Introduction

Emotional intelligence (EI) has long been considered an essential tool in leadership excellence in the business world and more recently, in the criminal justice sector. With its roots embedded in what Faltas (2016, p.1) describes as a 'contextual construction' within the realm of 19th Century philosophy, EI has been conceptualised in the work of Salovey and Mayer's (1990) 'ability model', Petrides and Furnham's 'trait' (2001) model and Bar-On's (2006) 'mixed emotional–social' intelligence (ESI) model. However, EI is most notably understood from Goleman's (1998) mixed model of 'skills and competences' based on five domains. Indeed, the latter, often referred to as the 'big five' is that which gained rapid popularity within the business world in the publication *'What Makes a Leader?'* (Goleman, 2004) where he set out the softer skills of human interaction and emotional understanding, that he proposed distinguish great leaders from good.

The 'big five' - self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills - form a domain framework of skills and competences that can enhance any type of work-related performance. When utilised in management, however, working within this framework produces extraordinarily motivated and skilled leaders who nurture not just their own success, but the success of others and the organisation (Goleman *et al*, 2003). What these leadership styles embrace is an awareness and regulatory strategy of self and others' emotions, which produces responsible and positive interactions (Druskat et al, 2005). Possessing high levels of EI is therefore believed to enhance an individual's ability to deal with the stress of demanding leadership roles, having a positive impact on their motivation and optimism (Gardner and Stough, 2002). Taking an EI approach to policing is therefore a prerequisite when dealing with the reiteration of call outs and repeat victimisation, such as those that are characteristic of Domestic Abuse (DA) where all involved are in a heightened emotional state. Response officers are at the forefront of this element of policing practice, leaders of the scene and making

those important decisions about risk that require just such skills when working with victims of DA at a time when they are most vulnerable.

Policing Domestic Abuse

Domestic abuse (DA) is widely understood as a gendered and hidden crime (Davies et al, 2014; Davies, 2018; Aldridge, 2020) and despite an increase in policy making for public safety, violence against women continues in the home with its prevention/reduction largely reliant on victim reporting and engagement with agency intervention. This has been even more apparent during the pandemic (Walklate *et al*, 2020). Improving strategies for police officer's interactions with victims and multi-agency intervention providers is therefore of great importance, particularly as the rate of domestic abuse continues to rise, with 910,980 DA related crimes recorded by the police to year ending March 2022 (ONS, 2022) an increase of 7.7% on the previous year.

Of all recorded violent crime against the person in England and Wales, domestic abuse accounted for 17% in that same time period with 74% of the victims of those crimes, reported as female (ONS, 2022). To put this into perspective, police forces in England and Wales receive an average of 130 calls per hour or 3100 in an average 24-hour period. Furthermore, there are approximately 2 female deaths per week committed by a current or ex-partner (33% of all femicide) many of which had a history of domestic abuse (Long *et al*, 2020). Work on the unintended consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic by Walklate *et al* (2020) amongst others is ongoing, with often multiple risks posed to victims, some more visible than others. The response of the attending officer when they arrive at an incident is thus pivotal to the short and long-term outcome of the victim's experience, their decision to report any future instances or indeed, their confidence to seek support to escape future abuse (HMICFRS, 2021). Listening to victim concerns can glean important information about risk of their repeat victimisation,

with many able to accurately identify the risks posed to them (Hoyle, 2007; Sherman and Harris, 2015; Robinson, Pinchevsky and Guthrie, 2016) but also build the necessary rapport to support and divert them to other support services and interventions.

To assist the officer in 'asking the right questions' (where 'right' is specifically linked to each unique incident) a framework of legislation, policy and processes is in place to guide them through mandatory tasks, including risk assessment (Robinson, Pinchevsky and Guthrie, 2017). This is not only important when completing the DASH (Domestic Abuse Stalking and Honour Based Violence) risk assessment tool, or the new DARA (Domestic Abuse Risk Assessment) currently being trialled (College of Policing, 2022), but also to ascertain the overall vulnerability of the victim. Ariza, Robinson and Myhill (2016) point out that assessment is not just about the prediction of future violence but also the type of violence, and how the information collected through the risk assessment tool can be used in establishing the right type of intervention for that unique couple; protection for the victim and desistance of the abuser that is tailored to their safety and criminogenic needs. It is this type of protocol that can prove problematic for policing practice, where the frontline officer is the obvious lead, but centrally driven policies and processes can restrict the use of individual discretion, whether informed by EI or not. So, whilst the use of new tools such as the DARA suggests a 38% increase in interrater reliability in risk assessing (College of Policing, 2022) the tool is only as accurate as the information gathered by the officer, whether via disclosure or their ability to 'tune in' to any unspoken and/or other situational signals.

The case for policing with Emotional Intelligence

Policing of domestic abuse in England and Wales and indeed beyond, is undoubtedly a complex and intensive aspect of the police officer's role where expectations of victim protection are at the forefront, yet in practice appears often fraught with misunderstandings, a lack of conceptual

knowledge about DA and the softer skills required to gain the necessary disclosure for an accurate risk assessment. EI is a proven aspect of practice that can empower officers in their approach to some of these difficulties, as advised by Eason (2020) or Rogers, Pepper and Skilling (2022) and is recognised by the College of Policing in its current PEQF (Police Education Qualifying Framework) national curriculum albeit being afforded limited space amongst a very demanding programme of work. Nevertheless, this is indicative of an appetite for EI and recognition of it as an important soft skill.

The most recent piece of legislation, the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 helps to clarify some of the obscurity in what is, and what is not abuse within interpersonal relationships. It provides a statutory definition of DA that encompasses a wider range of behaviours such as, controlling and/or coercive behaviour or helping to untangle perpetrator defences that purport or displace responsibility, such as sex acts that inadvertently cause injury or death. Being able to identify different types of DA help better prepare the officer in understanding the legal perspective of abusive relationships, which in turn gives more criminal weight to the victim's disclosure, their experience and prosecution credence. Having conceptual knowledge of DA further enhances officers in understanding the divergence of couple dynamics, risk indicators, associated thinking and attitudes and the myriad behaviours and emotions that entangle abusive relationships. It also helps to dispel some of the myths that continue to influence thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of DA. For example, Black, Lumsden and Hadlington (2019) found officers lack of conceptual knowledge as to why a cyber abuse victim continued to use internet forums, triggered dismissive attitudes towards them. This ultimately generated resistance from the victims to engage with the police, as they viewed the officer's indifference as a punishment. For some. however, online forums were often their only method of access to social and/or support networks.

Indifference inevitably leads to lack of meaningful communication, and this subsequently results in poor or indeed not listening to the victim, something Walklate (2018, p.7) suggests is a frequent occurrence. This failure to listen to the victim's account, concerns or own assessment of risk, is a conduct that frequently results in death or serious injury and indicative of poor levels of EI. Active listening, part of the social skills domain is a conscious process that can enhance our understanding of what is being said, prevents assumptions and promotes positive interaction (Goleman, 1995, p.266). Goleman exemplifies the benefits of active listening at time of conflict as a type of 'mastery' through which de-escalation and resolution can be achieved even in the most emotionally charged situations.

In the more recent work of Black, Lumsden and Hadlington (2019) previously mentioned, they propose an active listening approach needs to be non-judgmental, conducted in a meaningful way, with respect, understanding, and regulation of emotions both own and those of others, especially those associated with negative attitudes or negative perceptions. This is supported by Pyle (2022) who submits active listening is a pivotal skill in policing practices. This is particularly so when risk assessing, where the gathering of 'live' evidence to ascertain an immediate sense of potential harm to others is reliant on collating and understanding all available information This supports in protecting the victim and wider public and thus in the building of an empathic relationship built on trust and confidence of the victim.

Being able to achieve emotional congruence through empathic practice facilitates a deeper connection, enhancing the communicative interaction between police officer and victim. Eason (2019) takes this further by suggesting that other non-verbal or situational cues are also part of the active listening paradigm and are a crucial factor in the risk assessment process. Advocates of female empowerment and protection from violence including Walklate (2018), Richards (2020) and Monckton-Smith (2021), continue to emphasise how domestic abuse remains understated in policing practice and the need to re-think approaches to risk

assessment that consider abusers as potential killers rather than merely 'troubled lovers'. The self-regulation of negative feelings associated with just such attitudes and value-judgments, therefore, is essential to establish that effective rapport.

This paper advocates that all police officers are leaders; first at the scene, dealing with crisis, making decisions about risk of harm and public protection and this is none more evident than when attending domestic incidents. It promotes the idea that leadership is not just a concept for the higher ranks of the traditional hierarchical model of policing, but a necessary skill of the 21st century frontline officer who is often single-crewed and thus attending and managing incidents single-handedly. Rather like leadership explained by Pearson-Goff and Herrington (2014, p.15) as 'a set of characteristics, attributes, competencies, abilities, traits, actions or behaviours' that include role-modelling, decision-making and communication at all levels of the constabulary, it suggests it is not just the articulated risks that need to be identified. This paper advocates that it is also the signs and signals that are unspoken (expression and body language), marked by physical signs (indentations of removed furniture in the carpet, fist holes or picture marks on the wall) and emotional signals (uncontrollable sobbing, aggression through fear). All these and more, could be identifiers of ongoing abuse, escalated risk or dangerousness. Active listening is therefore not only listening to the words but reading and understanding the individual and environmental emotion and aligning contradictions of the unspoken and the scene to the rhetoric, what Eason (2019, p. 184) terms as *'observed dissonance'*; a disparity or tension between what is 'seen' and feelings linked to what is not 'seen'.

It is with this consideration of EI enhanced leadership that the following discussion can have a significant and damaging impact. Emerging from a wider research project, the findings imply that police officer's EI diminishes over time, scarred by the repeated attendance of domestic incidents from which there is little or no positive outcome. Sub-cultural issues may

also play a part in this. Cop culture, or canteen culture (Reiner 2010; IOPC, 2022) refers to collective or group think about policing, crime, criminality, and victimisation. It is prompted by storytelling (van Hulst, 2013) and shared experience. However, the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC, 2022, p. 10 - 13) have found misogynistic and condoning language and behaviour by male officers in the Metropolitan police, promoting abuse against women. These underlying attitudes and associated behaviours could also influence how EI diminishes. Being exposed to a dismissive way of thinking about women as victims of violence and abuse, may reduce motivation to practice in an emotionally intelligent way for several reasons, not least to 'fit in' with colleagues and the organisation but more so, feeling unable to challenge it. The latter was a significant finding of the IOPC report. Any reduction in the use of EI will inevitably affect policing practices, the impact of which is significant and potentially harmful.

The research

The research findings provided for this paper were part of a wider study to understand how, or if, EI was utilised in police decision-making about risk at domestic incidents (Eason, 2019). The participants, frontline officers, were asked how or if they applied EI in their risk assessing of female victims of DA and if they did, what impact they thought it had on the assessment and subsequent longer-term protection of the victim. It explored how they reacted to their own feelings and those of others and what mechanisms they used to manage them.

At the time of conducting this research it would be prudent to say that the researcher was on the periphery of the police service, operationally an outsider but a practitioner within the criminal justice sector with close ties and working relationships with the police. Reiner (2000) refers to this positioning as the 'outsider outsider', someone who has never served with the police and is undertaking the research as an academic. He points out that when undertaking

police research from this position it can be fraught with challenges not least the lack of trust between interviewer and interviewee.

This standpoint might raise the question of the validity of the research, whether the researcher was able to understand how the nuances of the police family and any cultural stressors of policing practices might influence participants responses. It might also pose the question as to the openness of the participants talking to someone they might feel doesn't 'get it', or the cultural barriers that do not condone the talking about feelings, something van Hulst (2013) talked about in his research. These challenges were the primary concern for the researcher so, disclosure of past practice, use of shared conversational language and positioning as an academic teaching police was presented at interview and afforded the researcher some status within the participant group. Furthermore, in the interviews the participants were suprisingly keen to talk about their emotions in the context of EI. Reflexivity at each step of the process supported an objective relationship with both data collection and its subsequent analysis.

Purposeful sampling

It was an inductive enquiry for a doctoral thesis (Crowther-Dowey and Fussey, 2013; Bryman, 2016; Robson and McCartan, 2017) using purposeful sampling as a method of accessibility to serving officers who had attended domestic incidents (Denscombe, 2014; Robson and Mccartan, 2017). This approach ensured potential participants fulfilled the necessary criteria and thus their responses of value to the research by gaining frontline officer's individual perspectives of EI as part of their decision-making process. Whilst it is acknowledged that this sampling approach may be considered by some as challenging, for example not fully understanding the diversification of the pool of potential participants being accessed (Mabry, 2009; Palinkas *et al* 2015), those that participated provided a real-life understanding of the

topic and were representative of the officers who attend domestic incidents most frequently. As such, the data collated informed the emerging themes that were constructed from *their* reality as police officers, who risk assess victims of DA as part of their daily practice.

Data collection and analysis

Following successful ethical approval from the University of Portsmouth, a series of 27 semi-structured interviews were undertaken across four constabularies, gathering rich contextual data that when analysed, demonstrated a collective set of understandings about EI, their use of it and thoughts around how it might be developed (Eason, 2019). The participants were a mix of gender and rank; 63% male, reflective of the gender England and Wales policing population ratio at the time (Hargreaves *et al*, 2018) and 18% (seven) were above the rank of police constable. The mean average age of the participants was 39.5 years with an overall mean average of 9.75 years in service and all of whom had attended many domestic incidents.

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Police Area/ID prefix	No. of Participants	Male/Female	Mean Average Age - years	Mean Average Length of Service - years
A (IP)	8	4:4	37	12
B (NP)	4	2:2	45	10
C (AP)	5	3:2	34	6
D (TP)	10	8:2	42	11
Total 4	Total 27	Total 17 Male – 10 Female	Overall Mean Average 39.5 years	Overall Mean Average Length of Service 9.75 years

Taken from Eason (2019, p.128)

The semi-structured interviews were conducted across the country at the chosen venue of the participants. For some this was their local station, for others their preference was to be at a neutral setting, such as a university. All however were conducted face to face to allow the

recording of non-verbal responses that might provide more informal data to the emotional context of the participant. The participants were shown the Goleman (1998) model and the definitions explained which offered a framework for the proceeding discussions. Many were able to relate to the model, linking their own definitions to the language used by Goleman. For those who were not, the model was explained in more detail. The interview schedule was broken down into three elements; responding to feelings, how these may influence decision-making and the benefits of EI development.

Utilising Braun and Clarke's (2006) method of thematic analysis the data was categorised and coded into relatable themes. The data revealed substantial evidence of value placed upon EI, and its significant and positive influence in relation to risk assessing the situation between, and the nuances in, abusive relationships between intimate partners. Engaging in the six-step process supported the inductive approach of the research and the avoidance of confirmation bias whilst facilitating the emergence of unanticipated themes, one of which is the basis for this paper. The cyclical nature of the process, particularly one to four, helped to construct the data into a logical framework of repeated patterns. These patterns evolved into four key themes. One of which, *"I've got it but he hasn't"* suggests a reduction in the use of EI in policing practice when officers are exposed to repeated attendance of domestic incidents, the impact of which is significant and potentially harmful. It is this theme that informs this paper.

Of course, applying the technique of thematic analysis can expose the research to subjective lines of enquiry that may distract from the focus of the research objective. Nevertheless, this theme was clearly discernible and of direct consequence to policing practices.

Findings and discussion

The overwhelming majority of participants felt EI was a useful soft skill worth developing and when shown the Goleman (1998) model were able to identify with it:

Table 2. Sample of Participant Responses When Shown the Goleman Model

Response	Participant
Me personally, I'd say that I use and have all of those skills. And obviously with the job that I do, there's also a lot of other people have got the same set of skills and the same – [not to say the 04:08] same ways of dealing with things, but we've got the same understanding. But yeah, from a personal point of view, I can display those, I do display those.	IP004
I can see that I have most of these, certainly I could say I am empathic and good communication skills. You have to don't you? To do the job I mean (smiled and dropped head).	AP010
I always say, I have a very high degree of empathy. And sometimes to a ridiculous level where I'll always, sort of, understand, and a lot of the time take pity on people, based on…I put myself in their position very easily	AP006
I think, without sounding ridiculously big headed I would say everything. I think all these are essential skills to be a police office. We've constantly got to read between the lines, people are not truthful with us. Unfortunately, that is…yeah. So I would say that I am very emotionally aware, I always have been.	IP006
Yeah, all of them, yeah.	NP004
… and safe to say that I think I have most of these. Does that sound a bit up myself (laughing) but really, all police officers have these skills as they are needed to do the job. If they don't, well, I mean, if they don't then they must find it [the job] really flaming hard. Mind you, some of what you see is really poor.	TP011

Taken from Eason (2019, p. 148)

The responses in table 2 demonstrate how these participants are both aware of and report as using in their practice, some or all of the skills and competencies that make-up

Goleman's (1998) five domain model. For example, participant AP101 and AP006 talk specifically about their use of empathy, a competence within the domain of social awareness, AP006 defining what that means as 'I put myself in their position very easily' (table 2).

The others shown in table 2, whose length of service averaged at 10 years or more, were confident that they applied all areas of the EI model in their practice. This is somewhat contrary to reservations expressed by some in the same areas, about not having the time needed to effectively do this. Nevertheless, they did recognise how it informed strategies to self-regulate their own (and others) emotions, as set out by Goleman (1998) and considered it an important tool in practice. This was particularly heightened when attending the same couple, when they may experience heightened feelings of frustration or despondency. Participant AP006, for example said 'I'd be lying if I said I'd never felt like that [frustrated or despondent] 'cause I think everyone's felt like that and they would be lying if they'd not said it' (Eason, 2019, AP006) going on to say that some officers might report 'a lot of the times we go to these repeat, oh it's just a verbal domestic. It's happened 20 times in the past month (AP006)' suggesting an almost dismissive attitude rather than considering it as only part of abusive behaviour.

Some did have reservations about the time needed versus legislative policy and protocols and did not feel those constraints would allow them to properly use it, however. Nevertheless, they did recognise how it informed strategies to self-regulate their own (and others) emotions and considered it an important tool in practice This was particularly heightened when attending the same couple, when they may for example, experience feelings of frustration or despondency. Participant AP006, for example said 'I'd be lying if I said I'd never felt like that [frustrated or despondent] 'cause I think everyone's felt like that and they would be lying if they'd not said it' (Eason, 2019, AP006) going on to say that some officers might report 'a lot of the times we go to these repeat, oh it's just a verbal domestic. It's

happened 20 times in the past month (AP006)' suggesting an almost dismissive attitude rather than considering it as part of a pattern of abusive behaviour.

This captured how many of the participants believed that although they operated in an emotionally intelligent way, they witnessed a lack of EI in some of their colleagues. Participant TP011 for example, suggested that all officers needed EI 'skills' and 'if they don't, well, I mean, if they don't then they must find it [the job] really flaming hard' (Eason, 2019, p. 148). When asked to elaborate, they went on to say that some of their colleagues' approaches were 'really poor' and lacking in EI, and this is echoed by other participants. Participant AP006 explains this as dealing with incidents in a very 'robotic' way 'cause they've been to it however many times before' (Eason, 2019, p. 149).

The implication of robotic or unfeeling interaction being linked to repeated attendances of domestic abuse is reiterated by other participants, including IP006. They saw youth as being a positive attribution for EI in an officer, or at least youth in service, because they had not been affected by the continuous attendance of domestic incidents and the subsequent feelings of resignation that it would not lead to a prosecution, or more importantly, victim protection. But those longer in service they suggested, appeared somewhat depleted:

> My honest opinion, having seen it both sides as well, I think the officers that are more newer have a better awareness, believe it or not, which you would think… That shocked me, because you would think people with more experience… And I'm not talking about everybody, but you'd think people with more experience would be more in tuned to domestic violence and emotional intelligence. I don't know if it's particularly officers that have been on response long, and for them they have become desensitised. And for them it's like oh, another domestic (Eason, 2019, IP006).

IP004 also referred to an officers age and/or a shorter length of service as a characteristic of desensitisation:

> younger officers, newer officers are definitely better at going in and being less judgemental if that's the right word, because they haven't got the same level of – I wouldn't say experience – yeah, I suppose, they haven't got the same level of experience that we've got (IP004).

These responses refer to 'experience' as the frequency of attendance at DA incidents and how new or young in-service officers are more willing to work with the victims taking an EI approach. However, as they attend more and more DA incidents, they become desensitised, numbed even traumatised, exasperated, or dismayed by their having to attend 'another domestic' knowing the likely outcome would be that no charges are brought, and they would be called out again at a later date. These types of responses were also noted in their own performance as there was a general acknowledgement of how they too, experienced the feelings of anger and frustration and whilst some reported able to mitigate these, others did not. This acknowledgement was not so prevalent in the participants reflections of themselves, which could be reflective of their desire to please the researcher (Robson and McCartan, 2017) or not wanting to show themselves in a negative light. Regardless, their willingness to inform on the behaviour of others, suggests that if more participants were interviewed, these findings would be replicated and indicative of a force of officers who are fatigued by repetitive policing of DA.

In the final part of the interviews, participants were asked if they thought they or any of their colleagues would benefit from education/training to develop EI. Not all were keen for it to be part of mandatory training suggesting softs skills are not an intrinsic part of the job but for most, it was thought beneficial. The consensus of the latter was that having regular inputs may not only help in EI development but also offer an opportunity to re-invigorate officers to use it. It was their recognition of how EI reduces that provided the rationale for this proposal.

The analysis clearly shows that those serving officers who deal with domestic incidents on a daily basis, and who undertake the necessary risk assessment needed to inform victim protection recognised and agreed the benefits and need for those softer EI skills. Moreover, and with some concern, it indicates that as the period of service in force increases, so EI

decreases, and this reduction results in perceived ineffective and potentially dismissive (thus high risk) policing practices.

Concluding comments

Policing DA in England and Wales is a complicated and emotionally draining element for our law enforcement community. The ONS (2022) indicates 130 calls of DA every hour making up a significant portion of responses on an officer's crimes. The victim, community and broader criminal justice sector are reliant on their ability to provide an accurate risk assessment to protect the victim, encourage community confidence and provide the preliminary details for successful prosecution and interventions. Without these, the abuser is free to repeatedly victimise some of our most vulnerable women in society. EI is proven to support the interpersonal interactions needed to fulfil this task, to achieve a swift rapport that is meaningful and informed and communication skills that can elicit disclosure that can often save lives (Walklate, 2018).

Active listening is what Goleman *et al* (2003) propose is central to positive communication and which Eason (2019) builds further to include the unspoken words and environmental signals, *observed dissonance,* that are pertinent to situational understanding and risk of harm. This is recognised by the officers who took part in the research, who openly identified EI as a necessary skill to police effectively though doubted not only the practicability of using it, against time constraints and central procedures/decision-making, but also how so many of their colleagues were lacking in it. This absence of EI was not attributed to their colleagues' skills *per se*, but rather a *decreasing circle of willingness to use it,* worn down by repeated attendance of domestic incidents, particularly of the same couple. The repetition not only of the same type of crime but often attending to the same people experiencing the same altercations, time after time, is taxing on the emotional state of the officer. Strong feelings of

frustration, exasperation, despondency and indifference are difficult to self-regulate without the internal skills to negate them and will inevitably spill into the management of the situation through poor communication, lack of empathy and awareness of impact on self and others, and in the leadership so needed if the victim is to make positive steps to end the abusive relationship. As is advocated in this paper, frontline officers regularly take a leadership role at these incidents, particularly if single crewed or immediately necessary where the risk of harm presents as imminent. Being able to utilise EI in these situations is beneficial not only to the officer but to the victims present.

This paper has presented the thematic findings of how EI diminishes across length of service from an officer's perspective and discusses the adverse impact this decline can have on the outcomes of DA risk assessment and thus victim protection. Its aim is to promote the inclusion of EI, in particular the concept of *observed dissonance* in officer education/training as a much more substantive component both within the PEQF curriculum and as ongoing continuing professional development. It asks the reader and indeed the police service to consider frontline officers as leaders and recognise the need for their EI development and its retention. The officers in this project welcomed development opportunities acknowledging how they could support the growth and essential maintenance of EI, halting its reduction and stimulating motivation to employ it as part of their everyday risk assessment toolkit. Not only would this improve practice but furnish them with a leadership methodology that has a solid grounding in evidence and is arguably a pre-requisite of 21st century policing.

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