Operation Turning Point

Testing an evidence-informed approach to policing low-risk offenders designed to reduce reoffending

Introduction

Operation Turning Point was a randomised controlled trial, which compared the effectiveness of court prosecution with a structured diversion to a deferred prosecution linked to a “Turning Point Contract”.

Method: Experiment in Action

The experiment started with offenders whom the custody officer had decided that it was in the public interest to prosecute – informal warning and cautions have already been discarded. At that point custody officers went to the Cambridge Gateway—a randomizer tool—which presented a series of triage questions that excluded offenders with multiple convictions, a high likelihood of prison and a serious offence. If the Gateway passed offenders as eligible for the experiment, they were randomised to prosecution or a Turning Point treatment.

The experiment ran in 4 Stages from November 2011 to July 2014. The sample from the final stage was over 400 offenders:

Sample from Stage 4:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Adult (337)</th>
<th>Juvenile (87)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal Victim (260)</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Personal Victim (164)</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Turning Point ‘Contracts’

Offenders given Turning Point were asked to attend a meeting the following day with an Offender Manager (Adult) or Youth Offending Service officer (Juvenile). They were warned that non-compliance with this requirement, reoffending, or failure to meet the terms of the Turning Point contract would result in certain prosecution. The contracts included a wide range of conditions and were for a wide range of offending.

Validity and Outcomes

The great advantage of an RCT design is the ability to reduce the selection bias. The two samples being compared—those prosecuted and those diverted—should be different only because they have been sent to a different treatment. But we still need to check this. The ‘internal validity’ of the experiment is critical to the confidence in the results. The Gateway gave the research team a check on consistency of custody officer decisions. The data in the Turning Point contract permitted monitoring of the consistency of contract conditions and enforcement. Another big challenge was to check the consistency of prosecution, the control treatment.

The outcomes of the experiment were measured by two key yardsticks: the prevalence and harm level of offending; the costs of the treatments. The former was done using data from the Police National Computer and the Cambridge Crime Harm Index, the latter by using cost data from the contracts and estimates of court prosecution costs.

The team also carried out qualitative observation and interviewing of police officers, offenders and victims to understand what was going on inside the ‘black box’ of the experiment and assist the force to continue to improve practice.

There have been more than 20 RCTs of pre-court disposal approaches with police involvement over the last 50 years. There have been many more quasi-experiments and process evaluations, including Home Office studies of the implementation of Conditional Cautioning in 2002. Turning Point was one of the largest and most sophisticated of these tests, covering both adult and juvenile as well as male and female offenders. Turning Point also, uniquely, included an RCT of the impact of the treatment and control on victims.

The three poster slides that follow provide details of:

- The implementation and victims study
- The reoffending outcomes and costs
- The victim-offender overlap and its implications

Background: The Evidence

Turning Point is grounded in research suggesting:

- Swiftness and certainty of punishment are more important than the severity
- Threat may be more effective than the punishment itself – the “Sword of Damocles” (see below)
**Operation Turning Point:**
Outcomes for victims and professional practice

Learning by testing: Early results from analysis of a randomised controlled trial

**Introduction**
Operation Turning Point was a randomised controlled trial, which compared the effectiveness of court prosecution with a structured diversion to a deferred prosecution linked to a “Turning Point Contract”.

**Early findings**
Early analysis from Turning has focused on two areas:

**Decision-making practice by police.**
The consistency of decision-making by police in making diversion decisions and in setting conditions has been a major criticism of Out of Court Discharges. But it was also a major potential flaw for the RCT because consistency is important for the internal validity of the experiment. We tested four different approaches to achieving consistency and then assessed their consistency by coding the conditions against SMART criteria.

**The Impact of Turning Point on victims**
A second major criticism of Out of Court Discharges is that they do not meet victims’ needs. The research used a survey of a randomised sample of victims from both treatment and control interventions to explore this issue. Victims were surveyed and asked how they felt about the diversion of their cases in Turning Point or the handling of their cases in court.

**Police Decision-Support IT**

**Method**
Four approaches were tested to improve the decision-making of police officers in setting conditions:
- Training
- Providing a set of recommended conditions
- Decision-making IT
- The use of a structured tool – LS-CMI

The approaches were tested sequentially – each step produced a significant enhancement of consistency.

**The Impact on Victims**

**Method**
A randomised controlled trial tested victim satisfaction in cases that went to court, versus those in Turning Point, a structured diversion to a deferred prosecution requiring the offender to complete conditions.

**Sample**
Victims were surveyed and asked about their perceptions of how their cases were handled. The sample included 142 victims, with a 70% response rate.

**Improving victim perceptions of police legitimacy**
Officers explaining to victims why their cases were diverted into Turning Point were asked to focus on 2 key concepts. These concepts were:
- POLICE MOTIVE—ADDRESSING VICTIM NEEDS: Ensuring victims feel that the police respect them, care about them, and are doing something in their interest.
- POLICE MOTIVE—REDUCING REOFFENDING: Talking to victims about reducing reoffending as a legitimate police goal.

**Victim Outcomes**

**Main Finding**
Victims with cases in the Turning Point sample were 43% more satisfied than those with cases sent to court.

**Why more satisfied with the out-of-court disposal?**
- Victims thought that Turning Point was more likely than court to stop the offender from reoffending.
- How out-of-court disposals are explained to victims matters—when a non-randomised similar group of victims with cases in Turning Point that did not have special attention to how officers explained Turning Point was surveyed, they were no more satisfied than court offenders.
- Many cases that went to court were dismissed (29%), and those that had a guilty outcome often received only a fine (19%) or a conditional discharge (10%).

**Implications for Practice**
Operation Turning findings suggest that:
- A deferred prosecution with conditions like Turning Point can satisfy victims at least as well as prosecution.
- It can potentially be better provided that police adopt the structured approach to explaining the disposal, listening to the victim’s concerns and talking account of the victim’s concerns and suggestions in setting conditions.
- The police can achieve high levels of consistency in delivering the treatments when they are supported by well designed decision support tools, training and effective tracking by management.
Learning by testing: Early results from analysis of a randomised controlled trial

**Introduction**

Operation Turning Point was a randomised controlled trial comparing prosecution (control) with a deferred prosecution with conditions. The outcomes have been measured principally by comparing data drawn from the Police National Computer and West Midlands Custody and Case system. The data has been analysed to show:

- The prevalence and frequency of reoffending by offenders in the control and treatment samples
- The relative “crime harm” of the reoffending, using the Cambridge Crime Harm Index to weight the crimes
- The costs of the treatments and number of court appearances

The data presented here represents the first analysis of this data and should be treated as preliminary data pending full publication of the result.

**Early findings on offending**

Tables 1 & 2 show the first year data for reoffending from the experiment. Table 1 shows that there is relatively little difference between the control – prosecution – and the Turning Point treatment. This suggests that Turning Point is at least as effective in treating low-harm offenders as a standard court prosecution.

Table 2 shows the figures for violent offenders only. There is a 35% difference between court prosecution and Turning Point, but the relatively low level of offending overall means that the difference is only marginally significant. Whilst this outcome is promising, it is likely to become clearer with more time and, therefore, more reoffending in the overall sample.

**The Impact on Court and Cost**

The data on the number of court cases is strong, even at this early stage of analysis. There have been significantly fewer court cases at less cost in the Turning Point sample.

- **No of Court cases**
  - Control: 432
  - TPP Treatment: 138

  There have been 68% fewer court cases in the TPP sample so far.

  Our initial assessment of the relative costs for the police are set out below and suggest that the cost savings may be of a similar magnitude, with TPP interventions costing less than a third of the control.

**Unit cost of Treatment/Control:**

- **Treatment:** £458
- **Control:** £1553

**Savings around £1000 per case and, therefore, savings across the study**

£205,833

**Outcomes so far and to come**

**Main Finding**

So far, with 12 months of data available, Turning Point appears to be at least as effective as a court prosecution in treating low harm offenders. It involves considerably fewer court cases and early analysis suggests that it can delivered at a lower cost.

The results from the RCT of personal victims whose cases were processed through court or Turning Point suggest that victims were more satisfied with Turning Point.

**Results to come:**

The robustness of these results will improve as the research team get the second years data in 2016. Further work is in progress on the Victim-Offender overlap (more than 50% of the offender had previously reported a crime to the police) and on understanding the effectiveness of the different conditions within the experiment.

The research team have already published a number of articles and papers on different aspects of the experiment. A final report with 2 years data will follow in 2016.

**The Research Team**

Peter Neyroud, Molly Slothower, Professor Lawrence Sherman, Dr. Barak Ariel and Eleanor Neyroud from Cambridge University and the University of Maryland.

http://www.crim.cam.ac.uk/research/experiments/rex-post/operation_turning_point.pdf

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**Partnerships**

The experiment is a result of a partnership between Cambridge University, Institute of Criminology and West Midlands Police and is funded by the Monument Trust. Experiments don’t just happen; they require long-term commitments from researchers, practitioners and funders. The research team thanks West Midlands Police and Monument Trust for their support.
Learning by testing: The prevalence of victimisation among low-level offenders

**Introduction**

The overlap between offending and victimisation is both a well-known and consistent phenomenon, with important implications for both policy and practice. While the consistency of the overlap’s existence is indisputable, the mechanisms linking the two together have been less studied. Two explanations tend to be advanced; firstly that both are related by variable such as the ability to exercise self control that effects both simultaneously, the second proposes that either offending is directly related to victimisation or vice versa, for example in the instance of retaliation.

While there is some research focussed on examining the overlap in juveniles and more serious adult offenders, there is little research with low-level offenders, or using victimisation reports to the police. Studying the victim-offender overlap in the Turning Point Project (TPP) sample provides important information on the co-occurrence of victimisation and offending in low-level offenders.

**Methods**

The 445 individuals involved in the TPP project were run through the police data system CRIMES. For incidents where the individual was identified as the victim of an event rather than an offender the date and type of incident were recorded. The type of incidents listed included those defined by the police as “no crimes” while these event did not meet the requirements of a criminal events they still involved a range of events where an individual was involved in a volatile situation, had been a victim but did not wish to press charges, or was identified as a vulnerable or at risk person.

From this data the prevalence of different types of victimisation where calculated using aggregate victimisation categories based on those provided by the Office of National statistics. In order to provide a comparison for the rates of victimisation figures from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) and from national police records from 2013/14 were used. The TPP incidences of different types of victimisation were calculated for the comparative time period and then factored to the same rate of per 1,000 adults.

**Research Findings**

The overlap between offending and victimisation was such that 56% (n=251) of the sample were listed as a victim on the police data systems. When considering only events that fulfilled the legal definition of a crime 50% (n=223) of the sample were recorded as being victims. The most prevalent type of victimisation was violence with 28% of individuals reporting a violent victimisation, and the second most prevalent acquisitive (21%). There was also a significant occurrence of incidents of domestic violence “no crimes and child abuse “no crimes.

As with other studies of victimisation there was a substantial variation in the total number and types of victimisation events recorded. While the majority of the sample (n=299) recorded only one or no victimisation events, there was a range of up to 21 events recorded.

**Implications for practitioners**

There is evidently a significant overlap between offending and victimisation in this TPP sample of low-level offenders, and violent victimisation occurred at a significantly higher rate than in the general population. It should be noted that the data reported on victimisation here may only represent a proportion of those suffered by low-level offenders, due to only using police data. The actual amount of victimisation suffered is likely to be far higher than the figures reported here. However this data does present conclusive evidence of an overlap between offending and victimisation for low-level offenders.

That there is a large overlap between victimisation and offending in low-level offenders is of importance to practitioners because understanding acknowledging the overlap firstly allows the identification of those most vulnerable to victimisation and secondly may allow opportunities for more effective interventions. Either at the point of victimisation with interventions like Restorative Justice, or when aiming to impact on offending behavior considering victimisation may give better targeted interventions. The type of Out of Court disposal approach used in Turning Point, which was based on Offender Desistent Policing may present one option for consideration with regards to this second approach. Futhermore given the extensive victimisation suffered by some of the offenders in this sample, sending them to court may not be the most effective response when the context of their offending in light of victimisation is considered.

**The Research Team**

Peter Neyroud, Molly Slothower, Professor Lawrence Sherman, Dr. Barak-Ariel and Eleanor Neyroud from Cambridge University and the University of Maryland.

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