Vulnerability Knowledge & Practice Programme

NPCC
National Police Chiefs' Council

SPOTLIGHT
Briefing

Vulnerability and individuals managed under Multi-agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA):

Learning for the Police from MAPPA Serious Case Reviews (SCRs)

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For some individuals managed under MAPPA their vulnerabilities can be a risk factor regarding their serious further offending. In order to best protect the public and safeguard those managed under MAPPA it is important to identify those vulnerabilities, assess any associated risk and plan appropriate interventions. This will help support individuals and manage the identified risk.

This briefing summarises some of the findings of our research into the vulnerabilities experienced by individuals managed under MAPPA who went on to commit further serious offences. The briefing:

- Highlights the extent and nature of vulnerability among individuals subject to MAPPA in our sample

- Identifies police learning in relation to understanding and responding to those vulnerabilities

- Provides some considerations for police practice when working with individuals managed under MAPPA

We hope the briefing will be of benefit to police colleagues and multi-agency partners working within MAPPA or wider offender management.
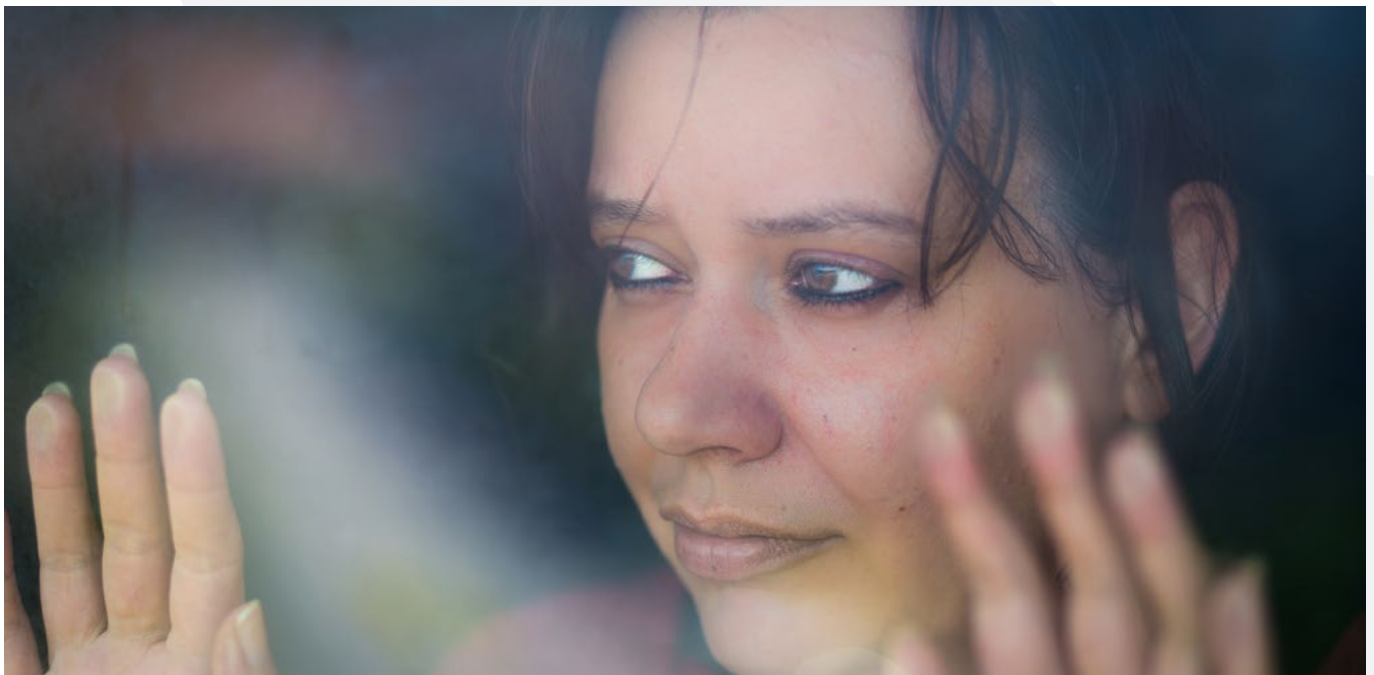
Background

In 2021/2022 The Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme's (VKPP) Review Team analysed[1] a large sample of Multi Agency Public Protection[2] (MAPPA) Serious Case Reviews[3] (SCRs) to identify learning for police. The purpose was to consolidate learning about missed opportunities and promising police practice regarding the management of individuals subject to MAPPA. This briefing describes one of the elements of that wider research project.

We have also published a report detailing the wider findings of the study as well as other spotlight briefings focusing on learning from the SCRs in relation to violence against women and girls and mental health.

In this briefing we discuss the need to understand vulnerabilities experienced by individuals subject to MAPPA, to support them in constructive ways and to manage them in the most effective way in light of these vulnerabilities if they are unable or unwilling to fully engage. We acknowledge that although the police and other agencies are tasked with protecting the public, offenders are responsible for their own behaviour (College of Policing, 2017). Consideration of the needs and vulnerabilities of individuals managed under MAPPA is important in contributing to potential changes in behaviour and managing risk, but it is critical that public protection is the paramount consideration in the development of risk management plans (National MAPPA Team, 2022).

Our analysis was based on the data available within documented MAPPA Serious Case Review (SCR) reports. As data is often missing from these final reports our analysis does not present a complete picture of the vulnerabilities experienced by individuals supervised under MAPPA. Whilst some vulnerabilities may be linked to offending, any potential relationship is complex and often facilitated by many factors.

[1] Phase 1 involved a quantitative analysis of 81 SCRs completed between 2012 and 2021. This identified 57 reviews that contained specific police learning and were included in our Phase 2 qualitative analysis. Further detail about the methodology used can be found here.

[2] Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements ("MAPPA") are designed to protect the public, including previous victims of crime, from serious harm by sexual and violent offenders in each of the 42 criminal justice areas in England and Wales.

[3] A SCR is conducted when an individual subject to MAPPA commits a 'serious further offence' causing death or serious harm.

Vulnerabilities and disability

Our findings

Individuals subject to MAPPA who featured in the reviews experienced a wide range of vulnerabilities. Many were reported as having a disability[4]. We have presented our findings about vulnerability and disability separately below.

The information presented is likely to be an under-representation of the extent of vulnerability experienced. This is because we found that there was a lack of information concerning equity, diversity and inclusion reported in serious case reviews, both in relation to individuals managed under MAPPA and victims. The recent requirement for MAPPA Strategic Management Boards[5] to report on matters of equity and diversity will help improve overall understanding here.

Vulnerabilities

The most common vulnerabilities identified for all managed individuals in our sample were substance and alcohol misuse or dependency. Over half of the individuals managed under MAPPA in our sample were reportedly dependent upon or misusing drugs and around a third reportedly dependent upon or misusing alcohol (either current to their serious further offending or in the recent past). Another common vulnerability was mental health needs; these were present in half of the managed individuals, with around a quarter reported as having a history of, or being at risk of, self-harm.

Individuals who have perpetrated sexual or violent offences and who have mental health needs may also present a **high risk of suicide**. The College of Policing Authorised Professional Practice on **suicide and bereavement response** and other **operational guidance** provides officers and staff with useful advice on understanding and managing these risks.

A third of individuals in our sample were also reported to have experienced negative events in their childhood, including child sexual abuse and exploitation, neglect, witnessing domestic abuse and having a parent misuse substances and alcohol. Adverse childhood experiences[6] like this can impact on an individual's vulnerability and behaviour later in life. For example, adverse childhood experiences have been identified as potential risk factors associated with **later violent behaviour**, **perpetration of and victimisation from domestic abuse**, an **increased risk of violence and/or carrying weapons**, an increased risk of **suicide and self-harm during periods of detention**.

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4 It is important to recognise that having a disability does not necessarily mean a person is vulnerable. A person with a disability would only be considered vulnerable if, as a result of their wider situation or circumstances they were unable to take care or protect themselves, or others, from harm or exploitation (as in the College of Policing definition of vulnerability).

5 The SMB is responsible for managing MAPPA activity in its area, including reviewing operations for quality and effectiveness and planning how to accommodate changes to legislation, national guidance or wider criminal justice. (National MAPPA Team, 2022)

Figure 1. Most common vulnerabilities experienced by individuals managed under MAPPA

Self harm | **Mental health needs** | **Alcohol dependancy** | **Drug Misuse** | **Adverse childhood experiences**

Other vulnerabilities reported included suspected exploitation, risk of radicalisation, involvement in group-based offending, homelessness, trauma and bereavement.

Within our overall sample there were also a number of individuals who had spent long periods of time in prison or secure institutions. For some these experiences impacted their ability to adapt to living independently when they were released into the community.

Although ours was a specific sample of individuals and is not representative of all individuals subject to MAPPA more widely, there were some interesting trends when comparing the reported vulnerabilities for individuals with different categories of offending histories[7]. For example, we found that:

- there was a higher proportion of individuals in the violent offences category with recorded mental health needs and drug and alcohol misuse than those in the sexual offences or mixed offences categories;
- there was a slightly higher proportion of individuals in the violent offences category with recorded ACEs compared to those in the sexual or mixed offences categories;
- the proportion of individuals recorded as having learning difficulties was almost double among those in the sexual offences category than the violent offences category (no learning difficulties were recorded for those in the mixed offences category).

Many individuals in our sample had complex needs resulting from a combination of vulnerabilities. Three-quarters of individuals subject to MAPPA had one or more recorded vulnerabilities. Of those, a quarter had two recorded vulnerabilities, a further quarter had three, and around one in 8 had four or more recorded vulnerabilities.
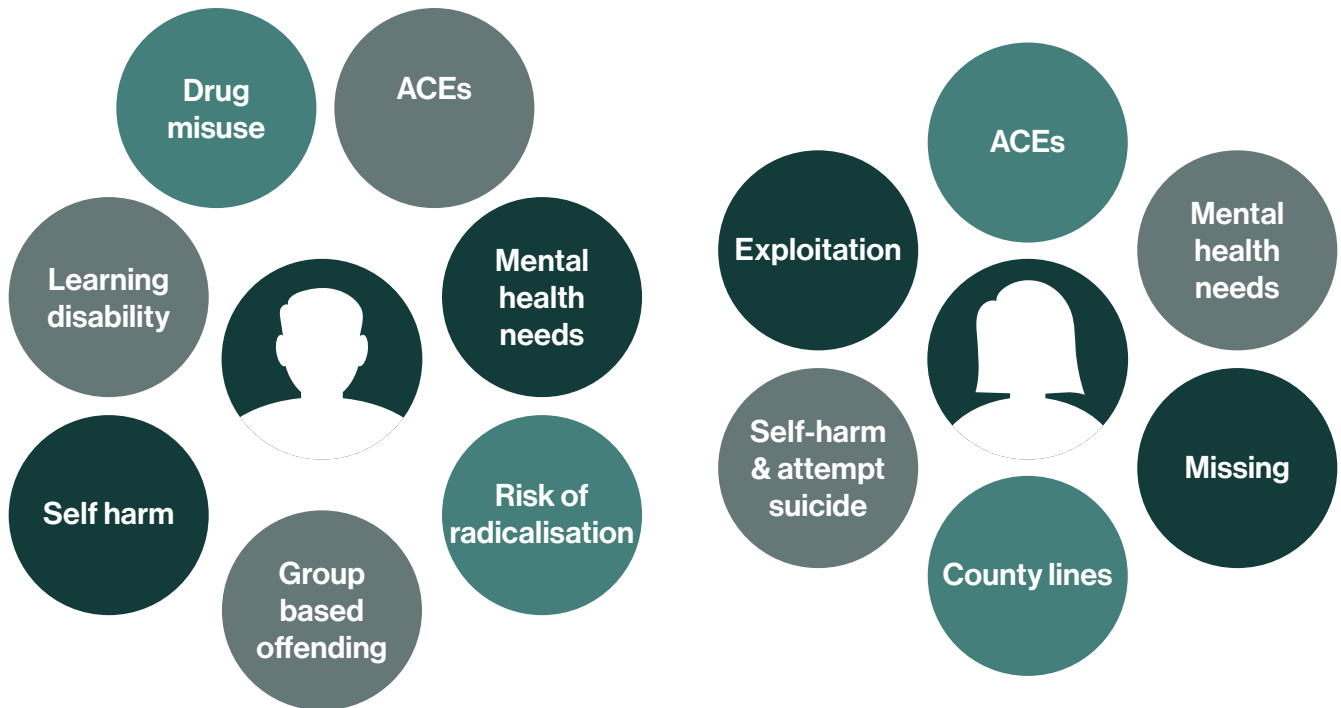
[6] Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are stressful events occurring in childhood including domestic abuse, parental abandonment through separation or divorce, a parent with a mental health condition, being the victim of abuse (physical, sexual and/or emotional), being the victim of neglect (physical and emotional), a member of the household being in prison, growing up in a household in which there are adults experiencing alcohol and drug use problems. More information is available at: **Introduction: Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) - Implications and Challenges | Social Policy and Society | Cambridge Core**

[7] Individuals were categorised as 'sexual', 'violent' or 'mixed' depending on the predominant nature of their offending and those offences that led to them being subject to MAPPA.

Children[8] and young people

Three of the individuals being managed under MAPPA in our sample were under the age of 18. They each had a combination of multiple vulnerabilities, with two of them reportedly experiencing more than six different types of vulnerability. The figures below represent the different known vulnerabilities for those young people.

Figure 2: Reported vulnerabilities for two under 18-year-olds managed under MAPPA

[National MAPPA guidance](#) highlights how children involved in criminal activity must be seen as vulnerable children in their own right and not just as offenders (National MAPPA Team, 2022). Many children who pose a risk to others have themselves experienced and been subjected to criminal offences, exploitation and abuse. Children convicted of an offence or who are alleged to have engaged in offending behaviour are entitled to the same safeguards and protection as any other child and due regard should be given to their welfare at all times (Department for Education, 2018). It is also important to consider the responsibility to safeguard and promote the welfare of children who are looked after by the state, and to try to **reduce any unnecessary criminalisation** they, and care leavers, might face (HM Government, 2018).

Vulnerable children need to be identified, safeguarded and supported for as long as they need. MAPPA meetings involving children should take a child-centred approach, with the views of the child being sought and considered. In order to support this approach Children's Services and Youth Offending Teams should always be represented at these meetings (National MAPPA Team, 2022). The VKPP have also published a practice briefing on the **Voice of the Child** which may be helpful to practitioners here.

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[8] A child is defined as anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday

In our study we found a number of issues regarding MAPPA supervision of 16-to-18-year-olds. In some cases, MAPPA oversight and professional and strategic leadership of the transition of young people managed under MAPPA from youth to adult services was not as developed as it should have been. The **Children's chapter** of the national MAPPA guidance was recently updated to include coverage of the transition of children and young people subject to MAPPA to adult services. A **transitional safeguarding approach**[9] to support supervised individuals is important here.

Disabilities

In the majority of reviews we analysed there was no information available about whether or not the individual managed under MAPPA had any disability. The most common disability types that were reported were mental health disability (around 1 in 6 individuals) and learning disability (around 1 in 7), either in isolation or in conjunction with each other. Physical disabilities were reported considerably less often, being identified among 1 in 26 individuals managed under MAPPA featuring in the reviews.

Further information about mental health needs and disabilities along with helpful resources can be found in our spotlight briefing on mental health and individuals managed under MAPPA. The College's Authorised Professional Practice on **adults at risk** and **mental health** are also very useful resources when dealing with individuals managed under MAPPA. They also include links to resources and practice guidance relating to learning disability, autism and neurodiversity.

Identifying vulnerability

The above findings show that individuals managed under MAPPA can experience a wide range of vulnerabilities. These vulnerabilities can manifest in a variety of ways and may fluctuate over time, due to changes in lifestyle, living circumstances, medication or treatment for example. Our analysis identified that for some individuals their vulnerabilities were a risk factor regarding their further serious offending. It is therefore important that practitioners working within MAPPA and MOSOVO (the management of sexual offenders and violent offenders) are able to identify signs of vulnerability or changes in known vulnerabilities and factor this into risk assessment and risk management plans.

The College of Policing's **vulnerability-related risks guidance** provides information and resources about identifying the potential signs of vulnerability. It suggests a four-steps approach to working with people experiencing vulnerability, which can usefully be applied when managing individuals subject to MAPPA:

1. Identify vulnerability

2. Understand how this may result in risk of harm in the context of the individual's environment or other vulnerability factors

3. Assess the risk of harm and responding appropriately with other relevant agencies, and

4. Respond appropriately in conjunction with other relevant agencies.

Risk identification, assessment and management

If individuals subject to MAPPA are identified as experiencing vulnerabilities, then the next step is to consider the vulnerability-related risks. The identification of vulnerability-related risk was generally good throughout the reviews we analysed in our study, however, sometimes the contextual information surrounding offender specific risk/vulnerabilities was not fully recognised or considered in risk assessment and risk management plans. There were also times when police colleagues did not always take account of important historical information about the managed individual or their circumstances.

The **identification and assessment of risk** is the starting point to managing all individuals subject to MAPPA and successful risk assessment is dependent on obtaining all the relevant information and using professional judgement to consider this (See also Chapters 11 and 12 of the **National MAPPA Guidance**). Risk assessment is a continuous process and should be reviewed regularly and informed by new information (with a multi-agency input) and changing circumstances for the offender (National MAPPA Team, 2022). Risk to the public and to the individual themselves both need careful consideration.

Risk Management Plans

Once vulnerability-related risks have been identified, appropriate methods to manage those risks need to be identified and clearly recorded in the individual's risk management plan. Our analysis found that some risk management plans did not follow MAPPA guidelines and encapsulate all four domains of Risk Management. This included failing to consider the implementation of support strategies when the individual was known to have mental health needs for example.

Some MAPPA Strategic Management Boards use the Four Pillars of Risk Management approach[10]. The approach specifically includes interventions and treatment as an important pillar in managing risk. This refers to activities and actions focusing more on developing the managed individual's own ability to avoid and manage risk situations. It also involves building strengths and protective factors that will help individuals to desist from re-offending (National MAPPA Team, 2022).

Risk management interventions can be restrictive, constructive or a combination of both. Table 1 below provides examples of the different types of intervention and key considerations in using them. The most recent **joint inspection of MAPPA arrangements** (Criminal Justice Joint Inspection, 2022) found that in some cases MAPPA meetings focused on restrictive actions to reduce short-term risks with insufficient focus on supportive and constructive activities and interventions.

Risk Management Plans should incorporate a range of different intervention types in order to support and manage the individual and reduce risk of harm. Interventions should be recorded along with a clear description of what they are intended to achieve, the rationale around why they are suitable to manage the risk related to that individual and how they will be enforced (College of Policing, 2017).

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[10]   The 4 Pillars of risk Management is a new approach to the planning and delivery of risk management developed by Prof. Hazel Kemshall at De Montfort University. The model is based on the four pillars of Supervision, Monitoring & Control, Interventions and Treatment and Victim Safety Planning.

Table 1: Intervention types with examples and key considerations

Intervention type	Information	Examples	Key considerations
Constructive or rehabilitative	Vital to a risk management plan. Offer individuals support to manage vulnerability-related risks themselves and increase their own wellbeing, reducing risk. Multi-agency working and contribution from duty to co-operate agencies is important. They play a large part in rehabilitating the individual and providing support for vulnerabilities.	• Referrals for medical or psychological interventions • Substance and alcohol misuse services guidance and treatment • Employment • Voluntary work • Accredited programmes addressing the cause of specific offending behaviour • **Circles of Support and Accountability**	Offender managers should be aware of specific support that the individual is receiving from support services and assess whether this is adequate in terms of risk reduction. Attendance at interventions is not sufficient to assess the impact on risk. Consider the quality of offender engagement and the evidenced of changes in thoughts, attitudes and behaviour when assessing the impact of interventions on vulnerability-related risks.
Restrictive	Designed to monitor or restrict an individual's activities. Primary purpose is to minimise risk of harm to others. Aims to 'control' rather than 'help' or 'change' behaviour (HMI Probation and HMI constabulary, 2010)	• Residing at aproved premises • Restrictions on residence • Office-based supervision (e.g. by a probation officer) • Intensive supervision • Home visits • Court orders - **see court orders and notices** • Restrictions on associations, movement and activities • Electronic monitoring/tagging • Surveillance • Disclosure to third parties • Further examples can be found **here**.	It is also important to understand that some restrictive interventions may lead to negative outcomes for the individual (e.g. a deterioration in mental wellbeing and therefore and increase in risk, so these should be considered alongside the advantage of public protection).

Content developed from College of Policing APP **Identifying, assessing and managing risk | College of Policing** and **National MAPPA Guidance** (National MAPPA Team, 2022)

We identified a number of further missed opportunities for police in assessing and managing vulnerability-related risk in our research. These are detailed in the table below along with some practice suggestions to help prevent similar issues in future. These suggestions are also linked to the relevant actions detailed in policing's National Vulnerability Action Plan[11].

Table 2: Identified vulnerability-related risk issues and practice suggestions

Issue	Practice suggestion
Professional curiosity There was sometimes a lack of professional curiosity to obtain relevant background information or explore particular vulnerabilities/ risks further with the managed individual or other agencies.	**2.1.1 Recognition and response** **2.1.2 Mental Health** Be professionally curious when identifying and considering vulnerability-related risks and, importantly, the contextual information surrounding them.
Information sharing Relevant information about vulnerability, risk identification and management was not always sought from other agencies, or provided to them when known by Offender Managers (e.g. information relating to unsuitable accommodation, mental health deterioration or non-compliance with substance misuse intervention). Linked to this, assessments were not always arranged to further understand specific vulnerabilities or risks.	**2.1.1 Recognition and response** **2.1.2 Mental Health** **2.1.3 Access to Services** **2.2.1 Appropriate Action** Seek relevant information relating to vulnerabilities from all agencies that have engaged with the managed individual. Ensure to share such information when it becomes known to police. Carefully consider this information to determine the likeli-hood of current or future impact of those vulnerabilities and include in the Risk Management Plan where appropriate. Seek further advice or support from specialists, including any relevant assessments, to help understand the nature of specific vulnerabilities for individuals. Use this to decide how best to manage any related risks.

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[11] The National Vulnerability Action Plan was developed by the VKPP, National Police Chiefs' Council and College of Policing, with support of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS). It is a framework that supports forces by identifying cross-cutting themes of vulnerability and draws on an extensive range of evidence to provide a concise, clear plan for forces to use in shaping and delivering their approaches to improving policing's response to vulnerability.

Issue	Practice suggestion
Appropriate professional challenge Where further assessments had been undertaken, sometimes the outcomes were not appropriately challenged when they conflicted with professional opinions of those supporting or directly managing the individual subject to MAPPA. Gaining the full picture of an individ-ual's vulnerability was sometimes complicated by conflicting diagno-ses from different medical profes-sionals. Police representatives, along with other multi-agency col-leagues, did not always explore or further challenge conflicting these diagnoses from different medical professionals. There were some examples where this concerned judgements about mental health, learning disabilities and neurodiver-sity, which sometimes had implica-tions for risk management.	**2.2.1 Appropriate Action** Use the MAPPA process and/or escalation procedures to appropriately challenge any professional opinions that con-flict with police information and knowledge in relation to the managed individual and their circumstances. Use the same processes to explore conflicting medical di-agnoses if those differences are likely to have implications for risk management.
Reviewing risk Risk management levels were not always appropriately reviewed when a change in risk/vulnerability became known (e.g. concerns around an individual's mental health needs or a return to misusing substances again after a period of abstinence). Specific actions to manage vulnerability-related risks were sometimes missing from risk management plans.	**2.1.1 Recognition and response** Be fully alert to dynamic risk factors relevant to the man-aged individual. Monitor these factors carefully and re-assess them regularly with multi-agency partners to en-sure risk management plans explicitly cover all risk areas. Ensure clear and specific actions are detailed in risk man-agement plans to address all identified vulnerability-related risks.
Referral to support services The decision or responsibility to access or refer to support services was sometimes left to the managed individual themselves. This facilitated disguised compliance where the individual was able to withhold information from a service. As a result, the individual was not receiving the necessary targeted intervention which would have been appropriate to help reduce risk.	**2.1.3 Access to Services** **2.2.1 Appropriate Action** Refer managed individuals directly to support services or support them to self-refer if necessary. Discuss their specific support needs with them and follow up to ensure any referral has been acted upon.

Issue	Practice suggestion
Exploring engagement The reasons behind an individual's reluctance to engage with support were not always explored, nor was further supportive action taken to encourage engagement.	**2.1.1 Recognition and response** Explore potential reasons for non-engagement with interventions with the managed individual. See if you or other partners can help identify barriers and discuss any potential ways to address these with the managed individuals. Where a managed individual does not engage then reassess risk.
Changes in MAPPA management levels In some cases, the level of MAPPA management was reduced inappropriately where unresolved issues around risk and vulnerability remained.	**2.1.1 Recognition and response** As part of MAPPA decision-making fully consider all available evidence around risk and vulnerability and ensure that action is taken to address any unresolved issues before supporting any decision to reduce the level of MAPPA management.

Summary

Our research has identified a wide variety of vulnerabilities experienced by individuals subject to MAPPA. Given that some vulnerabilities can have a substantial impact on individual wellbeing, which in turn can influence offending behaviour, it is vital to public protection that any vulnerability-related risks are identified and responded to appropriately. Some of the key findings and learning from our study and existing policy and practice are detailed below.

Key findings and learning

- Individuals managed under MAPPA often have a range of vulnerabilities and complex needs

- Common vulnerabilities identified were mental health needs and substance and alcohol misuse

- Offender managers and supervisors involved in MAPPA need to be able to identify and understand vulnerabilities (and the often multiple and complex nature of them). With multi-agency support they need to respond to them appropriately

- Supporting the managed individual and addressing vulnerabilities can help reduce risk and increase public protection

- Police offender managers and senior leaders who contribute to MAPPA have direct responsibility for assessing risk and managing it in relation to some types of offenders (with police-lead risk management plans) and joint responsibility for developing and monitoring risk management plans for other individuals. This means they need to create or actively contribute to the development and monitoring of robust plans that address any known vulnerability-related risks for the individual

- While restrictive interventions are important when managing individuals subject to MAPPA, constructive or rehabilitative interventions are also very important and need to be included in risk management activity

- Police leaders have a strategic role in managing risk via MAPPA processes. They should be prepared to professionally challenge colleagues and other agencies where necessary to ensure vulnerability-related risks are clearly articulated and actions to address these in risk management plans are robust and achieved.

Other Useful Resources

Vulnerability Assessment Framework

Home Office Guidance on Supporting Vulnerable People Who Encounter the Police

Transitional safeguarding (justiceinspectorates.gov.uk)

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