

“Riots were Revenge against the police” – StopWatch welcomes latest Reading the Riots findings

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Members of the StopWatch coalition welcomed the latest findings from the Guardian's Reading the Riots project, which indicate that police use of stop and search, was a major contributory factor leading to the summer's unrest. StopWatch member Kamaljeet Gill - a research and policy analyst at The RunnymedeTrust – said

“We welcome the Guardian's report. Finally the debate about the riots has begun to acknowledge what many have long suspected. The riots began after the fatal shooting of a young man by the police. The key role of police behaviour somehow seemed to drop from the conversation, drowned out by simplistic references to "pure criminality" and "shopping with violence””

Stop and search has long been a source of grievance for Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities in the UK, and for young people in particular. Looking at the statistics it is not difficult to see why. Black people are stopped at 7 times the rate of their white counterparts. Under Section 60 – a power designed to prevent violent crime – that figure raises to 27 times, but only 0.4% of Section 60 stops result in arrest for an offensive weapon. As Kamaljeet points out there are clear indications that this is dangerously eroding young people's relationship with the police:

“Young people that we talk to in StopWatch, often cite police behaviour and stop and search in particular as a cause of deep resentment and antipathy dating back generations. It is not surprising that generations of these impacted communities cite police-community relations as a causal factor in these destructive outbursts.”

What are needed are renewed efforts to improve the relationship between the police and the community if such unrest is to be avoided in the future:

“These problems are complex and will require a multiplicity of responses but one must surely be to focus less on "total policing" and aggressive tactics and more on building good relations with communities based on the understanding that good effective police work can only take place with the cooperation and consent of those policed.”

StopWatch has always argued that good community relations are essential to good policing. We welcome the latest findings, but the time has come to move beyond restating the problem and start implementing solutions. Public trust must be rebuilt. Recent moves which have undermined police accountability in relation to stop and search, in particular by eliminating requirements for key information to be recorded in respect of stops leading to searches and abolishing altogether the obligation on the police to record 'stops and account' (stops not resulting in searches). In the light of the recent findings surely increasing accountability must be the minimum we should expect.

Reading the Riots has provided a timely reminder of the consequences of a breakdown in police-community relations. It is just a shame the reminder came at such a cost to communities across the country.

ENDS

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. StopWatch is an action group that seeks to work with communities, ministers, policy makers and senior police officers to ensure that the reforms to the police service are fair and inclusive, and lead to better policing for all. For more information see the StopWatch website: www.stop-watch.org
2. Under Section 1 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 BME people are 7 times more likely to be stopped. Under Section 60 of the Public Order and Criminal Justice Act 1996 they are 27 times more likely. (Ministry of Justice)
3. '5 Days in August' is available online at: <http://www.5daysinaugust.co.uk/>
4. If you would like to contact StopWatch or any partner organisations please email Kamaljeet Gill: Kam@runnymedetrust.org or phone: 020 7377 9222

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