Evaluation of enhanced video response

The executive summary of the enhanced video response evaluation report

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Background and rationale

What is enhanced video response?

Enhanced video response (EVR) is a virtual police response option for routine and priority crime types, available via various contact routes including 999, 101, email and in person. EVR offers a two-way video response to eligible victims, using the GoodSAM (or similar) platform for secure video calls, evidence sharing and statement taking.

Incidents are risk-assessed, and victims are offered the option of a virtual response. Calls are triaged in the force control room (FCR), victims are offered EVR and complete a brief eligibility check. EVR officers who have been trained in virtual engagement and safeguarding conduct video calls, gather evidence and progress investigations as appropriate. If further action is needed, cases may be referred to patrol teams.

This evaluation focuses on the Avon and Somerset Police force trial. In this trial, high-priority domestic abuse (DA), rape, concern for welfare and missing persons incidents were excluded from being eligible for a video response.

Why was EVR introduced?

EVR was developed to address persistent challenges in police response to non-immediate incidents. These include slow response times, unmet victim expectations and declining public trust. National reviews highlighted the need for technological solutions to improve productivity and victim experience.

EVR builds on the success of a pilot of rapid video response (RVR) by Kent Police, which provided a video response to victims of DA. This idea was then further developed by Dorset Police to provide a flexible, efficient alternative to in-person attendance for routine and priority incidents. Following the successful pilot in Dorset, EVR was replicated in Avon and Somerset, a larger force covering urban and rural areas.

Evaluation design

Aims

The evaluation aimed to assess the impact of EVR on response times, investigative standards, victim satisfaction, engagement and case efficiency. It also aimed to understand implementation fidelity, barriers, facilitators and staff experiences, and to evaluate costs and productivity benefits.

Three of Avon and Somerset's bases took part in the EVR trial replication, which covered both urban and rural areas.

Methods

The evaluation took a mixed methods approach, using a range of data sources to conduct an impact evaluation, implementation and process evaluation and a cost evaluation.

- Impact evaluation: An incident-level randomised controlled trial (RCT) in three bases (urban, rural, mixed). Incidents graded as 'Priority' or 'Routine' (excluding certain types such as high-priority DA, rape, missing persons) were considered eligible for randomisation. Victims had to be supportive of a video response, over 18 and have means for video communication.
- Implementation and process evaluation (IPE): To understand how EVR was delivered, barriers/facilitators and staff/victim experiences, a mixed methods process evaluation was carried out. This included telephone interviews with victims, surveys to EVR officers and FCR, focus groups with EVR staff and interviews with implementation team members.
- Cost evaluation: To assess the costs and benefits of EVR, including both monetisable and non-monetisable impacts. Monetisable benefits were calculated from travel costs avoided (officer time, vehicle mileage) using administrative data and standard rates. Non-monetisable benefits included reduced stress, improved safeguarding and upskilling. Setup costs included GoodSAM licences, storage, equipment and training. Benefits and costs were annualised to estimate long-term value.

The outcome measures used in the trial included the following.

- Primary: Response time (hours from report to first attempted contact).
- Secondary: Investigative standards, victim satisfaction, victim trust/confidence, victim engagement, case effectiveness (for example, arrests, voluntary attendances and other positive criminal justice outcomes) and case efficiency (for example, days to outcome).

Key findings

Impact on victims and cases

Response times

EVR reduced average response times by over three days (78.6 hours) compared to business-as-usual (BAU). This improvement was consistent across locations, victims' gender, incident types and whether the EVR team was on duty or not.

Investigative standards

EVR cases had significantly higher compliance with investigative standards (+10.8 percentage points). In particular, EVR incidents were more likely to comply with the Victims' Code of Practice, have considered and actioned appropriate safeguarding and have evidential review officer (ERO) reviews in comparison to BAU cases.

Victim satisfaction and trust

While satisfaction scores were generally higher for EVR, differences were not statistically significant, likely because of sample size. Importantly, satisfaction levels were not lower for EVR than BAU. The same is true for levels of trust for victims, where EVR did not have a significant impact in comparison to BAU.

However, the victim trust statistics appear more favourable to EVR. They have a lower share of respondents who say that their trust has gone down following the encounter with the police and a higher share of respondents who report that their level of trust has gone up.

Case efficiency

EVR reduced overall case duration by more than seven days, suggesting benefits beyond initial response. While a positive effect is not necessarily surprising given EVR's impact on reducing response times, this effect shows that EVR has an impact on the duration of a case beyond the impact on the initial response.

Where EVR cases reduced response times by roughly three days, this effect suggests that a further four days are reduced from overall investigation duration compared to BAU cases.

Victim engagement and positive outcomes

No significant differences were seen in victim engagement or positive case outcomes, but qualitative feedback indicated improved victim experience and understanding. Victim engagement was measured by whether victims have withdrawn from the investigation process (in which case, investigations may not be able to proceed further).

Similar proportions of cases experienced victims withdrawing in cases assigned to EVR and BAU. Positive outcomes (including arrests, charges and out of court disposals) are a measure of case effectiveness. Rates were similarly low in both groups at around 2%.

Implementation and staff experience

EVR was delivered largely as intended, with adaptations to local context. Initial reluctance from FCR staff was overcome through targeted communication and support.

Staff wellbeing

Workload and stress decreased for EVR officers, BAU staff and for staff in the FCR, but increased for EVR sergeants because of admin demands. EVR improved job satisfaction and retention, especially for officers returning from sick leave.

EVR officers reported a decrease in workload, lower levels of stress and higher levels of job satisfaction. Officers felt that they had the time and focus to deal with incidents and speak to victims with no distractions, which they had often missed while being on response.

Surveys with FCR and patrol staff found that both groups reported a decrease in workload stress since the trial started (66.7% of survey respondents in FCR and 75.4% of respondents in BAU patrol teams). 50.8% of survey respondents in BAU patrol teams reported a decrease in stress. Moreover, both groups also reported a decrease in the amount of routine or priority incidents.

Victim experience

Victims appreciated the flexibility, speed and privacy of EVR. Video calls facilitated rapport and disclosures, particularly in DA cases.

Additional benefits

A few positive, unintended consequences were identified, including the fact that EVR helped continuous learning and the upskilling of officers. This was particularly the case with junior officers who gained confidence from working closely with more experienced officers and their sergeant.

Cost and productivity

Cost savings

EVR's travel and time savings outweighed setup costs within a year. Annualised benefits (mainly from officer time saved) were estimated at nearly £116,000 for the three pilot bases, compared to setup costs of around £50,000.

Not all of this benefit is cashable, though; most of it – 81% – is officer time. However, this time can be allocated elsewhere. The vehicle cost is more likely to be cashable – as some proportion of this is actual resource that is no longer being spent on petrol or vehicle repairs.

Non-monetised benefits

There are likely to be a wide range of non-monetisable benefits of EVR. As the impacts on response times are large, the associated benefits likely are too. The same is true of overall case efficiency. Both leave the potential for improved service and the ability to direct police resources towards other ends.

There are other benefits in some incidents to a police car not physically arriving outside a victim's house. The presence of a police car parked outside an address can lead to a loss of privacy, which can worsen an already stressful situation for victims of crime. Other benefits have been found in upskilling officers. Exposure to so many different case types with colleagues and sergeants on hand to provide guidance and support may increase officers' knowledge of the investigative process and contribute to professional development.

Challenges and lessons learned

Challenges

The most consistently reported challenge by interviewees was an initial reluctance by FCR staff, particularly call handlers, to assign eligible cases to an EVR team response. In practice, this meant that initially, call handlers were still making the decision to mark the case for an in-person police officer visit for some cases, despite callers answering 'yes' to all EVR eligibility questions.

There was limited practical training with new technology before launch. The timeframe of just over 12 weeks to set up the EVR team and trial in Avon and Somerset was tight. More time to set up the

service would have been beneficial.

EVR sergeants and officers would have benefited from more practical training in advance of starting to deliver EVR. This included with the supporting technologies SmartSTORM and GoodSAM, as well as practice delivering video calls to victims.

Another challenge was workspace and technology constraints (privacy, Wi-Fi, hardware). Finding an appropriate space, with sufficient privacy from other teams and without excessive background noise that could be picked up when on video calls with the public, was noted as one of the challenges by most Avon and Somerset Police interviewees. Technical issues included GoodSAM initially not passing police firewalls, which set back access for the EVR team during the pre-trial phase.

The only exception to the overall decrease in workload was for senior EVR staff, in particular sergeants. Sergeants have reported a higher workload than their previous role in response. This is because of the higher volumes of admin work they are expected to complete while being available to the team on duty.

In EVR there is only one sergeant per shift, while in response teams there are three sergeants. Moreover, sergeants commented that it is really important for them to stay on top of their work, especially admin work, since there is no one who can support them with their workload.

Facilitators

Strong leadership buy-in to EVR and governance structure was felt to be key to successful implementation. The communications about EVR across the force was felt to have resulted in significant interest in the early results from the EVR trial and ultimately in the early rollout to other bases in Avon and Somerset.

The governance structure included a project board that met regularly. This was attended by national implementation leads and senior leadership within Avon and Somerset Police, including superintendents. These meetings allowed for continuous dialogue between national implementation leads and Avon and Somerset, which they suggested had been useful.

Support from Dorset Police and the College of Policing included the implementation blueprint, supporting documentation, training materials, GoodSAM procurement materials and PowerPoint

slides for presenting EVR to leadership. This support was one of the primary facilitating factors for a successful EVR setup.

The presence of the Dorset Police EVR leads during the Avon and Somerset set-up was also mentioned as a supportive factor. This enabled rapid troubleshooting of problems as they arose, using previous experience from the EVR in Dorset.

A full pre-trial week, including three days after training to test processes and get the workspace and supporting technology set up, was a valuable part of the set-up process. This supported early successful implementation, even though staff did not have full access to GoodSAM during that period as planned.

EVR officers and sergeants described co-location as a great facilitator to the implementation of EVR because jobs could be discussed together, with more experienced officers and sergeants supporting junior colleagues. Being part of a close-knit team made a difference during the implementation, because colleagues could share how they approached different incidents and learn from each other.

Recommendations

The evaluation has identified the following learning for the successful implementation and long-term sustainability of EVR.

- Allow sufficient time to develop and deliver practical training (such as paper-fed exercises) to officers involved in EVR.
- Ensure effective internal force-wide communications in advance of the implementation of EVR. This will tackle any reluctance from FCR and deliver informative materials where it is clearly explained what types of incidents and victims are in the remit of EVR.
- Police forces will need to adapt the EVR approach to their systems and ways of working but it is recommended that the Dorset Police blueprint is followed as closely as possible.
- The EVR team should include a mix of experienced and junior officers. In addition, keep involvement in the EVR voluntary as adjusting to a desk-based job can be difficult for some officers on response.
- Co-location and creating a friendly and supportive team are also essential to ensure long-term effectiveness.
- Increase sergeant-to-PC ratio to manage admin workload.

- Establish national support and knowledge-sharing mechanisms so that, as the implementation of EVR increases, forces can also benefit from the sharing of challenges, learning and good practice among each other.
- Invest in technology and workspace improvements to ensure the sustainability of EVR. For example, improving the functionality of GoodSAM, the internet signal and police firewall and ensuring workspaces provide confidentiality and an appropriate environment for officers to work in.
- Plan for increased demand and resource accordingly so that the EVR team can be put in a position to continue delivering high-quality work despite high demand. Further demand analysis should be conducted to ensure the team is resourced correctly to service the anticipated force-wide demand.
- Continue data collection and evaluation for ongoing improvement. Collection of longer-term data would add to the understanding of EVR. For example, one outstanding research question would be whether the improved satisfaction immediately following EVR will persist into the future.

Limitations

There are a number of limitations to the design of the trial.

- Randomisation within bases may have led to spillover effects.
- Missing data for some outcomes (for example, victim satisfaction).
- Cost calculations based on assumptions about travel and attendance. For example, the analysis assumes that each dispatch is from base to the incident and back to base. In reality, the control room may consider where some officers already are when sending them to a new incident. At the same time, we are missing data on how efficient cases are in terms of repeat in-person trips to progress a case, or for a second attempted contact if the first did not succeed, which would mean our calculations underestimate total costs of BAU.

Future directions

A number of issues around the future implementation of EVR have been identified. These include whether continued implementation of EVR should be as part of a centralised model or a geographic model (for example, Basic Command Unit-type areas within which there is EVR, so that it can be part of the local response teams). The role of AI in EVR and the integration of EVR with RVR or other desk-based policing units are other areas to consider.

Conclusion

EVR is a promising, cost-effective innovation for modern policing, delivering faster responses, improved investigative standards, and positive staff and victim experiences. Careful planning, adaptation and ongoing evaluation are essential for successful scale-up and sustainability.

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Tags

Response policing