# Poverty – Violence Reduction Unit – Transcript

***Is poverty the main cause of violence in Scotland?***

**Karyn McCluskey, Director of the Violence Reduction Unit (VRU)***:* I wish I knew exactly why we have such levels of violence, and it is different in Scotland. There is obviously a big link to areas where deprivation is prevalent, and lots of the things that we associate with violence are things like poor parenting, lack of skills to get through life, empathy, communication, problem solving – all the things that you and I have.

If we have a disagreement we can discuss it with each other, we can work out a way to resolve our differences, but if you've not been taught empathy… I love your ring but I would never take it from you because it's yours and I have empathy.

But for lots of young people being brought up, they're not given empathy. They are being brought up in violent homes - domestic abuse. All they've seen is violence, so that's the way they think they can resolve their problems and there is a bit of lack of investment there, and lack of hope.

I deal with lots of young people who have no hope in their life. I go into prisons and I'll say to them what did you want to be when you were five or six and they'll say: 'Well I didn't want to be anything because I was told I would be just like my dad, who was in jail.'

You know, no hope, and I find that really difficult. I think every child has to be given hope because if you don't have hope you have nothing. So it's hugely complex and when we talk about......

I think an understanding is really developing because when we started we were looking at all the causes of crime, and housing, and lack of employment, and poor parenting, and alcohol and drugs and all these different things.

And then we had the Chief Medical Officer came along and he started to talk about hopelessness and alienation. And about how living a life of stress, and if you think about living a life of stress in an area where there is lots of violence, or if you're living in a violent household, you'll go home and you'll not know whether you'll get hit or there will be food in the house, or you’re going to be looked after. You start to secrete a hormone, and it's a stress hormone.

And actually what Harry Burns is now talking about is actually that long-term exposure to that can make you chronically unwell – it can completely affect you physiologically, it allows fat deposits to be laid down in the arteries and he thinks that that is now one of the reasons why we suffer such poor health – heart disease, strokes.

So, isn't it interesting that violence leads to strokes and heart disease and long-term ill-health in later life, and I think that's fascinating.

[End of transcript]