Can police deter drug offending at festivals and licensed clubs?

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Introduction

- Drug law enforcement is underpinned by the assumption that police can deter drug use & trafficking (MCDS, 2011)
- Limited evidence of deterrence exists (Babor et al, 2010)
- Increasingly problematic as an expanding array of “high deterrent” police strategies have been deployed (e.g. Mazerole, 2006)
- Growing concerns that deployment of ‘deterrent’ policing strategies may have adverse public health impacts (Duff, 2005; Harris, Edwards, & Homel, 2014; Parker, Aldridge, & Measham, 1998; Shapiro, 1999)
- This is particularly when deployed in high use settings like music festivals and licensed entertainment precincts
The challenge of policing festivals, clubs & pubs

- Common sites of policing as they are:
  - Popular sites for leisure, entertainment and socialising
  - People who attend festivals and licensed venues are more likely to have used drugs (eg Hesse & Tutenges, 2012; Lim et al, 2010; Miller et al, 2015)

- Attention to policing of such spaces has grown in Australia
  - eg national media ↑ 3 fold from 2011-2015: 8 fold for NSW

- Culminated in a policy impasse:
  - Public health advocates: Police cannot deter & that increase public health harms
  - Police: Police essential to deter & do reduce public health harms
The challenge in assessing DLE deterrent impacts

Traditional crime data is ill-suited for measuring deterrent effects as:

- Deterrence by definition means that crime will not have occurred
- Need to create a valid counter-factual of how much crime would occur in the absence of policing (Jacobs, 2010; Nagin, 2013)
- Messy reality of street-level policing: rarely one mode of policing used at once (Mazerolle, Soole, & Rombouts, 2006)
Study aims

1. To measure the deterrent effects of four Australian policing strategies on use, possession, purchasing or trafficking illicit drugs at outdoor music festivals and licensed entertainment precincts;

2. To identify which specific police strategy most (and least) reduces offending engagement;

3. To identify the relative role of policing vis-a-vis other factors in shaping drug offending engagement;

4. To identify whether there are individual differences in propensities to be deterred by police.
Three part study

- Study 1: National survey using experimental deterrence vignettes (hypothetical) of police presence vs absence at music festivals
- Study 2: National survey using experimental deterrence vignettes (hypothetical) of police presence vs absence at licensed entertainment precincts
- Study 3: Prospective study of real-world police encounters and drug use over a three month period as participants went out to festivals, clubs, pubs and bars in Sydney
Study 1: Experimental impacts of policing vs no policing at music festivals
Methods for hypothetical studies

- A purpose-built online survey was constructed – *Drug Policing Survey* - involving a series of 10 hypothetical experimental deterrence vignettes
- Proven method used in psychology, behavioural economics and criminology to provide insight into intended behaviours while controlling key variables of interest (Aviram, 2012; Nagin, 2013; Wallander, 2009)
- Depicted four different Australian police strategies and a counter-factual (no police), across the two different settings (festivals and LEPs)
The four policing approaches

High Visibility Police

Riot Police

Collaborative Police

Drug Detection Dogs
High Visibility Policing

You are going to a music festival this weekend, and festival organisers have said they expect 30,000 people to attend. You hear from a friend that police are planning a HIGH VISIBILITY operation involving over 200 plain clothes and uniform police who may be patrolling inside as well as outside the venue.

No Police

You are going to a music festival, and festival organisers have said they expect 30,000 people to attend. The band you want to see is late in the afternoon and so you know from past experience that police will have left for the day: i.e. that there will be NO POLICE present.
Method – cont.

- Administered to 4143 people aged 18 and over who regularly attend music festivals and LEPs in Australia
- Each participant was block-randomised to receive two hypothetical vignettes at one target setting: outdoor music festivals or LEPs
- Asked whether they would use, possess, purchase, give and/or supply illicit drugs, and type of drug(s) and quantity, and a range of demographic and other offending variables
Sample

Demographics
- Mean age 22.31 (SD=4.65)
- 55% male
- 93% completed year 12
- 42.4% employed: 29.9% full time
- 40% NSW, 26% Vic, 14% Qld

Illicit drug use:
- 78.4% any recent use

Criminal justice history
- 47% ever stopped by police
- 4.9% prior conviction

Police encounters &
drug offending at last
festival

- 71.2% Saw police
- 65.3% Drug use
- 22.5% Drug supply
Police presence vs absence: Impacts on offending at festivals

Offending engagement: Police vs no police

- ANY: 72.8% (Police) vs 77.4% (No Police)

Type of drug offending: Police vs no police

- Use: 70% (Police) vs 80% (No Police)
- Possess: 60% (Police) vs 70% (No Police)
- Buy: 50% (Police) vs 60% (No Police)
- Give: 40% (Police) vs 50% (No Police)
- Sell: 30% (Police) vs 40% (No Police)

* = p<0.05
Engagement in any drug offending at festivals: by policing strategy
Type of drug offending at festivals, by policing strategy

- Use
- Possess
- Buy
- Give
- Sell

- High Visibility Police
- Riot Police
- Drug Detection Dogs
- Collaborative Police
- No Police

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National Drug &
Alcohol Research Centre

The Difference is Research
Study 2: Experimental impacts of policing vs no policing at licensed entertainment venues
Police presence vs absence: Impacts on offending at LEPs

**Offending engagement: Police vs no police**

![Bar chart showing the percentage of offending engagement with police vs no police.](chart-1)

**Type of drug offending: Police vs no police**

![Bar chart showing the percentage of drug offending types with police vs no police.](chart-2)

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The Difference is Research
Engagement in any drug offending at LEPS: by policing strategy

- High Visibility Police: 54
- Riot Police: 52
- Drug Detection Dogs: *
- Collaborative Police: 68
- No Police: 70

* indicates a significant difference.
Type of drug offending at LEPs, by policing strategy
Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impacts of police presence on overall drug engagement</th>
<th>Music festivals</th>
<th>Licensed entertainment precincts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.6% point reduction</td>
<td></td>
<td>8.8% point reduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which strategy most deterred?</td>
<td>High visibility policing</td>
<td>High visibility policing and riot policing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Study 3: Prospective study – 3 mth follow up of police encounters and drug use in Sydney
Method

• Prospective follow-up study involving 38 regular festival and club attendees

• Used a smartphone app called the “Going out in Sydney” (GOIS) app to collect close to real time data

• Logged all “nights out” in Sydney over a 3 month period in early 2016:
  (1) where they went (e.g. festival, nightclub);
  (2) the prevalence and nature of any alcohol or illicit drug use;
  (3) the incidence and nature of any police encounters e.g. number and type

• A total of 353 logs were obtained
Police encounters and drug use, by venue

- Any venue
- Music festivals
- Club
- Pub
- Small bar

- Police presence
- Illicit drug use
Police encounters & drug use over the 3 mths

Police encounters

Illicit drug use
Individual differences in offending trajectories & responsivity to police

- When police were present:
  - 19% participants *always* used drugs
  - 36% *mostly* used drugs
  - 36% *sometimes* used drugs
  - 8% *never* used drugs
Individual differences in offending trajectories & responsivity to police
Impacts of policing on drug use

- Police presence had no significant effect on prevalence of use or quantity of drugs consumed on nights out.
- But, policing presence was more likely to impact on offending decisions of some patrons (patrons groups two and three), particularly at clubs and pubs (i.e. there were significant interactions between police presence * venue * patron type).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Venue</th>
<th>Patron type</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Festival</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Club</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pub</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bar</td>
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Impacts of increasing number of police on quantity consumed
Summary

• Shows that there were different offending trajectories and situational contingences in which policing did and did not impact on offending decisions

• Greater impacts on drug use amongst:
  • Two groups of patrons (patron type two and three)
  • Question is … why? What makes theses patrons more responsive?
Discussion and policy implications

• Suggests police can deter engagement in drug offending at festivals and licensed venues by an average of 4.6-8.8% points
• But, the likelihood of deterrence will vary according to setting and the specific police modality chosen:
  • Highest deterrent capacity – High visibility policing
  • Lowest deterrent capacity – Collaborative policing
  • Most risky – Drug detection dogs
• More generally it suggests that the capacity to deter will be far from fixed – instead it will be highly contingent on when, where and with whom police are deployed
Predictors of policing deterrence

- Police presence
- Type of strategy
- Number of police
- Venue
- Patron sub-type
- Day of week
- Patron past experiences with policing
- Month
- Season
- Holidays
Policy implications

• Reinforces important trade-offs in public health and crime control in policing of outdoor music festivals and licensed entertainment precincts
  • Most deterrent impacts will reduce use, not supply related activity
  • Risks that using police to deter will lead to perverse impacts e.g. patrons switching from bringing in own drugs to buying within settings and/or fuelling markets for supply
  • Particularly high risk with the newer deterrent strategies

• Raises new question – not can police to deter but
  • 1) to what extent and in what circumstances to which police should be used to deter drug offending at high drug use settings?
  • 2) what methods should be used? And what perhaps avoided?
Thank You!

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