

Empirical Research on School Resource Officers

The following reflects findings of a systematic meta-synthesis on the research on School Resource Officers (SROs) conducted in the fall of 2018 by Jamie Utt as part of his dissertation. Though the following in no way reflects all of the research on SROs, these are the findings of the more methodologically robust and reliable studies on a variety of outcomes of interest to the community and policy makers.

Overall, SROs are associated with higher rates of arrest and exclusionary discipline and higher rates of violence in schools. SROs are not found to have an effect on student feelings of safety, even if contact with officers is associated with more positive views of SROs.

Effects of SROs on Arrests, Crime, and Exclusionary Discipline

Two studies indicate that the presence of SROs leads to the recording of considerably more crimes including non-serious crimes such as minor school fights (Devlin & Gottfredson, 2018; Na & Gottfredson, 2011).

One study finds that the presence of SROs greatly increases the use of exclusionary discipline (discipline resulting in missed school) compared to schools without SROs (Fisher & Hennessey, 2016).

Nolan (2011) found that non-criminal student misbehavior would often be escalated into summonses and criminal charges because of “disorderly conduct” once the police got involved

One study finds that the presence of an SRO is associated a practically and statistically significant increase in arrests for the subjective and minor offense of disorderly conduct. Simultaneously, SROs are associated with a smaller decrease in arrest rates for assault and weapons (Theriot, 2009).

One study finds that SRO presence led to higher arrest rates for younger students and those who are disruptive in school but notes there are overall fewer crimes reported to law enforcement in the sampled schools when an SRO is present (Owens, 2017).

One study finds that SROs perform more law-enforcement activities in schools with higher measures of student disadvantage (Lynch, Gainey, & Chappell, 2016).

Effect of SROs on Feelings of Safety

SROs are not found to have an effect on student feelings of safety generally (Bracy, 2011; Miller, Gibson, Ventura, & Schreck, 2005; Perumean-Chaney & Sutton, 2013; Theriot & Orme,

2016), though some research finds that individual officers have relationships with students that help them to feel safer (Portillos, González, & Peguero, 2012).

Effect of SROs on Views of Police and Policing

Generally, students support the presence of police in schools, and one study notes that students simply see a police presence at school as a normal part of the educational experience (Bracy, 2011; Brown, 2005; Schuiteman, 2001).

One study found that increased contact with an SRO has a positive effect on views of SROs, but increased contact with an SRO has a negative effect on school connectedness (Theriot, 2016).

Effects on School Violence

Generally, SROs are associated with higher rates of violence in schools, though it's unclear of whether this indicates actually higher rates of violence or simply higher recording of violent incidents due to officer presence (Crawford & Burns, 2015; Crawford & Burns, 2016; Lane, 2009; Maskaly, Donner, Lanterman, & Jennings, 2011).

Crawford and Burns (2015) found an increase in violence in high schools when an SRO is present, but the presence of an SRO was associated with a decrease in violence in lower grades when an officer is present.

Jennings, Khey, Maskaly, and Donner (2011) found that the number of SROs was not significantly associated with less serious violence but was negatively associated with incidents of serious violence.

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