

Policing and Public Health

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Chaired by **Dr Matthew Bacon, Lecturer in Criminology**, University of Sheffield

Session 1: Harm reduction

The Harm Reduction Unit: a truly integrated approach to tackling stalking and serial domestic abuse – DS David Thomason, Cheshire Police, and Dan Jones, North West Boroughs NHS Foundation Trust

Session 2: Violence Reduction

Using data and community views in a public health approach to preventing violence - Superintendent Colin McFarlane, Angela Greenwood and Mike Parker, South Yorkshire Police

DIVERT – How policing works collaboratively to help young people move away from violence - Chief Inspector Jack Rowlands, Metropolitan Police

Session 3: Drug-related deaths

What's a few excess deaths in the face of COVID-19? - DS Dr Rob Ewin, Cumbria Police

There's nothing soft about preventing death - DCI Jason Kew, Thames Valley Police

Report

Overview

In a highly engaging and heartfelt session, presenters discussed the necessity and nature of police-public health partnerships. In the first session on harm reduction, the founders of the Cheshire Harm Reduction Unit talked about their work prevent harm from stalking, emphasising the vital importance of data sharing and service integration. In the Q&A, the methods of engagement with perpetrators and the repeatability of HRU's success was discussed.

In the second session on violence reduction, a team from South Yorkshire's VRU discussed effective community engagement in developing prevention strategies. This included making data accessible and meaningful, and using local knowledge to contextualise data into useful information. This was followed by a presentation from Jack Rowlands of the Metropolitan Police on the DIVERT programme, established to use custody as a 'teachable moment' when young people could engage with coaches, identify goals in education and training, and be supported to achieve them. In the Q&A, the vulnerability of such programmes to political acceptability was discussed, and the limitations and opportunities this created for DIVERT working in parallel with the criminal justice system.

In the final session on drug-related deaths, Rob Ewin looked at the effect of lockdown and Covid restrictions on drug-related deaths in Cumbria, making the case that public health mandated restrictions needed to include support for known drug users. Jason Kew then presented the work Thames Valley's drug diversion programme, which employs an ethos of unlimited referrals to provide education to those found in possession of drugs. This diverts thousands of people away from the criminal justice system, improving health, reducing stigma, and reducing disproportionality. In the Q&A, the crucial role of lived experience in developing effective programmes was discussed.

Introduction

Common mandate, disparate approaches

Dr Matt Bacon introduced the session by talking about the contemporary importance of collaboration between public health and policing, and the common objectives they shared to promote public well-being using both coercion and consent. This is most obvious in the public health approach to policing, which looks for causation at the level of population rather than individuals in order to create effective prevention, intelligence, and partnerships. Despite this common ground, Matt observed there are significant differences between the operation of police and public health, with disparate institutional and professional cultures, underpinning theory, and funding creating obstacles to effective partnerships.

Session One: Harm Reduction

Partnerships against stalking - David Thomason and Dan Jones

For the first session, David Thomason and Dan Jones talked about their work on the Harm Reduction Unit (HRU) in Cheshire, which is internationally recognised for its innovative approach to reducing the risk from stalking and serial domestic abuse.

David and Dan discussed how the HRU developed, beginning with Dan's motivation to improve preventative work after attending the homicide of a woman killed by her stalker. Dan and David talked through the development of the unit from 'clinics' run in addition to their full-time duties, to funding bids that allowed them to take on the unit as their full-time role with other practitioners in policing, psychology and social care, and working with charity partners. They emphasised that this development was very ad hoc and responsive to local circumstances and opportunities, but added that the enabling factors were support from senior leadership, the autonomy to develop what worked, the co-location of partners which meant that data and ideas could be shared easily, and clarity on the purpose of the unit.

Partnership working, not 'working with partners'

The purpose of the unit was specified as risk management – i.e. it is not a treatment programme, although treatment is always offered to perpetrators. David discussed how it was important to understand the motivations of stalkers, as while legal sanctions could reduce immediate danger, addressing the underlying fixation was the only way to remove the risk to victims. Psychological assessment and information sharing was therefore key to risk assessment, effective management strategies, and developing personalised intervention programmes.

Data sharing was however the biggest administrative issue to developing the unit. This was managed by the practitioners writing the data sharing business case to make things 'as easy as possible' for organisation's administrators, keeping data sharing specific to on-going cases, and asking 'why not' share data, rather than 'why should we?'.

The approach has proven effective, with reoffending rates at the lower end of those reported in studies of psychological intervention with stalkers. As Cheshire has the most developed data collection processes of the three forces examined, there is a high level of confidence that reoffending would be identified. There was also a high level of satisfaction from perpetrators that the bespoke intervention meant they now had the tools to address their fixation in the future. Similarly, victims were satisfied with the support offered to them, feeling informed and empowered them to manage their own safety and support the investigation.

In terms of economic cost, there is significant benefit to the state and the victim, in addition to the social benefits of resolving abusive behaviour.

Recipe for good practice

David and Dan concluded by summarising the key enablers for the success of the unit. This included a clear vision for the aim of the partnership, understanding integration as key to collaboration, flexibility and commitment from leadership, autonomy for the unit to make decisions, a practitioner-led approach, and a clear pathway for decisions and actions.

Q&A

Engaging with perpetrators

In the discussion, Dan expanded on how the unit engaged with perpetrators. They were offered an hour with a psychologist who used a motivational interview approach to inform them of the programme and its potential benefit for them. Dan pointed out that stalking is a restrictive activity that damages the perpetrator, cutting them off from normal life and the possibility of real friendships. This is generally a good way to encourage engagement in the programme and motivation to stop stalking. David added that this was also a screening process so they could pick cases where intervention was likely to be effective.

Dan reflected on the value of having no legal authority as the psychologist, as this enabled to talk more freely as to why they felt entitled to engage in this behaviour.

Repeatable success?

The importance of adapting to local circumstances was discussed. While it was useful to share concepts and experiences, the exact set up needs to reflect the demands and capabilities of the area being served. This also needs to account for developing sustainable programmes that don't rely on the involvement of one or two highly motivated individuals.

With regards to data sharing, David explained that writing data sharing proposals himself made it as easy as possible for partners to sign up to collaboration. The principles of successful data sharing plans is to make them proportionate, relevant, and auditable.

Session Two: Violence Reduction

Effective community engagement - Matt Parker, Colin McFarlane and Angela Greenwood

Matt Parker, Colin McFarlane and Angela Greenwood began the session with a discussion of the South Yorkshire Violence Reduction Unit.

18 VRUs were established in 2019, funded by the Home Office to take a public health approach to prevent and reduce violence.

Prevention is understood in three timescales: primary (long term measures), secondary (early intervention), and tertiary (preventing reoffending). To have effective prevention, strategies need to be developed in consultation with the community. SYVRU took the approach of consulting with the community before drafting a strategy and again with a one page summary of a draft strategy. Views were gathered through Voluntary Action Groups and using grants as a tool for engagement. As Covid restrictions came into play, forums were moved online so people could maintain contact with VRU representatives.

Accessible and meaningful

Angela and Matt discussed the importance of framing consultations and data in accessible, meaningful ways. For example, for public engagement the 'Strategic Needs Assessment' was relabelled the 'South Yorkshire Violence Assessment', while data on knife crime rates that appeared to be 'ranking' wards was

unhelpful and needed to be reframed. In reverse, local knowledge could make what appeared to be a statistical anomaly (low rates of knife crime despite high rates of deprivation) a case study for effective intervention.

Colin discussed Plan B, a programme that worked with victims and perpetrators of violent crime. For example, help to access education and training, campaigns against domestic violence, and A&E navigators who helped victims of violent crime report the incident in an effective and timely way.

Colin posited that the challenge was in clearly defining the role of the police, and how to operationalise a public health approach working in tandem with evidence-based policing. He suggested the best way to conceptualise this was to have clarity of timeline. In the short term, what is needed is problem solving with evidence-based policing. In the medium term, there needs to be contextual safeguarding. In the long term, the public health approach looks at the causes of causes. This illustrates how to unify work and objectives, with the aim of sustaining the timeline for violence prevention.

Custody as a 'teachable moment' – Jack Rowlands

Chief Inspector Jack Rowlands discussed the DIVERT, a Metropolitan Police custody programme designed to divert 18-25 years olds away from offending and into employment, education and training. DIVERT uses Custody Intervention Coaches based directly in police custody to speak with young adults to help them to access opportunities they feel motivated to pursue, such as music production, football coaching or becoming a mechanic.

The programme aims to use custody as a 'teachable moment' to move young people away from crime, while also changing police culture to embed the benefits of diversion. Partnership working is vital to these aims, both in creating opportunities for young people once they have left custody (such as the Palace for Life Foundation) and by creating meaningful networks between custody officers and third sector organisations.

Flexibility and openness

Significantly, DIVERT is separate to the criminal justice system. This gives the programme far more flexibility in who they can include in the programme, as there's no strict qualifying criteria. For example, young people who are released without charge, or who haven't been in custody, but whose friend has accessed opportunities through DIVERT and want to engage in the programme, as well as young people who do serve a jail sentence, have all worked with DIVERT. This flexibility and openness to partnership working has also helped DIVERT to work with parents, addressing both the gap in statutory support for young people and the common experience of relationship breakdown between parents and young adults.

Jack ended by reflecting on the many drivers that can push young adults into custody, and there's often a lot of unresolved trauma at play. DIVERT's model of using coaches helps to increase understanding, and create effective diversion.

Q&A

Past experience

In the discussion, Prof Corrine May-Chahal brought up similar diversion programmes that had seen success in the 1980's and 90's but had lost political appeal. One issue they faced was young people would commit crime in order to access the scheme, which was effectively filling in for gaps in other services. Jack responded that he hadn't come across this yet and the fact that the programme was open to young adults

who weren't in custody should prevent this. He also discussed the DIVERT app, which referred young adults to an on-call youth worker who could provide one-on-one intervention and support.

The art of the possible

Dr Matt Bacon asked if the separation from the criminal justice system was problematic, given the negative affect that criminalisation has on social cohesion and employability. With regards to DIVERT, Jack said that DIVERT follows people through the system in parallel. Whilst he acknowledged the negative effects of going through the criminal justice system, he argued that for DIVERT did not have the ability to take on cultural and political change at that level - it's better to do what's possible alongside the existing system rather than trying to fit into it. Speaking about Plan B, Colin said that this is not an alternative to going through the criminal justice system, and it isn't possible to take on government-led response to crime at a local level.

Session Three: Drug-Related Deaths

The effect of Covid restrictions – Rob Ewin

DS Dr Rob Ewin discussed the new role of the police in 'health surveillance' during Covid, and the dramatic shift in how community and even private spaces are policed. At the same time that lockdowns gave police wide-ranging new powers and responsibilities, they also correlated with an increase in drug-related deaths. After contextualising the role of isolation in drug-related deaths in normal times, Rob presented a survey of the drug-related deaths in Cumbria during Covid restrictions, concluding that during public health emergencies support must be afforded to identified drug users combining policing and health data.

Isolation - before lockdown, during lockdown

Rob's doctoral research had looked at the link between vulnerability in teenagers and later experiences of substance abuse and imprisonment. Isolation and social exclusion are powerful risk factors in harm, and he spoke movingly of drug-related deaths he'd attended in sheltered accommodation. Their isolation was often so total that Rob would attend funerals so there would be at least one mourner to mark their passing.

He made the point that despite common perception to the contrary, deaths from drug overdoses are generally unintentional, and frequently caused by cardiovascular shock. It should be understood that 'self-injury mortality' does not imply an intention to harm oneself.

The risk of drug-related deaths was therefore massively increased by the change in dispensing practices for controlled drugs brought in by lockdown. Previously, some oversight and social interaction had been provided by service users being required to attend appointments in person and have injections given by a pharmacist. During lockdown, a high quantity of drugs were dispensed in less frequent occasions, with no face-to-face dispensing. With the loss of even this contact, their isolation became very extreme. This increased isolation leads to less capacity for self-care and therefore riskier behaviour.

Survey of drug-related deaths in Cumbria, 2020

Cumbria constabulary saw an increase during lockdown one (March-May 2020), where the 6 cases represented a 45% increase on this period in the previous year. A further 6 cases of drug-related deaths occurred during 'general restrictions' (May-Nov 2020), an increase of 33%.

Of the 6 cases during lockdown, all were aged 35-48, there were 4 women and 2 men, and none had left a suicide note or evidence of suicide. In terms of personal history, all had a known history of drug use, 5 had a history of low mood or depression, 4 had a history of domestic abuse, 3 were known to have sought help from friends, and 2 were involved in Opioid Substitute Treatment.

For the 6 cases during general restrictions, all were aged 45-57, most were men, and there was no evidence of suicide. All had a known history of drug use, 4 had evidence of prescribed medical treatments, 4 had lost of contact with friends and family, 3 had been reported as missing, 3 had strong links to county lines offending, and 3 had a history of depression and low mood. Few had a reported history of domestic abuse.

Isolation at home, isolation from home

Commenting on the differences between the two groups, Rob said the lack of missing persons in the lockdown group was likely due to the heavy policing of movement in this period. Similarly, continued contact with social networks – including seeking help from friends – indicate that during lockdown isolation within the home, potentially with increased exposure to harmful relationships, was the common risk factor. During general restrictions greater freedom of movement acted as a risk factor for those with more fragile inclusion in social networks, whilst the uncertainty of continued illicit access to drugs motivated users to gain a larger supply when possible, increasing the opportunity for accidental overdose.

Public health emergencies must include support for identified drug users

Public health emergencies employing the use of large-scale public isolation represents distinct risk to drug using communities. Dispensing of controlled medication provided a regulated flow of drugs which supports regular user habits, whereas when drug supply may increase user desire to gain access to larger amounts due to uncertainty of continued supply. The vital conclusion is that health and policing surveillance systems should afford some support to identified drug users combining policing and health data.

Diversion: from a punitive response to positive health outcomes – Jason Kew

T/Chief Inspector Jason Kew presented the Thames Valley VRU drug diversion scheme, arguing police have a vital role in treating drug misuse as a public health matter rather than criminal behaviour.

Costs and trends

Jason contextualised the enormous economic and social cost of drug misuse, including the links to serious violence and deaths. He linked to a video which gives a dynamic analysis of trends in illegal drug use by type among 16-24 year olds from 1996-2019 according to the Crime Survey of England and Wales (CSEW), available at <https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/4897394/>. After a period of declining use (from a high of 31.8% in 1998 to a low of 16.5% in 2012/13), numbers are rising and increased to 20.3% in 2018/19. There is therefore both urgent need and a worsening problem.

Education, not arrest

Within this context, Jason argued that diversion schemes focused on 16-24 year olds had the greatest chance of effective intervention among those most likely to develop serious addiction.

The Thames Valley VRU Drug Diversion programme starts when an officer finds a young person in possession of any drugs. Instead of arrest or interview, checks are carried out. If it is the first incident of possession, they are referred to Youth Offending Team (YOT) who provide drug education and complete a referral flag. There is no further police involvement. If they have previously been found in possession, they are referred to the Youth Justice Unit for a decision on whether to pursue charges or refer to YOT.

Unlimited diversions

The ethos of the programme is unlimited diversions to tackle continued use, with the consequence of escalation to traditional pathways for non-engagement. Jason emphasised that YOT used a trauma-informed response and feedback on progress to the police. The programme has had great rates of

engagement, and worked with schools to provide wider access to the programme prior to contact with police.

Thames Valley has also established an Adult Diversion scheme along the same principles, but with the addition of court-ordered sanctions to compel use of the drug service. Completion rates in the pilot scheme have nonetheless been far lower, at 45%, with the lack of service availability outside normal working hours identified as the main cause of attrition.

With 5,300 incidences of drug possession recorded by Thames Valley Police each year, the diversion schemes have removed a significant number of people from the criminal justice system. This in turn improves health, reduces stigma, and reduces disproportionality.

Naloxone – community intervention

Jason concluded by discussing the Naloxone programme, where high-street businesses like Timpsons and Greggs distribute the medicine that rapidly reverses an opioid overdose. It is also included in packs distributed at needle exchanges. This focuses action and attention on saving lives, fostering a shift from criminalisation and exclusion to health and recovery.

Q&A

The value of lived experience

With regards to developing diversion schemes, Jason and Jack agreed that lived experience was crucial to creating effective programmes. Jason added that talking both to people with experience of addiction and families who have suffered bereavement was vital to understanding what support people needed.

Wrap-up

Value of partnerships

Matt Bacon concluded by thanking the presenters for bringing their innovative work to the forum. He highlighted the value of partnerships in addressing complex social problems, and how those partnerships demonstrated the routine use of research to inform police practice. Attendees thanked Matt and the speakers, commenting on how engaging and heartfelt the session had been.

Speaker Biographies

Dr Matthew Bacon, University of Sheffield, UK

Dr Matthew Bacon is a Lecturer in Criminology at the University of Sheffield. Before joining Sheffield, he worked as a Research Associate at the University of Manchester on a project examining the contractual governance of drug users in treatment. Matthew is the author of *Taking Care of Business* (OUP, 2016), an ethnography of police detectives, drug law enforcement and proactive investigation. His work has been published in journals such as *British Journal of Criminology*, *Evidence & Policy*, *International Journal of Drug Policy*, and *Policing & Society*. His current research focuses on innovation and reform in drugs policing, especially alternatives to criminalisation and other harm reduction measures.

DS Dr Rob Ewin, Cumbria Constabulary

I currently work for Cumbria Constabulary as the Detective Sergeant responsible for delivering both initial and investigative skills training, with a focus on using evidence-based research. My role in the N8 is to represent the constabulary and help focus future research. I have also completed a PhD at Cumbria University on the psychology of policing interactions with vulnerable people and how legal frameworks defined, categorised, and recognised them. More information about my PhD research can be found at https://whatworks.college.police.uk/About/News/Pages/R_Ewin.aspx

Angela Greenwood, South Yorkshire Police

Angela Greenwood is a Partnership Manager in the South Yorkshire Violence Reduction Unit, covering Sheffield. Angela has extensive knowledge and experience of community development and community project management and is a Chartered Member of the Chartered Institute of Housing. Angela has worked for Sheffield City Council for 14 years and is currently on secondment to the Unit, her most recent management role leading on Cohesion, Migration and Voluntary Sector issues.

Dr Dan Jones, North West Boroughs Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust

Daniel W Price-Jones is a NHS Consultant Forensic Psychologist who works within Cheshire Constabulary's Harm Reduction Unit (HRU) which, alongside Cheshire Police colleagues, he established and operationalised. Dan's clinical background is practising within both secure hospital and community settings, specialising in working with adults with an intellectual disability who present with diverse risk and offending behaviours. His passion for using psychological knowledge and its practical application in the real world setting of behavioural risk management informed the creation, development and establishment of the HRU.

DCI Jason Kew, Thames Valley Police

Jason Kew is now in the final year of his Policing career where he has worked in both uniform and as a detective in each rank to Ch Insp, within frontline, CID, Major crime and intelligence Policing teams. JQ is a humanist, compassionate and social justice orientated person and police officer, having prioritised drug-related deaths, homelessness and vulnerability in the design of Thames Valley's award winning drug diversion scheme. JQ is driven to reduce the stigma of addiction and drug use, implementing schemes in schools to preclude exclusions and enable everyone found with drugs a non-judgemental assessment about the drugs they are using and tailored education and harm reduction to reduce risk.

Superintendent Colin McFarlane, South Yorkshire Police

Colin joined South Yorkshire Police in 1995, after gaining a degree in Public Sector Management from Sheffield Hallam University. Since joining the force, Colin has served in predominantly uniformed roles,

gaining significant experience in numerous specialist areas across the force. Although Colin enjoyed his time in all areas of the force, it was in his role as a Neighbourhood Inspector that he found his passion for problem solving and crime prevention. Colin achieved the rank of Superintendent in 2012, serving in both Sheffield and Doncaster districts. He has also been the force's Director of Intelligence. Colin's most recent, and current, appointment is to lead the national Problem Solving and Demand Reduction Programme, after the force was awarded £6.35 million of funding from the Home Office over three years. Alongside this, Colin is one of the force's Critical Incident Managers and a Tactical Firearms Commander.

Mike Parker, South Yorkshire Police

Mike Parker is the Performance Review Officer at the South Yorkshire Violence Reduction Unit. He has been involved in policing since leaving university, working as a Survey Officer at Surrey Police until 2018 and a Performance Analyst at South Yorkshire Police until 2019. He produced the VRU's Area Profile and is working in collaboration with Sheffield Hallam University on an experiment to investigate Year 10's perceptions of knives and knife crime.

Chief Inspector Jack Rowlands, Metropolitan Police

Jack is a Metropolitan Police Chief Inspector and currently works at London's Violence Reduction Unit. In his 17 years' service he experienced the impact of violence on society first hand. Since 2010 he has concentrated on tackling the root causes of violence and has created a number of award winning diversion programmes working collaboratively with others. Most recently Jack created DIVERT, a police custody diversion programme, designed to help 18-25s away from crime into employment, education and training. This has resulted in DIVERT helping over 1000 young people who have come through police custody with just over half finding employment, education and training. In April 2020 The London VRU began funding DIVERT.

In September 2019 Jack, working collaboratively with Juvenis and Lambeth Council, implemented DIVERT Youth, a collaborative diversion scheme working with Lambeth Council helping 10-18 year olds from becoming first time entrants into the CJS system. In this time it has led to a significant drop in the number of first time entrants into the CJS. Jack believes that policing has an opportunity to collaborate more with statutory, grass root and funding bodies to achieve a more innovative way of reducing violence for the long term.

DS David Thomason, Cheshire Police

Detective Sergeant Dave Thomason created and leads the Harm Reduction Unit on behalf of Cheshire Constabulary day to day. The Harm Reduction Unit builds on the success of its predecessor, the Integrated Anti-Stalking Unit which Dave created and developed having spent 15 years working at local, national and international levels to tackle stalking. Dave has trained thousands of professionals around the world in the policing of stalking and was previously a Staff Officer to the national police stalking lead. Dave has worked operationally as a detective working in public protection for the majority of his service. In 2019, Dave was awarded the inaugural national College of Policing Award for Partnerships and is also the recipient of an Association of Chief Police Officers Presidential Commendation for his work on tackling stalking. Dave has led the development of a revised national Stalking Screening Tool which is currently being evaluated on behalf of the College of Policing and also in the process of completing a post-graduate degree with Liverpool John Moore's University, looking into the implementation and effectiveness of Stalking Protection Orders.