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Violence **Prevention** Unit

Evaluation of the Wales Violence Prevention Unit

Year 1 findings (2019/20)
August 2020

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Summary

The Wales Violence Prevention Unit (VPU) was established in 2019, comprising a range of members and partners from organisations representing the police, Police and Crime Commissioners (PCC), public health, Her Majesties Prison and probation Service (HMPPS), third sector organisations and community leaders. The Wales VPU is committed to implementing a public health approach to violence prevention, incorporating primary, secondary and tertiary prevention opportunities and key strategic approaches that aim to shape the counter-narrative for violence in Wales. In January 2020, the Public Health Institute, LJMU, were commissioned to support the initial development of the Wales VPU evaluation framework, and to provide baseline measurements to support long-term evaluation. The evaluation used a range of methods to gather evidence, including:

	Interviews (n=9) with VPU partners, practitioners and stakeholders: these provided insights about the development, implementation and impact of the VPU. These interviews were also used to develop case studies (n=5) to explore key issues in more depth.
	Engagement with partners and wider stakeholders at three events prior to and during the Wales Violence Prevention Conference (n=160).
	Review of documents relevant to the Wales VPU, alongside wider literature. Information about wider partners and strategic ambitions was also gathered through attendance at meetings and the Wales Violence Prevention Conference, and incorporated into this evaluation.

Findings

Findings from the interviews with key partners, frontline practitioners and wider stakeholders have been analysed with reference to the five principles set out by Public Health England (PHE) in their whole-system multi-agency approach to serious violence prevention (PHE, 2019): collaboration; co-production; cooperation in data and intelligence sharing; counter-narrative development; and community consensus. Findings have been examined to understand if, how and where these principles could be evidenced in practice.

	Collaboration - A collaborative whole systems approach requires a multi-agency approach across a wide range of partners. Partners need a collective understanding of the public health approach, and need to work together to develop ways of working to meet the needs of the local population.

- The Wales VPU takes a *multi-agency public health approach to reduce violence* that aims to identify problems and address underlying risk factors through localised solutions. Public Health Wales were described by partners as having a pivotal role in this approach.

- The VPU membership was formed from diverse organisations. The VPU was viewed as an *"umbrella organisation"* that brings together individuals and agencies. The range of members provide guidance and insight to the VPU about the activities in hot spot areas and have wider knowledge of 'all Wales'.
- The VPU operating model is based upon a whole system framework for prevention. The model uses the four A's approach of *aware, advocate, assist and adopt to ensure a comprehensive approach to the delivery of interventions.*

Co-production - Violence prevention activities should be informed by a wide range of perspectives that involve co-production and co-branding of activities. Community involvement is an important aspect of co-production.

- Partners viewed violence as a cross-cutting issue and 'everyone's business'. Involving partners and the wider community was seen to be *essential to the co-production* of the Wales VPU.
- Partner organisations are *encouraged to engage with others and share ideas* through VPU workshops and regular internal and external VPU meetings.
- In developing initiatives, the VPU has carried out co-production work (e.g. work with Barnardos has involved *work with local prisons and one-to-one work* with offenders). Plans to further embed co-production into the VPU for Phase 2 are underway, including work with Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Services (HMPPS) to support young adult violent offenders.

Cooperation in Data and Intelligence Sharing - Cooperation in data analysis and intelligence sharing is important. This process can be a challenge, but partners should work cooperatively to develop effective methods to share data. It is recommended that local partners agree who is responsible for combining, analysing and interpreting the data, and use the data effectively to inform decision-making.

- The VPU has developed *a strategic needs assessment to provide a baseline assessment* of serious youth violence in South Wales Police Force Area. The Wales VPU have also committed to developing a *Violence Surveillance System* (VSS), using datasets to tell the true picture of violence in communities and inform and direct local community safety efforts.
- The logistical challenges of data sharing were described. All partners agreed there is a *willingness to share data with the VPU 'in principal and at a high level'* and that organisations/services were looking at how to do that and what policy and support may be in place to help facilitate this.
- The VPU has invested in its analytical function, with two public health analysts able to analyse and interpret the data and tell a story with it, exploring the 'so what' in more depth, rather than just presenting charts and graphs. This analytical function is viewed as a *"really key part of the unit"* and will help the VPU prevent violence across Wales, not just in the hot spot areas where the interventions have been funded.

Counter Narrative - The counter-narrative provides positive messages to young people to counter any negative messages that they may hear. Partners need to commit to developing protective environments that help prevent violence and to promote preventative approaches to mitigate against violence.

- The VPU have worked hard to address the counter-narrative, *providing alternative, positive messages* and ensuring that the overarching ambition of the VPU is not just to prevent crime, but to *understand the causes of violence and reduce the risk of harm.*
- Partners acknowledged the importance of *understanding the factors that make people vulnerable* to violence, and the importance of implementing person-centred interventions to support vulnerable groups.
- VPU interventions were viewed as opportunities to develop *person-centred* processes that minimise the risk of violence and violence-related harm; it was viewed that successful initiatives could then be rolled out at scale to help larger numbers of people.
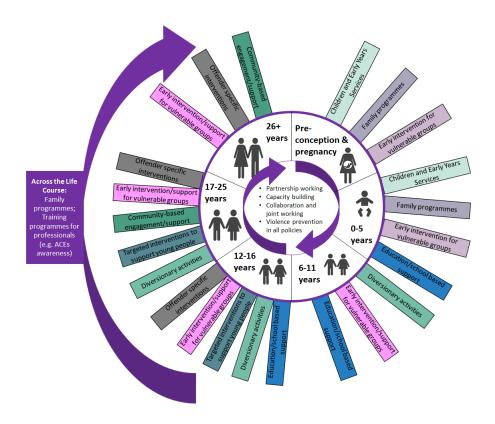

Community Consensus - Community consensus is defined as working with and for local communities by empowering them to take part in addressing issues that affect them. Partners are encouraged to use local organisations to support community engagement and advocate working with the voluntary sector, carrying out consultation events and linking with existing networks in order to build meaningful relationships and action with local communities.

- Interviews with partners highlighted how the VPU *are committed to supporting organisations to work together within their communities*. The importance of developing relationships and *gathering trust* was echoed throughout, particularly in terms of linking in with other providers and supporting people to gain further help with wider partners.
- It was felt that the VPU would *enhance community consensus* and support the development of localised initiatives that will create *meaningful outcomes*.
- Effectively 'branding' and communicating the work of the VPU was felt to be important. This was particularly so to *ensure communities understand the breadth* of the work of the VPU and that initiatives which were funded and associated with the VPU all felt part of the same programme.

Conclusions

This evaluation demonstrates how the Wales VPU has taken a socioecological approach to target violence prevention across individual, family, community and societal levels, using primary, secondary and tertiary interventions. The evidence gathered from stakeholders demonstrates the ambition for VPU interventions to be delivered across the life course, describing the delivery of a breadth of activities. This includes activities that are targeted towards children and the early years, targeted support for young people, early intervention support for vulnerable groups, offender specific initiatives, family programmes, education and school based support, community-based initiatives and diversionary activities.

Wales VPU: Life Course Public Health Approach to Violence Prevention

The Wales VPU has begun to create system-level changes in violence prevention, encouraging organisations to focus upon violence prevention as a public health issue. As a result, continuing this work should continue to build on early successes in preventing violence in Wales.

The ability of the Wales VPU to achieve the intended change is dependent on having the infrastructure in place to mobilise the strategic and operational activities. Whilst the money allocated to the VPU for investment was seen to be small, the buy-in for the public health approach was seen to have attracted many partners, who wanted to work together rather than in a silo. However, the short-term nature of funding was described as a limitation for long-term delivery of initiatives. Exploring opportunities to enhance sustainability and deliver interventions at scale should be a focus for future evaluation of the VPU.

Recommendations to enhance VPU delivery and impact

Widen and deepen collaboration: To achieve/strengthen the whole systems approach, explore opportunities to include wider stakeholders, including school-based support (e.g. School Nurses), practitioners from the Youth Offending Team, forensic psychology and mental health, housing, welfare, social services and education.

Develop community consensus: To develop further opportunities to work with practitioners who can develop trust with people who are hard to engage. Examples of good practice includes the work done by the Nurse Advocates and Barnardos.

Develop co-production: Build on the work integrated into the VPU to date (e.g. by Barnardos) and develop this further with other organisations (e.g. HMPPS).

Sustainability: Engage with broader Welsh partners to evidence the impact of the VPU and the cost of violence, in order to explore opportunities for further funding. Interventions receiving VPU funding should be evaluated to explore sustainability and identify where initiatives could be delivered at scale.

Recommendations for monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and data analysis: The VPU partners described the need to develop a standardised approach to evidence impact. Explore governance structures and barriers to data sharing. Increase awareness of the benefits of sharing individual and population level data across multiple agencies to enable identification of patterns of violence in specific areas. Ensure that any monitoring, evaluation and research yields actionable evidence that is relayed to the VPU in real-time.

Evaluation: Embed ongoing process and outcome evaluation to explore if and how the VPU is making a difference in implementing violence prevention measures across Wales, and in achieving the intended outcomes.

System-level and broader recommendations

Violence prevention in all policies: Ensure violence prevention is reflected in the Welsh government and local government priorities and policies. Focus should also be given to developing evidence for primary, secondary and tertiary preventative programmes.

The role of the VPU in informing the wider system: Ensure the VPU is strategically positioned to influence decisions made by other funding bodies and organisations to implement violence prevention activities in Wales.

VPU branding: Provide clear information about which interventions have received VPU funding. This will help increase awareness of the 'brand' but also ensure transparency, both internally and externally to the VPU.