

VRP Proposal – March 2024 Update

(update begins from page 7 onwards)

Ethics Committee (13th September 2023)

This project is at the proposal stage and is presented to the committee ‘in principle’ so that any immediate concerns can be raised.

This phase being presented to the committee is part of a bigger transition to have Violence Reduction Partnerships’ data collection and management gaining ethical oversight through the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner’s Ethics Committee.

For the purpose of this phase, an example qualitative project has been used as a reference for the type of work that may be carried out upon approval.

A legal consultation has not yet been processed but is being considered. A DPIA (Data Protection Impact Assessment) can be conducted by the OPCC DPO (Data Protection Officer) to support the proposal if considered necessary by the committee board.

Tasking

In the January 2023 Violence Reduction Partnership (VRP) strategic board meeting, board members highlighted the importance of community consultation and the lack of formal qualitative data collection taking place across the region. Members asked for the VRP to consider ways in which this could be explored, the benefits this would have for measuring VRP success, and enhancing insights through research and data. This request was then supported by the new Director of VRP in July 2023 as a key priority in the next financial year.

The aim of this phase of the project is to use the Violence Reduction Partnership skills and staff to develop resources of qualitative data that can be used by partners and organisations across the region to better understand and implement the public health approach to violence.

This will then feed into the wider aspirations to improve data sharing and the potential for a cloud-based system to support this enhancement.

Purpose

The purpose of conducting in depth primary data collection is to principally improve qualitative data on violence in the region.

Unlike quantitative data, qualitative data has the ability, to explore the “why” around violence crime which is crucial insight for organisations who are operating under a public health approach, focused on addressing and exploring the underlying drivers of violence and implementing preventative approaches.

It can also give a voice to those in communities who are most acutely affected by serious violence in ways static numerical data sets cannot.

Context

In the West Midlands, whilst data and evidence are used in strategic decision-making for tackling violence, the resource basis for qualitative data is low.

Across several organisations under the Serious Violence Duty, it has been highlighted that whilst overall data sharing and quality is one consideration for improvement, there is a distinct lack of community consultation and feedback which can uncover the 'dark figure' of crime¹. Whilst there have been several evaluative pieces commissioned by the VRP to universities and research groups, these pieces focus on the impact of specific interventions instead of on overall trends or types of violence.

In addition, in the 2022 Home Office statutory guidance paper on the Serious Violence Duty, it stated that the duty is to be implemented under the WHO definition of the public health approach:

"With and for communities; localities will be required to embed the voices and lived experiences of the communities they serve in their Serious Violence Duty-related activity. Both the SNA and local strategy should reflect the voices and lived experiences of the communities they intend to support"

Intended activity resulting from the project

Once approval has been given by the ethics committee, we intend to undertake more in-depth qualitative data collection projects.

To date, the VRP have conducted three surveys, primarily focused on generally feelings of safety and perceptions on violence. However, these surveys have not conducted data collection from under 18s or collected personal data.

And so, the VRP are seeking advice on procedure and best practice for data collection with under 18s and personal data collection through methods such as focus groups, surveys and case study reviews.

The reason we believe it would be beneficial to collection data from under 18's is due to our Home Office requirement to focus on violence that particularly affects under 25s. Without being able to collect data from under 18's, there is a large proportion of that cohort that we cannot consult and gain insight from. And so, whilst we acknowledge that data collection from under 18 participants will require additional measures to ensure understanding and consent but we believe it is necessary and appropriate to be able to explore youth voice as part of our future data collections to enhance our understanding of violence amongst this age group.

Additionally, the reason we wish to explore the collection of personal data, is to enhance the type and depth of analysis we can conduct as this would enrich the findings of these projects. To date, we have done analysis with non-identifying demographic information from participants to explore the experiences, thoughts and perceptions of particular groups. However, by enhancing that demographic information with narrower cohorts that information becomes personal data as it may be identifiable. We acknowledge that additional measures will be taken to ensure the security and management of this data

¹ "The dark figure of crime is crime that is neither reported nor recorded by law enforcement agencies" Penney, T. L. (2014). *Dark figure of crime (problems of estimation). The encyclopaedia of criminology and criminal justice*, 1-6.

and additional consent will be sought. However, for the purpose of gaining a richer insight into cohorts most affected by violence and implementing this information into commissioning decision there is a public good cause for this collection which makes it necessary and appropriate.

Ethical Considerations

Psychological impact on participants

Context:

Asking questions pertaining to violence may be triggering for certain participants. Research may be reaching a cohort who have personal experiences of violence that may mean discussion about violence is distressing.

Proposed solution:

We would navigate and anticipate the nature of the discussion and what elements may be triggering. We could work with our evaluation team and/or our commissioned psychological support staff to assess the proposed discussion and questions. We would then draft an appropriate warning for participants with a thorough participant information sheet, and signpost resources and follow our safeguarding procedures where needed.

Disclosures

Context:

We plan for future projects, the focus groups and interviews will be semi-structured in nature to allow for participants to contribute insight outside of the question structure, which could lead to richer information. However, we acknowledge that at that stage of data collection and/or after data collection, a disclosure can occur. A disclosure in this instance would be reporting of what could be a crime or safeguarding concern relating to themselves or someone they know or the sharing of personal information outside of the scope of the data collection parameters.

Proposed solution:

We would navigate this consideration by deciding, before data collection, a system by which disclosures can be managed if they do occur. This would include working with our WMP colleagues to create a procedure around admissions of potential crimes. There would also be a disclaimer and follow up explanation of the disclaimer by the researchers to advise participants on what disclosures are and the liabilities around disclosing, allowing for participants to be fully informed.

Under 18 participants:

Context:

We hope to conduct projects which involve participants who are under 18 years old. Under 18's can be classified as children and young people and we would be exploring topics around crime, faith, safety, drivers of violence and community engagement.

Proposed solution:

We acknowledge there are additional GDPR and research procedure considerations to take into account when collecting data from under 18s. And so, we will be seeking informed consent from legal parents and guardians before any direct data collections. We will also be creating participant information sheets for both parents and young people so there is clear understanding of the research project. We will also be creating a bespoke guidance and materials for the collection itself and we recognise these topics may be more inaccessible for a under 18 participants than an adult participant and so we will be working with education experts to ensure that these materials are using appropriate terminology and comprehension levels.

Personal data collection

Context:

For future projects we wish to explore the collection of personal data from participants. This in the context of our projects, would mean using narrower, selected cohorts of participants. We may also be asking personal demographic questions as part of our data collection e.g. a postcode for geospatial mapping analysis or what school or university they may go to.

Proposed solution:

For each project we will outline in the proposal how data will be managed, stored and used. This will then be given to our designated DPO (Data Protection Officer) who will conduct a DPIA (Data Protection Impact Assessment). We will ensure that we follow all legal requirement around the holding of this information and have clarity with the participant on this. We will also ensure high levels of anonymity and confidentiality where possible so that where personal data is collection, it is only done so when necessary for the project.

Data

<p>Data to be used:</p> <p>Primary qualitative data</p>
<p>Reliability of data:</p> <p>Reliable - sourced from participants in a relevant cohort. Some information may be factually inaccurate or some information may not be shared to researchers, this will be taken into consideration and data will be cleansed before analysis.</p> <p>Sample or entirety: Entirety</p>
<p>Type of analysis:</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Exploratory <input type="checkbox"/> Explanatory <input type="checkbox"/> Predictive <input type="checkbox"/> Optimisation <input type="checkbox"/> Dashboard</p> <p>Proposed methods:</p> <p>Focus groups, Surveys, Interviews, Case study reviews, Literature reviews.</p> <p>Proposed methodology:</p> <p>Grounded theory (an explorative theory that develops structure based on the results of the study and the insight provided by participants).</p> <p>Discourse theory (another explorative theory that analysis commentary and written evidence such as case studies and academic research to understand the current state of research on a chosen topic from past to present).</p>
<p>Will the project eventually be automated?</p>

Yes

No

Semi-automated – surveys maybe automated in collection but focus groups and interviews will be conducted by a researcher or analyst.

Means of evaluation:

Not applicable – no explanatory or predictive element to this project.

Update on VRP response to Ethics Board

feedback

(27th March 2024)

As outlined above, in September 2023, the Violence Reduction Partnership (VRP) brought an ‘in principle’ proposal to be considered by the OPCC Ethics Committee. The proposal outlined the VRP’s intentions to progress with qualitative research projects as part of a three-phase plan to enhance data and insight on serious youth violence. In the proposal, we shared the considerations of risk associated with qualitative research to be addressed, such as the psychological impact on participants, disclosures, under eighteen participants and personal data. From this, we presented a number of options to mitigate these risks. Insight and advice were received from the committee on additional factors to consider, as well as practical advice on implementing recommendations.

To date, in the current stage, the proposal is still ‘in principle’ as these products are currently still in development and untested. Learning was taken from a separate project the VRP supported (this will be referred to as an ‘undefined placed based project’ due to operational sensitivities). To address recommendations made previously by the committee, products have since been developed and research conducted; in this presentation we’re seeking further feedback on these products. We intend to continue with implementing the board’s feedback on relevant products and apply this in future qualitative research. We also hope to return to a complete qualitative research process with an example of successful implementation.

Recommendations from September 2023

- The Committee thanked the presenters for bringing this project forward at such an early stage and requested that it return to the Committee for further consultation once it is more developed.
- The Committee noted that more specificity was needed around which age groups the data collection would target and around the design of the research which took account of the different ethical considerations for each age group, purposes of the research, the risk of triggering and the question of anonymisation of results prior to any wider access being given to results.
- The Committee noted that the VRP has academic qualitative research advice available to it and recommended that this advice be accessed in respect of the design of the research and related materials e.g. consent forms, information sheets, anonymisation procedures.

Implementation of recommendations

Age consideration

The committee requested that more specificity was required on which age groups would be targeted and how research design would accommodate ethical implications for different age groups.

Targeted age groups

After discussions on these recommendations, it was decided this would be tackled in a number of ways. It was decided that for all future consultations/focus groups (the main method of qualitative research being considered), under 18 participants and over 18 participants would be consulted separately to allow for adaptations for under 18 groups. It was also recognised that under 18 encompassed children and young people with a wide range of maturity and comprehension levels. It was therefore decided this would be grouped where possible, and a minimum age of consultation would be set based on comprehension levels to ensure that participants were able to access, read and understand materials required to take part in the session, such as the participant information sheet and questions, and also taking into consideration the nature of the topics discussed (crime, violence reduction, safety).

With consultation of educational professionals, it was highlighted that there are significant maturity gaps to consider between the primary school and secondary school transitional age (aged 11), and also between the secondary and college/apprenticeship age (aged 16). It was decided that unless exceptional circumstances were presented through the needs of a project, the minimum age we would consult would be 11. It was also decided that where possible, under 18s would be grouped either in the 11-16 age category or the 16-17 age category.

Research design

It was decided that to ensure highest levels of ethical collaboration with under 18 participants, this participation would be sought under the principle of informed consent. It is now required for future VRP led qualitative research projects that all participants under 18 have a signed consent form from their parent/guardian alongside their own consent agreement. The consent form has been created with an accompanying participant information sheet (PIS) so that both the participant and their parent/guardian would be fully informed on all information regarding the research. The consent form and participant information sheet has been designed so that it is accessible to both the young person and their parent/guardian¹ [attached to be considered by the Committee].

It was also decided that the design of the research would take into account the age of the participants. For under 18 participants we recognised that a question-and-answer style consultation may be overwhelming and under stimulating for younger participants, and that under 18 participants may wish to express their views in a variety of formats. And so, in supporting the design of the 'undefined placed based project' this learning was expressed to shape the questions design to include a variety of activities, an ice breaker exercise and discussions with opportunities to verbally explain feedback or write or draw feedback instead² [attached to be considered by the committee].

¹ Attached appendices – Part A consent form

² Attached appendices - Part B consultation plan

Purpose of research

To address the recommendation around the purpose of research being explained to under 18 participants, the participant information sheet (PIS) was designed as explained above. The participant information sheet provides

- clarity on partners involved
- purpose of research
- what the research would entail
- parameters around participation
- use of data and anonymity
- how to find out more.

The sheet has been written at reading level that can be understood by the under 18 participant and their parent/guardian. For future projects will distributed at least two weeks in advance of the planned session to give enough time for questions to be considered and answered by researchers.

Risks of triggering

To address the additional risks of potential triggering - particularly with under 18 participants -, research on ethical standards best practice was undertaken and research agreement was produced³.

Research included how best to embed a [trauma informed approach](#) as used across the VRP in a number of projects, as well as into best practice using the [Department of Education user research manual chapter 'research with children and young people'](#) and the [International Charter for Ethical Research Involving Children](#). This research informed our consideration of having a safeguarding agreement in place, ensuring informed consent is received, as well as any adjustments required for participants with additional needs or accessibility issues such as a language barrier or learning difficulties.

The research agreement has been designed to be an agreement between the host organisations from which participants are drawn from or the qualitative project is linked to, and the VRP. The purpose of the agreement is to outline from the outset the safeguarding procedures and wrap around support that will be offered between the organisations. There is also reference in the research agreement for a risk assessment to be completed prior to consultation. This risk assessment is currently in development supported by the VRP evaluation team at the University of Wolverhampton and guidance drawn from researchers at the University of Birmingham. This risk assessment will aim to highlight where the consultation may risk triggering participants and a plan will be made to mitigate and address this risk.

Anonymising results prior to wider access

The Ethics Committee also raised the issue of anonymisation. As we seek to ensure that all under 18 participants are able to remain anonymous, we will be managing this in a number of ways. We seek to avoid any collection of personal data unless where necessary e.g. consent forms and keep this information separate from the results of the qualitative research. This will be treated in accordance to the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner's [Privacy policy](#), [General Data Protection Regulations \(GDPR\)](#) and [the Data Protection Act 2018](#). We will also be applying the enhanced Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) guidance '[Children and the UK GDPR](#)'.

³ Attached appendices – Part C research agreement

We will also be carefully considering any demographic data reported in future reports on the results. We are aware that not all demographic data will constitute personal data however, in combination with other information can become identifying.