



**"Proud to be a Special": A qualitative study exploring the experiences of Special Constables in the UK**

Journal:	<i>Safer Communities</i>
Manuscript ID	SC-08-2019-0024
Manuscript Type:	Research Paper
Keywords:	Qualitative, Special Constable, Police, Volunteer, Neighbourhood Policing, Austerity

SCHOLARONE™  
Manuscripts

Emerald allows authors to deposit their AAM under the Creative Commons Attribution Non-commercial International Licence 4.0 (CC BY-NC 4.0). To do this, the deposit must clearly state that the AAM is deposited under this licence and that any reuse is allowed in accordance with the terms outlined by the licence. To reuse the AAM for commercial purposes, permission should be sought by contacting [permissions@emeraldinsight.com](mailto:permissions@emeraldinsight.com).

For the sake of clarity, commercial usage would be considered as, but not limited to:

- o Copying or downloading AAMs for further distribution for a fee;
- o Any use of the AAM in conjunction with advertising;
- o Any use of the AAM by for promotional purposes by for-profit organisations;
- o Any use that would confer monetary reward, commercial gain or commercial exploitation.

Emerald appreciates that some authors may not wish to use the CC BY-NC licence; in this case, you should deposit the AAM and include the copyright line of the published article. Should you have any questions about our licensing policies, please contact [permissions@emeraldinsight.com](mailto:permissions@emeraldinsight.com).

## MANUSCRIPT DETAILS

TITLE: "Proud to be a Special": A qualitative study exploring the experiences of Special Constables in the UK

## ABSTRACT:

The paper aims to understand what motivates members of the public to volunteer within the Special Constabulary and seeks to understand their experiences when engaging in this role.

There is little qualitative research examining the experiences of volunteers and yet such literature is pivotal in supporting positive future engagement of a valuable resource.

Six currently serving Special Constables were interviewed about their role. The semi-structured interviews were transcribed and analysed qualitatively through thematic analysis.

Thematic analysis identified four main themes: 1) Proud to be a Special: active demonstration of pro-social behaviour; 2) Lines of division: recognition of distinction between Special Constables and Regular Police Officers; 3) Levels of training: adverse consequences of inadequate training; and, 4) Mind the gap: impact of financial austerity. The Special Constables recognised their role as a utilitarian resource with both positive and negative impacts on all Police Officers.

The findings highlighted the need for a careful balance between having enough Special Constables to maintain appropriate policing and yet ensuring opportunity for sufficient experience to develop and implement their skills, successful demonstration of which would support more positive working relationships with Regular Police Officers.

1  
2 Abstract

3  
4 Purpose

5  
6  
7 The paper examines public motivations to volunteer as Special Constables and seeks to  
8  
9 understand their experiences when engaging in this role.

10  
11 There is little qualitative research examining the experiences of volunteers and yet such literature  
12  
13 is pivotal in supporting positive future engagement of a valuable resource.  
14

15  
16 Design/methodology/approach

17  
18  
19 Six currently serving SCs were interviewed. The semi-structured interviews were analysed  
20  
21 qualitatively through thematic analysis.  
22

23  
24 Findings

25  
26 Four main themes emerged: Proud to be a Special, Lines of division, Levels of training, and, Mind  
27  
28 the gap. The SCs recognised their role as a utilitarian resource with both positive and negative  
29  
30 impacts on Regular Police Officers.  
31

32  
33 Originality/Value

34  
35  
36 The findings highlighted the need for a careful balance between having enough SCs to maintain  
37  
38 appropriate policing and yet ensuring opportunity for sufficient experience to develop and  
39  
40 implement their skills, successful demonstration of which would support more positive working  
41  
42 relationships with Regular Police Officers.  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2 Individuals who are motivated to increase another individual's welfare through volunteering are  
3  
4 considered a necessary and welcome asset by many organisations (Hamlyn et al., 2015). Recently,  
5  
6 the number of people who volunteer has increased (Prouteau and Boguslaw, 2015), partly in  
7  
8 response to changes in political policies, such as severe austerity measures (Casselden, Pickard,  
9  
10 Walton and McLeod, 2017). The reasons underlying individual decisions to volunteer include an  
11  
12 altruistic motivation to helping others, and associated benefits to the individual (Batson, 2011;  
13  
14 Shye, 2010). These benefits can include building skills and obtaining the experience to progress  
15  
16 towards a chosen career pathway (Akintola, 2011), or positive affect (Skoglund, 2006). Meer et al.  
17  
18 (2013) also noted that some individuals engage in volunteering in order to avoid the detached  
19  
20 feeling associated with only contributing financially.  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25

26 There are two main theoretical explanations for volunteering: Batson's theory of Empathy-  
27  
28 Altruism (Batson, 1981), and Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1979). Batson states that altruistic acts,  
29  
30 originate from the individual being highly empathetic and can enable the volunteer to show  
31  
32 empathic concern to another person's situation, and to reduce that person's distress (Batson,  
33  
34 2010; Taylor and Hanna, 2017). Batson (1994) states there are usually one of four motivators for  
35  
36 volunteering: volunteering benefits the volunteer personally (Egotism); to increase another's  
37  
38 wellbeing (Altruism); to support moral principles (Principlism); and Collectivism, whereby once an  
39  
40 individual identifies with a chosen group the aim becomes to increase its success. Collectivism  
41  
42 shares similarities with Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1979) which explains how people affiliate  
43  
44 themselves with groups based on a variety of characteristics to develop a sense of belonging with  
45  
46 the 'in-group' (Abrams and Hogg 1988) which may lead to engagement in pro-social behaviours  
47  
48 (Gorden, 1988). This engagement can be as a result of development of trust in the organisation  
49  
50 and a desire to empathise with the organisation's cause, which in turn increases the group's  
51  
52 potential (Batson, 1994). Conversely, however, being, or perceiving oneself to be in an 'out group'  
53  
54 can have adverse consequences on self-esteem, anxiety and stress (Meister, 2014).  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2 The decision to volunteer in a specific area can be based on the individual's own needs and  
3  
4 interests, producing a unique person-environment fit (Maki and Snyder, 2017). However, the  
5  
6 individual's initial basis for volunteering can stem from the need to fulfil both egoistic and  
7  
8 altruistic desires (Fitch, 1987). These desires may result in forming a relationship or identifying  
9  
10 with others in a group to achieve a specified goal (Fishback, Henderson and Koo, 2011),  
11  
12 particularly where there is a shared understanding of moral convictions (Skitka et al., 2016). For  
13  
14 example, the Criminal Justice System in the United Kingdom offers the volunteering role of ex-  
15  
16 offender peer mentoring. In this role, an ex-offender offers support and advice to inmates in  
17  
18 prison. The motivations to be engaged in such a role could be considered as having its roots in the  
19  
20 Altruism-Empathy Model (Batson, 1994) as the ex-offender's volunteering is altruistic and in  
21  
22 addition may also satisfy an egoistic need for an internal reward for the ex-offender, resulting in  
23  
24 feelings of accomplishment (Thomas and Buck, 2010).  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29

30  
31 Volunteer roles within the Criminal Justice System include mentoring, restorative justice  
32  
33 and victim support (Hewson, 2013). Civil unrest during the 1960's saw an increased demand for  
34  
35 citizens to assist the Police Force directly (Cook and Scioli, 1974), which led to the development of  
36  
37 the Special Constable (SC) voluntary role with the same legal powers as RPOs (College of Policing,  
38  
39 2017a). All SCs volunteer for a minimum of four hours a week, complete 16 days of initial basic  
40  
41 training, and exercise police powers including making arrests, stop and search, and executing  
42  
43 warrants. In England and Wales in 2018, there were 11,690 serving SCs, working with 122,404  
44  
45 RPOs (Home Office, 2018).  
46  
47  
48  
49

50  
51 During periods of financial austerity and cuts to public services volunteers represent a  
52  
53 much-needed resource facilitating an effective public service (Colley, 2012; Nesbit and Brudney,  
54  
55 2010). Between 2009 and 2014, the government's policy on austerity led to a reduction of 20,000  
56  
57 RPOs (Disney and Simpson, 2017). The SCs save central government over £2million per year in  
58  
59 revenue that would have been used to fund hours that would be otherwise worked by the RPOs  
60

1  
2 (Pepper, 2014). Severe cuts and austerity measures have left many areas of policing vulnerable,  
3  
4 especially within the area of Neighborhood Policing (O'Neill, 2015) which is intended to protect  
5  
6 local neighbourhoods and communities, to safeguard the vulnerable, and to manage and divert  
7  
8 offenders. Policing Vision 2025 (National Police Chiefs' Council, 2018) acknowledged that there  
9  
10 was an increased need for more local engagement and connectivity with the public in the form of  
11  
12 Neighborhood Policing. Financial cuts during the recent period of austerity have seen the closure  
13  
14 of over 600 local police stations nationwide (Pratt, 2019) and the reduction of a local Police  
15  
16 presence has been linked to an increase in disruption (Kochel and Weisburd, 2019). Accordingly,  
17  
18 the workload of SCs is now being completely moved into Neighbourhood Policing (Higgins, 2018;  
19  
20 Strudrick, Jameson and Rowe, 2017), with other SCs assigned to the emergency call Response  
21  
22 teams.  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27

28  
29 Research regarding volunteer police has been primarily focussed on Britain and North  
30  
31 America (see Dobrin and Wolf, 2016; Gaines and Kappeler, 2011; Pepper and Wolf, 2015; Wolf,  
32  
33 Pepper and Dobrin, 2017) with little attention to developments outside of these locations (for an  
34  
35 exception see van Steden and Mehlbaum, 2018). In many countries volunteers are recruited to  
36  
37 assist RPOs in conducting patrols, investigations, administrative duties, traffic and community  
38  
39 events. Some countries use volunteers in the same role as RPOs whereas others use volunteers to  
40  
41 communicate with the RPOs when there are problems arising within the community (Wolf, Pepper  
42  
43 and Dobrin, 2017; Dobrin, 2015). The level of training for SCs also varies considerably between  
44  
45 countries with the equivalent of approximately of 3-4 weeks in the United Kingdom (College of  
46  
47 Policing, 2017a), and a minimum of 319 hours for a similar role in Florida, United States (Wolf,  
48  
49 2015 as cited in Wolf, Pepper and Dobrin, 2017).  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54

55  
56 The United Kingdom recruits its SCs to perform a role equal to that of a RPOs (College of  
57  
58 Policing, 2017b; Bullock and Millie, 2018). Furthermore Jordan (2012) found volunteers in policing  
59  
60 helped to strengthen 'Moral Order' in the public sphere. Recruitment of SCs allows for more

1  
2 engagement with public and the development of trust, which can benefit the community as a  
3  
4 whole (Dobrin, 2017).  
5

6  
7         There are negative consequences for the SCs through exposure to threatening situations,  
8  
9 work-based stress, increased risk of developing related mental illnesses such as depression,  
10  
11 anxiety and burnout (Colley, 2012), or adversely affecting decision-making processes (Qi et al.,  
12  
13 2018). Another early (and continuing) challenge encountered by SCs was that the RPOs viewed  
14  
15 them negatively (Mirrlees-Black and Byron, 1994). High levels of recruitment masked high levels of  
16  
17 attrition in the SCs, which challenges the assumption that SCs provide value for money (Whittle,  
18  
19 2014). Volunteer retention was also highlighted by Millie (2016) who found that attrition related  
20  
21 to the SCs' views about being under-informed and underused.  
22  
23  
24

25  
26         Research into SCs is both limited regarding the perspectives of the SCs, or their perceptions  
27  
28 of their role (Whittle, 2014). To encourage recruitment, further engagement, and retention is  
29  
30 essential as volunteers within the Police Force provide a crucial supportive role within the Criminal  
31  
32 Justice System (Pepper and Wolfe, 2015). As the volunteering role of the SC is highly specific and  
33  
34 complex, the flexibility of a qualitative approach, utilising semi-structured interviews and then  
35  
36 conducting a thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2013; Braun, Clarke and Terry, 2012) was  
37  
38 considered the most appropriate approach for this study. The semi-structured interviews allowed  
39  
40 an exploration of SCs' perceptions of their volunteering experience. This would assist in the  
41  
42 formation of policy and development of voluntary experiences, inform evidence-based practice,  
43  
44 and, promote an environment in which the role of a SC is viewed positively, from the perspective  
45  
46 of all individuals concerned.  
47  
48  
49  
50

## 51 52 53 **Method**

### 54 55 ***Design***

56  
57  
58 Semi structured interviews were conducted with six currently serving SCs to explore their  
59  
60 experiences, opinions and perspectives of their volunteering role. A standardised open-ended

1  
2 approach (Cresswell, 2013) was used, which could be expanded upon depending on each  
3  
4 participant's response. The interview covered areas such as motivation to volunteer, the reasons  
5  
6 for undertaking volunteering as a SC, the participant's experiences within that role, and  
7  
8 expectations for the future. The questions were designed to encourage in-depth discussion on the  
9  
10 participant's experiences; for example 'What made you decide to become a volunteer?' Following  
11  
12 transcription, a qualitative thematic analysis was conducted (Braun and Clarke, 2006).  
13  
14  
15

### 16 ***Participants***

17  
18  
19 Permission to advertise for participants within a county Police Force in the Midlands of the United  
20  
21 Kingdom was requested, and granted, by the Chief Inspector of that county. Six SCs participated  
22  
23 (four male, and two female), aged between 21 and 31 ( $M = 26.83$ ,  $SD = 4.60$ ). The participants had  
24  
25 been volunteering for the SCs for between six months and four years ( $M = 19.00$ ,  $SD = 15.38$   
26  
27 months), and all had engaged previously in other volunteering roles (for example, in the National  
28  
29 Health Service, working in youth clubs). The interviews, conducted via Skype, had a duration of  
30  
31 between 31 and 87 minutes ( $M = 53.02$  minutes,  $SD = 24.85$ ).  
32  
33  
34  
35

### 36 ***Ethical considerations***

37  
38  
39 Ethical approval for this study was obtained from [anonymised] University with particular  
40  
41 consideration given to maintaining the anonymity of the SCs, and to remove any case identifying  
42  
43 details mentioned in the interviews.  
44  
45

### 46 ***Analytic Procedure***

47  
48  
49 Prior to analysis the interviews were transcribed, and participants were offered the opportunity to  
50  
51 edit their own transcript freely; no interviewees made any amendments. The thematic analysis  
52  
53 process started with familiarisation of the data, coding to capture both semantic and conceptual  
54  
55 reading of the data, the constructing, reviewing and labelling of initial subthemes, and ultimately  
56  
57 of overarching themes to provide a coherent and representative account of the information  
58  
59 elicited through the interviews (Braun and Clarke, 2006).  
60



## Analysis

The coded data from the transcribed interviews gave rise to four overarching themes: 'Proud to be a Special', relating to the active demonstration of pro-social behaviour; 'Lines of division', demonstrating recognition of the distinction and division between SCs and the general public, and between SCs and RPOs; 'Levels of training', and associated consequences with a lack of training provision; and 'Mind the gap', with the impact of austerity on the Police Force as a whole, as well as the impact that this has on the volunteers directly.

### ***Theme 1: 'Proud to be a Special'***

Throughout the interviews the SCs expressed a sense of enduring pride in their role. This was expressed clearly:

*'I am still as proud as day one putting on a stab vest and going out on shift; that's what keeps me going'.*

Pride was also evident in the general public's response to the SCs:

*'when some people recognise that you are a volunteer you know they will say 'that's great, what you're doing'... I think the members of the public have a lot more respect for the fact that you're doing it for free'.*

#### *Subtheme 1: 'It takes a certain person'*

The role of a SC is a complex and demanding role. Despite the variety of decisions underlying volunteering for this role (Maki and Snyder, 2017) participants expressed their opinion that not all individuals would be willing or capable of fulfilling this demanding role:

*'I gave up 88 hours of my time to keep people safe and not everybody would do that'.*

Participants defined those who became SCs as sharing similarities in their personalities and approach which led to a communal sharing of moral convictions (Skitka, Bauman and Mullen, 2016) and strong belief in the fundamental principle of 'enforcing the law.'

1  
2 *'We have a fantastic criminal justice system and some fantastic laws and legislations that are*  
3  
4 *wrote down... We're there to enforce the law, regardless of anything else going around.'*

5  
6  
7 The sharing of this collectivist approach (Batson, 1994) amongst the participants appears to have  
8  
9 its roots in the SCs sharing of mutual purposes and aims, which are supportive of efficiency,  
10  
11 success and motivation (Fishback et al., 2011):

12  
13  
14 *'It's sort of that group mentality where you all got the same sort of values and reasons... for doing*  
15  
16 *what we do.'*

### 17 18 19 *Subtheme 2: Awareness of motivation*

20  
21 According to Batson's (1987) research on pro-social motivation, pro-social behaviours are  
22  
23 motivated by one's desire for internal rewards. Many participants discussed the self-gratification  
24  
25 and rewarding feeling they achieved through volunteering as a SC, and how being a member of a  
26  
27 clearly defined group aligned the individual's personal identity to the group with which they are  
28  
29 associated:  
30  
31

32  
33  
34 *'I loved the idea. It's very much like a military organisation in terms of professional but you're also*  
35  
36 *part of a family there... you're part of looking out for each other... work with a great bunch of*  
37  
38 *people and come home'.*

39  
40  
41 The motivation to volunteer, however, was not limited to internal rewards but to how the  
42  
43 volunteer would be recognised by others:

44  
45  
46 *'I remember reading an obituary to Jo Cox [Member of Parliament for Batley and Spen]... She had*  
47  
48 *been a community volunteer for like 15 years before becoming an MP. As a role model you look at*  
49  
50 *yourself and think what have I done over the last 12 months?... what would somebody write in my*  
51  
52 *obituary?'*

53  
54  
55 This participant proceeded to discuss feelings of guilt when there had been times in his life  
56  
57 without a volunteering role and how volunteering limited aversive feelings (Batson 1987):  
58  
59  
60

1  
2 *'It's strange, it became so ingrained in me so when people talked about the volunteering they do, I*  
3  
4 *always felt quite guilty that I wasn't making a contribution.'*  
5

### 6 *Subtheme 3: Prestige and the future*

7  
8  
9 According to Kent and Swanson (2017), a sense of increased self-esteem, pride and confidence is  
10  
11 experienced when being accepted as part of an organisation or group that is considered high-level  
12  
13 or prestigious. The participants were passionate about a sense of pride in their roles as SCs and  
14  
15 some expressed a desire to continue in their role as a RPO:  
16  
17

18  
19 *'I applied to be a Special and I didn't intend to ever actually become a full-time officer. As it*  
20  
21 *happens I actually fell in love with it after about 6 months. So, I actually now hold a place to train*  
22  
23 *as a Regular.'*  
24  
25

### 26 **Theme 2: 'Lines of division'**

27  
28 Mirrlees-Black and Byron (1994) found a division between RPOs and SCs. This division appears to  
29  
30 continue to be an issue with current SCs who remain active, rather than being associated only with  
31  
32 those SCs who have left the organisation (Millie, 2016). The SCs demonstrated awareness of lines  
33  
34 of division not only in respect of their role in relation to the RPOs, but also in relation to the  
35  
36 general public, and in themselves as individuals.  
37  
38  
39

### 40 *Subtheme 1: 'Them and Us'*

41  
42  
43 Despite the enthusiasm of participants towards the unique role of SC, there were also challenges  
44  
45 faced, and challenges expected, but not experienced. The SCs expressed surprise that *'The public*  
46  
47 *are actually nicer than I had expected them to be'*. Even when circumstances were less positive,  
48  
49 and the SC was required to act this did not detract from a positive relationship with the public:  
50  
51

52  
53 *'I don't think negatively of the people you are arresting... hasn't made me want to be put off by it*  
54  
55 *because I expected it'*.  
56  
57

58 However, concern was raised by the SCs as to the public expectations and understanding of their  
59  
60 role:

1  
2 *'You know when you are out on shift people see you as a police officer, you are in uniform, you*  
3  
4 *don't look any different to RPOs... that member of the public doesn't know if you've been in for five*  
5  
6 *minutes or five years'.*  
7

8  
9 Amongst the participants there emerged a distinct perception of a line of division between  
10  
11 themselves and the RPOs, and between those RPOs who supported SCs, and those who did not.  
12

13  
14 For example, one SC recalled:

15  
16 *'I remember being crewed with a woman who probably didn't want me to be there.... There was a*  
17  
18 *very unsubtle radio conversation she had with her colleague... Basically said, 'are you all right with*  
19  
20 *that Special? ... Ok if it looks like it's tense I'll come over and take over'. I'm like 'guys, I'm sat right*  
21  
22 *here... I wasn't born yesterday and I can handle myself... I've felt particularly grubby and horrible*  
23  
24 *about it afterwards.'*  
25  
26

27  
28 The SCs felt that some RPOs viewed them as the 'out-group' (Tajfel, 1979), both as individuals, and  
29  
30 as a separate part of the organisational structure. This distinction was manifest in a RPO's  
31  
32 behaviour towards a SC, who stated:  
33

34  
35 *'I was on duty with a Regular who doesn't like Specials... you are there to do a job but I think it does*  
36  
37 *help when you can at least have a conversation with the person you are spending up to eight hours*  
38  
39 *with!'*  
40  
41

42  
43 The SCs linked this experience to adverse feelings in self-esteem and increased stress (Meister,  
44  
45 2014):

46  
47 *'It's just feeling that... made to feel inferior, when you don't feel confident in your own ability... you*  
48  
49 *want to be a useful resource to someone'.*  
50  
51

52  
53 Despite the adverse effect that being made to feel inadequate can have, the SCs seemed to  
54  
55 acknowledge and understand the reasons that certain RPOs may feel this way towards them:

56  
57 *'Sometimes it can... make an officer uneasy being paired up with a Special because they don't know*  
58  
59 *your experience... it must be quite unsettling...'*  
60

1  
2 The SCs were empathetic towards the RPOs, demonstrating shared empathic personality traits  
3  
4 (Skitka et al., 2016), and an awareness of how, despite the differences in training and experience  
5  
6 (the SCs train for eight weekends, the RPOs for 36 weeks), both SCs and RPOs have the same roles  
7  
8 and legal powers:  
9

10  
11 *'I do believe the training for Specials is diabolical... Regulars think 'hang on these Specials are*  
12  
13 *coming through really poorly trained and they going to make me 10 times the amount of paper*  
14  
15 *work...'*  
16  
17

18  
19 Because of this the SCs believed that they must work extra hard to *'prove themselves'* to the RPOs  
20  
21 in order to be accepted and recognised:  
22

23  
24 *'We would all get painted with the same brush ... we have had substandard training, but we are*  
25  
26 *willing and we are able if you give us the opportunity we will prove us right...'*  
27

#### 28 29 *Subtheme 2: The impact of acceptance by the RPOs*

30  
31 Group affiliation and acceptance is considered important to individual's perception of their self-  
32  
33 worth (Tajfel, 1979). Once a SC has overcome the RPOs' apprehension a new, highly positive and  
34  
35 equitable relationship develops:  
36  
37

38  
39 *'I will say what you will get is as soon as you break that barrier that you aren't a seat warmer,*  
40  
41 *...you are welcomed with open arms onto the shift... they will absolutely support you and do*  
42  
43 *anything and treat you like a paid officer'.*  
44

#### 45 46 **Theme 3: Levels of training**

47  
48 Some of the lack of self-confidence discussed by the participants can be explained by their views  
49  
50 on training. Lack of training was viewed by the SCs as a barrier to fulfilling their potential, and  
51  
52 provided an explanation for the lack of support from some RPOs:  
53

54  
55 *'...it's definitely hard to know when you should be taking an active role and when you should refer*  
56  
57 *to your much more experienced colleagues... they are trying to put you in to situations too early'.*  
58  
59  
60

1  
2 *Subtheme 1: The relationship between training and action*

3  
4 It emerged that the lack of training could affect the safety of the SCs causing anxiety and a lack of  
5 confidence particularly in threatening situations that they may encounter (Qi et al., 2018). One SC  
6  
7 stated:  
8  
9

10  
11 *'You basically do one weekend being trained to use your baton... there is no structured or formal*  
12 *way to practice that. I am very conscious that its almost two years till my next training day for that*  
13 *and if I end up having to draw a baton in 22 months' time it will be the first time I have done it in*  
14 *22 months... The Regulars are wary of working with Specials because a lot of them have had bad*  
15 *experiences... A lady who I work with pointed out that a Special who had worked with her in the*  
16 *past, didn't help out while she was being kicked on the floor and that makes her wary of working*  
17 *with someone until she has had some sort of positive experience with them, which is very*  
18 *understandable.'*  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31

32 *Subtheme 2: Procedural barriers to improving skills*

33  
34 Many of the SCs stated that they were keen to undertake further training but that access to  
35 appropriate courses was unavailable or difficult to obtain. For SCs this was a source of frustration  
36  
37 and anxiety, with an adverse effect on their mental health (Colley, 2012), as well as holding back  
38  
39 their development:  
40  
41  
42

43  
44 *'I can't get on the course to do... driving in a police car. I can still drive them but I have to get a*  
45 *sergeant to sign my pocket book to specifically authorise me... it feels a bit demeaning*  
46 *sometimes...'*  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51

52  
53 **'Mind the gap!'**

54  
55 When reflecting on the reasons for the lack of training, many participants thought that financial  
56  
57 resources were the main source of the problem. SCs consider themselves to be a critical resource  
58  
59 to support the Police to work effectively:  
60

1  
2 *'When you talk about why you can never get a helicopter to turn up to a job, there's never a dog to*  
3  
4 *turn up to a job, there's not enough devices to go round, there's not enough training, everything*  
5  
6 *eventually will bend back to budget cuts, everything'.*  
7  
8  
9

#### 10 *Subtheme 1: Filling the gap*

11  
12 SCs were acutely aware of the implications of financial restrictions and limitations on resources  
13  
14 and working conditions:  
15

16  
17 *'It only takes one person to be off sick and they can't seem to get the cover for them because they*  
18  
19 *can't afford the overtime... they just feel like they are chronically understaffed compared to the*  
20  
21 *position even like five years ago... a full shift complement was considered to be, two sergeants,*  
22  
23 *fourteen officers and Specials were add-ons. Now the average shift is one sergeant and eight staff*  
24  
25 *including Specials...'*  
26  
27  
28  
29

#### 30 *Subtheme 2: Intangible value*

31  
32 The SCs expressed satisfaction from supporting the Police during the times of financial cuts and  
33  
34 felt valued for their contribution:  
35

36  
37 *'I also know those 30 or 40 hours make a real difference whether that just by supporting my*  
38  
39 *Regular colleagues so one of them isn't going out singled crewed...'*  
40  
41  
42

43 Although austerity measures in Public Services has been shown to ultimately increase emotional  
44  
45 suffering in the workforce and can lead to increased difficulties in the individual being able to carry  
46  
47 out their role (Colley, 2012), austerity may have positive consequences for the Special Constables.  
48

49 With lower numbers of RPOs the SCs gained more experience than they might have previously  
50  
51 had:  
52

53  
54 *'The more stricter the budgets have got and the fewer number of officers - the more of a difference*  
55  
56 *we make... its sort of a better side-effect if one can be found.'*  
57  
58  
59  
60

## Discussion

The main purpose of the study was to gain an understanding of how current SCs viewed their role, to understand their experiences, and to examine how best to encourage optimal future participation in this voluntary role. Interviews with the participants provided insight through the identification of four overarching themes: 'Proud to be a Special', 'Lines of division', 'Levels of Training', and 'Mind the Gap'.

It was apparent that the SCs' volunteering was directed less on an organisational level towards the Justice System or the Police Force, but on the more individualistic and 'grass roots' level of the RPOs. So, although the SCs volunteer and represent a necessary and welcome asset (Hamlyn et al., 2015) for the Police, it is the RPOs with whom the SCs work whose welfare was the focus of the volunteering effort. In conjunction, it was with the RPOs that the SCs aspired to share characteristics, experience, goals and values (Abrams and Hogg, 1988; Taylor and Hanna, 2017). This could be attributed to the future aspirations of some of the SCs in becoming RPOs. Accordingly, volunteering as a SC fulfilled egoistic, altruistic purposes, and collectivism (Batson, 1994; Fitch, 1987; Tajfel, 1979) but lacked the principalism as a potential motivator. In addition, these current SCs did not focus on the status, power or right to wear a uniform that had previously been presented as a motivation to volunteer (Gaston and Alexander, 2001). The SCs' perceptions of being undervalued and unrecognised for their contribution (Mirrlees-Black and Byron, 1994) by the RPOs was still prevalent, though the SCs demonstrated understanding of the reasons for this and took responsibility to address the issue through the quality of their work. Accordingly, to promote recruitment and decrease attrition it may be advantageous to focus on the benefit of SCs to the RPOs rather than to centre the SC role within the wider contexts of the Police Force or Criminal Justice System.

The impact of austerity had both positive and negative impacts on the SCs with frustration expressed about the lack of training and development of skills but conversely, in contrast to



1  
2 previous research (Millie, 2016), the unexpected positive consequence of enabling higher levels of  
3  
4 experience. Higher levels of experience have the additional advantage of potentially improving the  
5  
6 relationship between the SCs and the RPOs as the SCs have greater opportunity to put their skills  
7  
8 into practice and demonstrate their competency. Greater experience also affords the SCs the  
9  
10 opportunity to obtain the respect and confidence of the RPOs, and thus to promote the unique  
11  
12 person-environment fit that is supportive of positive volunteering experience (Maki and Snyder,  
13  
14 2017). This suggests that the role of a SC may, rather controversially, be supported by a limit on  
15  
16 the number of SCs recruited, and that attrition in the short-term could be welcomed to enable a  
17  
18 more positive balance between providing a crucial resource (Nesbit and Brudney, 2010), who are  
19  
20 adequately trained, and providing sufficiently high levels of demand to enable positive levels of  
21  
22 experience. In an era of austerity, a reduced, but more active cohort of SCs would be supportive of  
23  
24 value for money (Whittle, 2014), and positive engagement. That said, the current changes  
25  
26 proposed by Higgins (2018) have resulted in the concentration of SCs duties solely on  
27  
28 Neighbourhood Policing, which have the potential to segregate the SCs and RPOs even further.  
29  
30 Furthermore, there is a possibility that inadequate levels of training and the reduction in  
31  
32 opportunities for the RPOs to support the SCs and potentially decrease the number of volunteers  
33  
34 willing to apply for, or continue in the role of SC.  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42

43 The current study recognises the limitations with the small sample size of the participants.  
44  
45 However, the themes elicited through the interview analyses resonated in all the participant  
46  
47 interviews. To improve the generalisability of the findings, it is planned to conduct a further study  
48  
49 with SCs from a wider geographical area and to triangulate through the inclusion of interviews  
50  
51 with RPOs and members of the public also.  
52  
53  
54

55 In conclusion, the role of SCs can, with experience, be supportive of facilitating law  
56  
57 enforcement in England and Wales. SCs are well aware that they provide a financially utilitarian  
58  
59 role, but this is viewed merely as an adjunct as their focus is towards gaining the respect and  
60

1  
2 approval of the RPOs with whom they work rather than on an organisational or governmental  
3  
4 level. A reduction in the number of SCs may be supportive in improving skills and experience,  
5  
6 would be more cost effective in reducing attrition, and promote better working relationships  
7  
8 between SCs and Regular Police Officers.  
9  
10

## 11 12 13 14 **References**

- 15 Abrams D and Hogg MA (1988) *Social Identifications: A social psychology of intergroup relations and*  
16  
17 *group processes*. Florence: Routledge.  
18  
19
- 20 Akintola O (2011) What motivates people to volunteer? The case of volunteer AIDS caregivers in  
21  
22 faith-based organizations in KwaZulu-natal, South Africa. *Health Policy and Planning* 26: 53-  
23  
24 62. <https://doi.org/10.1093/heapol/czq019>  
25  
26
- 27 Batson CD (1981) Is empathic emotion a source of altruistic motivation? *Journal of Personality and*  
28  
29 *Social Psychology* 40: 290-302. <https://doi:10.1037/0022-3514.40.2.290>  
30  
31
- 32 Batson CD (1994) Why act for the public good? Four answers. *Personality and Social Psychology*  
33  
34 *Bulletin* 20: 603-610. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167294205016>  
35  
36
- 37 Batson CD (2011) *Altruism in humans*. New York: Oxford University Press.  
38  
39
- 40 Braun V and Clarke V (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in*  
41  
42 *Psychology* 3: 77-101. <https://doi:10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>  
43  
44
- 45 Braun V and Clarke V (2013) *Successful qualitative research*. Los Angeles: Sage.  
46  
47
- 48 Braun V, Clarke V and Terry G (2012) Thematic analysis. *APA Handbook of Research Methods in*  
49  
50 *Psychology* 2: 57-71. <https://doi.org/10.1037/13620-004>  
51  
52
- 53 Braun V and Clarke V (2013) *Successful qualitative research*. Los Angeles: Sage.  
54  
55
- 56 Bullock K (2017) Shoring up the 'home guard'? Reflections on the development and deployment of  
57  
58 police support volunteer programmes in England and Wales. *Policing and Society*, 27, 341-  
59  
60 357. doi:10.1080/10439463.2015.1058378

- 1  
2 Bullock K and Leeney D (2016). On matters of balance: An examination of the deployment,  
3  
4 motivation and management of the special constabulary. *Policing and Society: An*  
5  
6 *International Journal of Research and Policy*, 26, 483-502.  
7  
8  
9 doi:10.1080/10439463.2014.949713  
10
- 11 Bullock K and Millie A (Eds.) (2018) *The Special Constabulary: Historical Context, International*  
12  
13 *Comparisons and Contemporary Themes*. London: Routledge.  
14  
15
- 16 Casselden B, Pickard A, Walton G and McLeod J (2017) Keeping the doors open in an age of austerity?  
17  
18 Qualitative analysis of stakeholder views on volunteers in public libraries. *Journal of*  
19  
20 *Librarianship and Information Science*, 47, 187-203. doi:10.1177/0961000617743087  
21  
22
- 23 College of Policing (2017a). *FAQs (powers, time commitment, training, promotion)*. Available at:  
24  
25 <http://recruit.college.police.uk/Special/Pages/faqs.aspx>  
26  
27
- 28 College of Policing (2017b). *Initial Learning*. Available at: [www.college.police.uk/What-we-](http://www.college.police.uk/What-we-do/Learning/Curriculum/Initial-learning/Pages/Initial-learning.aspx)  
29  
30 [do/Learning/Curriculum/Initial-learning/Pages/Initial-learning.aspx](http://www.college.police.uk/What-we-do/Learning/Curriculum/Initial-learning/Pages/Initial-learning.aspx)  
31  
32
- 33 Colley H (2012) Not learning in the workplace: Austerity and the shattering of illusion in public service  
34  
35 work. *Journal of Workplace Learning* 24: 317-337.  
36  
37  
38 <https://doi.org/10.1108/13665621211239868>  
39  
40
- 41 Cook TJ and Scioli FP (1974) Public participation in the criminal justice system: Volunteers in police,  
42  
43 courts, and correctional agencies. *Policy Studies Journal* 3: 44-48.  
44  
45  
46 <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1541-0072.1974.tb01126.x>  
47
- 48 Creswell JW (2013) *Qualitative inquiry and research design*. Los Angeles: Sage.  
49
- 50 Disney R and Simpson P (2017) *Police workforce and funding in England and Wales*. Available at:  
51  
52 <https://www.ifs.org.uk/uploads/publications/bns/bn208.pdf> (accessed 20 September 2018).  
53  
54
- 55 Dobrin A (2017) Volunteer police: History, benefits, costs and current descriptions. *Security*  
56  
57 *Journal*, 30, 717-733. doi:10.1057/sj.2015.18  
58  
59  
60

- 1  
2 Dobrin A and Wolf R (2016) What is known and not known about volunteer policing in the United  
3  
4 States. *International Journal of Police Science and Management*, 18, 220-227.  
5  
6 doi:10.1177/1461355716660732  
7  
8
- 9 Fishbach A, Henderson MD and Koo M (2011) Pursuing goals with others: Group identification and  
10  
11 motivation resulting from things done versus things left undone. *Journal of Experimental*  
12  
13 *Psychology: General* 140: 520-534. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0023907>  
14  
15
- 16 Fitch RT (1987) Characteristics and motivations of college students volunteering for community  
17  
18 service. *Journal of College Student Personnel* 28: 424-431.  
19  
20
- 21 Garbarino S, Cuomo G, Chiorri C and Magnavita N (2013) Association of work-related stress with  
22  
23 mental health problems in a special police force unit. *BMJ Open*, 3(7)10.1136/bmjopen-2013-  
24  
25 002791. Available at: <http://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/3/7/e002791.abstract> (accessed 20  
26  
27 September 2018).  
28  
29
- 30  
31 Gaston K and Alexander JA (2001) Effective organisation and management of public sector volunteer  
32  
33 workers: Police special constables. *International Journal of Public Sector Management* 14: 59-  
34  
35 74. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09513550110387075>  
36  
37
- 38  
39 Gaines L and Kappeler V (2011) *Policing in America*, 7<sup>th</sup> edition. London: Elsevier.  
40
- 41 Gorden DW (1988) *Organizational citizenship behavior: The good soldier syndrome*. Lexington, MA:  
42  
43 Lexington Books.  
44  
45
- 46 Hamlyn B, Fitzpatrick A, Coleman E and Bolling K (2015) *Giving of time and money - findings from the*  
47  
48 *2012-13 community life survey*. Available at:  
49  
50 [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/314432/20](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/314432/2012-2013-giving-time-and-money-report.pdf)  
51  
52 [12-2013-giving-time-and-money-report.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/314432/2012-2013-giving-time-and-money-report.pdf) (accessed 20 September 2018).  
53  
54
- 55  
56 Henderson K (1980) Programming volunteerism for happier volunteers. *Parks and Recreation* 15: 61-  
57  
58 64.  
59  
60
- Hewson A (2013) *What can I do?* Available at:

1  
2 <http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/portals/0/documents/what%20can%20i%20do.pdf>

3  
4 Higgins A (2018) *The future of neighbourhood policing & nbsp*. Available at: [http://www.police-](http://www.police-foundation.org.uk/2017/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/TPFJ6112-Neighbourhood-Policing-Report-WEB_2.pdf)  
5  
6 [foundation.org.uk/2017/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/TPFJ6112-Neighbourhood-Policing-](http://www.police-foundation.org.uk/2017/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/TPFJ6112-Neighbourhood-Policing-Report-WEB_2.pdf)  
7  
8 [Report-WEB\\_2.pdf](http://www.police-foundation.org.uk/2017/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/TPFJ6112-Neighbourhood-Policing-Report-WEB_2.pdf)

9  
10  
11 *Home Office statistical bulletin 11/18 police workforce, England and Wales, 31 March 2018*. Available  
12  
13 at: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/.../uploads/.../hosb1118-police-workforce.pdf>

14  
15  
16 Jordan B (2012) Making sense of the 'Big Society': Social work and the moral order *Journal of Social*  
17  
18 *Work*, 12, 630–646. doi:[10.1177/1468017310394241](https://doi.org/10.1177/1468017310394241).

19  
20  
21 Kochel T and Weisburd D (2019). The impact of hot spots policing on collective efficacy: Findings from  
22  
23 a randomized field trial. *Justice Quarterly*, 36(5), 900-928.

24  
25  
26 Maki A and Snyder M (2017) Investigating similarities and differences between volunteer behaviors:  
27  
28 Development of a volunteer interest typology. *Non-profit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 46:  
29  
30 5-28. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764015619703>

31  
32  
33 Meer J, Brown AL and Williams JF (2013) *Why do people volunteer? An experimental analysis of*  
34  
35 *preferences for time donations*. National Bureau of Economic Research. 10.3386/w19066  
36  
37 Available at: <http://www.nber.org/papers/w19066> (accessed 20 September 2018).

38  
39  
40 Meister A (2014) Feeling misidentified: The consequences of internal identity asymmetries for  
41  
42 individuals at work. *The Academy of Management Review* 39: 488-512.  
43  
44 <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2013.0102>

45  
46  
47 Millie A (2016) *Volunteering within the police*  
48  
49 *experiences of special constables and police support volunteers*. Available at:  
50  
51 <https://repository.edgehill.ac.uk/8206/> (accessed 20 September 2018).

52  
53  
54  
55 Mirrlees-Black C and Byron C (1994) *Special considerations: Issues for the management and*  
56  
57 *organisation of the volunteer police*. Available at:  
58  
59 [library.college.police.uk/docs/horpu/rup088.pdf](http://library.college.police.uk/docs/horpu/rup088.pdf) (accessed 20 September 2018).  
60

- 1  
2 Nesbit R and Brudney JL (2010) At your service? Volunteering and national service in 2020. *Public*  
3  
4 *Administration Review* 70: S107-S113. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2010.02252.x>  
5  
6  
7 National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) (2018). *Policing vision 2025*. Available  
8  
9 at: <https://www.npcc.police.uk/documents/Policing%20Vision.pdf> (accessed 20 December  
10  
11 2018).  
12  
13  
14 O'Neill, M (2015) Police community support officers in England: A dramaturgical analysis. *Policing*  
15  
16 *and Society: An International Journal of Research and Policy*, 27, 21-39.  
17  
18 doi:10.1080/10439463.2015.1020805  
19  
20  
21 Pepper I (2014) Do part-time volunteer police officers aspire to be regular police officers? *The Police*  
22  
23 *Journal* 87(2): 105-113. <https://doi.org/10.1350/pojo.2014.87.2.667>  
24  
25  
26 Pepper IK and Wolf R (2015) Volunteering to serve: An international comparison of volunteer police  
27  
28 officers in a UK north east police force and a US Florida sheriff's office. *The Police Journal:*  
29  
30 *Theory, Practice and Principles* 88: 209-219. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032258X15585251>  
31  
32  
33  
34 Police and Justice Act (2006) UK: Crown copyright.  
35  
36 Prouteau L and Sardinha B (2015) Volunteering and country-level religiosity: Evidence from the  
37  
38 European Union. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit*  
39  
40 *Organizations* 26: 242-266. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-013-9431-0>  
41  
42  
43 Pratt A (2019) Police stations: Are they a thing of the past?  
44  
45 Available: [https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/home-affairs/crime/police-stations-are-they-a-thing-of-the-](https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/home-affairs/crime/police-stations-are-they-a-thing-of-the-past/)  
46  
47 [past/](https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/home-affairs/crime/police-stations-are-they-a-thing-of-the-past/).  
48  
49  
50 Qi S, Hassabis D, Sun J, Guo F, Daw N and Mobbs D (2018) How cognitive and reactive fear circuits  
51  
52 optimize escape decisions in humans. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*  
53  
54 115:3186-3191. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1712314115>  
55  
56  
57 Shye S (2010) The motivation to volunteer: A systemic quality of life theory. *Social Indicators*  
58  
59 *Research* 98:183-200. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-009-9545-3>  
60

- 1  
2 Skitka LJ, Bauman CW and Mullen E (2016) Morality and justice. In: Sabbagh C and Schmitt M (eds)  
3  
4 *Handbook of social justice theory and research*. NY: Springer Science and Business Media, pp.  
5  
6 407-423.  
7  
8  
9 Skoglund A (2006) Do not forget about your volunteers: A qualitative analysis of factors influencing  
10  
11 volunteer turnover. *Health and Social Work* 31: 217-220. Available at:  
12  
13 <http://nclc203wagner.pbworks.com/f/vol%20turnover%20qual.pdf> (accessed 20 September  
14  
15 2018).  
16  
17  
18  
19 Sterling JW (1972) *Changes in role concepts of police officers*. Washington, DC: International  
20  
21 Association of Chiefs of Police.  
22  
23  
24 Strudwick K, Jameson J and Rowe J (2017). Developing volunteers in policing: assessing the potential  
25  
26 volunteer police community police officer. *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice*, pax056.  
27  
28 [doi:10.1093/police/pax056](https://doi.org/10.1093/police/pax056)  
29  
30  
31 Tajfel H (1979) Individuals and groups in social psychology. *British Journal of Social and Clinical*  
32  
33 *Psychology* 18: 183-190. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2044-8260.1979.tb00324.x>  
34  
35  
36 Taylor LK and Hanna JR (2017) Altruism born of suffering among emerging adults in Northern Ireland.  
37  
38 *Journal of aggression, conflict and peace research* 10: 157-169.  
39  
40  
41 <https://doi.org/10.1108/JACPR-01-2017-0271>  
42  
43  
44 Thomas E and Buck K (2010) Peer mentoring in a young offenders' institution. *Widening Participation*  
45  
46 *and Lifelong Learning* 12: 67-73. <https://doi.org/10.5456/WPLL.12.3.67>  
47  
48  
49 Van Steden R and Mehlbaum S (2018). Police volunteers in the Netherlands: a study on policy and  
50  
51 practice. *Policing and Society*, 1-14. [doi:10.1080/10439463.2018.1523165](https://doi.org/10.1080/10439463.2018.1523165)  
52  
53  
54 Whittle J (2014) The rise of the special constabulary: Are forces getting value for money from their  
55  
56 voluntary officers? An empirical study in Avon and Somerset Police. *The Police Journal:*  
57  
58 *Theory, Practice and Principles* 87: 29-39. <https://doi.org/10.1350/pojo.2014.87.1.649>  
59  
60

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27  
28  
29  
30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

Wolf R, Pepper L and Dobrin A (2017). An exploratory international comparison of professional confidence in volunteer policing. *Police Journal: Theory, Practice and Principles*, 90, 91-106.  
doi:10.1177/0032258X16671966

