Transforming Stop and Search in Scotland

During the course of our research on crime and victimisation, the eight Scottish police forces were merged into one single force in April 2013. During its early phase, Police Scotland faced significant criticism over its use of stop and search which was found to be significantly higher than other comparative jurisdictions. During a very turbulent period in Scottish policing history, there was intense political and media debate about the use and scrutiny of police stop and search. AQMeN became central to transforming the landscape of stop and search in Scotland through a combination of research, policy engagement and working collaboratively with practitioners, as described below.

In January 2014, Kath Murray brought the issue of stop and search to public attention through the publication of a report titled *Stop and Search in Scotland: an evaluation of Police Practice*. This was followed by a briefing paper on non-statutory search in May 2014. Police Scotland insisted that stop and search was necessary to respond to violent crime; however, research briefings outlining the lack of evidence to support a relationship between the volume of search and recorded rates of violence were published by McVie in early 2015.

In May 2015, the Cabinet Secretary for Justice appointed Susan McVie to a new Independent Advisory Group on Stop and Search (IAGSS). McVie provided expert advice, based on analysis of the Police Scotland stop and search database, as well as other evidence-based research, to inform discussion and decision-making of the group on the respective use of statutory and non-statutory search. McVie made a significant contribution to the drafting of the formal report of the IAGSS, published in August 2015, which made repeated reference to the work of Murray. All ten recommendations for improvement to the use and scrutiny of police stop and search were accepted by the Cabinet Secretary for Justice.

In June 2015, Murray produced an update report on stop and search practice under Police Scotland. Drawing on this report, the Scottish Human Rights Commission (SHRC) reported Police Scotland to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child and raised the use of non-statutory search with the United Nations Human Rights Committee (UNHRC). In response, the UNHRC (2015) advised the Scottish Government to abolish the tactic.

A Landscape Review of academic and policy research and evidence was commissioned by the SPA in October 2015, with a view to identifying gaps in the evidence base and informing Police Scotland research priorities. Findings from the report, written by Murray, fed into the Police Scotland Research Organizational Review Group on stop and search (RE-ORG) agenda.

In an effort to improve data usage, AQMeN provided bespoke training to Police Scotland crime analysts on using stop and search data in December 2015. Drawing on this training, McVie and Murray produced a detailed data analysis guide for Police Scotland, aimed at

providing guidance and advice on how to use statistical data to determine proportionately, fairness and effectiveness (in order to conform to the new Code of Practice). This work led to McVie and Murray designing a set of measures (metrics) for Police Scotland, with a view to helping Area Commanders monitor stop and search in their local area.

In May 2016, Murray and McVie published a detailed, evidence-based response to the Scottish Government's consultation on introducing a police power to stop and search children and young people suspected of possessing alcohol. In addition, Murray published a briefing paper to Members of the Scottish Parliament. Murray and McVie argued that there was insufficient evidence to support the introduction of such a power, a recommendation that was accepted by the Cabinet Secretary for Justice.

Since late 2014, McVie and Murray were part of the Understanding and Preventing Youth Crime (UPYC) study, with colleagues from Birkbeck College. The UPYC survey of 12-15 year olds in Scotland and England included a set of questions aimed at capturing children's experiences of stop and search.   In June 2016, Murray produced a report based on the UPYC data which focused on children's experiences of stop and search in Scotland. This report was commissioned by the SPA, as part of its commitment to establish the short and long term impact of stop and search on different groups and communities. Also using the UPYC dataset, McVie and Murray are currently writing a paper (with colleagues from Birkbeck College and the University of Hamburg) on the relationship between police contact and children's perceptions of police fairness.

In 2017, the Scottish Parliament Justice Sub-Committee on Policing invited Murray to present evidence on stop and search, relating to the introduction of the new Code of Practice. On 11th May, the new Code of Practice drafted by the members of the IAGSS came into effect, banning the use of non-statutory searches completely. The Scottish Police Authority invited McVie and Murray to give evidence to its Policing Committee in July 2017 to inform the development of a national strategy for performance assurance reporting of stop and search.

Based on their experiences of the stop and search journey, McVie and Murray are writing an academic journal article titled 'From powers of search to powers of persuasion: Cultural and normative transformation in Scottish policing practice'.

In 2016, Murray was awarded the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Outstanding Early Career Impact prize (in partnership with SAGE publishing) for her work on stop and search.

Further information:

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The Code of Practice on the Exercise by Constables of Powers of Stop and Search of the Person in Scotland.

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Murray, K. (2017) *Why have we funded this research?': On politics, research and newsmaking criminology.* Criminology and Criminal Justice. Advance online publication.

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Murray, K. (2014) Stop and search in Scotland: record figures need open debate. Guardian 17 January 2014.

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