The Quality and Status of ‘Evidence’ in Policing: Reflections on understanding success to build capacity through innovations in policing domestic abuse

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Background to the study

Recent HMIC (2014, 2015) reports provide further indications of the limitations of the police service response to victims of domestic abuse (DA).

It might appear that police sometimes lag behind in terms of policy developments (such as the concept of ‘coercive control’). Nonetheless, the HMIC reports also indicate considerable innovation in policy and practice.

Within the N8 area alone, police services have (among other things) created specialist posts and new training packages; piloted Domestic Violence Protection Orders; led on Domestic Violence Disclosures; and introduced multi-agency teams, school liaison officers, and victim advocates.

The central idea of this project was for academics and police officers and staff to work collaboratively to identify areas in which innovation has been successful, and to develop deeper and richer understanding of the enabling circumstances and how these might build capacity in other police services.
Methodology

a series of qualitative inquiries into the character and range of enabling factors.

two broad questions were be addressed:

• what were the key contextual features of each that allowed positive impact and what challenges were experienced?

• how can other police forces mirror this innovation in ways most likely to ensure that the impact is replicated?

the questions were be addressed via qualitative interviews with key stakeholders, including police and non-police staff (n=18), and partner agencies (n=13)

• West Yorkshire: Operation Kyleford (‘DV Car’)
• North Yorkshire: the Early Interventions Pilot (EIP)
• Northumbria: the Multi Agency Tasking and Co-ordination (MATAC) project
The Key(s) to Success?

• A clear delimited focus
• Complementary partnership & skill sets
• Access to data
• Organisation, leadership & management
• Evidence and evaluation
The Key(s) to Success?

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, and/or the need to gain buy-in from large numbers of partners

Relatively few partner agencies (and where there were many – one sub-division of Northumbria, for example – this was more problematic)
The Key(s) to Success?

**Complementary Partnership & Skill Sets**

information and expertise that different professionals bring to addressing complex issues was seen to add 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 example Operation Kyleford enabled IDVAs to do more effective risk assessments and safety planning and so secure disclosure of offences that police reported they otherwise would not have identified: so clear criminal justice outcomes

Equally, partner staff reported positively that they gained from police ability to deal with confrontational situations, and from data and background information, which tended to be regarded as authoritative
The Key(s) to Success?

Access to data

Police information (offender records, risk scores, intelligence, etc) was highly regarded by partners who perceived it as a definitive representation of DA patterns, trends, hot spots, etc.

The status of police data overcame contestation of priorities for intervention

“I had immediate access to that information you need. Whereas often, ordinarily, what we have to do is ring a Domestic Abuse Officer or the Supporting Victims Unit to get access to that information” (N. Yorks, non-police partner)

Data sharing problematic in one example
The Key(s) to Success?

Organisation, Leadership & Management

HO Innovation Fund (MATAc project, Northumbria) project was outside of mainstream work, not ‘doomed to succeed’ and so attracted less cynicism

Allocation of time for staff to participate, and fixed points of contact, communicated senior management commitment, important internally and externally to police
The Key(s) to Success?

*Evidence and evaluation*

Criteria for inclusions in the study was that the innovative project was based on evidence and had been subject to 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 (e.g. a review by NYP found that over 55% of EIP cases resulted in no further reported incidents).

The perception might differ from reality: ‘evidence’ and ‘evaluation’ were difficult to establish in practice, and often did not appear robust in scientific terms. Important to wider debates about the nature and deployment of Evidence Based Policing (Fleming and Wingrove, 2017 and Goode and Lumsden, 2018).
Conclusions

‘With the grain’ in relation to police occupational culture

• Narrow, task-oriented focus, relieved pressure on resources
• Relatively few partners
• Operational benefits (for all) from partnership working

Data, evidence and evaluation

Established authoritative credibility ...

... but these do not easily meet with prevailing standards of EBP – academic and police co-production of evidence will need to understand differences in style when ‘dancing with different partners’.