



## UNDERSTANDING PUBLIC DISCLOSURE OF SEX OFFENDER INFORMATION IN SCOTLAND: ACCESS, IMPACT & VALUE-ADDED

Co-hosted with & at the Risk Management Authority Scotland

### Introduction

This event is part of an ongoing Knowledge Exchange series co-funded by the ESRC and 10 regional as well as national partners, The Aim of the Knowledge Exchange series is to:

- To review the current evidence of best practice from the English and Scottish pilots, the schemes implementation in Wales, as well as the ongoing consultation process in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.
- To review issues of access and take-up.
- To review the impact and outcome of public disclosure in the UK, and what this means for the consultation process ongoing in both Northern and the Republic of Ireland.
- To review the impact on sex offenders.

The aim of the Scottish event was to discuss the reality of the limited disclosure of sex offender information scheme *in situ*. The event, and related keynotes and workshops, looked to address

- the value-added to child protection and reasons for limited impact;
- Strategies to maximise impact;
- Development & future use of impact measures.
- To share learning and best practice on access, targeting and marketing strategies, with a focus on increasing take-up by marginal and excluded groups, and increasing the scheme's responsiveness to diverse populations.

### Keynotes

The event had 3 main keynote speakers addressing a range of discussion points around the limited disclosure of sex offender information scheme in Scotland, and relating them to the wider academic literature as well as broader UK issues.

1. *Scottish Pilot overview and key learning points* (Lorraine Murray, IPSO MORI Scotland)
2. *Update on Disclosure Implementation in Scotland* (Willie Manson, Scottish National MAPPA Coordinator)
3. *Overview of sex offender community management in Scotland* (Beth Weaver, Strathclyde University)

All of the PowerPoint presentations and the related briefing notes by the authors are available on the Knowledge Exchange website ( ).

### Discussion sessions

A range of participants attended and engaged in the discussion groups/workshop sessions these included participants from Risk Management Authority Scotland, NHS Scotland, NIACRO, Barnardos, Stop it Now!, MAPPA Scotland, Glasgow University, Strathclyde University Scottish Prison Service

and Tayside Police. The workshops were an opportunity for a selection of these participants (usually 7 – 10 participants per workshop, with each workshop happening twice and all participants attending two different workshops) to engage in an in-depth discussion on a range of relevant issues tied to sex offender disclosure and boarder sex offender management in Scotland.

*Workshop 1 & 4: Access & targeting – extending the take up of the scheme*

These workshops were chaired by Hazel Kemshall. The discussions focused around how access to the public disclosure scheme could be improved, especially for hard to reach communities (either geographically or socially), so that the people and communities who needed the scheme could effectively engage with it. The participants realised that there needed to be better advertising of the scheme, therefore recognising that the current approach needed to be re-evaluated and alternatives looked at particularly new social media. This resulted in a growing recognition from the participants that there need to be a better understanding of the different communities out there, a better understanding of these communities realisation with the Criminal Justice System and a better understanding of how communities (but particularly parents) understand as well as respond to issues surrounding sexual abuse; leading to the suggestion that some research needed to be carried out in this area. The participants in these workshops also felt that the impact/success of the access and targeting of public disclosure scheme should be focused around the quality and not the quantity of the enquiries.

*Workshop 2 & 4: Development and use of impact measures to measure the effectiveness of limited disclosure schemes*

These workshops were co-chaired by Kieran McCartan & Lorraine Murray. The discussions focused around how the impact of the sex offender disclosure scheme can be accurately measured and therefore how, if at all, it can be said to be functioning. The participants stated that it was difficult to judge the impact of the scheme as there is no baseline data, so we cannot enquire to the police about potential sex offenders, compare controlled disclosures and look at how these related to reoffending by or the recall of sex offenders in the community. The participants felt that there needed to be mixed methods research started and measures developed ASAP. The participants felt that Northern Ireland was in a prime position to do this as they have not, as of yet, piloted or implemented the scheme. Although, the participants felt that an inability to measure impact was a real issue with judging the effectiveness, longevity and effectiveness of the scheme, this was not the main factor, the political context of sex offender management was. The participants felt that the scheme was, in part, politically motivated and guided and that this would trump whatever empirical research on the schemes impact was produced.

*Workshop 3 & 6: Development and use of impact measures to measure the effectiveness of limited disclosure schemes*

These workshops were co-chaired by Kirsty Hudson and Yvonne Gailey. The discussions focused how the current public disclosure scheme impacted upon the management of offenders in the community. The participants felt that the scheme was another tool to help in the management of sex offenders in the community but felt that it was “badly badged” and therefore the public did not often understand it, or use it, properly. This led the participants to say that in some respects it was not meeting its true potential and was not protecting children or managing offenders in the truest sense. The participants also felt that the scheme could have a compliance measure for offenders, therefore helping to keep them

in check and not reoffend, as well as make them engage in rehabilitation more readily. However, it was pointed out that only sex offenders had a register in Scotland, and therefore what were the realities and the issues surrounding that in terms of community management, policing and policy.

## Conclusions

There are a number of points that came out of today's discussion that can be taken forward and discussed in regard to Scotland responses to the scheme and in relation to the other ESRC events:

1. There needs to be greater community engagement around the understanding and management of sex offenders.
2. Material needs to be better advertised and the format reconsidered, especially for hard to reach populations and in terms of using up to date social media.
3. Is the labelling and branding of the scheme appropriate or "fit for purpose"?
4. The list of applicants needs to be broadened beyond parents (i.e., grandparents).
5. We need to understand what the role and purpose of the scheme is (public protection, preventing reoffending etc).
6. Need to measure impact in a variety of ways beyond reconviction data, using both hard and soft measures.
7. The scheme needs to be discussed and measured outside of the political context; it needs to be discussed in its own terms.



## Partner Organisations

