Operation Yeomanry – identifying, preventing and disrupting repeat suspects of rape and sexual offences

Identifying and managing repeat rape and sexual offences suspects to reduce reoffending.

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Key details

Does it work?	Untested – new or innovative
Focus	Reoffending
Topic	Crime prevention Intelligence and investigation Offender management Operational policing Violence against women and girls
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Region	South East
Partners	Police
Stage of practice	The practice is implemented.

Key details

Start date	April 2023
Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Adults Offenders Workforce

Aim

The main aim of this initiative is to improve the identification and disruption of repeat suspects of rape and sexual offences. It also aims to:

- create a tool that identifies repeat suspects of rape and sexual offences
- introduce a process that reviews and manages the risk posed by repeat suspects of rape and sexual offences
- reduce reoffending by suspects of rape and sexual offences
- improve outcomes for victims

The aims are both short and long-term and intend to impact both the organisation and the public. In the short-term, it aims to introduce a process to regularly and routinely identify and review repeat suspects of rape and sexual offences. In doing so, it aims to reframe secondary investigations as a priority for officers, and improve the standards of secondary investigation.

In the longer term, the initiative aims to reduce the reoffending of unmanaged suspects of rape and sexual offences and to drive criminal justice outcomes in response to rape and sexual offences. Operation Yeomanry is concerned with broader cultural change in investigation and encouraging investigators to consider prevention and disruption of offenders as a key component of their role.

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes of Operation Yeomanry are to:

- reduce the number of unmanaged suspects of rape and sexual offences

- increase the number of rape and sexual offences that result in a charge or formal action taken outcome
- increase the number of protective orders, either on conviction as a sexual harm prevention order (SHPO) or through applications for a sexual risk order (SRO) for suspects that have not been convicted or cautioned but a deemed to pose a risk of further harm
- see an increase in the use of arrest powers, appropriate bail conditions and retention of biometrics as a disruption tactic for suspects of rape and sexual offences

Description

This emerged as a response to Operation Soteria, a collaborative programme bringing together police forces with academics and policy leads to use evidence and new insight to enable forces to transform their response to rape and serious sexual offences (RASSO). One of the areas of focus for Operation Soteria is on disrupting repeat suspects of sexual offences.

Operation Yeomanry was developed to create a process for the identification and management of repeat suspects of rape and sexual offences that have:

- been suspected of an offence within the last month
- had a total of three or more RASO offences recorded by Thames Valley Police, and are not currently managed by a formal statutory process.

It was first trialled between April and June 2023 in three local police areas (Aylesbury, Slough and Reading) with the initiative being rolled out across Thames Valley Police (TVP) in November 2023.

Operation Yeomanry uses data from Niche (the crime reporting information system used in TVP) to identify a cohort of suspects that have repeatedly come to the attention of TVP for sexual offending. Once identified, each suspect within the cohort undergoes a secondary investigation and is reviewed at monthly local rape and sexual offences meetings to consider risk management and disruption tactical options. The process includes several steps.

- Data extraction and processing – subjects are identified each month from the Service Improvement Unit tool kit. The tool kit can be accessed by force intelligence hubs as well as investigators. The tool kit is a live document so the data is up to date each time a user enters the toolkit.

- Subject research – intelligence development officers will identify subjects for their police area each month and complete a thorough secondary investigation using police national database (PND) and police national computer (PNC) as well as local data. Briefing slides are produced focussing on the recent sexual offence, any previous sexually motivated offending and any modus operandi (MO) or triggers which can be identified which may motivate the subject's offending.
- Subject review and management – each suspect for that local policing area is discussed at the monthly rape and sexual offences meeting. The status of the current investigation is presented, previous offending and any intelligence is discussed, and prevention and disruption tactics are considered. The crime managers will decide appropriate investigators for the recent offences as well as deciding on an appropriate owner for the risk management occurrence to record disruption tactics.

Prevention and disruption tactics include (but are not limited to) the following:

- SHPO for any investigations which are likely to result in a prosecution
- SRO for suspected but not convicted offenders
- Protective orders which can be considered at any stage of an investigation
- Community protection notices and warnings to stop a person engaging in anti-social behaviour which is having a negative impact on the community such as repeatedly following females into public toilets
- Working with partners in education, housing, health, probation, Circles South East, substance abuse support agencies and others to take a multi-agency approach to educate the suspect, minimise the risk of further offending and focus on what may be the cause or motivation for the suspect to offend
- Achilles heel tactics to look at other options outside of the RASO investigation to manage the suspect

The force is currently developing a dashboard and improving its intelligence resource to do full subject profiles on the cohort of suspects each month. Phase 2 of the dashboard will be to start measuring outcomes.

Overall impact

As it is still in the early stages of implementation following the conclusion of the pilot, there has not been a robust evaluation of the initiative. One of the key barriers to evaluating the trial phase is the

lack of consistent data. During the initial trial, there was no guidance on when and how to record a Operation Yeomanry risk management occurrence (RMO – a meeting in which suspects of rape and sexual offences are discussed).

Following the trial period of April to June 2023, the team developed clear guidance on how to record an Operation Yeomanry RMO, which is hoped will enable future evaluation of how the process is running in practice.

A progress review was conducted in October 2023 with the support of the evidence-based policing lead in TVP. The review recommended that a process evaluation could take place in the shorter term, and a further review after 12 months of implementation to investigate the extent to which Yeomanry has impacted its long term aims.

Although it has not been robustly evaluated as yet, there have been some indications of positive impact.

- For the three trial local policing areas, there were a total of 32 different people identified across April, May and June. For the 3 trial local police areas in the three months there were a total of 9 for Aylesbury, 11 for Reading, and 12 for Slough
- Out of the 32 people identified across the three-month period, 19 RMOs were created in the trial local policing areas.

Due to the relatively short time in which the practice has been running, it has not been possible to reliably evaluate the long-term impact on suspect reoffending, outcomes for victims, and organisational change regarding secondary investigations and suspect-focused approaches to investigating rape and serious sexual offences.

However, anecdotal feedback from the local policing areas involved in the trial has demonstrated some of the early impacts of it on the management of some offenders and outcomes for victims:

'Having repeat suspects highlighted has increased officers thinking about seeking charge and remand for recent offences and using the secondary research to build suspect focused investigations and remand applications.'

'Opportunities have arisen to approach victims of previous offences to see if they would now engage to support a prosecution in light of further offences.'

'Suspects committing multiple sexual offences have been reallocated to specialist investigators to ensure thorough suspect focussed investigation and cases are progressed expeditiously.'

Learning

The force now has a dedicated intelligence resource. The initial challenge was in establishing the definition of a repeat suspect. Operation Soteria defines a repeat suspect as "an individual who has been investigated more than once by the police for a criminal offence".

However, including all suspects who had committed two or more offences since Niche records began in 2014 returned too many people for the practice to feasibly consider. Instead, it identifies repeat suspects as those who have committed one offence in the current month, and at least three rape or sexual offences recorded across TVP at any time since Niche recording began. Contact and grooming offences were included under the definition.

Another challenge has been securing analytical support to complete the subject research and create the RMOs. The team have requested a dedicated intelligence development officer to work on it full-time.

The initial trial identified a number of areas of learning:

- Subject research was very time consuming. To reduce the burden on analytical teams, a simple data toolkit was created which can be accessed on a shared platform and has the removed the need for intelligence teams to generate reports.
- One of the key barriers to evaluating the Operation Yeomanry trial phase is the lack of consistent data. During the first trial, there was no guidance on when and how to record an Operation Yeomanry RMO. Following the trial periods and as part of this review, the Operation Yeomanry team have developed clear guidance on how to record an Operation Yeomanry RMO, and have edited the process map to ensure all Operation Yeomanry-identified subjects have an RMO created.

The difficulty in using any form of risk matrix to help prioritise those within the cohort and many current models do not translate well to sexual offending risks.

The national definition of a repeat suspect from Operation Soteria is very broad and not possible to use for a force-wide process such as Operation Yeomanry.

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Tags

Rape and sexual offences   Crime reduction