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A public health approach to reducing violence: Can data linkage help to reduce demand on blue light services?

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Scotland has witnessed a remarkable reduction in violent crime in recent years. In part, the success of this reduction has been attributed to a 'public health' approach, which includes improvements in partnership working across multiple agencies – especially law enforcement and public health. Nevertheless, the emergency services continue to deal with a high volume of violent incidents, an increasing number of which involve some aspect of underlying vulnerability. Policy makers are keen to understand more about how aspects of vulnerability impact on violent crime, especially as this is a primary driver for policies like the public health approach to reducing violence.

In a project that brings together stakeholders from the Scottish Government, Police Scotland and the Scottish Ambulance Service, the Scottish Centre for Administrative Data Research aims to examine patterns of ambulance callouts and/or hospital admissions involving people who experience violence. The study, which will link together a range of health datasets, will bring together data about violence-related incidents with wider information about an individual's history of drug misuse, alcohol-related conditions and mental health problems. The study will also examine the extent to which violence and vulnerability contribute to increasing risk of premature death.

This paper will focus on the development of the research proposal and the opportunities and challenges of trying to bring together data from different emergency service organisations. If possible, it will present preliminary findings from the research. It is anticipated that this study will support the development of further violence prevention policies in Scotland, especially in terms of helping to identify opportunities for better partnership working and points of intervention that could reduce demand on blue light services to deal with violent incidents.

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