

HOW STOP AND SEARCH IS USED

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Introduction

Police use stop and search powers to search people who they suspect to be in possession of unlawful items, such as illegal drugs, weapons, or stolen property.

The power is seen by the police as a valuable tool in the fight against crime, both deterring offenders and preventing further offending. However the evidence on its effectiveness is mixed, and there are gaps in the data, particularly surrounding its use in the UK context. Moreover stop and search is associated with potential harms, both to individuals and to communities as a whole.

This briefing will examine the current evidence in relation to stop and search and how it is practised in the UK, examining in particular questions of its disproportionate use against young people and those from minority ethnic groups.

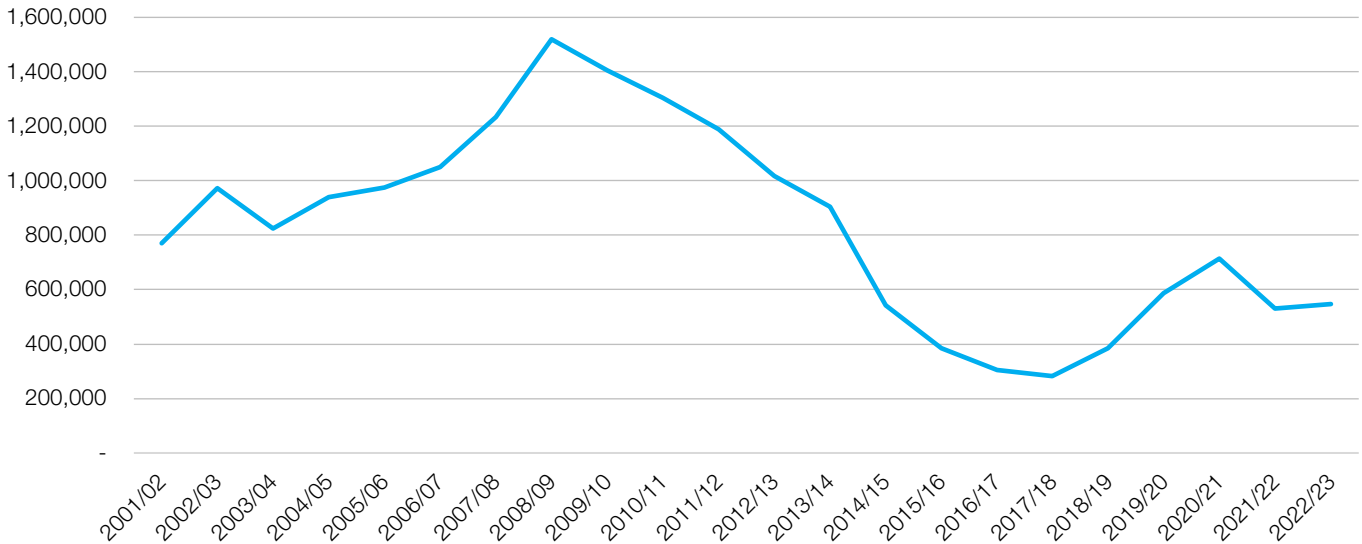
1. How stop and search is used

A review of the available data

Between April 2022 and March 2023 there were 547,003 stop and searches conducted by the police in England in Wales. These were conducted under two primary pieces of legislation, Section 1 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 and Section 60 of the

Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994. This was three per cent higher than the previous year but a 25 per cent decrease on the high of 714,914 in the year ending March 2021, as Figure 1 shows (Home Office, 2023)

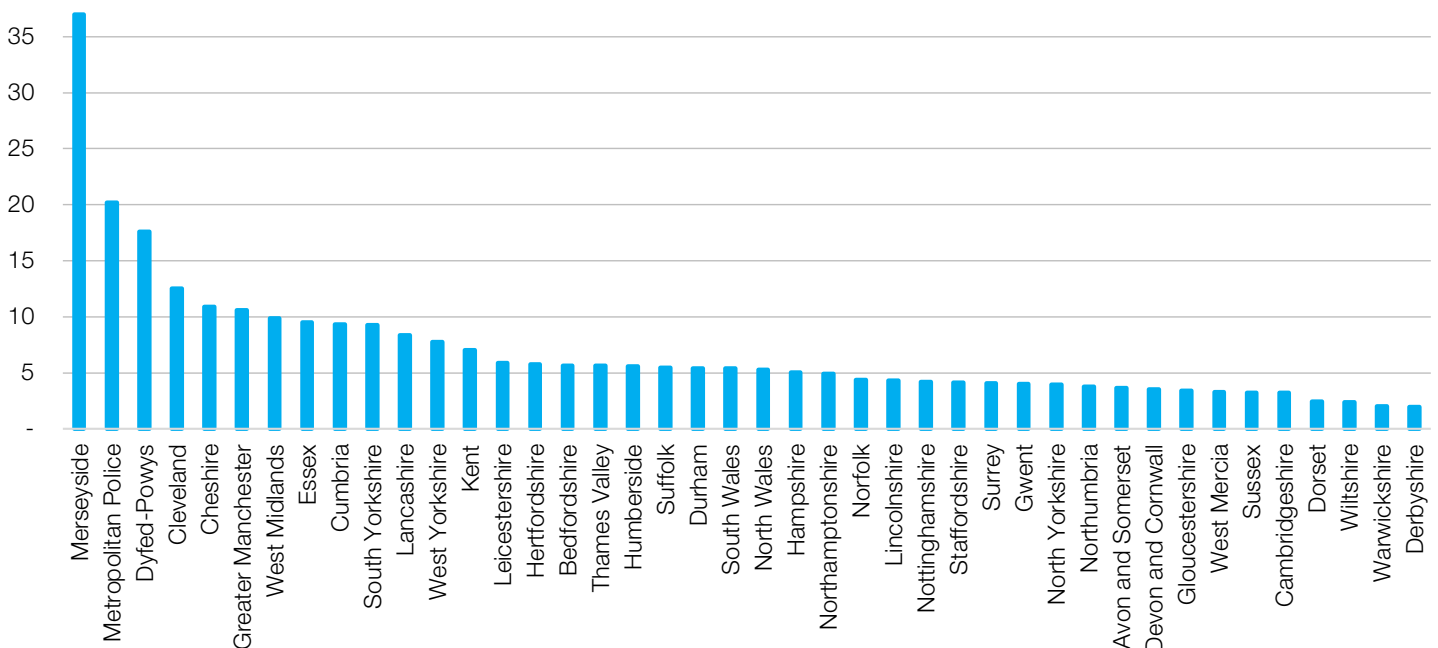
Figure 1 Total stop and searches, England and Wales 2001/2 and 2022/3 (Home Office, 2023)



The Metropolitan Police (MPS) accounts for a significant proportion of all stop and searches conducted in England and Wales (32 per cent in the year ending March 2023), though this proportion has been reducing in recent years. In the year ending March 2022 the MPS made up 40 per cent of the total number of searches, and in the year ending March 2021, the MPS made up 44

per cent of stop and searches (Home Office, 2023). In England and Wales there were nine stop and searches per 1,000 population in the year ending March 2023. Merseyside Police had the highest rate at 37 per 1,000 population, followed by the MPS, which had a rate of 20 per 1,000 population, as Figure 2 shows.

Figure 2 Persons searched under stop and search powers by Police Force Area per thousand population, England and Wales, 2022/23 (Home Office, 2023)



Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 and associated legislation

Under Section 1 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE) (and associated legislation), police can stop and search someone if they have ‘reasonable grounds for suspicion’ that they are carrying an unlawful item. Similarly, under Section 23 of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, police can search for controlled drugs where there is ‘reasonable ground for suspicion’ that someone has a controlled substance on their person. The smell of cannabis alone, in and of itself, is insufficient grounds for a search (College of Policing, 2016).

The following analysis groups together searches under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 with searches under s.1 of PACE and associated legislation.

Between April 2022 and March 2023, these accounted for approximately 99 per cent (542,723) of all stop and searches. The number of searches conducted under this legislation increased by three per cent compared with the year ending March 2022. However, looking at longer term changes, the number in March 2023 was 56 per cent below the peak recorded in March 2011 (Home Office, 2023).

The changes in stop and search rates over the years have been linked to the attitude of succeeding Home Secretaries to the police use of the power. For example, Theresa May in 2014 decided to re-focus the use of such powers through introducing the Best Use of Stop and

Search scheme, designed to contribute to a significant reduction in the overall use of stop and search and better and more intelligence-led stop and search. This was reversed in 2018 by the Home Secretary at the time, Sajid Javid who saw stop and search as a viable tactic to tackle an increase in knife crime. The 2021 increase may have been affected by proactive searches for drugs during national lockdowns throughout the Covid-19 pandemic (Home Office, 2023).

Figure 3 shows that approximately 61 per cent of searches under PACE were for drugs. This is a lower proportion than the proportion for the year ending March 2022, which was 65 per cent of searches, and bucks the trend of annual increases in the proportion of stop and searches carried out to find drugs. The proportion and number of drugs searches steadily increased between March 2018 and March 2021, but has reduced since then (Home Office, 2023). Most drug searches are for possession (for personal use), not for the more serious offence of possession with intent to supply (HMICFRS, 2021). The proportion of searches on people suspected to be in possession of stolen property or going equipped for stealing increased slightly in the year ending March 2023, as did searches in the ‘other’ category, which includes possession of fireworks. The number of searches carried out for offensive weapons, stolen property, going equipped, criminal damage and other offences, such as possession of fireworks, have also increased in that time.

Figure 3 Searches under section 1 of PACE by reason for search in England and Wales in year ending March 2023 (Home Office, 2023)

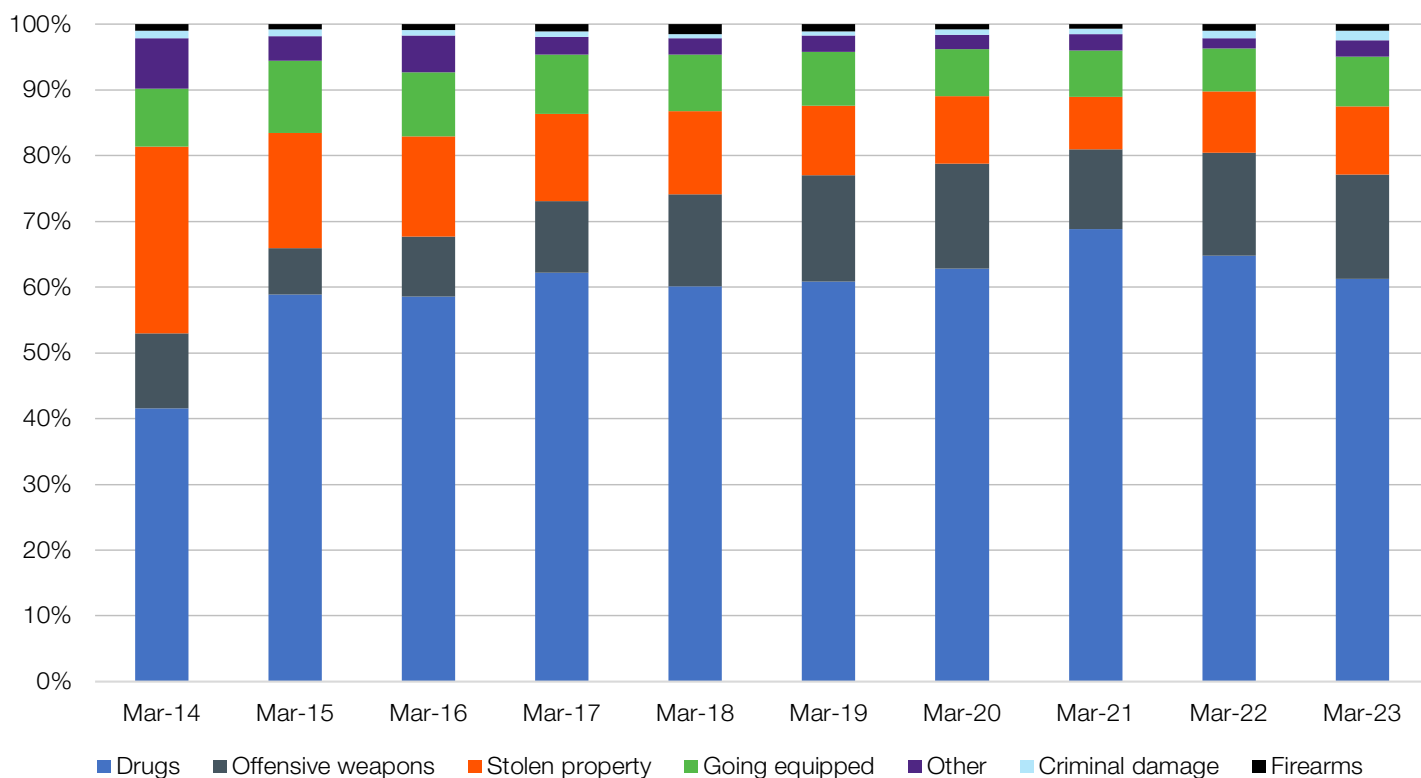
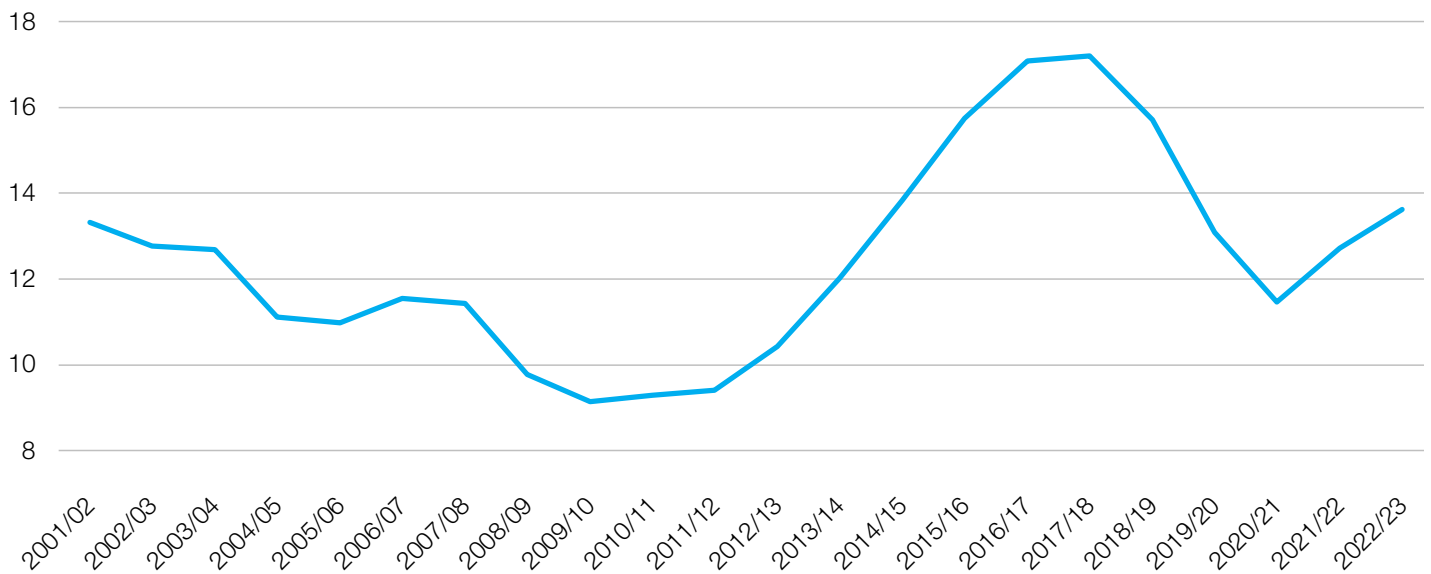


Figure 4 Percentage of stop and searches under section 1 of PACE resulting in an arrest, England and Wales, 2001/02 to 2022/23 (Home Office, 2023)



In March 2021, data collection was expanded to enable forces to give more detail on whether an offensive weapon or firearm was found in a stop and search encounter. Differences in the way forces collect it means this data is only an estimate but approximately 15,100 (three per cent) of searches in the year ending March 2023 resulted in an offensive weapon or firearm being found. Approximately 3,250 (22 per cent) of those searches which resulted in a find were when the initial search reason was for drugs (Home Office, 2023).

As Figure 4 shows the number of arrests following a Section 1 PACE search increased by 6,961 (10 per cent) in the year ending March 2023. This was a larger percentage increase than the rise in the total number of section 1 PACE searches over the same time period (an increase of three per cent or 16,093), leading to a rise in the arrest rate, up from 13 per cent in the year ending March 2022 to 14 per cent in the year ending March 2023. This is a slight increase on the previous year, but still not at the 2017/18 peak of 17 per cent (Home Office, 2023).

Of those searches where an arrest did not take place, 71 per cent ended in no further action, while the rest resulted in either a caution, Khat/Cannabis warning¹, penalty notice for disorder or community resolution, or one of the new outcomes launched in March 2021, which include voluntary attendance, verbal warning or words of advice, seizure of property, guardian intervention or other action. These other

outcomes would have previously been counted as 'no further actions' which makes comparisons with years before March 2021 difficult. If the outcomes introduced in the year ending March 2021 are considered to be 'no further action', then 75 per cent of searches in the year ending March 2023 resulted in 'no further action', the same proportion as in the year ending March 2022 (Home Office, 2023).

In a paper published before the most recent changes to stop and search legislation detailed above, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue (HMICFRS) (2021) found that 82 per cent of a sample of stop and search records had reasonable recorded grounds (down from 94 per cent in their 2017 review), although only 21 per cent had 'strong' grounds. Searches with strong grounds were found to be far more effective in terms of the find rate as Table 1 shows.

Table 1 Recorded grounds and find rates for stop and search (HMICFRS, 2021)

Recorded grounds	% of PACE stop and searches	Find rate
'Strong'	21%	40%
'Moderate'	42%	22%
'Weak'	22%	17%
'Not reasonable'	14%	14%

Stop and searches can be initiated in three ways (HMICFRS, 2021).

- Self-generated: when an officer proactively initiates an encounter based on what they see or hear.
- Third-party: when an officer initiates an encounter based on information from, for example, a member of the public or CCTV.

¹ A cannabis or khat warning may be given where the offender is found in possession of a small amount of cannabis or khat consistent with personal use and the offender admits the elements of the offence. The drug is confiscated, and a record of the warning will be made on local systems.

- Intelligence-led: when an officer initiates an encounter based on intelligence suggesting an individual is in possession of an unlawful item at that time.

The College of Policing authorised professional practice on stop and search (2016), (see also (Miller et al, 2020) states that it is “more likely to be effective when it is used in a targeted and intelligence-led way against active offenders and when officers’ grounds for suspicion are strong”. However, Table 2, which relies on data from the 2021 HMICFRS report, shows that just nine per cent of PACE searches were intelligence led. Being ‘intelligence led’ is important for the efficacy of stop and search but is also important for reasons of legitimacy and the efficient use of police resources. Moreover, there is evidence to suggest that officers tend to use intelligence to confirm prior knowledge and suspicions rather than to genuinely gain new information (Chainey and Macdonald, 2012).

Table 2 Type of search and proportion of searches with weak grounds

Search type	% PACE searches	% ‘weak’ recorded grounds
Self-generated	55% (70% in MPS)	54%
Third-party information	37%	34%
Intelligence led	9%	11%

Around half of the sample in the HMICFRS (2021) report were ‘self-generated’ searches, of which over half had weak grounds. 82 per cent of these self-generated searches were for drugs, and the vast majority (86 per cent) were for possession only. Of ‘third-party’ searches, 32 per cent were for drugs, with 78 per cent also being for possession. In relation to intelligence-led searches, 82 per cent of searches were for drugs and the majority of these were under suspicion of possession with intent to supply, with only 30 per cent for possession only. It is clear that intelligence led searches generate the best results, but these are used infrequently. The HMICFRS (2021) report shows is clear that stop and search is largely used for self-generated possession-only drug searches, most of which are based on ‘weak recorded grounds’.

In April 2023, a pilot of Serious Violence Reduction Orders (SVROs) was launched in four police forces. This new piece of legislation was introduced in the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022. A SVRO is a civil order that courts in England and Wales can impose on a person over the age of 18 convicted of an offence where a knife or offensive weapon was used or

was present. SVROs can last for between six months (minimum) and two years (maximum) and provide police with the power to stop and search someone subjected to them at any time without reasonable suspicion (Home Office, 2023a).

In the forces that have trialled them, chosen because of their relatively high rates of knife crime, Merseyside has imposed 44 in the first six months (Merseyside Police, 2023) while West Midlands has introduced six (West Midlands Police, 2023).

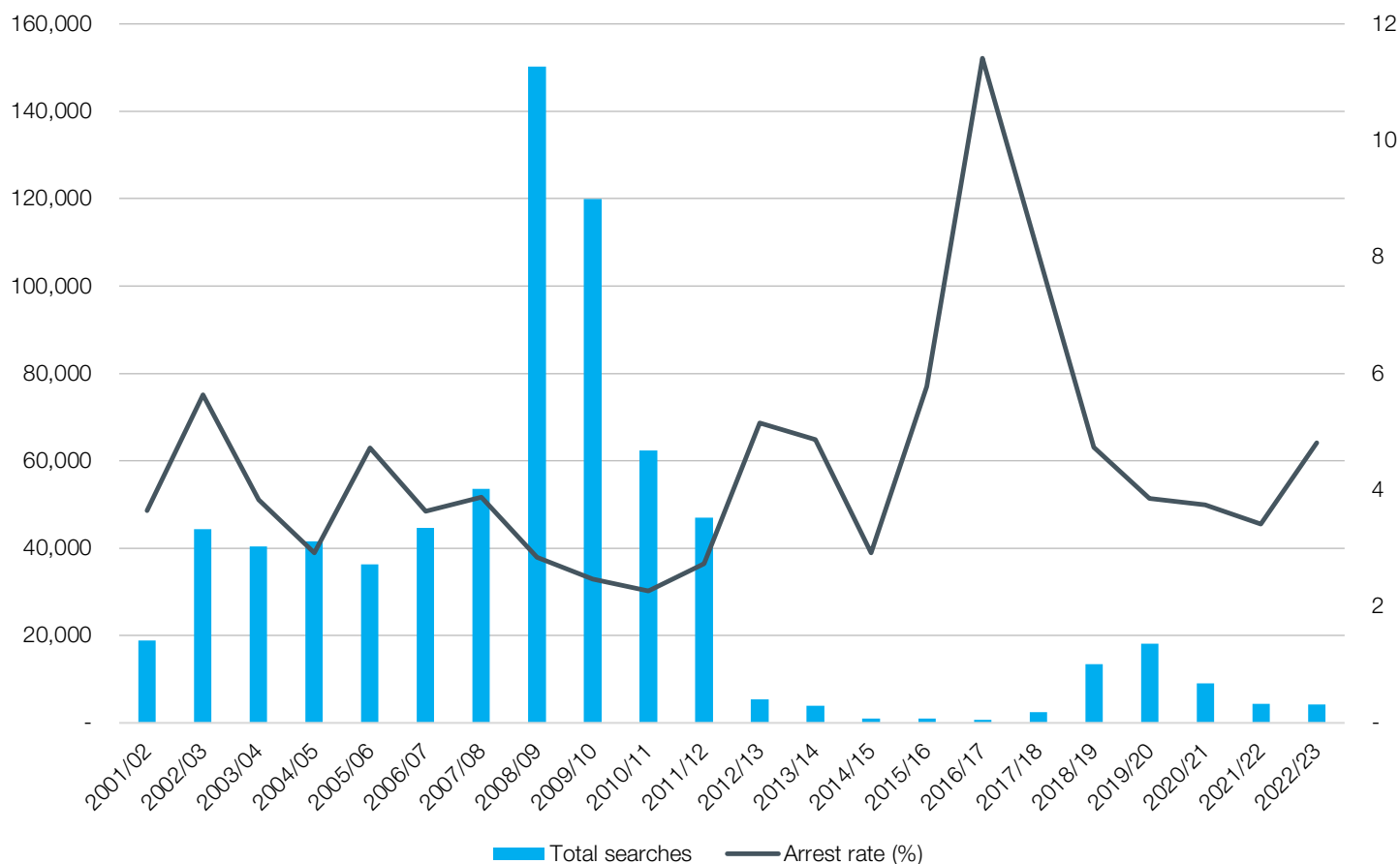
Section 60 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994

Section 60 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act (CJPOA) 1994 enables officers to conduct ‘no suspicion’ stop and searches for dangerous instruments or offensive weapons for a limited time within a specified area, when violence is anticipated there. Between April 2022 and March 2023, police in England and Wales carried out 4,280 stop and searches under Section 60, a one per cent decrease compared with the year ending March 2022 (when 4,341 such searches were undertaken) (Home Office, 2023a).

This is the third consecutive decrease in the number of searches under Section 60, following three years of increases between the year ending March 2018 and the year ending March 2020 (Home Office, 2023).

The decrease comes in spite of the government’s introduction of the Beating Crime plan, which proposed in 2021 that the conditions in which Section 60 can be used, governed by the Best Use of Stop and Search (BUSS) scheme, should be relaxed. This means they could be authorised by inspectors, chief inspectors and superintendents (rather than only more senior officers), that they could be authorised where there is a belief that serious violence ‘may’ (rather than will) occur and that the time period for which an authorisation being in place could be extended (Smith et al, 2023). Moreover, the relaxation of the BUSS scheme means police forces are also no longer required to communicate where an authorisation is in place to the public despite the Criminal Justice Alliance (2021) finding that forces rarely communicate Section 60 authorisations to community stakeholders and the public effectively and this has a negative effect on community relations. This decision was also made despite the Home Office’s equality impact assessment suggesting that increasing the use of Section 60 would magnify residual discriminatory use of the power (Home Office, 2019).

Figure 5: Number of Section 60 stop and searches, and proportion of those where a weapon is found (Home Office, 2023)



However, the use of Section 60 was also more widespread compared with the year to March 2022, as the number of forces in England and Wales making at least one stop and search under Section 60 powers increased from 18 to 23. Greater Manchester Police increased their number of stop and searches under Section 60 by 267 per cent in the year ending March 2023, from 260 up to 954. But the Metropolitan Police Service decreased its number of searches under Section 60 by 58 per cent in the year ending March 2023, from 1,760 to 741, which accounts for the current reduction (Home Office, 2023).

Figure 5 shows that when Section 60 stop and searches have increased, the results of Section 60 searches (if measured in terms of ‘outcomes’) have decreased. For example, the arrest rate in 2020/21 following Section 60 searches was just four per cent. In 2023, 48 per cent fewer searches were conducted and the proportion of those which resulted in an arrest increased to five per cent (Home Office, 2023). It is clear from Figure 5 that the ‘popularity’ of Section 60 as a policing tactic has varied over time and that, where used more sparingly, arrest rates improve.

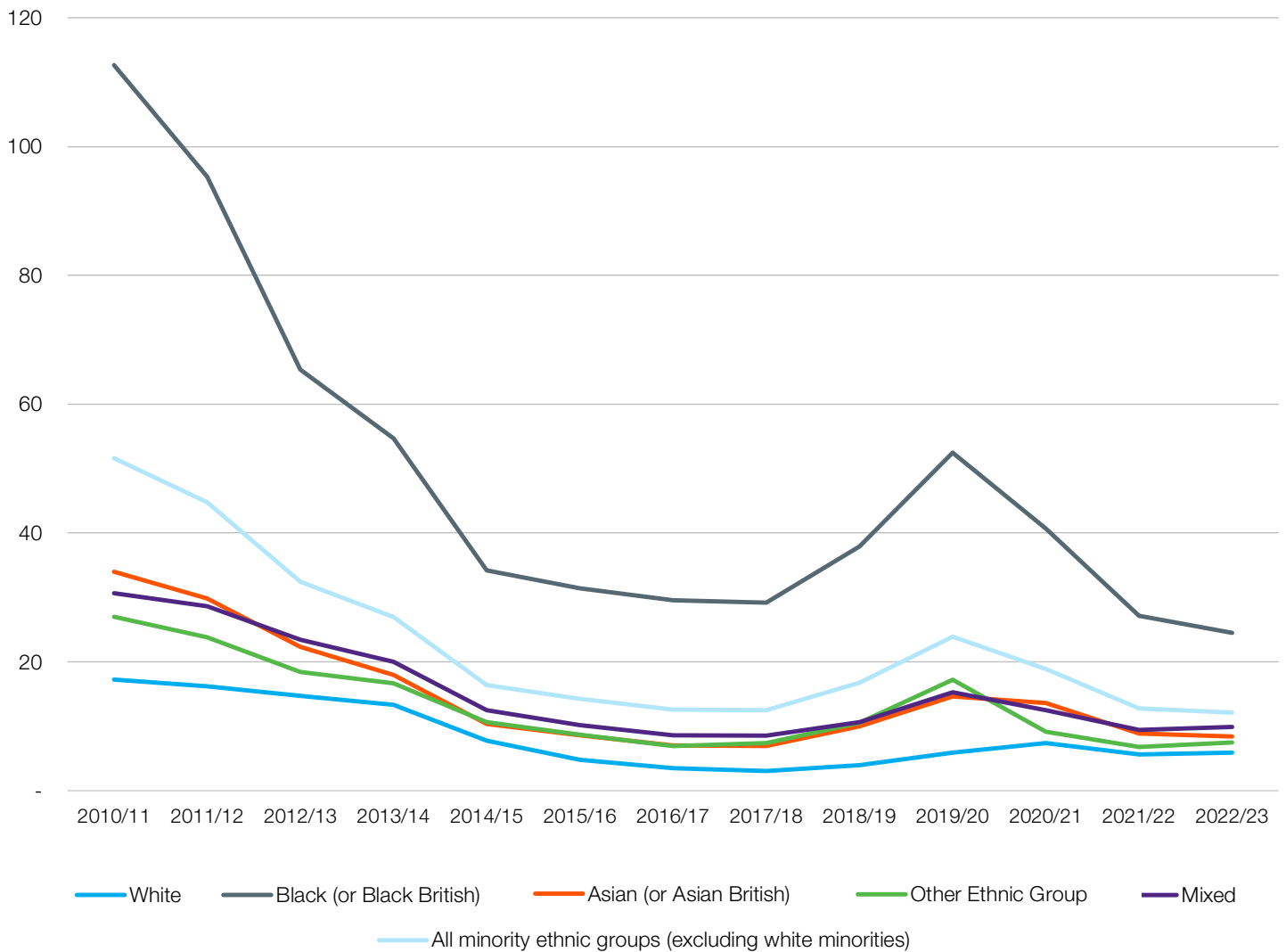
Racial disproportionality

In what follows we use the HMICFRS (2021, p. 8) definition of disproportionality as “the ratio between the percentage of people in an ethnic group who experience the exercise of a police power and the percentage of people in that same ethnic group in the population”.

Members of ethnic minority groups are much more likely to be stopped and searched than White people. Black people, who account for four per cent of the population, were the subject of 11 per cent of searches under PACE and Section 60 legislation in the year ending March 2023. White people, who are 82 per cent of the population, made for 55 per cent of searches, while Asian people made up 11 per cent, out of a population of nine per cent. People of mixed ethnicity make up three per cent of the population and three per cent of searches, and for those of other ethnicity it is two per cent of the population and two per cent of searches (Home Office, 2023).

There are signs that in the past few years as the use of stop and search has diminished slightly since the pandemic, so too has the disparity in searches between White and Black people, as more White people and fewer Black people are searched. Looking at all stops

Figure 6 Stop and search rate per 1,000 people by ethnicity 2010/11 to 2022/3 (Home Office, 2023)

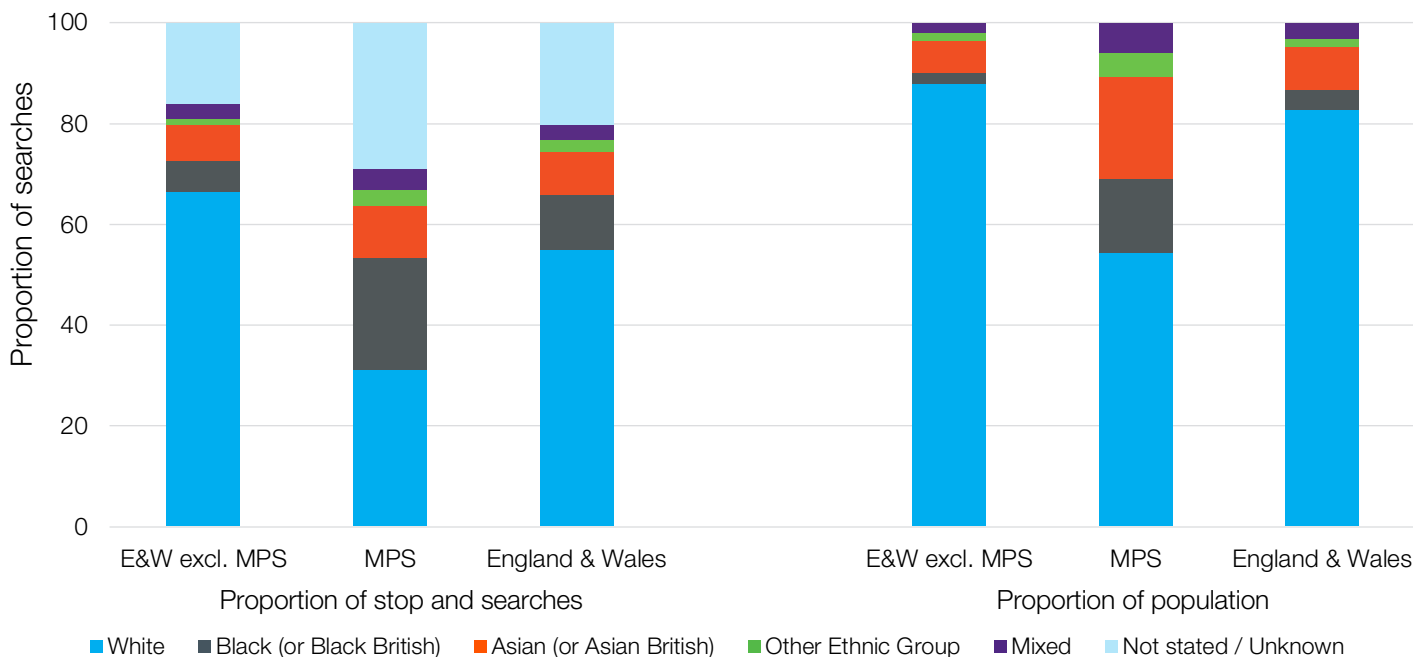


and searches, between the year ending March 2022 and the year ending March 2023 the largest increase in the number of searches was seen in the group of people who self-defined as White, an increase of 15,245 (six per cent), from 273,982 in the previous year to 289,22, while the number of searches of people who self-defined as Black decreased by 6,409 (10 per cent) from 65,452 to 59,043. The number of searches of people who self-defined as Asian decreased by 2,267 (five per cent) from 48,901 to 46,634 over the same time period (Home Office, 2023).

Black people are currently 4.1 times more likely to be stopped than White people. This is the second year on year decrease from 5.5 in the year ending March 2021 and 4.8 in the year ending March 2022. People of 'Other' ethnicities are 1.4 times more likely to be stopped and those of Mixed ethnicity and Asian people are 2.4 times more likely to be stopped (Home Office, 2023). However, some caution should be taken with

these figures since the data it relies on is partial – force areas vary in their ethnic composition and in their level of missing ethnicity data. Moreover, a significant minority of people decline to give their ethnicity, and this number is increasing. In the year ending March 2023, the level of missing ethnicity data (self-defined) was 20 per cent, compared to five per cent of searches in March 2014 (Home Office, 2023). This adds further uncertainty to the trends discussed below. Home Office (2023) analysis suggests that when self-defined ethnicity and officer defined ethnicity are both included, the missing ethnicity data is reduced but the disparity rates for people from ethnic minorities (not including White minorities), increase. For example, using this methodology, Black people had a disparity of 5.5, compared to 4.1 using self-defined ethnicity alone. This suggests that self-defined ethnicity is more likely to be 'not stated' or missing when the person searched was from one of those ethnic groups (Home Office, 2023).

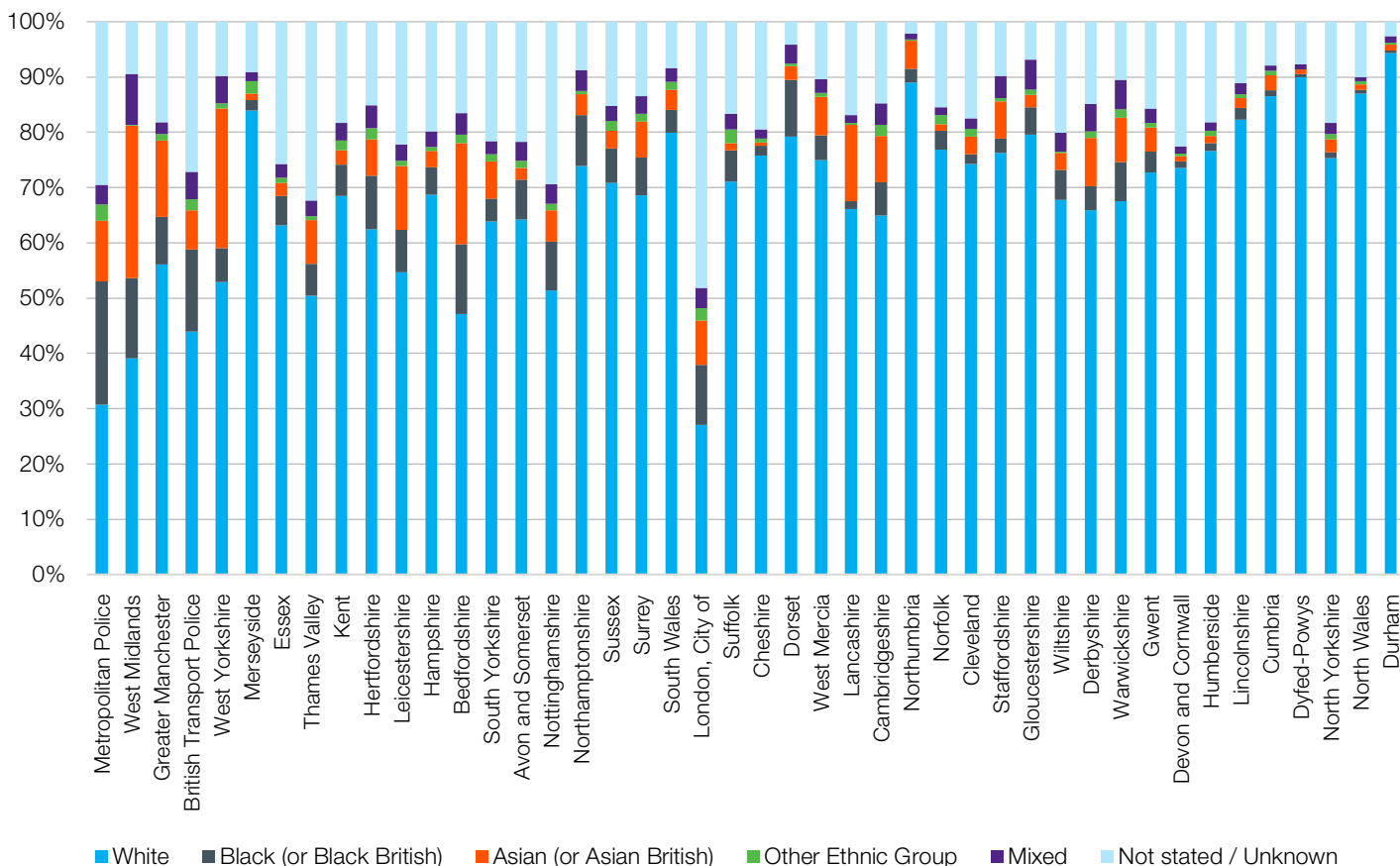
Figure 7 Proportion of stop and searches by self-defined ethnic group, England and Wales and the MPS area, year ending March 2023 (Home Office, 2023)



There is considerable variation in the use of stop and search and in levels of disproportionality across police forces (Figure 8). Every police force in England and Wales is more likely to stop and search a Black person than a White person (relative to their resident populations). The MPS was responsible for 32 per cent of all searches in the year to March 2023 and has a larger population

(46 per cent) of ethnic minorities (not including white minorities). Stops of individuals who define themselves as Black, Asian and other minority ethnic groups make up a larger proportion of all stops in the MPS area when compared with forces in the rest of England and Wales. In 2022/23, 37 per cent of searches in London were of Black people, as Figure 8 shows (Home Office, 2023)

Figure 8 Proportion of stop and searches by self-defined ethnic group, England and Wales and the MPS area, year ending March 2023 (Home Office, 2023)



There is some variation in the disproportionality rates depending on the reason why searches were conducted. For offensive weapon searches, and searches under Section 60, Black people were searched at a rate 9 and 8.7 times higher than White people respectively, and were searched at a rate of 5.1 times more than White people for drugs searches (compared with a disparity of 5.5 for all stop and searches when looking at self-defined and officer defined ethnicity). Searches of Black people for articles to commit criminal damage had a rate 1.5 times higher than white people (Home Office, 2023)

HMICFRS (2021) found that in 42 out of 43 forces possession-only drug searches were more prevalent than supply-type drug searches, despite few forces counting drugs possession (as opposed to supply) among their strategic priorities. Moreover, the same report found that drug enforcement contributed to disproportionality “despite evidence that there is no correlation between ethnicity and rates of drug use”. According to the Crime Survey for England and Wales, in the year ending June 2022, the proportion of 16 to 59 year olds reporting use of illicit drugs in the last year was 9.8 per cent of White people and 5.1 per cent of Black people (ONS, 2022). For Class A drugs, the proportion was 3.1 per cent for the former group and 0.5 per cent for the latter group (ONS, 2022). However,

in 2021/22, Black people were stopped and search for drugs (possession and supply) at a rate 7.7 times higher than White people (Home Office, 2022).

In terms of arrests, people who self-defined their ethnicity as either Black or ‘Mixed or Other’ (or perceived by the officer to belong to one of those ethnicities, if not stated) had an arrest rate of 15 per cent. White people had an arrest rate of 13 per cent, and people who self-defined or were perceived to be of Asian ethnicity had the lowest arrest rate (12 per cent) (Home Office, 2023).

Disproportionality with age

Being male and being under age 35 are greater predictors of higher search rates than being of an ethnic minority. According to the latest data from the Home Office (2023), about two-thirds (65 per cent) of all stop and searches of persons in the year ending March 2023 were on people aged between 10 and 29 years old (331,159 out of 509,953 searches). Of these, 107,763 were aged between 10 and 17 (21 per cent of the total), 157,467 were 18 to 24 (31 per cent of the total) and 65,929 were 25 to 29 (13 per cent of the total). There were 70 searches of those aged under 10 recorded in the year ending March 2022 and 64 in the year ending March 2023 (Home Office, 2023).

Figure 9 Numbers of stop search on those aged 10 – 17 by force area and percentage of total stops for that area in 2023 (Home Office, 2023)

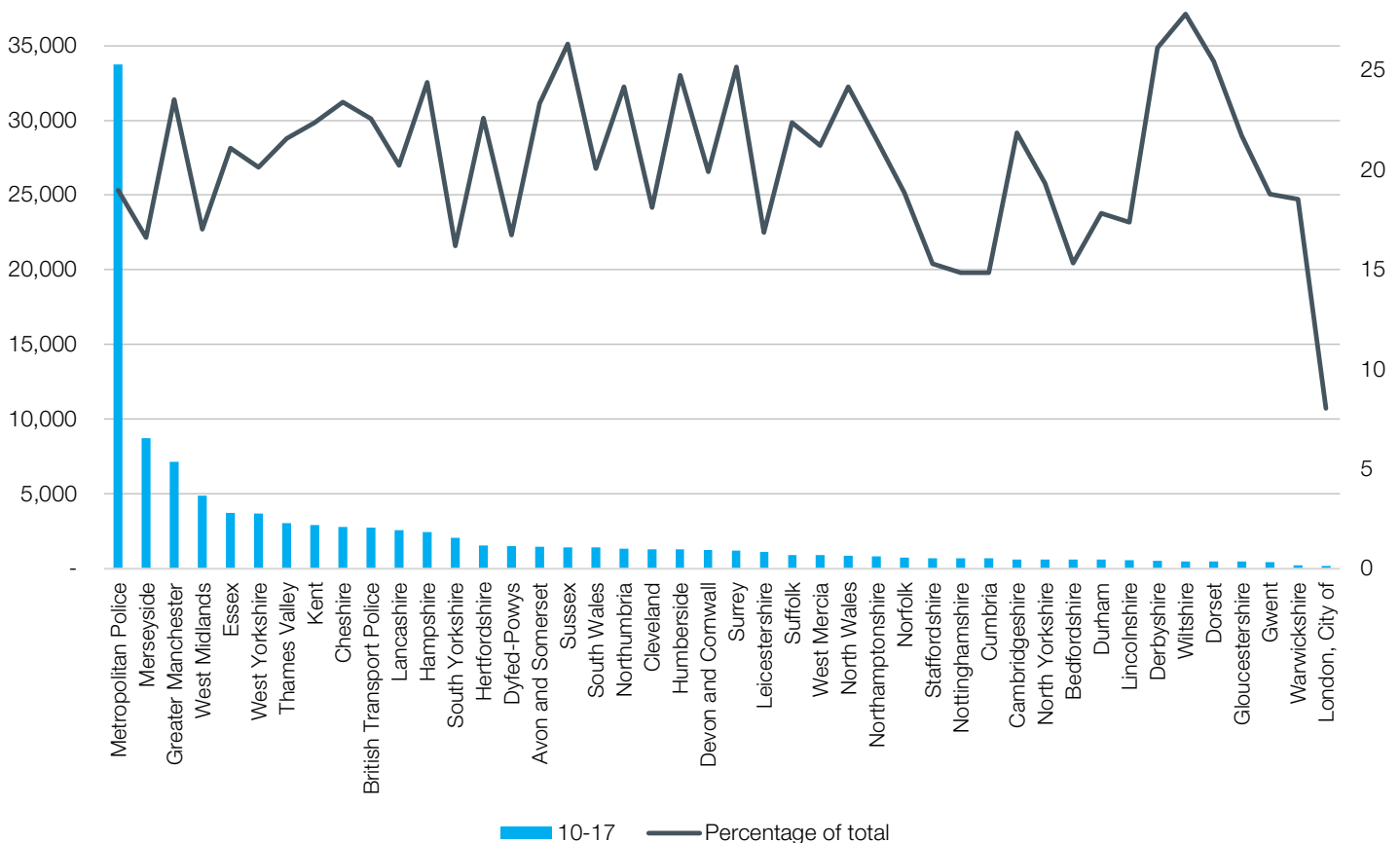


Figure 9 looks in more detail at stop and searches among children, more particularly in the 10 to 17 age group. While the majority of stop and searches conducted on this age category are carried out in the MPS force area, when looking at this category as a percentage of all stop and searches for that force, this number is in line with the national average. In contrast, while Wiltshire carried out only 496 stops on the 10 to 17 age group in 2023, this made up for 28 per cent of the total stop and searches carried out in that force. Similarly, in Sussex and Derbyshire, 1,445 and 534 searches were carried out respectively on those in the 10 to 17 age category, but these made up 26 per cent of the force total. Compared with the year ending March 2022, the proportion of people aged 10 to 17 and 30 or over being searched has increased in the year ending March 2023, while there were declines in the 18 to 14 age category, as Figure 10 shows.

There were some differences in the age of people searched depending on the reason for search. For example, people aged between 10 and 17 made up 59 per cent of criminal damage searches, but only 14 per cent of drug searches. In contrast, people aged 30 and above made up 43 per cent of searches for stolen property and 39 per cent of searches for going equipped, but only 19 per cent of searches under Section 60 (Home Office, 2023).

However, even though most stop and searches are carried out on young people, they are less likely to be arrested than those in older age categories. For example, only 10 per cent of searches on 10 to 17 year olds result in an arrest, compared with 12 per cent of 18 to 24 year olds, 16 per cent of 25 to 29 year olds and 17 per cent of those aged 30 and over. This is because police officers may use other methods of dealing with younger age groups, such as warnings or community resolutions (Home Office, 2023).

Stop and search is largely targeted at young males. For example, 63 per cent of stop and searches in the year ending March 2023 were on males aged between 15 and 34, while this group makes up 13 per cent of the overall population. Males aged 15 to 19 had the highest rate of stop and search, at 71 stop and searches per 1,000 population in the year ending March 2023, and were searched at a rate 7.2 times higher than those aged 45-49 (Home Office, 2023).

In contrast, females aged between 15 and 34 made up only seven per cent of stop and searches, despite being 13 per cent of the overall population. Searches of females aged 15 to 19 were roughly in proportion to their representation in the population (2.5 per cent of searches compared with 2.8 per cent of the population), however, for every other age group, the

Figure 10 Proportion of stop and searches by age group, England and Wales, year ending March 2022 and year ending March 2023 (Home Office, 2023)

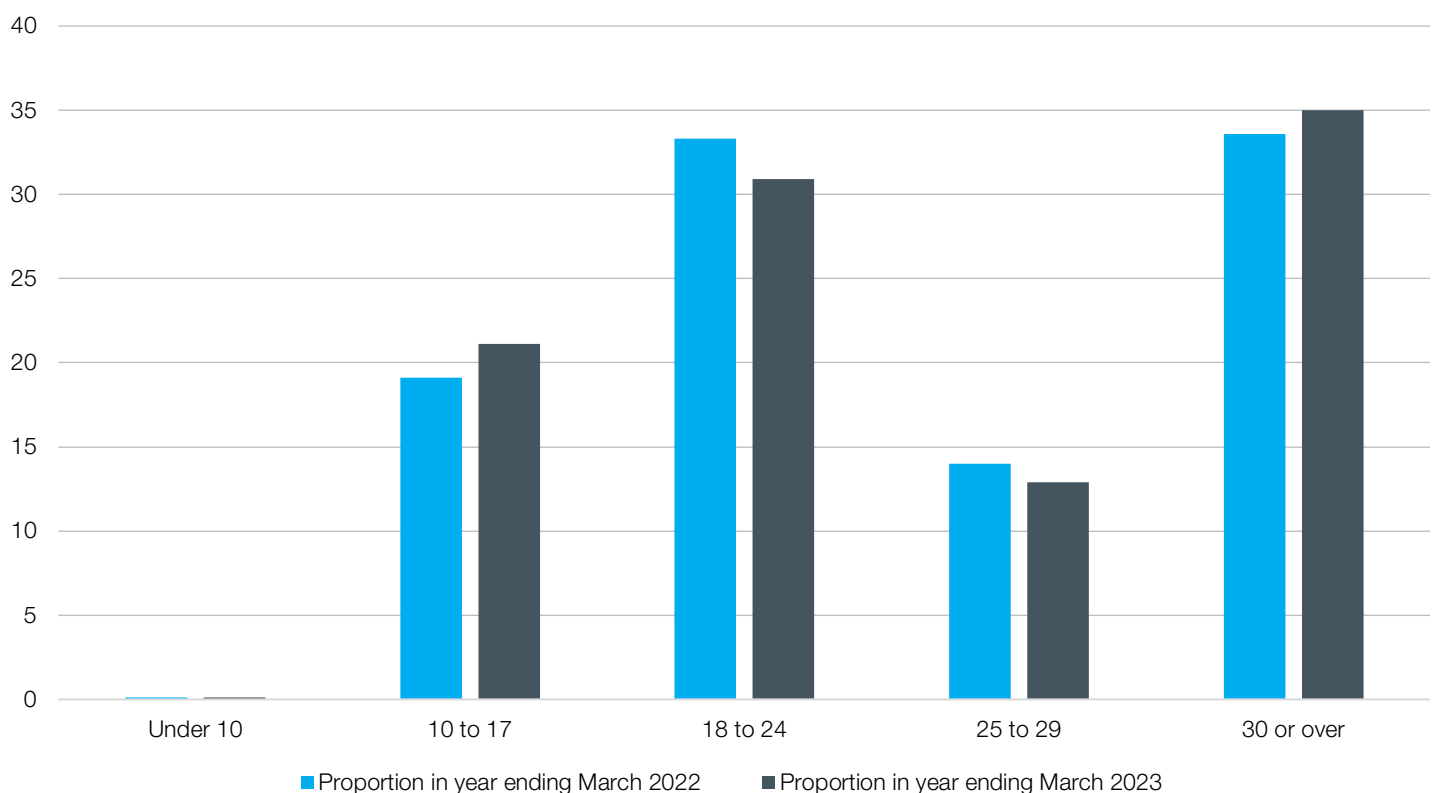
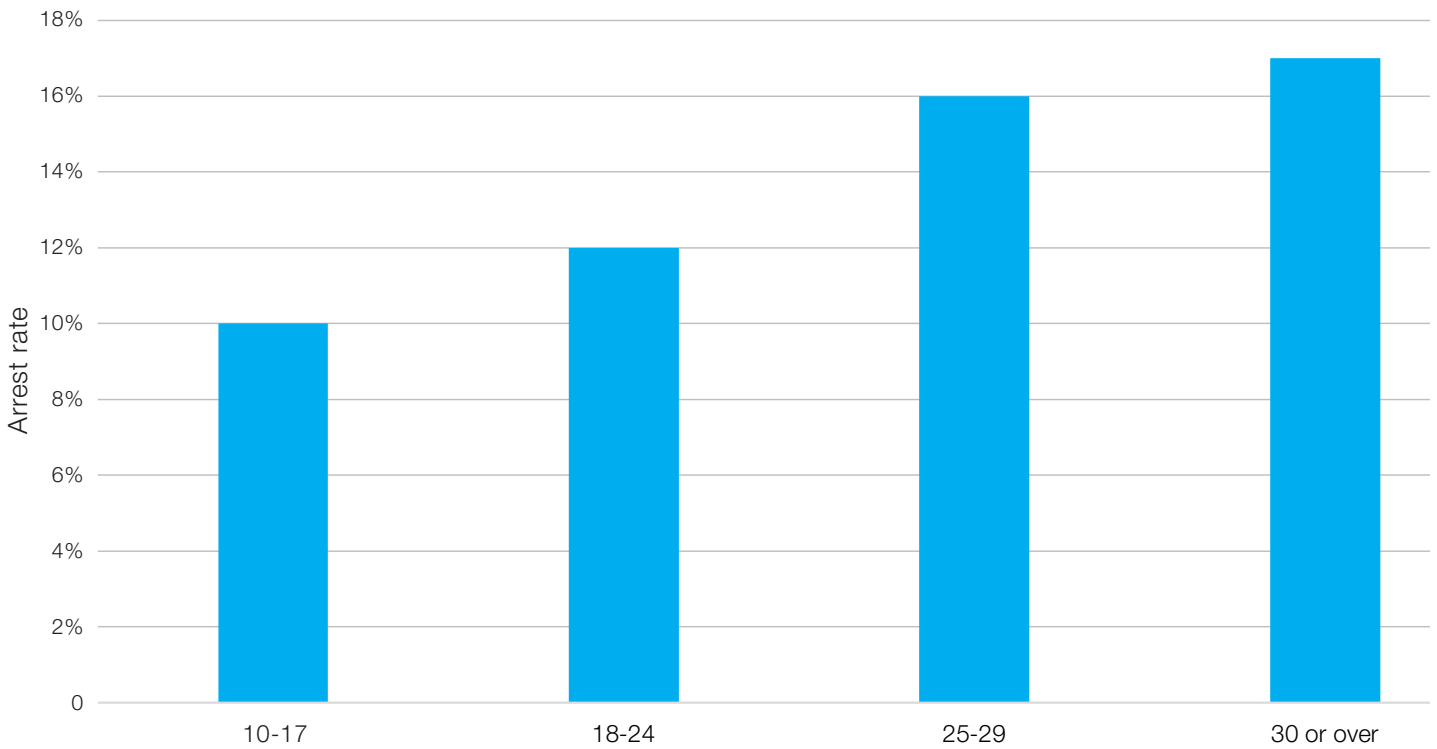


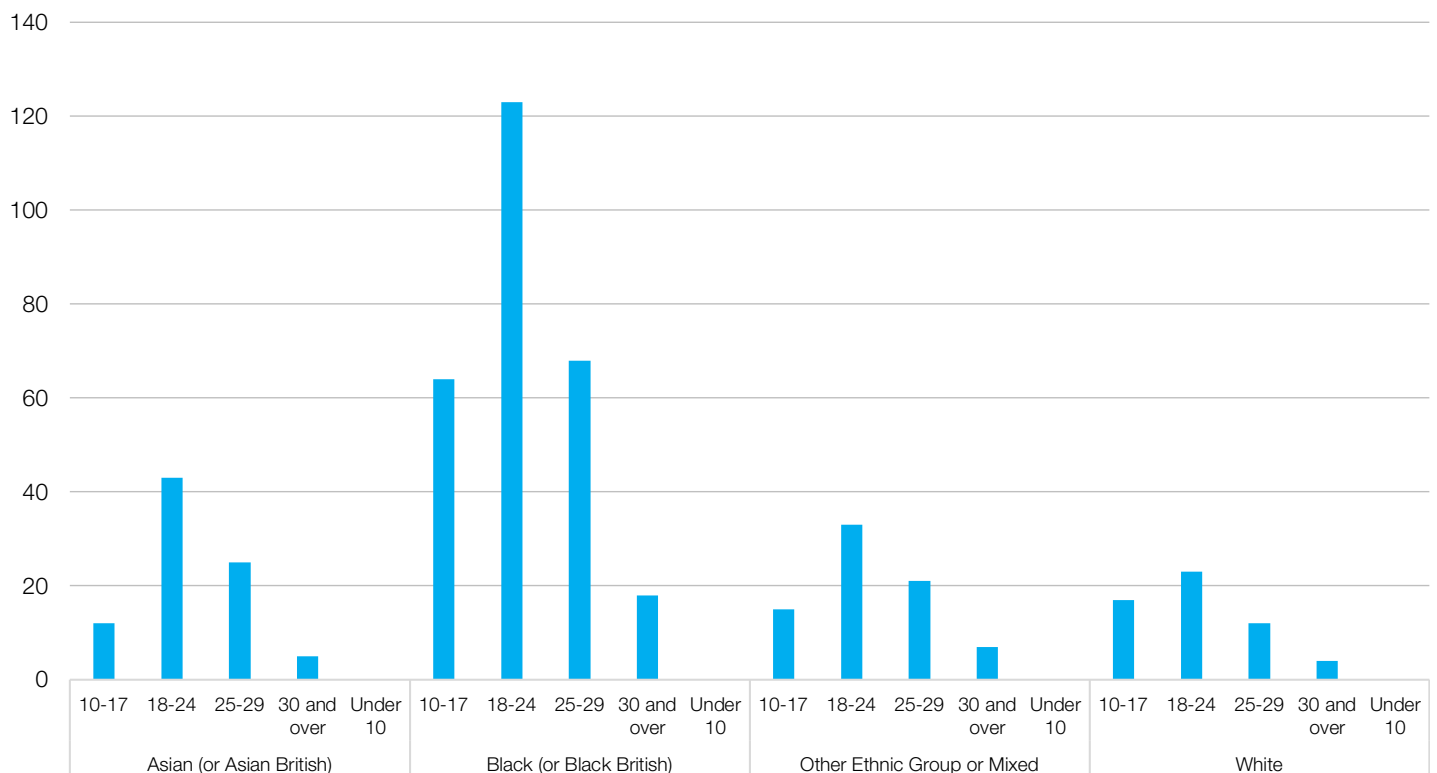
Figure 11 Proportion of stop and searches resulting in arrest by age, England and Wales, year ending March 2023 (Home Office, 2023)



proportion of females searched is lower than their proportion of the population. For males, only those aged nine and under, or over 49, represented a lower proportion of stop and searches than their proportion of the population.

Gender and age also intersect with ethnicity. Black men aged 18 to 24 have the highest search rate (under any legislation) as Figure 12 shows. Many people will be searched repeatedly but such data is not published by the police (Ashby, 2022)

Figure 12 Stop and Search Rate per 1,000 population by ethnicity and age, year ending March 2023 (Home Office, 2023; (ONS, 2023)



Analysis by Ashby (2022) shows that in London half of searches between April 2021 and March 2022 occurred in nine per cent of neighbourhoods. Moreover, 68 per cent of searches took place in neighbourhoods that were more deprived than average. In particular, 79 per cent of searches for weapons under Section 60 occurred in the most-deprived half of neighbourhoods. In London, disproportionality is highest in the most affluent boroughs where White people experience very low rates of stop and search but Black people are still subject to high rates. The fact that stop and search rates do not correlate with levels of deprivation is a pattern “consistent with ethnic profiling because it indicates that Black people are being singled out for suspicion” (Shiner et al, 2018, p. VII).

2. A review of UK implementation and process evaluations

Does stop and search work?

Code A of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE) states that “stop and search can play an important role in the detection and prevention of crime and using the powers fairly makes them more effective” (Home Office, 2014, p. 4). Code A of PACE also justifies the searching of those under the age of 10 (the criminal age of responsibility) where there is no power of arrest, because of the practice of older children or adults handing young children prohibited items in order to prevent detection (Home Office, 2014).

A recent fact sheet published by the Home Office News Team (2023) states that “stop and search powers are a vital tool for the police to prevent violence and other crime”. It adds that 100,000 knives and offensive weapons have been taken off the streets since 2019, 40,000 seized specifically through stop and search (Home Office News Team, 2023). Police typically justify the tactic of using stop and search for minor crimes such as possession of cannabis under the rubric of ‘broken windows’ theory (Wilson and Keeling, 1982) which argues that more serious crime can be prevented by proactive policing of minor infractions. In a speech made in January 2023, the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, Sir Mark Rowley cites a “forthcoming” global review of evidence for the *Oxford Journal of Policing* which he says has found that “stop and search in weapons crime hot spots can cut attempted murders in those small areas by 50 per cent or more” (Rowley, 2023)

It is logical to assume that without stop and search there would be more unlawful items on the streets and, without it, the job of the police would be made more difficult. The power has the potential to detain prolific offenders and may act as a deterrent for potential criminals. Rebekah Delsol (2015, p. 79) suggests that the effectiveness of the tactic has been taken for granted, particularly by police “who have an almost mythical belief in its efficacy”.

However, there is little evidence in a UK context that would back this assertion up. Bradford and Tiratelli (2019) suggest this is because no police chiefs are willing to take the risk of ceasing or reducing the amount of stop and search in an area that would be necessary for the study. Or indeed police chiefs feel there is no need for this experiment because they ‘know’ stop and search works (Bradford and Tiratelli, 2019).

In one of the few experiments carried out, McCandless and others (McCandless et al, 2016) explored the effect of Operation BLUNT 2, a knife crime initiative involving a large increase in Section 60 searches in some Metropolitan Police boroughs. Changes in crime rates in the boroughs where Operation BLUNT 2 was in place were compared with changes in those where it was not. They found the police operation, and the associated large increase in weapons searches had no effect on police recorded crime. They said that they could not rule out that a certain ‘base level’ of stop and search activity has an effect but could not determine what that base level might be. They concluded there was “no discernible crime-reducing effect at the borough level from a large surge in stop and search activity in London during 2008–11” (McCandless et al, 2016, p. 40).

Tiratelli and Bradford (2019) carried out analysis of ten years worth of crime data and found no evidence that conducting stop and searches could reduce robbery and theft, vehicle crime or criminal damage, and very small effects on burglary, non-domestic violent crime and total crime. A sudden surge in Section 60 searches had no real impact on the underlying trend in non-domestic violent crime. The only really strong evidence the authors found related to drug offences, but, they speculated, reductions in finds could have been due to people hiding them better or taking them before they went out rather than because they are deterred from taking them by stop and search (Bradford and Tiratelli, 2019). The researchers used a ‘worked example’ to identify how many stop and searches would need to be carried out to have any effect on crime. The London borough of Southwark recorded 1,282 searches

in October 2014, and 2,295 susceptible crimes in November 2014. The authors estimated if crime was to be three per cent lower in November – the equivalent of 69 fewer crimes – an additional 1,180 searches would have been required in October (taking the total to 2,462). Assuming it takes an average of 15 minutes to carry out a search, the extra searches that month would take 295 officer hours (or two extra officers). They added that most of the crimes ‘deterred’ would be drugs offences, and in all likelihood minor drugs offences at that (Bradford and Tiratelli, 2019).

Bradford and Tiratelli (2019) said that these results are comparable to Weisburd and others’ (2016) analysis of New York data during the peak years of the use of Stop Question and Frisk (SQF). Weisburd’s analysis found, around the peak in 2011, doing almost 700,000 SQFs would lead to only a two per cent decline in crime. The researchers said that even if the approach as practiced in New York was constitutional, this seems like a very large police investment for a relatively small crime-prevention gain (Weisburd et al, 2016).

Quinton and others (Quinton et al, 2017) also found inconsistent and weak associations between high rates of stop and search and lowering crime rates, providing limited evidence of a deterrent effect. They state:

“Even if the analysis provided ‘proof’ of deterrence, it would suggest that extremely large increases in stop and search, of a scale likely to be unacceptable to some communities, would only deliver modest reductions in crime. Any benefits derived from such increases would also need to be offset against the associated costs (i.e., financial, opportunity and to public trust) and weighed against their likely unequal impact on different communities” (Quinton et al, 2017, p. 4).

A recent study by Braakmann (2022) took advantage of a dramatic increase in stop and search following a murder in Newcastle to examine the effects of stop and search operations on crime. He found that monthly stop and searches in Newcastle city centre doubled and even trebled following the murder. Most of these additional searches resulted in no further action being taken. He found little evidence that increasing stop and search reduced drug and weapon offences or violent crime. There was a possible effect on property crime, and a fairly substantial reduction in antisocial behaviour, criminal damage and public order offences. He speculated that the latter was explained by the police acting as a general deterrent – it was not anything they did but rather their presence there alone which had the positive impact on antisocial behaviour in the area (Braakmann, 2022).

A study assessing the views of officers and community scrutiny leaders on Section 60 stop and search following recent changes in legislation around who can authorise them, as detailed above, also found no clear consensus on how, or indeed if, stop and search actually works (Smith et al, 2023). Some interviewees suspected it could work by acting as a deterrent rather than increasing detection, since the find rates for this type of stop and search are particularly low. Most interviewees agreed on the short term, localised nature of any specific Section 60 effect (Smith et al, 2023).

The same study suggested that any effect on crime believed to result from a Section 60 stop and search may not be due so much to the stop itself, but to the amount of officers concentrated in a crime hotspot, and that their presence there, rather than what they were doing, was the main factor in any reduction of offending (Smith et al, 2023). For these officers interviewed, the deterrent factor lay in communicating the fact that the Section 60 search was going to happen, so that potential offenders kept away, rather than in the volume of searches conducted. They were concerned that the relaxation of the obligation to tell community members about the authorisation would be counterproductive.

Nonetheless, stop and search remains a popular tactic because, at least for the individual officer, it does detect crime. Officers who conduct stop/searches do regularly uncover drugs, and less often, weapons (Bradford and Tiratelli, 2019). It could be easy, Bradford and Tiratelli argue, for hard pressed police forces to ignore the lack of overall evidence that stop and search reduces crime, and convince themselves that these individual successes mean they are meeting the demand to “do something” about violent crime by increasing stop and search.

Stop and search and other policing tactics

However, Bradford and Tiratelli (2019) state that it is impossible to say for certain stop and search does not work, particularly because of its association with other crime prevention techniques such as hotspot policing. They state that almost all hotspot interventions included stop and search among a wider catalogue of tactics ranging from problem solving to wider order maintenance work (Braga et al, 2014). A hotspot is a small geographical area where crime occurs often enough that it’s predictable. Hotspot policing is underpinned by deterrence theory and crime opportunity theory, the former being based on the idea crime can be prevented when an offender perceives that the cost

of committing a crime outweighs the benefits, and the latter that offenders make rational choices, picking targets that offer a high reward with little effort and risk (College of Policing, 2022). Police can act as capable guardians by increasing their presence in high crime hot spots, and so increase the risk and reduce the reward of committing a crime. A systematic review by Braga and others (2019) found that hot spots policing is an effective crime prevention strategy. The review concluded the tactic produces reductions in children and young people's involvement in crime and violence, and moreover does not inevitably lead to dispersal, but rather that crime control benefits may diffuse into the areas immediately surrounding the targeted locations (Braga et al, 2019).

However, one UK study of the relationship between the location of stop and search activity and the geographical concentration of crime suggests that at least some stop and search activity appears to take place in relatively low crime locations (Chainey and Macdonald, 2012; Ali and Champion, 2021). Conversely some high crime locations appear to have relatively little stop and search activity – and that while officers may have believed they were acting on intelligence, they were more likely to use the intelligence that chimed in with their prior knowledge (Chainey and Macdonald, 2012). As stated earlier, senior officers interviewed with reference to the effect of Section 60 on crime said that if there was an effect, it was most likely a response to the impact of focusing additional, highly visible resources in crime hot spots (Smith et al, 2023). Braga and others (2019) suggest moreover, that while increasing presence and concentrating traditional enforcement activities might constitute an effective police response, adopting problem-oriented and situational prevention strategies rather than aggressive enforcement strategies may not only generate stronger crime control gains but could also improve police–community relations (Braga et al, 2019).

Disproportionality and adults

Bradford and Tiratelli (2019) question why so many forces still rely on stop and search despite the marginal links between the practice and reducing crime, particularly violent crime. Their analysis suggests forces may have another justification for stop and search, albeit one not openly expressed by police, as part of “wider processes of social control directed particularly at deprived and marginal populations” (Bradford and Tiratelli, 2019, p. 9). Quinton (2011) suggests that the

current practice of stop and search falls on the socially marginal (such as young, Black men), reproducing social inequalities. Suss and Oliveira (2022) use their analyses of the concentration of stop and search in London in 2019 to suggest that deprived communities living in well off areas were most likely to be targeted. They found the highest concentration of stop and searches were in areas where the economically deprived and the well-off co-exist, such that economic inequality predicts heightened stop and search activity. They argue this concentration of policing in unequal locations demonstrates the role policing plays in these areas of “over-patrolling some groups of people in pursuit of other groups of people's protection” (Suss and Oliveira, 2022, p. 2).

Vomfell and Stewart (2021) find that ethnic disparities in stop and search are due to officer bias and deployment decisions. In other words, the ethnicity of people officers interact with and the ethnic composition of the places patrolled. Through analysing 36,000 searches by 1,100 police officers in a large English police force they provide officer-specific measures of over-searching relative to two baselines: the ethnic composition of crime suspects officers interact with and the ethnic composition of the areas they patrol. They found that Asian disparities are due to over-patrolling and Black disparities are due to both over-patrolling and (in larger part) officer bias, while White people are under-searched and under-patrolled. Officers are generally more likely to be deployed to areas with a larger proportion of residents from ethnic minority areas, which creates further disparities, but even if deployment was equal, Black and Asian people would *still* be disproportionately searched. The Lammy Review (2017) identified no adequate explanation or justification for the nature and scale of the statistical disproportionality, which renders Black people in the United Kingdom under-protected in proportion to the degree to which they are policed.

Forces still do not understand the impact stop and search has on individuals and their communities (HMICFRS, 2021). In her report, Baroness Casey finds that the Metropolitan Police is “unable to explain clearly enough why its use is justified on the scale it uses it, and in the manner and way it is carried out, particularly on Black Londoners” (Casey, 2023, p. 322). Baroness Casey finds that, when it comes to their strategy the Metropolitan Police “expects the public to understand the Met better, not for the Met to listen or understand public concerns regarding stop and search” (Casey, 2023, p. 321). Where there is little

identification, understanding, action and explanation regarding disproportionality, discrimination is often assumed and legitimacy is therefore undermined. For example, the HMICFRS report states that stop and search is predominantly used to search for drugs and most are for possession rather than supply, which is not in line with force policies. The HMICFRS (2021) report argues drug enforcement, mainly through stop and search, contributes to ethnic disproportionality, since drug searches are disproportionately carried out on Black people despite evidence that there is no correlation between ethnicity and rates of drug use, as the analysis earlier demonstrated (Shiner et al, 2018). It adds the likely damage to police community relations caused by large numbers of drugs possession searches, especially those that find nothing, may outweigh the benefits derived from such searches (HMICFRS, 2021). Similarly, with reference to the government's Serious Violence Strategy (2018), the Home Office (2019, p. 6) in its Equality Impact Assessment states "the evidence on links between serious violence and ethnicity is limited, and once other factors are controlled for, it is not clear from the evidence whether ethnicity is a predictor of violent offending".

Despite no evidence of a link between someone's ethnicity and their likelihood of offending, it is this assumption that underpins much police enforcement activity. For example, Minhas and Walsh (2021) analysed 2,100 stop and search records held by a police force in England, in addition to conducting 20 semi-structured interviews with frontline serving police officers from the same force. They found the use of stop and search powers was influenced by stereotypes with respect to age, appearance, and social class and confirmed the disproportionate recorded use of stop and search powers involving Black, Asian and Mixed communities.

The damage caused by unexplained disproportionality can be far-reaching and long-lasting. The HMICFRS report argues it may lead to more people from minority ethnic communities being drawn into the criminal justice system. Moreover, it feeds perceptions among the public and police about Black people and crime and may also influence how the police allocate and deploy resources. This in turn exacerbates the imbalances in the criminal justice system (HMICFRS, 2021).

This unexplained disproportionality is even more likely to occur during a search under Section 60, according to a Criminal Justice Alliance (2021) super-complaint. The Home Office (2019) equality impact assessment referred to earlier acknowledges this possibility even

as it recommended relaxing the rules on stop and search. It acknowledges that discrimination may be the cause of such disparity between police forces. It cites research from StopWatch that some forces have substantially reduced their use of stop and search – and have seen no increase in disproportionality – while others have seen more modest reductions in stop and search coupled with high, and increasing, rates of disproportionality (Shiner et al, 2018). The Home Office equality impact assessment acknowledges that "more Black, Asian and minority ethnic individuals are searched under this power despite not committing any offences, and without being provided with significant person specific justification for searches taking place" (Home Office, 2019, p. 10). The equality impact assessment also accepts the relaxation of the controls governing stop and search powers "would probably risk having a negative effect on a part of the community where trust/confidence levels are typically low" (Home Office, 2019, p. 10)".

Confidence in the police is more readily affected by a negative experience than by a positive one; there is an asymmetrical impact of contact with the police on confidence (Skogan, 2006). Significant proportions of the population feel that their police-community relations have suffered due to inappropriate use of police powers for many decades (Casey, 2023). For Delsol (2015) such events signal a loss of legitimacy. These adversarial encounters then have lasting effects (Bradford, 2015). On a community level, disproportionate use of stop and search has a "corrosive impact on social solidarity" which leads to social exclusion and resentment of authorities (Bowling and Weber, 2011).

Exclusionary and discriminatory use of stop and search can generate and exacerbate social tension, reduce political participation and exacerbate disadvantage (Bradford, 2017).

Disproportionality and young people

As the analysis above shows, young people are disproportionately likely to be subject to police stop and search (Metropolitan Police Service, 2022c). Lennon and Murray (2018) in analysing stop and searches of young people in Scotland note that rates vary from place to place and are "not readily explicable in terms of crime trends" which leads them to argue that the practice is "used for social control (rather than detection) purposes". Murray (2014) highlighted a disproportionate use of stop and search on children and young people, which police justify on the basis

of probability of offending, despite evidence that suggested lower detection rates for this group. The study found that detection rates are lower for young people, indicating age-disproportionality because of a lower threshold for suspicion. In analysing interviews with officers, Minhas and Walsh (2021) demonstrate that most officers base their decision to search young people, not on the available evidence but on generalisations and stereotypes based on people's age, appearance, employed status, location and social class; thus young people from socio-economically less well-off backgrounds and deprived areas are more likely to be stopped and searched. Flacks (2018) argues young people, as the main users of public, urban space, become "susceptible to strategies of discipline and surveillance" as adults perceive them as "threats" to the order and control of public spaces. The perceived threat is heightened if children congregate in large, noisy groups, or wear particular clothes which police associate with delinquent groups. Thus, stop and search becomes a means of control and punishing perceived transgressions rather than the prevention and detection of crime (Flacks, 2018). This apparent 'targeting' of young people is particularly common with Section 60, according to Smith and others, (2023) who cite the example of one young man being subject to three negative searches under that power within the space of 45 minutes.

For many, these set the direction of subsequent encounters with police (Skarlatidou et al, 2021). Bradford and Tiratelli (2019) argue that it may be inaccurate to assume that stop and search would have a suppressive effect on crime, particularly among young people. Procedural justice theory argues treating people fairly means they are more likely to cooperate with police and obey the law. Conversely, 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 in fact have a positive effect on crime, increasing levels of offending among those who are subject to it (Tyler, 2006; Bradford, 2017). Indeed McAra and McVie (Mcara and Mcvie, 2005) found that young people who are stopped, questioned, detained or charged are more likely to display deviant behaviour and be arrested again, compared to those who commit similar offences but were still unknown to the police. This can perhaps also be explained by the disruption to education, relationships and employment that the criminal justice system causes, increasing the likelihood

of offending and re-offending, particularly for young adults. These findings align with 'labelling' theory, where an intervention impacts social opportunities, triggers a negative life-course trajectory and therefore increases the likelihood of future criminality (Lemert, 1967). Flacks (2018) who interviewed parents of teenagers about their experiences of stop and search, suggested stop and search encounters might be an immediate and as well as long term contributor to the criminalisation of young people. He found parents feared their children may not understand their rights or, because of their embarrassment and humiliation, might not be able to control themselves and so be charged even if the search proved negative. A study comparing attitudes to the police between children in Scotland and in England found that children in the former, where they were more likely to be stopped and searched, had more negative views of police compared to those in England (Murray et al, 2020). Moreover, it linked higher prevalence and frequency of stop and search in the Scottish cities with lower levels of satisfaction about police officers' professionalism, fairness and respect during such encounters compared to young people in the English cities. The study provides, strong, though not clinching, evidence that high volume stop and search strategies damage young people's trust in the police and their perceptions of police legitimacy (Murray et al, 2020).

There is strong evidence from a number of sources that being subjected to stop and search, particularly at a young age, has a negative impact not only on the child's wellbeing but their future relations with the police and society. The Independent Office for Police Conduct's (IOPC) National Stop and Search Learning Report (IOPC, 2022) found young children suffered feelings of humiliation, trauma, and victimisation from stop and search encounters, which may impact their "sense of safety, stability and bonding". Evidence given to the Home Affairs Select Committee, 22 years after the publication of the Macpherson report, stated that "stop and search has a large ripple effect of trauma" (Home Affairs Committee, 2021). However, Flacks (2018) finds that there is very little awareness of the deleterious effect of stop and search on older children and teenagers, especially in media and academia. He says while Metropolitan Police guidance acknowledges "a negative stop and search encounter can have a long (even lifetime) effect on a child or young person" and urges officers to be "tolerant, patient and aware of any concerns when seeking co-operation" this guidance does not carry the legal weight of PACE, and so is liable

to be ignored (Metropolitan Police, 2015). He argues that while PACE references the need to “safeguard” those under 18, it does not recognise the harm that being subject to stop and search can have on them. He recommends the use of appropriate adults as a means of mitigating that harm (Flacks, 2018).

Disproportionality and Black children

As part of wider research on Black perspectives on stop and search by Crest Advisory, Evans et al., (2022a) carried out a survey of 101 children that had been stopped and searched and focus groups. In this sample, Black and Mixed ethnicity children reported having more negative experiences of stop and search compared with White children. A recent report from the Children’s Commissioner (2023) found that Black children in England and Wales were up to six times more likely to be strip searched when compared to national population figures, while White children were around half as likely to be searched. The Mayor’s Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) which surveyed 11,874 young Londoners between the ages of 11 and 16 found that even when controlling for exposure to gang and weapon-related violence, and for being a victim of crime, which made young people more likely to be stopped and searched, there were still increased odds of young Black Londoners being searched than White Londoners which made young people more likely to distrust the police (MOPAC, 2023).

In focus groups held by Evans and others (2022a) with Black and Minority Ethnic children, participants said that they believed that officers are unaware of the trauma that people, especially Black children, who have been stopped and searched can experience. Many in the focus group pointed to adultification as a cause of this disregard, where officers believe young Black boys to be more emotionally resilient than they are. The review of the case of Child Q, a Black girl who was strip-searched while on her period, highlighted adultification as a significant feature, suggesting this was why she was treated as a criminal instead of a child (Gamble and McCallum, 2022). The report defines adultification as a phenomenon in which certain children, because of their personal characteristics or lived-experience, are not believed by those in power to have “innocence and vulnerability”. Black children are more likely to be subject to adultification and assumed to be engaging in criminal or deviant behaviour, than White children (Evans et al, 2022a). This adultification can lead to more Black young people entering the criminal justice system, disrupting

education, reducing opportunities and compounding the cycle of deprivation. Moreover, it can contribute to attitudes in the police that there is a correlation between ethnicity and criminality (HMICFRS, 2021) .

A Criminal Justice Alliance (2017) study of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic children found that stop and search, if not carried out with “basic levels of decency and sensitivity” can make them feel “victimised, humiliated and even “violated”. The Criminal Justice Alliance (2021) in a super-complaint against the use of Section 60, found that the tactic made young people feel racially profiled when they experienced multiple stop and searches over a period of time or when they did not understand why they have been targeted, particularly with regard to Section 60 searches. The HMICFRS (2021) report states that fears of being targeted by police leads young Black people to avoid certain places and curtail their freedom, at a time when they should be expanding their horizons.

3. Financial cost of stop and search

There is little current information freely available on the cost of stop and search to police forces. However, some studies have provided indications of what the cost of stop and searches might look like in a UK context. Using a 10-year run of data from the Metropolitan Police (2004–14), Quinton et al., (2017) found that Southwark recorded 1,282 searches in October 2014 and 2,295 susceptible crimes in November 2014. They calculated that bringing about a three per cent reduction in crime between October and November would need an additional 1,180 searches. Assuming it takes a single officer an average of 15 minutes to carry out a search, the research suggested the extra searches that month would take 295 officer hours, which would be the equivalent of £10,889, or £158 per crime. This is based on average pay costs for a constable of £36.92 per hour. Similarly, there were a total of 337 searches in week 45 of 2014 and 542 crimes in week 46. If the crime rate were to be three per cent lower, it was estimated that an additional 722 searches would have been required in week 45 (1,059 in total). Again, assuming 15 minutes per search for a single officer, the additional searches required that week would have taken 181 officer hours (the equivalent of £6,666, or £417 per crime) (Quinton et al, 2017).

Analysis carried out by *The Herald* newspaper in 2014 using the funding formula held by the former Strathclyde

Police suggested that each search in Strathclyde in 2011-12 cost £20.25, based on two officers and 15 minutes per officer. Using the same formula, the analysis calculated every search carried out by Police Scotland costs £22. This means carrying out the recorded 640,699 searches for Scotland in 2013-14 cost nearly £14.1m (Hutcheon, 2014) .

4. Surveys

This section provides a summary of a number of surveys carried out assessing public opinion in relation to stop and search

Keeling, 2017

- Survey of 503 Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic 16-30-year-olds.
- Found for two-fifths of the young people surveyed, stop and search had reduced their trust and confidence in the police.

HMICFRS, 2013

- YouGov poll of 19,078 respondents and a smaller sub-sample of respondents who had been stopped and searched.
- Over half of adults said they felt safer knowing that stop and search is used by police as a tactic
- When broken down by ethnicity only 40 per cent of Black adults compared with 53 per cent of White adults felt safer.
- Older people were more likely to believe that the tactic is useful at preventing crime; younger and Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups were the least likely.
- Over one-third of those who had been stopped and searched recently had not been given a reason by the police for their stop, rising significantly (42 per cent) among BAME adults.
- More of those surveyed reported that they were not treated with respect (43 per cent) than were (36 per cent).

The findings were echoed in a 2020 IOPC survey of 1,833 adults in England and Wales which found that the majority (80 per cent) supported the continued use of stop and search and believed it was a necessary tactic. However, nearly half (49 per cent) thought that stop and search was either not applied as it should be, or was unnecessary

Evans et al, 2022a

- Survey of 1,542 ten to 18 year olds, 100 of whom were Black. Nationally representative when referring to all children, but not to Black children.
- 62 per cent of children agreed that knowing that the police are stopping and searching people makes them feel safer.
- 64 per cent of White children reported that they feel safer with the knowledge that police are stopping and searching people in their area, compared to only 36 per cent of Black children.
- 66 per cent of the nationally representative sample of children strongly or slightly agreed that the police treat people from their background fairly, this number falls to 25 per cent for Black children.
- More Black children strongly disagreed (36 per cent) that the police treat people from their background fairly than they strongly or slightly agreed (25 per cent).
- Only 25 per cent of Black children trusted the police to stop and search people fairly, compared to 51 per cent of White children. Over half of Black children (55 per cent) did not trust the police to use stop and search fairly.
- In the nationally representative sample, more children agree (39 per cent) than disagree (25 per cent) that the police unfairly target Black communities.

Evans et al, 2022

- Nationally representative sample of 3,000 adults.
- 86 per cent of adults support police having the right to stop and search someone if suspected of having a weapon on them, with 81 per cent support for searching someone suspected of having Class A drugs.
- 77 per cent of Black adults supported police having the right to stop and search to find weapons, and 71 per cent to find Class A drugs.
- 45 per cent of adults who had been stopped and searched found the experience traumatising, rising to 52 per cent of Black adults.
- 32 per cent of adults who had been stopped and searched felt the police did not explain their rights to them, rising to 39 per cent of Black adults.

MOPAC, 2023

- 11,874 responses were received from young people living or going to school in London.
- Six per cent of survey respondents had been stopped and searched. 25 per cent said they knew someone else who had been stopped and searched in London (2,328 people out of 9,494). These results have both decreased compared with the last time the survey was run in 2018 (by 10 per cent and 38 per cent respectively).
- Half of those stopped and searched said this had happened more than once (47 per cent, 262 of 563) - with a fifth saying they had been stopped more than three times (21 per cent, 118 of 563).
- Stop and search data recorded by the MPS shows 12.9 per 1,000 population searches involving a subject aged 10 to 14 (volume: 5,911, population: 456,696) (MPS, 2022c).
- The prevalence of self-reported stop and search experiences increased with age - from three per cent of those aged 11 (53 of 1,675) to 12 per cent of those aged 16 (50 of 414) - while young males were more than twice as likely to say they had been stopped and searched as young females (nine per cent, 362 of 4,202.)
- Young Londoners from Black backgrounds were most likely to say they had been stopped and searched (nine per cent, 116 of 1,263); while those from Asian Backgrounds were least likely (four per cent, 91 of 2,479).
- Young Londoners exposed to a range of wider vulnerabilities were more likely to have said they had been stopped and searched by the police.
- Nearly a quarter of young people who knew someone in a gang said they had personally been stopped and searched in London (22 per cent, 194 of 863), and this increased further to around half of those who had been asked or pressured by someone else to carry or hide a knife (50 per cent, 71 of 143), or who had personally belonged to a gang (57 per cent, 49 of 86).
- Even when controlling for exposure to such elements of gang and weapon-related violence – regression modelling continued to reveal increased odds of experiencing stop and search amongst Black young people.
- Less than half of those stopped said the police were polite (40 per cent, 220 of 544), treated them with respect (39 per cent, 212 of 542) or explained why they carried out the stop and search (42 per cent, 230 of 542) during their most recent interaction.
- People who said they had personally been stopped and searched were also far more likely to have a bad overall opinion of the police (40 per cent, 232 of 576) compared with those who had not been stopped (12 per cent, 1,011 of 8,503).
- Those who had been stopped - but who felt police were polite, respectful and explained the process - were no more likely to say they had a bad overall opinion of the police (15 per cent, 18 of 119) than those not stopped.
- In contrast, half who had been stopped - but who felt police were not polite, respectful and had not explained the process - had a bad overall opinion of the police (48 per cent, 202 of 421).
- Young female Londoners tended to be less supportive of stop and search and have less positive perceptions of the tactic compared with young male Londoners, despite also being less likely to have said that they have been personally subject to stop and search. Regression modelling shows that the strongest driver of support for stop and search is having a good overall opinion of the police.
- When compared with previous waves of MOPAC's Youth Surveys, the proportion of young people believing the police should conduct stop and search is lower here (44 per cent in 2018, 56 per cent in 2013),
- Half of young people believed that stop and search will help to stop people from carrying knives (53 per cent, 5,005 of 9,478), while even fewer agreed that they felt safer knowing the police can use stop and search (38 per cent, 3,641 of 9,474).

5. Conclusion

Policing does not occur in a vacuum; over policing and under protection is both a symptom and cause of structural racial inequality. The above analysis shows how the stop and search is carried out, particularly on Black young people, serves to compound that structural inequality. The police have both a responsibility and the ability to do what they can to break this reproduction and reinforcement of wider inequalities. There is a significant amount of public support for stop and search, as the survey responses above show, and indeed a strongly held belief among police and the public that stop and search is a vital tool in combating violent crime, particularly knife crime perpetrated by young people. However, there is little evidence which shows that stop and search has any effect in reducing violent crime. For instance, as mentioned earlier, only three per cent of stop and searches carried out in the year ending March 2023 resulted in a weapon being found. There are some signs that massively increasing stop and search use reduces drug offending, but the cost of such an increase, both in terms of finances and officer hours, far outweighs any benefits of such a minimal reduction. There is evidence that stop and search is most effective, and the most positive searches are returned when it is used sparingly, with 'reasonable grounds' on the basis of sound intelligence – such that more arrests tend to be carried out and the find rate is greater in years when there are proportionally fewer stop and searches compared to years where there are more.

Focus on the effectiveness of stop and search often (rightly) judges the merits of officers' decision making (reasonable suspicion, strength of grounds, biases at play etc), but should also account for the likely value of a stop and search. Informed discretion by a police officer should therefore balance the potential benefits and costs of carrying out the stop. If the costs outweigh the benefits of a stop, despite there being strong grounds for a stop, an officer might use their informed discretion not to conduct it. Equally, an officer may decide that the benefits of a stop outweigh the risks

despite objectively weaker grounds (although grounds must still be 'reasonable'). For example, a 'positive' stop may entail finding the small amount of personal-use cannabis that officers suspected an individual was carrying but, if this say leads to a first time entry into the criminal justice system and a reduction of legitimacy for the individual, their peers, family and community, the negative consequences clearly outweigh any 'positive' find. This can depend on a number of factors, such as: specific tensions in an area, the age of the individual, their race/ethnicity, whether they are under the influence of drugs, their mental health, and a number of other vulnerabilities. Stop and search can also be viewed as a policy and strategic tactic to reduce and deter crime, primarily in the form of a Section 60 authorisation. The evidence provided in this section illustrates that the deterrent effect of stop and search as an operational tactic is minimal and the risks (including to legitimacy) so great that it should not be used as such.

There is no doubt that knife crime and youth violence are a serious threat to the safety and happiness of young people and society as a whole. In the year ending March 2023, there were around 50,500 offences involving a sharp instrument in England and Wales (excluding Devon and Cornwall). This was 4.7 per cent higher than in 2021/22 (Allen et al, 2023). However, there are more effective tactics to combat it than stop and search. The amount of stop and searches carried out should not be a sign of success – indeed many forces have successfully reduced their stop and search levels without provoking a rise in crime. The evidence around hot spots policing suggests that merely having officers patrolling in areas where strong intelligence shows a higher prevalence of crime and harm is enough to reduce violence without having hands in pockets. Moreover, the approaches taken by the Violence Reduction Units (VRUs), many of whom make no reference to stop and search, suggest that a public health approach which seeks to address the reasons why young people might be motivated to carry a knife might be more effective.

Appendix - Violence Reduction Units and their use of stop and search

VRU and Police and Crime Plan sample

Name of Force	VRU Strategy	Police and Crime Plan	Notes	See more at
Merseyside Police	No reference to stop and search	Scrutinise data for signs of disproportionality in stop search, identify unconscious bias and improve community scrutiny		https://www.merseysidevrp.com/media/1176/merseyside-violence-reduction-partnership-strategy-document-hi-res.pdf https://www.merseysidepcc.info/media/esgbbj0b/final-police-and-crime-plan-2021-25.pdf
Metropolitan Police	No reference to stop and search	Aim to address community concerns about disproportionality in use of police powers affecting Black Londoners. Stricter oversight and scrutiny of the 'smell of cannabis' used as sole grounds for stop and search	VRU strategy states: While enforcement has a role in suppressing violence, it will not deliver sustained reductions or improve a young person's life chances	https://www.london.gov.uk/programmes-strategies/communities-and-social-justice/londons-violence-reduction-unit/about-us https://www.london.gov.uk/publications/building-safer-london
Cleveland Police	No reference to stop and search	<p>In a day 18 stop and searches, 4 of which are positive</p> <p>Getting tough on drugs and gangs - Success will look like increased use of stop and search with positive outcomes</p> <p>Measures and indicators – Success in tackling serious violence: Number and percentage of stop and search resulting in an arrest/positive outcome. Number and percentage of stop and search resulting in a linked outcome.</p>		https://www.cleveland.pcc.police.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/CURV-Final-Doc.pdf https://www.cleveland.pcc.police.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Police-and-Crime-Plan.html
Greater Manchester Police	Provide funding for targeted policing operations and the intelligence-led use of stop and search to tackle knife crime	Develop effective and representative local scrutiny and advisory groups to challenge the use of police powers including stop and search and the use of tasers.		https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/media/4811/gm_violence_reduction_plan_final_amends_final_accessible.pdf https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/media/5892/gmca-police-and-crime-plan.pdf
Thames Valley Police	Awaiting strategy	Thames Valley PCC What success will look like: Maintaining the proportionate and appropriate use of stop and search to detect and deter crime	VRU website references Op Rasure, Thames Valley Police's response to serious violence. Work includes enforcing Section 60 notices and hotspot policing	https://www.thamesvalley-pcc.gov.uk/police-and-criminal-justice-plan/

Name of Force	VRU Strategy	Police and Crime Plan	Notes	See more at
Bedfordshire Police	No reference to stop and search	No reference to stop and search	VERU (Violence and Exploitation Reduction Unit) strategy references: Continue to undertake targeted activity and interventions, including overt police activity, to tackle and reduce drugs, knife and gun crime in affected areas	https://bedsveru.org/what-we-do/ https://www.bedfordshire.pcc.police.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/FA_FINAL_POLICE-AND-CRIME-PLAN-.pdf
South Wales Police	Tactics that are regularly scrutinised include use of force, stop search and the use of facial recognition technology		VRU strategy says: We assist our partners with multi-agency data analysis to identify patterns, trends and hot spots of violence	https://www.southwalescommissioner.org.uk/media/2745/crp005-crime-plan-202327-final.pdf https://www.violencepreventionwales.co.uk/cms-assets/research/Wales-Violence-Prevention-Unit-Prevention-Strategy.pdf
Northumbria Police	No reference to stop and search	“Stop and search ... important crime-fighting tactic. Will ensure that Stop and Search is only used when police have sufficient grounds to act thereby protecting communities. Where there is disparity between different racial groups the police will work to reduce this rate.”	In the VRU strategy: “enforcement activity remains a component of the overall strategy as a complementary element of the approach. It is essential that we pursue, disrupt, and prosecute those who commit serious violent crimes... Use data to target resources into ‘hot spot’ areas and to those most in need of an intervention.”	https://northumbria-pcc.gov.uk/v3/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Response-Strategy-2023-24.pdf
Avon and Somerset	Knife possession offences also increased from around 17 to around 30 recorded possession offences per month. -It is important to note that the increases in possession offences might be the result of changing police practices, such as the increased use of Stop-and-Search, particularly targeting young people, rather than any rise in the underlying prevalence of knives.	Questions over effectiveness. 7,800 stop searches of people each year. Object searched for was found in just 26 per cent of cases – in top 14 forces. People wrongly searched feel aggrieved and share feelings with public leads to community tension. Improper or unfair use of powers is not only harmful to the individual but it can erode public confidence in policing. This undermines the very essence of UK policing by consent. Thorough and open scrutiny of the use of police powers can help improve and maintain public trust and satisfaction. Police should continue their internal scrutiny and PCC will engage volunteers to independently scrutinise the use of powers		https://www.avonandsomerset-pcc.gov.uk/about/police-and-crime-plan-2021-2025/ https://www.avonandsomerset-pcc.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Developing-serious-violence-strategy-avon-somerset-min.pdf

Name of Force	VRU Strategy	Police and Crime Plan	Notes	See more at
Sussex Police	Sussex Police No reference to stop and search	16 stop and searches a day done	Work collaboratively with police colleagues and other stakeholders to balance an enforcement response with VRP prevention	https://www.sussex-pcc.gov.uk/media/7548/vrp_serious_violence_strategy_2023.pdf https://www.sussex-pcc.gov.uk/media/7362/sussex-police-crime-plan-2021-24.pdf

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