



News Release

Issued: 21 June 2015

Scots' stop and search rates fall but stay top in UK, study shows

Police stop and search figures are dropping in Scotland but the practice remains far more common than it is south of the border, research shows.

Numbers have fallen by 38 per cent since the formation of Police Scotland in April 2013, but the latest figures show that people in Scotland are still four times more likely to be stopped and searched than those in England and Wales.

The study shows that out of the ten UK police divisions most likely to use stop and search, seven were in Scotland. Divisions located in the area formerly controlled by Strathclyde Police occupied the top five places.

Those five divisions in Strathclyde accounted for 86 per cent of the national drop between 2013/14 and 2014/15, the report shows. For this reason, the national picture may not accurately reflect police practice in other parts of Scotland, the report shows.

The study also found that the Tayside area's search rate per head of population was higher than in London, and that young people continued to be disproportionately targeted in some areas.

In 2014/15, the number of recorded searches on 16-year-olds in Glasgow was greater than the number of 16-year-olds in the city as a whole.

The report by the University of Edinburgh and Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research provides a broad overview of Police Scotland's stop and search trends in the two years since its formation, and takes into account data quality concerns.

In the first year of Police Scotland's existence, the number of searches fell from just under 683,000 in the previous year to just over 640,000. In the second year, the figure dropped to just under 427,000 – a decrease of almost 40 per cent over two years.

Despite the overall fall in searches during the first year, recorded search rates increased in 10 divisions. In the second year, search rates fell in all divisions, albeit inconsistently.

During Police Scotland's first two years, the number of recorded non-statutory searches – where individuals can be stopped without reasonable suspicion – fell by around 43 per cent.

The report shows that 12 to 17-year-olds were more likely to be searched on a non-statutory basis than older age groups.

In 2014/15, some 75 per cent of recorded searches on 14 year olds were non-statutory. The report says this calls into question current policy, which prohibits non-statutory searches on under-12s. It adds that the legality of non-statutory stop and search remains unclear.

The fall in the number of recorded searches does not appear to have led to increased levels of recorded crime, the findings show.

Researchers suggest that Scotland's high stop and search figures may be linked to a combination of performance management, weak regulation and a lack of accountability and scrutiny prior to 2013.

The report also suggests that the recent fall in stop and search is a likely result of media and political scrutiny following the Police Scotland merger.

This engagement is welcome and overdue, but has been destabilising for the new single police service at a time of huge structural change, the study concludes.

Kath Murray, of the University of Edinburgh's School of Law, said: "The overall trends in the report are encouraging, and it is clear that Police Scotland is putting a huge amount of work into this area."

"The findings also show the scale of the challenge in relation to stop and search, and highlight ongoing regional inconsistencies in how these powers are used."

"One of the key tasks for Police Scotland, the Scottish Police Authority and the Scottish Government is to put in place robust governance processes, and to ensure that stop and search, as well as other police powers, are deployed fairly and effectively."

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