



Feeling the Pinch: BME Children's and Young People's Views and Experiences of dispersal Powers in Merseyside

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Disproportionality

House of Commons Home Affairs Committee (2007) reported that black people were three times more likely to be arrested than their white counterparts, they were just over six times more likely to be stopped and searched by the police, and once charged black offenders were less likely to receive unconditional bail and more likely to be remanded into custody. The committee also noted that when sentenced, black and 'mixed ethnicity' young men were more likely to receive more punitive sentences than their white counterparts, while black people of all ages are five times more likely to be in prison than white people.

Dispersal [Section 30] Powers

- **The Anti Social Behaviour Act 2003**
 - introduced powers to disperse groups in designated dispersal zones.
 - These groups can be dispersed if *‘any members of the public have been intimidated, harassed, alarmed or distressed as a result of the presence or behaviour of groups of two or more persons in public places*
 - failure to disperse in a designated zone can result in arrest and summary charge
 - Under 16s in designated zone subject to a 9pm to 6am curfew should be supervised if they are out during this period. If not, they can be returned to their place of residence (Section 30(6b)).

Simplifying the toolkit

- Criminal behaviour orders
- Crime prevention Injunctions
- Community Protection Notice (Level 1 & 2)
- **Police Direction Powers**
- Community Trigger

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Significant change?

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Police Reform

- A 4 decade period of expansion ended with Coalition Government's austerity programme in 2010:
- 20% decrease in police budgets 2010-2014.
- Introduction of Police and Crime Commissioners – accountability, transparency and localism.
- Freeze on police recruitment.
- Overhaul of pay, pensions and working conditions.
- Viewed by some as opportunity to positively rethink the role of policing (see Millie 2012, Hough, 2012).
- But concerns populist agendas may focus on poor, unpopular and marginalised communities (Bridges, 2012, Brogden and Ellison, 2012)

The Threat of Police Culture

“Crave work which is crime orientated and promises excitement. They celebrate masculine exploits, show willingness to use force and engage in informal working practices. [...] Their culture is marked by cynicism and pessimism. The police world view includes a simplistic, decontextualised understanding of criminality and officers are intolerant towards those who challenge the status quo” (Loftus, 2010, 1-2).

“contemporary generations of police are expected to much improve the way they think about, and interact with, their socially and culturally diverse colleagues and publics [...] but there unequivally remains a resilient residue of dispositions that undermine the requirements of the new terrain. Notwithstanding the enormous reordering of the policing landscape, a more extensive disbanding of police culture is needed” (Loftus, 2010: 774)

The Area: Youth Workers' Perspectives

- “Very mixed, ethnically mixed, tolerant, generally poor, financially *and* in terms of education, high unemployment, quite a big...quite a large number of drug users, also, single parents, drinking issues, gambling issues – as a means to - gambling as a means to a better life, and drinking as a means to avoiding the life that you're in.”
- erm very much a working class area and it's a very mixed area racially. So you have the, the sort of double deprivations really caused by erm class issues and poverty issues and race issues on top of that. There's also in recent years, its always been a very mixed area racially, but in recent years there's quite new, relatively new groups coming in, I mean Somali's in particular are now one of our biggest client groups in Toxteth Sports Centre. But there also are in the whole of L8 really, mainly because of the political situation in Somalia, the recent wars and civil wars and stuff. So there's been a big influx of Somali's

The policing experience

YP: Everyone hates them basically coz you can hear about the wild things what they do. [...] yeah, there's threats there plus you get the race issue coz some biz, there is some bizzies that are racist and do pin-point coz we're ethnic.

Int: Uh-huh

YP: So there's another issue there.

Int: Uh-huh, so how do they do that then?

YP: Obviously stop the car, stop you all the time. Some – me mate, me mate thee-um arrested up by um, by school and when they got them in the back of the car they called them, they called them all kinds – called him a nigger, called him a monkey – said they were gonna batter him if he opened his mouth and stuff like that.

YP: There's not really that much bad things happening round here, it's only really like police really, that's too much police

Int: Tell me a bit about that, what, what, what's the problem with the police then?

YP: They're just urm, I'd say ... oh what is it about them I dislike? How can you put it? Don't know how to put it. They're just, it's like they're just waiting for you do something wrong even though you're not gonna do it

Int: Right

YP: I don't know, it just makes you feel like doing something wrong just so you're not getting pulled over so many times

I: So they don't, they don't give you any kind of measure really at all

- YP: No
- YP: It's like you could, you could go three weeks without doing anything wrong and get pulled over about twenty times in those three weeks, and then the week you actually do do something wrong (...) you don't get pulled.

Understanding of Dispersal Powers

- Well its hard to explain. [...] Stop you, ask questions, where's you going blah, blah, blah [...] for 4, 5 people in a gang. One or 2, that's fine" (young male).
- "we're not actually informed when there are Section 30s, we only heard there's this new thing where we can't be walking more than two, but that's all we know [...] and its just like the police are harassing them" (young female).
- "Too many people in a gang" (young male)
- "I just know they can move you off certain areas, certain streets and that if you are in a group of more than three [...] if you get told to move and then they come back and still there then you can get arrested" (young male)

Section What?

- "Is that the stop and search one? Or where you get the no more than two people?" (young male)
- "I didn't even know they were being used in X. Because [...] normally when they pull you actually they do normally say we're searching you because there's a Section Thirty, but they don't say that like [to] see if anybody would split up" (young male)
- "The only way you get told is if they stop yer and say 'this is a section blah, blah'. They start shouting the sections all the time. So they'll say 'Section 23, Section 60'. So you're like another section, all right." (young male).

Impacts of Dispersal

- Int: do you think dispersal powers are a good idea?
- YP: I suppose so because...yeah and no
- Int: yeah?
- YP: I think yeah because it does keep like when there's gangs, if there's like a bit of gang war it keeps it more separated out so there's not more trouble, so yeah it is sometimes
- Int: and what's the "no" bit of that then?
- YP: like when you're having a laugh with your mates and that and then they want to move you on so it's like stay in twos and that. You feel more safe if you're with all your mates than just you know obviously one of them

- Int: So how does it feel whenever they move you on or stop and search you, how do you kind of react to it?
- YP: there's nothing you can do really, because like you can't even just sit and have a laugh or nothing, or even just play football or something because they just say "oh you'll have to move because people are complaining" when they're just not. Some people say "you can play in the street" or whatever and when you're kicking a football about and that the police will come along and just tell us to move and whatever. So like in the end there's nothing what we can do, what do you want us to do? [...]just harassed really

- Int: Do you just think they're they're a good idea – dispersal powers?
- YP: They don't work.
- Int: Why do you not think they work?
- YP: Because you still do what you wanna do.
- Int: So they just make no impact whatsoever?
- YP: No

Exacerbating an already fraught relationship?

- "I don't mind [being dispersed]. I still hate them [the police]" (young male)
- "there is some bizzies that are racist and do pin point because coz we're ethnic. [...] It makes you embarrassed, I weren't really arsed to be honest. [...] Its happened so many times why would you be bothered. [...] you just get on with it" (young male).
- "it's degrading really because I don't ever do nothing wrong, never been like properly arrested, my name's not on file, I haven't got a criminal record. so its degrading, you know what I mean" (young male)
- "Its nasty. [...] they never say it nice. Its 'move over there' and they try and push you towards the wall, turn you around and all that. No wonder people run away. [...] Because they want you to argue back, don't they. Because then they're got a reason to do stuff. [how does it make you feel?] Angry. Because they speak to you like you're no one really and just trying to boss you around" (young male)

Grounds for optimism?

- In total 21,749 ASBOs have been issued over the period 2000-2011.
- The highest number of ASBOs issued in any calendar year was 4,122 in 2005. Since 2005 there have been year-on-year falls in the number of ASBO issued with 1,414 issued in 2011 – this is down by 15.0 per cent from the 1,664 issued in 2010
- 85.9 per cent of ASBOs have been issued to males (18,585 were issued to males and 3,060 to females)

The challenges of disproportionality

- **Austerity Britain**
- **Adverse effects of states ASB strategies will impact disproportionately on any groups who are disproportionately young and disadvantaged (Fitzgerald and Hale, 2006:83).**
- **Stop and Search (Section 60) 650% rise in the use of these powers, in 2008/9 black people were stopped at 27 times and Asian people at six times the rate for whites (Delsol: 2011: 21).**
- **"In the current climate of deep public spending cuts, nobody least of all the government, can afford to be complacent about trust and confidence in the police. What is required is more, not less, public accountability and a real commitment to once and for all eradicate racial disproportionality [in stop and search]" (Deisol, 2011: 21).**