

ROCKET SCIENCE

Research into vigils and protests that take place outside of hospitals and clinics offering abortion services

Quarterly update

February 2023

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1. Overview

In August 2022 Rocket Science were commissioned by the Scottish Government to provide research to better understand the scale, prevalence and nature of protests and vigils which occur outside of hospitals and clinics that provide abortion services and what, if any, impact this has for those services and people accessing them.

[redacted]

2. Research with protest and vigil organisations

[redacted]

3. Research with patients and NHS sites

[redacted]

4. Updated risk register

Outline of risk	Before Mitigation		Mitigating actions	After Mitigation	
	Severity	Likelihood		Severity	Likelihood
[Text redacted]					
<p>Negative publicity and/or social media</p> <p>Given the nature of the topic there is potential for significant negative publicity and/or social media comments (trolling) for all stakeholders involved. This may be particularly likely given recent events in the USA and associated press and activist activity.</p>	High	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rocket Science will work closely with comms teams in Scottish Government and Health Boards to develop processes and responses in the event of media/social media attention as well as agree communication and dissemination of findings • All communications regarding the research will ensure impartiality and be approved by commissioners prior to use 	Medium	Medium
<p>Unplanned staff absence or staff turnover (or other unplanned incident)</p> <p>Unplanned absence due to Covid-19 or other reasons could result in</p>	Medium	Low	Rocket Science has a team of 25 consultants and a network of associates enabling thorough handover in the eventuality of project staff becoming unavailable. We have business continuity	Low	Low

<p>inability to deliver the research in the agreed timescales.</p>			<p>plans to ensure continuity of delivery in the event of other untoward events.</p>		
<p>Low participation in the research by protest/vigil groups</p> <p>We may anticipate a degree of scepticism and hesitancy to engage with the research by both organising groups and individuals operating within them. This may be exacerbated by recent activity in relation possible exclusion zones being enforced and the inclusion of groups in mediation processes</p>	<p>High</p>	<p>High</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are elements of the research that can be conducted without the direct involvement of protest/vigil groups • We will prioritise observations of protests and vigils and digital/media content analysis. • We have been offered materials including codes of conduct for vigil attendees, case study data and video testimonies and can explore whether this could be included in the analysis. 	<p>Medium</p>	<p>Medium</p>
<p>Data loss or data protection breach.</p> <p>When handling sensitive information loss or breach presents risks to the data subjects as well as reputational and financial risk to the associated organisation.</p>	<p>High</p>	<p>Low</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DPIAs are in place identifying actions to be taken in relation to information security. • We will only collect personal identifiable information for consent purposes. This will be held separately and securely from the research information and will be linked via pseudonymisation processes • All data will be held within Rocket Science's secure cloud-based server and password protected to ensure 	<p>Low</p>	<p>Low</p>

			<p>access is available only to relevant members of the project team.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All staff are data security and GDPR trained. • All reports will be anonymised, and care will be taken to ensure individuals cannot be identified through any quotes used. 		
Reports not written to appropriate standards or not containing required information	Medium	Low	Rocket Science has a robust approach to quality assurance. Regular project management meetings will ensure we have a good understanding of your requirements, and our processes mean that all outputs are quality assured before reaching you. The evaluation team are experienced analysts and report writers and every output from our evidence review has a quality check/review built in.	Low	Low

5. Updated project plan

[Redacted]

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Scottish Government Abortion vigils or protests research

Inception report

December 2022

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1. Inception meeting note

1. Inception meeting

Thursday 25th August 2022 11am – 12.30pm Teams.

Attendees:

- [redacted], Scottish Government – works on abortion policy
- [redacted], Scottish Government – principal social researcher – holds the analytical lead for abortion
- [Redacted], Scottish Government – works on abortion policy
- [Redacted], Scottish Government – oversee the unit that looks after the abortion policy
- [Redacted], Rocket Science
- [Redacted], Rocket Science.

Scottish Government chose to work with Rocket Science because:

- The different elements of the research and approach was tailored to be relevant and appropriate.
- Rocket Science understood the challenge of balancing the right to access healthcare and the freedom of association and right to protest.
- The ethical sensitivities section in the proposal demonstrated a good understanding and relevant experience within this area.

Understanding the context for the research

A ministerial working group was convened in November 2021 about abortion clinic protests and vigils. This group raised that there is a need for evidence on the scale of the protests and vigils in Scotland, how it impacts women accessing services, and the reasons why people choose to protest/hold vigils.

The First Minister held a summit recently on buffer zones. [text redacted]

Scottish Government are aware of evidence in the USA on experiences of women but there hasn't been much done on Scotland specifically. Existing research tends to be conducted or funded by one side or the other of the debate. Scottish Government is looking for something more independent

[text redacted]

The timeframe of this research is to focus on the activity happening from now rather than going back too far to understand past trends. There may be useful insight from the past activity in terms of understanding how the nature, tone and scale of protest and vigils has changed recently. Covid restrictions throw historical data out slightly as protests and gatherings weren't allowed during this time. Therefore when looking at the prior activity we might need to look at information on 2019 rather than 2020/2021.

Research aims

With regards to the prevalence, frequency and scale of abortion vigils and protests in Scotland Some hospitals and abortion clinics tend to have more protests and vigils than others. Scottish Government can provide information on where we know protests and vigils have happened before which are currently within NHSGGC and NHS Lothian board areas.

With regards to the impact these vigils and protests have on patients' ability to access, and experiences of accessing abortion services in Scotland, the clinics that offer abortions don't tend to just offer abortion so there can be an impact on patients attending for other medical support and treatment. The primary focus of the research is those who are accessing abortions however there may be value in understanding the wider impacts for other patients/service users from the perspective of the staff working in the sites.

With regards to the research questions - the next step of the research is to set out the research framework which includes the aims, questions, methods, and instruments. Scottish Government will provide feedback on this.

Methodological approach

Scottish Government are comfortable with the originally proposed methodology which they feel covers the core elements of the research required.

1. Literature review

The purpose of the literature review is to answer how do you balance the right to protest with the right to access healthcare. This is to identify whether there is anything out there that already exists as current review to date has shown a gap in useful literature and evidence. Rocket Science will develop a set of research questions and suggested search terms for review by Scottish Government.

With regards to whether there any information on protests outwith the abortion area that might have some useful insights that can be applied here but that it is important to focus on the access to healthcare element of this issue so evidence from other situations may not be hugely applicable.

With regards to understanding the background to the decisions in Ealing and the academic evidence around that – Scottish Government are familiar with this already.

2. Documentation to review

[text redacted]

3. Field work

NHS ethics approval will be needed to access patients and instruct NHS observers – this can be a lengthy process (previously taken 8 months in one case). It will need to go to each Board's R&D panels. We should be able to do one (IRAS) application and submit it to each of the boards but noting that while some boards don't currently have protest and vigil activity we want to ensure that the ethics approval will include the ability to conduct field research should activity begin in the board area during our research timeframes. We will need to be clear what we are wanting from each Board. [text redacted]

Rocket Science observation of protests, on the spot interviews with protestors and qualitative interviews with protestors:

- Rocket Science to develop some communication draft for Scottish Government to review for contact with organised protest and vigil groups
- **[text redacted]** Scottish Government has some contact details for the groups that are publicly available but they do not currently have a comprehensive list of protest and vigil groups.
- Keen to reach the unorganised/informal protests and vigils not just the organised groups, organisations and campaigns which will require a bit of hunting around to find their details
- Rocket Science will then use the comms agreed to directly approach the groups to participate in the research.
- Rocket Science qualitative interviews with protestors – keen to understand their motivations for protests and why these protests need to be outside the clinic

[text redacted]

Rocket Science engagement with NHS staff:

- Scottish Government have contacts in Edinburgh and Glasgow that they work closely with and those Boards have asked staff whether they would like to participate in the research. Scottish Government are currently working on finding contacts from NHS Grampian who can speak to Aberdeen activity. **[text redacted]** Scottish Government can send through the contact details for the key person within NHS Lothian and NHS GGC and Rocket Science can work with them for recruitment – which are the only two boards with current activity that is known about.
- There is a Scottish Abortion Care Providers network who we could use to distribute some information to help keep people informed of the research. It is worth noting that Aberdeen and the Queen Elizabeth aren't part of this group so we can't rely too heavily on it as a communication mechanism on its own.

Rocket Science engagement with people who have accessed abortion services – these would be recruited through NHS staff and focus on NHS GGC and NHS Lothian. We will need to ensure informed consent as well as NHS ethics approval for accessing patient information. Once ethics approval is in place then we can take the next steps in designing, recruiting, and conducting field work.

[text redacted]

Agreeing the timescales and deliverables

[text redacted]

Contract terms and project management

[text redacted]

Actions

The following actions were agreed during the inception meeting:

Action	Owner	Status
To develop the research framework which includes the aims, questions, methods and instruments for feedback from Scottish Government	RS	Complete
To develop a set of research questions and suggested search terms for the literature review	RS	Complete
To set up a template for the routine data we would like from the NHS	RS	
To develop communication drafts for Scottish Government to review for contact with organised protest and vigil groups as well as the Scottish Abortion Care Providers network	RS	Complete
To develop a detailed workplan with updated GANTT chart and risk register	RS	Complete

To send guidance on the NHS ethics approval process and Rocket Science to start drafting the applications	Rachel	Complete
To update Scottish Government ethics approval checklist	RS	Complete
To organise quarterly update meetings	RS	Complete
To confirm PO number for invoicing	SG	

2. Literature review outline

[Redacted]

3. Project Plan

[Redacted]

4. Project Risk Register

Outline of risk	Before Mitigation		Mitigating actions	After Mitigation	
	Severity	Likelihood		Severity	Likelihood
[text redacted]					
<p>Negative publicity and/or social media</p> <p>Given the nature of the topic there is potential for significant negative publicity and/or social media comments (trolling) for all stakeholders involved. This maybe particularly likely given recent events in the USA and associated press and activist activity.</p>	High	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rocket Science will work closely with comms teams in Scottish Government and Health Boards to develop processes and responses in the event of media/social media attention as well as agree communication and dissemination of findings • All communications regarding the research will ensure impartiality and be approved by commissioners prior to use 	Medium	Medium

<p>Unplanned staff absence or staff turnover (or other unplanned incident)</p> <p>Unplanned absence due to Covid-19 or other reasons could result in inability to deliver the research in the agreed timescales.</p>	Medium	Low	<p>Rocket Science has a team of 25 consultants and a network of associates enabling thorough handover in the eventuality of project staff becoming unavailable. We have business continuity plans to ensure continuity of delivery in the event of other untoward events.</p>	Low	Low
<p>Low participation in the research by protest/vigil groups</p> <p>We may anticipate a degree of scepticism and hesitancy to engage with the research by both organising groups and individuals operating within them. This may be exacerbated by recent activity in relation possible exclusion zones being enforced and the inclusion of groups in mediation processes with clinic sites</p>	High	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RS to develop, in partnership with commissioners clear communications material with which to approach protest/vigil groups emphasising the neutrality of the research and its aims • There are elements of the research that can be conducted without the direct involvement of protest/vigil groups • Experience suggests that certain groups will be very willing to engage in the research 	Medium	Medium
<p>Low participation by service users</p> <p>It may be anticipated that people accessing abortion services may not wish to engage with the research</p>	High	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will work in partnership with organisations which provide support to people who have accessed abortions and use social media to share information about the research 	High	Medium

			<p>and maximise the coverage of the opportunity to participate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All communications material will be developed in partnership with commissioners • We will ensure opportunities for participation are flexible, accessible and trauma informed 		
<p>Return of restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic impacts upon ability to deliver fieldwork.</p> <p>Any reimposition of restrictions may result in the research team being unable to conduct interviews face to face or impede observations of protests.</p>	High	Low	<p>Rocket Science has delivered research and evaluation throughout the pandemic and has a range of virtual and other resources with which to conduct research remotely. In addition we will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contingency plan with commissioners if the reintroduction of restrictions looks likely • Develop all research tools for use both in person and virtually • Ensure all Covid-19 guidelines required by Health Boards and research sites are followed by the research team • Provide a range of options for participants to engage including virtual, telephone based and in person if required 	Medium	Low
<p>Data loss or data protection breach.</p> <p>When handling sensitive information loss or breach presents risks to the data subjects as well as reputational</p>	High	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DPIAs are in place identifying actions to be taken in relation to information security. • We will only collect personal identifiable information for consent purposes. This 	Low	Low

<p>and financial risk to the associated organisation.</p>			<p>will be held separately and securely from the research information and will be linked via pseudonymisation processes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All data will be held within Rocket Science's secure cloud-based server and password protected to ensure access is available only to relevant members of the project team. • All staff are data security and GDPR trained. • All reports will be anonymised, and care will be taken to ensure individuals cannot be identified through any quotes used. 		
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