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23rd Annual Conference of the ESC: Police Drug Diversion (PDD): A realist impact, process and economic evaluation (allacademic.com)

Eurocrim Conference 2023 Florence 6-9th September 2023

Abstract

While drugs policing often involved enforcement interventions that seek to tackle drug problems through criminal sanctions, in England and Wales diversion now occupies a central position in police responses to people suspected of either a drug offence or an offence related to their drug use. Police-led drug diversion (PDD) schemes have the potential to reduce the harms that are done by, and to, people who use drugs. They target people who are caught by the police in unlawful possession of substances that are controlled under the UK's Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. People are diverted away from prosecution and criminal sanctions and towards educative, therapeutic or social services. Diversion schemes are supported by current policy, but the UK evidence base is limited.

In this paper we present our revised programme theory of change of how such schemes work. This is the first stage of an ongoing mixed methods, multi-site project which adopts a realist framework to evaluate the effects of PDD on crime, health, and public spending. Contrasting PDD schemes in Durham, Thames Valley and the West Midlands are being evaluated. The theory of change has been informed by: (i) an initial programme theory based on a realist review of alternatives to criminalisation for the Irish government, which drew from literature published by June 2018 and informed the research design; (ii) a rapid review of more recent evidence, much of which comes from American Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion programmes that have spread rapidly across the USA from their origins in Seattle; and (iii) testing of ideas that emerged from the literature in stakeholder workshops in each of our evaluation areas and in a national workshop. All workshops included representation of police services, diversion service providers and people with direct experience of being policed.

Keywords
Drugs diversion, realist review, programme evaluation

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