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Removing Disabling Barriers in Policing: Dyslexia and Literacy Difficulties in the Police Service

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Abstract: The aim of this article is to explore the impact of dyslexia, self-identified dyslexia and literacy difficulties on police officers/civilian employees. The study employs a social model approach which advocates that problems associated with dyslexia are not due to an impairment effect but can be attributed to a lack of reasonable adjustment due to disabling environmental barriers (Macdonald 2009). The methodology applies a quantitative approach that analyses the impact that dyslexia / literacy difficulties have on policing. The authors suggest that with minor adjustments to working environments, police organisations can foster an inclusive rather than exclusive occupational environment (Hill 2013).

Introduction

This study investigates the impact that dyslexia has on serving police employees working in the North of England. The research explores to what extent dyslexia / literacy difficulties affect individuals currently employed as civilians and operational police officers. This article will commence by discussing the diagnostic label of dyslexia in order to conceptualise how the

condition might affect serving police officers within the UK. This will examine key symptoms/traits which may impact on operational duties within a police force that expects increasingly high levels of literacy skills from its employees. The authors will discuss different models of disability within the academic literature and apply the social model to interpret the data findings to conceptualise disability and dyslexia from a barrier-based approach.

A quantitative approach has been used in this study, but the authors have been significantly influenced by the qualitative work of Andy Hill (2013) who studied the lived experiences of operational officers with dyslexia. The findings section illustrates key disabling barriers with reference to under-diagnosis, disclosure of dyslexia, and operational barriers which affect police employees within this research. The study advocates that all police recruits coming into the service should be screened for dyslexia. Where the condition is identified, tailor-made interventions, which may include the use of assistive technologies and support networks, need to be developed within the police service to create inclusive environments. By doing so, combined with broader awareness campaigns, this will maximise the contribution and well-being of police staff with a range of learning abilities.

Understanding Dyslexia and Associated Literacy Difficulties

Within the UK it is estimated that dyslexia affects approximately 4% to 8% of the general population (Snowling 2000; Snowling & Maughan 2006; Semple & Smyth 2013; Peterson & Pennington 2012). The National Institute for Health Care Excellence (NICE) defines dyslexia as a neurodevelopmental condition which results in problems associated with visual, reading and

spelling accuracy and comprehension. Developmental dyslexia is experienced on a continuum where individuals are affected in a multitude of different ways ranging from mild, moderate and severe effects which impact on daily activities (Peterson & Pennington 2012). Traditionally the condition has been associated with childhood development. Previous assumptions were made that children would grow out of these developmental difficulties that were thought to be primarily experienced in an educational environment (Snowling 2000). Yet contemporary research conducted on adults has confirmed that dyslexia is a lifelong condition which has a significant impact in adult life, particularly affecting employment (Macdonald 2009; Bartlett & Moody 2010; Peterson & Pennington 2012). Although a number of dyslexia definitions exist nationally and globally, the UK Government in 2008 commissioned an independent review led by Sir Jim Rose into the condition. 'The Rose Report' (Rose 2009) offers the following definition:

> Dyslexia is a [specific] learning difficulty that primarily affects the skills involved in accurate and fluent word reading and spelling. Characteristic features of dyslexia are difficulties in phonological awareness, verbal memory and verbal processing speed. Dyslexia occurs across the range of intellectual abilities. It is best thought of as a continuum, not a distinct category, and there are no clear cut-off points. Co-occurring difficulties may be seen in aspects of language, motor co-ordination, mental calculation, concentration and personal organisation, but these are not, by themselves, markers of dyslexia. (Rose 2009: 10)

As referred to in this definition, dyslexia affects three areas of cognition which include phonological skills, short-term/working memory and sequencing speed (Snowling 2000; Bartlett & Moody 2010). As dyslexia results in phonological difficulties, i.e. the ability to decode language, this expresses itself in problems in speech, reading and spelling throughout a person's life. Short-term memory is also affected, which disrupts an individual's ability to remember small quantities of information for a brief period of time. As short-term memory is altered, this directly impacts on working memory and affects a person's ability to concentrate or follow regular instructions (Snowling 2000; Peterson & Pennington 2012). Finally, sequencing difficulties and speed of processing not only impact on reading and writing skills but also on organisational skills and a person's ability to translate ordered information (Snowling 2000; Snowling & Maughan 2006). Yet, it should be noted that this clinical definition of dyslexia is somewhat characterised by a biomedical understanding of the condition, where difficulties are entirely associated with people's cognitive abilities/disabilities (Snowling 2000; Snowling & Maughan 2006; Peterson & Pennington 2012) rather than being rooted within a disabling environment. Furthermore, it should be noted that dyslexia is significantly under-diagnosed in the UK as an assessment cannot be obtained through the National Health Service, but is conducted within the education system. Therefore, for adults who have not been identified as having dyslexia at school/university, a diagnostic assessment can only be obtained through private means, costing approximately £500 for a specialist teacher and £700 for an Educational Psychologist (see the British Dyslexia Association 2018).

Models of Disability and Policing

As Bartlett and Moody (2010) illustrate, cognitive difficulties associated with dyslexia may result in specific problems within the workplace. These are often associated with a person's literacy abilities, organisational skills, communication and/or coordination. It should be noted that literacy difficulties and dyslexia are experienced on a spectrum, therefore a person with mild dyslexia may experience very few difficulties, but as severity increases this can have a greater impact on adult life, particularly in certain careers like the police force, due to the administrative burdens within the role and where written evidence needs to be precise and correct.

Although IQ is not affected, having a specific learning difficulty can detrimentally impact on a person's emotional wellbeing and self-confidence, neither of which are conducive to effective police work or, by extension, to public legitimacy (Hough *et al.* 2013). Although the contemporary police service has a range of diverse roles, the possession of advanced literacy, organisational and communicative skills is expected at every level of the policing profession (Kilic 2011; Willis & Mastrofski 2018).

These problems associated with dyslexia have been theoretically understood from two distinct perspectives, referred to as the biomedical model and social model of disability. From a biomedical perspective, dyslexia is defined as an impairment which results in disability and can be conceptualised as a neurological dysfunction. This model was defined by the WHO's 'International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities and Handicaps', in which impairment and disability are defined as follows: 'Impairment: any loss or abnormality of psychological,

physiological or anatomical structure or function. … Disability: any restriction or lack (resulting from impairment) of the ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being.' (Semple & Smyth 2013: 90) Although the WHO has now replaced this definition, this is still the preferred classification in many clinical medical texts (Macdonald & Deacon 2019). By applying a biomedical perspective, questions can be asked as to whether individuals with dyslexia have the ability to become serving police officers based on their cognitive abilities.

However, within contemporary equality policy the biomedical model is conceptualised as over-simplistic and, in some cases, even discriminatory (Roulstone & Warren 2006). It is from the work of Vic Finklestein, Mike Oliver and Colin Barnes where we see the emergence of a new definition of disability which is termed the 'social model'. The social model redefines disability as:

> Disability: a disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by a contemporary social organization which takes no or little account of people who have… impairments and thus excludes them from the mainstream of social activities (Oliver 2009: 42)

The social model suggests that the biomedical approach oversimplifies the complexities of disability and impairment. From a social model perspective, impairment is defined as a long-term biological, sensory or neurological variation (not a dysfunction). Disability is defined by how people with a range of impairments are systematically excluded from social participation in

education, employment or general life. Therefore, the social model conceptualises dyslexia as an alternative learning style where individuals with the condition read, write and process information in different ways (Macdonald 2013). From a social model perspective, difficulties experienced by people with dyslexia are due to an education system which is ill-equipped to teach people with the condition, and an employment system which systematically excludes people with dyslexia from full participation (Riddick 2001; Macdonald 2009; 2012). Concerns about a person's workplace skills are based on misconceptions of what people with dyslexia can and cannot do. From a social model perspective, the ability to become a serving police officer/civilian is directly related to 'adjustments' within the workplace (Hill 2013; Kirby 2016). Thus, when applying the social model to police personnel, the organisation must recognise and remove disabling barriers in order to make an inclusive work space for disabled police employees. From this perspective, it is these adjustments (in the form of disabling barrier removal), or a lack of them, which include or exclude individuals from becoming a serving police officer/civilian.

Dyslexia, Literacy and the Police Service

Debates concerning the impact that disability has on serving police officers have been significantly under-researched within academic literature. The majority of literature concerning disability and policing focuses on issues of well-being and mental health (Kelley 2005; Houdmont 2013; Tyagi & Dhar 2014). Yet, due to the introduction of the *Disability Discrimination Acts* (1995; 2005) and later the *Equality Act* (2010), police organisations in England and Wales cannot deny employment to a person based on issues of disability (Kirby

2016). It should be noted that the first *Disability Discrimination Act* (1995) made it unlawful for any employer to discriminate against any individual on the grounds of disability. The act gave a clear definition of what constitutes a disability and introduced the concept of 'reasonable adjustment'. Reasonable adjustment derived inspiration from the disability rights movement which referred to problems associated with disability that result from social organisation rather than due to the physicality of their conditions (Roulstone & Warren 2006). Therefore the act promoted the idea that disabled people are structurally discriminated against through environmental disabling barriers.

Within England and Wales the *Disability Discrimination Act* (2005) was replaced by the *Equality Act* (2010) which reinforced the concept of reasonable adjustment and conveyed disability legislation in line with other civil rights issues such as race, ethnicity and gender inequalities. Due to the introduction of this legislation, the police service across England and Wales must take into account the concept of disability and discrimination not only within their general practice, but they also have a legal duty to support disabled employees who work for the organisation (Kirby 2016). With reference to dyslexia, both *Disability Discrimination Acts* and the *Equality Act* define dyslexia as a disability within UK law (Cole 2005; Kirby 2016). Therefore, the police service must make reasonable adjustments for offenders, victims and employees who experience disabling barriers within the organisation (Kirby 2016).

However, as Kirby (2016) suggests, there are a number of difficulties when trying to embed the *Equality Act* into police practice. For this reason, aspects of police culture need to be

acknowledged in order to comprehend some of these difficulties. Due to the complex nature of policing, there is often an absence of formal rules and procedures for every situation/confrontation an officer finds him/herself in (Chan *et al.* 2003). In the absence of formal rules and procedures, officers utilise accumulated experience as a guide for action and as a means of learning acceptable practices within the organisation. Importantly, what not to do is often as important as learning the 'doing of policing' if they are to avoid discipline (Chatterton 1979; 1995; Manning 1997). Police research suggests there is no blanket standard for assessing the competence of a police officer due to the wide range of duties and situations in which officers can be expected to engage (Van Maanen 1973; Fielding 1984; Chan *et al.* 2003). Drawing upon research within the Metropolitan Police, Manning (1997) identifies widespread agreement across all levels within the police hierarchy that 'good police work' relates to an officer's ability to: manage incidents with minimal dissent; manage agreement between parties and maintain control over the direction of their actions; the adoption of a cool, unemotional tone; to demonstrate properly executed tactics and properly applied skills; and to adopt an open-minded view of encounters with the public. It is conceivable, therefore, within such understandings of police work, that individuals who have literacy, reading and communicative difficulties would go unidentified should they fail to disclose these to the organisation.

Moreover, the focus of police education, training and professional development has been on equipping officers with the requisite police-specific occupational skills, including problem solving and gathering and protecting evidence, technical and information skills. For example, achieving proficiency in police equipment, software and intraweb communications, and sharing

cultural knowledge to support officers to develop the 'craft' of police work, which accrues from experiential learning on the job, to facilitate positive outcomes for the organisation. Within this framework for learning, different learning and cognitive abilities and specific learning or educational needs have tended to be overlooked, with a tacit assumption that any literacy and reading difficulties would be identified within the initial application process or probationer training. Possessing wide-ranging communicative skills to enable engagement with a range of different publics and audiences is deemed an essential part of the police craft, but these skills are not only difficult to assess, due to the relative invisibility of police work, but their application is a matter of judgement (Manning 2014). It is unlikely, therefore, that should officers experience difficulties with communication, which may or may not be related to dyslexia, that such issues would be detected and identified as a problem relating to an individual's cognitive abilities.

Although a small but significant amount of work has been conducted focusing on offenders and victims (Kirk & Reid 2001; Selenius *et al.* 2006; Macdonald 2012; Dåderman *et al.* 2012; Macdonald *et al.* 2016) there has been a lack of research on the impact that dyslexia has on police employees (Hill 2013; Kirby 2016). In a study by Mawby and Zempi (2016) on police officers' experiences of hate crime, their investigation focused on three different domains. Their research illustrated that officers experienced forms of hate crime firstly on duty, secondly as a member of the public (off duty), and thirdly within their organisations. The research explored experiences of officers from a range of sexualities, ethnicities and impairments. Interestingly,

with reference to disability discrimination, dyslexia was illustrated as a key issue which impacted on officers within their places of work. One officer states:

> Hidden disabilities is a huge problem in the police. I have to work twice as hard to prove myself. Being dyslexic myself, I spend so much time doing written work, I take work home to cope […] The thought of sitting in a meeting with a lot of paperwork and getting my big glasses out, saying 'yes, these glasses are for my dyslexia', it's like dropping a bombshell. It's like an elephant in the room. People don't understand disability, and the impact it has on people. When I was waiting for my assistive technology, people said 'why do you need so much? It's not like you've got cancer'. (Mawby & Zempi 2016: 10)

One of the most comprehensive studies of dyslexia and policing in the UK was conducted by Andy Hill (2013), an ex-police officer who also has dyslexia. Hill (2013) developed a qualitative study and applied the social model to conceptualise difficulties experienced by police officers. This research illustrated an abundance of discriminatory practices which excluded and often alienated serving police officers with dyslexia. Hill (2013) illustrates a fundamental barrier with reference to the disclosure of dyslexia to the police service. Many officers he interviewed did not want to disclose that they had dyslexia to their organisation due to stigmatising attitudes from fellow officers or senior management. His research demonstrates the negative impact that police culture had on stigmatising attitudes concerning dyslexia and disability in general.

Hill's (2013) research illustrated a lack of awareness of equality legislation throughout the police service. For officers that disclosed, this research illustrated an ineffective system which was often counter-productive rather than inclusive. When reasonable adjustment was made for officers, particularly around the introduction of assistive technologies, he proposes that these adjustments were often inappropriate and ineffective for many of his participants. An example of this was given with reference to officers being given laptops, which had assistive technology built in, but which were either inaccessible to the police system or senior managers refused to allow the officers to connect their technology to the IT system. Although these officers had access to assistive technology, many of the senior managers made these individuals handwrite victim statements, rendering the technology obsolete. The importance of this research illustrated that many officers with dyslexia were denied an equal employment environment, which often impacted on their career progressions or their continual employment within the police service (Hill 2013).

These experiences must also be considered in relation to officers/civilians with undiagnosed dyslexia. As discussed, many officers/civilians will not have received a diagnosis in education, so the police service must also support employees with a continuum of literacy difficulties, since these will be perceived as a competency issue within the organisation (Macdonald 2010; Hill 2013). Officers/civilians experiencing literacy difficulties will potentially hold concerns and fears about disclosure in terms of their competency being questioned from colleagues within the organisation (Hill 2013). If these officers/civilians do self-define or suspect they have dyslexia, they may choose not to disclose because of their concerns around the stigma attached to the

condition, and the negative connotations and reactions they might receive should they be diagnosed (Hill 2013). Hence, officers/civilians with undiagnosed dyslexia may refrain from defining their difficulties as potential dyslexia. This problem of a lack of diagnosis will have led to the organisation underestimating the extent of dyslexia within the police service. Therefore, to confront these issues this study will apply the social model of disability to comprehend difficulties experienced by officers as resulting from disabling barriers. This research develops a quantitative approach in order to locate key disabling barriers within the police as an employer and an organisation designed to serve the public. In the findings section, the article will present data on the extent of dyslexia within a northern police force, discuss issues of diagnosis, investigate key difficulties experienced by officers, and explore disabling barriers with reference to stigmatisation and employment adjustment.

Methodology

The aim of this project was to explore the experiences of people with dyslexia employed by a North of England police service. The study employed a quantitative methodology and recruited participants from a range of different roles within this selected police organisation. Data was collected by means of an online survey. The survey was conducted independently of the police service by members of the criminology team at the University of Sunderland. The survey was sent to all police employees within the organisation. In addition to this, senior managers sent out e-mails encouraging staff members to take part in the research. It should be noted that the research was entirely voluntary and no identifiable information of employees was collected. The study took place from 2017–2018 which initially produced a sample size of 598 participants. The

sample size surveyed in this study achieved 12.3% of the overall police population (4,859). This sample size incorporated police employees who did and did not have dyslexia. Therefore, the majority of analysis used in the findings section will draw on a sample of 261 participants (5.3% of the total population) who had been diagnosed with dyslexia, who self-identify as having dyslexia, or who experience literacy difficulties in the workplace (see Tables 2–8). Within the survey, respondents reported whether or not they had been officially assessed/diagnosed with dyslexia within an educational context. This group of employees are defined in this study as having *dyslexia*. Employees who reported that they had never received an assessment/diagnosis were subsequently asked whether they considered themselves as having dyslexia, despite never receiving an official diagnosis. These officers are defined in this study as having *self-identified dyslexia*. Another group reported experiencing literacy difficulties when conducting their duties, but did not attribute these difficulties to dyslexia. It is these three groups that form the basis of this study.

It should be noted that the authors are influenced by a critical realist philosophy regarding disability and impairment, and this paper employs the social model of disability in respect of the data analysis (see Macdonald 2013). Hence the authors apply the social model definition, which classifies 'disability' as disabling structural barriers and 'impairment' as a biological/neurological variation (Oliver 2009). The data was analysed using descriptive statistics in the form of cross-tabulation tests to examine the frequency distribution of cases. This was to examine any correlations between two or more variables. Two or more variable frequency distributions were analysed using a chi-square statistic (χ^2) to discover whether variables were statistically

independent or whether they were associated (De Vaus 2002). It should be noted that where the expected count fell below five in the data analysis, a Fisher's Exact Test was used to confirm statistical significance. The data from this survey were subsequently analysed, and only data which were calculated to be of significance are presented in this article ($P \leq 0.05$). The data were analysed using SPSS in the form of single variable analysis (univariate), and where data were calculated to be of significance ($P \leq 0.05$), bivariate and multivariate analyses were applied (De Vaus 2002). In the data analysis, three significant themes ($P \leq 0.05$) emerged in the bivariate data, which were: dyslexia identification; dyslexia support; and disabling employment barriers. Therefore, the findings in this article draw on a post-positivist perspective to develop an interpretative approach which is applied within the findings section.

Social Demographics

When exploring the social demographics of police employees, as expected, Table 1 reveals that there were marginally more male participants, at 56.5%, compared with female participants, at 43.5%. However, this is much more proportionate to the general population compared to the most recent national data on police officer strength that currently stands at 71% male and 29% female (Hargreaves *et al.* 2017). There was also a wide range of ages taking part in the survey, ranging from 19 to 64 years. The most prevalent age category, at 35.2%, was the 35 to 44 group, which was closely followed by the 45 to 54 age category, at 32.8%. This decreased to 21.5% for the 25 to 34 age group. The smallest groups consisted of the 19 to 24 years, at 4.3%, and the 55 to 64 age group, at 6.3%. With reference to ethnicity, the vast majority of police employees identified as belonging to a white ethnic group, at 98.5%. Although this study had a small

population of police employees from an ethnic minority background, this is consistent with police employees both locally and nationally (Rowe & Ross 2015). Furthermore, it should be noted that the North East of England has one of the lowest ethnic minority populations within the country at 5% (ONS 2016).

With reference to employment duties and rank, the vast majority of participants were serving police officers, at 65.1%. The second largest population were civilian staff, at 33.7% (this category also included Police Community Support Officers). Only two were senior officers, at 0.8%, and only one participant, at 0.4%, was a volunteer (i.e. special constable) who had some form of literacy difficulty. With reference to dyslexia, most participants, at 56.4% (n=337) reported that they did not have the condition. 10.4% (n=62) suggested that they do not have dyslexia but struggle with the literacy requirements expected in the contemporary police service. Consistent with the general population at 8% (see Snowling 2000; Snowling & Maughan 2006; Peterson & Pennington 2012), 9.4% (n=56) of officers had been diagnosed with dyslexia. An additional 23.9% (n=143) suspected that they may have dyslexia but had never received an official diagnosis. Therefore Table 1 indicates that just under half, at 43.6% (n=261), of police employees in this study describe having dyslexia or experiencing some form of literacy difficulties in conducting their current policing duties.

Table 1
Social Demographics

Variable Characteristics	Variable Values	Percentage	n
Sex	Male	56.5%	147
	Female	43.5%	113
		100.0%	260
Age	19-24	4.3%	11
	25-34	21.5%	55
	35-44	35.2%	90
	45-54	32.8%	84
	55-64	6.3%	16
	Total	100.0%	256
Police Role	Department/Area Command Police Staff	33.7%	88
	Police Officer	65.1%	170
	Senior Officer	.8%	2
	Volunteer	.4%	1
	Total	100.0%	261
Ethnic Groups	White	98.5%	256
	Asian	0.8%	2
	Black	0.8%	2
	Total	100.0%	260
Dyslexia Diagnosis	Self-identified Dyslexia	23.9%	143
	Diagnosed Dyslexia	9.4%	56
	Literacy Difficulties	10.4%	62
	None	56.4%	337
	Total	100.0%	598

Notes: n = participant numbers

Dyslexia and Policing Duties

An intention of this study was to examine the impact that problems associated with dyslexia have on participants employed by the police service. In the findings section, the authors were interested in not only officers/civilians who were diagnosed with dyslexia, but similarly participants who identified with the condition but had never been formally assessed. The study was also interested in employees who did not identify with the label of dyslexia but stated that they have literacy difficulties at work. As illustrated in Table 1, 43.6% of the sampled police population identified themselves in one of the above categories. When exploring this population in Figure 1, it was the self-identified dyslexic group at 54.8% who dominated this subgroup of police employees. This was followed by police employees who did not identify as having dyslexia but reported literacy difficulties, at 23.8%. Interestingly, the smallest population,

at 21.5%, were police employees diagnosed with dyslexia. Therefore, this analysis could illustrate that a significant number of police participants in this study who have literacy difficulties or identify as having dyslexia may have the condition but have not received a formal diagnosis to date.

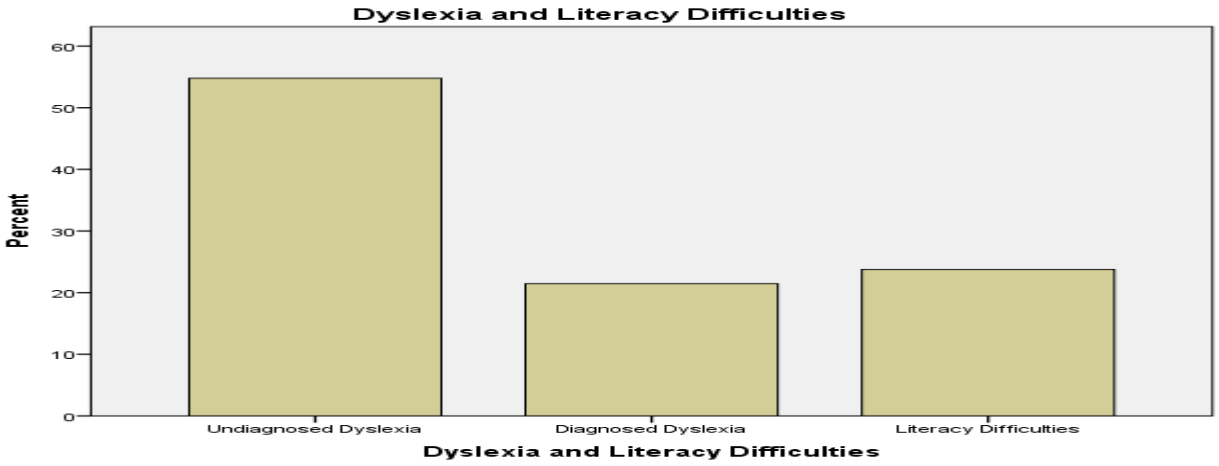

Figure 1: Dyslexia diagnosis

In order to discover if dyslexia or literacy difficulties had any impact on employment duties, the findings identified whether participants thought dyslexia traits/literacy problems impacted on their policing roles. Although similarities can be seen between groups, a significant difference ($p \leq 0.05$) emerged between the three groups with reference to severity. As expected, individuals who have been diagnosed with dyslexia are more likely to experience difficulties, with 10.9% experiencing significant difficulties and 34.8% experiencing moderate difficulties in conducting their duties. As indicated in Table 2, those who self-identified as having dyslexia and those who

reported having literacy difficulties were less likely to experience moderate or significant difficulties in their policing role.

Table 2
Difficulties experienced by police employees

Characteristics	Variable Values		Self-identified Dyslexia	Diagnosed Dyslexia	Literacy Difficulties	Sig.
literacy problems	Significant difficulties	n =	1	5	1	P = 0.00*
in your policing		%	0.9%	10.9%	1.9%	
role	Moderate difficulties	n =	31	16	5	
		%	27.2%	34.8%	9.4%	
	Few difficulties	n =	74	22	38	
		%	64.9%	47.8%	71.7%	
	No difficulties	n =	8	3	9	
		%	7.0%	6.5%	17.0%	
	Total	n =	114	46	53	
		%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

Notes: n = participant numbers
** Fisher's Exact Test = $p \leq 0.05$*

Dyslexia Support

To explore whether serving police officers/civilians had access to support within the workplace, it was important to discover if participants had disclosed any information about their literacy difficulties/disability to their employer. The concept of disclosure was central to Hill's (2013) study with serving police officers. For 'reasonable adjustment' to be made for police employees, they must first disclose their impairment or difficulties to the organisation. Thus, for disclosure to take place, police officers/civilians must be confident that disclosure will lead to a positive outcome and not lead to discrimination or stigmatisation within the police service (Bartlett & Moody 2010; Hill 2013). As Table 3 reveals, 63% of participants with diagnosed dyslexia had informed the police service of their condition. Although this data reveals that more than half of employees had informed the service, there were still 37% of participants with dyslexia who had decided not to disclose. Interestingly, 4.5% of the self-identified group had also informed the police service about their concerns relating to undiagnosed dyslexia. This low level of disclosure,

at 95.5% for the self-identified dyslexia group, may indicate a lack of confidence concerning access to a diagnosis and reasonable adjustments in their organisation. There may also be another reason for a lack of disclosure by officers/civilians, as Table 3 also indicates that a significant number of participants felt they would not acquire access to disability support relating to their condition. Hence, as can be viewed in Table 3, only 12.5% of the diagnosed group believed that they could easily access support within the organisation. In addition, only 14% of the self-identified group, and no participants with literacy difficulties, felt there was any support available to them within the police service. Thus, this data may reveal that many serving police officers/civilians with dyslexia do not consider that the police service offers any form of dyslexia/literacy support which will assist them with their operational/professional duties.

Table 3
Dyslexia disclosure and access to support

Characteristics	Variable Values		Self-identified Dyslexia	Diagnosed Dyslexia	Literacy Difficulties	Sig.
Disclosure Dyslexia to your organisation	Yes	n =	5	29	0	P = 0.00*
		%	4.5%	63.0%	0%	
	No	n =	105	17	62	
		%	95.5%	37.0%	100%	
	Total	n =	110	46	62	
		%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
Easy access to dyslexia support in the organisation	Yes	n =	20	7	0	P = 0.00*
		%	14.0%	12.5%	0.0%	
	No	n =	123	49	62	
		%	86.0%	87.5%	100.0%	
	Total	n =	143	56	62	
		%	100%	100%	100%	

Notes: n = participant numbers
** Fisher's Exact Test = p ≤ 0.05*

This study investigated whether participants with dyslexia had access to reasonable adjustment in the workplace. Within this data analysis it would not be expected for the self-identified group or the group with literacy difficulties to have access to disability support within the police

service, as they are not legally defined as disabled. However, there was an expectation that participants who had disclosed their dyslexia diagnosis to the organisation should have gained access to reasonable adjustment within their police force. As can be seen in Table 4, only 3.6% of participants diagnosed with dyslexia reported having access to support with reference to reasonable adjustment. Although only 3.6% of the dyslexia group accessed reasonable adjustment in the workplace, 7.6% of participants were using assistive technologies to help with their policing duties. This discrepancy can be explained by participants using their own devices (i.e. mobile phones) to assist their literacy skills. Referring back to Table 3, this figure is nowhere near the 37% who disclosed to their organisation. This data seems to demonstrate that, for the majority of participants with dyslexia, insufficient support and adjustment has been made within the police service to accommodate this group's condition.

Table 4
Reasonable Adjustment

Characteristics	Variable Values		Self-identified Dyslexia	Diagnosed Dyslexia	Literacy Difficulties	Sig.
Reasonable adjustments to workspace	Yes	n =	0	2	0	P = 0.02*
		%	0.0%	3.6%	0.0%	
	No	n =	143	54	62	
		%	100.0%	96.4%	100.0%	
	Total	n =	143	56	62	
		%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
IT support in the workspace	Yes	n =	0	4	0	P = 0.00*
		%	0.0%	7.1%	0.0%	
	No	n =	143	52	62	
		%	100.0%	92.9%	100.0%	
	Total	n =	143	56	62	
		%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

Notes: n = participant numbers
** Fisher's Exact Test = $p \leq 0.05$*

Dyslexia and Operational Difficulties

As established in Table 4, very few participants were aware of or had access to reasonable adjustment in the workplace. As was previously discussed, only minor adjustments have been made to accommodate for the different learning and cognitive styles of police employees within

this study. Therefore, the findings examined areas of difficulties which were experienced by participants with dyslexia and with literacy difficulties. The analysis was organised into three distinct areas focusing on moderate to severe problems with writing skills, reading skills and management expectations. The analysis reveals significant differences ($p \leq 0.02$) between the three groups in all areas of employment tasks. With reference to writing skills, it was employees diagnosed with dyslexia who consistently reported the most substantial problems with reference to writing within the workplace. 50% of participants diagnosed with dyslexia reported moderate to severe difficulties in general administration; 46.6% of this group reported difficulties in typing expectations; 46.5% reported difficulties in pocketbook note taking; and 69.7% reported difficulties in handwriting statements. Again, these figures decreased for the self-identified dyslexia group, which can be viewed in Table 5; 29.6% of the self-identified group reported moderate to severe difficulties with general administration; 30.8% of this group reported difficulties in typing information; 28.5% reported difficulties in making entries within their notebooks; and 46% reported difficulties in handwriting statements. For participants with literacy difficulties, it was this group that described lower levels of workplace problems. As can be viewed in Table 5, 19.6% of these participants reported moderate to severe difficulties with general administration; 13% of this group reported difficulties typing information relevant for their employment roles; 9.3% reported difficulties in writing entries within their notebooks; and only 23.8% reported handwriting difficulties and writing witness statements.

Table 5
Writing difficulties

Characteristics	Variable Values		Self-identified Dyslexia	Diagnosed Dyslexia	Literacy Difficulties	Sig.
General administration	No effect	n =	28	5	19	P = 0.02*
		%	25.9%	10.9%	37.3%	
	Slight effect	n =	48	18	22	
		%	44.4%	39.1%	43.1%	
	Moderate effect	n =	20	14	6	
		%	18.5%	30.4%	11.8%	
	Significant effect	n =	12	9	4	
		%	11.1%	19.6%	7.8%	
	Total	n =	108	46	51	
		%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
Typing statements	No effect	n =	26	7	22	P = 0.00*
		%	25.0%	16.3%	48.9%	
	Slight effect	n =	46	16	17	
		%	44.2%	37.2%	37.8%	
	Moderate effect	n =	22	6	3	
		%	21.2%	14.0%	6.7%	
	Significant effect	n =	10	10	3	
		%	9.6%	23.3%	6.7%	
	Severe effect	n =	0	4	0	
		%	0.0%	9.3%	0.0%	
	Total	n =	104	43	45	
		%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
Pocketbook entries	No effect	n =	43	11	24	P = 0.00*
		%	43.9%	25.6%	55.8%	
	Slight effect	n =	27	12	15	
		%	27.6%	27.9%	34.9%	
	Moderate effect	n =	16	7	2	
		%	16.3%	16.3%	4.7%	
	Significant effect	n =	11	8	1	
		%	11.2%	18.6%	2.3%	
	Severe effect	n =	1	5	1	
		%	1.0%	11.6%	2.3%	
	Total	n =	98	43	43	
		%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
Handwriting statements	No effect	n =	24	6	15	P = 0.00*
		%	24.0%	14.0%	32.6%	
	Slight effect	n =	30	7	20	
		%	30.0%	16.3%	43.5%	
	Moderate effect	n =	19	9	3	
		%	19.0%	20.9%	6.5%	
	Significant effect	n =	21	9	6	
		%	21.0%	20.9%	13.0%	
	Severe effect	n =	6	12	2	
		%	6.0%	27.9%	4.3%	
	Total	n =	100	43	46	
		%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

Notes: n = participant numbers
** Fisher's Exact Test = p ≤ 0.05*

When investigating if reading difficulties had an impact on operational duties, again it was participants with diagnosed dyslexia where reading skills had the greatest impact compared with the other two groups ($p \leq 0.00$). As Table 6 demonstrates, 41.3% of the diagnosed group

reported moderate to severe difficulties reading intelligence on the police national computer (PNC), and 43.5% of this group reported difficulties reading and interpreting police policies and procedures. Levels of difficulties decrease with reference to the self-identified group, as 26.6% reported moderate to severe difficulties reading intelligence, and 35.2% described difficulties in reading and comprehending police policies and procedures. These reading and comprehension difficulties decrease further with reference to the literacy difficulties group, as only 7.7% referred to moderate to severe difficulties reading intelligence, and 11.5% described difficulties reading and comprehending policy and procedures within the organisation. Thus, in practice these difficulties are therefore not causing them significant problems in the workplace.

Table 6
Reading Difficulties

Characteristics	Variable Values		Self-identified Dyslexia	Diagnosed Dyslexia	Literacy Difficulties	Sig.
Reading information /intelligence on the police national computer	No effect	n =	35	16	33	P = 0.00*
		%	32.1%	34.8%	63.5%	
	Slight effect	n =	45	11	15	
		%	41.3%	23.9%	28.8%	
	Moderate effect	n =	23	11	1	
		%	21.1%	23.9%	1.9%	
	Significant effect	n =	4	7	3	
		%	3.7%	15.2%	5.8%	
	Severe effect	n =	2	1	0	
		%	1.8%	2.2%	0.0%	
	Total	n =	109	46	52	
		%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
Reading and comprehension of force policy and procedures	No effect	n =	33	11	29	P = 0.00*
		%	30.6%	23.9%	55.8%	
	Slight effect	n =	37	15	17	
		%	34.3%	32.6%	32.7%	
	Moderate effect	n =	25	8	2	
		%	23.1%	17.4%	3.8%	
	Significant effect	n =	11	9	4	
		%	10.2%	19.6%	7.7%	
	Severe effect	n =	2	3	0	
		%	1.9%	6.5%	0.0%	
	Total	n =	108	46	52	
		%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

Notes: n = participant numbers
** Fisher's Exact Test = $p \leq 0.05$*

When exploring whether participants with dyslexia experienced any management or organisational difficulties within the police service, it was the diagnosed group who experienced the most significant difficulties. As Table 7 reveals, it is the diagnosed dyslexia group who were more likely to experience moderate to severe difficulties concerning management duties. As the data reveals, 41.2% described experiencing difficulties in management tasks such as staff appraisals, training material and disciplinary duties. In a similar trend to the previous analysis, the data reveals a decrease with reference to difficulties with management duties in the other two groups. As the data in Table 7 illustrates, 22% of the self-identified group describe moderate to severe difficulties with reference to these management expectations. Again, the data reveals a further decrease for the literacy difficulties group, as only 10% of this group report moderate to severe difficulties with reference to these duties.

Table 7
Management duties

Characteristics	Variable Values		Self-identified Dyslexia	Diagnosed Dyslexia	Literacy Difficulties	Sig.
Management duties (e.g. staff appraisals, training materials, disciplinary procedures)	No effect	n =	54	19	35	P = 0.00*
		%	54.0%	41.3%	70.0%	
	Slight effect	n =	24	8	10	
		%	24.0%	17.4%	20.0%	
	Moderate effect	n =	19	10	3	
		%	19.0%	21.7%	6.0%	
	Significant effect	n =	3	7	2	
		%	3.0%	15.2%	4.0%	
	Severe effect	n =	0	2	0	
		%	0.0%	4.3%	0.0%	
	Total	n =	100	46	50	
		%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

Notes: n = participant numbers
** Fisher's Exact Test = $p \leq 0.05$*

Progression within the Police Service

An intention of this research was to examine the impact that dyslexia had on police careers and progression. Similar to previous findings, the data reveals that participants diagnosed with dyslexia describe literacy difficulties as having the greatest impact on their career opportunities and promotions. However, in general very few participants believe that their promotion opportunities have been considerably restricted due to their literacy problems. As can be viewed in Table 8, it is the dyslexia group, at 16.1%, who describe literacy problems as having the greatest impact on promotion opportunities, which decreases to 14.7% for the self-identified group. No participants from the literacy difficulties group sensed that their literacy difficulties impacted on their promotion opportunities. Therefore, although some participants conceptualise their difficulties as having an impact on promotion, the vast majority of participants (83.9% diagnosed and 85.3% self-identified) did not report literacy problems as having a significant impact on their overall career progression.

Although participants did not conceptualise their difficulties as having an impact on promotion, the dyslexia group did believe that their difficulties had prevented them from accessing alternative career opportunities within their organisation. As can be viewed in Table 8, 39.3% of the diagnosed group felt their difficulties had prevented them from accessing alternative policing roles, whereas only 17.5% of the self-identified group described this issue. Again, for the group who reported having literacy difficulties, this does not seem to be an issue, as none of these participants described that literacy difficulties had prevented them from pursuing other policing roles. What this data reveals is that although the majority of participants do not conceptualise literacy difficulties as impacting on their promotion opportunities, the dyslexia groups do consider these problems as restricting aspects of their career aspirations with reference to accessing alternative policing opportunities within the organisation.

Table 8
Career aspirations and support

Characteristics	Variable Values		Self-identified Dyslexia	Diagnosed Dyslexia	Literacy Difficulties	Sig.
Dyslexia traits have prevented employees from applying for promotion	Yes	n =	21	9	0	P = 0.00*
		%	14.7%	16.1%	0.0%	
	No	n =	122	47	62	
		%	85.3%	83.9%	100.0%	
	Total	n =	143	56	62	
		%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
Dyslexia traits have prevented employees from pursuing different roles	Yes	n =	25	22	0	P = 0.00*
		%	17.5%	39.3%	0.0%	
	No	n =	118	34	62	
		%	82.5%	60.7%	100.0%	
	Total	n =	143	56	62	
		%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

Notes: n = participant numbers
** Fisher's Exact Test = $p \leq 0.05$*

Discussion

As Kirby (2016) reports, the police service is an establishment which is constrained by the same legal requirement as any commercial employer. Thus, the police service must cultivate anti-

discriminatory practices within the organisation. Due to the *Equality Act* (2010) the police service must ensure that officers and police employees are not knowingly discriminated against, and that reasonable adjustments are made within the workplace to remove disabling barriers and foster anti-discriminatory practices. The data findings in this study demonstrate that a significant number of participants, at 43.6%, reported having dyslexia, literacy difficulties or dyslexia traits. This article does not suggest that 43.6% of participants have dyslexia, but that there are a substantial number of police employees with literacy difficulties that impact on their daily operational duties. Although only 9.4% of this sample has been diagnosed with dyslexia, a further 23.9% of participants suggest they have undiagnosed dyslexia. Although it is implausible, without conducting an assessment on each person, to propose that every participant in the self-identified group have this condition, this data may indicate that dyslexia is under-diagnosed within the sampled policing population. This is consistent with previous research on victims and offenders with dyslexia, as a key disabling barrier to support and adjustment is a lack of diagnosis for these populations (Kirk & Reid 2001; Macdonald 2012; Dåderman *et al.* 2012; Macdonald *et al.* 2016).

The findings also illustrate substantial differences between the three dyslexia, self-identified and literacy difficulty groups. A consistent trend that appeared across the analysis was that the diagnosed dyslexia group described the greatest difficulties when performing general policing tasks. As discussed, 45.7% of participants with dyslexia reported moderate to significant difficulties within the workplace. The severity of difficulties decreased significantly to 28.1% and 11.3% for the self-identified group and for participants with literacy difficulties respectively. This

is consistent throughout the data with reference to difficulties associated with writing, reading and management skills. Furthermore, 39.3% of the diagnosed group and 17.5% of the self-identified group felt that they were prevented from pursuing other roles within the police service due to their dyslexia traits. Throughout the data analysis it was the diagnosed dyslexia group who experienced the most significant difficulties, followed by the self-identified group, and finally participants with reported literacy difficulties. These findings indicate a lack of support for all these groups, however; a substantial proportion of participants with self-identified dyslexia seem to experience moderate to severe difficulties, which presents implications for support both in terms of accessing a diagnosis and receiving reasonable adjustment from within the organisation.

When comparing this survey's data with the qualitative analysis presented by Hill (2013), this study seems to support many of his qualitative findings. A fundamental theme described by Hill referred to the disclosure of dyslexia to the police service. As this study illustrates, 37% of participants with this condition had decided not to disclose dyslexia to their organisation. In addition to this, only 12.5% of participants with dyslexia reported having knowledge of or access to dyslexia support within the police service. As Draffan *et al.* (2007) suggest, with advances in digital technologies, reading and writing difficulties can be successfully overcome with access to assistive technologies such as dictate software and text to speak technologies. Although it should be noted that not all assistive technologies are compatible with policing systems (Hill 2013), within the police service involved in this study, employees were able to access policing systems with tablet computers. These devices had these assistive technologies built within the

device, however, the police service concerned was unaware of this benefit and was not using these technologies as a form of reasonable adjustment. By allowing police officers the ability to use assistive technologies on these devices it would significantly remove a key disabling barrier experienced by police employees. Consistent with Hill's (2013) study, only 3.6% of officers had accessed 'reasonable adjustment', and very few participants (at 7%) used assistive technology within the workplace. Therefore, the data in this study is consistent with the work of Macdonald (2009), Bartlett and Moody (2010) and Hill (2013), as for the majority of adults in this study with dyslexia, and those who have literacy difficulties, there is little evidence to suggest that adjustments have been made in the police service to reduce disabling barriers that discriminate and exclude some officers and civilians.

Conclusion

To conclude, this study suggests that more work is required to successfully apply the concept of 'reasonable adjustment' to the police service consistent with the *Equality Act* 2010 (Kirby 2016). This study does not advocate that people with dyslexia cannot successfully become active police officers or police employees due to a neurological 'deficit'. On the contrary, this study proposes that dyslexia is a neurological variation and that people with the condition engage in literacy skills in different ways and use different (digital) technologies in order to read and write (Macdonald & Deacon 2018). Therefore, the authors recommend routine screening of all recruits into the service is conducted by the organisation, and where identified, interventions, including the use of assistive technologies and support networks, are identified and put in place

to create inclusive working environments. In order to reduce stigma, the police service need to actively engage in awareness campaigns to dispel any myths concerning the condition. As discussed, this article has interpreted the data findings from a social model perspective which the authors believe is the most appropriate approach to develop an inclusive environment for employees working within the contemporary police force. Therefore, data in this study may indicate that dyslexia is undiagnosed within the police service and additional work is needed on reassuring serving police employees to disclose their condition to the organisation. Finally, the police service must do more to recognise and remove disabling barriers, reducing stigmatisation, which will encourage police staff to disclose difficulties to the organisation so that they might receive an assessment and appropriate workplace adjustments to enable officers and employees with dyslexia the means to achieve their full potential. Despite the fact that this article focuses on disabling barriers within contemporary policing, the authors suggest that by applying the social model of disability to the criminal justice system this has broader theoretical implications concerning disability, discrimination and equality within a criminological context.

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