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CRIME PREVENTION AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SAFER COMMUNITIES EVIDENCE MATRIX SCOTLAND (SCEMS)

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THE Safer Communities Evidence Matrix Scotland (SCEMS) is a knowledge exchange tool which aims to provide easy access to evidence on policing and community safety from Scotland and farther afield. It has emerged against the backdrop of a collaborative working arrangement between the Scottish Institute for Policing Research (SIPR) and the Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy (CEBCP) at George Mason University (GMU). The collaboration formed from SIPR and CEBCP's mutual interest and leadership in not only generating impactful research, but translating and exchanging research and analysis into practical outputs for policing.

A Shared Interest: translating research evidence and the evidence-based policing matrix

One of CEBCP's tools became a focus in this exchange – the Evidence-Based Policing Matrix (Lum, 2009; Lum et al., 2011). Developed by the CEBCP's director Cynthia Lum and her colleagues with the support of the US Department of Justice, the Matrix is an interactive web-based tool which houses all police crime-control intervention research of moderate to high methodological quality, designed to provide law enforcement officials with easy access to the research knowledge on effective crime prevention measures. Through the Matrix, the authors collect, store, summarise, visualise and generalise from high quality evaluations of police crime control measures, updating it each year. The overall goal is to facilitate the use of existing knowledge in policing, and to serve as a resource for agencies in developing strategies and tactics for their own needs that have elements of successful interventions.

To achieve this, the Matrix classifies and maps rigorous evaluations of police interventions (see <http://cebcp.org/evidence-based-policing/the-matrix/>) based on three very common dimensions of crime prevention strategies: the nature and type of target, the degree to which the strategy is reactive or proactive, and how tailored a strategy is to a particular problem. Doing this allows clusters of studies and their findings to emerge revealing generalisations about crime prevention tactics that the police can deploy. For example, law enforcement officers are more likely to make an impact on crime when they design tactics that are place-based (rather than focused only on individuals), proactive (for example, using crime analysis to anticipate problems) and focused or tailored to a particular problem at hand.

The Matrix has become a starting point in disseminating information from a large body of research in a free and user-friendly online format to police officers. Further, by filtering for research with at least a moderate threshold of methodological quality, the Matrix provided the law enforcement community with the most reliable information on evaluated crime prevention efforts by the police.

How has the Safer Communities Evidence Matrix Scotland (SCEMS) developed?

SCEMS began in the context of police reform, with similar goals of linking research with practice. In late 2011, the then lead of the Reform Team's Local Policing Work Stream approached Prof. Ken Scott and Dr Liz Aston for advice on best practice in local policing. Scott and Aston applied for and received a SIPR 'Improving Police Action through Knowledge Transfer' grant, and during

2012 attended the ACPOS Local Policing Working Group meetings and provided advice on evidence relating to good practice in local policing. After hearing about the Matrix at a SIPR /Scottish Government event, Scott and Aston decided to develop a similar knowledge-translation tool on research related to local policing, which developed into the Scottish Local Policing Evidence Database (SLoPED).

Having looked at Lum et al.'s Matrix, it was clear that some amendments would need to be made in order to develop something which would be suited to the Scottish context. For example, the Matrix includes only those studies which are at least quasi-experimental (that is, at a minimum, the intervention was tested with the presence of a comparable comparison group) or that use rigorous time series methods. However, similar studies on policing interventions at that methodological threshold in Scotland are scarce.

A decision was made to include grey literature from the Scottish context and studies which use a broader range of methods, including qualitative research and 'conceptual' pieces such as literature reviews and theoretical or policy documents. In order to reflect the principles of the Police and Fire Reform Scotland Act (2012), the focus moved beyond crime reduction as the sole outcome of interest to also include community engagement and partnership working (Aston and Scott, 2013). However, the intention of SLoPED mirrored the Matrix - to provide key messages from the body of relevant literature that could be easily accessed by police practitioners.

Subsequently it became apparent that the idea appealed to organisations beyond the Police, and a decision was

made to look at broadening the scope beyond local policing, and developing it in line with the Building Safer Communities agenda. In 2014, Aston and Scott received a small SIPR grant to conduct a scoping exercise on the development of the Safer Communities Evidence Matrix Scotland (SCEMS). As a result the remit has been expanded beyond the policing principles, so in addition to 'community engagement', 'crime reduction' and 'partnership working' the Y axis now includes 'harm reduction' and 'reducing reoffending' (see Figure 1 and Aston et al., 2015).

It was clear that a user should also be able to gain a visual message and generalisations from the research when they look at SCEMS and how entries are distributed. Therefore, the X axis now reflects the 'policing approach', on a scale from 'reactive', to 'proactive' and 'highly proactive'. Additionally, the SCEMS takes inspiration from the Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research's 'Security of Mega Events Research Grid' (SCCJR /Hamilton-Smith et al. 2015). The intention is that SCEMS will become a dynamic matrix which will also show, for example, how successful police strategies are, the scope of the research (such as individuals, groups, communities and so on) and the research methodology employed (see Figure 1 below).

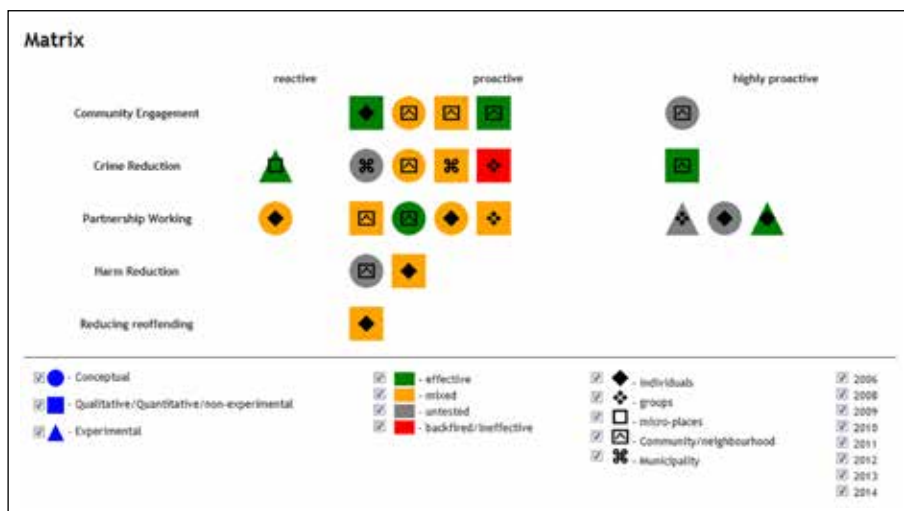


Figure 1 The Safer Communities Evidence Matrix Scotland

What are the next steps for SCEMS?

Police Scotland and partners have welcomed the development of a system which would allow users to readily access relevant research and help guide them as they seek to address policing and community safety challenges. Thus far one focus group has been conducted with a selection of local stakeholders (various representatives from Police Scotland, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, Scottish Government, Edinburgh City Council, and Lothian and Borders Community Justice Authority). Partners are keen on the idea of having a single place where evidence relating to safer communities can be accessed and used to inform decisions about what course of action to take. Various helpful suggestions were made, particularly in relation to additional ways in which entries could be classified in order to filter searches, for example, by timescale of intervention, target population, age, and geographical area. The intention is to pursue funding which would support the development of SCEMS and enable its delivery as a fully functioning and accessible tool for use by the police and partner organisations. The development phase would involve further consultation with a broader range of users (front line practitioners and managers in a range of organisations), focusing on their requirements.

At the outset, the reform of Scottish policing understandably concentrated on restructuring and delivering cost savings. However, two years on there is a need to focus on evidence based policing, in particular learning from best research and practice in relation to the delivery of local policing. Indeed, moving towards using what we know from research evidence to develop strategies that can prevent crime, reduce

harm, improve community relations and increase partnership working contributes to cost-effectiveness. There should also be an emphasis on ensuring that the principles enshrined in the Police and Fire Reform Scotland Act are upheld and underpin the activity of Police Scotland and its partners. This involves community engagement and partnership working, and in this context it is argued that the development and use of a tool like SCEMS becomes extremely important.

Most significantly, this endeavour and other exchanges between SIPR and the CEBCP highlight the importance of international partnerships and the sharing of ideas between scholars and practitioners. Although each country seems on the surface vastly different with regard to their policing practices, digging deeper reveals many more shared interests and common challenges.

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