

Operation Tetras – text message alert for domestic violence protection order (DVPO) compliance

SMS text messages sent to offenders subject to a domestic violence protection order (DVPO) to improve compliance of DVPO conditions.

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Key details

Stage of practice	Untested
Purpose	Prevention
Topic	Violence against women and girls Domestic abuse Offender management
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Region	North East
Partners	Police
Stage of implementation	The practice is implemented.
Start date	March 2024

Key details

Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Adults Offenders

Aim

The aim of the initiative is to increase DVPO compliance, therefore reducing breaches of DVPOs, arrests, and improving the safeguarding of victims.

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes of the initiative are to:

- reduce number of DVPO breaches
- reduce number of arrests
- improve victim safeguarding

Description

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is a critical area for policing and forms part of the HM Government direction to reduce this area of harm to the community. The detective chief inspector (DCI) in charge of implementing this practice had read an article in [Policing Insight](#) about Queensland Police using SMS messaging in Australia to remind offenders about their protection orders and conditions they are required to follow. This had resulted in a significant drop in repeat offences and an associated reduction in costs. This motivated the DCI to implement this within Durham Constabulary. Digital inclusivity was considered, and the evidence base suggests that this technological approach is more inclusive and accessible for offenders.

This practice is currently running as a randomised control trial (RCT), where the police are using the University of Cambridge ‘Randomiser’ to allocate offenders to either the control group (business as usual) or the intervention group (receivers of text message reminders). The DCI and a member of staff from the problem-solving team proactively look for DVPOs, and if offenders’ mobile numbers

are linked, they will be added to the randomiser.

If offenders are allocated the intervention group, they receive a number of short, scheduled messages. If the DVPO lasts 14 days, offenders will receive seven messages. If the DVPO lasts 28 days, they will receive 13 messages.

The content of the messages vary from outlining their conditions, signing posting support services, reminder of police activity, motivating the offender to make the right choices in their behaviour, and details of when the DVPO expires.

The aim of the messages is to improve compliance of the conditions set out in the DVPO. Sending the text messages is a short and quick task for the member of staff allocated to this task.

Evaluation

An evaluation is ongoing and being led by Durham Constabulary.

The evaluation is looking at the impact of the intervention by using a randomised control trial (RCT) to test the effectiveness of the text messages for compliance in comparison to usual policing activity. The evaluation is comparing outcome measures including arrest data, reoffending and breaches. The evaluation also plans to break the data down by demographics to see if the intervention works best for a particular type of offender, for example whether it works better for certain age groups.

According to early findings from the evaluation, the intervention is having a positive impact with fewer breaches of DVPOs.

Overall impact

Early findings from the evaluation show that 28% of the control group were arrested for non-compliance with the domestic violence protection notices (DVPN), compared to 4% for the treatment group who received SMS text reminders. Additional data such as the number of arrests, domestic abuse incidents, and other metrics are subject to further analysis.

One of the biggest challenges for the evaluation has been obtaining a phone number for the suspect. Some phones may have been seized as part of the investigation, therefore there is no current phone number for the suspect for the intervention to be given to. Consequently, there is a

relatively large cohort of individuals who did not go into the randomiser as no phone number was known. Further work has now been undertaken with the silver cohort (superintendents) who authorise the DVPO, to ensure the reasons why there is no phone number is recorded and tracked. The force are likely to re-run this evaluation to reduce the attrition rates during the selection process.

Learning

The following learning and recommendations have been made to support the implementation and delivery of using SMS messages to help with compliance for DVPOs:

- Not all offenders had mobile phone numbers that the messages could be sent to. This impacted the evaluation by limiting the number of people that could be randomised into the intervention group:
 - The DCI is working with the superintendent who authorises DVPOs to ensure the reason for an offender not having a phone number is recorded and tracked.
 - The team have also considered using probation information but still face challenges as not every offender is under probation.
 - Durham Constabulary are hopeful that when they understand more of the reasons why offenders do not have phone numbers, they can address the issue and get more offenders put into the randomiser, to help build the evidence base around this practice.
- The use of SMS messaging is supported by senior officers, which helps to drive the implementation and evaluation of the practice.
- The task of sending these messages has not been too onerous on the individual or organisation. They are quick to send and appear to be reducing demand and improving compliance with DVPOs. As part of the evaluation, there is potential to look at costings of the intervention.

Durham Constabulary aim to use advancements in technology to help policing. SMS messaging is used in other settings such as NHS reminders for appointments. Therefore, testing its use in policing should be explored to help prevent reoffending and provide better outcomes for victims.

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