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and Social
Research Council**

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University
of Dundee



INTERACT

***Public perceptions and expectations of technologically-mediated
police-public contact***

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<https://www.sipr.ac.uk/interact/>

@INTERACTpolice

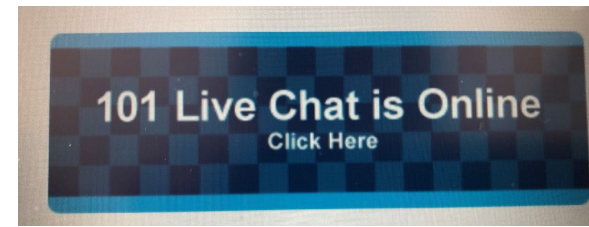




OUTLINE



- Background: strategic context and literature
- Research questions and focus group methods
- Digital Vs in-person presence /visibility
- Channel choice or confusion
- Accessibility and engagement
- Technology and in-person contact
- Digital evidence and responsabilisation
- Reflections on trust, confidence and legitimacy



Background: Strategic Context

- Public provisions have become increasingly digital, particularly post-covid.
- Police view that public expect online presence and ease of use like other services
- Provisions include:
 - 1) digitally-mediated contact: Live Chat, Single Online Home (online forms), Email, Social Media
 - 2) Insertion of technology into in-person policing: Mobile Data Terminals, Body Worn Video, Drones etc.
- Declining trust and confidence in police in UK (e.g. Diffley, 2023; Pickering et al., 2024)
- Public consultation and engagement: e.g. on BWV in Scotland, ETIAG sets out principles for clear and accessible public engagement approach ([Aston 2023](#), Campbell et al. 2023)



Background: Literature

- PJ literature is predicated on the assumption that police-public contacts /encounters are in-person between two humans (Wells et al. 2022)
- Relationships with the police are being transformed by new contact technologies (Wells et al. 2022)
- Visibility & accessibility –physical & virtual architecture?
- Voice –police demonstrate listening? Tech & opportunity for public to tell their side of the story? ('the abstract police' Terpstra et al. 2019)
- Need to build trust through community engagement to facilitate information sharing with police online (Aston et al. 2021)
- European research finds that digitally mediated interactions have a complex bearing on police legitimacy (EJPS Special Issue, 2024)



Research Questions

- How do the police and **public experience and perceive** technologically mediated contact across the UK in a **diverse range of contexts**?
- What is the **potential impact** of different types of technologically mediated contact on **police legitimacy for various publics**?
- What does **‘visible’ and ‘accessible’** policing mean in the digital age, to both the police and **various publics**?
- What is the role of technologically mediated contact in **building police legitimacy**, and how do police organisations best work towards this end?



Methods – public focus groups



Public Focus Groups:

4 Complete, 3 in Scotland, 1
England (3 x city, x1 rural)

Total Participants = 25

Supplementary Interviews:

2 in England

Ongoing:

2 interviews in Scotland.
2 Focus Groups in England.

January 2023 – June 2024



Digital Vs in-person 'presence' /visibility



- Communities notice the decrease in visibility/ physical presence of community policing.
- Digital presence does not appear to be sufficient to replace the loss of physical presence and community policing.
- Lack of public knowledge of 'digital front counter/police station' -seen as a reduction not replacement

[regarding digital presence]: Participant 4: *"It's no good 'cause a lot of your older generation don't use technology. They're not up to date with the technology, so what good is that for them? **That doesn't give any reassurance for that.**"*

[P2]: *"they still need them on the beat and out on the streets regardless. **Whatever new technology comes out, whatever else they put in to see the baddies, it's all about being seen and reassurance.**"*

(Force 1, Focus Group 1)



Channel choice or confusion?

- Digital as an alternative to 101 wait times, but channel confusion

Participant 2: "Well, I have tried to contact the police on one or two occasions, but, you know, it's been **impossible to get through** either online or on the phone."

P1: "I mean, I can confirm that. I did a one on one [101], 45 minutes I was held on it"

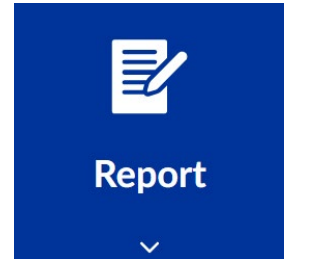
(Force 2, Focus Group 1).

One member of public types on live-chat "What is the time-frame for a response and **will it be on this kind of digital system or will it be a phone call, sorry I'm new to all this**" (Force 3, Webchat Observation).

- Social media reporting not inclusive as need an account, takes time & not clear which crime types can be reported through which route.

"When I phoned [101], I **was waiting for over an hour...it kept saying, you can report this...on Facebook**. So, I thought, right, okay, I'll go that route, you know. So, I got onto Facebook, did [reported] everything, which took ages, and then they said 'oh, sorry, no, **you've got to talk to someone because you can't do that online**', So, I had to go back again and wait...it was an hour and a half before I got to actually speak to someone" (Force 2, Interview 1)

If it's not 999,
go online.





Accessibility and engagement



- Public response to police-initiated contact channels.

*"But also, instead of all this noise on [Force 2's] social media, because in a lot of ways, that's what it is, it's just noise, **it doesn't contribute much at all**, is if the police kept a record...that people can look at in a list [online] and say, well, okay, they've actually solved this many crimes this month or this week or whatever"*

(Force 2, Focus Group 1).

*"...actually I tried [to respond to SmartAlert message] on the one occasion, and for some reason I...obviously it was user error, I couldn't work out, I think I'd got a separate account, yes that was it... it was complicated. I think **if that process could be simplified** that would be [good]"*

(Force 2, Interview 2).

- One way communication (social media posts & SmartAlerts) even if public can reply they are not responded to



Accessibility & engagement: feedback



- Digital comms can lack clarity re where it goes (ambiguity?) – want acknowledgement/response (engagement)?
- Lack of feedback/follow-up to victim/complainer -knocks confidence

*“I’m probably about 90 per cent nowadays, I can’t say I’m 100% confident any more...[because] one of the young boys [foster child] that came who’d been in some sort of issue with another boy, and he’d been in a police station [to report it] before he’d moved here. And the police then eventually got in touch with us to make a statement, and I chased him [the investigating officer] and chased him; and, do you know, **to this day he never came back**”*

(Force 2, Interview 1).



Technology & in-person contact



- Statements transformed into police language in MDT and feel alien to reporter

Participant 6: *"honestly, when I read that thing out, it wasn't even anything like what I said to her"*

(Force 1, Focus Group 1)

- Consistent expectations that for BWV to be explained & to have a say in whether the camera is turned on or off... voice?

[Regarding BWV] P3: *"Aye. That...**they shouldn't be able to have control of what they can use it and what they can't use.** I mean, if they go...they're going to go in and do a job, do the job. Like, for instance, you've got the dentist. **The dentist [explains] what tool they're going to use, what it feels like, how long it was going to take. The police should be the same.** So I've got this wee [camera] and [they should say] 'this is for this and I'm going to be recording that and this is what's going'...like, you know, the ins and outs of everything that they're doing and everything that they're using. **See the public...the reassurance that they need to know what all this, you know, it's going to be used for.**"*

(Force 1, Focus Group 1)

- In reality participants are often not aware BWV is on most of the time



Digital evidence & responsibilisation



- Reliance on digital evidence for investigation -passing responsibility onto citizens

[regarding an assault reported to the police] Participant 5: *'They [the police] asked me, 'if you see them again, **then take a photo**. But don't let them see you' [for evidential purposes].*

(Force 1, Focus Group 1)

*"I mean, funnily enough, something happened to me yesterday, that if I'd have had a digital camera, I would **have taken a picture of it** [to report it]"*

(Force 2, Interview 2).

- Observations of police encouraging the public to invest in their own technologies to aid investigations
- Risk of a two-tier policing system

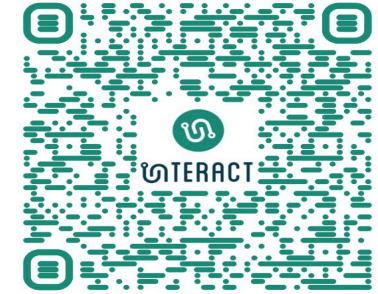
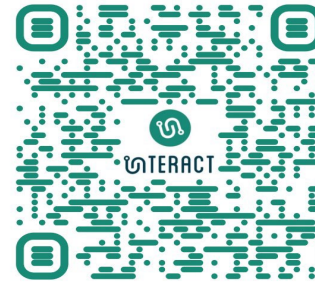


Reflections on trust, confidence and legitimacy



- **Reassurance and Visibility:** commonly related to *in person* policing, digital presence does not inspire the same confidence
- **Accessibility & Engagement:** channel confusion & access. One way communication lacks engagement, feedback & erodes confidence
- **Voice & Trust:** public want a **say** in police technology such as BWV. If not may damage trust
- **Access & Inequalities:** public are **responsibilised in their victimisation**, increasingly required to provide digital evidence

INTERACT sources



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Wells et al. (2024) '[Free text is essentially the enemy of what we're trying to achieve](#)': the framing of a national vision for [delivering digital police contact](#). EJPS Special Issue on Policing in a Digitalised World.

[INTERACT Project Conference INTERACT Project Conference - SIPR](#)

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Access Granted and Access Denied: Accessibility and Digital Police Provisions.

Dr Estelle Clayton,

**Professor Liz Aston, Dr Will Andrews, Professor Ben Bradford, Professor Megan O'Neill
and Dr Helen Wells.**

<https://www.sipr.ac.uk/interact/>

 **@INTERACTpolice**

Communities of Interest

- Central to PJT is the perception of the quality of social communication in police interactions.
- Dimensions of PJ such as voice, neutrality, and respect are evaluated on the basis of these interactions.
- What happens then, when those interactions are different in some way?
- The INTERACT project as a whole explores what happens when interactions are mediated by technology.
- Within this stream of the project, we explore the implications of this digitally-mediated context when individuals and communities *also* have different socio-communication needs.
- From this objective, we have explored the experiences of two communities: Deaf individuals and Autistic Individuals.

Autistic Individuals' Experiences of Policing

- As with all members of the public, autistic people come into contact with the police for a wide variety of reasons.
- There is a burgeoning scholarship that explores the challenges that can arise as a result of differences in communication preferences and styles between autistic individuals and police officers. (Senju and Johnson 2009, Gibbs et al., 2022).
- Research has shown that where the police do not understand or respond appropriately to these social communication differences, this can increase an autistic individuals' vulnerability to state power (Williams et al., 2018)

Strategic Context

- To some extent, EDI principles are present in the strategic drive towards increasing contact and digital provision in policing.

“The Public Contact and Engagement Strategy 2020 highlighted the expectation of more joined up services and a choice of engagement channels which are accessible, inclusive, and personalised. Society is changing too. Communities are becoming increasingly diverse in their makeup, range of languages and cultural norms.

There is a requirement for policing to adapt and find new ways to engage with people and offer a range of ways to interact and deliver services”

Police Scotland Digital Strategy, [2023](#)

Research Questions

- How do *accessibility and inclusion* factor into police decision making for new police technologies?
- How do communities and individuals with different socio-communication needs experience accessibility and inclusion in policing, and what are their needs and wants from policing and technology?



Methods



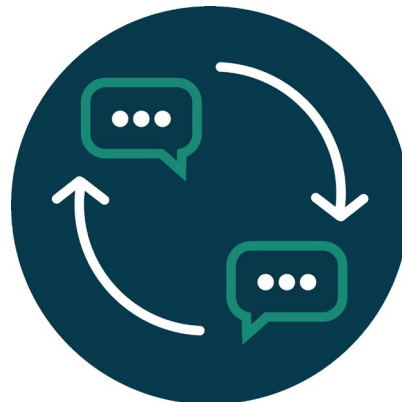
Community Interviews x9



Phase 2 interviews with EDI officers (x3) and officers/staff involved in digital design and delivery (x32)

Emerging Findings: Accessibility in Policing

- **Accessibility** is a priority across all three forces. Evident expertise in EDI teams.
- Unclear to what extent this expertise is harnessed within strategic decision making around technology.
- Little evidence of *technology* teams engaging with communities with access needs.



Yet, assumption that technology is a ‘silver bullet’

- Digitally-mediated contact has been assumed by strategic decision makers to resolve accessibility needs and remedy existing inequalities.
- Tendency within policing to view ‘voice’ in terms of the literal ability to communicate, such as opening new contact channels.

“They might have difficult speaking because of a disability or because they might have another form of barrier, be that anxiety, be that autism, be that some other thing that stops them from verbalizing their issues and again, **it's providing a gateway for them to services that they might not be able to access otherwise.**”

(National Strategic Technology Interviews).

Citizen-Initiated Encounters: Voice and Channel Choice

- For most participants, **channel choice**- the option to choose how and when to make contact with the police- was vital to **ensuring comfort, reassurance and autonomy**.

“It's gonna be like Facebook, but with the police, so you have the freedom. I share my thoughts openly with my friends on Facebook because at that point in time you just see my messages and my picture on my profile and my timeline, from that you do not know anything about me, **you are not seeing me face to face, we are not sending anything that involves me talking. I just need to openly type how I feel and you respond.** So at that point it makes the situation for the autistic person very calm, he will not overreact.”

Participant #5

Citizen-Initiated Encounters: Voice, Understanding and Engagement

- However, tapping into the deeper meaning of ‘voice’ in PJT, several participants highlighted that the **medium of contact is significantly less important than the manner.**

“So that’s an example of really good practice, and I do share that sometimes because I think, well, I think people need to know, you know, that actually the police aren't always scary people, and sometimes they're just there to give you, you know, they give you advice and they give you help. So, that's been my kind of positive experience. Would that have made any difference if I contacted them online? Not if the advice had been the similarly sympathetic, supportive and [for example as a response] ‘by the way, I don't want to put you under pressure. But our advice would be...’, do you know, to me, **it's not really the medium, it's the message and the manner.**”

Participant #2

Citizen-Initiated Encounters: Voice, Understanding and Engagement

- And when the **manner is inadequate** this can result in **loss of confidence**

“Sometimes when they turn up, you know, **one wrong step in the communication**, they do one thing out of script, **I’m just then masking** and not being honest, like, **it all falls apart**. The guys, they just kept saying, ‘well a silly mistake isn’t a crime, I’m sure they regretted it’... I was so stressed because the [other] police officer had told me to report it, **it was really important to report it. So I’d done as the police officer said, then a different police officer turned up and made me feel like I was wasting police time, ... I didn’t report anything for about a year, and the next time I reported I had my partner sit with me”**

Participant #4

Technology, Trust and Access to Justice

- Channel-choice not evident in face-to-face encounters with technology.

“I’ve said to them consistently...I’m like, ‘this bit I’m going to have to believe you that you’ve said what I did because that doesn’t [work for me due to how I process verbal information]... **They’ve never said, “oh well I’ll do it a different way for you, or I can print it out, or do you want me to email it through so you can see it on the big screen? “ ’Cause I can use my Read Aloud ...But I still haven’t seen my witness statement. The police have no interest... I’m finding it so hard just to know who to go to, know what is appropriate for me to ask for.** Yeah, I think that the follow-up and the chase of this and the unknown...I don’t know what I’ve reported because they told me it verbally. I don’t know what that was, **’cause as I outright told them, that is something that I can’t do efficiently’.**”

Participant #4

Intersection of Race, Neurodivergence and Experiences of Policing

- Several participants who are Black and Autistic men described experiences of police-initiated encounters.
- Compounded with general anxieties around being on camera, **BWV can communicate a 'suspect status'.**

“Like six months ago or seven months ago, you know as an autistic person you have the mindset (perception) that you are not wanted in society. I kind of run into the police when I was out for something, and you know, I’m black, so I was kind of being discriminated [against]... two policemen came down my path and the other one was videoing me with the body chest camera, I felt **so bad**...I’m a camera shy person, seeing that [I was being recorded] I felt so bad, like because maybe I am a criminal, **because you don’t video someone like that except [if they] are criminals.**”

Participant #8

Implications for Policy & Practice

“What you have to do is just listen to the person, ask the person, what do you need, and allow the person to say it and then respect it. Within means. It’s reasonable adjustments, right?”

(Participant #4)

“I think just like society evolves and and you know our society, it's changing and then there's a whole lot of considerations that have been given [about] different things especially, you know, when it comes to, you know, the way people think, the way they *ask* and the way people behave...I think that is also very important that, you know, generally policing goes through evolving in that way....I think doesn't have to be **something where we wait for the problem to start occurring before we now start looking for solutions to them or wait for those engagements to go bad before you start trying to sort them”**

(Participant #6)

**Enhancing Policing for
Deaf Communities
through Sign Language
Access and Technology**

ROBERT SKINNER



INTERACT



DEAF POWER



Scottish Government
British Sign Language (BSL)

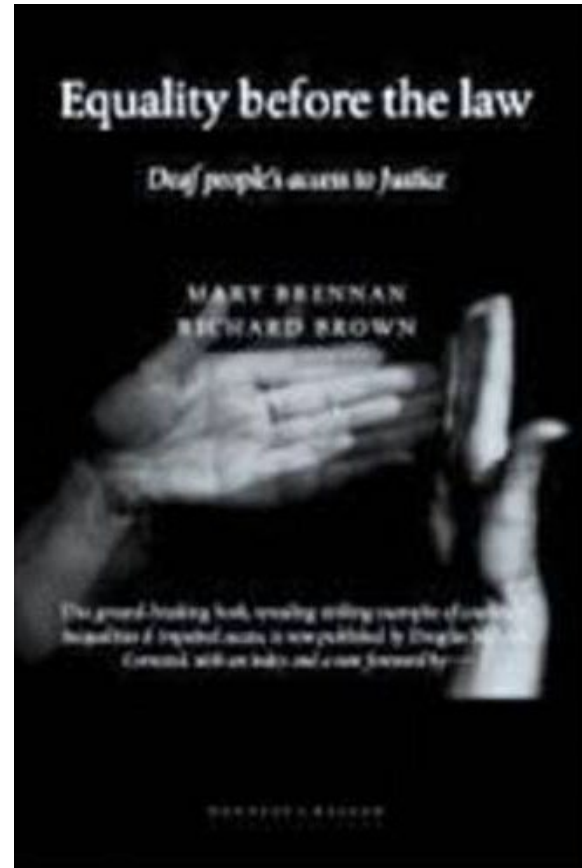
National Plan

2017-2023



Research – deaf signers, interpreters, & the police

- What is the “deaf” experience of policing?
- Do the police know how to serve deaf people?
- How successful is interpreter-mediated access in a policing context?



What about deaf signers?

- Identifying & obtaining accommodation
- Problematic accommodation
- Partial accommodation
- Adapting routine procedures

(Brunson, 2007; Skinner & Napier, 2023;
Skinner, 2024)



VRS for all



BSL Version: Your Police 2023-2024

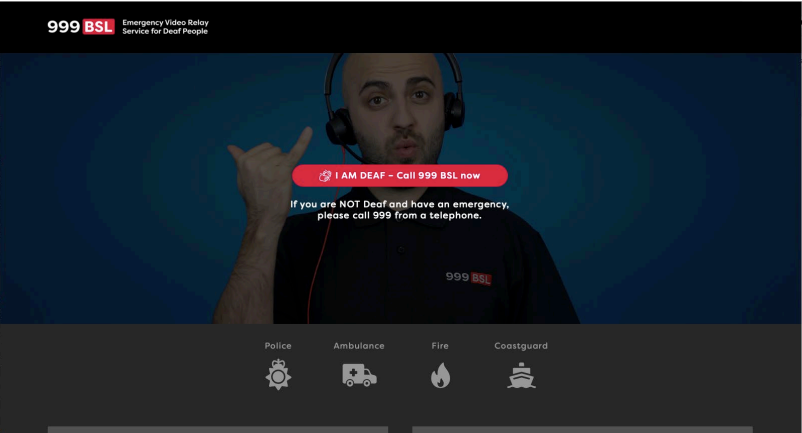
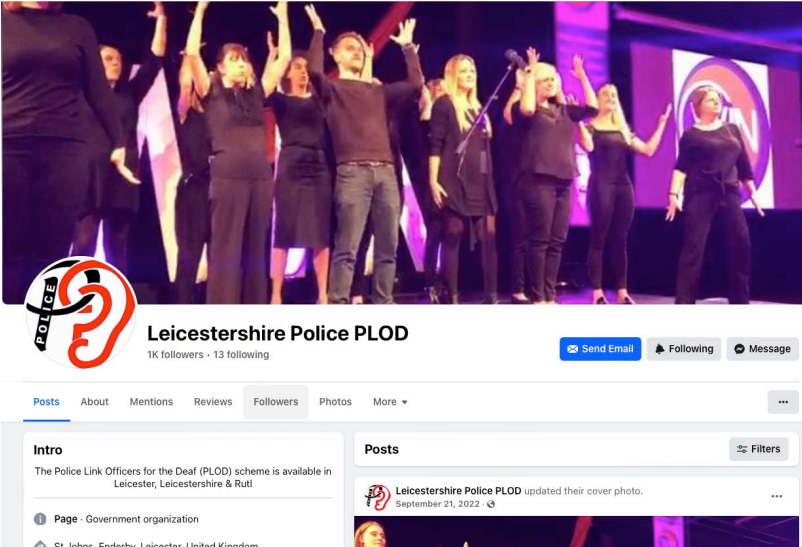
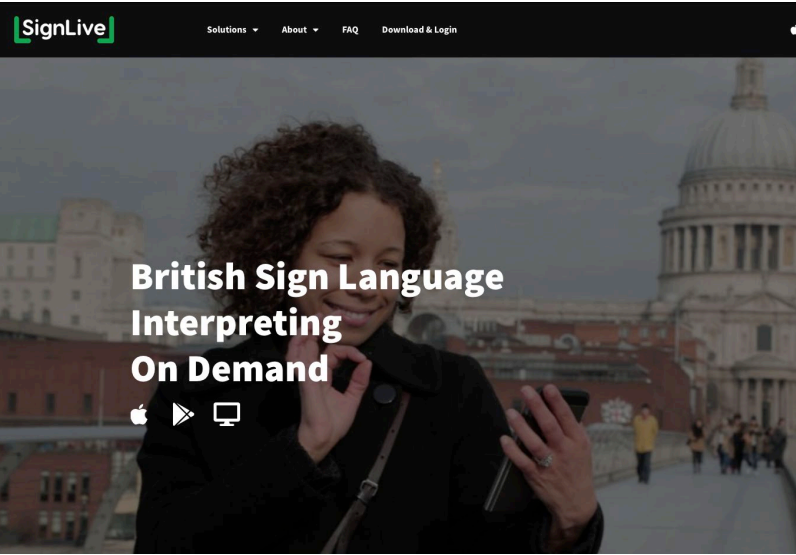
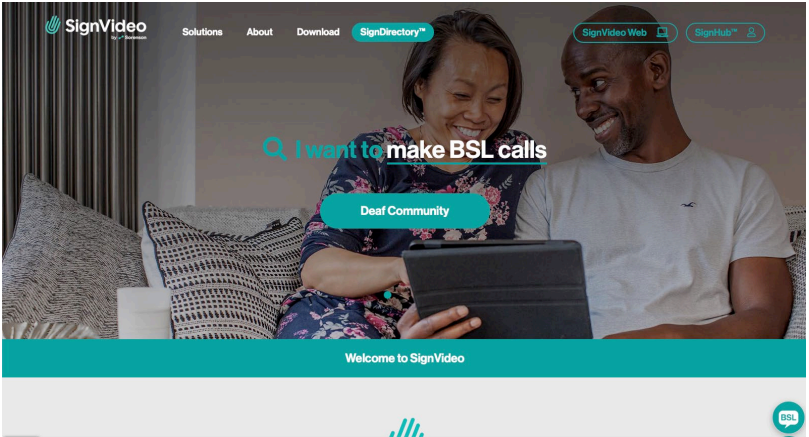
Overview

Closed 31 Mar 2024
Opened 6 Apr 2023



Contact
Strategy, Insight & Engagement: Research & Insight
InsightEngagement@scotland.pnn.police.uk

Understanding the views and priorities of Scotland's diverse communities is fundamental to how Police Scotland responds to the needs of the public. Our



Focus Group and Approach

- Two focus groups (5 x participants)
- Mixed: age, ethnicity, & gender
- 1.5hrs +



Themes

- General perceptions of the police.
- Experience of police.
- Views about technology:
 - Body worn cameras
 - BSL webpages
 - Social media
 - VRS/VRI

Technology and Voice

- Lack of language-concordant services and patchwork service provision.
- New technologies are implemented to provide a physical/literal capability to communicate.
- But these technologies are not sufficient to meet the needs of deaf people.
- Because they do not account for socio-linguistic communication needs.



Trust Relay

- Trust is relayed between the technology, the interpreter, and the police.
- This creates a fragile system in which trust in the police can be damaged as a result of low trust in either the technology or the interpreter.
- Deaf individuals are also **required** to trust third-parties with their data in order to gain access to the police.
- Creates an unequal provision of services: this is a cost that deaf people pay that hearing people don't.



Technology as Symbol

As Bradford et al, (2009 pp. 39) highlight, the accessibility of a police force to its' user groups is an important antecedent of perceptions of fairness, and so: **'a police force which was hard to contact would be sending a very definite message to those it policed about their relative worth or position'**

Scotland: Participant #3: but deaf people when I think about it, our access to services: I mean we're so far behind. I think we're 40 to 50 years behind everybody else and we've got such limited resources. It's hard.

Participant #1: in many ways I think technology has put us at a further disadvantage. It has put us back to the Stone Age.



Thank you!

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References

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Skinner, R. (2024). ‘When he comes into police custody, he has certain rights’: The burden for achieving access in a video-mediated interpreted custody interview. *International Journal of Police Science & Management*, 14613557241245585.

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