

Nicked: drug users' views of drug enforcement

Posted online on February 19, 2013. (doi:10.3109/14659891.2012.709914)

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Most countries drug strategies comprise a combination of drug treatment, drug enforcement, and drug prevention. While there has been a tendency in public policy documents over the last few years to emphasise the importance of basing policy on evidence of need and impact, in fact, the evidential basis across these three domains is highly skewed with most evidence being focused on drug treatment, some evidence focused on drug prevention, and relatively little evidence focused specifically on the impact of drug law enforcement. In this article, we report on drug users' views of major drug enforcement operations in their local area. The three drug enforcement operations we were looking at were carried out by the police in three different geographical areas. In each area, we interviewed a snowball sample of local heroin users to establish their views and experience of both the specific operations that had occurred in the recent past and their overall assessment of the impact of police activity in their local area. Most of those interviewed who had been involved in a drug raid described the experience as shocking, upsetting, and profoundly unsettling. However, according to the drug users interviewed, police activity had little sustained impact on the price, purity, and/or availability of illegal drugs locally. The article concludes by considering the policy implications of this research.

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