

Institution: Abertay University		
Unit of Assessment: 21 - Sociology		
Title of case study: Changing the Policing of Serious and Organised Crime in Scotland through Community Engagement		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: September 2016 to June 2018		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name:	Role (e.g. job title):	Period employed by submitting HEI:
Dr William Graham	Senior Lecturer	August 2014 to present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: September 2015 to present date.		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact <p>Our research on the effect of organised crime on disadvantaged communities in Scotland has impacted criminal justice policy, inter-agency working and community engagement. Due to our research, agencies that deal with organised crime have introduced changes in their policies and practices. Our research has contributed to a shift from exclusively law enforcement operations toward wider community involvement and engagement with other agencies, (e.g., social housing, NHS). This has fostered social and personal health benefits and reduced social harms for individual offenders and communities blighted by organised crime. Our findings were implemented in 'Operation Corner' leading to positive effects on arrested criminals, with 89% continuing to positively engage with services, changing their offending behaviour and desisting from further criminal activity.</p>		
2. Underpinning research <p>The Scottish Government has stated that Serious Organised Crime (SOC) is responsible for causing a wide range of harms to individuals, businesses, communities, and society. Evidence shows that Organised Crime Groups (OCGs) are located throughout the country. The estimated yearly economic cost of SOC to the Scottish economy (i.e., excluding the social cost) is £2 billion per year. SOC causes significant problems for communities in Scotland, for example, drugs offences, violence, and money laundering. The effects of SOC are not evenly distributed in Scottish communities, with impact varying in nature and severity across urban, semi-urban and rural areas. While certain forms of SOC have deep roots in territorially defined communities, others are less visible and more flexible such as mobile forms of drug supply.</p> <p>In order to assess the repercussions of SOC across Scotland and devise novel strategies for action, research into the community experiences of SOC was undertaken by a collaboration of expert researchers (Universities of Glasgow, Abertay and Stirling) [3.1]. The study used an innovative approach, moving beyond police and law enforcement perceptions of organised crime, focusing instead on a range of communities and actors affected by SOC. These included young people, older adults, local residents and business owners, representatives of local charities, groups and organisations.</p> <p>Prior to this research, there had been no dedicated effort to recognise and understand the direct and indirect impacts of organised crime on local communities. Moreover, the study was innovative</p>		

for the Scottish context since it aimed, for the first time, to conduct an extensive and focused qualitative research on the community experiences of organised crime. Indeed, in Scotland, there was a pressing need to obtain better knowledge of the diffuse impacts that organised crime has on various communities and on society as a whole.

The research design reflected the ambitions of the project by involving the selection of community case study sites based on a typology of 'SOC-affected' communities. These sites were chosen to reflect differing geographical areas, urban/rural areas, and the consequences of the decline in Scotland's traditional industries, including coal-mining, fishing, and manufacturing. The project used a combination of methods including semi-structured qualitative interviews, focus groups, unstructured interviews, and observational research.

Dr Graham's role in the project was substantive. Dr Graham is an expert in the field of gang violence research and actively works with key statutory agency stakeholders. He also has substantial experience in qualitative research of organised crime. Due to this experience, Dr Graham was responsible for the development of the semi-structured interview scripts for the research and conducted the interviews with key individuals from the police, social work, housing, and other statutory authorities across Scotland. Dr Graham also contributed to research design, case study development, fieldwork access, data analysis and writing of the publication.

During interviews, participants in the research identified street crime – notably drug dealing and theft – as the most visible manifestation of organised criminality; however, these visible forms of crime were just the 'tip of the iceberg', with the majority of SOC activity hidden from public view. There was consensus that the principal community repercussion of SOC continues to result from the illicit drugs market, which embeds a range of harmful consequences for users, their families, and the general fabric of community life, including the entrenchment of vulnerabilities such as addiction and debt.

The novel focus of this project, moving away from law enforcement views to perceptions of SOC affected communities, allowed original findings to emerge. First, we identified that individuals involved in harmful, exploitative, or coercive practices are deeply intertwined with the majority of law-abiding residents via families, friendships and other social connections. The implication of this finding is the need to frame prevention, policing and other responses in a way which balances with rehabilitation, social support and building opportunities for all in communities. Second, we found that grassroots, community-level resistance is important and should therefore be nourished from within rather than being led from outside the community. Indeed, it also suggested that organised crime cannot, and should not, be a dominant theme in community conversations and planning, but neither should the conversation be avoided through an exclusive focus on more positive 'assets'.

Our research findings suggested a novel direction for action: developing approaches for joint use of community resources and local policing models to enable the gathering of community intelligence and increasing trust in the police and other key service providers.

3. References to the research

3.1 Fraser, A., Hamilton-Smith, N., Clark, A., Atkinson, C., Graham, W. & McBride, M. (2018) 'Community Experiences of Organised Crime in Scotland', Scottish Government Research Report: Available at <https://www.gov.scot/publications/community-experiences-serious-organised-crime-scotland>

The Scottish Government funded the research and appointed the research team after a lengthy procurement process to ensure that the team were qualified and capable of carrying out such an important project.

The final report submitted to the Scottish Government underwent a rigorous quality assurance process throughout the research project, with an Advisory Board comprising of experts in the field, including academics.

4. Details of the impact

In May 2018, the project team submitted a major report [3.1] to the Scottish Government, with the findings from the research. The report proposed a novel approach for dealing with the negative effects of organised crime on local communities in Scotland.

In particular, the report made four key recommendations for action:

1. Develop resilient communities as a means of responding to the harms associated with organised crime.
2. Change the narrative from one of law enforcement responsibility for Organised Crime only, to one of wider community and organisational responsibility.
3. Address vulnerability, by involving more local service providers to support the most vulnerable, with the potential to create a significant prevention dividend.
4. Broaden community partnerships, in particular considering the importance of developing partnerships with families, mentors, and schools in the communities affected by SOC.

The report and all recommendations were approved in full by the Justice Minister of the Scottish Government. Subsequently (August 2018), the recommendations were submitted to the Organised Crime Task Force for implementation. The Scottish Government Justice Secretary chairs the Task Force and members include senior decision makers from justice agencies, the legal profession, academia, and the voluntary sector.

In March 2019, the research team hosted an Organised Crime conference in Glasgow. Fifty invited guests from the organised crime field (including both practitioners and academics) discussed the outcomes and recommendations of our research. Discussions from the conference were used to inform Scottish Government officials and relevant agencies in the implementation of the report recommendations and how they influenced the workings of the agencies involved.

The senior Scottish Government civil servant, with responsibility for the Organised Crime Unit, reported that our research findings were to be initially implemented in four anonymous test sites, (similar in shape and composition to, but not the same as, the four sites used in the original research). Four sites were established in the summer of 2019 to test the recommendations and were to be evaluated by community groups, each led by senior respected and trusted community and agency members.

The groups were established in the four test sites and provided with advice and support from the Government Organised Crime Unit when required. Each area group was tasked with examining and focusing on the main issues (for example, drugs misuse, housing allocation of ex-offenders leaving prison) affecting their areas and asked to implement strategies to reduce the influence of organised crime on their communities.

Unfortunately, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic all work in the test sites was paused in spring 2020 (as discussed later). However, our work has already had significant impact on the development and deployment of a police operation in North Aberdeenshire (Operation Corner).

Example evidence of impact: Operation Corner

Our research established the fact that for several years, OCGs from the north-west of England had been infiltrating North Aberdeenshire in order to supply Class A controlled drugs. These groups generally used the "County Lines" method of drug dealing, which refers to their activity being conducted through a single telephone number, often operated from outwith the area where the drugs are being dealt. The groups manipulate or coerce local drug users to facilitate their activities at a "street" level, often specifically targeting some of the most vulnerable persons in the community. A further tactic of OCGs is "Cuckooing", where the home of a vulnerable person is occupied, often using intimidation and threats, as a base to facilitate the supply of controlled drugs. The senior police officer in the area (interviewed by Dr Graham as part of our research), stated that traditional methods of enforcement have had a limited impact in tackling these problems in the region.

'Operation Corner' was established as a multi-agency operation with the objective of tackling Organised Crime Groups operating in North Aberdeenshire [5.1]. The police commander, with responsibility for SOC in the region, is a member of the police SOC national strategy team. Based on his prior knowledge of our research findings and ongoing discussion between himself and the research authors, he instigated Operation Corner:

"The genesis of the operation stemmed from our initial discussions and ultimately your paper on the impact of Organised Crime in local communities. Without this paper, your findings and our in-depth discussions, Operation Corner would not have been devised and implemented and these positive outcomes for vulnerable individuals may not have been realised". Detective Superintendent Alex Dowall, Police Scotland [5.2].

Operation Corner seeks to develop resilient communities in the north-east of Scotland by changing the narrative from one of law enforcement to wider community and organisational responsibility, targeting vulnerable drug uses and by establishing better partnerships. In September 2018 members of NHS Grampian and Aberdeenshire Council became part of Operation Corner and commenced the intervention phase with those identified by the police enforcement operation.

A new integrated approach was developed by establishing joint working practices between the police and NHS Grampian addiction services and local housing agencies to address the needs of vulnerable people. An ongoing evaluation being conducted by Dr Graham shows that a total of 53 people were arrested by the police as part of the operation [5.3]. Arrested individuals had their health and needs assessed and were then managed on a case-by-case basis in an effort to move them towards a more purposeful daily life. They were provided with help and assistance concomitant with their structured needs and requirements, e.g. addictions or housing assistance.

The final assessment of Operation Corner [5.4] (December 2020, conducted by Dr Graham) is showing very positive results: 47 (89%) of the 53 individuals arrested during the operation are still positively engaging with the police and health services and reducing their offending behaviour. This is borne out by comments made by Chief Inspector Finn McPhail in her presentation to Aberdeenshire Council in which she stated that:

"Operation Corner is having a positive impact on those who are engaging by reducing their reoffending and drugs misuse. It is clear that due to the perseverance and strength of the partnerships involved it is anticipated that these successes in engagement should increase as the operation continues" [5.1].

Implementation of our recommendations

As demonstrated above, our research has already had impacts on policy, agencies, and communities. Our research has led both to the instigation of Operation Corner and the Scottish Governments approval of our recommendations and initial implementation through the establishment of four pilot sites.

The process of implementation was overtaken in Spring 2020 by the exceptional demands made on public services by the COVID-19 emergency. The process of realising impact through the implementation of our research recommendations is being continually reshaped as conditions change. At this stage it is impossible to say when the test sites will become operational due to the on-going pandemic. Dr Graham will continue to play an active role in assessing and responding to the emergent properties of the project in different localities over time.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- 5.1** Interim report submitted to Aberdeenshire Council by Police Scotland outlining the findings of Operation Corner for Police Scotland NHS Grampian.
- 5.2** Testimonial letter from Detective Superintendent Alexander Dowall confirming that Operation Corner was implemented as a direct result of the outcomes and recommendations made in the report "Community Experiences of Serious and Organised Crime in Scotland".
- 5.3** Preliminary Assessment of Operation Corner. Report submitted to Police Scotland and NHS Grampian in January 2020.
- 5.4** Final Evaluation of Operation Corner submitted to Police Scotland and NHS Grampian in December 2020.