

## Measuring the Effects of Quality-of-Life Policing

*NIJ Research in Progress Seminar, "Measuring the Impacts of Policing Among Arrestees in New York City: Veracity of Self-Reports, Deterrence Effects of Quality-of-Life Policing, and Net Widening," Bruce D. Johnson and Andrew Golub, grant number 00-7353-NY-IJ, available on videotape from NCJRS (NCJ 190638).*

When police increase efforts against disorderly conduct, such as loitering, trespassing, and urinating in public, does it make a difference? Bruce D. Johnson and Andrew Golub, of the National Development and Research Institutes, studied this issue in New York City and found that it does. Arrestees report that they are aware of the New

## RESEARCH DESIGN

This study used the Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring (ADAM) program as a research platform for understanding the impact of recent New York City policing initiatives on arrestee behavior. During the second half of 1999, 892 New York City arrestees were interviewed. For this analysis, researchers compiled the responses to the standard ADAM questionnaire, ADAM drug test results, responses to a special New York City Policing questionnaire, and official New York State criminal histories.

York City Police Department's (NYPD's) various "quality-of-life" (QOL) initiatives, and many have changed their behavior accordingly. Further, such programs do not appear to "widen the net" and bring people into the criminal justice system who would otherwise not be involved with it. Johnson and Golub discussed their study at an NIJ Research in Progress Seminar.

### Quality-of-Life Policing

Initiatives against publicly annoying behaviors, such as loitering, panhandling, transit farebeating, urinating in public, public consumption of alcohol or marijuana, and overall disorderly conduct, are called QOL policing. The NYPD wanted to know if offenders were aware that police had stepped up efforts to control QOL offenses, and, if so, what their response was. As a related issue, the department wanted to know if those arrested for QOL offenses are truthful about their other criminal activities in their post-arrest interviews.

### Offenders Get the Message

Johnson and Golub found that the arrestees appeared to be getting the message. Arrestees reported their awareness that police were targeting people for a variety of QOL offenses. On average, about half of the offenders said that in response they had stopped or cut down on those activities in the past 6 months. (The greatest decrease was among farebeaters. Almost 70 percent reported that they had stopped

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or decreased their farebeating after becoming aware of QOL initiatives.)

Offenders primarily cited an increased police presence and a consciousness on the street of a stepped up police focus on QOL behaviors—rather than their personal contact with the criminal justice system—as the reason for changing their behavior. The researchers concluded that QOL policing initiatives can provide a general deterrent to these types of activities.

### Widening the Net?

The researchers compared those arrested for felony drug and index crimes with those charged with a QOL offense and found them to be highly comparable. The two groups had similar demographic characteristics, prior arrest records, and self-reports of QOL offenses. According to the researchers, this lack of differences, plus the fact that individuals without prior police records were generally not brought in on QOL charges, indicates that the QOL initiatives did not widen the pool of arrestees (at least not in New York City

in 1999). Moreover, the researchers note that QOL enforcement provides police with additional opportunities to monitor and possibly intervene in the lives of long-term criminal offenders who routinely pass through the city's criminal justice system.

### **Do Arrestees Tell the Truth?**

The arrestees interviewed were generally open and honest about their lifelong record of arrest and imprisonment, but not so candid about the details. While most accurately reported their use of marijuana, few volunteered that they had committed more serious crimes,

particularly violent crimes; this was true even among those arrestees who initially were honest about their prison time—they were less honest about the serious criminal actions that led to their incarceration.

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#### **For more information**

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