

Research Brief: “The Police-Community Interaction Survey: Measuring Police Performance in New Ways”

Reference:

Rosenbaum, Dennis P., Jon Maskaly, Daniel S. Lawrence, Justin H. Escamilla, Georgina Enciso, Thomas E. Chrisoff, & Chad Posick. (2017). “The Police-Community Interaction Survey: measuring police performance in new ways,” *Policing: An International Journal of Police Strategies & Management*, Vol. 40, no. 1: pp. 112-127.

Link to this study:

https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Chad_Posick/publication/315447137_The_Police-Community_Interaction_Survey_measuring_police_performance_in_new_ways/links/58dc7306aca2725c474a919f/The-Police-Community-Interaction-Survey-measuring-police-performance-in-new-ways.pdf

Summary

There is a growing need to move beyond crime statistics as a way to measure police performance, particularly regarding the quality of police-community interactions and the need for greater accountability in policing. The Police-Community Interaction Survey (PCIS) is a sophisticated “satisfaction survey” developed as part of the National Police Research Platform that allows the public to evaluate recent interactions with local police. The goals of the PCIS are to enhance professionalism and strengthen public trust in police by serving as a transparent mechanism for community input. PCIS data can be used to generate measured benchmarks for excellence in policing and to understand the factors affecting police-community interactions.

Community input gathered through the PCIS can help agencies identify ways they can improve community interactions and monitor the success of initiatives to enhance trust and legitimacy. The PCIS can also be used as a tool to evaluate officer performance in new ways or, if widely adopted, compare performance across agencies using PCIS-generated metrics. In addition, a national database of performance metrics would allow for large-scale examinations of the various organizational and community factors affecting police-community relations.

To ensure the confidentiality of responses and enhance credibility, the PCIS was managed independently of any police agency. Survey questions asked community members about their perceptions on a wide range of topics, mostly pertaining to characteristics of their individual cases and the actions and demeanor of the officer(s) with whom they interacted. The survey covered a wide range of content, including procedural justice concepts (e.g. respectfulness, neutrality, value of the individual’s input, and trust), legitimacy, empathy, competence, conversational etiquette, emotional control, use of force, assistance to crime victims, cooperation with the police, and overall satisfaction, among other variables.

Community members who had reported a crime incident (34.4% of respondents), reported a traffic accident (24.1% of respondents), or were stopped for traffic violations (41.5% of

respondents) in the two weeks preceding the survey were eligible to participate. Individuals received letters from the chief or sheriff emphasizing the independence of the study and asking them to complete the survey via phone or online. 53 of the 100 cities in the National Police Research Platform volunteered to participate in the PCIS in 2013 and 2014, generating a total of 16,659 community member respondents. The original sample from which PCIS cities were selected was constructed in a way that produced adequate representation across various regions, agency types (i.e. Sheriff's offices and municipal departments), and agency sizes.¹

Procedural justice includes several different aspects of officer behavior, including respectfulness, empathy, neutrality, trustworthiness, officer competence, conversational etiquette, emotional control, and support of crime victims. Other procedural justice measures included general visibility and responsiveness of the police organization, overall satisfaction with the encounter, and general confidence in the agency's ability to do its job. Unlike most prior research, the PCIS measured these elements of procedural justice separately. This allowed researchers to independently assess these various elements and how they interact with one another.

Researchers found evidence that the positive effects of procedural justice on willingness to cooperate were amplified when individuals perceived higher levels of officer trustworthiness. For example, findings reveal that respectfulness impacted trustworthiness, which then impacted individuals' willingness to cooperate with police. Respectfulness exerted the strongest positive effect on perceptions of trustworthiness, followed by empathy, and then neutrality. Regarding cooperation with the police, perceived trustworthiness was the strongest predictor, followed by empathy, and then respect. Respectfulness had the largest *indirect* effect (via increased trustworthiness) on community members' willingness to cooperate with the police, followed by empathy, and then neutrality. The significance of officer empathy suggests that empathy is an important element in the procedural justice framework that may warrant separate examination.

While perceptions of helpfulness, officer competence, organizational effectiveness, and organizational legitimacy appeared to be driven by a number of factors, there was a strong correlation between helpfulness and officer competence. A similar correlation was seen between perceptions of organizational effectiveness and organizational legitimacy.

The community survey showed use of force occurred relatively infrequently, but the department's metric of "actual" use of force was not driving this outcome. Rather, community members' perceptions of force were related to less serious types of force, such as searches and threats, that the department doesn't include when accounting for its use-of-force incidents. This suggests that community members define "force" based on less serious but more frequent types of force than those generally measured by agencies.

This study represents the first attempt to validate the measurement of police-community interactions in the U.S. on a large scale. While more tests are needed to fully understand the impact of other variables, such as race/ethnicity, this study is a useful step towards establishing standardized performance metrics for police-community interactions.

¹ Participating and non-participating agencies were not significantly different on these variables.