

Assignment 3 17.271

Paper: Kentucky High Schools with SROs and Without: An Examination of Criminal Violation Rates

Journal: Journal of School Leadership Volume 27, November 2017

What is the paper's research question?

SROs are School Resource Officers, police officers who work in schools in part to improve community policing and community relationships. The number of SROs in schools across the country increased steadily since 2000, thanks to a pass in federal funding for COPS grants and following several mass shootings at high schools and colleges in the U.S. This paper aims to answer the following question: Are there differences in criminal violation rates between Kentucky high schools that have a full-time SRO and Kentucky high schools that do not have an SRO?

How does the paper answer that question? What kind(s) of data do they use, and how they analyze it?

The researchers for this paper utilized criminal violation data from Kentucky public high schools between 2002 and 2013. The criminal violation data comes from the Kentucky Department of Education. It's unclear how the researchers identified when the SRO program started in each school. They categorized schools into one of three categories: 1) schools that have an SRO program that's at least 3 years old, 2) schools that have an SRO program that was implemented either too recently (<3 years old) or too early (pre 2002) 3) schools that have never had an SRO. They then ran a pre/post analysis on the schools in group 1 with the pre year being the full school year before SRO implementation and the post year being the 3rd year after implementation (once the officer becomes more familiar and involved in the school community). The second analysis is a comparative analysis between groups 2 and 3, schools with SROs and schools without SROs,

generally. Their goal is to see if the mean criminal violation rates (which they bucket given the many different types of violations) change between the pre/post and groups 2 and 3, respectively.

What conclusion do they reach?

The researchers conclude that there is no statistical significance between the mean criminal violation rates for the pre/post and comparative groups, even when controlling for minority (Kentucky has a small minority population, so they clump all minorities together as a control) and low income students (which they identify if a student qualifies for free/reduced lunch). And this held for all buckets of criminal violations (they made 10 buckets). Some other remarks in their conclusions are that other people would suspect criminal violations to increase since SROs will see and report more things, but the researchers caution that there's a difference between actual criminal violation rates and reported criminal violation rates.

What are the strengths and weaknesses of the paper? Are there limits to how broadly its findings should be applied?

I don't think these findings are very generalizable, if at all. Kentucky is a rural environment with a mostly white population, while I feel the general concern with SROs in schools comes from more urban areas. Also, there are many more potentially confounding variables other than minority and low-income status such as regional difference between schools across the state. School size and population are also potentially confounding variables. Are all SROs assigned to schools in the same way across the state? Do all schools have the same resources? This is especially a concern for the second analysis with schools that have always had SROs versus the

ones who never had SROs. There can definitely be regional differences that can influence criminal violation rates that could explain why one school never had an SRO versus another.

MIT OpenCourseWare
<https://ocw.mit.edu/>

17.271 "Mass Incarceration in the United States"
Fall 2020

For information about citing these materials or our Terms of Use, visit: <https://ocw.mit.edu/terms>.