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Introduction

Peer support in policing is offered as a means of providing care for colleagues from those who are better able to understand issues that may be encountered from a policing perspective (Grauwiler et al., 2008; Creamer et al., 2012; Whybrow et al., 2015; Jackman et al., 2020). Traditionally, peer support programmes offer a more informal and voluntary ‘duty of care’ for police personnel experiencing mental health (MH) issues related to work or non-work stressors or trauma experienced in the line of duty (Grauwiler et al., 2008; Creamer et al., 2012).

A more nuanced form of peer support may be required for specific issues which can impact negatively on MH and work performance. One such issue is Domestic Abuse (DA) experienced by police personnel. DA is an issue that has widespread impact and can affect anyone regardless of their background, culture, or ethnicity. It is experienced by all genders and sexualities, although statistics show that it is predominately women who are victims (Bennett et al., 2021).

In September 2020 the CIPDⁱ and EHRCⁱⁱ published guidance for employers on supporting staff experiencing DA. In April 2021 the Domestic Abuse Act was passed into law in the UK and had enshrined within ‘Domestic Abuse Protection Orders’ that also apply in the workplace. A Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) strategy, prioritising the safety of women and girls, was introduced by the UK government in July 2021. Against this backdrop, a Southern English police force, began to explore ways that its response to DA could be improved, including DA experienced by its own personnel. Anecdotal evidence from officers and staff suggested a lack of support from supervisors following disclosure that they were

being subjected to DA. In 2019 a staff survey had revealed a lack of confidence to report DA to the organization, due to the stigma/embarrassment associated with DA, fear that colleagues would find out, reluctance to admit it was happening, and a perception that there was a low chance of action being taken against the perpetrator (DCP 2020a). To try to address this, in September 2020 a network of peer supporters was initiated, called the Domestic Abuse in the Workplace Champions (and known as 'DA Champions').

The aims of this study were to explore the experiences of volunteer peer supporters involved in a novel initiative focused on a specific area of trauma (DA) and to investigate the application of trauma informed (TI) approaches. Qualitative research was conducted, focusing on the experiences and perspectives of the DA Champions and the extent to which this form of peer support is TI. As there is limited extant research on the peer support role in policing, limited research on 'DA in the workplace' initiatives in police organizations, and an emerging field of TI practice approaches applied within these settings, this research aims to address these gaps.

Interviews were conducted with DA Championsⁱⁱⁱ, and thematically analysed. At the time of the interviews, the DA Champions were in their infancy, so the research looked to understand their motivations and the potential benefits of a more nuanced form of peer support. The findings suggest that having DA peer supporters gives a wider organizational signal of a change in cultural direction, both in terms of overcoming the stigma associated with being perceived as having a personal weakness, and in enhancing police personnel's perceptions of organizational justice (Greenberg, 1987; Cohen-Charash and Spector, 2001).

In this article we consider literature that addresses police peer support and TI approaches, which will provide the context for the research. We set out our methodology and then outline and explore the themes we identified in the interview responses. We finish with a discussion and conclusion that DA specific peer support shows promise in terms of being a means of providing a TI approach. However, as hierarchical organizations are characterized by ‘macho’ organizational cultures (Chan, 1997; Loftus, 2009; Bell and Eski, 2015), developing a holistic TI organizational approach requires a wider commitment to organizational cultural change underpinned by support from senior leadership and training.

Literature and Theoretical Framing

There is limited research on police peer supporters’ experiences, police personnel as DA victims, or workplace initiatives to support police employees experiencing DA (Anderson et al., 2020; Richards et al., 2021). Research has considered the intentions and purposes of peer support, such as Finn and Tomz (1998) who looked at MH support for police in the US^{iv} and identified that it gives an outlet for those who mistrust ‘shrinks’, would feel stigmatised and worried that seeing a therapist would impact their careers, but might accept a referral to support from a peer. Research on police peer support programs for MH and trauma suggests it has a positive effect but is under-utilised because of the stigma associated with MH, concerns about confidentiality, and fears of negative career consequences. When utilised, research finds peer support is a strong predictor of psychological wellbeing amongst police personnel (Jackman et al., 2020), may improve MH literacy amongst police officers (Milliard, 2020) and may help to reduce stigma (Milliard, 2020). Importantly, Bell and Eski’s (2015) research into UK police personnel’s attitudes to colleagues’ MH issues found that ‘macho’ police organisational culture is implicated in impeding help-seeking and accessing peer support or other support services. They argue that police organisational ‘culture’ may

‘victimise’ personnel and exacerbate their MH needs (Bell and Eski, 2015, p. 95). However, they also argue that police ‘culture’ is more complex and multi-faceted than single, unified ‘culture’ and individual police ‘cultures’ may hold the potential to develop into ‘supportive and inclusive environment[s] for police officers experiencing mental health issues’ (98).

As stated in the introduction, peer support programmes in UK policing function as an avenue for encouraging wellbeing amongst personnel experiencing a variety of stressors or trauma (Grauwiler et al., 2008; Creamer et al., 2012; Whybrow et al., 2015; Jackman et al., 2020). Research and advocacy for peer support (along with other forms of support) for survivors of DA asserts that applying a TI approach is most likely to reduce re-traumatisation (Lathan et al., 2019; Rich, 2019) and encourage healing from trauma (Anyikwa, 2016; Sullivan et al., 2019). The adoption of a TI approach aims to improve responses to welfare, public safety, and vulnerability in the community/publics, ‘build resilience...and promote protective factors’ (ADPH, 2021: 2). For an organization to be TI it must have core values to be effective in the service it provides, which, for Covington (2016) are: physical and emotional safety; trustworthiness; choice; collaboration, and empowerment. This encompasses the treatment of members of the public, the personnel of an organization, and policies and practices. Recently, there have been recommendations to institute TI practice across policing, education, health, and housing in the UK (CoP, 2022; Centre for Mental Health, 2019). Understanding of the impact of trauma was developed in the 1970s by psychiatrists working with Vietnam veterans (van der Kolk, 2014). Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a reduced ability to emotionally regulate, such as being stuck in a heightened adrenal response or being emotionally numbed. Work to recognise the connection between traumatic incidents and poor health and other outcomes in the 1990s (Felitti et al., 1998), resulted in evidence of the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), based upon survey data from 17421 patients (van der Kolk, 2014). The concept of a TI practice approach was developed by

Harris and Fallot (2001) through their work with people with severe MH conditions. Interestingly they highlight the importance of peer support: ‘for trauma survivors, mutual support is often a powerful antidote to feelings of shame, alienation, and loneliness ... members discover they are not alone with often hidden and secret experiences of abuse’ (Fallot and Harris, 2002: 481).

There is an increasing focus within UK police forces on becoming TI, although research is limited and is focused on how police deal with the public, and the importance of training to understand ACEs and the impact of trauma. According to Jones (2020) training will improve officers’ abilities to interact with vulnerable and traumatised members of the public positively and compassionately, take a more strategic approach to arrest, and utilise alternatives where appropriate. Concerns raised from evidence-based findings indicate that current practice responses from public sector agencies may not consider the vulnerability or prior experiences of clients. This may result in poor service provision for those who have experienced trauma and possible re-traumatization of members of the public by these providers (Hickle, n.d; Jones, 2020).

For Hardwick et al. (n.d.), being TI in policing practice entails adopting the ‘five Rs’ approach: ‘realising’ the impact of trauma on people, being able to ‘recognise’ the signs and symptoms and having an appropriate ‘response’ to it, ‘resisting’ actions that could cause more trauma, and helping to develop ‘resilience’ (35). TI practice should include policies and practices that support staff as well as guiding interactions with the public, regarding which Gillespie-Smith et al. (2018) argue that ‘trauma in the workforce’ [must be] ‘recognised and supported, whether that arises from childhood adversity, adult trauma, or directly or indirectly via work’ (25).

A key component of developing ‘trauma-responsive organizational cultures’ (Esaki, 2020: 1) that encourages a supportive work environment for personnel to deliver TI services is organizational justice (Greenberg, 1987). Organizational justice is a concept rooted in perceptions of fairness, regarding matters such as pay, opportunities, training, decision-making, having a voice, honesty, and respect (Baldwin, 2006). It consists of employees’ views of fairness regarding compensation, treatment, recognition, and access to information (Greenberg, 1987; Esaki, 2020). When employees perceive their workplace as organizationally just, this contributes to job satisfaction and positive staff MH outcomes (Elrond et al., 2018; Esaki, 2020). A similar concept, ‘occupational justice’, related to occupational therapy, derives from social justice with its focus on equity and respect in terms of access to resources and opportunities. It is ‘underpinned by a belief in the right to engage in diverse and meaningful occupations to meet people’s individual needs and develop their potential’ (Durocher et al, 2013: 418). Linking this to the policing context, Birch et al. argue that occupational justice consists of ‘occupational rights such as inclusive participation...that is concerned with empowering people in their jobs’ (2017: 27). When employees view their workplace as occupationally just, this has been linked to enhanced well-being (Birch et al., 2017; Jakobsen, 2004). Considering the similarity in the concepts, this article will refer to ‘organizational justice’, but may draw upon writers who use the term ‘occupational justice’. In light of the traumatic and potentially destabilising impact of DA, having a dedicated peer support network can be a means of facilitating organizational justice by ensuring colleagues are treated fairly, given a voice and the necessary support and understanding to meet their needs. It can enable them to better manage work-life balance and feel empowered in both areas of their life.

Despite limited studies on the experiences of peer supporters in police forces and on specific DA in the workplace initiatives in the police, research suggests that TI peer support programmes may enable a more supportive organizational culture (Cody et al, 2022, Fallon et al, 2023). Incorporating a TI approach internally may influence a more supportive work environment that enhances organizational justice within the police. Recent research by Martin et al. (2023) found that frontline officers in one UK force during the COVID-19 pandemic experienced a sense of ‘organizational injustice’ which effected their morale, their relationships with leadership and their performance of their roles. Martin et al. (2023) concluded that police forces need to engage in ‘intra-organizational learning’, monitoring and strategic planning to ‘ensure a healthy organizational climate’ (39).

Methodology

Research Design

The research aims were to explore and capture the perspectives and subjective experiences of peer supporters in a DA-focused network, we therefore employed a constructivist qualitative approach (Cresswell and Cresswell, 2018; Lincoln and Guba, 1985). As the research is exploratory and descriptive, a qualitative approach was deemed most appropriate to understand how people experience the social world and to shed light on a phenomenon (peer supporters in the police; DA in the workplace initiatives) that is not well understood (Cresswell and Cresswell, 2018; Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

Data Collection

The research questions guiding this study include: (1) What are the perspectives of DA Champions on engaging in this initiative? (2) In what ways does the development of the DA Champions incorporate TI approaches? (3) What are the potential impacts of the network on

the organizational approach to well-being, and possible influences on external police interactions? A semi-structured interview protocol was developed that aligned to the research questions and allowed for flexibility depending on the participants' experiences.

The interview prompts focused on the participants' decision to volunteer to be a DA Champion, their motivations, their experiences in the role, and the training they had received. The prompts also sought to capture how and why the DA Champions network was created, what participants perceived as the possible need for the network, and their views on the benefits and challenges of providing this support service to colleagues.

Each interview was approximately 1 hour in duration and was audio-recorded with the participant's consent. At the end of the data collection period, we had approximately 16 hours of recorded interviews. Each interview was transcribed verbatim and assigned a unique ID number. The audio-recordings and transcripts were stored separately on a password protected database to ensure identifying information was kept secure and to mitigate linking participants' identities with their interview data.

Participants and Recruitment

Further to ethical approval from the Open University and agreement from the force, the Champions (31 officers/staff in the study force; 9 Chaplains, and 5 neighbouring force officers) were invited to participate via an informational email, which gave assurances that responses would be anonymised with a unique reference number (URN) to ensure confidentiality. Purposeful sampling was necessary for this research study because it is

focused on the experiences of self-selected volunteers for the DA Champions network. There were no incentives to participate, and participation involved setting aside time during or outside the workday. Those who chose to participate seemed to do so voluntarily and without any undue pressure or coercion (Bryman, 2004; Brunger, Martin and Tong, 2016).

Of the 45 possible participants, 3 declined, 26 did not respond to our initial or subsequent (second) recruitment email. The sample comprised 16 participants across a range of roles (staff, officers, chaplains) and between 2.5 and 26.5 years of experience in policing. The individual interviews were conducted online via Microsoft Teams due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Analysis

The qualitative data was analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) 6-phase thematic analysis approach. The goal of a thematic analysis is to identify themes in the data to address the research, interpret, and make sense of it (Clarke and Braun, 2013; Maguire and Delahunt, 2017). This method can be used to develop a detailed descriptive account of a phenomenon (Braun and Clarke, 2013). We used both inductive and deductive coding. We began analysis by coding the data inductively (open coding) to remain close to the data, center the views of the participants and to enable unanticipated topics to emerge (Strauss and Corbin, 1998; Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2018). We then used deductive coding (Flick, 1998; Miles and Huberman, 1994) guided by the literature and models of TI practice to capture participants' views and knowledge. Each researcher reviewed three of the same transcripts and coded these individually. This initial set of codes were then analyzed and discussed for inter-rater reliability. Once we established agreement on codes, we individually coded a set of

the remaining transcripts. We reviewed this new set of initial codes and refined these into higher-level codes/categories. We then refined these further into a finalized set of codes. The finalized codes were analyzed to develop preliminary themes, and the data in each theme was reviewed to determine fit and support for each theme. This analytical approach and process aligned with the aims of the research to explore and deepen our understanding of DA Champions' experiences of the network, elements of TI practice, and potential ways to enhance the network. The themes that emerged from our thematic analysis include: (1) perspectives/experiences [motivations, stigma, and low uptake of support]; (2) TI practice; and (3) value and potential impact.

Reliability, Trustworthiness and Researchers' Positionality

To enhance the reliability and trustworthiness (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) of the data analysis and findings, we engaged in member checks with participants, triangulation across participants' data, aimed to provide 'rich, thick description' (Creswell and Cresswell, 2018: 200) and reflected on our own biases and interpretations of the data. The first author is an experienced police officer with employment in the study site. The second author has no affiliation with the study site and has no background in policing. Davies (2016) advocates a reflexive approach to policing research and offers a word of caution that while co-produced knowledge may be considered to be more reliable, there is a risk of bias due to 'a lack of research independence' (155). This was mitigated against because the first author has no involvement with the DA Champions and was at the time of the research on secondment to the Open University. The research project itself was not initiated by the force. Davies acknowledges that collaborative research by outsiders and police insiders can 'develop better quality research, which is grounded in empirical data that can be challenged and tested in

practice' (2016: 160). A research team with one 'insider' member and one 'outsider' member enabled recognition of and acknowledgement of biases and assumptions throughout the data collection and analyses.

Study Context: The DA Champions

The 45 Champions are a combination of officers, staff, and Chaplains. They comprise 58% women and 42% men, with the interview sample (n=16) 75% women and 25% men. The Champions began in September 2020 which meant that face-to-face training was not possible due to the Coronavirus pandemic, so they met via video-call to receive an input on what was expected of them, and information and resources were placed on a page on the force's intranet. This was followed by bi-monthly video-call meetings to enable issues and developments to be shared. The DA Champion role does not have any pre-requisites in terms of required skills. Champions can be any rank or role, officers, staff, and volunteers, and must be prepared to share information about their own experiences openly and honestly. The force is in an alliance with a neighbouring police force, and a small number (n=5) of the Champions are from there, providing the potential for more confidential support.

The role involves responsibilities such as: giving one-to-one support; signposting to support agencies; ensuring any crimes disclosed are recorded in accordance with policy and National Crime Recording Standards; liaising with line managers and force specialists where appropriate; and providing an environment where people feel safe and secure so that they will report their DA and/or raise concerns for colleagues (DCP, 2020b). Personnel reporting DA are entitled to a Workforce Support Plan, agreed with their line manager, which can include reasonable adjustments to ensure they are safeguarded, such as their incident report being

restricted (particularly important if the partner is also an officer or staff member) and a change to working hours/location/role (DCP, 2020c). Having police Chaplains as Champions gives personnel the option to speak to someone who is not duty bound to record any disclosed crimes, although Chaplains must report any safeguarding concerns involving children.

Themes from the research

Three main themes are discussed here: Perspectives/experiences (which has the sub-themes of motivations, stigma, low uptake of the support offer, and ways to improve); TI Practice, and Value/potential impact.

Perspectives/experiences

1. Motivations

Participants were asked about their motivations behind volunteering to be DA Champions. As self-selected volunteers, they were oriented towards providing support to their peers and to improving wellbeing. Some were motivated due to their personal knowledge of colleagues who had been DA victims, such as URN 18, who commented that such incidents tended not to be ‘formally reported’ due to fears of ‘repercussions’ and embarrassment, especially when the offender also worked within the police organization and ‘perhaps might be in a higher-ranking position’. Hierarchical power dynamics in policing predominantly reflect societal norms of men being in positions of power and are often characterized as ‘male-dominated’ organisations (Brown et al., 2020; Cunningham and Ramshaw, 2020; Gaub and Holtfreter, 2022). The study force has a gender ratio comparable with other English and Welsh police

forces: women are 33.7% Constables, 21.1% Sergeants, 25.1% Inspectors, and 28.8% Chief Inspectors and above, and comprise 51% PCSOs and 61.5% police staff (Police.uk, 2022).

The concerns about reporting held by police DA victims due to issues such as disclosures not being kept confidential, may be further aggravated when the offender is in the police, and DA between personnel of different ranks/positions of authority can also inhibit reporting.

Brennan et al. (2023) note Police Perpetrated DA (PPDA) must be reported to accord with professional standards, there is a duty to record crimes and take positive action, and that understanding (which could be anecdotal) of how the organization has previously handled police DA victims may be a disincentive to reporting. They further suggest that the 'abusive partner can potentially use the disclosure as another abuse tactic, manipulating and gaslighting the victim to further isolate them from their support network' (705). That said, in their research Brennan et al. (2023) found that PPDA victims were more likely to make a disclosure than victims of non-police abusers.

Whilst it was not a focus for this research, we acknowledge that PPDA carries an additional complicating factor for victims who also work within the organization. Supporting police officers and staff within the force who experienced PPDA (from fellow officers/staff) was not an explicit or specific remit of the DA Champions network. Rather, the network was designed to support colleagues experiencing DA in a variety of forms inclusive of PPDA. Despite few participants explicitly discussing PPDA in terms of the DA Champions network, participants did highlight ways the force and network had considered the unique challenges that may be presented if a colleague sought support for PPDA within their organisation. To account for PPDA, participants explained the force has policies of restricting access to incident reports (to reassure regarding confidentiality), having investigations conducted by officers from a

different part of the force (to ensure no potential for bias or preconceptions), and offering a choice of peer supporter location (which could be from outside the force).

Some respondents reported personal experience of DA and wanting to use that experience to support others. URN 92 explained that their partner, a member of police staff, had been a victim of DA in a previous relationship, but had not been looked after during the investigation:

... it was handled really poorly ... and no welfare whatsoever. So, I've kind of seen it from that side, and knowing how that affects an individual then it's nice to be able to ... actually help somebody else experiencing the same thing.

A motivating factor was the desire to ensure others are better supported when dealing with the trauma of DA in an organization where being strong in the face of adversity is an expectation. As one participant noted 'we're often seen as robust, resilient people who don't have personal issues [the] solvers of issues not the source' (URN 2).

Respondents also reported being motivated due to the knowledge and experience they had gained through their substantive roles such as URN 55 who talked about a realisation that their 'experience in helping DA victims or survivors' and their understanding of the support available, would make them 'a good person to approach for advice'. DA Champions with skills and understanding from their professional experience are well placed to offer support, but the focus for the role is to be able to listen, understand, share experiences and signpost for further support, hence it being open to non-specialists.

2. Stigma

It was evident from the responses that participants were conscious of issues of stigma within the organization. The shame of revealing personal issues at work was highlighted as a problem, with the perspective that to ask for help is considered a sign of weakness in the eyes of their colleagues, and that it might impact on perceptions of one's ability to do the job. This clearly links to organizational culture in the police termed as 'hyper-masculine' by Newell (2021). Police officers are expected to be resilient, run towards danger, and be ready to take action. The culture effects how officers 'think, feel and act' (Milliard, 2020) which makes for a reluctance to seek help, which could reveal what others may perceive as a weakness, and negatively impact career progression.

The question of whether such a personal matter would remain confidential between the individual and a Champion was also highlighted as an issue, along with the question of 'if we would disclose it to the force or their line manager' (URN 7) which is a real sticking point. Police officers and staff are duty bound to record any crimes that are reported. The DA Champions includes Chaplains who are not bound by the same duty which is a positive development. That said, as URN 7 comments:

... There's still a lot of stigma ...around people asking for help, whether it's for domestic abuse or otherwise, and I think domestic abuse would probably be a bit more of a barrier for people to get over because they'll be worried about what implications that's going to have for them afterwards.

Participants conveyed that the organizational 'culture' was in part responsible for stigma and fear associated with seeking help for DA. The perceived cultural norms in the organisation combined with described societal expectations of 'police' were explained as contributing to the heightened sense of shame and reluctance to seek help for DA specifically. As URN 17 states: 'we are "the police", we must all be OK ... actually, we're not. We're just human

beings that happen to work currently for [name] police, and ... a cross-representation of society'. This highlights some of the challenges the DA Champions network may face.

Although they exist as a peer support option, the wider organizational culture is described as exerting a powerful influence that reinforces stigma and fear about help-seeking for DA. This is underscored by URN 35 who states: 'You know, you're a police officer. How can you possibly be involved in a DA relationship?'

3. *Low uptake of the support offer*

Linked to the issues of stigma were views on why the DA Champions had not received very many requests for support. Interviews were conducted between April and June 2021, so there had been at least 8 months since the Champions were initiated, and by this time only 25% of Champions had provided support. The issue of confidence was evident again, with URN 35 wondering:

... have we really got under the skin of our own colleagues ...? Do they feel genuinely and truly safe in disclosing something like this ...? I'm sure there's plenty in our organization that aren't coming forward. ... [It] just might be it's too close to home in terms of ... this is something I'm disclosing about me amongst my work colleagues.

A lack of confidence in reporting DA to the organization, and therefore seeking support, was also seen in the perception that colleagues would be concerned about confidentiality, and where the DA perpetrator was also a member of the force, the victim would be less likely to seek support. This was possibly due to a fear of the likelihood of information 'escap[ing] out...the last thing you want is a police officer perpetrator finding out their other half has reported it...' (URN 39).

Confidentiality concerns as a reason for low uptake of support was also discussed by a few participants specifically related to PPDA. Interestingly, PPDA was not frequently highlighted by participants explicitly as a specific area of focus within the DA Champions network. The participants expressed that any incidences or experiences of DA, whether internal to or external to the police force, were part of their remit. However, PPDA was discussed in terms of awareness of the ‘super complaint’ submitted by the Centre for Women’s Justice (CWJ) and the Bureau of Investigative Journalism (BIJ), which alleged there was mishandling and inappropriate responses to reports of DA by police officers/staff within police forces in March 2020^v (CWJ, 2020; HMICFRS, CoP and IOPC, 2020, 2022):

there's a national super complaint which was launched for victims of domestic abuse, it's more specific than our working practice, but it's very relevant, for [victims] who are perpetrated against by serving police officers... [It is] out in the public domain and [our force] had to provide their response, which was something that I worked on with PSD^{vi}...

(URN 2)

Those participants who referred to police officers/staff experiencing PPDA acknowledged this would present additional barriers to seeking support including not formally reporting because of ‘the uncomfortable part that police staff and police officers tend to be involved with people in the same organization....and can’t tell anybody because everyone is a mate...so that is a very difficult thing to admit to... [and] opens up a whole can of worms’ (URN 3).

In order to mitigate concerns about confidentiality when seeking support for DA, particularly in relation to PPDA, the force working practice has been changed so access to records can be restricted, and the incident log will be assessed by a senior manager to ensure those

investigating have no prior knowledge of or relationship with the parties involved (DCP, 2020c).

4. Ways to improve.

The participants suggested some ways in which they thought the support offer could be improved. It was clear from the responses that there was a lack of clarity about what was expected of them as Champions and the processes involved when providing support. This was in part due to the low uptake of the support which meant a majority had not provided any. While there had been an input on the role not all had been able to attend so were dependent upon the resources on the intranet. Many gave their best guess as to what they would do but in essence would need to refresh their memories and ask advice from others if they were approached to give support. It had also transpired that there were some anxieties about doing the right thing and possibly not recognising a safeguarding issue that needed reporting, recording, and ensuring action is taken. This was particularly in relation to the non-specialists within the DA Champions, such as URN 41 who expressed the need for more training in relation to the processes involved:

I like things in order, and I'd like to know, right so someone has reported this, what do you do? Where do you go? How do you record it and who should you notify? ... If someone did contact me, I'd like to know who to go to for advice and in what order to do things.

The importance of ensuring all the Champions are fully aware of what is expected of them was highlighted by URN 98 who gave the example of personnel with little experience of the organization:

... if you had a junior member of staff who wants to be a Champion and had somebody approach them full of risk, [and they] don't record a crime, [and it] doesn't get directed in the right way, that's a problem.

TI practice

Participants conveyed a general understanding of trauma, albeit more related to dealing with the public than with their colleagues. They described a range of approaches for engaging colleagues, that indicated that their understanding of trauma was being translated into their peer support practice, such as through listening, being supportive and non-judgemental, providing signposting and/or access to resources, and clarifying expectations and possible outcomes. Many respondents held a general, basic understanding that certain experiences can be traumatic, an example of which was from URN 67 who noted there are:

... things that you can look out for with colleagues, if they're all you know, normally all bright and happy, and then they're all just a bit quiet and stuff, and then you can kind of tell if somebody is not having a great time.

While it was not evident in the responses, and there is no explicit identification with a TI approach in the DA Champions' role, it is implicitly so; it goes to the essential values of safety, trustworthiness, collaboration, choice, and empowerment. URN 38 discussed their provision of support to a colleague who had asked about Clare's Law^{vii}:

... we went for a walk, and I just said to her 'Are you okay? Was this for you?' And then she explained yes it was for her ... and everything came out ... everything she was feeling and ... going through. I was able to support her, by talking to her, explaining everything that she could do and then ... I gave her confidence to leave and I ... gave her details of

Splitz^{viii} ... and then she was put into accommodation [with] her children. ... I made her aware that she could call me whether it's just for advice or just to chat ...

An important aspect of a TI approach is to do reflective practice (SAMHSA, 2014). The Champions' responses indicated that this was not something that was expected of them and had not been considered, although some stated they would do some personal reflection. The bi-monthly online meetings were also seen as a forum where matters could be raised and reflected upon. URN 35 explained they would be asked 'how is it going for you? Has anyone had any referrals?' which would generate discussion.

Value and potential impact

The participants held generally positive views about being Champions and recognised that having this form of peer support, along with the ongoing support for it by the organization had symbolic value. It was thought that it would help to foster a more open and supportive environment for officers and staff and encourage support-seeking. Respondents reflected that having specially targeted support was significant and would help individuals overcome the reticence in disclosing the abuse they are experiencing. In URN 98's view:

Just the pure fact for me that it has been advertised so heavily as "by the way, this is special and different, and you will be supported" [and] it's still currently on the front page of our intranet, and we are talking about it ... gives people, I think, the feeling that they can mention it. That in itself is actually the biggest win. It's a culture thing.

There was also a recognition that, although a positive step in the right direction there was room for development of how the Champions operate, given that it is was a relatively new

initiative. It will take time, a need for ‘word of mouth’ and ‘success stories’ along with messaging that reminds personnel that:

... the network is actually in existence, and how to access it [along with] some improved reporting process ... rather just having to pick an individual off the list from [the intranet]

(URN 92)

The challenge to a culture that inhibits help-seeking, relates to what Newell et al. (2021) have characterised as ‘hyper-masculine positionings that discourage emotional expression’ (4).

This perspective is clear in the following critique of the way messages have been communicated, from URN 96:

we also need to recognise who our target audience is. ... we need to make it less pink and fluffy ... before going through what I went through, ... I was quite dismissive of it ... “it’s not going to happen to me because my mental health is fine” ... we have to recognise that people think like that and then tailor the approach accordingly.

It should be noted that the link on the front page of the force intranet goes to a page of resources on DA, including how to access support from a Champion, and videos of personnel of various ranks and genders giving their DA experience stories. This goes some way towards getting the message across that it is okay to disclose DA.

Discussion and conclusion

The findings from this research show that the DA Champions were employing some TI approaches even if they did not name it as such. Peer support brings with it some of the fundamental elements of a TI approach: creating a safe environment, building trust, offering

choice (albeit within the limits of the requirement to record crimes), working together, and enabling future action/decisions. This is an important part of developing a sense of organizational justice. However, there are barriers in the form of the hierarchical structure and the dominant police culture, that can cause individuals to avoid seeking help and eschew signs of weakness. A TI approach to helping colleagues who are dealing with the traumatic impact of DA through dedicated peer support, which is sanctioned by senior leadership in the organization, can help to counter the negative impact of police culture and encourage help-seeking. Research into police practice and organizational justice has shown that certain conditions, such as the hierarchical structure of policing organizations and policies that restrict, can lead to a sense of injustice and a negative impact on health and wellbeing (Birch et al, 2017). Conversely, organizational approaches that encourage trust amongst the 'rank and file' members of the police (Herrington and Roberts, 2013) and specific leadership styles (Beckley, 2014) can contribute to organizational justice and wellbeing. TI approaches utilised internally and through peer support may promote wellbeing, and a perception of inclusivity and trust amongst personnel that enhances organizational justice in police forces.

The workplace is often a place of refuge, a legitimate means of escape from DA at least for the duration of a shift (CIPD, 2020). It is important for there to be a sense of psychological safety in that environment so that personnel feel confident to speak up (Edmondson and Leiz, 2014). The organizational motivation for establishing the DA Champions was to improve the confidence held by police personnel to report that DA was happening to them or raise concerns for colleagues. Those dealing with this trauma may not be as productive and exhibit behaviour changes, so early help is in their and the organization's interests.

A TI peer support approach can also help to make changes to the prevailing police culture and reduce the associated stigma. There was a recognition of the symbolic value in the establishment and publicity of the Champions, due to its influence on internal attitudes and behaviours. Despite this it was thought by many participants that the support offer would continue to be under-utilised. The stigma of being a victim of DA and the perceived prevailing organizational cultural norms and expectations will take time to challenge and change (Terpstra and Salet, 2019; Macauley and Rowe, 2020). Initiation of the DA Champions helps to break the silence around DA in the workplace and by the organization sustaining the network it signals leadership support that therefore may help to change perceptions and norms about seeking help for issues of a very personal nature.

The Champions' responses showed that although they had little explicitly TI training prior to taking on the role, many participants had knowledge of a TI approach. When discussing their previous experience of DA, both personal and role related, they conveyed an implicitly TI approach to providing support. This included ensuring colleagues felt safe, and that they would be transparent by clearly explaining to those seeking support how the Champions can help. There was a clear interest in learning more about how to develop TI practice both for supporting colleagues and working with the public.

The findings suggest some challenges for the operationalisation of the Champions' peer support, regarding clarity of role expectations and requirements, and the processes to follow. There were concerns raised about issues of disclosure and crime reporting. The training for the Champions needs enhancement, and this could include how to be TI in the approach to supporting their peers and engaging in reflective practice. Having formal reflective practice

will provide an opportunity to discuss support practice and debrief. It will also ensure the wellbeing of Champions is protected; support providers can experience vicarious or secondary trauma (Varghese et al., 2018). As noted by Christopher (2015) reflection can ‘actively acknowledge the affects of professional practice, assist in rationalizing the events, and reduce personal repercussions’ (334).

Having non-specialists in DA who have their own personal experiences to share is an important aspect of the Champions, and further training is vital to ensure that safeguarding concerns are appropriately handled. Indeed, there was an expressed need for additional training and consensus-building among the Champions, in part to improve practice, but also to mitigate potential risks to support-seekers, the Champions providing support if it is mis-handled, and to organizational reputation. This finding accords with the recommendation by Creamer et al. (2012) that peer supporters should have clear goals and role expectations, selection criteria, training on the functional and practice aspects of support provision, and a means of evaluating the support they give.

The establishment of the DA Champions workplace peer support is perceived by participants as a positive development in supporting the wellbeing of police personnel in this force. The support offer is implicitly TI and contributes symbolically to a more compassionate working culture. There is room for improvement in the training and development of the Champions, and evaluation of the support given. Future research could explore the effectiveness of this form of peer support after time has been allowed for it to embed and develop in a post-pandemic society.

This study contributes to a gap in the research of peer supporters' perspectives and experiences in policing in the UK and relatively scant research on DA in the workplace initiatives in policing. The findings highlight some implications for police forces in the UK and areas for further consideration. Firstly, peer supporters play a potentially pivotal role in supporting the mental health and wellbeing of their colleagues, which indicates the need to prioritise and formalise these support networks. Prioritisation in terms of funding, development of processes and procedures and leadership support may raise the profile of the benefits of peer supporters. Formalisation of the role would need to consider appropriate training and development so that they are equipped with the relevant skills and approaches that reflect best practice. This would potentially include recognising that whilst it is a voluntary role in addition to their substantive work commitments, that protected time is given for training and development. Moreover, police forces should consider developing peer supporters with training and expertise specific to DA in the workplace, and other areas that may not be well supported under an 'umbrella' or catch-all peer support structure. The findings underscore the nuances and unique support needs of those experiencing DA and specific approaches that may be required in the workplace.

Secondly, in order to address the stigma associated with help-seeking in policing in terms of DA, as well as mental health and wellbeing more broadly, police forces should consider how they publicise and bring awareness to the support programmes available. In order to change organizational and professional culture(s) that may inhibit discussion and help-seeking for DA, leadership from the top is essential to 'break silences' and signal that the organization will be open and supportive to personnel experiencing DA. Moreover, the specific issues involved in PPDA against police officers and staff within the same force requires detailed processes to address and support these instances.

HMICFRS, CoP and IOPC found evidence to support issues raised in the in super-complaint by the CWJ and BIJ, of initial reporting of PPDA, investigative failures, victims put at risk, issues of collusion and employment repercussions for those making reports of PPDA (CWJ, 2020; HMICFRS, CoP and IOPC, 2020;2022). Further research into the experiences of police personnel who have experienced PPDA and their decisions to report or seek peer support is needed to fully explore the phenomenon of victims and perpetrators of DA working within the same force.

This study highlights the potential benefits of developing specific DA-focused internal peer support networks in police forces and that the use of publicity and sharing of personal experiences of DA by personnel (through storytelling, video, etc.) may support organizational cultural shifts. DA-focused peer support can address the unique needs of personnel experiencing DA that may fall outside of more generalist internal peer support functions. Despite much debate about how to change police organizational cultures, resistance to cultural change, and continuity within police organizational cultures (Chan, 1997; Loftus, 2009; Terpstra and Salet, 2019; Cockcroft, 2019), Macauley and Rowe (2020) found that when police personnel across role and rank engaged in structured storytelling and sharing of reflective narratives in a ‘co-creative process’ this enabled culture change and ‘promote[d] attachment to new cultural values’ (1306).

Lastly, the study contributes to research on the applicability and use of TI approaches within police forces directed internally as integral to developing a broader TI practice ethos. If UK police forces want to develop and implement TI practice in meaningful and sustainable ways, this requires consideration of how they do so within their organizations, with peers and those

above and below their current rank/role, i.e., not simply in relation to how they deal with the public. To ‘become’ a Trauma-Informed service in the UK, police forces will need to adopt core values such as those advocated by Covington (2016) and devote time, resources, and training to implement these practices in a holistic manner.

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ⁱ Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development

ⁱⁱ Equality and Human Rights Commission

ⁱⁱⁱ The DA Champions (n=45) were invited by email to participate in the research. Those who responded positively (n=16) were interviewed online via a video call.

^{iv} The authors acknowledge that there are differences in structure, organization and policing approach between the US and UK which may impact associated police culture.

^v The Centre for Women's Justice and the Bureau for Investigative Journalism filed a super complaint in March 2020 alleging widespread problems with police forces' handling of PPDA. The super complaint system (2018)

allows designated bodies to ‘raise issues on behalf of the public about harmful patterns or trends in policing’ (Gov.UK). The regulations governing a super complaint require HMICFRS, CoP and IOPC the police in England and Wales to determine if a complaint is eligible for investigation, and if so, to investigate the matter. In this case, HMICFRS, CoP and IOPC investigated the super complaint ‘alleging that forces were not responding appropriately to cases of domestic abuse involving police officer or police staff suspects’.

^{vi} Professional Standards Department

^{vii} Clare’s Law is the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme which allows an individual to request information from the police in relation to their partner’s previous history to see if they have a record of domestic violence and/or violent acts. The police will research their records and if they show such a history, they will decide whether to share it with the individual, and if so, it will be done in a face-to-face meeting. It is named ‘Clare’s Law’ after a woman called Clare who was murdered by her partner in 2009. Her family campaigned for a change in the law, after it transpired that the offender had a history of violence to women ([What's Clare's Law? How is it Requested/Applied? Data & Stats \(criminalinjurieshelpline.co.uk\)](#))

^{viii} A local DA support organization