



## Knowledge Exchange Seminar Series (KESS)

*...is a forum that encourages debate on a wide range of research findings, with the overall aim of promoting evidence-based policy and law-making within Northern Ireland*



# The role of intimidation in death by suicide in Northern Ireland

**Presented by**  
**Sharon Mallon PhD, Open University**

**Understanding Suicide Collaborators**  
**Professor Gerry Leavey, Ulster University (PI)**  
**Karen Galway PhD, Queen's University Belfast**  
**Lynette Hughes PhD, Northern Ireland Association for Mental Health**  
**Janeét Rondon-Sulbaran, Ulster University**  
**Michael Rosato PhD, Ulster University**

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# Overview

1. Introduction to the topic of intimidation/PPA
2. Discussion of the potential link between intimidation and suicide
3. Overview of the Understanding Suicide (US) Project
4. Brief Findings from US project
5. Summary and Recommendations



# Overview PPA/Intimidation

- Paramilitary Punishment Attacks (PPA): widely accepted to be shootings or beatings.
- Tend to be carried out/ directed at young working class men by members of their own community.
- It is claimed they are used to exercise political and social control over communities.
- Darby's (1986) concept of 'intimidation' is broader. It includes the exercise and/or threat of violence allowing for the inclusion of exile orders, curfews and other aggressive threats.

# Northern Ireland's Insidious Violence

Hamill (2011) claimed beatings are viewed as an appropriate response to persistent offending by these individuals.

Knox (2000) called them “The ‘Deserving’ Victims of Political Violence”.

The following is a quote from an online forum discussing the issue:

*“And it's not just those who assist the British, it's mainly drug dealers that receive the beating/shooting/punishment, or joyriders or people who attack or steal from their own community.”*





## UK

### Hunt for 'punishment beating' gang



Ian Price is recovering in hospital after the attack on a 10-year-old boy in a paramilitary style in Northern Ireland.



Ian Price is recovering from a broken arm, several cuts and multiple bruises after being attacked with baseball bats and nails in Newtownabbey.

His mother, Grace Price, said she was shocked when she heard what had happened.

She said that at first she feared he was just going to die, but he just went from under me, nobody knew I got that sort of news," she said. "I was any other mother, it is the most terrible thing that has happened to me."



Ian Price: "They were beating me."

Security minister says it was impossible to prevent the attack.

### NI leaders condemn punishment beatings



FAIT says victims are now giving information about the gunmen.

Politicians with links to the main Northern Ireland paramilitary groups have told the secretary of state they disapprove of so-called "punishment beatings".



Mark Devenport reports on the latest wave of punishment attacks.

Mo Mowlam met leaders of the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP), Sinn Féin and the Ulster Democratic Party (UDP) on Monday.

All three groups assured her they did not condone the spate of violent attacks - but there were signs of resentment.

#### 'Don't lecture us'

PUP spokesman Billy Hutchinson said he resented the way the meetings had been called and Martin McGuinness of Sinn Féin refused to meet Dr Mowlam after discovering the sole agenda was punishment beatings.



Martin McGuinness refused to attend the meeting.

kneecappings stop.

The pressure group Families Against Intimidation and Terror (FAIT) says that this month alone the IRA had carried out four shootings and 12 beatings while loyalists groups shot six people, beat 15, intimidated 37 and forced 33 into exile.

The violence has sparked the UK Opposition leader William Hague to call for a halt to the release of paramilitary prisoners until the

# 1999

*"Punishment beating and shootings are endemic in Northern Ireland"*  
*BBC 25<sup>th</sup> Jan 1999*



Punishment beating and shootings are endemic in Northern Ireland



2012-14

# “Two punishment style attacks per week” Belfast Telegraph Nov 2014

## Punishment attacks: The fear of irrelevancy drives paramilitary vigilantism

Dissidents claim they carry out so-called punishment attacks to fill a 'policing vacuum'. But, like the Provisionals before, it is a parody of policing - not a substitute for it, says Mal O'Doherty.



Punishment Attack: Kneecapping in an entry in belfast city centre. Picture posed

November 4 2014

One of the first things that a paramilitary organisation learns to do is to impose discipline on the community within which it operates. It may rationalise this as a 'policing vacuum', or representing the will of the community, but they all



And if there had never been a rift between the RUC and the Catholic community

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## Mother's anguish after she was ordered to bring son to be shot



The scene of a shooting in an alley in the Creggan area

By Donna Deeney  
April 30 2012

A Londonderry mother has spoken of her distress after she was forced to bring her son to paramilitaries and wait as they shot him.



The woman said that she was ordered to take the 18-year-old to a laneway in the Creggan area of the city where she waited and listened helplessly as he was shot in both legs.

The vigilante group Republican Action Against Drugs (RAAD) is being blamed for the punishment-style attack on Thursday.

It is believed that the teen was targeted by the terror group because he had been dealing

## Two 'punishment-style' attacks carried out every week in Northern Ireland



Increasing rise in attacks. Picture posed



Shootings or beatings are taking place on the streets of Northern Ireland, the Belfast Telegraph can reveal.



Shooting attacks are on the rise, police have reopened investigations into punishment attacks across the region in the past five years.

Until September this year there were 41 shootings or beatings in the region, according to loyalist and republican ceasefires.

There have been an average of two shootings every month.

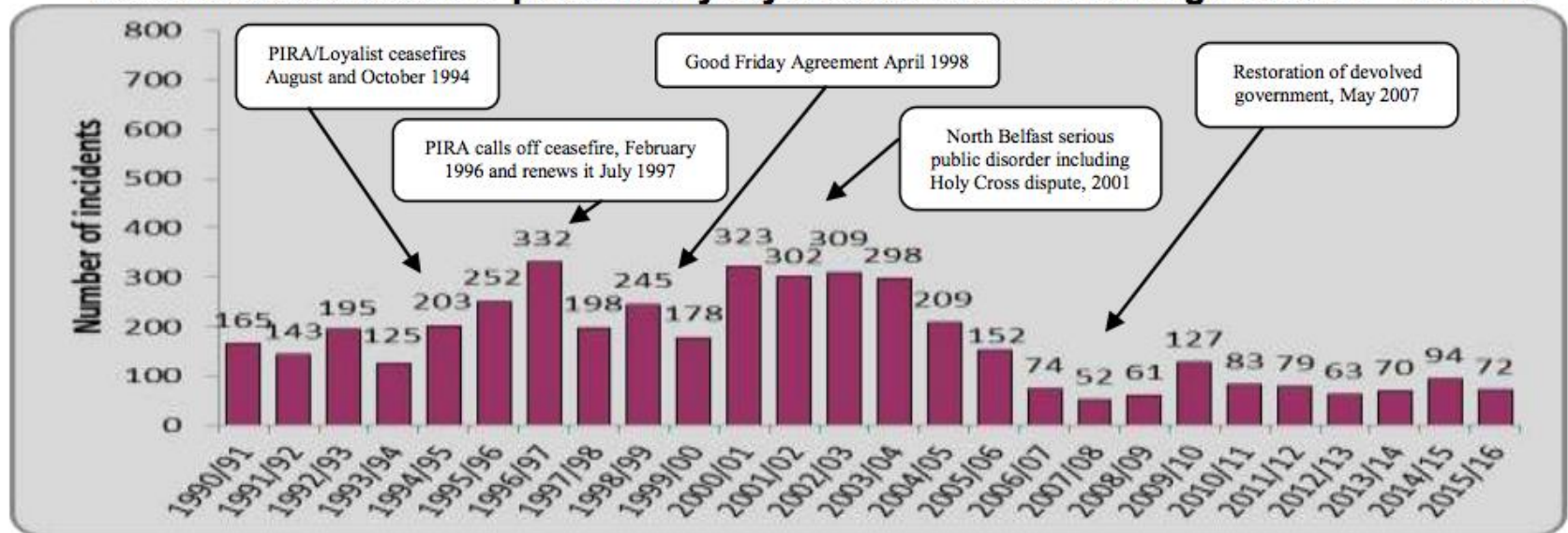
A man was shot in both legs in Londonderry last night, the second

man to be shot in both legs in the Shantallow area.

The man is believed to have been shot in the leg "by appointment" in the area of the city in the previous night.

# Police statistics on PPA

**Casualties as a result of paramilitary-style assaults and shootings 1990/91 – 2015/16**



<https://www.psni.police.uk/globalassets/inside-the-psni/our-statistics/security-situation-statistics/2016/may/annual-security-situation-statistics-report-2015-16.pdf>

# “...we have to do this...”

Interviewer: *Do you regret allowing him go?*

Mother: *In Northern Ireland this is acceptable, it happens. And we have to do this.*

Discussion about RAAD (Republicans Action Against Drugs), who were issuing appointments for punishment shootings.

Woman's hour 31<sup>st</sup> December 2012

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01phf4h#playt=0h29m28s>





# The 'imperfect peace'

- A report from OFMDFM estimated that in 2009-2010 there were 774 cases recorded cases of intimidation by paramilitaries in Northern Ireland (Matthews, 2012).
- 2013: Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission expressed concern about 'the worrying levels of paramilitary style attacks'.

# Broader Context in Northern Ireland

## Decline in terrorism: Rise in Suicide.

- Rates of suicide have risen dramatically since the ceasefire.
- There has been a number of key studies specifically looking at the context of Northern Ireland
- One study indicated that the cohort of men exposed to the troubles are at particular risk of suicide (O'Neil, 2014).
- Focus of much of the published research into the causes of suicide has been on historical and intergenerational trauma.

# Is there a link between suicide and intimidation?

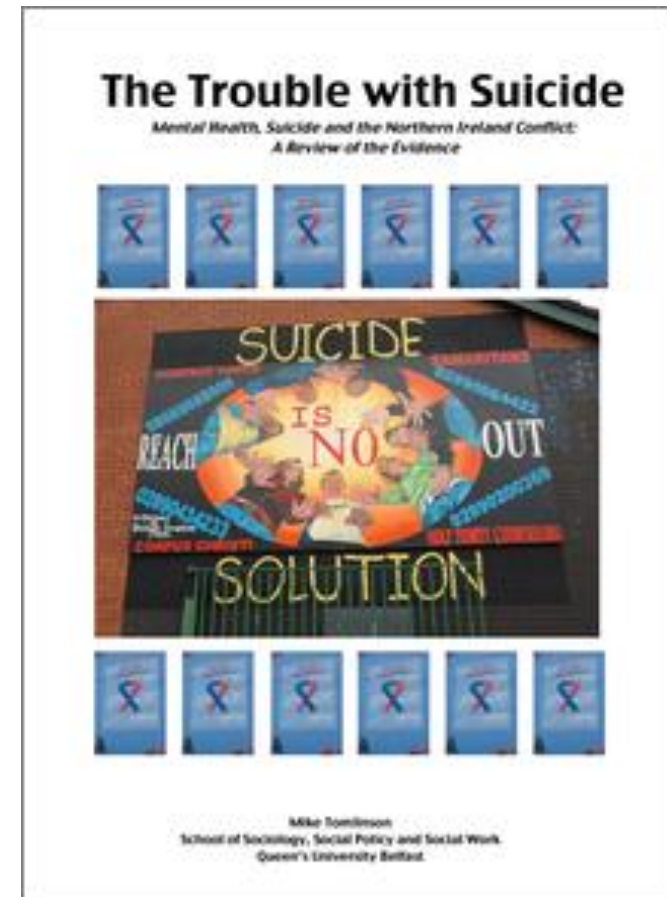
During a debate in 1996, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Mo Mowlam

- Listed 167 punishment beatings taking place in 1995
- Referenced two suicides that followed such beatings.

(Mo Mowlam, Hansard, 9 January 1996, col. 46).

“the sad situation in Northern Ireland is that the punishment beatings, the racketeering, the exclusions and even the pressure towards suicide among young people have all got worse since the joint agreement.”

(Geoffrey Clifton-Brown, Hansard, 10 March 2004, col. 1608)



# Tabloid Conclusions

*...the growth of suicide among young men in North Belfast can be attributed directly to 'punishment beatings'*  
*Sunday Life, 28 November 2004.*





# Anecdotal Evidence

A young man aged 21 from west Belfast hung himself on the railings of a motorway in Belfast. He had previously suffered a paramilitary 'punishment' attack, and had both his legs broken, because of his alleged involvement in 'joyriding' in the west Belfast area.

CAIN Chronology: Sunday 27 July 1997:

*The fact is that my son was viciously beaten by known IRA paramilitaries and continually intimidated right up to his death... There was continual intimidation by those so-called heroes or vigilantes who administer justice in their own form.*

*Thomas Clarke father of deceased man,*  
New Visions of Crime Victims (Hoyle & Young, 2002, p.67)



# Empirical Evidence

Evidence on paramilitary beatings presented to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee in 2001 made no mention of a link to suicide.

(Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, 2001,  
quoted in Tomlinson, 2007)

Despite the anecdotal evidence, we were unable to identify any studies that empirically examined any connection between intimidation and suicide.

# The psychological impact of intimidation

The lack of knowledge on the psychological impact of paramilitary beatings has been highlighted (Price, 1998).

Hamill's (2011) qualitative study, *The Hoods: Crime and Punishment*

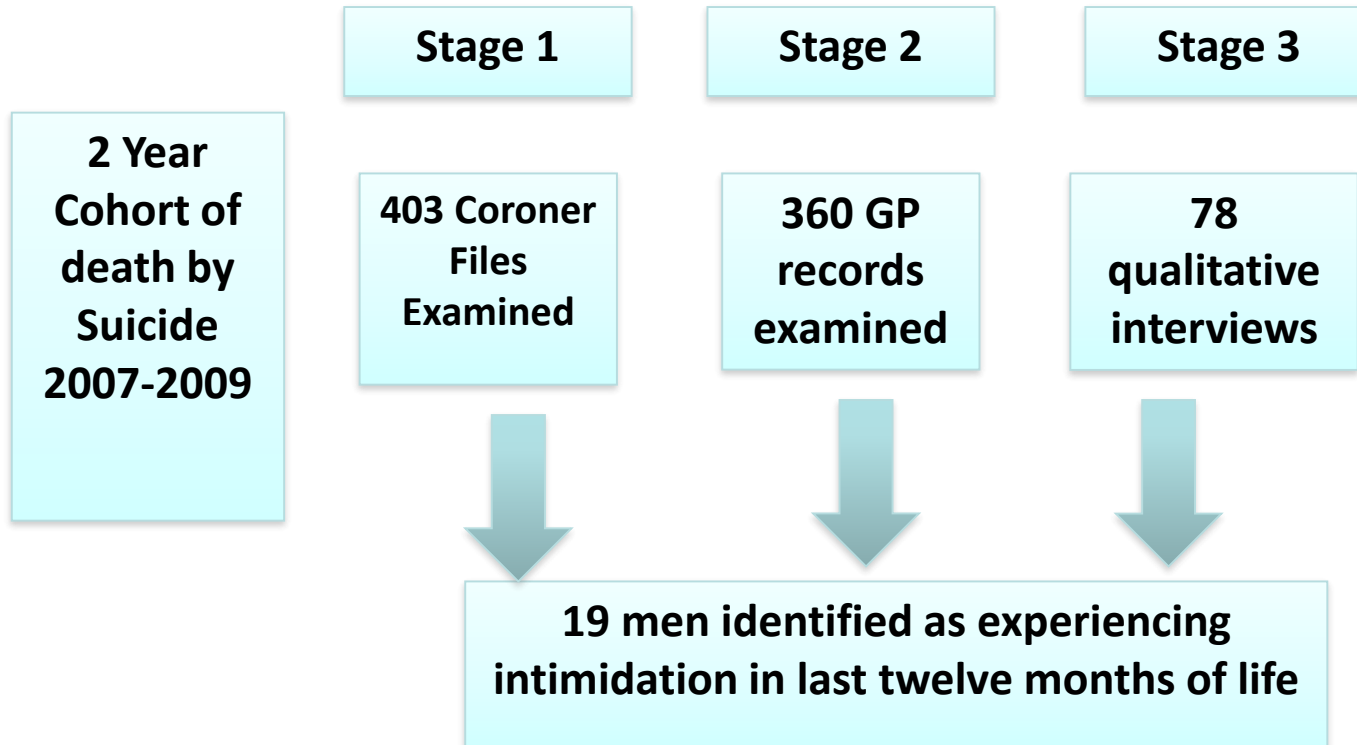
- over one third had experienced long periods of depression and had suicidal thoughts
- 22% admitted having attempted suicide
- many of the young people displayed symptoms of PTSD;  
a direct victim of a threat was quoted as saying  
*“my life's scary, and I can't sleep at nights 'cause I think I'm gonna get done (punished)”*

(Hamill, 2011 p.60).

# Understanding Suicide Project:

Help-seeking by people who died by suicide over a two year period (2007-2009)

As part of this we examined data for significant life events.





# Intimidation across life span

Table 1: Age range of men affected by intimidation

Age Range	Recent intimidation (n)	Males in this age range	% of Males in this age range
15-24	5	65	7.60%
25-44	10	144	6.90%
45-64	4	89	4.50%
>65	0	25	0
Total	19	323	5.90%

# Broad overview of the evidence

- For some of the men the most recent threat was part of a long term campaign of intimidation.
  - Over their lifetime at least 7 had experienced an actual PPA.
  - 4 had previously been exiled from Northern Ireland.
- **In all 19 cases the intimidation had recently been renewed.**
- Typical entry recorded by researchers from Coroner's records

*Assaulted with iron bars by two men one month prior to death, then received a threatening visit from another shortly before his death, mentioned fear of further assault to a friend.*

# Vignette 1: Defence against terror?

The first indication of any problems came four months before his death when it was noted in his GP records that he had been admitted with an overdose.

A friend has told him that the paramilitaries are after him and he would rather die than let them injure him.

The threat was issued in response to an incident that took place in a pub where he offended someone. He has been drinking a lot because his girlfriend has left him.

The notes indicated that the “threats appear to be real”.



# Vignette 2: Hopelessly helpseeking?

Man attends GP for anxiety six months prior to his death.

GP notes state that he has been threatened by paramilitaries, and is suffering from anxiety, he is referred to the CMHT they refuse diazepam as there is no mental illness.

Two weeks later he was assaulted.

Attends the GP in a very agitated state and is given diazepam at this point.

There are 8 further consultations between the first attendance and his suicide in which he complains about stress and anxiety and problems sleeping.

The final consultation takes place two weeks before his death.

This man had never attended the GP before for mental health. He never engages with the CMHT.



# Vignette 3: Fear or paranoia?

Psychiatrist noted that it was difficult to tell if the man had a paranoid personality or was having a reasonable response to threats.

As time continued the comments changed.

In the final appointment prior to the suicide it was noted that there is no psychiatric diagnosis and the response was appropriate given the threat the man faced.

# Role of the PSNI

*We know he was getting bullied because we've talked to people that seen him but they didn't know what it was about....the police didn't know nothing about it. When we found out what was going on we didn't want to involve the police because it would have brought up a lot of dirt and my mother didn't need to be going through that*

*Family member of a deceased man.*



# Overview

- In 19 cases evidence linking these suicides to intimidation was present in official documentation or reported by family members.
- Although the overall numbers were small, intimidation may be related to premature death of men to suicide (6% of the male cohort).
- In most cases, the intimidation occurred within a few months of the suicide, or were reiterated close to it, in some cases taking place on the day of the death itself.

# Pathways of support

Intimidation, in the form of actual or threatened violence, are a demonstration of power and control

They rely upon the instigation of fear.

It is fear, not anxiety that summed up the assessment of medical professionals who assessed and responded to these men.

Although medical professionals can usefully respond to the physical consequences of actual violence or the trauma of past experiences, their role in dealing with on going issues is limited.





# Defeat, hopelessness and entrapment

- In order to understand how suicide is linked to intimidation we need to better understand the psychological impact of these threats and the help seeking behaviour of men who experience them.
- Suicide research can help to theorize issues around these deaths and provide some guidance on how to respond to them.
- However, we also need to fundamentally change how these victims of crime are responded to within communities and our society.

# Proceed with Caution

- Secondary data has been used here to provide an analysis of a complex and poorly understood topic. However, empirical research exploring the link between suicide and intimidation is urgently needed.
- In this analysis we used Darby's definition of intimidation. Official reports are likely to rely upon physical violence that constitute PPA.
- The political sensitivities surrounding intimidation mean that future research should include key stakeholders who can help analyse and contextualise data.

# Recommendations/ Future Directions

- What is the role of the PSNI in these cases? How can we encourage the reporting of these crimes?
- What is the burden of care currently falling on primary care and other mental health professionals? How can they be supported or facilitated?
- The idea of an ‘Imperfect peace’ should be conclusively and publicly rejected. The issue of intimidation needs to be given considerable and serious prominence at a policy level.



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Assembly



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