School Resource Officers

Public Perspectives and Perceptions

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An Overview

COPS IN SCHOOLS
History

- The concept of an SRO varies from jurisdiction to jurisdiction
  - Unifying element: **sworn** police officers
- Police began appearing in schools in mid 20\textsuperscript{th} Century
  - Indianapolis, Los Angeles
- High-profile incidents of school violence in 1990s produced surge in SROs
A Federal Government Creation

- SRO movement largely the result of Federal initiatives
- Office of Community Oriented Policing (COPS)
  - COPS in Schools program
    - First round of funding: 1999
    - Most recent round of funding: 2005
    - $753 million to 3,000 grantees
      - Hiring of 6,500 SROs nationwide
  - Safe Schools/Healthy Students program
    - $10 million
      - Additional 100 SROs
Purpose

- It depends…
  - Safety, safety, safety
- NASRO “Triad” Model
  - Law enforcement
  - Counselor
  - Educator
- Substantively different than other police responsibilities
  - The nature of the context is drastically different
  - A custodial population
Evidence

- SRO programs are notorious for not collecting rigorous, systematic process or outcome data

Objective dimension
- Scant empirical evidence that SRO programs achieve their delinquency/crime reduction goals

Subjective dimension
- Students, faculty, staff, and parents tend to support SRO programs
Anchorage

SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICER PROGRAM

“Ensuring the safety of your school.”
Overview of Program

- Initiated in **May 2003**
  - First full term: Q1 2003-2004 school year
- Paid for by Anchorage Police Department
  - Anchorage School District provides office space, supplies
- **16 SROs (plus 2 supervisors)**
  - 8 high, 8 middle, 78 elementary schools
- **Not** a “security” force
  - ASD has its own security force
Goals

- Enhance safety of school, surrounding area
- Reduce juvenile crime
- Increase school attendance
- Build trust with students
- Provide “high level of police service”
Research Questions

• Is the public familiar with the idea of a school resource officer program?
• Does the public perceive a need for a school resource officer program?
• Is there public support for a school resource officer program?
• To what extent is there skepticism about a school resource officer program?
Demographics

- **Preliminary Data!**
- 817 adult respondents
  - Expected: ≈ 2,000
- Not a representative sample of Anchorage adults...
  - Sample weights not used in this analysis
  - Future analyses will correct for sampling bias

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Min-Max</th>
<th>Mean</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent of ASD child</td>
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<td>.298</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>18-94</td>
<td>49.1</td>
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<td>Race (white)</td>
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<td>Hispanic origin (yes)</td>
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<td>Marital Status (married)</td>
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<td>Veteran (yes)</td>
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<td>Education (m/t HS)</td>
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<td>Employment (employed)</td>
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<td>Household income (median)</td>
<td>$75k-$99.9k</td>
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</table>
FAMILIARITY
& PERCEIVED NEED
Perceived Awareness & Need

- Heard of SROs: 97.7%
- ASD Have SROs: 89.7%
- Need SROs: 72.5%
ASSIGNING POLICE TO SCHOOLS IS A GOOD WAY TO...
Police-Public Relations

1.0
1.5
2.0
2.5
3.0
3.5
4.0
4.5
5.0

Mean Score

Strongly Agree

Strongly Disagree

- Improve Police-Community Relations
- Build Partnership: Schools-Police
- Build Trust: Students and Police
- Improve Student Attitudes: Police
- Broaden Perspectives: Police Officers
Educate Students

- Instill "Respect for Law"
- Educate Students: Law and Legal System
- Learn About Law Enforcement Careers

![Mean Score Bar Chart]

Strongly Agree

Strongly Disagree
Improve School Safety

- Establish Order in Schools
- Enhance Safety in Schools
- Reduce Violent Crime in Schools
- Reduce Property Crime in Schools
- Reduce Vandalism of School Property

<table>
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<tr>
<td>Enhance Safety in Schools</td>
<td>4.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reduce Violent Crime in Schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reduce Property Crime in Schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reduce Vandalism of School Property</td>
<td>4.0</td>
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Mean Score

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
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<tr>
<td>Enhance Safety in Schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reduce Violent Crime in Schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reduce Property Crime in Schools</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduce Vandalism of School Property</td>
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</table>
Improve Neighborhood Safety

- Enhance Safety in Neighborhoods
- Prevent Drug Dealing Near Schools
- Limit Vandalism in Neighborhoods
- Improve Community Quality of Life

Mean Score

Strongly Agree

Strongly Disagree
Reduce Juvenile Delinquency

<table>
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<tr>
<td>Reduce Drug Use by</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kids</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Control Bullying</td>
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<td>Deter Children:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Crime &amp; Delinquency</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reduce Rates of</td>
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<tr>
<td>Juvenile Crime</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reduce Truancy</td>
<td>2.5</td>
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</table>

Strongly Agree

Strongly Disagree
CONCERNS ABOUT S.R.O. PROGRAM
Potential Downside to SROs

1. Increase fear in schools
2. Undermine authority of faculty/staff
3. Create additional barriers w/ students

Strongly Agree

Strongly Disagree
Univariate Analyses
Public Perceptions of SROs

- High level of awareness of SRO concept
- High level of awareness of SRO program
- Public perceives a need for SRO program in Anchorage

- Faith in the ability of the SROs to:
  - Improve police-public relations
  - Enhance safety of schools
  - Improve safety of neighborhoods
  - Reduce juvenile delinquency
  - Educate students about policing, legal system

- SRO program is not overly problematic in the eyes of the public
How Do Demographics Shape Perceptions?

BIVARIATE ANALYSIS
### Bivariate Analyses

#### Table 1. Bivariate Correlations
SRO Goal Scales vs. Respondent Demographic Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GOALS</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>G</th>
<th>H</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>J</th>
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<tr>
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<td>.092**</td>
<td>.004</td>
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<td>-.024</td>
<td>-.005</td>
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<td>-.020</td>
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<td>-.026</td>
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<td>Relationships</td>
<td>-.013</td>
<td>.163***</td>
<td>.009</td>
<td>-.085*</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-.033</td>
<td>-.003</td>
<td>.043</td>
<td>-.080*</td>
<td>-.029</td>
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<td>Delinquency</td>
<td>-.013</td>
<td>.171***</td>
<td>-.037</td>
<td>-.058</td>
<td>-.076*</td>
<td>-.022</td>
<td>-.022</td>
<td>.044</td>
<td>-.097**</td>
<td>-.042</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>-.004</td>
<td>.133***</td>
<td>-.055</td>
<td>-.030</td>
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<td>-.115**</td>
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<td>.050</td>
<td>-.090*</td>
<td>-.100**</td>
<td>-.045</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NOTES:**
- Parent (A), Age (B), Race (C), Hispanic (D), Gender (E), Marital Status (F), Veteran (G), Education (H), Employment (I), Income (J).
- * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$
Summary

- **Demographic variables of interest**
  - **Age**
    - Most consistent of all demographic characteristics
    - Older people have greater confidence
  - **Employment**
    - Those currently employed consistently **more skeptical** of SRO goals
  - **Gender**
    - Men are consistently more skeptical of SRO goals, though not always **significantly** more skeptical
Summary

- **Demographic variables of interest**
  - **Race**
    - Only significantly related to possible negative effects of SRO program
      - Non-whites more sensitive to possible negative outcomes
  - **Education**
    - Only significantly related to possible negative effects of SRO program
      - Changed direction! (negative)
  - **Gender**
    - Only significant for perceptions of delinquency
      - Men more dubious than women
Summary

- Null variables
  - Parental of ASD student
  - Marital status
  - Veteran
  - Household income
Future Research

- What other factors impact public confidence in SRO program?
  - Do effects of demographic variables persist upon control for:
    - Community crime rates
    - Community disorder
    - Perceptions of neighborhood safety
    - Collective efficacy
    - Criminal justice efficacy
    - Fear of juvenile crime
    - Prior experiences with police