Evaluation of Forensic Interviews and Interrogations: A Thematic Analysis of Law-Enforcement Views.

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Abstract

Purpose. Effective forensic interviewing is crucial, particularly if the interview is the only source of evidence. Whilst there are a number of non-coercive interview models that advocate for reflective practice, the evaluation of interviews rarely gets the time or attention it deserves. This is concerning given that interviewer skills drop significantly after six months, and there are limited opportunities for refresher training. The aims of the current study were to explore how law enforcement officers reflect upon and evaluate their interviews and seek their insight into what they believe an effective evaluation tool would constitute

Methodology. A total of 32 officers from three police forces in England and Wales and six international security organisations completed a qualitative questionnaire that explored their views on how interview evaluation is conducted and the impact on the interview, and how technology could assist in this important stage in terms of usability, efficacy and capability of a new evaluation tool.

Findings. Thematic Analysis was utilised resulting in three overall themes emerging from the data. These focused on current evaluation methods, barriers to conducting evaluations and technological solutions.

Originality. The findings are discussed in relation to interviewing and the Forensic Interview TraceÂ©. Implications for practice include the need for much more effort to be put into (re) introducing the evaluation stage into training to ensure that officers are allowed to reflect upon and evaluate their interview performance.

Keywords: Interview, Interrogation, Evaluation, Forensic Interview Trace©

Introduction

Conducting forensic interviews particularly with victims, witnesses, and suspects of crime, is a crucial part of any investigation across the globe (Oxburgh and Ost, 2011; Williamson, 2006). However, effective interviews are also important in multiple other settings, including military, intelligence, security, and administrative investigations. Many jurisdictions already have interview models in place including the PEACE model in England and Wales (**P**lanning and preparation, **E**ngage and explain, **A**ccount, clarify and challenge, **C**losure, and **E**valuation; CPTU, 1992a; Halley, 2022; Williamson, 2006), the PRICE model in Scotland (**P**repare, **R**apport, **I**nformation gathering, **C**onfirming the content and **E**valuation and action; Halley, 2022; Scottish Police College, 2007), and KREATIV in Norway (**C**ommunication, **R**ule of law, **E**thics and empathy, **A**ctive consciousness, **T**rust through openness, and **I**nformation - **V**erified through science; Fahsing and Rachlew, 2009). PEACE was created in the early 1990s, as a result of a number of high-profile miscarriages of justice due to interrogative pressure and poor interviewing (Gudjonsson, 2018; Meissner et al., 2014). The PRICE and KREATIV models followed shortly afterwards. All these models of interviewing provide an ethical foundation for interviewing any type of individual (e.g., victim, witness, suspect or other person of interest), and are underpinned by a robust and scientific evidence-base relating to theories of psychology, human rights and communication. Investigators receive various levels of training dependent on their role within their organisation.

However, while other countries around the world have moved towards using such models of interviewing, training often emphasises how to develop tactical plans for evidence disclosure and questioning strategies rather than focusing on the evaluation of the interview. For example, in the Netherlands investigators are trained in the Scenario's Onderzoekende Methode (SOM; Van Amelsvoort & Rispens, 2017, 2021) – translated into 'Investigating Scenarios Model', the model maps onto the 'Account, clarify and challenge' phase of the PEACE model in that it combines approaches to evidence disclosure (see the Strategic use of Evidence technique; Granhag & Hartwig, 2015, for example). Thus, the aim is to provide a more structured approach to this phase of the interview and focuses on evidence disclosure and questioning strategy. Whilst such strategic interviewing make use of existing knowledge relating to cognitive and social psychology, the evaluation stage is largely neglected, despite many models advocating for it.

Evaluation of Forensic Interviews

In some cases, the interview can often be the only source of evidence, particularly in historic investigations where there is little forensic evidence. As such, obtaining accurate and reliable information is pivotal in any subsequent interview (Walsh and Oxburgh, 2008); this can be a challenging process, particularly so, if the investigation or the needs of the interviewee/s are complex (e.g., vulnerable persons; Farrugia and Gabbert, 2020), and take place in countries where legal and procedural safeguards are not upheld as robustly as they should be, or where coercive interview practices are used. Being able to conduct an effective interview, therefore, is pivotal, and a skill that requires continuous and ongoing evaluation and reflection of one's practices.

Reflection

The concept of reflection can be described as an understanding of how we gain knowledge through experience (Johns, 2009) and is crucial in life-long learning. It encourages the development of insight into professional practice (Wain, 2017), resulting in an increased self-awareness and the ability to evaluate performance in order to inform future practice whilst learning from continuous experiences (Ramsden, 1992). There are a number of models of reflection in the literature that provides a structure in which to evaluate learning, of which the most prevalent are: (i) Gibbs (1988) who developed a reflective cycle to encourage systematic thinking; (ii) Schon (1983) who was primarily interested in the relationship between academic knowledge and the acquisition of competence, and; (iii) Kolb (1984) who proposed that learning occurs through discovery and experience. Regardless of which model one wishes to draw upon, reflective practice and evaluation is essential to improve practice and enables professionals to use their past experiences to inform future practice. Whilst reflective thinking was initially placed within the context of education (Kember, Jones and Loke, 2001), it also has an equal place within a professional context (in this case, forensic interviewing). When it is used and understood well, it enables professionals to demonstrate the continuous development of skills to the required standards for their role (Heyer, 2015).

Reflection in forensic contexts

Interviewing professionals deal with challenging and complex investigations that almost always involve an interview. Being able to critically reflect on their interview experience will enable evaluative insight into their performance and subsequently lead to a

plan for future practice. Indeed, the review and evaluation of interviews are recognised as vitally important elements in all interview models (i.e., PEACE, PRICE, and KREATIV). However, despite interview models and training manuals advocating for this (e.g., College of Policing, 2022), anecdotal evidence from police officers in England and Wales suggests strongly that this element rarely gets the attention it deserves with law enforcement officers indicating that they do not have enough time or resources to critically reflect upon or evaluate their own interviews or interviewer performance (Clarke, Milne and Bull, 2011; Walsh, King and Griffiths, 2017). At the conclusion of every interview, the interviewer/s should: (i) assess and analyse the amount and type of information obtained to establish how it fits with evidence already known; (ii) establish what (if any) further evidence may be required in order to advance the investigation, and; (iii) reflect upon their own performance relating to the overall process of the interview (i.e., the types of questions asked, the impact on the information obtained, whether rapport and empathy were developed and utilised, and whether adherence to policy and practice were maintained, including legal and procedural safeguards (see College of Policing, 2022; Farrugia *et al.,* 2019). Such lack of critical reflection and interview evaluation is therefore concerning, particularly when one considers the impact such processes can have on future learning and the maintenance of interviewer skills.

Although conducting forensic interviews forms an integral part of a police/law enforcement officer's main duties, not every officer possesses the skills to complete this effectively (Bockstaele, 2002). For example, the way in which some officers believe they are conducting interviews (in terms of questioning practice), does not always reflect what is actually occurring. As an example, scholars found that whilst officers believed they were always using *appropriate* questions, they were in fact relying on *inappropriate* questions (Oxburgh *et al.,* 2016). Thus, given the complexities of conducting interviews, particularly if the interviewee is vulnerable or if the case is complex, the importance of critical reflection and evaluation cannot be underestimated. Research has established that the quality of interviews is improved following individual interview analysis and/or supervision (Powell and Wright, 2008; Smets, 2012). However, whilst interview performance is enhanced immediately after interview analysis and/or training, interviewer skills drop significantly after approximately six months (Lamb *et al.,* 2002). Thus, maintaining interviewing skills pertaining to best practice is vital and can be achieved with reflection and continuous evaluation of interview performance (Farrugia *et al.,* 2019; Smets and Rispens, 2014).

Standardising reflective practice

Although there are many models and theories of reflection, currently, there are no known standardised practices or tools for analysing and reflecting upon forensic interview performance. Indeed, some organisations do not conduct any reviews or evaluations of their interviews at all, risking a decline in interviewer skillset (Walsh *et al.,* 2017). Other organisations engage with individual interview evaluation, or supervision from a mentor or a supervisor, known as 'intervision' (Smets and Rispens, 2014). Technological advances in assisting effective evaluation of interviews also remain in their primacy. One tool, known as the Griffiths Question Map (GQM; Griffiths, 2008) has been used by a limited number of academics and police forces. This tool maps the chronology and sequencing of questions across the timespan of an interview, thus providing a visual record of the interview but only relating to questions asked. Whilst the tool demonstrates some effectiveness in relation to questioning (Dodier and Denault, 2017; Griffiths, 2008), focusing solely on question type severely restricts its use given the many other aspects that occur in interviews, such as interpersonal communication including rapport and empathy, and the subsequent impact on eliciting information from the interviewee. Consequently, we would argue that those who use the GQM are not truly reflecting upon the entire interview performance or using the tool to develop future learning *per se*.

A more recently developed tool, the Forensic Interview Trace$^©$ (FIT$^©$; Farrugia *et al.,* 2019) may address the limitations of the GQM. Grounded within psychological concepts relating to memory, information retrieval, interpersonal communication, and rapport-building, the FIT$^©$ allows for various key aspects of the interview to be analysed and reviewed concurrently, thereby providing a more detailed visual trace of the entire interview (including question types, rapport, and empathy) and the real-time impact upon the information obtained (including the number and type of details reported, as well as 'turning points' that refer to events, behaviours, or actions that change the direction of an interaction toward, or away from, achieving the interviewer's goals). Interviewer and interviewee characteristics are also recorded (such as any vulnerability) and the tool allows users to document their decision-making throughout the interview process thereby assisting in an effective evaluation of their performance. However, empirical testing and pilot work is ongoing and, as such, there remains a wider need to know from the interviewer perspective what features such tools need to ensure that effective evaluation can take place.

Current study

Although it is increasingly reported how imperative the evaluation of interviews is (e.g., Smets and Rispens, 2014) and many models of reflection exist in the general literature, little research has been conducted that explores the perceptions of police/law enforcement officers, and if the use of technology could be utilised to assist them in this process. As such, the aims of the current study were to: (i) explore how police and law enforcement officers currently reflect upon and evaluate their interview performance, and; (ii) gain insight into what they believe an effective evaluation tool would constitute in terms of usability, efficacy, and capability.

Method

Design

A qualitative, reflexive Thematic Analysis (TA; Braun *et al.,* 2019) design, was used to explore insights from police and law enforcement officers regarding their reflection and evaluation of interviews. TA is considered theoretically flexible allowing for rich and in-depth data to be collected and can be used to address a number of different types of research questions, including individuals' views and perceptions on a given topic.

Participants

Police and law enforcement officers were recruited from police forces across England and Wales, and other international security organisations via a purposive sampling method to ensure a representative sample. This allowed for the identification of individuals that are especially knowledgeable about the phenomenon of interest (Cresswell and Plano Clark, 2011). To be included in the study, participants had to be: (i) actively involved in conducting forensic interviews; (ii) trained to at least Level 2 of the Professionalising Investigation Programme (PIP) in England and Wales (see College of Policing, 2020), and/or; (iii) trained to the equivalent level for international security organisations. Overall, 98 participants responded to the questionnaire. However, 66 were removed due to incomplete responses. The final sample, therefore, consisted of 32 participants from three police forces (n = 19) within England and Wales and six security organisations internationally (n = 13); these were based in the United States of America, Norway, and the Netherlands. All participants had been involved in conducting interviews with victims, witnesses, and suspects involved in complex or serious crimes. Other than their organisation, no other demographics were collected due to

confidentiality and anonymity reasons given their insights regarding the level of evaluation that was (or was not) conducted.

Materials

A questionnaire consisting of nine questions was developed to capture participants' insight and experience of reflecting upon and evaluating their interviews. The first section focused solely on their review and analysis and included questions such as, 'Describe the current forms of interview evaluation that you undertake (or are aware of) in your organisation and explain how you conduct evaluations'. The second section focused on the development of a tool to assist in reflection and evaluation and included questions such as, 'Would your interview evaluation benefit from a tool to assist you with evaluation? If so, how?' The questionnaire was developed based on the concerns raised in the existing literature pertaining to little evaluation being conducted, and the resources/tools needed to be able to do so. The questionnaire was piloted with serving police officers in England and Wales to explore the appropriateness of the questions and ensure that the questions captured rich data. No changes were made to the questionnaire[1]. The questionnaire was hosted on Qualtrics[2] and is recorded in Table 1.

Table 1 about here.

Procedure

Following ethical approval from the UK Ministry of Defence Research Ethics Committee and the first author's institution, police and security organisations were approached via email using the authors' key industry contacts. Once expressions of interest were received, details of the research (including the Qualtrics link for participation) were sent to each industry contact whom then acted as a gatekeeper. This was then disseminated via email to their teams/departments (based on the inclusion criteria) for completion.The Qualtrics link gave access to the information about the study, a consent form, and evaluation questionnaire. Please note, other than the professional working relationship with each gatekeeper, the research team did not know any of the participants personally. Furthermore, participants were informed that should they wish not to participate, they would not be

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[1] Participants from the pilot were invited to provide comments regarding the content of the questionnaire. Comments indicated that the content and type of questions included were appropriate for its intended purpose.
[2] Qualtrics is an online software programme that allows users to disseminate questionnaires/surveys for the purpose of data collection.

penalised in any way, thus, participation was voluntary and participants were not compensated for their time. Once completed, participants had access to a debrief regarding the study. In total, participation took from 20 to 30 minutes with a mean time of 23 minutes depending on the depth of responses recorded.

Analytical Strategy

The data were analysed through the process of reflexive TA which is a method that allows evaluators to identify and understand a patterned meaning within the data, with the aim of interpretation grounded by constructing patterns of meaning (Braun *et al.,* 2019). By adhering to a critical realist epistemology, the authors report upon an assumed reality evident in the data, thus understanding that the 'real' world cannot be observed and that understanding is constructed through perspectives and experiences of what is 'observable'. The analysis consisted of six stages as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Initially, the researchers familiarised themselves with the data by reading through the completed questionnaires and making notes of potential areas of interest for the analysis. The data was read several times during this process. The second stage involved the researchers generating initial codes – each questionnaire was coded using an inductive approach given the little research that exists in this area (and thus the need for exploratory research). An inductive approach means that the themes are linked to the data and are not fitted into a pre-existing coding frame or the researcher's analytic preconceptions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thus, the coding and development of themes was, therefore, directed by the content of the data. The third stage involved searching for themes – here codes were collated and gathered for each potential theme. The fourth stage involved the researchers checking if the identified themes worked in relation to the codes. Once this was completed, the researchers refined the specifics of each theme and sub-theme and names and definitions were produced for each. The final stage involved the researchers selecting examples of extracts to reflect the identified themes and sub-themes. All data and analysis was made available to the co-authors. The identified themes and sub-themes were reviewed and discussed to ensure agreement.

Results

Overall, three main themes and eight sub-themes were identified from the data that sought to understand how law enforcement officers currently evaluate their interviews and what they would seek in an effective interview evaluation tool.

Main Theme 1: Current Evaluation Methods

       Participants discussed methods they use to evaluate their interviews, if any. Within this first theme, three sub-themes that focus specifically on existing tools and methods, the inconsistent nature in which these occur, and the importance of conducting evaluations were identified.

Sub-Theme 1: Existing Methods and Tools

       Participants discussed the existing methods and tools they currently use when completing interview evaluations. Participants made reference to methods from, 'simple peer review' (participant 11) to a more formal nature. Other evaluations refer specifically to the use of tools. For example, participants recalled using the 'Griffiths Questioning Map to evaluate the questioning style' (participant 4) and applying, 'the strategic method for assessment, reliability and truth' (participant 8). However, other participants indicated that no official evaluations took place. For example, some stated, 'there is little to no evaluation' (participant 20), and, 'there is not a recorded or documented process' (participant 27). Others highlighted that they did not have a specific tool or form for evaluating interviews and that they are, 'not aware of any evaluation model in place which is implemented by my force' (participant 17).

Sub-Theme 2: Inconsistent Use of Interview Evaluation

       Although some participants referred to various methods and tools in conducting interview evaluations, participants also indicated an inconsistency in the ways in which they are implemented. For example, some participants stated that the evaluations they conduct are self-arranged for 'personal reflection' (participant 9) or for seeking 'constructive feedback' (participant 17). Others refer to the evaluation stage being completed as part of the investigation process, rather than for skills development – for example, 'interviews are evaluated as part of the evidence gathering, rather than identifying points of improvement' (participant 30). Others explained that evaluations were only conducted if there had been an issue with the investigation. For example, one participant explained that such evaluations are 'only conducted when something has gone wrong' (participant 3) and another indicated that interviews are 'evaluated by higher ranks if for example a complaint is made' (participant 1).

Sub-Theme 3: Importance of Conducting Evaluations

Despite the varying nature in which evaluations are conducted, participants highlighted the importance of conducting them for primarily two reasons. The first was for skills development with some participants indicating that evaluations could aid with, '…personal level development. Individuals learning from mistakes' (participant 3) and highlighting that, 'challenges faced can be used as lessons learnt for future interviews' (participant 20) as well as 'past experiences are used to make future performance better' (participant 21). Others referred to using, 'real life examples to generate training material' (participant 2). Participants also highlighted that they use evaluations to help plan for future interviews: 'I like to go over my forensic interviews and think about what I could do different or better next time' (participant 12). Others highlighted that, 'if any key topics or certain challenges are missed you work on that for your next interview' (participant 15).

Main Theme 2: Barriers to Conducting Evaluations

Whilst reporting the types of methods and tools that may or may not be used, participants frequently discussed the barriers they face when attempting to conduct evaluations of their interviews. Two sub-themes were identified that focused on the lack of resources available, and lack of time participants have due to work pressures.

Sub-Theme 1: Lack of Resources

Participants generally highlighted that conducting interview evaluations, 'is not always deemed a viable use of resources' (participant 4). They explained that not only is the, 'current belief that police are good interviewers' (participant 7), but that conducting evaluations is, 'often an overlooked part of the process and often rushed as "higher priority" tasks need conducting on the investigation' (participant 9). Thus, participants frequently indicated that evaluations are not being conducted, 'due to the pressures of work with operational commitments' (participant 14) and that are, 'not logistically possible due to staffing and demand' (participant 28). Others highlighted that even when they are able to conduct evaluations, it is, 'currently just a skim of the areas covered evidentially due to pressure of work' (participant 7) and are therefore used to further the investigation rather than skill development.

Sub-Theme 2: Time

Participants indicated that they did not have enough time to complete any type of interview evaluation. For example, one stated, 'I do not have the time to carry out a formal

evaluation' (participant 23). Others made reference to the impact of their workload on their time and lack of evaluation, 'not enough spare time, we have to produce full court case files for CPS' (participant 1), and, 'if you spend too much time reflecting you will fall behind on your current investigations' (participant 15). Of those that indicated that they spend *some* time completing interview evaluations, they believed it was inadequate. For example, one participant stated, 'I do not think its sufficient time, as it is often when I am under pressure or time critical' (participant 17), and another suggested that there should be, 'more time to reflect on interview ability' (participant 5).

Main Theme 3: Technological Solution

Participants shared their insights into the type of new tool they would wish to use and to its potential assistance. They highlighted what would prevent them from engaging with a technological solution in evaluating their interviews. This is explored through three sub-themes.

Sub-Theme 1: Use and Practicality

Any new tool to assist them with their evaluations needed to have, 'ease of use for certain' (participant 2) and given the barriers previously discussed, has to be, 'simple and quick' (participant 9) and, 'not take too much time in completion' (participant 28). Participants also provided more specific practicalities for a new tool. For example, some stated that they would like to have the use of , 'visual aids' (participant 3) and, 'a way of commenting or highlighting good and developing practice' (participant 7). Others suggested a way, 'to keep an electronic record of practitioners evaluations would be very useful when reviewing performance' (participant 4). All highlighted that a new tool would have to be relevant to, 'practice and skill development' (participant 11).

Sub-Theme 2: Benefits

Participants discussed how a new tool could help, 'target training for problem areas' (participant 3) and, 'help identify collective areas of improvement' (participant 8). In addition, many alluded to the quality of the interview being impacted: 'it may improve quality of interviews' (participant 1). Others highlighted that, 'if a tool worked in an effective and useful way then it would assist with accreditation of interviews and overall quality' (participant 2). Some referred to the quality of the interview within the trial process by

indicating that a new tool could assist with the interview being, 'legally defensible in court' (participant 5). Generally, participants agreed that having an effective evaluation tool would, 'smooth the investigation process' (participant 2) and, 'help establish systematic evaluation to be the norm' (participant 18).

Sub-Theme 3: Barriers

Although participants were generally positive towards the development of a new tool to assist them in their interview evaluations, they also provided some insight into potential barriers that would prevent them from engaging. One barrier referred to IT-based issues highlighting that they would be reluctant to use the new tool, 'if it was too complicated to use' (participant 6) or if there were issues regarding, 'security/compliance of the software for use with our computer systems' (participant 7). Others referred back to the impact on time: 'time would be the only thing that would prevent me from using it all the time' (participant 29). Others were in agreement and highlighted how, 'time is always a dynamic that impacts on busy police officers' (participant 4). The final barrier that participants referred to was workload; participants did not want the new tool to, 'become one more thing to do' (participant 18) and referred again to the, 'lack of staffing and underfunding of the police' (participant 2).

Discussion

The aims of the current study were to examine how interview performance is currently reflected upon and evaluated by police and law enforcement officers and to explore if the development of an evaluation tool would assist in conducting evaluation, and what the tool would need to consist of in terms of usability, efficacy, and capability. Overall, three main themes and eight sub-themes were identified from the data that provide a useful insight into this relatively under-studied area of academic research. The themes focus on current evaluation methods, barriers to conducting evaluations, and what participants believe would be a technological solution.

Overall, participants reported an inconsistent picture of their current interview evaluation methods stemming from peer review to more formal measures such as the GQM (Griffiths, 2008). Whilst this is positive in that research has shown how interview performance is enhanced immediately after evaluation (Powell and Wright, 2008; Smets, 2012), research suggests that interview skills significantly decrease after approximately six

months of the learning event (Lamb *et al.,* 2002). Other participants in our study reported that no reflection or evaluation took place and that no formal practice exists in how to conduct them. Interestingly, when discussing the inconsistent use of evaluation methods, participants alluded to a dual role – that is, evaluations would be completed at times for their skill development but more so as part of the evidence gathering for their investigation such as if there had been an issue with their investigation or a complaint made. This indicates that conducting evaluations may be largely led by the quality of the investigation rather than individual investigator need. However, participants highlighted the importance of engaging with effective reflection and evaluation post-interview with some recognising the impact this may have on the quality of their interviews; an issue that is regularly documented in the extant literature (e.g., see Lamb *et al.,* 2002) and within the general models of reflection when one considers the impact of no reflection on lifelong learning and skill development.

Generally, and corroborating previous research findings (e.g., see Clarke *et al.,* 2011; Walsh *et al.,* 2017), participants made reference to not having enough time or resources to reflect upon or evaluate their interview performance. Participants also alluded to the evaluation stage of the interview often being overlooked as a result. Of those that did complete <u>some</u> evaluation, they highlighted that not enough time was spent on this stage and that it was not deemed a viable use of resources especially given the demand of ongoing investigations on their already limited time. Some indicated that they believed there was a naive belief that investigators are good interviewers – this is concerning given that research has suggested that how officers believe they are conducting their interviews does not always reflect their actual practice (Oxburgh *et al.,* 2016). Maintaining effective interviewing skills is vital, especially as interviewers can be held accountable for their own performance (Oxburgh and Hynes, 2016).

Being skilled in interview practice can be achieved with continuous evaluation of interview performance (Farrugia *et al.,* 2019; Smets and Rispens, 2014) and technological solutions can assist with this. Whilst some of the participants in the current study demonstrated their awareness of existing tools, some provided insight into what an effective evaluation tool would constitute. Reference to ongoing issues such as lack of resources and time were reflected in the participants' requests to ensure that a new evaluation tool would be quick and efficient to use and be able to highlight good and developing practice. Participants identified the benefits that having an effective evaluation tool would provide them with and made frequent references to targeted training for skill development and improved interview

quality; thus, demonstrating their knowledge of what constitutes an effective evaluation (Walsh *et al.,* 2017).

Implications for practice

Conducting evaluations of interviews are vital and allow for skill maintenance and continuous interview improvement. Given the ongoing budget cuts and limited training (and refresher training) resources available to officers involved in conducting interviews, it is sensible to promote and support regular reflections and interview evaluations in order to slow down the skills fade that is often documented (Lamb *et al.,* 2002). As such, much more effort needs to be put into (re) introducing the evaluation stage into initial and advanced training programmes especially given that many training documents and policies advocate for it (APT, 2021; CoP, 2022); in addition, officers must also be allowed to engage with reflecting upon and evaluating their interview performance as part of their day-to-day duties. Introducing technological solutions may assist with this. By introducing tools at an early stage, interview evaluations may become embedded into interview practice and will thus, maintain effective interviewer skills. Overall, the 'evaluation' stage warrants much more attention than it is currently receiving.

Strengths and limitations

A major strength of the research was that data was received from those operating in police and security organisations internationally, thus providing a breadth and depth of insight that will allow for future work to be considered. However, one limitation relates to the drop-out rate of participants; indeed 64% of participant data was incomplete and thus not suitable for analysis. This suggests the wider issue of engaging with evaluations; those who were able to fully complete the questionnaire found time to reflect upon their interview evaluations and make suggestions for technological solutions to assist. Those that were not able to fully complete the questionnaire may have concerns for this vital stage but were not able to find the time to engage with the research. Another limitation may relate to the type of analysis conducted. Whilst thematic analysis provides a highly flexible approach and is useful when working with large data sets (Nowell et al., 2017), such flexibility can lead to inconsistency and lack of coherence when identifying themes (Holloway & Todres, 2003). In addition, establishing trustworthiness when conducting qualitative research can be difficult. However, the research team ensured the research process was logical and clearly documented

with audit trails kept when developing and finalising the themes. Future work could focus further on data and researcher triangulation.

Future research

The current study reported participants' concerns when trying to reflect upon and conduct effective evaluations, including what they believe would be a helpful technological solution. Whilst the data obtained was sufficient for the existing research, it is accepted that the richness of the data may have been affected by the on the online nature of the questionnaire. Given the international sample of participants, future work could focus on using available technology to conduct interviews online, such as the use of Zoom or Teams. This would assist in generating more data given the qualitative approach taken. In addition, given the findings that indicate the current state of evaluations being (or not being) conducted, future work should assess the impact that poor evaluative practice may have on the quality of interviews and the investigation overall. Finally, given participants' views relating to the use of a tool to assist in their evaluations, work needs to explore how technology may assist police and law enforcement officers to conduct effective evaluations and overcome the many existing barriers.

Conclusion

Conducting forensic interviews is a crucial but challenging stage of any investigation (Farrugia and Gabbert, 2020; Oxburgh and Ost, 2011; Williamson, 2006). As such, law enforcement officers need to be equipped with effective interview skills. Whilst the last 'E' of the PEACE and PRICE model advocates for the evaluation of interviews, this is rarely completed despite the implications for the overall investigation and for ensuring effective interview skills are maintained. This study is one of the first to provide insight into why this stage rarely gets the attention it deserves; participants suggest that whilst they wish to engage in evaluation, they do not have the time or resources needed and thus have difficulties in prioritising between the many demands of their job. Indeed, participants reflected that evaluations tend to be conducted when something has gone wrong with their investigation. The current research highlights the importance of completing regular evaluations and providing police and law enforcement officers with the tools to do so.

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