

Critically evaluate the impact of the National Vulnerability Action Plan (NVAP) on police practices in safeguarding vulnerable people. To what extent has NVAP improved multi-agency collaboration, early intervention, and outcomes for at-risk vulnerable people?

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BMPL5015

The National Vulnerability action plan is a key police strategy in prevention of mistreatment of vulnerable people. This Action plan forms a foundation for all constabularies on how to safeguard vulnerable people. Developed by the National Police Chiefs Council in 2018 within England and Wales (NPCC 2018). The primary purpose of the NVAP was to ensure there was an effective and universal method of safeguarding and responding to the growing numbers of vulnerable people. It improved on the Police's ability to identify, evaluate and protect vulnerable people. This essay will determine the impact of the National Vulnerability Action plan as well as assess the extent at which NVAP has improved multi-agency collaboration and early prevention. This essay will argue both the positive impacts of this Strategy as well as determine any flaws within the framework that could be improved upon.

The Aim of the National vulnerability action plan was to provide all constabularies with a framework that is universally applicable and then adaptable to local and individual situations. Oscar Kilo. (2022). The National vulnerability action plan is split into seven key strategies that form the action plan Early prevention is the first strategy in safeguarding vulnerable people. This strategy is based on the concept of interception of means that would render someone vulnerable. As an example (UK Public General Acts 2003). Under this act it is against the law to serve someone considered drunk additional alcohol, although this act is not directly related to the National vulnerability action plan it shows a method of interception and prevention as drunk people are inherently vulnerable as they are not in total control of their actions as an individual. A method of prevention more related to the National vulnerability action plan is that of changing the police's attitude to crime from a crime responsive to crime preventative such as identifying people with potential or already diagnosed mental health conditions. Another method of early prevention is having 999 call handlers training on how to identify potential vulnerable people. (College of Policing 2021). This allows for more effective information gathering as well as allowing police to respond to situations regarding vulnerable people. Additionally (College of Policing 2021-2). Shows us how the police formalised dealing with all situations in which you may find a vulnerable

person or potential vulnerable person. Which allows for as previously mentioned a universal methodology of safeguarding vulnerable persons. The advantages of having prevention and interception as a primary focus of the National vulnerability action plan is that for many people it is beyond prevention and focusing on prevention rather than response may lead to a lack of resources being put into crisis response which could then mean people who need immediate help are unable to receive it. The positives of this are that there are now more methods for victims or vulnerable people to reach out and escape whatever situation led to them becoming vulnerable or receive aid when needed.

One of the major victories for the National vulnerability action plan is that it has helped change policing culture at large over time by utilizing social media and the media in general. The result of this is the media attention that vulnerability has gained by being a primary target for the police. As a result many Police constabularies and even police forces at large have dedicated vulnerability groups and boards. As seen by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for South Wales. (n.d.) which has helped shape policing practice to help bring vulnerability as a concept to the forefront of the police. Additionally the national vulnerability action plan has helped shape strategic structure within many police forces. Many police forces has noted how after the introduction of this action plan coordination has grown between constables as a more structured foundation has been brought forward "improved governance and oversight from chief officers" (college of policing 2024) this shows us how effective the National vulnerability action plan has been even within the more senior positions of the Police. However this kind of policing is more data and analytics driven policing focusing more on the identification of so called "Vulnerability hotspots" and repeat offenders. This again shows a shift in policing practice and culture from response based to preventive based policing which is proving to be a recurring point within this essay. Although in regards to the cultural shift within policing some would describe it as procedural rather than properly changing the procedure behind vulnerable people. Some would argue that frontline day to day practice has remained unchanged. Backing this point is that the National vulnerability action plan is Non-mandatory for constabularies to introduce, being treated as more of a guideline then a rulebook. With a lack of resources meaning many constables go untrained in regards to vulnerability compiled with the non-mandatory nature of the national vulnerability action plan, means that the effect of the action plan is different from region to region. This takes shape as different constables performing different practises which is confusing and not the universal practice the action plan was hoping to form. The negatives of this change over time in policing culture means that less resources are being placed into policing by presence that many communities are asking for. However the positives are that preventative measures means that there is less likelihood of their ever being a victim as well as according to the NPPC that preventive policing is more effective than responsive policing. (National Police Chiefs' Council 2022). This shows a more positive change over the last few years towards a more effective and efficient policing system although it sacrifices policing presence due to the resource consumption.

As one of the primary pillars and most important objectives of the National vulnerability action plan Multi-agency cooperation. Understanding how safeguarding depends on multi agency coordination between police, health, social care, education, and voluntary agencies. The national vulnerability action plan states that different agencies should share collected data about developing situations as well as previous incidents and victims and offenders. This allows for a more cohesive system. Evidence suggests that the national vulnerability action plan has had success in improving collaboration. Many forces report stronger cooperative relationships with local and nationwide agencies according to (VKPP, 2021). The introduction of joint vulnerability assessments means that most public services will have an understanding of how to assess a person's vulnerability. Multi-agency cooperation became a huge primary issue after incidents such as Rochdale serious case reviews discover inter-agency and multiagency failings as described by Donovan, T. (2013). Show how due to failures within the system child sexual exploitation was allowed to slip between the gaps. Due to untrained, unqualified staff and due to the lack of communication between police and other agencies. After many of these incidents the national vulnerability agency decided to try and adjust their strategy to allow for other agencies to work at a higher level of cooperation to avoid incidents such as Rochdale again. Nonetheless, the complexity of handling multi-agency cooperation and consistency of partnership working remain problematic. Collaboration often depends on local relationships rather than national coherence. challenges include data-sharing barriers due to individual privacy rights , differing agency thresholds as well as agendas and resource disparities. For example, police reports frequently highlight that health and social care services lack the capacity to respond to referrals quickly and efficiently (Vulnerability Knowledge & Practice Programme (VKPP). n.d.). Which then undermined early intervention efforts. While the national vulnerability action plan improved the *structure* of collaboration, it did not fully fix the failings that limit joint safeguarding effectiveness.

Another primary objective for the national vulnerability action plan is the result and outcome for individuals who are or have been vulnerable. Summarised from (HMICFRS 2020) This is an incredibly complicated and complex objective due to the different kinds of individuals who can become vulnerable. Not all vulnerable people are the same and the situations of each individual are different. Additionally a positive outcome requires multi-agency coordination taken from the College of Policing. (n.d.). Which as written previously is a difficult strategy in and of itself. Attempting to ensure someone has a smooth transition back to their usual lives is a costly and difficult process that requires many different organisations working together. Another type of result is that of immediate safeguarding outcomes that ensures the safety of the potential victim by means of either removing the victim from harm's way or assisting the victim with reaching out to social services or other agencies. Another outcome is the matter of closure for the victim so that they may move on this may happen in many ways but one of the more common methods is by knowing the perpetrator has been charged, arrested or sentenced extracted from Sentencing Council. (2024). This provides the victim with closure however the effect is noted to be limited as victims may suffer trauma after the incident and

they may need additional support. Another issue with monitoring outcomes with regards to the national vulnerability action plan is that recovery and measuring the success of an outcome is often intangible as recovery is not commonly instant and therefore cannot be attributed to the efforts of the police making monitoring success for the purpose of evaluating the effectiveness of the national vulnerability action plan difficult. All of these issues unfortunately make the outcome for the victim sometimes very difficult as they must attempt to move on with their lives that is why the national vulnerability action plan is so important as it attempts to make improvements to this end. Some positive indicators exist: forces report better identification of vulnerability and improved recording practices. However, the National Appropriate Adult Network (2023) highlights that only 9% of adult detainees are recorded as requiring an appropriate adult, despite estimates that around 39% have a mental disorder—illustrating continued under-recognition of vulnerability in practice.

To conclude, the national vulnerability action plan has made a significant and positive effect towards reforming and changing police attitude and police response to vulnerability and setting out nationwide universal foundations for a guideline on how to prevent and react to vulnerable people. Although it is clear that there are some issues with the plan due to it being a national level objective for the police which is historically difficult to implement especially in a non-mandatory fashion. The national vulnerability action plan made a central foundation at which different agencies can all organise and cooperate to prevent and respond to the growing threat of vulnerability. It also helped to bring vulnerability to the forefront of people's attention by making it a primary goal for the police to strive towards. In regards to multi-agency collaboration which has improved with the structures of collaboration the national vulnerability action plan has provided, it has been marginally less accomplished in fixing the long-standing issues which plague inter-agency cooperation within the public service today. This means that the idea of a universal nationwide code of practice is not fully completed however further reforms may amend this issue. With respect to early prevention and intervention the national vulnerability action plan has made significant leaps in preventive policing rather than reactive which is a positive step forward. However there is still the issue of the consumption of funding and resources which is an ongoing issue within the police. Although that is not a critique of the national vulnerability action plan itself. Finally the national vulnerability action plan portrays an important advancement in the future of the police force as it transitions to create more effective proactive protection as well as creating effective and professional safeguarding the greatest challenge this essay has found for the national vulnerability action plan is the outcomes for the victims as consistently hosting effective multi-agency operations has proved difficult. The next reform should hopefully address the action plan for the outcome of the victim as well as insuring that local constabularies have the training and funding required to implement these changes.

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