

Critically exploring the role of the Problem-Oriented Policing Team in supporting Merseyside Police's ambitions to embed evidence-based practices and develop the force's strategic commitment to preventative policing

Capacity evaluation to fully embed research-informed practice and policy, including the work undertaken by the Problem-Oriented Policing Team in Merseyside Police.

Key details

Lead institution	Liverpool John Moores University
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Police region	North West
Collaboration and partnership	Merseyside Police.
Level of research	PhD
Project start date	September 2021
Date due for completion	August 2025

Research context

Policing in England and Wales is facing challenges and undergoing significant changes as the determination for increased emphasis on the value of evidence-based practice to contribute to claims of police legitimacy, efficient decision-making, and developing sound professional practice evolves.

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This dedicated case study focus on a major metropolitan force explores the practical and logistical challenges of developing research-informed products to help strategic and tactical decision-makers plan activity and go further to examine the readiness of organisational and occupational cultures within policing to adapt decision-making practices and integrating evidence-based practice informed philosophies.

Research questions

Within Merseyside Police:

- what mechanisms are currently in place to support the development of evidence-based practice and preventative policing practice?
- what role is and can the Problem-Oriented Policing Team play to effectively support the development of evidence-based practice approaches?
- what opportunities and challenges do police practitioners see in the development of evidence-based practice within the service?

Aim

To conduct a critical evaluation of evidence-based practice and problem-solving practice within Merseyside Police to facilitate 'best' practice and cost effectiveness.

Objectives

- Examine how police officers and staff understand, engage with, and utilise evidence-based policing strategies and the research evidence that underpins them.
- Examine the sources and expertise police officers and staff draw upon to inform their decision making in relation to preventative policing practice.
- Evaluate the impact of evidence-based policing tools on preventative intelligence practice in mainstream policing.
- Examine the role and notions of effectiveness of the Problem-Oriented Policing Team in promoting preventative policing strategy and practice.
- Identify recommendations for potential change to help facilitate further development of evidence-based policing and problem-solving policy and practice within Merseyside Police.
- Situate research findings within existing theoretical frameworks to contribute to academic knowledge and understanding of preventative policing practice.

Research methodology

A two phase, mixed-methods approach to data collection is used to expose a broader range of perspectives/experiences which in turn will assist with the formulation of explanation.

Phase one – Quantitative

An online anonymous survey – 'The Opinions on Problem Solving Questionnaire' – captured respondents' knowledge of/involvement with problem-solving, as well as any (perceived or actual) obstacles and enablers to the implementation or practice of problem-solving within Merseyside Police.

The questionnaire consisted of 32 questions, including 9 free-text questions, organised into two sections. This was distributed to a purposeful sample of police officers and staff (n=1335) from selected organisational strands of Merseyside Police.

This first phase of data collection is complete. Findings emerging from SPSS analysis of survey data are currently under consideration to inform study phase two.

Phase two – Qualitative

Semi-structured Interviews: Individual interviews with police officers and staff (n=20-25) who have a key role within the delivery of evidence-based practice within Merseyside Police will be conducted. Interviews will last 45 to 60 minutes.

Four participant subgroups have been identified.

1. Policy maker (chief officer/staff grade equivalent).
2. Policy enabler (Command Team representatives, department heads).
3. Practitioner (organisational strand team members).
4. Individuals currently engaged in the conduct of a problem-solving intervention.

Focus group discussions (FGDs)

To facilitate understanding around attitudes and differences between groups in relation to problem-solving or utilisation of problem-solving models within Merseyside Police, two to four focus group discussions will be conducted. Each group will comprise four to six participants and last 90 to 120

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minutes.

The purposive sample of key stakeholders will comprise:

- Merseyside Police officer or staff with a specific evidence-based practice or problem-solving remit
- practitioners engaged in selected problem-oriented policing case study examples
- academic partnership representatives

Qualitative Data Analysis

Written, informed consent and agreement to audio-record interviews and focus group discussions will be obtained, and transcripts transcribed verbatim. NVivo V12 software will be used to provide a transparent, rigorous approach to qualitative data analysis. Data will be thematically analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) analytic framework.

Target sample size

300

Tags

- [Evidence-based policing](#)