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“No one learned”: interpreting a drugs crackdown operation and its consequences through the ‘lens’ of social harm

Abstract

This article seeks to extend studies of social harm, by detailing the ways that harm is interpreted, identified and reflected upon by social actors in a specific empirical context; a drugs crackdown operation in a northern English city. Using a longitudinal ethnographic approach, unique insights are reported both from the time that the operation took place and a point in time, five years afterwards. The data offer rich accounts of the immediate, short and longer term impacts, as interpreted by youth workers and a group of mostly Somali young people (aged 13 – 19). Social harm, it is argued, offers a useful ‘lens’ through which to critically explore the culpability of well-meaning state interventions in the (re)production of structural inequalities.

Keywords: social harm, undercover, crackdown, policing, race

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Introduction

The over-policing of black and minority ethnic (BAME) communities in Britain has a long and persistent history (Hall et al. 1978 [2013]; Williams, 2015; Long and Joseph-Salisbury, 2018). Hall et al. (1978 [2013]: 179) reported the beginnings of a 'long deterioration in relations' between BAME communities and the police in the 1960s. This was later typified by the racialized moral panic surrounding the 'mugging crisis' which lead, by the 1970s, to the wholesale affiliation of black youth with 'mugging'. As Jefferson (2013) has observed, police stop and search practices began to focus disproportionately on the 'black areas' of British inner cities during this period, and news media constructed racialized framings of localised 'risk' and dysfunctionality (Gunter, 2017). Longstanding tensions between local BAME communities and the police have been cited as the causes of multiple inner city riots in Britain, including those in Bristol (1981), Brixton (1981), Toxteth (1981), Tottenham (1985), Handsworth (1981; 1985), Bradford, Burnley and Oldham (2001). Enquiries into the English riots of 2011 also identified "problematic relations with the police, and the experiences of stop and search" as significant factors in many rioters' decision making (Newburn, 2012: 333 *see also* Lewis et al. 2011). Black people remain disproportionately represented across all areas of police data (Cabinet Office, 2017) and in 2017 an independent review into the treatment of black and minority ethnic people in the Criminal Justice System found greater disproportionality in the number of black people in British prisons than the United States (Lammy, 2017).

Experiences of racialized policing cannot be detached from broader contexts of structural inequality (Khan and Shaheen, 2017). Compared with the white majority population, people from all ethnic minority groups in England are more likely to live in deprived neighbourhoods (Jivraj and Khan, 2013). Using 2011 Census data from

thirteen local authorities in the English West Midlands, Bywaters et al. (2017) have evidenced the disproportionality of racial demographics, showing that more than three-quarters of all black children lived in the most disadvantaged 20 per cent of neighborhoods. As Jefferson (2013: 392) put it “being black means to be concentrated in places where levels of inequality and child poverty are high and where stop and search is commonplace”.

Racialized discourses of responsibility have been routinely employed by agencies of control to justify interventions within disadvantaged communities (Hall et al., 2013; Williams, 2015). This is most evident in the uses and abuses of ‘gang’ imagery, as a mechanism for producing territorial stigma (Wacquant, 2007; 2008) and labelling young people as problematic and ‘risky’ (Alexander, 2008). As Wacquant (2007: 69) asserts, it is easier for authorities to justify special measures “once a place is publically labelled as a ‘lawless zone’ or ‘outlaw estate’, outside the norm”. In a British context, Smithson, Ralphs and Williams (2012) have depicted how the occupation with racialized dialogues of ‘risk’ can enable control agencies to attribute ‘blame’ upon often already marginalized communities, justifying heavy handed criminal justice interventions that perpetuate the operation of stigma and the deterioration of police community relations (Manski and Nagin, 2017). These sociological and criminological accounts call the efficacy and purpose of intensive criminal justice interventions into question, explicating the processes by which discourses of oppression and agencies of control can operate in tandem. Well-meaning interventions can engender harmful consequences. Yet, very few studies have explored criminal justice interventions from a social harms perspective (Pemberton, 2016). Using a social harm ‘lens’, this article focuses on one such intervention; a drugs crackdown operation in a northern English city.

Operation DRUGS

Police crackdowns can take multiple forms, ranging from highly coordinated activities to much looser, more general initiatives. Crackdowns are perhaps most commonly associated with models of drugs enforcement policing and criminological research from North America suggests that drugs crackdowns are most likely to take place in deprived areas populated by minority ethnic groups (Bluthenthal et al., 2005). Drug market crackdowns can include: the increased and targeted deployment of officers over short periods; more substantial and targeted increases in officers over extended periods, and; the deployment of undercover officers posing as drug users or dealers (Kerr, Small and Wood, 2005). Basic elements of crackdowns include: heightened police presence, geographic targets, the targeting of particular types of offences and increased severity of sanctions (Scott, 2004).

Operation DRUGS took place in Forgefield - a northern English city - and was justified as a response to growing community concerns about young people's involvement in violent and drug related criminality. The operation was large scale (lasting between August 2009 and January 2011) and culminated in the prosecution of over 50 people for drug offences across the city. Operation DRUGS involved the deployment of undercover agents from across the country, into parts of Forgefield known locally as drug dealing hot spots. These agents – who were unknown to local police - posed as drug users, spending time in and around targeted areas. Equipped with commodities that were presented as stolen goods (like mobile phones, trainers, designer clothing and perfumes) these agents created opportunities for crimes to be committed, by selling items at discount prices and offering to exchange them for drugs. Operation DRUGS led to a week of consecutive police raids in January 2011. The raids took place at dawn and targeted the homes of the people from whom

information had been gathered. These raids were subject to extensive media attention, much of which sensationalised the effected areas through the racialized image of 'the gang' (Alexander, 2008). 'Gang bust', 'gang operation', 'drug pushers' and 'gang crime' were all descriptors used in newspaper reports to portray the crackdown.

The string of events associated with Operation DRUGS (from execution to aftermath) had wide ranging consequences for those residing in the neighbourhoods effected. Using longitudinal ethnographic data, this article reports unique insights both from the time that the operation took place and a point in time, five years after the operation. These data offer qualitatively rich accounts of the immediate, short term and longer term impacts, as they were interpreted by youth workers and a group of mostly Somali teens in two of the areas most effected (Maple and Meadow).

The young people referenced in this article were not themselves criminally involved in Operation DRUGS. However the nature of their local networks meant that all were closely connected to those who were, both through friendships and familial ties.

Youth studies have shown that young people's experiences of everyday life can be intensely local (MacDonald and Shildrick, 2007; Harris, 2014; Gunter, 2017). Young people, living in and around active drugs markets, are therefore arguably well equipped to offer insights on the consequences of localised criminal justice interventions, due to the level of exposure they are subjected to in their daily lives. As its starting point, this article asserts that understandings of the social world can be gained through examining the interpretation of that world by its participants (Rabinow and Sullivan, 1979). As such, it is the perspectives of youth workers and young people, with uniquely personal and local perspectives of Operation DRUGS that this article prioritises. In so doing the article seeks to extend criminological

studies of police crackdown operations by foregrounding the voices of a largely unheard group, framed through the 'lens' of social harm (Pemberton, 2016).

Police Crackdown Operations

There is not space within this article to write history of undercover policing (Coomber et al, 2017; Loftus et al, 2016; Kruisbergen et al, 2011). However, it is important to note that, despite some evidence of benefits associated with drugs crackdown operations, including an increased sense of public order and safety (Kerr, Small and Wood, 2005), an established body of research associates a number of contradictory and potentially harmful consequences (Kerr et al., 2005; Maher and Dixon, 2001; Nelson, 2018). These include: the short term nature of positive impacts (Sherman, 1990; Scott, 2004); failure to address the physical or social conditions that contribute to crime and disorder; displacement of criminal behaviour to other locations (Aitken et al, 2002; Maher and Dixon, 2001); expense, both in terms of the operation itself and the criminal justice system (Scott, 2004); increased risks for drug users (Maher and Dixon, 2001; Kerr, Small and Wood, 2005); police brutality (Nelson, 2018); the failure to arrest high level suppliers (Dixon and Coffin, 1999); and, negative impacts to community-police relations (Maher and Dixon, 2001; Nelson, 2018).

Much of the published literature engaging with the impacts of drugs crackdown operations has done so from a standpoint integrating criminological and public health perspectives (Aitken et al, 2002; Bluthenthal et al, 2005; Cooper et al, 2005; Kerr, Small and Wood, 2005). These studies have tended to foreground the adverse consequences of crackdown operations for drug users. For example, Aitken et al's (2002) study on the impacts of an Australian police crackdown reports on the process by which amplified police presence deterred some drug users from

accessing Needle and Syringe Programmes. Cooper et al's (2005) study of a drugs crackdown in New York City depicted increasingly risky and rushed injection practices, reported by drug users as a strategy to minimise the chances of police contact. Notwithstanding a common focus on the geographical displacement of drugs markets (Aitken et al, 2002; Cooper et al, 2005; Maher and Dixon, 2001), less research has examined the adverse social effects of drugs crackdown operations, particularly from the perspective of residents who do not identify as drug users. This is despite some recognition that crackdown operations can produce harmful consequences, like the evolution of drugs markets (Coomber et al, 2017) and the exacerbation of strained relations between communities and the police (Maher and Dixon, 2001; Nelson, 2018).

Theorising social harm

Social harm is becoming an increasingly popular lens through which to analyse the unintended, but preventable consequences of systems and organisations in capitalist societies (Davies et al., 2014; Pemberton, 2016). The origins of this perspective lie in criminological debates that took place during the 1930s and 40s, where an emerging focus on white collar crime prompted scholars to consider extending definitions of crime, in order to incorporate the harms produced by corporations (Sutherland, 1945). However, as Pemberton (2016) has noted, it was not until the 1990s that concerted efforts took place to systematically develop a social harm perspective (van Swaaningen, 1999; Mincie, 2000; Pemberton, 2007; Hillyard and Tombs, 2007; 2008; Lasslett, 2010). This conceptual work included an uncoupling of traditional affiliations between crime and harm, achieved through the recognition that crime is neither a necessary nor sufficient factor in the production of harm (Lasslett, 2010). Rather, harms are positioned as inherent to the structure and organisation of capitalist

societies, and as such, the preventable or foreseeable nature of injurious phenomenon constitute the focus of social harm studies (Pemberton, 2016).

Despite its contribution to the criminological lexicon, social harm theorising has been questioned on ontological grounds, and particularly through its failure to define the nature of social harm and exactly what makes something a 'harm' or 'harmful' (Yar, 2012). Various attempts have been made to address this problem in the development of social harm theory. Yar (2012: 60) has argued that the application of a theory of *recognition* can "perform the analytical work of describing and classifying social harms and problems according to the specific needs that they refuse". For example, disproportionate rates of police stop and search amongst minority ethnic youths acquire a specifically harmful character in that they fail to *recognise* the symbolic injuries that result from *misrecognition* alongside violating the individual and collective realisation of dignity and self-esteem. Pemberton (2016) has since offered a *human needs* approach to the identification of social harm. Put simply, this posits that when the manifold human needs for self-actualisation are not fulfilled, including (1) a level of physical and/or mental health, (2) the capacity for autonomous action, and (3) sustaining human relations, these deficits represent a series of identifiable harms.

Theoretical developments in social harm have arguably borrowed from Bourdieusian social theory. This is perhaps most evident in synergies between the symbolic privations inflicted upon the subjects of social harm and Bourdieu's references to 'symbolic power' and 'violence'. In Bourdieu's (1979: 79) sociology 'symbolic power' constitutes the power enjoyed by elites "to construct reality" through the establishment of 'common sense' that serves to maintain the dominant social order. 'Symbolic violence' – a closely related concept - denotes the power to *impose* or

exercise violence “upon a social agent with his or her complicity” (Bourdieu, 1992: 167). Though complicity is not a necessary feature of social harm theorising, the influence of Bourdieu’s sociology within the developing social harm ‘lens’ is relatively clear. For example - and as this article will go on to demonstrate - the *relational harms* experienced by a young person who is stigmatized because of where they live, might also be understood as a matter of *symbolic violence* exercised through ongoing processes territorial stigmatization (Bourdieu, 1979; Wacquant, 2007; 2008).

Despite the increasingly established nature of social harm theorising (van Swaaningen, 1999; Mincie, 2000; Pemberton, 2007; 2016; Hillyard and Tombs, 2008; Lasslett, 2010) its application to empirical contexts has only recently advanced (Pemberton, 2016; Boukli and Kotzé, 2018; Lloyd, 2018; Canning, 2019; Tombs, 2019). Published studies on social harm have tended to focus on the establishment of the field (Lasslett, 2010), the reasons for its development (Hillyard et al, 2004), the criticisms associated with its development (Yar, 2012) and the examination of its potential (Pemberton, 2007). Indeed, where applications of harm thinking are evident to policing they have tended to reproduce the traditional affiliations between crime and harm. The production of crime harm indexes (CHI) are one such example (Ratcliffe, 2015; Sherman et al., 2016; Mitchell, 2017). Proponents of the social harm perspective have also acknowledged the need to extend ‘expert derived’ definitions of harm, by considering the ‘ways that ‘expert’ definitions could be refined through experiential knowledge’ (Pemberton, 2016: 23). There remains a need, therefore, to understand qualitatively what constitutes harm and the mechanisms by which harm can be produced and experienced in individuals’ everyday lives.

The study

The account presented in this article is based on longitudinal ethnographic research, spanning a seven-year time frame. Longitudinal ethnography is a qualitative approach characterised by extended immersion in a field of study, followed often by “extensive engagement, sometimes over many decades of revisits” (Neale, 2019: 13). ‘Revisits’ in longitudinal research can be marked by continuity or pronounced separations between the original study and the re-study. However, as is the case with this study, ‘revisits’ often feature as part of an ongoing relationship between a researcher and the community supporting his or her studies.

When applied successfully, longitudinal ethnography can produce distinctive frames, combining synchronous and retrospective accounts of social life in communities over time (Neale, 2019). This article presents accounts taken from two components of one study: (i) immersive fieldwork, completed in two inner-city sites; and (ii) a series of workshops, convened five years later with young people in one of two fieldwork sites.

Immersive ethnographic data are taken from doctoral fieldwork, which sought to examine the everyday lives of youth workers and marginalised young people from minority ethnic backgrounds. The fieldwork took place between 2010 and 2013 and was located across two adjacent neighbourhoods in West Forgefield (Maple and Meadow). Operation DRUGS fell coincidentally towards the beginning of this fieldwork. Both areas were home to ethnically diverse populations and ranked amongst the 20% most deprived places in England, with pockets of more concentrated deprivation (ONS, 2011). Maple, in particular, was framed locally as a ‘risky’ place to walk through, due to its historical associations with prostitution, drug dealing and

'gangs'. These perceived problems were often racialized in local discourse, implicating the resident British Somali community. For example, 'Somali gang members', 'Somali gangs' and 'Somali drugs gang' were all descriptors used in headlines to describe Maple in the Forgefield newspaper.

Fieldwork took place in and around two youth clubs. Meadow youth sessions were scheduled on Wednesday evenings and attracted a diverse group of (around 40) British Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Yemeni, West African and Somali teenagers, who came to socialise, play pool/table tennis and use the IT facilities. The Maple youth session took place on Friday evenings, attracting a smaller, but more consistent group of (around 20) British Somali teenagers from the local estate. Though all the youth sessions were open access, both of the youth clubs were mostly attended by boys (aged 13 – 19).

As a youth work volunteer in Maple and Meadow I actively participated in the delivery of youth sessions throughout the fieldwork, recalling each evening's events to write detailed fieldnotes (Emerson et al, 2011). This active role has facilitated a high level of ongoing engagement that is rare, even in Qualitative Longitudinal Research (Adler and Adler, 1987; Neale, 2019). Indeed, the accounts presented in this article cannot claim neutrality, as they are the product of youth work relationships, grounded in principles of social justice and the "value of advocating for, and with, young people" (Gormally and Coburn, 2014: 878). Regular conversations with youth workers about community issues and the organisation and running of youth sessions presented a comprehensive overview of the local happenings and youth work priorities. Discussions with young people about education, sport, music and friendships also facilitated a detailed understanding of their everyday concerns and practices. Throughout the study, fieldnotes were augmented by semi-structured

youth worker interviews (n = 15), and young person focus groups (n = 3), organised with a purposeful sample of young people from each of the clubs (see Mason, 2017).

In May 2017 - following four years of continued youth work in Mapleⁱⁱ - I invited five respondents, all of whom had taken part in the doctoral study, to attend a short series of three, fortnightly workshops. This formed the second stage of the longitudinal study. Workshops were convened in partnership with a senior youth worker and a local youth charity. Each lasted 2 hours and sought to 'map the issues' for young people in Maple. Participants were initially broken into two small groups and invited to map the positive and negative aspects ('ups' and 'downs') of Maple on A1 paper. This was followed by large group discussions convened to share outcomes and ideas, allowing respondents to set the agenda 'live', rather than responding to a preconfigured schedule (Tarr et al., 2017). Without prompting, these conversations centred on young people's exposure to drug dealing in Maple, evoking detailed retrospective accounts of Operation DRUGS. As such, the data presented in this article take on a uniquely detailed, temporal perspective, combining insights that are both synchronous and retrospective (Thomson et al, 2003; Thomson and McLead, 2015).

Table 1. Respondents

Pseudonym	Age (at 2017)	Ethnicity	Youth Worker/Young Person
Liveer	25	Somali	YW
Aki	25	Somali	YW
Royce	41	Jamaican	YW
Sharon	50	White British	YW
Chessey	38	Somali	YW
Shadan	34	Pakistani	YW
Zimbo	19	Somali	YP
Aqeil	17	Somali	YP
Faarax	17	Somali	YP
Adi	18	Somali	YP
Jaydon	18	White British	YP
Zanotti	17	Somali	YP
Maqil	19	Mixed Heritage	YP

All workshop components were digitally recorded and transcribed word-for-word, producing five transcripts. Transcripts were reviewed line-for-line using a hybrid coding technique (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Here Pemberton's (2016) human needs approach to harm was used as a loose framework, augmented by further open coding (Boyatzis, 1998). Following analysis of the workshop data, all ethnographic materials were subject to secondary, selective coding, using the same technique. All coded data were then organised thematically generating the following areas of analytical interest: relational harms; autonomy harms; mental health harms and the harms of misrecognition. I now go on to discuss these in turn.

Relational harms: the fragmentation of community networks

Relational harms stem from the breakdown of and exclusion from social networks (Pemberton, 2016). Research has long established the importance of social networks and ties within local community settings, particularly when those communities are subject the adversities of poverty, deprivation and stigma (Daly and

Kelly, 2015; Putnam, 2000; Wacquant, 2008). Close social ties can connect disadvantaged groups in ways that mitigate some of the injurious effects of multiple deprivation. Conversely, “exclusion from social networks are likely to have an impact on how people are able to function on a day-to-day basis”, constituting a range of relational harms (Pemberton, 2016: 30).

Territorial stigmatization, sustained resource deprivation and increasing diversification in Maple had engendered various community frustrations in the years preceding Operation DRUGS. Despite emphasizing the importance of ‘community’ residents often described local relations as fractious or even volatile. Confrontations could stem from many places, though they most often came down to competition between groups, for sparse local resources. For example, two years before Operation DRUGS the local youth forum was petrol bombed by a group of residents over a dispute about land use (Mason, 2014). Relational harms and the fragmentation of social networks were bound up locally in tensions between ethnic groups, families, community services, young people and the police.

Operation DRUGS came as a surprise to those living in the communities affected and in the weeks that followed, its impacts could be heard via conversations in the youth clubs. Both the Maple and Meadow youth sessions functioned as spaces for young people to share their feelings and reflect on the operation and its implications. Young people spoke openly and critically about the relational harms that the operation had caused, reflecting on police practices and the stigmatizing press that followed. For example, Zimbo a Maple youth club attendee, explained how he had lost faith in the police, feeling that rather than acting as a preventative force, the police were “there to find their targets” and fill a quota of arrests.

The consequences of Operation DRUGS rippled throughout the youth clubs and beyond in the weeks and months that followed the arrests. Despite their lack of involvement in the operation, Forgefield Police bore the brunt of community anxiety and frustrations, both at the Forgefield Magistrates Court, where families gathered to oversee the trial process, and during subsequent community meetings, where advice was offered to parents about legal process and representation. Chessy (a community development worker) described how the police were accused of institutional racism and complicity in what was seen to be a deceitful operation, where economic vulnerabilities had been exploited to entice young people to commit crimes.

The operation exacerbated existing community tensions between parents, young people and youth services. For example, a group of local parents, who had longstanding discrepancies with the Maple Youth Forum blamed the Forum for wasting money on programs that had, as they saw it, failed to safeguard young people from the local drugs market. Sharon (the forum manager at the time) described one community meeting about the operation as “probably the most awful meeting I’ve ever been to, ever”, where communication breakdown between the Forum, community elders and local parents was exposed, leading some parents to boycott the local youth forum (for a second time). Parents reported having felt used and abandoned by local youth services, who had failed to step up and support young people and families that became involved in the operation.

Operation DRUGS also saw the reactive commissioning of new resources for young people in Maple and Meadow. These resources were associated with the government’s Ending Gang and Youth Violence (EGYV) strategy; an initiative that followed the 2011 English riots, aiming to improve the way ‘gangs’ are tackled locally

(Home Office, 2011). 'Late intervention' has been defined as 'an umbrella term for a range of ... services that are required when children and young people experience significant difficulties in life', including those pertaining to children's social care, crime and antisocial behaviour (Chowdry and Fitzsimons, 2016). Late intervention strategies, funded by Forgefield City Council, included the appointment of new youth workers, tasked with job of safeguarding young people from future drugs activity. Though the provision of much needed community resourcing was welcomed, it was also the subject of some cynicism. As one newly appointed youth worker (Shadan) acknowledged, given the short term nature of his funding, there was a good chance that his post would expire by the time the streets "heated back up".

Short term 'reactive' funding was a point of routine frustration for local youth workers who needed more sustained resources to deliver effective youth projects. As other studies have established this short termism is now a well-recognized manifestation of the adjusted funding landscape produced by austerity youth policy (Mason, 2015; Pope, 2016; Seal and Harris, 2016). For example, Smithson and Ralphs (2016: 15) have described how "local authorities in receipt of EGYV funding had until March 2013 to spend it – with the majority of authorities not receiving the monies until the summer of 2012". Some youth workers in Maple went as far as arguing that, "the EGYV funding pot was a big farce" (Royce) resulting in more harm than good (Shute and Medina, 2014). Indeed, bursts of short term funding could be construed as undermining youth work efforts in the long term, setting providers up to fail with unrealistic targets and timescales. Thus, further damaging relations with service users and commissioners.

Shadan's contract was terminated after 12 months, as anticipated. In the five years that followed the Maple forum ended its association with youth provision and the

youth clubs in Meadow and then Maple both closed, subject to funding cuts and the withdrawal of resources. Efforts to restore trust between the remaining youth providers and local parents are ongoing. Though Forgefield Police expressed a commitment to learn from the operation and attempted to rebuild what were significantly damaged community relations - through community engagement practices like increased visibility - the following sections of this article show that young people in Maple remained highly suspicious of police and critical about the harmful consequences of Operation DRUGS.

Autonomy harms: the proliferation of drug dealing

Autonomy harms can result from “situations where people experience ‘fundamental disablement’ in relation to their attempts to achieve self-actualisation” (Pemberton, 2016: 29). In this context self-actualization is understood as the fulfillment of ones potentials and talents. For Pemberton, deficits in both (i) the opportunities available for people to engage in meaningful, productive activities and (ii) the ability to control ones circumstances, can constitute forms of autonomy harm.

Criminological research has identified how crackdown operations can create vacuums and opportunities for new groups of dealers to repopulate local drug markets (Moyle and Coomber, 2015). For the most part these studies have explored the harms associated with commuting drug dealers expanding their markets through ‘county lines networks’ with the identification and establishment of new bases (Coomber and Moyle, 2017). This has been set against the protective effects of dominant low level and indigenous drug dealing populations (Coomber et al, 2017). In their analysis of the cost of crackdowns in Sydney’s principle street-level heroin market, Maher and Dixon (2001) reported how crackdowns increased the volatility of

street level dealing, as street level dealers who left (either because they were arrested or displaced), were replaced by novices and those willing to work in a higher risk environment.

Throughout the workshops convened in 2017 the situation in Maple was described as “worse than ever”. Discussions about Operation DRUGS were marked by concerted scepticism, particularly in terms of its intended preventative effects. Aqeil and Faarax explained how:

Aqeil: I don't think it makes a difference people getting arrested because there will still be a new era coming up all the time. Operation DRUGS, no one learned from that. How many people got arrested? And it's still got worse.

Researcher: Why do you think that is?

Aqeil: You're stuck in a cycle.

Faarax: You know what it is, as soon as he gets arrested, if he serves three years [custodial sentence], as soon as he comes out he's gonna see the opportunity still going on.

This exchange references the trapping and cyclical experience of everyday life in Maple. Drug dealing in the neighbourhood was described as a consistent, accessible and lucrative opportunity. As Maqil put it “selling drugs is easy because you just see crack heads about everywhere. You can make money sat on the spot”. Respondents described the potential to earn six to seven hundred pounds a day selling drugs in Maple, an enticing prospect compared with the low paid and precarious work available to some teenagers (MacDonald, 2009). Residents' efforts to secure gainful employment were also hampered by the stigmatizing effects of living in Maple, a

racialized low-income neighbourhood associated with crime and poverty. The Maple postcode alone provoked what Waquant (2008:174) has referred to as “additional distrust and reticence among employers”. This is a point framed well by Adi who warned: “If you’re living in the area and you’ve got a CV yeah, do not write your Maple address”.

Against this backdrop it is perhaps unsurprising that for some, participating in the local drugs market outweighed the far slower and arguably less accessible benefits of low paid work. Crucially, when opportunities for employment are already compromised by the harms of racialized territorial stigma and the contexts in which young people live become increasingly criminogenic, due to the withdrawal of local resources, then commitments *not* to engage in the local drugs market are likely to become more and more difficult to make. Many of the young people selling drugs locally did so - at least in part - to make money for their families, for whom finances were a constant worry. This coalescence of the inability to control local circumstances, with the proliferation of harmful opportunities, was experienced by young people as a *narrowing of options* that can be understood as a kind of autonomy harm (Pemberton, 2016).

As Adi and Jaydon described, once young people had become involved in drug dealing, they could find it extremely difficult to desist. Those presenting as committed to the local drugs market were engaged, or voiced their willingness to be engaged in cyclical patterns of offending and jail time, making as much money as possible in stints between sentences. Even when getting ‘locked up’ was framed as inevitable this was not an adequate deterrent for all. As Adi expanded:

Adi: I think it's [Operation DRUGS] for the worse me, because no one yeah has actually gone and thought "you know what, these guys have done that yeah and I don't want to end up like that so I'm gonna stop being on road". If anything more guys have started jumping on road. Because they're thinking you know what them guys aren't here, no one's gonna stop me.

Adi's narrative signifies the operation's failure to prevent harm, by focusing on the symptom of the local drugs problem, not the cause. Rather than eradicating the local drugs market, these data suggest the conditions locally remained unchanged, beyond the creation of new opportunities for exploitation by those inclined to take the risks. Beyond that, by provoking increased (and negative) attention to the affected neighbourhoods, through racialized and sensational reporting, Operation DRUGS inadvertently contributed to experiences of social exclusion (relational harms), damaged opportunity (autonomy harms) and anxiety (mental health harms) associated with structural inequality and the symbolic violence of racialized territorial stigma (Bourdieu, 1992; Waquant, 2008).

Mental health harms: exposure to the 'open' drugs market

The association between criminogenic settings and mental health harms has been empirically established. For example, in a study of the relationships between mental health and place Weisburd et al. (2018) found significant associations between violent crime hot spots and self-reported symptomology for depression and post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Mental health harms encompass the range of psychological illnesses and impediments that can adversely affect individuals' quality of life. "Thus, ranging from extreme psychotic disorders ... to clinical forms of

depression that manifest in a sense of anxiety over the unpredictability of life” (Pemberton, 2016: 29).

Throughout this study, young people consistently reflected on the stresses of exposure to drug use and drug dealing. Maple residents encountered drug users daily, alongside the everyday disruptions of living within a drugs market. These disruptions included the sounds of shouting at night, the vandalism of local property, exposure to used needles and ongoing issues with defecation on the stairwells and hallways of local flats. On one occasion Zanotti described how he had been exposed to far more crime by the age of 14 than he would ever expect a young person to see.

A central concern voiced by respondents was that since the operation, the culture and practice of drug dealing in Maple had shifted, becoming more ‘open’. This was a significant frustration for young people in the study and a source of ongoing anxiety and stress. ‘Open’ as opposed to ‘closed’ drug markets are “generally understood as ‘street’ markets where sellers are reasonably visible to those seeking drugs” (Coomber, 2015: 16). Respondents agreed that, compared with those who had been arrested, the new generation of drug dealers in Maple were more overt in their practice. For example, Jaydon explained how the older generation were “a bit more sensible, like they didn’t try and show things. They weren’t flashy they weren’t driving in cars and saying “yeah this is what bags of sniff got me and whatever”. Adi and Faarax went on to explain how:

Adi: There would be guys back when we was younger, the older ones now that aren’t about yeah, we wouldn’t even see them smoking, let alone doing what they were doing (selling drugs). Now, there would be no crack heads in

the area, if they were still around... Whereas guys now, they're just bustin' shots outside their own mum's house.

Faarax: I've seen a guy literally doing it from his mum's house.

Respondents described a number of ways in which the prior generation of drug dealers had protected them (as 'youngers') from the realities of the local drugs market. Alongside practicing discreetly and on the outskirts of Maple, Adi explained how some would persuade dealers not to supply them with regular pocket money, so as not to distort their perceptions of the value of money. Others dissuaded 'youngers' from aspiring to wear designer clothing that they could not afford, going as far in one instance as marching Adi back to a shop to return a designer t-shirt and replace it with a cheaper one.

Despite their identity as drug dealers in the neighbourhood, this generation were recounted as espousing 'decent' values and operating within a 'code of the street' (Anderson, 1999; Gunter, 2017). In contrast, those who had 'filled the gaps' left by Operation DRUGS were described as more overt and 'flashy' about their practice; an issue that created local tensions and concerns. Indeed, respondents were particularly worried by the influence this overt and flashy drug dealing culture could have on younger children within the neighbourhood. Zanotti described how "you've got guys in the area selling drugs who will go to the [younger] ones sayin' "yo look how much money I made today". And then the kids are thinking: "Yo this guy made so much money, I wish I was like him"

Increased contact with drug users was another stressor raised during the workshops. The following fieldnote depicts an incident described by Zimbo, having arrived at the second workshop shortly after running an errand in Maple.

Zimbo arrived having been at the Maple Post Office submitting his University paperwork. On entering the room he told Saalim, Jaydon and I how he had left the Post Office and noticed the sound of footsteps behind him. After ignoring this for a while Zimbo had turned around, to see that he was being followed by around six people that he recognised as drug users. This was a familiar sight. Zimbo told how he had learned to confront drug users, in situations like this, exclaiming, “it’s not me”. This signified that he was not a drug dealer and he could not lead them to one. He went on to explain how, of all the racialized stigmatisation and labelling that he had been subjected to, as a Somali teenager from Maple, the assumption that he was a drug dealer (from drug users in the neighbourhood) was the worst.

The concerns expressed across these workshops exemplify what can be interpreted as unintended consequences of Operation DRUGS. Where the architects of this operation had intended to remove the criminal role models that young people looked up to, these data suggest that disrupting the drugs market to this extent had fundamentally damaged the social order of the neighbourhood, producing harmful opportunities and consequences (Coomber et al., 2017). Fundamentally, the young people in this study expressed a sense of ongoing discomfort about the situation in Maple and their lack of control over it. These responses signal mental health harms, generated by conditions that appeared to have worsened in the wake of Operation DRUGS (Pemberton, 2016).

Harms of misrecognition: police-community relations

Pemberton (2016: 31) has defined misrecognition as a relational harm resulting from “the symbolic injuries that serve to misrepresent the identities of individuals

belonging to specific social groups”. Misrecognition is closely related to the operation of stigma in society (Tyler and Slater, 2018). As Wacquant’s (2008) writing on urban marginality has argued, stigmatization processes are heightened by conditions of increasing inequality within neoliberal societies, manifesting in a kind of ‘violence from above’ (*see also* Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). The territorial stigmatization of Maple, including localised racialization and criminalization, produced conditions for the systematic misrecognition of residents, most of whom were not involved in the local drugs market.

The young people in this study were routinely subject to racialized and heavy-handed policing. In one of the workshops Zimbo described how he had been rugby tackled by two police officers in riot gear and bundled into a police van for questioning on his way home from football practice. Adi later described being pushed roughly against a pub wall and searched by undercover police. On both occasions neither Zimbo nor Adi had committed any crimes and both were released, without an apology. These young people’s experiences and tarnished interpretations of police contact reflected a recognition of their inscribed ‘suspect’ status, as young Somali men from Maple. This is concurrent with criminological research about discretion in the targeting of labelled ‘suspect’ individuals by police (Mcara and Mcvie, 2005; Ralphs et al. 2009). Mcara and Mcvie’s (2005: 9) analysis of Scottish survey data revealed how, once individuals came under the purview of the police, they became part of a permanent suspect population, sucking “young people into a spiral of amplified contact regardless of whether they continue to be involved in serious levels of offending”. More recently, the use of police intelligence practices related to ‘gang’ databases in England have been subject to extensive criticism for racial discrimination and profiling (Fraser et al. 2018). Ralphs et al. (2009: 490) have also

observed the potential for “entire neighbourhoods... of young people to be labelled as ‘gang members’ or ‘gang associates’ and to receive high levels of police attention as a consequence of being born and raised in estates and streets with established gang associations”.

For these young people Operation DRUGS compounded the harms of institutional racism and misrecognition. This was communicated through their acknowledgment that police viewed them as ‘permanent suspects’ and were preoccupied with ‘catching them out’.

Zimbo: That’s why there is no trust between the community and the police.

There just isn’t. If they would be honest with us “this this” then there could be, but with them finding ways to just do you over, there’s gonna be no trust.

The damaging impacts of crackdown operations for police-community relations have been outlined and cautioned against by wider research (Maher and Dixon, 1999).

Zimbo’s comment is indicative of an atmosphere of mutual suspicion observed throughout fieldwork and articulated by young people in Maple and Meadow. In fact, throughout the study respondents’ recognition of their inscribed suspect status was consistently rebutted by criticism of suspect, target driven and ostensibly ineffective police practices. Many felt that the undercover agents had been preoccupied with the quantity over the quality of arrests, leaving top ranking drug dealers and suppliers on the streets. In line with existing studies (Coomber et al, 2017) Aqeil and Zimbo interpreted Operation DRUGS as a symbolic exercise, preoccupied with appearances of safety over and above the underlying causes of drug dealing in the neighbourhood:

Aqeil: They (police) wanna make it look safe even though it's not. Because if they really wanted to crack down on crime they could easily. I could walk through the area and just know who's who, what's what. Because everyone's in the same place... So if they really wanted to, are you telling me that the police don't know what's going on? I think they're turning a blind eye for now because in the eyes of everyone it looks safe.

These comments resonate with recent debates about the harmful appearance management of disadvantaged spaces, for the benefit of (more affluent) others; a phenomenon that was symbolised tragically in the 2017 fire at Grenfell Tower, where the combustion of flammable cladding led to the deaths of over 70 people (Tombs, 2019). Aqeil and Zimbo's interpretation of policing in Maple hinges on the construction of an image of safety, over and above a genuine attempt to tackle the deep rooted and structural issues that produce drug dealing in the neighbourhood. As Coomber et al. (2017: 11) have acknowledged, these enforcement events can have "illusionary value, appealing to our emotions through reassurance, rather than holding any capacity for long term reductions in crime". Indeed for the wider Forgefield residents Operation DRUGS may have assuaged fears and restored some faith in the police. Yet, for the young people residing in Maple and Meadow, who reported feeling routinely unsafe and racially profiled, the operation produced more harm than good.

Conclusion

Developments in criminology have recognised that crime is neither a necessary nor sufficient factor in the production of social harm (Lasslett, 2010; Pemberton, 2016). Systems and organisations in capitalist societies can and do produce unintended

consequences, many of which have harmful and injurious effects. Recent criminological research in Nigeria has argued, for example, that police crackdown operations contribute to the structural inequalities endured by the most vulnerable in society, producing the avoidable impairment of human life (Nelson, 2018). This article has offered similar accounts from young people and youth workers in a British context and contends that social harm offers a useful 'lens' through which to read them.

The harms attributed to Operation DRUGS were varied, including: (i) relational harms, associated with the fragmentation of community networks and damaged trust between local residents and the police; (ii) increased anxiety and mental health harms through the feeling of being unsafe; and (iii) autonomy harms, regarding the proliferation of harmful opportunities and young peoples inability to self-define against processes of territorial stigmatization and racial profiling. All of those harms attributed to Operation DRUGS signify an exacerbation of the structural inequalities associated with institutional racism and misrecognition (Pemberton, 2016; Nelson, 2018). This is not withstanding the harms caused directly to those arrested in the operation (many of whom served arguably disproportionate sentences); one young man served a year in prison for supplying undercover operatives a small quantity of cannabis. This article has also identified instances where things that don't appear to be harms - like extra funding for youth work - can be experienced as such, signposting the need for nuanced interpretation of what constitutes harm and how harms can manifest over time.

Instead of protecting young people from 'criminal role models', Operation DRUGS was retrospectively described as an underhand intervention, preying on young people's economic vulnerabilities and consumerist aspirations. Beyond that, the

symbolic components of the intervention - exemplified through sensational reporting reliant upon the image of 'the gang' - acted to further embed 'discourses of vilification' associating those neighbourhoods effected with racialized moral degeneracy and risk (Wacquant, 2007). Close attention to the accounts of young people in this article has shown the ways in which such harms can intersect, impacting cumulatively upon the marginalization of disadvantaged neighbourhoods (Pemberton, 2016) and exacerbating barriers to participation in society that can influence young people's engagement with drug dealing in the first place (Sandberg, 2008).

Beyond seeking to extend the empirical literature on drugs crackdown operations (Aitken et al, 2002; Bluthenthal et al. 2005; Cooper et al, 2005; Coomber et al, 2017; Kerr, Small and Wood, 2005; Maher and Dixon, 2001; Nelson, 2018), this article has sought to offer two contributions to the developing study of social harm (van Swaaningen, 1999; Mincie, 2000; Pemberton, 2007; 2016; Hillyard and Tombs, 2008; Lasslett, 2010). Social harm studies have usefully offered a 'lens' through which to focus on varieties of harm production in capitalist societies. To date this work has focused predominantly on macro level causes embedded in the systems and organisations of capitalist societies. Less attention has been awarded to the unintended consequences of state interventions, particularly those associated with 'harm reduction infrastructures', occupied with services such as child protection, risk management and crime reduction. Criminological studies have established the disproportionate likelihood that families from BAME backgrounds will come into contact with the criminal justice system. As of November 2017 black people in England and Wales were 8 times more likely to be stopped and searched, three and a half times more likely to be arrested and four times more likely to be prosecuted

than white people (ONS, 2017). Such disproportionality in families' subjection to state intervention has been mirrored beyond policing. For example, social work research has shown how rates of child protection registration and removal are significantly higher for families living in poorer neighbourhoods, where BAME families are disproportionately situated (Bywaters et al, 2017). Studies from both disciplines evidence the racial and classed disproportionality of investigations, bearing potentially wide ranging social costs in terms of stigma, trust and social relations (Featherstone et al. 2018; Pemberton, 2016; Nadal *et al.* 2017).

The application of a harms 'lens' helps us to more critically engage with the experiences and outcomes of state interventions for recipients, with implications for their execution and design. The nature of harms revealed also offer indications towards more productive and less harmful responses. For example, this article has evidenced how a perceived lack of opportunity for young people was compounded by the proliferation of drug dealing in Maple following Operation DRUGS. A more effective response to the local drugs problem might have attempted to (i) address the conditions that bolstered the drugs market in the first place; and (ii) extend the opportunities for young people to engage in meaningful and productive activities. Working *with* the community (and indeed, community police) to identify needs and develop appropriate responses would be central to that process. As Ratcliffe (2015: 178) has argued, acknowledging harm in this way "requires an interdisciplinary response at the policy level, a response that goes beyond policing". Understanding the reduction of harm as a public health issue, rather than just a policing problem is one way to address this challenge. Important steps towards that end have been achieved in Glasgow, through the work of Violence Reduction Unit (Carnochan, 2015) and in child protection with the development of a 'social model' that seeks to embed

relationships, rights and ethics into a system that is becoming increasingly detached from its *raison d'être* (Featherstone et al, 2018). Fundamentally, social harm offers a 'lens' through which to critically explore the culpability of well-meaning state intervention in the (re)production of structural inequalities (Pemberton, 2016). Applying this 'lens' more readily could support advancements beyond traditional policing methods, towards responses to social problems that are commensurate with the reduction of harm (more broadly defined), not just crime.

Secondly, this article has evidenced the value of qualitatively anchoring conceptions of social harm with empirical data. By drawing on the synchronious and retrospective accounts of young people this article has revealed both the emergence and unfolding of harms over time. Accounting for the temporal, in this respect, facilitates an understanding of harm production from a 'time perspective' (Thompson and McLeaod, 2015), revealing social reverberations that would otherwise be obscured by conventional ethnographic approaches. It would not, for example, have been possible to comment on the changing nature of drug dealing in Maple, without access to young people's retrospective accounts. This suggests that Qualitative Longitudinal Research might function as a useful tool for empirically capturing harm production and, therefore, refining expert definitions of harm through experiential knowledge (Pemberton, 2016). Future research could build on the approach described within this article, extending the scope of studies in order to capture accounts from both the subjects and architects of other state interventions.

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ⁱ All references to names and places have been changed in accordance with conventional ethical procedures. This research gained ethical approval from the University of Sheffield Research Ethics Committee.