

THE EXPERIENCES OF AUTISTIC INDIVIDUALS IN POLICE CUSTODY

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OUTLINE

- Background – Why is this important?
- The research – What was the research?
- Key findings – What are the experiences of autistic individuals?
- Recommendations – What changes could be made to improve support?
- What next? – How do we best improve support in police custody?

BACKGROUND



**MORE LIKELY TO
COME INTO CONTACT
WITH POLICE**



**CONCERNS ABOUT
LEGISLATION**



**LIMITED INFORMATION
ABOUT EXPERIENCES
IN POLICE CUSTODY**

KEY FINDINGS

- Autistic individuals can have very negative experiences in police custody which can lead to significant personal and legal outcomes
- This may be due to difficulties i) understanding arrest and detention ii) coping with the demands of the custody process and custody environment and iii) participating in the custody process
- Changes to practice, custody environment and policy could improve the support of autistic individuals in police custody

PUNITIVENESS OF CUSTODY

- Autistic individuals may find it difficult to understand why they have been detained or have to take part in the custody process
- They may have negative encounters with police officers and custody staff
- Reinforced by detention, loss of privacy and impact on welfare



**TREATED AS
A CRIMINAL**



RESPECT & FORCE



**DEMANDS OF
DETENTION**

I thought they would like be more understanding (...) towards my condition and not, erm, treat me like a normal criminal. I thought they would like take it into account, my Autism. (...) Rather than treating me like (...) an individual that hasn't got any conditions.

INTERVIEW 1

COPING WITH DETENTION

- Autistic individuals may experienced a desire to escape police custody
- They may experience additional difficulties in police custody which may impact their welfare
- These demands may also affect their ability to participate in the custody process



DESIRE TO ESCAPE



EMOTIONAL IMPACT



ACCESS TO JUSTICE

COPING WITH DETENTION



SENSORY DEMANDS



BOREDOM



**NOT KNOWING WHAT
WILL HAPPEN**

(...) I am very sensitive to sound (...) And at the time there was this hubbub there, and I think maybe one of the reasons why it became a very ethereal experience for me is because I was suffering some degree of sensory over stimulation. (...) But for me that didn't lead to a meltdown situation, that just lead to me not really understanding or engaging with the gravity of what – what happened.

INTERVIEW 12

ACCESS TO JUSTICE



**WAIVING LEGAL
RIGHTS**



**UNDERSTANDING
QUESTIONS**



**ANSWERING
QUESTIONS**

when they asked about... just generically about medical conditions - which is what, I think, Autism would fall under (...) in their interview, like, they don't have a list... I think if they could make the open questions effectively into closed questions -- (...) 'cause I don't think - I wouldn't have mentioned Autism... (...) Had they not already known - 'cause the question – [It's medical] (...) and some people just find those (...) I might have mentioned it under... I think they said learning difficulties. (...) But that's towards the end of the interview.

WALTHROUGH 1

IMPROVING SUPPORT

- All professionals who deal with autistic individuals in police custody should have Autism training
- Adjustments should be made to the custody process and custody environment
- Legislation should be reformed to facilitate access to justice



AUTISM TRAINING



**IMPROVING
ACCESSIBILITY**



**LEGISLATIVE
REFORM**

WHAT NEXT?



**CHANGING
PRACTICE?**



**CHANGING
ENVIRONMENT?**



**CHANGING
POLICY?**

THANK YOU
FOR LISTENING



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