

Information sharing aimed at reducing violent crime: A survey of Community Safety Partnerships

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This report presents the key findings from a questionnaire study to explore the extent and nature of information sharing arrangements used by Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) across England and Wales to prevent and reduce violence and other types of crime.

Background

While police recorded crime remains a key source of information about violence and other types of crime for Community Safety Partnerships, it is known that not all crime is reported to the police (Walker *et al.*, 2009) and therefore information sharing between a range of local agencies can help partners develop a more detailed understanding of the nature and extent of violence in their locality. The data shared can be used in various ways including:¹

- strategically – to inform policy at both a national and local area level;
- operationally – to identify and target resources at high crime neighbourhoods and other locations; or
- at case level – to inform decisions about individual at-risk offenders and victims.

The types of information/data that are shared can be split into two distinct categories: 'personalised information sharing' which involves any information or data that can identify a living person; and 'anonymised information sharing' through which no living individual can be identified. Importantly, the criteria and legal framework for sharing each type of data are very different, with personalised information sharing being subject to far greater regulation.

¹ This list is intended to provide a broad overview of the ways in which shared data may be used, it is not intended to be exhaustive and the categories may not be mutually exclusive.

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Keywords

Information sharing
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Methodology

A questionnaire was used to investigate arrangements involving both personalised and anonymised data under three themes.

- 1) Current information sharing arrangements: the extent and nature.
- 2) The legislative framework: level of understanding and related issues.
- 3) Effective data sharing: levers and barriers.

Questionnaires were sent to all 340 CSPs in England and Wales. Overall, 52 per cent (178) of CSPs were represented in the responses.² This included 61 per cent of CSPs in 'high violent crime' areas.³ Although the response rate is comparable with other recent survey-based evaluations targeting CSPs, findings from this study should not be considered representative of all CSPs in England and Wales. Notably, there was considerable variation in response rates between regions and the findings rely upon the accuracy and completeness of the respondents' knowledge of arrangements in place within their CSP.⁴

Personalised information sharing arrangements

- The vast majority of CSPs who responded reported having arrangements to share personalised information about individual victims or offenders – e.g. Multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARAC) and Multi-agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) – in their CSP. These arrangements were, on average, reported to be working well or very well and the data shared through these arrangements were seen to be being used very effectively.
- CSPs with relatively high rates of violent crime scored higher than other CSPs on a proxy indicator for the overall effectiveness of personalised information sharing arrangements, which suggests,

2 One hundred and thirty-eight responses from individual CSPs were received and a further ten responses were completed on behalf of multiple partnerships, representing an additional 40 CSPs.

3 For the purposes of this report, high violent crime areas are the 71 CSPs with the highest volumes of violence against the person offences, which collectively accounted for 50 per cent of all such offences across England & Wales (data from Crime in England & Wales 2008/09).

4 It should not be assumed that the individual(s) completing the questionnaire had access to, or pursued, all relevant information. Further detail on the CSPs that responses/non-responses is included in Annex A.

as would be expected, that the development of personalised information sharing arrangements was more advanced in these areas.

- Part of the questionnaire focused specifically on MARACs, which are multi-agency meetings where representatives share information on high risk victims of domestic violence in order to create action plans for increasing the safety of these victims. The vast majority of partnerships surveyed reported that MARACs or other multi-agency domestic abuse case conferences were in place and that an average of 11 different agencies attended the meetings. For 63 per cent of these CSPs, these included all six of the 'core' agencies whose attendance is identified as being key to ensuring appropriate representation at MARACs – one of the ten principles for an effective MARAC identified by Co-ordinated Action Against Domestic Abuse (CAADA).⁵

Anonymised information sharing arrangements

- CSPs who responded reported sharing anonymised data with a wide range of agencies, both statutory and voluntary including: Local Authority; Fire and Rescue; Police; domestic violence projects; substance misuse; and Health agencies (e.g. Emergency Departments, ambulance services, etc).⁶
- CSPs used anonymised data for a range of purposes. Almost all CSPs who responded (over 97%) reported that anonymised data were used to prepare the CSP's Strategic Assessment, and to look for crime patterns to inform crime reduction. In addition, data were used to inform actions to tackle specific offence types, most commonly anti-social behaviour, burglary, hate crime, and crime in the night-time economy.
- Emergency Department (ED) data sharing is an established model of anonymised information sharing used to tackle violent crime (Warburton & Shepherd, 2006; Maguire & Nettleton 2003). Comparing findings from this report with a previous survey by the National Audit Office (NAO, 2008), the number of CSPs sharing ED data appears to have increased in recent years, perhaps reflecting the promotion of ED data sharing in the period.

5 (Police; Independent Domestic Violence Adviser (IDVA); health services; probation; housing; and children and young people's services). It should be noted that no measure of frequency of attendance/level of participation was included in the survey which are also likely to be factors related to achieving appropriate representation.

6 Over 70 per cent of CSPs reported sharing anonymised data with these agencies.

- Two-thirds of CSPs who responded reported that ED data sharing had either been established or was currently being piloted in their area and 'high violent crime' CSPs were more likely than other areas to report ED data sharing. However, for the majority of CSPs who responded, ED data sharing arrangements were relatively new, with more than half reporting that they were still being piloted.
- When asked to rate their experiences of setting up ED data sharing, the majority of CSPs who responded reported that it was difficult or very difficult; less than half reported receiving data monthly or more frequently, and less than half reported receiving all three types of information included in the Department of Health's recommended minimum data set. These findings suggest that, at the time of this survey (late 2009), further development was needed for many CSPs before ED data sharing could become an effective tool for reducing violent crime.
- Best practice suggests that agencies sharing data should be signed up to an information sharing protocol (ISP), a formal agreement between organisations that sets out the principles and commitments for the collection, storage and disclosure of information. Unexpectedly given the higher level of scrutiny associated with the sharing of personalised data, more CSPs reported having ISPs in place for anonymised information sharing (74% on average) than for personalised information sharing arrangements (46% on average).
- The compatibility and capability of Information Technology (IT) systems to collect and share data were the most frequently cited barriers to information sharing with poor data quality and lack of staff resource also commonly mentioned. Having committed, proactive partners and training, guidance, and the sharing of best practice were considered helpful to implementing effective information sharing.

General information about information sharing⁷

- In response to questions around the general process and implementation of data sharing, the majority of CSPs who responded (82%) reported that they had some partnership specific analytical personnel, most commonly funded either solely or in part by the CSP.
- The majority (over 85%) of CSPs who responded were at least quite confident that they had a sound understanding of the legal framework for information sharing and that arrangements within their CSPs met these requirements, with around half reporting to be either confident or very confident. However, almost one in ten (9%) were not confident that there was a sound understanding of the legal framework within their CSP and 14 per cent reported that they were not confident that arrangements within their CSPs fulfilled these requirements.

Conclusion

Although not representative of all CSPs, the findings of this study provide some evidence that, at the time of the survey (late 2009), data sharing was being widely used by CSPs who responded to tackle violence and other crimes and that these arrangements were more developed in areas with higher rates of violent crime. The results indicate that arrangements are working to varying degrees of success, with personalised information sharing arrangements (i.e. MARAC, MAPPa and PPO) perceived to be particularly effective. Other arrangements however, such as anonymised ED data sharing, may require further development in order for them to become widely effective tools for violence and crime reduction.

⁷ It should be noted that responses to these questions related to information sharing generally and responses regarding specific arrangements may have differed.