

The Proactive Policing Study

8 Points on Proactive Policing; Vital Understanding of What is Truly Happening in Today's Law Enforcement.

The President of The United States says there's no evidence it exists and Attorney General Loretta Lynch agrees. James Comey, the director of the F.B.I., believes it does exist. Chuck Rosenberg, the director of the Drug Enforcement Administration thinks it's for real. Ronald Davis, who's Director of the DOJ Community Oriented Policing Services testified at a Senate hearing that the suggestion of it "insults the nation's police officers". So, just what is "it" that has some of the highest powers in the nations at odds.

The "Ferguson Effect"

The politicians and self-proclaimed "pundits" are in disagreement over a policing slow down appropriately named the "Ferguson Effect". The Ferguson Effect defines a hypothesis that law enforcement officers are slowing down enforcement efforts due to the social outrage concerning perceived rampant police brutality. The slow-down has been anecdotally linked to an increase in crime and criminal activity in some areas (disagreement exists here as well). However, the FBI crime statistics show an uptick within the first 6 months of 2015 compared to the same period in 2014 (1.7 percent nationally). Is this an indicator of things to come?...only time will tell. However, answering the question concerning the Ferguson Effect is now a little less ambiguous based on a new study conducted by Blake Consulting & Training.

As a law enforcement trainer, I have had the opportunity to speak with a 100's of law enforcement officers from different agencies and jurisdictions. I have also spoken to other national trainers and what I have found is there is a consistent theme within law enforcement patrol level officers. That theme is one of anxiety and fear. An officer level perception that doing their job may ultimately lead to discipline, termination, or criminal prosecution. The subsequent behavior associated with this perception would likely be an aversion to proactivity based upon personal risk assessment. A concept within Psychology termed, "negative conditioning" may explain this perception and subsequent behavior involving a decrease in proactivity.¹

Based on the anecdotal information received, it appeared prudent for an exploratory national survey to be conducted with intent to garner empirical evidence on whether officers are slowing down on proactive enforcement. Also relevant, was to attempt to correlate potential causal factors if a work slow-down was found to exist. To that end, Blake Consulting & Training requested input from national law enforcement (Patrol level only) officers asking them to complete a short survey. A statistical review of the results are partially analyzed showing

¹ Ricker (n.d.). PSY 101 – Introduction to Psychology: Section 4-17: Reinforcement & Punishment in Operant Conditioning. Retrieved from: <http://sccpsy101.com/home/chapter-4/section-17/>

statistical significance in the areas discussed. When analysis is complete, the study will be submitted for peer reviewed publication.

Method: Officers were contacted through law enforcement related social media and cooperating law enforcement executives. The survey was restricted to law enforcement patrol level officers who were requested to answer 19 questions (Likert Scale). We received 489 responses from small suburban (25 officers) to large metropolitan departments (3000+) across the nation. The officer's ages ranged from 21-65 years, with anywhere between less than 5 to 30 plus years of employment.

Results: The first clear answer was whether patrol level officers believed proactive patrol efforts made a difference in regards to criminal activity:

1. Proactive Policing

- 97.4% believe proactive policing greatly decreases crime or decreases crime to some degree.

The survey used a Likert scale to provide officers the ability to discuss their increase or decrease in proactive policing over the last year. The results are concerning:

2. Proactive Traffic Stops (See Figure 1)

- 49.1 % said they decreased proactive T-stops between 5 and 10 a month.
- 37.5% said they had not changed the level of proactive traffic stops.
- 13.4% said they increased proactive T-stops by 5 or 10 a month.

3. Proactive Pedestrian Stops (See Figure 2)

- 46.9 % said they decreased proactive Ped-stops between 5 and 10 a month.
- 44.1 % said they had not changed the level of proactive ped. stops.
- 8.9 % said they increased proactive ped. stops

Officers were asked their opinions as to whether or not they believed crime had increased or decreased in their jurisdiction. Again, the results should cause some concern:

4. Increase of Criminal Activity

- 61.1% believe criminal activity has increased in their jurisdiction (in the last year).
- 29.5 % believe crime has remained the same.
- 9.2% believe crime has gone down.

- 55 % believe the crime rate has increased in their jurisdiction due to less proactive enforcement.

In the event of a trend in work increase or work decrease presented itself, the survey asked several other questions in regards to potential influences on performance. The results are as follows:

5. Leadership*

- 40.7 % have slowed down / stopped proactive policing due to negative executive level influence.
- 50.1 % feel the negative executive level leadership response to current trends have left them feeling unsupported.
- 38.9 % said executive management had increased discipline against officers.
- 62.5 % said executive management had created more restrictive policies.

6. Media*

- 58.1% have slowed down / stopped proactive policing due to media influence.
- 94% of officers believe the media is somewhat or completely biased toward a negative representation of law enforcement.

7. Citizen Support*

- 36% have slowed down / stopped proactive policing due to low citizen support.
- 45.9% reported they had a negative (11.7%) or an increasingly negative (34.2%) relationship with the community.
- 54.1 % reported they had a positive (36.81%) or an increasingly positive (17.38%) relationship with the community.

8. Training*

- 25.3% said that new training caused them to slow down or stop proactive policing.
- 19.7 % said the training was not evidence based (proven to be successful).
- 73.8 % said the new training was not beneficial or made no impact at all.
- 36 % believed training had no influence on proactive policing.

Conclusion

The data from this study provides significant evidence of a decrease of proactive policing across the nation. Study data also provides significant correlations between leadership, media,

community relations, and training to their individual effects upon decreased proactivity. It can only be anecdotally derived from the results that the effects of the causal factors are overlapping in part or in whole.

Discussion: This exploratory study provides data that should be concerning to police executives as well as society based on the potential long term effects of decreasing proactive policing. According to a U.S. Department of Justice scientific review of more than 500 crime prevention programs, proactive policing in the form of; hot spots, specialized units, and continued incarceration of repeat offenders has an evidence based foundation for what works in decreasing crime.² Proportionally, according to a New South Wales Justice Department document, increases in crime are partially caused by; crime prone places, criminal opportunity, and lax / insufficient law enforcement.³ These facts provide the foundation of belief that a slow-down or stoppage of proactive policing may have long term effects. Those effects may be becoming visible (1.7% increase in crime nationally).

Recommendation: The Department of Justice, research organizations (IACP / PERF), and individual law enforcement agencies across the nation should evaluate whether law enforcement officers in individual jurisdictions are decreasing proactive policing and determine through statistical analysis of crime rates (e.g.: change from year 1 to year 2) whether correlations exist. Further, if there is a correlated finding between the decreases in proactive policing and increased crime rates, the next step would be to determine the causal factors and create a plan of corrective action circumscribing evidence based methodology.

² Sherman et al, (1998). Preventing Crime: What Works, What Doesn't, What's Promising. Retrieved from: <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles/171676.PDF>

³ Weatherburn, D. (2001). What Causes Crime. NSW Bureau of Crime Statistic Research. Crime and Justice Bulletin. Retrieved from: <http://www.bocsar.nsw.gov.au/Documents/CJB/cjb54.pdf>

Figure 1.

Percentages of officers who increased / decreased proactive traffic stops
PROACTIVE TRAFFIC STOPS

- Increased T stops (10 monthly)
- Increased T stops (5 monthly)
- No Change
- Decreased T stops (5 monthly)
- Decreased T stops (10 monthly)

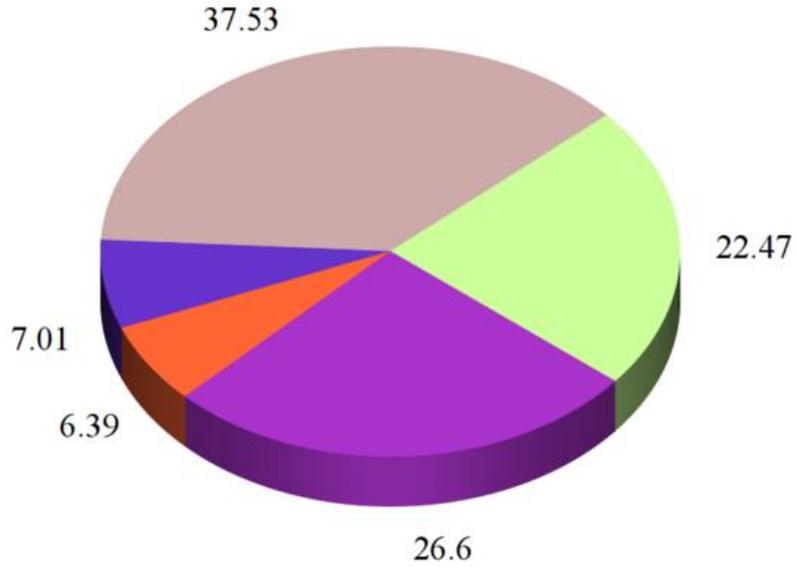


Figure 2

Percentages of officers who increased / decreased proactive Pedestrian stops
PROACTIVE PEDESTRIAN STOPS

- Increased P stops (10 monthly)
- Increased P stops (5 monthly)
- No Change
- Decreased P stops (5 monthly)
- Decreased P stops (10 monthly)

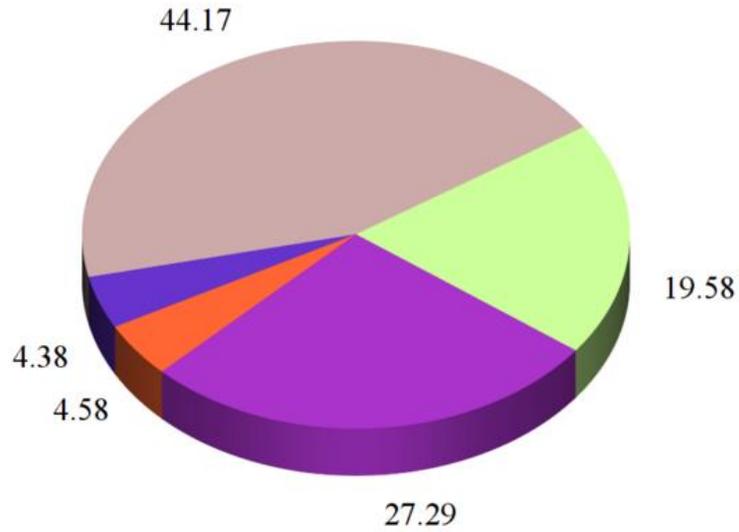
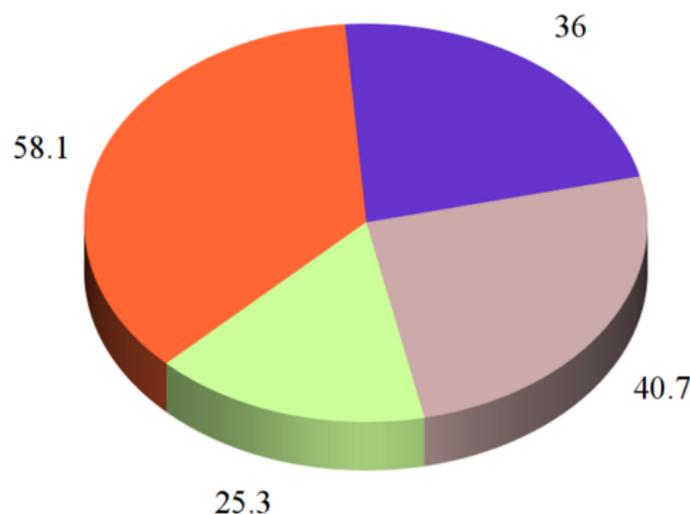


Figure 3

Negative Influences on proactive policing.

NEGATIVE INFLUENCES ON PROACTIVE POLICING

Media Citizen Support Leadership Training



*Chart equals over 100 percent as these are overlapping causal factors.



Author: David Blake, M.Sc, F.S.A., C.C.I., owns Blake Consulting & Training, provides expert witness services, and is a contract instructor with the California Training Institute facilitating their CA-POST certified courses entitled; Force Encounters Analysis & Human Factors, Threat and Error Management. He is an Adjunct Professor of Criminal Justice, a Police Academy Instructor, and a Force Options Simulator Instructor at a large regional training center. His policing experience includes positions in; SWAT, Field Training, Gangs, Narcotics, Supervision Media Relations, and Use of Force Training. Dave has instructor certifications in; Force Options Simulator, Firearms, DT, and Reality Based Training. He is a published author in several periodicals and journals to include a quarterly column with PoliceOne online magazine entitled; “The Science of Training”. Dave’s 8 year service in the USAF included deployments in support of Operations Restore Hope and Desert Storm. He holds a Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice Management and a Master’s of Science in Psychology. He is a Certified Criminal Investigator with the American College of Forensic Examiners Institute and a Force Science Certified Analyst with the Force Science Institute ©.

Statistician: Dr. Blake Lafond is an Assistant Professor of Criminal Justice at Pfeiffer University. Blake served honorably in the United States Marine Corps. Following his service, Blake served for fourteen years as a sworn law enforcement officer with the New Orleans Police Department and the Cabarrus County, North Carolina Sheriff's Office. Blake also served two years in a research capacity with the North Carolina Department of Public Safety and the Governor's Gang Task Force. Blake has also been an educator for eight years, teaching seated and online courses. Blake has earned several degrees, including a Ph.D. in Public Safety with a specialization in Criminal Justice, Master's degrees in Criminal Justice, Public Administration, and Business, and a graduate certificate in Sociology. Blake is also a licensed private investigator, armed private investigator, and firearms instructor.