Policing PESTER: an examination of the deployment of a national tactic in a local setting

This research project is looking to evaluate the Home Office PESTER tactic used to tackle organised drug supply.

Key details

Lead institution	Cardiff Metropolitan University
Principal researcher(s)	Helen Mitchell
Police region	Wales
Level of research	PhD
Project start date	October 2024
Date due for completion	January 2028

Research context

This research seeks to investigate and evaluate the effectiveness of the Home Office PESTER tactic. This tactic has been used widely by law enforcement and a critical analysis of its effectiveness has yet to be undertaken.

The PESTER tactic offers an opportunity to safeguard vulnerable drug users by signposting them to support services. This research explores the complexities that exist when policing exploitative drug trafficking, especially county lines.

This research will explore the perceptions of police officers who work within organised crime units, drug teams and the National County Lines Coordination Centre who are deploying and encountering the recipients of PESTER messages on a daily basis.

Objectives

- To be able to identify the extent of the use of the PESTER tactic nationally.
- To inform recommendations to improve the PESTER tactics use and effectiveness in the future.

Research methodology

This research will adopt a mixed methods approach. Quantitative methodology will involve an anonymous questionnaire that will be disseminated to all PESTER trained police officers across the UK. Qualitative methodology will involve semi structured interviews with PESTER trained police officers.

Quantitative and qualitative

Secondary data analysis:

- Analysis will be conducted of PESTER national deployment data from the National County Lines Coordination Centre. The data will show the usage of the tactic across the UK, which forces use the tactic the most and the least, and the cost involved in deploying the tactic.

Non-probability

Purposive sampling methods:

- The questionnaire will be targeted towards police officers who have been trained in using the PESTER tactic.
- Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with police officers at varying levels. The research is looking to interview officers at the rank of detective constable and detective sergeant trained in the use of the PESTER tactic, and other officers at detective inspector rank who are involved in the management and supervision of the tactic. All have the requisite knowledge and practical application skills deploying the PESTER tactic.

Analysis of data will adopt a thematic approach. A thematic approach will assist in examining the perspectives of research participants, identifying commonalities and generating insights. (Braun and Clarke 2022 p 30).

This research will use data matrix heat mapping to analyse the PESTER tactic deployment data. This approach will visualise the operational deployment of the PESTER tactic across police forces in England and Wales. This approach will systematically synthesise and provide a visual representation of the data, as supported by Salvati et al (2023). This aligns well to the nature of the research seeking to map PESTER usage across 40 of the 43 territorial police forces.

References

- Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2022) Thematic analysis: a practical guide. 1st edition. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Salvati, Z.M., Rahm, A.K., Williams, M.S., Ladd, I., Schlieder, V., Atondo, J., Schneider, J.L., Epstein, M.M., Lu, C.Y., Pawloski, P.A., Sharaf, R.N., Liang, S., Burnett-Hartman, A., Hunter, J.E., Burton-Akright, J. & Cragun, D. 2023, "A picture is worth a thousand words: advancing the use of visualization tools in implementation science through process mapping and matrix heat mapping", Implementation science communications, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 43

Research participation

Participants are sought from serving police officers who are trained in the deployment of the PESTER tactic.

If you would like to participate in this research, please contact: HAMitchell@cardiffmet.ac.uk