

New research paints bleak picture of repeat violence in Scotland

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Repeat victims of violence do not report to the police, even in cases

involving serious injury and hospitalization, a new study has found.

Researchers based at the Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research (SCCJR) discovered that those experiencing repeat [violence](#) do not seek support due to a mistrust of authorities, social rules around 'no grassing' and the risks associated with identifying as a victim.

Official crime statistics have shown more than half the victims of violence in Scotland do not report it to the police, which means little is known about this group's experiences.

The study, which is the first of its kind in Scotland, featured 95 in-depth interviews with people who have experienced repeat violence and community workers who support them. Participants were mainly recruited from anonymized urban, town and rural locations with high levels of deprivation and violence.

Dr. Susan A. Batchelor, a senior lecturer at the University of Glasgow, and co-author of the study, said, "It is well established that violence is underreported to the police, especially in under-resourced communities and among marginalized groups, who experience higher levels of victimization."

"Our research provides insight from people who are not counted in official statistics, giving us a unique insight into the meaning and impact of repeat violence. Many of those we spoke to described having become accustomed to the continuous threat of violence and of having to cope on their own because they could not access formal support."

Most of the people who participated in the research had multiple experiences of violent victimization across the life course. As well as experiencing violence as children within the [family home](#) and as [young people](#) within the community, many had been on the receiving end of

violence within institutional settings, including children's homes, schools, prisons, and homeless hostels and hotels. These experiences contributed to a sense that the world was a [dangerous place](#), where you could not rely on others, including the authorities.

As Dr. Batchelor explained, "There was a deep sense of resignation about the inevitability of violence among the people we interviewed because their repeated experiences of trauma and harm had left them feeling like nobody cares, and no one is coming to help. The very small number of participants who had an experience of reporting victimization to the police or another authority felt disbelieved or discredited—and this was often linked to their status as 'homeless', 'a drug user', or 'an ex-offender'."

The research found that people belonging to marginalized groups can get caught up in a vicious circle of victimization, disadvantage, and further victimization.

"Participants told us about leaving home to escape domestic violence or drug-related exploitation. Finding themselves homeless, they were then placed in emergency accommodation in areas characterized by concentrated disadvantage, increasing their exposure to violence. Yet they often felt unable to report victimization in this context, due to social rules around 'no grassing' and/or fear of retaliation. Some were even excluded from victim support services because of their accommodation or substance use status. Isolation meant that drug and alcohol use was a common coping mechanism," said Dr. Batchelor.

Co-author Dr. Caitlin Gormley, a lecturer at the University of Glasgow, said the [social pressures](#) on men to be tough meant violence was almost expected of them. She said, "Young men, especially in deprived communities, are often under chronic pressure to live up to hyper-masculine ideas of 'the hardman' and 'protector' which means they can

find themselves in dangerous situations, increasing their likelihood of becoming victims of violence. Yet men receive less recognition as victims and there is a lack of services targeted to their needs."

In the report's recommendations, the researchers suggest communities could play a critical future role in preventing violence. Dr. Gormley said, "We have seen the benefits of taking a public health approach to violence prevention in Scotland and need to continue to develop community resources. Our findings also point to the value of community policing presence."

"Histories of marginalization are associated with a lack of trust in state institutions which contributes to a culture of self-reliance, reluctance to engage with justice services, and further social isolation. The people we spoke to had a strong preference for informal resolutions and for local, peer-led, support. More sustainable funding for grassroots community projects that promote strong participation, led by people with lived experience, could be the key to ensuring these hidden groups are not only seen but are engaged in getting the support that they want."

More information: Report: [www.gov.scot/publications/repe ...
ualitative-approach/](https://www.gov.scot/publications/repeat-violence-in-scotland-2023-09-04/pages/10-qualitative-approach/)

Provided by University of Glasgow

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