

STUDY

PREVENTING THE USE OF DEADLY FORCE



The Relationship Between Police Agency Policies and Rates of Officer-Involved Gun Deaths

A RESEARCH SUMMARY OF:

Jennings, J. T., & Rubado, M. E. (2017). Preventing the use of deadly force: The relationship between police agency policies and rates of officer-involved gun deaths. *Public Administration Review*, 77(2), 217-226.

TOPIC AREA:

- Use of Force
- Policy
- Organizational Culture
- Organizational Structure and Change Management
- Training

QUESTIONS ADDRESSED:

- Can agency policies reduce the rate of officer-involved shooting deaths?
- Which policies in particular help reduce the rate of officer-involved shooting deaths, and which policies have no significant effect?



KEY FINDINGS

- Agency policies that require officers to complete a report each time they display their firearm but do not shoot was associated with a statistically significant reduction in the rate of officer-involved shooting deaths.
- The policy of requiring officers to provide written documentation when they display their firearm was associated with a reduction in fatalities of just over 3 people per one million in the population.
- While this policy was associated with lower rates of shootings deaths, as of 2013, only approximately 50% of agencies have this policy in place.
- Policies that are not associated with decreased rates of shooting deaths included mandating the racial composition of agencies, a community policing training requirement, and assigning officers to regular beats.

METHODS USED:

- This study investigated the impact of the racial composition of agencies compared to the racial composition of the community, as well as three policies on rates of officer-involved gun deaths. Those three policies included: requiring community policing training, assigning officers to regular beats, and requiring that officers complete a written report each time they display their firearm.
- To examine the impacts of each, the study utilized data from three sources. Data regarding the racial composition of communities came from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey, data regarding agency policies came from the 2013 Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics (LEMAS) survey, and data regarding officer-involved shootings came from the Fatal Encounters Project.
- The research team employed an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression model that included the racial demographics and three agency policies of interest, as well as several control variables relating to various departmental and community characteristics. The rate of officer-involved shooting deaths per 100,000 served as the outcome variable in the model.
- In total, 5,141 fatalities across 1,107 police agencies from the years 2000 to 2015 were included in the final sample.

LIMITATIONS:

- The Fatal Encounters dataset only includes fatalities resulting from officer-involved shootings, meaning that fatalities resulting from vehicles, Tasers, asphyxiation, or other non-firearm means are not included in the final sample.
- This study does not include state police agencies, federal police agencies, or agencies that serve populations less than 25,000. As such, the results from this study may not be applicable to these types of agencies.
- Due to the methods employed by the research team, fatalities are measured from 2000 to 2015 while agency policies are reflective of 2013. Since these data are measured at different points in time, the research team cannot claim that the firearm display documentation policy caused a decrease in fatalities, only that the two are associated.

HOW DO THESE FINDINGS APPLY TO MY AGENCY?



This study provides evidence to suggest that requiring officers to complete written reports each time they display their firearms but do not shoot is associated with decreased rates of officer-involved gun deaths.



However, many agencies do not have a policy like this in place. This indicates a potential reform that agencies can make to reduce citizen fatalities in officer-involved shootings.

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