

Children are being stopped and searched

Children aged as young as 10 years old were among more than 1,500 Scottish youngsters frisked by police officers using stop-and-search tactics in a three month period, according to a new report.

According to Police Scotland data, youngsters aged 17 and under were searched 1,555 times between April and June this year, including 15 searches in the age group 1-11.

None in the lowest age category was found to be carrying anything illegal, and Police Scotland said each case had been reviewed and found to be in line with "expected criteria".

Police Scotland confirmed that 12 of the 15 searches within the age group 1-11 were children aged 11 years old, and there were three searches of 10-year-olds.

Stop-and-search is an operational tactic which allows police officers to stop, question and search a person who is suspected of doing something illegal, including carrying drugs or weapons such as knives.

Critics say the method has little effect on violent crime, and Police Scotland admit that illegal items such as drugs, weapons or stolen goods are recovered in around only a third of all searches.

Performance report data shows there were 825 searches of

children aged 12-15 with 106 “positive searches” (12.8%) and 715 searches of teenagers aged 16-17 resulting in 140 positive results (19.6%).

Nick Hobbs, Head of Advice and Investigations at the Children and Young People’s Commissioner Scotland, said children in conflict with the law needed to be “treated first and foremost as children”.

He said: “A human rights-based approach to policing must take into account the State’s duty to protect children from harm, meaning that stop-and-search powers are used lawfully and proportionately.

“Children are far more likely to be victims of crime than to be a risk to others. Their needs and behaviours must be addressed in a child-friendly justice system where their rights, welfare and best interests are respected, protected and fulfilled.”

Scottish Conservative deputy justice spokesperson, Sharon Dowey MSP, warned that Police Scotland must use its stop and search powers “proportionately”.

She said: “These figures will undoubtedly raise concerns among the public, particularly those who have children. While these concerns should be listened to, stop and search remains an essential tool for police to carry out searches when they believe it is necessary to do so.

“However, it is imperative that the police use these powers proportionately so that Scotland’s consensual policing approach is not compromised.”

Police Scotland recorded 9,116 such searches on people of all ages between April and June, up 11% compared with the same period last year. However, less than a quarter proved positive.

In total 1,747 searches led to the recovery of drugs, 245 searches found weapons and 200 uncovered stolen property.

The report adds: "Fourteen of the searches that recovered weapons were conducted for a care and welfare reason, and a further four were conducted for the protection of life search reason."

A Police Scotland spokesperson said: "Intelligence-led stop and search is a valuable and effective policing tactic in detecting and preventing crime when it is used lawfully, proportionately and in line with the Code of Practice.

"Victims of crime and people right across the country expect us to use all powers at our disposal to keep them safe.

"Stop and search is just one of those powers and one in every three searches leads to the recovery of illicit or harmful items, safeguarding our communities.

"The Code has a dedicated section for children and provides guidance for officers when making a decision to stop search a child using the appropriate statutory power.

"We recognise that stopping and searching people is a significant intrusion into their personal liberty and privacy and we remain committed to ensuring that people are treated with fairness, integrity and respect.

"It is also a tactic that enables the service to keep people safe and assist in ensuring the wellbeing of our wider communities."



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