

Do stop and searches
breach our privacy?



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Since it was first introduced, the 'stop and search' method of countering crime has sparked a fierce debate as to whether these searches are morally right. Happening almost daily, the practice continues to be very controversial, with many claiming that 'stop and searches' breach our right to privacy. In the next couple of paragraphs, I shall attempt to answer the question "do stop and searches breach our privacy?" and learn a little more about the controversial topic.

Depending on where in the UK one lives, one is likely to be stopped and searched at least once in their life by a police officer - it has become an inevitable fact. When told by an officer that they are going to be searched in public, a person is given a number of key rights and responsibilities. Both the former and the latter are obvious: the right to be told the officer's name and police station, the right to receive a 'receipt' from the officer about the search, the right to not be strip searched in public, and the right to be searched by an officer of the same sex, as well as the responsibility to comply with the police, to not resist or abuse the officers, to take off all garments when asked to (only up to a jacket; never trousers or a shirt), and the responsibility to tell them your name and address.

This fairly ordinary occurrence happens all the time, and is, for many, a regular procedure. It may seem like a harmless, if slightly annoying, chore. Unfortunately, when one looks a little deeper into the facts and statistics, there seems to be a racially-motivated reason why some social groups are more searched than others; black people are six times more likely to be stopped and searched than white people, and Asians are twice as likely. Most people are searched under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act, which gives

police officers the permission to perform the act randomly with anybody they suspect of carrying drugs or concealed weapons. The stubbornly high levels are shocking as it would seem that, according to members of the police force, people from ethnic minority groups are more likely to carry illegal drugs or items.

This prejudice has led to more fierce debate and is, quite simply, unfair. Many people attack 'stop and searches' due to this fact, claiming that this racially-motivated trend is ridiculously cruel, and out-dated for modern western society. Another argument against the 'stop and search' procedure is one that criticises the lack of evidence that proves that ethnic minorities are more likely to be involved in crime; it is simply not justifiable for officers to base their 'reasonable suspicion' on personal beliefs. A final argument is the low reduction of crime caused by the search, with crime rates dropping by only 0.2%.

On the other hand, many claim that it is a necessary way to prevent crime, and is justifiable as an officer should know who is more likely to commit offenses. Some also believe that due to the large amount of crime possibly prevented by 'stop and searches' (in 2009 14,700 people were arrested and 7,500 knives were recovered) the whole thing has helped to make society a safer place.

In conclusion, it seems clear that the 'stop and search' method is wrong and has little impact on criminals, and despite the amount of crime prevented, the whole procedure is unnecessary, unfair, bullying, and inefficient.