

Institution: University of St Andrews



Unit of Assessment: A1 – Clinical Medicine

Title of case study: Reducing violence to improve health; in the UK and Internationally

1. Summary of the impact

Our evaluation of gang member rehabilitation and violence reduction programme in Glasgow has had considerable and enduring policy impact. Scottish Government policy is built on the principals our research espouses. Homicide rates in Scotland are now at a thirty-year low. The Prime Minister and national newspapers cited the initiative as a solution after the London riots and the UK Government incorporated the ethos of this program into their policy and practice. Working jointly with the WHO, we are having impact in South Africa, Jamaica and Lithuania. For example, the Western Cape Province of South Africa has, following our involvement and for the first time, initiated a violence reduction strategy. The most important impact of our work, however, is the change it creates in young people's lives, transforming their prospects from those of a lifetime of intermittent imprisonment to one of useful and meaningful societal involvement and contribution.

2. Underpinning research

The Public Health and Health Policy group at St Andrews University was established in 2008 and has become a leading centre in Violence Reduction Research. The group who all still work at St Andrews joined and are graded as follows; Donnelly, 2008 Professor, Williams 2009 Research fellow becoming lecturer 2013, Gehring PhD student 2009 becoming Research fellow 2013, Neville Research fellow 2011. Our work includes evaluations of interventions and the study of factors that facilitate or prevent the adoption of effective violence prevention policies in the UK and internationally. The team started evaluating a gang member rehabilitation and violence reduction initiative (the Community Initiative to Reduce Violence) (CIRV) in Glasgow in 2008. The initial dramatic self-referral session was described in the British Medical Journal¹.



Our 2009 project funded by the Wellcome Trust explored motivations for positive change among gang members. Gaining work experience and obtaining and holding on to employment were identified as being particularly important. The group then moved on to a detailed quantitative evaluation, using an innovative quasi experimental design, which demonstrated a fall of nearly 50% in violent acts and a fall of 85% in knife carriage amongst those engaged in the programme.² Williams and Donnelly won the inaugural Elizabeth Russell Prize of the Faculty of Public Health for this work. The 2009/10 development of a methodology to cost a homicide investigation emphasised that violence prevention is not only a moral imperative but also sound economics.³ Throughout 2009/11 the group set about understanding factors that may underlie or precipitate violence. They were able to show that young prisoners in Scotland have an excess of symptoms related to ADHD and also that the presence of these symptoms are predictive of violent breaches of prison discipline⁴. Cooperating with other centres Donnelly co-authored a paper that shows very high rates of psychiatry morbidity in gang members⁵. A 2011/12 project in cooperation with Strathclyde Police explored the relationship between Old Firm (Rangers vs Celtic) football matches and rates of domestic violence, demonstrating an excess of domestic violence calls in the 24hrs

following match kick off time.⁶ The relationship between football and violence is almost certainly mediated by alcohol and alcohol plays an important part in many violent acts in Scotland. The group therefore in 2011/12 piloted innovative trans-dermal alcohol monitoring technology, which allows continual sobriety monitoring, as a possible means to reduce levels of alcohol-related violent reoffending. A mixed methods pilot project demonstrated the benefits of such an approach⁷ and this work informed a further pilot in Barlinnie prison. An international project 2009-13 funded by the Scottish Government (£250,000) undertaken in conjunction with the World Health Organisation (2008-2013) looked at the way in which violence reduction policy is developed and implemented in Jamaica, the Western Cape Province of South Africa and Lithuania. Important lessons were learned about the historical context of policy making.

3. References to the research

1. Donnelly, P. D., Tomes, J., An unusual day in court *BMJ* 2008; 337:a2959. DOI: [10.1136/bmj.a2959](https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.a2959) *Graphically describes the gang member self referral session which started the CIRV gang member rehabilitation process. Published in a leading international medical journal.*
2. VRU. *A public health approach to the evaluation of the Glasgow Community Initiative to Reduce Violence in Glasgow's Community Initiative to Reduce Violence in Second year report.* Violence Reduction Unit, Glasgow 2011. *Reports publically for the first time research done by our group showing a significant fall in violent offending and knife carrying; a finding of considerable international significance which rapidly led to changes in police and social work practice.* <http://www.actiononviolence.com/content/cirv-second-year-report>
3. Harvey, M., Williams, D. J., & Donnelly, P. D. Testing a method to develop preliminary cost estimates of homicide in Glasgow: A research note. *Criminal Justice Policy Review*, 2012 DOI: 10.1177/0887403412448819. *Emphasises the cost of not running a violence reduction program by calculating the cost of investigating a homicide. Helps make the economic case for violence reduction work in a well regarded and appropriate international specialist journal.* <http://cjp.sagepub.com/content/early/2012/06/19/0887403412448819>
4. Gordon, V., Williams, D. J., & Donnelly, P. D. Exploring the relationship between ADHD symptoms and prison breaches of discipline amongst youths in four Scottish prisons. *Public Health*, 2012 126(4), 343-348. DOI: [10.1016/j.puhe.2012.01.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.puhe.2012.01.004) *Demonstrates the excess prevalence of ADHD symptomatology in youth offenders and links to breaches in prison discipline; a finding of practical significance to justice authorities. Published in a leading specialist journal.*
5. Coid, J.W., Ullrich, S., Keers, R., Bebbington, P., DeStavola, B., Kallis, C., Yang, M., Reiss, D., Jenkins, R., Donnelly, P. Gang membership, violence, and psychiatric morbidity. *American Journal of Psychiatry* 2013 DOI: [10.1176/appi.ajp.2013.12091188](https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ajp.2013.12091188) *Demonstrates high levels of psychiatric morbidity amongst gang members with traumatisation and fear of further violence particularly prominent. Published in the leading international psychiatry journal with accompanying editorial. The first article on this subject ever published by the journal in its 169 year history.*
6. Williams, D.J., Neville, F., House, K. and Donnelly, P. D. Association between old firm football matches and reported domestic (violence) incidents in Strathclyde, Scotland. *Sage Open* 2013 3: DOI: [10.1177/2158244013504207](https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244013504207) *Shows for the first time this suspected link and thus helps inform police and health service expectations and operational tactics in the period around such games. Published in a quality open access peer reviewed journal. Generated huge media interest.*
7. Neville, F. G., Williams, D. J., Murer, J. S., Donnelly, P. D., Goodall, C. An Experimental Trial Exploring the Impact of Continuous Transdermal Alcohol Monitoring upon Alcohol Consumption in a Cohort of Male Students 2013 *PLoS One*. 2013; 8: e67386. DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0067386 <http://www.plosone.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0067386>
Proves that continuous transdermal alcohol monitoring has a beneficial effect on assisting sobriety and provides suggestions as to why that might be. This was an important prelude to our ongoing prisoner discharge randomised control trial of this technology. Published in a high impact peer reviewed open access journal

4. Details of the impact

During the period 2008-12 the group has placed particular emphasis on achieving societal impact employing an experienced homicide detective to assist. The beneficial impact of our gang violence reduction work on local communities has received widespread media coverage. ^{M1, M2} Police and Local authority leadership are clear about the importance of our contribution. Since the start of our 2008 evaluation and the publication of our 2011 results we have changed Police and Social Work, attitudes, policy and tactics. We have substantially altered what these professional groups think is possible in dealing with violent young men. For example an, Assistant Chief Constable at the Scottish Police Service explains how we have helped the police see that violence is not inevitable but can be prevented ^{S1}

“Working with police colleagues, Professor Donnelly and his team have revolutionised expectations as to what is possible. The team have recast violence not just as a Public Health issue but one that actually can in many instances be prevented. The results of the CIRV Programme were praised by the Prime Minister in Parliament and the subject of a visit by the Home Secretary in the wake of the London riots. Police Forces elsewhere have been encouraged to learn from Glasgow’s experiences with its record fall in offending.”

Our work has changed the way social workers practice and how they are managed such that they now focus on what these young men can contribute to society rather than what trouble they may have caused in the past as the Head of Social Work Services in North East Glasgow explains. ^{S2}

“I have used Professor Donnelly’s research to inform the practice of Social Workers and managers across the service I manage.....(His) work helps to demonstrate what can be achieved in terms of true collaborative working in this area, when individuals, communities and professionals focus on positive reinforcement as opposed to deficit models of working with young people involved in gang violence. The value of the work undertaken by Professor Donnelly and his team cannot be overstated.”

The fundamental impact of this work since late 2008/ early 2009 has been that lives are saved and injury caused by violent crime is reduced. The head of community safety for the Scottish Government is very clear that we are beneficially impacting on violent crime rates ^{S3}

“I have had very direct experience of the work done by Professor Peter Donnelly and his group at the University of St Andrews on violence reduction over the past few years. As policy lead for violence reduction for the Scottish Government, I am happy to confirm that this important work has had a direct impact on our policy and practice in the area of violence reduction, which has helped contribute to a 38 year low in recorded violent crime.”

The impact has been developed internationally. This is particularly true in the Western Cape Province of South Africa who following visits from us 2009-11 now have a cross Government violence reduction strategy for the very first time. A violence reduction expert at the University of Cape Town writes ^{S4}

“.....with regard to the impact of Prof. Donnelly’s work in the field of violence reduction. There is no question that he and his research group at the University of St Andrews are having impact internationally. It is a measure of the impact of his work and that of his team, and the respect they have earned internationally, that he is often asked to take senior leadership roles in meetings of the Violence Prevention Alliance.”

In addition Donnelly was one of two subject experts invited to address a closed-door meeting of senior Republican and Democratic politicians on the issue of firearms and injury in San Diego in August 2013. He has been selected to design and lead a special Board highlighted 90-minute session on the Sandy Hook School shootings at the 2013 American Public Health Association meeting (typical attendance 13,000) involving key individuals present on the day of the shootings and relevant gun control experts. These are both highly unusual honours for a non-US citizen. Much more importantly they seek to use research to reduce violent deaths. Working closely with the World Health Organisation (2008-13) we are helping other nations realise that violence reduction is possible and are helping them develop strategies and interventions. A WHO official speaks to this impact ^{S5}

“Through his regular and important contribution to the VPA steering committee, to VPA Project Groups (such as the project group on preventing violence in weak institutional settings), and to the annual VPA meetings and Milestones in a Global Campaign for Violence Prevention meetings (many of which he has chaired), Professor Donnelly has had a very significant influence over the shaping of international violence prevention policy.”

Our leadership in this area of work resulted in a commission from Oxford University Press to edit a book of international violence research contributions and this nears completion.

The most important impact is the effect on young men most at risk of drifting into a life of violence. We dramatically change their life trajectories and consequently the impact they have on others and on society. The quotation below from a young man involved in the project illustrates this (Edited version taken from the CIRV final report, reference 2 in section 3 of this document).

“When I got to 14, I started carrying knives and it became a bit more serious because I wasn't stood at the back watching any more. I was at the front, looking to do damage and not caring. By the age of 15, I was involved in selling drugs and was taking cocaine, Valium and Ecstasy. My parents had serious addiction problems and they found it difficult to provide for me and my young brother. Your gang becomes your family. At 15 I was expelled from school for violence against a teacher. It was at that point I got involved with guns.”

“By 17 I was in prison for a firearms charge. I did three and a half years. When I got out I got involved with their football coaching programme. From there, I heard about the CIRV East End Football League and got together a group of local boys to enter a team. Through being involved with the football, I found out more about CIRV, got involved with them and started giving workshops to help others break away from gangs. I'm now a Peer Advocate, working with gangs on a daily basis.”

“It takes a lot of courage to change. You're throwing away everything you've ever stood for, and it's hard to leave your pals and say I don't want a part of that. But I'm glad I did. The future's looking pretty bright now. I'm training an amateur football side, I've got a baby and I don't touch drugs. If I hadn't changed, I'd probably be dead, or serving a long prison sentence. I know I wouldn't be anywhere I would want to be. If I can do it so can these guys. Working with them is a better buzz than any drug.”

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

Letters of support (S1 to S5)

S1. Assistant Chief Constable, Scottish Police Service

Corroborates change in police policy and tactics and fall in violent crime rates.

S2. Head of Social Work Services in North East Glasgow

Corroborates change in social work training and practice.

S3. Head of Community Safety for the Scottish Government

Corroborates impact on policy formulation and fall in violent crime rates.

S4. Associate Professor at the University of Cape Town

Corroborates international impact with the Western Cape Province of South Africa as an example.

S5. Technical Officer, World Health Organisation

Corroborates international policy leadership with the World Health Organisation.

Example media coverage (M1 and M2)

M1. Guardian <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2011/aug/11/glasgow-gangs-peace-crackdown>,

Corroborates beneficial impact on communities of our gang reduction work.

M2. BBC <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-19915113>

Corroborates endorsement of Scotland's new Police Chief Constable for our approach.