Evaluation of Manchester Investment Hub supporting young people impacted by organised crime

This is an evaluation of an early intervention programme for young people at risk of exploitation being implemented by Greater Manchester Police.

Key details

Lead institution	The Open University
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Police region	South East
Collaboration and partnership	Greater Manchester Police and the Centre for Policing Research and Learning (CPRL) membership group.
Level of research	Professional/work based
Project start date	December 2021
Date due for completion	July 2023

Research context

The purpose of this project is to evaluate a pilot scheme that is being implemented by Greater Manchester Police (GMP) and its partners. The pilot involves an early intervention programme with 56 young people (aged under 18 years) identified as being at risk of exploitation by serious organised crime groups (OCGs), either as a victim (or potential victim), offender or family member of older individuals associated with OCGs.

The participants will be matched with a mentor and receive up to 20 mentoring sessions over the course of 12 months. This will include referrals for mental health and substance misuse support, educational and employment opportunities, and access to other activities which match their interests and aspirations.

The purpose of this research is to provide a (qualitative) process evaluation of the intervention programme, primarily via pre-and post-intervention perceptions of young people, on the implementation and benefits of the intervention, early perceptions of impact and drivers of engagement/dis-engagement.

Data collection and analysis will involve qualitative semi-structured interviews with a sub-sample of the young people receiving the intervention. Two focus groups with the adult mentors will also be undertaken, and interviews with parents or guardians of young participants who have disengaged will be attempted.

The evaluation will employ a case study research design, guided by a Theory of Change approach. This will inform the research questions by helping to explain under what contexts, for whom, how and why mentoring interventions can motivate engagement of the target group, and the potential mechanisms that result in attitudinal and behavioural change in young people at risk of involvement in serious organised criminality.

The Theory of Change approach has emerged since the late 1980s as a suitable evaluation approach for community initiatives, particularly when there is a need to estimate a programme's effects on interim and longer-term outcomes and where there is a need for understanding on how those initiatives produce those outcomes.

Research methodology

Data collection and analysis will involve, primarily, qualitative semi-structured interviews with a sub-sample of young people receiving the intervention. Two focus groups with the adult mentors will also be undertaken, and interviews with parents or guardians of young participants who have disengaged will also be attempted.

Up to 30 young participants will be interviewed early in the intervention period ('baseline interviews'), followed by a second interview at the end of the intervention period ('follow-up'

interviews). Where participants have disengaged from the program (unplanned exits), follow-up interviews will be attempted with parent participants.

The interviews with the participants will take place remotely via telephone or digital conferencing platform. Interviews and focus groups will be audio-recorded (with participants' permission), pseudo-anonymised and transcribed.

Intended themes for the interviews are:
Baseline perceptions of young people at (pre) entry into the programme on:

- personal well-being, perceptions of safety and support
- perceptions of crime/violence and motivations for taking part in the programme
- expectations of the programme and future aspirations/goals

Post-programme perceptions of young people towards the end of participation but prior to programme exit on:

- changes in psycho-social well-being and feelings of safety
- changes in criminal activity/gang association/other behavioural change
- perceptions of police/support services and future willingness to ask for support
- perceived benefits of the project or consequences from participation

Mid to post-programme reflections of mentors / project staff on:

- process issues (project implementation and delivery)
- perceived benefits to participation
- barriers to and enablers of success and key learning points

Data will be coded and analysed using a thematic approach in NVivo, with comparisons made between baseline and follow-up interviews to identify any change in narrative that may be attributable to the programme.