

Police training reduced complaints and use of force against civilians

April 20 2020



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

A Northwestern University evaluation of a procedural justice training program involving more than 8,000 Chicago Police Department (CPD)

officers shows it reduced complaints filed against police by approximately 10%. It also reduced use of force by 6% in the two years following officers' training.

"The CPD is undergoing significant reform on multiple fronts, through a consent decree, including new top leadership and now a response to an unprecedented health epidemic," said Andrew Papachristos, co-author of the study and a professor of sociology in the Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences at Northwestern. "Fundamental to such reforms is repairing trust with the larger community. Reducing force and misconduct in a way that is fair and transparent by adopting procedural [justice](#) strategies is one key way to repair trust."

Papachristos is also a faculty fellow in the University's Institute for Policy Research (IPR).

The study by IPR postdoctoral fellow George Wood, along with Tom Tyler of Yale University and Papachristos, shows that this approach to [police training](#), which typically only takes one day, can reduce complaints and improve community relations.

"It's particularly notable that these reductions were achieved through a [training program](#), which was scaled up to include a sizable majority of the officers within the CPD," Wood said.

The procedural justice model emphasizes transparency and responding to community concerns, as well as police treating citizens in encounters with dignity, courtesy and respect. Such training is one of the strategies recommended by President Obama's 2015 Task Force on 21st-Century Policing, which argues for transparency and efforts by officers to build popular legitimacy with civilians instead of harsher "command-and-control" police techniques.

The CPD officers who took part in the training also received fewer sustained complaints, or complaints that were found valid, and had fewer complaints that resulted in a settlement payout by the city. The researchers' estimates suggest 500 fewer incidents of use of force by trained officers between 2011 and 2016.

These results indicate that procedural justice training can reduce both police use of force and complaints related to police misconduct. The researchers tracked use of force over a five-year period by using official forms that must be filled out by an officer when engaging in certain actions, ranging from a wristlock to discharging a firearm. They tracked complaints using CPD administrative records.

The findings reveal that training police in how to adopt procedural justice principles is a promising strategy for reducing use of force and complaints against officers and can be successfully used in other communities.

"By reducing force and hostility, this type of training might help the process of rebuilding trust between police and civilians—and because the training is relatively short and can be staggered over time, it will not be a major disruption of policing activities," Wood said.

The methodology used the phased roll-out of training in which officers were trained at different times over a four-year period between January 2012 and March 2016. This roll-out meant that, within a given time period, the researchers could compare trained officers to officers who had not yet undergone training. In the same model, they also compared officers after training to their own behavior before training.

The researchers also observe that procedural justice training significantly changes how officers behave in the field, and the impact of such training lasts for at least two years. They note that its effect could be even greater

as officers trained in procedural justice share their knowledge throughout their departments. When officers are trained in such tactics, they behave in ways that are proven to promote public trust, compliance and cooperation between police and citizens.

According to the researchers, such training efforts could not only change police behavior on the streets, but reform how entire departments operate. That could be a major factor in reducing misconduct and the undue use of force.

"Procedural justice training reduces police use of force and complaints against officers," publishes April 20 in the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS)*.

The Northwestern Neighborhood and Network Institute (N3), directed by Papachristos and where Wood is a postdoctoral fellow, has been researching the causes and consequences of police misconduct and use of [force](#). N3 is also involved in the ongoing evaluation of a new Neighborhood Policing Initiative aimed at improving police-civilian relationships through new methods of community-focused policing practices.

More information: George Wood et al., "Procedural justice training reduces police use of force and complaints against officers," *PNAS* (2020). www.pnas.org/cgi/doi/10.1073/pnas.1920671117

Provided by Northwestern University

Citation: Police training reduced complaints and use of force against civilians (2020, April 20) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2020-04-police-complaints-civilians.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.