

Research shows growing support for changes to the use of electronic monitoring tagging in Scotland

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Credit: University of Stirling

Findings and recommendations released in a new report by University of Stirling criminologists, Professor Gill McIvor and Dr Hannah Graham, indicate support among criminal justice practitioners for key changes to the use of electronic monitoring tagging in Scotland. Their study sought the views of criminal justice social workers, Scottish Prison Service staff, sheriffs, the Parole Board for Scotland, Police Scotland, G4S monitoring staff, Scottish Government policymakers, and a third sector

organisation.

Currently, the majority of electronically monitored orders made by Scottish courts and prisons do not involve supervision by [criminal justice social workers](#) or support from third sector services. Instead, most people are simply tagged and expected to stay at home during curfews of up to 12 hours a day.

Lecturer in Criminology and report co-author Dr Hannah Graham said:

"Our findings suggest that the use of [electronic monitoring](#) in Scotland over the last 15 years can be characterised as relatively simple but stable in approach. There's plenty of momentum among most participants in this study to pursue more innovative and tailored uses."

"Tagging and curfews alone don't address the reasons why people commit crime. In line with international evidence, we recommend that tagging needs to be integrated with rehabilitative supports and opportunities to help people change their lives and leave crime behind."

"One approach to electronic monitoring simply doesn't fit all. Involving criminal justice social workers will harness their practice knowledge in tailoring community sentences, and could reduce unnecessary uses of court time and resources – for example, do sheriffs really need to decide on requests to change address?"

"Sheriffs are important decision-makers, but there's a need for greater clarity and consistency between sheriffs and courts across the country about how and why they use electronic monitoring. Whether you get tagged or sentenced to prison should not significantly depend on where you live and who sentenced you."

The Scottish prison population rate is one of the highest in Western

Europe. One in every 700 people in Scotland are in prison. [Recent figures](#) show that some Scottish sheriffs and courts use electronically monitored Restriction of Liberty Orders (RLOs) as an alternative to a custodial sentence much more than others, who barely use them at all. In 2015, the rate of Restriction of Liberty Orders imposed by sheriffs in Glasgow was 256% higher than that of their Edinburgh counterparts, with 314 RLOs imposed in Glasgow compared to 88 RLOs in Edinburgh.

Stirling criminologists Gill McIvor and Hannah Graham worked on this project with an international research team of academics from England & Wales, Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands. Commissioned by the European Union, this electronic monitoring comparative research is the first of its kind in Europe.

Dr Hannah Graham added:

"Electronic monitoring offers a versatile and flexible tool in trying to reduce Scotland's swollen prison population, but this is not the only option and its use must be proportionate and not in isolation."

"In Scotland, there are moderately high completion rates for electronically monitored orders. Most monitored people do not get breached and returned to court or recalled to prison for non-compliance."

"Instead of simply focusing on when and where a person must be curfewed or excluded from, we can gain valuable insights from how European neighbours, like the Netherlands and Scandinavian countries, use electronic monitoring. In Scotland, we should be considering more imaginative uses which include meaningful activities and community supports. This might involve work, volunteering or education, mentoring, attending an alcohol recovery group or family activities focused on

parenting."

More information: The Scottish report and briefing paper summary are available online at emeu.leeds.ac.uk/reports/

Provided by University of Stirling

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