A framework for a harm reduction approach to drug-related enforcement activity

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Why re-focus on drug-related harms?

- Widespread recognition that drug markets are extremely resilient and traditional enforcement – struggles to make sustainable impact on supply – can make matters worse.
- Drug strategies increasingly focus on reducing harms.
- Trend towards a local partnership approaches and a focus on community priorities.
- Performance still tends to be judged by measures of traditional supply-side activity such as seizure rates.
“Harm reduction, rather than quantities of drugs seized or individuals convicted, is a more useful way of prioritising activities to improve the lives of citizens in the UK”

*Extending Our Reach*, HM Government (2009)

“Although entrenched markets may be difficult to disable, they can be guided by enforcement action so that they do the least possible damage”

*World Drug Report 2009*, UNODC
Project Objectives

- To identify and promote the contribution that drug-related enforcement activity can make to reducing drug harms
- To develop a framework which enables enforcement & other agencies to plan and assess operational activity on the basis of evaluation of impact on drug-related harms
Project components

- **Essays** on how drug enforcement might address harms published: *Safer Communities* Vol 8(1) January 2009

- **Desk research** – to identify evidence of different enforcement activity and their impact on a range of harms and develop a framework relating enforcement to harms

- **Consultation** – with groups and individuals to identify different perspectives on harms caused by drugs and how enforcement is/can address drug harms

- **Case studies** – to supplement desk research

- Dialogue with key influencers
Key features of the approach

- A broad view of harms
  - All levels – individual / family / community / national
  - All types – health / economic / social / structural / environmental
  - All sources – use / production / distribution / control

- A main focus on reduction of harms linked to drug markets (and associated enforcement)

- Building on existing practice / guidelines

- Applicable to all levels of enforcement
Opportunity for real impact on harms

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<th>Harms to:</th>
<th>Individual</th>
<th>Neighbourhood</th>
<th>National</th>
<th>International</th>
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<td>Harms from:</td>
<td>Users/suppliers</td>
<td>Families/neighbours/business/institutions</td>
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- **Focus of traditional harm reduction programmes**
- **Main focus for consideration for harm reduction through policing**
- **Main focus for consideration for harm reduction through SOCA and other (inter)national enforcement agencies**
Findings: examples of focus on harms

- Modification of enforcement approach to mitigate harm caused
- Consideration of harms in prioritisation
- Harms feature in aims of operations
  - Acquisitive crime
  - Public nuisance / community impact
- Targeting new harms

**BUT** assessment of impact on harms rare
Findings

- Enforcement agencies generally accept that:
  - Enforcement will not eradicate drug markets
  - Not all markets are equally harmful
  - Enforcement has the potential to shape the market both positively & negatively
  - Benefits of partnership working

- A more harm-focused approach is possible within existing policing practice / guidelines

- Need to extend consideration of harms into all stages of the enforcement process
Suggested approach + simple tools

Framework for harm-focused approach and tools to assist implementation:

- Harm framework to assist problem assessment
- Problem analysis framework
- Case studies illustrating enforcement approaches and their impact on drug harms
- Examples of potential measures of the impact of activities and of unintended consequences.
Challenges for policy & practice

- Traditional policing practice has short-term focus – more successful drug-related enforcement work needs longer time frame.

- Classic police organisational culture not well suited to community engagement / partnership working – but is changing & need to identify & spread best practice (not work against it).

- Trade-offs – whose harm?

- For a harm-focused approach to be adopted need better measures of harm and targets that relate to them.
An example: Operation Nemesis

- Extensive preparatory phase:
  - Understanding the problem
  - Intelligence gathering
  - Partner engagement + joint training

- Community workshops -> action plans

- Media and communication strategy

- Multiple interventions
  - Targeted arrest phases
  - Increased drug treatment provision
  - Youth seminar and Crucial Crew events for schools
  - Crime reduction equipment provided
  - Clean up operation
Potential benefits of this approach

- Improve **partnership-working** through common language and objectives
- Harm-related objectives lead to **alternative measures** of impact (both positive & negative) and better understanding of cost-effectiveness
- May be spur to **innovation & development** of new tactics
- **Improve communication** with communities and greater recognition of enforcement’s impact
- **Real impact** on drug harms
Thank you.

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http://www.ukdpc.org.uk/publications.shtml/#hre_report