

## INNOVATION IN POLICING DOMESTIC ABUSE: UNDERSTANDING SUCCESS TO BUILD CAPACITY

In recognition of the principle that evaluation needs to concentrate on mechanisms of change, as well as outcomes, the central idea of this project was for academics and police collaboratively to identify areas in which innovation around the policing of domestic abuse (DA) has been successful, and to develop deeper and richer understanding of the enabling circumstances and how these might build capacity in other police services. A central objective was to help *transfer* innovative practice around DA as well as, more broadly, to provide police and academic researchers with greater understanding of the mechanisms and contexts shaping successful changes in operational practice. Two core themes emerged: first, the nature and application of ‘knowledge’ in policing practice needs to be better understood; and second, the factors key to enabling success in terms of the three projects focused upon. This can help us understand the circumstances and context required to develop police capacity in the key area of domestic abuse.

### INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

The research team worked with police colleagues in three forces (Northumbria, North Yorkshire, and West Yorkshire) to identify examples of effective innovative practice relating to DA. In order to examine ways in which evidence is applied to police practice, the examples cited had to meet two criteria. Namely, that they were developed from an evidence base, and that they had been subject to evaluation. If projects met those criteria and there was (in addition) evidence of a demonstrable positive impact in the policing of DA, then the project was eligible for inclusion in the project.

Between Nov. 2017 and Apr. 2018, the research team interviewed police colleagues (n=18) from the three police services to establish their views on why innovative practice identified in the first section of the study had enjoyed positive outcomes. Additional interviews have been conducted with partner agencies (n=13) engaged in the chosen projects; observational and data analysis have also been undertaken. On this basis, something is said later in this summary about the enabling conditions that police services in other parts of the country might need to consider prior to developing similar approaches in their area. Local OPCCs have been consulted for their perspectives on the projects selected for analysis.

Using the approach outlined above, the researchers and police identified three innovative projects that had been evaluated as having a positive impact on tackling domestic abuse. The features of these projects are outlined in the box below.

West Yorkshire Police	North Yorkshire Police	Northumbria Police
<p>‘Operation Kyleford’</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DV car</li> <li>• Police officers and Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (IDVA)</li> <li>• Responsive deployment</li> <li>• Police interventions, and information and advice to victims</li> </ul>	<p>‘Early Interventions Project’</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two localities with highest recorded incidents</li> <li>• Case review for accurate reporting</li> <li>• Identification of offenders</li> <li>• Passed to IDVAs for further intervention</li> </ul>	<p>‘Multi Agency Tasking and Co-ordination (MATAC) Project’</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Force-wide</li> <li>• Partnership with six local authorities, social and education services, housing agencies</li> <li>• Identify and intervene on basis of ‘risk, frequency, and gravity’ of offending associated with the ‘most serious’ perpetrators</li> </ul>

Two core themes emerged in relation to the project's objectives. First, the nature and application of 'knowledge' in policing practice. This is an important area of interest in an era where 'evidence-based policing' is widely advocated against a background of decreasing resources and changing demand. The second theme is to identify emerging perspectives on those factors that enabled the success of the three projects. The study was not to determine whether the projects had positive impacts on DA (since this was a criterion for initial selection into the study) but, rather, to better understand the circumstances and context required for that success to develop. This is important if other services and agencies want to emulate strategies identified as effective in relation to an aspect of police work that has been established as a central priority.

*Theme One: Applying Knowledge and Evidence to Policing*

As noted, DA-related policing projects could only be included in the research if they had been developed on the basis of research evidence and had been evaluated. Researchers liaised for several months with police colleagues to identify suitable projects, and often there was a lack of information about the origins and rationale of the projects considered. It is important to recognise that the difficulty of applying these two criteria to the various projects considered does not necessarily mean that there was no evidential basis or research that underpinned them, or that they had not been subject to evaluation. A positive interpretation might be that the projects were developed on the application of 'knowledge' and had subsequently been evaluated, but that the staff that engaged with the research team were unaware of that dual process. If that were so then it is notable that written evidence of those processes was not available in two of the three cases, although staff spoke of internal police reviews and data analysis that had led to the development of the projects. It was not possible to demonstrate (except in the Northumbria case study) how the projects were developed from robust scientific analysis or subject to an evaluation process with a recognised scientific method.

In each case where it was claimed that innovative practice was derived from research evidence, this referred to internal police data. External scientific research did not feature as the root of innovative practice and so there was a limited evidential base – not based on large scale, multi-site research – but more typically on the basis of performance data. In West Yorkshire, for example, the project had been developed following analysis of police statistics, such that the car was deployed in relation to 'hot spots' and 'hot times' apparent from operational data on cases reported. Equally, the 'success' of the intervention was judged in terms of the amount of cases responded to, and victim satisfaction with the response provided. This is a relatively modest research base; however, in the context of this study, this project was adjudged to meet the inclusion criteria. If it had been excluded then it would have been difficult to find any case study projects to include in the second phase of the work.

The project identified in Northumbria used research and evidence as a central part of the intervention work. Nonetheless interviews conducted showed that what constitutes 'evidence' is highly varied amongst the different individuals involved in the MATAC. For some it is professional insight and/or expertise, for others it is rigorous evaluation demonstrating particular effects. Often it was implied that the evidential basis of the work stemmed from the insight of local police leaders who had instigated the innovation.

In the MATAC project, police data ranked offenders on the basis of the Recency, Frequency, and Gravity associated with their crimes. The top cohort were then subject to multi-agency interventions. Police and external partners commonly reported that this provided an authoritative hierarchy that was widely perceived to be robust. On this basis it became easier to create consensus among the multi-agency partners around those perpetrators that ought to become the focus of

interventions. Additionally, this project had been evaluated by independent researchers, held by partners to add to the credibility of the work.<sup>1</sup>

The MATAc project was funded by the Home Office Innovation Fund rather than core police resources, and this was considered significant by many police respondents. One argued that this status had a significant impact on the internal police service response to the work involved. Notably, the independent funding meant that there were resources sufficient to implement the project on a force-wide basis, with no partial or pilot going ahead. Related to this, the project had ‘permission to fail’ rather than being ‘doomed to success’. This reflects a widely-noted cultural and organisational imperative for projects to be seen as successful and that this is associated with the career development of those who lead them. One person interviewed noted ‘there was less cynicism around the project, and internally we were under less pressure. Because it was an ‘innovation’ fund, we were given more room to experiment and staff bought into it more easily’.

### *Theme Two: Key Enablers of Success*

Participants were asked to reflect upon the factors that had made the various projects succeed, and how these were distinct from other experiences that might have been more problematic. Many of the findings that emerged reflected the wider research picture addressing challenges that multiagency work faces. Notably, not all participants agreed that projects were ‘successful’ and identified limitations. Nonetheless, respondents tended to attribute successful innovation to projects having a range of features, many of which over-lapped. These are outlined below.

#### *A clear delimited focus*

- Not broad all-encompassing partnerships, but task-oriented and narrow
- Each had highly focused objectives, which precluded elongated inter-agency debate
- Relatively few partner agencies (and where there were many – one sub-division of Northumbria, for example – this was more problematic)

#### *Complementary partnership & skill sets*

- Information and expertise from a range of professionals added value and credibility to projects
- That the initiatives benefitted the police (e.g. reducing workload, providing additional support, information and advice) was crucial for police buy-in and success. For police, there were clear criminal justice outcomes
- Partner staff reported that they gained from police ability to deal with confrontational situations

#### *Access to data*

- Police data (offender records, risk scores, intelligence, etc.) was valued by partners who perceived it as a definitive representation of DA patterns, trends, hot spots, etc.
- The status of police data provided an authoritative basis for multiagency intervention
- Data sharing problematic in one example

#### *Organisation, leadership & management*

- Where sectoral boundaries coincided among agencies then coordinating relationships was easier. For example, in one police sub-division various local authority areas were served by a single housing association, which meant that there were fewer agents to coordinate and networks were more easily sustained

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<sup>1</sup> For the sake of transparency, this was completed by Paul Biddle and Pam Davies of this project team. Due to their prior knowledge, the work on this element of the N8 project was done by the other members of the team.

- Allocation of time for staff to participate communicated senior management commitment, important internally and externally to police

*Evidence and evaluation*

- Officers, staff and external partners reported that these were both important in establishing the credibility of the projects, and helped secure buy-in from multi-agency partners and from individual staff
- The perception might differ from reality: ‘evidence’ and ‘evaluation’ were difficult to establish in practice, and often did not appear robust in traditional scientific terms.

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

Myriad issues arise from the project, key findings include:

Each project was underpinned by some knowledge and evidence but that the nature of this was considerably adrift from standards of research methodology and the scientific principles usually advanced by proponents of evidence-based policing (even where methodologies beyond RCT are recognised as valid and robust in relation to some police activities).

HEIs and police (and other) colleagues need to develop common understandings of concepts of research, evaluation, timescales, data and methodology so that a more effective dialogue can develop between partners.

The project was inevitably retrospective, continuing observation and discussion with partners in ongoing projects would be hugely beneficial, not least since we have probably been unable to capture some of the changes in these three projects as they have developed.

A wider set of perspectives would have been useful, particularly from victims or perpetrators who experienced the various projects outlined: did they regard these projects as successful innovations?

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