

Briefing Paper for upcoming parliamentary debate on ‘Effect of police stop and search powers on BAME communities’

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[Release](http://www.release.org.uk) is the UK’s centre of expertise on drugs and drugs law. We have been providing free and confidential specialist advice to the public, and campaigning for the reform of drug policy, since 1967.

Police forces across England and Wales are making the operational decision to prioritise low-level drug possession over other more violent crimes

- In 2016/17, 62 per cent of stop and searches were for drugs, compared to 11 per cent for offensive weapons, 9 per cent for going equipped and 1 per cent for firearms.¹
- In Merseyside, 82 per cent of stop and searches were for drugs in 2016/17 – more than any other police force area in England and Wales.
- Evidence from HMICFRS suggests that drug searches are overwhelmingly for possession of cannabis for personal use.²
- The Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police Service³, the Mayor of London⁴, and the previous Home Secretary⁵ have called for increases in the use of stop and search to address knife crime even though there is a significant body of evidence that shows this is likely to be ineffective⁶. These claims also ignore the way that stop-search is primarily used to target non-violent crime, including large numbers of low-level drug possession offences.

BAME groups are disproportionately searched for drugs and this is driving racial disparity

- The Crime Survey for England and Wales estimates that BAME people are much less likely to use drugs (including cannabis) compared to white people.⁷
- Yet, black people were stopped and searched for drugs at a rate 9 times higher than their white counterparts, compared to 8 times higher for all other reasons for a search.⁸
- Asian and mixed people were also stopped and searched for drugs at a rate 3 times higher than their white counterparts, compared to 2 times higher for all other reasons for a search.⁹

Drug searches on black people are likely based on weaker grounds

- HMICFRS conducted an assessment of stop-search records and found broadly similar find rates (i.e. the rate at which the object searched for is found after a search) across ethnic groups.
- However, when drug searches were examined, they found that searches of black people were consistently less likely to result in drugs being found compared to those involving white people and other ethnic groups.¹⁰

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¹ Home Office (2017) 'Police Powers and Procedures, England and Wales, year ending 31 March 2017, second edition', *National Statistics*, Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/police-powers-and-procedures-england-and-wales-year-ending-31-march-2017>

² Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (2017) *PEEL: Police legitimacy 2017 A national overview*, Available at: <https://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmicfrs/wp-content/uploads/peel-police-legitimacy-2017-1.pdf>; Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (2013) *Stop and Search Powers: Are the police using them effectively and fairly?*, Available at: <https://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmicfrs/media/stop-and-search-powers-20130709.pdf>

³ Weaver, M. (2017) 'Met police chief says more stop and search may help reduce knife crime,' *The Guardian*, 8th August 2017, Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/law/2017/aug/08/met-police-chief-stop-and-search-increase-reduce-knife-crime-cressida-dick>

⁴ Dearden, L. (2018) 'Sadiq Khan to 'significantly increase' stop and search in London', *The Independent*, 10th January 2018, Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/sadiq-khan-stop-search-london-crime-plan-violence-police-metropolitan-stabbings-acid-murder-moped-a8152371.html>

⁵ Weaver, M. and Mason, R. (2017) 'Amber Rudd backs Met police chief on use of stop and search,' *The Guardian*, 9th August 2017, Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/law/2017/aug/09/amber-rudd-backs-met-police-chief-cressida-dick-stop-and-search>

⁶ McCandless, R., Feist, A., Allan, J. and Morgan, N. (2016) *Do initiatives involving substantial increases in stop and search reduce crime? Assessing the impact of Operation BLUNT 2*, Home Office, Available at: http://whatworks.college.police.uk/Research/Documents/SS_and_crime_report.pdf; Ward, I. Nicholas, S. and Willoughby, M. (2011) *An assessment of the Tackling Knives and Serious Youth Violence Action Programme (TKAP) – Phase II*, Research Report 53, Home Office, Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/an-assessment-of-the-tackling-knives-and-serious-youth-violence-action-programme-tkap-phase-ii>; StopWatch (2015) 'Less stop and search does not mean more knife crime', *StopWatch and the Open Society Justice Initiative submission to the UN Human Rights Council*, Available at:

<http://www.stop-watch.org/news-comment/story/more-stop-and-search-does-not-equal-less-knife-crime>

⁷ Home Office (2017) 'Drug Misuse: findings from the 2016 to 2017 CSEW', *National Statistics*, Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/drug-misuse-findings-from-the-2016-to-2017-csew>

⁸ Home Office (2017) 'Police Powers and Procedures, England and Wales, year ending 31 March 2017, second edition', *National Statistics*, Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/police-powers-and-procedures-england-and-wales-year-ending-31-march-2017>; Office for National Statistics (2012) 'Ethnicity and National Identity in England and Wales: 2011', *2011 Census*, Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/ethnicity/articles/ethnicityandnationalidentityinenglandandwales/2012-12-11>

⁹ Home Office (2017) 'Police Powers and Procedures, England and Wales, year ending 31 March 2017, second edition', *National Statistics*, Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/police-powers-and-procedures-england-and-wales-year-ending-31-march-2017>; Office for National Statistics (2012) 'Ethnicity and National Identity in England and Wales: 2011', *2011 Census*, Available at:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/ethnicity/articles/ethnicityandnationalidentityinenglandandwales/2012-12-11>

¹⁰ Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (2017) *PEEL: Police legitimacy 2017 A national overview*, Available at: <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/wp-content/uploads/peel-police-legitimacy-2017-1.pdf>, p. 30.