

STUDY

CAN POLICE SHOOTINGS BE REDUCED BY REQUIRING OFFICERS TO DOCUMENT WHEN THEY POINT FIREARMS AT CITIZENS?



A RESEARCH SUMMARY OF:

Shjarback, J. A., White, M. D., & Bishopp, S. A. (2021). Can police shootings be reduced by requiring officers to document when they point firearms at citizens? *Injury Prevention*, 27, 508-513.

TOPIC AREA:

- Use of Force
- Policy
- Accountability Systems
- Data and Technology

QUESTIONS ADDRESSED:

- Can a policy requiring officers to document each time they point their firearms at citizens help reduce the frequency of officer-involved shootings?
- What is the impact of this firearm pointing policy on officer-involved shootings where the officer incorrectly believed that the citizen had a firearm (i.e., threat perception failure)?
- Does this policy result in increased rates of officer injuries?



KEY FINDINGS

- After implementing a policy requiring officers to document each time they point their firearm at a citizen (a “point and report” policy), the Dallas Police Department saw a significant reduction in the total number of officer-involved shooting events. However, this reduction was gradual and did not occur immediately after the implementation of the policy, possibly because organizational change takes time to develop.
- Specifically, there was a statistically significant decrease in the number of shootings involving unarmed citizens, citizens attacking with hands/feet, and citizens using motor vehicles as a weapon.
- The study also found a statistically significant reduction in the frequency of shootings resulting from officers incorrectly believing the citizen had a gun. While 18% of shootings pre-policy involved a threat perception failure, only 4% of shootings in the post-policy implementation period involved officers incorrectly believing the citizen had a gun.
- In terms of officer safety, there was no increase in the rate of injuries suffered by officers post-policy implementation.

- There were no significant changes observed regarding shooting outcome, citizen race/ethnicity, officer duty status, or the number of officers involved in the shooting.

METHODS USED:

- This study relies on publicly available Dallas Police Department officer-involved shooting reports from 2003 to 2018. In total, 231 officer-involved shootings were included in the final sample.
- The Dallas Police Department implemented a policy on January 1, 2013 that required officers to document whenever they point their firearm at a citizen. As such, the research team compares officer-involved shootings in the years pre-policy implementation (2003-2012) to the years post-policy implementation (2013-2018).
- While previous studies have only examined citizen fatalities, this study investigated all instances in which officers discharged their firearm. Shooting outcomes were categorized as fatal shootings (34.2%), non-fatal shootings (29.0%), and shoot and misses (36.8%).
- In addition to data regarding shooting outcomes, measures capturing whether the citizen was armed or not, citizen weapon type, citizen actions, citizen race/ethnicity, officer duty status, and officer injuries were also included.
- The research team utilized several analyses to determine if officer-involved shootings decreased overall, if officers were more likely to be injured post-policy, and whether the policy impacted officer threat perception failure.

LIMITATIONS:

- The data are limited to officer-involved shooting reports from only one agency, which may limit the generalizability of this study.
- Due to the small sample size of officer-involved shootings, the research team was limited in their choice of analytical strategy.

HOW DO THESE FINDINGS APPLY TO MY AGENCY?



The results from this study demonstrate that a “point and report” policy may lead to reductions in the frequency of officer-involved shootings and reduce threat perception failures, while not placing officers at a greater risk of injury.



This suggests that implementing a policy that requires officers to file a report each time they point their firearm at a citizen may reduce officer-involved shootings.

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