frontline of a public health crisis, some of them exposed to a previously unknown virus, potential illness and death. They were not alone in their insecurity and precarity. Human rights groups had been calling for ongoing reviews of coronavirus legislation and restriction since the beginning of the pandemic (Orzechowski et al., 2021; Liberty, 2020). The immediate suspension of the Care Act (2014) through coronavirus legislation was inherently problematic to Disability Rights groups. The Care Act

had previously afforded greater protection of this section of group, so often conceived of as 'vulnerable' (Chakraborti & Garland, 2012). The Act also assigned greater responsibility and liability to local authorities and care providers (2014). There were concerns that the restrictions introduced for the lockdown would be enforced even once the pandemic ended, which would have serious and insidious implications for civil rights (Liberty, 2020).

The suspension of the Care Act under the Coronavirus Act (2020) expired on the 16th of July 2021. The ramifications of the act's suspension and the 'vulnerabilities' it exposed remain to be seen. Government restrictions bound by policy, procedure and legislation have forged public health and wellbeing long before the pandemic. The dynamics of power and privilege have in turn approved and denied each of our abilities to adhere to those restrictions (Team & Manderson, 2020). This is the legal and political architecture of "normative" and acceptable existence within our society (Peroni & Timmer, 2013). Structural inequalities can therefore be impacted by situational uncertainty, blending into a precariousness often understood as 'vulnerability' (Butler, 2006).

When considering the 'vulnerability' of the police, there can be the distinct sense that one is being asked a riddle for which there is no answer - the riddle itself is somehow, inexplicably, the answer. The 'vulnerability' of the police is felt by staff yet ignored by the general public and excluded in favour of comparison to the healthcare service. It highlights the temporal and paradoxical nature of 'vulnerability': how it is conditional, yet still unfixed.

It can be difficult to conceive of the police as 'vulnerable'. As an institution, they can appear the opposite of 'vulnerable', full of power and infused with agency. But the responses from participants demonstrate how individual officers and staff can be 'vulnerable' by the very nature of their role. It is this 'vulnerability' that will require greater recognition and attention in future research, in the hope that it can positively impact on the policing environment. For, on one hand, participants noted that the focus on 'vulnerability' had opened their minds and provided them with the gift of empathy. Given the complexity of 'vulnerability', I would suggest that this is a necessary attribute and practice. I would further assert that 'vulnerability' can be a positive attribute in the context of social relationships, involving honesty, trust and humility with oneself and with others. For the police, this would require transparency and accountability. Such a shift would be crucial, if not revolutionary, for the police at the time are currently in a 'vulnerable'

position concerning public trust and legitimacy owing to this same toxic culture, fuelling

questionable practices, grossly influenced by misogyny and racism (Casey, 2023). I would venture that an emphasis on empathy and compassion, through the lens of 'vulnerability' (rather than risk or harm), would be a progressive avenue for the police to take if they are to tackle toxic environments and depersonalisation. This also includes tackling the cultural image of the police as heroic saviours. As noted elsewhere, expectations often fail to meet reality - disappointment is the only result.

Within the context of the police and wider structural problems, 'vulnerability' can be used to draw critical gaze from wider structural permeations and perpetuations of inequality and marginalisation (Munro & Scoular, 2012). The 'vulnerability' of the police demonstrates this notion further: focusing on the police alone draws our critical gaze from how we, and wider society, also perpetuate 'vulnerability' and inequity. The failure to hold the police accountable for making individuals 'vulnerable' within the police environment exposes that our society both actively and passively participate in who the police marginalise - for we collectively marginalise them too (Loader, 2020). Further, by making 'vulnerability' the problem of the police, like other agencies, we can sidestep our own responsibilities, reinforcing expectations and assumptions about policing as an institution and 'vulnerability' more widely. Unfortunately, the police can blame the external issues that cause their, and service users', 'vulnerabilities' as an attempt to deflect criticism. The power of the institution and its accepted mythos within our society grants permission for this deflection, instilling inertia and apathy towards meaningful change (Loader, 2020).

Institutions themselves can be guilty of creating and perpetuating 'vulnerability', rather than removing it. The hierarchical nature of 'vulnerability' often holds significant sway over this process. The pandemic perpetuated this practice. To reduce the 'vulnerability' of the pandemic to the wider population, individuals and their own, personal 'vulnerabilities' were increased.

Domestic violence and mental health issues were two significant areas of competing, hidden pandemics. Yet restrictions created by the government and enforced by the police did not ameliorate these 'vulnerabilities', instead increasing them.

The experience and aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic will be felt - and studied - for many years to come. At the time of writing, an inquiry has opened into the readiness of the UK for a global pandemic. How much will be gained from this inquiry or others remains unknown. The police have learned new ways of operating, as have we all. Whether these new

processes remain in place is also unknown. There is also a question mark as to how much we, as individuals and as a society, are willing to learn the lessons of the pandemic. We all experienced a seismic shift, unlike anything any of us have experienced previously. We were all 'vulnerable' to the virus.

But, as ever, the 'vulnerability' of the scenario was disproportionately distributed across society, compounding pre-existing inequalities of health, finances and marginalisation (Team & Manderson, 2020). I have faith that our unique, yet shared experiences of 'vulnerability' can progress us forward in society. Though, like many of the participants quoted in this chapter, consistent exposure to 'vulnerability' has also left me cynical. I do, however, believe that the pandemic has offered us the opportunity to delve deeper into our understandings of 'vulnerability', especially the experience of being 'vulnerable', which has received little attention. The pandemic offers us opportunities that are always offered by tragedy: to learn lessons, however bitter, and create something much better. If we are to succeed, of course, we will need to be vulnerable.

Chapter 8 - Operationalising 'vulnerability': Conclusions

Introduction

"Vulnerability" needs vigilance. The police too require vigilance in identifying and responding to 'vulnerability' (Keay & Kirby, 2018). The police possess more power than other agencies, as well as individual citizens, (Gilson, 2013; Goodin, 1985), and it is therefore vital to investigate their role concerning 'vulnerability'.

'Vulnerability' as a term and operational concept can be taken for granted as a clear pathway for identifying people who require intervention (Brown, 2011). Our society can also apply taken-for-granted assumptions about the police, which the police themselves perpetuate - especially the notion that the institution has a mandate "to enable the well-being of individuals and the growth and welfare of community" (Emsley, 2021:1). A significant issue is that the 'vulnerable' often overlap with groups and individuals who have been historically and politically marginalised within society, with the police on the frontline of active discrimination and oppression (Bartkowiak-Theron & Asquith, 2017; Gilson, 2013; Brown; 20211; Reiner, 2010). Reiner, 1978). The findings, as well as previous literature, have highlighted that 'vulnerability' is conceived of as a problem, which requires either a solution, a repair or both (Brown, 2015). This framing, alongside the emphasis on the role of the police, presumes that the police are the solution (Bartkowiak-Theron & Asquith, 2012; 2015; 2017). The prevention and detection of crime, the maintenance of public order and the preservation of the State and cultural status quo can all "fall under the rubric of modern policing" (Emsley, 2013:76). This rubric cannot be separated from the well-meaning, protective rhetoric that places 'vulnerability' as a core feature of contemporary policing (Keay & Kirby, 2018).

To investigate how the police operationalise 'vulnerability', the thesis answers three research questions:

1. How are the police informed about vulnerability?

2. How do the police identify vulnerability?

3. How do the police respond to vulnerability?

In non-participant observation, interviews and initial analysis, I approached the research questions through the epistemology of critical realism. This lens permitted a kaleidoscope of

different perspectives: the 'real', concerning the institution of policing and its afforded powers; the 'actual', concerning the roles of police officers and staff in practice; and the empirical, where the two meet for observation and reflection. Critical realism encourages an approach that is based on how things are, and not how they should be. The desire to extort the latter can be tempting within the realm of criminal justice. I was able to examine not only what beliefs are held, but why they are held and how they are produced. In this concluding chapter, the findings are situated alongside evidence from previous literature and policy to draw out emerging themes for future research. Future policy and practice are also explored, particularly the expectations about and within policing concerning 'vulnerability' - and consider the future of the police, and 'vulnerability', within our society.

To begin, however, the limitations of the current project and relevant considerations for future research.

Limitations of the project

The clearest limitation of the project is that the data is drawn from a small sample of officers and staff within one force out of the thirty-nine across England. Whilst the themes raise questions about the possibility of wider occurrence, the findings cannot be fully applied to either the force itself or as a robust example of policing itself.

From a pragmatic perspective, there were also gaps in who were represented in observation and interviews. Response officers were absent from observation, owing to the riskier nature of their everyday practice: as a result there was a reliance on their own opinions and views, without necessarily the opportunity to compare their actions in practice. Whilst CID and resolution hubs - a unit like contact services, where civilian staff responded to incidents identified as low risk and could be handled over the phone - were identified for interviews, but the interviews scheduled did not occur. Whilst there was no definitive answer on why this did not occur, the pandemic was offered as the prevailing answer, as they were expected to cover an increase in their duties and COVID-19 related responsibilities. Neighbourhood policing is also absent from the data, whilst there is only one police partner included - although it is acknowledged that the focus of the project is strictly the police, rather than necessarily their partners.

A cross-comparative replication of the research across more than one force would be a significant vehicle to investigate these findings further, with an expansion in what operational units and professional roles were included in data gathering and collection. This would allow more scrutiny around gaps within the current findings, especially around intersectionality. There would need to be an emphatic focus not only on how stand-alone characteristics affect identification and response to 'vulnerability', but also the intersection of said characteristics, and how they might reinforce one another within a policing context (Crenshaw, 1991; 1995).

The role of police liaison requires further scrutiny and consideration in future projects. Whilst I had, in my opinion, a fortunate experience, there are benefits and risks to collaborating closely with the institution being studied. The benefits are primarily about access, but this can turn when circumstances change. The problem is, without access, actively researching the police in terms of observation and interviews - as well as surveys, focus groups and any other methodology - requires police co-operation for robust data and effective analysis. The police can be gatekeepers to more than operational concepts.

How are the police informed about 'vulnerability'?

During observations and interviews, it became clear that staff struggled to adequately define what they meant by 'vulnerability', mirrored by the struggles of academics with the elastic and often multi-purpose nature of the term (Cole, 2016:263). Tensions arose concerning the understanding that anyone *could* be considered 'vulnerable' by the very nature of their encounters with the police, as well as a rejection of a one-size-fits-all definition, as the complex nature of 'vulnerability' does not permit a seamless translation or operationalisation (Cunnif-Gilson, 2016).

These tensions were exacerbated by a lack of force definition concerning 'vulnerability'. Despite executive management emphasising the definition that they helped the College of Policing to create, it appears that the definition had failed to be communicated or translated to the frontline in a meaningful way. For the force to demonstrate its commitment to more effective governance and operationalisation of 'vulnerability', a definition can create cohesion on which all employees can draw. This is recurring and much wider issue, as there is no law or policy that cohesively defines who counts as 'vulnerable', which can lead to significant confusion, and distinctly different criteria across forces and in different agencies (Moyle, 2019). Despite this recommendation, the police are still faced with the challenges of

defining 'vulnerability' that academics face in their attempts to do the same. Inclusion of academics who study 'vulnerability' in the creation of definitions, training, policy and practice can aid police understandings of 'vulnerability' concerning implications of the term, to more robustly inform them - and perhaps even reassure them - that there is much more to 'vulnerability' than a signal for protection. There would also be reasonable questions around how effective a cohesive definition can be, as definitions can encourage prescriptive approaches and a need for indicators that would attempt to render 'vulnerability' quantifiable (Green, 2007). The problem with indicators - as highlighted by research investigating 'risk' indicators and factors - is that they may provide some explanation for presenting issues, but obscure the role of structural causes and facilitators (Brown, 2019; Webster et al., 2006; Phoenix, 2012a). Prescriptive indicators can also facilitate inclusion and exclusion, which in turn perpetuate further marginalisation (Munro & Scoular, 2012). Any definition would also need to place an understanding of the subjective and socially constructed nature of 'vulnerability' at its core (Burghart, 2013).

When investigating what 'vulnerability' meant to participants, the likelihood of harm and suffering were recurring themes, which previous literature has also highlighted (Gilson, 2013). Abuse and exploitation were noted as significant indicators of both 'vulnerability' and 'harm', which requires the presence of another person in order for the harm or 'vulnerability' to harm to occur (Gilson, 2013; MacIntyre, 1999; Nussbaum, 2006). There was, however, recognition from participants that 'vulnerability' was much wider than criminal sources of harm.

A theme that arose from participants' responses - and noted in observations - was that 'vulnerabilities' revolved around the concept of need. Sometimes the need was clear: for example, a need for police intervention, for information and for referrals. Sometimes the need relates to other concepts, such as support or protection from harm. But this 'need' could often be as complex, fluid and unclear as 'vulnerability' itself. 'Need' could concern finances, shelter, nutrition, bodily integrity, attachment, education, health and social participation - and has pinpointed as the feature that underpins our 'vulnerability' (Gilson, 2013; Miller, 2012). The answers provided by participants highlighted these different needs, with an emphasis on an individual lacking in some way or possessing less than the expected norm (Alwang et al., 2011). It is worth noting that this understanding is drawn from studies on sustainability. Sustainability is based on ideas concerning maintenance - the avoidance of loss or harm (Oxford Languages, 2023). It is perhaps unsurprising therefore that the police, who it can be

argued are primarily concerned with order maintenance (Reiner, 2010), have unconsciously drawn their understanding of 'vulnerability' based on notions of maintenance and sustainability. Future policy can include this conceptualisation - not as a definition to replace 'vulnerability', but as a framework for officers and staff to use when trying to identify and respond to 'vulnerability'. By asking what an individual needs - either directly or through their own reflections - then officers and staff are provided with a pathway to follow to ensure the most appropriate help. The most appropriate help, crucially, may not be the police themselves. 'Need' can be interpreted through a lens of ethical care, with needs being "objective, inescapable, inevitable, urgent, and universal….if unmet, will result in the harm of compromised agency" (Gilson, 2013:25; Miller, 2012). Similarly, 'vulnerability' can be interpreted as a framework of ethical responsiveness to need (Cunnif-Gilson, 2016), with an emphasis on rights (Peroni & Timmer, 2013). There is a well-founded argument for future meaningful collaboration and debate between theorists concerned with ''vulnerability' and theorists concerned with 'need' (Miller, 2012; Gilson, 2013).

The difficulty is that 'need' becomes yet another term to be added to policing lexicon of 'vulnerability', which already includes 'risk' and 'safeguarding'. The relationship between 'risk' and 'vulnerability' differed between participants and was complex to untangle in analysis. There was some agreement with previous research, in that both concepts can be considered context-dependent and historically situated (Ford et al., 2024). The police can understand 'vulnerability' by drawing on pre-existing ideas about 'risk'. Their cultural and linguistic history with 'risk' outpaces that with 'vulnerability' in their formal practice, and therefore it is unsurprising that the police draw on said previous history. The police were - and still can be considered - knowledge holders, and therefore gatekeepers, of 'risk' (Ercison & Haggerty, 1997). They may expect to play the same role in 'vulnerability' (see chapter 5; and relevant findings later in the chapter). Their reflections also provide emerging ideas about the relationship between the two: the dichotomy of 'risk' and 'vulnerability', activity and passivity; as well as the hierarchical positioning of the two concepts in theory and in practice. There is also the strong sense that 'vulnerability' and 'risk' can be interchangeable in policing and wider safeguarding contexts, suggesting that both terms are perhaps merely operational linguistics, deployed for agency communication rather than effective practice. These ideas have only received an introduction in the thesis: further research will be needed for further elucidation.

Further work is required in forces, and the College of Policing, to untangle the relationship between both concepts and their relationship to each other in practice and policy. Research is well under way in this area (Mythen & Weston, 2022). However, policing institutions would do well to include academic researchers in this area - not solely those considered to be specialist in areas concerning 'vulnerability' - to learn from their work and experience, including to challenge current conceptualisations. Academic researchers investigating 'vulnerability' could also be included in the creation of training, which was highlighted as playing a key role in how the police are informed about 'vulnerability'. Person-centred narratives concerning 'vulnerability' was a prominent feature of the training developed by the College, and this approach can aid to shift discourses around groups who are marginalised, yet considered 'deviant' within policing, such as sex workers (Brown & Saunders, 2017). There are problems, however, with this approach, as it can heavily imply that 'vulnerability' is a specialism within policing, requiring specialist knowledge of social issues, such as sex work, or child abuse. Public Protection Units can have their effectiveness undermined by emphasising a need for specialist knowledge, primarily involving training and awareness of 'indicators' (Casey, 2023), rather than skills-based approaches that can apply to everyday encounters with service users, regardless of the 'type' of person or incident. Thus, the experiential learning asserted as significant to being informed about 'vulnerability', would be part and parcel of parcel of police activity.

The shift in discourse that 'vulnerability' can provide requires further embeddedness within training, as well as policy and practice. Academic researchers have highlighted that 'vulnerability' carries negative connotations of weakness, passivity and fragility, and that labelling an individual as 'vulnerable' automatically invites comparisons with the 'norm' (Burghart, 2013: 556). Current findings suggest that there is an absence of police understanding concerning the implications emphasised within research, including the perspective that calling someone 'vulnerable' can remove their agency and position them at the margins of agency decision-making (Brown & Saunders, 2017; Burghart, 2013; Bevir, 2013). Training, informed by researchers, can aid to challenge these assumptions within policing, to encourage officers and staff to understand and consider the consequences of calling someone 'vulnerable'.

How do the police identify 'vulnerability'?

When asked who they identified as 'vulnerable', participants tread familiar paths of inclusion and exclusion (Munro & Scoular, 2012). Age was a significant factor in 'vulnerability', though there were noted complexities in terms of the circumstances - in particular, youth justice and young offending. Prior research has highlighted the significant tension between protection and discipline within the policing response to criminal justice (Dehaghani, 2017). The recognition of children's 'vulnerability' is relatively new when situated in our cultural history (Aries, 1965; Gulati, 2022), as is the concept of youth justice within policing (Reiner, 2010; Hughes et al., 2022). Prior legislation and policy has focused on 'rescuing' children perceived to be deviant owing to their non-conformity to expectations of what it means to be a child - and 'vulnerable' - which focuses intervention on the child as 'the problem' and management as the answer (Schnell, 1979; Hughes et al., 2022). There is a need for policy and practice to draw on research conducted with children and young people who have lived experiences of childhoods that empathically do not fit with our cultural notions, such as Ellis (2019), who documented a rejection of practitioner prescriptions of both 'childhood' and 'vulnerability'. There needs to be collaboration with children and young people to understand how they interpret their own lives, which has the potential to engage more meaningfully with what support would be most effective from their perspective.

It would be significant to consider other 'vulnerabilities' in a similar light: that considering people who are victimised and/or are lacking in capacity, for example, as 'vulnerable', does not mean that the police necessarily have any affection or empathy for these individuals. It is more the 'particular nature' of these characteristics and lived experience that underlines the 'vulnerability'. The particular nature of these characteristics require further unpacking within future research. In terms of policing policy and practice, reflective supervision and reflective sessions for management creating policy would be a useful tool for curiosity, challenge and discussions on how best to address the negative implications and consequences for these 'vulnerabilities'. Like the example with children, there is a need to engage person-centred approach not only to identify needs appropriately, but to actively involve individuals in decision-making in a manner that is highlighted as a barrier by previous research (Burghart, 2013).

Future research can investigate the relationship between 'vulnerability' and tragedy that so frequently appears within the disability/medical model (Brown, 2016; Burghart, 2013), and how far this applies to conceptual understandings of 'vulnerability' within policing. In

tandem, it is worth considering how the models of disability might inform our understanding of the associated 'vulnerability' of victimisation, as there are often similar themes of tragedy (Wishart, 2003). This is particularly crucial when considering the emphasis placed on physical 'vulnerability' in the findings concerning police identification, as it is given priority within their operational hierarchy.

The hierarchy of 'vulnerability' outlined within the findings requires further scrutiny and investigation. Hierarchies have been a crucial noted theme and criticism within previous research (Green, 2007; Chakraborti & Garland, 2012). 'Vulnerability' cannot be *understood* in a vacuum, whilst the findings highlight that 'vulnerability' can also not be *identified* within a vacuum. 'Vulnerability' is understood relationally, and frequently by comparison (Gilson, 2013; Burghart, 2013; Goodin, 1985). Rather than necessarily promoting understanding between groups, however, comparisons and hierarchies promote the politicisation of 'vulnerability', which requires frequently monolithic groups to compete for public recognition and practitioner resources - which can invisibilise individuals further down the social hierarchy (Brown et al., 2016).

Considerations of who the participants identified as 'vulnerable' can simultaneously highlight who is not considered 'vulnerable' by virtue of their absence. Alongside comparisons of different 'vulnerabilities', the absence can also speak to binaries. Binaries, such as 'vulnerable/not vulnerable' or capacity/incapacity - are frequently founded on biological narratives that reproduce social hierarchies, including gender (Cole, 2016; Moyle, 2019). There was some contention over the absence over the recognition of men as 'vulnerable' in custody, framing women as unilaterally 'vulnerable' is also contentious. Both rely on gender stereotypes and expectations around strength and weakness, competency and incompetency, which can overrule the nuances within the lived experience of the individual (Pieri, 2022; Cole, 2016). There are questions about how this practice in custody aligns with the Equality Act (2010). Further investigation and scrutiny are required in both research and policy to evaluate the effective identification of 'vulnerability' via gender - or indeed, any characteristics covered under the Act, especially how these conceptualisations of 'vulnerability' equate to deservedness and worthiness - or deviance (Pieri, 2022; Cole, 2016). The perceptions of addiction within the findings underline this dichotomy, which simultaneously framed 'vulnerability' as a choice, which is a recurring problem within the public sector and criminal justice (Brown, 2011). More robust policy and practice around responding to addiction is required, which will require collaboration with the local authority

and relevant partnerships. More attention is also required to examine the use of dichotomies within policing, with emphasis on a need for the appreciation of a spectrum of experiences (Bartkowiak-Theron & Asquith, 2015), particularly as binaries can provide the foundation for intervention (Trebilock & Weston, 2020; Brown, 2015).

The notion of binaries and labels deployed within policing highlights the topic of police linguistics. 'Vulnerability' is a relatively new addition to the lexicon (chapter two). In the same chapter, the use of the terms 'police property' and 'rubbish' also appeared, to denote different categories of people which the police could encounter (Reiner, 2010:123). Most personal and circumstantial characteristics of those historically considered 'rubbish' or 'police property' - victims of domestic abuse, addiction, the homeless, sex workers, children and young people - are now adopted under the umbrella of 'vulnerability' (Brown, 2011; 2019; Bartkowiak-Theron & Asquith, 2012; 2015; Walklate, 2011; PEEL, 2015). The term 'rubbish' in particular concerned individuals who were not worth police time or were choosing their own circumstances - similar to how some individuals considered 'vulnerable' can be considered to be choosing their 'vulnerability' (Brown, 2011; 2017). The police now are expected to identify, respond and protect this section of the population, conceptually recognising their personal and circumstantial powerlessness - however, it appears that 'vulnerability' framework has merely handed the police a more palatable and subtle method to categorise those they consider 'property' or 'rubbish'. This aspect requires further research, including whether these terms are in fact historic, or still appear.

A significant issue that occurs throughout this section, and the findings, are assumptions that the needs, wants, desires and experiences of those identified as 'vulnerable' (and who are not) are unanimous amongst and within these groups. The intersectionality of these groups - and attendant 'vulnerabilities', through the lens of both their individual experiences and perpetuations of structural inequality - requires further investigation in research to inform more effective practice and policy. There can be the assumption that the individuals within these groups all experience 'vulnerability' in the same, fixed manner, with a failure to recognise the intersectionality of race, gender, class, sexuality and disability, amongst others (Cunliff-Gilson, 2016; Crenshaw, 2013). Any framework in policy and practice going forward requires consideration of intersectionality, rather than an evaluation of each category separately from the others. Such active consideration can support more nuanced insight into individual lived experiences concerning 'vulnerability', the barriers within society that may

be facilitating 'vulnerability' and more accurate assessments of need (Cunliff-Gilson, 2016; Crenshaw, 2013).

How do the police respond to 'vulnerability'?

The themes of this chapter highlight the multi-agency nature, and expectations, of police response to 'vulnerability'. Previous policy has highlighted the emphasis and faith placed on multi-agency working (see chapter 3; Hughes et al., 2022), whilst research has in turn questioned the realistic efficacy of the approach (Davies, 2022).

The findings also challenge the approach. It must be acknowledged that further research is required in this area, to understand the challenges of demand, as the findings currently reflect the police perspective of partnership working, rather than a holistic assessment. However, it is still useful to investigate the policing perspective, as their beliefs and opinions can highlight areas of challenge. Despite a need for collaboration and interdependency, the findings voice frustration with what appears to be increasing dependency on the police by other agencies, as well as civilians re-routed from those same agencies. Confusion over responsibility for 'vulnerability' in the frontline was particularly stark, with the sense that the police are expected to pick up the pieces of the work of other agencies. Further investigation is resolutely required to understand the accuracy of this perspective, including working collaboratively with the other agencies to explore their own experiences of multi-agency working and with the police. It is worth noting that competing operational priorities, systems and practice have been highlighted on a national level as perennial issues for multi-agency working, which frequently inhibits effective information sharing (CSPRP, 2024).

There is some glimpse into how the police can be perceived by other agencies. The first is from the only interview with a participant who was not a police officer or civilian staff, but seconded to the police: Blair, the mental health nurse. She describes the police as intimidating, for which they were not necessarily at fault but because of their uniform. Future research is required to explore the role of intimidation and the uniform within policing, their awareness of this feature, and how it is deployed. The findings suggest some awareness in some quarters, with officers in the harm reduction hub in particular demonstrating acute awareness of this, wearing civilian clothes to engage on a more human levels with victims and offenders alike. This practice could be applied more widely within the police, and receive formalisation in policy, for forces to untangle the use of their uniform in everyday practice.

There needs to be further awareness within policing practice and policy of how the presence and engagement with the police themselves can be distressing and unsettling for civilians, who often are already in a heightened state of stress (Dehaghani, 2017).

Joint accountability within multi-agency partnerships was imagined to avoid notions of 'lead' agencies for operations and strategy (Hughes et al., 2022). However, descriptions by executive management highlight awareness on a strategic level that the way the police work - reactive, immediate and a strong need to 'take over' - can leave other agencies alienated (Hughes et al., 2022). Policy concerning multi-agency work around 'vulnerability' must emphasise proactive intervention, rather than reactive response, including working with practitioners to identify who is the most appropriate agency to lead in terms of appropriateness for civilians. Policy must ensure a balance of shared vision and goals concerning 'vulnerability' between partners, but greater clarity around the responsibilities and accountability of individual agencies, which has been advocated elsewhere (CSPRP, 2024).

This aspect of policing response, or policing 'personality', returns to the prospect of skills-based training and practice. The use of soft social skills such as reassurance, empathy, validation and active listening speak to a significant shift in practice. Previous literature has identified these skills as necessary within the context of call handlers on the frontline (Black & Lumsden, 2020). Future research is required to further explore their efficacy, for the police and civilians alike. These skills will also require a place in policy and future training, rather than necessarily revolving around specialisms or activity. Framing 'vulnerability' as a specialism is to frame the concept as a problem to be solved or fixed (Brown & Saunders, 2017; Munro & Scoular, 2012; Scoular & O'Neill, 2007). Providing reassurance, for example, has been an ongoing function of policing, but only allocated to specific roles in specialised silos, such as the former Women Police Officers and currently PSCOs (Emsley, 2009; Reiner, 2010). Rather than necessarily viewing the response to 'vulnerability' as a specialised skill that requires specialist knowledge and training, the deployment of soft skills provides an opportunity for the police to meaningfully engage with civilians, from the perspective of 'vulnerability' as being part and parcel of police encounters (Bartkowiak-Theron, 2017; 2021).

Further, there is an argument to be made that a significant amount of policing practice - as demonstrated within the findings - involves interaction and association with other people, including civilians, partners and fellow police staff (Nussbaum, 1992). Social relations are a

key factor in the success of humanity, particularly within the area of care, justice and ethics (Gilson, 2013). Skills based on effective communication and engagement requires more emphasis within policing training, policy and practice - so the function of the police concerns not just *what* the police do, but *how* they do it.

There are difficulties concerning the level of flexibility within police response highlighted in the findings, which gives rise to concerns around discretion (as discussed in chapter 2), which in turn leads to issues found within zero-tolerance policing. This is particularly challenging as discretion can be framed as a vital component of policing practice (Young, 1999). Zero-tolerance policing is reactive and immediate, and so is understandably favoured by the police in operational practice, but disproportionately targets the most marginalised in our society and reproduces racial hierarchies in particular (Green, 2007; Reiner, 2010; Bustamante et al., 2019). The flexibility of response therefore risks reproducing the same social hierarchies, especially within the context of the hierarchical findings of chapter five in the thesis. Further research and critical challenge are required around this practice, especially as past attempts to tackle police powers to decrease the likelihood of police abuse and misconduct has instead resulted in an enhancement of those same powers, alongside a dilution of pre-existing safeguards (Reiner, 2010: 100).

Unexpected vulnerability: the COVID-19 pandemic and the 'vulnerability' of the police

Despite the proposed potential of soft skills, previous research has highlighted the difficulties in embedding empathy and compassion within police practice (Aliverti, 2020). Scepticism and cynicism was highlighted in chapter five as playing a key role in police decision-making. Scepticism, cynicism and ignorance has been highlighted as a critical factor in making judgements around mental health in custody, with relevant 'vulnerability' overlooked and dismissed (Dehaghani, 2016). There is need to investigate the factors and dynamics at play within the everyday role that increases the likelihood of officer cynicism, rather than a monolithic approach to 'cop cynicism', which - like 'vulnerability' - can pathologise the individual and make them solely responsible for its resolution, rather than considering environmental and structural factors (Regoli, 1976; Niederhofer, 1967). There is also a need to avoid the taken-for-granted assumption that cynicism and scepticism are natural by-products of the policing role (Galliher, 1971).

Empathy and compassion may have the potential for effective deployment in practice, but close scrutiny and balance is required. To have empathy and compassion does not preclude suspicion and worry, or cynicism (Aliverti, 2020; Aas & Gundhus, 2015; Heyman, 2002). Further, empathy and compassion often demand physical and emotional proximity of others (Aliverti, 2020). In this way, 'vulnerability' can be useful in providing a framework of the shared components of being human, listening to and reflecting on experiences of other people's 'vulnerability' in order to reckon with our own (Cunniff-Gilson, 2016).

However, the police "deal with the most appalling injuries inflicted upon man, women and children" (Emsley, 2009:283). Empathy can be demanding in terms of emotional labour, already underlined as a challenge for call handlers on the frontline (Black & Lumsden, 2020). The introduction of empathy and similar soft skills in training, policy and training would require simultaneous checks and balances in resources for mental health support, as well as reflective supervision, to support officers and staff in their endeavour.

Further research is required around the experiences of 'vulnerability' within policing. The current absence of police officers and staff as individuals from 'vulnerability' highlights the emphasis on the 'invulnerability' of the institution and the state as a whole - with 'invulnerability' having the potential to be dangerous, with increases in oppressive interventions that historically have targeted those considered 'vulnerable', positioned as a risk to the social order (Cole, 2016).

The COVID-19 pandemic has built on pre-existing themes of 'vulnerability', but also introduced new ones. The 'vulnerability' of the police themselves is one element, as their physical proximity to the virus provided a clear image and metaphor for wider considerations of 'vulnerability' within the role. Research since the pandemic has highlighted the role of other practitioners on the frontline, such as teachers (Jopling & Harness, 2020). The arrival of the pandemic shifted 'vulnerability' temporarily away from the margins and into the mainstream, where everyone could be considered 'vulnerable' - however, such narratives were dominated by familiar voices of privilege, which simultaneously silenced the voices of those with pre-existing marginalisation that became compounded (Pieri, 2022). Such hierarchical dominance within discourses is unfortunately familiar within the 'vulnerability' literature (Carlson, 2014).

The experience or feeling of being 'vulnerable' has yet to be explored within the literature, which has primarily focused on practitioner conceptualisations and definitions. The findings

here however provide some starting points, with 'vulnerability' of individual police officers and staff highlighting familiar 'types', such as physical, situational, mental health and environmental. The 'vulnerability' of an officer or staff is affected by structural factors and cultural organisation, which will require scrutiny. Rather than hijacking 'vulnerability' for their own uses, however, future research can be used to inform the police as an organisation on how to robustly support their employees in terms of their physical and emotional wellbeing. Research on teachers has encouraged organisations to examine circumstances such as the pandemic in terms of the human impact, rather than that on the system, as well as encouraging leaders to embrace 'vulnerability (Jopling & Harness, 2020). So too can the police embrace 'vulnerability', rather than distancing themselves as 'invulnerable' stalwarts of the state. Some disability scholars have advocated that 'vulnerability' can be a vehicle for willingness, acceptance, generosity and honesty in exploring what it means to be human (Ford et al., 2024; Ginsburg & Rapp, 2020) - which potential may provide some space for officers and staff to explore what it means to be in the police, and their future role in 'vulnerability'.

Further considerations of policy, practice and research

This section considers other examples of policy considerations and research that are drawn from more subtle themes that have arisen from the findings and analysis that can support future practice.

The first is that, if we are to consider the 'vulnerability' of police officers and staff to give voice to how they might be supported in their roles, then there must be a similar opportunity offered to civilians labelled with the role of 'vulnerable'. There is limited research on this topic, with the literature that has focused on this topic highlighting predominantly negative reactions, with a rejection of the term itself (Ellis, 2019). Brown & Saunders (2017), however, highlight the balance that is required between the benefits and drawbacks of 'vulnerability', as it can be useful for individuals to explore their own narratives, but be rejected as a label to be affixed. Individuals are not consulted or asked about this designation, despite the significant role the term can come to play in the decision-making of practitioners, leaving the individual themselves at the margins of their own lives (Ellis, 2018; Brown, 2016). These early foundations now require further evidence, which will also require an emphasis in policing policy and practice. Encouraging Crime and Disorder Reduction

Partnerships to involve agencies that represent distinct groups within the community - including addiction, women, disabilities, ethnic groups - was a novel idea, but failed in practice (Hughes et al., 2022). Rather than necessarily have agencies represent their clients, there would be value in consulting directly with members of the community on policy and protocol. Academic researchers - both as specialists on 'vulnerability' as a concept, and specialists on specific types of 'vulnerabilties' (poverty, child sexual exploitation, etc.) - can also play a role here to engage said communities. Feedback may be challenging and difficult for the police to hear or implement but may aid to avoid the moralising tone and logic of previous legislation and policy (Hughes et al., 2022; Munro & Scoular, 2012). Researchers can have significant power in questioning and challenging assumptions within policy and practice concerning 'vulnerability' (Brown, 2015), providing an opportunity to create more nuanced and balanced policy. There is, however, a risk that academic or expert voices will still dominate, as has been documented in previous research in this area (Brown & Saunders, 2017; Geymonat & Macioti, 2016). What also requires scrutiny and challenge is that a significant majority of policies and strategies within policing are written by white men (Long, 2018), which raises questions about for whom policies are written, as well as intersectionality within the police hierarchies and recruitment.

The police, like other agencies, also must focus on what Gilson (2013:22) calls "pathogenic vulnerabilities", which are interventions that may be intended to fix or decrease 'vulnerability' but instead exacerbate pre-existing 'vulnerabilities' - or create new ones. It is currently unclear how aware the police are of their historic and cultural role in social control. It is therefore worth questioning and exploring how much or closely the police believe they need to be in the lives of civilians (Brown, 2015). Policies therefore require scrutiny from both the community and academics, as noted, to highlight flaws in logic and practice.

Poverty is a theme that is touched on throughout the thesis, but particularly in relation to concepts of 'need' and participants' frustrations over social issues they encounter. Policy, informed by research, is therefore required to understand how poverty plays a crucial role in the intersectionality with other 'vulnerabilities' (Traustadotti & Rice, 2022). Further, the wider social and structural factors that create and perpetuate 'vulnerability' through disadvantage, inequality and marginalisation are critical for both research and future policy of the police, as well as multi-agency working (Brown, 2019:622; Crenshaw, 2013; Garland, 2001; Flint, 2006; Harrison & Saunders, 2014). These may be complex problems, but previous research has highlighted how an examination of structural problems contributes to a

more nuanced understanding of the complexities involved in individual 'vulnerability' (Brown, 2019; Sharp, 2013). Long standing social issues need to be meaningfully addressed through funding, innovation and collaboration, rather than the historical precedent of political short-term 'wins' that target voters and focus on results rather than the individuals considered 'vulnerable' (Reiner, 2010; Gilligan, 2007; Crawford, 1998).

Any discussion on the police raises the spectre of a specific question that has arisen in recent years - defund or refund the police? Binaries are not solely to be avoided by the police for their lack of nuance and rigid essentialism (Gilson, 2013). The police have already been on the receiving end of defunding since 2010 but were expected to extend their responsibilities to more and more incidents under the criteria of 'vulnerability' - as have most agencies (Ecclestone Rawdin, 2016). Refunding the police, however, does not necessarily solve their issues entirely. Other agencies - including the courts, probation, children's social care, adult's social care, mental health services, drug and alcohol services, prisons, education, the NHS, services for neurodiversity, services within the care sector, amidst many more - also need funding to ensure not only their survival, but to ensure effective support for civilians so they are not in the position to where they have little choice but to contact the police.

Just as the police cannot be expected to respond to crime alone, the findings emphasise that they cannot be expected to respond to 'vulnerability' alone - regardless of whether "this is seen as desirable or oppressive" (Reiner, 2010:140). Early intervention and prevention cannot be stressed enough. A potentially fascinating element of future research would be to put the proposals set out by organisations that argue for defunding to police leaders, officers and staff for consideration about their feasibility. There is the possibility that some arguments may be supported by the police, but the use of the term 'defunding' results in antagonism. I would further argue that any community provisions would need to have policies and practices scrutinised, challenged and informed in the same manner as the police, to ensure effective practice and avoidance of the emergence of familiar pathways of inclusion and exclusion.

Finally, the policy suggestions here can apply to the force studied within the project, as well as other forces. A final policy suggestion concerns research within policing itself, with a more formal process for engaging researchers to help support evidence-based practice. There was a formal process of support via the CASE nature of the project, but also the individual who performed the role of the police liaison. They were an experienced individual in policing, 'vulnerability' and working with academics. They were also committed to progressing the

force's response to 'vulnerability' and was an advocate for the role research could play in drawing out themes to be addressed. They also possessed a great deal of humility and honesty in our discourses around the limitations and barriers within policing. However, the connection to the force was lost when the liaison moved on in 2022, with new people in the roles, who had their own agendas and priorities. A greater sense of embeddedness is needed to ensure that the research that occurs can be effectively used by the force, though there are admittedly a great many challenges that face researchers and the police in this function. Research on the topic of researching the police, particularly methodologies and effective practice, is ultimately required to create a usable framework for future PhD students and researchers. There would need to be significant commitment to this activity by both national and local leaders within policing, which may take significant work and capital to achieve. There is, however, the danger of working so closely with the police, as there can be the temptation to shy away or tone down any criticism, no matter how constructive, of policing policy and practice, to ensure an ongoing relationship. These tensions require further investigation - but also potentially a more open dialogue between policing practitioners and researchers.

Final conclusions

Through the lens of 'vulnerability', the police wear multiple hats. They must be historians, aware of their institution's impact on those considered 'vulnerable'. They must be social workers, spending time delving into civilians' wider circumstances, even their emotions, to respond effectively. They must be mental health workers, with knowledge and understanding of how to deal with individuals in crisis. They are advocates, speaking up for those who have no voice.

They are managers: of risk, vulnerability, expectations and occasionally public relations. They can provide food vouchers, personal alarms and door locks. During the pandemic, they became responsible for a public health emergency. And they are still police officers: surveilling, regulating and controlling certain sections of the population; preventing, reducing and investigating crime; protecting individuals and the public; managing offenders; and navigating the bureaucracy.

The police are now a great many things. In terms of 'vulnerability', the concept may be unclear but their role in society still holds that policing is responsible for identifying and responding to it in practice. How this expectation has been operationalised has been explored throughout this thesis. This expectation is not disappearing any time soon, especially considering the aftermath of the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis. Both are significant issues that impact pre-existing 'vulnerabilities', which can then result in increasing demand for the police to identify and respond. 'Vulnerability' opened Pandora's box - and the aftermath cannot be handled by the police alone. 'Vulnerability' is not going to disappear from the policing agenda - and perhaps it should not, as discourses and recognition of 'vulnerability' can stress a need for ethics and justice, prompting us to respond in kind (Cunnif-Wilson, 2016). The police themselves are also not disappearing any time soon - as "if there was universal consensus about norms, values and appropriate modes of social behaviour there would be no need for a police force" (Reiner, 2010:69).

The police are "a regrettable necessity" as suggested by Reiner (2010:254). It is possible that the introduction of 'vulnerability' has also been a regrettable necessity for both the institution and our wider culture, in a failure to appropriately and effectively address structural inequalities and marginalisation. 'Vulnerability' can highlight the diversity of late modernity - of experiences and voices, the many ways of being in the world and the many harms that can be experienced. This can an evoke "nostalgia for the inclusive, secure world of the past", dominated by monolithic and mythic narratives concerning law and order, including policing, alongside a "demand for quick fixes, for panacea" (Young, 1999:121). It can address the many, many ways of being in the world, and the challenges of life, which do not necessarily always require fixing (Ford et al., 2024). However, the police have already been appointed - and appointed themselves - as the solution. This requires ongoing scrutiny, curiosity and challenge, especially considering the often oppressive, harmful elements embedded in policing as the law enforcement arm of the state (Aliverti, 2020; Dehaghani, 2017; Reiner, 2010).

The College of Policing training on 'vulnerability' contained the tagline 'if you don't look, who will?' This tagline was presented at the end of the training, emphasising the role of the police in identifying and responding to 'vulnerability'. I first read the tagline in 2018, echoing in my mind ever since. It became an accidental prophecy of the scenario that the police would find themselves in six years later, as the possible answers to that rhetorical question dwindle

to zero. The police must continue to own, identify and respond to people who may be 'vulnerable' - for if they don't, who honestly will?

This project has highlighted the potent need for researchers to closely survey how 'vulnerability' is deployed by the police, the criminal justice system and wider society. Researchers can highlight and legitimise the problems with the term. We can also highlight and legitimise the issues of civilians and police alike in relation to the focus on 'vulnerability. Research must keep tabs on how the term is appropriated, and even manipulated, for the convenience of practitioners over the protection of civilians – for if we don't, who will?

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Appendix A: Ethics protocol

Project Title   Operationalising Vulnerability in (redacted) Police

Name of Researcher   Laura Briody

Research Institute   School of Social Science and Public Policy

Correspondence address   School of Sociology and Public Policy

Chancellor's Building, room CBB0.082 Keele University

Keele e-mail address   Redacted

Work telephone number   Redacted

Supervisor's Name   Dr Samantha Weston

redacted

Project Start Date   September 2018

Project End Date   September 2021

Section B - Project Details

In lay terms provide a brief summary of the project including the background and rationale for the proposed research and the hypotheses or research question(s) (max 500 words)

The project is set in the context of national and local discourse concerning the police's role in assessing and interacting with vulnerable members of the population. This discourse has been set in motion by media and government reports including, but not limited to, child sexual exploitation, mental health, stalking and harassment, and child abuse both institutional and domestic. These events have raised inquiries and concerns about whether the police in the United Kingdom is adequately equipped to handle "Vulnerability".

"Vulnerability" is an ever-widening concept that attempts to identify individuals perceived to be at risk from harm or exploitation. An individual's perceived vulnerability factors can include, but is not limited to, their gender, age, race, mental health, disability, sexuality, culture and religion. Therefore, the definition of who is and who is not vulnerable is difficult to pin down conclusively, as it appears to constantly be in flux.

In 2015, (redacted) was one of four forces HM Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) graded as inadequate at protecting vulnerable people from harm. In 2017, Dr Samantha Weston, a senior lecturer of Keele's Criminology department and a research collaborator with (redacted), applied successfully for a CASE studentship from the Economic and Social Sciences Research Council in order to gain funding for a PhD research project to investigate how the force identifies and operationalises vulnerability.

The 3-year research project aims to explore how (redacted) are informed about vulnerability via legislation and policy; how this then develops training and strategy; and finally, how this operates in the context of everyday policing. The project will identify weaknesses and gaps in these areas, with a view to developing effective tools and resources to improve the practices of the (redacted) force in their interactions with vulnerable people.

The research questions that the project aims to explore are as follows:

1. Where are key decisions regarding Vulnerability being made?

2. Who is making these key decisions regarding Vulnerability?

3. How are these decisions reached?

4. How are these decisions carried forward?

The research stages are as follows:

Stage One: Policy Analysis (July - September 2019)

Stage Two: Participant Observation (October - December 2019) Stage Three: Semi Structured Interviews (January - March 2020)

B2

In lay terms outline the type of procedure(s) and/or research methodology (e.g observational, questionnaire, interviews, experimental) to be employed (max 500 words)

Stage One: Policy documents

These are a selection of policy and strategic documents from (redacted) that chart the development of the force's knowledge, approach and application of their understanding in relation to Vulnerability.

These documents do not contain personal information or data. They are not confidential and some are already available to the public.

Stage Two: Non-Participant observation

Five units within (redacted) have been identified as significant locations where key decisions are made regarding an individual's vulnerability. All five units also interact with the entire range of possible vulnerabilities that an individual may have, avoiding the occasionally siloed nature of police work.

I will conduct non-participant observation in these five different units, which are as follows:

1. Contact services, redacted

2. Custody facility, redacted

3. Victim Gateway, redacted

4. Vulnerability Hub, redacted

5. Vulnerability Hub, redacted

Non-Participant observation permits the process and procedure of identifying, assessing, mitigating and handling Vulnerability in real time with the benefit of context.

The units each have different shift patterns owing to the nature of the service that they provide:

Contact Services - 5 separate shifts - 24 hours a day, 7 days week **Custody Facility** - 3 separate shifts - 24 hours a day, 7 days a week **Victim Services** - all shifts are 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday **Vulnerability hubs** - all shifts are 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

I intend to have at least two sets of each shift for the purpose of comparison, replication and generation of data. Observing each shift allows there to be consideration for how vulnerability may be operationalised differently at different times of the day, the year or by a different shift. Vulnerability is more likely present in individuals at the weekend or at night as other services are not available.

I will not use a recording device and will instead use a notebook to collect observations about the procedures and decision-making processes.

Contact services, which handles 999 and 101 calls as well as dispatch, often handle highly sensitive information coming from callers reporting incidents. This sensitive information is not to be collected as part of this project, nor are details of specific incidents to be noted as neither are necessary.

The same procedure is to be followed for participant observation of **Custody, Vulnerability Hubs and Victims Gateway.**

Further in the cases of the **Vulnerability Hubs and Victims Gateway,** where a vulnerable individual's information may be discussed as part of the services' everyday duties, the individual's name is not to be given to or spoken aloud in front of the researcher. They are instead to be given a pseudonym or an initialism.

Non-Participant observation also attempts to identify which specific individuals will be included in the second stage of the research project.

Stage Three: Semi structured Interviews

To further explore the data collected in the previous stage, specific individuals from each of these units will be identified as playing a key role in decision making regarding vulnerability. They will be invited for individual interviews with researcher.

There will also be individuals from outside of these units who will be invited to take part in semi-structured interviews, identified primarily as strategic leaders on vulnerability within

(redacted). Examples include Chief Superintendent (redacted), who takes the lead on Neighbourhood Policing, and (redacted), the force's Vulnerability manager.

The interviews will last between 60-90 minutes and will be recorded. They are to take place at the individual's place of employment.

B3

Describe the characteristics of the participant group, and the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Indicate the sample size, with an explanation of how this sample size was decided/calculated.

The participants for semi-structured interviews will be identified as police officers or police staff that are employed in one of the aforementioned identified (redacted) units. Further, they will be identified as having a distinct role to play in the decision-making process regarding vulnerability. Within each units, there are a variety of different roles and ranks. Therefore, an individual from each of these as far as possible would be the optimum selection, with at least 4 identified from each unit.

The exact number of interviews to be undertaken is not yet known at this stage but is unlikely to exceed 30.

Section C - ethically sensitive, challenging or issues of risk

Will the research involve deceased persons, body parts or other human elements such as blood, hair or tissues sample (including saliva and waste products)?

NO

C2

Outline any potential risks to individuals, participants and members of the research team; the measures that will be taken to minimise the risk; and the procedures that will be adopted in the event of an adverse event.

Risks to participants

There are no direct risks to participants of non-participant observation.

There are also no direct risks to **participants** of the semi structured interviews. However, Police officers and staff are often on the frontline of the public sector, and their interactions often involve events of heightened emotion, anxiety and trauma.

Vulnerability is a complex concept that often sits at the heart of policing and can embody its risk-averse culture. Discussions on vulnerability can involve challenging ideas and accepted knowledge within both the wider cultural sphere and the institutional one of policing. Difficult discussions can facilitate negative thoughts and emotions. The interview also may facilitate memories that are negative or traumatic to arise.

This can be addressed by the **researcher** being aware of social cues, body language and the atmosphere in the room. If a question/answer appears to be impacting negatively on a participant, the subject can be changed or even the interview paused for a break.

It can also be addressed by gently asking participants how they are feeling at the end of the interview, with the tape recorder turned off. Any issues that have arisen can be discussed.

It may also be useful for the researcher to become familiar with occupational health and support provided by (redacted). The **researcher** will provide information at the end of the interview about the services that the force provides as well as services outside of the force.

In respect of the wellbeing of the **researcher,** observing police officers operationalise vulnerability often involves the researcher observing the social interactions that the police deal with on a daily basis, mentioned above. This may involve being confronted with second-hand or third-hand trauma, either on behalf of the police officer or staff, or the situation of a service user. This can speak to the researcher's own experience of trauma, facilitate negative thoughts or generate negative/traumatic memories.

This can be addressed by the researcher discussing any issues confidentially with the police liaison or academic supervisor, both of whom have more experience in this area. It can be addressed through reflection via the field diary, allowing for the proper and safe processing of emotions and thoughts.

The researcher has easy access to the University counselling and mental health support, as they have already made contact and formed a relationship with the service.

The **researcher** will be undertaking acts of lone working, some of which may include observing shifts that begin very early in morning or end very late at night. The researcher is also a female working primarily in a male dominated institution.

This can be mitigated through a series of measures, primarily by following Keele University's lone working policy. The researcher's police liaison, (redacted), and their supervisor, Dr Samantha Weston, are to be informed of the researcher's participant observation schedule. Dr Samantha Weston and the researcher will keep in regular contact through phone calls every 2-3 hours during participant observation.

Semi-structured interviews are to occur at the participants' place of work during average working hours (Monday to Friday, 9 - 5pm). The researcher is not to be in the position of being alone with a male police officer or member of staff for any reason outside of the semi-structured interview times.

C3

Will the research be undertaken overseas?

NO

C4

Will the research include children or vulnerable adults such as individuals with a learning disability or individuals with cognitive impairment?

NO

C5

Will the participants be deceived in any way about the study?

NO

Section D

D1

Indicate how potential participants will be identified, approached and recruited and outline any relationship between the researcher and potential participant.

Recruitment of participants will be facilitated through contact with (redacted) and the researcher's police liaison.

The **participants for non-participant observation** have been identified as police officers or police staff that are employed in one of the aforementioned identified (redacted) units. The managers of each shift will be contacted by e-mail informing them about the non-participant observation aspect of the project via (redacted). **(see Attachment 1)**

The **participants for semi-structured interviews** will be identified as police officers or police staff that are employed in one of the aforementioned identified (redacted) units.

Further, they will be identified as having a distinct role to play in the decision-making process regarding vulnerability. Within each units, there are a variety of different roles and ranks.

Therefore, an individual from each of these as far as possible would be the optimum selection. These individuals will then receive a letter of invitation by e-mail **(see attachment 7)** and an information sheet **(see attachment 8)** will be attached to provide further information about the interview. If, upon reading this information, the individuals are interested in taking part and willing for the interview to be recorded, they will be asked to complete a consent form **(see Attachment 6)** relating to the interview and return it to the researcher as soon as possible. Again, if they agree, a mutually convenient time and date will be arranged between the participant and the researcher.

D2

Describe the process that will be used to seek and obtain informed consent.

For **non-participant observation**, an information sheet **(see attachments 2 through 5)** will be sent containing all the necessary information about what this stage of the project involves and what the researcher will be doing it. It will also contain information about anonymisation

of the participants, data retention and disposal, and contact details of the researcher, supervisor and police liaison.

This information sheet will also be displayed in multiple different spaces within the unit during the shift under observation. The e-mail from D1 **(see attachment 1)** will be sent to the corresponding shift manager a significant amount of time before the observational shift, to be disseminated amongst the employees present at said shift.

If, for whatever reason, the researcher would like to quote something that a participant has said during observation, a consent for quotes form **(see attachment 6)** and information sheet will be presented to the individual. The participant will be asked to confirm consent before and after signing, and also will be informed that the source of the quote will remain anonymous.

For **semi structured interviews**, an information sheet **(see attachment 7)** will be included in the e-mail invitation **(see attachment 7)** to the specified individuals. This information sheet will contain the same information as the information poster above. Once the information sheet has been read and the individual is happy to proceed with the interview, they will be asked to sign and return a consent form to the researcher at their earliest possible convenience. At the beginning of the interview, the participant will be presented with another information sheet to be read and another consent form to confirm that they are content to be recorded and proceed with the interview. At the end of the interview, once the recording is turned off, the participant will again be asked to confirm that they are content to have been recorded.

D3

Will consent be sought to use the data for other research?

NO

Will consent be sought to contact the individual to participate in future research?

YES

D4

Can participants withdraw from the research? No - non-participant observation

The police officers and staff involved in participant observation are anonymised at all times as it is primarily the procedures for decision making that are being observed.

If, for whatever reason, the researcher wishes to quote something a participant has said during observation, a consent for quote form and information sheet will be presented **(see attachment 6 and 8)**. The participant will be informed before and after signing the form that they have the right to decline. The researcher will send the individual a transcription of their quote within six weeks to re-confirm their consent for it to be used. Up until that point, the individual has the right for the quote to be withdraw from the data.

Yes - semi structured interviews

Participants of the semi-structured interviews will be informed in the information sheet **(see attachment 8**) that they do not have to take part in the project, are free to stop the interview at any time and withdraw from the project. If they continue with the interview, they will be sent a transcription of their interview and will be asked to re-confirm their consent for the data to be used. They will be informed that up until this point, they are free to withdraw from the research project.

Section E

Confidentiality and anonymity

E1

Outline the procedures that will be used to protect, as far as possible, the anonymity of participants and/or confidentiality of data during the conduct of the research and in the release of its findings.

The data will be anonymised by removing personal information that could reveal a participant's identity. Information of individual shifts under observation will also be anonymised (such as the date of observation). Custody and Contact Services shifts' rotate frequently and so there is no way to identify which participant was on each observed shift.

Each participant of the semi-structured interviews will be assigned a code known only to the researcher, assigned to their recordings and transcripts. This information is to be kept separately, and further separate from communications between participant and researcher. Confidentiality will be maintained as far as the identity of the participant will not be revealed to third parties unless the researcher thinks there is a serious risk of harm to the participant or to a third party.

The research data itself, whilst anonymised, will not be confidential as the findings will be published in the final PhD thesis and potentially shared in publications. Participants will be made aware of this limitation.

Participants will also be informed that while efforts will be made to keep their identity confidential, there is the potential to identify them. The interviews will focus on specific individuals with specific roles in the organisation, of which they may be the only one. Generic job titles will be used but the potential does remain for participants to be identified by quotes used in the research. Participants will be informed of this risk by the researcher and in written form in the information sheet.

Section F

Storage, access to, management of, and disposal of data

F1

Describe the research data that will be stored; where it will be stored and for how long; the measures that will be put in place to ensure the security of data; who will have access to the data; long term data management plans following completion of the project; and how/when data will be disposed of.

Any electronic data collected from both interactive stages of the study will be stored on a password protected file on the researchers' university computers. Codes will be used to identify participants on audio recordings and only the researcher will have access to these files.

All data contained on paper (such as consent forms) will be stored separately from any interview data in the researcher's locked filing cabinet, to which only the applicant has keys.

The data collected will be kept on the researcher's university drive for a period of 5 years, after which it will be securely destroyed.

Section G

Other ethical issues raised by the research

NO

G1

Are there any other ethical issues raised by the research?

NO

Section H H1

Does the project require researcher(s) to have a disclosure and barring service DBS check?

NO

Does the project require national offender management service approval?

NO

Does the project require NHS research development approval?

NO

Does the project require approval from another organisation?

NO

Appendix B: E-mail from police liaison to Hubs concerning non-participant observation

Dear (Name of Shift Manager),

Operationalising Vulnerability in (redacted): ESRC-funded PhD research project with Keele University, 2018-2021.

I am writing to inform you that a PhD researcher from Keele University will be attending [shift] on [Day][Date] from [Hours of Shift].

The researcher's name is Laura Briody and she will be shadowing your unit for the duration of the above shift.

Attached to this e-mail is an information sheet - please take the time to read it and disseminate it to the fellow members of your shift. Laura will also have these information sheets in poster form to display in the unit during the shift. She will arrive approximately 15 minutes before the beginning of the shift in order to complete this.

Best wishes, (Redacted)

Research Information Sheet for Non Participant Observation of (police unit)

Study Title: Operationalising Vulnerability in (redacted)

Aims of the Research

The purpose is to understand how [redacted] Police are informed about vulnerability, how this is demonstrated in policy and training, and how this then is operationalised in the context of everyday policing.

What is going to happen?

A researcher from Keele University will be attending at least two shifts of each available shift pattern at (police unit). They will be making notes about the procedures that assess and handle the vulnerable people with whom (police unit) interacts.

You may be asked about the decision-making process concerning an individual's vulnerability and the strategy set in place to help them. You may have an opinion that the researcher considers worthy of quotation, for which separate consent will be sought.

At the beginning of each shift, the attendees will be reminded of the researcher's presence. Because of your role in the operationalising of

vulnerability at (police unit), you may be contacted in the future to participate in a one to one semi structured interview. However, separate notification and consent will be sought for this activity.

What are the benefits (if any) of taking part?

There are no direct benefits to you take part in this research. However, your experience of policing and vulnerability will help to provide insight into how (redacted) can improve or change its working practice, develop tools and resources for more effective practice.

What are the risks (if any) of taking part?

There are no direct risks to you taking part in the research.

How will information about me be used?

The notes from observation are primarily concerned with procedures designed to assess and handle vulnerability. Any information provided will be completely anonymous. No individual will be identified in the final thesis and any subsequent publications concerning the research. Generic job titles will be used and private information will not be disclosed by the researcher.

Who will have access to information about me?

Only the PhD researcher named on this document will have access to information about you. The data collected will be stored securely on a password protected computer at Keele University. If you consent for something you said to be quoted, the researcher will use a code rather than your name to identify what you have said. Any hard copies of data (i.e., consent forms, the transcribed notes) will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's locked (personal) office when not in use.

The data will be retained by the researcher for five years, after which it will be securely disposed of.

Who is funding the research?

The research is funded by the Economic and Social Sciences Research Council.

Contact Details

If you have any questions regarding any aspect of this study, you may wish to speak to the researcher who will do their best to answer your questions. You should contact Laura Briody in this case. Contact details for the researcher's supervisor, (redacted), and (redacted)'s (redacted0, are also included below.

(Details redacted)

Appendix D: Copy of e-mail invitation to participants of semi-structured interviews

Dear,

Operationalising Vulnerability: investigating how police are informed about, identify and respond to individuals categorised as "vulnerable": ESRC-funded PhD research project with Keele University, 2018-2021.

My name is Laura Briody and I am a PhD student at Keele University undertaking the above research project, which has been approved by (redacted).

Given your unit's unique role in the assessment and handling of Vulnerability, I would like to invite you to take part in a one-to-one semi-structured interview via video in order to explore your knowledge, understanding and opinions of the subject and how it is operationalised in the context of day-to-day policing.

Please find attached to this email an information leaflet about the interview. If you are interested in participating in this project or have any questions please get in touch using the contact details below so we can arrange a mutually convenient time and location to conduct an interview.

Yours sincerely, Laura Briody

Appendix E: Consent forms for interview participants

Consent Form

Title of Project: Operationalising Vulnerability in (redacted)

Name and contact details of Principal Investigator: Laura Briody, Keele University, E: (redacted), T: (redacted)

Please initial box if you agree with the statement

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet dated 03/06/2019 (version no 1) for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw up until the interview has been transcribed and sent by the researcher for final confirmation of consent.

3. I agree to take part in this study.

4. I agree to allow the dataset collected to be used for future research projects*

_____ _____ _____

_ Date _ Signature

Name of participant

_____ _____ _____

_ Researcher _ Date Signature

CONSENT FORM FOR USE OF QUOTES

Title of Project: Operationalising Vulnerability in (redacted)

Name and contact details of Principal Investigator: Laura Briody, Keele University, E: (redacted), T: (redacted)

Please initial box if you agree with the statement

1. I agree for my quotes to be used

2. I do not agree for my quotes to be used

Name of participant _ Date _ Signature

_ Researcher   _ Date Signature

Appendix F: Research Information Sheet for interview participants

Research Information Sheet for Semi-Structured Interview

Study Title: Operationalising Vulnerability: investigating how the police are informed about, identify and respond to individuals categorised as "vulnerable".

Invitation

You are being invited to consider taking part in a one to one semi structured interview with a PhD researcher from Keele University.

Before you decide whether you would like to take part, it is important that you understand why this research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read this information carefully and discuss it with colleagues if you wish. If anything is unclear, or you would like to ask any questions, please get in touch for more information - contact details are on the second page of this information sheet.

Aims of the Research

The purpose is to understand how (redacted) are informed about vulnerability, how this is demonstrated in policy and training, and how this then is operationalised in the context of everyday policing.

Why have I been invited?

You have been invited to take part as you have been identified as having a role in the decision-making process concerning a service user's vulnerability during said individual's contact with [redacted] Police.

Do I have to take part?

You are free to decide whether you wish to take part in the one to one semi structured interviews or not. If you do decide to take part you will be asked to sign two consent forms, one is for you to keep and the other is for our records. You are free to withdraw from the interview at any time. After the interview, you will be sent a transcription of your interview and asked again for your consent for the interview data to be included in the research project. You will not be able to withdraw from the project after this point.

What will happen if I choose to take part?

The interview will take place on a video call platform. Whilst the participant and researcher will be able to see each other during the interview, only the audio of the interview will be recorded. The interview is expected to last between 1 hour and 90 minutes.

During the interview, you will be asked about your experience in [redacted] Police, your experience of working with vulnerable individuals and the role that you play. You will also be asked your opinions and ideas concerning the definition of vulnerability, its use as a term in policing and the reality of how it is assigned in the context of your role.

In no instance will you be asked to explain or disclose details of any particular case or individual to the researcher.

What are the benefits (if any) of taking part?

There are no direct benefits to you take part in this research. However, your experiences and opinions of policing and vulnerability will help to provide insight into how (redacted) can improve or change its working practice, develop tools and resources for more effective practice.

What are the risks (if any) of taking part?

There are no direct risks to you taking part in the research. There is however an appreciation that discussing issues surrounding policing and vulnerability may facilitate negative emotions or the recollection of difficult memories. If this does arise, you will be free to pause the interview for a break or move on to a different topic.

How will information about me be used?

If you agree to be interviewed, the session will be recorded and transcribed. After transcription the recordings will be destroyed. Any information you provide will be

completely anonymous. No individual participants will be identified in any way in the final thesis or any subsequent publications resulting from the research. While generic job titles will be used and private information will not be disclosed by the researcher given some of the unique roles held there is the potential for participants to be identified by the quotes used in the research.

Who will have access to information about me?

Only the PhD researcher named on this document will have access to information about you. The data collected will be stored securely on a password protected computer at Keele University. If you consent for something you said to be quoted, the researcher will use a code rather than your name to identify what you have said. Any hard copies of data (i.e., consent forms, the transcribed notes) will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's locked (personal) office when not in use.

The data will be retained by the researcher for five years, after which it will be securely disposed of.

In the unlikely event that the researcher is concerned about the actual or potential harm to yourself or others, they do have to work within the confines of current legislation over such matters as privacy and confidentiality, data protection and human rights and so offers of confidentiality may sometimes be overridden by law. For example, in circumstances whereby the researcher is concerned over any actual or potential harm to yourself or others, they must pass this information to the relevant authorities.

Who is funding the research?

The research is funded by the Economic and Social Sciences Research Council.

Contact Details

If you have any questions regarding any aspect of this study, you may wish to speak to the researcher who will do their best to answer your questions. You should contact Laura Briody in this case. Contact details for the researcher's supervisor, (redacted), are also included below.

(Details redacted)

Appendix G: Interview schedule

Section A: Warm up questions

What is your role?

How long have you been in this role? What other roles have you had?

Section B: Vulnerability in the present

When I say "vulnerable people", what images or words come to mind? Tell me what you know about vulnerability

How do you identify vulnerability?

Then what do you do? Act on any vulnerability disclosed. What kind of vulnerability do you see the most?

What kind of vulnerabilities do you feel confident in identifying? And what about the confidence in your response?

Why do you feel confident?

What kind of vulnerabilities do you feel less confident in identifying? And in your response?

Why do you feel less confident?

What kind of vulnerabilities do you consider to be 'police business'? What kind of vulnerabilities do you feel are not?

What issues do you encounter in identifying vulnerable people?

- Prompts: Lack of information provided (from agency or citizens); lack of co-operation; lack of knowledge; lack of procedure; communication.

What about issues in response?

- Prompts: lack of intervention; lack of resources; lack of co-operation; lack of legislation.

What training have you received in relation to vulnerability? What did you think of the training?

Section C: Vulnerability in the future

What else would you like to have to help you more effectively identify and respond to vulnerability?

How has your understanding of vulnerability changed over time, if at all?

Optional question, if not addressed elsewhere: What does 'vulnerability' mean to you?

Section D: The vulnerability of the police

What impact has the focus on vulnerability had on your role? How does dealing with vulnerability make you feel?

- Prompt: address participants' responses/examples from the interview
- Prompt: how do you feel when (response/example) occurs?

In what ways do you feel vulnerable in your own role?

Section E: Vulnerability and risk

Is there a difference between vulnerability and risk?

- If so, how?
- If not, why?

Section F: COVID-19

How has COVID-19 affected your role?

Section G: Demographics and Wrap up

- Some quick demographic questions: could you confirm for me:

- Age

- Gender

- Ethnicity

- Is there anything that you would like to add to what we have discussed?

Appendix H: Ethical approval from Keele University

Keele University HumSS Faculty Research Ethics Committee

humss.ethics@keele.ac.uk

4 July 2019

Dear Laura Briody,

Project Title:	Operationalising Vulnerability in (redacted)
REC Project Reference:	HU-190024
Type of Application	Main application

Keele University's Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee reviewed the above application.

Favourable Ethical opinion

The members of the Committee gave a favourable ethical opinion of the above research on the basis described in the application form, protocol and supporting documentation, subject to the conditions specified below.

Conditions of the favourable opinion

The favourable opinion is subject to the following conditions being met prior to the start of the Study.

1.	There are no required changes. The application is very thorough and well put together and can be granted approval.
2.	
3.	

Reporting requirements

The University's standard operating procedures give detailed guidance on reporting requirements for studies with a favourable opinion including:

- Notifying substantial amendments

- Notifying issues which may have an impact upon ethical opinion of the study

- Progress reports

- Notifying the end of the study

Approved documents

The documents reviewed and approved are:

Document	Version	Date
Attachment 1 (redacted) email to shift managers - Laura Briody	1	04/07/2019
Attachment 2 Research Information Sheet Contact Services - Laura Briody	1	04/07/2019
Attachment 3 Research Information Sheet Vulnerability Hub - Laura Briody	1	04/07/2019
Attachment 4 Research Information Sheet Custody - Laura Briody	1	04/07/2019

Attachment 5 Research Information Sheet Victims Gateway - Laura Briody	1	04/07/2019
Attachment 6 Consent Forms - Laura Briody	1	04/07/2019
Attachment 7_ Semi structured interview Email Invitation - Laura Briody	1	04/07/2019
Attachment 8 Research Information Semi Structured Interviews - Laura Briody	1	04/07/2019
Laura Briody Ethics Review Protocol June 2019 - Laura Briody	1	04/07/2019

Yours sincerely,

Professor Helen Parr Committee Chair

Appendix I: Details of policy, legislation and research noted in policy chapter

- **Making Safeguarding Personal 2013/14: summary of findings (LGA/ADASS)**: an investigation into how practitioners can more effectively protect 'vulnerable' individuals

- **Core business: An inspection into crime prevention, police attendance and the use of police time (HMIC)**: identifying repeat 'vulnerabilities' and victimisation.

- **Children and Families act (2014)**: legislation to more robustly protect children identified as 'vulnerable'.

- **A joint inspection of the treatment of offenders with learning disabilities within the criminal justice system (Criminal Justice Joint Inspection)**: learning disabilities identified as a 'vulnerability'.

- **Care Act 2014**: legislation pertaining to the effective care and protection of people with disabilities and chronic illness, identified as 'vulnerable'.

- **Independent inquiry into child sexual exploitation in Rotherham – 1997-2013 (Jay)**: an inquiry into the failure of the local authority to take disclosures of children being sexually exploited seriously.

- **Policing in austerity: meeting the challenge (HMIC)**: an inquiry into the impact of the Conservative government's austerity policies on police resources.

- **Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or from care (Department of Education)**: guidance that highlights the 'vulnerability' of these children and advocates for more effective protection.

- **Code of Practice - Mental Health Act (2014 Revision) (Home Office: Mental Health Crisis Care Concordat)**: a policy recognising the 'vulnerbaility' of those with mental health problems.

- **'Would they actually have believed me?' A focus group exploration of the underreporting of crimes by Jimmy Savile (NSPCC)**: research concerning how victims of Jimmy Saville were treated by institutions, including the police, including why victims may choose not to report their assault.

- **Joint thematic inspection of Integrated Offender Management (HMIC & HMPS)**: an inquiry into how 'vulnerabilities' of offenders are identified and managed.

- **Everyone's business: Improving the police response to domestic abuse (HMIC)**: an investigation into how domestic abuse, identified as a form of 'vulnerability', is respond to by the police

- **Anti-social behaviour, crime and policing act 2014**: legislation concerning the treatment of children and young people identified as 'vulnerable'.

- **Multi-agency practice guidelines: handling cases of forced marriage (HM Government)**

- **Multi Agency Working and Information Sharing Project Final report (Home Office)**: investigation into how information sharing practices can improve the identification and response to 'vulnerable' people.

- **Helping the police to support people with vulnerabilities (Home Office)**: guidance for the police concerning their encounters with individuals who have mental health issues or learning disabilities.

- **Supporting vulnerable people who encounter the police: A strategic guide for police forces and their partners (Home Office)**: similar guidance as to that noted above.

- **Crime recording: making the victim count (HMIC)**: inquiry into how victims and their 'vulnerabilities' are identified by the police.

- **Serious and organised crime local guides: a guide (HM Government)**: identifying 'vulnerabilities' in the context of organised crime.

- **Achieving Best Evidence in Child Sexual Abuse Cases (Joint Inspection, HMCPSI/ HMIC)**: guidance to identify and support individuals who have been victimised and/or have identified 'vulnerabilities' in the context of police interviews and investigations

- **Girls in the Criminal Justice System (Joint Inspection by HMI Probation, CSSIW, CQC, HMIC, HMI Prisons, Ofsted, HMI Probation)**: inquiry into the disproportionate treatment of girls within the criminal justice, including their 'vulnerabilities'.

Appendix J: Details of College of Policing Vulnerability Training

The course primarily relied on case studies and lived experiences of individuals to highlight how 'vulnerability' can manifest in different circumstances, and how they were often related to personal characteristics, such as age. Examples of high-profile cases were used to highlight the 'vulnerability' of the victim, prompting discussions on the nuances between personal characteristics and circumstances. These cases frequently included failings by services, including the police:

- Murder of Victoria Climbie: murder of 8 year old girl via abuse by her great-aunt and her partner, known to multiple agencies (BBC News, 2003).

- Murder of Peter Connelly: murder of 2 year old boy via abuse by his mother and her partner, known to multiple agencies (BBC News, 2013).

- Murder of Daniel Pelka: murder of 4 year boy via abuse by his mother and her partner, again known to multiple agencies (BBC News, 2013).

- Death of Olive Cooke: 92 year old completed suicide, with death linked to alleged harassment by multiple charities frequently calling her (BBC News, 2015).

- Assault of Fakhara Karim: her husband was given a suspended sentence for acts of domestic violence, including beating her with a cricket bat and forcing her to drink bleach. The judge in the case referred to Fakhara as 'not vulnerable' despite the abuse as she had a degree and many friends (The Independent, 2017).

- Deaths of Fiona Pilkington and her daughter Francesca Hardwick: after ten years of harassment by local teenagers, targeting her 18 year old daughter with disabilities, Fiona killed her daughter and then took her own life. There had been multiple contacts with the police, who viewed the case as anti-social behaviour, rather than a hate crime (BBC News, 2011).

Other than significant failures by agencies - including the courts and not-for-profit organisations - there is a stressed theme that links victimisation with 'vulnerability'. The individual's 'vulnerability' is framed by traditional framings of 'crime' and 'harm'. The

relationship between 'vulnerability' and age is also stressed here, which will be revisited within the findings in chapter five.

The training included a deep-dive into two cases. The first was again a high profile case - Brett Bednar, a 14 year old boy who was groomed online and then murdered by his abuser. Brett's mother had contacted police about the perpetrator, but was dismissed and the information she had on him was not followed up - which would have revealed that the perpetrator had previous convictions for sexually abusing young boys (BBC News, 2015). There was also the life-story of a young man, including being sexually abused by peers, and one of the men victimised by Daryll Rowe, the first man to be convicted of deliberately infecting partners with HIV (BBC News, 2019). There were other options available to trainers, with the other cases involving examples of radicalisation to terrorism, homophobia within policing, child sexual exploitation and sex work.

The examination of different cases provided insight into the nuances of how 'vulnerability' manifests in circumstances primarily involving abuse and exploitation. The 'vulnerability' aid created by the College was used to highlighted how personal characteristics can facilitate specific types of 'vulnerability', usually to specific types of crime, but also why they may be overlooked by the police. In the example of Brett Bednar, his gender was the primary reason that concerns by his mother were overlooked (BBC News, 2015). There is again a heavy emphasis on 'vulnerability' being related to specific criminal offenses, which was further founded on an activity where participants in the training were encouraged to volunteer what 'counted' as 'vulnerability' in policing, with all the examples being criminal offenses: child abuse, sexual violence, stalking, harassment, domestic abuse and honour based violence.

The training involved a brief introduction to the practice of active listening, which I would later find as a vital component of the Early Intervention Officer role (see chapter 6). The training also stressed the need for 'professional curiosity', the notion of asking the second question or 'thinking the unthinkable' (Burton & Revell, 2018). It is a term now well-embedded within safeguarding in particular - but like 'vulnerability', further exploration is needed to explore how the concept is operationalised in practice (Burton & Revell, 2018; Thacker et al., 2019; Cramphorn & Maynard, 2023).

Thank Yous

There are many people to whom I am extremely grateful to have had with me during this journey.

My first thanks must go to Dr Samantha Weston, for choosing me to lead this project and for her unending support over the last five years. Her knowledge and experience have been a source of inspiration, and her belief in me has been invaluable.

To Professor Sandra Walklate: for her incisive and constructive feedback, her grace and her kindness.

To Di Malkin, my liaison and 'vulnerability' guru: for facilitating all of my meetings and interviews with the police and allowing me to pick her brain more times than I can count.

To the officers and staff of [redacted] Police, for their willingness to bring me on board to research this vital topic. I am extremely grateful how I warmly I was welcome and treated during training sessions, observations, interviews and later meetings.

To Mum and Dad, for your encouragement and support when I needed it the most. I do not think any of us realised that my obsession with true crime as a teenager would become my job!

To Sara, your love and compassion have been greatly appreciated. It has been a long road, for which I am grateful to have you as a companion. Thank you to Gary for your support and your good humour. And many thanks to Ruaridh and Orla, for teaching me not to take myself too seriously and to enjoy the little things in life.

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To Paul, for being a truly excellent friend and your fantastic conversations.

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And finally, to William. I will never be able to fully express my gratitude, or repay the generosity, compassion and kindness you have shown me. Thank you for being you - I consider myself eternally blessed to have you as my partner, I could not have done anything of this without you.