

# UK study finds policing of county lines 'criminalizes' minority youth

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A new research report has raised concerns that policing efforts targeting "county lines" drug operations in the U.K. rely on discriminatory assumptions about minority groups and contribute to the criminalization

of minoritized communities.

This study was carried out by the Sociology department in collaboration with University of Sankt Gallen in Switzerland and Manchester Metropolitan University. It was [published](#) in the journal *Race & Class*.

## **Racial profiling in county lines policing**

The study found that county lines policies mirror the methods previously used in the controversial Gangs Violence Matrix database of the London Metropolitan Police.

Both employ vague criteria that lead to the over-policing of [minority](#) youth, their families and communities.

Despite a lack of evidence showing increased drug offenses, in some areas, black boys are up to six times more likely to be classified as at risk of involvement in "county lines."

## **Safeguarding as a route to criminalization?**

While government rhetoric around county lines emphasizes safeguarding exploited youth, the report found interventions legitimize extensive policing and surveillance of minoritized communities.

Subjective distinctions between "victims" and "offenders" mean many youth face potential criminalization rather than care.

Ultimately, researchers argue that relying on [racial stereotypes](#) to tackle county lines serves to further marginalize and criminalize [minority groups](#) rather than addressing systemic inequality.

**More information:** Insa Koch et al, 'County lines': racism, safeguarding and statecraft in Britain, *Race & Class* (2023). [DOI: 10.1177/03063968231201325](https://doi.org/10.1177/03063968231201325)

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