Reviewer's report

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

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Reviewer: Daniel Reidpath

Reviewer's report:

The paper raises a fundamentally interesting question about the relationship between the style of policing (evidence planting) and the efficacy of harm reduction strategies in injecting drug users.

There are two interpretive problems with the paper, and one issue with the presentation of the statistics.

It should be noted that in the penultimate paragraph in which the limitations of the study are discussed, both interpretive problems I will discuss are mentioned. The tenor of the article, however, does not reflect the limitations, that the authors themselves have identified.

The first interpretive problem relates to the operationalisation of "evidence planting." In the study evidence planting by police is measured using self-report by injecting drug users. Just as one might be justifiably skeptical about accepting police self reports about their use (or lack of use) of evidence planting, one should also treat reports of police evidence planting made by injecting drug users with skepticism. There are obvious threats to the validity of findings such as these, when based on self-report. Although the validity problems are mentioned in the manuscript, little is made of it.

The title should clearly mention that the results are based on reports of evidence planting made by injecting drug users. The conclusion should be far more cautious. The suggestion that these findings "validate previous anecdotal reports" (p.7) or that "our findings indicate that evidence planting by police is indeed another way in which abuse of power by police is exerted in Thailand" is unrealistic. In the absence of an alternative, independent measure of evidence planting, the findings simply provide further (important) anecdotal evidence.

The second interpretive problem is the conflation of association with implied causation. The last line of the Abstract provides a good example of this: "These findings identify a novel form of drug-related harm associated with policing practices in Thailand." The statement is simply not true given validity issues discussed above, more importantly in this context, however, (and notwithstanding the use of the word "association") the implication is that the policing practice of evidence planting causes harm. The best that the data support is an interpretation along the lines that those injecting drug users who reported police evidence planting were also more likely to share syringes (etc.). Where a
statistically significant association was found, much was made of the kinds of causal factors that may be at play to explain the association. Plausible psychological arguments could probably also be mounted to explain why injecting drug-users who report midazolam use were also more likely to suggest that police officer had planted evidence on them.

The article should more fully reflect the lack of a causal relationship between *self-reported* evidence planting and harm.

I was unclear about the presentation of the statistics in Table 2. The results are from a multivariate logistic regression and the adjusted odds ratios are presented. What variables were included in the regression model? Was it only the ones presented, or did it include others? If it was only the ones presented, how were they selected? A few sentences explaining the approach in more detail (and possible changes to Table 2) would be helpful.

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**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