

An assessment of the Tackling Knives and Serious Youth Violence Action Programme (TKAP) – Phase II

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Background

The Tackling Knives Action Programme (TKAP) ran initially from June 2008 until March 2009 and aimed to reduce teenage knife crime in ten police force areas in England and Wales. TKAP Phase II was then launched and the programme re-branded into the Tackling Knives and Serious Youth Violence Action Programme. Phase II ran from April 2009 to March 2010 in 16 police force areas (the original ten TKAP forces and six new areas)¹ and aimed to reduce all serious violence involving 13- to 24-year-olds using a range of enforcement, education and prevention initiatives.

¹ The ten original areas included Essex, Greater Manchester, Lancashire, Metropolitan Police Service, Merseyside, Nottinghamshire, South Wales, Thames Valley, West Midlands, and West Yorkshire. The six new areas were Bedfordshire, British Transport, Hampshire, Kent, Northumbria, and South Yorkshire.

Aims and methodology

The Home Office Research and Analysis Unit was asked to form an assessment of the success of TKAP Phase II in reducing serious youth violence. A secondary aim of the programme (assessed in Appendix B) was to improve public confidence around serious youth violence in the 16 police force areas.

As the TKAP areas were partly selected due to their high levels of violent crime, a randomised experimental design could not be used to assess the impact of the programme. Instead, a quasi-experimental methodology was applied using a variety of analytical techniques to compare what happened in the TKAP areas during TKAP Phase II with the previous year (2008/09) and before the start of the programme (2007/08). Wherever possible, comparisons were also made with a group of forces not involved in the programme (non-TKAP areas).

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Keywords

Knife crime
 Offensive weapons
 Serious violence
 Homicide
 Fear of crime
 Young people
 Youth violence
 Young offenders
 Crime reduction
 Performance monitoring

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Results

A range of sources of violent crime data were analysed. Of these, Homicide Index and hospital admissions data were the most robust for the purpose of this assessment as they allowed for comparisons between age groups and between TKAP and non-TKAP areas.

Table S1 *Number of homicide offences involving victims and/or principal suspects in the target age group prior to and during TKAP Phase II*

| | | Number of offences | | | | |
|--|----------------|--------------------|---------|---------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| | | 2007/08 | 2008/09 | 2009/10 | Comparing 07/08 with 09/10 | Comparing 08/09 with 09/10 |
| All recorded homicides offences | | | | | | |
| Victim aged 13 to 24 | TKAP areas | 136 | 107 | 91 | -45 | -16 |
| | Non-TKAP areas | 47 | 35 | 29 | -18 | -6 |
| Principal suspect aged 13 to 24 | TKAP areas | 183 | 145 | 133 | -50 | -12 |
| | Non-TKAP areas | 64 | 72 | 42 | -22 | -30 |
| Victim and principal suspect aged 13 to 24 | TKAP areas | 77 | 72 | 50 | -27 | -22 |
| | Non-TKAP areas | 24 | 20 | 10 | -14 | -10 |
| Knife/sharp instrument homicide offences | | | | | | |
| Victim aged 13 to 24 | TKAP areas | 63 | 60 | 43 | -20 | -17 |
| | Non-TKAP areas | 23 | 13 | 13 | -10 | 0 |
| Principal suspect aged 13 to 24 | TKAP areas | 76 | 69 | 53 | -23 | -16 |
| | Non-TKAP areas | 21 | 16 | 12 | -9 | -4 |
| Victim and principal suspect aged 13 to 24 | TKAP areas | 42 | 44 | 27 | -15 | -17 |
| | Non-TKAP areas | 14 | 6 | 6 | -8 | 0 |

Percentages are not shown due to the small numbers. Homicide Index data includes homicides recorded by all 16 Phase II police forces. Homicide offences are shown according to the year in which the police initially recorded the offence as homicide. The data refer to the position as at 28 September 2010. Note that, although data on suspects are presented for 2009/10, these are likely to be revised upwards during 2010/11 as cases progress through the courts.

Current homicide data (correct as at September 2010) suggest positive reductions in the number of homicide victims and/or principal suspects² in the target age group during TKAP Phase II across England and Wales. Reductions were recorded by both TKAP and non-TKAP police forces, and in general were not proportionately greater in the TKAP areas.

Hospital admissions for assault involving those in the target age group reduced between 2007/08 and 2009/10 in both TKAP and non-TKAP areas. Looking specifically at comparisons between the TKAP Phase II period and the previous year, there was a decline in the non-TKAP areas but no change in the TKAP areas. However, there were no statistically significant differences in changes in average admission rates between TKAP and non-TKAP areas over this period.

Impact of the programme was also assessed using British Crime Survey (BCS) and TKAP monitoring data (a special collection of police recorded crime data broken down by age).

² A principal suspect is defined as (i) a person who has been arrested in respect of an offence initially classified as homicide and charged with homicide or (ii) a person who is suspected by the police of having committed the offence but is known to have died or committed suicide prior to arrest/being charged. Note that, although data on suspects are presented for 2009/10, these are likely to be revised upwards during 2010/11 as cases progress through the courts.

Table S2 Number of assault admissions to English NHS hospitals in the target age group

| | Number of admissions | | | Comparing 07/08 with 09/10 | Comparing 08/09 with 09/10 |
|---|----------------------|--------|--------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| | 07/08 | 08/09 | 09/10 | | |
| Hospital admissions for assault aged 13 to 24 | | | | | |
| TKAP areas | 11,171 | 10,738 | 10,740 | -3.9% | 0.0% |
| Non-TKAP areas | 6,061 | 5,791 | 5,664 | -6.6% | -2.2% |
| Hospital admissions for assault by sharp object aged 13 to 24 | | | | | |
| Total number | 1,674 | 1,500 | 1,500 | -10.4% | 0.0% |
| Non-TKAP areas | 514 | 507 | 407 | -20.8% | -19.7% |

Note: Excludes City of London, British Transport Police, and all Welsh police force areas.

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Between 2007/08 and 2009/10 the BCS did not show any statistically significant changes in violence with injury rates involving 16- to 24-year-old victims in either the TKAP or non-TKAP areas. However, the available BCS data did not capture all incidents occurring during the TKAP period and data from the 2010/11 BCS are needed to assess the impact of the programme.

TKAP monitoring data showed reductions in several categories of violent crime offences involving victims aged from 13 to 24 in the TKAP areas during the Phase II period. For example, comparing 2008/09 with 2009/10, there was a five per cent reduction in 'all violence'³ offences involving victims aged 13 to 24 and a four per cent reduction in offences involving victims of other ages. However, for the majority of offence types, reductions were not consistently greater for offences involving victims in the target age group than for other ages. Data on police recorded offences involving victims aged from 13 to 24 in the non-TKAP areas were not available for comparison.

Additional analyses to further explore the impact of Phase II

There was considerable variability in trends in serious youth violence during the Phase II period across individual police forces, perhaps suggesting that the programme was more successful in some areas than others or due to the data being more variable at lower geographic levels.

Changes seen in the larger police forces dominated the overall TKAP trends, particularly increases in attempted murder offences and hospital assault admissions involving youth victims in London.

Analysis conducted to further explore the impact of the larger forces on overall trends showed that, even after excluding the TKAP forces with the highest hospital assault admission rates (and thus comparing the most closely matched TKAP and non-TKAP areas) the TKAP areas did not show significantly greater reductions than the non-TKAP areas (in either assault admissions or police recorded violent crime rates). The main findings summarised above do not therefore solely reflect the dominance of figures from the larger police forces.

Further analysis was conducted to look at whether TKAP Phases I and II areas achieved different results in their efforts to reduce violent crime. Phase II of the programme was associated with reductions in all violent incidents involving teenage victims (in the Phase II areas), but increases in teenage knife crime. The results for violent incidents involving victims in the 'new' age group included in Phase II (20 to 24) were also mixed.

Analyses were also conducted to compare the 'new' Phase II areas with the original Phase I areas (areas included in both phases of the programme). The Phase II period coincided with marked reductions in violent incidents and sharp instrument assaults involving 13- to 24-year-olds in the 'new' areas, but results were mixed in the original areas during Phase II. This could suggest that Phase I had an initial impact on teenage knife crime that proved difficult to build on, or perhaps that the reductions seen during Phase I in the original areas, and during Phase II in the new areas, reflect the impact of factors other than TKAP.

³ 'All violence' offences include police recorded offences of attempted murder, wounding with intent to do grievous bodily harm (GBH), inflicting GBH without intent, and actual bodily harm (ABH).

Public perceptions

Findings from the British Crime Survey and MORI Crime Tracker survey were used as proxy measures to capture changes in public perceptions of serious youth violence prior to and during TKAP Phase II. Public perceptions of some violent crimes have improved across the country in the last few years, but neither survey was fully able to capture any impact of the programme itself so it is not clear to what extent changes in perceptions could be attributed to TKAP.

Conclusions

Between April 2007 and March 2010, there were reductions across the country in serious violence involving 13- to 24-year-old victims or offenders, with TKAP running in the latter two of the three years. However, comparing the Phase II period with the previous years, improvements in the non-TKAP areas were generally similar or greater in magnitude than those recorded in the TKAP Phase II areas.

The picture is complicated by the fact that pre-existing differences between TKAP and non-TKAP areas meant that a robust comparison group was not obtainable. Furthermore, at least some of the TKAP elements were national in scope, and activities to reduce serious youth violence were concurrently taking place in the non-TKAP areas. As a result of these factors, it is not clear what would have happened in the absence of the programme.

While these findings provide encouraging evidence that serious youth violence declined across the country between 2007/08 and the end of March 2010, given that the reductions were not specific to or consistently greater in the TKAP areas, and taking into account the methodological limitations described above, it is not possible to directly attribute reductions in the TKAP areas during Phase II to TKAP activities.