Britainthinks
Insight & Strategy

March 2023

Improving lives through linked data: Views from groups with complex needs

Victim Pathways Pilot

Audience summary report

Contents

Executive summary	3
Background and methodology	5
Context	8
Attitudes towards data linking	11
Responses to the BOLD project	14
BOLD use cases	16
Appendix	23

Executive summary

The Better Outcomes through Linked Data (BOLD) project is a three-year, cross-Government pilot programme, created to demonstrate how individuals with complex needs can be better supported by the Government through linking and improving data in a safe, secure and ethical way. BOLD is sharing and linking a range of social policy datasets from across government to drive new evidence and insight, and better understand how services delivered in one part of government impact on outcomes in another.

To ensure that BOLD delivers for the individuals with complex needs that it aims to serve, four projects have been identified that could deliver the greatest impact with the highest probability of success. The four key projects chosen are: Homelessness, Substance Misuse, Reducing Reoffending and Victim Pathways. In order to demonstrate what BOLD will involve in practice, each project has developed 'use cases' which outline key research questions and the data sets that will be used to investigate these.

As part of a commitment to put data ethics at the heart of its delivery, and to support transparency and public engagement, BOLD and the Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation commissioned this piece research with the overarching aim of informing how to take the BOLD programme forward, by engaging and consulting with the relevant audiences.

The research has engaged 18 people with lived experience of victims alongside third sector support services, and the high-level findings are provided below.

This report focusses specifically on the research with the group of participants discussing victims, including those with live experience and the organisations that support them, henceforth shortened to 'victims' audience' in this report.

Key findings

Note: the findings in this report reflect the views expressed by participants who took part in this research. The sample for this research included a total of 18 participants from the Victims audience.

1. **Overall participants in the victim's audience are receptive to data sharing, and clearly understand the role that this could play in improving public services.** Participants highlight potential benefits of more 'joined up' services, based on their own experiences, such as not having to repeat their stories and re-live the trauma.

2. **However, this audience does have concerns about ensuring their anonymity in the context of data sharing across public services.** This is a particularly sensitive area given the fear that many victims have of repercussions if their privacy were to be breached, including facing social stigma.

3. **Participants are broadly positive about the BOLD programme but highlight the need to address the social and psychological barriers to victims reporting**

crimes in the first place. Participants feel that this is a necessary first step, before support services themselves can be analysed, as they feel 'further down the line'.

4. **Most participants lack trust in the criminal justice system, and police specifically, and approach use cases focusing on these institutions with a degree of scepticism.** Participants are more positive about the use cases which relate to the issue of widening access to support and encouraging victims to come forward. This is because participants feel these are important 'first steps' to addressing broader challenges faced by victims. Furthermore, participants highlight broader systemic issues, such as funding, which are perceived as important to address to improve outcomes for victims.

5. **Participants respond positively to use cases that treat victims as individuals, with unique experiences and needs.** However, this can sometimes feel at odds with BOLD's aim to identify general trends and patterns, and participants seek clarity on how BOLD will balance these two perspectives.

Considerations for communicating BOLD with the victim's audience

1. **BOLD should recognise the context of distrust between victims and the criminal justice system in order to engage this audience in the project.** Most participants (and the intermediary organisations) expressed a basic level of distrust towards the criminal justice system and police, in particular. They are therefore likely to be sceptical of BOLD's impact unless the programme demonstrates transparency and acknowledgment of 'failings' within the system.

2. **A balance needs to be struck between treating victims as individuals and as a collective.** Victims seek to be understood, and treated, as individuals with unique circumstances and needs. However, they do see the role that identifying collective experiences will have in better supporting victims. BOLD needs to demonstrate the value of identifying broader trends with a sensitivity towards the need for individualised approaches.

3. **When communicating BOLD's overarching objectives, participants felt there should be a focus on preventing people from becoming victims in the first place.** Victims see this as being a critical priority for public services and feel that BOLD's biggest impact could come from informing preventative measures. For example, participants suggest that by using data linking one could identify and protect 'high risk' potential victims and ensuring that perpetrators of violent crimes are prevented from reoffending.

4. **Use cases should link outcomes back to the areas that matter most to victims.** Participants feel that encouraging victims to report crimes and access services is an important first step. Highlighting how improvements to the criminal justice system could increase the number of victims reporting crimes is likely to resonate with victims.

5. **Use cases should offer clarity on how ‘success’ will be defined.** This is currently unclear, and perceived as subjective, with victims feeling this must be explained for them to understand how services will be assessed – and, ultimately, improved.

Background and methodology

Background and objectives

BOLD is a three-year cross government pilot programme, created to demonstrate how individuals with complex needs can be better supported by removing barriers across government and linking and improving data in a safe, secure and ethical way. To ensure that BOLD is able to deliver on this, four projects have been identified that could deliver the greatest impact with the highest probability of success. The four key projects chosen are:

- Homelessness
- Substance Use
- Reducing Reoffending
- Victim Pathways

BOLD and the Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation commissioned this piece of research with the overarching aim of engaging and consulting with the relevant audiences for the BOLD project to help inform how we take the programme forward.

The specific aims of the research were to:

- Gain **feedback** to improve and refine **how BOLD delivers** the four pilot projects, in particular in relation to determining acceptable uses and forms of analysis of shared data
- Inform **how BOLD communicates** about the aims of the programme, and the progress it will make to the relevant audiences, in order to be as **clear and transparent** as possible in what BOLD are doing
- Understand how the ways in which BOLD manages data **impact on how much trust there is** in the programme.

Methodology

Our overall approach consisted of the following stages:

Intermediary organisation workshops

We conducted workshops with expert intermediary organisations, such as charities, who have a deep understanding of each of the audiences' attitudes and needs.

The purpose of these sessions was to:

- **Explain the purpose of the project to the intermediary organisations, covering:**
    - The proposed approach for the project
    - The specific methodologies to be used for their audience, including specific groups within this audience
    - Run through the initial draft materials
    - The role we would be asking them to play in the recruitment of participants for fieldwork
- **Gain their feedback on the approach and materials**
    - We built in time for this to ensure that the organisations had an opportunity to have their perspective on this heard, particularly in relation to the BOLD use cases
    - Ensuring that our research approach was ethically informed and considerate of practical considerations relevant for each audience (e.g. setting fieldwork activities likely to ensure the most engagement)

The following organisations participated in the initial intermediary workshop. Note - three more organisations were engaged but are not mentioned in the report:

- Survivors Trust
- New Pathways
- Welsh Government
- BAWSO
- Male Survivors Partnership

Based on the feedback in this initial workshop, we revised the research materials and held a follow-up session to share these with the organisations. Those who attended this follow-up session included:

- Welsh Government
- Survivors Trust

Overall feedback from the intermediary organisations related to:

- Highlighting the likely high levels of concern amongst victims about how their personal information is shared and accessed. This is particularly concerning for intermediary organisations as they feel there is a risk of this inhibiting victims from approaching services.
- Use cases need to highlight the benefit for the end user (i.e. victims themselves) in order to encourage openness to data linking.
- Use cases need to ensure they accurately represent the purpose of the BOLD programme and clarify reasons why specific types of data are being used.

Use cases were revised and shared at the follow-up session, where intermediary organisations felt that the research materials had progressed in a positive direction since the previous workshop, and that feedback relating to the use cases had been taken on board.

Fieldwork

We engaged with a total of **18 participants** across the Victims audience over the course of the fieldwork period, using a combination of methods to ensure full participation from a range

of individuals with differing experiences of victimisation. Participants were offered an incentive payment of £60 for taking part in the research to reimburse them for their time.

The fieldwork activities conducted for this audience are outlined below:

	Victims
Stage 1	**6 x 1hr depth interviews with victims** with lived experience of a variety of crimes experienced (including victims of domestic abuse, stalking, rape and sexual abuse). Participants were recruited via our trusted recruitment partner, 'iThoughts'. This phase enabled us to gain detailed feedback in a one-to-one setting with participants.
Stage 2	**Online community with 12 participants**, following the same content as the Stage 1 interviews. Participants were recruited via two channels: those engaging with support services through an intermediary organisation, and those recruited via our trusted partner. In this phase, we gained feedback through set tasks and response activities.

Sampling

Given the sensitivities and nuances associated with the Victims group, and based on our experience of conducting research with these audiences, it was agreed that we would recruit participants via two channels: the intermediary organisations and our recruitment partner, iThoughts. We developed a recruitment screener, which was shared with both parties, enabling them to reach out to their networks as a trusted voice to find potential participants. Participants across our sample had experience of a range of different crimes, as well as a mix of experiences of reporting crimes to the police and receiving support from support services in the past. It should be noted that the crimes experienced are 'high harm' crimes that present a unique context for participants' interactions with, and perceptions of, public services.

Achieved sample

Below is an overview of the achieved sample across the research:

	Victims
Stage 1	**6 x victims** with lived experience of a variety of crimes experienced (including victims of domestic abuse, stalking, trafficking, rape and sexual abuse): ● 2 x men; 4 x women ● Range of ages (from 21-60) ● Mix of ethnic groups (incl. White British, White European, Asian and Black) ● Mix of locations in England and Wales

Stage 2	**12 x victims** with lived experience of a variety of crimes experienced (e.g. domestic violence, sexual assault): ● 3 x men and 9 x women ● Range of ages (from 21-70) ● Mix of ethnicities (incl. White British, Asian, Black and Arab) ● Mix of locations in the UK (incl. England and Wales)

Note on limitations of this research: *Several caveats apply to the findings presented in this report. The participants were not randomly selected and are not representative of the whole population of interest. As participation was voluntary, it is likely that participants are more motivated than the general population, and likely to have a stronger interest in the issues being explored. As the evidence draws upon individual past experiences, responses may also be subject to recall bias. This research provides rich insights into the experiences and views of participants, though it should be noted that findings will be influenced by the attitudes, experiences, crimes experienced and inherent individual biases of those providing input. The findings therefore reflect only the views of one sample of individual participants and do not reflect wider experiences of all victims.*

Context

Engagement with participants throughout the research surfaced contextual themes which, while not derived from direct lines of questioning, were influencing participants' responses to data linking and the BOLD programme. This section highlights the most relevant of these contextual themes for the victims audience.

Participants highlight that a key challenge in the provision of support for victims is that many survivors do not disclose crimes committed against them in the first place and are not always aware that support is still available to them.

- Participants perceive the reasons for this as being complex, but frequently due to fears of repercussions such as social stigmatisation and/or 'shame', or a continued threat from the perpetrator.
- This means that public services' ability to support victims is limited to the (perceived minority) who actually report crimes. Participants typically see support as following the reporting of a crime, and it is not necessarily clear that support can be gained without doing so.

> *"The attitudes of people in general, let alone the criminal justice system, seems to be quite conservative in their outlooks. Particularly for victims of sexual crime, it feels like you're the crime and you're being scrutinised…some of the attitudes I met, even from those close to me - people were saying 'well your boyfriend or husband can't rape you.'" (Female, 31-40, victim of rape)*

> *"The criminal justice system only intervene when it is too late, and you also feel like you're not being heard, and when you build the courage to speak up, it's just forgotten about until the next incident is reported. I was lucky to have my mum who helped me and put her heart and soul into it. I know other people who have suffered from forms of domestic violence, abuse and online harassment, all of which has not been taken much notice of, again until it is too late…If I'm honest, I suppose not everyone would speak up [about crimes] due to how poor the criminal justice system is." (Female, 21-30, victim of domestic abuse)*

Victims say that many are put off reporting crimes due to poor perceptions of, and experiences with, public services – specifically, the police.

- Even once victims have felt able to report crimes, they report having poor experiences of engaging with public services, such as the police. This can lead to many 'dropping out' of engagement with services, and acts as a deterrent for others who hear about these poor experiences, and develop poor perceptions of their own.
- In particular, participants have low trust in the criminal justice system, due to a feeling of being 'let down' by them in the past. Examples of this include:
    - Not being 'taken seriously', 'believed' or 'listened to' by first points of contact within the police when attempting to report crimes
    - Being treated as a 'statistic' rather than as an individual, with a lack of discretion and sensitivity towards their trauma and emotional needs at the time

        - By contrast, mentions of positive experiences typically involved being treated with ‘care’ and ‘compassion’ by the individuals who victims interacted with.
    - Several participants highlight the need for more consistent support from the police and criminal justice system in general, throughout the victim journey, from the time of the incident, through to trials and also ‘aftercare’ post-trial. Currently, this is felt to be lacking and inconsistent.

"I’ve had a lot to do with [charities] and have friends who have worked with them. They’re great and have good people. But the thing that stops them [from being effective] is when they pass you over to someone else to take over the issue, like the police.” (Male, 31-40, victim of domestic abuse)

“I’ve had amicable conversations with police officers that have left me feeling hopeful, but hopes always dashed.” (Female, 51-60, victim of domestic abuse)

“I have met some completely indiscrete people who, for example, work in medical records in a hospital and know far more about other people [and the crimes they have experienced] than they should.” (Female, 51-60, victim of domestic abuse)

Victims have particularly low trust in the police. This has only been heightened by recent scandals reported in the media.

- The police are often the first point of contact for victims when reporting crimes and seeking support, and are frequently the source of the poor experiences already mentioned.
- Recent high-profile sexual abuse scandals within the police are mentioned by a few participants, as further reasons for victims to distrust – and even fear – the police.
    - Female participants also mention hesitance about approaching a male police officer for support, given the nature of their personal experiences as victims of male perpetrators.

“I have seen people misuse information that they had access to. I mistrust people in power. Who polices the police?” (Female, 51-60, victim of domestic abuse)

“There needs to be an overhaul of the system – what was in the news recently about that police officer committing two decades of rape. This needs to change if they want to build trust.” (Female, 31-40, victim of rape)

While a few participants note that awareness and support for victims has improved in recent years, most feel this still has ‘far to go’.

- Participants report feeling disappointed, and negatively impacted, by a lack of ongoing support offered to them, from the moment of the crime to the case and/or trial, and beyond.

- Several participants cite experiencing ongoing mental health issues resulting from their experiences (some of which occurred decades previously), for which they do not feel there is support available.

> *"There was 10 years difference between my [two cases]. The second was much better, I was supported, and they were kind. [The police] had taken a new approach and it had become much better. But, it's really mixed. I see the support some people get and it's a really mixed bag." (Female, 31-40, victim of stalking)*

There is a divide, observed by victims themselves, in the ways in which survivors feel about sharing their experiences – and information connected with these. These different attitudes broadly fall into two groups:

- **'Open' advocates:** those who are extremely open about their experiences as victims and are keen to share these experiences to help others who are going through similar situations. These participants often feel it has taken them a long time to reach this point of confidence and 'ownership' of their experiences.
- **'Closed' pasts:** those who are extremely reluctant to speak about their experiences, either in the interest of 'moving on', or due to a desire not to engage with trauma or social stigma. These participants were less represented in this research, likely as a reflection of their preference to avoid discussing their experiences. However, other, more 'open' participants frequently referenced others they know who would fit into this group.

> *"I am a victim of domestic abuse, I personally wouldn't mind the sharing of my information if it would improve the type of support I'd receive, but I believe a person should have the right to 'opt in or out' of this. I know it's not the same, but I know so many service users who never wanted their drug treatment details (i.e. what prescriptions they were on) to be shared on the police national computer or with the job centre because they felt it was unnecessary. As I said, I wouldn't mind at all, but would it be to improve the type of support I've asked for or just a 'copy every service in' sharing exercise? Think this needs to be discussed on an individual basis." (Female, 31-40, victim of domestic abuse)*

Participants reflect that this context is an important basis for attempts to understand the experiences of victims, and how to improve the support available to them.

- Participants frequently note the importance of victims being treated as 'individuals', with different contexts, experiences and needs when it comes to support.
- However, they acknowledge that this can make it difficult to establish and deliver support services to the victim community as a whole.

Attitudes towards data sharing / linking

During the research, participants were shown information about what data linking involves, to help build their understanding of this topic and explore their initial response to the concept of their data being used in this way. This section highlights key themes relating to their overall attitudes towards data linking. Full stimulus material shown to participants can be found in the Appendix.

Participants have concerns about their personal data being shared or linked, often stemming from a strong interest in ensuring their anonymity.

- Anonymity is particularly important for this audience, given the sense of personal privacy that many want in relation to their experience of violent and/or sexual crime.
- They are therefore particularly concerned about personally identifiable data being shared, with the risk that it could be connected back to them.
- A lack of trust in public services also leads several participants to express concern that those with access to their personal data may not use it responsibly, or as intended.
- Most participants, therefore, feel there is a need for data sharing or linking to be conducted on an 'opt-in' basis.
- Connected to this, participants feel that – should data linking occur – only relevant data should be shared between organisations i.e. that which is relevant to the work that each organisation does, and that is required to facilitate a shared understanding between two organisations.
    - This is because participants feel that there is a risk of 'irrelevant' data affecting decision making around access to services, such as housing.

> *"I don't think it is a good idea for information to be shared across organisations that don't seem connected. For example, I would be uncomfortable for my health information to be shared with housing services, possibly for fear that that may affect their decision making. I think it may be useful if information were shared between more connected services, however. For example, between health and emergency."*
> *(Female, 21-30, victim of domestic abuse)*

However, these attitudes towards data sharing do differ, to an extent, depending on how 'open' or 'closed' participants are about their experiences more broadly.

- Those who are more open about, and happy to share, their experiences often feel less concerned about their data being shared across different organisations or services, as they feel that they have 'nothing to hide'.
- However, they acknowledge that those who are more 'closed' about their experiences are likely to feel otherwise, and be much more sensitive to their data being shared – particularly data relating to their case.

> *"I think sometimes it can be quite scary knowing that your information is going to be shared across multiple services, however I do believe that at times sharing information is vital in people receiving the support they need i.e. healthcare professionals and the benefits service. Education and*

healthcare or security could be vital in ensuring children won't slip through the gaps especially in schools" (Female, 31-40, victim of domestic abuse)

"It could be useful. I am still somehow sceptical about how it would not use personal identifiable information. If it works in a way that doesn't then I can see how it can be used to provide a lot of benefit to our society." (Female, 31-40, victim of rape)

Nonetheless, participants see a clear value of data sharing or linking and highlight particular benefits for victims in preventing them from having to repeat their stories.

- Almost all participants highlight the difficulty that they – and others – experience when having to re-live their traumatic experiences by re-telling their stories at each interaction with public services.
- Several highlight that this process often acts as a deterrent for people seeking support, and that sharing information across services would not only improve, but also broaden access to, the victim journey.

"I totally think [BOLD] would be a great service, as the amount of times both myself and my mother had to repeat everything that had happened and relive that trauma weekly was just a lot! As well as trying to study at the same time and have a normal teenage childhood, it was a lot, but it was the only way we could move forward and be able to move away from it all. I do wish different organisations managed more and worked together so victims of violence don't have to continuously relive trauma." (Female, 21-30, victim of domestic abuse)

"I had this with the police when I reported the ongoing saga with my neighbours' threats. It was nearly always a different officer to whom I would have to repeat a long story. They had minimal or almost generic notes e.g. 'problems with neighbours'." (Female, 21-30, victim of stalking)

Participants feel that being able to identify and analyse patterns would be useful, particularly if it meant that people could be prevented from becoming victims in the first place.

- The prospect of building a 'whole' understanding of victims is appealing, particularly in terms of the circumstances and/or events that led them to become victims.
- Participants feel that this type of analysis would be invaluable in making interventions for at-risk individuals, and providing people with the support they need before, during and after a crime has taken place.
- However, participants remained cautious about their personal information being shared, even if this would be useful for the data linking process. This further reflects the need to offer clarity around how anonymity would be maintained in the context of personal information being shared.

"I think it makes sense, it's about building a picture" (Female, 21-30, victim of domestic abuse)

Participant example:

Participants feel that data linking could play a role in preventing individuals from becoming victims – either in the first instance or in a recurring context.

For example, one participant spoke about her family suffering domestic abuse from her then partner. While the police and the children's schools had been alerted to the incidents that were taking place, this information was not shared with Adult Social Care services. The participant had to spend time in hospital, and a social worker suggested that her ex-partner could be let back into the family home to look after the children during this time – which would have been extremely dangerous, and unacceptable.

"Things like the police alerting Adult Services would give credence to the stress a family is going through and their need for support." (Female, 31-40, victim of domestic abuse)

However, there is a perceived tension between the principle of identifying general trends, whilst acknowledging the individualised nature of victims' crimes, circumstances and needs.

- Participants feel that Victims' journeys are often so specific to the individual, such as their upbringing, relationships and personality – with a strong belief that such crimes often defy expectations, and 'anyone can be a victim'.
    - For example, one participant referenced being 'young' and 'inexperienced' as contributing to her entering an abusive relationship, which would not necessarily feature in data held about her by public services.
- This means that participants are sceptical about the extent to which the data held by public services would be able to build a 'whole picture' of victims.
- Participants also reference how differing levels of 'openness' towards sharing one's experiences could mean that there would be varying levels of comfort with data sharing (as mentioned above).

"It would need a broad cross section of our community from every thinkable demographic to at least begin to understand all victims of crime. Anyone and everyone can be a victim." (Female, 31-40, victim of rape)

"This is a tricky one...[the support people need is] too much of a grey area and unfortunately would all depend on a person's circumstances." (Male, 31-40, victim of domestic abuse)

"I recognise that sometimes it is difficult to spot patterns that can help make the most effective change with a very honed-in perspective. At times the best change happens when you take in an individual's context, you have a bird's eye view to the problem and can know how your solution may interact with different aspect of an individual's life." (Female, 21-30, victim of domestic abuse)

Responses to the BOLD project

During the research, participants were shown information about the BOLD project, to explain its purpose and objectives. They were also shown information about what BOLD aims to do in the context of the Victims Pathways pilot, specifically. This section highlights key themes relating to their response to the BOLD project overall. Full stimulus material shown to participants can be found in the Appendix.

Overall, participants are receptive to the BOLD project, and find its purpose of improving support for victims appealing.

- Participants understand that identifying trends and patterns will help to improve support services for victims and feel this is a worthwhile aim.
- There is some surprise, and even disappointment, that services are not currently sharing data in this way.
    - For a few participants, finding out that data is not currently shared in this way is surprising, but explains their experiences of badly 'joined up' services, where they have needed to re-tell their stories multiple times.

"It is really interesting, and I can definitely see how this can be used in a positive way. I am surprised this has not been used already." (Female, 31-40, victim of trafficking)

"From the example provided, I feel disappointed that this is not actually how the services are collaborating with each other at the moment." (Male, 21-30, victim of domestic abuse)

"I hope BOLD makes it easier for victims to get justice and knowing they are better supported. I feel other people will feel the same way especially knowing the poor statistic is true for victims of crime. With BOLD's intention, I believe people will see BOLD has a good way to help and support other victims. As long as my data is safe and secure and for other people, victims will be happy and support the idea of linking data especially if victims are understood more." (Male, 31-40, victim of domestic abuse)

In line with broader attitudes towards data linking, participants feel that a key benefit of BOLD could be preventing people from becoming victims in the first place.

- In terms of improving services, victims are more likely to reference the need to prevent crimes from happening 'in the first place'.
    - For example, by identifying and protecting high risk potential victims, and ensuring that perpetrators of violent crimes are prevented from reoffending.
- It is in this context that participants see a clear role for more 'joined up' services in allowing for high-risk individuals to be identified, and appropriate protective steps to be taken.

"I think it's great - linking data helps to build a fuller picture. We know there are specific groups of people who are more likely to become victims because of their past experiences, if data was shared those agencies

could put things in place to prevent that...it would be a very positive thing." (Female, 21-30, victim of domestic abuse)

Implication for BOLD:

This presents a potential challenge for BOLD, in that Victims are keen to see efforts focused on earlier stages of the victim journey, from prevention to encouraging victims to report crimes and access support (as mentioned above). This contrasts with BOLD's current focus (as per the use cases), which is more on improving the criminal justice system and support services. Many participants see these areas as 'secondary', and actions relating to these will have limited impact unless these 'earlier' challenges are addressed. BOLD should ideally describe how the project will impact these earlier stages, as well as improving the criminal justice system and support services.

Furthermore, participants feel that there are some 'obvious' reasons why victims currently do not receive adequate support, which can lead to scepticism about why research is being conducted.

Participants identify two key reasons that currently impact victims' ability to receive support:

1. **Social stigma:** as mentioned, participants feel that there are societal issues which hold victims back from reporting crimes and accessing support in the first instance.
2. **Perceived systemic issues:** even once victims do feel able to access support, issues such as funding and resource mean that services can struggle to adequately help them.
    - Participants note a perceived lack of funding and resource for support services and police as resulting in less efficient justice processes (and fewer positive justice outcomes for victims). Participants feel a lack of funding and resource might explain their experiences of struggling to access support services (e.g. via the police) throughout their justice journey.
    - The perception of insufficient funding is typically driven by participants' sense that there are 'few' services on offer, and their experiences of witnessing understaffing within the police.
    - The issue of funding was also highlighted by intermediary organisations providing input on this research at the workshops.
    - They also mention the need for reform of the justice process, such as revising the ways in which sentencing and probation services operate, to ensure that victims feel safe from perpetrators.
- Without addressing these broader systemic and societal issues, participants are sceptical about the impact that BOLD could have on improving outcomes for victims.

"I totally get [the purpose of BOLD], but I will say that there are so many contributing factors. I just feel that there needs to be more money put into increasing the number of victim support staff, police to make speedy efficient arrests, support services in general to support families and ensuring the criminal justice process wasn't unnecessarily delayed, tougher sentencing guidelines, more probation and youth offending officers...the list is endless." (Female, 41-50, victim of domestic abuse)

“I just feel that the research is futile, I can tell you the answers you will get from that research! Money, time, manpower needs to be put into our public services…then maybe research wouldn't be necessary!” (Female, 31-40, victim of domestic abuse)

“I think there will be lots of other people like myself, who for whatever reason, have not sought out a criminal conviction or even contacted the police about their violence. So, the data is not going to show a true representation of what is going on.” (Female, 31-40, victim of domestic abuse)

BOLD use cases

During the research, participants were shown three example use cases to demonstrate the types of issues that the Victims Pathways pilot would seek to address, and how BOLD would do this. This section outlines participants' responses to the use cases overall, as well as detailed responses to each use case shown. Full stimulus material shown to participants can be found in the Appendix.

Participants broadly understood how the use cases could play a role in improving support for victims, though improvements to the criminal justice system are met with scepticism.

- Participants perceive other factors, such as access to support services, as playing a key role in encouraging victims to report crimes and pursue justice outcomes in the first place.
- Therefore, participants feel that the use cases relating to accessing and engaging with support are more relevant and must be prioritised as a 'first step' before focusing on improvements within the criminal justice system.
- This, combined with a context of distrust and perceived 'obvious' systemic issues, means that participants are sceptical about the impact that researching problems within the criminal justice system would have.

There is a lack of clarity across all use cases as to how 'success' is defined in the context of victim journeys, both through engagement with support services and the criminal justice system.

- Participants also view 'success' in the context of victim journeys as being subjective, in line with their view that all victims are individuals with differing contexts, experiences and needs – and therefore, likely to have different definitions of what 'success' looks like for them
    - This was a concern that was also raised during the intermediary organisation workshops.
    - Participants suggested that 'success' could be defined in terms of: numbers of victims reporting crimes, levels of positivity about the support experience (e.g. impact on victims' mental health) and number of positive justice outcomes.

In general, the victims use cases did not raise concerns about stigmatisation.

- Participants highlight the role that broader social stigma plays in holding victims back from seeking support, but largely do not feel that these use cases present a risk of reinforcing that stigma.

Across all audiences, we have used the following overarching principles to analyse the performance of the BOLD use cases.

- **Relevance:** use cases should depict scenarios that are recognisable and relevant to target audience groups.
- **Impactful:** examples of BOLD outcomes should clearly explain the positive impacts they might have on the target audience groups.

- **Clear and informative:** case studies should be explicit in how BOLD will and won't use personal data, including clarifications about anonymisation where necessary and what BOLD is aiming to achieve.
- **Non-stigmatising:** care must be taken to avoid any suggestion that BOLD may link negative factors together and increase the stigmatisation that these groups experience on a regular basis.

Below is an overview of the performance of each use case presented to participants in the Victims audience. The ticks and crosses indicate where the use cases did or did not deliver against each respective principle.

Use Cases	Principles			
	Relevant	Impactful	Clear and informative	Non-stigmatising
Victims				
Use case 1: Engagement with the criminal justice system	✗	✗	✗	✓
Use case 2: Engagement with support services	✓	✗	✗	✓
Use case 3: Accessing support	✓	✓	✓	✓

Use case 1: Some victims of crime are not engaging with the criminal justice system – either through dropping out, disengaging, or not reporting the crime. This means that not all victims are known to public services. As a result, public services are not able to support them or keep them engaged with the criminal justice process, thereby reducing their likelihood of seeing a positive justice outcome.

- Participants feel that this use case is the most polarising of the three presented to them, largely due to their scepticism about its relevance and impact. While many agree with the need to improve the criminal justice system, they feel that the use case is unlikely to reveal anything 'new'.
- This risks BOLD being perceived as naïve, with a minority of participants interpreting this use case as 'blaming' victims for not engaging with the system.

"I do agree with the statement in the sense that this is the case, victims of violence will drop out, because they're not feeling heard, and they're scared." (Female, 21-30, victim of domestic abuse)

"My concern is that the statement needs to suggest less that it is the victims' fault for dropping out and maybe think more about why and where they're dropping out in the process and maybe it is their actual fault and the way they handle things that make victims of abuse hide away and not speak out." (Male, 31-40, victim of domestic abuse)

- Participants highlight that the social and psychological barriers which hold victims back from reporting their crime or engaging with services are the most significant – and pressing – issue to address. Therefore, most participants feel that research into a range of other factors, beyond engagement with the criminal justice system, needs to be prioritised.
- Therefore, while participants do feel that the criminal justice system needs to improve in its delivery of positive outcomes for victims, this stage is perceived as being 'too far down the line' to make a difference.

"I think support is the biggest factor that needs to be looked at here - while engagement with the criminal justice system is also important, there are so many other factors about the criminal justice system that need to be looked at before you can work on the engagement." (Female, 31-40, victim of domestic abuse)

USE CASE 1: Engagement with the criminal justice system		
	Worked well	**Areas for improvement**
Relevant	Participants recognise that disengagement with the criminal justice system is **widespread** and is important to address.	Participants feel that there are 'obvious' issues with the way the criminal justice system supports (or does not support) victims. For example, **societal stigma** holding victims back from reporting crimes, and systemic issues such as **under-funding** leading to poor outcomes for victims who do enter the criminal justice system. They strongly believe that the criminal justice system's own internal failings should be investigated, rather than focusing on broader or external factors.
Impactful	While sceptical about the likely impact that this use case could have, participants do feel that	**Improvements to the criminal justice system feel secondary** when compared with the key

	the **principle of improving justice outcomes** for victims would be extremely **positive**.	challenge of encouraging victims to report crimes and seek help in the first place.
Clear and informative		Participants lack clarity on **how 'success' is defined** in this context, and whether this is limited to victims achieving a specific justice outcome.
Non-stigmatising	Participants largely **do not** feel that this use case will reinforce social stigma.	For a minority, this use case is interpreted as **'blaming' victims** for dropping out of the system, whereas participants feel the problems lie more in the system itself.

Use case 2: Victim support services provide a wide range of vital and effective support services, and work done by charities and support organisations. However, there is often a lack of accessible data and evidence around what the best services are for specific circumstances, what is working well for certain groups, and what is not.

- Participants feel that this use case is highly relevant and warrants investigation, due to the perceived key role that charities and other organisations play in supporting victims, with many citing personal experiences where these organisations have made a positive difference for them.

> *"I think it is good that more research is being done into ensuring the solutions you are providing individuals are really evidence-based, with a record of providing highly effective support." (Female, 21-30, victim of domestic abuse)*

- However, participants are quick to highlight that a key issue impacting these organisations' ability to deliver services effectively is perceived under-funding and under-resourcing. This makes them sceptical about the impact that this use case could have without addressing these systemic issues.
    - Intermediary organisations also strongly believed that under-funding and under-resourcing were critical issues to prioritise addressing.

> *"I just don't see the relevance when it comes to victim support that 'research carried out shows that…' Just put money, time and effort into sourcing and upskilling and creating these support services." (Female, 41-50, victim of abuse)*

- Participants are concerned that the individualised nature of victims' experiences and needs might make it difficult to define what is 'best' in terms of services. This is also perceived as hindering support organisations' ability to define 'certain groups' to cater to.

"I feel myself and others are all different in our own ways, so support services need to provide services which are varied and offer and cater to all victims with all experiences." (Male, 31-40, victim of domestic abuse)

USE CASE 2: Engagement with support services		
	Worked well	**Areas for improvement**
Relevant	Participants feel that making improvements to support services is important, and will **build victims' confidence in accessing support** if they know that the services in question are highly effective. They also feel that it is important to recognise that **individuals will have different needs and preferences** for how they receive support.	Participants are unsure of how realistic it is to consider the **individualised** nature of victims' needs, whilst focusing on **broader 'groups'.**
Impactful	Participants feel that **understanding, and establishing, 'best practice'** across support services will only have a positive impact for victims.	Participants strongly feel that that **funding and investment** into developing support services is critical, and that without this, research will have limited impact.
Clear and informative	The **overall objectives and focus** of this use case are clear to participants, in principle. However, they are less clear on how this analysis would work in practice.	Participants are unclear as to what the **markers would be for analysing and assessing the 'best' services.** They are also concerned that the definition established by BOLD may **not align** with that held by victims themselves e.g. BOLD focusing on the number of victims engaging with a particular services, rather than qualitatively assessing the impact that the services have on victims (e.g. improvements to their mental health or ability to cope).
Non-stigmatising	Participants largely **do not** feel that this use case will reinforce social stigma.	

Use case 3: Each victim has their own set of needs. We need to understand how victims access support, including barriers, such as age, ethnicity and disability, both in the criminal justice system and victim services. We need evidence on which groups of victims are more or less likely to access services and whether additional or different support is required to reach different groups of victims.

- Participants feel that this use case is highly relevant, as they believe that widening access to support across a range of different victim groups is, in principle, a very positive ambition.

> *"Significant issues such as racism, homophobia remain in all institutions. Also language and lifestyle barriers if the victim can't speak English or believes certain customs to be acceptable. I know there are certain things like language line available, but agencies for different demographics no doubt face issues with the same lack of funding, staff, waiting lists." (Female, 41-50, victim of domestic abuse)*

- Participants feel that this use case will have a significant impact as it speaks to a broader belief that victims require individualised support. They feel that, ultimately, this use case is likely to help services engage with a range of victims who might otherwise not have been open to seeking support.

> *"It is fair to say each different age group, ethnicity and disability will all have different requirements and support. We need to understand more about which groups receive better help and support than others…Does culture also prevent someone coming forward?" (Female, 41-50, victim of domestic abuse)*

- Though to a lesser degree than for use case 2, a few participants voice concerns that this use case will be hindered by the perceived tension between treating victims as individuals, and seeking to generate generalised findings about certain groups.

> *"Situations like domestic violence are so personal and different that just by being similar to some demographic aspects does not mean our experiences will be able to he handled the same." (Female, 21-30, victim of domestic abuse)*

USE CASE 3: Accessing support		
	Worked well	**Areas for improvement**
Relevant	Participants feel this is highly relevant, as they easily recognise that **different demographic groups will have varying experiences and needs** from support services. They base this understanding on	A minority of participants express concern about this research being used to **prioritise access to support** for certain groups, over others, and seek reassurances that this will not occur.

	their personal experiences, and anecdotal evidence from peers.	
Impactful	This is felt to likely have a strong, **positive impact** on victims – both in encouraging a wider range of individuals to access services, and to improve the experience of accessing those services once engaged.	A few participants suggest that, as part of building understanding of different groups, support organisations should also look at **improving their staff's knowledge** of diversity and inclusion.
Clear and informative	Participants are clear on the focus and objectives of this case study, finding it helpful to see **specific groups of consideration** outlined (e.g. age, ethnicity).	Participants suggest exploring further areas that may present barriers to victims accessing services, such as: language, cultural norms, mental health and socio-economic circumstances.
Non-stigmatising	This use case is largely felt to be focused on **building understanding, and inclusion**, of different demographic groups, and therefore working to in fact **overcome social stigma**.	n/a

Considerations for communicating BOLD with the victim's audience

1. **BOLD should recognise the context of distrust between victims and the criminal justice system in order to engage this audience in the project.** Most participants (and the intermediary organisations) expressed a basic level of distrust towards the criminal justice system and police, in particular. They are therefore likely to be sceptical of BOLD's impact unless the programme demonstrates transparency and acknowledgment of 'failings' within the system.

2. **A balance needs to be struck between treating victims as individuals and as a collective.** Victims seek to be understood, and treated, as individuals with unique circumstances and needs. However, they do see the role that identifying collective experiences will have in better supporting victims. BOLD needs to demonstrate the value of identifying broader trends with a sensitivity towards the need for individualised approaches.

3. **When communicating BOLD's overarching objectives, there should be a focus on preventing people from becoming victims in the first place.** Victims see this as being a critical priority for public services and feel that BOLD's biggest impact could come from informing preventative measures. For example, by using data

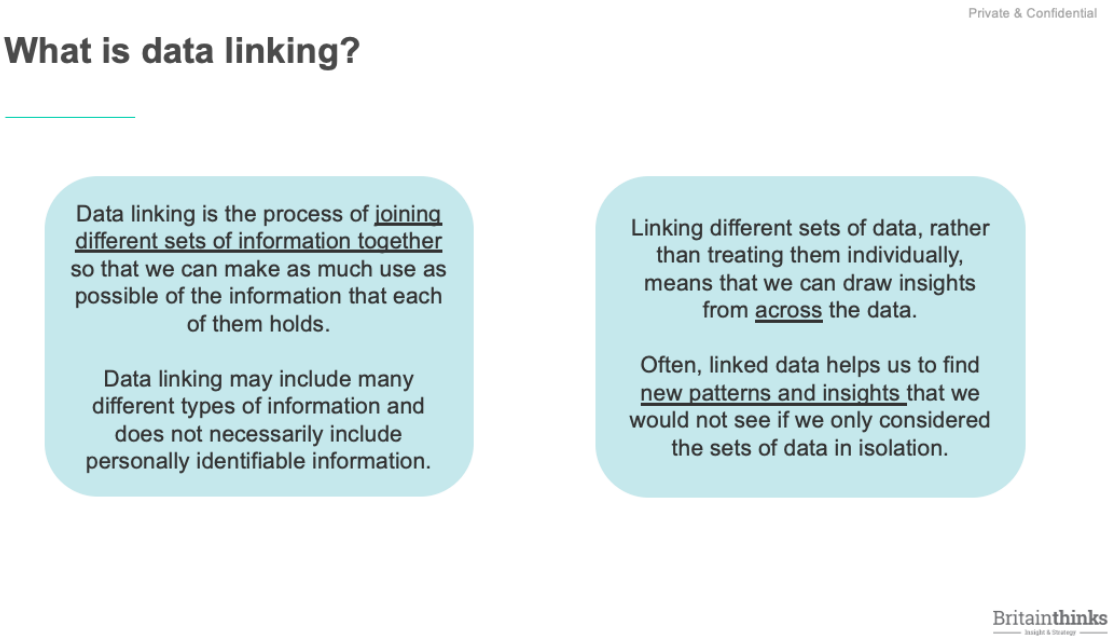
linking to identify and protect ‘high risk’ potential victims and ensuring that perpetrators of violent crimes are prevented from reoffending.

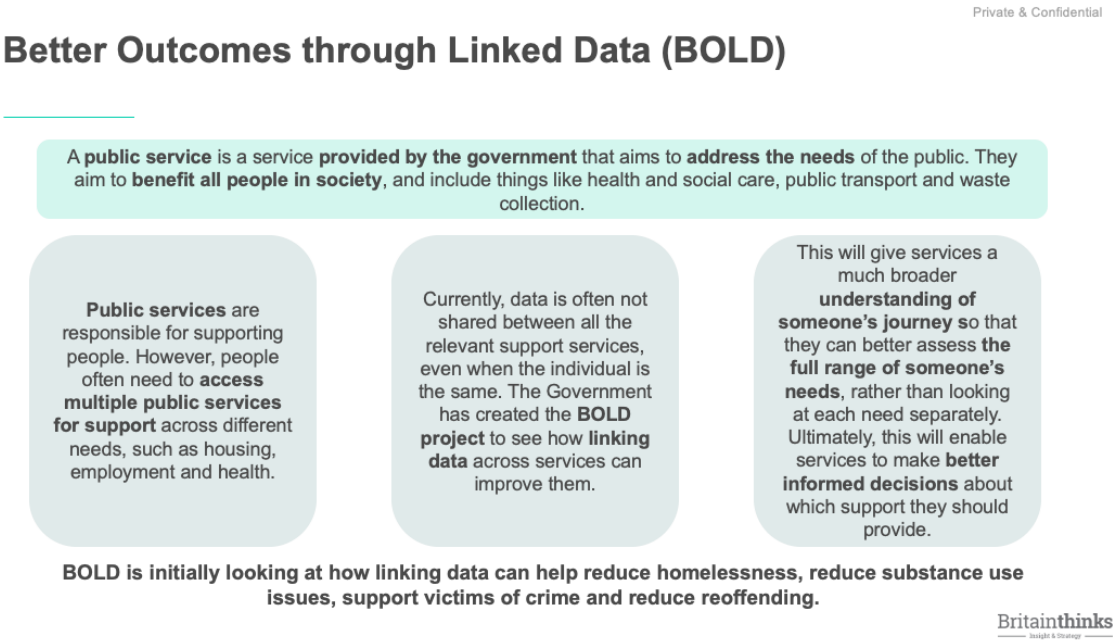
4. **Use cases should link outcomes back to the areas that matter most to victims.** Participants feel that encouraging victims to report crimes and access services is an important first step. Highlighting how improvements to the criminal justice system could increase the number of victims reporting crimes is likely to resonate with victims.

5. **Use cases should offer clarity on how ‘success’ will be defined.** This is currently unclear, and perceived as subjective, with victims feeling this must be explained for them to understand how services will be assessed – and, ultimately, improved.

Appendix

Stimulus material showed to participants





Victims of crime

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Better Outcomes through Linked Data (BOLD)

WILL do

- ✓ Share data through a secure internet-based data sharing platform
- ✓ Follow stringent legal processes to gain approval for data to be shared
- ✓ Keep personally identifiable information separate across pieces of data to ensure confidentiality e.g. one person working with a set of data might know your name and nothing else about you, whereas another person working a linked data set might know some information about you, but not your name.
- ✓ Only use data for the purposes of research

WON'T do

- Collect new data about specific individuals, organisations or cases
- Use your data to make decisions about you or your case
- Share your data with anyone outside of government or the criminal justice system
- Use any kind of predictive technology to make decisions
- Use your data for any purpose that falls outside of those that have been expressly authorised through data sharing agreements (i.e. the purpose is limited)

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What BOLD could mean for Victims of crime

Supporting Victims of Crime

36% of victims that were surveyed report dissatisfaction with the way the Criminal Justice System (CJS) handled their case, with 32% of reported criminal cases dropped due to victims disengaging from an investigation or prosecution, with this figure having risen every year since 2014. The Victim Pathways Pilot project aims to better understand how government and third sector services can most effectively support victims of crime to cope, build resilience and confidently seek justice. The ultimate goal is to better understand victims' journeys and their support needs - this evidence can then be used to improve victims' experience of the criminal justice system and support them to achieve a positive justice outcome. The Victim Pathways Pilot project also wants to understand what positive lessons they can learn from support services to identify where they can replicate this good practice.

Source: ONS CSEW (year ended September 2021); CJS scorecard (Autumn 2021); ONS Criminal Justice Statistics (year ended June 2021) ; Victims' statistics (year ended March 2019)

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The purpose of the BOLD project for the victims audience

Currently, the data that is collected on victims is held by **many different local and national organisations** (over 1,000+), across victim support services (i.e. those based in the charity sector) and the criminal justice system (i.e. the Government support provided).

There is **no central body** which holds all of the data about victims.

This means that victims' data is collected in many different ways, across many different partners. As a result, it is **difficult to understand what is and is not working.**

e.g. do you have to tell the criminal justice system multiple times about the same issue? Are you given all the right information about your case? Are you given all the support you are entitled to?

The BOLD project will **help to answer** some of these gaps in understanding and show what is and isn't working for victims.

BOLD will look at how data across these partners can be linked and where this can help **fill gaps** in understanding.

While BOLD itself may not be able to deliver better outcomes for victims, it will **provide the evidence** to support making real and effective changes for victims in the future.

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ISSUE 1

Some victims of crime are not engaging with the Criminal Justice System (CJS) – either through dropping out, disengaging or not reporting the crime.

This means that not all victims are known to public services. As a result, public services are not able to support them or keep them engaged with the criminal justice process, thereby reducing their likelihood of seeing a positive justice outcome.

ISSUE 2

Victim support services provide a wide range of vital and effective support services, and work done by charities and support organisations.

However, there is often a lack of accessible data and evidence around what the best services are for specific circumstances, what is working well for certain groups, and what is not.

ISSUE 3

Each victim has their own set of needs. We need to understand how victims access support, including barriers, such as age, ethnicity and disability, both in the criminal justice system and victim services.

We need evidence on which groups of victims are more or less likely to access services and whether additional or different support is required to reach different groups of victims.

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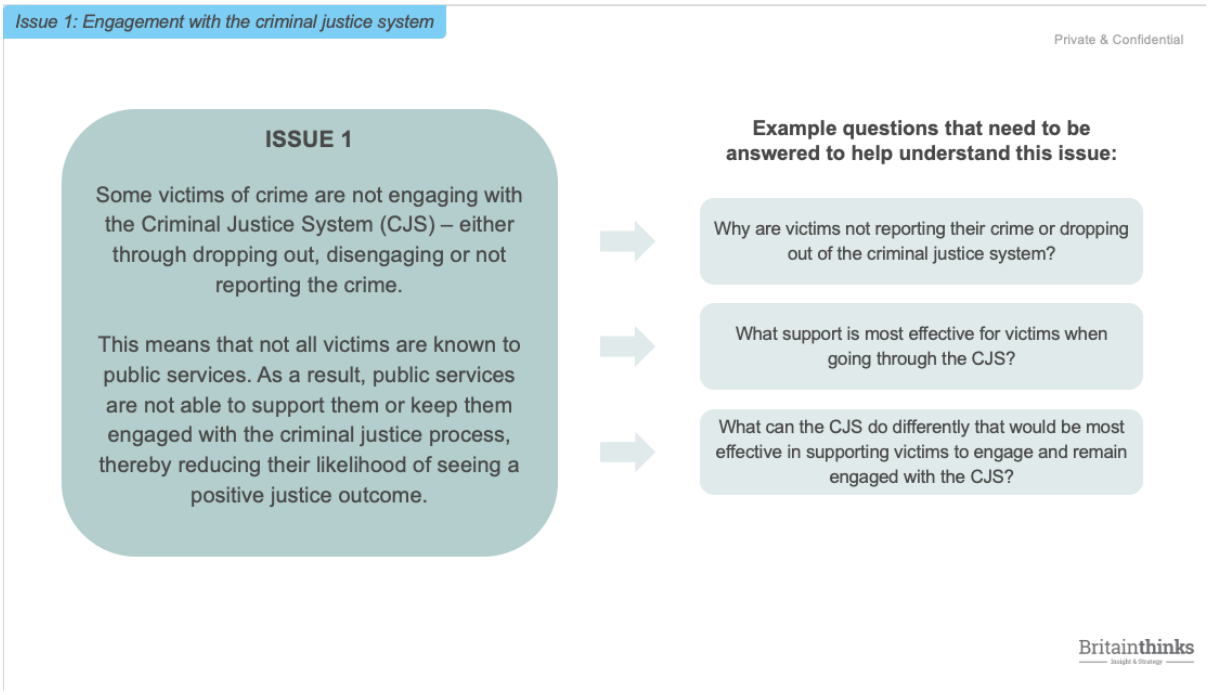
Issue 1: Engagement with the criminal justice system
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ISSUE 1
Some victims of crime are not engaging with the Criminal Justice System (CJS) – either through dropping out, disengaging or not reporting the crime.
This means that not all victims are known to public services. As a result, public services are not able to support them or keep them engaged with the criminal justice process, thereby reducing their likelihood of seeing a positive justice outcome.
Example questions that need to be answered to help understand this issue:
Why are victims not reporting their crime or dropping out of the criminal justice system?
What support is most effective for victims when going through the CJS?
What can the CJS do differently that would be most effective in supporting victims to engage and remain engaged with the CJS?
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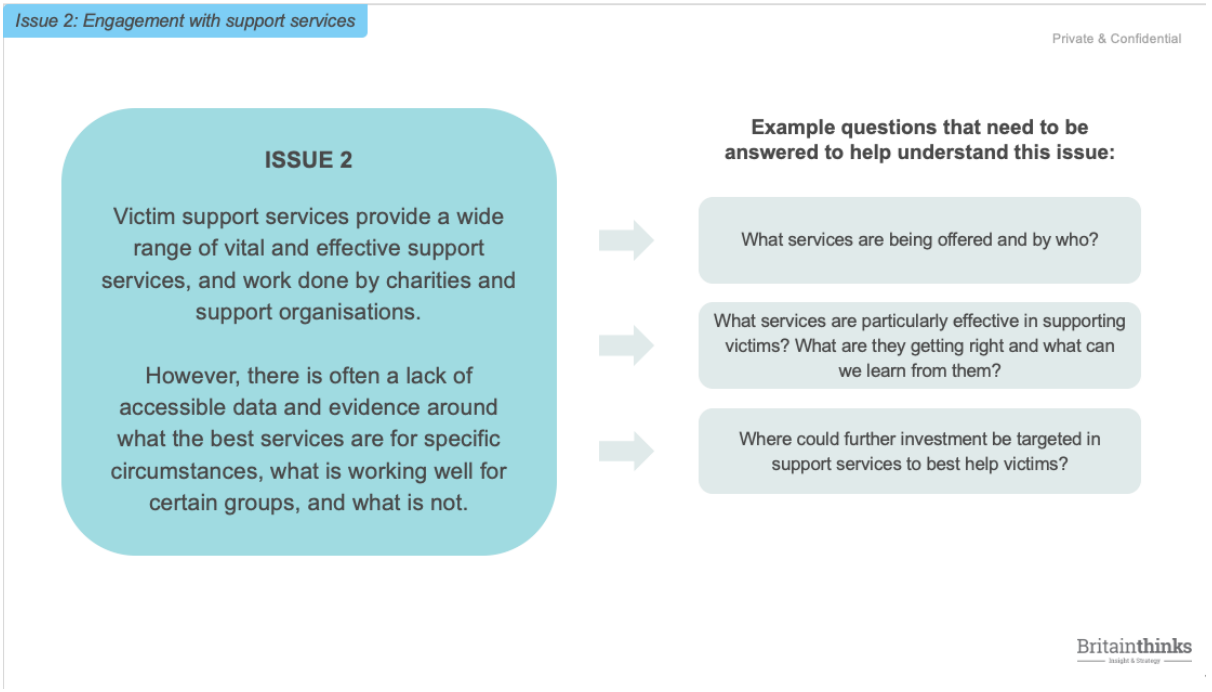
Issue 2: Engagement with support services
Private & Confidential
ISSUE 2
Victim support services provide a wide range of vital and effective support services, and work done by charities and support organisations.
However, there is often a lack of accessible data and evidence around what the best services are for specific circumstances, what is working well for certain groups, and what is not.
Example questions that need to be answered to help understand this issue:
What services are being offered and by who?
What services are particularly effective in supporting victims? What are they getting right and what can we learn from them?
Where could further investment be targeted in support services to best help victims?
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Issue 3: Accessing support

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ISSUE 3

Each victim has their own set of needs. We need to understand how victims access support, including barriers, such as age, ethnicity and disability, both in the criminal justice system and victim services.

We need evidence on which groups of victims are more or less likely to access services and whether additional or different support is required to reach different groups of victims.

Example questions that need to be answered to help understand this issue:

- To what extent, if at all, do different demographic group receive a lower quality of service from the criminal justice system or victim support sector? If so, why and how can we stop this happening?
- What are the needs of different groups of victims accessing certain services, for example age, ethnicity, sexuality?
- What are the key barriers victims face to accessing victim services? What works in overcoming them?

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Victims of crimes

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Across these problem areas, the Ministry of Justice will receive information from the following organisations to help answer the questions across these areas:

	Demographic information (e.g., age, marital status)	Details on services / support victims have accessed	Details on the case investigation and any support provided in court	Details on the case in court (e.g. the charge, case outcome)	Details on information about the offender that has been passed on to the victim (e.g. release date)
Third sector organisations (e.g. charities) that BOLD has partnered with	✓	✓	?	?	?
Police	✓	✓	✓		
Crown prosecution service	✓		✓	✓	
Courts				✓	
Prison & Probation services	✓				✓

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How would linking data help BOLD to understand these issues?

By linking data across the criminal justice system and third sector organisations, BOLD can…

See the **impact** certain factors have on victims. For example, is there data to show that if the case takes over a year, victims are less likely to continue to engage with the criminal justice system?

Highlight if there are **certain groups** of victims who are more likely to disengage with the criminal justice system and seek to understand why and how to resolve this. For example, do certain groups receive a lower quality of service from the criminal justice system?

Evidence 'what works' in the victim support sector and share learning across the sector and the criminal justice system.

As a result, BOLD will be able to provide evidence to support real and effective change for victims in the future.