

Interactions between people who use drugs and the police: Experiences and impacts

This study aims to understand how often people who use drugs encounter the police and the impacts of these encounters.

Key details

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| Principal researcher(s) | Dr Andrew Papworth and Dr Sam Hinrichs research.map@college.police.uk |
| Police region | Yorkshire |
| Level of research | Professional/work based |
| Project start date | May 2025 |
| Date due for completion | April 2028 |

Research context

There are great harms to individuals and costs to society associated with illegal drugs. Last year saw the highest number of drug-related deaths in the UK since records began and estimates suggest that drug misuse costs the UK almost £20 billion a year. Heroin and crack cocaine are among the most harmful illegal drugs. Those using these substances often interact with the police. Previous research suggests that these interactions, between people who use drugs (PWUD) and the police, can profoundly shape the wellbeing of PWUD. However, we know very little about the frequency and nature of these interactions.

It is particularly important to understand this now due to the large number of drug-related deaths in the UK and the increased funding the Government is spending on new policing and public health initiatives to address this. Having a fuller understanding of interactions between PWUD and the

police could help ensure the best chance of success to improve the lives of PWUD, and help to emphasise best police practice.

Research methodology

The interpret study has four stages:

Stage one

Stage one will be a review of the published research on this subject to see what has already been written about it.

Stage two

Stage two will involve collecting information from people living and working within the Cleveland constabulary, including:

- interviews and focus groups with at least 60 PWUD
- interviews with other professionals working with PWUD, including social workers, public health practitioners and housing professionals
- interviews with 20 police officers and PCSOs who interact with PWUD
- 20 hours of shadowing police officers who work with PWUD

Stage three

Stage three will involve the analysis of routine police data on recorded interactions between the police and PWUD.

Stage four

Stage four will take place after all this information has been collected and analysed. It involves sharing the findings with the police, relevant professionals and people with lived experience of drug use, so that they can share understandings and discuss possible ways forward.

Additional resources

[Project website](#)