

Police-led interventions

Police-led interventions for drug crimes.

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Supplier arrest and seizure

There's an assumption that focusing on disrupting the supply of drugs through supplier arrest and seizure will deter drug crime and use. There's a further assumption that this will as a result:

- increase drug prices
- impact purity and/or potency
- reduce drug harms more generally

A systematic review suggests there's limited high-quality evidence into the impact of supplier arrest and seizures on drug-related outcomes. Therefore, an overall estimation of impact is not possible (Eggins and others, 2020).

From the individual studies identified, there are mixed findings on the effectiveness of these approaches.

Impact on drug crime

Three studies examined the impact of supplier seizure on drug crime. They did not provide unequivocal evidence of an effect. There were no studies identified that examined the impact of supplier arrest on drug crime.

Impact on drug use

One study examined the impact of supplier arrest or seizure on drug use. This report found no evidence of an effect.

Impact on drug price

Three studies examined the impact of supplier arrest or seizure on drug price with mixed results. A separate study (not included in this review) found little evidence that raising the risk of arrest, incarceration or seizure at different levels of the distribution system raised drug prices (Pollack and Reuter, 2014).

Impact on drug purity and potency

One study examined the impact of supplier arrest or seizure on drug purity and potency. It found that increased seizures predicted some of the variance in street-level purity of heroin in the twelve months following the seizures.

Impact on drug harms

Six studies examined the impact of supplier arrest or seizure on drug harms, with mixed results.

Two of the studies suggest that increased seizures are associated with:

- decreased mortality
- decreased ambulance call-outs
- increased seeking of help for substance use

The other four studies suggest that supplier arrests or seizures tend to increase drug-related harms, including:

- law enforcement spend
- drug-related deaths
- presentation to emergency departments for drug-related health issues
- drug-related violence

Other impact on crime and violence

Alongside the limited evidence on effectiveness, research suggests that enforcement activities – such as seizures and arrests – can increase crime (Hughes and others, 2018; King and Mauer, 2006; Werb and others, 2011).

Removing suppliers can have the unintended consequence of increasing violence. For example, by creating a gap in the market for dealers to compete over, or increasing distrust in the market.

Example of relevant practice

Operation Orochi (Metropolitan Police Service)

Operational partnerships have been created with home-county forces (HCFs) to gather intelligence from exploited children and target 'county line-line holders'.

The objective is to:

- charge and remand the line-holders for drug supply offences
- seize weapons, cash and confiscate other assets

This intelligence is used to identify further active lines that the organised crime network may be using to exploit further children.

Operation Orochi conducts overt operations to disrupt county lines activity. Working in partnership with other forces and partners, they focus on transport routes and wanted offenders.

Tags

Evidence-based policing Crime reduction