

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of the New Orleans Police Department's (NOPD) field interview program is to collect and analyze information to monitor, prevent, and investigate criminal activity. Officers are permitted to stop, question, and collect personal identifying information from citizens when they have "reasonable suspicion" that criminal activity is taking place.¹ However, many citizens are concerned that some officers could use this authority to target and harass certain segments of the population. Data show that police officers in a number of cities disproportionately stop and frisk members of a particular minority racial group, and more than 60% of United States citizens believe biased policing occurs.² Police departments can address concerns about the program's fairness and legality by collecting reliable data, analyzing the data using well-designed methodologies, and monitoring and reporting the results in an open and transparent process.

The Inspections & Evaluations Division of the City of New Orleans Office of Inspector General (OIG) conducted an inspection of the NOPD's field interview data (information obtained during NOPD officer stops of suspicious persons, also known as "stops and frisks") reported from January to June 2011 at the request of the Independent Police Monitor Division of the OIG. The overall objective of the current inspection was to determine whether or not NOPD officers were compliant with legal requirements to stop individuals only when there was reasonable suspicion to do so, and determine whether, when conducting stops and frisks, NOPD appeared to apply the constitutional standard of reasonable suspicion equally to all persons, regardless of their age, gender, or race.

Inspectors examined the NOPD field interview data, but were unable to conduct planned statistical analyses due to flaws in the department's method of field interview data collection and reporting. NOPD officers were required to complete a field interview card (FIC) for every stop of a suspicious person, then submit the information to the department's FIC database. However, the data as collected made our planned statistical analysis impossible: officers did not complete FICs in full and information about subjects and actions taken against subjects were aggregated onto one FIC card (for up to three subjects) for one stop, making it impossible to reconcile identifying information with stop outcomes.

We then planned to review the Communications District Central-Aided Dispatch (CAD) database, which maintains a record of all officer-citizen interactions, to determine whether all suspicious person stops reported to CAD that resulted in a field interview were also reported to the NOPD FIC database, as required by departmental policy. However, there was no disposition category in CAD that indicated whether or not an FIC was completed for a stop. We learned from NOPD that there is no standard for reporting events to CAD across agencies, and changing the categories would be an arduous process for the Communications District. This made

¹ New Orleans Police Department Operations Manual, Chapter 41.30.

² COPS, *How to correctly collect and analyze racial profiling data*, 2002. Report available from COPS office (800-421-6770) or at <http://www.cops.usdoj.gov/files/RIC/Publications/e06064106.pdf>.

verification of corresponding suspicious person cases with FICs across the two databases impossible.

The NOPD has implemented a field interview (or stop and frisk) program as a way of identifying potential criminals for investigatory purposes; however, the department has not completed the steps to ensure its data collection practices are valid and useful for analysis. If done appropriately, field interview data collection and independent analysis can increase the transparency of NOPD operations and communicate to the public that the department is committed to best practices in its effort to reduce crime. At this time, however, there is no way to determine whether or not the NOPD field interview program is being conducted in compliance with constitutional requirements and without evidence of age, gender, or racial profiling, because the data are insufficient.