

# Harm Reduction Policing

A case study of foot patrol policing at an open drug scene in Copenhagen

**European Society for Social Drug Research (ESSD)**

Eötvös Loránd University

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**CENTRE FOR ALCOHOL AND DRUG RESEARCH, COPENHAGEN**  
DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY  
AND BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCES  
AARHUS UNIVERSITY

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4 OCTOBER 2018

TOBIAS KAMMERSGAARD  
PHD STUDENT



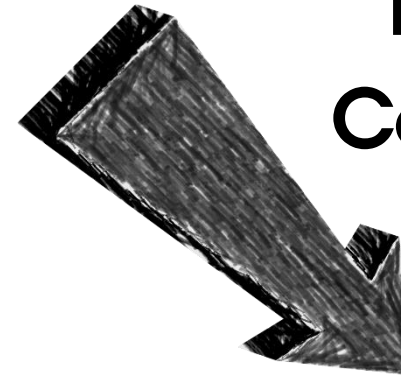
# Harm reduction policing

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- Harm reduction = reducing the harms associated with drug use, without necessarily eliminating or reducing the drug use itself.
- Most closely associated with reducing health risks for drug users (clean syringes, drug consumption rooms)
- Harm reduction policing?  
“harm-reduction offers a framework for explicitly taking into account both the benefits and the potential adverse consequences of policing” (Caulkins & Reuter, 2009).
- Impact?  
“the literature has long embraced harm reduction on the demand-side, but repeated attempts to advance parallel arguments for DLE [drug law enforcement] have not penetrated the drug policy mainstream”. (Caulkins, 2017)

PhD Project:  
**Policing of Open Drug Scenes**

Drug scene 1:  
**Aarhus**  
(Klostertorvet)



Drug scene 2:  
**Copenhagen**  
(Vesterbro)



# Drug consumption rooms in Denmark

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- **Drug consumption room:** legally sanctioned, medically supervised facility in which drug users are able to consume illegal drugs.
- **2012:** Municipalities allowed to operate and run drug consumption rooms

## Ministry of Health (2015):

“Possession of illicit drugs for personal use will not normally be prosecuted in the immediate vicinity of the drug consumption rooms, if the person is 18 years or older, and because of a longer and persistent use illicit drugs, has a strong addiction of the drug in question”

How does the policing of the open drug scene look like today, after drug possession has been decriminalized





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# Arguments for drug consumption rooms

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## 1) Drug user centred:

Reduce the amount of lethal overdoses.

## 2) Neighbourhood/resident centred:

Reduce drug waste and disorderly behaviour in the neighbourhood.

# Functions of the local police

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## 1) Neighbourhood/resident centred:

Reducing nuisance connected to public drug use.

## 2) Drug user centred:

Providing safety and security to the drug users.



# Neighbourhood/resident centred policing

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**Prohibition of  
drug use**



**Management  
of drug use**

# Neighbourhood/resident centred policing

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## Examples

- Relocate drug use from the streets to drug consumption rooms
- Encourage drug users to clean up after injecting (on the streets)
- Suggest a different place for drug using
- Encourage drug dealers to be discrete and low-key

# Functions of the local police

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## 1) Neighbourhood/resident centred:

Reducing nuisance connected to public drug use.

## 2) Drug user centred:

Providing safety and security to the drug users.

# Good and bad drug dealers



# Good and bad drug dealers

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## “Bad” drug dealer

- Uses violence
- Uses threats
- Causes unrest and disturbance



## “Good” drug dealer

- Deals in a peaceful manner
- Does not use violence
- Does not threaten drug users



# Four ways of reducing harm?

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## Caulkins and Reuter, 2009

- 1) reduce the amount of drugs used
- 2) reduce the harm that drug cause to themselves
- 3) reduce the harms that drug users impose on others
- 4) reduce the harms caused by production, trafficking and distribution of drugs

# Four ways of reducing harm?

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- 3) reduce the harms that drug users impose on others
- 4) reduce the harms caused by production, trafficking and distribution of drugs

## Missing?

**5) reduce the harm that are caused to drug users by other people!**

# Is harm-reduction too narrow?

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Harm-reduction is **negatively** defined!





# Beyond harm reduction?

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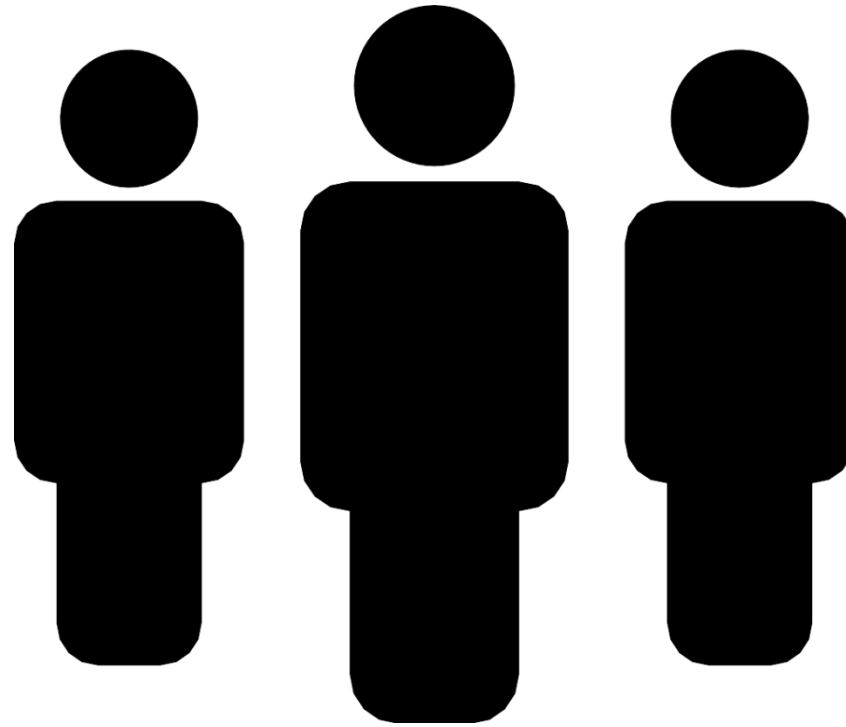
***“we have to make them citizens with rights  
– just as everyone else”*** (Interview with police officer)



# Decriminalization as a necessary condition

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Criminals ↔ Citizens



# Enforcement of drug legislation?

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**“Police officer:** Then I would not work here. Then I would do something else, because I wouldn’t like it. It is pointless and undignified and we step on people that already is lying down. I would work with something else then.”  
(Interview with police officer)

**Police officer:** Absolutely not. Then it would be like it was before. Chasing these people around the streets and confiscating their drugs. They would not have the opportunity to use our service, because they would hate our guts” (Interview with police officer)



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