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Police Research Series
Paper 127

The Impact of Stops and Searches on Crime and the Community

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Policing and Reducing Crime Unit: Police Research Series

The Policing and Reducing Crime Unit (PRC Unit) is part of the Research, Development and Statistics Directorate of the Home Office. The PRC Unit carries out and commissions research in the social and management sciences on policing and crime reduction.

The Police Research Series presents research material on crime prevention and detection as well as police management and organisation issues.

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Foreword

This report is the first of six to be published presenting the findings from a programme of work on stops and searches carried out by the Home Office's Policing and Reducing Crime Unit (Research, Development and Statistics Directorate). This programme was developed following the report of the Inquiry into the Death of Stephen Lawrence. This highlighted anew minority ethnic communities' lack of trust and confidence in police use of stops and searches, but recommended retention of search powers as necessary for the prevention and detection of crime.

The report examines critically the role that stops and searches play in policing. It considers the evidence for the effectiveness of searches against crime, as well as their impact on the community. The research draws on statistics collected routinely by the Home Office on searches and crime, existing literature from Britain and the United States, and data collected as part of the broader research programme.

The evidence suggests that, while searches play some role in tackling crime and lead to about a tenth of arrests nationally, they appear to have only a small impact on the detection and prevention of recorded or reported crime. The report also confirms that searches tend to have a negative impact on public confidence in the police. Bad feeling results, at least in part, from a perception by individuals stopped and searched that police officers are not polite and do not provide adequate explanations for stopping them. There is, however, in principle support for both stops and searches, provided they are used properly.

The report recommends ways in which police forces need to minimise the negative impacts of stops and searches on local community confidence, while maximising their effectiveness against crime. Emphasis is placed on forces making an efficient and targeted use of searches based on intelligence and high levels of suspicion, and focusing on more serious crimes and more prolific offenders.

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September 2000*

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Executive summary

This research forms part of a broader research programme looking at the issue of stops and searches, instituted as part of the Home Office response to the Report of the Inquiry into the Matters Arising from the Death of Stephen Lawrence. This report takes a balanced look at the value of searches as a crime-fighting tool and the impact of stops and searches on the community.

In doing so, it draws upon statistics collected routinely by the Home Office on searches and crime, existing literature from Britain and the United States, and data collected as part of the broader research programme. The latter includes interviews with over 100 officers, statistics generated by areas involved in the pilot of recommendation 61 of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report, over 340 hours of observation of police officers on shifts, and a range of visits to and telephone interviews with a dozen police forces.

For the purposes of clarity, stops without searches will be referred to as 'stops', while stops with searches will be referred to as 'searches'.

Key findings

- There is a substantial variation between forces in the extent to which searches are used, even among forces with similar characteristics and crime rates. For example, while Cleveland records 101 searches per thousand population its most similar force, Humberside, records only six. There are also large differences between forces in the extent to which arrests from searches contribute to the overall numbers of arrests, even among those with similar characteristics. So while statistics indicate that the Metropolitan Police relies on searches to provide 18% of arrests, the same is true for just three per cent of arrests in the West Midlands, its most similar force.
- Searches appear to have a minor role in detecting offenders for the range of all crimes that they address, and a relatively small role in detecting offenders for such crimes that come to the attention of the police. Thus, based on the British Crime Survey, there are 106 crimes which, in theory, might be detectable by searches for every search arrest for such crimes. Similarly, for every 26 such offences recorded by the police, there is one search arrest. However, they make a more notable contribution to police arrests for these crimes, totalling an average of 13% across a range of forces.
- Searches appear to have only a limited direct disruptive impact on crime by intercepting those going out to commit offences. Based on the British Crime Survey, it is estimated that searches reduced the number of 'disruptable' crimes by

just 0.2% in 1997. Equivalent figures for recorded crime range from 0.6% to 2.3% for 1998/9. However, less is known about their localised effects in relation to areas specifically targeted by the police.

- It is not clear to what extent searches undermine criminal activity through the arrest and conviction of prolific offenders. However, it is unlikely that searches make a substantial contribution to undermining drug-markets or drug-related crime in this way, given that drug searches tend to focus on users rather than dealers, and cannabis rather than hard drugs.
- There is little solid evidence that searches have a deterrent effect on crime. Certainly, within Metropolitan Police data there is no strong and consistent correlation between searches and crime levels a month later (Penzer, 1999a; 1999b; 1999c). There is, however, some evidence that the very existence of stops may prevent crime, whether or not they involve searches. This may involve deterrence. Although not investigated by this study, it is also possible that where searches are used intensively in particular locations they may have a localised deterrence or displacement effect. The subject of deterrence would benefit from further research.
- The role and effectiveness of searches in relation to intensive 'order maintenance' activity by the police is unknown. While this type of policing in general can have a short-term impact on serious crime, it has the potential to damage police legitimacy and hamper the effectiveness of policing in the longer-term (Jordan, 1998).
- Searches can provide 'added value' to police work in the form of intelligence, although this is likely to be true of stops in general. However, the fact that stops are not currently recorded while searches are means that intelligence arising from searches is probably better utilised.
- There is, in principle, support for the use of stops and searches from the public, provided it is used properly. This has been demonstrated through qualitative and survey research.
- The experience of being searched is associated with reduced confidence in the police. The disproportionate use of searches against people from minority ethnic communities appears to contribute directly to a reduced confidence in the police among these groups. Again, this finding emerges from both qualitative and survey research.

- In general, the public are more satisfied with a police stop when they feel they have been treated fairly and politely, given a reasonable explanation, and not searched.

Recommendations

Recommendations arising from this research focus on making better use of searches, while minimising negative impacts on the community. They include the following:

- Searches should be used in an efficient and targeted way based on strong grounds for suspicion and making the best use of up-to-date intelligence about local crime problems.
- The flow of intelligence to patrol officers should be maximised, for example by routinely providing intelligence information during briefings.
- Forces should have sound mechanisms in place for gathering and using intelligence from both searches and other police encounters with the public.
- The role of searches that do not require legal grounds, such as s60 and voluntary searches, needs to be considered carefully given their likely impact on community confidence and inefficiency at producing arrests.
- In assessing the productivity of searches, attention could be paid to maximising the quality of arrests they produce. Ideally, searches should focus on more serious crimes and more prolific offenders. In this context, the weight given to searches for more minor offences, such as the possession of small amounts of cannabis, needs to be considered carefully.
- Forces should respond to the issue of disproportionality by focusing on officer practice, and by improving community confidence in their use of the tactic. Specific details of how this might be achieved are provided by Bland, et al. (2000).
- Forces should aim to improve officers' skills in relation to the handling of stops and searches encounters. More details on how this might be achieved are provided in Quinton, et al. (2000).
- Local police authorities should look at ways of monitoring the local use of stops and searches in order to assess whether they being used in the most efficient and effective way, whether they are producing quality arrests and whether officer practice is acceptable.

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1. Introduction

There has been much debate about the value of searches to the police. For some, it is seen as a valuable tool in the detection and prevention of crime (e.g. O'Connor, 2000). Others have been far more sceptical, regarding it not only as ineffective at tackling crime, but as alienating to those on the receiving end (Thompson, 2000). In particular, it has aroused strong hostilities from minority ethnic communities: accusations of racial discrimination have been levelled at the police in their use of searches, based both on personal experiences and a range of statistics which have, for some time, shown that a substantially larger number of black people are searched than might be expected from their numbers in the population (Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report, 1999; Bucke, 1987; Smith, 1981).

This report takes a balanced look at these issues, examining searches both as a crime-fighting tool and in terms of its broader impact on the community. In particular, it focuses on the following questions:

- What role do stops and searches have in policing?
- Are searches effective at tackling crime problems?
- Under what circumstances are they most effective?
- How do they impact on public perceptions of the police?
- How can negative impacts be minimised?
- What, therefore, are the implications for good practice in relation to stops and searches?

The context of the study

This study forms part of a broader research programme on stops and searches conducted by the Policing and Reducing Crime Unit (PRC) following the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, and will refer readers to the findings from other projects in the programme where these provide more detail. The programme comprises the following elements:

1. *Assessing the impact on crime and the community*

This research is reported here.

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2. An evaluation of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry's recommendations on stops and searches

This research evaluates the impact of a pilot of recommendation 61 of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report (sometimes referred to as the Macpherson Report). It recommended that a record be made of all police stops and searches, the record to include the reason, outcome and the self-defined ethnicity of the person stopped. This pilot was carried out in five areas across the Metropolitan Police Service, Leicestershire Constabulary, Suffolk Police and West Yorkshire Police. The evaluation assesses, among other things, whether the changes produce improvements in public trust and confidence, monitoring and accountability, and search practice. The full results of this evaluation are presented in Bland, et al. (2000a).

3. Public views on stops and searches

As part of the evaluation of the pilot, a large-scale qualitative research project was carried out by the British Market Research Bureau (BMRB) to gather the views of people who have experienced stops and searches as well as community members more generally, drawing on the experiences and opinions of people across different ethnic backgrounds. This is reported in Stone and Pettigrew (2000).

4. Police stops, decision-making and practice

This project takes a detailed look at the factors which underlie police decision making in relation to stops and searches, and the risks that these may pose. It also attempts to identify what makes a 'good stop'. This relates both to treating members of the public fairly, and to identifying circumstances when a stop or search encounter is more likely to be effective and legal. The findings of this research are presented in Quinton, et al. (2000)

5. Profiling populations 'available' for stops and searches

A key issue in understanding the reasons for the disproportionate use of stops and searches against minority ethnic communities is the make-up of the population 'available' to be stopped and searched. This refers to people who are present in public places and at times that stops and searches tend to occur. This research provides a detailed profile of those 'available' in this way, from the sites involved in the pilot of recommendation 61, and compares this profile with resident populations and those actually stopped or searched. The findings of this research are presented in MVA (2000).

6. Interventions to improve the management of searches

This study examines a range of initiatives being developed by a selection of forces which aim to make their use of stops and searches more fair and effective.

Interventions focus on improvements to:

- managerial effectiveness;
- operational effectiveness;
- recording practices;
- officers' knowledge of search powers;
- community confidence.

The first phase of this research has been reported in Quinton and Bland (1999), and the final results are presented in Bland, et al. (2000b).

It is planned to bring together the key results from all this work in an extended briefing note which draws overall lessons from the programme.

The background to searches

'Stop and search' refers to the police practice of stopping members of the public because of suspicion that they have illegal items in their possession, and carrying out a search for these items. Where these are found, they will typically be followed by an arrest.

History

Prior to the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE) legal powers to search existed within a variety of local and national legislation (Willis, 1983; Brown, 1997). While there were general powers to search for drugs and firearms, powers to search for stolen goods were only found in local legislation, for example under s66 of the Metropolitan Police Act 1839 which applied only to the capital.

It is clear there were a number of problems in the way the police used their search powers before PACE. For example, a study by Willis (1983) found that, while the various pre-PACE legislation required some kind of reasonable suspicion before carrying out a search, in practice officers often did not follow this requirement. Smith (1983) reporting on the Policy Studies Institute's research on policing in London came to similar conclusions. Willis and Smith also found that searches fell disproportionately on black people. The Scarman report (Scarman, 1981) also pinpointed the intensive and discriminate use of searches as a factor underpinning the Brixton disorders of 1981.

The introduction of PACE

PACE legislation in the area of searches followed on the heels of the Royal Commission on Criminal Procedure (1981) which had drawn attention to the problems in the use of search powers and made recommendations accordingly. The

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legislation granted new powers applying to searches of persons and vehicles for stolen or prohibited articles, and these were designed to be clear and to apply nationally. PACE also incorporated safeguards, including the requirement of reasonable suspicion, the provision of reasons for police actions, the completion of a written record - a copy of which was to be made available to the person stopped, and the publication of search statistics (Young, 1994; Brown, 1997). In doing this, the new search legislation followed the general spirit of PACE, with its stated aim of balancing the rights of the suspect against the need to tackle crime (Young, 1994).

In defining reasonable suspicion, PACE makes clear that this should have a clear and objective basis, and should not involve the stereotypical targeting of particular groups. The current PACE Code of Practice on Stop and Search (hereafter referred to as PACE Code A) explains this idea as follows:

Whether a reasonable ground for suspicion exists will depend on the circumstances in each case, but there must be some objective basis for it. An officer will need to consider the nature of the article suspected of being carried in the context of other factors such as the time and the place, and the behaviour of the person concerned or those with him. Reasonable suspicion may exist, for example, where information has been received such as a description of an article being carried or of a suspected offender; a person is seen acting covertly or warily or attempting to hide something; or a person is carrying a certain type of article at an unusual time or in a place where a number of burglaries or thefts are known to have taken place recently...reasonable suspicion may be based upon reliable information or intelligence which indicates that members of a particular group or gang, or their associates carry knives unlawfully or weapons or controlled drugs.

The Code also makes clear:

Reasonable suspicion can never be supported on the basis of personal factors alone without supporting intelligence or information. For example, a person's colour, age, hairstyle or manner of dress, or the fact that he is known to have a previous conviction for possession of an unlawful article, cannot be used alone or in combination with each other as the sole basis on the which to search that person. Nor may it be founded on the basis of stereotyped images of certain persons or groups as more likely to be committing offences.

Furthermore, while PACE did not affect the police's existing right to carry out voluntary searches, the current PACE Code makes clear that this should be carried out in a clear and transparent way:

In these circumstances, an officer should always make it clear that he is seeking the consent of the person concerned to the search being carried out by telling the person that he need not consent and that without his consent he will not be searched.

The limitations of PACE

Despite the best intentions of PACE, it has been subject to a range of criticism. One of the key criticisms relates to the difficulty of regulating police behaviour through legal rules. This point has been forcefully made by Baldwin and Kinsey (1985), who argue that the cultural norms and working practices of policing may stand in the way of the incorporation of abstract legalistic rules. In this regard, Smith (1983) goes as far as to suggest that searches are simply beyond regulation through the law. He argues PACE merely provides a set of 'presentational rules' to gloss over the reality of police practice in relation to searches. The notion of suspicion is necessarily vague, and police discretion is inevitable. Dixon, et al. (1989) also point to the very real practical difficulties of operating on the basis of individualised suspicion. Certainly, empirical research since the introduction of PACE (Bottomley, et al., 1991) suggest it is doubtful whether the standard of reasonable suspicion is always reached by officers, based on analysis of search records.

In a similar vein, Young challenges the PACE ideal of an individualised suspicion free from stereotyping (1994). He argues that a true 'democratic' suspicion which involves treating all citizens as equally suspicious is a nonsense: "A young lad nervously carrying a bag late at night might well present a suspicious spectacle; an old lady agitatedly carrying just such a bag would not" (1994: p20). Rather, stereotyping in police work is both inevitable and necessary. However, this reality leaves the door open for stereotyping which is not based on objective facts about the sections of the population most likely to be involved in crime. According to Young, this can and does lead to discrimination in the use of searches against black people.

Dixon, et al. (1997) also remind us that some officers may avoid the requirements of reasonable grounds for suspicion and the recording of searches if it can be claimed that the suspect consented to the search. Furthermore, as Young (1994) points out, the notion of 'voluntary' is extremely liable to interpretation, and the limited knowledge that people have of PACE make it unlikely they will be confident about challenging the police during a search encounter. Certainly, research by Dixon, et al. (1989) suggests that consent searches are very often based on the ignorance of the person searched.

Overall, it seems that problems and controversy around the use of search powers have not subsided with the introduction of PACE, and recent conclusions from the

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Stephen Lawrence Inquiry (1999) about stops and searches point to continued discrimination against minority ethnic groups in the use of the tactic.

Current search powers under PACE

Police search powers are embodied in a range of legislation, collectively regulated by PACE Code A. These powers give an officer the right to detain a person in order to carry out a search. Additionally, an officer can carry out a 'voluntary' search. This, however, requires the consent of the person searched, and officers have no legal powers to detain a person in order to do this¹.

¹ Some forces have policies not to use voluntary searches (see e.g. FitzGerald and Sibbitt, 1997).

Details of searches under the most common legal powers, along with voluntary searches, are given in Table 1.

Power / basis for search	What is the object of the search?	When can it be used?
Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, s1	Stolen goods; articles for use in certain Theft Act offences; offensive weapons, including bladed or sharply-pointed articles.	Where an officer has reasonable grounds for suspicion.
Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, s23	Controlled drugs.	Where an officer has reasonable grounds for suspicion.
Firearms Act 1968, s47	Firearms.	Where an officer has reasonable grounds for suspicion.
Section 60 Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, as amended by s8 of the Knives Act 1997	Offensive weapons or dangerous instruments.	When authorisation by officer of the rank of inspector or above is given in relation to a specific place and time period.
Non-legislative 'voluntary' or 'consent' searches	Any illegal item.	When an officer has the consent of the person searched.

Note: Other powers include: sections 163a and 163b of the Prevention of Terrorism Act 1989; various poaching and wildlife conservation legislation; the Aviation Security Act 1982, section 27(1); the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979, sections 163 and 164; and the Sporting Events (Control of Alcohol etc.) Act 1985.

Other police stops

While the above discussion has referred to stops which specifically involve searches, there is a much wider range of police-initiated contacts with members of the public which do not involve searches. These may be described as 'stops'. They occur for a variety of reasons, including where:

- an officer stops someone with a view to a search, but has his suspicions allayed after a conversation - this will often involve detaining the person under PACE powers;
- an officer stops a vehicle under Section 163 Road Traffic Act 1988, which allows him to stop a vehicle and speak to the driver, even if they are not suspected of having committed an offence (they can also ask drivers to produce their driving documents at a police station);
- an officer stops a vehicle that has committed a moving traffic offence or has a vehicle defect (this can also involve a breathalyser); and
- an officer stops somebody on a voluntary basis, perhaps because they have some suspicions about the person (although not necessarily grounds for a search), or because they think the person may have some useful information.

While there has been less monitoring of stops, there are important reasons for giving consideration to these encounters in addition to searches. Research suggests that the public do not always make the distinction between stops with and without a search (FitzGerald, 1999). Furthermore, the report of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry (1999) drew attention to the fact that a wider range of contacts is of concern to ethnic minorities in addition to searches.

This report will focus primarily on searches although some reference will be made to stops more generally. Bland, et al. (2000a) looks in more detail at the issues raised by the wider recording of stops in relation to recommendation 61.

Methods

This study will draw on information from a range of sources, including:

- statistics collected routinely by the Home Office on searches and crime;
- existing literature from Britain and the United States on stops and searches, and policing; and

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- data collected as part of the broader programme of research into stops and searches carried out by PRC.

The broader research programme includes a variety of data. The main data sources drawn upon for this research are summarised in Table 2.

Main project	Data sources
Evaluation of Stephen Lawrence Inquiry's recommendations in relation to stops and searches	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Interviews with over 100 officers in five pilot areas across the Metropolitan Police, Leicestershire Constabulary, Suffolk Police and West Yorkshire Police.● Statistics generated in pilot areas on stops and searches for at least six months.● Over 340 hours of observation of officers on shift.
Interventions to improve the management of searches	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Visits to six police forces, involving a range of interviews with officers, civilian staff and community representatives.● Telephone interviews and documentation received from a further six forces.

The report

The report is presented in five chapters:

- Chapter 2 examines the use of searches by the police;
- Chapter 3 examines the effectiveness of searches as a tool against crime, and draws out implications for good practice;
- Chapter 4 examines the impact of stops and searches generally on the community, and discusses the implications for good practice;
- Chapter 5 presents the overarching conclusions of the research, and summarises the report's main recommendations.

Definitions used

For the purposes of clarity, for the remainder of the report a clear distinction will be made between stops without searches and stops involving searches. When discussing the former, the report will simply refer to 'stops'. In discussing the latter, the report will refer to 'searches'.

2. Searches in context

This chapter examines how searches fit into the work of police forces, focusing on the situations in which they are used, variations in practice between forces and officers' views on the tactic.

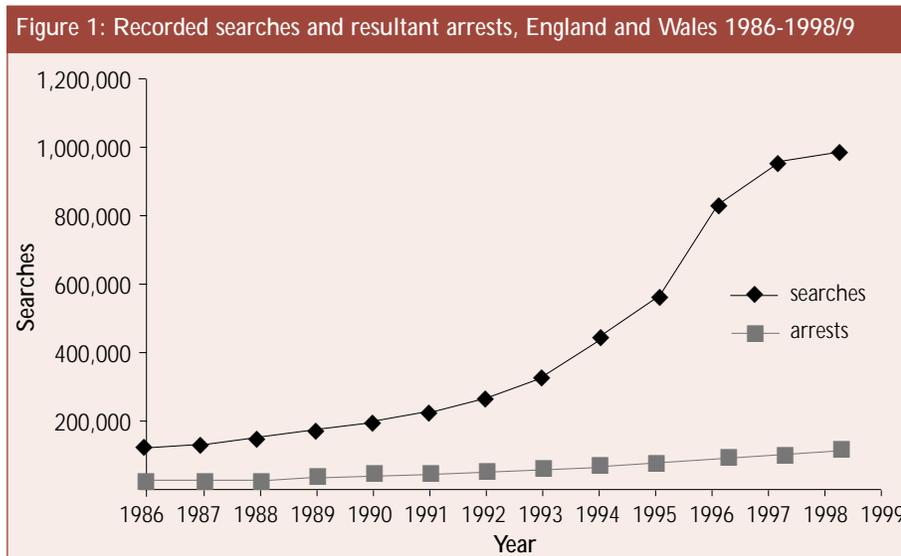
The use of searches

In the last year, more than a million searches were recorded by police forces in England and Wales. This figure, however, may be a substantial underestimate of the true number of searches. FitzGerald and Hale (forthcoming) suggest that, in 1993, the number of searches recorded by the police was substantially lower than that estimated using the British Crime Survey, and recording levels were significantly worse outside the Metropolitan Police.

Part of the reason for the under-recording of searches is that traditionally police forces did not record voluntary searches, as they are not required to under PACE. However, it is also likely to reflect under-recording by police officers of the searches that are carried out with powers (FitzGerald and Sibbitt, 1997)².

It is notable that recorded search activity has shown a sustained and substantial increase since 1986, when monitoring of searches began. Figure 1 shows the changes in levels of search and arrests from searches recorded in England and Wales under PACE and other legislation from 1986 to the present, based on Home Office statistics.

² Recent attempts by some forces to improve recording is an issue which has been looked at as part of PRC's research programme, reported in Bland, et al. (2000b).



Source: Home Office (1995); Wilkins and Addicot (2000).

Given that 1986 was the year in which Section 1 of PACE first came into operation, it is likely to reflect, at least to some extent, an increasing use of the tactic by the police. Brown (1997) commenting on the increase, suggests it is likely to be explained by an increase in police activity along with the increased recording of voluntary searches.

Interestingly, the graph also indicates that while arrests have increased over the same period as searches, they have not increased to the same extent, suggesting on the face of it that searches have become less efficient over the period, although this may also relate to an improved recording of searches.

There are no equivalent police figures available for stops. However, some estimate can be made of the proportion of such contacts using data collected for the evaluation of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry's recommendations (Bland, et al. 2000a). Based on observations of police work involving 149 police-initiated stops of individuals, only 20 involved searches, suggesting that stops may outnumber searches by about seven to one.

The focus of searches

Searches are most commonly used to identify those carrying stolen property, drugs, firearms, offensive weapons and those going equipped to steal, based on the main powers described in Table 1. In doing so, arrests from searches are estimated as making up nine per cent of all arrests nationally for England and Wales (Home Office, 1999).

To illustrate the profile of searches, and their outcomes, Table 3 details proportions of searches and resultant arrests associated with different prohibited articles.

The table shows that the police, overall, use searches most often to look for stolen property (two out of every five searches) and drugs (a third of searches). Searches for equipment to be used in Theft Act offences make up just one in seven searches. Just one in 20 searches is for offensive weapons, and one in 100 for firearms.

The table also shows that 11% of searches produce a successful result, in that they lead to arrest. It should be noted, however, that not all arrests result in the identification and sanction of an offender. It can be estimated, however, that two thirds of these arrests lead to a caution or charge, based on work by Phillips and Brown (1998)³, and FitzGerald (1999) suggests that just over half lead to a caution or sentence. Furthermore, these figures represent the overall picture for England and Wales and there is, in fact, some variation between forces in the efficiency of searches at producing arrests, which will be discussed later in the report.

³ In their survey of a selection of police arrests, Phillips and Brown (1998) found that a total of 50% of arrests from stops or searches resulted in a charge with 41% going on to result in a conviction, while 17% of arrests resulted in a caution.

Object of search / reason for arrest	All searches (%)	All search arrests (%)	Proportion of searches resulting in arrest (%)
Stolen property	40	30	9
Drugs	34	37	12
Firearms	1	1	11
Offensive weapons	5	7	14
Going equipped	14	7	5
Other	6	17	30
Total (Number)	100 (1,080,700)	100 (121,300)	11

Notes:

1. The reasons for a particular search may not always be the same as the reasons for the arrest. This occurs if the person searched is found to have a different illegal item than originally suspected.
2. 'Other' searches describe those under other powers, such as the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989, section 15; various poaching and wildlife conservation legislation; The Aviation Security Act 1982, section 27(1); the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979, sections 163 and 164; and the Sporting Events (Control of Alcohol etc.) Act 1985.
3. Figures may not total 100 because of rounding.

Source: Wilkins and Addicot (2000).

The overall balance of arrests from searches is not substantially different from searches as a whole, dominated as they are by drugs and stolen property: just over a third of arrests from searches are for drugs, and just under a third for stolen property. However, there are clearly some important differences in the extent to which searches lead to arrest. Disregarding 'other' reasons for searches, the most effective searches are those for offensive weapons, with about one in seven leading to an arrest. The least effective searches appear to be those for 'going equipped', with just one in twenty being successful at producing an arrest.

Though it is difficult to relate these arrest figures to the precise offence for which people are arrested, it seems likely that for certain classes of offence, searches make a substantial contribution to arrests. For example, FitzGerald (1999) found in her analysis of searches in a number of Metropolitan Police divisions that in 1997/8, searches accounted for just over 90% of all arrests for offensive weapons, and in 1998/9 the figure was 84%. This reflects the fact that these offences are only likely to come to light through searches.

Variations between police forces

There is a substantial variation between forces in the extent to which searches are used, even among similar forces.

This is illustrated by Table 4. Listed on the left hand side of the table are the five forces recording the least search activity followed by the five forces recording the most use of searches. As a comparison, the right hand side of the table, shows the level of searches in their closest ‘force family relatives’ as defined by Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) criteria. These represent the most similar forces based on key social and economic variables⁴.

⁴ These include the proportions of: one-parent families, the unemployed who are males under 25, households living in rented accommodation, population living in the most densely populated Enumeration Districts in England and Wales, the area of each police area which falls within the most sparsely populated Enumeration Districts in England and Wales.

5 police forces making ...least use of searches	Searches per 1,000 population aged 10 and over	Closest ‘force family’ relatives to those making least/most	Searches per 1,000 population aged 10 and over
Essex	5	Kent	40
Humber-side	6	Nottinghamshire	7
Dorset	7	Warwickshire	20
Nottinghamshire	7	West Yorkshire	16
Sussex	7	Bedfordshire	9
...most use of searches			
Kent	40	Essex	5
Merseyside	43	Greater Manchester	26
London	45	West Midlands	11
Dyfed Powys	51	Cumbria	28
Cleveland	101	Humber-side	6

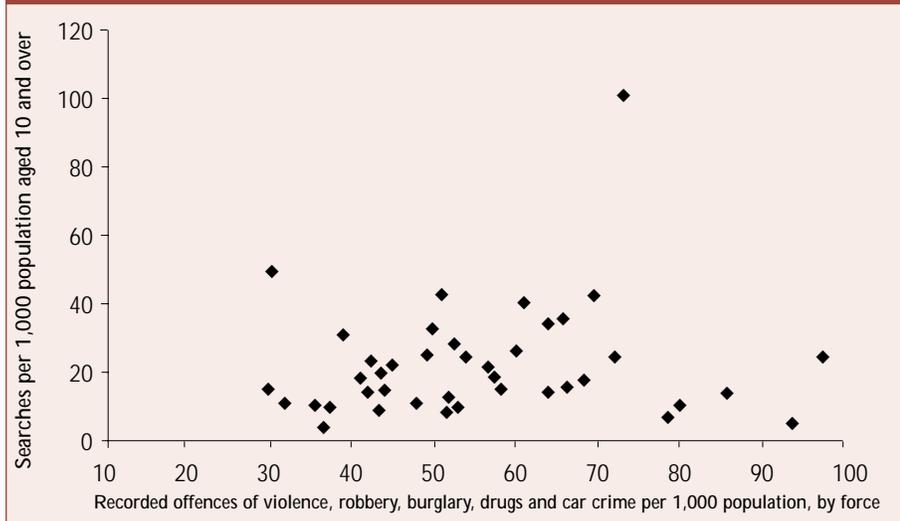
Note: ‘London’ combines both the Metropolitan and City of London Police.
Source: Home Office (1999), HMIC.

The left hand side of the table shows that there are very marked differences between forces. Essex is the force which makes least use of searches, recording only five searches per thousand population. By contrast, Cleveland records the most use, recording a total of 101 per thousand population - 20 times as many as Essex, per head of population. It is important to bear in mind that some of this variation is likely to relate to differences in levels of recording between forces, although this seems unlikely, on its own, to explain such wide variations.

It is particularly surprising, however, that similar police forces often record very different levels of search activity. The most striking finding in Table 4, in this regard, is the difference between Cleveland, with 101 searches per thousand population, and its closest relative, Humberside, with only six. It is also notable that Essex, with just five searches per 1,000 population, is markedly different from its closest relative, Kent, which has 40.

In a similar way, we also might expect searches to be used more often in forces that experience higher rates of crime. Once again, however, the evidence does not bear this out. This is illustrated by Figure 2 which compares the rates of searches and crimes which searches may be seen as addressing, for police forces in England and Wales.

Figure 2: Relationship between use of searches and crimes of violence, robbery, burglary, drugs and vehicle crime for police forces in England and Wales, 1998/9



The graph shows that, despite a wide range of crime rates for those offences which searches address, across forces there is no relationship with levels of searches at all: rather than falling into a line, the points representing police forces are spread across a wide area.

The variation across forces in the use of searches is also reflected in differences between them in the proportions of their arrests which arise from searches. Table 5 provides such figures for the lowest seven and highest six police forces, measured in

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terms of the contribution to arrests made by searches. As Table 5 shows, the nearest HMIC defined 'force family' relatives are also included as a comparison.

Table 5: Proportion of all arrests arising from recorded searches for six forces with the highest contribution and seven forces with the lowest and their nearest HMIC 'force family relatives', England and Wales 1998/9

7 police forces making least use of searches	Proportion of all arrests arising from searches (%)	Closest 'force family' relatives to those making least/most use of searches	Proportion of all arrests arising from searches (%)
Humberside	3	Nottinghamshire	3
Nottinghamshire	3	West Yorkshire	6
West Midlands	3	Greater Manchester	8
Wiltshire	3	Norfolk	14
Bedfordshire	4	Sussex	5
South Yorkshire	4	West Yorkshire	6
Staffordshire	4	Cheshire	6
6 police forces making most use of searches			
Kent	14	Essex	unknown
Norfolk	14	Cambridgeshire	9
Cleveland	15	Humberside	3
Dyfed Powys	15	Cumbria	9
North Wales	16	Dyfed Powys	15
Metropolitan Police	18	West Midlands	3

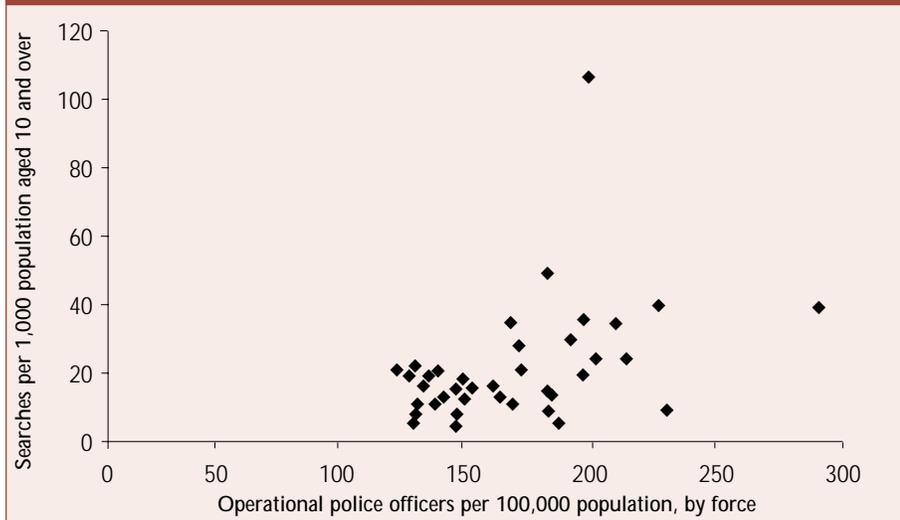
Source: Home Office (1999)

Once again, it can be seen that differences between forces are large. Some police forces rely quite heavily on searches as a contribution to their overall arrests, while others do not. So while about one in six police arrests comes from searches in the Metropolitan Police and North Wales and for one in seven in Cleveland, this is true for less than one in 30 arrests in Humberside, Nottinghamshire, West Midlands and Wiltshire. Comparisons between forces and their nearest 'force family relatives' also suggest that these variations do not map closely on to force characteristics. For example, while Wiltshire relies on searches for one in 33 arrests, its nearest relative, Norfolk, relies on searches for one in seven of its arrests. And while searches

contribute to more than one in six arrests in the Metropolitan Police, they contribute to just one in 33 arrests in West Midlands, its closest relative.

Overall, therefore, it appears that forces have come to rely to varying degrees on searches as a contribution to police work. The numbers of operational officers within a force may be part of an explanation, as illustrated in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3: Relationship between levels of search and numbers of operational police officers for police forces in England and Wales, 1998/9



While levels of recorded searches are not a direct product of officer levels, there is clear evidence of a positive relationship between the two. In statistical terms, this relationship is significant.

Another explanation for this may be that different levels of searches correspond to different policing styles. This issue is beyond the scope of the present study. However, it is notable that Cleveland, which records by far the largest number of searches, also operates 'zero tolerance' policing policies (Bland and Read, 2000) which may help explain this.

Police officers' views on searches

Based on the officers interviewed for the research programme it was clear that there was in, in general, a high level of support for searches within the police.

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There were, however, shades of opinion across different officers. At one end of the spectrum, were those officers who saw searches as central to police work:

Crime would go through the roof if they did not stop and search people.

We'd be toothless without it.

However, there were more cautious views expressed. Some felt that searches were a good tool but had to be used in a focused way:

Stop and search is just one tool in the tool kit.

80 per cent of searches are a waste of time...it's a solid gold tool for a solid gold problem.

Officers also flagged-up a range of different ways in which searches could be useful and often varied in the types of crimes which they felt it was most effective against. For example:

It impacts mainly on street crime.

It's most effective for drugs in this area.

Officers generally felt that it was important as a tool of detection:

It's very valuable in producing arrests.

However, there was also a perception that it could have a preventative impact:

It's good for going equipped - it can reduce burglaries.

It has an impact on reducing drug use.

Some officers also mentioned the intelligence value of searches. They could be useful as "a way of monitoring things" or "knowing which criminals are active in the area".

There was also some variation between officers in the extent to which they used searches, partly reflecting their own attitude, and partly reflecting the job they were doing. For example, one officer felt he used searches less than his colleagues, arguing that the 'grounds for search are pushed by the supervisor'. His resistance to carrying

out searches had led to a confrontation with his supervisor, in which he argued that searches were often illegal.

By contrast, another officer said:

I'm active in my use of stop and search. I'm paired with a probationer... They have to evidence things, and need kicks. They need to show who's doing work or they're out of a job.

In general, officers interviewed for this study felt that by and large they were careful only to carry out searches when they felt they had grounds to do so, even though they sometimes felt this hampered their activity. This is likely, in part to reflect the fact that most officers interviewed as part of this study were involved in the pilots of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry's recommendations and had received recent training. Officers also drew attention to the impact of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry as a factor which had focused their mind on the need to be cautious in their use of search powers, particularly when dealing with ethnic minorities. Some officers, however, felt they should be able to search without grounds, as this hampered their effectiveness:

We need more power - to stop anyone and search without grounds.

Nonetheless, some officers in some forces reported making common use of voluntary searches, namely those which involved the consent of those they searched. In practice, however, it was not clear from their descriptions that they made members of the public fully aware of their rights in relation to voluntary searches. In keeping with the findings of Dixon, et al. (1990) there was a sense that the public were often unaware that they could decline.

Summary

- The number of recorded searches has increased since 1986, and now totals more than a million per year.
- Searches are estimated as making up 9% of all arrests in England and Wales.
- Searches are used most often to detect stolen property and drugs, and this is reflected in arrests from searches.
- On average, 11% of searches lead to an arrest. However, there are variations between different types of search, with searches for offensive weapons being most successful (14%) and searches for 'going equipped' being least successful (5%).

SEARCHES IN CONTEXT

- There is a substantial variation between forces in the extent of recorded searches, even among forces with similar characteristics or crime rates. Thus, while Cleveland carries out 101 searches per thousand population, Essex carries out just five.
- There are also large differences between forces in the extent to which arrests from searches appear to contribute to the overall numbers of arrests, again even among similar forces. For example, while arrests from searches contribute to 18% of arrests in the Metropolitan Police, this is true of only three per cent of arrests in Humberside, North Yorkshire, West Midlands and Wiltshire.
- Some of this variation may reflect differences in recording practices, although the size of the differences suggests this is likely to be only part of the story. Part of the explanation of this variation appears to relate to differences between forces in the numbers of operational police officers. However, it may also be explained, in part, by different policing styles.
- Operational police officers feel that searches are a valuable tool. However, while some see it as central to police work, others see it as just 'one tool in the tool box'. There are also differences between officers in the extent to which they carry out searches.
- Officers interviewed in this study were generally well aware of the legal requirement to have good grounds before carrying out a search, and felt that they were careful to do this. However, some officers also made use of voluntary searches, where grounds are not required, and it was not always clear that people searched in this way were aware of their right to refuse.

3. Fighting crime

Clearly, the purpose of searches is to tackle crime. As we saw in the last chapter, there is a general view among police officers that searches are effective at doing this.

Despite such a widespread belief, surprisingly little work has been carried out to assess the extent to which this is in fact the case, or the ways in which stops and searches may impact on crime. This chapter will draw together the evidence, such as it exists, to assess these key questions. While it is not always able to offer definitive answers, it nonetheless aims to clarify some of the key issues.

How do searches work against crime?

Initially, it is important to consider the ways in which searches, at least potentially, may impact on crime.

A useful starting point is provided by the legal basis for searches. In the first instance, searches are legally founded on the principle that they identify people suspected of having carried out a crime, or who are in the process of doing so. In this respect, the primary purpose of searches is a method of detection. Thus, searches for those in possession of stolen property will identify people who have recently carried out a crime such as theft, burglary or robbery. Searches for drugs, firearms or offensive weapons will help identify those actively and illegally carrying these items, and those offensive weapons or firearms may also be linked with recent violent offences. And those 'going equipped', while they are likely to be planning to carry out a more serious crime, are already committing an offence by carrying particular items with an intent to use them and these may also be linked with crimes already carried out.

However, searches are also held up as an important tool in the prevention of crime (FitzGerald, 1999; Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report, 1999). The potential effects of searches in this regard can be unpacked into a range of possible mechanisms. One of the most direct ways it may do this is by the direct disruption of offenders who are planning to carry out crimes. This is perhaps most clearly seen with searches for those 'going equipped'. By intercepting these offenders, a subsequent offence is clearly prevented. In addition, it is quite likely that by intercepting those in possession of offensive weapons or firearms, an imminent violent offence will be prevented. In some cases it is also possible that interception of those carrying drugs will prevent the further illegal supply of drugs.

Searches may also have the effect of preventing crime through the long term disruption of offenders. Where searches lead to an arrest and conviction of a prolific offender, it seems likely that a range of crimes over a longer period will be prevented.

Certainly, there is evidence that the targeting of high rate offenders can have an impact on crime (Jordan, 1998).

Another way in which searches may be seen as preventing crime is through deterrence. It is important to bear in mind that while this can never be seen as a legal justification for searches, it is nonetheless possible that the existence and use of the search power inhibits the criminal activities of offenders or potential offenders through fear that they may be caught by the police.

A final way in which it could be argued that searches may contribute to preventing crime, is through their contribution to order maintenance. Wilson and Kelling's (1982) 'broken windows theory' suggests that by focusing police efforts on low-level disorder within particular communities, the community bonds will be maintained, which in turn keeps in check public fear of crime and prevents the development of more serious crime problems.

There is perhaps a further way in which searches may be seen as contributing to the police's efforts to address crime problems - one which may be seen as ultimately contributing both to the detection or prevention of offenders. This is through the intelligence that searches generate on offenders, even when they may be unsuccessful at producing an arrest. The value of searches in this respect has been documented by FitzGerald (1999). Once again, this cannot be seen as providing a legal justification for searches. Rather this may be seen, in FitzGerald's words, as amounting to 'added value' from searches.

A summary of these key ways in which searches may be seen to address crime are presented in Table 6.

Having identified these mechanisms, we will now go on to examine the contribution made by each of them to crime problems in practice, below.

Detection of offenders

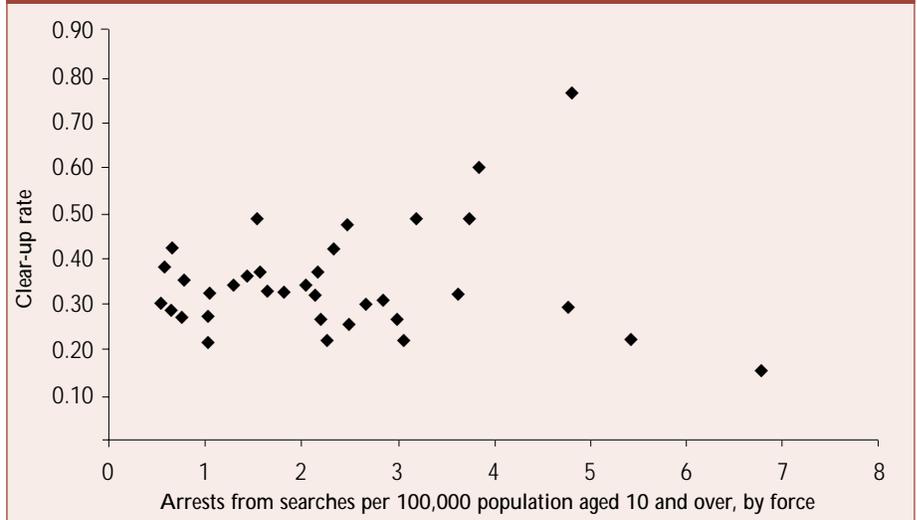
In 1998/9 there were 121,300 arrests from recorded searches. Based on the work of Phillips and Brown (1998) we would expect about half of these to have resulted in the sanction of an offender through caution or conviction. On the face of it, this looks impressive, particularly if we consider that the true figure is likely to be even higher given the problems of under-recording already discussed. However, it is important to place this figure in context.

Table 6: Ways in which searches may impact on crime

Impact on crime	Mechanism
<i>Detection</i>	
Past crime	Detection of those carrying stolen goods from crimes, those carrying offensive weapons or firearms who have recently committed violent offences, or those 'going equipped' who can be linked with crimes
Present crime	Detection of those carrying drugs, offensive weapons, firearms, 'going equipped'.
<i>Direct disruption</i>	
Planned crime	Intercepting those 'going equipped', those carrying offensive weapons or firearms in order to carry out crimes, and those carrying drugs with intent to supply.
<i>Long-term disruption</i>	
Potential future crime	Incapacitation or desistance of criminals through detection and sentencing.
<i>Deterrence</i>	
All crimes susceptible to detection	People not committing crime for fear they may be discovered through a search.
<i>Indirect effects through 'order maintenance'</i>	
General crime and disorder	Focus on low-level crime problems maintains social order and prevents the development of more serious crime problems (and reduces public fear of crime).
<i>Intelligence</i>	
Contribution to detection of past crime and prevention of future crime	Information gained during a search encounter informs subsequent police work.

One important question which may be asked of searches is: what contribution do searches make to the overall detection of offenders? This can be explored by comparing the clear-up rates for police forces with their levels of arrest from searches. Clear-up rates can be taken as a useful indicator of the rate at which crimes coming to the attention of the police are resolved by the identification of an offender. Figure 4 plots the relationship between the rates of search arrests within the population and clear-up rates for the main categories of crime susceptible to detection by searches for different police forces.

Figure 4: Relationship between clear-up rates for vehicle crime, burglary, robbery, violence and drug offences and rates of search arrests, forces in England and Wales, 1998/9



The graph does not show any clear relationship. Certainly, there is no statistically significant association between clear-up rates and rates of search arrests in the population. There are forces that have high levels of search arrests that achieve only low primary clear-up rates, as well as forces with lower levels of arrests from searches that achieve good clear-up rates.

Another important question we should ask of searches is: how often is an offender identified through a search? One way of addressing this question is to compare the number of recorded arrests from searches with the overall number of offences that searches may address. The British Crime Survey (BCS) provides one way of doing this. The survey asks a representative sample of the general public to report crimes which they have been victims of, thereby allowing an estimate to be made for England and Wales as a whole. It should be noted, however, that this approach does not provide a measure of victimless crimes or crimes where the victim is no longer available. Therefore, drug offences, acts of carrying offensive weapons, firearms or equipment to be used in theft offences, fraud or manslaughter are not covered. Furthermore, because the BCS is a survey of the general public aged 16 and over, it does not record offences against commercial properties, or offences against younger victims.

Table 7 provides a breakdown of BCS crime estimates for the main types of offence which searches are likely to address through detection. These crimes fall into the key categories of theft, robbery, burglary and violence, to which searches are directed.

Offence	Numbers of crimes
Burglary	1,639,000
Vehicle thefts	3,483,000
Bicycle theft	549,000
Stealth theft from the person	507,000
Robbery	307,000
Wounding	714,000
Snatch theft from the person	83,000
All BCS crime susceptible to detection by searches	7,282,000
All BCS crime	16,437,000

The table suggests that a total of 7.3 million BCS crimes in 1997 were susceptible to detection by search. In view of the fact that the arrests from searches for drugs will not be effective in detecting BCS crimes, it is important to exclude these from any comparison. When these search arrests are subtracted from the overall figure, a total of 68,800 arrests from searches were recorded in 1997/8.

The comparison shows that there is a ratio of 106 'susceptible' BCS crimes for every search arrest relating to such crimes, as presented in Table 8.

	Crimes	Recorded search arrests for relevant crimes
BCS crimes susceptible to detection by searches	106	1
All BCS crimes	239	1

FIGHTING CRIME

While there is likely to be some under-recording of arrests from searches, which tend to reduce their apparent effectiveness, we should also bear in mind that only around half of arrests will lead to caution or conviction of offenders. This, by contrast, may enhance their apparent effectiveness. The impression we are left with is that overall, searches probably make a fairly small contribution to the detection of the types of crimes to which it is addressed.

A similar comparison can be made using crimes recorded by the police. These figures have certain limitations: they are subject to under-recording, perhaps principally because of limited reporting by the public, particularly in relation to less

Offence	Numbers of crimes
Wounding or other act endangering life	14,006
Other wounding	196,739
Possession of weapons	23,635
Robbery	66,836
Burglary	953,187
Aggravated vehicle taking	10,098
Theft of pedal cycle	128,558
Theft from vehicle	658,921
Theft/unauthorised taking of motor vehicle	381,713
Vehicle interference and tampering	48,011
Theft from the person or another	63,118
Theft from shops	281,972
Handling stolen goods	27,747
Cheque and credit card fraud	142,311
Drug offences	135,945
Going equipped for stealing etc.	5,866
Firearms Act offences	3,325
Knives Act 1997 offences	99
All notifiable offences susceptible to detection by searches	3,142,087
All notifiable offences	5,109,104

serious offences. Furthermore, certain 'non-notifiable' offences are not required to be recorded. Based on a comparison of equivalent crimes measured by the BCS and police statistics in 1997, it was estimated that just a quarter of BCS crimes are measured in police statistics (Mirrlees-Black, et al., 1998). They do, however, offer figures on victimless crimes and crimes against commercial properties not recorded by the BCS. However, they are likely to substantially under-record drug crimes which are unlikely to come to the attention of the police in most cases.

Table 9 provides a summary of the recorded crimes which are susceptible to detection by searches for 1998/9. Once again, these crimes were selected to reflect the main types of crimes upon which searches are likely to be able to detect.

The total number of arrests from searches totalled 121,300 for the year 1998/9. This compares with 3.1 million notifiable offences likely to be susceptible to detection by searches. This represents one arrest from a search for every 26 'susceptible' notifiable offences, as illustrated in Table 10.

Table 10: Ratio of notifiable offences susceptible to detection by searches to arrests from searches, England and Wales 1998/9		
	Crimes	Recorded search arrests for relevant crimes
Notifiable offences susceptible to detection by searches	26	1
Total notifiable offences	42	1

This looks much better than the estimate based on the BCS. The differences are likely to reflect, in part, the fact that it is often the more serious crimes that come to the attention of the police, although crimes in general are affected by under-recording. This, of course, may be offset to some extent by under-recording of search arrests.

We should also bear in mind that quite a number of these offences will tend to come to the attention of the police often as a direct result of a search, such as those involving drugs, offensive weapons and offences of going equipped. This will tend to enhance the apparent effectiveness of searches at uncovering crime by looking at recorded crimes.

FIGHTING CRIME

Overall, the figures suggest that searches play a notable, but relatively small, role in detecting the offenders for crimes that come to the attention of the police, particularly given that only half of these arrests are likely to result in the sanction of an offender, through conviction or caution.

Finally, we can assess the contribution that searches make to detection by the police by viewing them in the context of all detections made by the police. Ideally, this would involve comparing clear-ups for crimes which result from searches with overall clear-up rates. Unfortunately, this data is not available. An alternative is to compare the arrests from searches with all arrests made by the police for crimes which might be susceptible to detection. Figures on this are presented in Table 11 for the 14 forces for which data are available.

Table 11: Proportion of arrests for offences susceptible to detection by searches (violence, robbery, burglary, theft and handling and drugs) arising from searches, 14 police forces in England and Wales, 1998/9

Force	Proportion of arrests for offences susceptible to detection which arise from searches (%)
Avon and Somerset	15
Bedfordshire	6
Cheshire	8
Cleveland	18
Devon and Cornwall	16
Dorset	7
Kent	19
Metropolitan Police	24
Northamptonshire	8
Northumbria	8
North Yorkshire	10
Thames Valley	7
Warwickshire	17
West Mercia	12
Average	13

The picture presented here shows searches in their most flattering light, contributing to an average of about one in eight arrests for 'susceptible' crimes across a selection of forces. However, it is interesting to note - as we did in the last chapter - that there is substantial variation between forces in the extent to which searches contribute to arrests. Thus, in Bedfordshire, only one in sixteen arrests for 'susceptible' offences are generated through searches, while in the Metropolitan Police, this is true of nearly one in four. Furthermore, as we also noted earlier in this chapter, a heavier reliance on searches does not necessarily involve higher rates of clear-up for crimes. Therefore, even where search arrests make a substantial contribution to arrests, it should not be assumed that clear-up rates for these crimes are higher as a result.

In sum, it can be concluded that searches appear to play a minor role in relation to overall crime, and a notable, but relatively, small role in relation to crimes which come to the attention of the police. They do, however make a more important contribution to police arrests for crimes susceptible to detection by searches. This is true for some forces in particular. However, it is not clear that a greater reliance on searches in this way for some forces improves their general rates of crime detection.

Direct disruption of crime

Another key way in which searches may be seen to tackle crime are through the direct disruption of offenders' activities. As already discussed, offenders who are going out to commit crimes such as burglary or thefts often carry equipment, such as screwdrivers, which will assist them in their attempts to do this. Similarly, some offenders going out with a view to perpetrate acts of violence may carry with them weapons such as knives, or in some cases firearms. It is also possible that a positive search for drugs may prevent a drug-dealer selling on drugs to others. Successful searches for these items have the potential to interrupt an offender before he has carried out the intended crime.

One way of assessing the extent to which searches are effective in this regard involves comparing the numbers of arrests from searches for 'going equipped', offensive weapons, firearms and drugs offences with the numbers of property and violence offences susceptible to disruption through searches. Once again, this can be done based on the BCS and recorded crime statistics.

Table 12 provides a breakdown of the main categories of offences recorded by the BCS for 1997.

Table 12: BCS crimes susceptible to disruption by searches in England and Wales, 1997 estimate

Offence	Numbers of crimes
Burglary	1,639,000
All vehicle thefts	3,483,000
Bicycle theft	549,000
Robbery	307,000
Wounding	714,000
All BCS crime susceptible to detection by searches	6,692,000
All BCS crime	16,437,000

Source: Mirrlees-Black, et al. (1999)

Overall, then, a total of 6.7 million BCS crimes may be seen as having been potentially susceptible to disruption. Set against this, the total number of arrests recorded in 1997/8 for 'going equipped', offensive weapons or firearms from searches totalled 16,336 (drugs are not covered by the BCS). If it is assumed that each one of these arrests prevented an offence taking place, we can estimate that searches reduced the potential number of susceptible BCS offences by 0.2%.

Clearly, there is likely to be some under-recording of arrests from searches, which will tend to reduce the estimated disruptive impact of searches here. Furthermore, some search arrests may disrupt more than one crime, for example if they intercept someone going on to commit a series of burglaries in an evening - this too may reduce the estimate. However, this may be offset to some extent by the fact that only about half of search arrests are likely to result in conviction or caution, suggesting that in many cases they do not involve the apprehension of genuine offenders. Overall, however, the estimate presented should be seen as a crude rather than a precise measure.

The same comparison can be made using police recorded crime data. Table 13 presents figures on recorded crimes, identifying those categories of offence which may be susceptible.

A total of 2.6 million recorded crimes may be seen as potentially susceptible to disruption. Set against this, the total number of arrests in 1998/9 arising from searches for 'going equipped', drugs, offensive weapons or firearms totalled 61,067. Once again, if we assume that each of these arrests prevented an offence taking

Table 13: Notifiable offences susceptible to disruption by searches in England and Wales, 1998/9

Offence	Numbers of crimes
Wounding or other act endangering life	14,006
Other wounding	196,739
Robbery	66,836
Burglary	953,187
Aggravated vehicle taking	10,098
Theft of pedal cycle	128,558
Theft from vehicle	658,921
Theft/unauthorised taking of motor vehicle	381,713
Vehicle interference and tampering	48,011
Cheque and credit card fraud	142,311
Trafficking in controlled drugs	21,788
All notifiable offences susceptible to disruption by searches	2,622,168
All notifiable offences	5,109,104

Source: Povey and Prime (1999).

place, that would otherwise have become a recorded crime, we could conclude that searches reduced the potential number of disruptable recorded crimes by 2.3%.

For this estimate, we have assumed that all drug arrests from searches have prevented a crime taking place. This is actually very unlikely, given that most of these arrests are likely to be for possession (see FitzGerald, 1999). If we remove drugs offences and arrests from the calculation we find that there were a total of 2.6 million disruptable recorded crimes and 16,767 arrests from searches. On this basis, recorded crime would only have been reduced by just 0.6% through search arrests.

Once again, we should see these estimates as crude rather than precise measures. As discussed, they will be affected by under-recording of search arrests, as well as the fact that many arrests will not disrupt any crimes, while others may disrupt several.

The estimates of crimes prevented, both as a proportion of 'disruptible' crime, and as a proportion of all crime, are presented for both the BCS and recorded crime in Table 14 below.

Table 14: Estimated reduction in crimes through disruption as a result of searches

	BCS 1997 (excludes drug crimes and arrests)	Recorded crime 1998/9 (including drug crimes and arrests)	Recorded crime 1998/9 (excluding drug crimes and arrests)
All crime susceptible to disruption by searches	0.2%	2.3%	0.6%
All crime	0.1%	1.1%	0.3%

Overall, comparisons with the BCS and recorded crime suggest searches probably have only a marginal effect on crime levels through direct disruption of criminal activities⁵. Further confirmation for this idea comes from another source. Analysis by Penzer (1999c) explored the relationship between searches as a whole and the number of recorded crimes from April 1993 to September 1999 within the Metropolitan Police area.

⁵ We should, however, note that we have not included disruptible offences based on arrests for 'other' reasons from searches in this analysis.

If searches made an important contribution to the direct disruption of crime, we would expect a noticeable negative correlation between arrests from searches for disruptible offences with disruptible crimes recorded at the same time. Although this precise analysis was not carried out, Penzer compared searches as a whole with, among other things, levels of 'burglary in a dwelling', 'burglary in other buildings', 'personal robbery', 'theft from a car', 'theft of car', 'theft of cycle' with the numbers of searches taking place in the same monthly periods. Using time-series models which took account of seasonal variations in crime, he found that only two of these categories showed any relationship with search levels. These were thefts of cars and burglary in a dwelling. However, even with these, the size of the relationships was small, limited to certain police divisions, and were at least in part driven by shifts in offence levels at particular times rather than throughout the time-series. This suggests that they may well have been coincidental rather than causal. Overall, the picture painted by Penzer lends little more credibility to the idea that searches have much direct disruptive impact on crime.

It is perhaps important to note that we have not been able to investigate the disruptive impact that searches may have on localised areas where they are targeted at particular crime problems. It may be that searches can be effective at dealing with these types of problems, though this is something further research would need to assess. However, as we will discuss below, the intensive use of searches in particular locations may also have the consequences of alienating the communities served and hamper the longer-term effectiveness of police efforts.

Long-term disruption of crime

It has been suggested that searches could have a longer term disruptive impact on crime if they were to result in effective sanctions against those otherwise likely to offend again. In this respect, searches are likely to have more impact if they were to focus on serious criminals who are responsible for a large amount of crime. This idea seems particularly important when it is acknowledged that only a small number of offenders are responsible for a substantial portion of crime. For example, Flood-Page, et al. (2000) report, based on the second Youth Lifestyles Survey, that about one in ten of offenders are responsible for just under half of crime. Certainly, evidence in the United States suggests that targeting prolific offenders can be effective at reducing crime (Jordan, 1998). This idea was given further substance by anecdotes recounted by some officers in interviews as part of PRC's research. For example, one officer noted how a spate of street robberies had been halted when the police had managed to arrest a small group of prolific offenders in his area.

However, in most cases there is little information over and above arrest statistics that tell us what kind of offenders have been caught as a result of a search, or whether they are successfully dealt with by the criminal justice system.

One area in which we have some limited information relates to drugs searches. In an ideal world, and in order to maximise the long-term impact of searches on serious drug-crime and drug-related crime the police would need to target:

- those involved in dealing rather than just using drugs; and
- those drugs likely to be linked to drug-related crime, such as heroin or crack cocaine.

FitzGerald (1999) examined the search records for seven police force divisions in the Metropolitan Police for the year 1998/9. She found that 'most' search arrests for drugs were for possession rather than dealing. Furthermore, across areas, more than three quarters of arrests were for cannabis.

This does not simply relate to the outcomes of searches: it is clear that in many cases searches are carried out with the expectation of finding cannabis for personal use. An analysis of search records carried out in two police force areas for the current study found that, of 326 search records, only 9% made any mention of dealing within the grounds for search, and of the 161 cases where a drug could be clearly identified, 94% indicated searches for cannabis. Indeed one officer noted in relation to drug dealers:

[The] police can't do anything [about drug dealers] - they might be targeted by the drugs squad. Difficult to use stop and search on these people - they don't act in suspicious way in street.

Thus, while we know little about the overall longer-term impacts of searches on preventing offenders committing further crime through arrest and sanction, the information available on drugs searches suggest that these types of searches are often not focused on this goal. However, the targeting of more serious offenders is clearly an area which would benefit from further research, and should stand as an important issue in the police's efforts to focus searches.

Deterrence

The idea that searches can act as a deterrent against criminals has a certain plausibility. In interviews carried out by PRC researchers, some officers drew attention to this idea, for example by claiming that people may 'think twice' before committing a crime given the possibility that they may be caught by police carrying out searches. This suggestion was also made by officers and, in one case, a community worker interviewed in Fitzgerald's study (1999).

Before focusing on the evidence in relation to searches, it is important to unpack the idea of deterrence further. Von Hirsch, et al. (1999) draw attention to important issues in relation to this concept. First of all, they make an important distinction between 'general' and 'marginal' deterrence. General deterrence occurs when a potential offender does not commit a crime because of the general possibility that he may be caught and sanctioned. Marginal deterrence, however, refers to changes in offending behaviour caused by changes in the likelihood of being caught and sanctioned.

Von Hirsch, et al. argue that evidence for the existence of general deterrence is strong, although they were looking at the criminal justice system as a whole rather than simply searches. They are, however, more cautious in making a strong claim for marginal deterrence. While they note that there are indeed some negative correlations between crime rates and the likelihood of being convicted for committing a crime, they have some important reservations about its effectiveness. One of the most significant of these is the need for offenders to be aware of relative differences in their likelihood of being detected if they are to adjust their offending behaviour accordingly.

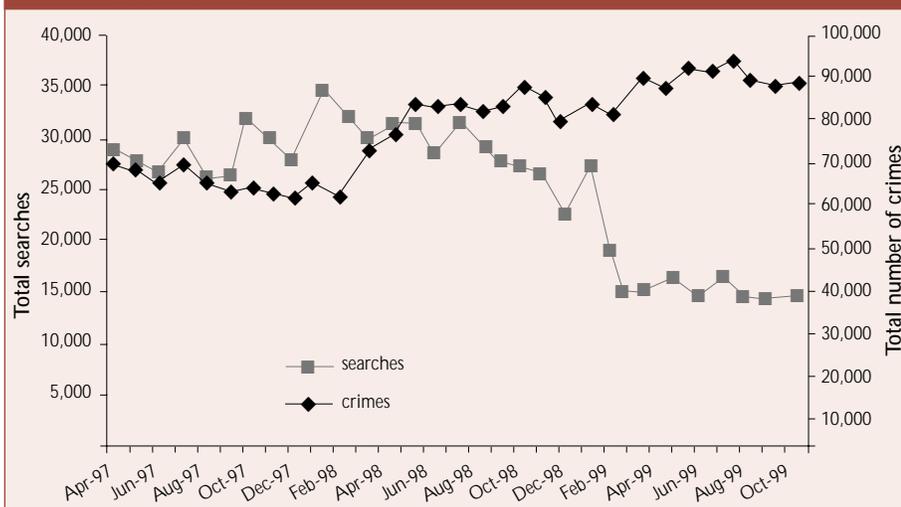
With these distinctions in mind, we can turn to the evidence in relation to searches. One way to explore the possible deterrent effect of searches is to compare

levels of crime with levels of searches. In effect, this allows an investigation of the marginal deterrence of searches. If changes in the levels of searches do have an effect on the amount of crimes being committed, this would be reflected in changes in crime levels at least some time afterwards, as potential offenders recognise such shifts, and respond accordingly.

An analysis of this type was carried out by Penzer (1999a, 1999b, 1999c) using data from the Metropolitan Police from April 1993 to September 1999. Perhaps his key finding, in this regard, was a statistically significant negative relationship between the levels of searches and all recorded crime or Total Number of Offences (TNO) a month after, for the Metropolitan Police as a whole. However, the relationship ceases to be significant once an unusual shift in the figures in March 1999 is taken into account. The relationship, therefore, does not exist across most of the time period considered, and Penzer concludes, based on his data, that "claiming a relationship between total crime and the number of searches seems untenable" (1999a: p6).

This suggests that in general, searches do not have any marginal deterrence effects on total offending. However, the unusual shift in figures at March 1999, perhaps warrants a closer look. Figure 5 illustrates, for the Metropolitan Police area, that between for April 1997 and October 1999, a downward shift in searches coincided with an upward shift in crime.

Figure 5: Searches and recorded crime in the Metropolitan Police, April 1997 to October 1999



The graph shows a clear increase in crime following a substantial drop in searches in March 1999. What is notable about this drop in searches and increase in crime at this time is that it coincided with a loss of confidence among the police following the publication of the critical report of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry (Fitzgerald, 1999). It may be that potential offenders became aware of this loss of confidence, particularly given the publicity that surrounded it, and may also have noticed the reduced level of search activity associated with it. In this case, the change may have led to some increase in crime. Certainly, this ties in with the idea, discussed above, that offenders need to be aware of changes in their chances of being caught and sanctioned if they are to change their behaviour.

Further circumstantial evidence for this idea comes from work in the former Tottenham division of the Metropolitan Police (NACRO, 1997). Here a substantial drop in searches associated with the 'Tottenham Experiment' was also associated with an increase in crime, although the effects were less pronounced than across the Metropolitan Police following the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry. Once again, the Tottenham Experiment enjoyed local publicity, and this may have been enough to influence the perceptions of offenders and affect their offending behaviour.

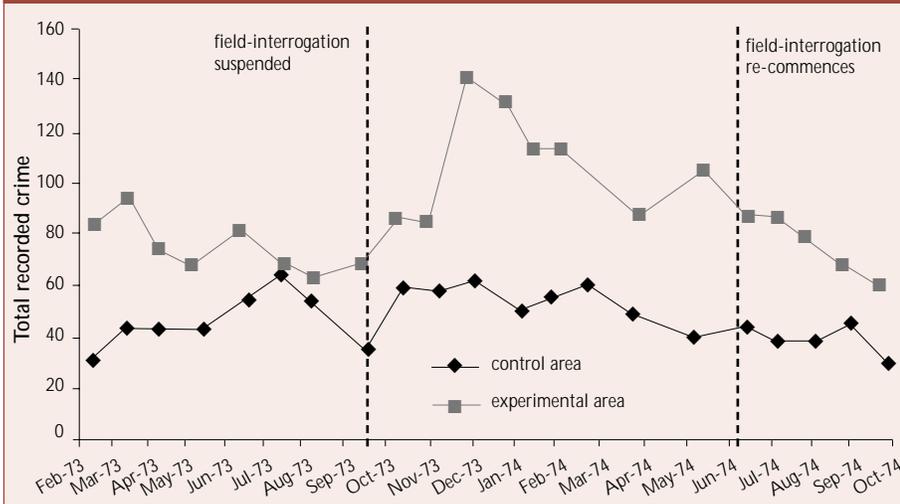
Overall, however, we should be cautious about taking this idea too far. It is based on circumstantial evidence, and both of the examples could amount to a co-incidence⁶. Certainly, even if there was a direct relationship here between policing and offending, it is not clear in either case whether it was specifically searches that led to changes in crime. For example, in the first case, a reduction in the number of searches may have been just one element of a general reduction in proactive policing associated with a loss of police confidence in the wake of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry. Penzer's analysis shows no evidence that the increase in street crime in the Metropolitan Police was due to the drop in searches (1999a).

Another piece of research which sheds some light on the issue of deterrence associated with stops and searches is the San Diego field interrogation experiment carried out between 1973 and 1974 (Boydston, 1975). 'Field interrogation' is a technique used in the United States which approximates to stops of the public prompted by officer suspicion. This technique approximates to the use of both stops and searches in our terms.

In brief, the experiment showed that in an area of San Diego, where the police suspended their use of field interrogations, crime showed a statistically significant increase compared to control areas. In terms of the definition discussed above, a total withdrawal of stops means that this is a test of their general rather than marginal deterrence value. Results from this study are presented in Figure 6.

⁶ Jock Young (personal communication) notes, in this regard, that: "If we take any two variables (say the price of carrots and cabbages) and artificially plot them together by using two coinciding scales, they will go in harmony and then inevitably diverge. This simply doesn't prove (as Penzer acknowledges) any relationship".

Figure 6: The San Diego field interrogation experiment, 1973/4



Despite the evidence of this experiment, it has important limitations. For one, it cannot tell us about the specific effect that searches have, given that stops were also suspended over the same period. Second, suspension of field-interrogation took place in just one part of San Diego, and there may have been some displacement of crime to other areas. Third, there may be other reasons for a reduction in crimes, such as less direct disruption of offenders, or less order maintenance. Finally, we should be cautious about inferring too much from an experiment carried out over 25 years ago in a different jurisdiction. However, it does suggest that police initiated contacts with the public can have an inhibitory effect on crime. This idea is in line with at least some other research which suggests that high-profile policing methods in general can reduce crime (e.g. Trojanowicz, 1986).

Perhaps a final way in which searches may be effective as a deterrent is where they are used intensively in a particular location. For example, the rationale for s60 searches is to tackle offences at sports events, and the existence of this power may have some effect on deterring those coming to such events from carrying knives. Also, in an example recounted by one officer, a local car park which was used openly for drug-dealing and was an effective 'no-go' area for police, was targeted as part of a large operation by police which led to a number of arrests. The longer term impact of this operation appeared to be a reduction in the overt use of the car park for drug-dealing purposes. Nonetheless, it is important to bear in mind that if deterrence was to operate in specific locations, problems may be displaced elsewhere. And, as already mentioned, where searches are used intensively, they may

have counter-productive effects on policing by alienating the community, a point which will be addressed in more detail below. However, a proper analysis of this issue is beyond the scope of the current study.

To sum up, the evidence on deterrence is mixed, and not entirely clear. Generally speaking, changes in the level of stops and searches do not appear to affect the levels of crime. However, in particular instances where substantial drops have occurred in a climate of publicity, there have been increases in crime rates, and it is possible that these are related. They may, however, simply be coincidences. Nonetheless, there is some evidence that the very existence of police stops has at least a preventative effect on crime, although it is not clear the extent to which searches contribute to this. Finally, it is noted that deterrence or displacement effects may operate where searches are used intensively in particular locations, although this research has not evaluated this issue.

Order maintenance

The idea that a police focus on social disorder and low-level crime problems can prevent the development of more serious crime problems has enjoyed popularity in the US, where some have claimed it contributed to the drop in New York crime rates during the 1990s (Bratton, 1995). Some police forces in England have also adopted policies which have drawn on these 'zero tolerance' ideas (Bland and Read, 2000).

Jordan, reviewing US evidence, defines 'order maintenance' as "the concentration of police effort on a small area with particular crime problems, and policing it very strictly" (1998: p72). He notes that there is 'moderately strong' evidence that it can reduce serious crime in the short term, although his analysis looks at police strategies generally, and does not identify the role that searches play in these. However, he also points out that the approach should be used with caution. He suggests that the long term impact of increasing arrests for minor offences may be to damage police legitimacy with the community. This is more than just an issue of bad public relations: as Jordan also points out, research evidence shows that where effort is put into reducing fear and suspicion of the police, and treating people (including offenders) with respect has a positive effect on the degree of co-operation the police get from the community.

Certainly, there is evidence that searches are used to tackle issues of social disorder. FitzGerald (1999) has drawn attention to their use in disrupting groups of young people in the Metropolitan Police force area, for example where the police believe the group may become involved in an affray, where they have been reported as

smoking cannabis, or where their presence is perceived as intimidating other members of the public. Assessing the role and effectiveness of searches in order maintenance is beyond the scope of the current study. However, in view of the above, and given that searches generally appear to negatively affect public confidence (detailed in the following chapter), it seems likely that their use as part of order maintenance strategies has the distinct potential to impact negatively on community relations and hamper the longer-term effectiveness of police work.

If research was to address the role of searches in localised order maintenance, and the more serious crime which may be prevented as a result, it would clearly be important to disentangle the specific effects of searches from other forms of police activity such as other stops and high visibility policing in general, all of which may play some role in order maintenance.

Intelligence

The final mechanism by which searches may impact on crime is through their general contribution to intelligence. This can help the police in their efforts both to detect offenders and prevent crime. This must, however, be seen as an 'added value' to searches, given that searches cannot be justified on this basis.

The value of searches in this regard has been argued by FitzGerald (1999) based on research in a number of Metropolitan Police areas. Records of searches, often involving detailed descriptions of the clothing and physical characteristics of individuals searched, can be fed back to a pool of police intelligence, often being formally entered onto intelligence databases. It is often possible to subsequently make links between individuals and crimes which have taken place in an area, for example where a suspect description matches that of a person searched nearby at the same time of day. FitzGerald notes overall, however, that within the areas she researched, the approach to gathering of intelligence was, at best, patchy.

The issue of intelligence was pursued further in interviews with officers for PRC's present research. Officers' initial reactions to being asked about the intelligence value of searches was to say that they were indeed useful. Some drew attention to the possibility of uncovering drugs paraphernalia or details of personal contacts, for example through names, addresses and telephone numbers found during searches. However, it became clear that the main source of intelligence associated from searches was the conversations and observations that accompanied them, rather than the searches themselves. It was clear that, while searches prolonged an encounter and maximised the chances of obtaining useful information, broadly similar kinds of intelligence could in fact have been produced by a less intrusive stop without a search.

However, while searches are routinely recorded, and this provides a useful vehicle for information which can be passed back to intelligence, the same cannot be said of stops generally. Traditionally, information from stops has been passed to intelligence systems in a more *ad hoc* way, rather than being collected routinely. It may be, therefore, that much useful information from stops does not always find its way back to intelligence systems.

Getting the best out of searches

Moving on from questions about the general effectiveness of searches, it is important to ask the question: under what circumstances are they most effective? Evidence bearing on these issues comes from interviews with officers and from statistics.

The importance of 'grounds'

One of the clear messages that came back from many officers is that searches are most effective when they have reasonable grounds for suspicion. That is, in discussing the criteria that were important to carrying out a search, they corresponded closely to the specifications of PACE Code A. Certain factors, when observed in some combination, tend to render someone 'suspicious' and more likely to lead to an arrest if searched. Commonly mentioned factors included when a person:

- fits a description of a suspect, for example following a call to service;
- is in the vicinity of a very recently committed crime;
- is seen in an area experiencing a large amount of crime;
- is out late at night;
- behaving in a suspicious manner; and
- a known offender.

There were, however, some officers who felt that a less discriminating and more intensive use of searches could generate arrests and deter offenders. For example, one officer described s60 searches, which do not require grounds, in the following way:

Section 60 is a brilliant one. You can search who you want if you think they've got a knife...it's particularly effective.

Under s60, provided authority is given by an officer of the rank of inspector or above, searches can be carried out in specified areas at the discretion of the officer. These powers were designed, originally, to deal with football violence.

However, support for the idea that grounds are important in generating arrests comes from comparisons between searches that do require reasonable grounds for suspicion (such as s1, s23) and those that do not (i.e. s60 and voluntary searches).

Evidence from one of the areas involved in the pilot of the recommendations, which has used s60 to combat problems with violence in the city centre, suggests that these searches are actually far less successful at producing arrests. This evidence is based on pilot monitoring data which aimed at recording all stops and searches carried out by police officers. This is illustrated in Table 15.

Table 15: Arrest rates for searches under different powers, in one pilot area, selected months 1999/2000

Section 1, Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984	Section 23, Misuse of Drugs Act 1971	Section 60, Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1997
16% (590)	22% (207)	5% (439)

The table shows that s60 searches yield about a third of the proportion of arrests produced by s1 searches and a quarter of the proportion yielded by s23 searches. It is also interesting to note that, in talking about s60 searches, officers pointed out that they were more ready to search people under this power where evidence was not strong. One officer described how he targeted s60 searches in the following way:

Anyone causing trouble really - but people who aren't worth pulling [arresting] cause they haven't done enough.

A comparison between searches carried out under powers and voluntary searches is provided in Table 16, based on three areas involved in the pilot. Once again, this data is based on a system of monitoring which aims to record nearly all search encounters.

Table 16: Arrest rates for searches under different powers, in three pilot areas, selected months 1999/2000

Section 1, Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984	Section 23, Misuse of Drugs Act 1971	Voluntary searches
15% (1307)	20% (495)	4% (206)

This shows that the yield for voluntary searches is as equally low as s60 searches and sheds further doubt on the efficiency of searches that do not require reasonable grounds for suspicion.

Use of intelligence

One of the issues mentioned most often by officers when discussing the characteristics of successful searches was the importance of intelligence. The types of intelligence valued by officers was that which closely dovetailed with information needed to develop grounds to carry out a successful search, and included:

- the location of crime hotspots;
- current crime problems;
- suspect descriptions; and
- details of serious and prolific offenders identified by the police.

It is notable that one of the potentially effective ways in which searches may prevent crime is by arresting serious offenders. Clearly, intelligence can play an important role in targeting these individuals.

One of the challenges for police forces is to make sure that officers going out on patrol are well briefed on intelligence matters. In interviews with officers, many officers valued information bulletins that were passed to them and the regular intelligence briefings that they received.

However, there is no doubt that more could be done to pass intelligence on to patrol officers. For example, many officers felt that they were given little intelligence in their daily shift briefings, which is potentially one of the best channels through which such information might be imparted. Another officer remarked on a traditional police culture which eschews the use of intelligence, but which needs to be challenged.

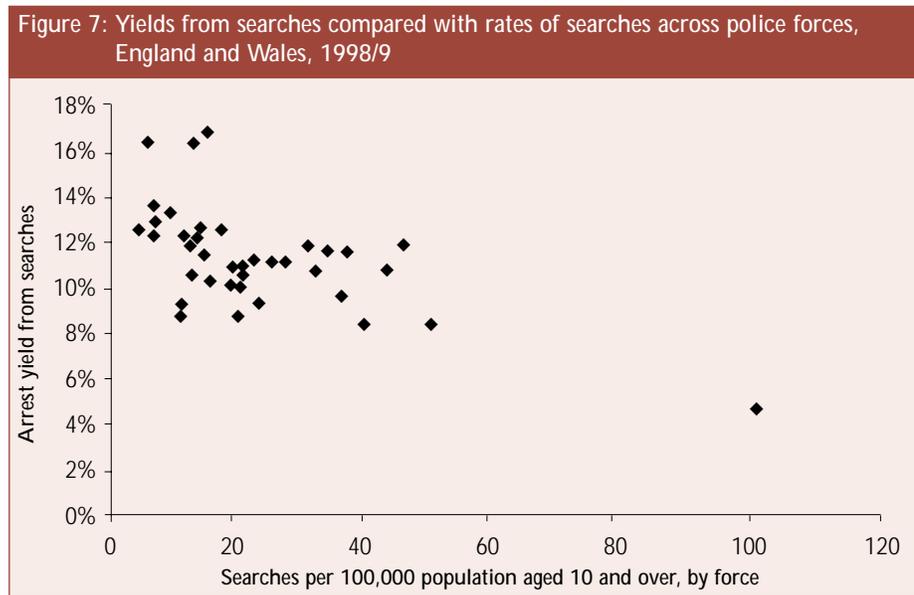
Issues of quality and quantity

Across a range of settings and situations, it appears that when searches are carried out more often, they tend to be less efficient. That is, although they are likely to produce more arrests overall, the proportion of searches leading to arrest typically decreases.

This has already been observed in relation to the changes to searches through time, illustrated in Figure 1. The graph showed that while the numbers of both searches and resultant arrests have increased progressively since 1986, the proportion of

searches leading to arrests has decreased. It is notable, also, that when the number of searches fell in the Metropolitan Police in the wake of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, the yield from those arrests increased and a similar phenomenon was observed during the Tottenham experiment.

The same type of pattern is also observed when forces are compared with one another, as illustrated in Figure 7.



The graph shows that when the rate of searches is compared with the yield from searches, there is negative relationship. This relationship is highly significant in statistical terms.

One of the reasons for the decline in yield associated with increased search activity may be a reduced quality of grounds. Where police are more ready to use searches, they may often have a lower threshold in terms of reasonable suspicion before carrying them out. If this is the case, not only will this involve more searches of innocent members of the public, but these may more often take place without sound reasons. This is likely to have some implications for police community relations, a point which will be taken up in the next chapter. Furthermore, as Jordan (1998) has pointed out, a loss of legitimacy with the public can have a damaging effect on the public co-operation with the police which may hamper police effectiveness.

A factor which may help explain the lower yield associated with large numbers of searches is the issue of police performance. Although police forces are moving away from assessing the performance of patrol officers based on the absolute numbers of searches they carry out, there is a lingering sense among at least some officers interviewed - particularly probationers - that they are still judged on this, at least on an informal basis. In forces or contexts where this perception exists, it is possible that the quality of grounds may be sacrificed, at least to some extent, to the pursuit of high rates of search.

It should be noted, however, that high levels of searches can, if carefully targeted, produce a respectable yield. To illustrate this point, two case studies are presented in Box 1, which illustrate contrasting outcomes when searches were temporarily increased as part of an operation. In the first example, the yield from searches declined substantially. In the second example, the yield from searches remained high.

Box 1: Increases in searches - two case studies*Example 1: An operation in a Metropolitan Police borough*

Following a sustained increase in crime within the borough, officers from the Territorial Support Group (TSG) were drafted into the area to assist in tackling the problem.

The involvement of the TSG was associated with a doubling of searches for the few months they were there, from about 300 to 600 per month. However, accompanying this was a near halving of the arrest rate from searches, suggesting that these extra searches were largely unsuccessful in producing arrests.

When the TSG left the area, searches dropped back to about 300 and the arrest rate returned to previous levels, and there had been no change in crime rates.

Example 2: An operation in a division of a non-Metropolitan police force

Within the main city of the division, there had been a notable increase in tension between members of the local criminal fraternity, and criminals from outside the area. This had occurred because of competition between the various groups who were active in the illegal supply of controlled drugs, with the 'outsiders' taking over local facilities and using increasing violence to secure a foothold. The focus of much of this activity was a particular café in the city.

A fundamental cornerstone of the operation to tackle the problem was the use of intelligence, and the operation involved daily intelligence briefings for officers. The community was fully consulted about the operation, and because of the reassurance given, a significant amount of community intelligence was fed to the police. The police also gathered intelligence through observation of the café in question.

Nearly 100 searches were carried out as part of the operation, and the arrest rate associated with the searches was 19%. This is substantially higher than the average arrest rate for searches in England and Wales.

There is, however, a further way in which quality of searches is potentially sacrificed for quantity. This relates to the nature of arrests they produce. We have noted that a large proportion of drug arrests from searches are for offences involving the

consumption of cannabis, and indeed that searches are very often targeted at these types of offenders. Evidence suggests that the use of soft drugs may be of less concern to the public than the sale of hard drugs, or crimes such as burglary or robbery (e.g. Bland, 1997). As we have noted, arrests for these offences are unlikely to have a major preventative impact on future crime through the long-term disruption of offenders. And while they have the potential to play a role in 'order maintenance' strategies, their effectiveness in this regard is unknown, and they run the risk of alienating the community and impacting negatively on the effectiveness of policing in the longer-term.

Following from this, it is perhaps necessary to judge the quality of searches (and the performance of officers using searches) not simply on their yield, but also on the types of crimes for which they produce arrests. Ideally, they might be tied to the policing priorities of police areas. It is also important to bear in mind that the more often searches are able to result in arrests of prolific offenders, the more this will tend to prevent crime in the future.

Making the best use of stops to gather intelligence

An example of good practice in the use of search information for intelligence may approximate to the account given by one intelligence officer interviewed by FitzGerald (1999). The broad rules employed by his staff in deciding whether to enter information from searches onto an intelligence database included:

- whether the individual searched was a 'prominent' or 'development' nominal, i.e. currently a specific target of police surveillance;
- whether the individual had a known history of offending;
- whether the type of circumstances or the activity for which the search was conducted were directly relevant to crimes of priority interest to the police at that time.

FitzGerald, however, notes that good practice is not always the norm. For example, where responsibility for entering search information onto intelligence systems lay primarily with the officers conducting searches, some clogged databases with information of marginal interest at best, while others failed to provide relevant information. Clearly, then, police forces might usefully look to structuring the procedures for gathering intelligence from searches in a streamlined and focused way.

Perhaps one of the key benefits of searches in feeding intelligence systems, observed by FitzGerald, is that they more routinely involved the filling-out of a search slip which can be scrutinised for intelligence. Other types of encounters, by contrast, are

recorded and passed on to intelligence units at the discretion of the officers on the street. This may, therefore, represent an advantage arising from the recording requirements for searches, rather than an intrinsic advantage of this type of encounter. Interestingly, many of the officers interviewed for the current study were trialling a form to be filled out for both stops and searches as part of the piloting of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry's recommendations. There were strong indications, though anecdotal, that as a result of this, new intelligence from stops was now being generated and used within pilot areas, for example around physical descriptions, clothing, known associates, and cars being driven.

This points to the importance of gathering intelligence more systematically across the wide-range of police contacts with the public, not just searches. Furthermore, if intelligence can be effectively gathered from a wide range of police-public contacts, this should take the pressure off officers to carry out searches principally for intelligence purposes, a phenomenon observed by FitzGerald among some officers in the Metropolitan Police.

Summary

The first part of this chapter examined the evidence for the effectiveness of searches against crime. Key findings are:

- Searches have a minor role in detecting offenders for the range of crimes that they address, as reported by the public, and a relatively small role in detecting the offenders for such crimes that come to the attention of the police. However, they make a more notable contribution to police arrests for these crimes.
- Searches appear to have only a limited direct disruptive impact on crime overall by intercepting those going out to commit offences, although less is known about their localised effects in relation to areas specifically targeted by the police.
- It is not clear to what extent searches undermine criminal activity through the arrest and conviction of prolific offenders. However, it is unlikely that searches make a substantial contribution to undermining drug markets, or drug-related crime in this way. The extent to which searches concentrate on prolific offenders is something which could usefully be monitored and researched.
- There is little existing evidence that searches have a deterrent effect on crime, although the picture is not entirely clear. There is some evidence that stops generally may inhibit crime. Although not investigated by this study, it is also possible that where searches are used intensively in particular locations they may have a localised deterrence or displacement effect.

- The role and effectiveness of searches in relation to intensive 'order maintenance' activity by the police is unknown. Research shows that this type of policing in general can have a short-term impact on serious crime. However, it seems likely that their use in this way has at least the potential to damage police legitimacy among the communities served, and to hamper the effectiveness of policing in the longer-term.
- Searches can provide 'added value' to police work in the form of intelligence. However, this is likely to relate in part to the forms that are filled in following searches, which can be fed into intelligence systems.

The second part of this chapter identified the best ways of using searches to tackle crime. Key findings include the following:

- Searches are most likely to be successful when they were associated with good 'grounds for suspicion'. Section 60 and voluntary searches, which do not require these grounds, less often result in arrests.
- Searches are likely to be more successful when they are based on intelligence. However, more could be done to improve the flow of intelligence to patrol officers.
- Across a range of settings, when searches are carried out more often they tend to be less productive. However, where they are used in a targeted and intelligence-led way, this does not necessarily follow.
- Attention could be paid to maximising the quality of arrests produced from searches in assessing their productivity. For example, searches aimed at cannabis possession may not represent the most effective use of resources. Ideally, searches should focus on prolific offenders, particularly if they are to prevent crime.
- Intelligence from searches is not always used effectively, and mechanisms for gathering and using intelligence could be improved. Furthermore, attention should be paid to gathering intelligence across the range of police encounters with the public in addition to searches.

4. Community impact

There is a range of evidence that the use of searches can have a damaging effect on the communities that the police serve, in particular among minority ethnic communities. The Scarman report identified the use of search powers, at that time under s66 of the 1839 Metropolitan Police Act, as a key factor in the cause of the Brixton riots in 1981 (1981). Subsequently, the report of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry (1999) identified searches as a major cause of concern among minority ethnic communities.

While good community relations is an important end in itself, it also has implications for the quality of policing. As Jordan (1998) has noted, where the police are perceived as legitimate in their activities, the public are more inclined to co-operate with them. This is of central importance to effective policing.

This chapter explores the impact of stops and searches on the public in more detail, and the features of stops and searches that are likely to cause the most problems for community relations.

Public attitudes to stops and searches

There is a general support for the principle of stops and searches in the community at large, provided that it is used appropriately. For example, qualitative research carried out by BMRB as part of the PRC programme (Stone and Pettigrew, 2000) found that people from a range of ethnic backgrounds saw a value in stops and searches⁷. However, they also felt that it could be abused, and was not necessarily targeted at 'real' criminals. Similarly, FitzGerald (1999) cites survey evidence across a range of minority ethnic groups in London suggesting that most people thought the power could be useful in addressing crime. Her qualitative interviews with young males also suggested that there was a general support for the principle of searches, even though there were complaints about the way it was used in practice.

One of the major criticisms of searches has been their disproportionate use against people from minority ethnic communities (e.g. Home Office, 1999; Bucke, 1997; Smith, 1983) and was identified as a major concern by the report of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry.

Disproportionality describes the higher rates of stops and searches among those from minority ethnic backgrounds. Table 17 provides figures from the 1996 BCS describing the different rates of both stops and searches reported by the public for different ethnic groups.

⁷ This involved research with 104 people in 12 discussion groups, designed to represent a range of age groups and ethnic backgrounds, as well as in-depth interviews with 55 people who had recently been stopped or searched, again drawing on people from a range of ethnic backgrounds.

Table 17: Rates of stops and searches for different ethnic groups, BCS 1996

	Whites	African Caribbeans	Asians
Stopped during year (%)	16	23	15
Stopped more than once during year (%)	5	14	7
Searched (% of those stopped)	8	20	15

The table shows clearly that African Caribbeans, compared to whites, are substantially more likely to be stopped, more likely to experience multiple stops, and more likely to be searched - both in absolute terms, and in relation to any particular stop. The table suggests that Asians, in general, are likely to experience stops at similar rates to whites. However, once stopped, they are more likely to be searched.

There is also evidence that ethnic groups not captured by the breakdown may also suffer disproportionately from stops and searches. For example, research by Mooney and Young (1999) identify Irish people in an area of north London as more likely to be stopped. It is also notable that disproportionality in searches, at least for black and Asian people, can be found across most police forces in England and Wales (Home Office, 1999).

The precise reasons for disproportionality are likely to be complex. Possible explanations include:

- stereotyping or racism by police officers in their use of stops and searches;
- the concentration of policing in areas with high minority ethnic populations, perhaps because of higher rates of crime;
- perhaps linked to the above, more people from minority ethnic backgrounds in public places at times stops and searches take place, thereby being more 'available' to be stopped or searched (e.g. FitzGerald and Sibbitt, 1997; MVA, 2000)
- a higher level of involvement in crime by certain ethnic minorities (e.g. Reiner, 1992), prompting officers to stop or search ethnic minorities more often based on suspect descriptions and intelligence. This might also interact with, and amplify, any racism within the criminal justice system (Reiner, 1992).

The identification of ‘institutional racism’ within the police by the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry has placed the first of these explanation in the spotlight, and there is no doubt that this idea contributes to a negative perception of the police in their use of stops and searches. It should be noted, however, that research by MVA (2000), carried out as part of PRC’s programme of research into stops and searches, suggests that structural explanations for disproportionality are likely to be important.

Experiences of being stopped or searched

One of the central issues to understanding the effect of stops and searches on community perceptions is to understand the experiences of those who are stopped and searched by the police.

Who gets stopped or searched?

We have already noted that stops and searches fall disproportionately on those from minority ethnic backgrounds. However, in interview, many police officers claimed that the sort of people they searched were targeted because they were criminals, regardless of ethnic background. In view of this, searches were often seen as acceptable, even when nothing was found. To shed some objective light on whether this is generally the case, data from the 1998/9 Youth Lifestyles Survey (YLS) was analysed⁸. This is a survey of young people aged between 12 and 30 which focuses on experiences of crime and the criminal justice system. Details are presented in Table 18.

⁸ The YLS analysis presented in this chapter is based on 3,931 cases, including 3,579 white, 107 black, 80 Indian, 76 Pakistani/Bangladeshi, and 89 ‘other’ respondents.

Table 18: Proportions of those stopped and searched who were offenders and non-offenders among those aged, 12-30 year olds, YLS 1998/9

	All (%)	Those stopped in the previous year (%)	Those searched in the previous year (%)
Offended in previous year (other than drug-use)	19	26	50
Used drugs only in previous year	17	19	24
Not offended in previous year	65	55	27
All	100	100	100

Notes:

1 Offending here is defined as having committed at least one of a range of offences in the last 12 months, involving criminal damage, property, fraud and violence.

2 Those searched in the last year are those who, on the last occasion stopped either in a vehicle or on foot, were searched; those only ‘stopped’ were those who were not searched on the last occasion.

The table shows that those stopped or searched are more likely to have reported offending in the past year. However, half of the respondents who have been searched in the previous year had not been involved in offending, other than drug offences, as had three quarters of those stopped. When drug-use is also considered, stops and searches appear more closely targeted: while half of people stopped did not report offending or taking drugs in the previous year, this was true for just a quarter of the people searched. It is worth noting that among those who ‘used drugs only’ in the previous year 54% have used only cannabis.

Overall, then, it appears that many stops and most searches are focused on those who have offended or taken drugs. However, we should not lose sight of the fact that a substantial minority of searches and over half of stops still involve those who do not report offending or drug-taking. This may be an important issue when considering the potential impact of stops and searches on community perceptions.

Impact of stops and searches on confidence in the police

Table 19 presents figures on public confidence in the police according to whether they had been stopped and searched.

Table 19: Proportions of those not stopped, those stopped and those searched who thought the police did a good job, 12-30 year olds, YLS 1998/9			
	Those not stopped in the previous year (%)	Those stopped in the previous year (%)	Those searched in the previous year (%)
Proportion thinking the police do a fairly/very good job	67	64	46

On the face of it, this suggests that the experience of a stop, on its own, does not substantially affect an individual’s confidence in the police. By contrast, for those who had been stopped in the last year who had, on the last occasion⁹, been searched, only 46% thought the police did a good job.

⁹ For those who had experienced both a foot and a vehicle stop in the last year, this relates to those who had experienced a search either during the last foot or vehicle stop.

There are, however, likely to be a wide range of factors which influence the confidence that the public has in the police and it may be that these explain the relationship if they are correlated with experiences of being searched. For example, the YLS also shows that while 57% of those who had offended (excluding drugs) thought the police did a very or fairly good job, this was true of 66% of those who had only taken drugs and 69% of those who had not offended or taken drugs. It is also notable that 72% of those in rural areas thought the police did a good job compared to only 56% of those in inner-city areas.

In order to assess whether searches appeared important in influencing perceptions of the police, independently of other such factors, a statistical model was developed. The model is summarised in Table 20, while the full statistical details of the model can be found in the Appendix A.

Table 20: Independent relationships between a range of variables and confidence in the police among 12-30 year olds, YLS 1998/9

Variable	Relationship with confidence in police (after taking into account other variables)
Age	Confidence in the police appeared highest among those aged 12 to 13, and lowest among those aged 18 and 25.
Area	Those living in inner city areas were least likely to have confidence in the police, while those in rural areas were most likely.
Offending	Those who had offended in the last year were less likely to have confidence in the police, although this did not apply to those who had only used drugs.
Being a victim of crime	Those who had been a victim of certain property of violent offences in the last 12 months had less confidence in the police.
Social class	Those lower down the class spectrum had less confidence in the police.
Knowing people in trouble with the police	Those people who knew others in trouble with the police because of involvement in crime had less confidence in the police.
Ethnic background	Although small numbers of ethnic minorities in the survey make interpretation difficult, confidence appeared substantially lower among Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi groups.
Experience of searches	Where people had been searched on the last occasion they were stopped in the last 12 months, confidence in the police was lower. This did not apply, however, to stops without searches.

Note: Area of residence and having initiated a contact with the police were not sufficiently predictive to be in the model.

The model confirms that searches were indeed strongly associated with a lower confidence in the police, even after accounting for a range of other variables. However, the experience of being stopped but not searched did not show an

association. We should perhaps be a little cautious about disregarding the experience of stops, however. Certainly, qualitative research suggests that the experience of being stopped can be a negative one (e.g. Stone and Pettigrew, 2000).

While this finding has clear implications for those searched across the board, it seems inevitable that people from minority ethnic backgrounds, because they are more often searched, will disproportionately suffer from a loss of confidence as a direct result of their personal experiences of searches.

What factors influence experiences of stops?

There is a body of research which has examined what influences public satisfaction with being stopped by the police, and has produced a fairly clear and consistent picture. This has included both statistical and qualitative approaches.

For example, Skogan (1994) explored the correlates of satisfaction in the police handling of stop encounters using the 1992 BCS. These included:

- whether people felt they were fairly treated by the police;
- whether the police acted politely;
- whether the police showed enough interest in what people had to say;
- whether people were searched or sanctioned; and
- whether people were given a reason for the stop.

A similar picture emerged from FitzGerald and Hale's analysis (forthcoming). They constructed a model of public satisfaction with vehicle stops using the 1994 BCS. Overall, their model showed that some of the main causes of dissatisfaction were:

- whether the police were perceived to have been impolite;
- whether they gave a reason for a stop - and one which was acceptable;
- whether the stop was followed by a search; and
- whether they were asked to produce their documents.

A range of qualitative evidence such as open-ended interviews and focus groups, confirms the general picture provided by statistical evidence, and provides some important additional detail.

FitzGerald (1999) carried out a range of interviews and focus groups in London with community workers and young people, as well as with police officers. For young people, officers' behaviour and attitudes during encounters were the main focus of complaint. They stressed that it was important for officers to be polite and respectful and to offer an explanation for why they had been stopped, in keeping with the

statistical analyses discussed above. The research carried out by BMRB for the Home Office of people stopped by the police also came to similar conclusions (Stone and Pettigrew 2000).

This work identified some further important issues, some of which were also echoed by FitzGerald:

- some police were seen as 'cocky' in their handling of stops;
- young officers were often seen as the most difficult;
- stops could be embarrassing, for example when they occurred outside work, outside the mosque or in front of others;
- bad experiences of stops were the most memorable ones.

It is also important to realise that members of the public are not necessarily passive when they are stopped. In FitzGerald's study, both young people and police officers acknowledged that those stopped could be hostile, with police officers sometimes responding badly to this. For example, where an officer felt that the person they stopped 'failed the attitude test', this could lead to an escalation of the encounter. This suggests that it is important for officers to know how to handle difficult members of the public without creating bad feeling.

Overall, it is clear that the way in which the police handle stop encounters can have an important effect on the way people experience them. It is notable, in this regard, that in the BMRB research, some people interviewed recounted positive experiences of stops. It is also clear that when a stop is followed by a search, this will tend to reduce their satisfaction with the encounter.

Ethnicity and experiences of stops

Evidence suggests that the quality of stop encounters is often worse for those from minority ethnic backgrounds. This point is illustrated by Table 21 based on the 1996 BCS presented in Bucke (1997).

Table 21: Satisfaction with stop encounters for different ethnic groups, BCS 1996			
	Whites	African Caribbeans	Asians
Proportion of those stopped who are satisfied with treatment (%)	82	55	72

The table shows that both African Caribbeans and Asians were less often satisfied with the police handling of stop encounters, compared to white people.

This lower level of satisfaction is explained, at least in part, by the fact that stops of ethnic minorities more often have the characteristics associated with dissatisfaction for all groups. For example, Bucke (1997) observed that African Caribbeans and Asians were more often searched and were less convinced by the explanations of stops given by the police than other ethnic groups. Similarly, FitzGerald and Hale (forthcoming), in their analysis of vehicle stops, found that as well as being searched more often, black and Asian men were less likely to feel they were given a satisfactory reason for a stop, less likely to think they were treated politely or fairly and were more likely to be asked to produce their documents at a police station.

It is not entirely clear why people from minority ethnic backgrounds should have more negative experiences of stops. It may be that officers sometimes act, or are perceived to act, in a discriminatory manner. It may be that some police officers, when confronted with those from minority ethnic backgrounds are less able to develop a good rapport, either because of cultural or social differences, or because they are confronted with more resistance or hostility from those from minority backgrounds. In this regard, FitzGerald and Sibbitt (1997) observed a climate of mistrust between the police and black people, although Norris, et al. (1992) found no evidence of differences in the treatment or reactions of white and black people stopped by the police.

Minimising problems with the public

The above discussion points to some important steps the police can take to minimise the negative fallout from their use of stops and searches. Interestingly, some of these dovetail closely with ideas presented in the last chapter for making the most effective and efficient use of searches to deal with crime.

Making the most efficient use of searches

It is obvious, given that search encounters have the potential to cause bad feeling with the public, that they be used in the most efficient way possible. This would minimise inconvenience to the community, and maximise their impact on crime. One way in which this may be best pursued is to make sure that there are strong grounds before a search is carried out. This is likely, as described in the last chapter, to involve making the best use of intelligence. This approach has the added advantage of furnishing the officer with a reasonable explanation to offer the person searched, which is important for public satisfaction with encounters.

In view of this, thought should be given to how s60 and voluntary searches are used, given that these are typically less efficient and effective. Furthermore, forces should

perhaps consider whether searches that address minor crimes, such as possession of cannabis, should be given a low priority, given the consequences for community confidence.

Responding to disproportionality

It is likely that, in at least some cases, discriminatory officer practice plays at least some role in disproportionality, and it is important that this is addressed.

For example, one force, through the monitoring of search forms, was able to identify a particular shift that were searching large numbers of Asians where good grounds did not exist. It transpired that the shift supervisor was encouraging officers to focus searches on those looking 'out of place' in the patrol area. Because the patrol area was predominantly white, Asians were being routinely stopped by the shift. This allowed the force to take remedial action to deal with the problem.

It has been noted, however, that there are likely to be important structural reasons why ethnic minorities are stopped and searched more often than their white counterparts (MVA, 2000), and these may not be easily overcome. It is also important, therefore, for forces to consult with communities to reassure them that they are carrying out searches on a sound basis.

These issues are taken up in detail in other research in the PRC programme, and are reported on in Bland, et al. (2000b).

Good management of encounters

It is clear that the public are more satisfied with stops and searches when they receive a reasonable explanation and when they feel they have been treated politely and fairly. As already noted, good explanations may come on the back of good grounds for searches.

However, in the course of the observations for the research, it was clear that the police are involved in a wide range of encounters, and many of these place significant demands on them. These sometimes require significant insight and skill to handle without creating bad feeling, and there were some examples where this was evident among officers. Box 2 provides an example where a potentially difficult encounter was handled calmly by officers, despite difficulties.

Box 2: A well-handled encounter

An example from the observations:

We get a call to go to a supermarket, where there were apparently a couple of men causing trouble. We arrive and talk to the security man, as well as a couple of shop staff. Apparently, the situation has now calmed down a bit - there are two guys who have been throwing produce around in the aisles, and had been there for over an hour messing about. However, they are now checking their stuff through at the till, PCX and PCY do not rush over, but saunter slowly to where the two men are at the till. They recognise one of them as a well-known local heroin addict.

Eventually, they go up to the men. One of them, who is shaking, is clearly suffering from some sort of drug or alcohol withdrawal symptoms. This guy has 'love' and 'hate' tattooed on his knuckles, and is probably in his 20s. PCX asks him: "Are you here for your weekly shop?" He is very hostile, expressing strong resentment that the police had been called. The officers remain calm. They explain that they had been seen throwing produce around. The man remains hostile, and claims they have been doing nothing wrong. His friend, a man of about 30, is more conciliatory, but is also protesting at the fact that they haven't done anything wrong. The officers see them out of the store, PCY asking the man with the shakes where he is now living.

Eventually, they leave the shop, although the second man comes back to talk again to PCX, complaining about their treatment, and asking for his collar number. PCX remains civil, and gives him the number on a piece of paper from his notebook.

However, it was also evident that officers could also behave in a way which made a situation worse. Box 3 provides an example where a search encounter was handled well, but was negatively affected by the manner in which another officer intervened.

Box 3: A less well-handled encounter

An example from the observations:

A man is standing on his own looking back at us about 100 yards away. PCX and PCY and I all start to walk towards him. He doesn't move. The officers call out to the man to stay where he is. PCY extends his baton and holds it downwards close to his right leg. The man does not move. They ask him what has been going on. I cannot really hear him but he says he was in the pub with a friend.

"What do you need that for?", asks the man indicating PCY's baton. "I thought you was going to hit me with that". PCY says something about a knife but pushes the baton back down shortly afterwards. PCY explains to him that he is going to search him because someone has said he has a knife. "OK?" "You can search me I haven't got anything", says the man. PCX asks him to take off his jacket which he gives to PCY. The man extends his arms and PCX pulls up his T-shirt, feels around the waist band of his track-suit bottoms, then pats down his legs. Nothing is found.

During all this, the area car pulls up beside us and PCZ gets out. "I know you don't I mate?", he asks. "Yes", says the man "I know you". "What's your name then?", asks PCZ. The man does not answer. "Things alright then?", asks PCZ. "Alright", replies the man. "What's your name mate?", asks PCZ again. The man gives his name and PCZ uses the radio to carry out a name check.

"Is that it then?", the man calls to PCZ, "Nothing on me, I'm clear. No apology then?"

"Not from me, mate", says PCZ as he walks back round to the passenger's side, "maybe from him" he says, indicating to PCX.

A detailed analysis of the most appropriate ways for police officers to handle stops and searches has been carried out as part of the PRC programme of research. Full details of this are provided in Quinton, et al. (2000).

However, the fact that in some cases people come away from stop encounters with a positive experience (Stone and Pettigrew, 2000) suggests that the police have the power to retain, and perhaps in some cases improve, public confidence while carrying out stops and searches.

Summary

The first part of this chapter looked at evidence of the impact of stops and searches on the community. Key findings include:

- There is, in principle, support for the use of stops and searches among the public, provided they are used properly.
- One of the major sources of controversy around searches relates to their disproportionate use against minority ethnic communities. While there are structural reasons which help explain this, police stereotyping and racism may also underlie some disproportionality.
- While searches are focused on offenders and drug-users, a substantial proportion of stops and searches still involve those who do not report offending or drug-taking.
- The experience of being searched is associated with a reduced confidence in the police, even after taking into account other variables. Given the disproportionate use of searches against minority ethnic communities, this is likely to contribute directly to a reduced confidence in the police among these groups.
- In general, the public are more satisfied with a police stop when they feel they have been treated fairly and politely, given a reasonable explanation, and not searched.
- Some people find the police 'cocky' or sarcastic in their handling of stops and searches, and this is more often associated with younger officers.
- Stop encounters sometimes involve hostility from the person stopped. This can produce a bad reaction from police officers.
- In general, ethnic minorities are less satisfied with stop encounters than white people. This is, at least in part, because they are more often searched, less likely to feel they have been given an adequate explanation, less likely to be treated politely and fairly, and for vehicle stops because they are more likely to be asked to produce their documents at a police station.

The second part of the chapter looked at ways in which problems with the public could be minimised:

- In order to minimise negative impacts on the community, searches should be used efficiently by being based on strong grounds and making the best use of intelligence. Consideration should be given to how searches not requiring legal grounds, such as s60 and voluntary searches, are best used given that these are less effective at producing arrests. Forces may also wish to consider giving searches for small amounts of cannabis a low priority.
- Forces should respond to disproportionality by addressing bad officer practice, and by generating confidence among the community in forces' use of search powers. Detail on force attempts to achieve this is provided in Bland, et al. (2000).
- The public are more satisfied with counters when they receive a reasonable explanation and when they feel they have been treated politely and fairly, although it is accepted that police officers often face difficult encounters that require careful handling. There are examples where they handle these well, but there are also instances where they create unnecessary bad feeling. Further details on approaches which the police might take on addressing these issues are provided in Quinton, et al. (2000).

5. Conclusions and recommendations

The preceding chapters have reviewed a wide range of evidence and presented analyses which have not previously been carried out. In doing so, they have provided answers to some key questions in relation to stops and searches. A range of claims that might be made about stops and searches are presented in Table 22 along with a response to them, based on the findings of this research.

The broad picture painted by this research is that overall, searches seem to have a small impact on the detection and prevention of crime, overall, although they make a notable contribution to arrests by police forces. However, there is substantial variation in the extent to which forces rely on the tactic even between those with similar characteristics.

The research also shows that searches tend to have a negative impact on confidence in the police, both as a result of their direct impact on those searched, which tends to fall disproportionately on ethnic minorities, and because of a wider perception of police racism associated with disproportionality.

Nonetheless, we should not lose sight of the fact that searches can and do detect criminals, and in some cases are able to prevent crime. The fact that their impact, alone, does not appear large is probably true of most policing methods observed in isolation. Were it not for the controversy and bad-feeling that stops and searches create, no doubt the 'stop and search' tactic would be seen as one of the many tools that the police use to carry out their work. Certainly, there is evidence that the public are, in principle, supportive of stops and searches, provided they are used fairly and properly.

If searches are to be rehabilitated as an efficient tool that is accepted by the public, there are certain steps the police should take. In particular, they should focus on using searches in a targeted, intelligence-led way, aimed at catching serious offenders. In all stops of the public, the police should place a great emphasis on behaving in a polite, respectful way, providing people with a full and credible explanation for their actions. Finally, in their use of searches, the police should be open and transparent with the communities they serve about the reasons for searches and for their patterns of search activity.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Table 22: Claims about stops and searches and responses based on research

Claim	Response
Crime would go through the roof if it wasn't for searches.	There is little existing evidence that suggests that this is the case. In general, the direct disruptive effect of searches on crime appears small, and there is no clear evidence that searches are a strong deterrent to potential offenders. Though it is possible that the very existence of search powers may have some deterrent effect, this has not been demonstrated by research, as yet.
Searches are crucial for detecting offenders.	Searches probably make a small contribution to detecting offenders for crime in general. However, they can provide an important source of arrests, for some forces in particular.
Searches help catch serious offenders.	This may or may not be true. Currently, there is little evidence to assess this claim. However, in relation to drugs arrests from searches, which overall make up about a third of search arrests, this does not seem to be the case.
Only those who deserve it (i.e. criminals) get searched.	Although stops and searches are clearly targeted at offenders, a substantial proportion of stops, and to a lesser extent searches, are nonetheless carried out on people who are not involved in offending.
Searches are an irreplaceable form of intelligence.	Searches do provide useful intelligence. However, it is likely that this is well utilised because of the requirement to record them. It seems likely that intelligence from a range of other encounters, including stops, could also provide the basis of good intelligence if properly utilised.
Experiences of stops and searches alienate those at the receiving end.	Generally speaking, stops appear to be less alienating than searches, which clearly are. However, by treating people politely and respectfully, and providing good explanations, this alienation can be minimised.
Disproportionality is a product of police racism.	It may be that stereotyping and racism play a role in disproportionality. However, there are other structural factors which contribute to this.

Key recommendations

The main recommendations from this research for police managers and police authorities are presented below.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Police managers

- Managers should encourage an efficient and targeted use of searches based on strong grounds for suspicion and making the best use of up-to-date intelligence about local crime problems.
- The flow of intelligence to patrol officers should be maximised, for example by routinely providing intelligence information during briefings.
- Managers should ensure that sound mechanisms are in place for gathering and using intelligence from both searches and other police encounters with the public.
- The role of searches that do not require legal grounds, such as s60 and voluntary searches, needs to be considered carefully given their likely impact on community confidence and inefficiency at producing arrests.
- In assessing the productivity of searches, attention could be paid to maximising the quality of arrests they produce. Ideally, searches should focus on more serious crimes and more prolific offenders. In this context, the weight given to searches for more minor offences, such as the possession of small amounts of cannabis, needs to be considered carefully.
- Force managers should respond to the issue of disproportionality by focusing on officer practice, and by improving community confidence in their use of the tactic. Specific details of how this might be achieved are provided by Bland, et al. (2000).
- Force managers should aim to improve officers' skills in relation to the handling of stop encounters. More details on how this might be achieved are provided in Quinton, et al. (2000).

Police Authorities

- Local police authorities should look at ways of monitoring the local use of stops and searches in order to assess whether they being used in the most efficient and effective way, whether they are producing quality arrests and whether officer practice is acceptable.

Further research

Avenues for further research in this area are detailed below:

- Research on the types of offenders arrested through searches would make a contribution to our knowledge. This might help focus searches more effectively at more serious and prolific offenders.
- Monitoring of the contribution of searches to clear-ups would help further inform the role of searches in crime detection.
- Further research on the reasons for differences between forces in their use of searches should be considered. In particular, it would be useful to establish whether these differences relate to different policing 'styles'.
- Research could also look further into how intelligence could be best used to direct searches, to maximise their impact on crime detection and prevention.
- The effectiveness of searches at preventing, or at least displacing, crime in local areas is not well understood. A better understanding of this would help police target their searches.
- Further research looking at the effectiveness of searches might also focus on the issue of deterrence. This could involve interviews with offenders, to establish their own responses to the existence of search powers in relation to their offending. It might also involve carrying out an experiment, similar to that reported by Boydston (1975). This would involve suspending search activity in a particular place for a limited period of time. The effects of this suspension on crime rates could then be monitored.

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Appendix A: Statistical model of satisfaction with the police

The model developed to predict public satisfaction with the police was based on logistic regression. The outcome of this modelling process is presented in Table 16. Presented here is the full statistical details of the model.

Logistic regression identifies which factors are associated with a particular outcome variable when all other factors are held constant. However, it should be borne in mind that any significant statistical relationship does not necessarily imply a causal relationship between the two.

Model of satisfaction with the police						
Variable	B	Standard error	Wald stastic	Significance	R	Exp(B)
Searched (last year)	-0.3699	0.1865	3.9322	0.0474	-0.0225	0.6908
12-13 years			30.4829	0.0000	0.0768	
14-17 years	-0.5871	0.1446	16.4977	0.0000	-0.0617	0.5559
18-21 years	-0.7777	0.1551	25.1497	0.0000	-0.0779	0.4595
22-25 years	-0.7368	0.1586	21.5709	0.0000	-0.0717	0.4786
26-30 years	-0.5036	0.1332	14.3004	0.0002	-0.0568	0.6043
White			11.3258	0.0231	0.0295	
Black	-0.2388	0.281	0.7222	0.3954	0.0000	0.7876
Indian	-0.4511	0.2646	2.9065	0.0882	-0.0154	0.6369
Pakistani/Bangladeshi	-0.8672	0.3109	7.7817	0.0053	-0.0389	0.4201
Other	0.1493	0.2876	0.2695	0.6037	0.0000	0.1.161
Social class I/II			10.1445	0.0174	0.0330	
Social class IIINM	-0.0661	0.1519	0.1892	0.6636	0.0000	0.9361
Social class IIIM	-0.1942	0.0949	4.1893	0.0407	-0.0240	0.8235
Social class IV/V	-0.3676	0.1214	9.1756	0.0025	-0.0434	0.6924
Inner city			16.1396	0.0003	0.0564	
Urban	0.3685	0.0974	14.3028	0.0002	0.0568	1.4455
Rural	0.4364	0.139	9.8521	0.0017	0.0454	1.5471
Not offended			10.8002	0.0045	0.0422	
Used drugs only	0.0546	0.1172	0.2174	0.6410	0.0000	1.0562
Offended	-0.3316	0.1106	8.9948	0.0027	-0.0428	0.7178
Knows someone in trouble with police	-0.2093	0.0836	6.2615	0.0123	-0.0334	0.8112
Victim of crime	-0.2673	0.0919	8.4560	0.0036	-0.0412	0.7655
Constant	1.3776	0.1562	77.7396	0.0000		

Notes:

1. 3,021 cases were included in the model.
2. Those searched in the last year are those who, on the last occasion stopped either in a vehicle or on foot, were searched.

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