

Police Contact Outside of and In Schools

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Overview

Police contact is a fairly common experience for many of today's youth. Reliance on self-report data, such as that collected through the UMSL CSSI survey, suggests that interactions with the police occur far more frequently than would be assumed based on official police records alone. In this report we review data from the third and final wave of the study to examine the lifetime prevalence and six-month frequency of police contact as measured by whether youth report being stopped or arrested by the police. This report also highlights police contact both within and outside of schools because although youth primarily experience contact outside of schools, the increased presence of officers in schools has resulted in a rise in the number of students questioned or arrested at school. We describe demographic information for youth who have not had police contact and for those who experienced contact in and out of schools in order to determine whether any disparities are apparent. Finally, we summarize the details and consequences of youth's contact experiences to highlight any differences in encounters occurring within versus outside of school.

Prevalence and Frequency of Police Contact

Table 1, indicates that of the students who completed the survey (as 9th and 10th graders), 18% experienced some form of police contact in their lifetime. A slightly smaller percentage (13%) of the sample reported they had been stopped or arrested in the last six months. Among those who had contact, 84% were stopped and 16% were arrested.

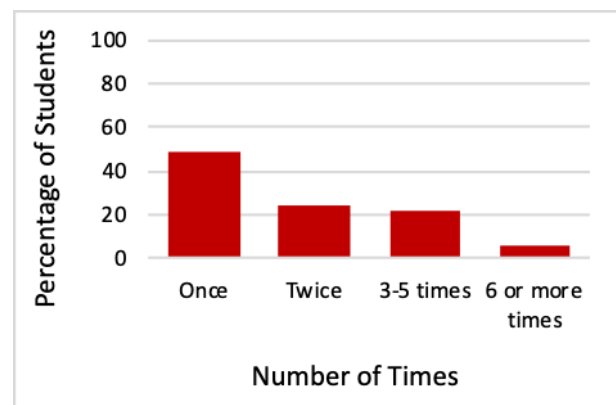
Table 1. Prevalence of Police Contact

	% (n)
Police Contact (ever)	
No	82 (2,169)
Yes	18 (490)
Police Contact (last 6 mo.)	
No	87 (2,304)
Yes	13 (352)

Although arrest is a potentially serious consequence, we combine both forms of contact in the remainder of this report due to the lower prevalence of arrest.

Figure 1 provides information about the frequency of police contact among youth who reported being stopped or arrested in the past six months. This figure reveals that for most (48%) contact occurred only once. However, a sizable proportion of youth were stopped or arrested twice (24%). Yet another 22% of students experienced police contact 3-5 times, and nearly 6% were stopped or arrested 6 or more times.

Figure 1. Frequency of Police Contact within the Past Six Months



Location of Police Contact: Demographic Differences

Nearly all of the school districts in the UMSL CSSI study have police officers stationed in their schools. Thus, it is expected that officers may be called upon to deal with student misbehavior. Among the 403 students who reported a stop or arrest in their lifetime and provided location information for the most recent contact, the majority (84%) said that it happened off school grounds, while 66 students (16%) reported that contact occurred at school. Although police contact at school is relatively uncommon, it may differentially affect youth. Boys and racial minorities tend to be most likely to encounter the police, so we assess the distribution of contact based on these demographic characteristics in the next table.

According to Table 2, there are no age differences among youth who did not have contact, encountered the police outside of school, and had in-school contact. Consistent with expectations, boys are slightly more likely than girls to experience police contact. Among girls, 11% had contact outside of school and 2% had contact within school. This is contrasted with 15% of boys having out-of-school contact and 3% experiencing contact at school. Also consistent with expectations, black youth experience the highest levels of police contact. While 91% of white students reported no contact, only 78% of black youth reported the same. Among white youth, 8% and 1% reported out-of-school and in-school contact, respectively. Meanwhile, 18% of black youth said they experienced contact outside of school and 3% had contact at school. Youth reporting another race were also overrepresented in police contacts, but not to the same degree as black students.

	No Police Contact	Out-of-School Police Contact	In-School Police Contact
	Mean/%	Mean/%	Mean/%
Age	15.08	15.24	15.29
Sex			
Female	87	11	2
Male	82	15	3
Race			
White	91	8	1
Black	78	18	3
Other	85	13	2

Note: Row percentages may not total to 100 due to rounding.

Details & Consequences of Police Contact

The nature of police contact and its consequences may differ depending on where the stop or arrest occurred. Table 3 shows that among students who reported contact outside of school, 75% were searched or frisked, and 33% said the police used force. By comparison, only 32% of youth who had contact at school reported that they were searched or frisked and 13% said force was used. Considering the consequences of being stopped or arrested, youth who had contact outside of school were more likely to report paying a fine or fee (19%), receiving a ticket or citation (20%), going to the police station (40%) and going to court (23%). Youth who experienced contact in school reported fewer legal outcomes, but location does not appear to impact

school-related consequences. Schools were notified for 23% of youth who had out-of-school contact and 22% of those with in-school contact. Suspension or expulsion was the result for 27% of youth with out-of-school contact and 22% of those with in-school contact.

	Out-of-School Police Contact	In-School Police Contact
	%	%
Searched or frisked	75	32
Police used force	33	13
Paid fine or fee	19	13
Given ticket or citation	20	15
Taken to police station	40	9
Went to court	23	17
School was notified	23	22
Suspended or expelled	27	22

Conclusion

The data presented in this report indicate that while the majority of respondents have not had police contact, an unignorable number encountered the police one or more times. Importantly, police contact can shape youth's perceptions of the law as well as their behavior during future encounters. Males and racial minorities experience more police contact, and this is true regardless of whether contact occurs in or out of school. Contacts at school, however, are less likely to involve searches and the use of force and less often result in additional justice system responses. This suggests that police are likely responding to minor misbehavior in schools rather than more serious offenses. Still, officers must use caution when interacting with students at schools, as these encounters can have a lasting impact on students directly involved as well as bystanders.

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