Methodological and Practical Challenges of Undertaking a Randomised Controlled Trial in a Police Custody and Community Setting

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Overview of presentation

- Background
- The Gateway programme
- The Gateway study: design and methodology
  - a pragmatic RCT
  - challenges and solutions
- What have we learnt?
Background: the problem

• Approximately 1403 young adult offenders were dealt with by Southampton Police District (SPD): 2013/14 data
• Of those, 779 (55%) were via court based proceedings
• ‘Hard to engage group’, often have chaotic lifestyles and a range of health and social care needs
• The Gateway programme aims to provide targeted support to this cohort to break the cycle of offending
• The evidence around the use of diversion is still unclear
Gateway Collaborative Partners

- Hampton Trust - LINX coordinators
- No limits - navigators
- Restorative Solutions
- Southampton County Council - navigators
- Wheatsheaf Trust

The study includes:
- RCT
- Economic evaluation
- Qualitative study

Funded by NIHR
The Gateway study

• Single site: Southampton Police District (SPD)
• Aimed at 18-24 year olds, living in SPD, pleading guilty to a low level crime(s) committed in the Southampton area
• Gateway intervention programme vs a Court summons (usual care)
• An out-of-court community-based intervention (OCBI) with three components:
  1. assessing health and social care needs (such as drug or alcohol misuse) and mentoring (navigators)
  2. empathy workshops (LINX co-ordinators) to address offending behaviour
  3. restorative justice conferencing (only at victim’s request)
An evolving pragmatic RCT

POLICE ASSESS POTENTIAL ELIGIBILITY OF OFFENDERS IN CUSTODY SUITE

INVESTIGATOR OBTAINS CONSENT FOR RANDOMISATION TO A GATEWAY CONDITIONAL CAUTION vs COURT SUMMONS. If interested in research they are passed to the Researcher

Randomisation (1:1)

Court summons (Control)  
* n = 167

Gateway (Intervention)  
* n = 167

Immediately post-randomisation:  
RESEARCHER IN CUSTODY SUITE RECRUITS AND OBTAINS CONSENT TO TAKE PART IN STUDY CARRIES OUT BASELINE ASSESSMENT

16 WEEK ASSESSMENT

1 YEAR ASSESSMENT

2 YEAR ASSESSMENT

POLICE ASSESS POTENTIAL ELIGIBILITY OF OFFENDERS IN CUSTODY SUITE

Stage 1 - Initial Consent:
INVESTIGATOR OBTAINS CONSENT FOR RANDOMISATION TO A GATEWAY CONDITIONAL CAUTION vs COURT SUMMONS +/- CONSENT for the sharing of personal details with a Researcher who will contact them

Randomisation (1:1)

Court summons (Control)  
* n = 167

Gateway (Intervention)  
* n = 167

Stage 2 - Full Consent & 4 WEEK ASSESSMENT

16 WEEK ASSESSMENT

1 YEAR ASSESSMENT

2 YEAR ASSESSMENT
Population

• ‘Hard to engage’ group
  • 18-24 year olds
  • Interested in research?
    • Incentives? £10 gift voucher - not to be discussed at Stage 1
    • Loss of follow up and withdrawal rates expected to be high
    • Researchers need to build rapport with participants

• Police Front Line staff
  • Different roles
  • 2 x H.C. Police Officers
    - Police vs Civilian Investigators
    - act as our ‘link’ with the site
    - also part of the ‘Gateway Team’
    - delivered training to > 260 staff
    - TMG membership

• Eligibility criteria
  - Set by the police for the programme (within the law)
    – fixed for inclusion in the study, therefore limitations of what can change
Outcomes and data access

• Primary Outcome: Had to be health related WEMWBS* (NIHR)

• Secondary Outcomes: SF12*, AUDIT*, ADIS*, ACE* & health resource use
  - Re-offending rates at year 2

• Long term health outcomes: approval from NRES required for year 10
  - need funding and consent to access this data

• Access to Police data: held on different IT systems
  - Some items of interest not consistently recorded or available.

• Data sharing: ‘Huddle’ system for data sharing, in progress

• Researcher data collection: in the community setting, Stage 2 consent

Most of our outcome measures are self-reported (either face to face or telephone) using validated questionnaires*
Data Protection Act (2018)

25th May 2018 – GDPR law was implemented. For research the impact was unknown

• Research- we follow Research Governance guidance, as well as our organisational Data Protection Officer recommendations
• Police-Information Governance Team and Force Solicitors
• Differences exist in the way we implement GDPR:
  - both Sponsor and Hampshire Constabulary acting as Data Controllers
  - Legal basis = ‘task in public interest’ vs ‘consent’ (Stage 1 consent)
  - Common law and ethical principles still apply for research
  - Withdrawn individuals to be ‘wholly anonymised’
• Greater transparency for processing data - organisational URLs
  - review of all consent materials and data sharing agreements in place
Language and Culture

- Collaboration between academics and the Police still developing nationally
- Police recognise need for robust evidence
- Terminology:
  - What constitutes a low level criminal offence? *e.g.* assault, theft, drug offence, public order, fraud, drunk & disorderly, other?
  - Conditional caution vs community resolution (Codes of Practice, legalities)
  - Research also uses many acronyms and specific terms
- Need to understand more about how we operate
- Learn from each other, share best practice
## Our latest challenges

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<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Solution</th>
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| Currently few eligible offenders being identified                        | • Review eligibility criteria – limited options  
                             | • Review sample size if necessary                 |
| Police resources recently diverted to major crimes                       | • A backlog of offences - yet to be investigated   
                             | • May account for some shortfalls                  
                             | • **Await feedback**                              |
| Control arm (court summons?)                                             | • Consequences of not automatically giving a conditional caution to be considered  
                             | • **Outcome of these discussions awaited**        |
What have we learnt?

• Never enough set-up time
• Never believe anything you are told
• Steep learning curve
  - Legalities are out of our control
• Compromise is inevitable
• Be ready for the next challenge.....
Acknowledgements and further information

For more information on the study: https://www.york.ac.uk/healthsciences/research/trials/research/trials/gateway/

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