A Mixed-methods Inquiry into the Experiences Autistic Adults

have when Encountering Police Personnel

**Summary of Results**

The aim of this study was to gain an understanding of the types of experiences individuals on the autism spectrum have when interacting with police personnel. Through undertaking a mixed-methods approach, an online, anonymous and semi-structured survey was developed. Five respondents comprised the final sample. One respondent was female and the remaining four respondents were male. Respondent age ranged from 18-31. Frequency of contact differed greatly, with the highest number of encounters reported being 8-12 times, and the lowest being one encounter. Three out of the five respondents reported to have experienced only one encounter, with police contact occurring when they were in their 20s. Experiences reported differed, however similarities across the sample were observed. These included four out of the five respondents reporting to have experienced a predominately negative encounter with police personnel. Negative experiences were associated with limited understanding of the encounter and emotions associated with anxiety, stress and fear.

Types of contact included child elopement, coming into contact with police as a result of being involved in an incident in a public space, as well as being stopped and questioned by police (both at random and on the basis of suspicion). Four respondents reported to have experienced some form of being stopped and questioned by police. The sample was predominately male, older and displayed low-moderate levels of independence and a moderate level of community engagement. All incidents took place within a public space. Furthermore, three out of the five respondents reported to be undiagnosed and unaware of their autism at the time of police contact.

The present study’s findings aligned with that of previous research, highlighting the importance of raising awareness and understanding of autism on both a societal and criminal justice level. Additionally, findings support concerns raised around autistics regularly reporting to experience difficulties when encountering police personnel. Difficulties regularly reported to be experienced is a societal problem that urges further attention. Further research and awareness on such difficulties is required in order for meaningful and informed change to be made.

We would like to thank those that participated in the study and for sharing your individual experiences. If you would like to read more about the study and its findings, the thesis will be published and publicly available via Murdoch University’s online library. You can expect the thesis to be available online by the beginning of March.

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to email g.hall@murdoch.edu.au or 32894997@student.murdoch.edu.au