**APPLYING A CRIME SERIOUSNESS SCALE TO INDIVIDUALS ARRESTED IN FLORIDA**


**WHY WAS THE STUDY DONE?**

Since 1989, total and violent crime rates in Florida have consistently and significantly declined, but the perception among Florida residents is that individuals arrested today are committing more serious and violent crimes than in the past. To assess the legitimacy of these views, Florida’s Statistical Analysis Center (SAC) analyzed Computerized Criminal History data on over 8 million felony arrests and almost 3 million arrestees from 1984 to 2002 to examine trends in offender seriousness. The SAC calculated individual arrest histories and developed a seriousness scale. The scale was applied to annual cohorts to obtain an accurate representation of the seriousness of individuals’ police encounters over time.

The study had three primary purposes: First, to demonstrate how crime seriousness scores can be applied to arrestees, specifically, in Florida from 1984 to 2002, to measure the severity of their criminal careers; second, to examine whether, in fact, individuals arrested in Florida are increasingly committing more serious crimes; and third, to examine whether changes in punishment policy are related to changes in arrestee seriousness by examining trends in crime seriousness.

**WHAT DID THE STUDY FIND?**

The study findings show that the total number of arrests in Florida from 1984-2002 does not accurately reflect the seriousness of the crime situation.

- In terms of arrest frequency, individuals arrested in 2002 had, on average, more arrests than individuals arrested in 1984 – 4.5 in 2002 compared with 3.3 in 1984 (an increase of 44.4%). Further, the number of arrests for all crime types increased steadily on an annual basis, except for 1994-1995, which showed a slight decrease.

- For career seriousness scores, the study found that the average overall criminal career serious score for arrestees in 2002 increased by 7.4% over the level of those arrested in 1984. While the seriousness level increased annually from 1984 to 1993, it declined every year thereafter through 2002.

The peak seriousness score for all crimes in an individual's career, grouped by annual cohort, declined from 1984 to 2002 (47.2 to 40.5, or 14.1%). This measure, which was relatively stable from 1984 until 1993, then declined through 2002, suggests that police are actually encountering less serious offenders today than in the past.

In short, despite an increase in arrest frequency, career seriousness scores show that the police are encountering individuals today similar to those encountered in the past. The peak seriousness score indicates that today’s arrestees are actually less serious than those of almost 20 years ago.
The study also found some relationship between punishment policy changes and changes in the seriousness of arrestees. In 1994, Florida instituted a determinate sentencing policy. For all crime types, average time served increased by 86.4% in 1994-2002 compared to the earlier period (1984-1993). The increase was significant for violent offenders (41.7%), though not as great as that for property (125%), drug (109.1%), or other (100%) offenders. Looking at career seriousness score trends, it is apparent that the change from an indeterminate to a determinate punishment strategy in 1994 is associated with a change in the level of arrestee seriousness. For all crime types and for violent and property arrestees, career seriousness scores declined from 1994-2002. For drug arrestees, annual increases in seriousness stopped in 1994 and remained stable through 2002. In contrast, seriousness scores for public order arrestees increased from 1996-2002 after being stable from 1984.

Methodology. Florida Computerized Criminal History Records were used to identify all arrestees from 1984-2002 who had a felony arrest, and their prior felony arrests in the previous ten years were included as well (2,947,929 arrestees with 8,131,745 felony arrests). Unique identifiers were assigned to each arrest event and arrestee, enabling identification of arrest cohorts from each year and their prior felony arrests. Arrestee seriousness was derived from offense seriousness scores, which are based on the legal categories and scoring system implemented by Florida’s Criminal Punishment Code, a more precise measure of seriousness than traditional systems.

What Did the Study Find?

The comparisons suggest that QOL policing did not systematically broaden the target population for arrest as practiced in NYC in 1999. On average, the primary difference between QOL and serious arrestees was only their current arrest charge, and not their demographic composition, prior record, past-year participation in QOL offenses, drug use, educational attainment, marital status, or employment. QOL arrestees did differ by age across offenses; farebeaters and trespassers tended to be older than serious arrestees, and marijuana misdemeanants (those with marijuana possession) tended to be younger. The similarity between serious and QOL arrestees may reflect either a lack of crime specialization among offenders or, alternatively, the impact of police discretion in arrest.

A major concern regarding QOL policing is whether it disproportionately targets minorities. This study found that most (90%) of the QOL arrestees in NYC in 1999 were black or Hispanic. However, most (89%) of the serious arrestees during this same time period were also black or Hispanic. This suggests that QOL policing did not expand the targeting of minorities for arrest, nor did it reduce it.

These findings have important implications for policing in NYC. Most centrally, they provide partial support to NYC’s decision to continue QOL policing by countering the accusations of possible net widening and racial bias associated with the policy.

The findings also have important implications for other jurisdictions considering the use of QOL policing, although any jurisdiction’s experiences with QOL policing will depend on the nature of its crime problem, its implementation of QOL policing, and the synergy (or conflict) of QOL policing with other ongoing programs.

Methodology. This study compares 195 QOL and 265 serious arrestees by demographic characteristics, New York State criminal histories, self-reports of QOL behaviors, and recent drug use as detected by urinalysis. The study used data collected under the Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring (ADAM) program New York City Policing Study, a unique and detailed dataset. Criminal histories were obtained from the NYS Division of Criminal Justice.
Services. Serious arrestees were defined as those charged with a drug or indoc felony under NYS law. QOL arrestees were defined as those charged with one of the three most common charges in this sample that may have resulted from QOL policing: forebeating, trespassing, and misdemeanor possession of marijuana.

**NOT-AT-FAULT CRASH DATA IN RACIAL PROFILING RESEARCH**


**WHY WAS THE STUDY DONE?**

Racial profiling research commonly compares police traffic stop populations to some type of benchmark population, such as populations estimated from census figures, licensed drivers, arrestees, reported crime suspects, or observed drivers and traffic violators. One purpose of such comparisons is to ascertain whether minority drivers are being stopped disproportionately to their representation in the chosen benchmark population. A proper benchmark will estimate the demographic profile of individuals who will be stopped assuming that no bias exists in police stopping behavior. Existing benchmarks all have significant limitations, however, that limit, or in some cases obviate, their usefulness as comparison populations. This article reports on a study of a new, alternative benchmark based on not-at-fault drivers in two car collisions that may have advantages over some of the comparison populations currently in use by researchers.

**WHAT DID THE STUDY FIND?**

This study’s findings indicate that non-responsible drivers in two-vehicle crashes appear to represent a reasonably accurate estimate of the racial composition of drivers on the road at selected intersections and within areas of varying racial composition. The implications of the findings for traffic studies in general and racial profiling research in specific are significant. Law enforcement agencies could easily record the race and ethnicity of drivers involved in crashes, and these data can serve as a less costly and more comprehensive estimate of the racial composition of the driving population than traffic observation methods currently provide. Such data could be useful in assessing bias against minority groups.

Methodology. As part of a larger study of racial profiling in Miami-Dade County, Florida, traffic pattern data were collected from 11 intersections. Observation data from these intersections were later compared to not-at-fault traffic crash data from the same intersections. Intersections were selected specifically for their high traffic and crash volumes and the racial make-up of the area. Traffic observation and crash data were compared at three levels of aggregation.

**COMPARISON OF COMMON BENCHMARKS IN RACIAL PROFILING**


**WHY WAS THE STUDY DONE?**

Developing an appropriate benchmark to estimate the proportional representation of racial and ethnic groups within a population of individuals exposed to police observation is the most important methodological consideration in racial profiling research. The purpose of this study is to compare three common racial profiling benchmarks — population, field observations, and accident records — in an effort to understand the relative advantages and disadvantages of each benchmark. The article compares the results of three independent racial profiling studies that were conducted in Wichita, Kansas — with the same police officers collecting stop data, and at essentially the same time but using three different benchmarks — to determine whether the benchmark used affected the findings.

**WHAT DID THE STUDY FIND?**

Population benchmark study. The population benchmark comparison (based on the 2000 U.S. Census) found that blacks appeared to be stopped at disproportionately higher rates than their representation within the population. Whites, Asians, Native Americans, other races, and Hispanics were underrepresented, i.e., they were stopped at disproportionately lower rates than their representation within the population.
Not-at-fault drivers benchmark study. The researcher obtained records of two-vehicle accidents occurring in Wichita from January 15 through July 15, 2001 (a total of 7,874 accidents). Comparing these to stop data provided by the police department produced results similar to those from the comparison using the population-based benchmark. In this benchmark, whites represent 83.1% of Wichita’s driving population, blacks represent 10.7%, Asians 3.0%, Native Americans .3%, and unknown races 2.9%. Among the drivers stopped by the Wichita Police Department, whites represent 70.3%, blacks 21.4%, Asians 2.9%, Native Americans .2%, and other races 5.1%.

Field observation benchmark study. Researchers observed traffic in 9 locations on randomly selected days and at randomly selected times. They recorded the race, ethnicity, gender, and approximate age of each driver and county of origin of each vehicle. These observations were compared to stop data provided by the police department. Based on comparisons of black and Hispanic drivers observed and stopped, the researchers concluded that while there was some level of disparity, the police department was not engaging in racial profiling.

It appears from this analysis that the benchmark used does make a difference, but only a slight one. The ratios of overrepresentation of black drivers stopped to the population-based and the accident rate-based benchmarks are essentially the same, nearly two to one. Based on these comparisons alone, the conclusion (of racial profiling) would likely be identical. The comparisons based on the population and field observation benchmarks both found the levels of disparity more extreme with respect to black than Hispanic drivers. Neither of the independent studies (Police Foundation, 2003; Withrow, 2001) ultimately concludes that racial profiling is occurring. It is likely that an independent evaluation using the accident data would result in a similar finding.

The Reentry Court Initiative


Why Was the Study Done?

A combination of trends in sentencing, incarceration, and post-release supervision has brought prisoner reentry to the forefront of discussions among policymakers, practitioners, and researchers. In response to the growing need to effectively manage the large numbers of released prisoners returning into the community, the Office of Justice Programs launched the Reentry Court Initiative (RCI). Nine sites were identified and charged with developing strategies to improve the tracking and supervision of offenders upon release and providing the services necessary to help offenders reconnect with their families and the community. This article describes the RCI programs and provides detailed program descriptions for three sites selected for more in-depth study.

What Did the Study Find?

The sites employed diverse approaches in establishing their programs, with the judicial branch maintaining programmatic authority in five of the eight operational sites, and administrative law judges and/or parole boards serving as the legal authority in the remaining three. All RCI programs required regular court appearances, although not all established a specialized reentry court docket. The majority of sites appeared to offer comprehensive services to their program participants (such as substance abuse treatment, mental health treatment, job placement/vocational services, educational assistance, housing assistance, and assistance with other basic needs), with case management provided either through a specialized case manager or the supervision officer. Several barriers were common across the RCI sites, particularly the difficulties in obtaining employment and appropriate, affordable housing for program participants.

Methodology. Telephone interviews were conducted with key site contacts from each site. Site visits were conducted to three sites, during which semi-structured interviews were conducted with 28 key stakeholders, including judges, program directors, supervision officers, case managers, and program participants.