Integrated offender management: Evaluation research in Merseyside and North Staffordshire

By ***Anne Worrall and Mary Corcoran*** (Keele University) and ***Giles Barratt, Helen Bickett-Wilson, Lol Burke and Matthew Millings*** (Liverpool John Moores University).

Integrated Offender Management is the latest incarnation of intensive supervision for prolific and persistent offenders in England and Wales. It is an attempt by the Ministry of Justice to provide a nationally recognised framework or 'strategic umbrella' to co-ordinate all multi-agency collaborations in working with offenders.

In 2010, a joint Home Office and Ministry of Justice document identified the five key principles of IOM as being:

- All partners tackling offenders together
- Delivering a local response to local problems
- Offenders facing their responsibility or facing the consequences
- Making better use of existing programmes and governance
- All offenders at high risk of causing serious harm and/or re-offending are 'in scope'.

Projects for prolific adult offenders (PPOs) were originally concerned with the reduction of volume property crime, predominantly theft and burglary, although more recent IOM projects now accept offenders with some form of current or past violence in their records. The central feature of such projects has been the combination of intensive attention from both the police and probation services, with ready access to provision by other partner agencies. Physical co-location is a feature of many projects, including the two considered here.

The body of evaluation research on these projects comprises a mixture of internal monitoring, independent evaluations by academics and larger scale national or multi-site evaluations undertaken by Home Office and Ministry of Justice researchers. Methodological limitations have meant that the resulting reports and their conclusions, though positive, tend to be highly qualified in relation to reduced re-offending and cost effectiveness. Nevertheless, the joint report of HM Inspectorate of Probation and HM Inspectorate of Constabulary in 2014 concluded that 'cautious optimism' was justified, despite noting the under-development of performance management data and systematic evaluation.

The Knowsley IOM scheme

The Knowsley IOM scheme was commissioned by Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council and was evaluated over a 6 month period by a research team from Liverpool John Moores University. Access to all participants was negotiated through site lead officers and participation in the study was anonymous, voluntary, and premised on informed consent. The primary research methods and fieldwork involved undertaking focus groups with the strategic heads of services and semi-structured interviews with key operational partners, IOM service users and their immediate family members. Commissioned by Staffordshire Police and partners, Keele University undertook a 12 month research project to evaluate the North Staffordshire IOM unit, analysing both the *process* and the *outcomes* of this complex social intervention. Set in the context of existing literature and policy, the methodology consisted of semi-structured interviews with staff, stakeholders and offenders, as well as observation of some practice and some simple statistical analysis, including rudimentary cost benefit analysis.

Both IOM projects were located in deprived, predominantly white, urban areas, with crime rates that were higher than for surrounding districts. Although serious acquisitive crime had been a major concern for many years, both areas were experiencing new concerns around violence, particularly domestic violence and gangs. Consequently, both evaluations were asked to consider whether IOM, in principle and in practice, could make a contribution to tackling these newer priorities.

Both evaluations were faced with the fundamental question: What counts as success in IOM? It is

widely acknowledged that PPO and IOM projects are complex in terms of their multi-agency nature and the needs of their clientèle. Their value should be judged beyond crime rates and cost effectiveness, though these are of course important. Other criteria which should be taken into account include, on the one hand, health, educational and social benefits for participants and, on the other hand, improved multi-agency working and information exchange between project partners, and improved intelligence on prolific offenders.

In respect of the Knowsley project, a high level of support was evident amongst all the main statutory partners based on a belief that it was building on existing arrangements as well as fostering new ways of thinking about how services should be delivered. The support and rehabilitative aspects of the IOM scheme appeared to have had a significant impact on some service users' perceptions of criminal justice professionals. What might previously have been acrimonious relationships between prolific offenders and the police had been transformed in some cases by the facilitative and accommodating nature of the interventions provided and approach taken.

There was a recognition that the effectiveness of the scheme rested on the ability of the staff involved to translate its aims into practice. The motivational skills of the worker, regardless of their organizational affiliation, were seen as crucial in moving resistant individuals towards desistance. Small investments (such as giving an individual a lift to court) appeared to make a big difference in terms of building relationships between service users and IOM staff. Families of service users also acknowledged the support received from the IOM team, particularly in terms of receiving guidance and having someone to go to when new issues arose such as changes in the service user's behavior or changes in family circumstances. Moreover, families felt that alongside support for themselves and service users, the

enforcement and surveillance aspects of IOM were crucial.

Whilst there was a shared commitment amongst the partner agencies to the overarching objective of the scheme, which was very much seen as a shared aim around reducing re-offending through the targeting of specific groups, how this translated into practice was governed by the different organizational priorities and responsibilities of the partner agencies. Whilst it was believed that the scheme had brought about a cultural shift in terms of the relationships between the partner agencies, it was unclear how far this had impacted upon the working practices within those agencies beyond those workers directly involved. In this respect, it was identified that more work needed to be done to ensure that IOM was an integral part of the agencies working practices and ethos rather than merely an 'add-on' to existing provision.

The tensions around delivering on partnership agendas whilst also having to resource and deliver core services was particularly acute for some of the strategic leads who were stretched across a number of roles, often with competing priorities which were in turn made more acute by resource constraints. As the IOM caseloads increased it was becoming increasingly difficult for the small number of staff involved in the scheme to provide an adequate service to the target group.

Whilst it was felt that IOM had broadened the range of providers and led to a greater involvement by the third sector interventions in the borough, concerns were raised that despite the establishment of protocols for sharing data some partners were reluctant to exchange information. This was compounded by the absence of a shared computerized case management system, despite several attempts to establish one. As a result information was often held on different systems and communicated in an ad-hoc fashion. This not only potentially compromised joint-working, but also often meant that there was a lack of dynamic information regarding the individual's progress and the impact of the interventions and services provided to them.

There was also a recognition that clearer criteria for assessing the individual's suitability for the scheme were needed in order to minimize potential duplication of effort and that timely pre-release information and intervention was seen as the key to being able to respond proactively following release from custody.

Most of the key findings from Knowsley applied equally in North Staffordshire, where the research was also asked to address three other issues: identifying specific areas of good practice; identifying which offenders benefit most from IOM and why; and what the future of IOM might look like. One example of good practice was the role of police 'field officers' who were seconded to the IOM from LPTs (where they remained based) for a fixed period, to act as a bridge between the IOM unit and local police officers, to aid mutual understanding and increase the general skill set of the police. It was noted that field officers saw themselves very much as having a 'change' or rehabilitative role as well as a 'control' role in relation to offenders. A second example of good practice, seen as vitally important by offenders, was the routine of IOM workers meeting offenders on release from prison and guiding them through the acute challenges of their first day at liberty.

Rather than focusing on which types of *offence* were suitable for IOM intervention, the North Staffordshire research identified four broad typologies of *offender* on whom the IOM had made an impact: predominantly younger offenders for whom IOM was the last chance before custody; predominantly older offenders with lengthy prison records who couldn't face another term inside; vulnerable non-copers who simply wouldn't have survived in the community without IOM support; and those for whom IOM meant only 'control' and who were not yet ready for 'change'. It was recommended that resources should focus on the first three of these groups.

Despite the largely positive findings from these two evaluations, it remains the case that the future of IOM is unclear. On the policing side, Police and Crime Commissioners need to be convinced of its value if its funding is to remain secure. Much discussion is focused on the flexibility of IOM principles to address a wider range of offenders. On the probation side, the allocation of IOM to the CRCs raises numerous concerns from the risk assessment of IOM offenders to the willingness of the police and existing voluntary sector partners to be co-located with private sector providers. These two evaluations demonstrate that IOM 'works' well for some offenders in some circumstances and provided the definition of 'success' is sophisticated and nuanced. Whether or not that is sufficient to guarantee its future is a political, not a research, question.

For more information contact:

Anne Worrall, Keele University
a.j.worrall@keele.ac.uk

Lol Burke, Liverpool John Moores University
l.burke@ljmu.ac.uk