



Research paper

The deterrent effects of Australian street-level drug law enforcement on illicit drug offending at outdoor music festivals

Caitlin Elizabeth Hughes ^a  , Vivienne Moxham-Hall ^a, Alison Ritter ^a, Don Weatherburn ^b, Robert MacCoun ^c

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Abstract

Background

Australian and international street-level drug law enforcement deploy many strategies in efforts to prevent or deter illicit drug offending. Limited evidence of deterrence exists. This study assessed the likely impacts of four Australian policing strategies on the incidence and nature of drug use and supply at a con

Methods

A purpose-built national on hypothetical experimental vi Visibility Policing, Riot Poli

Dogs) and a counter-factual (no police presence). The survey was administered in late 2015 to 2115 people who regularly attend festivals. Participants were block-randomised to receive two vignettes and asked under each whether they would use, possess, purchase, give or sell illicit drugs.

Results

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Compared to 'no police presence', any police presence led to a 4.6% point reduction in engagement in overall illicit drug offending: reducing in particular willingness to possess or carry drugs into a festival. However, it had minimal or counterproductive impacts on purchasing and supply. For example, given police presence, purchasing of drugs increased significantly within festival grounds. Offending impacts varied between the four policing strategies: Drug Detection Dogs most reduced drug possession but High Visibility Policing most reduced overall drug offending including supply. Multivariate logistic regression showed police presence was not the most significant predictor of offending decisions at festivals.

Conclusion

The findings suggest that street-level policing may deter some forms of drug offending at music festivals, but that most impacts will be small. Moreover, it may encourage some perverse impacts such as drug consumers opting to buy drugs within festival grounds rather than carry in their own. We use our findings to highlight trade-offs between the goals of public health promotion and crime control in street-level enforcement.

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Keywords

Drug law enforcement; Deterrence; Use; Supply

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