Interviewing police suspects with autism – testing theory and best practice for interviews

This research will investigate whether standard practices when undertaking a police suspect interview are adequate when questioning a suspect with autism.

Key details

Lead institution	University of Bath
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Police region	South West
Collaboration and partnership	Greater Manchester Police.
Level of research	PhD
Project start date	October 2019
Date due for completion	March 2023

Research context

Autism is associated with core difficulties in social communication and interaction, and these difficulties are likely to be exacerbated during the social and cognitive complexities of a police suspect interview. However, no research to date has examined whether current investigative interviewing practice is appropriate for autistic suspects.

Autistic individuals find retrieving specific personal events from memory challenging even in non-stressful situations, and have difficulties understanding the thoughts and intentions of others and providing coherent narratives. As such, their ability to judge the case against them and provide

appropriate information to counter incriminating evidence during a suspect interview is likely to be limited.

In collaboration with Greater Manchester Police, this PhD will evaluate the efficacy of UK investigative interviewing practice for autistic suspects and will ultimately provide clear recommendations for best practice.

Research methodology

- Experimental mock-crime/interview studies
- Analysis of custody interviews with autistic suspects
- Interviews with autistic adults on their experiences of police suspect interviews.