

Crime and Criminal Justice Research Programme

Evaluation of the Arrest Referral Pilot Schemes

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Arrest Referral (AR) is one of a range of recent policy initiatives intended to disrupt the link between substance misuse and offending by improving uptake of services among arrestees whose offending may be linked to drug or alcohol use. Although there has been growing interest in AR in recent years, it was given new impetus in Scotland by the announcement in 2003 of Scottish Executive funding for a series of pilot projects. This paper presents the main findings from an evaluation of the schemes carried out by the Scottish Centre for Social Research and Stirling University.

Main Findings

- Pilots were successful in reaching arrestees with substance misuse problems – of arrestees interviewed in the 3 case-study areas, only 8% had not used either drugs or alcohol in the 24 hours prior to their arrest, 1 in 6 had used both, and the levels of drug and alcohol use reported were, in most cases, highly problematic. Alcohol users were less likely to be in contact with services. The vast majority of arrestees were repeat offenders.
- Pilot throughput ranged from 100-900 a year with the 3 largest, urban schemes achieving a higher level of AR interviews than expected. Smaller and more rural schemes failed to generate enough referrals from police offices.
- The AR service provided an important safeguarding and advocacy service for existing service users as well as providing a significant access point for 'new' service users. Most arrestees interviewed by ARWs were referred on to services: 38% were 'new' services users in EMARS (Edinburgh and Midlothian Arrest Referral Service) as 53% were in Tayside; whilst in the new Glasgow scheme this figure was nearer two-thirds. In Glasgow, virtually all referrals were made to the integrated Community Addiction Teams who would facilitate further assessment, support and treatment; whilst in Tayside and EMARS, around three-quarters were referred, via a variety of pathways, to a variety of specialist drug and alcohol support agencies. Small scale studies offered cause for optimism that subsequent appointments at service agencies were attended and some maintained service contact for months.
- The setting shaped the way AR operated and in a busy police office there were challenges to overcome in introducing a 'civilian' AR team into an environment with a strong focus on custody management. At all sites custody staff favoured secure, purpose built interview spaces on health and safety grounds but these were often perceived as barriers by Arrest Referral workers (ARW)s.
- Most arrestees interviewed would recommend AR to other people (84%, base 132).
- The cost of achieved initial AR interview varied from around £150 at direct-access court based settings to around £340 in a police-based setting. Court-based AR ensures high throughput and is cost effective, while reaching a higher proportion of persistent offenders. Police settings have more opportunity to capture individuals arrested on minor offences but they can miss particular vulnerable groups such as women and young people who are released early.
- Monitoring arrangements to record basic throughput were adequate but not consistently maintained. Information on referring on, contact and retention in services was in general poor.

Background

Six pilot schemes were funded by the Scottish Executive. Three were completely new schemes: Glasgow; Dumfries and Galloway (D&G); Lanarkshire. Three were extensions of existing arrangements: Edinburgh & Midlothian (EMARS); Tayside; Renfrewshire, East Renfrewshire and Inverclyde (RERI). All but one scheme (in Glasgow) were operated by voluntary sector agencies under contract to the Social Work Department.

The schemes included a mix of police-based and court-based locations and of direct and police-mediated access to arrestees. All but one of the schemes (again, Glasgow) operated from more than one site. Indeed, across the six AR pilots schemes operated from some 17 separate locations (police offices and courts, ARW and other offices), greatly complicating the task of evaluation.

Planning, Implementation and Operation

Because some of the pilots were extensions to existing schemes, while others were new, the schemes were all at different stages of development at the point of Scottish Executive funding.

Key issues during the planning and start-up phases included assessments of risk within police offices covered by the scheme; recruitment of suitable AR staff and their associated vetting through Disclosure Scotland; training of police and Reliance staff and of ARWs themselves; preparation of premises; final agreement of protocols and procedures; and building awareness of the scheme.

Of these activities, identification and preparation of suitable premises and AR staff recruitment proved to be the most problematic, with knock-on effects on the launch date for some of the pilots.

The setting for the AR schemes clearly shaped the way that they operated. In the context of a busy police office, the most important of these related to the difficulty of introducing AR (and its associated team) into an environment with its own strong sense of professional identity and a very clear focus on custody management.

Although good working relationships are clearly possible between AR and police staff, these can be difficult to build and maintain in the context of large numbers of police staff, high turnover and a shift work-based structure.

The role of the custody sergeant was seen as especially important in setting the tone and practice within individual shifts, though individual officers also varied in terms of their understanding of and commitment to the scheme, and their ability and willingness to promote its benefits to appropriate arrestees.

The custody staff (from Reliance) in a court-based setting have a more limited role and found it relatively easy to accommodate the needs of AR. The fact that the courts operate office-type hours and have greater continuity of staffing was also seen as an advantage, along with the fact that AR staff could have direct access to prisoners at the cells.

At both police and court sites, purpose built interview spaces were favoured by custody staff on health and safety grounds but were often perceived as a barrier by ARWs.

Although a national monitoring framework was agreed for AR, there was variation in how effectively this was implemented across the schemes. Issues relating to data quality, comparability and completeness proved a significant constraint on the evaluation.

Throughput of arrestees

In terms of throughput, there was great variation across the schemes in terms of absolute numbers, ranging from around 800-900 initial contacts per year with arrestees in Edinburgh and Tayside, to around 100 in Lanarkshire and RERI.

There was also great variation in terms of the relationship between projected and actual numbers. Edinburgh, for example, recorded almost twice as many initial contacts as originally projected, while Lanarkshire recorded only around a tenth of the number expected.

Overall, those arrestees accepting referral to the AR pilots were predominantly male, white and aged between 21-40 years. The vast majority were not employed and had previous convictions and/or charges pending.

The schemes appear to be successfully targeting arrestees with substance misuse problems – among arrestees surveyed in 3 case study areas, only 8% had not used either drugs or alcohol in the 24 hours prior to their arrest and around 1 in 6 had used both, most reported problematic drug and/or alcohol use. The survey interviews also suggested that AR is reaching individuals whose lives are being disrupted by substance misuse in broader ways – e.g. through dislocation of relationships with family and friends, reported by the vast majority of survey participants.

Data from both the survey of arrestees and monitoring sources also confirm that the vast majority of those seen by ARWs are repeat offenders, often with experience of incarceration.

Arrestees offered help in relation to alcohol were less likely to have been offered help or support previously.

In all areas, ARWs provided basic harm reduction information, new referrals on to other agencies or liaison with services which the arrestee was already in contact with.

Outcomes

There is reasonable evidence to suggest that ARWs are making referrals in connection with the majority of arrestees interviewed. Referrals appear more straightforward within an integrated service structure - in Glasgow virtually all arrestees interviewed by ARWs were referred on to the local Community Addiction Teams (CATs). Other AR schemes had to refer to multiple agencies via multiple pathways - in Tayside and EMARS around three-quarters were referred on to another agency.

In the established Edinburgh and Tayside schemes it appears that around 40-50% of those referred on to services might be 'new' service users, while data from the new Glasgow scheme suggests that as many as 69% arrestees interviewed and referred to the CATs are not previously known to them.

Only limited data is available in relation to retention in services, but it suggests that a clear majority of arrestees referred will attend at least one appointment and will be in contact weeks or months later, giving grounds for optimism about longer-term engagement.

Within the short evaluation time-scale and for a variety of theoretical and logistical reasons it proved not possible to obtain data on offending patterns pre- and post-referral to AR.

Most arrestees surveyed found the experience of AR positive – 92% (base 132) said they found it useful and 83% that the ARW was interested in what they had to say. Eighty-nine percent said they would like to see an ARW again. The vast majority of arrestees (84%) said they would recommend AR to other people, and nearly half (45%) said that they would recommend it strongly. There was a reasonable level of awareness of AR prior to arrest amongst survey arrestees (28%, base 132, having heard of it before).

Conclusions

AR faces more structural and organisational challenges in a police setting than in a court setting. Overall, the latter allows schemes to reach high numbers of arrestees and persistent offenders whilst the police-setting is more likely to enable contact with individuals arrested on more minor offences. However those released early from police custody, particularly vulnerable women and young people might be missed.

ARWs prefer direct-access to mediated access as ARWs feel they are better placed to identify need and 'sell' the service than custody staff who need to focus on custody management.

The 3 largest pilots contacted more arrestees than expected, and the Edinburgh court-based pilot twice as many as expected. AR refers the majority of arrestees to support and treatment services, offering a 'signposting' service for new arrestees with no previous service history and an advocacy and safeguarding service for existing clients. Many arrestees are attending initial and subsequent service appointments.

There is little concrete evidence of long-term impact on substance misuse and offending. Monitoring arrangements were adequate in structure for recording overall AR throughput but systems to capture referral on, service contact and retention required further development.

Schemes felt the Scottish Executive funding was essential to 'kick start' the planning and management of a new multi-disciplinary, multi-agency AR scheme.

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