Citywide Seminar Report on Drug-Related Intimidation in Communities

April 9th 2013, St. Andrew's Resource Centre

Introduction

Joan Byrne opened the seminar by explaining that this event was a further step in a series of steps that Citywide have taken in bringing people together on the issue of intimidation and the effects it has on the communities we live and work in. In 2011 Citywide hosted a seminar to discuss how intimidation was affecting people in local communities. This was followed by a wide consultation process which culminated in the production of the *2012 Citywide Policy Document*. This Policy Document committed us to pursuing concrete proposals for a coordinated response to the scourge of intimidation in our communities.

Over 80 participants from Community Drug Projects, Youth Services, Drugs Task Forces, Community Policing and Safety Forums across the country attended the seminar which consisted of three presentations, two table discussions and a research project proposal.

Presentation 1: Siobhan Maher - National Family Support Network

In 2006 and 2007 family members and family support groups started reporting issues of intimidation as a result of drug-related debt. Research was conducted in 2008 and the research was published the following year. The research resulted in the intimidation issue becoming Action 5 of the National Drug Strategy and a framework was developed to provide an appropriate response to the issue of drug-related intimidation in the communities

Reporting Programme

The purpose of the programme that NFSN established in partnership with the Garda National Drugs Unit is to respond to the needs of drug users and family members who are experiencing drug related intimidation.

Inspectors have been selected by the Garda Commissioner to respond to this issue and the Inspectors appointed will always be at a management level within the force and will liaise directly with the Superintendent in relation to the case.

Family members can meet with an Inspector for an informal meeting and Gardaí will:

- Provide practical safety information.

- Provide advice in relation to particular threats or instances of intimidation.

- Provide information on appropriate drug support services for the individual in the family who is accruing drug debts.

- Outline how to make a formal complaint, what is involved, what happens after and possible outcomes.

- It is the decision of the person being intimidated if they want to make a formal complaint.

- If a person wishes to meet with the Inspector, although are apprehensive to meet in the Garda station, or to meet with an Inspector in uniform, they may request to meet the Inspector in a neutral venue with the Inspector in plain clothes.

The 'Responding to Intimidation Policy' (QuADS) & Training Seminar:

- Provide services and workers with a good practice guide to responding to disclosures of intimidation.
- Provide a consistent response to family members and service users.
- Increase the confidence of services and workers in their ability to respond to the issue.
- Provide workers with an opportunity to practice some of the skills required to respond to the issue.
- Provide workers with an opportunity to meet and work in partnership with the nominated Inspector.

Feedback on Training:

"On a personal note there was no place more important for me to be that day and you helped clarify the steps I need to take in a very difficult situation I have found myself in the course of my work. I have already met my inspector for my area and things are much better."

"I will feedback to my organisation how worthwhile I felt today was. I am delighted to have worked and met in person with my area Inspector."

"I work with families within a treatment centre. They are so frightened. I feel more informed and equipped to work with them."

Leaflet and online video:

- Increase awareness of the issue and the reporting programme.
- Provide greater clarity on the programme to family members and service users.
- Provide workers with a resource that they can use in their work.
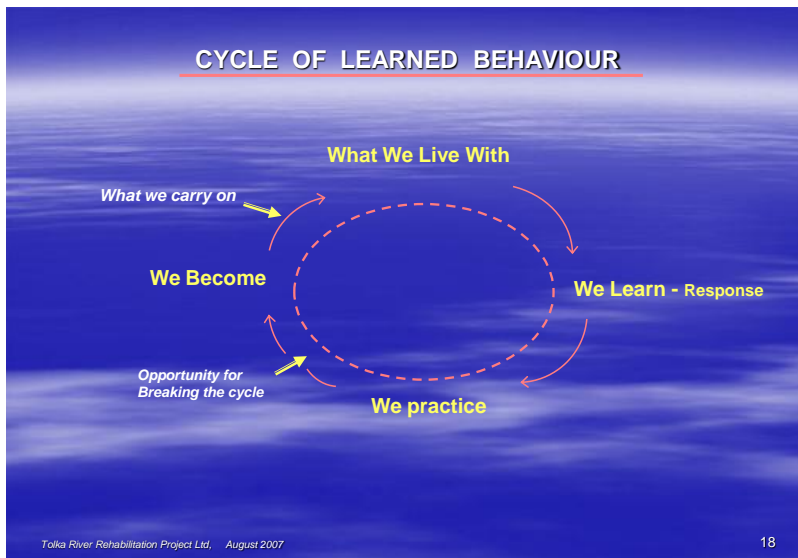
The video is available at:

http://www.drugs.ie/features/feature/the_drug_related_intimidation_programme

Presentation 2: Philip Jennings, Safer Blanchardstown: *Melting the Iceberg of Fear*

The need for research on the underlying causes of intimidation had been increasingly raised in Safer Blanchardstown – a local Community Policing Forum. The research was then carried out by Philip Jennings who compiled a report entitled: *Melting the Iceberg of Fear – A Collective Response*.

The report discusses the underlying causes of intimidation in the community as the following:

- A child's surroundings determine their choices.
- Powerless children can gain power by intimidating adults through their behaviour.
- Children and adults are socialised into intimidation.

Philip uses the iceberg analogy to show the three orders involved in drug-related intimidation.

Lower Order: Involves children and young people damaging property etc. Gardai do not respond to this.

Middle Order: This group are usually early school leavers. Interventions must be used to stop the progression from lower to middle order.

Higher Order: Drug gangs intimidating families of drug users.

Collaboration

- The issue of drug-related intimidation should be tackled in a co-ordinated and consistent way.
- Safer Blanchardstown have been working on an Interagency Working Agreement for three years.
- Under 18's services are expected to sign up to the agreement in order to reduce anti-social behaviour and early school leaving.
- Priority and prolific offenders should sign up to interagency agreements as this has been successful in the U.K. at reducing offences.
- Community Information Networks can work to get information from people in the community.
- There must be a link made between buying small amounts of drugs to the drugs trade and related issues.
- Agencies must consider their own policies and work together in an area so as to exchange information.

Invest to Save

The UK Home Office Research Development and Statistics Unit 2010 published the costs of crime as follows:

- Common Assault……………..€764

- Wounding…………………..€24,783

- Sexual Assault…………...€26,912

- Serious wounding…….€184,096

- Homicide……………..€1,558,000

This money would be better allocated to interventions.

Philip concluded his presentation by pointing out that there is very little research on the phenomenon of drug-related intimidation and that there is a need for further national research.

Table Discussion 1: Participants were asked to discuss the impact of various levels of intimidation in their communities as well as the challenges and opportunities in developing responses.

Impacts of Intimidation:

- People are afraid to talk about it in local areas and get involved in local forums.
- Grooming of young people to courier drugs.
- Intimidation within families with mothers being most vulnerable to intimidation.
- Intimidation between families.
- Intimidation has become *the* business and debts are sold on.
- Access to money has become more difficult so that people cannot get loans to pay off debts.
- Intimidation tactics have escalated and become more extreme (e.g. rape).
- Intimidation behaviour has become normalised and is therefore tolerated.

Challenges:

- Intimidation is the cause of many health issues (e.g. stress, depression) but this is not identified in services.
- Although young children are involved, representatives from schools and Department of Education are not participating in forums and other meetings.
- There are no consequences for young people engaging in anti-social behaviour and services are limited in terms of scope and availability (e.g. services not available outside office hours).
- Hard to get evidence safely (people fear being labelled as 'rats'**)**
- Not enough robust evidence on what works and why (Family Support Network review- need to know what is not working).
- Not enough focus on outcomes.
- Hard to distinguish drug-related intimidation from more general social intimidation.
- Responses are not coordinated so for instance housing authorities can make matters worse when they are housing people.

Opportunities:

- Training from NFSN.
- The implementation of case management under NDRIC.
- Learning from international models.
- Developing collective responses rather than individual.
- Learning what makes campaigns effective (public education on cannabis use for instance has not been successful in reducing use).

Presentation 3: Niamh Hourigan, *Intimidation in Community Contexts: Insights from Limerick*

After speaking with local people from housing estates in Limerick after regeneration, Niamh Hourigan found out that many people lived in fear there and took this as her starting point for a research project which culminated in ***Understanding Limerick, Social Inclusion and Change (2011)*** which:

- Is an edited collection on poverty and crime in Limerick featuring work of a range of scholars.
- Includes her own three year research project on intimidation, fear, feuding and organised crime in the city conducted between 2007-2010.
- Consisted of 221 interviews with local residents, those on the fringes of criminal gangs, community leaders, Gardai, 100 hours of participation observation (one third of which was conducted at night).

Definition of Intimidation:

- To frighten or overawe, especially in order to make a person do what one wants (Oxford Dictionaries).
- To coerce, inhibit, implies the presence of a fear inspiring force.
- Extensive legal definitions of 'harassment' yet fewer legal definitions of 'intimidation' which is more likely to impact on socially excluded communities.

Intimidation, Power and Fear

- At core, intimidation is about power.
- It can take place in a range of contexts – family, workplace, playground.
- However, residents of communities with high levels of criminal activity and anti-social behaviour are particularly vulnerable to intimidation – why?

Code of the Street

- Socially included people earn respect through their jobs and gain status.
- Long-term unemployed people don't have the same form of status and seek status through different means.
- Lack of respect for residents, (particularly men in socially excluded communities) results in 'scumbag stigma.'
- They come to seek a new way of getting respect – fear based respect.
- Children are socialised into this process from age seven onwards (Code of the Street – Elijah Anderson).
- This creates a 'hard man' hierarchy rooted in violence.
- They must prove their toughness by fighting and intimidating others.
- Result – becoming a person 'to be feared.'
- There are high money rewards and power in intimidation.

In an interview with a local resident Stella, she comments:

"They'll never work to be powerful. They'll never go to school to be powerful. They'll never achieve anything in life, they know themselves, the only way they can achieve anything is to sell drugs and intimidate the livin' daylights outa someone, and get an utter feelin' of power out of them, of gettin' rid of people."

Intimidation – Random and Organised

- Acts of intimidation can be random – linked to intoxication, immediate conflicts and acting out behaviours – particularly in areas without a strong criminal justice presence and general atmosphere of being 'out of control.'
- Broken window syndrome (Wilson and Kelling, 1982).
- Areas with high concentration of the 'disadvantaged of the disadvantaged.'
- Addiction, money-lending, unstable family structures.

Organised Intimidation

- Maintain control over pockets of estates where criminal activities are being undertaken.
- Discourage people from giving evidence in court.
- Force people to vacate homes which might be needed for distribution or other purposes.

Family Gang Criminal Hierarchies Evident in Limerick

- Serious players – high position within gangs, usually organise rather than engage in acts of violence.
- Elicit huge fear.
- Local residents may be afraid to make eye contact with these individuals.
- Serious players are hyper vigilant for signs of resistance to their authority within their families, gang structures and local communities.

Foot Soldiers

- Between 15 and 22, trying to make their way up the gang hierarchy.
- Often engage in acts designed to manifest their toughness and elicit fear in others.
- Sometimes ordered to engage in acts of violence.
- They themselves can be intimidated if they fail in tasks, steal money.
- Their families are very vulnerable to intimidation in some cases.

Child-Gang Participants

- Some anti-social behaviour amongst younger children linked to gang activities, some behaviours are random.
- Why do children engage in anti-social behaviour?
- In Limerick, it was believed that kids engaged in anti-social behaviour because they were bored.
- If boredom was addressed, behaviour would stop.

Voluntary Risk Taking

- By 2010, 24 major youth intervention schemes and 10 sports development projects, yielded only 25% reduction in referrals to Garda Diversion.
- Jack Katz – The Seduction of Crime (1988).
- Stephen Lyng – Edgework.
- Buzz of edgework linked to feeling of control and power.

William Miller

"Delinquency as a form of edgework may represent an attempt to escape an otherwise oppressive, constraining and alienating social world... It is the intense feelings of fear and excitement and the sense of control [power] that make the edgework experience, in this case, delinquency, particularly seductive."

What are the Consequences of these Systems of Intimidation?

- In his book Discipline and Punish, Foucault writes 'how docile bodies are produced by organising individuals in practices of surveillance which train comportment.'
- Through systems of surveillance, gangs are able to transform their neighbours into 'docile bodies.'

Another resident Ann says:

"You know what they really want is for you to be down on yourself so that you don't believe you can have any other life. They want you to keep your head down and just put up with it, even if there are gunshots comin' in your window and you're lyin' on the floor with your kids... What they want is for you to keep your head down and just shut the fuck up and accept that that's your life, full stop."

In the UK Manyard Identified Three Levels of Intimidation:

- Many families viewed the likelihood of intimidation as being so strong that they would never consider giving evidence to the police (between 3-14% of crime not reported because of this fear).
- Intimidation related to physical assaults or damage to property – 13% of crime reported by victims and 9% reported by witnesses led to this type of intimidation.

Intimidation which Result in Deaths

- Range of relevant cases in Limerick - both solved and unsolved
- One Garda commented 'nearly every day I have an incident where there are concerns about witness intimidation. It's the first obstacle in any major investigation.'
- Weakness of witness protection
- Logic of Feuds

Responses to Intimidation

- Community Policing
- Earlier and more effective juvenile justice and child protection interventions designed to specifically target anti-social behaviour.
- Improving access to criminal justice system and responsiveness of Gardaí.
- Greater links with housing Department.
- Anti-social behaviour is a criminal justice rather than a housing issue – use of term 'community violence.'

Johnny Connolly – A Research Project Proposal from the Health Research Board

There is major gap in public knowledge about drug-related intimidation. The issue of fear was highlighted by Tony Gregory in the 1980's yet the drugs trade is very different now as is the level of fear and intimidation.

- The issue of intimidation is now on the agenda of the Drugs Strategy.
- Intimidation is a way of making money.
- The intimidation is more violent and younger people are involved now.
- The violence is hidden in local communities and not known about nationally.
- There is a need to reveal hidden community violence because there is little research on it.
- There is a need to build an evidence base.

Johnny proposed that the Health Research Board would carry out a piece of research to access this hidden information about drug-related intimidation which could be used to highlight community violence and intimidation to policy-makers and the wider public and also to identify approaches adopted in other countries in response to the issue.

In relation to this piece of research, Johnny spoke about the need to find creative ways of gathering information on this issue that will respect the sensitivities and issues of confidentiality that surround it:

- Possible ways of gathering information and collaborating with projects and other agencies including Housing, Education and Credit Unions where people discuss their experiences of intimidation.

- Making links with groups to collect information so as to ensure that the research is grounded in community experiences.

The precise details of the research project remain to be worked out. The purpose of today is to obtain feedback so as to inform that process. It is suggested that the research project would involve three stages:

➢ **Stage One:** This would involve a scoping exercise, to collect information about intimidation. This would build on the work already conducted by the Family Support Network, the Limerick study and the Iceberg of Fear study reported above. The purpose of this stage of the research would be to get an up-to-date and broad understanding of the issues involved.

➢ **Stage two:** The second stage would involve desk research to identify similar issues elsewhere and to identify the responses being developed and used that could possibly be employed here

➢ **Stage Three:** The third stage would involve reporting back to communities.

Table Discussion 2: Participants were asked to discuss whether or not they would like to get involved in the research. Groups were given time to discuss any concerns they had about the collection of evidence as well as the practicalities of accessing information.

The groups raised the following concerns:

- Safety of confidentiality
- The vulnerability of workers who are known to be gathering information
- The possibility of the study just sitting on the shelf
- People may lose trust in projects or agencies
- Difficulties in the language used in reports and the researcher's ability to capture the stories from the ground.

The groups then gave ideas about practical involvement in the research project including:

- Certain projects could incorporate questions about drug debt and intimidation when assessing participants.
- The Community Safety Committees could gather the information.
- Drugs Workers and Community Reps could pass information on to Drugs Task Forces.
- Local councillors who receive information should capture it anonymously.
- There should be a tight definition of categories to distinguish between drug-related intimidation and socio-economic intimidation or 'community violence'.
- The information should be captured broadly, not just by projects.
- Perhaps further research could be done involving young gang members as there are a number of those who do not use drugs but engage in the drugs trade and intimidation as a career.

Conclusion

Citywide will assist the HRB in gathering evidence if this project develops and will be in contact with projects, Task Forces and Forums on this issue in the near future. We would like to thank the speakers and all of those who attended the seminar and facilitated or participated in the group discussions and we look forward to working with you in the future.