The Relationship between Stop and Search, Procedural Justice and Police-Youth Relationships: Insights from Ethnographic Research in Scotland

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This paper will focus on sharing insights from recent ethnographic research, funded by the British Academy, which explored the nature and impact of police stop and search procedures and wider street engagements in Scotland against the backdrop of a highly politicized environment and unprecedented levels of scrutiny and policy change within Police Scotland. The study was focused on exploring the extent to which stop and search procedures, wider street engagements and the police culture associated with proactive policing units were underpinned by a focus on procedural justice values and the related impact on police-youth relationships. During the presentation, Deuchar will share insights from an extensive period of participant observation during police deployments in disadvantaged neighbourhoods in the west and east of Scotland and from extensive interviews conducted with police officers and young people. He will relate some of the insights to existing literature on procedural justice and to Foucault’s (1977) analysis of surveillance, panopticism and disciplinary control. He will also share insights about the journey that Police Scotland has gone on to attempt to re-align its use of stop and search with procedural justice principles, and the way in which insights from recent research have helped to inform and shape that journey. In doing so, Deuchar will open up some important discussion about the relationship between procedural justice and police/youth relationships and the way in which police departments can actively try to learn from previous limitations in practice and to ensure that their procedures become more focused on fairness, integrity and respect.