Reviewer's report

Title: Evidence Planting by Police among a Community-Based Sample of Injection Drug Users in Bangkok, Thailand

Version: 1 Date: 30 March 2009

Reviewer: Nick Crofts

Reviewer's report:

An important and extremely under-researched subject this - and this paper will add one small but important piece of evidence in building the case for the negative public health and human rights impact of ill-directed and corrupt law enforcement.

However, I would like to see the paper carefully rewritten so that it does not leap to conclusions in advance of the data - a sure way of invalidating conclusions in the eyes of critics. There is a dataset, obviously collected as part of bigger studies - i.e. not specifically for the purpose of examining police behaviours with IDUs or their impacts - which is built entirely on self-report; there is no triangulation nor attempt at triangulation of these data. In itself not a problem, if this is how the report is presented; unfortunately the authors repeatedly lapse into claiming more than their data tell them; e.g.: "Police corruption in the form of evidence planting documented in the present study ...". Such corruption is NOT demonstrated in the present study - reports of it are. I have no doubt of the validity of most of these reports - but the authors cannot claim beyond the data. Similarly, second para of discussion: "Our findings validate previous anecdotal reports ..." - they do not, they simply repeat them in greater number. And at the end of the Results section, "59 (48.3%) paid the police money ..." - should be "... reported paying police money ..."

The factors chosen for analysis as associations of self-report of evidence planting seem also to be selected simply because they are in the dataset - no reasons are advanced for the choice of these particular factors, they seem simply convenient. A posteriori reasoning attempts to justify their choice and interpret possibilities from simple associations - which remain associations, no matter how strong.

I see this as a valuable first step in a program of research to find other ways of observing and measuring policing behaviour and its impacts on health and human rights - and raising questions and postulating hypotheses for further examination is an essential part of this. But a line in the second last paragraph is inadequate in intellectual terms for thought about where we go next.

The other issue I would like the authors to have shown some evidence of thought about is 'what can we do about this phenomenon?' Working with police is beginning to show evidence of effectiveness in other situations - as distasteful
as some may find it; what other approaches are there that promise effectiveness?

Small points:
Dates in Abstract are July to August 2009
Reference 30. I doubt I could find the source referred to on the basis of this citation.
Reference 31. Reid GaC, R. ??

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests