

STUDY

REFORMING THE POLICE THROUGH PROCEDURAL JUSTICE TRAINING



The Law Enforcement
KNOWLEDGE LAB

A Multi-City Randomized Trial at Crime Hot Spots

A RESEARCH SUMMARY OF:

Weisburd, D., Telep, C. W., Vovak, H., Zastrow, T., Braga, A. A., & Turchan, B. (2022). [Reforming the police through Procedural Justice training: A multicity randomized trial at crime hot spots](#). *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 119(14). doi:10.1073/pnas.2118780119

TOPIC AREA:

- Hot Spots Policing
- Procedural Justice
- Police Training

QUESTIONS ADDRESSED:

- Did the intensive procedural justice training lead to more procedurally just policing?
- Did the intensive procedural justice training impact arrest behavior?
- Did the intensive procedural justice training impact community perceptions of crime and police in high crime areas?
- Did the intensive procedural justice training reduce crime?



KEY FINDINGS

- Intensive training in procedural justice can lead to more procedurally just behavior and less disrespectful treatment of people at high crime places, resulting in reduced crime, reduced arrests, and improved community perceptions of officers.
- Officers who received the intensive training were significantly more likely to give people voice, show neutrality, and demonstrate respectful behavior in hundreds of observed interactions as compared to those officers who did not receive the training, indicating that they were implementing the procedural justice training in their interactions.
- Officers who received the intensive training made 60% less arrests during the study period than those who did not receive the training.
- People living in the areas where officers did not receive the intensive procedural justice training were significantly more likely to say that police officers “harass” people on their block and “use more force than necessary.”
- Areas where officers received the intensive training experienced a 14% decline in total crime incidents as compared to the high crime areas where officers did not receive the training.

METHODS USED:

- This experiment involved a randomized controlled trial conducted in three cities, funded by Arnold Ventures and the National Policing Institute.
- Officers selected for the study were selected from patrol assignments and then matched with other officers for consistency in background, race, ethnicity, gender and experience between the two groups. Then, the officer pairs were split, randomly assigning one from each pair to the group to receive training and the other to the group that would not receive training. Twenty-eight officers participated across the three sites.
- Forty high-crime areas in each city were also randomly assigned to the two groups of officers – those that received the intensive training and those that did not.
- The training received by officers took place over 40 hours and included instruction on hot spots policing, procedural justice (voice, neutrality, dignity and respect, trustworthy motives), the importance of the historical context in understanding trust in policing, working with diverse populations and behavioral health problems. The training consisted of both lecture and practice scenario exercises, as well as role playing. Pre-post surveys of officers demonstrated significant improvement of officer knowledge in procedural justice following the training.
- Following training, the officers were assigned to the hot spot areas where they patrolled for nine months. Officers were observed by trained observers using systematic social observation techniques. A community (residential) survey was conducted before and after the intervention in the hot spot areas, and crime and arrest data were tracked for all areas. Crime data measured violent, property, drug, disorder, domestic and other crimes.

LIMITATIONS:

- Though the experiment was rigorous and scientific, the results should be confirmed through additional research and evaluations.
- One of the three cities where the randomized controlled trial was conducted had Covid-19 restrictions in place for part of the treatment period and during the collection of survey data, which may have affected those findings.

HOW DO THESE FINDINGS APPLY TO MY AGENCY?



The use of procedural justice training, particularly in high-crime areas, may reduce crime and improve community perceptions of the agency without increasing arrests.



Intensive training in procedural justice, as provided to the officers in this study, may be highly beneficial for those officers serving patrol functions, specifically in high-crime areas.

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