



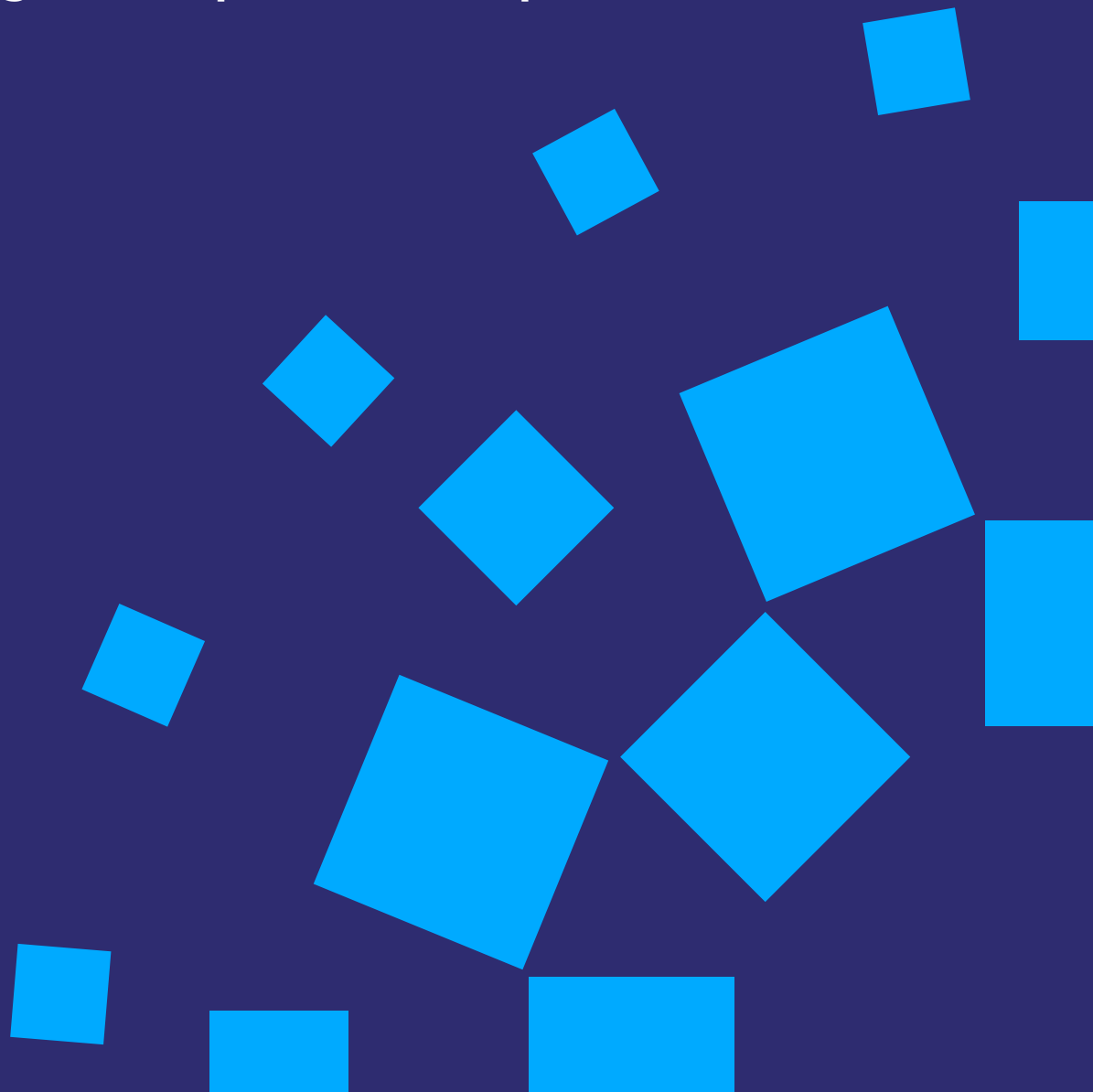
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Policing

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Vulnerability and Violent Crime Programme

Evaluation of Think Family Early Intervention (TFEI)

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:

research@college.pnn.police.uk

Overview

Think Family Early Intervention (TFEI) is an initiative run by Avon and Somerset Police that aims to help families who fall below the threshold of receiving help from the council and social services, but still require police assistance and engagement. To be eligible for the scheme, a family has to meet at least two criteria from a list of six. At least one of those criteria has to be police related, so either: 'crime and antisocial behaviour', 'domestic abuse' or 'children who need help'. The other, non-police-related criteria are: 'poor school attendance', 'unemployment' and 'problems with health'. The TFEI process involves police community support officers (PCSOs) working with families (typically for six to 12 months) to understand their key difficulties, identify what support is required and help to source that support.

Does it work?

A before/after evaluation of the intervention showed a reduction in domestic violence, crime and youth crime for families after the intervention, but not for antisocial behaviour (ASB) or missing persons reports. However, PCSOs reported experiencing problems in delivering the intervention due to a lack of training and understanding of procedures, problems working with other agencies and issues with family engagement and rapport.

Background

About this report

This report summarises the findings of the full independent evaluation of the TFEI undertaken by the University of Birmingham as part of the College's Vulnerability and Violent Crime Programme (VVCP). This summary describes how TFEI works in practice, as well as outlining key findings from the impact, process and cost analysis strands of the evaluation. Emerging implications for practice are also discussed.

[Read the full TFEI report](#)

What is TFEI?

TFEI is a policing initiative that aims to help families who fall below the threshold of receiving help from the council and social services but still require assistance from the police. The initiative aims to prevent an escalation or intergenerational cycle of offending by tackling issues such as drug or alcohol abuse, domestic abuse, missing persons incidents and ASB. TFEI is based on the core philosophy of the Troubled Families programme¹ and is a multi-agency approach. When a family is brought to the attention of the TFEI scheme, the force creates an intelligence pack, which includes a list of previous linked offences, to assess their suitability for the scheme.

To be eligible for the scheme, a family has to meet at least two criteria, and one of those has to be police related. The police-related criteria are: 'crime and ASB', 'domestic abuse' and 'children who need help' (this includes missing persons – handled by the police). The non-police related criteria are: 'poor school attendance', 'unemployment' and 'problems with health'. Once a family is deemed eligible for the intervention, a PCSO is allocated to engage with them.

Participation in TFEI is optional and there is no penalty for refusing to participate. If a family refuses to take part, PCSOs leave guidance and contact information should they change their mind. If a family agrees to take part, the allocated PCSO will then work with them for six to 12 months. The PCSO will develop a bespoke action plan with the family that will identify their difficulties and help them tackle those difficulties. At the time of the evaluation, around 40 PCSOs were involved in the intervention. In general, each PCSO was engaging with one family at any one time. The PCSOs remain a point of contact with the police for the family and can help address family issues involving the police. Where relevant, they can also signpost or submit referrals to external organisations such as school workers or council agencies. PCSOs update Niche with latest information and any actions taken.

¹ The Troubled Families programme encourages a 'family intervention approach', where a nominated key worker is assigned to each family to gain an understanding of a family's interconnected issues and design a plan of action.

How was the intervention evaluated?

Following the development of a logic model² for TFEI, a mixed methods design was developed. The aim of this project was to evaluate the TFEI programme to understand what aspects of the intervention work, for whom, and in what context.

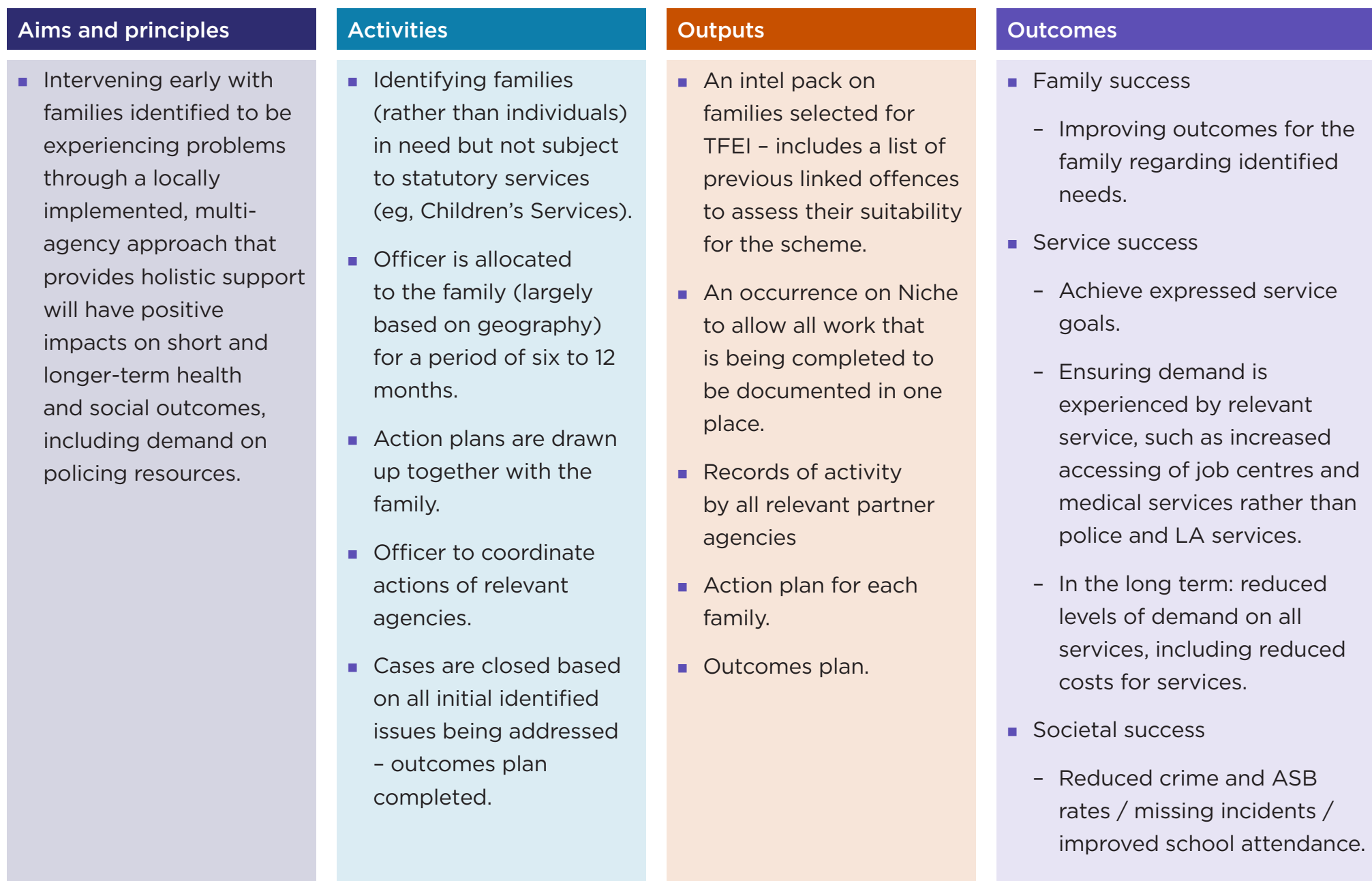
The research questions for this evaluation are as follows:

1. What are the impacts of TFEI measured against its intended outcomes?
2. What are the levels of understanding of the officers delivering TFEI?
3. How do families engage (or not) with TFEI?
4. What is the nature of the relationship between officers and families?
5. How does the cooperation between multiple agencies work to meet the diverse needs of the families?

The **impact evaluation** used quantitative data collected from all families that went through the intervention in the Avon and Somerset Police area between October 2015 and June 2019. This included baseline and demographic data such as socio-economic status and family characteristics. Data was not provided for a control group so a before/after study was carried out. To understand the dynamics of each family before and after the intervention, the data was obtained at different time intervals (six and 12 months before the intervention, and six and 12 months following the start of the intervention) for a number of crime and non-crime outcomes. This included the number of missing persons episodes reported or number of domestic violence incidents recorded.

2 A logic model helps you think critically about the links between your problem, your intervention and your measures of success to show how and why your intervention might work. More information can be found at: whatworks.college.police.uk/Support/Pages/Research-guidance.aspx

Figure 1: TFEI logic model



The **process evaluation** used phone interviews and focus groups to explore: 1) The experiences of individuals involved in the delivery of TFEI, 2) Views on the benefits and challenges of TFEI, 3) Views on the relationship between the families and PCSOs, 4) Views of individuals involved in supporting families on the impact of TFEI and 5) Views on the merits of TFEI being adopted by other forces.

A **cost analysis** was not possible due to limitations in data availability.

How did the intervention perform?

Evidence is presented using the EMMIE framework, which was developed to help practitioners and decision-makers 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?

Evidence on the overall impact of the intervention is limited by both the duration of the evaluation period and available data sources. In the absence of longer term data, the best available measures of change were used to give an indication of potential impact. Future follow-ups using longer term data would help us to understand better the overall impact of the intervention.

The TFEI evaluation showed mixed findings. The quantitative phase showed a statistically significant reduction in crime, youth crime and domestic violence incidents both six and 12 months following the intervention compared to a similar period of time before the intervention. However, there was no similar drop in missing persons episodes or ASB. Even though numbers were lower after the intervention, the change was not statistically significant.

Unfortunately, due to a lack of a suitable control group, it is not possible to establish whether the TFEI was responsible for these reductions. Reductions in offending can be expected simply due to the passage of time, as involvement in offending tends to reduce over the life course. However, beyond this, many PCSOs believed the engagement of family with the intervention could cause crime, including youth crime, to drop. This reflects the findings of the desistance and assisted desistance literature, which emphasises the role of supportive individuals in an offender's process of desisting from crime and creating a new non-offending identity (Maruna and Mann, 2019; Sapouna et al., 2016). This applies to both adult and youth offenders (Hampson, 2018; HMIP, 2016; Morris et al., 2008).

The qualitative phase found that some PCSOs felt underqualified and out of their depth supporting families with complex needs. Additionally, there were general concerns about the procedures and training, with many PCSOs struggling to remember what the training and procedures were. Participants challenged whether this type of intervention should sit with the police and discussed the level of responsibility other agencies should have in contributing to supporting families or taking the lead on cases.

Mechanism – how did it work?

TFEI is based on the premise that early intervention tailored specifically for families with complex and multiple problems should prevent the escalation of offending. In the focus groups, the individuals who ran the intervention felt that early intervention was crucial to TFEI and was an important part of the intervention's philosophy. That said, the majority of those who helped run the intervention felt that, while early intervention was important, the police should not be taking the lead in

TFEI. There was no specific identification of aspects outside of early intervention, such as the drawing up of action plans, the coordinating role of the police staff member or the individual ways in which cases were closed that participants felt contributed to the success of the intervention. Due to the lack of a comparable control group, it is not possible to conclude that the reductions in the outcome measures seen in this evaluation are down to early intervention.

Moderator – where did it work best?

PCSOs involved in the interviews and focus groups felt that TFEI was implemented differently across areas. Furthermore, evaluation participants reported that early intervention with families was not always possible. The reasons for this were complex and included families coming to police attention too late. The lack of control group data meant that further assessment of the issues was not possible.

Implementation – how to do it

Overall, our findings show that TFEI was implemented as intended. The findings from this report have informed a set of recommendations for other forces seeking to implement TFEI. There were three elements of the intervention where there were inconsistencies in implementation.

Firstly, some PCSOs felt underqualified and out of their depth supporting families with complex needs. Additionally, there were general concerns about the procedures and training. PCSOs' perceptions of the training were inconsistent, with some reporting they had received inadequate training, which they felt impacted negatively on their knowledge of TFEI and how it should be implemented. Many PCSOs reported struggling to remember what the training and procedures were. To mitigate these issues, forces should:

- provide refresher training for PCSOs involved in delivering TFEI
- ensure PCSOs are matched to families they have the capability to support
- have regular communication between PCSOs and intervention leads
- ensure supervisors of PCSOs have an understanding of what is expected of PCSOs delivering TFEI

- be aware of sustainability issues of the intervention, especially in forces where PCSO numbers may be subject to reduction

Secondly, the quantitative results showed that some families had been referred onto TFEI without meeting the threshold of two criteria. To mitigate these issues, forces should:

- ensure families meet the criteria before being approved for TFEI
- ensure families know what support they will receive from TFEI
- recognise the intervention needs to be adapted to each family it engages with

Finally, there was less agreement on whether the police should be the ones taking the lead in early intervention. To mitigate these issues, forces should:

- ensure other agencies involved in supporting families are aware of what TFEI can offer
- make sure it is clear who will take the lead on supporting families
- support timely information sharing across agencies

Early intervention to support families can be complex and such support requires effective working across agencies, including local councils or schools. PCSOs will need the support of other agencies to successfully manage complex cases, which may require more senior support.

Economic cost – how much is it?

Due to data limitations, it was not possible to undertake an economic evaluation. For future evaluations, it may be possible to compute costs by estimating the amount of work hours PCSOs commit to each family, as well as any direct costs (such as specific interventions people are referred to) incurred as part of the intervention.

Conclusion

Based on a before and after analysis, the evaluation showed a reduction in domestic violence, crime and youth crime for families after the intervention, but not for ASB nor missing persons reports. It is not possible to draw strong conclusions about the impact of TFEI due to the lack of a comparison group to understand what would have happened to similar families without the intervention.

In the qualitative phase, most PCSOs reported that while early intervention is important, they did not feel the police should be taking the lead in TFEI. Some PCSOs felt they had received inadequate training and they experienced challenges in working with other agencies. The implementation of TFEI could be improved with better training, communication and information sharing between agencies and appropriate selection of families onto TFEI.

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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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