Tackling the Developing World of OCGs through a Multi-Agency Strategy
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This study provides a first evaluation of the enforcement of one of the most innovative aspects of the 2018 Serious and Organised Crime Strategy: the multi-agency approach adopted to prevent OCGs from being active, expanding their business, and recruiting new members inside prisons.

The aim was to analyse the development of innovative strategies to fight criminal networks operating inside prisons, focusing on the UK governmental multi-agency strategy against organised crime and assesses the current level of cooperation between police, prison and probation in developing common strategies, practices and policies to respond to the full range of serious and organised crime threats.

This project was co-designed with the participation of Humberside police and HMP Humber and Hull prisons. It brings together academics, police, prison officers, and CJS practitioners with specific expertise in investigating and disrupting organised crime groups (OCGs). The research team conducted 55 in-depth interviews with police, prison, and probation officers (local, regional, and national) and analysis of documentary sources.

Recommendations are provided to further strengthen cooperation and improve multi-agency practices, crime prevention and criminal network disruption.

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KEY FINDINGS

- The prison population is highly vulnerable to organised crime due to a variety of social and environmental factors (such as the condition of confinement and the prison context). The role of data-sharing among different CJS agencies has major benefits in mitigating how this vulnerability can be exploited by OCGs.
- A common data sharing system among different CJS agencies could improve the quality of the collaboration and reduce the duplication of workload. By collaborating across organisational boundaries through data-sharing, partners gain a sense of collective responsibility and common ground for action. This can give a comprehensive understanding of the impact of the OCGs within and outside prison.
- The effectiveness of the multiagency strategy is highly dependent on the local and national blend of enforcement against OCGs. This cooperation should be further strengthened.
- There are benefits in the purpose and duties of the Prison Intelligence Officers (PIOs) who are police officers liaising between police and prison in the HMPPS and the role is approached flexibly. However, core tasks, priorities, responsibilities and outcomes could be further standardised to enhance effectiveness and the sharing of best practices.
- Data sharing in the form of joint meetings or through the PIOs plays a vital role in liaising and building trust with the different CJS agencies and ensuring more tailored and efficient action can be enforced to tackle the expansion of OCGs.
- The strategies to neutralise potential OCGs' threats in prison should include not only traditional enforcement of disruption tools such as keeping OCGs' individuals apart or moving them to different prison facilities, but also additional measures such as financial investigation and intelligence, to examine and disrupt serious and organised crime activities within the prison and the development of networks between prisoners and outside OCGs.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

The 2018 Serious and Organised Crime Strategy[1] sets out a multi-agency and data-sharing approach, including collaboration between police forces and HMPPS. Although criminal networks in prison are not a new phenomenon, OCGs are increasingly treating prisons as a place for potential lucrative activities and proliferation[2], such as recruiting new members[3], creating joint ventures with other organisations, and expanding their activities towards new markets[4]. Accordingly, for the UK government, prisons have emerged as a new frontline in fighting organised crime, intensifying the difficulties of tackling OCGs' networks. The risk that convicted criminals with a known link to organised crime go on to re-offend is serious and it becomes critical to track and manage OCGs within and outside prisons. Recent successes in fighting criminal networks[5] demonstrate the potential for new coordination between police and prison intelligence to consolidate disruption and dispersion of OCG activities[6]. Due to low levels of trust, difficult information access/tech-related problems, and lack of clarity in the policies/guidelines, at present, intelligence coming from different law enforcement agencies is not systematically shared or jointly collected. Moreover, there is little cooperation among law enforcement agencies despite the substantial potential value in developing consistent disruption strategies through effective multi-agency working.

FINDINGS

Information sharing and the need for holistic strategies

One of the primary benefits of developing a multi-agency approach, according to interviewees, is the overall action against OCGs to be as informed and coordinated as possible. This increases the volume and suitability of the information available to all agencies and affects how they work.

Police, prison and probation officers highlight the relevance of adopting a holistic approach and increasing understanding and trust between agencies. Emphasis is placed on the value of sharing information and intelligence about a criminal group and its members, to determine the most appropriate response. Units including both police and probation/prison officers at the national, regional and local levels provide timeless information and data about potential risks of OCGs activities, including the ones beyond the usual area of 'influence' and in prison. This approach reflects the definition of *holistic* strategies aimed at countering the criminal group and its overall actions rather than the individual only.

The multi-agency approach is described by the participants as increasing the level of trust between the police forces and the HMPPS. Furthermore, this then led to facilitating the building-up of good lines of communication and referral pathways as well as sharing best practices that could benefit the criminal justice system as a whole:

"It's not just about our ability to share intelligence, it's about where it's stored, who has access to it, what do they do with it once they have it, it's all those sorts of things […] if it's a human thing, it's around trust, it's

[1] Updated in 2019

[2] Treadwell, J, Gooch, K & Barkham-Perry, G (2018) 'Crime in Prison: What now and where next?' [online]. Available at: https://purehost.bath.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/193158391/PCCs_present_plan_to_government_to_tackle_organised_crime_in_prisons.pdf

[3] Wood, J. L., & Giles, H. (2014). Group and intergroup parameters of gang activities: An introduction and research agenda. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, *17*(6), 704-709.

[4] Gaston, S., & Huebner, B. M. (2015). Gangs in correctional institutions. *The handbook of gangs*, 328-344.

[5] Kirby, S., & Snow, N. (2016). Praxis and the disruption of organized crime groups. *Trends in organized crime*, *19*(2), 111-124.

[6] College of Policing. (2016). *Disrupting serious and organised criminals – menu of tactics*. [online] Available at: https://www.college.police.uk/research/menu-of-tactics.

around what are they going to do with that piece of intelligence, so that's what we need to try and get over."
(Police officer)
Even though this is a relatively new approach, almost all the participants, with few exceptions mostly linked to seniority, valorise the multi-agency work as a potential new frontier for the organisation of the criminal justice system that needs further investment and work.

A shift in the criminal justice system's response to OGCs: improving collaboration
There is a clear recognition among the participants that the single local forces are not in the best place to tackle OCGs that are able to operate nationally or regionally; a local police action against a specific group could redirect the activities of the group somewhere else or trigger new OCGs' manoeuvres in response to police intervention. This perception is echoed by prison and probation officers who refer to the activities of OCGs behind the bars as part of the OCGs' strategies to expand their businesses:

"The problem with prison is that when OCGs get inside, they start networking, and then there are crossovers to other OCGs, and they need to exist in there, survive in there. There's a big business within the prison for organised crime [...] it's the supply of mobile phones, the supply of drugs, and the supply of any illicit commodity within the prison." (HMPPS OC Unit)

"We often call it the university of crime [...] you've joined a new network and it's a bigger network coming out of prison, because then you understand that people with different skills who you know can further your OCG". (Police officer)

The creation of regional multi-agency units has facilitated the understanding of OCGs' overall approaches and helps in addressing CJS exposures and weaknesses in dealing with OCGs. In particular, prison officers think that cases of criminal activities by OCGs inside prison walls can be prevented by the combined actions of police intelligence and prison disruption techniques such as solitary confinement for OCGs' individuals. They recognise the value of prison intelligence officers (PIOs) liaising between prison and police:

"That is why they're there, to make sure that is effective [...] You have to look at consistency around staffing and resourcing. Some prisons are really busy, some prisons are less busy. So, it's probably one of the most important invisible things that PIOs do, nobody really knows this goes on, but it goes on every single day".
(Prison intelligence officer)

With a deeper understanding of both the police and prison/probation systems, the multiagency national and regional units can advise local police forces, which can make the criminal justice system intervention more time-efficient.

Overall, both prison/probation and police officers feel that the growing collaboration increased their understanding and improved their reading of OCGs' operational strategies. In addition, the mistrust amongst CJS agencies in sharing information seems to be slowly fading away, and even though especially at the local level participants report cautions in data sharing, this study's findings show that the multi-agency approach is producing an overall cultural shift in the criminal justice system.

Challenges in consolidating the multi-agency strategy
While the interviewees overall perceive the multi-agency approach as innovative they also raise challenges, especially at the local level. The first challenge is related to the different databases used and the access to them. Police, probation, and police use different IT systems, with limited access for the other agencies. This generates several issues and adds layers of practical complexity in consolidating data-sharing practices. The second challenge found by the participants is the differences in the organisational and work culture, in particular between police and prison officers. These differences in places generate misunderstanding and

obstacles to the building up of a solid line of communication between the different agencies of the criminal justice system. The last challenge is about the multiple layers of the institutional bureaucracy. Both police, probation and prison report how excess bureaucracy reduces the time that staff have for more concrete implementation of multi-agency practices:

"Then in terms of sharing, it's just incredibly difficult in-between agencies […] there is a lot of hesitancy and obviously getting stuck in routines and paperwork (MARSOC)".

CONCLUSIONS
The multi-agency SOC strategy has brought important benefits to policing practice and to HMPPS strategies in dealing with OGCs. Remarkably, there is a common belief among interviewees that this approach has led to more efficient use of CJS resources, increasing the effectiveness of police response and the HMPPS awareness of the OCGs' operational capacity. Although some restrictions prevented the implementation of the original research design, the overall perception is that the new approach is producing positive outcomes. Following the suggestions provided by the participants, this research suggests a list of recommendations to further improve the multi-agency approach:

1. Adopt one shared database for intelligence purposes and data exchange. In addition, access to the software used for intelligence and sharing could be simplified
2. Adopt one shared policy on how to deal with OGCs inside and outside prisons and circulate it widely amongst different forces across the CJS. Such policy should clearly distinguish between high and low-risk OCGs individuals within a shared conceptualisation and definition of OGCs risk. This policy should be implemented by a protocol.
3. Organise regular meetings, workshops, and further practice exchange events, nationally, regionally, and locally, to increase trust and confidence amongst different CJS agencies and individuals. This could also increase the intelligence exchange from local to national and vice versa, as well as internationally.
4. Increase the number of PIOs responsible for local and regional areas, as well as inside every prison, to strengthen the implementation of the multiagency strategy.

METHODOLOGY
The main methodological and analytical approach of this study relied on conducting qualitative research applied to policy research. Due to restrictions in database access, the initial social-network analysis considered in the original project has been replaced by an exploration at the national and local levels of the implementation of the new strategy. Therefore, the data collection has been organised into two main steps: an initial documentary analysis, exploring the 2018 strategy and the related documents, is followed by 55 in-depth interviews with CJS practitioners (police, prison, and probation) active in implementing the new strategy at the national, regional, and local levels. The data collected has been used to situate and triangulate the findings of the research. The study has explored not only the official actions put in place for the enforcement of the new strategy but also the informal practices adopted in facilitating and managing the cooperation between prison and police forces, beyond the national and regional new structures.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH
The research team is considering placing the project's findings against the analysis of strategies adopted in other jurisdictions to define a multi-agency and holistic approach to tackle OCGs. The problem of OCGs being able to operate within the prison seems to characterise several EU and non-EU countries. Therefore, the UK CJS could benefit from the comparison with the strategies adopted in other countries with different levels and issues of organised crime, and vice versa.

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