



Public Perceptions of School Resource Officer (SRO) Programs

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School Safety

- Several high profile incidents in 1990s
 - Put pressure on school and police administrators to “do something”
- Responses
 - Technological solutions
 - Zero-tolerance policies
 - Addition of security staff
 - Assignment of sworn police officers to schools



Police in Schools

- Presence of police in schools not new, extent of their presence is
 - Prior to 1990s police footprint was small
 - Now police in schools is largely taken for granted
 - 43% local police departments//47% sheriff's departments
 - SRO program participation increases with jurisdiction size
 - Estimated 20,000 SROs (2003)



School Resource Officers

- Reconceptualization of the police role
- SRO programs embody many of the principles and aims of community policing
 - Forging new relationships with citizens, new partnerships with other institutions
 - Explicit recognition of many non-enforcement duties police are called upon to provide
- Tripartite Mission: law enforcement, law-related education, counseling/mentorship



Effectiveness of SRO Programs

- Do they work?
 - We don't really know...
 - Most research focuses on perceptions/attitudes, not student behavior
 - SRO evaluations are largely descriptive, not predictive
 - Lack of multivariate models



Perceptions of SRO Programs

- School administrators, teachers, parents, students generally supportive
 - Largely anecdotal, descriptive analyses
 - We know little about the factors that shape these attitudes/perceptions
- General public perceptions
 - Deep body of research on perceptions/attitudes of police *in general*...
 - No research on perceptions of SRO programs



Research Questions

- Is the general public familiar with SRO concept?
- Is the general public aware of Anchorage SRO program?
- Does the general public believe there is a need for SRO program in Anchorage?
- Does the general public have confidence that SRO programs can achieve their objectives?



Data and Methods

- Anchorage Community Survey (2009)
 - Mixed-mode survey (mail, internet)
 - 5-stage protocol
 - Adult heads of household
 - Sample size: $n=1,983$
- Ordinary least squares (OLS) regression
 - 5 models



Dependent Variables

- SRO Program Objectives:
 - *Crime/Delinquency Prevention*
 - *School Climate and Safety*
 - *Police-Community Relations*
 - *Community Quality-of-Life*
 - *Unintended Consequences*
- Confirmatory factor analyses
- Summated scales



Predictor Variables

- **Demographics**
 - Age; Race; Gender; Education; Marital status; Employment status; Parent of ASD student; Residential tenure
- **Household**
 - Income; Language spoken at home
- **Crime/Victimization**
 - Prior felony assault (household); Prior misdemeanor assault (household); Fear of youth victimization
- **Attitudes/Perceptions of Police – General**
 - Crime control; Order maintenance; Fairness; Confidence; Official contact; Social contact
- **School/SRO**
 - Satisfaction K-12; Prior knowledge SRO programs
- **Neighborhood**
 - Street crime; Loitering



OLS Regression Results

	Model 1 Beta	Model 2 Beta	Model 3 Beta	Model 4 Beta	Model 5 Beta
Age	.112***	.009	.098***	.107***	-.064**
Race (White)	-.044	-.023	-.014	-.051*	-.069**
Gender (Female)	.121***	.061**	.055**	.103***	-.037
Education (L/T high school)	.015	.032	.005	.017	.088***
Marital Status (Single, never married)	.003	-.025	-.035	.003	.045*
Parent ASD Student	.040	.033	.056**	.002	.013
Anchorage Resident (Years)	-.013	-.040	-.044	-.053*	.004
Household Income	-.027	.002	-.033	-.051*	-.020
Language Spoken at Home (English)	-.054**	-.035	-.022	-.059**	-.032

Model 1: Delinquency Prevention; **Model 2:** School Climate and Safety; **Model 3:** Police-Community Relations; **Model 4:** Community Quality-of-Life; **Model 5:** Unintended Consequences.



OLS Regression Results

	Model 1 Beta	Model 2 Beta	Model 3 Beta	Model 4 Beta	Model 5 Beta
Rating:APD Crime Control	.118***	.068***	.080***	.107***	.022
Rating: Confidence in APD	.103***	.129***	.157***	.095	-.133***
Social Contact,APD Officer	.044*	.061***	.088***	.064***	-.078***
Satisfaction: K-12 Education	.018	.055**	.030	.064**	-.017
Prior Knowledge: SRO Programs	-.048**	.006	.063***	-.040*	-.163***
Neighborhood Problem: Loitering	-.032	-.004	-.011	-.053*	-.014
Constant:	3.459	3.840	3.431	3.587	3.049
F:	5.820***	4.010***	7.230***	6.050***	9.420***
R ² :	.077	.053	.092	.075	.118
N:	1,745	1,745	1,745	1,745	1,745

Model 1: Delinquency Prevention; **Model 2:** School Climate and Safety; **Model 3:** Police-Community Relations; **Model 4:** Community Quality-of-Life; **Model 5:** Unintended Consequences.



Summary

- What factors influence public confidence in SRO programs?
 - It depends on which domain of SRO activity people are asked about
 - Some factors are significant in some models, but not others
 - Some factors are consistent predictors, but others are not
 - Direction of effects can vary, depending on domain
 - Public support for SRO programs is **multidimensional** and “**fuzzy**”



Significant Predictors

- **Demographics**
 - Age (4); Gender (4); Race (2); Education (1); Marital status (1); Parent of student (1); Residential tenure (1);
- **Household characteristics**
 - Language spoken at home (2); income (1)
- **Attitudes toward police (general)**
 - Rating: Crime control (4); Confidence in police (4)
- **Experience with police**
 - **Social contact (5)**
- **School/SRO program familiarity**
 - Prior knowledge SRO programs (4); Satisfaction K-12 education (2)
- **Neighborhood context**
 - Neighborhood problem: Loitering (1)



Non-Significant Predictors

- **Demographics**
 - Employment status
- **Attitudes toward police (general)**
 - Rating: Order maintenance; Police fairness
- **Experience with police**
 - Official contact APD officer
- **Crime Victimization/Fear**
 - Prior felony assault (household); Prior misdemeanor assault (household);
Fear of youth victimization
- **Neighborhood context**
 - Neighborhood problem: Street crime



Conclusions

- **Demographics**
 - Consistency and magnitude of effect varied, but...
 - Provide important clues to the complexity of public's perceptions
 - Beliefs in police efficacy deeply intertwined with socio-cultural identities
- **Institutional Legitimacy/Public Conception of Police Role**
 - Faith in ability of police to control crime (but not Order Maintenance, Police Fairness)
 - Overall confidence in the police
- **Contextual Knowledge**
 - Prior knowledge of SRO programs, satisfaction with K-12 education, perceptions of community disorder
- **Nature of Interactions with Police**
 - Interactions outside the realm of “official” duties are important



Conclusions

- **Crime/Delinquency**
 - Public appears to view SRO programs as a delinquency prevention strategy
 - But confidence in them seems to be unrelated to underlying crime concerns
- **Public Support for Police is Multidimensional and “Fuzzy”**
 - Level of support depends on domain of activity
 - Influence of predictive factors varies across domains of activity
 - Must be careful when making blanket statements about public support
 - Public perceptions of police are remarkably nuanced
 - Research efforts must reflect this reality



Questions?

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