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News Release

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Durham Police Department Uses RTI International to Study Traffic Stop Data

By 2014 Disproportionality Is Indistinguishable

The Durham Police Department (DPD), in an effort to promote transparency and achieve a better understanding of its operations, recently requested RTI International to analyze its traffic stop data. DPD provided RTI with six years of data from 151,700 traffic stops. In turn, RTI performed a series of analyses that concluded that black male drivers were disproportionately pulled over in traffic stops conducted by DPD from January 2010 through October 2015.

While researchers found that for traffic stops with male drivers, the odds of the driver being black were 20 percent higher during daylight than in times of darkness, the results suggest that the racial disproportionality declined over the six-year analysis period. Black males were most over-represented from 2010 through 2013. By 2014, the differences in the odds of the motorist being a black male in the daylight compared to darkness were indistinguishable.

No evidence of racial disproportionality was found among female drivers.

The study does not establish overall organizational bias within DPD. The results suggest that the level of disproportionality varied by different units. The greatest disproportionality was found among the High Enforcement Abatement Team (HEAT), a unit focused on drug, vice, and gang violence. There was no evidence of disproportionality among the stops conducted by DPD's Traffic Services unit, which primarily focuses on speeding drivers and people driving while impaired.

"This is a study that the Durham Police Department requested to determine the possibility of bias being a factor in our traffic stops and examine if the changes we've put in place sufficiently addressed those concerns," said Interim Police Chief Larry Smith. "It's essential that we get an objective view of our operations and in turn be willing to not only accept the findings, but continue to work toward putting the necessary tools in place to correct the issues this analysis revealed—and ensure that bias of any kind is never a part of police operations.

"We believe the improvements in the disproportionality are a result of the changes in our policies, procedures and training that we've instituted in the past few years. This shows that we are willing to listen to our community and make adjustments in our policing practices when necessary," Smith said.

DPD has progressively established procedures to ensure fair and balanced policing during stops:

- HEAT, Patrol and Traffic Services units have been outfitted with in-car cameras to capture interactions during stops
- The department conducts semi-annual traffic stop data reviews, analyzing data pertaining to the initial purpose of a traffic stop, the enforcement action and the potential for being searched during a stop (DPD traffic stop data is also reviewed by the state of North Carolina)
- Biannually, the department performs a detailed analysis for any officer with at least 25 traffic stops and a 75 percent or higher stop rate of minorities. The analysis includes the time and location of the stop, whether a search occurred, the demographics of the driver, and a random review of the in-car camera video for the officer's stops
- Monthly reviews of in-car camera footage are done by division commanders
- Complaints resulting from traffic stops are thoroughly investigated by the Professional Standards Division in an attempt to identify patterns
- Signed written forms are required for all consent searches during traffic stops

DPD has taken additional measures to enhance police-community relations:

- All officers have completed Fair and Impartial Policing training and the training is now included in the Basic Law Enforcement Training curriculum for all incoming new recruits
- Officers have recently received verbal conflict and de-escalation training and select personnel have been trained as trainers through the U.S. Department of Justice on procedural justice and police legitimacy
- In addition to semi-annual traffic stop data reviews, DPD will now utilize RTI's free tool to continue to track traffic stop data

To study the racial distribution of traffic stops, researchers used the "veil of darkness" approach, which is based on the assumption that police officers are less able to determine the race of a motorist after dark. By using this method, researchers explored racial disproportionality by comparing the race of drivers stopped during daylight to the race of those stopped during darkness. The study examined traffic stops during the intertwillight period roughly between 5:30 p.m. and 9 p.m.; during which it is light at some times of the year but dark at other times.

RTI's analysis isn't able to gauge context, whereas the findings cannot pinpoint the decision-making process attached to each traffic stop—only the results.

Click [here](#) to view the RTI news release

Click [here](#) to view the RTI traffic stop study

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