

Study considers football behaviour legislation

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An evaluation by the University of Stirling and ScotCen Social Research has been published today, on the impact of legislation covering disorder and offensive behaviour at football matches.

They conducted a two-year assessment of Section 1 of the Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications (Scotland) Act 2012 on behalf of the Scottish Government.

Evidence gathered included: two national surveys of [football](#) fans in 2013 and 2014; interviews with representatives from Police Scotland,

the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service; supporters and supporters' group representatives.

The evaluation is intended to be one contribution, sitting alongside other possible evidence, perspectives or material in the Scottish Government's consideration of the Act.

Key findings included:

- Successful prosecutions have dropped from 73 percent to 52 percent in the last year, which is consistent with other football-related charges.
- Charges fell by 24 percent between the first and second year of the Act's introduction though it is not possible to determine whether this is directly attributable to the Act.
- The average time to progress and conclude football-related charges appears to be particularly lengthy; a source of frustration and unfairness felt by some fans.
- The legislation, along with the complementary initiatives set up prior to the legislation such as the establishment of the Football Coordination Unit Scotland, was well-regarded by Procurator Fiscals, who felt that it enabled the fiscal service to work more effectively.
- Policing methods in the early stages were seen as adversarial and disproportionate by some fans whilst enforcement of the Act by policing and stewarding was inconsistent between different grounds.

In the qualitative research, both fans and stakeholders expressed some disquiet over the extent to which the Act is perceived to be targeted at younger fans.

Eighty-five percent of surveyed fans agreed it was offensive to sing

songs or make remarks about people's religious beliefs or backgrounds and 90 percent agreed it was offensive to celebrate the loss of life.

Reaction from Sheriffs ranged from strongly supportive to emphatically critical, with most in between, whilst Police Scotland felt the act gave them greater clarity on how to act.

Dr Niall Hamilton-Smith, Senior Lecturer in Criminology at the University of Stirling said: "Our evaluation neither endorses nor rejects the Act, but presents robust evidence on patterns of implementation, perceptions of impact and emerging issues and questions relating to section one of the legislation."

Provided by University of Stirling

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