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**Why training is not improving the police response to sexual violence against women:  
A glimpse into the 'black box' of police training**

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**Abstract**

After decades of research, HMIC inspection reports, enquiries, police reform and legal changes, a 'justice gap' remains in one of the most iconic crimes against women and girls. More rape and sexual assault victims come forward than ever, however prosecution and conviction rates remain low. Time and again, analyses of the problem call for better training of police officers who investigate complaints and engage with victims of sexual violence. More and improved training is hoped to give officers better knowledge and understanding, and to effect changes in attitudes and behaviour towards victims of sexual violence committed against women and girls. In this chapter, we explore current challenges and barriers to effective police training on sexual violence. We reflect in particular on challenges of police-academic cooperation in producing police training, and offer some conclusions on where to go from here.

**Introduction**

Few allegations of rape are reported to police. Even fewer rape allegations reach court, and even fewer still result in the conviction of the alleged suspect (CPS, 2016). This outcome is replicated throughout the world. Characterised as the 'justice gap' (see for instance Horvath and Brown 2009), the process of investigating rape allegations was the subject of a ten-year inquiry inside the London Metropolitan Police Service (MPS). Two full months' data in 2012 was the focus of more detailed analysis (Hohl and Stanko, 2015). This analysis showed that victim withdrawal of complaints accounts for almost half of the attrition of the 587 sample cases studied. The next largest contribution to attrition was the police decision to take no further action, *accounting for 67% of attrition in non-withdrawn allegations*. These decisions are rarely scrutinised by anyone outside of policing. Analysis shows that there are three

critical factors present in decisions to proceed in the allegation data recorded by police: the availability of independent evidence of the incident, the identification of a suspect who is a 'credible criminal', and the assessment that a complainant is 'credible'. All of these strengthen the likelihood that an allegation will result in a charge by the Crown Prosecution Service.

The Angiolini Review found that rape myths still influenced the way police manage rape complaints, and that the officers who were in roles to support rape victims perceived victims as 'not telling the truth' (2015:76). The enquiry concluded that there was a compelling case for improvement in the police management of rape and sexual assault. There is growing acceptance, from the Angiolini Review to Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (an independent police oversight body in England and Wales), that victims who report rape to police in London are more likely to be highly vulnerable (see also Stanko and Williams, 2009), more likely to know their assailant, and only occasionally involve a complete stranger attacking a victim without warning. Four key vulnerabilities dominate rape allegations reported in London over the decade of the MPS study: the complainant is young (under 18) at the time of the rape; drugs and alcohol mis-/overuse are present (either for the victim, the assailant or both); the complainant has mental health issues; and there is a domestic abuse/violence context. Police investigation, as the consensus of research and the conclusions from a raft of enquiries point out, needs to be viewed through the lens of how vulnerable victim experience sexual assault/exploitation (Horvath and Brown, 2009; Brown and Walklate, 2011; Hohl and Stanko, 2015; Williams and Stanko, 2016). What seems to be continuously frustrating to activists, scholars and government officials is how little seems to have improved in the justice outcomes for those who report rape to the police despite decades of scrutiny.

Debates – seemingly endless – about why these institutional changes have *not* resulted in incremental improvement across the board in the policing of sexual violence against women often return to the mantra that police officers need to be provided with more *training*. But *why* should training lead to improvement in police decision-making and action? Training, as a lever (or theory) of change, is expected to be a mechanism to change police actions and responses but thinking about training as a mechanism of change too often removes it from the culture and structures within which police decisions are made (see Hoyle 1998). While police culture, societal expectations and personnel are continuously changing over time, police training is largely hermetically sealed within the core culture of policing, one that continues to be criticized for its macho culture, lack of diversity and command and control ethos. Few outsiders see training in action. Essentially, police train police, and any insight from scholarship and/or research, and even force performance or HMIC inspections, is generally kept at arms' length from the training school preparations because there is no active mechanism to address these concerns from within. This observation is important for activists and campaigners working on policing improvement to understand because they too call for more and better training. The growing impact of a feminist critique has been felt inside policing: few police forces would for instance not recognize the fact that the overwhelming majority of victims of domestic abuse and rape and sexual assault are women and girls. But

how has this recognition permeated into the way police are trained to respond to these demands for policing intervention? And what does the evidence tell us about the link between training, learning and improvement? What kind of insight from the feminist research on sexual violence against women and girls needs to permeate the way ‘the police train the police’?

This chapter aims to stimulate critical debate about police training in the area of sexual violence against women. It draws on the authors experience of working with two police forces, as part of a Police Knowledge Fund (PKF) project, to co-produce an evidence-informed training package for Sexual Offences Investigative Trained (SOIT) officers, and the lead author’s experience in working inside a police force for 15 years. What we present in this chapter are personal observations and reflections based on these experiences - a glimpse into the ‘black box’ of police training. Fully opening the ‘black box’, i.e. a systematic analysis of police training in the area of sexual violence against women and girls, would require a level of transparency and openness to outside scrutiny that at present does not exist.

The remainder of the chapter is structured as follows. First, we discuss why police training is a popular solution suggested to improve police response to sexual violence against women and girls. Then, based on our observations of working with training units, we outline some defining features of police training that we believe are crucial in understanding how police training is carried out in practice, and the barriers they present to improving police response to wider violence against women through training. In particular, we reflect on the challenges of academic-police collaborations aimed at introducing an evidence-informed element to police training on sexual violence and engaging with victims of sexual violence. The final section asks, through the conceptual framework of ‘craft vs. science’ in policing (Willis, 2013) and the adult learning literature, how training might improve officer decision-making in ‘messy’ domestic abuse and complex sexual offences cases involving vulnerable victims.

### **Training as the solution?**

The continuous search for improvement in the policing of violence against women has largely pinned its hopes on the influence of ‘better’ police training. At the same time, changes in organisational practice or the role of inspection presume that the ‘best’ training is available, and as such bespoke specialist roles have been developed in some forces to deal specifically with domestic abuse or rape victims. The recognition of rape, sexual assault, and domestic abuse, as key performance improvement areas in strategic force-wide plans and performance regimes has been prompted by the active monitoring by HMIC of the operationalization of the policing practice to help and to support domestic abuse and sexual assault victims (HMIC, 2017).

Despite the rather sparse evidence base, there is a stubborn insistence in putting forward recommendations that presume that training leads to improvement. The available knowledge about the policing of domestic abuse – far more studied than the policing of rape – is used here as an example of the problems of ‘training’ better police officers by police officer trainers. The College of Policing’s (CoP) own research on the impact of training on coercive

control aimed to measure change in the police officer's understanding of domestic abuse (Wire and Myhill 2016). Wire and Myhill set out to test whether first responder training on coercive control in one force in England improves police officer knowledge and understanding. There is an assumption in this training package that better understanding will lead to better action and response. The authors test for this using a questionnaire developed specifically for this evaluation. This experimental training package was applied within the current model of 'training' delivery to police officers within their organisations. The findings suggest that the training had 'no impact on officers' general attitudes to domestic abuse' but had some positive effects for some (but not all) indicators of knowledge and understanding of coercive control. In other words, training per se is not a silver bullet or 'solution' to the issues identified by researchers and by the HMIC for changing the practice of policing domestic abuse.

In order to understand why training might not work as intended, the following section outlines some key features of police training in practice as we have observed them in working with police training units and in observing police training on rape and sexual offences. These are personal observations of the authors in working with police forces, and in the case of the first author, working inside a police force for 15 years.

## **Understanding police training in practice**

### ***Handing down the craft***

Police training has been delivered largely by former operational police officers who bring with them a view about '*the way things work from experience in policing and particularly here*'. Trainers – at least those in England and Wales – undergo certification in order to become 'trained trainers' who understand how adults learn. The approach recognises that handing down the *craft* from one officer to another often relies on tacit knowledge (not academic knowledge) to share good practice. Some of this craft is highly specialised and has a tradition of 'perfected practice' in areas such as homicide investigation, advanced driving, public order policing or firearms training. Professional skill development – especially for police officers seeking to learn a different operational role such as a sexual assault liaison officer – takes place *inside policing*, and rests on police internal knowledge, taking little account of other sources of information (and particularly independent academic evidence). The approaches and techniques that are being handed down have rarely been tested, are not challenged by those outside the police, least of all from academic research, because the world of in-house training is largely hermetically sealed to outside eyes and ears.

### ***Insulation from academic evidence and scrutiny***

Because police training is largely sealed off from outside scrutiny, there is little transparency, educational review or accountability for what is being taught. What we found working with police forces on the sexual assault liaison officer course was that reviews of learning material take place internally, behind closed doors. There is a platform for on-line learning but not for sexual assault liaison officers. There was neither scrutiny from outside the police service of the sexual assault liaison officer course material nor any way to assess whether the learning

approach helps ‘improve’ police response or is compatible with science or systematic academic research evidence on rape and sexual assault. Course attendance for officers choosing this role typically requires ‘abstraction’ from operational duties, meaning the learner attends the training in person, with little written training material available for the learners to take home, review and to refresh (with the exception of the written law on sexual assault and rape). A largely oral culture of training, with little written documentation, limits the practical ways in which training units can be scrutinized and held to account. The College of Policing has, in part, been created to set national standards for training and professional practice. For sexual offence investigation, including the SOIT role, there currently exists no national standard or nationally accredited training, and no Authorised Professional Practice (APP)<sup>i</sup> guide to enable police force training units to tether their training to what is considered to be best practice.

There is currently almost total reliance on craft-based, police officer trainers who have had little exposure to the evolving academic knowledge about the impact of sexual violence on victims and their contact with police. At present, the influence of ‘research and evidence-based practice’ is extremely limited; police training units write and prepare their own lesson and learning plans in-house, or use those from the College of Policing (which for sexual assault do not exist). Training units often do not have the capacity or resources to access, evaluate, and use academic research fully. To give one example of the practical barriers to using outside evidence from the PKF project, police IT firewall settings meant officers were not able to receive academic articles on the topic of rape or sexual violence via email due to those words (‘sexual’ or ‘rape’) being contained in the text.

Unfortunately too, there is little scientific research on how police training *works* to change behaviour (that is, what is the mechanism for change?). There is sparser evidence on how best to ‘train’ for investigating complexity and complex situations involving vulnerable victims, such as in cases of sexual assault and domestic abuse. Development and delivery of training are split and often conducted by separate teams of officers, with training materials passed on to the officers who deliver the training. Trainers and training developers are supposed to be ‘experts’ in *training*, able to deliver for any topic; they are not subject area experts. The prevailing assumption is that ‘police trainers’ can deliver any training package by reading out and following the instructions of the training package itself; that trainers do not need to be experts in the subject matter they are delivering. This is flawed. If we expect police officers to be critically thinking, problem solving professionals who are evidence-informed, a different approach to training is urgently needed; one that encourages better learning about what the (scholarly) evidence says about successful interventions *with victims* so that this thinking can be applied to complex situations encountered when responding to domestic abuse, and allegations of rape and sexual assault.

### ***Reproducing localised organisational procedure***

Police officer trainers who train police officers for new roles draw upon their own experience of ‘doing the role’ to inform the substance of the ways of working they wish other police officers to follow; as well as knowledge about the local, social, legal and organisational

context for 'best practice' from their operational experience. Police trainers may also rely on 'command' to provide an invisible funnel through which new information is assimilated into police action. 'This is the way we do things around here' is an expression used to convey a host of hierarchical and unspoken conventions about ways of working. Within the UK Policing network, there is an acceptance that process and procedure will differ between forces (e.g. forms or the way officers tape evidence bags may differ). Within a police force, knowing local convention conveys competence, especially important for new joiners to operational units. Understanding how things work locally may also imply knowledge about how a particular commanding officer or a particular unit requires operational officers to conduct investigations, consult the officer in charge or share information. Developing a lesson plan on what constitutes a problem and how to manage it (as police action, process and procedure) is constructed through the lens of localised, organisational process. Telling trainees 'what to do' turns the job into using *process and procedure* as an anchor for deciding how to respond to a situation, event or report of a crime. However if training is actively to provide access to knowledge which is validated outwith the police culture, then an officer needs to be exposed to that information and, in theory, might influence practice and act as a buffer to traditional ways of working and promote iterative improvement from within.

Police training though is largely overshadowed by local force process and procedure, an invisible institutional framework to exclude knowledge that is generated outside policing itself. These differences loomed large in the work conducted with forces described below. Much time and effort was expended working through individual force procedure to enable the two forces collaborating with the project to identify common ground on which learning could be improved. Regardless of where an operational officer works, each individual police officer (who is providing vital support to sexual assault victims) is continuously confronted by having to make informed (and defensible) decisions about very complex situations. Routinely accounting for how policing decisions are made (when, why and often under some form of supervision) invisibly underpins traditional training. We also found that the work of the training unit is not routinely informed by the police force's way of accounting for its success in its business. There is – at least in these training units - no internal in-house feedback loop to assess whether what the police trainers are training officers to do 'works', or makes any difference in the performance of a police force in terms of delivering 'good enough policing.'

### ***The status of training within the organisation***

Working within a police training unit, preparing the next generation of officers for their role, does not confer much status within the police organisation. Too often training is considered a 'dead zone', where officers who have grown weary of frontline work, or officers who are burnt out and 'need a rest', or who can't find a role in the rest of the organisation, train others to do what they no longer wish to do. These training officers may have been out of operations for a long time. They may not have been the best practitioners either. They are seldom developed professionally as learning specialists. While these issues have been recognised in a number of HMIC reviews (HMIC, 2002; Neyroud, 2010), they remain a significant organisational barrier to improvement to learning within the police service.



## Police – academic co-production of SOIT training

This chapter draws on learning from a police-academic collaboration funded through the UK's PKF. The project translated academic research on the policing response to rape into a new training programme designed for sexual assault liaison police officers (SOITs) in two forces in England. The process of creating a new approach to improving sexual assault liaison officer training was informed by research evidence mentioned earlier and published in 2015 in the London study of rape allegations (see Hohl and Stanko, 2015). The lessons learnt from the academic-police collaboration's creation of a new training course in the two partner forces can be shared with other police forces at home here in the UK and abroad.

In order for innovative, evidence-infused police training 'to be understood and relevant', there must be a broad alignment of what is considered to be 'good policing' (HMIC, 2014) or 'good enough policing' (Bowling, 2007) shared across borders. These reflections here will largely focus on the grounding of 'what is meant by good training' or 'good enough' training, so that policing is better (after all, that is the purpose of training – improving professionalism). This explicitly means that somehow – and over time – the impact of the training should be able to be measured, transparent, and experienced by victims who report sexual assault as 'good enough'.

Sexual assault liaison policing is a specialist role inside the police service in England and Wales, differing among the forty-four police forces. Some of the roles combine victim support with sexual assault investigation; other forces separate the two roles. The approach to a force's policing role and the place of policing of sexual assault within this may differ between forces. 'Training' officers for this role is largely in-house, in-force. Force police training approaches should be compatible with national training standards set by the College of Policing so sexual assault training modules should abide by learning objectives specified by the College but these do not yet require that the specific information within any module align with the available (best) evidence according to *academic* standards. Training on how to interview *witnesses and particularly suspects* has been influenced by psychology. Cognitive interviewing, whose evidence base is largely influenced by its research with university student samples, frames the section of the course devoted to interviewing practice. Although drawing on the academic evidence that demonstrates that victims report feeling 'not believed' or 'being blamed' for the sexual assault, our study found there was no course material that set out the problem of sexual assault offending as a problem of exploiting vulnerability (the evidence is presented in Hohl and Stanko, 2015). Preparation of any training delivered to officers desiring a new role is largely undertaken by training units within individual police forces, and as outlined above, the 'evidence' basis for what an officer 'does' and how s/he 'does it' is largely managed through in-house *craft-based* skill development and rarely observed in situ by anyone other than police practitioners. At present, there is a gap in academic knowledge about the impact of such training on police practice across the country and in the force itself. There is also a gap in exploring whether what is being taught accords with the academic evidence about the nature of rape and sexual assault, a criticism found in much of the academic literature on the experience of victims.

## **A Review of Sexual Assault Liaison Officer Training**

The PKF project's theory of change draws on what the research evidence says about factors that contribute to victim outcomes for rape allegations. The research (Hohl and Stanko, 2015) highlights the vulnerabilities of victims through an analysis of allegations reported to a local police force, and demonstrates the influence of these vulnerabilities on outcomes. This theory of change suggests that better evidence-informed training (officers attuned and better informed about victim vulnerabilities and the implications for criminal investigations) would strengthen (or at least align) police training with improving the justice outcomes of rape allegations. An evidence-informed course would set out to develop explicitly an appreciative inquiry approach to putting victim vulnerability at the heart of sexual liaison police officer training and require the trainees to think differently in order to make decisions informed by victim need. Although only a partial 'fix' to 'whole system' improvement in the investigation of rape allegation (e.g. there needs to be more work regarding the interviewing skills of officers who are, after all, interviewing highly vulnerable victims), the project provides new insight into the process of academic-police collaboration on police training.

The PKF project opened the discussion in the two forces' training units about how the needs of the complainant of rape and the needs of the investigation are often in tension. These needs are not fixed and learning to balance these should be part of the core competency of a successfully trained specialist officer. The needs of the complainant are framed by the kinds of vulnerabilities complainants 'bring with them' when reporting a rape. As noted above, understanding the nature of these vulnerabilities should enable officers to prepare in advance how they will manage these vulnerabilities within the investigation window. These should be made explicit, as these are common issues officers will be managing in their roles. What we found in the discussions was that while academics on the project foregrounded 'victim vulnerability', police trainers had previously put this in the background, with legal definitions, process and procedures being prioritised over the understanding of how vulnerability is important in recorded allegations of rape.

### ***Co-producing sexual assault liaison officer training***

Working with two forces meant that there were two different approaches to the policing roles that 'support victims' and 'lead investigations', and thus there were different in-house training designs for that support. The project working group (comprising academics and police officers) agreed to two key changes to the previous training course that were critical to better delivery. First, there was the inclusion *as a core part of the lesson plan* of the use of case studies reflecting the kinds of vulnerabilities that those who allege rape have. Second, the training package addressed 'well-being' needs of the police officers themselves, as officer resilience is often stretched when working with victims with serious vulnerabilities. The PKF project found that Sexual Assault Liaison Officers struggled to reconcile the conflicting demands of the police investigation and safeguarding the victim's well-being, as well as keeping the victim 'on board' and engaged in the investigation. One common example that Liaison Officers would give is that whilst an exhausted and traumatised victim is likely to be desperate to shower and sleep, and ask to be taken home, the investigating officer might

instruct the officer to interview the victim and take forensic evidence regardless, so the investigation can commence and potential arrests can be made. The training package aimed to equip officers with the understanding and skills to negotiate these situations and also be mindful of their own well-being.

Both forces have now pledged to use the new training materials, harnessing the information on victim vulnerabilities (e.g. proportion of victims who are underage, used drugs or alcohol prior to the attack, or have a current or previous intimate relationship with the perpetrator) and use cases dealt with by the local police force as case study materials. It took a lot of effort to shift ‘the way we do things around here’ for just one course.

### **Conceptualising police training: Craft vs. Science**

Reflecting on our observations of police training practice, and the co-production of the SOIT training package in particular, Willis’s (2013) distinction between *craft-based* and *science-based* skill development appears a useful framework to apply to the current approach to training (see also, Willis and Mastrofski, 2016). Willis discusses policing as a profession through a framework characterising police knowledge as influenced by ‘craft’ (experience) versus ‘science’ (academic research/evidence informed). He suggests that *science-based* (or even *science-informed*) approaches are less prevalent. Willis further proposes that improvement in policing would and should enable a more scientific-aligned way of working that does sit comfortably alongside the historical craft-based way of working. This framework has implications for the way we think about police training.

Policing as a *craft-based profession* would approach training and the acquisition of policing skills in supporting rape victims and investigating rape through the lens of ‘perfecting craft’. A craft is acquired and improved through practice, is taught by fellow craftspeople (police officers) who *know* about good practice of refined policing skills through their experience of field operations. Applied to the case of sexual assault liaison policing, *craft as ‘trained knowledge’* would be prepared and delivered by police officer trainers for police officer trainees, designed to show the trainees how to respond to, for example, a rape victim, using in-house force approved tools<sup>ii</sup> - emphasizing the legal provisions, legal processes and internal police procedures. There may or may not be input from victim support workers. Improvement in craft may be measured in the refinement of applying force procedure and protocols to better practice, *but the training itself may not challenge traditional ways of knowing, thinking and working in the field.*

Craft based knowledge is infused within *police force cultures* within which craft is acquired (Chan, 1997; Bacon, 2014). In any police force, it is impossible to avoid this wider cultural context. For a craft savvy police officer, the closer the officer adheres to the process or procedure, the better. Improvement in officer performance is typically measured through looking at the process or procedure, *not by the outcome, nor by how well treated victims feel.* Performance measurement would need to capture, too, whether police were managing the high vulnerability of victims of sexual assault better as a consequence of training. Given the research that now exists about the gap between knowledge regarding domestic abuse and

coercive control, and policing action and training (Vigurs et al. 2016, Robinson et al. 2016, Wire and Myhill, 2016), it is time to think differently about how to measure the success of training itself. Training alone is not a single solution, but one linked to a full raft of supportive organisational self-awareness that provides systematic feedback to supervisors as well as operational staff. This is the purpose of continuous professional development, critical for any profession.

### **Improving complex decision making through training**

There is limited or no evidence in policing on which to base any chosen approach for the mode or method of training (see Wheller and Morris, 2010 for a review). According to Mugford et al. (2013: 312) ‘what is currently absent in the police training literature are concrete empirically supported instructional strategies that can be incorporated into training to promote the long-term retention and transfer of learned skills and knowledge.’ This has implications for police training practitioners – the approaches taken to improve their trainees’ actions on the job are not yet evidence informed, simply because this evidence does not yet exist. Instead, police trainers largely rely on what they ‘did’ when they were operational officers. As a result, police forces are unable to rely on police trainers who are knowledgeable about the latest academic evidence and developments in the professional skills they are passing on.

Recent HMIC inspections on public protection, domestic abuse and child sexual exploitation indicate that police forces have not yet delivered a *significant* and sustained change in practice (HMIC and HMCPSI, 2012; HMIC, 2016; HMIC, 2015). Nor has the police service agreed on what constitutes ‘success’ – is this in the victim’s eyes (good and fair treatment regardless of criminal justice outcome), the police officer’s eyes (an investigation accepted as a charged case by the CPS) or some combination of organisational performance outcomes? Nor has the police service yet delivered a ‘good enough’ police training response in the policing of domestic abuse (Bowling, 2007). There is little evidence-based knowledge about how training might change police behaviour and action (see Neyroud, 2010). A theory of change might make transparent the issues that may be contributing to the continued ‘confusion’ around what to do when responding to a domestic and/or sexual assault incident. As Mugford et al. remind us (2013: 317) ‘in ‘naturalistic’ scenarios, information on what actions to take draw on a multiplicity of knowledge that must be brought together in a collective way to address a complex issue’. Put simply, complex *decision-making requires applying knowledge, improving knowledge and reflectively reviewing practice as a consequence*.

In situations of rape and sexual assault, police officers have complex decisions to make, and thus would benefit from on-going, iterative social science insight to guide their organisational responses. The research on violence against women documents its complex nature (Kelly, 2002; Kelly, Lovett and Regan, 2005, Hohl and Stanko, 2015). A large volume of literature explores female victims’ responses to men’s violence, and these responses are also complex and include coping mechanisms which make any policing investigation tricky (Stanko, 1985; Kelly 1988; Jordan, 2008). As police officers are expected to assess the victim’s need to

trigger legal interventions (criminal as well as civil), the more assistance police officers have in understanding female victims' coping mechanisms, the better. Indeed, these are not just the lessons of female victims— the complexities of gender loom large in sexual violence of men and boys too (Davies, 2002). But these complexities also deserve a gender-based approach in scholarly knowledge unpicking how men and boys are exploited sexually.

Returning to sexual offences training, a training session rarely starts with a clear analysis of what the victims are telling police about the problem of sexual assault *locally*. What are the circumstances presented by those who report sexual assault or rape, and how do these circumstances challenge the application of law? What most police services will admit is that most victims know their offenders, and that the circumstances of applying law requires unpicking tricky issues of consent, force and exploitation of vulnerability in these pre-existing relationships. This is not easy. For forces using practitioner trainers, a focus on applying procedure and law does not help steer trainees' skills toward gathering (best) evidence of what happened and how that evidence might demonstrate a violation of law. The impact of 'messy' cases on high demand for limited resources requires far more attention and time, and in the age of austerity, often causes frustration and/or officers' stress and burn-out inside policing. The ability to *train* police officers requires police officers to acknowledge the business they manage ('messy cases'), *learn* how to manage 'messiness' differently using insights from scholarly research on victims' vulnerability to exploitation, adapt the learning to enable officers to understand the business of sexual assault allegations, and apply their practice and problem solving skills to the kinds of rape allegations that actually are reported to their local police service.

### **Concluding remarks**

Just over half of London victims turn away from justice after they contact police (Hohl and Stanko, 2015). These victims disengage. This does not mean that the rape allegations they report are unfounded; what we know about these victims is that the majority are highly vulnerable at the time of the assault. These incidents deserve much more understanding so that we might improve victims' experience *and* victims' strength to challenge assailants. There is academic research that tells us why vulnerability might cause victims to back away from justice, *but not what to do differently as a consequence of knowing this*. If the UK has learned anything in the past five years from the scandals of historical sexual abuse allegations, it is that few victims felt they were taken seriously, felt that they were believed, or felt that they had the strength to push back against 'rape myths' seeping into their exchanges with authorities (see chapter X, this volume). Linking police training with an analysis of the situation of victims who report rape allegations locally requires the police service to know what kinds of sexual allegations come to their attention and how to respond best to the kinds of vulnerabilities these victims bring with them when they turn to the police for help.

There remains a gulf between academic language and practitioner language, and this communication gap hinders the integration of 'academic/outside the force' knowledge into training, procedures and understanding inside the police force. Police forces should invite academics with subject matter expertise and expert operational practitioners to participate, to

observe and to help transform training. Both must be willing to understand the evidence and the insight from both perspectives, to value both craft and science. The co-production of the content and the approach to the training will be uncomfortable and irritating at times but the space within which the police 'train their own' has tended to be a closed shop for too long.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Authorised Professional Practice (APP) is developed and owned by the College of Policing (the UK professional body for policing). APP is authorised by the College of Policing as the official source of professional practice on policing. Police officers and staff are expected to have regard to APP in discharging their responsibilities.

<sup>2</sup> Since 2009 all UK police forces are expected to use the Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment (DASH) tool.

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