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Critically analyse the role of policing in prevention exploitation of vulnerable individuals.

Within a changing socio-economical landscape a constant has remained throughout time, and that is the presence of individuals who are unable to care for themselves or others. People who may be within harm's way through no fault of their own, whether it be through background factors such as their upbringing or more personal, physical factors such as age or ability. With up to 75% of police interactions around the world (Asquith, Theron 2019) including people who may be classified as vulnerable, the role of police within these instances is analysed and assessed continuously to ensure the appropriate measures are taken. Within the UK police service, the approach to policing and recognising these risks associated with vulnerability can never be within black or white. Due to the spectrum of living standards and scenarios around the country. Within England alone, it is approximated that "3.7 million" (ONS 2021) people are classified as vulnerable and at a higher risk of exploitation, whether that be financial, emotional, sexual or physically, and this large number creates a large number of problems for police officers in the way they approach and manage individuals and cases within the UK, and within the essay we will explore and analyse the methodology behind the approaches and strategies used.

The interpretation of a "vulnerable" individual from person to person will provide a different answer and perspective to who you ask. However, within 2016 to 2021 "chief officers' understanding of vulnerability changed" (Shannon 2019) showing the police and the public that a "tunnelled eyed" aspect of approaching vulnerability cannot and should not be used. Whilst the methods and strategies may have changed over time, professional judgement has always been a mainstay within the arsenal of a police officer. Allowing them to question not just others but themselves around factors and situations an individual may be in. Secondly, Identification of vulnerability is a key skill police officers must possess in addition to a good understanding of professional judgement, the definition of vulnerability identifies it as being within a vulnerable position, due to health, age or disability which may leave you in risk of psychological or physical harm. The police within the UK, especially the college of policing underline the importance of key features such as age and health in the "interaction of an individual's situation" (college of policing 2021). As someone who may present themselves as being unwell physically may receive care and support which enables them to not be vulnerable. On the other hand a person who is unwell physically who does not receive treatment or care would be perceived as that of someone who is at a higher risk of vulnerability. This identification of vulnerability can be seen as a professional skill which may need to be developed similarly to that of social or literacy skills, as it is a tool which may lead to saving someone's life. Personally I believe this is a useful and effective tool for police to use when in the context of policing vulnerable people, as it allows officers to change from person to person, and case to case and using their professional judgement to aid in making sure the person who is possibly at risk is safe.

How police officers approach the prevention of a vulnerable person from an individual perspective, include the use of a predominant strategy such as THRIVE (Threat, Harm, Risk, Investigation, Vulnerability and Engagement) this tool allows officers to understand the "appropriate response grading" (Cleveland Police 2023) needed to understand their course

of action that should occur next. This checklist includes how to identify a person's vulnerability, which may present itself as signs of neglect, a possible disability or even their surroundings. Secondly the scenario that the possibly vulnerable person may be in, and if it is safe for them to continue being there. Followed by if there is a present of possibly underlying danger that may harm that person, such as an abusive spouse or parent, or possibly even themselves where some cases such as the 1983 mental health act is needed. Finally identifying the course of action which should be taken next, possibly in the form of medical care, a change of location or possibly a detention being made to ensure the safety of the person and others. Cities such as Liverpool saw a "313% rise" (Kotecha 2023) in mental health related call-outs for police. Now these calls may not have resulted in immediate medical care being needed or a change of location but within each of these calls this checklist should've been used alongside the three responder-focused guidelines, which allows a more brief and comprehensive analysis of a person's scenario that requires police intervention. The Venn diagram ^{*1} which shows "communication, clues and curiosity" as its 3 components allows for a whole use of all three simultaneously to determine how to help a vulnerable person. Communication may be just talking to the person calmly, meaning you mean them no harm. Followed by clues, which could present itself as physical marks of self harm. Followed by curiosity, trying to find out the problem and cause of the incident or vulnerability. Personally I believe that these tools are extremely effective within policing vulnerable people, as it allows for a more personable and informal approach to aiding a person who is at risk of exploitation.

Early intervention is a key component to aiding policing and the prevention of exploitation within vulnerable people. The beginning of an individual's involvement into vulnerability may be due to adverse childhood experiences (ACE's), these experiences may come in the form of "physical, social and emotional abuse" (Manchester university 2017) and have been linked to contribute to a "cyclic effect" (Bells 2014) in which the future generations may be affected by ACE's due to the vulnerability inflicted upon the previous generation. As previously mentioned early intervention is a key tool in mitigating these ACE's and aiding within the long term policing of vulnerable people. To try and reduce ACE's and furtherly incidents of policing associated with vulnerable people, within Wales the well being of future generations act was created. With a target to protect vulnerable children of the future and aid long term projects and repeat concerns such as domestic violence alongside child neglect and abuse. This act was created to "improve life's 25,50,100 years into the future" (Walker 2015), as this is a long term act of legislation which aims to combat exploitation in vulnerable people. However within the short term (>10 years) the reduction of aces has been attributed to several different causes such as an approach to "supporting parenting" (Di Lemma 2019) which outlines methods of creating strong parent-child relationships within the development of the family and a "healthy" family life. A harmful familial side of a at risk or vulnerable child can be the consistent factor of exploited or vulnerable child with "36%" (Davies 2019) of children within the United Kingdom facing some form of sexual, verbal or physical abuse and the production and provision of early intervention in forms as the previously mentioned supporting parenting and alongside the National Vulnerability Action Plan which "prioritises prevention ahead of harm and demand" (College of Policing 2023) allows for the reduction of aces and furtherly call outs and arrivals to police officers in the future which may allow for more effective policing as a whole. These tools are an essential component to effectively policing exploitation within vulnerable people, as it helps reduce the chances of vulnerable people being created and the sufficient care being allocated within the public view. With a

decrease of “7,000 to 4,000” (ONS 2024) approximate cases of household crime , the effectiveness of these strategies has proven to be effective.

Multi agency interventions and partnerships are seen as a key component to policing exploited and vulnerable people. As the UK has seen economic scrutiny , the ability to control and develop the links between agencies such as social services and police services has seen an increased strain , however as multi-agency cooperation is an effective tool in providing aid to vulnerable or at risk people , it is often underpinned by lack of funding and assists, which allows for cases to “slip through” and become increasingly at risk of exploitation and harm. Unification is often used as a tool to combat exploitation within society, as “the merger of health , ambulance , police and fire service under the banner of a harm-response service” (Andrews 2023) would allow for an ease and transparency within the context of information. However within modern policing the introduction of the Child Sex Offender Disclosure Scheme or “Sarah’s law” allows for a multiagency (between social and police services) to determine whether or not a person may be at risk to a child (vulnerable person). Personally I believe that the multiagency tool is an extremely valuable tool for services to use, especially the police in policing exploitation of vulnerable people , as it allows them to communicate and provide crucial information which may help and aid someone who is at risk.

A major criticism of how police engage with vulnerable people within the media is a primary talking point of many conversations around the world and the UK. The introduction of the “Right Care, Right Person” approach seeks “to limit police involvement” (Crawford 2024) due to the physical stigma associated with the police in modern society such as the “ACAB” and “Defund the police” movements, possibly volatile and at risk individuals may approach a police service in a more aggressive way as opposed to a health worker. Secondly, a major concern and criticism of modern day policing includes discrimination, protected characteristics such as ability , age and gender may play a key role in how some police officers respond to a scenario. For example, alongside the mental capacity act of 2005 police may have provided an appropriate adult and reasonable adjustments however the “absence of police safeguards increases the likelihood of vulnerable people experiencing miscarriages of justice” (Lyon 2008) this may fall into the bracket of discrimination by the hands of a police officer. These causes of discrimination may fall from a lack of funding support , since 2010 the police services across the UK have suffered a “20%” (Coxhead 2024) decrease in funding allowing officers to suffer from higher pressure, lack of accessibility to services such as mental health training and professionals which may equate to a higher chance of discrimination due to lack of training and understanding.

In conclusion, the proactive approach the modern day policing has took , such as the early intervention schemes and the strategies such as the THRIVE template has seen a slow but steady increase in exploitation and violence against vulnerable people, even more so within children * 2 (Esposti 2019) . However, within the case of discriminatory policing “3% of all allegations logged involved discriminatory behaviour “ (IOPC 2023) towards a protected person's characteristic, such as ability or gender. This small percentile does show the disparity of how police officers may respond to a vulnerable person , showing that as the number of calls has dropped from “roughly 6,000” (Jessup 2024) within London , a metropolitan diverse area which broadcasts a small snippet into the demographic spectrum,

it is clear to say that the accusations of discrimination towards vulnerable people is a minority and not the majority.

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