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What Influences Witness Satisfaction in Police Interviews? Interpersonal Qualities and Perceived Identity Bias

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Abstract

Witness interviews play an important role in criminal investigations, yet the experiences of witnesses have received comparatively limited empirical attention. This study examined how witnesses in the United Kingdom perceive the quality of police witness interviews. Seventy-four individuals who had previously been interviewed as witnesses completed a survey measuring satisfaction, interviewer professionalism, interpersonal behaviours, and perceived identity-based treatment. Quantitative analyses indicated that interviewer interest was the strongest predictor of satisfaction, outperforming demographics, professionalism, and perceived dismissal. Qualitative thematic analysis provided deeper insight into witnesses' experiences, with participants highlighting the role of empathy, clarity, and engagement while also reporting identity-related concerns that influenced their interview experiences. The findings indicate that witnesses' perceptions of interviews are closely linked to relational quality and perceived objectivity in how accounts were understood and represented. Greater attention to interpersonal engagement and sensitivity to identity-related concerns may inform efforts to enhance witness experiences and cooperation in investigative contexts.

Keywords: Witness interviewing; Police interviewing; Interviewer behaviour; Perceived fairness; Witness satisfaction

Background

Police interviews with witnesses play a pivotal role in shaping both the direction and quality of criminal investigations (Milne & Bull, 2016). Yet, existing literature has historically focused more on suspect interviewing than on the experiences of witnesses (Fisher et al., 2014). Witnesses often enter interviews with limited understanding of the process, differing expectations of their treatment, and varying levels of emotional vulnerability (Gudjonsson, 2010). Their perceptions of the interaction therefore carry important implications for account accuracy, willingness to cooperate, and trust in the wider criminal justice system (Hoogesteyn et al., 2020).

A central determinant of these perceptions is the quality of interpersonal treatment witnesses receive (Vanderhallen et al., 2011). Communication behaviours such as showing interest, listening attentively, avoiding interruptions, and allowing adequate time for recall are repeatedly identified as essential to effective interviewing (Bull & Milne, 2016; Vallano & Compo, 2015). Witnesses who feel respected, supported, and treated as credible contributors tend to perceive the interview more positively (Hope & Gabbert, 2019), whereas interactions perceived as rushed, dismissive, or assumption-driven can undermine psychological comfort and the completeness of information provided (Dando et al., 2015). Importantly, interviewer skill has also been shown to directly affect evidential outcomes, with lower levels of skill, encompassing rapport-building, use of open-ended questioning, and avoidance of assumption-driven approaches, associated with greater inaccuracies in both witnesses' verbal accounts and the written statements produced by investigators (Walsh et al., 2023).

Beyond their evidential purpose, witness interviews serve as a key point of contact between the public and the criminal justice system (Bull, 2014). For many witnesses, this may be their first, and sometimes only, direct interaction with law enforcement. As such, the

interpersonal dynamics of the interview may be associated with broader perceptions of police legitimacy (Alison & Howard, 2005). Procedural justice research shows that individuals judge legal authorities less by outcomes and more by whether they were treated fairly and respectfully (Burke & Leben, 2007; Bolger & Walters, 2019). Principles such as voice, dignity, and clear explanation are therefore fundamental to public confidence and cooperation within the criminal justice system (Hill et al., 2021). Satisfaction with procedural treatment has been identified as a key mechanism through which these principles translate into concrete outcomes, including willingness to disclose information, perceived legitimacy, and ongoing cooperation with authorities (Mazerolle et al., 2013; Skogan, 2006).

Within interviewing practice, these principles align closely with the PEACE framework, a structured model of investigative interviewing used in England and Wales, emphasising rapport building, active listening, and reducing interviewer-led assumptions (Milne et al., 2007). Although well supported, research on how witnesses themselves perceive these practices remains comparatively limited. Existing studies often focus on interviewer behaviour or cognitive processes (Dando et al., 2008; Hanway & Akehurst, 2018), with relatively few examining witnesses' subjective impressions (Vanderhallen et al., 2011). Those who do suggest that witnesses are highly attuned to interpersonal tone, frequently identifying interest, neutrality, patience, and clarity as positive factors that contribute to their overall experience of the criminal justice process (Hoogesteyn et al., 2020).

Recent scholarship has increasingly attended to interviewees' subjective experiences, including the development of tools such as the Rapport Scales for Investigative Interviews and Interrogations (RS3i) to measure rapport from the interviewee's perspective (Duke et al., 2018) and a growing body of work on rapport-building and empathy in investigative contexts (Baker-Eck et al., 2020; Brouillard et al., 2024; Gabbert et al., 2021). Much of this research, however, relies on mock-interview paradigms with relatively homogeneous samples, raising

questions about ecological validity and the extent to which findings generalise to direct witness experiences in real investigative contexts (Duke et al., 2018). Evidence from practitioner-based research further suggests variability in the application of recommended interviewing practices. For instance, Hyman Gregory et al. (2023) reported that although officers recognised the importance of open-ended questioning and rapport-building, training was uneven and implementation inconsistent, indicating that witnesses may encounter diverse interviewing approaches in practice.

Despite this recognition, several aspects of witness experience remain underexplored (Hope et al., 2022). Little is known about how witnesses from different ethnic backgrounds perceive interviewing practices, despite evidence that minority groups often report lower trust and heightened sensitivity to assumptions in police encounters (Minhas & Walsh, 2018; Murray et al., 2021). The RS3i's Cultural Similarity subscale, developed to capture interviewee perceptions of shared cultural understanding, represents one of the few attempts to operationalise this dimension within investigative interviewing research (Duke et al., 2018). The influence of crime type is similarly unclear: some research suggests that serious or violent offences prompt more sensitive interviewing (Campbell, 2008), whereas other work finds minimal variation across offence categories (Kebbell & Milne, 1998). Witness interviews also vary in structure, ranging from brief enquiries to full PEACE-based or Cognitive Interview procedures (Fisher & Geiselman, 2010). Research indicates considerable inconsistency in how these formats are applied (Clarke & Milne, 2001; Dando & Milne, 2009; Fisher & Geiselman, 2010). Few studies, however, have examined how such variation shapes witnesses' perceptions. Finally, although satisfaction is central in related fields such as victim engagement and procedural justice (Skogan, 2006), it has rarely been treated as a primary outcome in witness interviewing (Kebbell & Johnson, 2000).

In practice, recommended interviewing frameworks such as PEACE and the Cognitive Interview are not always applied consistently. Time pressures, operational demands, and limited training can lead officers to truncate interviews or rely on more directive, assumption driven approaches (Clarke & Milne, 2001; Griffiths & Milne, 2013; Dando et al., 2009; Powell et al., 2005; Schreiber Compo et al., 2012; Walsh & Bull, 2011). Another under-researched dimension is ethnicity, cultural background and language. Minority communities often report lower trust and greater perceived stereotyping within criminal justice contexts (Bradford, 2014; Minhas, 2024; Minhas et al., 2017a), which may shape how interviewer behaviour is interpreted (Minhas & Walsh, 2018; Minhas et al., 2017b). Beyond ethnicity alone, extra-legal factors such as accent status, race, and age have been shown to influence how eyewitnesses are perceived. For example, experimental research based on a UK online survey demonstrates that witnesses with higher-status accents are perceived more favourably than those with lower-status accents, and that racialised perceptions interact with age in complex ways (e.g. younger Black witnesses being rated more favourably than older Black witnesses), alongside an overall tendency for white witnesses to receive more positive evaluations (Frumkin & Stone, 2020). Cultural norms, communication style, accent, and prior experiences with law enforcement may therefore all influence witness comfort, yet empirical research on these language-mediated dynamics within witness interviewing remains scarce (Cantone et al., 2019; Hope et al., 2022). This represents a notable gap in the present evidence base.

Similarly, crime type may shape both the emotional context of the interview, and the expectations witnesses bring. Witnesses to violent or traumatic offences may require more supportive interviewing (Ellison & Munro, 2017; Campbell, 2008), whereas those involved in property or traffic incidents may anticipate more procedural interactions (Alison & Howard, 2005). Although some studies suggest that seriousness prompts more careful interviewing

(Korkman et al., 2006), others find little difference across offence categories (Clarke & Milne, 2001; Kebbell & Milne, 1998). Yet the extent to which crime type meaningfully shapes witness experience remains unclear.

Despite growing recognition that witnesses bring diverse experiences and vulnerabilities to the interview process, relatively little research has examined how they perceive the interview process (Schreiber Compo et al., 2012). Much of the literature continues to prioritise interviewing technique or memory accuracy (Fisher & Geiselman, 2010; Hope et al., 2011), and while rapport and empathy have emerged as substantial subfields in their own right (Brouillard et al., 2024; Ericsson et al., 2025; Gabbert et al., 2021), less attention has been paid to interviewees' perceptions of the overall interview experience (Myklebust & Alison, 2000; Walsh & Bull, 2012). As a result, it remains unclear which interpersonal and procedural elements matter most, or how these impressions vary across demographic or contextual factors (Dando & Milne, 2009; Hope et al., 2022; Sharp & Atherton, 2007).

Given these gaps, examining witnesses' holistic perceptions of police interviews, including interpersonal quality, rapport, interviewer interest, and neutrality, is essential (Hope & Gabbert, 2019; Milne & Bull, 2016; Vallano & Schreiber Compo, 2015). Satisfaction, although rarely examined in this context (Kebbell & Johnson, 2000), may be critical for cooperation, perceived legitimacy, and the completeness of witness accounts (Bolger & Walters, 2019; Mazerolle et al., 2013; Sunshine & Tyler, 2003). Understanding how satisfaction is formed is, therefore, key to improving interviewing practice. Despite this theoretical importance, little is known about how witnesses form overall evaluations of interview satisfaction, or which interpersonal and procedural factors most strongly shape these global impressions (Fisher et al., 2014; Vallano & Schreiber Compo, 2015). To examine this gap, the present study draws on survey data from adults in the UK who were interviewed

as witnesses, providing an empirical examination of how satisfaction with the interview is constructed and which aspects of interviewer behaviour and procedure are most influential.

Methods

Sample

The sample comprised 74 adults residing in the UK who had previously been interviewed by the police as witnesses. Recruitment was intentionally targeted at individuals with direct experience of police witness interviewing, as the research question required evaluations grounded in lived interview encounters. Individuals with such experience constitute a specific and relatively low base-rate population, and ethical and procedural safeguards restrict direct recruitment through police channels. Consequently, the sample size reflects an appropriate balance between access and relevance, capturing a group representative of the population of interest, namely individuals who have been interviewed by the police as witnesses.

Participants were recruited through a combination of social media platforms, community-based online groups, victim-support forums, and charitable organisations that assist crime victims and survivors. Recruitment materials specifically invited adults who had previously participated in a police witness interview. This approach enabled access to a diverse pool of individuals with genuine witness experience, while avoiding police-mediated contact with witnesses. Eligibility criteria required participants to be aged 18 or above, proficient in English, and residing in the UK. All participants confirmed that they had been interviewed by police as a witness to a crime or incident. The survey was designed to take approximately 15–20 minutes to complete. In total, 116 individuals initially completed the survey. Following data screening, 42 responses were excluded due to missing or incomplete data on key outcome measures, resulting in a final analytic sample of 74 participants.

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Participants ranged in age from 18 to 65 years ($M = 37.8$, $SD = 14.76$), reflecting a broad distribution across adult life stages. In terms of gender, just over half identified as female (52.7%, $n = 39$), 43.2% identified as male ($n = 32$), one participant identified as non-binary/third gender (1.4%), and two participants (2.7%) preferred not to disclose their gender. The sample also included individuals from diverse ethnic backgrounds: 62.2% identified as White ($n = 46$), 13.5% as Black ($n = 10$), 10.8% as Asian ($n = 8$), and 4.1% as Mixed ethnicity ($n = 3$), with a further 9.5% selecting “Other” or an uncategorised option ($n = 7$). Although the sample included participants from a range of ethnic backgrounds, it was skewed towards White participants. As shown in Table 1, participants reported being interviewed in connection with a wide variety of incident types.

Table 1. Distribution of Incident Types Reported by Participants

Type of Crime	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Violent crime (e.g., assault, robbery, domestic violence)	36	48.6
Property crime (e.g., burglary, theft, vandalism)	11	14.9
Traffic incident (e.g., hit-and-run, reckless driving)	9	12.2
Hate crime (e.g., motivated by race, religion, gender)	9	12.2
Drug-related crime (e.g., possession, trafficking)	3	4.1
Cybercrime (e.g., online fraud, hacking, identity theft)	2	2.7
Other	4	5.4

Ethical approval was obtained from the authors’ institution prior to data collection. Participants completed an online survey and provided informed consent before participation. Data collection took place over eight weeks, and all responses were anonymised.

Instrumentation

The questionnaire was designed to capture a broad and detailed account of participants' witness interview experiences. It comprised four main sections. The first section collected demographic and background information, including age, gender, and ethnicity. These variables were included to explore whether demographic differences were associated with variations in perceptions of police interviewing.

The second section focused on participants' witness interviewing experiences. Here, respondents described the nature of the incident they witnessed, how they became involved in the interview, whether it was their first time acting as a witness, and their relationship to the event. This information provided important contextual detail and enabled comparisons across different types of incidents.

The third section assessed perceptions of interview quality and participants' ratings of interviewer professionalism. This section consisted of multiple closed-ended items examining key aspects of the witness–officer interaction, including satisfaction, interviewer engagement, confidence, fairness, comfort, and perceived bias. Response formats varied depending on the construct being measured, and all scale anchors were explicitly labelled. The questionnaire included a combination of 4-point and 5-point response scales, as well as categorical response formats. This variation was intentional and reflected the conceptual nature of the constructs assessed. Evaluative perceptions such as satisfaction, fairness, and comfort were measured using 5-point scales to capture gradations in experience, whereas confidence and perceived interviewer engagement were assessed using 4-point scales to encourage more definitive responses and reduce central tendency bias (Presser et al., 2004). Items assessing perceived influence (e.g., race, gender, age) used categorical response options (e.g., “Yes, positively,” “Yes, negatively,” “No impact,” “Not sure”) to capture directional interpretations rather than degree-based ratings.

The grouping of items was theoretically driven and specified a priori, based on established constructs in the investigative interviewing literature (Brimbal et al., 2024; Gudjonsson, 2003; Hyman Gregory et al., 2023; Minhas, 2024; Milne & Bull, 2025; Walsh & Bull, 2012). Specifically, items were designed to capture distinct domains of witness experience, including satisfaction, confidence, perceived fairness, and perceived bias, rather than to identify latent structures through data-driven methods. Accordingly, the measures were organised on conceptual grounds consistent with the study's applied aim.

Overall satisfaction with the interview process was measured using a 5-point scale ranging from "Extremely dissatisfied" to "Extremely satisfied" in response to the item: *"How satisfied were you with the overall interview process?"* Perceived interviewer engagement was assessed using the item: *"How much did you feel the interviewer was interested in the information you provided?"* with response options ranging from "Not at all interested" to "Extremely interested (fully engaged and attentive)."

Participants' confidence was measured using two items: *"How confident were you in the accuracy of your statement?"* and *"How confident are you that the interviewer accurately understood and represented your perspective?"* with response options ranging from "Not confident at all" to "Completely confident." Perceived fairness of questioning was assessed using the item: *"How fair did you feel the questioning was?"*, with responses ranging from "Unfair" to "Fair." Comfort during the interview was measured using the item: *"How comfortable did you feel during the interview?"*, with response options ranging from "Extremely uncomfortable" to "Extremely comfortable." Perceived interviewer bias was assessed using the item: *"How often did you feel the interviewer dismissed or ignored information that contradicted their assumptions?"* with responses ranging from "Never" to "Always." Although measured as separate questionnaire items, overall satisfaction with the interview process and comfort during the interview were averaged to form the Interview

Satisfaction Scale (ISS), which was used as the dependent variable in all quantitative analyses.

Participants were also asked to evaluate whether interviewer characteristics influenced their experience. These items included: *“Did you feel that the interviewer’s race or ethnicity influenced your experience during the interview?”*, *“Did you feel that the interviewer’s gender influenced your experience?”* and *“Did you feel that the interviewer’s age influenced your experience?”* with categorical response options including “Yes, positively,” “Yes, negatively,” “No impact,” and “Not sure.” In addition, participants were asked to reflect on whether their own identity influenced their treatment, using items such as: *“Do you believe that your own race affected the way you were treated during the interview?”*, alongside equivalent items for gender and age.

Finally, the questionnaire included an open-ended section inviting participants to describe specific aspects of their experience. Participants were asked to elaborate through prompts such as: *“Describe any aspects of the interview process that you found particularly effective or ineffective,”* *“Describe any specific instances where you felt supported or unsupported,”* and *“Do you have any suggestions for improving the fairness and effectiveness of police interviews?”* These qualitative responses provided detailed contextual accounts of communication and interpersonal dynamics, allowing participants to highlight issues not captured in fixed-response items. A full version of the survey instrument, including all item wording and response formats, is provided in the supplementary materials to enhance transparency and replicability.

It is important to note that the data collected in this study reflect participants’ subjective perceptions of their interview experiences and do not constitute an objective assessment of interviewer behaviour or interviewing practices. For clarity, Table 2 provides

an overview of study variables, including their measurement, scale structure, and direction of scoring.

Table 2. Overview of Study Variables, Measurement, and Scale Properties

Variable	Description	Items	Scale (Range & Anchors)	Direction
Interview Satisfaction Scale (ISS)	Composite measure of overall interview experience	2 items: (i) satisfaction with interview, (ii) comfort during interview	1–5 scale: <i>Extremely dissatisfied</i> - <i>Extremely satisfied</i> (satisfaction); <i>Extremely uncomfortable</i> - <i>Extremely comfortable</i> (comfort)	Higher = more positive
Interviewer Professionalism and Competence (IPCS)	Perceived professionalism and competence of interviewer	3 items: (i) perceived fairness of questioning, (ii) accuracy of understanding, (iii) accuracy of representation	1–4 scale: <i>Unfair</i> - <i>Fair</i> (fairness); <i>Not confident</i> - <i>Completely confident</i> (accuracy items)	Higher = more positive
Interviewer Interest	Perceived interviewer engagement with witness information	1 item: perceived interest in information provided	1–4 scale: <i>Extremely interested</i> - <i>Not at all interested</i>	Higher = less interest
Perceived Dismissal	Extent to which interviewer ignored or dismissed contradictory information	1 item: dismissal of contradictory information	1–4 scale: <i>Never</i> - <i>Always</i>	Higher = more dismissal
Identity Bias	Perceived influence of participant's own identity (age, gender, race) on treatment	Composite of 3 items (own age, gender, race influence)	Categorical: <i>Yes (positively)</i> , <i>Yes (negatively)</i> , <i>No impact</i> , <i>Not sure</i> (recoded for analysis)	Higher = greater perceived bias
Interviewer Race Bias	Perceived influence of interviewer's race/ethnicity on interaction	1 item	Categorical: <i>Yes (positively)</i> , <i>Yes (negatively)</i> , <i>No impact</i> , <i>Not sure</i> (recoded for analysis)	Higher = greater perceived bias

Scale Construction and Reliability

To prepare variables for analysis, multi-item measures were assessed for internal reliability.

The Interview Satisfaction Scale (ISS) comprised two items assessing (i) satisfaction with the interview and (ii) comfort during the interview. The scale demonstrated acceptable internal consistency ($\alpha = .77$), and the items were averaged to create a composite satisfaction score.

The Interviewer Professionalism and Competence Scale (IPCS) comprised three items assessing (i) perceived fairness of questioning, (ii) confidence that the interviewer understood the witness's perspective, and (iii) confidence that the witness's account was accurately represented. The IPCS demonstrated good internal reliability ($\alpha = .85$), and items were

combined to form a composite score. In addition, three single-item indicators were included to assess (i) perceived interviewer interest, (ii) perceived dismissal of information that contradicted the interviewer's assumptions, and (iii) perceived identity-related bias (i.e., whether the witness's age, gender, or race influenced how they were treated during the interview).

Data Analysis

Quantitative analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 30). Descriptive statistics (means, frequencies, standard deviations) were used to summarise demographic variables and key outcome measures. Inferential analyses explored associations between participant demographics (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity) and perceptions of interview quality. Composite variables were created by combining multiple items representing the same theoretically defined constructs (e.g., satisfaction, confidence, perceived fairness, and perceived bias). Consistent with established practice, such multi-item Likert scales were treated as approximating interval-level measurement when aggregated (Norman, 2010). On this basis, linear regression analyses were conducted to examine associations between variables. A sensitivity power analysis was conducted for the final hierarchical regression model. Although the overall sample comprised 74 participants, the regression analyses were based on 73 complete cases, as one participant had missing data on a variable included in the regression models. With 73 complete cases, nine predictors, $\alpha = .05$, and 80% power, the analysis was capable of detecting an overall effect of approximately $f^2 = .24$. These analyses were exploratory, consistent with the study's aim of identifying preliminary patterns in witness perceptions. During data preparation, positively worded items were recoded where necessary to ensure a consistent coding framework across variables prior to scale construction and analysis. Accordingly, the interviewer interest item was recoded so that lower scores

represented greater perceived interviewer interest, consistent with the analyses reported below.

Qualitative data from the open-ended responses were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis following the six-phase approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The initial coding was conducted by the first author, who familiarised themselves with the data through repeated reading before generating inductive codes. To deepen analytic reflection, a subset of the data was reviewed by the second author, and emerging interpretations were discussed collaboratively throughout the analytic process. These discussions supported reflexive engagement with the data and refinement of the developing themes. Codes captured meaningful features of the data relating to interpersonal experiences, communication quality, and perceptions of identity-based treatment. These codes were then grouped into potential themes, which were reviewed, refined, and defined to ensure coherence and clarity. The analytic process was iterative and data-driven, with themes derived from the content of participants' accounts rather than imposed a priori. This approach provided a rich, contextual understanding of the interpersonal dynamics of police witness interviews. The survey instrument and full dataset (including both raw and cleaned versions) are available on the Open Science Framework (OSF).

https://osf.io/bryq3/overview?view_only=20c6ad5c3dfc4e26b40351f1ec7c9695

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive analyses were conducted to summarise the core study variables. The Interview Satisfaction Scale (ISS) showed a mean score ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 1.45$), reflecting variability in witnesses' overall satisfaction with the interview. Witnesses' ratings of the interviewer's

professionalism and competence (IPCS) showed a mean score of 2.08. The individual items assessing accuracy, understanding, and fairness had mean values ranging from 1.91 to 2.27. Turning to interpersonal behaviour, the mean score for interviewer interest was 2.32 (SD = .92), with lower scores reflecting higher perceived interviewer interest. Perceived dismissal had a mean score of 2.14 (SD = .89), indicating that participants did not frequently report feeling ignored during the interview.

Correlational Analyses

Bivariate correlations examined associations among the main study variables. Interview Satisfaction was significantly associated with interviewer interest ($r = -.47, p < .001$), indicating that higher perceived interviewer interest was associated with higher satisfaction. Interview Satisfaction was also significantly associated with perceived fairness of questioning ($r = -.24, p = .043$). The items comprising the Interviewer Professionalism and Competence Scale (IPCS) (accuracy, understanding, and fairness) were strongly intercorrelated ($r_s = .57-.75$, all $ps < .001$), supporting their aggregation into the IPCS. Perceived dismissal was associated with lower IPCS scores ($r_s = .47-.52$, all $ps < .001$), indicating that feeling dismissed was linked to less favourable views of interviewer competence and understanding.

Preliminary Inspection of Bias-Perception Items

Before entering bias-related variables into the regression, correlations among the six bias-perception items, which asked witnesses whether the interviewer's race, gender, or age, and whether their own race, gender, or age, influenced their interview experience, were examined. Items reflecting witnesses' perceptions that their own age, gender, or race shaped their treatment were moderately intercorrelated ($r_s = .25-.46$, all $ps < .01$). In contrast, the item assessing whether the interviewer's race influenced the interaction showed weaker associations with the remaining items. Given the modest sample size and the over-

representation of White participants, these analyses were not intended to test group-level differences by ethnicity but rather to capture experiences of perceived bias within the sample as a whole. These associations supported the decision to enter two conceptually distinct predictors into the regression analyses: (i) Identity Bias (own age, gender, race); and (ii) Interviewer Race Bias. This approach avoids over-factoring with a modest sample while retaining theoretically meaningful constructs.

Hierarchical Regression Analyses

The hierarchical regression examined whether participants' perceptions of interpersonal interview behaviours predicted interview satisfaction beyond demographic characteristics. Predictors were entered in three sequential steps: (i) demographic controls (Model 1); (ii) interpersonal interview variables (Model 2); and (iii) bias-related perceptions (Model 3).

Model 1: Demographic Controls

The first step of the hierarchical regression examined whether demographic factors predicted interview satisfaction. As shown in Table 3, Model 1, which included age, gender, ethnicity, and type of crime witnessed, was not statistically significant, $F(4, 68) = 0.21$, $p = .932$, and accounted for only 1.2% of the variance in interview satisfaction ($R^2 = .012$). Gender and ethnicity were dummy coded for inclusion in the regression analyses; due to small cell sizes, ethnicity was collapsed into a binary variable (White vs minoritised) to ensure model stability. None of the individual demographic variables was significant predictors (all $ps > .41$). These findings suggest that, within this sample, demographic characteristics were not significantly associated with variation in reported interview satisfaction. However, given the modest sample size and the over-representation of White participants, these null effects should be interpreted cautiously and do not preclude the possibility of demographic or racialised differences in larger or more diverse samples.

Table 3: Regression coefficients for Model 1 predicting interview satisfaction from demographic variables.

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p
Constant	3.23	0.66	—	4.88	< .001
Age	0.00	0.01	.002	0.02	.987
Gender	0.12	0.26	.056	0.46	.649
Ethnicity	0.00	0.10	.000	−0.00	.998
Crime Type	−0.07	0.08	−.100	−0.82	.415

Model Summary: $R = .111$, $R^2 = .012$, *Adjusted* $R^2 = -.046$; $F(4, 68) = 0.21$, $p = .932$

Model 2: Interpersonal Predictors

Model 2 examined whether interpersonal interview behaviours explained additional variance in satisfaction beyond demographics. Adding IPCS, interviewer interest, and perceived dismissal led to a significant improvement in model fit ($\Delta R^2 = .232$, $\Delta F(3, 65) = 6.64$, $p < .001$), increasing the explained variance to $R^2 = .244$ (*Adjusted* $R^2 = .163$). The overall model remained significant, $F(7, 65) = 2.998$, $p = .009$ (see Table 4). Among the interpersonal predictors, interviewer interest was the only significant independent predictor of satisfaction, $\beta = -.357$, $t = -3.13$, $p = .003$. The negative coefficient reflects the coding of the interest variable, such that lower scores (indicating greater interviewer engagement) were associated with higher satisfaction. Neither participants' ratings of interviewer professionalism ($\beta = -.110$, $p = .422$) nor perceived dismissal ($\beta = -.190$, $p = .171$) uniquely predicted satisfaction once interest was included.

Table 4: Regression Coefficients for Model 2, including Perceived Interviewer Behaviour Variables.

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p
Constant	5.72	0.82	—	6.98	< .001

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p
Age	−0.00	0.01	−.040	−0.36	.720
Gender	−0.05	0.23	−.025	−0.23	.822
Ethnicity	−0.04	0.09	−.049	−0.44	.662
Crime Type	−0.05	0.07	−.071	−0.64	.523
IPCS	−0.16	0.19	−.110	−0.81	.422
Perceived Dismissal	−0.27	0.19	−.190	−1.38	.171
Interviewer Interest	−0.47	0.15	−.357	−3.13	.003

Model Summary: $R = .494$, $R^2 = .244$, *Adjusted* $R^2 = .163$; $\Delta R^2 = .232$, $\Delta F(3, 65) = 6.64$, $p < .001$; $F(7, 65) = 2.998$, $p = .009$

Model 3: Adding Bias-Related Predictors

In the final step of the hierarchical regression, two bias-related variables were added: Identity Bias, representing witnesses' perceptions that their own age, gender, or race influenced their treatment, and Interviewer Race Bias, indicating whether the interviewer's race or ethnicity was perceived to affect the interaction. As shown in Table 5, the inclusion of these predictors produced a significant improvement in model fit, $\Delta R^2 = .076$, $\Delta F(2, 63) = 3.60$, $p = .035$, increasing the total explained variance to $R^2 = .320$ (*Adjusted* $R^2 = .223$). The overall model remained significant, $F(9, 63) = 3.297$, $p = .002$. Consistent with the earlier models, interviewer interest continued to be the strongest predictor of interview satisfaction, $\beta = -.366$, $p = .002$, demonstrating that perceived attentiveness remained central to witnesses' evaluations even after accounting for demographic, interpersonal, and bias-related factors.

Importantly, Identity Bias emerged as an independent predictor, $\beta = .233$, $p = .036$, indicating that perceptions of identity-related influence were significantly associated with interview satisfaction, independent of perceived interviewer behaviour. In contrast, Interviewer Race Bias was not a significant predictor, $\beta = .135$, $p = .239$, suggesting that although some witnesses perceived the interviewer's racial or ethnic background as

influential, these perceptions did not independently shape interview satisfaction once other variables were considered. It is important to acknowledge that the lack of a significant effect for Interviewer Race Bias may reflect limited statistical power associated with the overrepresentation of White participants, rather than the absence of race-related processes in witness perceptions. These findings suggest that witnesses' perceptions of the interview were associated with both perceived interview engagement and perceptions of being personally respected and treated equitably.

Table 5: Hierarchical Regression Predicting Interview Satisfaction (Model 3)

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p
Interviewer Interest	-.482	.146	-.366	-3.29	.002 **
IPCS	-.085	.190	-.060	-0.45	.653
Perceived Dismissal	-.233	.186	-.166	-1.25	.216
Identity Bias	.552	.257	.233	2.15	.036 *
Interviewer Race Bias	.227	.191	.135	1.19	.239

Model statistics: $R^2 = .320$; Adjusted $R^2 = .223$; ΔR^2 from Model 2 = .076, $p = .035^$; $F(9, 63) = 3.297$, $p = .002$ [$p < .05$ (*), $p < .01$ (**)]*

Qualitative Findings

A thematic analysis of the 74 open-ended responses identified two central themes that provided contextual insight into participants' interview experiences, particularly regarding interviewer interest and identity-related concerns.

Interviewer Interest and Communication Quality

The most commonly reported theme concerned the interpersonal quality of the interview, specifically whether officers appeared interested, empathetic, and communicated clearly (reported by 51 witnesses; 69%). Witnesses who described interviewers as supportive and attentive generally reported greater comfort and satisfaction.

Many participants highlighted positive interpersonal conduct. For example, one witness noted that *“they tried to make me feel comfortable and heard,”* while another stated that *“the officer was empathetic to my answers and assured they would look into it.”* A further participant reported feeling supported because *“the officer was clear and respectful.”*

In contrast, others described interviewers who appeared rushed, disengaged, or uninterested. One witness felt *“the officer seemed not very interested... it was just a traffic incident to him,”* while another said, *“they did not seem interested in what I had to say.”* Some perceived the process as superficial, *“more a tick-box exercise,”* and others expressed a desire for respectful treatment: *“treat me like a witness, not a suspect.”*

Poor communication was often linked to feeling unsupported or dismissed. One participant explained feeling *“unsupported, as at first they didn’t believe me,”* while another described communication that *“didn’t make me feel completely comfortable.”* Practical communication issues were also mentioned, such as poor pacing, *“the officer could have spoken a bit slower for better understanding,”* and inappropriate timing, for example, being contacted *“in the middle of teaching a class”* with no explanation. These accounts suggest that witnesses’ experiences were closely associated with perceived interpersonal qualities such as interest, empathy, and clarity, often more so than procedural aspects of the interview.

Identity-Related Bias Concerns

Twenty-six per cent of participants (n = 19) reported that aspects of their identity, most notably age, gender, and race, influenced how they perceived their treatment during the interview. Several women described feeling discomfort or heightened vulnerability in interactions with male officers, particularly in sensitive cases. For example, one participant reported, *“being a woman interviewed by two male officers made me very uncomfortable,”* while another stated, *“there should have been two female officers... it was a domestic*

violence case.” Others described feeling judged by male officers, for example, *“he should have listened and not judged as a male officer.”*

Race-related concerns were also raised. One witness explained, *“you can feel a little discrimination from officers... it makes you uncomfortable,”* while another felt that *“my race had a negative impact on the interviewer’s interest.”* In one contrasting case, a witness felt their race improved attentiveness: *“I just feel the interviewer gave me a listening ear because of my race.”* Age-based concerns were similarly evident. Some participants felt their views were discounted due to age differences, such as *“I was dismissed because I was younger than the officer.”* These accounts suggest that identity-based perceptions could shape how witnesses understood their credibility, comfort, and sense of impartiality during the interview.

Discussion

The present study examined how witnesses in the UK perceive the police interview experience, with particular attention to the interpersonal and identity-related factors that influence overall satisfaction. Although witnesses play an important role in the investigative process, research has traditionally focused on suspect interviewing, memory accuracy, and interviewing technique rather than on witnesses’ lived experiences. The present study sought to address this imbalance by combining quantitative and qualitative evidence from individuals who had been interviewed as witnesses. The results suggest that perceived interviewer interest was an important predictor of interview satisfaction.

Across the analyses, interviewer interest was consistently associated with interview satisfaction, even after accounting for demographic variables, professionalism, communication quality, and bias-related perceptions. Witnesses who felt the interviewer listened attentively, appeared engaged, and demonstrated genuine interest reported higher satisfaction. These findings are consistent with established interviewing frameworks such as

the PEACE model, which emphasise rapport building, active listening, and open-mindedness (Milne & Bull, 2016). They also reflect procedural justice research indicating that people perceive encounters with authority figures primarily through the interpersonal quality of treatment rather than technical competence or outcomes (Burke & Leben, 2007; Sunshine & Tyler, 2003). In the context of witness interviewing, perceived interest may signal respect, legitimacy, and the value placed on their contribution.

The qualitative findings complement these findings by showing how interviewer engagement is experienced and interpreted in practice. Positive experiences were characterised by participants describing officers as “empathetic”, “supportive”, “clear”, and “listening carefully”. In contrast, negative experiences were characterised by perceptions of officers as “disinterested”, “rushed”, or focused on “a tick-box exercise”. These patterns are consistent with qualitative and survey-based research on investigative interviewing, which highlights the central role of empathy, attentiveness, and relational engagement in shaping interview outcomes and perceptions (e.g., Baker-Eck et al., 2020; Magnusson et al., 2021; Sivasubramaniam & Goodman-Delahunty, 2021). From the interviewee's perspective, these findings also align with earlier work demonstrating that perceptions of interviewer behaviour strongly influence cooperation, disclosure, and overall evaluations of the interview process (e.g., Holmberg & Christianson, 2002).

Identity-related bias perceptions were also significantly associated with interview satisfaction, independent of perceived interviewer professionalism or communication style. The qualitative data shed light on how participants described these identity-related concerns. Some witnesses described feeling judged or dismissed because of their gender, particularly women interviewed by male officers in domestic abuse contexts. Others noted subtle racial cues that affected their sense of fairness or comfort. Age-related concerns also surfaced, with younger witnesses feeling ignored during the interview. Although these accounts do not alter

the quantitative conclusions, they help contextualise why identity-related perceptions may have influenced satisfaction, particularly through participants' feelings of emotional safety, perceived legitimacy, and trust in the interviewer.

Interestingly, perceptions relating to the interviewer's race or ethnicity were not independently associated with interview satisfaction. One interpretation is that witnesses may be more sensitive to how their own identity is treated within the interaction than to the characteristics of the interviewer themselves. This pattern is consistent with procedural justice research, which emphasises that perceptions of fairness are grounded in personal experiences of respect, dignity, and inclusion rather than solely in the attributes of authority figures (Bolger & Walters, 2019). It also supports the quantitative distinction between identity-based concerns directed at the self and perceptions focused on the interviewer. However, this finding should be interpreted cautiously given the study's sample characteristics. . It is therefore possible that the non-significant effect for interviewer race reflects sample limitations rather than indicating an absence of race-related dynamics in witness experiences.

It may also reflect variability in how different officers apply PEACE or Cognitive Interview principles in practice. For example, differences in the extent to which officers were perceived to engage in active listening, allow witnesses to speak without interruption, or demonstrate empathy may shape whether witnesses felt heard, respected, and taken seriously. Such variation in perceived interpersonal delivery may, in turn, contribute to differences in how identity-related concerns are experienced across interviews (Clarke & Milne, 2001; Griffiths & Milne, 2013; Walsh & Bull, 2011).

Finally, this study contributes to the underdeveloped literature on interview satisfaction. Although satisfaction is well explored in research on victim engagement and

police–public encounters (Skogan, 2006; Mazerolle et al., 2013), it has rarely been treated as a central construct in witness interviewing (Kebbell & Johnson, 2000). The present findings suggest that satisfaction is not a peripheral outcome; rather, it appears to reflect whether witnesses felt respected, understood, and supported. Higher levels of interview satisfaction may enhance witness cooperation in the interviewing process and may increase witnesses' willingness to provide more detailed accounts (Hope & Gabbert, 2019; Vallano & Compo, 2015). For police forces seeking to improve investigative outcomes and public confidence, satisfaction offers a valuable and underused metric for evaluating and strengthening interviewing practice.

Several strengths of the study warrant mention. First, it draws on a hard-to-reach population, adults who had directly participated in police witness interviews, providing ecologically valid insights that are rarely available in controlled laboratory studies. Additionally, the combination of regression modelling and thematic analysis offers a richer understanding of the interview experience than either method alone. The combination of quantitative and qualitative findings provides complementary perspectives on witnesses' experiences, particularly regarding interviewer interest and identity-related concerns.

However, several limitations should be acknowledged. The cross-sectional design limits causal interpretations: it is not possible to determine whether interviewer interest increases satisfaction, or whether satisfied witnesses perceive the interviewer as more interested. Longitudinal or observational research would help clarify these relationships. The modest sample size, while meaningful for a real-witness study, limits the power to detect small effects, particularly in demographic comparisons. The sample was recruited through social media networks, community forums, and victim-support organisations, which may introduce self-selection bias. Witnesses who chose to participate may differ systematically from those who did not; therefore, the findings should be interpreted with caution. The

reliance on self-report measures means the findings are based on participants' retrospective interpretations, which may be associated with memory, emotion, and the personal meaning attached to the incident. Additionally, participants' interviews likely varied in structure, duration, and purpose, meaning that some may have been full PEACE-based interviews while others were brief field enquiries; such variation could influence expectations and evaluations. Future research would benefit from combining self-reported perceptions with observational or recorded interview data. In addition, although the qualitative analysis followed a reflexive and collaborative process, the themes remain interpretive and may have been influenced by researcher perspectives, which is an inherent feature of reflexive thematic analysis.

Future research should examine witness experiences in larger and more diverse samples, with particular attention to ethnic minority groups, younger witnesses, and individuals involved in sensitive or traumatic incidents. There is also value in observational research that examines how interviewer behaviours unfold in real time and how witnesses respond. Studies could test whether brief interviewer training interventions targeting active listening and empathy increase satisfaction and recall accuracy. Additionally, integrating physiological or behavioural measures may help triangulate self-reported comfort or stress.

In conclusion, this study indicates that witnesses' satisfaction with police interviews is closely associated with how they perceived the interpersonal quality of the interaction and whether they felt their identity was treated fairly and respectfully. Perceived interviewer interest emerged as a particularly salient correlate of interview satisfaction, remaining significant beyond demographic and other perceived interpersonal factors. Although the findings are exploratory and based on retrospective self-reports, they highlight the potential relevance of interpersonal engagement and sensitivity to identity-related concerns for informing police training and reflective interviewing practice.

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