ISVAs and Intermediaries: Learning what Works in Practice

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Session Overview

- Context and background to the research project
- Observed similarities and differences between ISVAs and RIs
- Theme 1 and case study
- Theme 2 and case study
- Theme 3
- Theme 4
- Conclude and Close

*Disclaimer – findings are preliminary and are subject to change as full analysis is carried out.

Context and Background to the research

- **Why am I doing this project?**

I am a former ISVA and have spent the last 4 years working as a researcher in the field of Criminology at Northumbria University. I have an interest in understanding how ISVAs fit in the current criminal justice system and how we can better support and raise awareness of the ISVA role.

- **How did I do it?**

I carried out a total of 32 interviews across several participant groups (ISVAs, police, barristers, RIs and V/S) and a series of observations with ISVA networks. Today I am focusing on **interview data with RIs.**

- **What do I want to achieve?**

To raise awareness of the ISVA role amongst practitioners, research, policy makers and other criminal justice bodies. To improve overall understanding of how all professionals work together and operate within the criminal justice arena, understanding what works and what can be improved. To provide insight into the impact of advocacy support for victim-survivors of sexual violence.

General observations across the data sets

Similarities

- Both roles would benefit from better awareness & understanding
- Both are impartial
- Work can be unreliable in different ways (fixed-term contracts vs. self-employment)
- Vicarious trauma and burn out
- Sometimes feeling unvalued in the wider system
- Can experience resistance from judges and barristers

Differences

- RIs are NOT advocates
- RIs can interject and speak in court
- RIs spend limited time in the system compared to ISVAs who are often long-term support
- RIs have limited time spent talking to victims/witness outside of court
- Different use of terminology (witness vs. victim-survivor)
- RIs sometimes hear evidence a lot earlier than ISVAs

Theme 1: Stronger Together

This theme focuses on the ways in which the ISVA and RI role can and do work together in practice.

Participants discussed how **both roles had different strengths** which could provide different yet complimentary functions for victims and witnesses.

"I didn't have the means to get feedback of the witness's views, and I wanted them to have a bit of notice so, the ISVA took that role on and then could update me… they were there on the day of trial and I think that was a really big advantage for the witness. And we worked as a kind of team with the officer, the ISVA and myself." (RI1)

"for example, somebody's in the middle of cross-examination in a live link room and emotionally they're not coping and they need to leave the room. It actually means that that person can leave the room, have somebody there for them instantly. But then I can continue to talk to the court.." (RI3)

Theme 1: Case Study

So, for example at the moment I'm working with a young woman, who has got some learning difficulties, neurodiversity's and also some serious mental health issues. We're at the police interview stage and there has been an **ISVA already appointed in the case**. And so, from the very beginning, she and I have been in touch with each other, have discussed how we can **mutually work together**, and we often **provide information to each other**. It's the most direct route to get information back, particularly about what's happening in this woman's life. And so, it's **extremely positive** because we can make **recommendations** to the police, primarily focused on the woman's well-being and mental health, and for me, I can take that into account into how I advise them about interviewing.

(Participant RI2)

Theme 2: Perceptions of Partnership Working

This theme focuses on the mixed experiences of partnership working between RIs and others.

Communication is extremely important in facilitating effective partnership working.

In relation to RIs and ISVAs, limited contact and lack of awareness can sometimes lead to tensions and confusion about the full remit of each others respective roles. This may lead to ambiguity about what best practice looks like.

"And it's trying to tease out who the best person is for that particular witness because I'm aware that it's been confusing...my thinking is that ISVAs can offer emotional regulation and support. However, I have been told by an ISVA that that's not within their remit because they're not a councillor" (RI1)

"I could probably hold up on one hand, how many times I've worked with an ISVA. It's not very many times…" (RI4)

Theme 2: Case Study

"I've worked with an ISVA not so long ago who was brilliant, and we worked really well together. And then I've worked with another where it's not been so great and it felt like there was a feeling of stepping on each other's toes a bit, which you know, was a bit difficult...

The witness gets really overwhelmed when there's too many adults present at one time. I got information from the OIC so I could e-mail or **contact the ISVA directly**, just to speak to them and when I did speak to them, they were put out by the fact that I'd suggested about doing a pretrial visit and organising it for a date that the OIC was available, but not when she was available. And I said I don't really know if we need to both be there, but I do definitely need to be there to do my assessment.

I just feel like we didn't kind of establish what was, I dunno, it just seems like **crossover,** a little bit of overlap, and for some people, it might be OK, but for others, maybe it's just a bit a bit too much, maybe?"

(Participant RI4)

Theme 3: Self-care and Well-being

This theme focuses on the different ways that RIs value the importance of self-care, protection and well-being whilst carrying out their role. This theme was also strong amongst ISVA data and there were many similarities across the two data sets.

An example here can be seen with regards to manging personal well-being.

RI

"Yes, it's horrendous what you hear, and I do sometimes need to come up with my own strategies to help process that, but the more demanding bit is the feeling that justice isn't being served by how the system's working, and that's, you know, You can't deal with that with supervision." (RI2)

ISVA

"For ISVAs its really important we maintain out well-being, we can't control court delays. It's not us against the world, there are bigger institutions at play." (ISVA 4)

Theme 4: The Wider System

This theme focuses on wider structural issues that the RIs discussed and how this impacted their role in various ways as well as the experiences of witnesses in court.

Again, this theme was also discussed by the ISVA participant group with many shared opinions and experiences across both groups.

RI

"For whatever reason that trial is moved or adjourned and you feel like you can see the sort of the resolve of the person being chipped away every time that something untoward happens. I can understand why people withdraw." (RI3)

ISVA

"Often, I've had cases where the client gets a text at 4:30pm on the Friday telling them there's no court on Monday... I don't expect a case to happen anymore." (ISVA 13)

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To Conclude:

- Both ISVAs and Registered Intermediaries fulfil different but equally important roles when supporting witnesses/survivors through the criminal justice process.

- Both might benefit from training on each other's job roles and responsibilities to be able to plan how best to support clients, using a case-by-case approach.

- Support given to clients can be strengthened when ISVA and RIs work together effectively.

Final analysis and project completion date is October 2026.
After which, I will be looking to share findings with any and all interested organisations, participants, researchers etc.

If you have any follow up questions, please contact me on:
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THANK YOU!