

Coming of Age with Stop and Frisk: Experiences, Self-Perceptions, and Public Safety Implications

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FACT SHEET

BACKGROUND

Amid the debate about stop and frisk, its relationship to reductions in crime, and concerns about racial profiling, one question has to date gone largely unexplored: How does being stopped by police, and the frequency of those stops, affect those who experience these stops at a young age?

This is a highly consequential question because a body of research indicates that negative encounters with police during an individual's developmental years can erode his or her confidence in the justice system. In New York City, at least half of all recorded stops annually involve those between the ages of 13 and 25. In 2012, the most recent year for which data is available, just over 286,000 young people in this age group were stopped.

The Vera Institute of Justice—which has a long history of working with the New York City Police Department (NYPD) on criminal justice system reform—launched a study in the fall of 2011 to examine this question. Focused exclusively on young people in highly patrolled, high-crime areas who have been stopped by police at least once, the study surveyed roughly 500 people between the ages of 18 and 25 and conducted in-depth interviews with a smaller sample of 13- to 21-year-olds. (The study does not evaluate the efficacy of stop and frisk in terms of its ability to suppress crime, nor does it assess whether or not the NYPD is conducting stops within the scope of what is permitted under the law. See page nine of the report for a description of the study methodology.)

The findings do not tell us how New Yorkers, in general, experience stop and frisk, or feel about the police. They do, however, reveal a great deal about the experiences and perceptions of young New Yorkers who are most likely to be stopped.

The report describes findings from the study and offers a series of recommendations.

KEY SURVEY FINDINGS INCLUDE:

- > For many young people, stops are a familiar and frequent experience and also perceived to be unjustified and unfair.
 - 44 percent of young people surveyed indicated they had been stopped repeatedly—9 times or more.
 - Less than a third—29 percent—reported ever being informed of the reason for a stop.
- > Frisks, searches, threats, and use of force are common.
 - 71 percent of young people surveyed reported being frisked at least once, and 64 percent said they had been searched.
 - 45 percent reported encountering an officer who threatened them, and 46 percent said they had experienced physical force at the hands of an officer.
 - One out of four said they were involved in a stop in which the officer displayed his or her weapon.
- > Trust in law enforcement and willingness to cooperate with police is alarmingly low.
 - 88 percent of young people surveyed believe that residents of their neighborhood do not trust the police.
 - Only four in 10 respondents said they would be comfortable seeking help from police if in trouble.
 - Only one in four respondents would report someone whom they believe had committed a crime.
- > Young people who have been stopped more often in the past are less willing to report crimes, even when they themselves are the victims. Each additional stop in the span of a year is associated with an eight percent drop in the person's likelihood of reporting a violent crime he or she might experience in the future.
- > Half of all young people surveyed had been the victim of a crime, including 37 percent who had been the victim of a violent crime.
- > Young people are self-confident and optimistic.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Vera has a long history of working with the New York Police Department, with much of this work focused on improving police-community relations. In this spirit of collaboration, Vera recommends that the NYPD consider the following steps to address the collateral consequences of stop and frisk that this study reveals:

- > In light of the fact that it decreased stops by 22 percent while the crime rate held steady, the NYPD should continue to recalibrate its stop and frisk practices so as to remedy the serious consequences to police-community relations and public safety that this study reveals.
- > Expand upon existing trainings to encourage respectful policing that makes people feel they are treated fairly (including informing them of the reason for the stop), and emphasize strategies aimed at reducing the number of stops that escalate to the point where officers make threats and use physical force.
- > Collaborate with the predominately black and Hispanic/Latino communities where stop and frisk has been concentrated to improve relationships by finding tangible strategies to put into practice.
- > Partner with researchers to better understand the costs and benefits of various proactive policing strategies as well as individual practices such as stop and frisk.

The Summary Report describes these and other key findings in more detail and briefly discusses the recommendations. For a complete presentation of findings, please see the Technical Report.

Read the summary report at www.vera.org/stop-and-frisk-summary-report

Read the technical report at www.vera.org/stop-and-frisk-technical-report

Vera Institute of Justice
233 Broadway, 12th Floor
New York, NY 10279
Tel: (212) 334-1300
Fax: (212) 941-9407

Washington DC Office
1100 First St. NE, Suite 950
Washington, DC 20002
Tel: (202) 465-8900
Fax: (202) 408-1972

New Orleans Office
546 Carondelet St.
New Orleans, LA 70130
Tel: (504) 593-0937
Fax: (212) 941-9407

Los Angeles Office
707 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 3850
Los Angeles, CA 90017
Tel: (213) 223-2442
Fax: (213) 955-9250

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For More Information

For more information about *Coming of Age With Stop and Frisk: Experiences, Self-Perceptions, and Public Safety Implications*, contact Jennifer Fratello at jfratello@vera.org.

For more information about the Center on Youth Justice, contact Annie Salsich at asalsich@vera.org.

The Vera Institute of Justice is an independent non-profit organization that combines research, demonstration projects, and technical assistance to help leaders in government and civil society improve the systems people rely on for justice and safety.