



# Coals to Newcastle?

## **Part 1: a study of offender profiling**

*by  
Gary Copson*

**COALS TO NEWCASTLE?  
POLICE USE OF OFFENDER PROFILING**

Gary Copson

**POLICE RESEARCH GROUP  
SPECIAL INTEREST SERIES: PAPER NO 7  
LONDON: HOME OFFICE POLICE DEPARTMENT**

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London SW1H 9AT

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First Published 1995

### **Police Research Group: Special Interest Series**

The Home Office Police Research Group (PRG) was formed in 1992 to carry out and manage research in the social and management sciences relevant to the work of the police service and Home Office policy divisions.

The object of this series of Special Interest Papers is to present those elements of PRG research which are of shorter term relevance to policing, such as a 'snapshot' of current activity, or which relate to an area of specialist police interest.

By its nature this series will have a relatively more specialised circulation. Wider issues are discussed in the Police Research Series and Crime Prevention Unit Series.

## Foreword

In 1992, the Metropolitan Police established a scholarship to investigate the operational usefulness of 'offender profiling', and I am pleased to introduce this first published product of the research associated with that scholarship.

We saw a need for such an investigation because it had been recognised that the marketing of 'offender profiling' was in danger of exceeding the product. It was increasingly apparent that despite the accelerating process of developing new profiling systems and approaches, no-one had yet properly consulted police users to establish benefits and costs.

The development of 'offender profiling' as a science could be pursued as an end in itself. For the police service, however, the objective of profiling must be to assist in serious crime investigations, especially, perhaps, those crimes committed on strangers, in which traditional victim oriented approaches often do not lead to the identification of the offender.

This comprehensive survey ensures that the authentic voice of the user, the operational detective, is not lost in the debate about the future development of 'offender profiling'. It offers some unexpected conclusions, and poses some questions about the validity of operational profiling which the next stage of research - comparisons of profilers' predictions with the outcomes of investigations - will seek to address.

This report is the first stage in a two tier process, and I see it as a positive and encouraging piece of work which moves towards the focusing and sharpening of profiling as an investigative tool.

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*August 1995*

## **Acknowledgements**

I should first thank the respondents, without whose co-operation there would have been no data; also the Heads of CID and force co-ordinators whose support enabled the operational profiling register to be compiled.

Many others have also given time and effort: the project management group - Gisli Gudjonsson, Dick Oldfield and Tom Williamson; my Metropolitan Police sponsors David Tucker and John Grieve; from the Metropolitan Police Department of Performance Review and Management Services - John Jones-Lloyd, Misha Hebel and Yvonne Davidson; from the Police Staff College - Brendon Gibb-Gray; from the Home Office - Gloria Laycock, Barry Webb, Chloe Jolowicz, Paul Moran and Rick Brown; the ACPO Crime Sub-Committee on Offender Profiling, chaired by John Stevens; and Janet Jackson of the NISCALE Institute.

Special thanks are due to three people who have actually worked with me on the project: Alison Wakefield, who in a six week secondment helped to conduct the pilot project; Gail Easton, who in a twelve month placement secured and registered the bulk of the data through unfailing charm and persistence; and Suzanne Brandom, whose attention to detail in the analysis and reporting phases has been invaluable.

Thanks also go to Graham Dunn, Head of Psychometrics at the Institute of Psychiatry, for providing quality assurance for this report.

GARY COPSON  
March 1995

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## Executive summary

This study forms part of a programme of research that is evaluating the potential for 'offender profiling' to assist with the investigation of serious crime. It is the first of two reports on a project that is assessing how useful operational 'offender profiling' advice has been to date in live serious crime investigations. It is based on a questionnaire survey of detectives who between them have commissioned 184 instances of operational profiling advice.

For the purposes of this project, 'offender profiling' advice is defined as any predictions, recommendations and observations based on the inference of offender characteristics from behaviour exhibited in a crime or a series of crimes, and offered to investigators as the product of statistical or clinical expertise.

Previous attempts to evaluate operational profiling advice imply that its practical usefulness needs to be inferred from the verdicts of the officers for whom it was formulated. This study, by far the most extensive to date, uses a questionnaire survey to collect the judgements of the officers involved. The limitations of an historical questionnaire based survey are acknowledged.

The 184 questionnaires upon which this study was based represent a response rate of 76% of the 242 instances identified as falling within the project definition, and 81% after setting aside those in which the advice was still under active consideration. The returned data set is dominated by murder investigations (61.4%).

The four types of profiling advice which have been most demanded by detectives are:

- predicted characteristics of unknown offenders;
- information which furthers the officer's understanding of the offender's behaviour or future level of threat;
- interview strategies; and
- linking of a series of offences by behavioural traits.

It is apparent, however, that police expectations of operational profiling are not always clear.

The returned data set includes the work of 29 different 'profilers' (people or systems) of which 12 feature only once each. The data set is dominated by the work of two individuals who, between them, contribute 47.8% of the instances considered. Most profilers have made no charge for their advice.

The question of whether operational profiling tells investigators anything they did not know already - or whether it just delivers 'coals to Newcastle' - cannot be answered simply. While 53.8% of respondents report that the advice they received added something to the information they supplied to the profiler, the true nature of 'added value' is bound up in complex aspects of usefulness and satisfaction.

Respondents report that few instances of advice assisted in solving a case (14.1%), that few instances of advice were directly acted upon (16.3%), and that very few instances of advice led to the identification of an offender (2.7%). By contrast, 82.6% of respondents report that the advice they received had been useful; most often by furthering their understanding of the case or the offender (60.9%), and/or by providing the reassurance of having expert judgement confirm their own opinion (51.6%).

Overall, 126 respondents (68.5%) report that they definitely would seek profiling advice again in similar circumstances, though only 91 (49.5%) report that they would definitely use the same profiler in similar circumstances. Satisfaction ratings of individual profilers are dealt with in section five.

The disclosure of profiling advice, regardless of whether it was borne out by events, has not to date jeopardised a prosecution case.

It appears that the majority of the detectives in this survey perceive the benefits of operational profiling as coming from the introduction of 'new thoughts', arising out of an intelligent second opinion, and the development of 'investigative philosophy' through consultation and debate. These seem more likely to assist indirectly than directly in the solving of a case.

The majority of the detectives in this survey do not appear to perceive any particular benefit from the inference of offender characteristics. This may be because:

- (a) it is unrealistic for profilers to accurately predict these characteristics;
- (b) though it is realistic for profilers to accurately predict offender characteristics they most often fail to do so;
- (c) officers lack the conviction to act upon profilers' predictions;
- (d) although officers do act upon profilers' predictions they fail to recognise or to acknowledge that they have done so.

The second part of this project, not reported here, will go some way to clarifying this important issue. It is concerned with content analysis of operational profiling advice collected from amongst the officers involved in this survey and, where possible, will compare profilers' predictions with the outcomes of investigations. This will give an indication of how reliable such predictions are, and therefore how safely they can be acted upon. It might also help to distinguish more clearly between police satisfaction with a profiler's contribution and the real potential value of it: in other words, between the service and the science.

The most compelling recommendation arising from this study concerns the need for further action to be taken to educate police on the potential value and limitations of offender profiling so there is a clearer understanding of what can be expected from it, what kind of expertise is most appropriate for different situations, and in what circumstances operational profiling advice should and should not be commissioned.

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# 1. Introduction

## Background

'Offender profiling' is a term originally coined in the United States of America, for an approach to police investigations whereby an attempt is made to deduce a description of an unknown offender based on evaluating minute details of the crime scene, the victim, and other available evidence. Sometimes other labels are used to describe what are essentially the same range of activities. These include psychological profiling, criminal profiling, and personality profiling, while the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) now use the term criminal investigative analysis to cover the range of operational support activities offered within their Behavioural Science Unit.

Following some reported successes through the use of psychologists or psychiatrists in particular investigations, this approach was placed on a more systematic footing by a group of FBI agents in the late 1970s. Its introduction in the UK also began, in the early 1980s, with isolated reported successes, but has not led to the same kind of systematisation. Rather, its development has been characterised by individual approaches which have led to arguments about the nature of the process, including the extent to which the American system is valid when applied in a different culture. Opinions vary on how far profiling is, or can be developed as, a science. A review of the literature invites the conclusion that profiling is not yet proven as a science.

It is generally accepted that the underlying principle of profiling is the inference of offender characteristics from offence characteristics, but there are a number of different approaches, each of which advocates a different basis for this process. These approaches rely, to varying degrees, on three strands of expertise: statistical analysis of crime data, behavioural science and detective expertise.

Over the last decade there have been more than two hundred British police investigations in which offender profiling is known to have been used in its various guises, but no truly independent scientific assessment has been conducted to evaluate its usefulness.

There is no governing body for the regulation of professional or ethical standards in offender profiling. Notwithstanding several postgraduate psychology courses which incorporate some study of it, there is no academic qualification for offender profiling, and there is very little academic literature which deals directly with either the principles or the validity of offender profiling. There used to be an eleven month course run by the FBI, which was open to law enforcement officers from anywhere in the world to learn their profiling system, but even this was closed at the end of 1991 as part of a restructuring and cost saving exercise. There is no official forum for learning and development of profiling skills, no mutual support network, and

precious little evidence of any feedback by which profilers can be made aware of their strengths and weaknesses.

Those wishing to know more of the history and origins of offender profiling are referred to the bibliography. The following articles offer accessible accounts of the state of offender profiling in Britain at the time of writing this report: Oldfield (1994), Wessely (1993), Pile (1994), and Davies (1994). For detailed accounts of the development of offender profiling in the United States of America, the following books are recommended: Hazelwood and Burgess (1987), Ressler et al (1988), Ressler and Schactman (1992). A personal account of profiling experiences and scientific principles to do with profiling can be found in Canter (1994).

### **Context**

The research which gives rise to this paper is part of a wider programme of offender profiling research which emerged from the recommendations of a review designed to take stock of British initiatives in offender profiling (Britton, 1992). Conducted within the Home Office Police Research Group (PRG), on behalf of the British Police Service, it carries the mandate of the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) Crime Sub-Committee on Offender Profiling.

The objectives of the PRG research programme are twofold:

- to establish whether offender profiling can significantly enhance the investigative proficiency of the experienced detective; and
- to manage the development of an appropriate mechanism to deliver any benefits of offender profiling to the police service.

### **Terms of reference**

The initial terms of reference for this project, which formed part of the PRG programme, were to provide a means by which investigating officers (SIOs) could obtain objective advice on the operational use of offender profiling, pending the completion of the programme. These were to be met in three parts:

- (i) by establishing a procedure to evaluate operational offender profiling in a manner that was useful to SIOs and acceptable to the Home Office, ACPO, and the profilers themselves;
- (ii) by collating and evaluating all British profiles that had been produced to date; and
- (iii) by managing the implementation of an interim system to provide objective advice to SIOs on operational offender profiling, pending the delivery of a long term solution on completion of the programme.

In January 1993 the project was developed and combined with a Metropolitan Police Scholarship founded to investigate the operational usefulness of offender profiling. This was partly a union defined by pragmatism, but also a response to the unexpected size and weight of the problem. It had been initially assumed that offender profiling had been used operationally in Britain not many more than a hundred times, involving perhaps ten or a dozen individuals. It was quite quickly recognised, however, that there were at least 200 instances and at least 30 profilers. What was conceived as a short data collection and analysis exercise therefore emerged as a much more significant study, in two parts.

This report deals with the first part of the study, a survey of police users of operational offender profiling advice. A content analysis of collected examples of profiling advice and, where possible, comparison of predictions and outcomes, will follow.

The question posed in the title “Coals to Newcastle?” is a reflection of a common criticism of operational offender profiling advice: that it tells the investigating officer only what he or she already knows. Little previous effort has been made to establish whether this is true, or even justified to any extent.

### **Definition of offender profiling**

There is no universally accepted definition of the term offender profiling. As defined for the purposes of this study, it is a term of convenience which is applied to a range of approaches to criminal investigation, in which the behaviour exhibited in a crime, or a series of similar crimes, is studied and inferences are drawn about the offender.

In the first instance the inferences drawn from such a study of a criminal's behaviour may focus on predicted characteristics of the offender, such as domestic and social circumstances, domestic and criminal histories, education and employment records; they may go further, for example, postulating mental health or sexual preferences and dysfunctions. This inferred picture of the offender can then be used as a basis for a range of observations, predictions, and recommendations.

An offender might be implicated in previous unsolved crimes, and a pattern of expected further offending may be suggested. In an extortion case an assessment could be made of the likelihood of any threat being enacted, and responses to publicity might be predicted. Interrogation strategies are sometimes recommended. Advice based upon inferred characteristics should be regarded as offender profiling just as much as the list of characteristics itself.

### **Definition of offender profiler**

An offender profiler, for the purposes of this study, is a person who offers advice to a police investigation based on having collected data on past crimes, or on relevant professional expertise, typically as a psychologist or psychiatrist. This may include people working inside as well as outside the police service, but only where they are acting as an appointed consultant to an investigation, rather than where they are operating some form of innovative interventionary intelligence system. The study is concerned, therefore, with reactive rather than proactive profiling, and with those who present themselves as having some kind of relevant expertise.

## 2. Review of previous evaluations of operational profiling

Only four studies were identified which deal with evaluation of operational profiling: Douglas (1981); Britton (1992); Goldblatt (1992); and Jackson et al, (1993a). Only one of them, Jackson's, has been published. Two further published studies, Pinizzotto and Finkel (1990) and Jackson et al (1993b) are each concerned with comparing the approaches of profilers and non-profilers in analysing given case material, with the object of identifying characteristics of the profiling process.

### **The FBI evaluation (Douglas, 1981)**

In 1981 John Douglas, then Special Agent on the Investigative Support Unit, now Unit Chief, conducted an internal review as a cost-benefit study to determine the value of profiling services which had been made available to all law enforcement agencies since 1978. It was specifically concerned with two questions: the nature and extent of any assistance provided by psychological profiling; and the actual results of utilising a psychological profile in terms of offender identification and/or savings in investigative agent days. In a discussion of the chosen methodology the difficulties are acknowledged of isolating the effect of profiling from the "infinite number of potentially decisive factors impacting upon an investigation", and a qualitative evaluation, based on a questionnaire survey, is chosen above a quantitative one.

Douglas' study is sometimes mistakenly attributed to Pinizzotto, because its widest circulation is as a series of quotes in "Forensic psychology: criminal personality profiling" (Pinizzotto, 1984). Pinizzotto offers a number of Douglas' findings, but the evaluation is best understood by direct reference to its own executive summary:

"Based upon the findings of this research the use of psychological profiling can be of definite value in an investigation. While probably most useful in the investigation of murder, the procedure has also been of significant assistance solving other types of crimes. In the 192 cases examined, psychological profiling helped focus the investigation in 77% of those cases where the perpetrator was identified and actually identified the subject in 15 instances. Even in cases where the suspect has not been identified psychological profiling was helpful. According to detectives, the procedure was often helpful in that it ensured that a complete investigation was conducted. All in all, investigators suggested psychological profiling had saved an estimated 594 investigative man days and all users overwhelmingly agreed that the service should be continued."

### **The Britton Review (Britton, 1992)**

This review was funded by the Home Office for ACPO and conducted by Paul Britton, head of Trent Region Forensic Psychology Service, a consultant clinical and forensic psychologist with wide experience as a profiler. It was concerned with



evaluating existing British initiatives in offender profiling and the potential for further development.

Britton's examination of operational profiling was conducted by means of a questionnaire to Heads of CID, asking about their force's use of psychologists to advise on crime investigations. This aspect of the study was conducted on Britton's behalf by two police Superintendents, one of whom later wrote an annexe to the review, in which he evaluated Britton's operational profiling. The focus of the questionnaire was on identifying profilers and establishing how far, in the eyes of the respondents, profiling advice had led to the arrest of suspects. Judged on this stark criterion, and contrary to popular perception, little evidence was offered that profiles were either accurate or had contributed to any arrest. Nevertheless there was deemed to be sufficient potential in the various strands of profiling research for the review to conclude that offender profiling in Britain should be regarded as viable, and that the British offender profiling initiative should proceed, albeit with some degree of caution.

The review recommendations were presented in a confidential report to the ACPO sub-committee in July 1992 and all 26 were accepted. It is those recommendations which were taken as the starting point for the PRG Offender Profiling Research Programme.

### **Goldblatt's review (Goldblatt, 1992)**

The Goldblatt review took the form of an undergraduate placement essay written by Philip Goldblatt, a psychology student from the University of Hertfordshire. It was focused on the work of the Psychological Offender Profiling Unit at the University of Surrey. The unit was founded by David Canter, a professor of psychology now at Liverpool University, who headed a group of students, several of them police officers, concerned with developing offender profiling data sets and operational advice.

The review, based upon information given to Goldblatt by Canter, finds that of 57 profiles then submitted by the unit, a suspect had been charged in "at least 12 cases". The observation was added that "unfortunately, it is not a simple matter to establish to what extent the enquiry procedure was aided by the introduction of a profile", and later "undoubtedly, those caught up in the investigative process are perhaps the best to judge the profile's effectiveness".

Goldblatt's review is partly based on feedback attributed to officers in the 12 solved cases, which allowed the profiles to be compared with information provided by police about the persons charged. He observes that "These comments, both positive and negative, ... speak for themselves as an assessment of the unit's work". His analysis of those 12 cases concludes that "out of 114 pieces of information suggested

by the profiles, 72% (82 pieces) were correct, 19% (22) were incorrect and 9% (10) needed more information to determine their accuracy". In two of the twelve cases, it is reported, the profile was prepared after the suspect was charged, but overall the operation of the unit was declared a success.

### **The Dutch consumer satisfaction survey (Jackson et al, 1993a)**

The Dutch consumer satisfaction survey, conducted in 1993 by researchers from the Netherlands Institute for the Study of Criminality And Law Enforcement (NISCALE) research institute, was designed to evaluate the product of a Scientific Research Advisory Unit set up within the Dutch National Criminal Intelligence Division (CRI). It was based on twenty cases over a two year period in which the unit had offered advice and where sufficient time had elapsed to enable it to be acted upon. In only six of the twenty cases did the advice amount to a formal offender profile, that is to say a list of characteristics predicted to be found in an unknown offender. Given the relatively small consumer group the researchers were able to interview respondents personally rather than send a questionnaire.

The broad conclusion drawn from the officers' ratings of the advice they received was that the majority of detectives interviewed could be viewed as satisfied customers. It was apparent, however, that it was not simply profiling that left them satisfied customers. Indeed, "a large percentage of those interviewed spontaneously said how much they had learned from the experience of discussing the case with the profiler; how many new ideas they had acquired and how useful these would be for future investigations." "This", the researchers add, "is the type of success that is very important but is also very hard to measure and this report makes no attempt to do so".

### **Conclusions to be drawn on relevant past studies**

What each of the four previous studies has in common is that they all rely to a large extent on the opinions of detectives who have used offender profiling advice in live investigations. All four studies offer some measure of approval for the potential of offender profiling, while three of the four go further, applauding the contribution of profiling to the cases under their consideration. None of the four, however, can be regarded as definitive.

The FBI study scans a substantial range of cases but little of substance is revealed from the questionnaires collected. The Dutch study offers substantial detail, but from a very limited range of cases. That aspect of the Britton review which is of direct concern here must of necessity be treated with caution since not only is the author's own work as a profiler quite properly excluded from his evaluation, but as a profiler himself he might be considered to have been placed in a somewhat invidious

position by being required to pass judgement on others active in the field. The Goldblatt review, meanwhile, looks only at the work of Canter and his students, and was, by design, limited in scope.

Nonetheless, it is possible to extract some very useful pointers for this study. Douglas highlights the care which must be taken in pursuit of quantitative measures of usefulness if apparent precision is not to be misleading. Britton, in stating the limitations of operational profiling when judged solely in terms of the identification of offenders, while still endorsing the viability of profiling as a potential aid to police investigations, encourages the search for other measures of usefulness, while Jackson offers some such alternatives. Goldblatt echoes Douglas (apparently without having had the opportunity of reading his review) in warning of the difficulties of isolating the impact of a profile from the complex dynamics of a police investigation, and offers the investigator as the best arbiter of usefulness.

### **3. Approach to the study**

#### **Development of the methodology**

The methodology chosen for this project evolved out of a process of wide consultation: within PRG, within the ACPO sub-committee, with interested psychologists, both academics and profiling practitioners, and – perhaps most significantly – amongst a range of contacts in the CID from a number of British forces: users and potential users of offender profiling. What follows in this section is a summary of methodological considerations: a more detailed account is available on application to the author.

#### **Measuring operational usefulness**

The starting point was the realisation that very little had been demonstrated outside the FBI Academy of the process of offender profiling, and that next to nothing had been demonstrated anywhere of its validity. In order to measure the usefulness of profiling, it would be necessary first to gather examples of operational profiling advice and analyse them to see what they consist of.

Next came the most important working assumption, that the process of profiling could well carry some benefits for investigators independent of the product: in other words, that accuracy was unlikely to be the sole reliable measure of usefulness. And while accuracy could seemingly be established quite simply by comparison of predictions with the outcomes of solved cases, understanding other dimensions of usefulness could only be achieved by reference to the users.

It followed that wider consideration of the profiler's role was necessary. Rather than seeing the profiler simply as an impersonal source of advice, it became necessary to look at aspects of communication: particularly at what in respect of medical practitioners might be termed "bedside manner". So the project was effectively divided into two parts. What was under consideration in exploring the users' judgements of offender profiling advice was not so much the science – if science it be – but the service. That is the principal subject of this report on the first part of the project. The approach to the second part of the project will be discussed in a separate report, in due course.

#### **Constructing a register of cases**

At the commencement of this project no official register existed of British cases in which profiling had been used. It was necessary then to create one. In constructing a register, every potential source of useful information was pursued. Letters were sent to every Chief Constable, seeking endorsement, then to every Head of CID, seeking support and assistance. At the same time letters were sent to every known profiler, explaining the intended course of research and seeking not just co-operation but also observations on the nature of the work.

### **Scoping and sampling**

It was decided to set the broadest parameters for the project. As well as having adopted a definition of offender profiling which included a wide range of 'expert' advice to investigators, contributors were encouraged to nominate any advice which they thought counted as profiling. All types of crime were included, and no time limits were imposed. All degrees of involvement were included, from a single telephone conversation seeking general advice to appointment of the profiler as a consultant member of the investigative management team. Some commentators, including Jackson (private communication) have serious doubts about accepting the notion that such casual advice could be considered profiling at all, but it is included here as it conforms to the project definition in that it is based on inferred characteristics of an unknown offender and offered on the basis of relevant professional expertise. The aim of setting such wide parameters was simply to try to discover every British example it was possible to trace.

### **Co-operation by profilers**

Almost all active profilers expressed their support for the project, and many offered information about additional cases. Several sent copies of written advice they had offered to investigations, while some offered advice on the construction of the project. A number of other profilers, no longer active in the field, also assisted in these regards. Only one profiler declined to co-operate, questioning the usefulness and validity of the project.

### **Devising a questionnaire**

Investigating officers in all the cases identified were consulted by means of a questionnaire. The logistics of interviewing a large number were deemed too great an obstacle within the context of the project, despite the potential advantages in terms of the quality of information on offer. It was also considered that the impersonal use of a questionnaire would minimise the risk of any bias being introduced to influence officers' responses.

A first draft questionnaire was formulated to reflect the themes which arose in January 1993 in a meeting of a user group panel nominated by ACPO sub-committee members. The group was unanimous that an open review process was necessary to measure operational profiling objectively and to determine the effectiveness of individual profilers. Subsequent drafts came about by incorporating advice from involved and interested parties. An explanatory letter was written to accompany the questionnaire, and it was tested in a pilot project.

### **Conduct of the pilot project**

Twelve cases were chosen, to reflect a blend which offered something of every variable which could be anticipated. Questionnaires were sent to the officers in charge of investigating these cases with letters explaining the purpose of the exercise and asking not just for the questionnaire to be completed, but for other relevant documentation, in preparation for part two of the study.

### **The result of the pilot project**

1. The target group co-operated beyond expectations. It had been anticipated that there would be a generally good response, but the pilot project appeared to demonstrate real enthusiasm for the exercise.
2. A good volume of quality information was captured, which would be amenable to appropriate statistical analysis.
3. It appeared that the information captured would be sufficient for both parts of the study.

The lessons of the pilot project were incorporated into minor revisions of the questionnaire and the accompanying letter, and the full data collection exercise was commenced. Copies of the final versions of the questionnaire and accompanying letter may be obtained on application to the author. Also available is an expanded version of the questionnaire showing the aggregate responses to each question.

### **Limitations of the methodology**

An historical questionnaire based survey is limited. There may, for example, be difficulties of involuntary, or even deliberate, bias. Reference was made to Hawkins and Hastie (1990) in considering the potential for involuntary bias. Accepting the difficulty of detecting deliberate bias, no evidence of it was observed.

### **The nature of opinion**

The responses gathered in the questionnaires are clearly respondents' opinions, and factors such as pride, prejudice, ignorance and misconception can all contribute to the formation of opinion. What was being sought, however, was not personal opinions of like or dislike, but professional judgements on the service rendered. Great care has been taken throughout the course of this project that it should not be contaminated by the opinions, personal or professional, of the researcher, nor by those of any advisor.

## 4. Some characteristics of the data collected

### Nominated cases

Up to 1 December 1994, the cut off date for data collection for this report, 296 instances of profiling had been nominated. There was no way of telling how this number compared with the true number of cases in which offender profiling advice has been commissioned but, based on reactions from around the country in the course of gathering information, it seemed reasonable to suppose that the true number would not have exceeded 400.

### Rate of response

Table 1 shows how the target for data collection (the target data set) of 242 instances was broken down, and how the response rate of 81% was arrived at by comparing the maximum possible response with the actual response. 162 questionnaires (71.4% of the possible responses) were returned without any form of reminder, while of the 43 instances for which no response had been elicited by the closing date for this data set, 14 had been received by the time of reporting, too late for inclusion.

Table 1: Instances of profiling nominated for the project	
Nominated	296
Deleted, not relevant *	54
Target data set	242
Too early for a response	15
Possible response	227
Actual response (returned data set)	184
=> Return rate	81%
*****	
* Reasons for deletions	
Advice deemed outside definition	22
Profiler failed to deliver any advice	4
Case solved before advice delivered	4
Officer withdrew request for advice	2
Officer had no recollection of the advice	14
No trace – Officers all retired	7
Papers lost	1
Total	54

## SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DATA COLLECTED

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Table 1 also shows the reasons why 54 nominated instances of profiling were deleted from the survey. Most commonly this was because the advice turned out not to fit within the adopted definition of profiling. Instances of this included hypnosis to try to enhance the memory of witnesses, and traumatic stress counselling. In the 14 instances in which the officer expressed no recollection of receiving advice, none of the advice had been delivered in writing. It is inferred from this that verbal advice, especially over the telephone, is less likely to have any significant impact upon either the officer or the enquiry, and may be easily forgotten.

### Police forces represented in the sample

Of 56 police forces in Britain, 48 were represented in the nominated case register. Four forces returned a double figure number of questionnaires: the Metropolitan Police (28), West Yorkshire (15), Thames Valley (10) and Hampshire (10). There seems to be no clear link between crime rates or force sizes and the tendency to take profiling advice.

### Case types

Table 2 shows a breakdown of the types of cases and the established outcomes of the investigations in the returned data set: at 61.4%, the set is dominated by murder investigations.

**Table 2: Returned data set: case types – proportion solved and unsolved**

CASE TYPE	NUMBER OF CASES	SOLVED CASES	UNSOLVED CASES
Murder	113	59 (52.2%)	54 (47.8%)
Fire and arson	4	4 (100%)	0 (0%)
Rape	40	23 (57.5%)	17 (42.5%)
Other sexual	10	7 (70%)	3 (30%)
Threatening telephone calls	2	1 (50%)	1 (50%)
Extortion	12	8 (66.7%)	4 (33.3%)
Abduction	3	3 (100%)	0 (0%)

N = 184 (Solved 105, Unsolved 79)

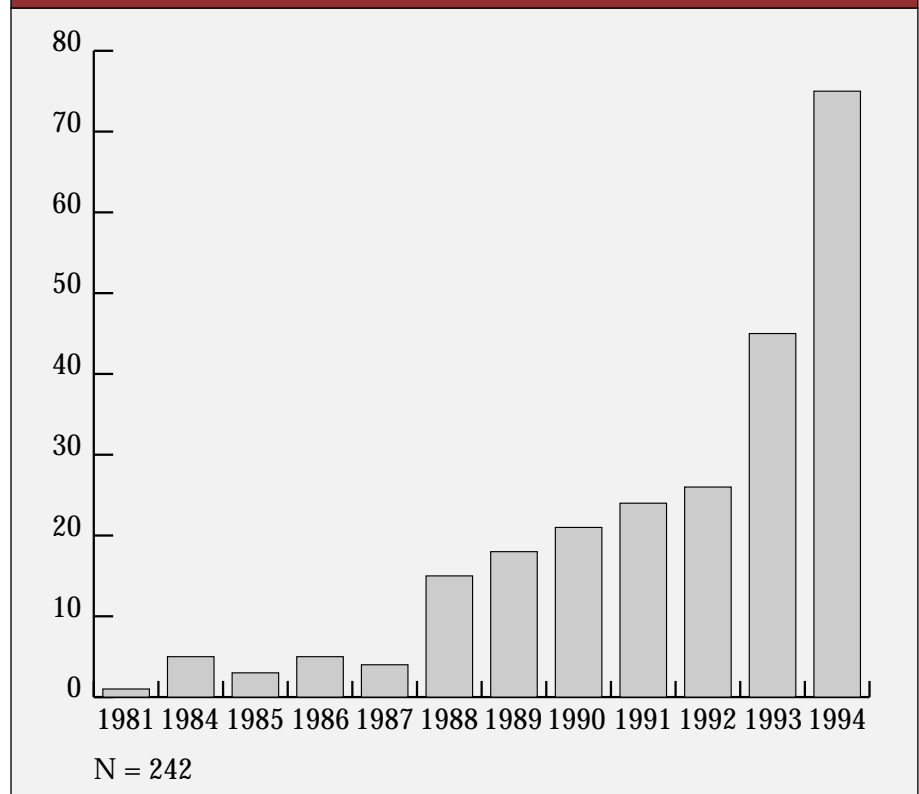
n.b. the terms “solved” and “unsolved” are used in the police accounting sense of whether the case can be shown as cleared up or not.



**Prevalence of non sexual murders as the subject of profiling**

To learn more about the precise nature of police requirements, some effort was made to see what proportion of those murder cases were the result of a sexual attack on a female victim. Because it proved difficult to identify where sex was the motive – for example, multiple stab wounds could, but would not necessarily, indicate some kind of auto-erotic manic fixation – no precise figure can be reliably offered. It is apparent, however, that at least 60% were not sexually motivated, a finding which might concern those who advocate profiling on the basis of the development and analysis of a crime data set, since little relevant developed data exists. Only the work of Rick Holden, a former police officer who studied under David Canter, has been concerned with compiling a data set of murder cases. And Holden’s system, while prompting some good reports from officers who have taken advice based upon it, was founded on details of only 62 cases – a small sample upon which to place such a large burden.

Table 3: Target data set: temporal analysis



### **Temporal analysis**

Table 3 shows a temporal analysis of the target data set, showing a rapid increase in demand in recent years, from 21 nominated cases in 1990 to 45 in 1993, and 75 in 1994.

Table 4 shows a similar analysis of the returned data set, but also shows the pattern of demand for different types of advice. A steady general rise in demand can be observed for all types of advice, and a particular rise in demand for an understanding of offender behaviour. A single instance can contain several different types of advice, for example offering a list of predicted offender characteristics and also advice on interviewing the alleged offender on arrest, so the numbers in table 4 will add up to more than 184.

### **Direct dealings with the profiler**

There were 53 respondents (28.8%) who did not themselves deal directly with the profiler. This may have been because the SIO delegated direct dealings to a junior officer but nevertheless retained responsibility for deciding whether and how to make use of the advice, or it may have been because the officer who did have direct dealings with the profiler had retired and so was unavailable to complete the questionnaire.

### **Provision of supplementary information**

In 168 instances brief facts of the case were supplied, in 122 instances a proper account of the profiler's advice was supplied – either a copy of written advice or a copy of notes of verbal advice – and in 6 further instances some brief details of the profiler's advice were supplied. This information will be used in part two of the study, and is mentioned here as an indication of the degree of co-operation elicited.

### **Profilers identified**

The profilers identified in this survey, and the number of cases in the returned data set on which they have advised, are shown in table 5. It reveals 29 separate sources of profiling advice, 12 of which feature only once each. The set is dominated by the work of two individuals, who between them advised on 47.8% of the instances considered. Profilers will not be named in this report.

SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DATA COLLECTED

**Table 4:** Returned data set: type of advice sought each year

TYPE OF ADVICE	1981	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	TOT.
Linking a series of crimes		1	2		1	5	5	3	6	5	7	12	47
Predictive profile	1	1	2	3	2	10	9	12	16	19	18	23	116
Interview strategy		1			1	5	5	4	4	7	12	12	51
News media strategy								2	1		1	2	6
Evaluation of confession		1		1			1	1	1		1	2	8
Evaluation of witness	1	1			1		2	3	2	2	5	8	25
Undstndng of behaviour	1	4	2	3	3	7	8	13	10	10	23	28	112
Analysis of text					1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	11
Assessment of suspect							1	1				1	3

## SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DATA COLLECTED

**Table 5: Profiles featured in the returned data set**

PROFILER	NATURE OF EXPERTISE	DATA	COUNT
1	Clinical Psychiatrist	no	1
2	Forensic Psychiatrist	no	6
3	Clinical Psychologist	no	1
4	Forensic Psychologist	no	1
5	Clinical Psychologist	no	10
6	Clinical Psychologist	no	1
7	Academic Psychologist	no	8
8	Forensic Psychologist	no	43
9	Academic Psychologist	YES	45
10	Police Data System	YES	7
11	Police Officer	no	1
12	Police Scientist	YES	2
13	Law Enforcement Unit	no	6
14	Unknown	no	1
15	Forensic Psychologist	no	4
16	Forensic Psychiatrist	no	1
17	Unknown	no	1
18	Forensic Psychologist	no	8
19	Forensic Pyschiatrist	no	3
20	Police Officer	YES	11
21	Police Oficer	YES	6
22	Police Officer	YES	1
23	Academic Psychologist	no	1
24	Unknown	no	1
25	Academic Psychologist	no	5
26	Forensic Psychologist	no	2
27	Forensic Pyschologist	no	2
28	Forensic Pyschiatrist	no	1
29	Consultant Therapist	no	4

NB: 'DATA' refers to British police data collected and organised for the purposes of profiling.

## 5. The use and usefulness of offender profiling

### Use of offender profiling

Aspects of use considered in this section are the nature of advice requested, officers' expectations of that advice, the stage of the enquiry when advice was requested, the cost of advice, and material requested by and supplied to the profilers.

#### *What did the officers ask for?*

There were six kinds of advice for which requests reached double figures (table 4). The most common requests were for predictive profiles and for information which would further SIO's understanding of the offender's behaviour or future level of threat.

#### *What did the officers expect to gain?*

The responses to the question "what did the officers expect to gain?" suggest that many officers did not know what to expect from the advice they requested. Analysis shows that nine officers even expected to benefit from established research data when taking advice from profilers who had no access to such data.

#### *At what stage of the enquiry was the advice requested?*

Table 6 shows the stage of the enquiry at which advice was requested. Respondents were left to judge within the context of their own investigation what amounted to "an early stage". It would not have been meaningful to ask for the number of days or weeks which had elapsed. In the older cases this would probably have been sheer guesswork, and even in the more recent cases a given number of weeks might reflect several different stages of an investigation. It will be seen from table 6 that in recent years there seems to have been a growing trend to call in profilers earlier.

Table 6: At what stage of the enquiry was the advice requested?, year by year

YEAR	AT THE OUTSET	AT AN EARLY STAGE	AFTER DIRECTION OF ENQUIRY ESTABLISHED	AFTER INITIAL LEADS EXHAUSTED	AFTER ARREST	NOT SPECIFIED
1981		1				
1984		1	2	1		1
1985				2		
1986			3			
1987			2	1		
1988	1	5	1	4	2	
1989	1	5	6	2		
1990		4	7	4	1	
1991	1	10	9	3		
1992	3	9	6	6		
1993	3	14	12	6		
1994	5	22	14	3	1	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>
N = 184						

### *What did the advice cost?*

In only 28 instances was a fee charged for profiling advice, varying from a few hundred to a few thousand pounds. In only 19 instances were any expenses claimed. The rest came free and, for those concerned about hidden costs, a number of possible reasons suggest themselves. It might have been out of a sense of public responsibility, it might have been because the prestige, even the thrill, of being involved seemed payment enough. It might also have been, particularly for those involved in the mental health field, because involvement in a police investigation afforded an insight into their own profession which they would otherwise rarely, if ever, have got to see – it will have informed their professional judgement and sharpened their skills. For those who deal in data analysis, every new case adds to their data set and, moreover, for all behavioural scientists, their involvement will have brought some prospect of access to an exceptionally rich field of co-operative research.

### *What material were officers asked to supply?*

A high degree of consistency was found between profilers in the material they required to conduct their analyses. The basic sources of material were facts of the case, witness statements, scene photographs and maps. There is no incidence in this data of profilers asking for material and being refused it. On the contrary, it seems more information was supplied than was asked for.

### **Usefulness of offender profiling**

As well as discussing different ways in which profiling advice has been perceived to be useful, this section will consider whether the profiling process has added value to information supplied and the perceived contribution of the advice to the solving of cases. Reported usefulness will be considered in relation to some variable features of the cases under consideration.

### *Coals to Newcastle?*

Table 7 reveals what, at first sight, appears to be a series of contradictory findings. Only 14.1% of respondents reported that profiling advice had assisted them in solving a case (which amounts to only 21.7% of the solved cases in the sample). Only 16.3% of respondents reported that profiling advice had opened new lines of enquiry. Responses to the fundamental question of whether profiling advice told police anything they did not already know refute the common criticism that it does not, but hardly overwhelmingly, with those saying value was added outnumbering those saying it was not by 53.8% to 38.6% (7.6% chose not to answer this question). These findings – seemingly lukewarm endorsements at best – are then defied by the fact that 82.6% of respondents reported having found the advice they received operationally useful.

**Table 7: Effect of advice:**

Did the advice...	YES	NO
assist in solving the case?	14.1%	78.3%
open new lines of enquiry?	16.3%	82.1%
add anything to information supplied?	53.8%	38.6%
prove operationally useful?	82.6%	17.4%

*Aspects of operational usefulness*

It is clear from this disparity that substantial benefits must have been perceived to lie elsewhere than in the identification of offenders and the solving of cases. Table 8 shows where. Overwhelmingly, the most commonly reported aspects of operational usefulness were furthering of the officer's understanding of the case or the offender (60.9%), and providing the reassurance of having expert opinion confirm the officer's own judgement (51.6%). It is inferred from this that the most important contribution of profiling, as it has been practised in this country to date, is its part in developing the investigating officer's thinking on the case.

**Table 8: How was the advice operationally useful?**

Aspects of usefulness:	
Led to identification of offender	5 (2.7%)
Furthered understanding of case/ offender	112 (60.9%)
Expert opinion reassured own judgement	95 (51.6%)
Offered structure for interviewing	10 (5.4%)
Other	17 (2.3%)*
Not useful	32 (17.4%)
N = 184	
* This percentage is not consistent with the others in this table as the 17 instances of unspecified usefulness were from a possible total of 736 not 184.	



Analysis of reported usefulness in relation to the stage at which advice was requested revealed no significant differences. Neither did comparing responses of officers who dealt directly themselves with the profiler and those who did not reveal any meaningful differences in satisfaction with the advice. Some interesting differences were found, however, and these are featured in table 9.

**Table 9:** The effect of some variable case features on judgements of operational usefulness

Aspects of usefulness in relation to other variables:	% reporting not useful
'ACPO force' investigating	26.7% (16/60)
Non 'ACPO force' investigating	12.9% (12/124)
Solved investigations	15.2% (16/105)
Unsolved investigations	20.3% (16/79)
"Clinical" profilers	12.5% (14/112)
"Statistical" profilers	25% (18/72)
<p>N = 184</p> <p>For the purpose of these comparisons the following definitions apply:</p> <p>"ACPO force" = one which is represented at ACPO level on the ACPO offender profiling sub committee</p> <p>"solved" and "unsolved" are used in the police accounting sense of whether or not the crime could be shown to be cleared up.</p> <p>A "statistical profiler" is taken to be one who holds a British police data set, while a "clinical profiler" is taken to be one who does not.</p>	

Respondents from police forces represented at ACPO level on the ACPO sub-committee were much more likely than those from other forces to report having found profiling advice not useful (26.7% against 12.9%). Analysis shows that this difference cannot be accounted for by any difference in the type of case, the kind of advice sought, or the profiler commissioned, and two possible explanations present themselves. These officers could have higher expectations as a result of having a better understanding. Or they could have been ordered to take profiling advice they

did not really want, and which they were predisposed to finding not useful. Indications encountered in the process of collecting and discussing information point to the second interpretation as much the more likely. This impression is reinforced by a number of officers who did not return questionnaires having implied that they had been instructed to take the advice and had not used it.

Respondents whose cases were unsolved were much more likely than those whose cases were solved, using those terms in the police accounting sense of whether it can be shown as cleared up or not, to report having found profiling advice not useful (20.3% against 15.2%). Even allowing that some might be more disposed to generosity in reflecting on a solved case, this suggests a body of officers who see the usefulness of profiling advice only in terms of solving a case. They are, however, heavily outnumbered by those who could still find profiling useful in a case which was not solved. Examining the most commonly reported aspects of usefulness – further understanding and reassurance – reveals no marked difference in reported rates of usefulness between solved and unsolved cases. This would appear to bear out Douglas (1981) in his suggestion that “Even in cases where the suspect has not been identified psychological profiling was helpful. According to detectives, the procedure was often helpful in that it ensured that a complete investigation was conducted”.

Respondents who had taken advice from profilers who keep a police data set (referred to here as “statistical” profilers) were much more likely than those who had taken advice from profilers without such data (referred to here as “clinical” profilers) to report having found profiling advice not useful (25% against 12.5%). The possibility was raised that this result was a reflection of the ‘ACPO’/non ACPO’ finding but is rejected as officers in ‘ACPO’ forces took more advice from “clinical” profilers than “statistical” profilers. More information would be required to offer a full explanation, but it might be accounted for either by poor use of data or by instances of “statistical” profilers advising on types of cases for which they hold no data. One respondent reported unambiguously that he had asked for advice on a murder case on the understanding that the profiler held relevant data and discovered after receiving advice which he found unhelpful that the bulk of the data held related to rape. It is assumed for the purposes of this study that those who keep police data use it to inform their inferential judgement.

### **Differences between profilers**

This research has revealed that the most significant variable affecting officers’ perceptions of usefulness – also their satisfaction with the profiling service provided – is the identity of the profiler giving the advice. Discussion of the individual performances of profilers is beyond the scope of this paper, but the importance of the profiler’s identity is demonstrated by the anonymised data contained in table 10.

**Table 10: Was the advice operationally useful? - anonymous comparison of profilers' ratings**

HOW ADVICE WAS USEFUL	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	The Rest
Led to the identification of the offender		10%	12.5%	4.65%					9.1%		
Furthered understanding of case/offender	66.7%	60%	87.5%	60.5%	44.4%	57.1%	83.3%	50%	81.8%	50%	70.6%
Expert opinion reassured own judgement	83.3%	20%	62.5%	55.8%	33.3%	57.1%	50%	62.5%	54.5%	50%	67.6% * 1
Other	3.3%	4%	2.5%	5.1%	1.3%	11.4%		5%	1.8%		1.2%
No, advice was not useful		40%		11.6%	33.3%		16.7%	25%	18.2%	16.7%	5.9% * 2

NB % figures shown are the proportion of the total number of cases on which each profiler advised: the columns total more than 100% as many officers found advice useful in more than one way.

Profilers A to J are those in respect of whom six or more questionnaires have been completed. The range runs from 6 questionnaires to 45.

\* 1: Pearson Chi Square Value = 17.14, Degrees Freedom = 10, P = 0.07

\* 2: Pearson Chi Square Value = 20.4, Degrees Freedom = 10, P = 0.03

It can be seen from table 10 that advice from profilers 'H' and 'E' was reported to have furthered understanding in respectively only half and fewer than half of the cases on which they advised. Advice from profilers 'B' and 'E' was reported not to have been useful at all in 40% and 33% of cases respectively, while advice from profilers 'A', 'C', and 'F' was reported to have been useful on every occasion.

### Levels of satisfaction

Table 11 shows that 126 respondents (68.5%) reported that they definitely would seek profiling advice again in similar circumstances, though only 91 (49.5%) reported that they would definitely use the same profiler in similar circumstances.

**Table 11:** Would you seek profiling advice/use the same profiler again?

	<b>Seek profiling advice again?</b>	<b>Use the same profiler again?</b>
Yes definitely	126 (68.5%)	91 (49.5%)
Yes probably	44 (23.9%)	48 (26.1%)
Probably not	10 (5.4%)	32 (17.4%)
No	4 (2.2%)	13 (7.1%)

Table 12 shows how the identity of the profiler is of crucial importance in determining officers' satisfaction with the service they received. Indeed the research suggests that, at this stage of the development of profiling in Britain, approaches to profiling are so idiosyncratic as to be indivisible from the identity of the profiler.

**Table 12: Would you use the same profiler again? - anonymous comparison of profilers' ratings**

USE SAME PROFILER AGAIN	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	The rest
<b>Yes, definitely</b>	83.3%	55.6%	* 100%	60.5%	17.8%	71.4%	50%	50%	72.7%	66.7%	41.2%
<b>Yes, probably</b>	16.7%			20.9%	46.7%	28.6%		37.5%	9.1%	16.7%	29.4%
<b>Probably not</b>		22.2%		16.3%	28.8%		16.7%		18.2%	16.7%	17.6%
<b>No</b>		22.2%		2.3%	6.4%		33.3%	12.5%			11.8%

Profilers A to J are those in respect of whom six or more questionnaires have been completed. The range runs from 6 questionnaires to 45.

\* The 100% record for profiler 'C' is based on a relatively small number of questionnaires and should therefore be treated with caution.

Pearson Chi Square Value = 57.07, Degrees Freedom = 30, P = 0.002

It can be seen from table 12 that three profilers, identified here as 'A', 'C', and 'F' were rated most highly, while three others, 'B', 'E' and 'G' were rated least highly.

Respondents expressing dissatisfaction were asked to give reasons, and 38 out of the 45 who said they would not, or would probably not, use the same profiler again, did so. These reasons help to put the rates of dissatisfaction into perspective, and it is very clear from them that most of the officers' verdicts were not simple expressions of like or dislike, but were considered professional criticisms of the service rendered. One profiler was felt by several officers to be carrying too heavy a workload to be able to concentrate on their case, while another was felt to be using police to further his own knowledge rather than theirs.

A few respondents reported that they would not use particular profilers again because their advice was wrong, but in a preliminary content analysis exercise it was found that, while sometimes this advice had been wrong, in one instance the respondent had misread the advice, which had later been proven correct. There appears to be a lesson here about clarity of presentation, and also about the need for officers to ensure that they have carefully studied and understood the advice they have been offered. Officers' interpretation of advice will be considered in more detail in part two of this project.

### **Profiling as an issue in Court**

Of the 90 instances of profiling in cases which have been to court, there were only six reports that profiling had been at issue in the proceedings. In 20 instances it was reported that the advice had been disclosed to the defence, and in 20 others it was reported that it had been revealed to the Crown Prosecution Service. There were only two reports of the profiler being required to give evidence. While there was great concern in police circles at the outset of this project about potential difficulties over disclosing profiling advice prior to trial, these responses suggest that in reality those fears have as yet come to nothing.

In the course of conducting the project no evidence was found to suggest that disclosure of profiling advice had had an adverse effect on the prosecution of any case. Even widely reported criticism both of police and of the profiler concerned in the case of Colin Stagg, who was tried and acquitted in October 1994 of the murder of Rachel Nickell, tended to obscure the point that that case turned on substantially different issues. It was the adjudged unfairness of aspects of an undercover police operation which led to the dismissal of the prosecution case, before those aspects which were more directly concerned with offender profiling even came to be argued. The judge's ruling in that case nevertheless does encompass some discussion of profiling and, while it is made abundantly clear that there are great and potentially insurmountable difficulties in introducing profiling as evidence in British courts,

nothing is said to undermine its use as a basis for investigative decision making (Ognall, 1994).

## 6. Results and conclusions

Conclusions based on the results of analysis of the questionnaire data presented here need to be carefully drawn, given the nature of historical questionnaire based surveys, as discussed in section 3 of this report. They do, however, offer insights into police attitudes to offender profiling that have not previously been reported.

The following summarises the findings:

1. Police expectations of offender profiling are not always clear.
2. The great majority of officers who have taken profiling advice report having found it beneficial.
3. What officers report finding most useful is information which furthers their understanding of a case or an offender, or which reassures them by confirming their own judgements.
4. The reported benefits of profiling do not to any significant degree include the identification of the offender.
5. It appears that few officers have acted directly on the advice they have received.
6. There are signs that there is little point in instructing a reluctant officer to take profiling advice.
7. Some officers seem to have commissioned profiling advice without the intention of actually using it.
8. Casual, verbal advice appears to make little impact and to be easily forgotten.
9. It appears that not all profilers are equally well regarded.
10. It appears that, at this stage of the development of profiling in Britain, approaches to profiling are so idiosyncratic as to be indivisible from the identity of the profiler.
11. It appears that advice from “statistical” profilers (those who keep a police data set) was less well appreciated by investigators than advice from “clinical” profilers (those without such data).
12. The disclosure of profiling advice, whether or not it is borne out in its predictions, has not to date jeopardised a prosecution case.

This project has also created:

- \* A procedure to evaluate operational profiling in a manner which promises to be useful to SIOs. It has so far proved acceptable to the Home Office and to



ACPO, and to most of the profilers themselves. Reactions to this report, of course, will be the clearest guide to acceptability.

- \* A register of British cases in which offender profiling advice has been commissioned, and a bank of detailed information concerning its use in approaching 200 of those cases.
- \* A system to provide objective advice on operational profiling to SIOs.
- \* A system to provide objective and constructive feedback to profilers.

### **Interpreting the findings**

The findings of this survey reflect some degree of confusion amongst police users of profiling advice. There are clear indications that many officers who really want to use profiling are unsure of what to expect from it, beyond a vague faith that they will be dealing with some kind of expert. There are equally clear signs that some of the officers who have commissioned profiling advice did not really intend to use it.

It is clear, however, that profiling advice has made little impact on the courts. Offender profiling, after all, is not evidence one way or the other. As set out in the ACPO policy at appendix 1, it is about informing investigators, to help them in decisions concerned with the management of investigative options and resources in pursuit of admissible evidence. A profile which fits the accused is no more evidence of guilt than one which does not is evidence of innocence: neither proposition is realistic.

If operational profiling is to add anything to detective expertise then it seems reasonable to suppose that it will do so because it helps to make an investigation more efficient or more effective, or else because it will reassure the officer that no obvious avenue of enquiry has been neglected. There are clear signs that it does so, with 82.6% of respondents reporting that they found the advice they received useful in one way or another. But the detectives in this survey do not appear to perceive any particular benefit from the inference of offender characteristics. Instead, they perceive the benefits of operational profiling as being to do with the introduction of new thoughts, arising from an intelligent second opinion, and the development of investigative philosophy – formulating and testing theories about the case and the offender – through the process of consultation and debate with the profiler.

This backs up Simon Wessely's observation that "the simple act of obtaining advice from a well informed professional may help police take a fresh look at information they already have" (Wessely, 1993). It supports Janet Jackson's conclusion that "By taking an independent stance, not bogged down with the inconsequential details that a detective actively working on a case has to contend with, the professional

profiler can offer directions and advice that can result in the team achieving success in apprehending the culprit” (Jackson et al, 1993a). And it bears out Inspector Finney of the New York Police, (Brussel, 1968): “Sometimes the difference between failure and success is a new thought”.

It can be said then, that operational profiling works as a service, albeit one which is more likely to assist indirectly than directly in the solving of a case. But the premise underlying offender profiling is that offender characteristics can be inferred from offence characteristics. If, therefore, profiling is to be judged valid on its own terms then its success ought to be based upon telling officers something of the type of person who has committed the offence under consideration, so that the conduct of the investigation – and its outcome – might be influenced by advice based on those inferences. The respondents in this survey perceive that profiling does not succeed on those terms. This may be because:

- (a) it is unrealistic for profilers to accurately predict offender characteristics;
- (b) though it is realistic for profilers to accurately predict offender characteristics, they most often fail to do so;
- (c) officers lack the conviction to act upon profilers’ predictions;
- (d) although officers do act upon profilers’ predictions, they fail to recognise or to acknowledge that they have done so.

The second part of this project will go some way to clarifying this important issue. It is concerned with content analysis of operational profiling advice collected from amongst the officers involved in this survey and, where possible, will compare profilers’ predictions with the outcomes of investigations. This will give an indication of how reliable such predictions are, and therefore how safely they can be acted upon. It might also help to distinguish more clearly between police satisfaction with a profiler’s contribution and the real potential value of it: in other words, between the service and the science.

### 7. Recommendations

The recommendations made here are based on the outcome of part one of this project, and also on some very clear impressions gained in the conduct of it.

- \* Further action should be taken to educate police on the potential value and limitations of operational profiling so there is a clearer understanding of what can be expected from it, what kind of expertise is most appropriate for different situations, and in what circumstances operational profiling advice should and should not be commissioned. Offender profiling should be more clearly defined in detective training, and the ACPO policy on offender profiling should be the key to that training.
- \* Police officers should not commission operational profiling advice unless they actually want to consider using it.
- \* Police officers commissioning operational profiling advice should make use of the register of profiled cases to communicate with other officers who have used the same profiler, or who have used profiling in similar circumstances, to help them to make best use of the advice they receive.
- \* Police officers commissioning operational profiling advice should agree in advance what it might cost and when and how it is to be delivered.
- \* Police officers commissioning operational profiling advice should consider offering a reasonable fee for it, so they can be in a position to state their own requirements.
- \* Police officers commissioning operational profiling advice should ask for predictions, recommendations and significant observations to be expressed clearly in writing.
- \* Police officers should take steps to ensure that they understand the meaning of operational profiling advice they have received. Where any doubt exists as to the exact meaning of any piece of advice they should ask the profiler to clarify it.
- \* Where interrogation strategies are offered, detectives should treat them with caution as they are not always founded on a proper understanding of the legal and ethical framework within which police interviews with suspects must be conducted.
- \* Police officers who commission offender profiling advice should continue to receive questionnaires for the information of the police service, through the responsible ACPO committee. By collecting information as soon as it is available the exercise would not only be liable to reap more accurate

information, but by taking on some of the characteristics of a prospective (contemporaneous) study, would eliminate the problems associated with hindsight bias.

- \* When sufficient numbers of questionnaires have been collected, analysis should be conducted to assess the levels of satisfaction with active profilers, and the results of this analysis should be used to inform officers who would commission operational profiling advice for live investigations.
- \* A comprehensive good practice guide for police officers seeking and using operational profiling advice should be produced on the completion of part two of this project.
- \* Profilers should be given clear guidance on police requirements, and a guide for responsible operational profiling should be produced on the completion of part two of this project.

## Appendix 1

### ACPO POLICY ON OFFENDER PROFILING

#### Responsibility

- The ACPO Crime sub-committee on offender profiling bears the responsibility on behalf of the police service to investigate the status and value of offender profiling and to make recommendations regarding best practise

#### Definition

- Offender profiling should be understood to consist of a range of methods used to develop advice for investigators, based on the study of behaviour exhibited in the commission of crime(s) and the drawing of inferences about the offender(s).

#### Articles of faith

- That offender profiling be considered essentially viable, even though it must be understood that it has not yet been properly scientifically validated
- That offender profiling should be owned by the police service

#### Articles of purpose

- That offender profiling advice must be understood not to amount to probative evidence
- That offender profiling advice should be understood to be about informing investigators to help them in decisions concerned with the management of investigative options and resources in pursuit of admissible evidence

#### Management of research

- That an offender profiling research programme be managed on behalf of this sub-committee by the Home Office Police Research Group, and that this programme should consist at the outset of five projects (i) establish the detective user requirement (ii) assess the operational usefulness of offender profiling (iii) determine statistical procedures for offender profiling (iv) develop a national rape database (v) develop an appropriate delivery mechanism
- That police initiated offender profiling research projects, such as presently exist in Derbyshire, Lancashire, South Yorkshire and Surrey, are supported and monitored by this sub-committee to co-ordinate developments in offender profiling on behalf of the police service

- That this sub-committee should be informed of any future police initiated research project in this field
- That this sub-committee takes an active interest in the application of the principles of offender profiling, operationally and in research, by other agencies world wide, and establishes co-operative relationships where mutual benefits are identified

#### **Release of police data for academic research**

- That police should take great care in considering applications for the disclosure of police data for academic research. It should be remembered that not all research is sound, not all research is useful, and some is plain misleading. There are many issues to consider, including those of ownership, access, data protection, costs and benefits, and restrictions on publication.
- Where doubts arise in respect of applications for data for offender profiling research, advice might be sought from the sub-committee secretary.

#### **Operational use of profiling advice**

- That it should be entirely a matter for the investigator, together with their Head of CID, to decide whether to pursue profiling advice, and to choose where they will seek it from
- That requests by investigators for profiling advice must not be made without reference to their Head of CID
- That requests by investigators for profiling advice must be notified by them to the sub-committee registrar - this is so that operational use of profiling can be properly monitored and so that enquiries can subsequently be made as to the operational usefulness of advice
- That the sub-committee registrar should maintain a list of persons, inside and outside the police service, who are willing to offer profiling advice to police investigations
- That the list of those willing to offer expert advice should be clearly understood not to constitute official endorsement of those persons or their methods, given the absence of any proper basis upon which such judgement could be made
- It is important that officers resist having unwanted, and perhaps inappropriate profiling advice foisted upon them by television companies in connection with crime appeals programmes

- Where profiling is a legitimate part of a crime appeals programme it is important that officers insist that it is presented in a proper perspective - where doubts exist advice should be sought from a member of the sub-committee
- It is vital that police resist the temptation to see profiling as a way of introducing some kind of expert opinion of guilt in cases where their intelligence, or their judgement, is not matched by hard evidence.

**Publicity and media interest**

- That, where offender profiling is employed in a police investigation, whether current or completed, the discretion to decide on the publication of details of that enquiry to the public remains with the Senior Investigating Officer.
- That details should not be revealed about the process of offender profiling which would, in the opinion of police, be likely to assist offenders to avoid detection in the future.
- That care should be taken to ensure that in disclosing any information the rights and sensibilities of victims, victim's families, and offenders' families are respected.
- That, where an issue of offender profiling policy is raised it should be referred to the appropriate governing body. These are:

Concerning policy on the police use of offender profiling:

For ACPO:                    John Stevens QPM LL.B  
   Chief Constable, Northumbria Police  
   Chairman of the ACPO Crime Sub-Committee on  
   Offender Profiling  
   Tel. 01661.872555

Concerning policy on the Offender Profiling Research Programme:

For the Home Office: Home Office Public Relations Branch  
   Queen Anne's Gate, London SW1  
   Tel. 0171.273.4610

Where doubt exists as to whether particular information should be withheld for this reason, advice should be sought from the ACPO Crime Sub-Committee on Offender Profiling.

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