De-Policing in America: The Effects of Media and Leadership on Officers' Discretionary Enforcement

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Abstract

Proving the existence of the Ferguson Effect has been elusive and the center of national debate. Generally, the theory defines some form of de-policing correlated with a rise in crime. While the controversy continues in specifically correlating these two points, there exists significant academic, statistical, and anecdotal evidence showing crime is increasing while discretionary policing has been reduced in some areas. The current study accepts the existence and relevancy of de-policing and believes the urgent question is not one of strict correlation between crime and arrest rates but, rather, why a de-policing trend exists. The current study derives the answer from front-line law enforcement officers responsible for proactive discretionary policing. The results, along with substantive literature on the topic, provide a clear representation of the effects of negative media and leadership influence on police discretionary activity nationally.

There is no denying the increased negative media portrayal of law enforcement in the United States and the proportional effects. Many criminal justice professionals will point to the August 9, 2014, officer-involved shooting death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, as the ignition point for what may now be described as a continuing law enforcement crisis. The media frenzy and proliferation of misinformation circumscribing the events in Ferguson began a false narrative of systemic excessive force used by law enforcement officers against people of color (Kindy, 2015; MacDonald, 2016; Martinelli, 2016; Riddell, 2015; U.S. Department of Justice, 2015).

Michael Brown's death and the forensically disproven false narrative of "Hands up/Don't Shoot" is anecdotally believed by many to be the originating point of the *Ferguson Effect*—an idea that officers have slowed or stopped policing in fear of the social, political, and professional consequences. Subsequently, as other sensationalized officer-involved shootings of black males have gone "viral," some municipalities have seen decreases in discretionary proactive policing.

Unfortunately, the focus has shifted away from decreases in police proactivity and toward geographically correlating any slowdown to increases in crime. This method has been proven problematic and stalls academics from empirically validating the Ferguson Effect. Failures in validating the geographical correlations have led many to dismiss the importance of de-policing in the context of the larger social ramifications. The current study is based on a premise that the statistics concerning de-policing and rising crime rates are relevant regardless of specific geographical correlations.

As such, the long-term ramifications of de-policing are known—rising crime—and

should be concerning to a law-abiding society (Sherman et al., 1998; Weatherburn, 2001). Therefore, the current study focuses on the subjective thoughts of those responsible for discretionary proactive policing—the patrol officers. Their responses provide an invaluable insight into the reasons why some officers are no longer engaging in discretionary policing. The influences of negative media and executive leadership are center stage in the findings.

Current Definitions of the Ferguson Effect

The academic definitions of a *Ferguson Effect* have eluded a standard definition, which may be why it has been difficult to empirically validate its existence. *Forensic Magazine,* self-described as an authoritative voice in a wide-ranging field of forensic disciplines, defined the *Ferguson Effect* as the title of a controversial hypothesis describing how law enforcement officers across the country have reacted to negative police publicity by being less inclined to work with their communities to fight crime (Allocca, 2015).

Johnathan Smith (2015), an Associate Dean of Experiential and Clinical Programs at the University of the District of Columbia's David A. Clarke School of Law, defined the *Ferguson Effect* as police "withholding their services because they're resentful of reforms and afraid of being featured on the evening news" (p. 1). Other academics have defined the *Ferguson Effect* as existing or being of import if a rise in crime rates correlates to a decrease in police activity (Rosenfield, 2015).

Many definitions of the *Ferguson Effect* are speculative as no studies the authors are aware of have explored the related subjective beliefs of officers. There is no empirical evidence to support statements that officers are fearful, resentful, or have other mindsets related to reducing their activity. To that end, a reasonable defining statement void of

officers' subjective mindsets must be established for this study. Such a statement is found in a recent study defining the *Ferguson Effect* in the following way: "High profile citizen deaths at the hands of the police have caused such widespread negative attention that some argue it is causing police officers to withdraw from their duties in order to avoid being accused of excessive force or racial profiling" (Wolfe & Nix, 2016, p. 2).

As stated, the authors find that the term *Ferguson Effect* has been publicly identified with the need to correlate crime rates with police proactivity. Failures to correlate these data points have allowed for a public dismissal of the theory by politicians, academics, and police executives. To avoid such a dismissal, the current study wishes to disassociate with the term *Ferguson Effect*. Instead, the current study wishes to align with the Wolfe and Nix (2016) definition, but replaces references to the Ferguson Effect with the "de-policing theory."

Proof of De-Policing

Proof of a national epidemic of de-policing is found in statements from the highest levels of law enforcement and includes a cornucopia of de-policing statistics. For instance, FBI Director James Comey has publicly stated, "A chill wind has blown through law enforcement over the last year, and that wind is surely changing behavior" (Eilperin & Lowery, 2015). While his statement is anecdotal, the educated opinions of respected law enforcement leaders and academics should not be discarded as unimportant.

Supporting Director Comey, further evidence of de-policing comes from major metropolitan police chiefs. Philadelphia Police Commissioner Charles Ramsey has stated it was plausible that officers are less proactive due to the current social climate (CNN, 2015). Milwaukie Sheriff David Clarke testified before the House Judiciary Committee stating

law enforcement officers' psyches are being affected by the negativity directed toward them. Clarke said, "The one common theme I heard from all of them is . . . 'You know, Sheriff, I don't know if I want to continue to take that extra step anymore because I don't want to be the next Darren Wilson'" (May, 2015, p. 1).

Andrew McCarthy (2015), Senior Fellow at the National Review Institute and retired U.S. Attorney, presents the possibility of a policing slow-down by discussing the ramifications of law enforcement agency ethos. Specifically, he points to officer perceptions that taking enforcement action may lead to penalties ranging from discipline to incarceration, and these perceptions will reliably have a negative effect on proactive policing. As support for his statements, he points to President Obama's negative narrative toward police, U.S. Department of Justice actions post–officer–involved shootings, and U.S. Department of Justice prosecutorial misconduct. McCarthy finalizes his statement by describing law enforcement officers as "intimidated into passivity" (p. 25).

Public statements by knowledgeable leaders are not the only evidence of de-policing. Statistics from across the nation are providing a bleak picture of de-policing. An article reviewing first quarter 2016 enforcement statistics in Minneapolis found an arrest rate drop of about 30% and a pedestrian stop decrease of 32% from the same time period in 2015 (Jany, 2016). The Chicago Police Department has experienced a nearly 90% drop in police stops at the beginning of 2016 compared to the same time period in 2015 (Konkol, 2016). Vehicle stop statistics inclusive of 60 Connecticut police departments shows a 20% decrease in traffic stops across the state. Queally, Mather, and Chang (2017) report arrest rates in California have dropped to the lowest numbers in 50 years. Officers in the state have made 400,000 less arrests from 2006 to 2015. In Los Angeles alone, arrests have plummeted by 25%.

Provided thus far is a small sample of the evidence of de-policing from across the country. While some areas may not be experiencing these drops, many large metropolitan areas are. The academic studies on the *Ferguson Effect* to date discount an association between crime rates and police proactivity even when some evidence exists to support it. However, as long-term data becomes more available, academics like Dr. Richard Rosenfield are changing their opinions (Beckett, 2016).

Crime Statistics and De-Policing

Concerns over de-policing and rising crime rates are widespread and circumscribe the highest levels of government. In 2015, the Major Cities Chiefs Association convened an emergency meeting to discuss a new and recurring trend of increases in homicides in their jurisdictions. Washington, DC Police Chief Cathy Lanier stated, "We have not seen what we're seeing right now in decades. . . . We had this meeting as an urgent summit because we felt a sense of urgency because people are dying" (Greenberg, 2015, p. 1). A survey of the Major Cities Chiefs Association showed there had been both a rise in weapons on the streets as well as increased killings. The District of Columbia saw homicide rates climb to 87 in August 2015 compared to 105 for all of 2014 (Greenberg, 2015).

In that same meeting, Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel is quoted as telling Attorney General Lynch his officers were "Going fetal. . . . [T]hey don't want to be a news story themselves, they don't want their career ended early, and it's having an impact" (MacDonald, 2015a). According to the article, homicides increased 17% in the 56 largest cities in 2015. Robberies were up 9%, and nonfatal shootings were up 21% in the 63 largest cities. Chicago statistics show a 90% drop in proactive police stops, while shootings were up 50% between 2014 and 2015 (MacDonald, 2015a).

Academia has been paying attention to crime statistics as well. A John Hopkins study conducted by Stephen Morgan and Joel Pally (2016) reviewed Baltimore, Maryland, crime statistics. The authors dispersed crime trends and arrest activity within specific time periods consistent with the (1) Ferguson unrest (August 11, 2014–April 19, 2015), and (2) the Freddy Gray protests (April 20, 2015–July 12, 2015). The study provided evidence of an association between police proactivity and crime rates:

> *(1) Arrests between August 11, 2014, and April 19, 2015, fell 19% (152 fewer arrests per week). The decline was found most often in less serious crime such as driving violations, disorderly conduct, and property destruction. These areas are identified in policing as discretionary enforcement.*

> *(2) Arrests between April 20, 2015, and July 12, 2015, fell by another 30% beyond the previous period. In addition to the decline in discretionary arrests, the study found that arrests for murder and attempted murder declined 30%, while weapons violations arrests declined 18%.*

Pyrooz, Decker, Wolfe, and Shjarback (2016) examined post-Ferguson crime trends in 81 U.S. cities with populations exceeding 200,000. The study makes a point to state that any increase or decrease cannot be correlated with de-policing but only shows whether there has been a marked change in crime trends. Of significant interest to the current study is the finding within Pyrooz et al. that certain cities such as Baltimore, St. Louis, Newark, New Orleans, Washington, DC, Milwaukee, and Rochester, among others, experienced large increases in homicides post-Ferguson.

The issue of de-policing and its effects has even been discussed at length in the U.S. Senate. The Senate Committee on the Judiciary conducted a hearing of the Subcommittee on Oversight, Agency Action, Federal Rights and Federal Courts entitled, "The War on Police:

How the Federal Government Undermines State and Local Law Enforcement. Testimony in the hearing came from both high-ranking government officials and academics. The following are summaries of their testimony.

Heather MacDonald (2015b), a Manhattan Institute Fellow, stated crime was spiking across the country, and the spike may be caused by de-policing. Her evidence of de-policing is provided in her written testimony:

> *In New York City, for example, summons for low-level, quality-of-life offenses like public urination and drinking were down 26% in the first half of 2015; arrests in every crime category were down 15% as of late October, even as homicides were up 8%. In Los Angeles, arrests are down 10% even as violent crime is up 20%. Arrests dropped 56% in Baltimore in May following the anti-cop riots and the indictment of six officers for the death of drug dealer Freddie Gray. (p. 1)*

Senator Orrin G. Hatch asked Ms. MacDonald follow-up questions in regards to her testimony. He asked specifically what effect the Obama administration's words and actions had upon police morale. Ms. MacDonald answered that President Obama has repeatedly attacked officers and the criminal justice system in regards to racial bias which damaged the legitimacy of policing as well as the entire criminal justice system. She added that other factors negatively influence police proactivity such as community violence against officers, social media, lack of support from police executives and elected officials, and overreaching criminal indictments (Hatch & MacDonald, 2015).

Plausibly, the most powerful empirical evidence to date comes from the National Institute of Justice study, *Documenting and Explaining the 2015 Homicide Rise: Research Directions* (Rosenfeld, 2016). The study sampled homicide data from 56 U.S. cities with populations exceeding 250,000 and explored

potential causes. The data show that between 2014 and 2015, 40 cities experienced increases in homicide and 16 experienced declines. Eighteen cities experienced a 25% increase in homicides, while 12 cities experienced a 50% increase. The increase across all 56 cities (mean) was 16.8%, with a top ten list of cities responsible for much of the overall increase. Rosenfeld (2016) falls short of attributing the increased homicide rate to de-policing but indicates stronger support for its effect on crime.

Proactive Policing: Does It Matter?

The importance of correlating crime rates with de-policing geographically has been brought into question by the current study. The foundation for that query is provided in the empirical evidence concerning proactive policing. Discretionary/proactive policing is often defined through umbrella terms such as *hot spot policing* or *Stop & Frisk*, although the concept is far from restricted to these methods. For instance, discretionary policing is inclusive of proactive pedestrian and traffic stops conducted during an officer's standard tour of duty.

In a study by the National Institute of Justice titled, *Preventing Crime: What Works, What Doesn't, What's Promising* (Sherman et al., 1998), proactivity was shown to be a law enforcement methodology preventing crime and reducing the risk of future criminal activity. For instance, increased policing in criminal hot spots reduces crime (traffic/pedestrian stops) as does repeat offender units that return criminals to prison more quickly than when they are unmonitored. Additional studies have repeatedly proven the positive effects of proactive policing in reducing crime (Braga, 2001; Braga & Weisburd, 2011; Hall, 2010; Kubrin, Messner, Glenn, McGeever & Stucky, 2010; National Institute of Justice, n.d.).

On the opposite end of the spectrum, a meta-analysis by Don Weatherburn (2001) researched the causes of crime. He found that public tolerance of crime, criminal opportunity, and lax or insufficient law enforcement (not all inclusive) have been shown to increase crime rates. Weatherburn further states that proactive policing decreases crime at a higher rate than reactive policing. The summation of these studies provides evidence that proactive policing is necessary, and de-policing results in increases in crime.

Current Study

Participants

Participants (*N* = 489) were law enforcement patrol officers ranging in age between 18 and 65 years old (M = 38) and having between "less than 5 years" and "25-30 years" (M = 12.5) of policing experience. Participants were employed by law enforcement agencies having between "1-10" and "3,000+" officers (M = 150).

Method

An online electronic survey of 19 questions was created via *Survey Monkey* (https://www.surveymonkey.com/home) and was advertised through law enforcement-targeted social media. In some cases, police executives agreed to present the survey to employees; and in other cases, the survey was received and completed as a direct response to marketing. The survey produced a convenience sample of patrol-level officers across the U.S. The survey specifically targeted patrol-level officers as they are the primary source of self-initiated or proactive policing.

Participants were provided a URL which allowed them to access the survey online. Upon entering the site, participants were presented with the purpose of the study as follows: "The purpose of this anonymous survey is to determine whether social trends within

the last year have had any influence upon patrol level proactive policing." Additionally, the survey provided a disclaimer stating it was intended for patrol-level officers only. The disclaimer defined a patrol-level officer as "Those engaged in uniformed patrol in a marked police vehicle and who respond to calls for service, engage in proactive policing, enforce laws, and work a 'beat' during their tour of duty."

Additionally, the survey defined *proactive policing* as "Self-initiated law enforcement activities to include self-initiated traffic enforcement, self-initiated pedestrian stops, and other self-initiated enforcement activities (e.g., Probation Searches)."

Data Handling and Statistical Treatment

To receive the most accurate results, the survey provided anonymity to participants; however, 23% of participants identified their police departments (113 total), and 99% identified the state where they were employed (485 total). While anonymity remains, it is worthy of mention the responses represent a large number of agencies across the country.

The data from the survey were converted to Microsoft *Excel* and then exported to *SPSS*. The file was stored only on the researcher and statistician's desktop computers, and all data were deleted from the online survey system. The *SPSS* database used for data analysis was accessible only by using a strong password known only to the statistician. Neither dataset contained any coded identifiers and, as such, both are completely anonymous.

The *SPSS* data will be retained on the researcher's desktop computer for a minimum of five years along with related files in case questions arise about the analysis. The dataset and related files will be transferred to any future computer owned by the researcher until the five years have expired. After the five years, the researcher will destroy the *SPSS* data file.

The various measures were scored according to published norms. Then, the several independent variables, which were measures of subjective opinions on media, leadership, community relations, and training, were correlated with the results of the self-reported proactivity results. Patterns of correlations were detected by extracting significant correlations from the datasets and presenting them in a tabular format. Because the direction of each correlation was predicted by the hypotheses in the study, alpha levels were one-tailed and set at $p < .10$ for significance.

Results

Analysis

This study sought to explore the dynamics of de-policing post-Ferguson exposure for law enforcement officers at the local level. In this particular analysis, data analysis was limited to frequency and bivariate correlational analysis. The objective of the analysis was to properly describe the sample data in terms of perceptions and attitudes regarding the perception and portrayal of police by media outlets and communities. Furthermore, the analysis worked to describe the perceptions of law enforcement officers concerning their views of proactive policing and support of law enforcement executives and other social entities. Future analysis will consider other data analysis techniques to maximize data effectiveness.

Frequency Data

The sample of law enforcement officers were employed in areas described as suburban and urban, with populations between 10,000 and 99,999 people ($n = 343$, 70.9%), and a majority of the law enforcement officers sampled advised that they worked in agencies with 200 officers or less ($n = 200$, 51.9%). Additionally, a majority of respondents had less than 15 years in the law enforcement profession ($n = 306$, 62.8%), and the mean age range for

the sample was between 36 and 40 years of age (or slightly higher than 40 years of age). Overall, the law enforcement sample was not evenly distributed across all demographic areas. However, each of these demographic categories were represented to some extent, making the sample viable.

Initially, the data analysis revealed that law enforcement officers shared pessimistic views of the perception by the public of law enforcement officers and objectives. According to the data, a significant number of law enforcement officers believed that the media presented the law enforcement profession in a negative light (n = 363, 74.7%). Furthermore, a smaller number of law enforcement officers felt that the presentation of law enforcement was somewhat less negative but still represented a negative presentation (n = 94, 19.3%). Additionally, respondents did feel that the relationship with members of the community had worsened post-Ferguson events. According to the data, over one-third of respondents felt that the relationship between the community and law enforcement had become marginally or significantly worse post-Ferguson (n = 167, 34.2%).

Furthermore, the data shed light on the perception of law enforcement support and the impact of events post-Ferguson on proactive policing. Respondents were asked to gauge their change in proactive policing based upon media depictions of the policing subsystem. As a result, a significant percentage of respondents stated that they had reduced or stopped their proactivity based on the media depiction of law enforcement officers and agencies (n = 284, 58.1%). The respondents also felt that the media was overwhelmingly biased toward the policing profession, either in a somewhat negative or extremely negative manner (n = 457, 94%). The media seemed to play a major role among the sample in the proactive policing duties undertaken by law enforcement officers, perhaps signaling that the use of discretion was changing as a result.

Additionally, the impact of executive or administrative mandates and treatment were a subject of inquiry. Respondents in the study were asked about their level of proactivity and the impact of executive leadership on this proactivity. Slightly less than half of the sample (n = 198, 40.7%) stated that their proactivity on the job had decreased or completely stopped as a result of executive leadership actions. Contrary to this, nearly 25% of these respondents advised that their executive leadership had no influence on proactivity in their daily duties. Overall, this represents a significant level of law enforcement officers (n = 319, 65.6%). Also, respondents considered whether executive law enforcement actions had impacted a variety of agency aspects. More than half of the respondents (n = 244, 50.1%) felt that law enforcement executives had reacted negatively to the current trends in law enforcement and to current legal aspects in particular. Further, respondents felt that executives had overwhelmingly implemented more restrictive policies within the agency (n = 297, 60.7%), although the same respondents did not feel that executive leadership were any more prone to speak negatively about the agency or impact internal investigations of officers overall.

Some of the more interesting observations concerned how perceptions and actions impacted proactive policing among the respondents. According to the respondents, training in the agency did not significantly impact the decision to engage in proactive policing. However, a sizable percentage of respondents did adjust proactive policing activity based upon citizen influence (n = 275, 36%). Additionally, respondents significantly reduced proactive traffic and pedestrian stops following the events in Ferguson. Specifically, 238 respondents stated that they reduced proactive traffic stops to some extent (49.1%), and 235 respondents stated that they reduced proactive pedestrian stops to some extent (46.9%). Overall, nearly half of the respondents altered their proactive work and vehicle and pedestrian stops post-Ferguson.

Correlational Analysis

Correlational analysis was also conducted using the acquired data. Although all of the variables carried a significant interest in terms of the post-Ferguson policing environment, we were specifically concerned with the relationship between a variety of predictor variables and the change in proactive vehicle and pedestrian stops by the respondents. Understanding the impact of these factors on the proactive output of the respondents was a distinct interest of the study. Of course, some discussion of other notable correlations would be feasible in this particular case.

Initially, the data analysis should focus on the demographic differences within the sample. The size of the agency seemed to be somewhat predictive in certain relationships. First, the size of the agency seemed to be weakly correlated with the relationship between community and agency ($r = -.127$, $p = .013$) and the relationship with the level of proactivity based upon community perception ($r = .127$, $p = .013$). The respondents also reported that crime seemed to be more prevalent in those agencies with larger numbers of officers ($r = -.176$, $p = .001$). Lastly, these respondents also believed that agencies with higher numbers of officers were impacted by the level of crime based upon lower levels of proactivity ($r = -.129$, $p = .012$). As observed, the size of the agency seemed to have some discernible impact on these areas of proactivity as well.

The number of years of experience appeared to have some impact on proactivity and other variables related to proactivity as well. The number of years of experience appeared to have a positive significant correlation with the change in proactivity based upon community perception ($r = .109$, $p = .016$). Additionally, years of service had no apparent correlation with the view of proactivity impact on crime ($r = .000$, $p = .000$). Essentially, the experience of the law enforcement officer impacted how the officer engaged in proactive policing based upon negative perception by the community. As the experience increased, officers tended to change their proactive behavior based upon this perception. Yet, the value of proactive policing in relation to crime did not seem to be correlated at all with years of experience.

There also seemed to be a disparity in the impact of years of experience on proactivity as it relates to vehicles and pedestrians. In the analysis, the years of experience appeared to have a significant correlation with the change to proactive vehicle stops. Specifically, respondents with more experience seemed more apt to change proactivity in terms of vehicle stops following the events in Ferguson ($r = .161$, $p = .000$). However, there was no significant correlation between years of service and change to pedestrian stops. This could be attributed to a number of factors, including the reluctance of officers with more years of service to engage in proactive pedestrian stops. Yet, the years of experience of the respondents appeared to have some impact on the amount or propensity of proactive vehicle stops during the normal course of duty.

One of the observed correlational relationships of note concerned the relationship between the influence of the media on the respondent and the subsequent impact of proactivity within the respondents' duties. The analysis indicated that influence of the media on the respondents' vehicle and pedestrian proactivity was significant. Correlational analysis indicated that media influence on respondents was significantly correlated with changes in proactivity concerning vehicles ($r = .594$, $p = .000$). Additionally, this media influence was observed to be significantly correlated with changes in proactivity concerning pedestrians ($r = .599$, $p = .000$). In both cases, these borderline strong correlations indicated that a more negative media depiction of law enforcement distinctly and negatively impacted the level of proactivity by respondents that viewed such media depiction.

Further, the influence of police leadership response to these events appeared to have a distinct impact on law enforcement proactivity. The analysis revealed that the influence of the police leadership response to the events post-Ferguson was strongly correlated to levels of proactivity among law enforcement respondents, both in terms of vehicle stops ($r = .611$, $p = .000$) and pedestrian stops ($r = .513$, $p = .000$). Essentially, the levels of proactivity across the board were significantly impacted by the influence of police leadership in response to these post-Ferguson events. Just as in the relationship between media influence and proactivity, the correlations were positively and strongly correlated. This indicated that the negativity of police executive influence reduced levels of proactivity in both vehicle and pedestrian stops.

There were other observed relationships that may be interesting to note for the purposes of this research. The influence of the media, either positively or negatively, on police officers and their proactivity was observed to be significantly and positively correlated with the influence of police leadership, positively or negatively, on police officers and their proactivity ($r = .564$, $p = .000$). Based upon the analysis, the influence of media and police leadership tended to be strongly correlated in the same direction, compounding the potential impact on law enforcement officers. Of course, this relationship also could move in the other direction, promoting the importance of one upon the other for policing agencies and, accordingly, individual law enforcement officers.

The influence of media cannot be overstated. The influence of the media reporting on police proactivity was also indicative of the perception of law enforcement executive reaction ($r = .414$, $p = .000$), perception of positive public dialogue about the agency and officers ($r = -.221$, $p = .000$), perception of negative public dialogue about the agency and officers ($r = .210$, $p = .000$), perception of positive private dialogue ($r = -.178$, $p = .000$), perception of negative private dialogue ($r = .171$, $p = .000$), perceived increased Internal Affairs investigations ($r = .237$, $p = .000$), enhanced discipline against officers ($r = .216$, $p = .000$), and the creation of more restrictive policies ($r = .242$, $p = .000$).

One of the other major factors in determining the propensity to embrace proactivity was the reaction of law enforcement executives to such incidents. In particular, the reaction of law enforcement executives had a significant impact on law enforcement proactivity among rank and file officers. Law enforcement executives' reactions to current trends in policing have a significant, positive correlation with changes in proactive vehicle stops among officers ($r = .478$, $p = .000$). Additionally, these same reactions also had a significant, positive correlation with proactive pedestrian stops ($r = .424$, $p = .000$). In essence, the directional dynamic of the correlation dictated that as negative perceptions of law enforcement executives are observed, there is a greater likelihood that the frequency of proactive vehicle and pedestrian stops will be reduced. Such an observation indicates that executive reaction has a detrimental impact on policing activities.

In light of recent events involving proactive policing and negative exposure, these observations are absolutely critical to the functionality of law enforcement and the continuity of proactive policing as a staple in our public safety paradigm. While these types of results may not be observed in all locales, the generalizability of this particular sample indicates that such impacts are being felt nationwide. Unfortunately, exposure to negative perceptions of policing can have a detrimental impact on law enforcement officers within any type of jurisdiction. Negative exposure on the parts of the media, community, and executives within law enforcement agencies are potentially damaging to the policing subsystem, particularly to the proactive law enforcement within the communities that need this the most. The subsequent discussion details

the potential for such negative impacts in our policing subsystem and how these results can be utilized for future research and for more effective approaches to such mainstream incidents and their potential fallout.

Discussion

A significant amount of statistical information from both law enforcement organizations and academia have demonstrated a trend of national de-policing as well as increases in crime rates in some areas. The current study is the first to go to the source to learn if de-policing was occurring and to ask the all important question, "Why?" To do so, we queried objective information from officers who are most likely to engage in discretionary policing—the street-level patrol officer. A significant number of officers involved in the current study stated they had reduced discretionary pedestrian and traffic stops by almost 50%. This is indicative of significant national de-policing.

What may be the most important unexpected finding within this study is the fact that subjective opinions of media negativity on de-policing and negative law enforcement executive influence on de-policing were significantly correlated. This indicates a potential association between media portrayal of law enforcement and executive actions (increased Interrnal Affairs or enhanced policies). While negative media portrayals may affect officers and leadership, directly and indirectly, it is important to note that leadership is highly influential in regards to de-policing. Two recent studies within this context speak clearly to leaders.

The first study by Wolfe and Nix (2016) involved 567 deputies from a southeastern law enforcement agency to determine if the Ferguson Effect "is associated with de-policing in the form of decreased willingness to engage in community partnership, and to determine whether such an effect persists upon accounting for perceived organizational

justice and self-legitimacy" (p. 1). The results found a moderate correlation between the existence of the Ferguson Effect and law enforcement officers' willingness to work with the community. However, the study asked a secondary question; they asked whether or not organizational justice and self-legitimacy had an independent influence upon the first finding.

Organizational justice is defined as an employee evaluation of their employer as being "fair." *Self-legitimacy* is defined as a confidence in one's own authority as law enforcement officers. The results provided that organizational justice and self-legitimacy actually negated the Ferguson Effect in regards to a willingness to engage in community partnerships. Wolfe and Nix (2016) provided empirical evidence that management and supervisors had a great deal of influence on how officers react during the current negativity directed toward them. The study makes a summary statement in regards to this: "[W]hen supervisors are fair and cultivate confidence among officers, they can minimize the harmful effects of negative publicity (p. 8).

Nix and Wolfe (2015) conducted a second study entitled, "The Impact of Negative Publicity on Police Self-Legitimacy." Within their literature review is significant evidence that negative public support of law enforcement, negative publicity, and negative organizational issues (e.g., fairness) all have a negative effect upon officers' self-legitimacy. Self-legitimacy has been demonstrated to have an influence on officer behavior in areas such as the use of force, community associations, and support for their own organizations. The authors' showed negative publicity equated to lower self-legitimacy and lower levels of officer motivation to do their jobs.

An important take-away from this second Nix and Wolfe (2015) study is found in the discussion of their findings. The authors indicate that the effects from both negative publicity and organizational justice (e.g., perceived

fairness) may have an almost cyclical effect upon officers' willingness to engage in many areas of policing that are necessary to create positive relationships within their communities. Ultimately, they state that this situation can create an environment of "de-policing" that could be detrimental to public safety.

Limitations

The current study had several limitations in methodology and sample size. In regards to methodology, the search for respondents was partially conducted through social media, and the actual survey was also online. Even with protective measures in place, there is no way to ensure 100% of the respondents were active patrol-level police officers. The sample size for this study is believed to be an adequate convenience sample, but it is still a small representation of the population.

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