

ROUTLEDGE STUDIES IN
POLICING AND SOCIETY



Drug Law Enforcement, Policing and Harm Reduction

Ending the Stalemate

Edited by Matthew Bacon and Jack Spicer



'This book is a timely and contemporary contribution to the highly dynamic and disputed area of drugs policing. It provides a much-needed examination of the conceptualizations and application of "harm reduction policing" as a distinct and alternative policing model. The contributions are an excellent collection of approaches, views, and theories to think about the current state and potential future of policing of drug use and markets'.

**Alissa Greer, Assistant Professor in Criminology,
Simon Fraser University**

'Everyone wants to minimize the harms of drugs and policing. But how? This book gives us answers. It is an outstanding contribution at the intersection of addiction research, drug studies, criminology, and criminal justice. It will appeal to people on the left, the right, and between'.

**Scott Jacques, Professor of Criminal Justice and
Criminology, Georgia State University**

'This extraordinary edited volume provides the most extensive collection of research on harm reduction policing to date. The book is well-written and leads the reader on a journey through some of the most important research on the topic. This book should be on the shelf of all academics, researchers, and practitioners interested in drugs policing, and is well suited for undergraduate and graduate coursework'.

**Aili Malm, Professor of Criminology and Criminal
Justice, California State University**

'This timely book makes a vital contribution to the drug policy literature by giving a comprehensive and detailed account of a burgeoning area of study: police-led changes to drug policy and practice. In the UK, the 2011 Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act, which created offices of Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs), has afforded variation in local drug policing practice and enabled force areas to develop policing priorities shaped by local needs and priorities. A key development has been the increasing use of diversionary methods by the police to channel drug users away from the criminal justice system and into forms of support. Although becoming more widespread, there is a limited evidence base as to how these strategies were formulated, how they have been implemented and the ways in which they have been evaluated. This book addresses this gap. In doing so, it expertly brings together key thinkers and doers in the field. It advances knowledge by the array of contributors nationally and internationally as well as those working across research, policy and practice. It is edited by two important voices in the field, both of whom make telling contributions to the work. It will be of interest for researchers and practitioners in criminal justice, public health drug policy and beyond'.

**Mark Monaghan, Reader in Criminology and Social
Policy, University of Loughborough**

‘Where drugs policing debates are filled with cliches from both libertarians and warriors, this invaluable collection brings light rather than heat to the field. Anyone with an interest in how the harms associated with drugs, with policy, and with law enforcement can be reduced and managed will benefit from reading the diverse and important analyses contained here. Cutting across disciplines and academic/practitioner divides, and with an international outlook, this book is required reading’.

**Karim Murji, Professor of Social Policy and
Criminology, University of West London**

“Harm reduction policing” may sound to some like an oxymoron. This precious volume demonstrates – with fascinating case studies, provocative insights and creative theoretical formulations – not just the negative consequences of punitive drugs policing but also the ways in which “harm reduction” makes just as much sense for policing as it does for drug use’.

**Ethan Nadelmann, Founder and Former Executive
Director (2000–2017) of the Drug Policy Alliance**

‘This book provides a comprehensive overview of what we have learned with harm reduction and a valuable guide to continue walking down the path created by the reforms to drug policies and policing in several countries around the world’.

**Eduardo Paes Machado, Professor of Sociology,
Federal University of Bahia**

‘Drugs present a uniquely troubling challenge for the police. At one extreme, in the Philippines the police have carried out thousands of extra-legal executions of drug dealers and users. At the other extreme, there are police forces in Western Europe and North America that see their primary role as helping persuade drug users to enter treatment. This entirely original collection of essays is the first effort to survey the many drug policing reform efforts that incorporate the insights of harm reduction that have been so influential in other areas of drug policy. It will inform both policymakers and researchers’.

**Peter Reuter, Professor of Public Policy and
Criminology, University of Maryland**

‘This outstanding edited collection brings together a rich array of material on drugs policing. Absent hysterical hyperbole, chapter authors summarise research and practice experience and consider how drugs policing could be reformed. The multidisciplinary and global contributions provide a comprehensive one-stop-shop for understanding the relationships between policy, police practices directed towards illicit drugs, and harm reduction. I can highly recommend this important volume to students,

scholars, practitioners, and anyone interested in reconfiguring drugs policing to reduce harms’.

**Alison Ritter AO, Professor and Director of the
Drug Policy Modelling Program, University of New
South Wales**

‘Bacon and Spicer have assembled an outstanding collection. The role of policing in drug control and in the enforcement of drug laws is surprisingly under-researched, despite its centrality to drug policy. By curating a set of contributions that are international in scope, empirically-oriented and theoretically-engaged, Bacon and Spicer have produced a book that will undoubtedly prove influential, both intellectually and in terms of policy reform, for many years to come’.

Toby Seddon, Professor of Social Science, UCL

‘This collection is welcome for many reasons but not least are that it really understands the potential of a harm reduction perspective, it reminds us that “policing” should be flexible and enabling rather than discriminating and disabling, it contextualises drugs policing locally and globally – from the legacy of colonialism to the implications of digital markets, it provides evidence that policing the public should also be about the good health of the public, and finally, it’s highly original and long overdue!’

**Nigel South, Professor of Sociology, University of
Essex**

‘Harm reduction policing is an idea whose time has come. In this fascinating book, Bacon and Spicer have brought together an impressive range of international contributors – with both research and practical expertise – to inform us of the latest thinking and evidence from the field. This theoretically robust and empirically informed collection offers new ways to reduce the harms done by both drugs and policing’.

**Alex Stevens, Professor in Criminal Justice,
University of Kent**



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

DRUG LAW ENFORCEMENT, POLICING AND HARM REDUCTION

The policing of drugs is an intriguing, complex, and contentious domain that brings into sharp focus the multifaceted nature of the police role and has far-reaching consequences for health, crime, and justice. While research on drugs policing has historically been surprisingly sparse, fragmented, and underdeveloped, the field has recently become a burgeoning area of academic study, influenced by contemporary trends in policing practices, changes in drug policy, and wider social movements. This book makes a much-needed interdisciplinary and international contribution that engages with established and emerging areas of scholarship, advances cutting-edge debates, and sets an agenda for future directions in drugs policing.

Drug Law Enforcement, Policing and Harm Reduction is the first edited collection to devote its attention exclusively to drugs policing. It brings together a range of leading scholars to provide a deep and thorough account of the current state of knowledge. In addition to academic analysis, authors also include serving police officers and policymakers, who have influenced how drugs policing is framed and carried out. Together, the contributors draw on a diverse set of empirical studies and theoretical perspectives, with the thread running throughout the book being the concept of harm reduction policing. With accounts from various countries, localities, and contexts, topics covered include the (in)effectiveness and (un)intended consequences of the 'war on drugs', attempts to reform drugs policing, and the role of partnerships and policy networks. The broader theme of inequality lies at the heart of this collection.

An accessible and compelling read, this book will be of interest to academics and students of criminology, public health, and social policy, especially those researching policing, drug policy, and harm reduction. It also offers valuable insights and practical guidance for professionals working in the drugs field.

Matthew Bacon is a Senior Lecturer in Criminology at the University of Sheffield.

Jack Spicer is a Lecturer in Criminology at the University of Bath.

Routledge Studies in Policing and Society

Series Editors

Jenny Fleming, University of Southampton, UK

Jennifer Wood, Temple University, USA

Routledge Studies in Policing and Society aims to establish an inter-disciplinary, international intellectual space of original contributions to either classic or emerging debates about the nature and effects of policing in society. The works in this series will advance our theoretical, methodological and/or empirical knowledge of policing in various societies across the world. It is the hope of the series editors that the works in this series will help fill gaps in our global understanding of policing and society.

Criminal Futures

Predictive Policing and Everyday Police Work

Simon Egbert and Matthias Leese

Women Police in Contemporary China

Gender and Policing

Anqi Shen

Electric-Shock Weapons, Tasers and Policing

Myths and Realities

Abi Dymond

Police, Organization, and Wellbeing

An Ethnography

Jamie Ferrill

Policing in a Changing Vietnam

Towards a Global Account of Policing

Melissa Jardine

Drug Law Enforcement, Policing and Harm Reduction

Ending the Stalemate

Edited by Matthew Bacon and Jack Spicer

DRUG LAW ENFORCEMENT, POLICING AND HARM REDUCTION

Ending the Stalemate

Edited by Matthew Bacon and Jack Spicer

Designed cover image: Anastasiia_Guseva / Getty images

First published 2023

by Routledge

4 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge

605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

© 2023 selection and editorial matter, Matthew Bacon and Jack Spicer;
individual chapters, the contributors

The right of Matthew Bacon and Jack Spicer to be identified as the
authors of the editorial material, and of the authors for their individual
chapters, has been asserted in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the
Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced
or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other
means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and
recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without
permission in writing from the publishers.

Trademark notice: Product or corporate names may be trademarks
or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and
explanation without intent to infringe.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-0-367-72269-2 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-0-367-72270-8 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-1-003-15413-6 (ebk)

DOI: 10.4324/9781003154136

Typeset in Bembo

by Deanta Global Publishing Services, Chennai, India

CONTENTS

<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>xi</i>
<i>List of Contributors</i>	<i>xii</i>
Drug law enforcement, policing and harm reduction: An introduction <i>Matthew Bacon and Jack Spicer</i>	1
1 Harm reduction policing: Conceptualisation and implementation <i>Matthew Bacon and Jack Spicer</i>	13
2 More harm than good: A review of the English language literature on the policing of drug possession <i>Charlie Lloyd</i>	39
3 Drugs, race, and defunding the police: Daring to dream <i>Benson Egwuonwu, Habib Kadiri, and Michael Shiner</i>	64
4 Symbolic drugs policing: Conceptual development and harm reduction opportunities <i>Ross Coomber, Matthew Bacon, Jack Spicer, and Leah Moyle</i>	87
5 Policing cryptomarkets and the digital war on drugs <i>James Martin, Ian Warren, and Monique Mann</i>	111
6 Policing drugs in the Caribbean <i>Matthew Louis Bishop and Dylan Kerrigan</i>	132

7	Policing of drugs in Scotland: Moving beyond the stalemate to redesigning the chess board <i>Maria Fotopoulou and Elizabeth Aston</i>	151
8	Treading the paths of drug diversion <i>Wojciech Spyt and Jason Kew</i>	174
9	‘Another tool in the toolbox’: An investigation of a drug diversion programme in a Danish police precinct <i>Tobias Kammergaard, Esben Houborg, Thomas Friis Sogaard, and Sidsel Schröder</i>	197
10	Beyond harm reduction policing <i>Katherine Beckett, Monica Bell, and Forrest Stuart</i>	215
11	Law enforcement and public health partnerships: Opportunities and perils <i>Evan Anderson and Ruth Shefner</i>	234
12	From opponents to ‘interested’ partners? A case study of police and harm reduction service collaboration <i>Esben Houborg, Tobias Kammergaard, and Thomas Friis Sogaard</i>	256
13	Leading local change: Police and crime commissioners and drug policy <i>Meg Jones and Ben Twomey</i>	275
	Conclusion: From stalemate to progress <i>Matthew Bacon and Jack Spicer</i>	298
	<i>Index</i>	305

FIGURES

3.1	Police-recorded drug crime (numbers)	75
3.2	Drugs arrests by ethnicity (number)	76
10.1	Number of drug arrests in the United States, 1980–2019	218
13.1	The local PCC governance structure	277
13.2	Types of respondents to the PCC’s Drug Policy Call for Evidence	281
13.3	Drivers for a PCC-led approach	287

CONTRIBUTORS

Evan Anderson is a senior lecturer at the University of Pennsylvania, where he teaches in multiple schools and programmes. Dr Anderson is a public health law researcher. With doctoral training in law and public health, his research blends doctrinal legal analysis and epidemiologic methods. His most recent work explores pre-booking diversion programmes, ‘drug courts’, and other specialised court programmes, and drug consumption rooms. Dr Anderson was formerly the senior fellow at the Public Health Law Research programme, a national programme office of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, which supports empirical research on the health effects of laws and legal processes.

Elizabeth Aston is the director of the Scottish Institute for Policing Research (SIPR) and a professor of criminology at Edinburgh Napier University. Liz has a strong record of collaborative research on policing in both Scotland and mainland Europe, and is experienced in knowledge exchange and building strong researcher–practitioner relationships. Her research interests centre on local policing and intersections with health, and she is currently involved in projects on drug checking and police carriage of naloxone. Liz has conducted research on the relationship between substance use and offending, community policing, stop and search, and youth diversionary projects. She is a member of Police Scotland’s Drug Strategy Board and the Naloxone Delivery Steering Group.

Matthew Bacon is a senior lecturer in criminology at the University of Sheffield. Before joining Sheffield, he worked as a research associate at the University of Manchester on a project examining the contractual governance of drug users in treatment. Matthew’s research broadly focuses on policing and drug policy. He is the author of *Taking Care of Business* (OUP, 2016), an ethnography of police detectives, drug law enforcement, and proactive investigation. His current research is

concerned with innovation and reform in drugs policing, especially alternatives to criminalisation and other harm reduction measures. Matthew is institutional co-lead of the N8 Policing Research Partnership and a founding member of the Sheffield University Policing Research Group. These roles involve promoting evidence-based practice and collaborations in knowledge exchange, enhanced training, and research co-production.

Katherine Beckett is S. Frank Miyamoto professor of sociology and professor and chair of the Department of Law, Societies, and Justice at the University of Washington. Her recent research projects have explored the consequences of penal expansion for social inequality, the role of race in drug law enforcement, and the transformation of urban social control practices in the United States. She is the author of numerous articles and four books on these topics, including, most recently, *Ending Mass Incarceration: Why it Persists and How to Achieve Meaningful Reform*, published in 2021 by Oxford University Press.

Monica Bell is a professor of law at Yale Law School and an associate professor of sociology at Yale University. Her areas of expertise include criminal justice, welfare law, housing, race, qualitative research methods, and law and sociology. She previously served as a Liman fellow at the Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia, and earned her PhD in sociology and social policy from Harvard University in 2018.

Matthew Louis Bishop is senior lecturer in international politics at the University of Sheffield and was previously based at the University of the West Indies (UWI) in Trinidad between 2009 and 2016. His work broadly focuses on the political economy of development, with a particular focus on the Caribbean, and his recent work has examined processes of cannabis legalisation in the Americas, drugs and weapons trafficking, the gendered drivers of gang violence, and participatory development in post-conflict Colombia.

Ross Coomber is a professor of criminology and sociology with more than 30 years research experience in the drug and alcohol field. He has written extensively and broadly in this area – particularly on the machinations of illicit drug markets, nationally and internationally, and across different cultural and environmental spaces. His research is strongly inter/multidisciplinary and boasts ongoing collaborations with forensic chemists/scientists, medics, public health practitioners, and researchers, as well as, perhaps more predictably, disciplines across the humanities and social sciences.

Benson Egwuonwu is a solicitor and member of StopWatch. He has conducted research on international human rights law for The Law Society of England and Wales, and has also written about human rights and policing for the award-winning digital charity EachOther. Benson has a BA in law (jurisprudence) from

the University of Oxford, and an LLM in professional legal practice from BPP University.

Maria Fotopoulou is a senior lecturer in criminology at the University of Stirling. Her research interests revolve around drug policy and its intersection with criminal justice systems; human trafficking where this intersects with drugs use/trade; and gender and drug use. Maria has worked in the field of policy and service evaluation of the health and social care of people who use drugs and more broadly marginalised and minority groups in the United Kingdom and Greece.

Esben Houborg is associate professor at the Centre for Alcohol and Drug Research, Aarhus University. His main areas of research are drug policy in a historical and contemporary perspective, criminological research particularly concerning law enforcement, sociological research in the areas of drug treatment and harm reduction, and urban studies of drug-related issues.

Meg Jones is director of new business and services at the social justice charity, Cranstoun. Meg leads on identifying, developing, and delivering innovative, evidence-informed solutions that rebuild lives. Meg is currently a selected expert supporting the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime for the Vienna and New York Committee on Drugs. Prior to this, Meg was head of policy for the West Midlands police and crime commissioner, with responsibility for delivering the PCC's police and crime plan. Meg has a strong academic background with an MSc public management distinction, an MA international relations distinction, and a BA in history and international relations, combined with practical experience in both the public and private sectors. Throughout her career, Meg has been known to develop and deliver collaborative policies, improving systems in the criminal system as well as in drug policy. As regional policy officer, working for four police and crime commissioners in the West Midlands, the first role of its kind in the country, Meg worked at regional and national level to create and develop innovative changes to collaborative policing.

Habib Kadiri is research and policy manager for StopWatch, a charity that works for fair and accountable policing. He also has public health policy experience from a previous appointment, as well as an interest in digital rights issues. Habib has a BA in modern history with economics and an MA in political economy from the University of Manchester.

Tobias Kammergaard is a research associate at the University of York working at the ESRC Vulnerability and Policing Futures Research Centre. His research revolves around policing, drug policy and marginalisation. In his PhD dissertation, he investigated private and public policing of marginalised drug users in two cities in Denmark.

Dylan Kerrigan is a peace and development officer with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in Trinidad. Previously he was a lecturer in

criminology at the University of Leicester, UK, working with a multidisciplinary research team on the definition, extent, experience, and treatment of mental, neurological, and substance use (MNS) disorders in Guyana's jails. From 2010 to 2019 he was a lecturer at the University of the West Indies (UWI), St Augustine Campus, and was a visiting lecturer with the UWI until 2021, supervising graduate students in cultural and political sociology. His publications include research on the militarisation of policing, state violence and anti-black racism, and the relationship between masculinities and community violence.

Jason Kew is a former detective chief inspector with Thames Valley Police and lead for drugs, exploitation, and harm reduction. Jason began his career in the Royal Navy and has since had a 26-year career serving in the police. During his career, Jason developed a deep understanding and compassion for people who use drugs and their families or friends facing all aspects of addiction. He is industrious to carefully and thoughtfully deliver policies and plans to reduce stigma and marginalisation with professional experience working with governments in numerous countries, the Home Office, academics, various cross-sector charities, and, most importantly, people with lived experience. Jason continues his vocation and passion for social justice with the Centre for Justice Innovation.

Charlie Lloyd is a professor of social policy and criminal justice at the University of York. Charlie has a background in criminology, undertaking research at the University of Cambridge and then the Home Office, where he undertook research on prisons and probation and managed a programme of research on drugs prevention. He then moved to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, where he managed research programmes on young people, drugs, and alcohol. At the University of York he has undertaken research on police responses to substance use, stigmatisation of people who use drugs, and drug use in prison and on release. He currently co-directs the ESRC Vulnerability and Policing Futures Research Centre.

Monique Mann is a senior lecturer in criminology and a member of the Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation at Deakin University. Dr Mann is an adjunct researcher with the Law, Science, Technology and Society Research Centre at Vrije Universiteit Brussel. Mann's research expertise concerns three main interrelated lines of inquiry: (1) new technology for policing and surveillance, (2) human rights and social justice, and (3) governance and regulation.

James Martin is a senior lecturer in criminology at the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at Deakin University. James is a leading authority on cryptomarkets and the dark web drugs trade, and has published two books as well as numerous quantitative and qualitative journal articles on this topic.

Leah Moyle is a senior lecturer in criminology and sociology at Royal Holloway, University of London. Leah's research interests focus principally on illicit drug

supply. She has published widely in this area with recent work spanning the policing of street-level drug markets, the sentencing and punishment of low-level ‘drug dealers’, and the use of social media in drug markets. Leah’s work is internationally recognised and her findings have informed policy reports by the Global Commission on Drug Policy, the UK government, and the Advisory Council for Misuse of Drugs (ACMD).

Sidsel Schrøder is an educational anthropologist and part of the administrative staff at the Centre for Alcohol and Drug Research, Aarhus University. She works across different drug research areas, including young people, marginalised drug users, and treatment.

Ruth Shefner is a doctoral student in sociomedical sciences at Columbia University’s Mailman School of Public Health, and a pre-doctoral fellow in Columbia’s NIDA T32 training programme on HIV and Substance Use in the Criminal Justice System. A practicing social worker, Ruth formerly directed a re-entry programme, which provides therapeutic case management services along a continuity-of-care model to individuals transitioning out of Philadelphia’s county jail system. She received her master’s degrees in public health and social work from the University of Pennsylvania, where her research examined connections between criminal justice contact and fatal overdose, pre-booking diversion programmes, and criminal justice–public health collaborations.

Michael Shiner is an associate professor in the Department of Social Policy at the London School of Economics and Political Science, and a member of StopWatch. He has conducted extensive research on drug policy and policing, with particular reference to stop and search and ‘race’, and has a longstanding interest in police reform and organisational change.

Thomas Friis Søgaaard is associate professor at the Centre for Alcohol and Drug Research, Aarhus University. Thomas is a qualitative researcher and his research interests include drug markets, policing, drug policy, and the night-time economy.

Jack Spicer is a lecturer in criminology at the University of Bath. Following his doctoral studies, he has written extensively on the emergence of the ‘County Lines’ drug supply model and the responses to it. This reflects his wider research interests into the functioning of illicit drug markets, the enforcement of drug laws, and drug policy reform. Dr Spicer has published articles in leading journals and presented papers at a range of international conferences. In 2019, he was awarded ‘Best Early Career Researcher’ by the International Society for the Study of Drug Policy. In 2021 he was the recipient of the prestigious Radzinowicz Prize. As a member of a number of domestic and international networks, he regularly contributes to practitioner events, public engagement initiatives, and media engagements. He is the co-editor of Routledge’s *Drugs, Crime and Society* book series and sits on the

editorial board for the *Journal of Qualitative Criminal Justice and Criminology*. His first book entitled *Policing County Lines: Responses to Evolving Provincial Drug Markets* was published in 2021.

Wojciech Spyt is a serving detective chief inspector with Thames Valley Police (TVP). Wojciech has previously worked in the Policing Strategy Unit, during which time he worked together with DCI Jason Kew over a period of two years in designing, implementing, and providing analysis of two separate drug diversion schemes currently operating in TVP. During his time with the police, he has completed a doctorate in criminal justice studies at the University of Portsmouth focused on how officers evidence electronic material that is stored in cloud computing networks.

Forrest Stuart is a professor of sociology at Stanford University, where he is also the director of the Stanford Ethnography Lab. As an urban ethnographer, he uses fieldwork, archival, and other qualitative methods to investigate the causes, contours, and consequences of urban poverty in spaces ranging from Los Angeles' Skid Row to Chicago. A 2020 MacArthur fellow, he is the author of *Down, Out, and Under Arrest: Policing and Everyday Life in Skid Row* and *Ballad of the Bullet: Gangs, Drill Music, and the Power of Online Infamy*.

Ben Twomey is director of policy and communications for a leading children's rights charity, NYAS (National Youth Advocacy Service), where he supports and empowers care-experienced children and young people. Having previously worked for three police and crime commissioners, Ben led on drug policy in both the West Midlands and County Durham. Ben's policies have been praised by government ministers, cross-party parliamentary groups, national treatment agencies, and senior police officers. Nationally, Ben sits on the Labour Campaign for Drug Policy Reform's Expert Working Group, as well as co-chairing the Alliance for Children in Care and Care Leavers. He has an LLM with distinction from the University of Warwick, and a first-class history and politics BA from the University of York. When he was 22 years old, Ben also became the youngest candidate ever in the country to stand in a police and crime commissioner election, where he emphasised treating addiction as a health issue rather than a criminal justice one.

Ian Warren is a senior lecturer in criminology at Deakin University. He has written widely on comparative legal and criminological developments, focusing primarily on US processes of extraterritorial law enforcement. He is involved in ongoing research examining the laws of extradition and evidence exchange, with specific reference to new developments in information communications technology and their impacts on transnational police cooperation.



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

DRUG LAW ENFORCEMENT, POLICING AND HARM REDUCTION

An introduction

Matthew Bacon and Jack Spicer

The seeds of this book were planted when we embarked on our respective doctoral projects. Empirically, both theses, and the monographs that followed (Bacon 2016; Spicer 2021), reported on our time spent in the field observing drugs policing ‘in action’. As budding ethnographers, experiencing the realities of this intriguing, hidden world at first hand deepened our understanding, honed our sense of purpose, and was perhaps the most ‘fun’ part of the research process. But, as part of these projects, we also immersed ourselves in the existing literature and read what others had to say on the matter. Among other things, reviewing this body of work led us to two broad observations, each revolving around a paradoxical core. The first was that, while undoubtedly some ‘classic’ texts have been published in decades past – or at least publications that have been hugely influential on our own academic journeys, such as Peter Manning’s (2004) *The Narcs’ Game*, Nicholas Dorn and Nigel South’s (1990) article ‘Drug markets and law enforcement’, Mike Collison’s (1995) *Police, Drugs and Community*, and Lisa Maher and David Dixon’s (1999) work on ‘Policing and public health’ – scholarship with drugs policing as its dedicated, primary focus is surprisingly light. This is especially so given the centrality of policing in drug policy debates; the fact that drug law enforcement receives the largest share of government spending on drugs; the considerable amount of time taken up by drug problems in the working lives of many police officers; and its wider cultural standing. The second observation was that, while a number of insightful concepts and theories have been put forward to help make sense of the complex, contradictory, and controversial nature of drugs policing, attempts at theoretical development and advancement through empirical exploration have been rather sporadic and

disjointed. As a result, the area remains underdeveloped. This book seeks to remedy this situation. In doing so, we have endeavoured to produce a text that we wish had been available to us when we were attempting to assimilate all that had been written on the subject a few years ago.

Aims and approach

This edited collection is the first of its kind on this important and now burgeoning field of study. Demonstrating the status of drugs policing as a growth area of scholarly interest, recent years have seen the publication of two special issues of journals that broadly focus on the subjects of policing and drug policy. In 2016, Eduardo Paes-Machado and Christopher Birkbeck brought together a range of international perspectives on the policing of drug markets for *Police Practice and Research*. The articles examine the tensions, conflicts, and prospects of change in various countries and regions of the world (see Paes-Machado and Birkbeck 2016). The following year, Alison Ritter and Alex Stevens guest edited a special issue of the *International Journal of Drug Policy*, with the aim of improving knowledge on law enforcement in drug policy through a mixture of original articles and commentaries (see Ritter and Stevens 2017). Our goal with this book is to continue this momentum. It brings together a range of leading scholars, some of whom contributed to the above-mentioned special issues. Importantly, it also boasts valuable insights from experienced practitioners, including serving police officers and those who have sat around the policy table. Combined, the academic and ‘pracademic’ contributions that comprise this book make a much-needed interdisciplinary and international contribution that engages with established and emerging areas of scholarship, advances cutting-edge debates, and sets an agenda for future directions in drugs policing.

As we will go on to outline in more detail below, the individual chapters that comprise the content of this book are diverse and eclectic. Utilising a variety of methodological approaches, analysing various data, and adopting a number of theoretical standpoints, the authors focus on a range of issues and contexts specifically relevant to drugs policing. This includes responses to specific drug market issues, such as ‘county lines’ supply, drug trafficking in transit countries, and the ‘dark web’; situating drugs policing within wider social contexts, such as calls for defunding the police; and the (in)formal ways and means in which drugs policing operates, including various attempts at diversion. The central thread that connects the chapters is the concept of ‘harm reduction policing’. Despite being well established in the drugs field more broadly, ideas surrounding ‘harm reduction’ are relatively new to drugs policing and are receiving increasing attention in the drug policy and policing literature (Bacon 2016, 2022; Beckett 2016; Caulkins and Reuter 2009; Kammersgaard 2019; Perrone et al. 2022; Shiner 2016; Spicer 2021; Stevens 2013). At its core, harm reduction policing involves the adoption of evidence-based policies and practices which aim to reduce the adverse health, social, and economic consequences associated with drug use, drug markets, and

efforts to control them through the criminal justice system. It sits in opposition to ‘drug war’-style forms of policing that follow the logic of prohibition in pursuing blunt, punitive interventions that can be not only ineffective in their stated aims of reducing production, supply, and use, but often counterproductive in their wider outcomes. The harmful impact of criminalisation on violence, security, civil liberties, human rights, police legitimacy, public health, and social inequality has been extensively documented throughout the world (Rolles et al. 2016). Yet, harm reduction policing is not dogmatic or necessarily demanding of root and branch reform. As a perspective, or model, it allows for pragmatism and highlights the potential for positive change and progressive development to be achieved within the confines of the current policy context. In other words, harm reduction policing provides a way to end the stalemate and bring about meaningful reform.

From the outset, we think it is necessary to address a common issue with terminology and distinguish between ‘drugs policing’ and ‘drug law enforcement’ – hence the title of the book. Drugs policing is sometimes treated as if it were synonymous with drug law enforcement. This is inaccurate and problematic as it overlooks and undervalues the wider purpose of drugs policing. While there is a lack of consensus on how to define ‘policing’ and the question of the police mission is recurring and contested, it is generally accepted in the field of police studies that policing is much broader than the exercise of legal powers (Bowling et al. 2019; Loader 2020). Enforcement is certainly a core element of the police mandate. Policing, however, encompasses a host of social service functions and activities that are aimed at the promotion of order and assurances of safety. For us, drug law enforcement should be viewed as a means to an end rather than an end in itself. Drug laws are resources that can be enforced in order to achieve the goals of harm reduction policing.

Contemporary issues

With this in mind, there has arguably never been a more important time for harm reduction policing to come to the fore as a theoretically robust and practically feasible model for organising how drugs policing is structured and undertaken. Across the world, we find ourselves in a precarious position where drug-related harms are at risk of intensifying beyond their already damaging levels. The *World Drug Report* (UNODC 2021) predicts that the number of people using drugs could rise by 11 per cent over the next decade, with as much as 40 per cent in Africa alone. It also highlights that more people are suffering from drug use disorders and losing their lives, with, for example, roughly 50,000 people dying from opioid overdoses in the United States in 2019, more than double the 2010 figure. The fallout from COVID-19, including increased unemployment and inequality, could well generate more problematic drug use and engagement with illicit markets. As the *European Drug Report* (EMCDDA 2021) also documents, despite some minor disruption, restrictions associated

with the pandemic have not had any significant impact on production or supply, with the market rapidly adapting to changing environments and circumstances. In fact, there continues to be surges in the supply of many drugs, such as cocaine, with uncertainty around others. What impact the Taliban rule in Afghanistan will have on global heroin markets, for example, remains to be seen (Felbab-Brown 2021).

Combined with other major trends, such as digital developments, globalisation, demographic shifts, migration, and climate change, it is unsurprising that the *European Drug Report* (EMCDDA 2021, p. 7) concludes that ‘both the drug market and patterns of drug use are becoming ever more dynamic, complex and globally connected’. Of course, simultaneously, policy responses are also being formulated to this context. A ‘quiet revolution’ (Eastwood et al. 2016) of progressive drug policy reform is visible in many countries, with decriminalisation becoming more popular and attempts at legalisation no longer only residing in the dreams of drug policy activists. Policing typically remains a central component of drug strategies throughout the world. But there are signs that the focus and nature of drugs policing are changing. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC 2021) stress that tackling drug trafficking requires international cooperation and the transfer of best law enforcement practices. The increased number of people with drug use disorders, however, requires a multifactorial approach. Importantly, UNODC (2021, p. 48) state that ‘[p]rotecting the human rights of people who use drugs by treating them with dignity, removing stigma and providing equal access to health and social services need to be the underlying principles of all interventions relating to drug use’. Similarly, the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA 2021) draws attention to the new EU drug strategy, which makes explicit that the response to drugs should be evidence based and judged on its impact on the health, safety, and well-being of citizens. In the United Kingdom, part of the government’s response to Dame Carol Black’s (2020) commissioned report into the state of the domestic drug market was to promote tough enforcement activities targeted at all levels of the supply chain and ‘meaningful consequences’ for people who use drugs (HM Government 2021). The second part of Black’s (2021) independent review focuses on prevention, treatment, and recovery. One of the many recommendations that has found its way into the government’s strategic approach is the promise to divert more drug-related offenders to treatment instead of prison. What plays out in practice will be the focus of much attention for years to come.

Chapter synopsis

Harm reduction policing should be central to national and international debates about the future of drugs policing and the wider dynamics of drug policy reform playing out across the globe. Lessons can be learnt and evidence can be drawn upon to try to ensure that drugs policing actually reduces rather than exacerbates

drug harms. In various ways, the contributions in this book all seek to promote this goal.

Key concepts, issues, and themes

Chapter 1 sets the scene for the rest of the book by examining the origins, development, and current standing of harm reduction policing. We synthesise the existing literature on the topic and offer a detailed overview of developing trends and specific examples from around the world. Our aim is to bring together this growing body of work for the first time, conceptualise harm reduction policing as a distinct policing model, and provide a framework for future research. Key points of discussion include enforcement-led prohibition and its shortcomings, the emergence, evolution, and application of the notion of ‘harm reduction’ in drug policy and practice, and the meaning and types of ‘harm’. Drawing on the concepts of the ‘risk environment’ (Rhodes 2002) and ‘responsive regulation’ (Braithwaite 2011), the chapter also considers theoretical tools that can be employed to inform harm reduction policing. To date, the application of harm reduction principles to drugs policing has only been realised to a limited extent in responses to drug use and markets. The chapter therefore concludes by considering the prospects of harm reduction policing, including the barriers and facilitators to its expansion.

Harm reduction and harmful drugs policing

The following section examines established drug law enforcement practices and considers the extent to which they reduce or result in harm.

In Chapter 2, Charlie Lloyd presents the first international literature review on the policing of drug possession. It focuses on three broad themes: (1) policy change, including the ‘Lambeth Experiment’, cannabis reclassification, diversion, and order maintenance policing in New York; (2) the impacts of policing – both positive and negative, including consequences for police legitimacy, patterns of drug use, and other social issues; and (3) variation in enforcement and the use of police discretion – the differences between laws and policies ‘in the books’ and ‘in action’ on the streets. The chapter concludes that policing drug possession is doing more harm than good and highlights the need for new thinking and approaches. For Lloyd, by far the largest weight on the negative side of the scale is the gross over-representation of young black men among those stopped and searched on suspicion of possession.

In Chapter 3, Benson Egwuonwu, Habib Kadiri, and Michael Shiner examine the role of drug law enforcement in the over-policing of black and minority ethnic communities in the United States and England and Wales. They demonstrate that drugs policing is a key driver of the problems underpinning recent calls to ‘defund’ the police on both sides of the Atlantic, most notably racial discrimination, disparities, and disadvantages. This leads the authors to conclude that the

defunding agenda should be taken more seriously in the United Kingdom. In light of the failure of repeated reform efforts, however, as well as the likelihood that the police will adapt to budget cuts in ways that perpetuate existing practices, which is demonstrated through an analysis of policing under austerity, they argue for a broader focus on structural racism and institutional transformation. Drug reform, in particular the decriminalisation of drug possession, should be at the forefront of this process, alongside community investment, therapeutic interventions, employment programmes, and public health approaches to policing.

Chapter 4 considers the nature and consequences of symbolic forms of drugs policing. Building on the framework originally presented in Coomber et al. (2019), Ross Coomber, Matthew Bacon, Jack Spicer, and Leah Moyle start by discussing further concepts that can advance theoretical perspectives on symbolic policing, including Goffman's (1959) concept of 'performances', Manning's (1997) dramaturgical analysis of policing, and Loader's (1997) work on 'symbolic power'. The authors then draw on their respective empirical studies to illustrate how symbolic drugs policing operates in practice, from the perspectives of police officers and affected drug market actors. Attention is given to how specific drugs policing activities such as crackdown operations, the execution of drug warrants, responding to new threats, and attempting to safeguard 'vulnerable' populations can be considered symbolic in terms of how they are performed and their outcomes. Recognising that symbolism is inescapable in how drugs policing is undertaken and represented, the chapter concludes by putting forward recommendations for how the communications and signals sent out may be reconfigured to help promote practices that align with harm reduction principles.

Continuity, change, and the prospect of reform

The next three chapters explore continuity, change, and the prospect of reform in drugs policing.

In Chapter 5, James Martin, Ian Warren, and Monique Mann examine the ideological challenges and principal enforcement tactics associated with policing cryptomarkets. Focusing on legal developments in the United States and Australia, the authors draw on the concept of moral panic to help explain the constant expansion of state power into new and problematic territories. In particular, they demonstrate how permissive organised crime, conspiracy, and surveillance laws provide the basis for sanctioning interventions that undermine human rights and civil liberties but do little to reduce the size of the market or the harms caused by illicit drug distribution on the dark web. The authors argue that the policing of cryptomarkets is a digital manifestation and expansion of the war on drugs that is strikingly similar in terms of its limited effectiveness and damaging impact.

Although many parts of the world are experiencing shifts in rhetoric, discourse, and policy regarding the policing of drugs, Matthew Bishop and Dylan Kerrigan consider the difficulties faced by many Caribbean states in moving

towards approaches based on harm reduction principles. Chapter 6 explores the distinctive nature of the ‘drug problem’ in the Caribbean in three main sections. First, the authors discuss how the barriers that exist reflect both enduring legacies of colonial brutality in which policing systems were established to maintain order in deeply racially stratified societies and a post-independence settlement that coincided with intense anti-drug surveillance led by the United States. Second, they explain the changing geopolitical context since the dawn of independence, showing how Caribbean policing systems have evolved in tandem with US-driven security interventions, entrenching structural dynamics which inhibit them from either emulating legal shifts elsewhere or developing more humane criminal justice systems. Third, they examine how the securitising, militarising, and privatising of ‘hard’ interventions on the basis of imported policing models that sit uneasily with local culture, in tandem with deteriorating public infrastructure for ‘soft’ policy geared towards social transformation, have exacerbated this picture, leading to sustained antagonism between police and marginalised populations.

Chapter 7 illuminates aspects of the risk environment within which drugs are consumed and policed in Scotland, a country that is in urgent need of reform to reduce the negative health, social, and legal impacts of drug use, not least because drug-related deaths are at record levels. Maria Fotopoulou and Liz Aston start by critically analysing the policy environment. They explain how the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act has created enabling conditions for criminal justice responses but impedes the establishment of harm reduction interventions, such as drug consumption rooms. They also explain how, as a devolved administration, Scotland has its own drug strategy, which recognises drug use as a public health issue and aims to focus on a holistic, human rights-based approach to drug problems. The organisational policies of Police Scotland are also conducive to harm reduction policing. However, while the language of the police signals a progressive approach, the authors argue that there is a gap between policy and practice, which they demonstrate through their analysis of contemporary policing practices. They conclude with suggestions for fundamental shifts in the field to move beyond the stalemate produced by heavily prohibitionist policies.

Drug diversion schemes

The next section of the book focuses on police-led diversion and includes studies of drug diversion schemes in England (Chapter 8), Denmark (Chapter 9), and the United States (Chapter 10). Diversion is a key element of the harm reduction agenda that has generated significant interest and is being increasingly employed internationally. These chapters examine different models of diversion and assess their aims, benefits, risks, and the challenges associated with implementation.

In Chapter 8, Wojciech Spyt and Jason Kew examine the rationale for the development of two separate drug diversion pilots that have been implemented by Thames Valley Police, a regional police force operating in England and Wales.

Written by two serving police officers, this chapter offers a unique and valuable insight into police decision-making processes and the various factors that are driving change in how the police deal with people who use drugs, including a greater emphasis on evidence-based policing amid record levels of illicit drug use, dependency, and drug-related deaths. It also provides a detailed overview of different models of diversion, a critique of deferred prosecution schemes, and an evaluation of the West Berkshire pre-arrest voluntary referral scheme pilot. The authors conclude that there is appetite within the police to treat drug use as a public health issue and that the trend towards diversion is likely to continue.

In Chapter 9, Tobias Kammergaard, Esben Houborg, Thomas Søgaard, and Sidsel Schrøder provide an account of the first police-led diversion scheme in Denmark for young people caught in possession of illicit drugs. Based on survey, interview, and focus group data, the authors reveal that referral to treatment and social services was viewed by police officers as ‘another tool in the toolbox’ instead of an alternative to criminal sanctions. As a result, it is suggested that the diversion scheme is indicative of a new dual approach to policing youth drug use, which involves the use of traditional punitive deterrence in combination with demand or harm reduction measures. The authors also engage with the concept of ‘treatmentality’ (Jöhncke 2009) to explain why even progressive forms of drugs policing might still maintain a range of problematic assumptions about drug use and the appropriateness of treatment interventions.

In Chapter 10, Katherine Beckett, Monica Bell, and Forrest Stuart evaluate the current state of the drug war in the United States and describe the emergence and evolution of community-based alternative responses to drug use and drug markets. In particular, the authors account for the shift towards – and beyond – harm reduction policing that has taken place in Seattle, Washington. Their account starts with the adoption, benefits, and challenges of LEAD 1.0 (Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion), a pre-booking diversion scheme for people arrested on drug and prostitution charges. It continues by explaining how and why this framework was adapted – in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic – to become LEAD 2.0 (Let Everyone Advance with Dignity), in which police no longer serve as gatekeepers to services. Beckett et al. hope that this trend may help decentre the police and render extreme poverty, homelessness, and behavioural health issues ‘unpoliceable’.

Partnerships and policy networks

In the final section, the chapters are concerned with partnerships and policy networks and illustrate how multiple sectors have come together to forge new directions in the policing of drug-related issues.

Chapter 11 examines law enforcement and public health partnerships, drawing on the development of a pre-booking diversion programme in Philadelphia. Evan Anderson and Ruth Shefner focus on the complexity and implementation challenges of aligning police and public health activities. They demonstrate

that diversion is not sufficient to improve individual and community health if the resources and services needed to satisfy unmet social and health needs are lacking. They also explain how diversion can perpetuate the medicalisation of drug use, homelessness, and other social distress, not only producing substantial incidental harm but also obscuring more effective upstream strategies for promoting health. Accounting for local context, the authors contend, is essential to understanding the potential value and pitfalls of pre-booking programmes as a replacement for many current drugs policing practices.

Chapter 12 presents a case study of how police and low-threshold social and harm reduction services went from being opponents to partners in a joint effort to reduce drug-related harm associated with an open drug scene in Copenhagen. Using the concept of ‘policy network’ (Carlsson 2000) and actor-network theory (Latour 1993), Esben Houborg, Tobias Kammergaard, and Thomas Søgaard explore the work that went into interesting and enrolling local actors into collective action. Aside from providing insights into the networking processes involved in the development of harm reduction policing, the authors also show how the scheme created new ways of working for the various actors involved and made new types of action possible. The chapter shows that there does not have to be a contradiction between policing and harm reduction, which has often been the case in this area of drug policy.

Finally, Chapter 13 argues that, in England and Wales, directly elected police and crime commissioners (PCCs) have become ‘drug policy actors’ and enablers of harm reduction through their convening power in policy networks. Meg Jones and Ben Twomey explore the PCC role in police governance and the journey to develop and deliver a harm reduction approach to drug policy in the West Midlands, where local initiatives include diversion, naloxone provision, heroin assisted treatment, drug safety testing, and drug consumption rooms. Drawing on their extensive experience working for PCCs and promoting harm reduction policing, the authors provide a rare account of the inner workings of the policymaking process and share their insights on how to overcome barriers to drug policy reform. They conclude by offering practical guidance for policymakers, practitioners, and the general public on how to achieve change.

Conclusion

With all of its contributions combined, this edited collection augments and significantly advances drugs policing scholarship, representing a notable landmark in the emerging body of literature on harm reduction policing. In so doing, it also makes a valuable contribution to the broader but still relatively new field of law enforcement and public health, which is fast finding itself at the forefront of much policing research (Punch and James 2017; van Dijk and Crofts 2017; van Dijk et al. 2019). Collectively, the authors critically examine empirical findings on drugs policing in various contexts; explore the conceptual and practical advantages, challenges, and risks of harm reduction approaches; and provide

fresh perspectives on drug policy debates by fleshing out options for what can and should be done to reform the policing of drugs. Importantly, thinking critically about addressing inequality provides an overarching theme that lies at the heart of much of the discussion. In its traditional manifestations alongside broader policy regimes, drugs policing has often played a role in exacerbating inequality. But a central contention of this collection is that there is potential for progressive change.

While covering a range of countries, localities, and contexts, inevitably this edited collection does not provide an exhaustive overview of drugs policing throughout the world. Nevertheless, several core messages span the chapters: (1) ‘drug war’-style forms of policing that follow the logic of prohibition in pursuing blunt, punitive interventions are generally both ineffective and counterproductive; (2) harm reduction policing provides a workable alternative that can reduce the adverse health, social, and economic consequences associated with drug use, drug markets, and efforts to control them through the criminal justice system; and (3) the path towards harm reduction policing is fragile, challenging to navigate, and almost insurmountable in some situations. With these as a starting point, there is undoubtedly a need for more research to be undertaken. Conceptually, there remains significant scope to develop our ideas, understandings, and explanations. The contributions of this book are largely concerned with policing people who use drugs and local drug distribution. More research is needed to explore harm reduction approaches to suppressing supply further up the chain and countering organised crime groups for whom drugs are one of a range of criminal activities. Empirically, as changes in the strategic direction of drugs policing continue and the contexts in which it operates shift, the need to gather and analyse data will be vital in continuing to improve our knowledge. Hopefully this book can play a part in this research agenda. As well as informing and giving critical insight into the present state of affairs, we hope it will inspire and guide the drugs policing scholarship of the future.

References

- Bacon, M. (2016) *Taking Care of Business: Police Detectives, Drug Law Enforcement and Proactive Investigation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bacon, M. (2022) ‘Desistance from criminalisation: Police culture and new directions in drugs policing’. *Policing and Society*. 32(4): 522–539.
- Beckett, K. (2016) ‘The uses and abuses of police discretion: Toward harm reduction policing’. *Harvard Law and Policy Review*. 10: 77–100.
- Black, C. (2020) *Review of Drugs: Phase One Report*. London: Home Office.
- Black, C. (2021) *Review of Drugs: Phase Two Report*. London: Home Office.
- Bowling, B., Reiner, R. and Sheptycki, J. (2019) *The Politics of the Police*. 5th edn. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Braithwaite, J. (2011) ‘The essence of responsive regulation’. *University of British Columbia Law Review*. 44(3): 475–520.

- Carlsson, L. (2000) 'Policy networks as collective action'. *Policy Studies Journal*. 28(3): 502–520.
- Caulkins, J. and Reuter, P. (2009) 'Towards a harm-reduction approach to enforcement'. *Safer Communities*. 8(1): 9–23.
- Collison, M. (1995) *Police, Drugs and Community*. London: Free Association Books.
- Coomber, R., Moyle, L. and Mahoney, M. (2019) 'Symbolic policing: Situating targeted police operations/'crackdowns' on street-level drug markets'. *Policing and Society*. 29(1): 1–17.
- Dorn, N. and South, N. (1990) 'Drug markets and law enforcement'. *British Journal of Criminology*. 30(2): 171–188.
- Eastwood, N., Fox, E. and Rosmarin, A. (2016) *A Quiet Revolution: Drug Decriminalisation Across the Globe*. London: Release.
- EMCDDA (2021) *European Drug Report: Trends and Developments*. Lisbon: EMCDDA.
- Felbab-Brown, V. (2021) 'Pipe dreams: The Taliban and drugs from the 1990s into its new regime'. *Small Wars Journal*.
- Goffman, E. (1959) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Doubleday Anchor.
- HM Government (2021) *From Harm to Hope: A 10-Year Drugs Plan to Cut Crime and Save Lives*. London: HM Government.
- Jöhncke, S. (2009) 'Treatmentality and the governing of drug use'. *Drugs and Alcohol Today*. 9(4): 14–17.
- Kammersgaard, T. (2019) 'Harm reduction policing: From drug law enforcement to protection'. *Contemporary Drug Problems*. 46(4): 345–362.
- Latour, B. (1993) *The Pasteurisation of France*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Loader, I. (1997) 'Policing and the social: Questions of symbolic power'. *British Journal of Sociology*. 48(1): 1–18.
- Loader, I. (2020) *Revisiting the Police Mission*. London: Police Foundation.
- Manning, P. (1997) *Police Work: The Social Organization of Policing*. 2nd edn. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press.
- Manning, P. (2004) *The Narcs' Game: Organizational and Informational Limits on Drug Law Enforcement*. 2nd edn. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Maher, L. and Dixon, D. (1999) 'Policing and public health: Law enforcement and harm minimization in a street-level drug market'. *British Journal of Criminology*. 39(4): 488–512.
- Paes-Machado, E. and Birkbeck, C. (2016) 'Introduction'. *Police Practice and Research*. 17(4): 303–305.
- Perrone, D., Malm, A. and Magaña, E. (2022) 'Harm reduction policing: An evaluation of Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) in San Francisco'. *Police Quarterly*. 25(1): 7–32.
- Punch, M. and James, S. (2017) 'Researching law enforcement and public health'. *Policing and Society*. 27(3): 251–260.
- Rhodes, T. (2002) 'The "risk environment": A framework for understanding and reducing drug-related harm'. *International Journal of Drug Policy*. 13(2): 85–94.
- Ritter, A. and Stevens, A. (2017) 'Improving knowledge on law enforcement in drug policy'. *International Journal of Drug Policy*. 41: 89–90.
- Rolles, S., Murkin, G., Powell, M., Kushlick, D., Saunter, N. and Slater, J. (2016) *The Alternative World Drug Report: Counting the Costs of the War on Drugs*. 2nd edn. Bristol: Transform Drug Policy Foundation.
- Shiner, M. (2016) 'Drug policing: What is it good for?' In Collins, J. (ed.) *After the War on Drugs*. London: LSE Expert Group on the Economics of Drug Policy: 56–66.

- Spicer, J. (2021) *Policing County Lines: Responses to Evolving Provisional Drug Markets*. London: Palgrave.
- Stevens, A. (2013) *Modernising Drug Law Enforcement: Applying Harm Reduction Principles to the Policing of Retail Drug Markets*. London: International Drug Policy Consortium.
- UNODC (2021) *World Drug Report*. Vienna: UNODC.
- van Dijk, A. and Crofts, N. (2017) 'Law enforcement and public health as an emerging field'. *Policing and Society*. 27(3): 261–275.
- van Dijk, A., Herrington, V., Crofts, N., Breunig, R., Burris, S., Sullivan, H., Middleton, J., Sherman, S. and Thomson, N. (2019) 'Law enforcement and public health: Recognition and enhancement of joined-up solutions'. *The Lancet*. 393(10168): 287–294.

1

HARM REDUCTION POLICING

Conceptualisation and implementation

Matthew Bacon and Jack Spicer

Introduction

Of all the features comprising the contemporary policing landscape, drugs is arguably one of the most intriguing, complicated, and contentious. It is a domain that brings into sharp focus the multifaceted nature of the police role in society, characterised by a miscellany of tasks, goal conflicts, and policy trade-offs. Under the drugs umbrella, those undertaking policing functions can be exposed to anything from violent organised crime groups to drug overdose deaths. Drugs policing is undoubtedly faced with an ‘impossible mandate’ (Manning 1997). Central to this is how drugs cut across so many societal issues, presenting complex, compounding challenges that are intertwined with a range of wicked problems. Poverty, crime, addiction, inequality, homelessness, personal trauma, and mental health conditions are all regularly connected in various ways to the use, supply, and presence of drugs in communities. At the same time, while no drug use is entirely harmless, drugs are a source of pleasure for many and can often be used with minimal risk to both the user and the general public. Consequently, drugs and their control are bound up in thorny moral and politically charged debates that are difficult to reconcile. Policing is often caught up in this wrangling, being heavily disparaged by some, while ‘fetishised’ by others (Bowling et al. 2019).

Aligning with the ideologies and institutions of the global prohibition regime, drugs policing is firmly centred on law enforcement and punitive interventions. The core aim has long been to reduce – or even eliminate – the production, supply, and use of controlled substances through deterrence and criminal sanctions (MacCoun and Reuter 2001). This rather myopic view has tended to obscure the wider purpose that drugs policing could be oriented around and the harm reduction functions that the police could potentially achieve. While undoubtedly sometimes distorted, exaggerated, and misunderstood, drugs and their supply

are causal factors in a multitude of serious and ‘real’ harms. There are a variety of enforcement interventions that can effectively reduce drug crime and associated problems (see e.g. Mazerolle et al. 2007, 2020). But it should also be recognised that there are changes and reforms that can be made to policing to reduce or contribute to the reduction of a broader range of drug harms.

There is emerging evidence that drugs policing is moving away from traditional enforcement interventions towards a greater focus on harm reduction (Bacon 2016; Beckett 2016; Cloud and Davis 2015; Kammersgaard 2019; Krupanski 2018; Monaghan and Bewley-Taylor 2013a; Perrone et al. 2022; Spicer 2021; Spooner et al. 2004; Stevens 2013; UKDPC 2009). For the purposes of this chapter, ‘harm reduction policing’ is broadly defined as policing measures that aim to reduce the adverse health, social, and economic consequences of drug use, drug markets and the efforts to control them through the criminal justice system. Signs of a shift are apparent in burgeoning police-led diversion schemes. Other indicators include the carrying of naloxone by frontline officers and police support for harm reduction services, such as needle exchange programmes, heroin-assisted treatment, drug consumption rooms, and drug safety testing. Indeed, many proponents of harm reduction increasingly identify the police as a key partner when it comes to implementing harm reduction programmes (Houborg et al., this volume). It therefore appears timely to provide clarity to this area by considering exactly what harm reduction policing is and how it works in practice.

This chapter examines the origins, development, and current standing of harm reduction policing. It synthesises the extant literature on the topic and offers a detailed overview of developing trends and specific examples from across the globe. Our aim is to bring together this growing body of work coherently for the first time, conceptualise harm reduction policing as a distinct policing model, and provide a framework for future research. While much of this research might – often quite rightly – be explicitly critical by drawing attention to the direct and indirect harms that drugs policing causes, we argue that there is also a need for a pragmatic focus on how it may be (re)configured to reduce drug harms. The chapter begins by sketching out the wider drug policy context. It offers an overview of enforcement-led prohibition and its shortcomings, before outlining the origins and development of the harm reduction movement that emerged in response. While by no means an exhaustive account, such context is important, especially for those who come to this topic from a policing standpoint and might not be overly conversant with the drugs field. The chapter then turns its attention to the topic of harm reduction policing. It suggests that the underpinning ideas represent a continuation of themes visible in earlier drugs policing research, before going on to consider more contemporary conceptualisations and the types of drug harm with which this policing model is concerned. Drawing conceptually on the ideas of the ‘risk environment’ (Rhodes 2002) and ‘responsive regulation’ (Braithwaite 2011), the chapter moves on to discuss theoretical tools that can be employed to inform harm reduction policing. We conclude by