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Notes

FROM THE RESEARCH ON INTERACTIONS BETWEEN LAW ENFORCEMENT AND YOUTH DISCUSSION

DECEMBER 2017

Prepared for the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

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NOTES

Summary

On October 12, 2017, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) convened a group of researchers, practitioners, and federal staff to discuss the state of research on interactions between law enforcement and youth. The meeting's purpose was to identify research strategies that could inform OJJDP's efforts to support officer, youth, and community safety. At the meeting, OJJDP underscored the importance of law enforcement's role as first contact with youth involved in the juvenile justice system and the agency's support of delinquency prevention efforts. The discussion included a summary of the current research and literature, highlighting the scope of law enforcement and youth interactions, factors that lead to and influence police-youth interactions, and best practices or programs designed to improve interactions. Relevant research considerations, research methods, and research questions identified from the discussion are outlined in the sections below.

Research Methods and Measures

Participants identified the need to balance the confines and structure of quality research with the practical needs of law enforcement and communities, including the need to translate research findings into practice within the field and the recognition that some law enforcement-youth activities considered successful by practitioners are not evidence-based programs and practices. Below are some key themes that emerged as research considerations for the field and recommendations designed to improve the quality and applicability of research on law enforcement and youth interactions.

SETTING AND CONTEXT
Understand how the diverse settings where law enforcement and youth interact and the context of those interactions may impact research results and outcomes.

- **Setting examples:** Schools, community, public housing development, etc.

- **Context examples:** Street approach, field interview, responding to youth as victims and responding to incidences of domestic violence within the home.

- **Contextual fit:** Implementation science research requires willingness of all involved parties to participate in programs/practices (e.g., Although law enforcement considers diversion a best practice, communities need to buy in to the idea as well).

LAW ENFORCEMENT PERSPECTIVE
Consider law enforcement's perspective about programs and their definition of success versus how researchers define success.

- Although research may reveal a program or practice does not work, police leadership may believe it is the right thing to do, and/or officers attribute positive changes in youths' attitudes and behaviors to the program.

  - **Police Athletic League (PAL) program:** Officers believed the program was effective based on what they observed in the community, but the research did not support their perspective. Other police-led programs face similar challenges.

- Police leadership need support and encouragement when trying new programs since they are taking a risk by not knowing the outcomes.

- Police require training on using discretion to make decisions. Officers may be reluctant to use discretion to make decisions for fear it could result in a youth committing a crime or reoffending.

IMPACT ON MULTIPLE STAKEHOLDER GROUPS
Consider program limitations, including the ability of one program or intervention to impact the safety of multiple groups (youth, community, and police) and the capability of basic research to unpack and analyze this complicated issue.

- Can one program influence each of the three target groups?

- To achieve safety for each group, program goals/actions may be different and opposed to each other.

- A single evaluation may not be able to determine a program's impact on the safety of multiple groups simultaneously.

EVALUATION CONSIDERATIONS
Research may be more valuable and informative if it expands beyond traditional impact program evaluation and incorporates implementation science.

- CrimeSolutions.gov: Presents only programs supported by experimental/quasi-experimental design, but it is also important to recognize the need for qualitative research and the importance of theoretical building.

- Expand research beyond program development to consider if program implementation is happening as designed and how to operationalize findings to inform day-to-day practice of law enforcement.

- Recognize the importance of using a logic model that makes sense with the distinct outcomes identified, such as reducing officer injury, which is not the same logic behind a prevention program.

- Look at implementation science research approach versus focusing more narrowly at impact in evaluations.

  - For example, an implementation science approach would examine how programs were put into practice, how meaningful partnerships were established, how police policy was created on the ground and how it works within the law enforcement culture.

- Ask research questions that have a practical application for law enforcement. For example:

  - Identify the outcomes relevant to law enforcement that may not be a main goal of program (e.g., DARE).

  - Consider police goals and the impact of police-led programs and the ability to leverage program results to inform decision making.

- Use a participant research model where youth are trained to serve as partners in conducting research about youth experiences and interactions with law enforcement.

- Research methods should be realistic and balance practicality with traditional rigor. For example, reconcile disconnect between researchers' desire to see what works on paper (i.e. strong internal validity) and the reality on the ground (i.e. strong external validity).

INFLUENCE OF PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON STUDY CONTEXT

Previous research may have included recommendations that contributed to current law enforcement and community problems (e.g., persuading police to focus on hot spots of criminal activity and crime and violence, instead of focusing on programs, prevention, or relationship building with community members).

- Officers see research as a top-down approach and would prefer a bottom-up approach.

- Programs are often unsustainable—when funding is exhausted, the program must end.

USE TECHNOLOGY

There is the opportunity to use technology to reduce the cost of conducting research and improve sampling methods.

- Conduct research on youth and law enforcement interactions in a more economically prudent manner with police cameras.

- **Strategic sampling:** Ability to select the sample population to research, for example, youth with higher risk factors, youth victims, or youth exposed to violence.

- Technology expands the potential for conducting cross-organizational analysis by creating more efficient information sharing and data linking capabilities.

OUTCOMES

Identify outcome measures that can reveal the effectiveness of programs and practices that are also relevant to law enforcement.

- Short- and mid-term outcomes vs. long-term outcomes.

  - Long-term outcomes do not meet the immediate needs of police chiefs working under time-sensitive constraints.

- **Outcome examples:** Law enforcement safety, youth safety, reduction of serious behavioral incidents impacting officer safety, etc.

- Redefine safety outcomes more broadly to include an officer's perceptions of safety and the impact of officer trauma and job-related injuries.

MEASURING INTERACTIONS

Identify and measure different types of interactions, including both positive and negative interactions, occurring between law enforcement and youth.

- **Examples of positive experiences** include school and diversion practices, school justice partnerships, and efforts to prevent youth from entering the court system, including efforts designed to promote staying in school (e.g. the National Council of Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ).

- Include longitudinal research to measure long-term outcomes (e.g., If youth stopped offending in adulthood after having not been arrested at an earlier age). For example, account for whether diverted youth are sent on a long-term positive trajectory.

PRACTITIONER PARTNERSHIPS IN RESEARCH

Participants discussed the importance of engaging law enforcement and other key practitioners throughout the research:

- **Need for more rapid studies.**

  o **Factors:** Time for data integration across systems, accessing data within a single system.

- **Law enforcement benefit:** Ask police agencies what they want to learn and try to provide programs or practices that are mutually beneficial.

- **Research/law enforcement partnership:** Establish meaningful partnerships between researchers and law enforcement to create police policy on the ground. Work within the law enforcement culture and engage with local police departments, including completing small studies, working for free, or responding to questions in a timely manner.

- **Research demonstration projects:** Allow for mid-course feedback and mid-course correction.

- **Community member role:** Understand that community members as key stakeholders remain constant, even if police leadership is fluid.

- **Research Translation:** Consider how to operationalize research findings on the ground in a tangible manner as opposed to a "30,000 foot" view.

Research Questions

Participants identified research questions and topic areas to explore in greater depth. The following topics are designed to expand the field's knowledge-base and provide recommendations for how to support law enforcement, youth, and community safety.

INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH

Participants discussed the impact of international laws and research conducted in other countries that could impact interactions between law enforcement and youth in the U.S.

- **Argentina:** No youth under the age of 16 can be held criminally responsible.

- **Latin America and Caribbean:** Addressed corruption by promoting gender balance within law enforcement departments and training women to become officers.

- **Netherlands:** Law enforcement exposure to traumatic case material places officers at risk for psychological injury.

POLICE-LED DIVERSION PROGRAMS

- For example, the recent evaluation of Philadelphia diversion program:

  o **Knowledge of the diversion program:** Assess officers' program knowledge post-training. Do officers understand what they are supposed to do, the program concepts, etc.? Are they doing what they are supposed to do? What is their experience?

  o **Officer perceptions:** How do officers feel about the training? Do they perceive an improvement in school safety following the training? What does it mean for justice?

  o **Evaluation of the diversion program:** Is the program working? Has recidivism decreased? Has school climate improved? Have outcomes improved?

LEGAL SOCIALIZATION

Continue to develop research on legal socialization (e.g., Understanding how children perceive the law and the legal structure—their exposure to rules, laws, and agents of enforcement).

- Research would need to involve longitudinal studies to understand a subset of legal socialization—the political development of youth and their outlook on political/legal systems.

LAW ENFORCEMENT ROLES

Examine the impact of the changing role of law enforcement and the factors that influence their interactions with youth, including officer safety and future risk factors associated with not arresting a youth.

- **Role examples:** Law enforcer, educator, counselor/mentor, gatekeeper for informal diversion, social worker, prevention trainer, PAL program provider.

- **Methods for measuring law enforcement interactions:** Strategically sample interactions between law enforcement and specific target groups, such as high-risk youth.

- Important to measure decisions, attitudes, and different types of interactions against different officer roles.

  - **Example:** The negative impact of interaction between an officer and a youth if the interaction occurs at a traffic stop or in a park versus a school-based interaction, where school-resource officers spend more time acting as a mentor/counselor and are less likely to arrest a young person.

CHILD AND ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT

Examine research that specifically looks at the differences between adult and youth/adolescent development and the impact of those differences on youth interactions with law enforcement.

- Include research on developmental brain science and whether youth perceive and respond differently than adults.

- What specifically about youth adolescent brain development impacts behaviors and attitudes of police? What do police know about adolescent brain development?

  - Expand training on adolescent brain development for law enforcement in addition to existing officer training.

- What are the implications of child and adolescent development on law enforcement and youth interactions?

- **Exposure to violence:** What does the research on brain development reveal about the impact of exposure to violence on youth, and how can this knowledge be translated into practice and follow-up?

- Impact of adolescent brain development on young officer recruits who are themselves still experiencing brain development.

DEVELOPMENTAL DIFFERENCES AMONG DIFFERENT AGED YOUTH

Examine how different developmental stages of youth based on age may influence youth interactions with law enforcement.

- How can we capture this variable in studies (juvenile vs. adult vs. 18-24, or more-fine-tuned developmental divisions)?

- Specifically focus on the young adult category, which shows very different offending profiles.

- **School Interactions:** How do interactions change with different aged youth? Do the outcomes change?

COMMUNITY AND LAW ENFORCEMENT PERCEPTIONS

Understand how documented levels of mutual mistrust among law enforcement, youth, and communities influence youth and law enforcement interactions before supporting implementation of programs and practices.

- Research social cohesion and collective efficacy.

- **Levels of mutual mistrust:** We do not know enough about how to move from mistrust to trust.

- Understand how the context can be negative when there is a high police presence.

- Understand the role of implicit bias.

LAW ENFORCEMENT, YOUTH AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Develop research on how to improve relationships and build trust among youth, law enforcement, and community members so that they see each other as true partners and can work together to implement programs designed to improve safety.

- Highlight the importance of facilitating relationships, not just solving problems.

LAW ENFORCEMENT WELL-BEING

Examine the importance of law enforcement's satisfaction with their jobs and whether they are equipped to intervene and engage in interactions with youth. Evidence exists that long-term exposure of law enforcement to traumatic experiences has a negative impact on their job performance since they are not trained like mental health providers or social workers on how to manage their exposure to trauma. This phenomenon is also called vicarious trauma or secondary stress. The National Institute of Justice has identified the issue of officer wellness as a high priority and published a "Safety, Health, and Wellness Strategic Research Plan" that examines how exposure to trauma affects those employed within the criminal justice system. The following are important areas for consideration in exploring the implications of law enforcement well-being:

- Research trauma, gender, and developmental stage (e.g., older adolescents) of officers.

- Examine if law enforcement is experiencing self-efficacy.

- Does officer training and the program being evaluated contribute to an officer's sense of professional efficacy, well-being on the job, and job satisfaction? Do these outcomes impact other outcomes important to law enforcement leadership (such as officer job tenure)?

- Look more broadly at "wellness" and how to define "officer safety." Should "officer safety" be defined as not being injured or killed? Do broader community interventions have a positive impact?

- **Officer trauma:** Explore research on how to improve or enhance officers' wellness and methods for supporting officers (not supporting adolescents experiencing trauma).

- Identify trauma informed practices.

- Include officer safety as an outcome within program evaluations.

LAW ENFORCEMENT TRAINING

Examine the effectiveness of police training on behavior change. What is the interaction among agency context, agency policies, and police training on law enforcement decision making (e.g., choices to divert youth and when)?

- Link training to policies and promotion.

    o Norms exist in police departments on how police are promoted.

- **Impact of training and technical assistance:** Law enforcement need sustained support. Training and technical assistance is needed to make these changes. Research is needed to see if these changes are having an impact.

- Understand how police are incentivized to improve or change behaviors.

- Look at how training changes not only the understanding of key concepts, but also day-to-day work.

Research Translation and Dissemination

Participants recommended integrating research translation and dissemination goals throughout the research:

- Stakeholder needs to "sell" research to police trainers using data-driven results.

    o For example, for every 10 hours of this training, safety increases by X amount.

- Shift focus of research from a tendency to tell officers what not to do, to offering guidance to officers on what to do.

    o For example, provide officers with information about what to do when making discretionary decisions instead of only providing them with research telling them what not to do.

- **Learn from other systems:** How can lessons be extrapolated to youth justice? Use an asset-based versus weakness-based approach.

- Disseminate research findings to law enforcement in a timely manner. Share more immediate findings sooner rather than later and report findings in real-time so law enforcement can make strategic adjustments.

Conclusion

Participants reiterated the need for tailored methods that promote law enforcement and researcher partnerships and the need to both evaluate the implementation and effectiveness of programs along with other more basic research questions. Regardless of the questions, research is only valuable if there are meaningful ways to translate findings to practice.

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