Article

The Impact of COVID-19 on Police Intelligence Reports and Stop and Search within the United Kingdom

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Abstract: The full impact of COVID-19 on policing, crime and disorder is slowly being fully unraveled. However, there remains a number of areas of policing that are yet to be examined in detail. Two of these areas include the impact on the intrinsically linked, volume of police recorded intelligence reports, and the use of stop and search. In this study we examine them symbiotically and frame them in the context of the intelligence led policing model, in particular in an effort to understand how national lockdowns in the United Kingdom affected both proactive policing approaches and the underpinning intelligence cycle. To achieve this, we use data from freedom of information requests regarding the annual levels of recorded police intelligence over a 10-year period for 20 police services. To supplement this, we examine overall national monthly volumes of stop and search activity over a 5-year period. Finally, we then use a case study approach of 3 police services to further explore changes in the conduct of stop and search such as the officer defined ethnicity, grounds for search and disposal outcomes. The findings indicate that both recorded intelligence reports and stop and search increased dramatically during periods of lockdown, despite widespread decreases in crime and social mobility. Changes in proportional impact are identified for White and Black citizens, searches for controlled drugs and the no further action disposal, but these are not consistent across police services. Potential causes and implications are then discussed and again, framed within the context of the impact on the intelligence led policing model and wider policing environment.

Keywords: Policing; Crime; Stop and Search; Intelligence Led Policing; COVID-19; Coronavirus

1. Introduction

The use of tactical interventions by the police to help prevent, reduce and detect crime has a long standing history. When considered in their broadest context these tactics are described as *'reactive'* and *'proactive'* forms of policing. Although both forms generally target offenders responsible for committing criminal offences or focus on locations where crime is known to concentrate, they do possess distinctions. For instance, reactive policing often focuses on the detection of crime. As a result, it occurs post event and places an emphasis on retrospective investigation and analysis of information and intelligence to identify suspects responsible for committing crime. Investigators form hypotheses, establish lines of enquiry, and utilize various tactics including the interviewing of witnesses, reviewing closed circuit television video footage, examining crime scenes, and increasingly taking advantage of opportunities presented by modern technology such as the pursuit of digital forensics, and use of facial recognition and automated number plate reading. Proactive policing on the other hand places a greater emphasis on the reduction or prevention of crime. In that vein, the policing tactics used include covert methods such as *'plain clothes'* patrols, and even foot or vehicle surveillance. However, the majority of proactive policing is made up of simple high visibility uniformed interventions in crime and disorder hotspots. Within such areas one tactic that is frequently used by the police conducting proactive policing is the controversial tactic of stop and search. This tactic is used as a method of detecting criminal offences such as possession of offensive weapons, controlled drugs, items that can assist in the commission of a crime, and also possession of

stolen property. The tactic can also be used without grounds for a search in areas where a senior officer believes that incidents involving serious violence may take place. As a result, the tactic accounts for a large portion of police intelligence reports submitted by officers. Admittedly, stop and search is just a single inlet for police intelligence but because '*reasonable grounds*' a person is, or has committed some form of offence are often required to conduct a search, it means its conduct has a high likelihood of providing worthy intelligence. As a result, police stop and search frequently leads to officers submitting intelligence regarding the identity, time, location, grounds for the search and nature of movements of individuals subjected to the tactic, and this information can be used to '*feed the intelligence cycle*'.

Throughout the late 1990's and early 2000's, in an effort to leverage such intelligence and maximize the effectiveness of proactive policing tactics such as stop and search, modern police organisations integrated the intelligence led policing (ILP) model. One of the fundamental components of this model relates to the interpretation of the criminal environment, which is achieved through the collection and analysis of criminal intelligence. The intelligence obtained is then subsequently used to inform future decision making regarding the proactive (and to a lesser degree, reactive) deployment of policing resources. The process of this intelligence cycle leads to further focused deployment of resources into areas of concentrated crime and disorder, naturally leading to future use of the stop and search tactic in those zones, and as a result, the collection of more intelligence. And so the cycle continues. It is because the '*hands on*' use of stop and search, and submission of criminal intelligence converge in such a symbiotic relationship, that both aspects are being considered together, in a single study.

Research into how and where the police deploy resources has shown that the '*capable guardianship*' provided by proactive tactics are successful at pre-emptively deterring people from committing crime. There is also extensive literature advocating the benefits of intelligence led policing, and in particular its ability to increase efficiency and effectiveness within policing. The effectiveness of the deterrence provided by stop and search is less conclusive, and is notoriously difficult to assess. As such, it is not the intention of this study to further explore these areas. Instead, we consider them in a pandemic context. As alluded to, what is central in this context is the interaction between the police and members of the public. Because of this fact it is likely that the COVID-19 Coronavirus pandemic will have had an identifiable impact. There is a growing breadth of research literature that has explored the impact of COVID-19 on policing in the United Kingdom (UK) and this is starting to show that the restricted levels of social mobility caused by national lockdowns have had a significant effect. Intuitively, one would naturally hypothesize that in the context of this study, both the submission of intelligence reports and conduct of stop and search are likely to have reduced. However, to date, there is no research that has explored how COVID-19 has impacted either the volume of criminal intelligence reports or the use of the stop and search tactic.

To fill these research gaps this study uses two sources of data. First, freedom of information requests are used to obtain data regarding the volume of submitted intelligence reports within 20 police services within the UK. Second, published police data on stop and search is analysed to understand the extent of the impact, if any, of COVID-19 on the use of the proactive tactic. We pay particular attention to the volume of, and changes to the circumstances of the searches conducted and in particular the ethnicity of those searched by the police. The combined results are then discussed in respect of their correlation with dates of 3 UK national lockdowns. Discussion is then considered in the context of how and why any identified changes may have occurred. This research is not only important because of its potential to illustrate further the impact of COVID-19 on policing, but also because of the controversial nature of stop and search. There is extensive literature and popular media reporting that highlights the negative impact on the legitimacy of the police through the use of the tactic. Specifically, it is suggested that the tactic is disproportionately used against Black and minority ethnic communities, significantly undermining

their confidence in the police. As such, the social value of the study is important as it will aid in considering if, how and why, wider society may have been affected by the impacts of COVID-19 on the use of the stop and search tactic, and changes in the volumes of police intelligence reports.

2. Literature Review

Intelligence led policing (ILP) emerged onto the landscape of modern policing as a result of a 1993 audit commission report in the UK (Audit Commission 1993). From the very start it was clear that the purpose of the model was to enable police services to tackle crime more effectively through improvements in the deployment of police resources, specifically by increasing their focus on the sources of crime, whether that be a person or place. It has been described as a business model and managerial philosophy (Ratcliffe, 2008). Ratcliffe's definition of ILP describes how "*data analysis and crime intelligence are pivotal to an objective, decision-making framework that facilitates crime and problem reduction, disruption and prevention through both strategic management and effective enforcement strategies that target prolific and serious offenders*" (2008, p3). Since its emergence a model of ILP has been refined and it is now accepted that central to its success is the emphasis on police intelligence. Although the term '*intelligence*' has a number of meanings, what is important to recognize is that within policing, frontline officers consider reports and information that is self-generated, and which they view as '*worthy of interest*', to be classed as intelligence (Warner, 2002), and this is the classification used in this study.

Ratcliffe has outlined how effective ILP follows a structured process. First, existing intelligence is analysed to interpret what is occurring within the criminal environment, such as identifying a serial offender, or a spatial or temporal hotspot (Ratcliffe, 2003). Next, an intelligence '*product*' produced from this analysis is used to provide police officers with information which they can then use to support their decision making regarding people or places that should be targeted to prevent or reduce crime (Ratcliffe, 2003). Finally, impact is then achieved by pursuing action using the tactical interventions available to them (Ratcliffe, 2003). Together, these elements create what is often referred to as the '*intelligence cycle*' (Ratcliffe, 2003 and 2008) which needs to retain its cyclical nature to ensure its effectiveness. Research examining ILP has done so from a variety of perspectives. Its use as a managerial model to improve effectiveness has been examined in detail and as a result, it is generally accepted as being a successful development (Carter, et al, 2014; Darroch and Mazerolle, 2013; Maguire and John, 2006; Ratcliffe and Guidetti, 2008; Sheptycki, 2004).

Stop and search is also an area that has been widely studied but relevant to this article is that which has considered it in the context of its relationship to intelligence reporting. Previous research on this area has supported the position that police officers see stop and search, and the use and production of intelligence as being integrally linked (Chainey and MacDonald, 2012). It has been argued this is not just a view shared amongst frontline officers, but also senior police leaders, with reporting suggesting that through an intelligence led approach, the police consider stop and search as one of the main tactics used to help prevent and reduce knife crime (Dodd, 2015). This also appears to be a belief held by the general public with governmental studies previously highlighting that citizens felt that stop and search was an effective tool that the police can use to prevent and reduce crime, and importantly, gather intelligence (You.Gov, 2013). Research has indicated that this view is intuitively reached because the tactic places an extremely high focus on crime control (Murray, 2015). In addition, the intervention fits easily into the analysis, decision, impact approach advocated through ILP (Quinton and Bland, 1999). Studies have shown that this appears to be especially true when the police are responding to short term surges in crime in a particular area, such as the sudden emergence of a burglary hotspot or a spate of knife crime incidents for example (Ratcliffe, 2016).

Chainey and MacDonald (2012) have previously identified that officers use briefing products created by analysts following the ILP model to identify such hotspots, and that

they then use this information to directly influence where and when they patrol. Furthermore, it was identified that this then directly influences their use of stop and search in the outlined areas (Chainey and MacDonald, 2012), supporting the position that they work symbiotically to drive the cyclical nature of the intelligence cycle. This is also a behavior that is openly encouraged and directed by police leaders (Chainey and MacDonald, 2012). Although this has been argued is a very limited use of such intelligence products, it stubbornly retains its credibility as one of the primary tactical responses within hotspot policing (Murray, 2015). The justification for using the stop and search tactic occurs as police officers use the intelligence information to proactively drive their targeting behavior in specific areas, or against specific individuals (Chainey and MacDonald, 2012). It is argued that the existence of intelligence is often enough to tip an interaction between the police and a member of the public *'over the threshold'* for a legal search (Ashby and Tompson, 2017). In fact, the view of the police officers conducting stop and search is that they have to *'work harder'* to attain reasonable grounds that would make a search lawful if it occurs outside a known crime hotspot or without intelligence to support their decision making (Chainey and MacDonald, 2012). Despite its widespread use as a tactical intervention the criminogenic effectiveness of stop and search is not universally accepted (Chainey and MacDonald, 2012) and it has been argued that its impact on crime rates may be minimal (Miller et al. 2000). Not only is the impact debatable, there is a range of studies, both historic and present, that have suggested that it may even have a negative impact due to its disproportionate use against people from Black or minority ethnic backgrounds (Bowling and Phillips, 2007; Parmar, 2011 and Vomfell and Stewart, 2021). Understanding if such disproportionate impact has persisted, or changed during the pandemic is an important question. It will serve to further explore what may be driving the feelings of *'over policing'* which it is argued has been felt by members of the Black and minority ethnic communities in the UK (Harris et al, 2021) during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Understandably, at the outset of the pandemic researchers focused attention on simply aiming to understand the impact of the global pandemic on crime and disorder. As a result, there is no existing literature that has examined the impact on intelligence reporting during the pandemic, and also only a single non peer reviewed study that examines the use of stop and search during the COVID-19 pandemic (Harris et al, 2020). Instead, the majority of literature produced has examined how COVID-19 has impacted policing in the UK and has focused on recorded crime statistics for offences that include many forms of property crime, such as theft from the person, (Dixon, Sheard and Farrell, 2020), shoplifting Dixon, Sheard and Farrell, 2020 and Halford et al, 2020), burglary and vehicle thefts (Dixon, Sheard and Farrell, 2020; Halford et al, 2020; Langton, et al, 2020; Neanidis and Rana, 2021 and Nivette et al, 2021). Some of these studies also examined violent crimes such as assault and homicide (Halford et al, 2020 and Nivette et al, 2021), and sexual violence (Langton, et al, 2020 and Neanidis and Rana, 2021). Other studies examined online cyber related offences (Buil-Gil, et al, 2020) and disorder related behavior such as public order offences (Langton, et al, 2020). Importantly, some of this research did examine behavior that is linked to stop and search such as drug possession and possession of offensive weapons (Dixon, Sheard and Farrell, 2020; Langton, et al, 2020 and Neanidis and Rana, 2021). With the exception of cybercrime and offences related to drugs, all of these studies identified that the occurrences of such crimes all reduced significantly. In contrast, the rise of drug related offences such as possession of a controlled drug, hint at the possibility of a change in offending, policing behavior, or both. Could it be that more people turned to drugs during the pandemic, or was more drug possession simply being detected because more searches were undertaken? Media reporting (Grierson, 2020) supported by non-peer reviewed exploratory research (Harris et al, 2020) has suggested that it was the latter, especially for Black citizens. However, what is completely absent from the research in respect of how COVID-19 has affected policing in the UK is any form of empirical analysis to ascertain if this is in

fact the case. Furthermore, if there was a change in policing behavior that related to stop and search, was the COVID-19 pandemic a causal factor? In addition to the absence of any examination whatsoever on the impact on police submitted intelligence reports, it is these gaps in research that this study is seeking to fill.

3. Data and Methodology

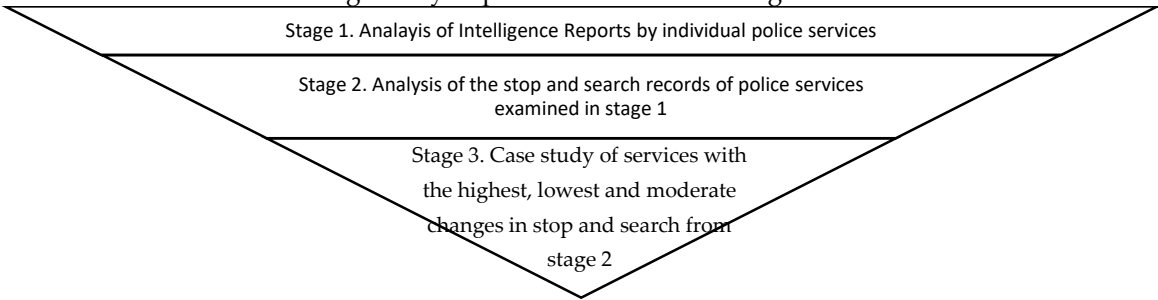To enable the study, we take advantage of two sources of police data and follow a 3 stage analysis process as outlined in Figure 1.

Stage 1. Analayis of Intelligence Reports by individual police services

Stage 2. Analysis of the stop and search records of police services examined in stage 1

Stage 3. Case study of services with the highest, lowest and moderate changes in stop and search from stage 2

Figure 1. Outline of the staged process of analysis.

In respect of the data, first, freedom of information requests were used to obtain data regarding the volume of intelligence reports submitted by police services. This avenue had to be used as unlike other forms of police data, this information is not routinely publicized by UK police services. As such, other than by contacting each force individually to request this information there is no known method for this data to be obtained. To retrieve this data every police service in the UK was contacted via email and requested to provide the overall number of intelligence reports submitted and retained annually. We defined a retained intelligence report as "*any information submitted to their police intelligence system which was retained by the force after the initial review and processing stage which occurs immediately after its submission onto their force intelligence system by a police officer or member of police staff*". We used such a wide definition of intelligence as it has been suggested that frontline officers consider reports and information that are self-generated, and which they view as '*worthy of interest*', to be classed as intelligence (Warner, 2002). This wide practical definition enables capture of all '*worthy*' information submitted, and which subsequently remains on the police intelligence system for use at the time, or in the future. The period of data requested covered the years 2000-2021. Data requests were sent to 46 police services in England, Scotland and Wales, including the Ministry of Defence (MoD). The response rate to this request was 67% (n=31). However, only 11 services returned all the requested data with a large volume only returning partial responses. As such, the number of police services examined was reduced to 20 and the period for analysis was reduced from the years 2000-2021, to 2011-2020. This ensured 10 full years of uninterrupted annual data from 20 police services was available for analysis.

The second source of data was extracted from that which is publicly available online at data.police.uk. This website includes data from police services in the UK for all recorded crime, calls for service and essential for this study, stop and search. Data for each of the 20 police services identified in stage 1 was then extracted for the 5-year period covering January 2017 – December 2021. To further explore the makeup of stop and searches and specifically examine any changes in the ethnicity of people subject to the tactic we then case study the stop and search data in additional depth for 3 police services. These services are Cleveland Police, the Metropolitan Police and the City of London Police. These services were selected as the results of analysis of intelligence reports indicated they had experienced the highest (Cleveland), lowest (City of London) and average (Metropolitan) proportionate increases, as can be seen in Table 2 (within the results section).

The aforementioned data was then examined in the context of the national COVID-19 lockdown periods within the UK. Originally, the study intended to conduct this analysis across England, Scotland and Wales. However, as Police Scotland were unable to provide sufficient data regarding the intelligence reports we exclude this region from the analysis and instead focus on English and Welsh police services only. To achieve this, 3 separate lockdown periods are considered in both England and Wales. Lockdown 1 which ran between march 26th 2020 until its ease down began on May 10th 2020 in England and June 1st in Wales. Lockdown 2 is also included and this ran from October 23rd 2020 in Wales, and November 5th 2020 in England, before restrictions began easing again on November 9th 2020 in Wales and December 2nd 2020 in England. Finally, lockdown 3 is included which began on the 26th December 2020 in Wales and January 6th 2021 in England. The gradual release of the final national lockdowns commended on March 8th 2021 in England and March 13th 2021 in Wales.

We use a manual approach to examine the data in this study. All retrieved data was collated using Microsoft excel. In respect of the stop and search data this is provided in a monthly format which outlines the data related to each individual record for each month. To ascertain the overall volume, we recorded only the total number of stop and searches conducted for each police service, for each month. For the case study analysis, we delved deeper into the monthly stop and search data by exploring 3 pre-defined categories provided within the data which are outlined in Table 1. This included *'officer defined ethnicity'*, of which we recorded the monthly number of searches of Asian, Black and White citizens. We also explored the *'object of search'* category, specifically the 'controlled drugs' option as this is overwhelmingly the most frequent reason for a search and previous research has identified possession of controlled drugs as increasing during the coronavirus pandemic lockdowns (Dixon, Sheard and Farrell, 2020 and Langton, et al, 2020) Finally, we explore the number of no further action and positive outcomes.

Table 1. Stop and search data categories provided by data.police.uk. *which specific act is not specified; **Other is not specified further.

Stop and Search Category	Sub Categories	Sub Categories Examined
Officer-defined Ethnicity	Asian, Black, White, Other, Blank	Asian, Black, White
Object of Search	Anything to threaten or harm someone; Article for use in theft; Articles for use in criminal damage; Controlled drugs; Evidence of offences under the act*; Firearms; Offences weapons; Stolen goods	Controlled Drugs
Outcome	No further action; Arrest, Caution; Community resolution; Cannabis warning; Summons; Other**	No further action All other sub categories are grouped under 'Positive Outcome'

To analyse the findings we take a simple descriptive approach by examining the proportional changes identified and these are represented using suitable tables and charts. This methodology is utilized because amongst the primary target audiences for this article are practitioners, senior police leaders and policy makers. It has been suggested that the use of descriptive approaches are more effective at improving understanding (Conner and Johnson, 2017), and therefore have a greater potential for impact. Albeit, a descriptive approach lacks the strength of more complex methodologies such as ARIMA modelling for example.

4. Results

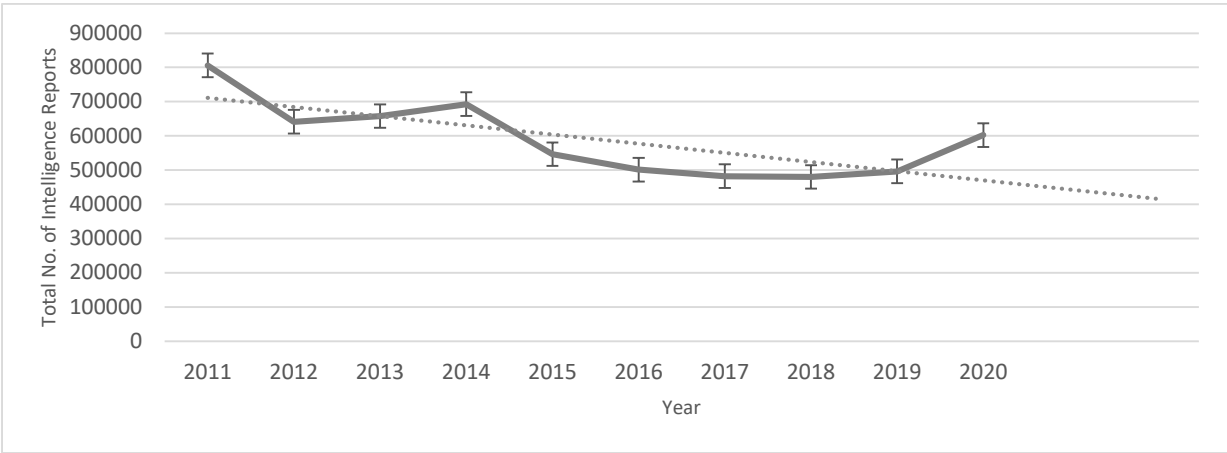### 4.1. Intelligence Reporting

Table A1. located within the appendices outlines the volume count of retained intelligence reports submitted by each police service over the examined 10-year period. To

better contextualize the volume count Table 2. displays the percentile changes over a 9, 5 and 1-year period of change. This table illustrates that the overwhelming majority of police services (n-17, 85%) experienced an increase in intelligence submissions during the first year of the pandemic. This is in stark contrast to a declining trend of intelligence reporting that was present before 2020.

Table 2. Intelligence Report Submissions by Police Service. 9-year change = % change between 2011-2019; .5-year change = % change between 2015-2019; 2020 change = % change between 2019-2020.

Police Service	9 Year Change	5 Year Change	2020 Change
Cleveland Police	-53.01%	-26.34%	**26.30%**
Hampshire Police	-24.12%	9.29%	**21.43%**
Northumbria Police	-39.02%	-10.13%	**21.15%**
Humberside Police	-49.27%	-30.60%	**20.56%**
Thames Valley Police	-36.88%	-7.94%	**16.57%**
Wilsthsire Police	-15.57%	4.76%	**14.07%**
Bedfordshire Police	-31.37%	-2.56%	**13.87%**
South Wales Police	11.21%	7.20%	**13.20%**
Sussex Police	5.32%	-8.85%	**13.06%**
Dyfed-Powys Police	91.21%	8.66%	**11.16%**
Cumbria Constabulary	-45.07%	-16.68%	**11.09%**
Metropolitan Police	-36.37%	-23.95%	**10.98%**
Ministry of Defense	-48.99%	2.28%	**9.91%**
West Midlands Police	-21.71%	-8.75%	**9.42%**
Cheshire Constabulary	-33.19%	-8.30%	**4.42%**
Lancashire Constabulary	-59.23%	-24.17%	**3.96%**
Devon and Cornwall	-57.33%	-18.66%	**0.72%**
Cambridgeshire Constabulary	-26.25%	-24.91%	**0.00%**
British Transport Police	-22.21%	-38.65%	**-9.60%**
City of London Police	199.12%	-2.01%	**-13.13%**
Total Reports	**-38.43%**	**-9.17%**	**+21.41%**

Figure 2. visualizes this shift best and illustrates that intelligence reporting was at its 10-year peak in 2011 with over 800,000 reports being submitted by the 20 examined police services. After that time the volume significantly reduced over the next 5 years before seemingly stabilizing at an annual count of approximately 500,000 intelligence reports between 2015-2019, then rising sharply in 2020 by over 100,000 reports. Unfortunately, the returns provided by police services was on an annual basis and as such we are unable to ascertain the exact timing of the increases in 2020.

Figure 2. Total Annual No. of Recorded Intelligence Reports from all 20 Police Services Examined.

However, despite this it is natural to deduce that this rapid increase is linked to a change in the criminal environment. The natural presumption would be to conclude that this change was due to a rise in crime or criminal behaviour. However, we know from the previous research outlined in the literature section that this change was in fact a drastic reduction in crimes reported to the police for a plethora of criminal offences, with the primary exceptions being cyber dependent crimes and drug related offences such as the possession of controlled drugs. We also know that this reduction was almost certainly due to the coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic, specifically the reduction in social mobility caused by the national lockdowns. Against this backdrop, any increase in intelligence reporting is highly unusual.

4.2. Stop and Search

As we have argued in the previous sections, intelligence reporting and stop and search are intrinsically linked. As such, an examination of the volume of stop and search records completed by police services will likely provide additional context to the identified rises in intelligence. Figure 3. Illustrates the change in stop and search over the past 5-year period across all of the 20 examined police services (the count values by police service can be found in Table A2. within the appendices). This analysis shows that although stop and search records have been increasing over the preceding years, 2020 saw a rapid and surprisingly large short term spike during national lockdown 1.
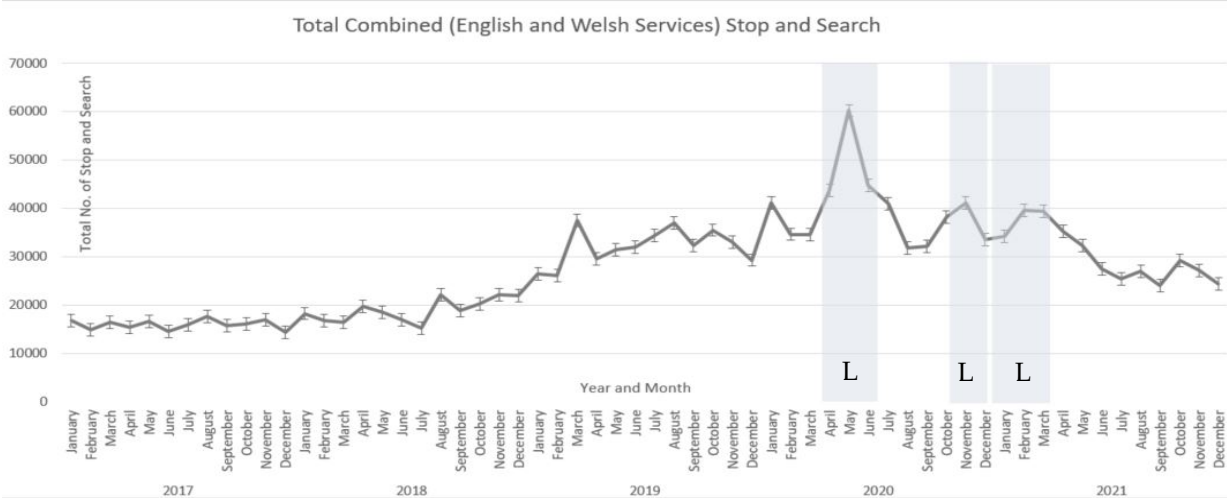
Figure 3. 5 Year Combined Stop and Search History in the Examined Police Services (Lockdown 1, 2, 3 = L1, L2, L3).

The identified spike subsides after the lockdown period almost as quickly as it emerged. However, this drop was then followed by two smaller, but equally apparent double spikes, the timing of which also indicates that they occurred as a result of lockdown 2 and 3. These spikes then again subsided after the lockdowns ended and since the final national lockdown eased down, stop and search records appear to have returned to pre-pandemic levels. When considered annually, the total volume of stop and search records for all of the services examined identified that in 2020 over 450,000 stop and searches were conducted, a clear increase from 2019 (364,636 stop and searches) and the subsequent drop in 2021 (346,761 stop and searches). Figures A1. and A2. located in the appendices indicate that this pattern is present within both Welsh and English police services when considered against the national lockdowns for Wales and England alone. We argue that this pattern supports the argument that the rise in reported intelligence and records of stop and search are linked and that this has been caused by the shift in the criminal environment caused by the national lockdowns put in place to control and prevent the spread of COVID-19.

4.3. Case Study Examinations - Cleveland Police

The number of intelligence reports recorded by Cleveland Police in 2020 can be seen in Table A1 (appendix). Analysis showed they experienced the highest percentile rise of all the services examined during 2020. Cleveland police have historically conducted a modest volume of stop and search, which until late 2019 had never risen above 200 per calendar month. In comparison, the average number of stop and search conducted in 2020 was 429 per month and in 2021 this rose further to 521. Even when considered against a rising population in the area Figure 4. illustrates that these rises follow the national picture and appear to directly correlate to the implementation of UKs response to the COVID-19 pandemic during national lockdown 1, and continue in an increasing trend throughout 2020 and well into May 2021 when the trend begins to subside.
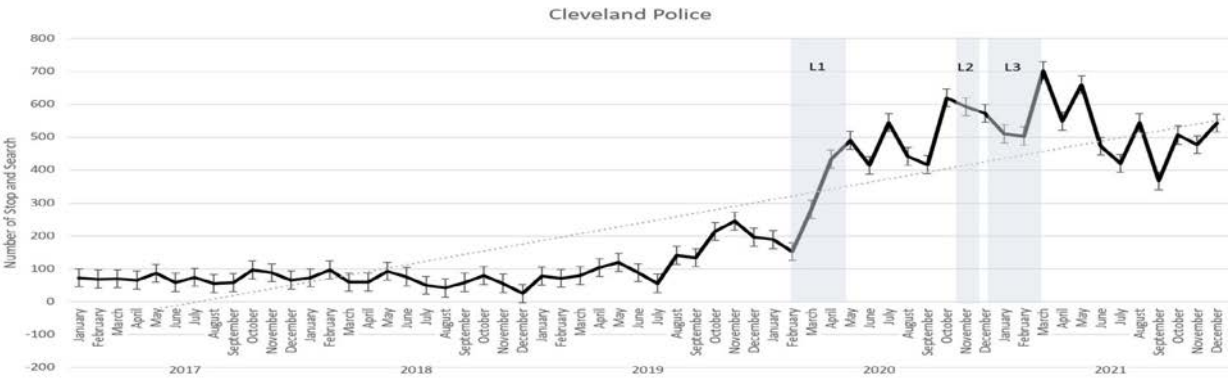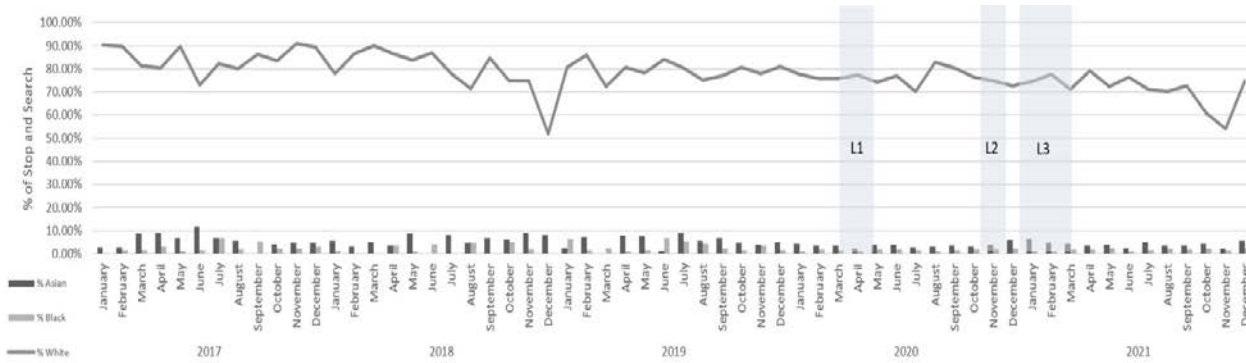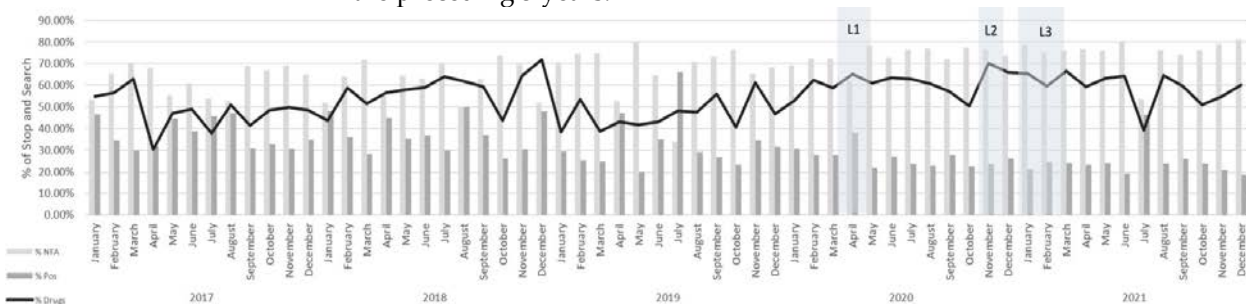

Figure 4. 5 Year Stop and Search History for Cleveland Police

Figure 5. illustrates the proportional representation of the officer defined ethnicity (White, Black and Asian people) of those stopped and searched over the same 5-year period examined. Due to the demographic makeup of the population who live in the Cleveland area the overwhelming majority of people stopped and searched are unsurprisingly White, with extremely low proportions of Black and Asian people subject to the tactic. As such, we argue that the pattern does not exhibit any substantial changes during any of the 3 lockdown periods examined.

Figure 5. 5 Year Proportions of Officer Defined Ethnicity Cited in the Stop and Search History for Cleveland Police.

Figure 6. displays the analysis of the makeup of the searches identifies that the proportion of those attributed to searching for controlled drugs does increase during each of the lockdown periods. The rises seen in lockdown 1 are in the context of a trend of rising proportions of drug related searches in the area, they do however, decrease over the summer period of 2020 which is in contrast to previous seasonal trends. In addition, there is a rapid increase during the period of national lockdown 2 (which consisted of almost all of November 2020), when they accounted for a record 70% of all searches conducted. Throughout a 12-month pandemic period between March 2020 – March 2021 the proportion of searches that resulted in nothing being found or no further action fell below 70% on only a single occasion, this is a ratio only ever reached in a handful of months during the preceding 3 years.
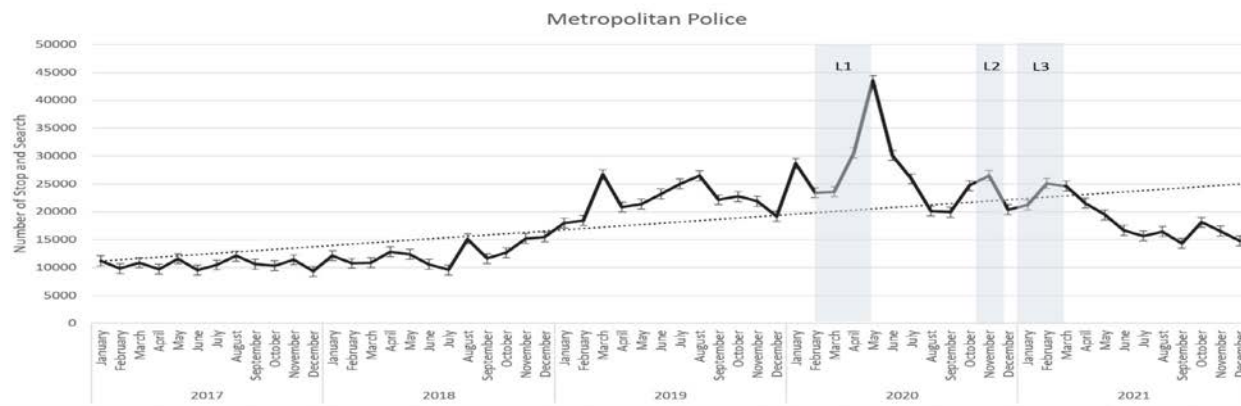

Figure 6. 5 Year Stop and Search History Outlining the Proportion of NFA, positive Outcomes and Drug Related Searches for Cleveland Police.

Overall, these findings suggest that during year 1 of the pandemic, Cleveland Police recorded their highest volume of intelligence reporting in a number of years, and conducted more stop and search. However, the proportion of Black or minority ethnic citizens subject to the tactic did not substantially alter. However, results of these searches resulted in consistently lower volumes of breaches in law being identified.
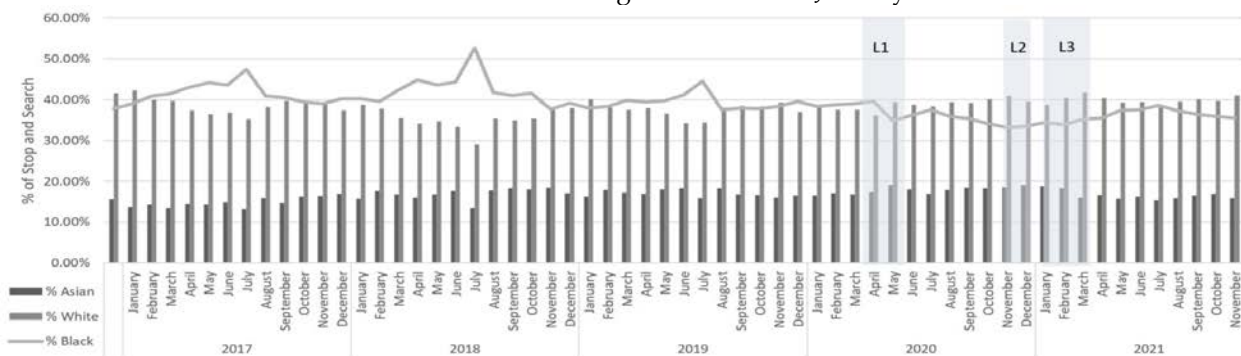
4.4. Metropolitan Police

The 10-year record of recorded intelligence reports within the Metropolitan Police can be seen in Table A1 (appendix), which shows a steady decline in intelligence reporting since 2015 before an 11% rise in 2020. In contrast, stop and search has been increasing over the 3 years preceding the pandemic. However, as Figure 7. illustrates, even against the backdrop of increasing numbers, the rise in 2020 stands out and represents a 19% increase from just over 265, 000 in 2019, to nearly 320, 000 in 2020, before falling again in 2021 to below the pre-pandemic levels seen in 2019 at just over 220, 000 searches. In contrast to Cleveland Police, the Metropolitan Police experiences its greatest increase around lockdown 1, before returning to pre-pandemic levels. They then experience a 'double peak' that coincides with lockdown 2 and 3, before again returning to pre-pandemic levels.
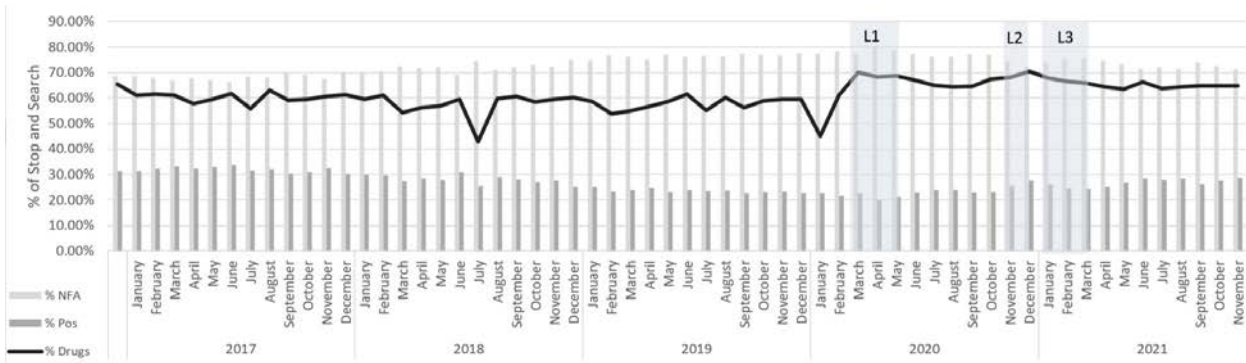
Figure 7. 5 Year Stop and Search History for Metropolitan Police.

The Metropolitan Police service is often on the front line of the political debate over the use of stop and search due to its suggested disproportionate use against Black and minority ethnic members of the community. In Figure 8. we examine the ethnic make-up of the searches over the 5-year period under scrutiny. In doing so we see there was a stark rise in stop and search in the year of the pandemic and unsurprisingly, the Metropolitan police did increase the number of Black people stopped and searched during the pandemic. However, the proportional make-up of searches conducted on Black and minority ethnic citizens changed significantly. In fact, the proportion of Black citizens stopped and searched drops below the proportion of White people for the most prolonged period across the whole 5-years examined. In November 2020 (during national lockdown 2) these were at their lowest level for nearly 5 years. In contrast, White people stopped and searched reached its highest level since January 2015.

Figure 8. 5 Year Proportions of Officer Defined Ethnicity Cited in the Stop and Search History for the Metropolitan Police.

Figure 9. illustrates the proportional makeup of the searches conducted and it is clear to see that at the outset of national lockdown 1 there is a rapid increase to a 5-year high for those attributed to searching for controlled drugs. The proportion then remains consistently at this new record level throughout 2020 and 2021, with only small reductions seen intermittently (but still above previous levels). In terms of outcomes, although more drug related searches were being conducted the proportion resulting in nothing being found and no further action peaks in the 3-month period between March-May 2020 during national lockdown 1, averaging 79%, This is the highest in the 5-year period examined.
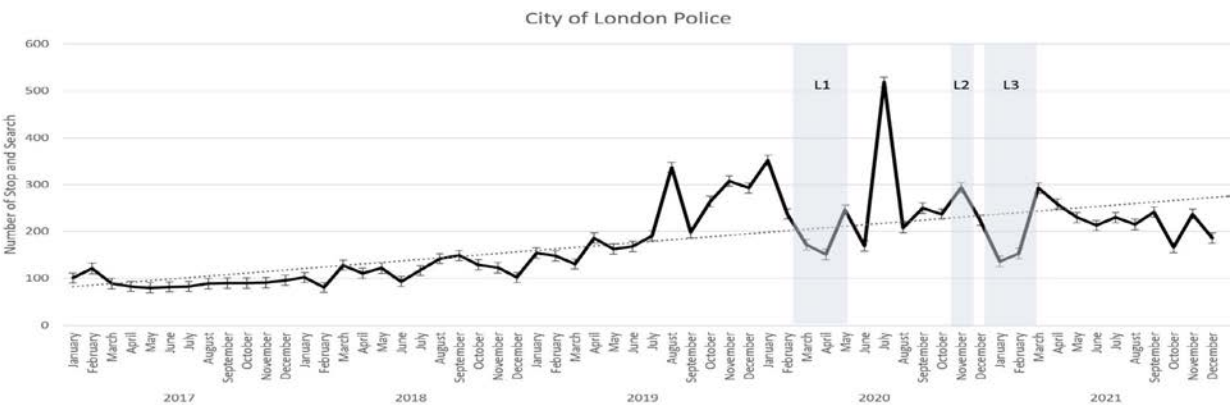
Figure 9. 5 Year Stop and Search History Outlining the Proportion of NFA, positive Outcomes and Drug Related Searches for Cleveland Police.

Overall, these findings also suggest that the service did conduct more stop and search, and recorded their highest volume of intelligence reporting in the past 3-years. However, the proportion of Black or minority ethnic people subject to the tactic reduced and White people were consistently stopped and searched in high proportions than at any time in the past 5 years. Again however, the results of these searches also resulted in lower volumes of breaches in law being identified.

4.5. City of London Police

The 10-year record of recorded intelligence reports within the City of London Police can be seen in Table A1 (appendix), which shows a relatively stable picture with overall numbers rarely deviating more than 1000 reports during any given year. In 2020, the service had the highest reduction in recorded intelligence reports (13%) of the services examined, and was in fact, 1 of only 2 (with the British Transport Police) that actually reduced their volume in 2020. This decrease is despite a large increase of stop and search activity (20%) which can be seen in Figure 10. However, the pattern differs from that experienced by both Cleveland and the Metropolitan Police. In contrast, the major increase occurs post national lockdown 1. In fact, it appears that *reductions* in stop and search actually occur during the national lockdown periods, before returning to pre-pandemic levels, best illustrated after lockdown 3.
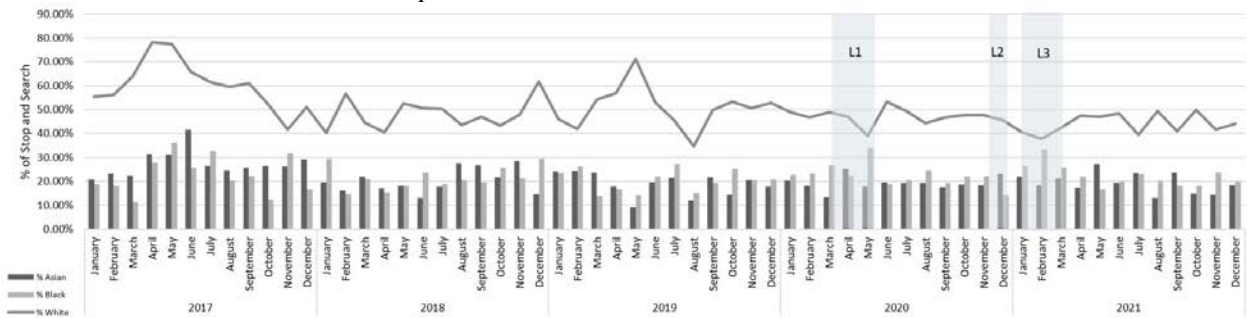

Figure 10. 5 Year Stop and Search History for the City of London Police.

In further contrast to the Metropolitan Police, Figure 11. shows that the proportion of Black people stopped and searched during national lockdowns does appear to increase. For instance, in May 2020 during lockdown 1, and February 2021 during lockdown 3, the proportions rose to 34% and 33% respectively. These are, by some margin, the two highest proportionate levels seen in the 5-year period examined. In comparison, the same months

saw the proportion of White people stopped and searched drop to its lowest levels in the same period.

Figure 11. 5 Year Proportions of Officer Defined Ethnicity Cited in the Stop and Search History for the City of London Police.

When we examine the makeup of the conducted searches we also see some significant changes. Figure 12. Illustrates that at the outset of national lockdown 1 we see a sharp rise in the volume of searches for controlled drugs. The proportion remains at the increased level until lockdown 2 and 3, when it increases further and reaches the highest level (74%) of the 5-years examined, in January 2021 before returning to pre-pandemic levels as 2021 progressed. Similarly, the proportion of searches resulting in nothing found or no further action reached its 5-year high (83%) in February 2021 during lockdown 3.
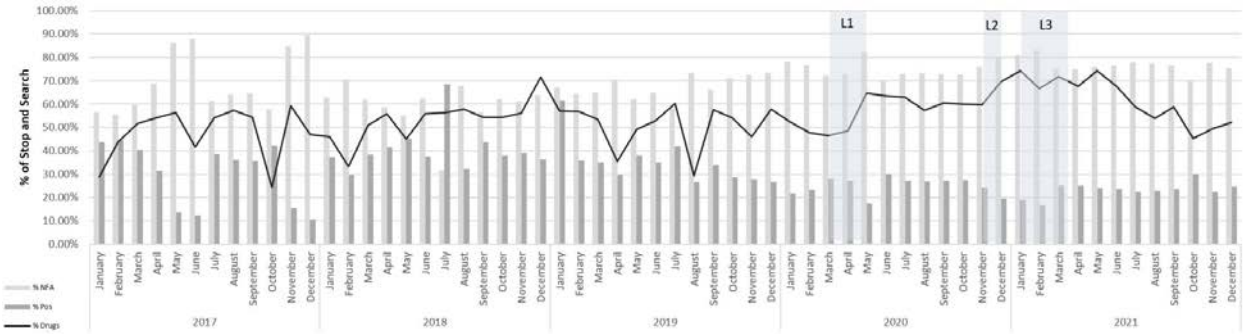
Figure 12. 5 Year Stop and Search History Outlining the Proportion of NFA, positive Outcomes and Drug Related Searches for the City of London Police.

Overall, these findings suggest the service did conduct more stop and search, which is consistent with the national picture and also that of Cleveland and the Metropolitan Police. This was despite the service delivering only a modest rise (5%) in recorded intelligence reports. We also see that the rising volumes of drug related searches and the proportions resulting in no further action, persist throughout 2021, post lockdown 3. In contrast to the previous case studies, in the City of London we see evidence of short term shifts in the ethnic makeup of those stopped and searched which was most prominent in the longer periods of lockdown (1 and 3).

5. Discussion

The findings from this study raise a number of important issues for consideration. It is clear that the number of recorded intelligence reports increased during 2020, which was the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Even outside of lockdown conditions the entire UK was subject to robust restrictions on organized events, public gatherings and the night time economy. As such, social mobility was dramatically decreased within the population, and with it, rates of crime also reduced. This leads us to the question, why then, did all but 2 of the police services examined experience rises in intelligence reporting? We argue the cause could be 1 of 3 potential hypotheses. First, organized crime, including drug trafficking and possession, was one of the only areas of criminality to increase as a result of

the pandemic (Dixon et al, 2020; Langton et al, 2020 and Neanidis and Rana, 2021). As such, it is possible that the rises in intelligence reports is a direct consequence of increases in this form of criminality. Second, it is possible that the rises are in fact unrelated to what we would consider as '*traditional crime*', and instead relate to rises in intelligence reports regarding breaches of coronavirus legislation. For example, information received that a neighbor was having regular gatherings that breached coronavirus legislation may have been recorded as intelligence for use at a future time, or when a threshold is breached. For instance, a service may only choose to respond after 3 reports of a COVID breach. Such behaviors related to COVID-19 record keeping has been seen in studies of anti-social behavior (ASB) (Halford et al, 2022). Additionally, a combination of the 2 may also be occurring. Finally, it may be that there is an as yet unidentified cause for the increased volume of intelligence reports that further research may yet uncover.

Unsurprisingly, given the identified rises in recorded intelligence reports, we see significant increases overall for stop and search. Every service examined reported higher volumes of stop and search than preceding years. Due to the monthly reporting of data we can say with increased certainty from our analysis that the increases are related to the pandemic, and specifically the lockdown periods. Similarly, however, it is difficult to identify a specific factor in the policing response that led to these rises. We again hypothesis several potential scenarios that could cause stop and search to increase. As alluded to in the introductory sections of this article there is a well-established link between recorded police intelligence and its influence on the conduct of stop and search. As such, a natural deduction would support the potential that true rises in organized crime, including drug trafficking and possession offences has occurred. In their efforts to tackle this issue the police are likely to have responded by legitimately increasing tactics such as uniformed and '*plain clothes*' patrolling which was directed and influenced by the increased intelligence, leading to more stop and search activity and accounting for the proportional rises of searches related to controlled drugs. However, an undermining factor for this argument is the increased proportion of searches that failed to identify any offences and resulted in no further police action. Considering these opposing perspectives we argue that although more searches did mean more overall numbers of criminal offences detected (accounting for some of the rises in recorded drug trafficking and possession offences), this is a direct result of the increased volume of stop and search and is more likely closer to the true level of offending of this nature, and does not necessarily represent a '*rise in crime*'.

Importantly, if true rises in crime are not responsible for the increased use of stop and search we suggest that in the absence of a designated COVID-19 search category for stop and search data records, the increases may represent coronavirus related interventions. For instance, those interactions that occurred between the police and the public as they stopped citizens using the '*engage, explain, encourage, enforce*' approach to tackle breaches of coronavirus legislation. This would also help explain the rises in no further action disposals. This approach has already been identified in recent research on anti-social behavior (Halford et al, 2022) that showed police services incorrectly categorized reports from the public regarding breaches of coronavirus legislation as ASB. Similarly, if the police have used a breach of coronavirus legislation on unwitting citizens as a justification for a stop and search, for example, to corroborate their excuse for being outside, and drug related offences were then detected, in the absence of a coronavirus category the grounds for the search may have been recorded as being related to the pre-defined category of controlled drugs. This would also help explain the rise in searches for controlled drugs. Finally, a combination of all of the aforementioned is of course also a possibility.

An important part of this study was to explore the potential impact on Black and minority ethnic members of the public as a result of the rises in both intelligence reports and stop and search. Our case study analysis has shown that there is evidence to suggest the pandemic lockdowns did impact the ethnic makeup of those stopped and searched. Overall, stop and searches did increase and as a result the volume conducted against Black and Asian citizens, as previous literature had suggested (Harris et al, 2020). However, the

proportional impact on officer defined Asian, Black and White citizens has not been consistent across policing areas. As seen in the case of Cleveland Police, some areas displayed very little deviation in the ethnic makeup of those stopped and searched. The Metropolitan Polices result evidenced a decline in the proportion of Black citizens stopped and searched. A result which some may argue is surprising given their historical relationship with the controversial tactic. The city of London Police on the other hand showed evidence of short term increased use of stop and search against Black people. The biggest question here is again, why has this occurred? Unfortunately, this is not a question the scope of this study has been able to answer. However, we can offer several reasons. Firstly, it may be impacted by the demographic makeup of the populations in the policing area. Second, it could also be influenced by the ethnic make-up of frontline workers who were afforded more social mobility during the lockdown and as such, were more likely to come into contact with the Police. Additionally, it could be linked to the geographic location of the policing area, for instance, more rural or coastal police services may have experienced increased levels of transiting citizens trying to maximize their sanctioned outdoor activity to take exercise or shop for essential products. Dependent on their place of origin and destination this could also impact the ethnic makeup of citizens interacting with the police during the relevant time frames.

Our final area of discussion relates to the links between the intelligence led policing model and stop and search. We have argued that there is a strong link between levels of intelligence reporting and stop and search, and their combined impact on the intelligence cycle. In the context of this study this could have several implications. First, from a positive perspective, if the rises are linked to a true increase in criminal activity then shifts in ethnic proportionality of those stopped and searched and subject to criminal intelligence reports will likely result in a future medium to long term impact in the targeting of certain ethnic groups, shifting towards a more accurate representation. This occurs as a result of the intelligence cycle (i.e. intelligence directs targeting, targeting influences stop and search, searching results in more detected offences and intelligence, and the cycle repeats). If this is the case, then this may help improve the public confidence in the police and improve their legitimacy, especially in services that experienced reductions in stop and search of officer defined Black or Asian ethnicity. If intelligence regarding breaches of coronavirus legislation has directed or influenced police targeting deployments, or, the stop and search tactic has simply been used in a broad brush approach to enforce such laws, then there is potential for negative implications. This is especially true if those subject to stop and search or intelligence reporting were in all other contexts, law abiding citizens, who now find themselves criminalized for temporary (coronavirus) or relatively minor (e.g. cannabis possession) criminal offences, that in non-pandemic times, would have been unlikely to have occurred. For example, now their '*names are in the system*', it is unknown how this will impact future intelligence cycles. In the worst case scenario, this may result in future targeting of such individuals or their communities. As such, the police service would be wise to take great care in understanding the identified rises and how this may influence their interpretation of the criminal environment, especially that related to drug trafficking and possession.

6. Limitations and Future Research

This study has a number of limitations. First, is the number of police services who returned sufficient data in response to the FOI requests to enable analysis of recorded intelligence reports. Only 20 achieved this and as such, data from all of the 45 identified services may result in different findings. Similarly, inclusion of all police services in the stop and search analysis may also result in greater insight. Finally, we used the officer defined ethnicity category to examine the makeup of those stopped and searched. The self-defined category had significantly more sub-categories of ethnicity and as such may provide further nuances, particularly as they relate to people of mixed heritage. For example, a person who is defined as '*Black*' by an officer, may self-define as '*Black – mixed*

White European'. In respect of the methodology utilized, other approaches, such as ARIMA modelling can enable inclusion of social mobility data and in doing so could provide results with increased statistical validity.

We recommend that to further explore the issues raised in this article that future research seeks to reduce the outlined limitations. Qualitative research that investigates the themes and patterns of the rises in intelligence will go a long way to understanding this issue. Furthermore, free text data or original stop and search records may provide insights regarding the grounds of the searches and enable analysis to determine answers to some of the questions we pose. This would be especially true for detecting any patterns in the changes of grounds or the incorrect recording of coronavirus led searches. Surveys or interviews of officers on frontline duties during the pandemic may also identify their views and perspectives on the identified rises in both intelligence and stop and search. Finally, other variables such as geo locations of the stop and search records may also provide insights into the geographical impact of the pandemic on stop and search.

7. Conclusion

In this article we sought to understand the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the levels of recorded intelligence reports held by police services, and the conduct of their stop and search activity. In addition, we sought to explore how the ethnic makeup of people searched may also have been affected, along with the ration of drug related searches and outcomes. All of these aims have been achieved. In doing so we have identified that the national level of both intelligence recording and stop and search increased during the pandemic. Case study analysis has shown that these increases vary amongst police services but that evidence that emerged provided a strong case to suggest that the rises are linked to the 3 national lockdowns in the UK. The impact of these rises includes increases of proportions of drug related searches and deviations in searches that resulted in no further police action. When considering these finding's, we suggest causes for the rises may include true increases in organized crime, drug trafficking and possession offences, inaccurate recording of coronavirus legislation breaches, or misuse of the aforementioned laws, or a combination of all these factors. We also examined the ethnic makeup of people stopped and searched and identified a mix of impact including no changes, and both reductions and increases in officer defined, Black and White people searched, dependent on the police service examined.

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Appendices

Police Service	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Ministry of Defense	5817	4088	2941	2897	2901	2954	2574	1849	2967	3261
City of London Police	2271	8063	7916	6919	6932	7095	7459	5734	6793	5901
Cambridgeshire Constabulary	45972	39078	57471	49861	45154	45154	41107	27641	33905	33905
Bedfordshire Police	44389	42660	43365	35335	31264	31482	31766	32482	30464	34690
Cheshire Constabulary	50842	42570	43079	44152	37045	33786	33972	29775	33970	35472
Cleveland Police	62889	62887	62698	53538	40122	30842	31634	29436	29554	37327
Wilsthsire Police	44011	46652	49315	39766	35472	31996	33723	35152	37160	42387
Cumbria Constabulary	70447	72889	70347	58555	46441	50891	50473	35663	38696	42988
Dyfed-Powys Police	21020	25407	40320	36239	36990	40198	41867	43272	40192	44677
Lancashire Constabulary	113196	102513	90945	72576	60856	49632	53140	60028	46146	47974
British Transport Police	80074	87930	102467	90813	101521	65932	66595	75643	62287	56309
Humberside Police	105467	95857	90902	80993	77102	80052	68951	43258	53508	64508
Hampshire Police	85515	61310	59308	86378	59371	62537	59160	66660	64887	78794
Thames Valley Police	114120	104001	113004	87492	78251	70651	72393	73887	72037	83973
Sussex Police	72432	89039	75671	81695	83694	68613	72063	76921	76289	86252
South Wales Police	69984	86858	125415	120734	72606	65791	68382	71712	77832	88107
Devon and Cornwall	262591	228852	261963	184654	137754	135037	117732	111202	112047	112852
West Midlands Police	148344	131439	130242	116865	127276	122572	107295	105203	116135	127071
Welsh Services	114120	104001	113004	87492	78251	70651	72393	73887	72037	83973
Metropolitan Police	576275	567438	546244	476278	482167	999905	453209	393710	366688	406942
Northumbria Police	655473	515046	533754	550903	444787	405691	389267	381770	399720	484259
Total Reports	**519127**	**508750**	**576053**	**474575**	**372305**	**340092**	**330570**	**333722**	**338205**	**371184**

Table A1. Number of Retained Intelligence Reports by Police Services between 2011-2020.

Police Service	2020 % Changes		Police Service
	Intelligence Reports	Stop and Search	
Cleveland Police	*26.30%*	*238%*	*Cleveland Police*
Hampshire Police	21.43%	128%	Humberside Police
Northumbria Police	21.15%	63%	Cheshire Constabulary
Humberside Police	20.56%	60%	Cambridgeshire Constabulary
Thames Valley Police	16.57%	60%	Cumbria
Wilsthsire Police	14.07%	58%	Thames Valley Police
Bedfordshire Police	13.87%	42%	Wilsthsire Police
South Wales Police	13.20%	40%	British Transport Police
Sussex Police	13.06%	39%	Bedfordshire Police
Dyfed-Powys Police	11.16%	37%	Hampshire Police
Cumbria Constabulary	11.09%	37%	Lancashire Constabulary
Metropolitan Police	**10.98%**	33%	Devon and Cornwall
Ministry of Defense	9.91%	24%	South Wales Police
West Midlands Police	9.42%	23%	North Wales Police
Cheshire Constabulary	4.42%	23%	Dyfed-Powys
Lancashire Constabulary	3.96%	*20%*	*City of London Police*
Devon and Cornwall	0.72%	*19%*	*Metropolitan Police*
Cambridgeshire Constabulary	0.00%	14%	Northumbria Police
British Transport Police	-9.60%	6%	Sussex Police
City of London Police	*-13.13%*	5%	West Midlands Police
Total Reports	**21.41%**	**24%**	**Total Reports**

Table A2. Percentage Comparison of Police Service Rises in Intelligence Records and Stop and Search

Police Service	2017	2018	2019	2020 (% change)		2021
Cleveland Police	862	771	1527	5152	238%	6261
Humberside Police	1058	1437	2746	6260	128%	6670
Cheshire Constabulary	2178	2243	3597	5849	63%	5087
Cambridgeshire Constabulary	1002	1433	2302	3690	60%	2971
Cumbria	1420	1579	1995	3198	60%	2736
Thames Valley Police	6860	7634	13043	20613	58%	16097
Wilsthsire Police	1115	1027	803	1940	42%	1581
British Transport Police	2261	4215	7757	10848	40%	11454
Bedfordshire Police	1408	1888	2918	4045	39%	3229
Hampshire Police	8715	8003	8812	12072	37%	10753
Lancashire Constabulary	3055	3811	7783	10671	37%	10467
Devon and Cornwall	3606	4157	5483	7300	33%	6215
South Wales Police	6290	10161	12243	15130	24%	11952
North Wales Police	1406	1231	4630	5686	23%	3641
Dyfed-Powys	2124	2653	2796	3446	23%	2558
City of London Police	1095	1399	2541	3059	20%	2560
Metropolitan Police	126936	149277	265952	317517	19%	224526
Northumbria Police	2814	2804	4562	5222	14%	3959
Sussex Police	5260	6367	8033	8524	6%	6780
West Midlands Police	11188	14803	24782	26057	5%	25415
Annual Total -England	180833	212848	364636	**452017**	**24%**	346761
Annual Total - Wales	9820	14045	19669	**24262**	**23%**	18151
Combined Annual Total	190653	226893	384305	**476279**	**24%**	364912

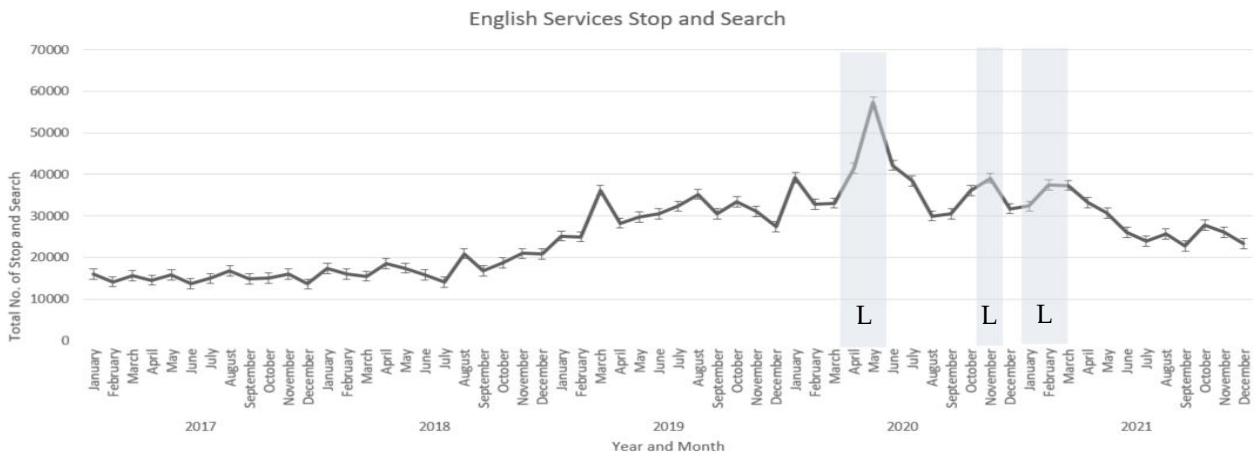Table A3. 5 Year Stop and Search History by Individual Police Service Examined

Figure A1. 5 Year Stop and Search History in the Examined English Police Services (Lockdown 1, 2, 3 = L1, L2, L3)
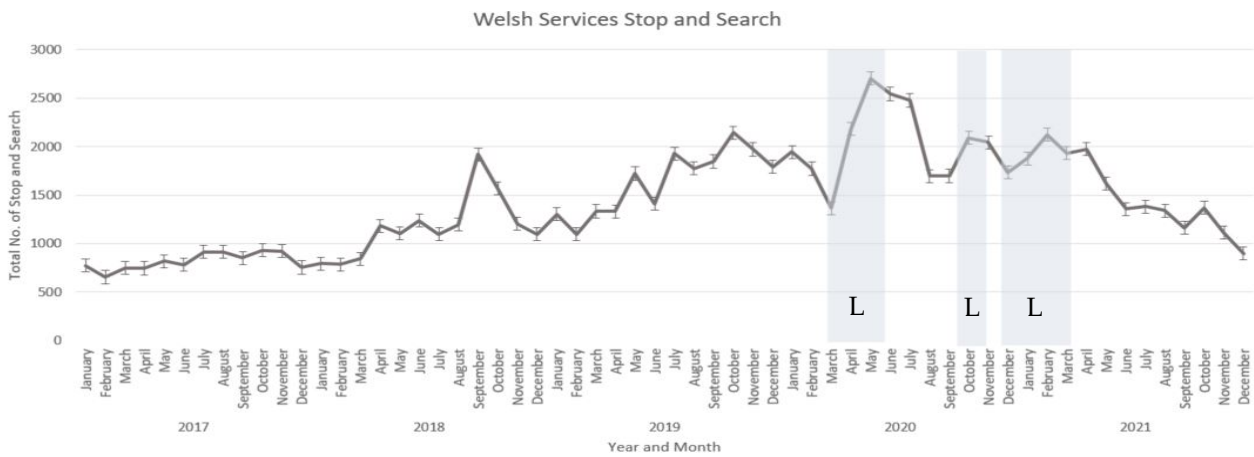
Figure A2. 5 Year Stop and Search History in the Examined Welsh Police Services (Lockdown 1, 2, 3 = L1, L2, L3)