

Building safer communities: changing the focus of crime reduction strategies in Scotland

- Our AQMeN research has revealed that the crime drop has not impacted equally on all Scottish communities or all sectors of Scottish society
- Crime in Scotland has fallen but it has not reduced equally across all local communities
- High crime neighbourhoods have remained stubbornly persistent
- Areas with a crime drop have seen greatest reductions in deprivation and disorganisation
- Crime has fallen most amongst those at least risk of being victims, but not for chronic victims
- This research is changing the focus of crime reduction policies and strategies to focus more on those who are at greatest risk of crime, including communities and households that experience high levels of poverty and deprivation

Summary of research evidence

Researchers from the Applied Quantitative Methods Network (AQMeN) have conducted research on trends and patterns in crime and victimisation in Scotland. **The research has revealed an increase in crime inequality amongst communities and social groups.**

Police recorded crime in Scotland has fallen significantly since the early 1990s. However, **variation in the extent of change at a local level suggests that some communities have benefited more from the crime drop than others.**

Using recorded crime data for Greater Glasgow, we found marked variation in both the *level of crime* and the *trajectories of crime* over time for different neighbourhoods. Neighbourhoods tend to cluster in terms of high, moderate and low levels of crime, and crime level is associated with particular structural and situational variables (e.g. deprivation, household composition, population age structure and situational crime attractors).

Low crime areas have higher levels of owner occupation, fewer young people aged 16-24, more households with dependent children, lower levels of unemployment, higher household income and the lowest level of small business addresses.

In contrast, high crime areas have low owner occupation, more young people aged 16-24, fewer households with dependent children, higher rates of unemployment and the highest number of business addresses.

Neighbourhoods that exhibited a sustained crime drop over time tended to experience a greater reduction in crime 'stressors' compared to some other areas, including lower social rented housing, less unemployment and reduced

concentration of business addresses. In other words, the crime drop neighbourhoods became more similar in their characteristics to low crime neighbourhoods.

Our findings suggest that changes in tenure, deprivation and situational factors may have influenced area crime trends, although our analysis cannot be used to test causality.

Using data from the Scottish Crime and Justice Survey, we found the overall risk of being a victim of crime in Scotland has fallen. However, **risk of victimisation reduced most amongst those who were likely to experience only one or two incidents of crime per year, on average.** There was no significant change in risk for those who tend to be most frequently victimised in Scotland.

The risk of victimisation was lower for women and decreased with age, whereas it was higher for some social groups, including adults in single parent households and those living in social rented accommodation.

Our findings demonstrate an increase in crime inequality in Scotland. Crime has become more concentrated in certain types of neighbourhoods and amongst certain types of social groups, especially those who are most disadvantaged.

Impact of our research so far

The findings of our AQMeN research on crime and victimisation have been used to inform and influence the strategic direction of the Scottish Government's flagship Building Safer Communities (BSC) Programme. Established in 2013 under the Scottish Government's strategic objective of creating a safer and stronger Scotland, the BSC aims to contribute to several of the government's National Outcomes including 'We live our lives safe from crime, disorder and danger'.

BSC is a collaborative programme of work which assists both national and local partners and communities to work in partnership to make Scotland safer and stronger. In line with evidence from the AQMeN research, it has been involved in implementing a number of place-based initiatives in a range of local pilot areas across Scotland. These are areas that have been identified as having stubbornly persistent problems of crime and violence. Importantly, these initiatives build on an assets-based approach to reducing crime and improving community wellbeing which focus on addressing the problems facing both *places* and *people*.

Professor Susan McVie (leader of the AQMeN crime research programme) was appointed to the BSC Programme Board at its inception in 2013. She was involved in the development of the vision and aims of the BSC and has visited each of the pilot areas to observe and discuss the particular problems faced by persistently high crime communities within Scotland. In 2014, Prof McVie was assigned the role of Performance Champion for BSC with a mandate for developing the evaluation strategy for the programme.

Through her role on the BSC Board, she has used evidence from the AQMeN research to influence and inform the development of new policies and practices aimed at significantly reducing the number of victims of crime in Scotland by 2018, especially in the most deprived communities.

In particular, by bringing together the research evidence on crime inequalities involving both 'people' (e.g. victims and offenders) and 'places' (e.g. crime locus and events), we have influenced innovative thinking around how policing strategies can be more accurately targeted and can have diffusion benefits.

We are also influencing collaborative practice and better coordination of public service delivery across a range of agencies.

Next steps

There is existing evidence that policy makers and practitioners are using AQMeN research (highlighted above) and we continue to work collaboratively with members of the Scottish Government and Police Scotland to inform the development of new interventions; running research-based knowledge exchange events and producing bespoke research materials.

Underpinning research

This research applied complex quantitative methodologies to police recorded crime data from 1998/99 to 2012/13 for Greater Glasgow in Scotland and data from the Scottish Crime Surveys from 1993 to 2014/15. The analytical techniques used included Latent Class Analysis, Local Indicators of Spatial Association and Group-Based Trajectory modelling. For further details of the methods used, see our research papers or contact members of the research team.

Find out more about the AQMeN research on crime mentioned in this case study

Bannister, Bates and Kearns (2017) Local variance in the crime drop: A longitudinal study of neighbourhoods in Greater Glasgow. *British Journal of Criminology*. doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azx022

[Humphreys, Francis and McVie \(2014\) *Understanding the Crime Drop in Scotland*. AQMeN Research Briefing 1 <http://bit.ly/AQMeNResearchBriefing1>](http://bit.ly/AQMeNResearchBriefing1)

[Norris, Pillinger and McVie \(2014\) *Changing patterns of victimisation in Scotland 1993-2011*. AQMeN Research Briefing 2 <http://bit.ly/VictimisationRB2>](http://bit.ly/VictimisationRB2)

For more information visit the [AQMeN website](http://aqmen.ac.uk) or contact info@aqmen.ac.uk