Cannabis, violence and policing in London – assessing current practice, modelling future approaches

Final Report

Submitted to MOPAC by the University of West London (UWL) and ARCS Ltd

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INTRODUCTION

This report is the final deliverable from the *Cannabis, Violence, and Policing in London* research, funded by MOPAC. The research was delivered by the University of West London (UWL), in partnership with ARCS Ltd.

The report has been structured around the key research questions that formed part of the original specification for the research. The three main questions are below:

- *What are the links between illegal cannabis dealing and violence in London?*
- *What impact do the Met's drugs-related stop and search tactics have on violent crime in London?*
- *What is the impact of cannabis enforcement on community relations in London?*

We have used shortened versions of these as the main section headings, with sub-headings being taken from either the sub-questions also within the specification, or related issues that have arisen under each main question, either from our review of the relevant literature, or from our consultation work.

The research is based on:

- ***extensive review of the research and policy literature*** - focusing on links between forms of policing and their impacts on both the functioning of drugs markets and levels of associated violence, and about connections between cannabis policing strategies and wider community relations;

- ***collection and analysis of official and other data*** - including a wide range of survey data and other official data-sets - e.g. data from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW), Stop and Search – and related data-sets from various MPS dashboards (e.g. Use of Force), Drug misuse in England and Wales, NHS data from the Smoking, Drinking and Drug Use among Young People in England surveys; mapped police data concerning stop and search activities, and a wide range of (police/ONS/MOPAC) data concerning area-specific levels of violence and cannabis use; MOPAC confidence and satisfaction data from the Public Voice Dashboard and Neighbourhood Perceptions and Crime Comparator; data retrieved from the Office of National Statistics also provided an insight on socio-demographic determinants that might influence the relationship between cannabis, crime and policing;

- ***focused discussions with key experts*** – these discussions were held with informed experts from a range of public, academic and community organisations, and they focused on key issues concerning current practice in policing cannabis, and the impacts such practice might have on violence or community relations, and on confidence in policing; about a dozen of these focused on very specific issues that matched a respondent's particular expertise, and a further 15 were more formal (being transcribed fully for detailed analysis in NVIVO).

Further details concerning methods are outlined in an Appendix.

1 LINKS BETWEEN CANNABIS AND VIOLENCE

In this section we focus on what the available evidence suggests about links between cannabis dealing and violence, but we also present some of the evidence concerning links concerning cannabis *use* and violence, as the latter links have often been referred to in the literature that we have been canvassing. We provide an overview of that material first in the section, and we then focus on connections between both cannabis dealing and cannabis farming, and violence.

The boundaries between users and suppliers within the U.K. cannabis market are far from clear. In a study by Chatwin and Potter (2014), out of 464 regular cannabis users residing in the United Kingdom, the authors found over a quarter had bought large amounts of cannabis at one time, a third had been involved in selling cannabis for profit, and over two fifths had been involved in intentionally taking cannabis across internal European Union borders. The overlap between supply–supplier and use–user means that to understand the occurrence of violence in the context of cannabis dealing, it is important to understand whether and how cannabis use can increase violent behaviour, as this may affect both the seller and the buyer. The section below aims to answer the following questions:

- Is cannabis use linked to increased violent behaviour?
- If so, what are the factors that increase the risk of violent behaviour in cannabis users?
- What are the implications for interventions and policies?

1.1 Links between cannabis use and violence

Despite many years of research on this topic, locating accurate data still proves a challenge. UK data is sparse and thus we must turn to international data to consider the links between cannabis and violence.

A recent meta-analysis of 30 studies (yielding a total of 296,815 adolescents and young adults) suggests that cannabis use, especially *persistent use (frequent and continuous),* is associated with increased risk of *perpetration of physical violence* (including aggravated assault, sexual aggression, fighting, and robbery) (Dellazizzo et al., 2020a). This association weakened, but remained statistically significant, even when socioeconomic status and other drug and alcohol use were taken into account.

However, none of the studies included in the review assessed the potency of cannabis (THC content), only few recorded a measure of the amount of cannabis used and these measures were often inaccurate; hence, this review does not allow us to establish whether, and to which extent, the violent behaviour depended on the dose of cannabis consumed. Another review of 19 articles (Rafiei and Kolla, 2022) confirmed the link between cannabis use and violence; however, the authors stressed that this relationship is strictly correlational rather than causal, with the strength of this relationship depending on the population (e.g., populations with severe and persistent mental illness versus the general population). For example, youths with conduct problems who are already at increased risk for both substance use and perpetration of physical violence and have a predisposition to development of violent characteristics have been found to be at increased risk of experiencing negative effects of cannabis use, including increased impulsivity and aggressive behaviour (e.g., Macleod et al. 2004).

Nordstrom and Rossow (2014) attempted to control for pre-existing differences by assessing 2,681 young people twice, at 16 years and at 21 years old [1]: they found that a 10% increase in *frequency of cannabis* use was associated with a 0.4% *increased risk of violence* (being involved in fights, with and without weapons). This association remained significant after controlling for other contributing factors such as binge drinking, age, and gender. However, the measures used do not allow us to determine whether the violence occurred under the influence of cannabis. In addition, the study did not account for history of pre-existing mental health conditions.

Similarly, a literature review of Intimate Personal Violence (IPV) (Testa and Brown, 2015), found a moderate but significant association between cannabis use and the risk of intimate partner violence (IPV) *perpetration and victimization*, meaning that the individual who used cannabis is more likely to perpetrate violence but also to be a victim of violence by their partner. This risk remains after controlling for alcohol use, and other factors such as antisocial behaviour, other substance use and psychopathology. However, it was unclear whether the aggressive behaviour was triggered by the effects of cannabis, or whether the types of individuals who are involved in IPV are likely to be cannabis users. To answer this question, it is important to understand how long after cannabis consumption the violence occurs. Only one study attempted to explore the temporality between cannabis use and violence (Testa et al., 2018)[2] : they found that in young couples (18- to 30-year-olds) where at least one partner used cannabis at least twice weekly, cannabis contributed to the occurrence of relationship conflict and verbal aggression (but not physical aggression) within 2 hours of use. This effect remained after controlling for alcohol use. However, it should be pointed out that the study included only couples where at least one partner was a frequent cannabis user, hence these findings should not be generalised to occasional use. Also, the mechanism by which cannabis may increase IPV and interpersonal violence in general is still unclear.

[1] 2,681 Norwegian young people were administered a survey at 16 and 21 years old (1994/1999) asking them to rate how frequently they used cannabis and how frequently they got involved in fights with weapons, and without weapons, “in the last 12 months”.

[2] Participants included 183 married or cohabiting heterosexual couples. Couples were excluded if either partner reported IPV that caused fear for one’s life or required medical care, or if one partner required psychiatric treatment or used cocaine or other stimulant drugs.

1.1.1 *Possible mechanisms that explain the link between cannabis use and interpersonal violence*

From a psychopharmacological perspective, there are various ways in which acute and chronic cannabis intoxication may increase the risk of violent behaviour. Cannabis can trigger paranoia and psychotic states in people with pre-existing mental disorders and can heighten physiological arousal and make some anxious or panicky (see Dellazizzo et al., 2020 for a review), which can increase the likelihood of violent behaviour especially in the context of drug use, where confrontations and tense interactions are more likely to occur (Moore et al., 2005).

Cannabis has also been found to alter the function of brain regions rich in cannabinoid CB-1 receptors that mediate emotional and affective processing (see Bloomfield et al. 2019 for a review). Overall, those who have used cannabis frequently and heavily, appear to process emotional stimuli differently in comparison to non-users and this may explain their impairment in the recognition of affect. For instance, neutral stimuli can be interpreted as negative or aggressive during the use of cannabis. These effects have been shown also after administration of an acute dose of THC (ranging from 8mg to 6mg) (Hindocha et al., 2015 and Bossong, van Hell, et al., 2013). Deficits in emotion recognition have been associated with violence in offenders (Philipp-Wiegmann et al., 2017), and people with schizophrenia (Bulgari et al., 2019) thus cannabis use inducing such impairments may increase the risk of violent acts in the context of social interaction, as well as in the context of transactions (i.e., the spatial and temporal space where the cannabis dealing occurs). However, this hypothesis needs to be substantiated by further studies exploring whether these cannabis-induced changes are linked to actual behavioural changes.

Several studies have found that cannabis use impairs the user's ability to control impulsiveness and suppress aggressiveness (see Wrege et al., 2014 for a review), however the link between impulsivity and substance use in general is bidirectional, in fact it is well known that high impulsivity traits increase the risk of heavy substance use (e.g. Cuomo et al, 2008), which in turn further alter impulsivity control by affecting areas of the brain that control impulsive behaviour (de Wit, 2009). There is increasing evidence that heightened impulsivity can play an important role in the increased risk of violent behaviour in people in the early phase of psychosis who smoke cannabis, especially when the cannabis use started at early age (Moulin et al., 2020).

1.1.2 *What are the risk factors that make cannabis users more likely to get involved in violent behaviour?*

The main factors that increase the risk of cannabis related violence are: (1) poor mental health, (2) age of first cannabis use, (3) cannabis potency (THC level), and (4) social/cultural factors. Details concerning how each these factors influences the relationship between cannabis and violence, are provided separately below.

Mental health factors

As mentioned above, *cannabis withdrawal symptoms* often include irritability, anger and aggression, which can lead to violent behaviour. A recent review of 47 studies, representing 23,518 participants, found a 47% overall prevalence of cannabis withdrawal symptoms, indicating that almost half of the sample displayed symptoms of physical cannabis dependence. However, sub-analysis revealed significant difference between groups, with 17% prevalence in population-based samples, 54% in outpatient psychiatric samples and 87% in inpatient psychiatric samples (Bahji, et al., 2020), signifying that there is a strong link between mental health disorders and the symptoms of cannabis dependence. In line with this hypothesis, a study of 265 psychiatric patients found that those with a cannabis use disorder (CUD, as defined by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders DSM-IV)[3] were more likely to be involved in violent behaviour against a person, in comparison to those who did not have a cannabis use disorder (46 % vs 15%; Mouline et al., 2018). Similarly, a longitudinal study of 1,136 recently discharged psychiatric patients (Dugre' et al., 2017) identified that those who continued to use cannabis after discharge, were 2.44 times more likely to display violent behaviours, than those who did not continue to use. The analysis suggested that cannabis use predicted violent behaviour among this group, rather than the other way round. These findings indicate that mental health should not be seen in isolation from substance misuse. As recommended by the Black report (Black, 2021),[4] an integrated approach between the police, mental health and drug treatment services would decrease the risk of violence in those with a mental health disorder.

Age of first cannabis use

One of the most widely reported risk factors for problematic cannabis use, including associated violent behaviour, is early onset of use[5] (i.e. earlier than 16 years old), which may cause disruption of the normal brain maturation processes that occur during the developmental period of young adolescence and may therefore cause deterioration of neural structures associated with inhibition and sensation-seeking, which will likely have long-term consequences for users (e.g. Blest-Hopley , 2018; Chye et al., 2020; Lorenzetti et al., 2019). For example, a neuroimaging study by Gruber et al. (2014) found that early onset of cannabis use was associated with alteration in matter development in the frontal lobe (implicated in controlling impulsive and aggressive behaviour) and higher reported impulsivity. A meta-analysis of imaging studies exploring the link between cannabis use and impulsivity suggests cannabis

[3] DSM-IV criteria for CUD: At least three of the following symptoms occurring within a 12-month period: 1. Tolerance (a need for increased amounts of the substance to achieve intoxication or desired effect; markedly diminished effect with continued use of the same amount of the substance). 2. Withdrawal symptoms and using cannabis to avoid them. 3. Cannabis is often taken in larger amounts or over a longer period than was intended; 4. A persistent desire or unsuccessful efforts to cut down or control cannabis use. 5. A great deal of time is spent in activities necessary to obtain cannabis, use cannabis, or recover from its effects. 6. Important social, occupational, or recreational activities are given up or reduced because of cannabis use. 7. Cannabis use is continued despite knowledge of having a persistent or recurrent physical or psychological problem that is likely to have been caused or exacerbated by cannabis.

[4] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-drugs-phase-two-report/review-of-drugs-part-two-prevention-treatment-and-recovery

[5] And in particular of course, early onset of regular use.

has an impact both on the structure and on the function of the brain, notably at the level of the prefrontal cortex which is specifically involved in the control of behaviour (Wrege et al., 2014). Neuroimaging findings were supported by studies on psychiatric populations. For instance, a study comprising 265 early psychosis patients (aged 18-35; Moulin et al., 2020) found that patients who began using cannabis on average before the age of 15, were more likely to get involved in violent behaviour including physical aggression, robbery with physical aggression and assault. This association remained significant also after controlling for alcohol and other substance use.

Taken together, these findings suggest that it is important to implement early interventions to delay as much as possible the onset of cannabis use in young people and thus minimise any violent behaviour which may be associated with its use. In the context of the debate around cannabis legalisation, there might be scope for considering a minimum legal age for non-medical (i.e. recreational) use of cannabis (Nguyen et al., 2020).

Potency of cannabis used (THC content)

Cannabis contains various cannabinoids, two of which have almost opposing actions: cannabidiol (CBD) has antipsychotic properties, whereas Delta9-tetrahydrocannabinol (Delta9-THC) can trigger and worsen psychotic symptoms (Morgan and Curran, 2008). Morgan and Curran (2008) studied the divergent effects of THC and CBD in 140 healthy individuals. Levels of Delta9-THC and CBD in their hair samples were used as an indicator of the kind of cannabis they smoked. Participants were split into three groups: those with THC only in their hair, those with both THC and CBD in their hair and those with no cannabinoid in their hair (indicating that they had not smoked cannabis). It was found that those who smoked cannabis with high THC content, displayed higher levels of positive schizophrenia-like symptoms compared with those who did not smoke cannabis and those who smoked cannabis that contained both THC and CBD, and higher levels of delusions compared with the 'no cannabinoid' group. These results evidenced the potential harmful effects of THC as well as the protective properties of CBD. The results could also mean that people who are more prone to develop psychosis are more likely to seek out a more potent kind of cannabis. However, a meta-analysis of 13 trials whereby healthy participants who were injected either with THC, or CBD (injected or inhaled) were compared to matched individuals who were injected with a placebo, showed that THC was able to induce schizophrenia-like symptoms in healthy volunteers (Hindley et al., 2020). This confirms that recreational use of cannabis with high THC content may trigger hallucinations and psychotic-like symptoms.

A South London based study also highlighted the impact of high potency cannabis, containing high levels of THC, known as "skunk",[6] on mental health. It found that individuals who mostly used skunk-like cannabis were nearly twice as likely to be diagnosed with a psychotic disorder if they used it less than once per week; almost three times as likely to have this diagnosis if they used it weekly, and more than five times as likely to have this diagnosis if they were daily users (highly statistically significant) compared with those who never used cannabis (DiForti et al., 2015). High

[6] Skunk is a manufactured high potency form of cannabis made from unpollinated cannabis plants which naturally contain higher levels of THC (Freeman and Winstock 2015).

potency cannabis, or cannabis containing high levels of THC, can increase anxiety, depression, and risk of dependence, with these risks being heightened in people with pre-existing poor mental health (Childs et al., 2017; Hall and Degenhard, 2009).

These findings might seem to be inconsistent with the claims of many cannabis users who say that smoking cannabis helps them relax and cope with emotional distress (Hyman and Sinha, 2009). However, research shows that while low doses of THC commonly do produce a feeling of relaxation and stress relief, higher THC doses can increase feelings of anxiety and negative mood (e.g. Childs et al. 2017).

The first comprehensive survey of cannabis strength published in the UK found that high-potency variety sinsemilla, also known as 'skunk' made up 94% of almost a thousand police seizures from London, Kent, Derbyshire, Merseyside and Sussex in 2016 (Potter et al., 2018). On the same lines, a meta-analysis of 12 studies based in different countries worldwide[7] found that THC concentrations increased by 0.29% each year from 1970 to 2017 in herbal cannabis, by 0.57% each year from 1975 to 2017 in resin cannabis (Freeman et al., 2021). In contrast, there was no evidence in changes of CBD content over the same period of time. Another large-scale study that included all EU countries + UK, Norway and Turkey, found a moderate increase of from 6.9% to 10.6% in THC level in herbal cannabis, while THC level tripled in cannabis resin (from 7.6% to 24.1% THC) between 2010 and 2019 (Manthey et al., 2021). This increase of high potency cannabis mirrored a rise in rate of treatment entry for cannabis problems in all countries involved (from 27 to 35 per 100,000 adults overall) during the same period. In the UK, the increase of people starting treatment for problematic cannabis use continued with a 5% rise, from 25,944 people in 2019 to 27,304 in 2021 (Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, 2021),[8] suggesting that the number of people who develop cannabis dependence is on the rise.[9]

1.1.3 *Intersection with socio/cultural factors: social inequality, ethnicity, drug use and violence*

Drug use does not happen in a vacuum and the effects vary according to the individual characteristics as well as the socio-economic determinants. The actual experience of being 'high' is subjective and variable, depending on the dose of the drug, the route of administration (inhalation or oral), the environment in which it is consumed, and the expectations or experience of the user. Like any other psychoactive substance use, problematic cannabis use is more likely to occur in people with pre-existing vulnerabilities (EMCDDA 2008). Social deprivation, trauma, lack of opportunities, lack of access to services, also increase the vulnerability of developing problematic

[7] Studies were based in the USA, UK, Netherlands, France, Denmark, Italy and New Zealand.
[8] https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/substance-misuse-treatment-for-adults-statistics-2020-to-2021/adult-substance-misuse-treatment-statistics-2020-to-2021-report
[9] The increase could also be explained in terms of a higher proportion of people with problematic use coming forward for treatment than previously, but we are not aware of any evidence that this is the case – the kind of evidence we might find, for example, in the wake of awareness raising programmes about the value of seeking treatment. If anything, recent trends have included both a decrease in available drug treatment across the board, and a lack of publicity campaigns about the possible downsides of cannabis use.

substance use in general[10] (Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs, 2018). The above factors are interlinked; for example lower childhood socio economic status is also associated with a greater risk of adverse childhood experiences and trauma (Walsh et al., 2019). Violence may also emerge from inadequate policy and practice responses to substance use (Rhodes, 2009) and impact unevenly on vulnerable groups. Some ethnicities are more likely than others to be affected by the above vulnerabilities. In 2019, people from all ethnic minority groups[11] (except the Indian, Chinese, White Irish and White Other groups) were more likely than White British people to live in the most overall deprived 10% of neighbourhoods in England. Around a third (30%) of people from a Black ethnic background experience barriers to employment and housing, as opposed to 8.2% of those from White British backgrounds. Black people as a whole were the most likely of all groups to live in the 10% of neighbourhoods most deprived in relation to crime (16.3%) (Office for National Statistics, 2020). In addition, a survey by Mind of about 14,000 people over 25 years of age, with attendant mental health problems, found that inequalities in housing, employment and finances had a greater impact during the Covid pandemic on the mental health of people from ethnic minority groups than white people, and Kooth's report (2020) shows worse mental health outcomes for young people from ethnic minority groups in comparison to young people from White groups.

Drug use can also function as a form of medication in response to social suffering, discrimination and stressful environments (Amaro et al. 2021; Galea et al., 2004), with cannabis use becoming a form of "anti-stress self-medication". Finally, considering the strong link between mental health and risk of dependent or problematic cannabis use, it seems reasonable to conclude that users of cannabis among ethnic minority groups are at higher risk than their White counterparts to suffer associated negative consequences, which, as discussed above, are also associated with an increased risk of violence.

1.2 Links between cannabis transactions, dealing and violence

Cannabis transactions which occur in street settings are perhaps the riskiest in terms of possible violence. Cannabis transactions which occur within student dormitories, domestic homes or within pubs and clubs (closed markets), are more likely to involve individuals already known to each other or who have a pre-existing relationship. It is likely that cannabis transactions occurring in open drug markets or in everyday street settings present a higher risk.

In the field of substance misuse, these different locations are characterised by concepts of 'closed drug markets' (Edmunds et al, 1996; Sampson 2001), characterised by low profile transactions to familiar clients, often taking place in residential homes (Parkin 2013), and 'open drug markets' - mostly street-based involving stranger-to-stranger transactions (which also involves opportunistic purchasing). Sampson (2001) also offers the possibility of a 'hybrid market', of the

[10] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/761123/Vulnerability_and_Drug_Use_Report_04_Dec_.pdf

[11] These included: Bangladeshi, Chinese, Indian, Pakistani, Asian other, Black African, Black Caribbean, Black other, Mixed White/Asian, Mixed White/Black African, Mixed White/Black Caribbean, Mixed other, White British, White Irish, White Gypsy/Traveller, White other, Arab, Any other

type now more associated with county lines, whereby sellers operate from a static house location, but use runners to deliver drugs to various locations.

Such street-based transactional environments (open drug markets) present an elevated risk due to several factors. Firstly, transactions may occur (as they also do for drugs other than cannabis) outside public view, away from CCTV, in alleyways or behind shops. Parkin (2013: 185) refers to such settings as Category B[12] settings, which include public car parks, stairwells, derelict buildings, parks, etc.

Open market locations are frequently operated by more than one dealer, and they also invite surveillance and enforcement from the authorities. This in turn means street-based transactions must be more furtive or hidden or take place more swiftly. Areas hidden from public footfall or public visibility might also offer increased opportunity for street robbery once cash is presented.

There are other risks associated with some transactional environments in terms of the levels of control/governance that urban street gangs maintain. Their governance and control might include multiple gang-affiliated youth having a presence in the area, either because they lay territorial claim to the area or drug market; or because they wish to ensure tight control and governance over supply and also of their sellers.

Where cannabis transactions occur under the governance or purview of urban street gangs, the potential for violence is elevated. Within urban street gangs or even amongst more youthful anti-social peer groups, violence may be an unintended consequence of pre-existing internal group dynamics. Gang scholarship tells us that internal street gang dynamics are complex, stressful, and often violent (Densley, 2013; Harding 2014). In this vicarious street world, trust is often a rarefied commodity and allegiances can alter daily. Hidden social media influences have further complicated inter-personal relationships often generating tensions and rivalries both within gangs, amongst peers, and externally towards rivals. Young people who are active or embedded in street gangs, can easily find themselves in risky, threatening, or fast-evolving situations. These situations may in turn influence cannabis transactions or how they are conducted or concluded. Hidden gang dynamics and pressures might suddenly be played out in the context of an otherwise casual cannabis transaction. For example, a gang Younger might have been instructed by a gang Older to raise revenue by robbing unsuspecting customers; or a youthful gang member may wish to demonstrate his ‘street capital’ (Harding 2014), or enhance his street reputation by assaulting, or robbing, another gang Younger who is buying cannabis. Such interactions may always elevate potential unforeseen outcomes, however where this involves someone who is a heavy user of cannabis, particularly high-strength skunk, it is entirely possible that ongoing psycho-pharmacological effects of cannabis use will play a further part in any instances of violence. For gang-affiliated youth engaged in drug dealing, and actively avoiding the police, a sense of insecurity and paranoia may already be heightened and triggers for violence may thus be nearer the surface.

[12] “Category A setting” in the field of substance misuse refers to public toilets usually reserved for injecting heroin.

Should acute or chronic cannabis intoxication be a present variable in any street-based transaction then it is possible it will make the street-based transaction more unpredictable and uncertain, increasing the possibility of a violent confrontation.

Cannabis transactions are usually regarded as being less likely to involve violence than transactions for some other drugs simply because cannabis is more likely to involve "social supply". Friendship is an extremely important aspect of drug supply and young people involved in selling cannabis sell almost exclusively to their friends, acquaintances or friends-of-friends in a process known as 'social supply' (Taylor and Potter, 2013). Such activity is often centred on strong social in-groups or social networks.

Core characteristics of social supply are (i) that it takes place among non-strangers and (ii) that it is non-commercial (Coomber and Turnbull, 2007; Harrison et al., 2007; Hough et al., 2003) or "not-for-profit" (Potter, 2009). Social suppliers may make some minimal profit, but unlike commercial dealers, their main motivation is to "help out a friend". It is common that users get drugs "for free" from friends through sharing and/or gift-giving (Werse et al., 2019). A study of 192 cannabis users in three rural and three urban locations in England, found over three quarters (78%) reported sharing their cannabis with friends (Coomber and Turnbull, 2007). Most commonly, respondents described it as a process of giving and receiving (35%) and saw sharing as a social activity (23%). The study revealed that there is little contact by younger cannabis users (aged under 18) to the wider drug market, therefore it may be better to understand this activity as taking place in an "arena of transaction" rather than seeing it as an extension of the normally conceived drug market.

Coomber and Turnbull (2007) identified social supply as where friends supply or facilitate the supply of cannabis to their inner circle of friends (Duffy, 2008; May and Hough, 2004; Nicholas, 2008; Taylor and Potter, 2013). They suggested that this form of dealing was significantly different from that of traditional supply within drug markets and thus it should be delineated differently but also addressed differently by the criminal justice system. Other scholars in substance misuse have confirmed social supply as an active staple of local supply methods (Hathaway et al, 2018; Coomber et al. 2016; Natarajan and Hough 2000; Potter, 2009; and Scott et al. 2017).

Skliamis and Korf, (2022) in their pan-national study of seven countries also found social supply to be dominant in relation to cannabis. Of participants buying their cannabis ($n = 929$), overall, buying from friends was the most common source of supply, followed by street dealers, home dealers, and delivery services. There were, however, variations by country; for example, Dutch participants tended to purchase from coffee shops whereas French participants were more likely to buy from street dealers. Purchasing from the internet remained marginal in most countries. Their research concluded that across all the countries surveyed, users often prefer to purchase their cannabis in a "regulated or legal market". A likely part of the explanation is that many people smoking or purchasing cannabis do not wish to interact with drug dealers operating in drug markets.

Many social supply transactions take place in homes with the dealer invited in as a regular friend or member of the social circle. In this way reputations can be made for anyone able to source a supply of cannabis, even during a "drought"; or for those who

always have the best available cannabis resin or buds. Within this social supply transactional space, the supply of cannabis often forms part of a "gifting" transaction, where money does not change hands (Werse, 2008; Werse et al., 2019). In such scenarios cannabis is given without immediate exchange of money. Payment may be deferred or relinquished or refused. A central element of gifting is that of creating a lasting relationship built on trust (Potter, 2009; Taylor and Potter 2013). This trust extends to the individual carefully sourcing the drugs for friends, and discreetly delivering the drugs and discreetly conducting the transaction. It often extends to the supplier having personal knowledge of the social circumstances of an individual and their circle of friends, i.e., who smokes and how regularly; or if that customer consumes other types of drugs.

Within the context of social supply, and the closed markets which nurture social supply, preserving "business security", observing a personal moral code and a recognition of friendship ties, limit the recourse to violence. These social bonds also encourage suppliers to remain patient with debtors (Taylor and Potter, 2013), in the knowledge that any funds due will be collected next week or soon after.

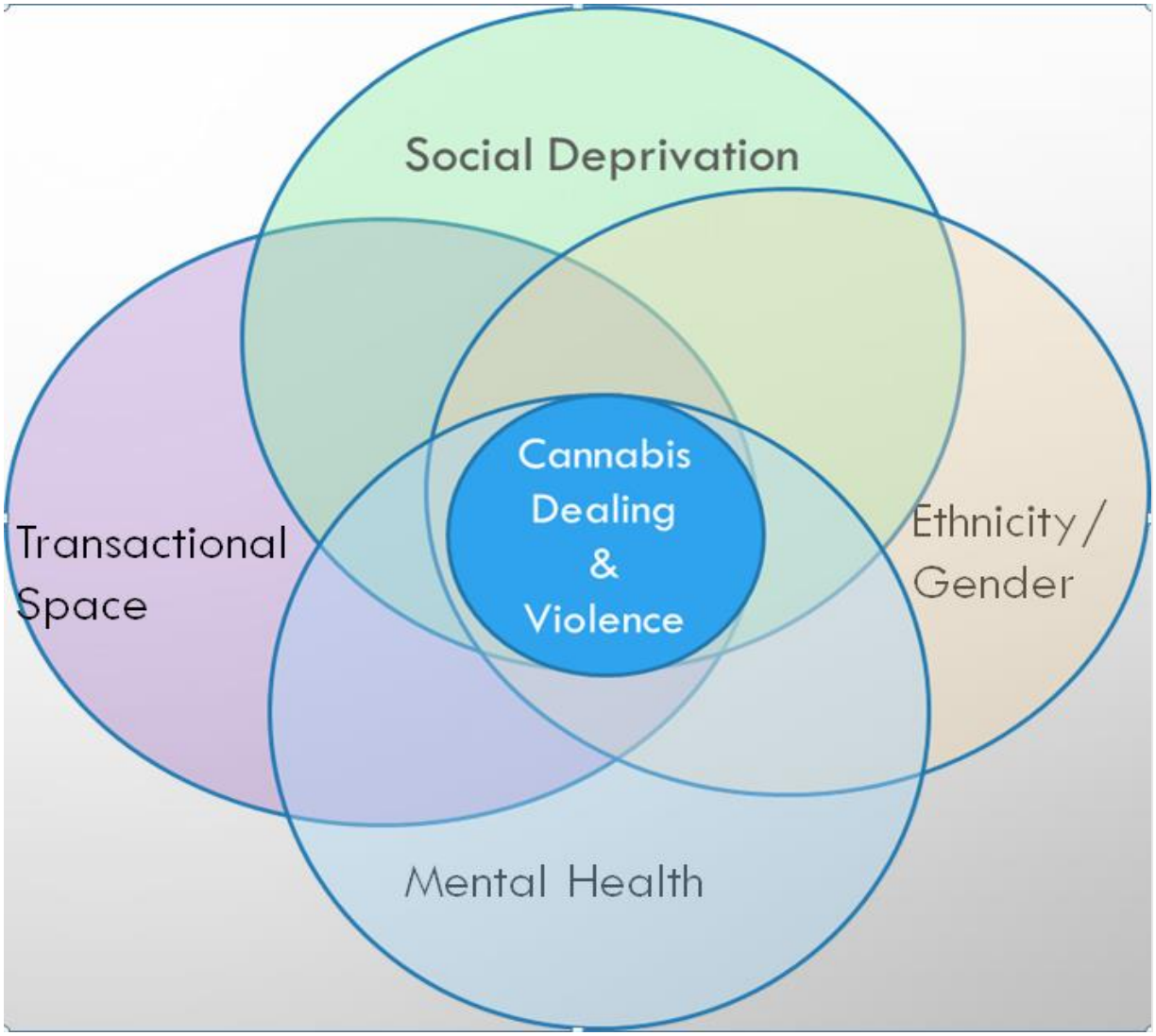
For those cannabis users who obtain their cannabis via social supply networks or via low level casual cannabis dealing amongst friends, the concept of physical violence as part of these transactions within this social space is unfamiliar, remote, and for many, quite unheard of.

When discussing the relationship between cannabis and violence it is also important to recognise that there are different overlapping factors which underpin or influence that relationship. These include a mix of dynamic factors (such as mental health and social/economic deprivation) and static factors (such as ethnicity). We use the term overlapping or interacting factors, rather than the term intersectionality which originally refers to "overlapping or intersecting of social identities and related systems of oppression, domination, or discrimination" (Crenshaw, 1989).

Coomber (2006) for example, suggests that levels of drug dealing violence depend on a number of factors, including the "class, gender, culture and personal dispositions" of the sellers and buyers involved.

Figure 1 below illustrates how some of these variables might interact or overlap to create a situational relationship between cannabis dealing and violence.

Figure 1 - visual representation of the overlapping factors that influence the relationship between cannabis dealing and violence



Source: Authors

To summarise, violence related to cannabis dealing is a result of the interaction of several social/ environmental/psychological factors and the transactional space where it happens (e.g., social supply vs drug market; physical vs virtual space). The exact mix of these variables will vary in situational context, thus it is not possible to predict exactly if a violent outcome will arise at any given time. Dealers or customers with social skill and expertise in 'street socialisation' may be able to talk their way out of a threatening or potentially violent confrontation. Moreover, the very presence of these variables does not mean a violent confrontation will necessarily occur. The above model does however illustrate the key influential relationships behind cannabis and violence.

1.3 Links between cannabis dealing and exploitation

Since one of the outputs of this research was meant to be "a summary of the evidence linking cannabis and violence/exploitation in London", we needed to pay some

attention to exploitation in relation to cannabis, and this section focuses one of those key linkages.

The criminal exploitation of children and young people within the context of drug dealing and drug supply is a relatively nascent area of scholarship and research. Existing scholarship has largely focussed on dealing Class A drugs and involvement of young people in county lines. Exploitation in the context of dealing Class B drugs and cannabis remains more hidden and attracts less attention in academic or practitioner research. Two factors further inhibit clarity here, notably that no specific dedicated legislation or polices exist solely for child criminal exploitation, leaving the issue to be dovetailed under the Children and Young Persons Act (1933), the Child Abduction Act (1984) and the Children Act (1989), and the Modern Slavery Act (2015). According to Maxwell et al. (2019:8), '*There are a wide range of risk factors that can increase potential vulnerability to child criminal exploitation. These include poverty, abuse, neglect, behavioural difficulties, school exclusions, special educational needs, children looked after, those who are missing, drug users, and those with physical or mental health issues'*. Multiple vulnerabilities will of course increase risks. Maxwell et al. (2019:8) also note that '*Child criminal exploitation is linked with other forms of exploitation including child sexual exploitation and serious violence; and that exploited children can be both the victims and perpetrators of violence, with children carrying weapons as a warning as well as to protect themselves'*. The implication for policy and research is that the current data set on child criminal exploitation is not sufficiently detailed to inform us on the role played by cannabis dealing within child criminal exploitation cases. Additionally, cases involving young people in cannabis supply cannot be easily disaggregated from other instances recorded under this legislation. The Children's Society (2019) describes our understanding of child criminal exploitation as inconsistent and often patchy. Whilst this comment was made in general and is not specific to issues of cannabis, it usefully underscores the gaps and challenges which exist in our broader comprehension of exploitation and drug dealing affecting young people.

Whilst copious documentation has now been published regarding Modern Slavery and exploitation[13], much of that literature covers Class A drug dealing and county lines, and the evidence directly linking cannabis dealing with child criminal exploitation remains scarce. Stories of exploitation do, however, appear in survivors' accounts and more regularly in Case bundles and court reports presented within the criminal justice system often provided by social workers and youth offending team officers in cases before the courts.

A further complication and knowledge gap regarding child criminal exploitation is how young people present to the authorities, either at the point of arrest, when entering custody, or when appearing in court. Harding (2022) notes that many young people who, when arrested, may present to the police as having considerable agency in their own involvement in drug dealing or may even appear to be happily and actively involved in dealing drugs. Elements of manipulation, duress and coercion by exploiters may be hidden, even to professionals. This remains a serious concern when

[13] See Centre for Social Justice, (2013); Cooper, C. et al. (2017); HM Government, (2014); HM Government (2020); HMIC (2017); Home Office (2021a); Home Office (2021b); Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner (2019); National Audit Office (2017); Office for National Statistics (2020).

considering how young people can be exploited within low level cannabis dealing (or drug dealing in general). Young people being coerced or controlled may not even recognise themselves as vulnerable or as victims. Their reality of being exploited may be disbelieved or even discredited as they may not fit the stereotype of the ideal victim. In this way they experience 'contested vulnerability'. This in turn may mean that the Crown may actively pursue prosecution to the detriment of the young person. As our understanding, and vocabulary, of child criminal exploitation continues to develop and evolve such issues remain poorly understood.

Issues of child criminal exploitation do however surface more frequently within cannabis production, particularly large-scale or industrial production. Often this not only has proven links to national drug networks and localised bulk supply chains, but also to international child criminal exploitation, modern slavery, and human trafficking (NCA 2018). Here the evidential link is stronger as child criminal exploitation surfaces when cannabis farms are raided by the police and young people forced to manage local production sites, are taken into custody. Papadaki (2020:15) notes that if vulnerabilities are overlooked, the victims of forced criminality are more likely to be treated as criminals.

1.3.1 *Moving from gifting/sharing to exploitation*

Regular 'gifting', or 'sharing', of cannabis creates peer friendship bonds between buyer and seller. These bonds are built upon familiarity and trust which are underpinned by frequency of social supply transactions. Once trust has been established in a social transactional setting, opportunities arise for cannabis to be offered ('gifted') or made available on credit or 'on tick' (Harding 2020; Moyle and Coomber 2015; Taylor and Potter 2013). For those supplying the credit, it provides opportunities to 'bank' or delay accepting payments until the receiver can make payment. It also creates an obligation for the receiver to eventually settle/ pay up. Within a social supply transactional space such arrangements are informal and very variable. Sometimes payment may be made in another way deemed acceptable e.g., being offered a meal, an overnight stay, or introductions to a wider social circle with opportunities to further expand profits through further transactions.

Within a street environment or an urban street gang, gifting and offering credit (tick) is undertaken by gang Olders (males with longevity in the street gang aged 17 – 23) and gang Youngers (younger boys and men aged 12-17) who often find themselves short of cash to pay for small quantities of cannabis (Harding 2020; Harding 2023; Robinson et al. 2019). The multiplicity and frequency of communal cannabis smoking amongst young men in street settings creates numerous opportunities for sharing cannabis and thus for 'gifting' small quantities of cannabis. This ubiquity of cannabis smoking within a street gang means gang Olders regularly use gifts of cannabis to create social bonds with gang Youngers. Older males may boost their own credibility and street reputation by being generous and writing off small loans or outstanding credit, or by 'helping out' other males. Whilst this arrangement is widely reported amongst young males in street gangs, it can also occur for young females. For young females, the 'gifting' arrangement is often linked into romantic relationships, but it may at times also develop into a more exploitative relationship where sexual favours are implied or requested in return for 'free' cannabis. In some cases, in street socialised environments, the gifting of small quantities of cannabis is undertaken as a form of

casual manipulation and stealth grooming to establish loyalty and forms of obligation towards gang Olders (Harding 2014; 2020; 2022).

On other occasions this form of grooming and manipulation is more openly exploitative with cannabis on credit/tick being purposefully used to create 'fake' friendship bonds through debt creation. Such debts are often small at first and subtlety introduced, but can be called in at any time (Harding 2020). Interest can be applied, and debt volumes can escalate rapidly and unexpectedly. Younger males can suddenly learn that the cannabis they were gifted for the last three months, was not really a gift at all but an extended (if unspoken) loan. Via such means, 'debt bondage' (Andell and Pitts 2017; Harding 2020) is created, whereby the younger person owing the debt is now beholden to the older male and must pay off the debt. Paying off the debt often involves undertaking duties or performing tasks for Olders until the debt is paid off. For many this will involve working for 'free', possibly carrying or hiding weapons, drugs, or cash.

In this way extending credit in cannabis transactions and establishing forms of debt bondage are often entry points for a young person's subsequent recruitment into drug supply networks including county lines networks. Again, evidence here lies within multiple accounts from young people surfacing within Youth Offending Teams and to schools Designated Safeguarding Leads. It is widely reported by both young people, by schools and by Youth Offending teams, that if such drug debts fail to be discharged upon request, sudden and unpredictable violence can often occur (Harding 2020; Harvard et al. 2021; Robinson et al., 2019). Youth Offending Teams across the country are familiar with scenarios of young men being forced to undertake drug dealing in a county lines network having first fallen into debt bondage[14]. Charities and central government alike now cite debt bondage as a key element of county lines and a key instigator of the involvement of young men and young women into this practice (Calouri et al., 2020; Home Office 2021; NCA 2018; NCA 2019; NYA 2020)[15].

Enforcing younger teenagers to work for a drug line (either within London, or a county line from London to another provincial town) is a form of child criminal exploitation as they are effectively committing criminal activity under duress and coercion. This in turn is a form of Modern Slavery (HM Government, 2020; HMIC, 2017; HM Government, 2015; HM Government, 2019; Home Office, 2020; Home Office, 2021; IASC, 2016; Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, 2019; Local Government Association, 2017). Once a young person is coerced into wider drug supply or for working in county lines drug supply, further child criminal exploitation can occur. Young people may be forced to leave London for several days to deal drugs in rural or regional towns. Whilst some young people refer to this as 'going country' or 'going out

[14] For more detailed accounts of youth exploitation within street gangs and county lines, see Andell and Pitts (2018), Calouri et al. (2020), The Children's Society (2019), Firmin (2018), Harding (2020), Harvard et al., (2021), Maclean et al., (2019), NYA (2020), Pepin (2018), Robinson et al., (2019), Spicer (2019), Windle and Briggs (2015), and Windle, Moyle and Coomber (2020). The County Lines Pathfinder Policy Review (Traverse 2021) also provides good practice on tackling this issue - https://yjresourcehub.uk/images/County%20Lines%20Pathfinder/Policy_Review_County_Lines_Pathfinder_2021.pdf

[15] See also, All Party Parliamentary Group for Runaway and Missing Children and Adults (2017, 2019); Centrepoint (2019); Contextual Safeguarding Network (2019), Early Intervention Foundation (2018); Home Office (2018a); Home Office (2019); Ofsted (2018); Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board (2021); The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel (2020); The Children's Society (2019); and Victims Commissioner (2020).

of town' this is in fact a form of human trafficking[16] (the transfer and exploitation of individuals) and child criminal exploitation. In such scenarios the exploitative mechanisms used will usually include further threats of violence, actual physical violence and possibly sexual violence and exploitation.

Once an exploitative arrangement has arisen via grooming and debt bondage, the exploitation can increase rapidly into dealing Class A drugs such as crack cocaine and heroin. In this way it is entirely possible for there to exist an theoretical 'escalator' commencing with elementary 'gifting' of cannabis at a low level – to a situation of 'debt bondage' – to child criminal exploitation working in larger drug supply networks.

Indeed, it is possible that early familiarisation and learned social manners of 'gifting' and credit within social supply networks creates a false sense of security and expectation outside the social supply circle. However, such conventions do not operate outside this transactional space. Young people may therefore have unrealistic assumptions and expectations which can then lead them into poor decision-making.

Should such a scenario arise where the young person is recruited (forced) into county lines drug dealing, the young person will be forced to deal both heroin and crack cocaine to addicted users. Within such arrangements the vulnerable young person will be at greater risk and greater levels of violence may be present. This includes serious physical violence arising from the exploiter (controller), from rival drug dealers, or from erratic users.

The full extent of young people ending up in county lines exploitation after falling into debt bondage through casual gifting of cannabis cannot be determined accurately without further research, but it is likely that cannabis gifting does play a role in some of those pathways.

1.4 Cannabis farming and violence/exploitation

It is well known that over the last three decades cannabis supply has shifted strongly from importation to home production (Ancrum and Treadwell, 2017; McSweeney et al., 2008; Pakes and Silverstone, 2012). Whilst Pakes and Silverstone cite globalization as a key driver for this shift, increasingly production has shifted in terms of product (from cannabis resin to skunk) and to domestic production locations - in 2008, 7 per cent of the herbal cannabis seized had been home-grown using intensive methods (Hardwick and King, 2008:4). Small scale cannabis production might suit closed cannabis markets supplying family and friends. Numerous such small-scale cultivators and supply chains exist and growers may not be fixed to any one supply chain (Taylor and Potter, 2013).

[16] Human Trafficking is defined by Article 4(a) of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (the Convention) describes 'human trafficking' as '"the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of person, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation." Human Trafficking is widely misunderstood to mean trafficking across international borders, however human trafficking occurs and does occur within the UK when it involves the recruitment, transfer, transportation, harbouring or receipt of an adult or a young person for sexual exploitation, forced labour, or criminal exploitation.

Shorter supply chains for cannabis supply have the benefit of increasing profitability for those supplying cannabis as there is no need for large-scale product transportation, and this has in turn led to a proliferation of UK grow sites.[17] A UK grow site will also eliminate risk of interception by border officials whilst ensuring a larger volume of product reaches the end user, again increasing profitability. Grow sites are easily established, and expanded to meet demand. Production sites used can include domestic production in the attic space of residential housing – to industrial capacity warehouses or large grow sites in disused buildings[18].

The large profits available to those involved in cannabis production have increased the involvement of organised crime – both domestic and international (ACPO 2010).

The National Crime Agency (NCA) has reported that OCGs already view the cannabis industry as a lucrative arena for illegal profiteering. Page 10 of their 2017 report, notes *More than a third of forces (35%) reference the supply of cannabis by county lines groups. However, this is generally referenced as a secondary drug and there is some suggestion that it is supplied by runners as an independent supplementary sideline to generate additional income.*

In their 2016 report, the NCA noted that approximately 30% of police constabulary areas reporting county lines drug supply claimed that cannabis was also being supplied alongside Class A drugs.

Central to some forms of cannabis farming and larger-scale industrial production is the need to constantly manage the crop whilst reducing costs and maximizing profit margins. Large scale cultivation is often a task designated to younger males sometimes from countries such as Albania or Vietnam, who are trafficked or are victims of modern slavery. Violence can be used to control their movements and ensure they remain in situ to cultivate the crop (Ramiz et al. 2020). Again, such individuals are subject to exploitation, coercive control and debt bondage (which can include bondage as a result of receiving passage to the UK).[19]

Violence in various forms is therefore widely associated with large-scale domestic cannabis production. Here, violence can also include multiple robbery raids/ home invasions on cannabis farms. These are now increasingly common due to the opportunity of obtaining both the cash profits and the plants during a raid. A raid will also put a rival producer out of business, at least for a while. The involvement of street gangs and organised crime has escalated forms of serious violence with arson and kidnapping now more common; indeed, some fatalities linked to cannabis farming have now been recorded.

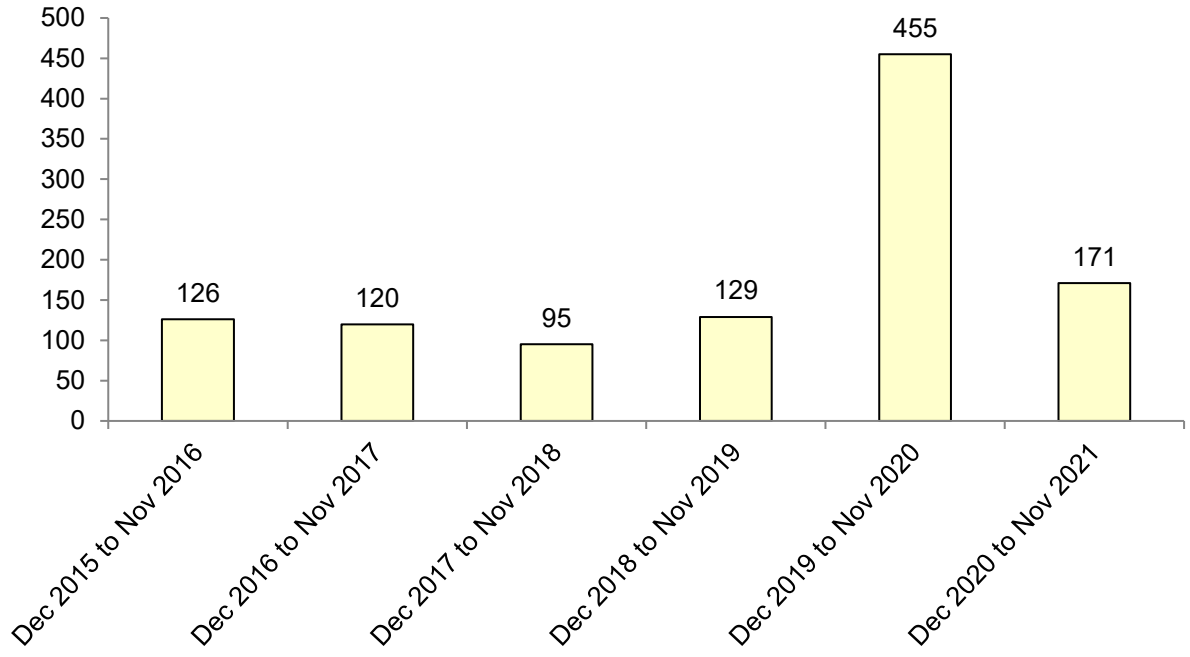
Comprehensive data on the existence and status of cannabis farms (small and large scale) across London is not available, although some London-wide data has been reported in the press recently[20], for example, showing numbers of cannabis farms

[17] Full and detailed data-sets relating to this remain unavailable, although we refer to some of the information which can be found, below.
[18] See O'Hagan and Parker (2016).
[19] There are references to bondage of this kind in case notes included in the cannabis farm data that we refer to later in this section. Within those notes it is said that, for example, that: "Suspects at four venues claimed they were brought into the country illegally then forced to maintain the grows".
[20] See for example https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-59893274

discovered by the Metropolitan Police across London during the period from 01/12/2015-30/11/2021.

During that period, a total of 1,096 cannabis farms were found across the city, as summarised at Figure 2. The reasons for the fluctuations in numbers are not fully explained, although the figures for 2020 obviously include the period when there were COVID-19 lockdown and other restrictions.

Figure 2 – Cannabis farms found across London, December 2015 to end-November 2021



(Source: Metropolitan Police Data)

We have also managed to access some smaller data-sets focusing on this, and in particular, a data-set from one of the 12 BCUs in London which was produced from a search of CRIS records and shared with the research team. We include some of the details here because they illustrate what was found in one area of the city, but this obviously cannot be used to generalise to other areas.

The record search identified 80 cannabis factories across the BCU area over a period of just over 6 months (from 15 August 2020 – 02 February 2021), and the information was used both to map these factories and to identify hotspots. [21]

[21] The report notes that the number of identified cannabis factories will likely not be an accurate reflection of the real total present in the CRIS records, because they are sometimes buried in the system using other codes. Even if the number is accurate of course, it will only include those addresses that have come to the attention of the police – and the report does give a full breakdown of how the police became aware of each cannabis production site (usually via contacts from the public – 68%).

A BCU report based on this information was written in response to local concerns about recent spikes in violence associated with cannabis factories – including some very serious violence involving weapons, and at least one murder. In terms of the CRIS reports, there was no violence in relation to 43% of the records, known violence in 20%, and unknown use of violence for the other 38%. Weapons were identified in 28% of the records – ranging from axes, machetes and knives, to firearms.

Thirty suspects were identified as targeting cannabis factories of whom 57% (n= 17) were white males; 37% (N= 11) were black males. The suspects targeting cannabis factories ranged in age between 19 and 43 years old.

In addition to violence which can often occur at the locations of cannabis production, these locales can be the location of a significant number of fires (– not only because the combination of equipment used in cannabis farming involves a fire risk, but because rivals sometimes seek to put competitors out of business by setting fires at rival locations).

1.5 Cannabis and violence – conclusions and recommendations

Although a direct causal link between cannabis and violence cannot be established with certainty, research evidence suggests that cannabis users are at increased risk of different forms of violence, both as victims and perpetrators. Not all cannabis users will experience psychological and violent behaviour as a result of it, especially if smoked occasionally, in low doses, and if there are no pre-existing mental health conditions, but it is becoming apparent that a range of factors makes it more likely for cannabis use to trigger violent behaviour in certain individuals.

Studies about cannabis and violence are limited in several ways. First, studies are heterogeneous in terms of methodology, sample and measures of cannabis use and measures of violence, findings are therefore often not comparable or are contradictory, indicating that the existence and the nature of the link between cannabis and violence is not clear. In addition, most studies rely on participants retrospectively reporting their past cannabis use, which is likely to be influenced by underreporting bias (Khalili et al., 2021). Also, most cannabis-violence studies only assess frequency of cannabis use, even though the route and dose of cannabis are known to result in different effects, for example, smoking cannabis produces more rapid and intense effects, which may influence behaviour differently. As a result of these limitations, from a policy and harm reduction perspective, it is not possible to advise on what amount of cannabis use constitutes a risk for violence when under the influence.

Cannabis use may, if other conditions are present, drive violent behaviour. The pharmacological characteristics of the substance itself, the characteristics and behaviours of the individual user, and the environment in which cannabis use and dealing occurs may all interact to produce violent outcomes.

Early, persistent use of cannabis and high THC levels increase the risks of changes to mental health and cognitive functioning that can lead to more impulsive and aggressive behaviour. Therefore, educational and treatment interventions should focus on delaying the age of onset of cannabis use and reducing the demand for high

potency and frequent cannabis use. A harm reduction rather than "just say no" policy might be more effective in reaching young people.[22]

The debate around the safety and the impact of cannabis use must take into account levels of THC content. People, especially young people, need to be informed about the difference between low and high potency cannabis, and about risks to their mental health, potential cannabis dependence, and consequent increased risk of violent behaviour. They should also be informed that resin cannabis generally contains a higher percentage of THC and is therefore more potent than herbal cannabis. GPs should also be aware of the impact of potent cannabis use on mental health - a recent study of medical records taken from 787 general practices throughout the UK showed much lower levels of cannabis use when compared to data derived from surveys of the general population (Keerthy et al., 2021), although this might be due to cannabis being under reported by patients except in severe cases, or to cannabis being perceived as being less problematic than other drugs.

In terms of supply, those who advocate for cannabis decriminalisation suggest that legalising the market would allow for regulation of the quality and strengths of cannabis. The recent report by the London Cannabis Legalisation Commission (Stewart, 2021), proposes a framework for creating an equitable and efficient legal cannabis market in London. The report proposes a pilot to enable safe cannabis production and manufacturing; this would include managing potency for cannabis and cannabis edibles with a clear London cannabis traffic light labelling system, which would indicate THC level. If this pilot goes ahead, it would be an opportunity to research the impact of legalisation on cannabis potency, prevalence and patterns of use (e.g. how many users would choose less potent forms of cannabis), and also the impact on violence.

Given the link between mental health, cannabis dependence and violent behaviour, the increase of THC levels in the cannabis available in the national and global market (which has occurred steadily over the last 30 years; Potter et al., 2018), poses public health as well as community safety concerns.

Social deprivation, trauma, lack of opportunities, lack of access to services, also increase the vulnerability of developing problematic substance use in general[23] (Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs, 2018). Therefore, a "risk environment" (Rhodes, 2002) model rather than a cause-effect one might be more appropriate for understanding and addressing the relationship between cannabis and violence. Such a framework envisages drug harms as being "a product of the social situations and environments in which individuals participate" (Rhodes et al., 2009: 193). Socio economic status is strongly interlinked with these vulnerabilities and certain ethnic groups are more affected than others. With the UK child poverty levels predicted to increase, any policy approach that ignores the socioeconomic context will potentially be less effective than it could be (Walsh et al., 2019). As highlighted by the recent Black report (Black, 2021) interventions and policies should be holistic, aim at reducing

[22] The evidence also suggests that "Just say no" policies are not very effective; see Lillienfeld and Arkowitz (2014) for a brief discussion.

[23] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/761123/Vulnerability_and_Drug_Use_Report_04_Dec_.pdf

the inequality gap and focus on delivering early intervention programmes that build resilience in young people.

Given the strong link between mental health, problematic substance use, and antisocial behaviour, a coordinated approach between mental health, drug and alcohol services and police is essential.

There is a need for more research on cannabis farming, and on links with human trafficking, exploitation and organised crime groups. A good first step would be to synthesize information already collected about some of these things at BCU level, as in the example presented above in section 1.4.

Further research into cannabis and county lines would also be useful, to add specificity to what we already know anecdotally about the role played by cannabis (and cannabis gifting) in the recruitment of young people into county lines and subsequent drug supply activities.

2 LINKS BETWEEN DRUGS-RELATED STOP AND SEARCH TACTICS AND VIOLENT CRIME IN LONDON

2.1 An Overview: Stop and Search for Drugs

Stop and search is a key police power that is generally seen to be essential for maintaining the safety of the public (and of individual officers).[24] The power is also accepted as legitimate by a strong majority of the public, as suggested by numerous measures including regular public attitude surveys (see below, section 3.4).

The power has nonetheless generated considerable controversy both in England and Wales generally, and in London specifically, and questions about the effectiveness of the practice in terms of the deterrence, detection, investigation and prevention of crime have continued to be debated.

The police use of stop and search powers in England and Wales has become increasingly concentrated on drugs, rising from just under half of all stop and searches in 2010/11, to 63% in 2019/20 (Home Office, 2011, 2020). Analysis carried out by Her Majesty‘s Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC, 2013: 5-6) as part of its first ever thematic inspection of stop and search found that in 2011/12, “almost half of all searches nationally were for drugs, and of those, most were for low level street possession” HMIC (2013: 5). They noted that it was “extremely surprising” that the use of the powers was not better aimed at preventing or detecting priority crimes, despite many forces stating their focus was on violent or gang crimes. The Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) was singled out as a constabulary which required substantial improvement, committing to reduce searches for drugs, where no drugs were found, by 50 percent, whilst increasing weapon searches (HMIC, 2013: 25).

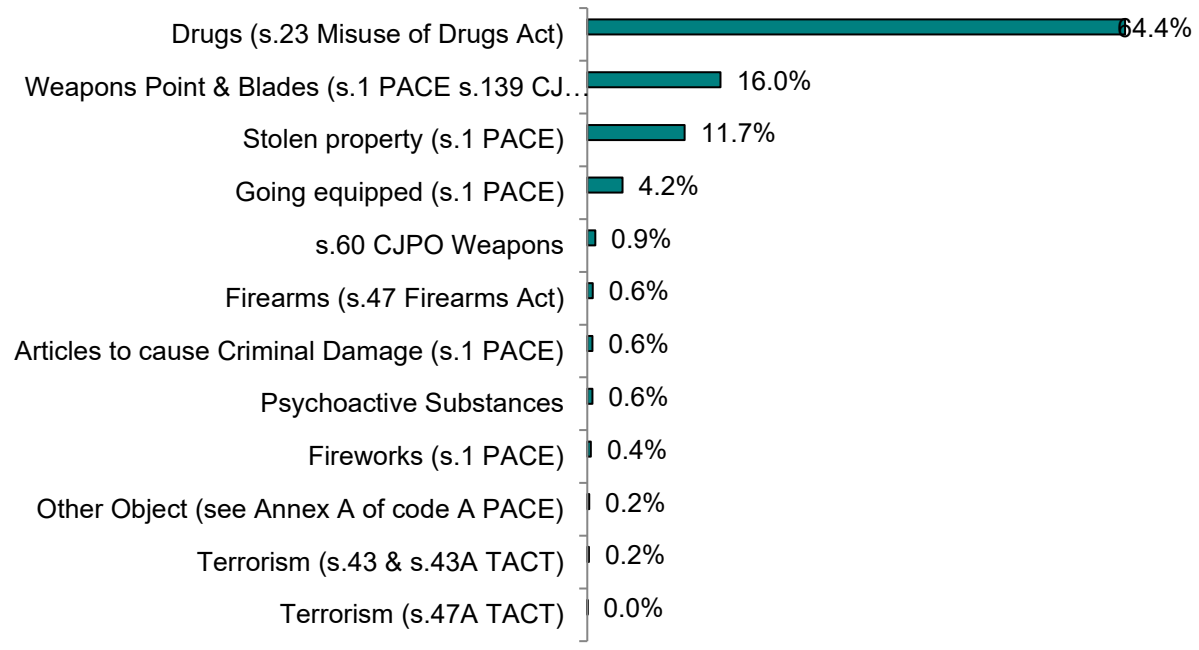
In 2017, Her Majesty‘s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Service (HMICFRS), again raised concerns about the effectiveness of the practice, asserting

[24] As stipulated by PACE Code A, paragraph 1.4, the goal of stop and search is to “enable officers to allay or confirm suspicions about individuals without exercising their powers of arrest”.

that forces were failing to focus on priority crimes. Based on their analysis of 8,574 records, HMICFRS (2017: 26-27), found 5,272 were for drugs and of these 70% were for suspicion of possession only, emphasising that in many cases the powers were still not being used to tackle violent or more serious drug related crime. Drug searches involving Black people were also less likely to result in drugs being found. In records which involved only the smell of cannabis, the find rate was 37% for White people and 29 for Black people. Four years later, HMICFRS (2021: 2) again highlighted issues with the use of stop and search for drugs, noting that forces often cite county lines as a reason for the prevalence of possession searches, "but to be most effective, policing tactics need to target drug supply more effectively". Due to the array of different approaches employed and a lack of standardised policy across constabularies in England and Wales, the report called for an "evidence-based national debate" on the use of the practise for policing controlled drugs (HMICFRS, 2021: 2).

As well as being the largest of the 43 territorial police forces, the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) makes the greatest use of stop and search (Data.Police.UK, 2022)[25]. In keeping with other research our own analysis shows that the highest proportion of searches conducted by the MPS is related to s.23 of the Misuse of Drugs Act. During the two year period from 1st November 2020 to end-October 2022 for example, 64.4% of stop and searches recorded in London had s.23 recorded as the search reason (n=282,873). The breakdown of all stop and search episodes in London during that period is summarised on the following figure.

Figure 3 – Breakdown of stop and search episodes in London by reason (%), during period from 1 November 2020 to end-October 2022 (n=439,028)



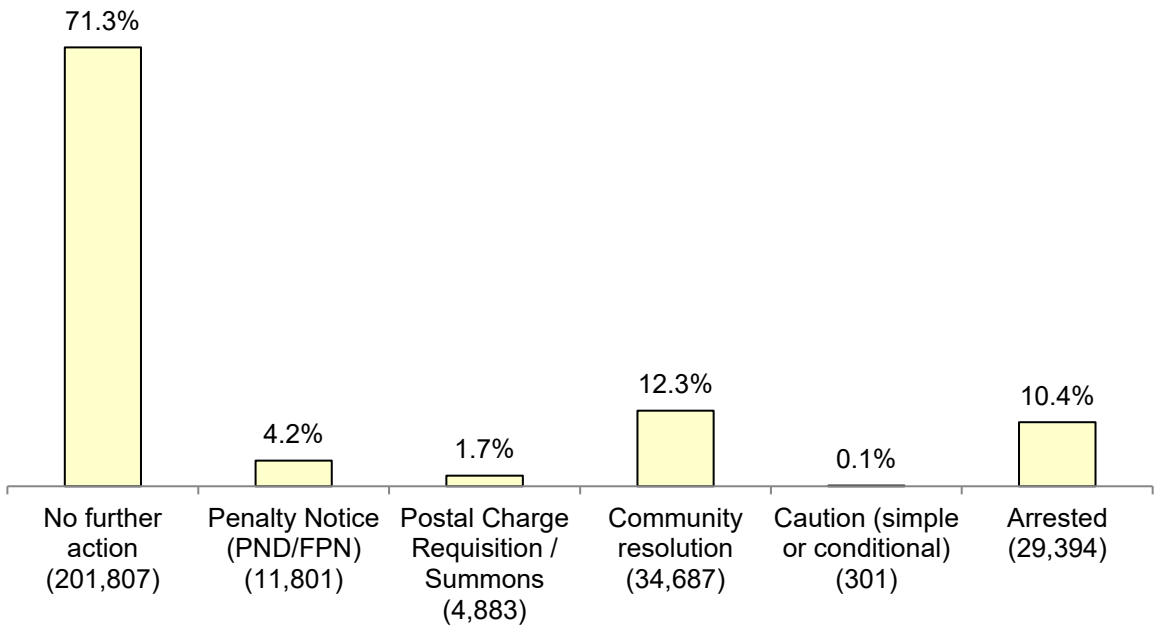
Source: (MPS, 2022)[26]

[25] https://data.police.uk/data/

[26] Full stop and search data-sets can be downloaded for specific periods at: https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/mps-stop-and-search-public-dashboard-data?resource=01687806-00b3-4291-a550-fdd53b625e4d

In terms of outcomes relating to s.23 stop and search episodes specifically, the bulk of them (71.3%) are recorded as "no further action", which usually means that the search did not lead to the discovery of any drugs or other illegal items which would have required further action of some kind. Just over 1 in 10 of these searches led to an arrest. The full range of outcomes for this set of s.23 stop and searches during the two year period referred to above, is summarised on the following figure.

Figure 4 – Breakdown of s.23 stop and search episodes in London by outcome (%), during period from 1 November 2020 to end-October 2022 (n=282,873)



Source: (MPS, 2022)

The stop and search data also includes details on the reasons for the above outcomes, and we return to that issue in section 3 below.

2.2 Stop and search for drugs, and impacts on violence

Relatively little empirical evidence is available exploring the efficacy of drug stop and searches in relation to violent crime. Whilst there is a growing body of literature investigating the effectiveness of stop and search powers against some crime types, albeit producing weak and inconclusive findings (Bradford, 2017: 30), relatively few studies explore the nature and extent of cannabis searches (May et al., 2002; Hales, 2007; May, 2007; Eastwood, Shiner and Bear, 2013; Shiner et al., 2018). Bearing in mind the potential of the practice to undermine police/community relations in the capital, either as a result of direct contact (Bradford et al., 2009); or through the sharing of negative vicarious policing experiences by friends, family or the media (Rosenbaum et al., 2005), as evidenced recently with the high-profile search of Child Q (Gamble and McCallum, 2022), the paucity of research on this topic remains surprising. While Home Office statistics do not record or detail the drug searched for or the quantity found, (only recording cannabis searches under the rubric of Section 23 searches), wider research evidence suggests that the vast majority of drug searches in London are for personal possession of cannabis instead of dealing (FitzGerald, 1999; Hales,

2007; Eastwood, Shiner and Bear, 2013; Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, 2013; Shiner et al., 2018).

Though dated, a study published in response to the Macpherson Report sought to examine the effectiveness of searches against crime and impact on community relations at the time. Based on their analysis of Home Office statistics, observations with constables on shift and interviews with 100 officers in five pilot areas (including the MPS), Miller, Bland and Quinton, (2000: v) concluded, that "Searches appear to have a minor role in detecting offenders for the range of all crimes that they address" and only "a relatively small role in detecting offenders for such crimes that come to the attention of the police". Regarding the use of stop and search for drugs, the authors noted that it is unlikely that the tactic makes a substantial impact on undermining drug markets or drug related crime, especially bearing in mind searches tend to focus on users of cannabis rather than dealers. In line with findings from prior research (FitzGerald, 1999), an examination of recorded grounds on search slips from two forces found that of 326 searches, only 9% mentioned 'dealing', and of the 161 instances in which the drug was identifiable, 150 cases were for cannabis. While Miller, Bland and Quinton, (2000: 44) noted that drug searches may play an important role in 'order maintenance', i.e., that proactive policing of minor offences, such as personal possession of drugs, may prevent or deter more serious offending, they underscored that such tactics may alienate the community, undermining the efficacy of policing in the long term.

A study published by the Home Office revealed similar findings (McCandless et al., 2016). As part of Operation Blunt 2, an intervention aimed at reducing weapon related offences and serious youth violence, London boroughs were assigned one of three tiers based on the perceived severity of their knife crime problem. Boroughs placed in Tier 1 (such as Lambeth, Haringey, and Croydon) received more than a three hundred% increase in weapon searches whilst Tier 2 locations received a 115% rise. Tier 3 boroughs recorded an upsurge of 87% in comparison to pre-Blunt 2 levels. In total, nine measures of recorded crime were analysed including robbery, assault using sharp instruments, weapons, and drug offences and three types of acquisitive crime. Overall, McCandless et al., (2016: 2) found "no statistically significant crime-reducing effect from the large increase in weapons searches," also commenting "that the greater use of weapons searches was not effective at the borough level for reducing crime". Interestingly, McCandless et al., (2016: 31) found that ambulance calls fell for 'knife injuries' and 'all weapons injuries' in boroughs that received the smallest increases in stop and search activity. Counterintuitively, a reduction in assault hospital admissions was observed in Tier 3 Boroughs where the upsurge in weapons searches was lower than those in Tiers 1 and 2. With respect to weapon and drug offences, McCandless et al., (2016: 36) observed no significant effect, which is surprising as weapon and drug possession are offences most susceptible to detection through stop and search (Miller, Bland and Quinton, 2000).

A study based on ten years of data supports findings from prior work, concluding that although stop and search "had a weak association with some forms of crime in London between 2004 and 2014, the effect was at the outer limits of statistical and social significance" (Tiratelli et al., 2018: 1224). Regarding the use of stop and searches for violent crime, the only significant result was the net effect of Section 1 and Section 47 weapon searches, with a 10% upsurge in weekly searches resulting in a decrease of

0.01% in non-domestic violent crime. Overall, Tiratelli et al. (2018: 1223) commented that they "struggled" to find evidence of an effect of the tactic against violent crime, with the only robust finding relating drug searches, with a 10% increase in search volumes monthly, leading to a fall in recorded drug offences of 1.85% monthly. Although these findings suggest the use of the powers may be a strong deterrent for this type of offending, another explanation is that the practice prompts users to adapt their behaviour, making it harder for the police to find drugs by carrying smaller quantities or concealing them more carefully. As noted by Shiner et al. (2018: 54), reductions in recorded drug crime do not necessarily imply a reduction in offending as people may move to areas where the police are less active (displacement) or hide drugs more carefully.

With respect to the socio geographic distribution searches and their effectiveness, recent evidence (Shiner et al., 2018) mirrored findings from earlier work conducted in London (Eastwood, Shiner and Bear, 2013), concluding that drug searches have a marginal impact on crime, and that rates of stop and search are more strongly linked to deprivation and inequality, as opposed to individual drug use or violent crime. Shiner et al., (2018: 1) commented that "reductions in stop and search have not been distributed evenly and residual activity has become more heavily concentrated on drugs, often for minor possession offences, and black and minority ethnic groups" (Shiner et al., 2018: 1). With respect to the use of the practice for cannabis, the authors noted that the concentration of search activity in more deprived London boroughs cannot be explained by patterns of drug or cannabis use (Shiner et al., 2018: 25).

More recently, in the three months from July to September 2020, 65% of searches in London were for drugs, 17.2% for weapons, 11.5% for stolen goods and 0.6% for firearms (Ashby, 2020: 2). In total, 76% of all searches during this period resulted in no further action. Overall, 39% of searches for drugs resulted in an arrest, contrasted to 88% of searches for firearms. Individuals stopped and searched who were from Mixed or Black ethnicities were most likely to receive a formal criminal justice outcome for drugs in comparison to other groups, at 30 and 26% respectively. In comparison to the population, Black men aged 18-24 were 29 times more likely to be searched in London for suspicion-based weapon searches (Ashby, 2020: 5). Consistent with Eastwood, Shiner and Bear (2013) and Shiner et al., (2018), Ashby found a strong relationship between deprivation and search activity, revealing that 69% of searches took place in neighbourhoods that were more deprived than average.

Another report investigating the effect of drug searches on crime was published by HMICFRS (2021), who found 80% of self-generated[27] drug searches analysed had 'weak' recorded grounds. This contrasts with weak recorded grounds in 15% of searches made in response to third party information and 5% of 'intelligence-led' searches, implying self-generated drug searches are significantly less likely to find the item searched for (HMICFRS, 2021:36). Though the records revealed fewer searches were solely based on the smell of cannabis alone in comparison to the last inspection (see HMICFRS, 2017), the report underscored that further improvement was still required. Interestingly, HMICFRS (2021:6) found that a large number of possession only stop and searches for Black people had weaker recorded grounds than

[27] "Self-generated" searches, according to HMICFRS, are those that are "initiated spontaneously by the officer in response to what they see or hear, rather than intelligence-led or as a result of information from a third party" (2017: 6).

comparable ones conducted on White people. Concerning disproportionality and community relations they commented "Drug searches influence the disproportionality rate more than other types of search, and risk damaging police community relations" (HMICFRS 2021: 6).

The most recent meta-analysis focusing on some of these issues was released in 2023 (Petersen et al., 2023), and it examined findings from across 40 eligible studies of "pedestrian stops" by police. Their focus was essentially on stops for any reason – with these often being called "stop, question and frisk" (or "SQF"s) in the American studies – and they applied the standard methodological approaches required for Campbell Collaboration systematic reviews.[28] Most of the studies that the authors included were undertaken in the United States, although 7 were undertaken in Europe, with 5 of these being UK studies.[29] The authors found that police-initiated pedestrian stops were associated with a 13% reduction in crime in their treatment areas, as well as a "diffusion effect" of 7% in areas adjacent to the treatment areas. That is the most positive result that we have seen in terms of links between such events and actual reductions in crime rates, although the authors also found significant negative individual-level impacts on mental and physical health among those who were searched. They also report more negative attitudes toward the police, and elevated levels of self-reported offending after search experiences. In view of that mix of results, the authors conclude:

> *While our findings point to favorable effects of pedestrian stop interventions on place-based crime and displacement outcomes, evidence of negative individual-level effects makes it difficult to recommend the use of these tactics over alternative policing interventions. Recent systematic reviews of hot spots policing and problem-oriented policing approaches indicate a more robust evidence-base and generally larger crime reduction effects than those presented here, often without the associated backfire effects on individual health, attitudes, and behavior. Future research should examine whether police agencies can mitigate the negative effects of pedestrian stops through a focus on officer behavior during these encounters.*

Their reference to hotspot policing is noteworthy, and we make brief reference to some of that evidence in the following section.

In relation to s.23 searches in the UK, although there does not appear to be any convincing evidence that they have a measurable impact on actual rates of violence, it is worth considering other claims that are sometimes put forward to establish such an impact – concerning the way in which stop and search might play a preventative role because of the weapon seizures which it is said to generate.

Police officers have often said to us that stop and search allows them successfully to take large numbers of weapons off the streets of London, and that this is a significant benefit of the practice in terms of reducing violent incidents which could otherwise

[28] Interested readers can find those here: https://www.campbellcollaboration.org/meccir.html.
[29] The UK studies included the Jackson et al. (2021) study which we refer to in section 3.4, the McCandless et al. (2016) study of Blunt 2, the Murray et al. (2021) study of stop and search, procedural justice and compliance in Scotland, and Singer's (2013) study on stops and the London riots (they also include Murray's PhD thesis, 2014, which focused on stop and search in Scotland).

have occurred. Sir Stephen House is quoted as saying that the MPS is "seizing something like 300 knives a month off the streets" through stop and search activities, for example (quoted in Casey, 2023: 317), and a bit more precisely, the London mayor has noted in response to a question from the public that during the calendar year 2021, police stop and search activities led to the seizure of 4,816 weapons.[30]

As part of our own assessment of such claims we examined MPS stop and search data in relation to outcomes and reasons for those outcomes, covering a two year period from 1 November 2020 to end October 2022, and that analysis showed that the numbers provided above concerning weapons are broadly correct.

Looking at all stop and search episodes together - i.e. including all 12 recorded reasons for stops – the percentage for each kind of stop was calculated, relating to three main outcome reasons ("drugs", "firearms offences" and "weapons points and blades offences"). This allowed us to see that out of all s.23 stops for example, 22.8% had an outcome reason that was recorded as "drugs", .1% as "firearms offences" and .9% as "weapons points and blades offences". Looking more broadly across all types of search, the analysis provides us with a rough guide as to what was discovered across all types of stop and search that are included in the open-source data-sets. In cases where a search led to the discovery of drugs, for example, the outcome reason would be recorded accordingly, and where firearms or other weapons were discovered, a recording to that effect would be made on the stop and search report.

If we assume that every case where an outcome reason is recorded as "weapons points and blades offences" – across all types of stop and search, in total - then the analysis suggests that over that two year period, 8,579 weapons in that category were seized. That is an average of 357 per month, or just under 12 per day.

There were 850 searches having "firearms offences" as the outcome reason, which is an average of just over 35 per month.

In the following figure, each type of search is presented with percentages for those searches that had any of the three outcome reasons referred to above – having to do with either drugs or weapons. As illustrated in the figure, weapon seizures are a very small proportion of most search types – for blades and pointed weapons usually much less than 2%, and only just under 7% even where those items were what was being searched for. For firearms the figures are even lower, as we would expect, and it is also noteworthy that just over 14% of searches for firearms also have "firearms offences" listed as the outcome reason.[31] We suspect, but cannot prove, that the reason for that percentage being relatively higher than for other types of search, is that searches for firearms are more often linked to intelligence.

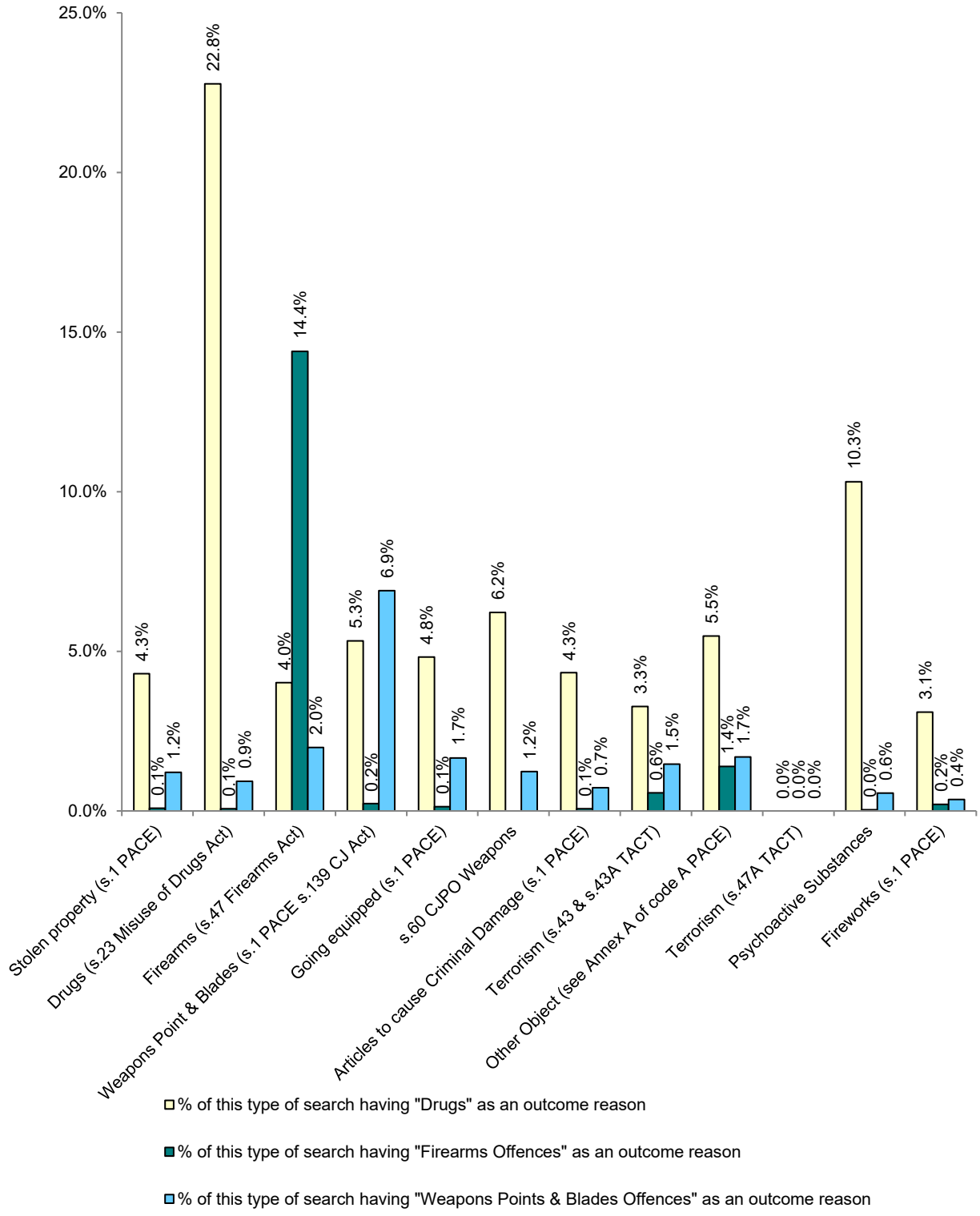
The percentage of drug finds for s.23 searches is just under 23%, although we do not know what type or types of drugs were involved in these cases. Based on other

[30] A breakdown of those weapons is available at: https://www.theyworkforyou.com/london/?id=2022-05-18.4076.h. It is worth noting that a significant proportion of these items seem to be ones that are also easily replaceable – kitchen knives for example, which will be present in some quantity in most households.

[31] That outcome reason would also apply in cases where the subject had ammunition; possession of an actual firearm is not the only "firearms offence".

research that we have referred to above however, it seems likely that the bulk of these cases will involve possession of small amounts of cannabis.

Figure 5 – Breakdown of all stop and search episodes in London by outcome reasons related to drugs or weapons (%), during period from 1 November 2020 to end-October 2022 (n= 439,028)



(Source: MPS 2022)

It is also noteworthy that drugs as an outcome reason can be found to some degree across all types of search – i.e. some drugs appear to be found no matter what the original reason for the search was (averaging 6% across all search types) - and that although there is a similar spread for blades and pointed weapons, the figures are very much lower (averaging 1.6% across all search types). These percentages arguably provide little evidence of effectiveness in terms of addressing violent crime using this tactic - particularly in relation to s.23 searches - given the very large number of events taken to generate this low level of finds.

There is another set of arguments about the benefits of stop and search in terms of violence reduction that is worth considering, concerning the way in which stop and search activity can generate information and intelligence which can be utilised to reduce violence even where such activity does not lead to seizures of weapons for example.

Police officers often say to us that stop and search episodes allow them to know who is in a particular area at a certain time for example, and to map networks associated with particular individuals of interest, or even to learn about offending activities (or plans for these) through what they sometimes find on phones or other sources that they might uncover as part of the search. It has already been noted earlier that although the police have little interest in cannabis possession itself (i.e. this is not usually regarded as a high police priority)[32], s.23 searches do create opportunities for them to access useful forms of information or intelligence – intelligence which may provide them with new investigative leads about other, higher priority crimes, such as gang-related drug dealing for example, or inter-gang violence.

Issues about perceived benefits of this kind are of key importance, since we need to know what might disappear if the police de-prioritised cannabis possession as grounds for stop and search, for example. Some police respondents have said that while they do use cannabis possession as grounds for stop and search, they do so simply because those grounds are easier to justify and defend, and more importantly, the stop and search activity then can focus on other things which actually do have potential in terms of violence reduction – it is argued that most gang members also use cannabis for example, and many people who carry knives also use cannabis. Hence, focusing on cannabis possession provides the police with a possible “way into pockets” which can then yield other benefits for their investigative work.

These are empirical claims, but they are difficult to test in the absence of the available evidence. We have already presented evidence concerning weapon seizures generated by stop and search (and found that evidence to be quite thin), but the extent to which stop and search might partially alleviate an intelligence deficit is hard to assess because those things are not usually recorded (we only hear about them anecdotally). It is worth noting that the impact that stop and search appears to have on relations between the police and local communities probably also worsens the gathering of useful intelligence, in which case a reliance on tactics such as stop and search might be perceived as being even more important by those who use it.

[32] We return to this issue in section 3.2, below.

Finally, in relation to the links between stop and search and violence it is also suggested by some experts that stop and search activity might actually result in *increases* in violence, rather than reductions.

Some of our respondents from local communities clearly suggested this. As one community representative noted:

> *So it's (stop and search) not dealing with the issues around violence or resolving violence. In fact, it's probably escalating the violence yeah. Because, the core issues is if I don't believe you are out here to safeguard me, then I am going to do what I think is right to safeguard myself.*

The claim is that if individuals do not have confidence that the police will protect them, they will begin to make their own decisions about their own safety. Similar views have been expressed to us by young people who we have questioned about knife carrying.

There are also some linked issues about confidence in the police and compliance here. There is very little research that focuses specifically on links between negative perceptions of stop and search and individual propensity to engage in violence, but some of the existing research is suggestive about possible links between those perceptions and compliance with the law or the likelihood of offending more generally. Murray et al. (2021) looked at stop and search and young people (in England and Scotland) through a procedural justice lens, for example, and found that stop and search experience can be corrosive of trust and compliance, and could perhaps increase a young person's likelihood of offending. The authors are careful not to suggest that they are able to demonstrate a causal link between stop and search and such an increase, but they conclude that

> *If the results of this study prove to be causal, it is highly likely that more stop-and search in communities already impacted by violence and disorder will further damage relations between the police and young people, and potentially increase rather than reduce compliance with the law* (Murray et al., 2021: 279).

They also note that their findings:

> *suggest that stop-and-search may damage trust in the police and perceptions of police legitimacy, regardless of the volume of police stop-and-search, and this may result in increased offending behaviour. With ongoing calls to increase the use of stop-and search in response to recent increases in knife crime in England, we argue that its use needs to be carefully balanced against the, as yet poorly evidenced, benefits of the use of the tactic.*

Densley and Stevens (2015) contend similarly that official punitive approaches to gangs such as stop and search in socio-economically deprived areas can have the unintended consequence of pushing people into gangs as a form of reaction and defiance to being labelled as such, in turn, resulting in relatively high rates of serious violence in these socio-economically deprived neighbourhoods. The higher volume of stop and search in boroughs where serious youth violence offences are higher might therefore have less of an impact on the reduction of violent crime levels overall.

Similar conclusions are drawn by Bradford and Tiratelli (2019) who, also drawing on procedural justice theory, note that:

> *. . . to the extent stop and search is considered unfair (and we know this is often the case – Bradford, 2017) it may actually* ***cause*** *crime. Since police activity experienced as unfair undermines public trust and police legitimacy, and weakens people's social bonds to the law and legal institutions, stop and search may have a* ***positive*** *effect on crime, increasing levels of offending among those subject to it (Tyler, 2006). While it seems unlikely that any such process would function over the relatively short timescales considered in our London study, in a general sense the increasingly well evidenced association between procedural injustice and offending (Tyler, 2017) cautions against assuming a unidirectional association between stop/search and crime* (2019:8; authors' emphasis).

Our own review supports the claim made by Murray et al. (2021: 279) that the benefits of stop and search in violence reduction terms are "as yet poorly evidenced", and this applies in particular to s.23 searches, which make up the majority of stop and search activity.

2.3 Evidence on the efficacy of Hot Spot Policing and drugs

Though the above implies stop and search has at best a marginal impact against crime, there is a large body of evidence which concludes hot spot policing (HSP) can have a positive effect (Weisburd and Eck, 2004; Braga, 2005; Weisburd et al., 2010; Taylor et al., 2011; Braga et al., 2014; Weisburd et al., 2015; MacDonald et al., 2016; Braga et al., 2019). This is pertinent as HSP often involves increased use of stop and search, either intentionally, or indirectly, due to an increased police presence within a given area. Though the majority of HSP research was conducted in the USA, this caveat to the debate is important as it suggests highly targeted use of stop and search in specific areas can impact different crime types. A systematic review conducted by Braga et al., (2019) of HSP found 62 of the 78 HSP interventions reported a statistically significant reduction in violent crime and disorder, property crime and drug offences. The review also assessed whether HSP interventions had an impact on crime displacement i.e., whether crime moved to other neighbouring areas because of an awareness of increased police activity. Interestingly, the results revealed little evidence of displacement, suggesting that HSP is likely to produce "unintended crime prevention benefits in areas immediately adjacent to targeted hotspots", implying crime also reduced in these locations (Braga et al., 2019: 42). Despite these encouraging findings, the authors were cautious in their implications for practice, reminding readers that HSP can easily become indiscriminate zero tolerance style policing which has the potential to undermine community relations.

Evidence exploring the impact of drug HSP on crime provides encouraging results, however these types of interventions tend to involve a range of different tactics and do not always involve increased use of stop and search. This body of work was also predominately conducted in the USA and is somewhat dated (Sviridoff et al., 1992; Sherman and Rogan, 1995; Hope, 1994; Lawton, Taylor and Luongo, 2005; Weisburd et al., 2006). One study by Weisburd and Green (2006) used computer mapping techniques to identify 56 hot spots of drug activity, each of which was assigned

experimental or control conditions. The findings revealed “consistent, strong effects of the experimental strategy on disorder-related calls” (Weisburd and Green 2006: 731).

2.4 Drugs-related stop and search and violence in London – conclusions and recommendations

Though the tactic is an important tool for the MPS, overall, the weight of evidence suggests drug searches do not have a measurable effect on violent crime. Despite some positive findings about stop and search generally (and about hotspot policing), claims that stop and search for drugs is an effective tool in preventing or deterring other forms of criminality in the capital are likely to be misplaced.

There is some evidence that stop and search activity more generally does lead to weapon seizures, but the quantities are very small compared to the number of stop and search episodes, and s.23 stops in particular have an extremely small “yield” in terms of weapon seizures.

As Home Office statistics do not detail the drug searched for or the quantity found, only recording cannabis searches under the rubric of Section 23 searches, it is hard to assess the efficacy of the tactic for this reason without analysing individual search slips and outcomes. Like Shiner et al., (2018), we recommend that it is mandatory for officers conducting drug searches to record the substances they hope to find and what is actually found, including the weight of substances, and any other items found (e.g. weapons). This will allow forces to identify trends and if cannabis searches are used to target dealers or individuals for personal possession. In keeping with the IOPC (2022) recommendations, recording practices should also ensure that information is recorded concerning the use of force in relation to the tactic for cannabis (including whether force was used, and the type of force used), rates of disproportionality and all other disposal types. To boost transparency and confidence, this data should be made available to the public. Though these improved data and recording practises could be useful tools, they will only be effective if forces actively monitor the data for quality and consistency.

3 IMPACT OF CANNABIS ENFORCEMENT ON COMMUNITY RELATIONS IN LONDON

This section focuses primarily on evidence concerning the impact of cannabis enforcement on police-community relations in London, but we start by addressing three sub-questions that were included in this section in the original specification (and which the research team was asked to use as headings in this report).

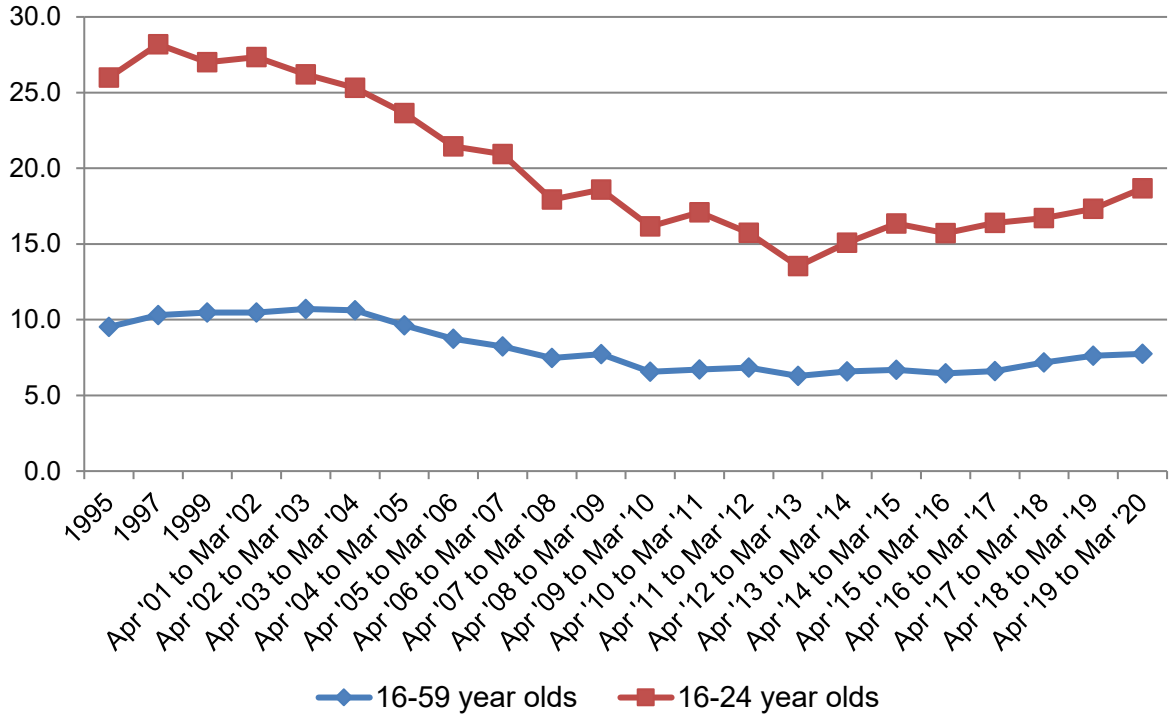
As these sub-questions focus on issues that range more widely than the main title of this section, we have followed them with additional sub-sections where we comment in more detail on issues concerning cannabis enforcement and its impacts, and disproportionality, and also on issues concerning scrutiny and transparency, and procedural justice.

3.1 Who uses cannabis in London?

Cannabis is the most widely used illegal substance in the UK, with 7.8% of 16- to 59-year-olds (2.6 million people) and 18.7% of 16-to 24-year-olds (1.2 million people) reporting use in 2019/20 (ONS, 2021)[33].

It is well known that cannabis use is more concentrated in younger age groups, as demonstrated in the following figure, which is based on ONS data from the *national* Crime Survey for England and Wales.

Figure 6 - Proportion of individuals reporting use of cannabis at least once in the last year, by age range, year ending December 1995 to year ending March 2020



(Source: Office for National Statistics - Crime Survey for England and Wales[34])

The evidence also suggests that those who report having used cannabis in the last year are more likely to use it frequently[35], than those who report using other drugs in the past year. For example, from the same data-set used to generate the above figure, we can see that for three commonly used drugs – cannabis, powder cocaine and ecstasy – the proportion of "frequent" users of cannabis is highest.

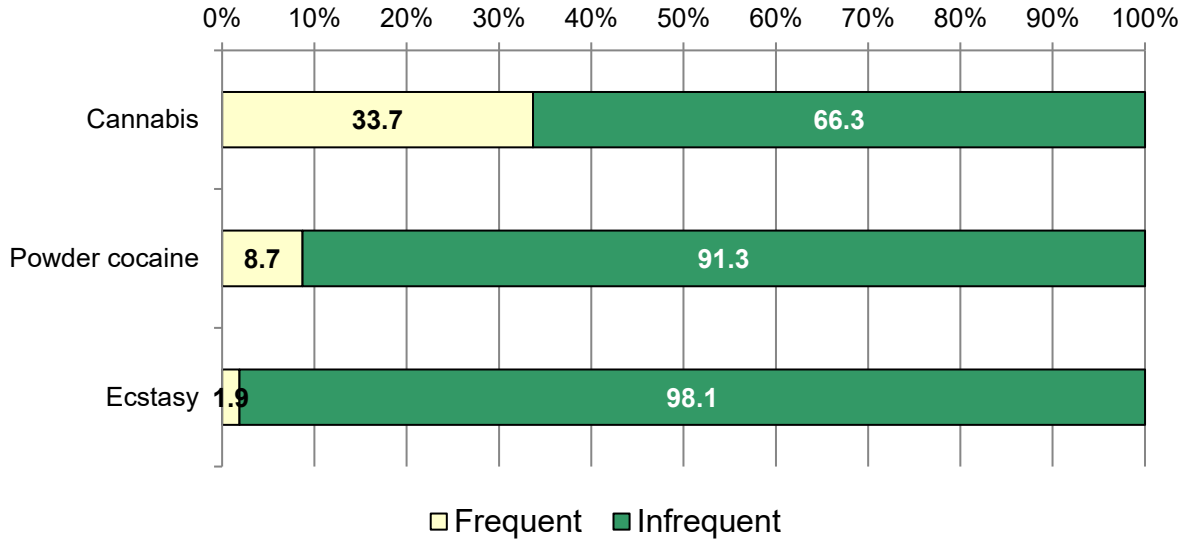
[33] https://www.ons.gov.uk/releases/drugmisuseinenglandandwalesyearendingmarch2020

[34] Note that earlier figures are based on calendar years (and include some gaps). Full figures available at: https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/drugmisuseinenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2020#drug-misuse-in-england-and-wales-data. The available open source data did not allow us to disaggregate the 16-24 year olds from the 16-59 year old group as illustrated in the Figure. Using 16-24 and 25-59 year old bands instead would have highlighted the age difference more clearly.

[35] Which is usually defined as using the drug more than once a month in the past year.

As illustrated at Figure 7, just over a third of those who reported using cannabis in the last year were frequent users, with the comparable proportion for powder cocaine being 8.7%, and for ecstasy, 1.9%.

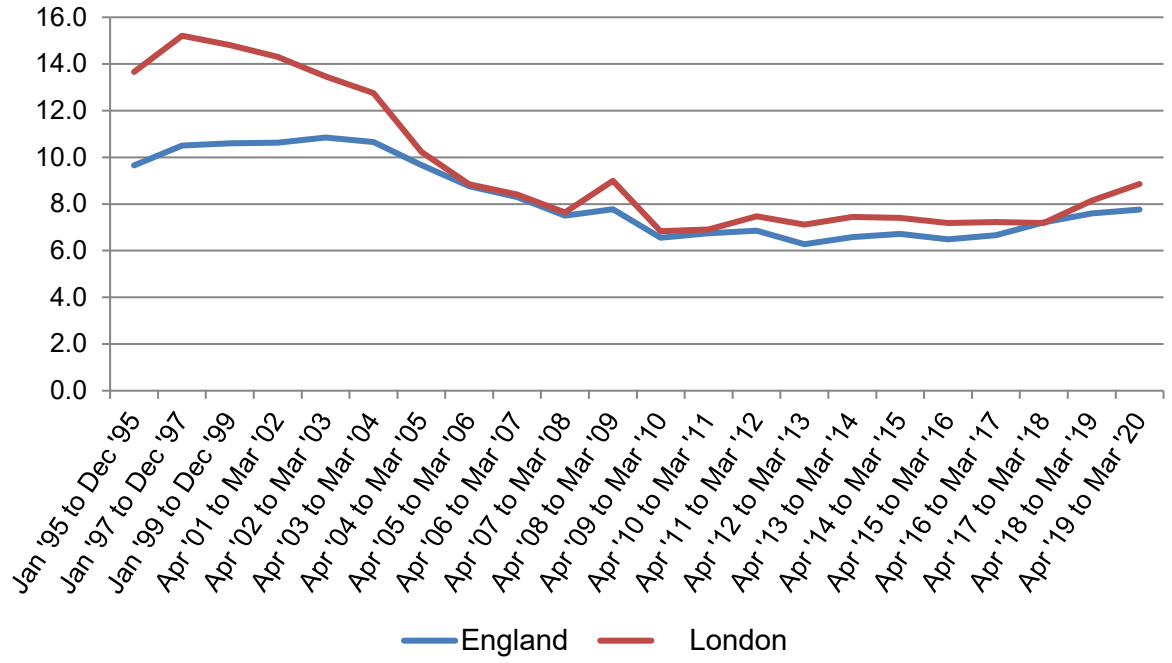
Figure 7 - Proportion of individuals aged 16-59 years reporting taking cannabis, powder cocaine or ecstasy in the last year, by frequency of use, year ending March 2020 (England and Wales)



(Based on figures from Office for National Statistics - Crime Survey for England and Wales)

Rates of drug use in London obviously differ sometimes from the average national figures, but in relation to use of cannabis, London rates have been quite similar to the national rates since about 2006. The proportions of those reporting use of cannabis in the past year for both London and England generally are summarised on the following figure.

Figure 8 - Proportion of individuals aged 16-59 years reporting taking cannabis in the last year, during the period January 1995 to year ending March 2020 (England and London figures compared)



(Based on figures from Office for National Statistics - Crime Survey for England and Wales[36])

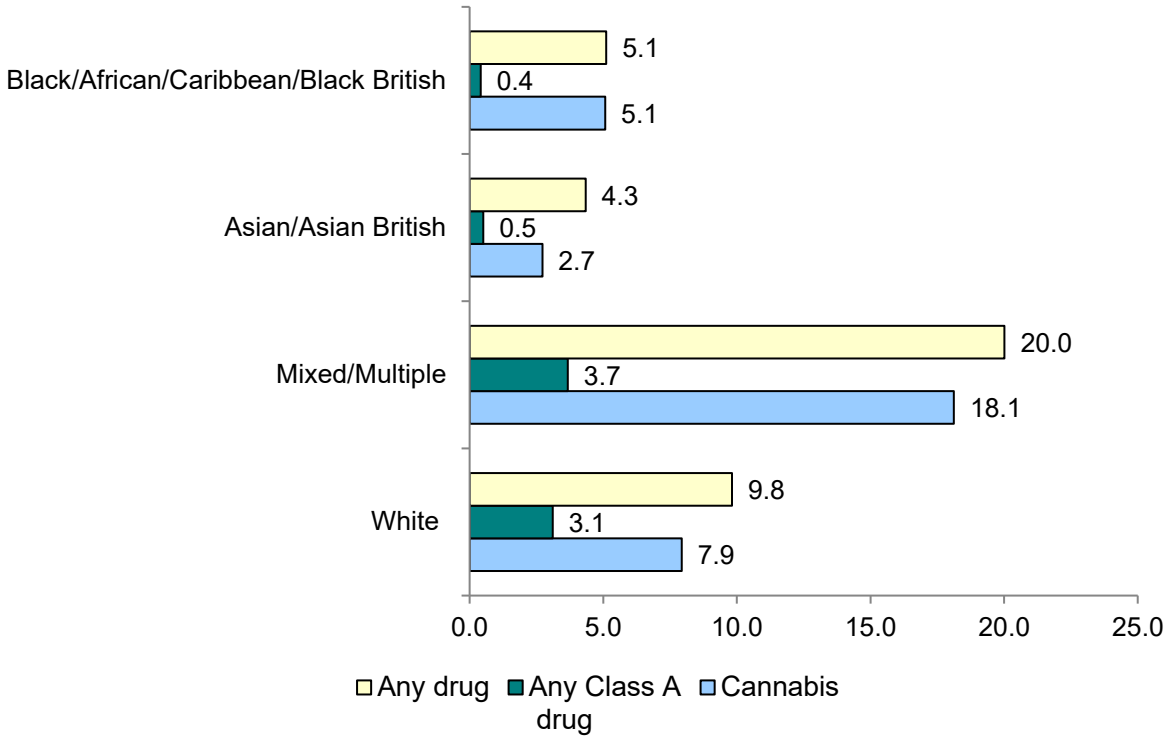
In terms of ethnicity, most available measures suggest that individuals from Black and other minority ethnic groups tend to use drugs at a similar or lower rate than White individuals, although there are some differences in by type of drug and in patterns of use.

According to the most recent CSEW data, Black and Asian people tend to use substances less than White individuals, and also to use drugs that are lower classification. Black people use cannabis in particular at about half the rate that White people do, and for Class A drugs, the rate for White people is over seven times the rate for Black people. Those in the "Mixed" group tend to have higher rates of self-reported cannabis use (which may be at least partly because the age profile of that group is relatively younger than the other groups) but they also use Class A drugs at about the same rates as White individuals.

Details are summarised at Figure 9.

[36] Note that earlier figures are based on calendar years (and include some gaps). Full figures available at: https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/drugmisuseinenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2020#drug-misuse-in-england-and-wales-data.

Figure 9 - Percentage of 16 to 59 year olds reporting use of illicit drugs in the last year, by ethnicity (England and Wales, year ending June 2022)

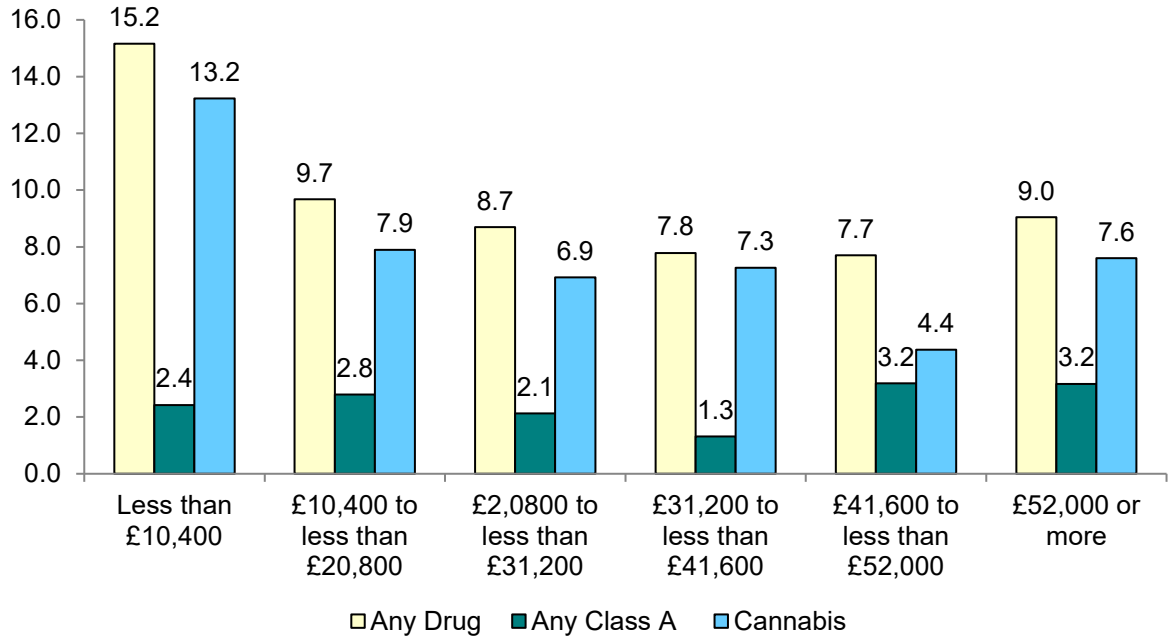


(Source: Crime Survey for England and Wales)[37]

In terms of income levels, cannabis use tends to be higher at the lowest income levels, but use of Class A drugs is slightly higher at the highest income levels. We were not able to drill down into this data to see how other factors combined at each level – since we know from some of the sources already referred to that problematic substance misuse is more likely in circumstances of deprivation, for example, and that some drug use is also strongly linked to the alleviation of anxiety – but the higher rates shown for lower income brackets in the following figure can probably be explained to some extent by factors of that kind.

[37] We have used CSEW response categories in producing the figure. Data-sets are available at link below: https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/drugmisuseinenglandandwales/yearendingjune2022.

Figure 10 - Percentage of adults aged 16 to 59 years who reported using a drug in the last year by total household income (England and Wales, year ending June 2022)

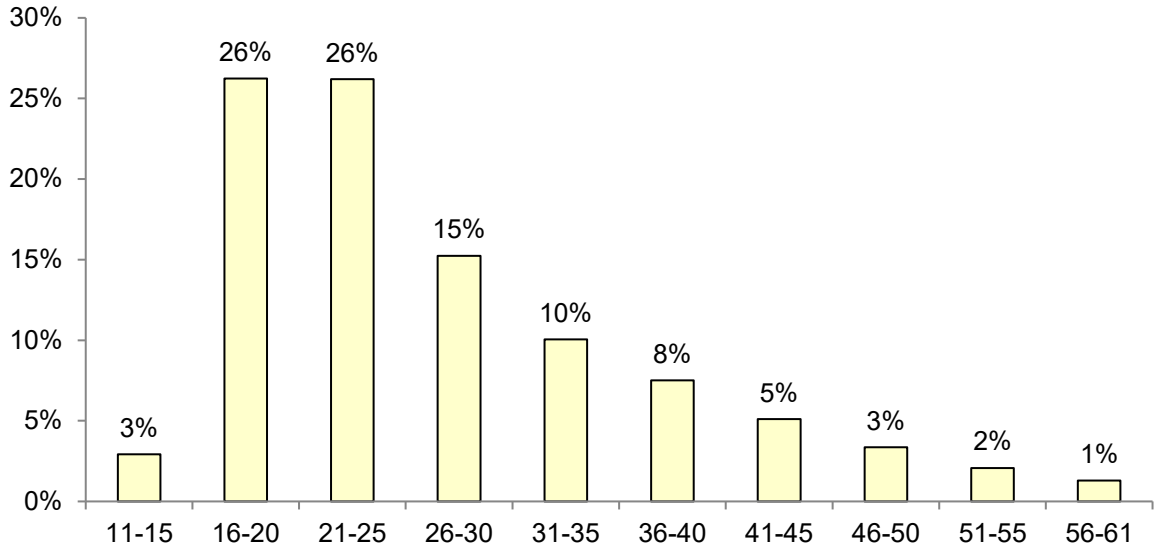


(Source: Crime Survey for England and Wales)

3.2 Who is being stopped and searched for cannabis possession and supply? Is it proportionate?

Unsurprisingly, current data suggests that young people are more likely to be stopped and searched for drugs, than older people. Around 70% of s.23 stop and searches involve young people up to age 30, for example, with about 30% of searches involving people aged 31 or older. Details are summarised on the following figure.

Figure 11 – Breakdown of s.23 stop and search episodes in London by age (%), during period from 1 November 2020 to end-October 2022 (n=282,873)



(Source: MPS data, 2022)

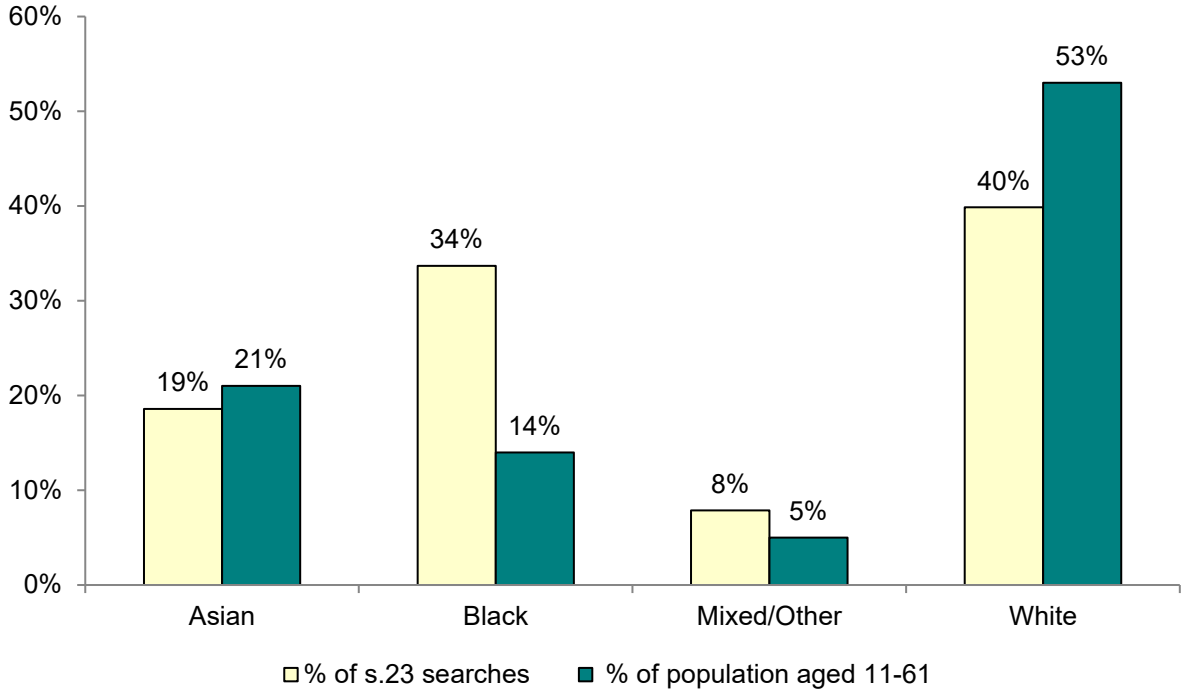
In terms of the ethnicity of people being stopped, it has already been noted in section 2 that individuals from BAME communities are far more likely to be stopped and searched than those who are White. In the twelve months to the end of March 2020, Black individuals were 3.7 times more likely to be stopped and searched compared to White individuals for any reason – based on 2020 London residential population figures. However, this increased to 7 times more likely for stops related to weapons, points, and blades and 7.4 times for stops related to Section 60 (MOPAC, 2022)[38].

Similar patterns can be found in relation to s.23 stop and searches, as illustrated in the following figure, which provides a breakdown of drug searches by ethnicity, and compares these with the London population breakdown by ethnicity (although we do not focus on the full age range of Londoners here, but only on those aged 11-61, who account for the vast bulk of those searched by the MPS).

It is worth noting that this disparity occurs in spite of the fact that levels of reported drug use are as described above. The ethnicity breakdown of those being stopped and searched for drugs does not fit the contours of drug use data – that is, we would expect fewer, not more searches of Black people than White people, based on such data.

[38] https://www.london.gov.uk/publications/action-plan-transparency-accountability-and-trust-policing#contents

Figure 12 – Breakdown of s.23 stop and search episodes in London by ethnicity (%), compared with % of the London population aged 11-61, during period from 1 November 2020 to end-October 2022 (n=282,873)



(Source: MPS data, 2022, and census data, 2021)

We have also noted that people in more deprived areas are more likely to be stopped and searched, although this is in relation to general stop and searches, rather than those for cannabis possession and/or supply. In terms of who is being stopped and searched *for cannabis specifically*, it is not possible with open source data to assess and present this.

So with reference to whether stop and search events are "proportionate", it is not at all clear that s.23 searches which make reference to cannabis are actually intended to be proportionate when compared with actual rates of cannabis usage. Feedback collected as part of our own research and also by some of our external experts suggests that searches for cannabis are not obviously *intended* to somehow match the probability that a particular individual is likely to be a cannabis user or supplier. Some police respondents are quite candid about cannabis simply being a strong and currently defensible "way into pockets", as one police respondent in research conducted by Gavin Hales (2019) expressed it. That is, some police officers do not regard the policing of cannabis possession to be a priority, but they do see stop and search justifications as allowing them greater scope for making other "finds" and also for gathering intelligence about gang activities for example. As one officer put it:

> *All those who I know who have been stabbed or chased with knives are linked to low level drug dealing, which is by and large cannabis, so yes, s.23 searchers are used to disrupt gang activity by getting hands in pockets in the hope of finding something better than a snap bag of cannabis.*

Another of Hales' respondents elaborated:

> *The fact is, you'll very, very rarely have grounds to search people for weapons as defined in law.*
> *…usually people search for drugs because it's just so blindingly obvious.*
> *…It's a route into their pockets as it's so prevalent… Ways and means.*
> *…It's so obvious it provides easy straightforward grounds to get hands in pockets, so that's what people use.*
> *Drugs searchers are far more easy to get grounds for. The reasons to search for weapons are much harder to establish, especially if you have no prior knowledge of the person, group you are searching.*

Many of the external experts that we consulted offered similar remarks, with some referring to s.23 searches as "a tactic without a strategy" for example, and others adding that searches of this kind are very costly in terms of police time, but ineffective in relation to violence reduction (or the reduction of other offences that the public is more concerned about than personal cannabis use). One respondent answered our questions about cannabis enforcement and "proportionality" in this way:

> *Well it's very curious isn't it? Because the reality is that the police say that possession of cannabis is not something that they are prioritising as a problem, you know. I mean if you talk to any senior police officer, very few of them will say, "Yeah, my big priority is nicking people for personal amounts of cannabis." And so it's very curious then that the, you know, the bulk of these searches are in relation to a suspicion around cannabis.*
>
> *Now I think what may be happening there is to some extent the police are using cannabis as an excuse to get their hands into peoples' pockets, and that may be in order to find a weapon on someone, you know, that might be one interpretation of it. Or it may be just – and I do think there's truth in this, that the stop and search is used also as a means of asserting the authority of the police on the street.*

The latter part of that comment includes a plausible though unsupported empirical claim – that the police might use stop and search at least partly as a means of "asserting their authority on the street". Similar claims are also sometimes made in the research literature by those who have also found that stop and search for drugs does not play a role in violence reduction, and who therefore engage in speculation about other explanations, such as the one linking s.23 stop and search activity to wider processes of social control or to "police culture". Bradford and Tiratelli (2019) for example, note that a lack of credible evidence about the positive benefits of stop and search activity leads us to raise questions of this kind, the answers to which:

> *likely involve local police cultures and the link between police activity and deprivation (Bradford, 2017; Shiner et al., 2018). They open up inevitable discussions about the extent to which stop and search is not really 'about' crime, but rather relates to wider processes of social control directed particularly at deprived and marginal populations. The evidence we have presented . . . supports this argument by underlining the only marginal association between stop and search and, in particular, violent and indeed 'volume' crime* (2019:9).

In their use of the term "social control", those authors clearly mean more than just that stop and search is a tool for order maintenance or enforcement of the law, since they also refer to the way in which that tool is "directed" at groups that are already deprived and marginal. Tiratelli et al. (2018) expand on this point and describe two senses in which the widespread use of stop and search might be understood. They note that the extent to which police use the power is partially dependent on police culture and the extent to which stop and search is viewed as being a visible and active way of "doing something about crime", but under what those authors refer to as a wider "benign" interpretation, stop and search is also a useful way for the police to "establish authority and maintain order" on the street. Under the second interpretation (which the authors describe as "less benign") stop and search is a power that is used disproportionately against the relatively powerless, and it thus reinforces and deepens social divisions and marginality. Under each of those interpretations the question of what the crime control impacts of stop and search might be is in a sense beside the point, since those impacts are not what the use of the power is "about" (Tiratelli et al. 2018:1227).

The recent Casey Report also makes a similar claim about stop and search and disproportionality more generally, noting that there is an "absence of cogent explanations of why this happens" (Casey, 2023: 329) – that is, there is an absence of clear explanations for why the power is used so widely given the absence of evidence about its crime control benefits. Although that report does not provide alternative explanations for the use of s.23 stop and search activities more specifically, it does suggest that those activities (along with a range of others including use of force) serve to further marginalise groups that are already marginal – and in particular, at several places in the report BAME communities are referred to as being "over-policed and under-protected".[39]

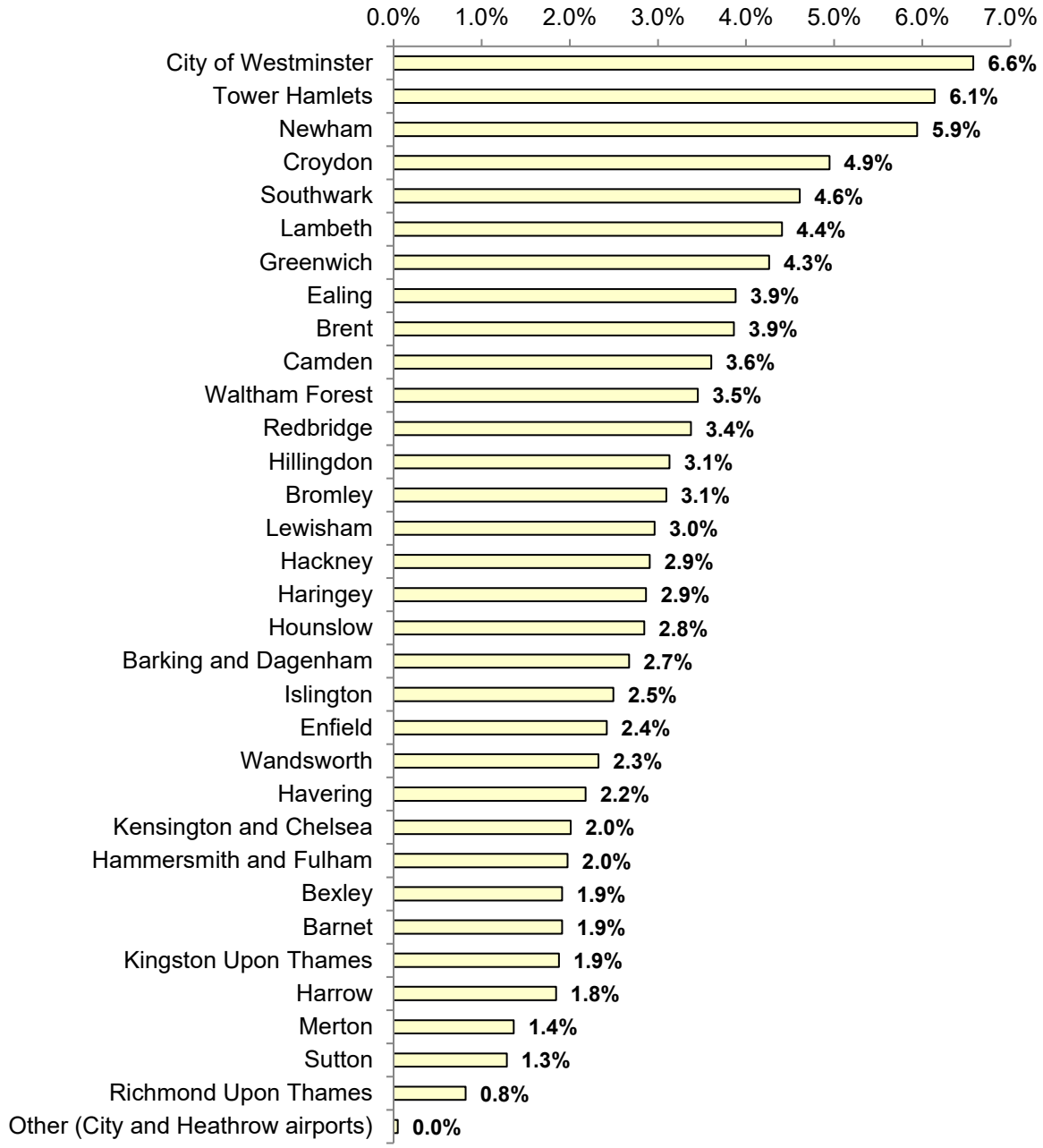
3.3 Where in London are individuals being stop and searched for cannabis? Is this proportionate against where cannabis is being used/supplied?

The available open source data-sets on stop and search do not allow stop and search events that focus on cannabis specifically to be disaggregated from other events, and it is therefore difficult to map cannabis-focused stop and search episodes accurately.

But for s.23 stop and searches in general, at borough level they take place most often in the City of Westminster, Tower Hamlets, Newham, Croydon and Southwark, as summarised in the following figure.

[39] We return to issues about links between stop and search and disproportionality in section 3.4, below.

Figure 13 – Overall rates of stop and search for drugs across the 32 London boroughs during the period from 1 November 2020 to end-October 2022 (n=282,873)

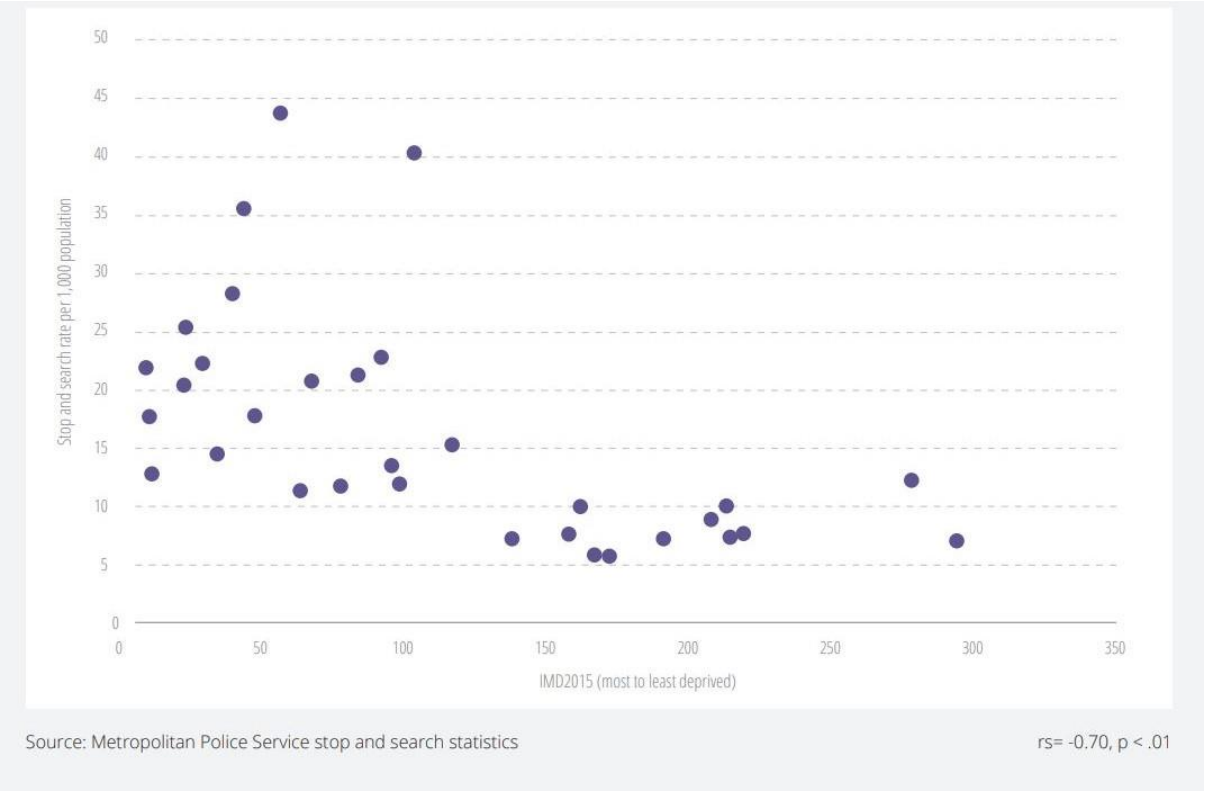


Source: (MPS, 2022)

In terms of the wider research focusing on links between stop and search and the characteristics of geographic areas, Shiner et al. (2018) identified that the differences between inner and outer London boroughs were partly a function of deprivation and inequality. These authors found the more deprived boroughs generally had higher rates of stop and search, though this relationship was not perfectly linear (see Figure 14).[40]

[40] As the RS value shows however, it is a very strong relationship.

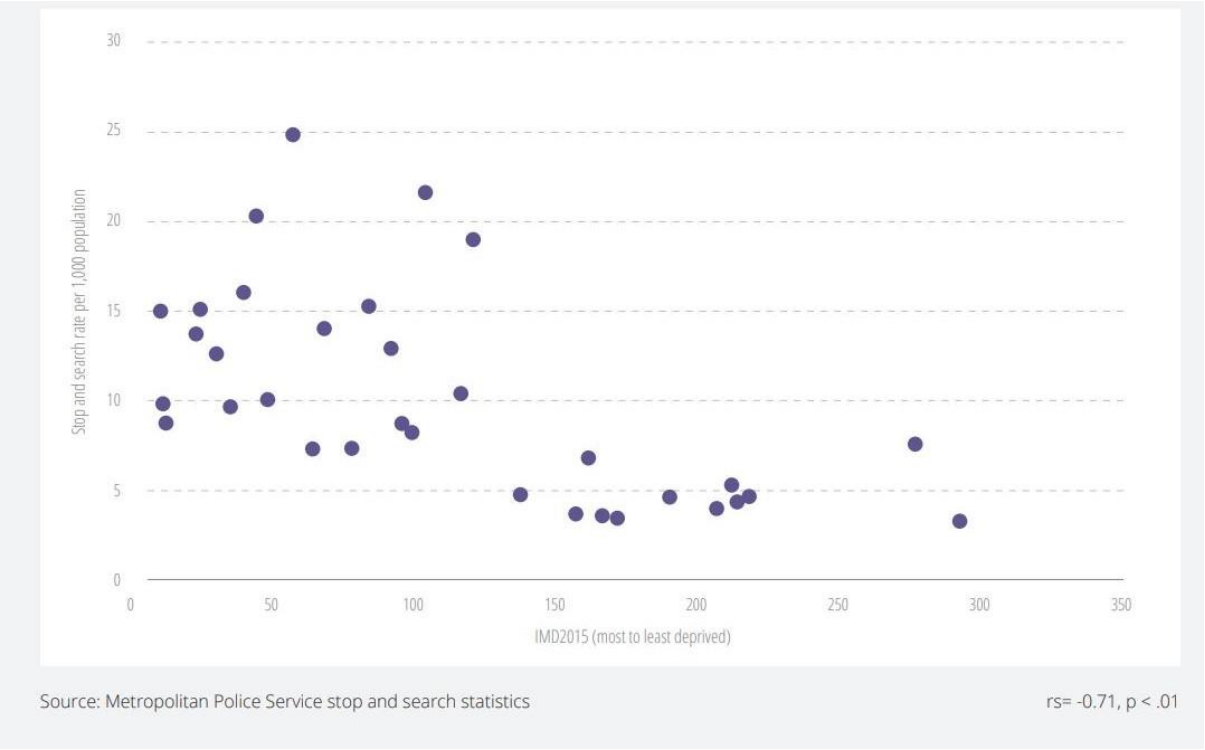
Figure 14 – Relationship between overall rates of stop and search for any reason across London Boroughs (2016/2017), by level of deprivation



(Source: Shiner et al., 2018)

The very highest rates of stop and search - for drugs and all reasons - were evident in Kensington and Chelsea, and Westminster, which are not among the most deprived boroughs (Shiner et al., 2018) but do have among the highest rates of serious youth violence offences (GLA Intelligence Unit, 2018).

Figure 15 – Relationship between overall rates of stop and search for drugs across London Boroughs (2016/2017), by level of deprivation



(Source: Shiner et al., 2018)

Using a sophisticated and wide-ranging analysis of some of these factors at LSOA[41] level in London, Suss and Oliveira (2022) argue that it is not so much deprivation, as *economic inequality* that is most strongly linked with stop and search rates (overall, and not just for drugs). Income deprivation on its own does not influence the spatial concentration of stop and search episodes in certain areas according to these authors, but the distribution of wealth does. They found that "police officers tend to engage in more searches in more economically unequal locations", and that "[w]hile a homogeneously wealthy or poor neighbourhood will have relatively few searches, a neighbourhood where the gap between wealthy and poor residents is large will have plenty" (2022: 15). Their conclusion resonates with the comments we have already made above (in section 3.2) concerning the way in which stop and search may not be simply "about" crime, but about the maintenance of social order:

> *These results suggest that S&S powers are indeed employed as a tool of social control, protecting and asserting power over some segments of society. The police contribute to maintain social order by symbolically reproducing two groups of people: law-abiding citizens, the ones police officers protect; and potential criminals, the ones police officers police (Choongh, 1998; Bradford and Loader, 2016). Highly unequal neighbourhoods where the rich and the poor co-exist are areas in which the two groups collide, with citizens to protect and individuals to police both occupying the streets, thus attracting a heavier police presence. By disproportionately stopping and searching members of the public*

[41] "Lower Layer Super Output Area"

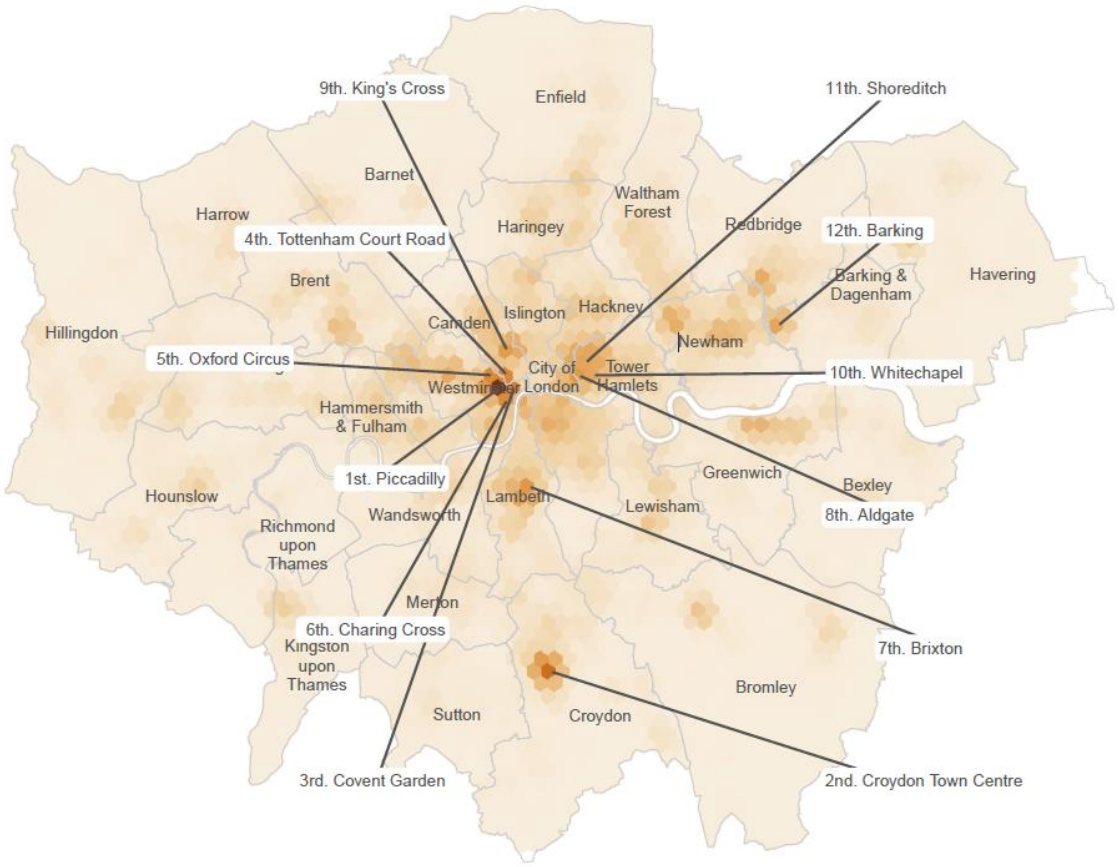
> *in economically unequal locations, police officers contribute to ascribe identity and maintain social order* (2022: 15).[42]

The GLA Strategic Crime Analysis (GLA Intelligence Unit, 2018) report found a significant relationship at the borough level in London between rates of serious youth violence offences and a range of factors, including poverty, deprivation, social integration, conduct and emotional disorders, and the proportion of the resident population aged 18-24 years. Eighty-seven per cent of serious youth violence offenders are male and 50 per cent are aged between 14 and 21 (GLA Intelligence Unit, 2018). The data from MPS (2022) reveal that 49.5 per cent of stop and searches were conducted with individuals aged between 15 and 24 from January 2021 to January 2022. Boroughs with the highest rates of serious youth violence offences are Westminster, Lambeth, Southwark, Camden, Haringey, Islington, Hackney, and Newham (GLA Intelligence Unit, 2018). The data from MPS (2022) show that the highest proportion of stop and searches were conducted in many of these boroughs. However, it is difficult to disentangle this from the other factors that are present in such areas. The higher volume of stop and searches in boroughs where youth serious violence offences are higher suggests that stop and search might have less of an impact on the reduction of violent crime levels. In Scotland, Murray et al. (2021) note that youth violence has declined significantly in recent years, and policy development around stop and search has focused closely on reducing the volume of searches.

Ashby (2022b) has produced a useful heat map for stop and search in general, which is based on data on stop and search in London from April 2021 to March 2022. The author used geographic coordinates available in the open source stop and search data to map searches across all 657 wards in London, and then highlighted the top twelve hotspots on the map (see Figure 16).

[42] They add that they have not shown that the any of these relationship are *causal*, and they also note that the spatial distribution of stop and searches based on reasonable suspicion and those that are to some extent "suspicion-less" (e.g. those based on s.60) may well have different spatial distributions. Suss and Oliveira (2022) also use the term "social control" here in the less benign sense described by Tiratelli et al. (2018) in section 3.2, above. Suss and Oliveira are suggesting that stop and search activities function to reinforce and sustain social division and the marginality of some groups – with some groups being more heavily policed because they are suspicious and more likely to be involved in criminality, and others being "law-abiding" and in need of protection.

Figure 16 – Stop and search hotspots by ward, April 2021 to March 2022

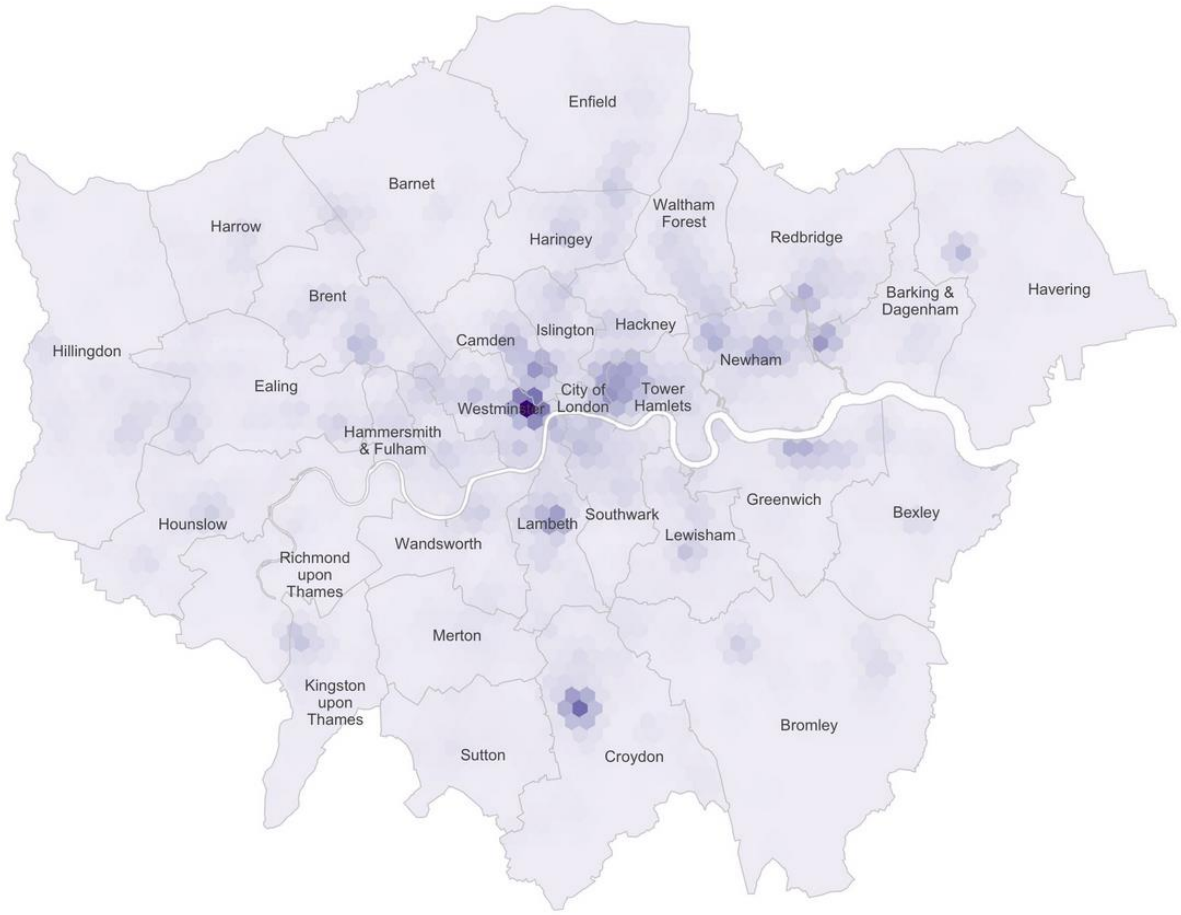


(Source: Ashby 2022b:10)

Further analysis by the above author also suggests that stop and search hotpots vary considerably by type of search however, although the above map does differ markedly for s.23 searches. The following Figure illustrates concentrations of stop and search episodes for drugs.[43]

[43] The pattern is quite different for searches for firearms however, and also for weapon searches based on reasonable suspicion, and for weapon searches based on authorisation under s. 60, during the same period. We do not reproduce the relevant heat maps here, but they can be viewed at https://twitter.com/LessCrime/status/1534973734800572416.

Figure 17 – Locations of searches for drugs, April 2021 to March 2022



In terms of whether high levels of stop and search in some areas of London are "proportionate" or not, we would make the same point made above concerning the way in which police officers who initiate stop and search justify their focus on cannabis. In the case of areas, there is no clear evidence that cannabis-focused stop and search is targeted to areas because there might be a geographic concentration of cannabis users in such areas.

Grimshaw and Ford (2018) also explored the relationship between deprived areas, cannabis use and its relations to stop and search. They found a moderate association between stop and search, income inequality, cannabis use and all types of violent crime. From a community perspective, even if the risk of apprehension is extremely low (about 2–3% for any cannabis user) it has been shown that receiving a criminal charge for even a minor cannabis possession offence can have a significant impact on those individuals arrested in terms of future employment prospects (Graffam et al., 2008; Kilmer, 2002). This concentrated focus on drug searches particularly in deprived areas has been found, not only in the UK, but also in other parts of the world such as the US (Gelman et al., 2007), the EU (Williams and Kind, 2019) and Brazil (Mizael and Sampaio, 2019).

Some of the above area-focused connections are obviously complex and to some extent mutually reinforcing. Overall levels of violence are probably driven by the interaction between the characteristics of the communities and societies in which people live (Sethi et al., 2010). In particular, such levels of violence are driven by relationships between people and groups, and individual-level factors (Grimshaw and Ford, 2018). In their study concerning young people, violence and knives Grimshaw and Ford (2018) identified drivers of violence which underlie the familiar themes of gangs and illegal drug markets. These authors contend that these deeper influences include some fundamental social relationships - inequality, deprivation and social trust - as well as mental health. At the community level, several studies provide evidence for a link between levels of income inequality and violence (Sethi et al., 2010).[44]

3.4 Cannabis enforcement, community impact, and disproportionality

Of the three key questions outlined in the research specification, the question of links between cannabis enforcement and community impact has attracted the least attention in research terms, although there is a well-established body of evidence concerning the impact of stop and search activities in particular (as opposed to "cannabis enforcement") on community relations.

Concerning that more specific impact however, the available evidence does suggest that:

- there is such an impact,
- it is largely negative, and focused disproportionately on BAME communities, and
- it is complex and linked to wider processes.

As noted in section 3.2, there is a prodigious range of evidence suggesting that BAME individuals are more likely to experience stop and search than White individuals. We also know that BAME communities are less likely than other ethnic groups to have trust in the criminal justice system more generally[45], independently of attitudes to, or experience of, cannabis enforcement.

Regarding policing specifically, BAME communities are less likely to claim that they have trust in the police, for example, or that they believe the police operate in a fair/balanced manner – the recent Police Foundation report provides a powerful illustration of this (see Figure 18). This figure is generated by comparing CSEW (Crime Survey England and Wales) responses from those in "lower level" ethnic groups (i.e. those that form a minority proportion of the general population) with responses from the White British majority. The comparison for each is then shown as a percentage point difference in either a positive or negative direction. As illustrated, respondents from Black and Mixed groups tend to respond less favourably to all three of the key questions, than White British respondents.

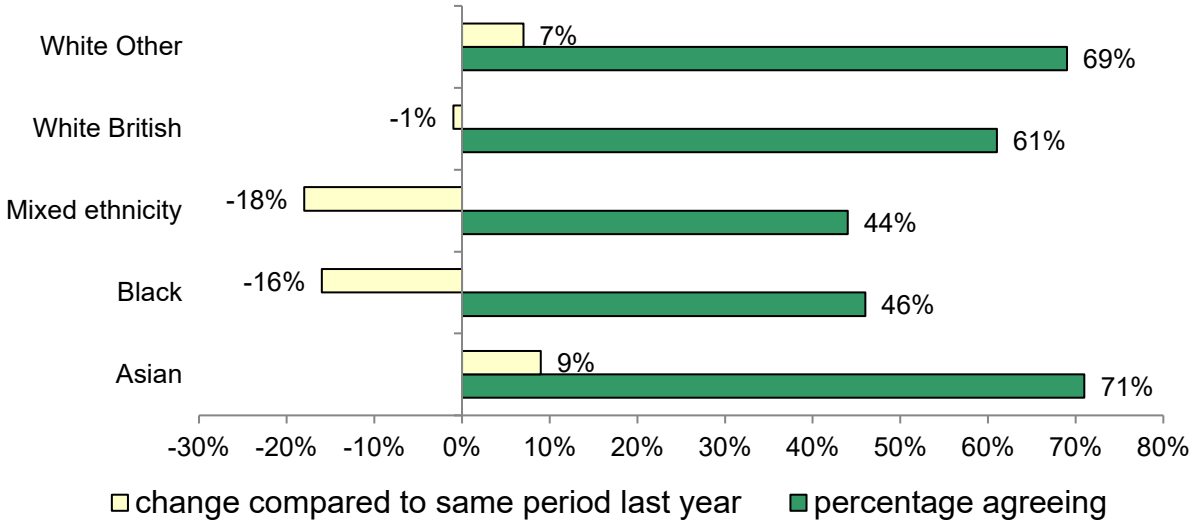
[44] See also Coccia (2018), and Sanz-Barbero et al. (2015).
[45] For a comprehensive overview of this issue, see The Lammy Review (Lammy, 2017), for example.

Figure 18 - Trust in local police and expectations of fair and respectful treatment: lower-level ethnic groups compared to White British majority, year ending March 2020 (ONS, 2020) (chart shows percentage point difference from White British majority)

(Source: Muir et al.; 2022:82)

A similar pattern to the national one is also found in London, as reflected in MOPAC's Public Attitude Survey returns for example – in fact, the latter show that perceptions of fairness and trustworthiness of the police among Black and Mixed ethnic groups fell further recently and from a lower starting point than elsewhere in the country. In response to the key question about police "fairness", for example levels of agreement fell for the latter groups, from a point one year ago that was already significantly lower than for respondents from White groups (see Figure 19).

Figure 19 – MOPAC Public Attitude Survey; proportion agreeing with statement "the police treat everyone fairly regardless of who they are", by ethnicity (rolling 12 months to 31 March 2022 – showing current percentage, and percentage change from previous period)



(Source: MOPAC Public Voice Dashboard[46])

Similarly, a survey of Londoners conducted by YouGov (Mile End Institute, 2022) found that just under half of all respondents (N=1,114) had either "no trust at all" or "not very much trust" in the Metropolitan Police, with trust levels also varying significantly by ethnicity – the percentage for BAME respondents was 54%, and a large majority of BAME respondents also felt that the Metropolitan Police service is either "definitely" (43%) or "probably" (29%) institutionally racist.

The Clear View report on black community and human rights (Henry, Imafidon and McGarry, 2020) found that 85% of black survey respondents (in England and Wales) did not believe that they would be treated the same as a white person by police (n=515).

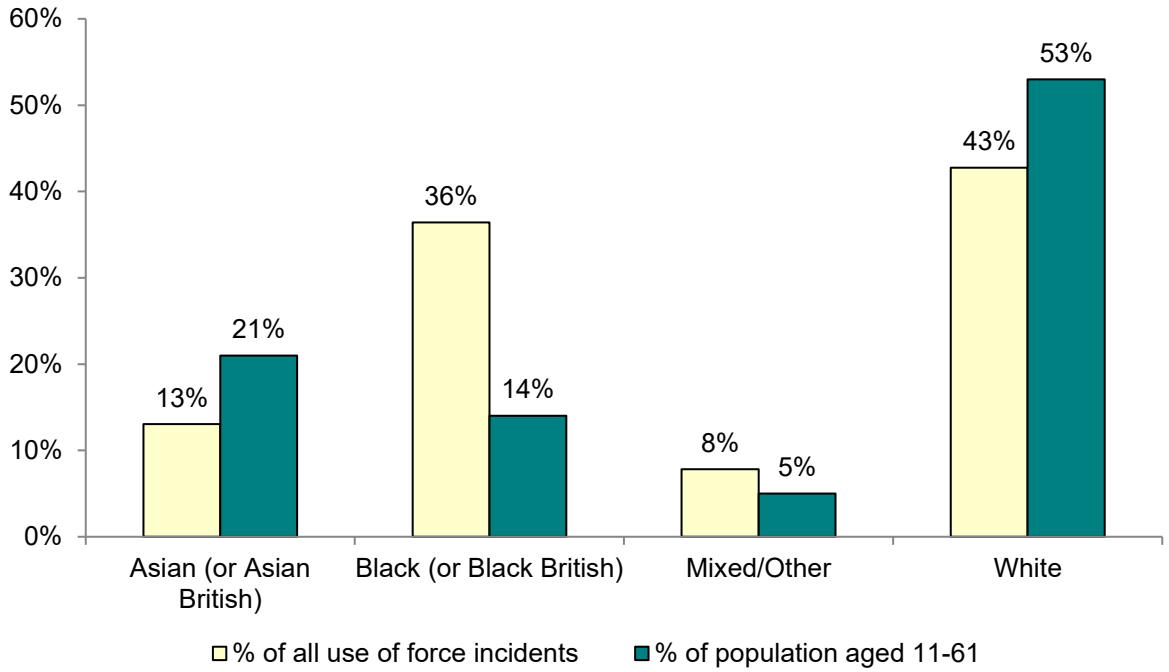
People from BAME communities are also more likely than White individuals to experience use of force by the police, although this claim is contested by some. Our own analysis of MPS "Use of Force" data highlights this disproportionality clearly, in keeping also with analysis presented in other reports such as Casey (2023).

The MPS Use of Force data is very detailed, and is recorded both for individual and group incidents. It is not limited to stop and search encounters, but is meant to include details for all cases where force has been used (e.g. during arrest or questioning). Looking at all incidents of use of force in MPS data for the one year period ending 31 March 2022 – where details about ethnicity were recorded in one of the four key categories used on the following figure, we first of all calculated the percentage for each category and then again compared those with the percentage of the London population aged 11-61 for each category. Those percentages are summarised at Figure 20 and they suggest that both Whites and Asians are subjected to use of force

[46] Accessible at: https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/mayors-office-policing-and-crime-mopac/data-and-statistics/public-voice-dashboard.

less often than their proportion of the London population would suggest, and that Black people in particular are subjected to use of force to a much greater extent than their proportion of the population would suggest.[47]

Figure 20 – MPS Use of force, subjects by ethnicity (n=144,510) for one year period ending 31 March 2022, compared with ethnic group % of London population aged 11-61



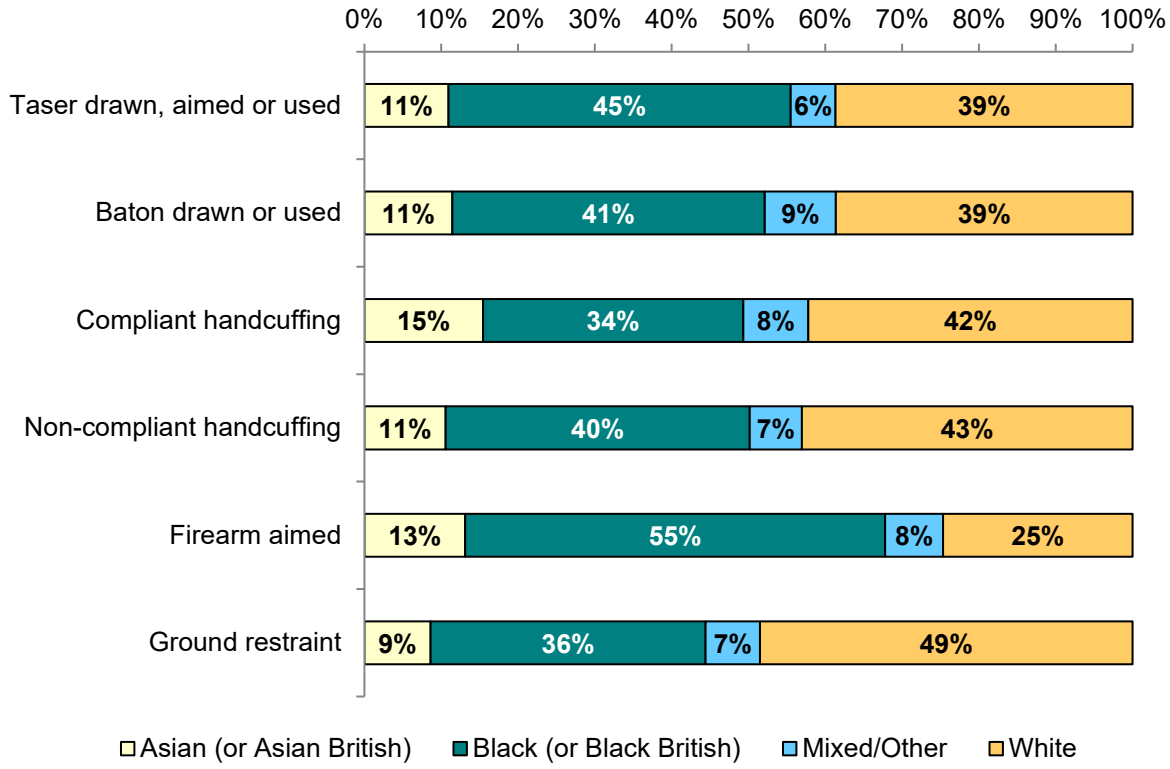
(Source: MPS Use of Force data; we have excluded cases where ethnicity was not known, and where the subject was Chinese – due to very small numbers)

In the MPS use of force data-sets details are recorded for a very wide range of specific "tactics" used in each case, and although most cases (about 85%) involve the adoption of a particular tactic in the first instance which is successful, some cases involve up to 9 different tactics sequentially. In other words, if the first tactic is not successful, the officers might move to a second tactic, and so on. We examined each of 6 tactics by ethnicity, by combining some categories in the data-set where that made sense (e.g. "baton drawn" and "baton used", into a new category covering both of those), and also ignoring some (e.g. dog use) because of small numbers. In effect, we have ended up with a sample of use of force tactics, which we analysed by ethnicity. The results are presented at Figure 21.

The figures suggest that levels of disproportionality increase somewhat with the severity of the tactic, with use of tasers, batons and firearms being clearly higher for Black subjects than White subjects for example.

[47] Calculating rates per 1,000 illustrates a similar pattern, but we have not included those figures here.

Figure 21 – Breakdown of 6 "Use of Force" tactics by ethnic group (%), for incidents during the one year period to 31 March 2022 (%)

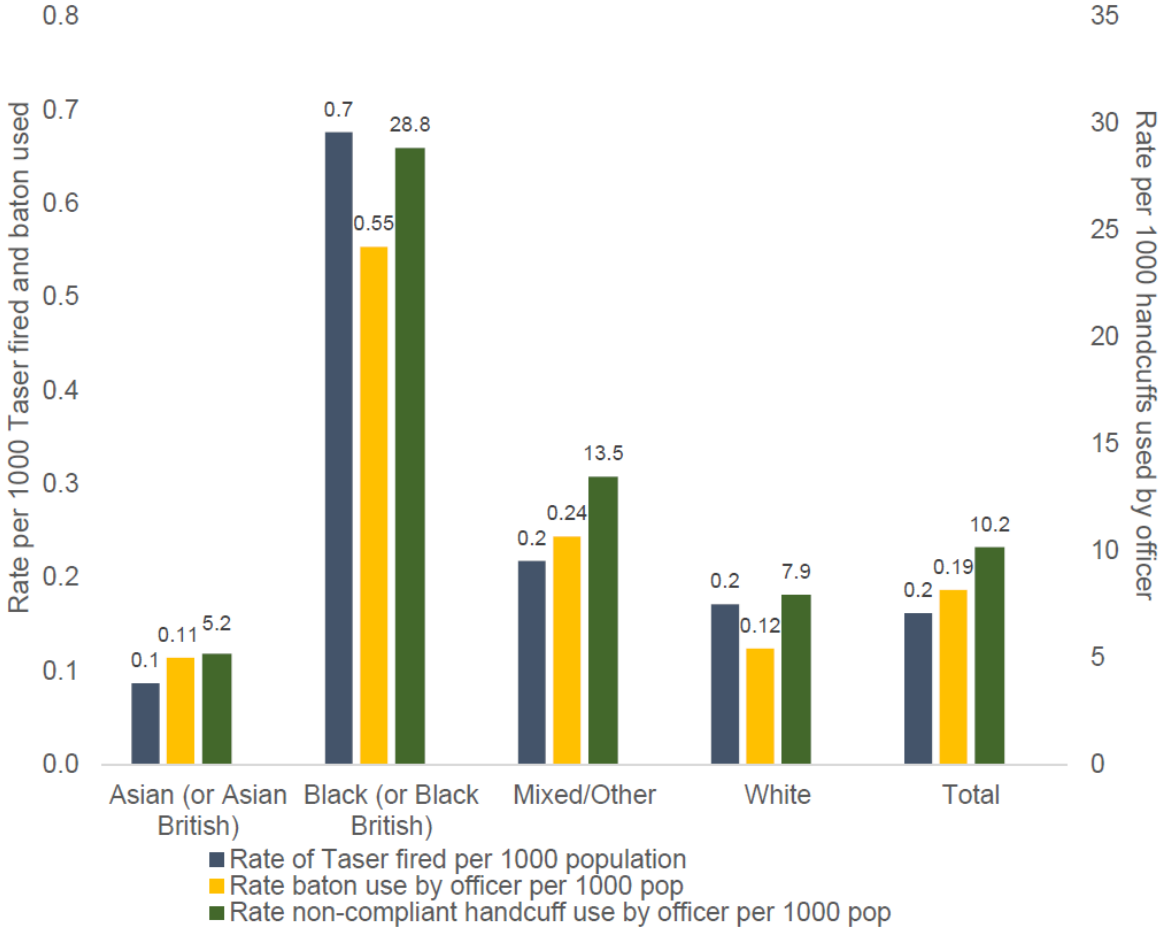


(Source: MPS Use of Force data, 2022)[48]

Another way of presenting similar material can be found in Casey (2023), where the authors use numbers per 1,000, as in the presentation below:

[48] Because we have looked at only 6 tactics, the total number of incidents represented on the figure is 89,508, rather than the total number of use of force incidents for that year - 147,371. The latter figure is also separate from use of force incidents in a public order/large group context.

Figure 22 – Rate of Taser fire, baton use, and non-compliant handcuff use per 1000 population aged 11-61 in London, by ethnicity, August 2020 to August 2022

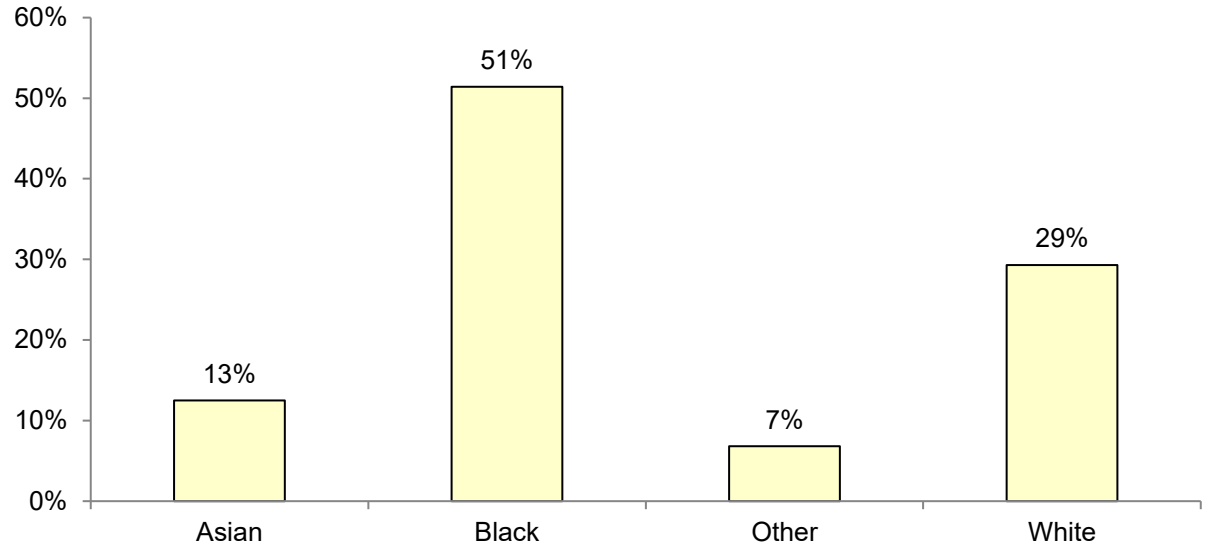


(Source: Casey, 2023: 324)

Searches for weapons also show differences by ethnicity, with searches recorded as “weapons points and blades offences", for example, being focused primarily on non-White individuals. Details are summarised at Figure 23.

For subjects in cases where “weapons points and blades offences" is recorded as an outcome reason (which means that an item in that category was found), 53% of the subjects are Black, 10% Asian, and 31% White.

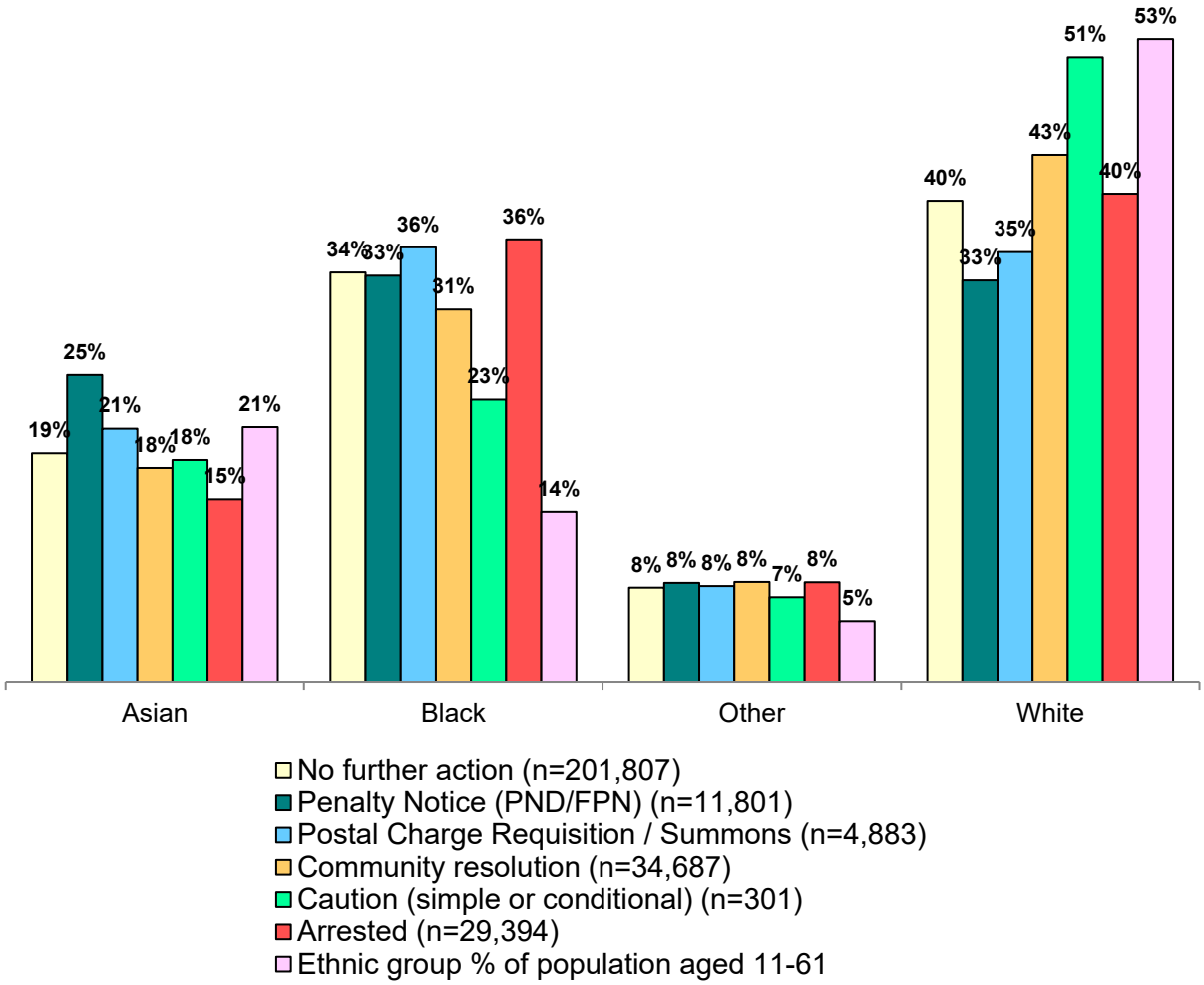
Figure 23 – Breakdown by ethnic group, of subjects in all searches recorded as "weapons points and blades offences" (%), during the during period from 1 November 2020 to end-October 2022 (n= 70,111)



(Source: MPS, 2022)

Concerning s.23 searches specifically again, the figures relating to search outcomes also reflect some differences in terms of ethnicity. In keeping with findings from other research, Black individuals are more likely to be arrested than White individuals (in relation to their proportion of the London population aged 11-61).

Figure 24 – Breakdown of s.23 stop and search outcomes in London by ethnicity (%), during period from 1 November 2020 to end-October 2022 (n=282,873), compared with ethnic group % of London population aged 11-61



(Source: MPS, 2022)

In relation to stop and search more generally, we have already noted that people from BAME communities are more likely to experience it, but they are also less likely to claim that stop and search as currently practiced is justified or should continue. In a recent IOPC public perceptions tracker, only 28% of respondents from BAME communities claimed the latter for example, as opposed to 43% of white respondents (Naseem, 2021).

Similar perceptions can be found in relation to related practices such as Section 163 vehicle stops for example. A public survey of more than 7,500 drivers reported on in HMIC (2015) showed that Black, Asian, and Other minority ethnic people were more likely than White respondents to believe that traffic stops are used unfairly.

Stop and search activities are not linked straightforwardly to actual levels of cannabis use (or to offending) across London, although as noted earlier they are strongly linked

to poverty and deprivation (or as Suss and Oliveira have argued, to wealth inequality; 2022). In deprived areas rates of stop and search tend to be higher, and BAME communities are more likely to be found in areas of higher deprivation, but actual cannabis use is quite uniform across areas (Shiner et al. 2018).

More generally, we know overall attitudes toward police have become more negative recently across all ethnic groups, but with clear differences in those attitudes remaining across different ethnic groups (Muir et al. 2022).

So the impact of cannabis enforcement on police-community relations cannot be separated from these more general trends, although the impact of that enforcement appears to resonate with (or reinforce) those wider developments.

Again concerning impact, it is clear from the wider research that even a small number of negative stop and search experiences (or even just one) can have a significant impact on local public attitudes towards police.[49]

One qualitative study of such impact (Barton-Crosby and Hudson, 2021), describes how stop and search incidents were experienced by BAME young people in largely (though not entirely) negative fashion, and feedback reported on by Keeling (2017) concludes that stop and search disproportionality and the "toxic" negative stop and search impacts on individual young BAME people erode good community relations:

> *too many of them feel a visceral hostility towards police as a consequence. What's most stark is that too many are so obviously also becoming alienated from public institutions meant to protect them at the very point of their transition to adulthood* (2017:1).

In our own "Perceptions of violence" research (Liddle and Harding, 2024, forthcoming), residents, young people and professionals (e.g. Designated Safeguarding Leads at London schools) sometimes described stop and search incidents that were highly negative in this way – e.g. in one case on a housing estate, a particular stop and search incident (akin to the kind of "jump-out gang" described by Keeling, 2017) was sufficiently politicising for several witnesses to propel them into community activism against perceived abuses of young black people by the police.

At an individual level, stop and search experiences can be highly traumatic, and corrosive of mental health and wellbeing. As the authors of the recent IOPC report (2022:35) put it:

> *Stop and search is often the most confrontational encounter an individual will have with the police. When a search is not carried out professionally and with sensitivity, complainants have told us of the lasting effect it can have, making them feel victimised, humiliated, and violated. And when the individual being stopped is a young child who may subsequently experience repeated stops and searches throughout their lifetime, the cumulative impact can be significant.*

[49] As can single incidents such as the one relating to Child Q, for example. That incident generated a significant and very heated local public response.

In their study of data from the UK Millennium Cohort Study, Jackson et al. (2021) found an association between police-initiated encounters and subsequent youth self-harm and attempted suicide.

The focus on negative experiences of policing through a trauma lens is a relatively recent development. Research evidence over many decades has illustrated both the way in which adverse experience can have a variety of negative impacts on individual behaviour and development, and that those involved in the criminal justice system (and who are involved in violence and exploitation in particular) are disproportionately likely to suffer from some of these impacts (see Liddle et al., 2016). But more recent research has illustrated in a similar manner that discriminatory experience and hate crime for example, can generate some of the same kinds of impacts on individuals, that we see in cases where there is a significant history of ACEs (adverse childhood and adolescent experience). Notions such as "racial trauma" and "race-based traumatic stress" were first popularised in the U.S. literature, but are now widely used in the U.K. as well to describe some of these impacts (Helms et al., 2010; Carter et al. 2013; Carter et al. 2017).

Other evidence suggests that stop and search impacts are also linked to the impacts of *previous* trauma. Borysik and Corry-Roake (2021) focus on connections between "policing trauma" and previous adverse experience back into childhood and adolescence for example, and for a series of case studies they map that experience on detailed timelines. The timelines illustrate how the impact of negative policing experiences can be mediated by other experiences and contexts (e.g. of long term poverty, of family discord, hate crime, and persistent discrimination).[50]

Those individual impacts can also resonate at community level. Harcourt's (2007) notion of the "ratchet effect" does focus on some of these impacts, and he draws on evidence of cyclical and repeated involvement in the CJS as an iterative process which is facilitated by targeted interventions such as stop and search. He provides detailed empirical support for this effect, and illustrates how it is that such targeting also functions to justify further police and criminal justice attention in the future – because enforcement activities are actuarial in the way that they assess risk and target resources, and statistics concerning the outcomes of these processes actually justify such targeting and risk assessment.[51]

That model also applies in a UK context. As one of our external experts suggested, in relation to research that they have done on stop and search and disproportionality,

[50] The wider research on trauma also suggests clear differences across ethnic groups. The England Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey found that Black/Black British adults are more likely than other groups to report experiences of trauma, for example, and are also around twice as likely as their White British counterparts to screen positive for PTSD (8.3% as compared to 4.4%, respectively; Fear et al. 2016). Differences of this kind are also complicated by interactions with other variables such as economic inactivity or unemployment for example. In the same survey referred to above, among economically inactive people of working age, almost four in ten adults (38.2%) reported that they experienced significant trauma at some point in their lives, compared to three in ten (29.7%) of those in employment. Economically inactive people were also more likely to screen positive for PTSD (10.5%) than their employed counterparts (2.7%).

[51] Criticisms of this model have been offered by Gross (2008), Margalioth (2008), and Sapir (2008); Harcourt offers a comprehensive response to these criticisms in Harcourt (2008).

> *What we found there was really interesting, because we found that one of the drivers of disproportionality was these feedback loops . . . So what happens is if you're focusing on a black area for stop and search, you focus and you stop people. If the rules say you're only allowed one warning around cannabis, but you're looking at the same area, of course those people are then going to get warned more than once and then they get pulled into the criminal justice system. And so there was a lot of feedback loops happening, and cannabis is a really key one that was obvious.*

In other words, targeted stop and search can trigger longer term processes that involve a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy, which tends to enhance disproportionality.[52] And as in Harcourt's "ratchet effect" model, the degree of disproportionality increases as you move forward in time and through more levels of intervention. Harcourt argues that later on in retrospect, criminal justice outcomes will clearly appear to have justified previous interventions, and the perception that there is a need for profiling and focused targeting will be reinforced:

> *To a large extent, these statistics have been used to grease the wheels of a vicious cycle—a self-fulfilling prophecy where law enforcement agencies rely on arrest data that they themselves generated as a result of the discretionary allocation of resources and targeted drug enforcement efforts.*

Harcourt notes that these processes not only accelerate "the imbalance in the prison population" (in terms of disproportionality), but it also "aggravates the secondary impact on the profiled population". This secondary impact has to do with individual exclusion from the labour market (because securing employment becomes more difficult as criminal justice interventions accelerate), and ruptures in community networks (because some of those involved in the criminal justice system are effectively removed from those communities).

Some of these connections have also been noted in the recent IOPC report (IOPC, 2022), which highlights the importance of trauma in key respects, to the impact of stop and search in particular on relations between the police and BAME communities. The report's acknowledgement of the impact of perceived racism on whole groups also resonates with recent response to incidents such as the Child Q incident in Hackney which erupted in the media in March 2022 (see Gamble and McCallum, 2022). In connection with that event, some of our own research team members attended subsequent public sessions to observe, and were struck by the way in which participants wanted the police representatives to acknowledge the existence of institutional racism, which for them was related not only to disproportionality more widely, but to the event involving Child Q. There was clearly a level of frustration that this wider experience was not acknowledged or recognised – and we know this

[52] This account is obviously consistent with what we know about the way in which levels of disproportionality increase as we move from initial processes such as stop and search or arrest, and toward higher levels of processing including charging, sentencing, and imprisonment. That is, one result of these processes is a gradual increase in disproportionality at each further level of criminal processing.

because participants made this claim as part of their response to police presentations.[53]

The notion of "community trauma" also has much to offer as an organising concept which can pull together many of the factors discussed above, although it has previously been used mostly in an American context. Community trauma – or collective trauma as it is sometimes also referred to – is usually understood to refer to more than simply a collection of individuals living in the same area who may have experienced trauma in their own past (although in some areas it is true that many such individuals may "pool up" together in close proximity). The notion incorporates a consideration of trauma at several levels including the socio-cultural environment, built environment and economic environment. For example, the Prevention Institute describes community trauma as:

> *[T]he product of the cumulative and synergistic impact of regular incidents of interpersonal, historical, and intergenerational violence and the continual exposure to structural violence. Structural violence refers to harm that individuals, families, and communities experience from the economic and social structure, social institutions, social relations of power, privilege and inequality and inequity that may harm people and communities by preventing them from meeting their basic needs. Structural violence is a primary cause of the concentration of premature death and unnecessary disability in oppressed communities and is very closely linked to social injustice* (Pinderhughes et al. 2015:22).

3.5 Community scrutiny, transparency and trust

Bearing in mind the negative impact stop and search can have on police public relations, both at an individual level (Skogan, 2006), and vicariously on the friend's families and communities of those searched (Rosenbaum et al., 2005), it is important that forces allow for external scrutiny to increase transparency and confidence. According to the College of Policing's Authorised Professional Practice (APP) on stop and search, independent scrutiny means "opening stop and search practices up to communities for close examination, with a view to providing them constructive oversite, dialogue and challenge". As stipulated by Code A of PACE in paragraph 5.4, to promote trust, constabularies should make arrangements with members of the community to scrutinise the tactic, explaining to them the use of the powers at a local level. Despite its potential to demonstrate openness and build confidence (Kalyan and Keeling, 2019), relatively little work has been published exploring the practice's effectiveness and impact on community relations. Though several HMIC (2015, 2017, and 2021) reports have underscored the importance of stop and search scrutiny, to date the topic has received relatively little scholarly attention. According to Kalyan and Keeling (2019:3), effective external scrutiny is based on four principles:

- *Independent and empowered*: Led by the community, acts as a 'critical friend', provides constructive challenge and influences change.

[53] Which is not to detract from a police response that accepted that "adultification" had occurred in this case, and that racial bias had also played a role. There was also a subsequent investigation which made similar findings.

- *Representative*: Reflects the communities most affected by stop and search, stays dynamic by periodically reviewing and refreshing its membership and actively engages young people and BAME people in its work.
- *Informed*: Has effective and transparent access to a wide range of data and records on stop and search, including body worn video footage, and access to appropriate training and guidance.
- *Open and visible*: Promotes its work widely in the community, particularly with young people and 'harder to reach' groups, publishes summaries of meetings and outcomes, and is easily contactable by members of the public.

Whilst these are important components of community oversight and scrutiny, in HMIC's thematic inspection of stop and search, actioned in response to the 2011 riots the need for greater community scrutiny of the tactic was laid bare (HMIC, 2013). Their analysis found that less than half of constabularies complied with the requirement of PACE Code A to make arrangements for the public to scrutinise the powers. HMIC commented that it was 'surprising' how few forces consulted or communicated with community representatives about the tactic, revealing that almost half of all constabularies did nothing to understand the impact they were having. Only a small number were found to actively seek the views of those most affected. Though in 2021, HMIC concluded most constabularies inspected had improved external scrutiny arraignments, involving a broader range of community members, Community Scrutiny Panels (CSPs) and Independent Advisory Groups (IAGs), they found some were ineffective because they were not given the tools to perform their duties. The report revealed that there were still several forces that had no scrutiny arrangements in place and that these constabularies were missing opportunities to learn about the lived experience of policing, including how to improve stop and search procedures, and target local crime more effectively. Despite these more positive findings, gaps were found, particularly in relation to scrutinising the use of force (UOF) and utilising body worn video recordings. Regarding the UOF, HMIC (2021:5) called for greater external monitoring and governance:

> *We expected that police forces would have relatively advanced processes in place for the monitoring, governance and external scrutiny of their use of force, but in too many forces they were either ineffective or non-existent. These forces have a limited understanding of how fairly or appropriately their officers and staff are using force. For example, sometimes feedback is not acted on, or panel members don't receive adequate training or information to perform their role.*

Another tool commonly used by CSPs and IAGs to monitor the use of force and stop and search is police body worn videos (BWV). Over 90% of stop and search encounters are captured on BWV[54], so it can provide a significant resource for community monitoring activities. According to the IOPC (2022: 28-29), BWV can "support transparency, trust, and confidence in the police", whilst also enabling

[54] Undated letter from MPS to IOPC, concerning progress on stop and search learning recommendations: page 6. Available at: https://www.policeconduct.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Documents/investigation_reports/Stop%20and%20Search%20-%20Response%20to%20IOPC%20Learning%20Recommendations.pdf

external stakeholders and community members to understand the extent to which people being searched are treated with fairness and respect. HMIC's (2021: 4) inspection revealed that too few forces were assessing BWV, either as part of their internal or independent external scrutiny procedures. Overall, only five forces used BWV recording as part of their external scrutiny arrangements.

As positive example of scrutiny arrangements of this kind has been examined in some detail by members of our review team, and it is worth commenting briefly on this work as a kind of case study.

The scrutiny activities are undertaken by Haringey Independent Stop and Search Monitoring Group (HISSMG), and that work does highlight a number of issues that are relevant to this report, and also illustrates some practical ways in which scrutiny of stop and search can be undertaken, improved and sustained.

The Metropolitan Police Service has its own BMV scrutiny forms which can be used to keep track of the results of scrutiny panel monitoring, but these forms were found to have some shortcomings which have been addressed by HISSMG. That group aimed to address some of the limitations associated with the MPS BWV scrutiny forms in terms of monitoring the use of force (UOF), grounds, quality of interaction and correct use of BWV by developing their own proforma (available on request), which is based on a traffic light system. If the stop and search encounter is graded green, the officer is provided with positive feedback from the group. If amber, HISSSMG recommend that the officer is provided with additional training and feedback (- in some cases the forms are used as feedback). If graded red, the group will refer the officer to the Chief Inspector or Borough Commander who will feedback directly to the officer in question. Training will be provided to the constable.

3.6 Stop and search, discretion, reasonable grounds, and procedural justice

We end this section with some comments on stop and search and "procedural justice", because that notion is relevant to a range of issues about transparency, "fairness", and compliance with the law, and also to some of the research that we have referred to in earlier sections, that considered the possibility that current stop and search practice might actually *increase* offending or violence.

Minhas and Walsh (2021) examined a record of 2,136 police searches and conducted semi-structured interviews with 20 front-line police officers. They found that stop and search powers are disproportionately weighted against Black, Mixed and Asian communities, and also revealed some substantial evidence based on disproportionality concerning the perceived social class. They concluded that the pattern of entrenched use of stop and search powers is consistent with the evidence on the use of racial stereotypes with respect to social class. Also, this pattern is consistent with the disproportionate use of stop and search powers on Black, Mixed and Asians with the evidence of racial prejudice and stereotyping (Minhas and Walsh, 2021).

During their interviews, officers were asked what an 'effective' stop and search encounter in the light of their experience is (Minhas and Walsh, 2021). These police

officers' views were correlated with PACE (1984) guidelines. According to officers' views, a stop and search encounter is effective when it meets these criteria:

i) *Definable suspicious behaviour* (decision to stop and search is more effective when based on definable suspicious behaviour, as outlined in the PACE Act (1984) Code A)
ii) *Guided by up-to-date operational intelligence* (e.g., focused on active and more serious offenders, local crime trends, and specific crime hotspots).
iii) *Carried out in a respectable manner* (stop and search encounter which is carried out respectably with a clear explanation of the reason for a stop and search would enhance public confidence)
iv) *Carried out in the context of police-community relations and cooperation*

Contrary to police officers' own expectations and perceptions of a good stop and search encounter, the analyses of recorded stop and search dataset and interview transcripts revealed that people's age, appearance, time and location, racial stereotypes, and social class, all play a role when officers make decisions about who to stop and search. Furthermore, Minhas and Walsh (2021) found a relationship between a specific stereotype (i.e., young people on the street in deprived areas as potential criminals) and the formation of suspicion (being seen in a particular location at a particular time). This is consistent with earlier research conducted by Loftus (2012: 165) on 'classed people', 'classed places'. Loftus found that "*officers invariably viewed lower working-class areas as places to target and gather intelligence. While stable areas were viewed as appreciative and deserving police service, poor and decaying areas were denounced from seemingly containing anti-police populations and criminogenic families."*

Following the introduction in 1984 of the PACE Act guidelines, a number of studies (e.g., Dixon et al., 1989; Minhas and Walsh, 2021; Quinton, 2011) found that racial and cultural stereotypes play a role in informing suspicions around stop and search practice, showing that reasonable grounds for suspicion are only 'occasionally' regarded. According to PACE (1984), reasonable grounds for suspicion should not be based on stereotypes or individual qualities (such as social class, race, or previous criminal records). Researchers have found that police officers use specific racial and cultural stereotypes when classifying people based on their ethnic origin and social class (Minhas and Walsh, 2021; Shiner and Delsol, 2015; Quinton, 2011).

Feedback gathered from officers as part of the study conducted by Minhas and Walsh illustrated a range of perceptions of this kind, which can inform discretionary decision-making:

> *I would suggest that predominantly drug use and drug dealing is part of the Black minority. It's just how…it's how it's perceived in society. I would say so, yes, because like I say it's predominantly Black ethnic minorities that will be drug dealers... I think that just gets into your mind. It gets into other people's minds as well* (Minhas and Walsh, 2021, p 301).

Such stereotypes are central to discretionary decision-making in stop and search encounters which result in a police focus on ethnicity and the socially marginal (Minhas

and Walsh, 2021; Quinton, 2011). In turn, consequences in youngsters from deprived backgrounds and ethnic minorities are targeted. Eastwood, Shiner, and Bear (2013) found that black people are subject to particularly high rates of stop and search for drugs, and that Black, Asian and 'mixed race' young people are considerably more likely than their White counterparts to have been arrested as a result of proactive police work, which often focuses on robbery and drug offences. According to PACE (Code of Practice A, 1984), individual officers and their supervisors are legally obliged to base their decision to stop and search individuals on reasonable suspicion that the concerned individual has committed or is about to commit, a particular offence. Hence, it is unlawful to target people based on officers' generalised beliefs.

Some of the above comments about discretion and stereotyping are also relevant to issues which form part of the focus of procedural justice theory, and we refer to those issues here briefly not only because many of our respondents commented on them in their responses to our questions, but because many of the recommendations made previously in key reports about stop and search and how practice might be improved[55] have been anchored in a commitment to make such practice more transparent and procedurally consistent.

Procedural justice is usually defined in terms of the "fairness" of processes used by those in authority to achieve key outcomes, and in a policing context, procedural justice is linked to notions of legitimacy and compliance. To the extent that a local community feels that policing activities are legitimate and fair, they will consent to act within their ambit, and will cooperate with the police in the understanding that policing activities are aligned with the public interest. Where such activities are perceived not to be legitimate and fair, local communities may withdraw their cooperation, and levels of compliance might also be impacted (Murray et al. 2021).

It is worth noting that efforts to ensure that stop and search episodes are conducted fairly and consistently, will not necessarily engage with any of the key issues about disproportionality (which were discussed in section 3.4). As one of our respondents expressed it:

> *I mean even if every search was being done in a procedurally fair way, if I'm being procedurally fairly searched, you know, 10, 20 times in the last month, than I'm still going to be pissed off and feel like I'm being unfairly targeted.*

3.7 Cannabis enforcement and community impact – conclusions and recommendations

Our review of the evidence makes it clear that stop and search activities that are cannabis-focused have no demonstrable impact on violence reduction.

The most convincing explanations of why these searches are undertaken in the large numbers that they are (much larger by far than any other force in the country) - given that the possession of cannabis is not a priority of the MPS or any other force, and that the bulk of such searches end up with no further action – focus on issues concerning bias and stereotyping, "police culture", and social control (in either or both

[55] E.g. the Best Use of Stop-and Search (BUSS) scheme, Home Office (2014).

senses of that term as discussed in section 3.2). Issues concerning police culture or social control do have some testable components which could be researched further, but many who make reference to those issues do so because the available evidence concerning the crime control benefits of stop and search are unconvincing.

Although S.23 searches do uncover some drugs (as detailed earlier in this section) they uncover only a tiny number of weapons, and whatever other benefits they might generate (in terms of intelligence and other information that they might yield for example) cannot be evidenced in anything like a robust manner.

On the other hand, the available evidence also suggests very clearly that s.23 stop and searches have some real costs associated with them. As currently conducted, they have demonstrably negative impacts both on the individuals who are searched (and the communities in which they live), and on police-community relations more generally.

Those impacts have in turn been shown to lead to an erosion of trust and possibly compliance, arguably making the job of the police even more difficult since, as noted above, information-sharing from the public can also be adversely affected, and some communities can feel as if they need to manage their own safety instead of relying on the police.

S.23 searches fuel disproportionality and in that way resonate with a whole range of criminal justice processes about which similar claims have been made in hundreds of reports over several decades (many of which are referred to in earlier sections of our report). To the extent that stop and search in general has become what Casey calls a “racialized tool” (2023: 317), the same conclusion seems even more applicable to s.23 searches specifically.

Given those costs, there would need to be some convincing upsides to continuing to use cannabis possession in particular as a justification for stop and search – at least to the extent that it is currently practiced. Reference is often made to such benefits, but the evidence for them is thin, and even if some benefits could be evidenced, it is not clear that they would be substantial enough to warrant the costs of continuing current stop and search practice.

Reducing s.23 search numbers

It seems to follow clearly from the above that the numbers of s.23 searches should come down – even if they were halved, they would still be higher proportionately than in many areas of the country that are also largely urban and ethnically diverse. Reductions could be brought about partly by increased transparency linked to a tightening of search grounds, and to the kind of community scrutiny that we have described in section 3.5. To the extent that these searches are conducted with stronger reasons and are monitored more effectively they should also generate a higher proportion of positive outcomes. Beyond that, any specification of how s.23 “should” be deployed is a matter for dialogue and agreement between key authorities and community interests, laid out in a clear charter which is monitored and overseen independently.

Alongside that dialogue, a pilot to test out alternative approaches to cannabis enforcement in a small number of London boroughs would provide an opportunity for the impacts of a shift in s.23 search focus to be assessed in a robust manner, and in particular, for any impacts on the policing side to be carefully monitored - to see whether, for example, there is a drop off in useful intelligence or other perceived benefits of treating individual cannabis use as a criminal justice rather than a public health issue.

It would be important however to ensure that cannabis-focused stop and search episodes are themselves reduced, rather than maintaining numbers and simply substituting diversionary rather than criminal justice outcomes.

PACE Code A Amendments

Bearing in mind the weight of evidence suggesting drug searches are deployed with weaker grounds, have lower find rates and are disproportionately applied to Black people, especially in relation to the use of the tactic for cannabis, it is appropriate to consider how the powers can be more tightly regulated when used for this reason. Mirroring recommendations made by Shiner et al. (2018), the IOPC (2022) and our respondents, we suggest that PACE Code A is amended so it clarifies that:

- the smell of cannabis alone does not constitute reasonable grounds to initiate a search unless it is used with several other objective factors;
- using the smell of cannabis alone to initiate a search on a suspect who an officer thinks may be involved in other forms of criminality contravenes PACE code A and is unlawful.

In addition to this, practical guidance should be provided in Code A, explaining the role that the smell of cannabis plays in developing suspicion. Scenarios in which using the smell of cannabis with other factors to build reasonable grounds should be provided to assist officers. This will give greater clarity to constables about situations in which they can use their powers when using the smell of cannabis.

External scrutiny through body worn video

We are aware that MOPAC is already taking action on some of these issues, but bolstered external scrutiny through BWV has the potential to make the use of stop and search more transparent and to promote public confidence. Given the limitations with the MPS BWV scrutiny documents (referred to in section 3.5) regarding monitoring the UOF, grounds, quality of interaction and correct use of BWV by officers, we recommend that CMGs/IAGs use Haringey Independent Stop and Search Monitoring Groups detailed traffic light scrutiny form (available on request). If this proforma was used locally within each borough across London, MOPAC could collate and analyse the data, presenting it in a dashboard. This could serve as a useful tool for overall regional scrutiny highlighting specific locations, divisions, boroughs, or police stations where poor practice is continually identified, as well as units where good practice is most often followed.

Cultural competency and trauma-responsive policing

As we noted in section 3.4 concerning community response to the case of Child Q, there is a strong perception within some communities in London that their experiences of what they regard as over-policing and/or discrimination are simply not understood by police officers, and individuals from those communities want the importance of those experiences to be recognised. It was clear from our own observations of public gatherings after that event that some recognition of that kind could have a positive impact.

We would therefore concur with a range of sources referred to in previous sections that have recommended taking steps to facilitate "cultural competency" within the MPS.

It is also worth noting that efforts to change the dynamic processes which erode police-community relations will be more difficult if they do not engage with the "lived experience" across communities *and* the police. It is not clear that simply admonishing the police to be more understanding or to recognise institutional racism has made much headway since the Brixton riots, but some of our feedback from respondents has also made it clear that profound change can result from careful and balanced recognition of "lived experience".

Police respondents in our Perceptions of Violence research (Liddle and Harding, 2024, forthcoming) often commented on how they felt that some areas of the capital were strongly "anti-police", and that the public often does not appreciate how difficult and unsupported their own jobs can be. So addressing issues around cultural competence would need to engage with some of these wider issues if it is to gain traction.

There is a strong connection here between issues around trauma, and issues around disproportionality and racism, and we would recommend that efforts be made to facilitate a shift toward "trauma responsive" service delivery – an approach that goes beyond simply putting on more training sessions (which can, after all, have a very limited short term impact), and which adopts more dynamic approaches that involve carefully managed interaction and exchange about these issues (by specialist personnel) and which incorporates attention to "lived experience" as noted above.

APPENDIX 1 – FURTHER COMMENTS ON METHODS

We provide some further and brief comments in this section, on our approach to reviewing the literature, and our consultation exercise with key experts.

On the former, we did not undertake a (Campbell Collaboration-style) systematic review or meta-analysis of the key sets of literature that we have discussed in the report, but instead pulled together a team of people who had already undertaken reviews recently as part of their own specialisms and publication activity. Team members had already undertaken reviews of the stop and search literature, and of the literature on links between cannabis and violence, on disproportionality, on exploitation and drug dealing, and on procedural justice theory. Team members had also contributed to particular strands of that literature, but we also monitored publications carefully during the period of the research to ensure that new material on these topics – which is being released quite regularly, including some of the reviews and meta-analyses that we have referred to above – was properly included.

As part of that monitoring, team members also attended relevant academic and practice conferences during that period, of which there were several where new work was presented.

For the consultation with key experts, we very carefully sought out some of the most senior and experienced individuals in the academic, public and community sectors who had appropriate topic knowledge, and asked for their views about a range of issues that we discuss in the report, premised on solid guarantees of confidentiality and anonymity that we provided to them (and which were accepted by the University of West London Ethics Panel).

A core of 15 interviews with these individuals were undertaken and recorded digitally, and then transcribed by a professional transcriber. Transcriptions were pseudonymised, and recordings were destroyed after transcription.

Respondents were provided with privacy notices and information sheets in advance, which were also vetted and accepted by the Ethics Panel. The interviews themselves were semi-structured, with the interviewer using a tailored questionnaire for each (given the range of their individual expertise).

A further 12 discussions were also held with key respondents (mostly researchers who had undertaken or authored key reports on our key topic areas), that were more focused on specific questions that we had (e.g. about their own research). These discussions were not recorded, but they were all written up, and those write-ups were also pseudonymised.

All files from this strand of the research were imported into NVIVO for analysis, and although we roughly adhered to the required methods for “reflexive thematic analysis” or RTA[56], we also used a coding frame which was linked to the key research questions and sub-questions.

[56] Braun and Clark first outlined the RTA approach in their 2006 paper, but have since elaborated on the approach at much greater length (2012, 2013, 2014, 2020).

Our team members were also already very familiar with open source data on a range of issues related to the key research questions, although we downloaded new material as it was published, as well. Fellow researchers also provided us with some data-sets in confidence, which informed our thinking about some of the issues even though we could not use all such material.

For the key open source data-sets, we usually undertook analysis in SPSS, and for reasons to do with budgets and the wide range of research questions, this analysis was fairly basic and descriptive.

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