



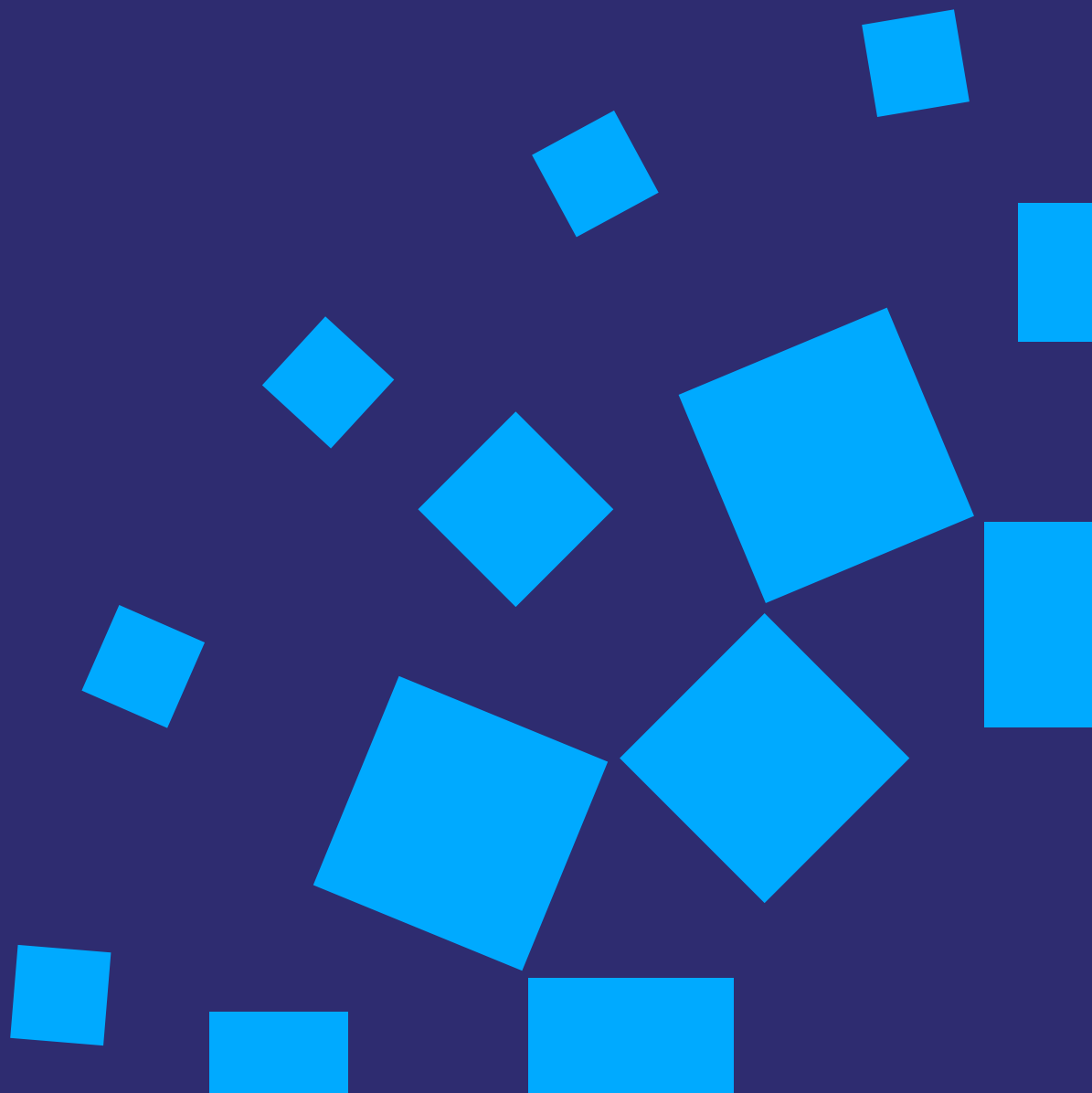
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Vulnerability and Violent Crime Programme

Evaluation of Operation Met Divan

Key findings and implications for practice



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Vulnerability and Violent Crime Programme (VVCP)

The College of Policing was awarded a grant through the Home Office Police Transformation Fund to develop the evidence base on vulnerability and serious violence. The programme focused on key areas of interest to policing, including knife crime, gangs, county lines, criminal exploitation of young people, and child sexual abuse and exploitation. This is one of nine summaries accompanying ten reports delivered as part of the VVCP.

If you have any questions about the VVCP, please email:

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Overview

Op Met Divan is an early intervention programme based in south London, delivered by the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS), which seeks to identify and support young people under the age of 18 suspected of carrying knives or other weapons. Potential participants are identified from intelligence and are discussed at panel meetings to clarify if they meet the eligibility criteria. If selected, a Safer Neighbourhood Officer (SNO) or Safer Schools Officer (SSO) meets with the young person and explains the potential risks and consequences of carrying a weapon and provides them with an Official Notice¹. The young person is also referred or signposted to other support services if appropriate.

This summary also includes analysis conducted by the College of Policing, which explored the characteristics and backgrounds of young people who came to the attention of Op Met Divan. This work explored whether there were patterns and commonalities among young people referred and which individuals were deemed as most suitable for the intervention.

Does it work?

All interviewees defined success as the young person not coming to the attention of the police or school for carrying a knife/weapon again after receiving a visit. As the number of young people taking up Op Met Divan was low at the time of data collection, interviewees could not say whether Op Met Divan was having this impact yet, or if it would have an impact in the future. Despite this, interviewees from the Op Met Divan team suggested they were starting to see the early impacts of the programme, such as reduced interactions with the police for young people and improved information gathering and sharing across agencies.

¹ The Notice is a two-page document, 'Carrying a Knife or Weapon: is it worth the risk?'. It describes what is meant by a knife or weapon-related crime and its consequences, and provides details of who to contact if they are concerned about their or someone else's safety.

Background

About this report

This report summarises the findings of the full independent evaluation of Op Met Divan undertaken by NatCen as part of the College's Vulnerability and Violent Crime Programme (VVCP). This summary describes how Op Met Divan works in practice and outlines key findings from the impact, process and cost analysis aspects of the evaluation. Emerging implications for practice are also discussed.

This report also includes further work conducted by the College of Policing, which aimed to understand more about the characteristics and backgrounds of young people who came to the attention of Op Met Divan between April 2019 and January 2020, and subsequently which of these individuals were deemed most suitable for the intervention.

[Read the full Operation Met Divan report](#)

[Read the College of Policing report on Operation Met Divan](#)

What is Op Met Divan?

Op Met Divan is an early intervention programme based in south London, delivered by the MPS, which seeks to identify and support young people suspected of carrying weapons. Op Met Divan was implemented in Croydon in April 2019 and rolled out to Bromley and Sutton in October 2019. Op Met Divan is based on a pre-existing programme, Op Divan, delivered by North Yorkshire Police (NYP) since 2018.

Op Met Divan uses intelligence gathered from three databases (Merlin, CRIS and Crimint) to identify young people who have come to the attention of the police for suspected weapon carrying. To be eligible for the intervention the individual must:

- be under the age of 18
- not have previous criminal convictions for weapon possession
- reside in the London boroughs of Bromley, Croydon or Sutton
- have evidence relating to them suggesting that they have been or intend to carry a weapon

All individuals who are eligible for Op Met Divan are discussed at weekly selection meetings. These selection meetings were attended by a combination of police, members of the Op Met Divan team and delivery partners who had agreed to use Op Met Divan as an early intervention service. Weekly attendance at these meetings varied. If selected for Op Met Divan, a SNO or SSO meets with the young person. The location of the meeting was either at home or at school, depending on the location of the incident. For example, if it was at school then a SSO will conduct the meeting at school. In the meeting the SNO or SSO explains the risks/consequences of carrying a weapon, provides them with the Official Notice and signposts or refers

them to support services depending on their needs.

How was the intervention evaluated?

Following the development of the logic model (**Figure 1**) for Op Met Divan, this evaluation used qualitative approaches and a quantitative cost analysis to explore the delivery and perceived effectiveness of Op Met Divan. As the intervention was expanded into Bromley and Sutton, the logic model was revisited at this stage of the evaluation.

Impact evaluation

A robust impact evaluation (experimental or quasi-experimental) was not feasible in the available time frames due to the limited number of individuals who had received the intervention during the evaluation period.

Process evaluation

Nine in-depth interviews were conducted with Op Met Divan programme leads and delivery staff. They explored their perceptions of programme set-up, delivery and its impacts. Interviews with young people (programme participants), their parents/carers and partner agencies were also planned, however these were not undertaken due to recruitment challenges, which is a limitation of the evaluation.

The research team also observed two 'selection meetings' where

potential programme participants' suitability for the intervention was discussed by the Op Met Divan team.

Cost analysis

Cost data was collected from the programme leads using a proforma. Cost was divided into four categories: implementation costs, staff time costs, marginal financial costs and other variable costs.

The information provided by the leads was used to estimate the cost of the programme. All of Op Met Divan's costs could be attributed to staff costs, though all cost categories were considered when cost data was collected. Given that the programme was in its early stages and the lack of information on what 'average' programme caseload would be, it was not possible to collect information to estimate the average per-participant cost of the programme.

Examining the Op Met Divan cohort

The analysis conducted by the College of Policing was primarily exploratory in nature and sought to determine whether there were patterns or commonalities among characteristics relating both to (a) the **incident** for which the young people came to police attention, and (b) the **young people themselves**.

The data used in this analysis was taken from the Op Met Divan monitoring spreadsheet, which was populated by an analyst with data drawn from Merlin, CRIS and Crimint. Records on these systems are primarily intelligence reports and are therefore usually a summary of incidents of potential criminal behaviour and safeguarding concerns. For each case, demographic information about the young person and information about the incident had been recorded, which were used to inform decision making around whether a young person was suitable for the intervention. It also included information on the final decision with regard to the suitability of the young person for the intervention and the outcome for those deemed suitable, or a rationale for exclusion for those deemed unsuitable.

The coding framework was developed by College researchers, supported by an academic advisor attached to the VVCP. The coding framework was not predetermined but driven by the data and

developed through an iterative process of coding and categorisation that was quality assured.

Figure 1: Op Met Divan logic model

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Impact
<p>Staff</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Safer school officers ■ Youth engagement team ■ Dedicated ward officers (from safer neighbourhood teams) ■ Dedicated Intel team ■ ASB team ■ YOT officers <p>IT</p> <p>Partnerships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Partnership information sharing ■ Wider links, for example, ASB IOM gangs, YOS, housing and education, social services) <p>Staff training on Met Divan process</p>	<p>Intelligence gathering</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Searching of 3 databases (MERLIN, CRIS and CRIMINT) <p>Management/administration of intelligence by ASB team.</p> <p>Weekly meeting to discuss intelligence results and identify potential Met Divan beneficiaries.</p> <p>Targeted YP visits/discussions</p> <p>Home visits (by SSO/DWO/YET) where educational intervention delivered including signposting and referral to information and support.</p> <p>Refer YP to partner</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Case is referred to another part of the police/wider agency, for example, children’s social care, other local services. 	<p>Identifying young people unknown to police.</p> <p>Young people educational about consequences of carrying knives/weapons.</p> <p>Increased awareness of and openness to seeking support.</p> <p>Item surrender/seizure and disposal.</p> <p>Carrying knife or weapon notice issues.</p> <p>Dialogue between young people and police instigated.</p>	<p>Improved understanding of consequences of carrying weapons.</p> <p>YP engages with partners and takes up support.</p> <p>Voluntary compliance amongst young people.</p> <p>Reduce number of young people carrying weapons.</p> <p>More trust in police among young people.</p> <p>Change behaviour of parents and family and networks.</p> <p>Improve educational outcomes and attendance.</p> <p>Create a safer environment in schools and the community.</p> <p>Better stakeholder / multi agency co-operation / information sharing and response to YP.</p>	<p>Prevent criminalisation of young people.</p> <p>Improved internal processes around intelligence on knife crime and wider information sharing with partners.</p> <p>Reduce (re) offending.</p> <p>Prompt culture change to keep young people safe.</p> <p>Increase safety and security for the wider community.</p> <p>Divan is rolled out to all front-line officers and becomes fully integrated into suite of programmes available.</p>

The three main code types were **'Incident type'**, **'Prior contact with the police'** and **'Personal background'**.

Due to the exploratory nature, chi-square tests² were run to test for an association between a combination of profile characteristics (such as age, sex or family background) and the outcome of their Op Met Divan case, to investigate whether individuals with certain characteristics were more or less likely to be deemed eligible for a home visit. Additionally, chi-square tests were carried out between each profile characteristic to investigate whether individuals with certain characteristics were also likely to have other characteristics.

Through latent class analysis (LCA), a statistical modelling technique, it is possible to identify potential groups within a population; the characteristics that are most strongly associated with that group; the prevalence of the groups; and the covariates that explain differences in group membership. Additionally, these models can be used to predict which groups future subjects may fall into and can also be used to predict other variables or outcomes. As a result of the small sample size, it was not possible to conduct additional predictive analysis, which would allow us to determine whether individuals with certain characteristics were more or less likely to successfully receive the intervention.

2 The chi-square test is used to establish whether there is an association between categorical variables, by comparing the observed values to the values that would be expected if the variables were completely independent of each other. In summary, a chi-square test assesses how likely it is that any observed patterns are due to chance.

How did the intervention perform?

Evidence is presented using the EMMIE framework, which was developed to help practitioners and decision-makers to understand and access the evidence base quickly and easily. The EMMIE framework describes findings across five dimensions.

Effect	Impact on crime or offending	Does the evidence suggest that the intervention led to an increase or decrease in crime or offending, or that it had no impact?
Mechanism	How it works	What aspect(s) of the intervention could explain this effect?
Moderators	Where it works	In what circumstances and contexts is the intervention likely (or unlikely) to work?
Implementation	How to do it	What conditions should be considered when implementing an intervention locally?
Economic cost	How much it costs	What direct or indirect costs are associated with the intervention, and is there evidence of cost benefits?

Effect – what was the impact of the intervention?

An impact evaluation was not feasible due to the small number of individuals who came to the attention of Op Met Divan over the period of the evaluation. Therefore, indicators of potential impact are drawn from the in-depth interviews.

All interviewees defined success as the young person not coming to the attention of the police or school for carrying a knife/weapon again after receiving Op Met Divan. As the number of programme participants was low at the time of data collection, interviewees could not say whether Op Met Divan was having this impact yet, or would have in the future. Despite this, interviewees from the Op Met Divan team suggested they were starting to see the early impacts of the programme described below.

- **Reduced interactions with the police** for young people. Interviewees discussed how once the home or school visit was made, the young person would often not come to their attention again (either in person or flagged in the databases). This was seen as promising evidence of the intervention's success.
- **A shift in police perspectives** of the young people who were in possession of a weapon/at risk of carrying a weapon, from criminal to vulnerable. The change in perspective was felt to have led to a different approach in style and manner, for example being non-confrontational, and more conversational when interacting with young people.
- **Efficiencies in information gathering** across the south Basic Command Unit (BCU). As additional police roles (such as Youth Engagement Officers (YEOs)) were associated with the programme, existing information about young people and their families could be more easily acquired. Information that had not been available through police databases was now attainable by discussions with the wider network of officers, enabling clearer and quicker access to information.
- **Expanded skillset** for officers on the Op Met Divan team and across delivery partners and policing roles in the south BCU. Being part of the Op Met Divan team was felt to allow officers to apply principles of the intervention in their daily work/engagements with at-risk young people.

Mechanism – how did it work?

The in-depth interviews conducted with Op Met Divan programme leads and delivery staff identified specific features of Op Met Divan that may underpin successful outcomes:

- **Improved safeguarding** for young people who took up the programme, including the identification of wider issues they might be facing (such as neglect, abuse, learning difficulties) and signposting to wider support services when needed. Parents/carers were also given advice and support where appropriate.

- **Raising awareness about the consequences of knife crime among young people** including how carrying a knife/blade increases risk of being a victim of knife crime and criminal trajectories (for example a criminal record, prison sentences). This awareness was felt to come from the discussion at the Op Met Divan meeting and from the Official Notice.
- **Increased trust, confidence and cooperation between young people and the police.** Interviewees felt that speaking to a police officer in the context of an Op Met Divan intervention could improve the young person's view of the police. They might feel increased trust and confidence in the police in protecting their community and be more likely to seek out police support when in need (such as reporting a crime).
- **Improving relationships between young people and the police.** Police officers and staff involved in delivering Op Met Divan described how speaking to a police officer in the context of an Op Met Divan intervention might improve the young person's view of the police. Officers and staff suggested young people might feel increased trust and confidence in the police to protect them/their communities, and may be more likely to seek out police support when in need (such as reporting a crime).
- **Clear communication between police staff and the Op Met Divan team** and delivery partners was perceived to facilitate decision making about selection into Op Met Divan and caseload management.
- **Good relationships and networks between team members and wider partner agencies** facilitated effective information sharing, needs assessments and support provision.

Moderator – where did it work best?

Moderator effects were not available due to a lack of quantitative data.

Implementation – how to do it

Police team members described Op Met Divan delivery as part of their roles, and as forming part of a ‘toolkit’ of interventions aimed at responding to knife crime among young people.

Interviewees discussed a range of factors they felt facilitated decision making about cases during the selection meetings:

- **Inclusive discussions:** team members were perceived to be open to each other’s suggestions and respectful of them and of others’ professional experiences.
- **Timely access to Police National Computer (PNC) data for additional information:** it was relatively easy to check the criminal records of the young people in real time if more information was needed.
- **Networks and connections:** wider partner agencies or services may have been in contact with the young person or have worked with them in the past, which enabled additional information to be brought to the meeting.

Interviewees also discussed a range of barriers that impacted on decision making in the selection meeting:

- **Availability of police and statutory services data on the person:** if data was limited, interviewees felt it could be difficult to make an informed decision about case inclusion.
- **Wider individual risks and needs:** team members felt they were not always aware of how the risk and needs of young people were perceived differently by wider partner agencies. Disagreements would sometimes require further discussions, which could delay delivery of the intervention.
- **Ongoing investigations:** the team did not want to interfere with ongoing investigations so inclusion or exclusion decisions were not made until cases had an outcome.
- **Resource constraints:** as staff must deliver Op Met Divan alongside their everyday roles, there were not always felt to be sufficient resources to conduct a visit quickly after referral. One SSO

described how home visits were preferred by young people and their parents/carers, but due to the SSO working 9am to 5pm and the young person usually being in school, it was difficult to carry out home visits.

Interviewees identified key lessons learnt through the implementation of Op Met Divan in Croydon, and its wider roll-out across the south BCU. The elements considered essential for wider roll-out included:

- **Importance of establishing strong partnerships with partner agencies.** Activities to support effective partnership working between the Op Met Divan team and partner agencies included: more regular communication; development of shared aims and objectives for the delivery of the intervention; and engagement activity such as information sessions for all. This was felt to assist with the visibility of Op Met Divan among police staff across the south BCU.
- **Clear communication and processes.** Due to the larger scale of Op Met Divan compared to NYP's Op Divan, a wide network of professionals (such as school officers) needed to be involved in and informed about the programme, its perceived benefits and its outcomes on a regular basis to ensure high-quality delivery. Information sharing agreements were developed to help facilitate communication through the programme.
- **Flexible approach for engaging young people.** Early delivery in Croydon suggested much of the risky behaviour associated with knife/weapon possession was occurring outside of schools and so a flexible and responsive approach was needed to engage young people in the intervention. As SSOs could not always deliver home visits due to their working pattern, YEOs and SNOs were used to ensure wider reach to young people.
- **'Bolt-on' support.** Op Met Divan aimed to refer young people into organised activities where appropriate, to provide support and build confidence. However, most of the relationships with service providers were in their infancy and needed more work to establish formal networks and connections. Staff approaches to referrals were inconsistent as some team members had contacts

with agencies, while others were unclear of the process and just provided participants with information of possible activities via leaflets. Some interviewees questioned the suitability of programmes that young people were referred to, leading them to feel that the referral aspect was a ‘tick-box exercise’.

- **Ease of accessing information from various data sources.**

Information was shared among the team using a system called Box³. Being able to access information from various data sources (such as the PNC) meant that all team members could develop a holistic understanding of potential participants.

Potential challenges of the future delivery of Op Met Divan across the MPS and challenges that may arise if it was implemented elsewhere in the country were identified.

- The current volume of cases was felt to be manageable. However, it was felt that any increase would require additional staff and resources.
- The Op Met Divan team reported needing to be aware of how different local authority services operated. This included where they were located, for example the police and YOT are co-located in Sutton but housed separately in Croydon and Bromley, which had implications for information sharing within the boroughs.
- Op Met Divan required an existing network of school officers to be in place. In other areas of the country, there may be fewer or no school officers available. These factors should be considered when considering Op Met Divan’s replicability and scalability, as this would substantially increase the cost of implementing the intervention in its current form.

Economic cost – how much is it?

Cost data was collected from the programme leads. Given that Op Met Divan was at an early stage of implementation, costs are not presented as a ‘per-participant’ cost, as all costs are attributed to staff time costs.

³ Box is a cloud content management and information sharing system. Available from: [box.com/home](https://www.box.com/home) [Accessed 12 June 2020]

Op Met Divan's delivery model was directly incorporated into MPS standard practice within the BCU and does not receive external funding. Op Met Divan formed a small part of the listed staff's overall responsibilities and this was accounted for in the cost analysis.

At this early stage in implementation, staff costs were estimated to be approximately £23,000 each year, based on the proportion of staff time spent on Op Divan work. The intervention lead, sergeants and the Intelligence Officer were all assumed to spend approximately 5% of their contracted hours working on Op Met Divan; SSOs and SNOs were assumed to spend 3%; and YEOs were assumed to spend 2%.

However, costs could increase if staff spent more time working on Op Met Divan and less time on their other duties, and if the number of individuals referred to the programme increases.

Understanding the profile of young people coming to the attention of Op Met Divan

Further analysis conducted by the College was primarily exploratory in nature and aimed to see what could be learned about these young people and their backgrounds. Further analysis sought to determine whether there were patterns or commonalities among characteristics relating both to (a) the incident for which the young people came to police attention, and (b) the young people themselves. The research helps build a picture of the multiple and complex challenges that form part of the backgrounds of young people who are either involved, or at risk of becoming involved, in knife crime.

Sample

157 young people were considered for the intervention in 2019. Of these, 35 were female and 122 were male. Two thirds were aged under 16 and the remaining third between 16 and 18 years old.

The characteristics of the sample of young people who came to the attention of the intervention during the evaluation period are described below.

Incidents for which they came to police attention

- 70% of incidents for which the young person came to the programme's attention involved the confirmed presence of a knife or weapon.
- In 12% of cases the young person was suspected of carrying/possession but this was not confirmed.
- In the remaining 18% of incidents, the young person was exclusively the victim of an offence or there was no explicit suspicion of weapon possession by the young person.
- Almost a fifth of incidents involved additional offences other than the possession of a knife or weapon, such as criminal damage, robbery, possession of drugs, theft and affray.

Background of young people

Young people coming to the attention of Op Met Divan have complex backgrounds and needs.

- Nearly half (47%) of all young people were known to at least one partner agency. Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), social services and YOTs were the most frequently cited agencies.
- A fifth of young people (20%) were considered to have experienced mental illness, behavioural or learning difficulties.
- Nearly a fifth (18%) of individuals were recorded as having educational issues, such as not being in full-time education, school exclusion or bullying.
- In almost a quarter of cases the young person had experienced at least one form of family instability (not including living away from parents) including:
 - being a victim or witness of domestic or child abuse
 - unstable housing situation
 - family or parental criminality
 - family illness (including mental health)

- a death or traumatic incident
- 12% of young people were known to be or had previously been living away from their parents, either within the care system (in a children's home or with foster parents) or with other family members.

Previous contact with the police

- Over a third (34%) of the sample had previously committed a criminal offence.
- Nearly a fifth (17%) of young people within the sample had previously been reported to the police as a missing person.
- 12% had been identified as being associated with gangs.
- Just over 10% had experience of victimisation.

Identifying groups within the Op Met Divan cohort

Using LCA, all indicators in the coding framework were initially examined together. This overall analysis of incident type, prior contact with the police and personal background identified five groups of young people in which cases had a high probability of sharing characteristics where:

- **Class one** was the largest class, comprising 37% of the sample, and broadly contained individuals who had not had previous contact with the police but may be known to partner agencies for mental health or behavioural issues or some form of family instability. **Incidents in this class may have been 'one-offs' or not necessarily indicative of escalating risky behaviour.**
- **Class two**, comprising 17% of the sample, **contained individuals with particularly complex needs, who may be particularly vulnerable to becoming involved in knife crime.** Young people in this class were the most likely to have lived or be living under care arrangements, and therefore be known to partner agencies. They often displayed aggressive behaviour and were likely to have mental health or behavioural issues and consequently issues in education. Incidents in this class often involved foster parents or carers, or other family members being threatened by the young person.

- In **class three**, which comprised 16% of the sample, incidents were likely to involve a peer of the subject, usually involving some form of aggression, which may have been threats. Young people in this class were unlikely to have had any contact with the police previously but had a small probability of being suspected or known to associate with gangs. **These young people may be susceptible to escalating their behaviour** if they are already on the fringes of gangs.
- Broadly individuals in **class four**, which contained 15% of the sample, **were likely to be suspected of carrying a knife but the presence of a weapon was never confirmed.** This suspicion was often the result of the young person having previous weapons offences, or associating with known knife carriers. These young people may also be at risk of being exploited or pressured to carry knives by those they are associating with.
- Individuals in **class five**, which contained 14% of the sample, were **generally the most known to police for various types of offending, and probably those already engaging in the most risky behaviour.** They were the most likely to be involved in gangs, as well as having complex needs and backgrounds. These incidents also often involved other offences.

Further analysis indicated that incidents between family members were more likely to concern individuals who had a history of behavioural issues and who were more likely to engage in risky behaviour, such as previous offending or missing episodes. In contrast, peer-related incidents were often committed by individuals who were less likely to have a previous offending history or behavioural issues, and were perhaps 'isolated incidents'. This finding also emerged in the LCA, combining all variables where one group largely contained peer incidents and the group members were unlikely to have any offending history or other known issues.

Individuals who had previously been reported as being aggressive (usually by a parent/carer) were found to be more likely to have committed prior offences, including violence or weapon possession, and these individuals were more likely to be known to partner agencies. Children who had experienced family instability, including abuse or other welfare concerns, were found to be more likely to have committed

prior offences. Again these findings were echoed in the combined LCA, where one group of incidents was characterised by the presence of a family member and displays of aggression by the subject, and the young people in this group were likely to have had contact with the police for prior offending. They were likely to be known to partner agencies and to have experienced family instability.

Conclusion

Overall, the qualitative evidence showed that the Op Met Divan team were generally positive about the impacts of the delivery and perceived benefits of the intervention as they felt positive towards the impacts in its early stages. The programme was felt to have addressed a gap in police-led services for early intervention with young people.

Op Met Divan was perceived to have benefits in three key areas. The benefits for young people, where they had reduced interactions with the police and raised awareness about the risks and consequences of knife crime. The benefits for the wider community, including improved safeguarding for young people and improving the relationship between young people and the police. And finally, the benefits for the police. This included a shift in police officers' perspectives of young people from criminal to vulnerable, efficiencies in information gathering and an expanded skillset, such as clear communication for officers and delivery partners, and applying principles of the intervention in their daily work/engagements with at-risk young people.

Further research is needed to provide stronger evidence around the impacts of Op Met Divan, especially from the perspectives of its target group: young people. More information about their experiences would provide some clarity on the effects of the intervention.

Since its implementation in Croydon, Op Met Divan has expanded and there is additional interest across London boroughs. As cases continue to be referred and undertaken, further opportunities to assess the intervention will become available.

Analysis undertaken by the College has shown that there is not a homogenous group of young people at risk of becoming involved in knife crime and that the incidents involved and backgrounds of

About the College

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Working together with everyone in policing, we share the skills and knowledge officers and staff need to prevent crime and keep people safe.

We set the standards in policing to build and preserve public trust and we help those in policing develop the expertise needed to meet the demands of today and prepare for the challenges of the future.

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