



Evaluating a Program Designed to Improve Attitudes between Police and Youth

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ABSTRACT

This poster presents the results of an evaluation of a program which aimed to foster positive relationships between police officers and youth in Connecticut. Eleven programs were funded in Year One, with an equal number in Year Two. Funded communities designed programs that included local police officers and youth (ages 12-18) engaging in enjoyable activities and a community service project. Although the specifics of each program varied, all programs completed the same pre- and post-tests, one for youth participants and one for police participants. Changes in attitudes toward the opposite group were assessed. Overall both groups reported increased positive changes in attitudes.

INTRODUCTION

Research suggests that youth perceptions of police are partially determined by their past experience with police, which then influences their attitudes and behavior toward police. Rabois and Haaga (2002) found that informal contacts between police and youth offer valuable opportunities for positive relationship-building. Hinds (2009) found that informal contact plays an important role in shaping youths' willingness to cooperate and support police. Unfortunately the Hinds study did not examine changes in police attitudes toward youth. The present study evaluates changes in both police and youth attitudes following participation in a program designed to facilitate positive informal interactions between police and youth.

METHODS

Program components

- Each program required youth participants ages 12-18, police interacting in non-enforcement roles, a team-building exercise, leadership opportunities for youth, and a community service project.

Procedure

- Data collection took place over two years. Pre- and post-test surveys were used at the beginning and end of each year of programming, respectively.
- Because seven communities participated in both years, it was possible for some respondents to participate twice. Stable, respondent-generated participant IDs were used to track participation across years.

Measures

- Youth attitudes towards police were measured with a 14-item scale (adapted from Fine et al., 2003; Webb, 2006) with response options on a five-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree). An overall score was calculated by averaging across all 14 items. Example items include "I feel comfortable when I see police on the street" and "Police officers are respectful of people like me."
- Police attitudes toward youth were measured with a 10-item scale derived from a survey used in a prior police-youth evaluation (CARHD, 2008; Rabois & Haaga, 2002). A five-point Likert scale from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree was utilized. An overall score was calculated for each participant by averaging across all 10 items, with higher scores indicating more positive attitudes toward youth. An example item is "Young people are positive assets to my community."
- Both youth and police officers also answered various demographic questions.

Youth Demographic Variables

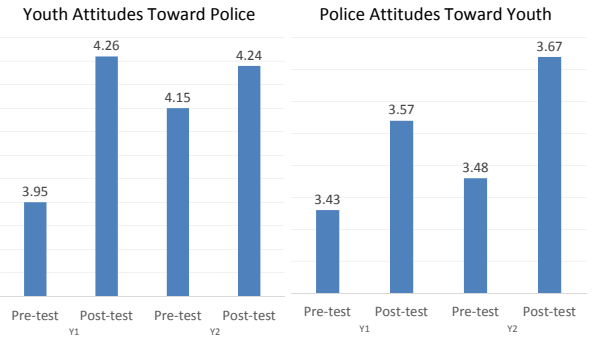
		Y1 (n=124)		Y2 (n=168)	
		N	%	N	%
Gender	Male	51	41	100	60
	Female	73	59	68	40
Ethnicity	White	89	72	114	68
	Black	14	11	21	13
	Latino	6	5	10	6
	Other	14	11	20	13
Age	11-12	18	15	33	20
	13-14	28	23	54	32
	15-16	48	38	54	30
	17-18	30	24	30	18
Grades	As/Bs	114	92	137	82
	Cs/Ds	9	7	24	14
Free/ Reduced Lunch	Yes	16	13	38	23
	No	108	87	129	77

Percentage columns exclude missing data.

Police Demographic Variables

		Y1 (n=35)		Y2 (n=59)	
		N	%	N	%
Gender	Male	27	77	50	85
	Female	7	20	8	14
Ethnicity	White	32	92	48	81
	Black	0	0	2	3
	Latino	2	6	5	9
	Other	0	0	3	5
Years	1-5	10	29	11	19
Experience	6-10	8	22	9	15
	11-15	11	31	19	32
	16-20	4	11	10	17
	21+	2	6	9	15
Received	Yes	18	51	41	70
Special	No	16	48	17	29
Training					

Percentage columns exclude missing data.



RESULTS

- Repeated measures analyses revealed significant positive changes in youth attitudes toward police in both Year One [$F(1,123)=48.64, p<.001$] and Year Two [$F(1,165)=5.64, p<.05$].
- A significant positive change in police attitude toward youth was found in Year Two [$F(1,58)=14.24, p<.001$], but not Year One.
- There were no differences between demographic groups in either year for either group of participants.
- A mixed ANOVA with Year One experience as a between subjects factor was conducted in the analysis of change from pre-test to post-test in Year Two. No significant interaction was found. The sample size of police who had previous program experience was too small to conduct this test.

DISCUSSION

- Overall police and youth reported positive experiences and positive changes in attitudes.
- A limitation of this study is the variability of programming between towns. Although each town fulfilled minimum requirements, programs varied widely on factors such as number and type of interactions. It may be useful to conduct sub-group analyses to examine effects of duration of program, number of meetings, and ratio of officers to youth.
- A future direction of this research could be to target youth participants with lower baseline attitudes toward police and to account for variability within the program. It may also be useful to collect behavioral data, such as number of youth arrests, to determine if the attitudinal change leads to behavioral change.

REFERENCES

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