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Hester, Richard ORCID logoORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9008-0136> (2020) "It's become fashionable": Practitioner perspectives on football hooliganism involving young people. In: Social Vulnerabilities Conference 2020, University of Gloucestershire, 15/07/2020, 15/07/2020, Online - University of Gloucestershire. (Unpublished)

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Richard Hester & Nick Pamment

“It’s become fashionable”:
Practitioner perspectives on football
hooliganism involving young people

Accepted into the International Journal of Police Science & Management (22/6/20)

Why research this topic?

- Previous experience in football policing – DFO
- Major issues with ‘youth risk groups’
- Considered to be a national and emerging problem (Hopkins & Hamilton-Smith, 2014) by senior police officers (Bridge, 2010; Burke, 2016; Keegan, 2018)
- No co-ordinated response guidance for police/clubs
- No previous research specifically considers this issue
- Opportunity to divert under 18s from CJS and provide evidence based solutions

Pictures – Richard Hester





Methods

Freedom of Information (FOI) Requests

- FOI is an underutilised tool in social science research (Walby & Luscombe, 2017)
- Submitted to Home Office to establish data trends on youth arrest, FBOs and disorder incidents.

Questionnaires

- Online survey aimed at 2 specific research populations – DFOs and club safety officers.
- Sent to all professional clubs and police forces in England & Wales
- Questions aimed at establishing how prominent the issue is, and how it is managed.

Interviews

- 6 DFOs and 3 safety officers across 7 interviews.
- Covered all leagues from Premiership to National South, so as representative as possible.

Data collection from November 2018 to May 2019



Findings – the scale of the issue

FOI

Established that data is present but not disentangled

Survey data

80% of respondents considered youth hooliganism had increased over the past 5 seasons

Police officer comments:

DFO1 – *‘...it’s almost like it’s become fashionable. It’s got a lot worse since the Euros in my opinion. It was getting bigger before, but it’s definitely come back into fashion’.*

DFO5 – *‘Youth groups are problematic now, a lot more problematic. And it’s for me, it sounds bizarre, older lads understand the rules of engagement with other hooligans, youth groups don’t. They’ll go for scarfers and shirt wearers, and try and start disorder with them...across the board I think, home or away everywhere we go it seems to be the younger groups’.*



Findings – the use of FBOs

Participants stated that FBOs are used as a last resort on under 18s, however, there is potential for social desirability bias (Brancati, 2018, p. 105) in the answers provided.

The notion of proportionality to youth justice and FBOs isn't always followed

SO2 – speaking about 2 under 18s who had received FBOs for possession of pyrotechnics:

'...I thought it was quite harsh that they got a banning order against him....'

'...the other one was just a normal kid who thought it'd be fun to take a flare to the ground...pleaded guilty at the court and they gave him a banning order...which I thought was quite harsh, because I honestly think, with hindsight I could have just dealt with it internally'.

However positive schemes were identified to divert under 18s



Findings – other identified issues

Austerity

- Police not having enough resources to effectively tackle the issues
- Clubs claiming that low level offending is pushed onto them to deal with through club bans, ABCs etc.

Labelling of young persons

DFO1 – *‘we’re feeding it...we the police make them stronger and more confident and give them kudos by following them around, guarding them and stuff like that’.*

- The police ‘stop checking’ young persons may have the effect of labelling them and increasing the likelihood of future delinquency (Wiley et al., 2013), but the police don’t feel they can let the behaviour go unchecked

Safeguarding

- Police officers / clubs may be left ‘looking after’ under 18s who are vulnerable, intoxicated and hundreds of miles from home:

DFO5 – *‘we’ve got to engage with them, we can’t just let them carry on because they will get hurt eventually and I don’t want to be making that phone call to someone’s parents’.*



Solutions

Practical measures:

- Letters to parents – followed by – Home visits / School visits
- Club meeting, sign code of conduct (ABC), followed by short club bans if breached.
- Community / club based projects – eg. SO2 – arranged football match with youth group, police and club staff (involved a lecture though!)
- Community punishments for more serious offending – young offenders doing work based at the football club as a restorative disposal. Resulted in low reoffending rates and is in line with 'child friendly justice' (Goldson & Muncie, 2015)

However all this requires police forces and clubs working together to identify these young persons initially and then manage them. Policing needs the resources to do this effectively, otherwise it may become a bigger problem.



Conclusion

- Football hooliganism involving under 18s is a growing area of concern among practitioners, but currently insufficient understanding of the problem nationally
- Practitioners appear to be embedding proportionality and 'child friendly justice' into their solutions, but it is apparent that inappropriate FBOs are being issued to youths
- Range of solutions available, but require intensive police resourcing and a multi agency approach to be successful
- **Key message – if young people are diverted at the earliest possible stage, then the general problem of football hooliganism may be lessened in the future.**



Thank you very much for listening, are there any questions?

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