Comparing Urban and Rural Police Views of Bias-based Policing

Ralph Ioimo, J. Bret Becton, Leslie M. Meadows, Rachel S. Tears, and Michael T. Charles

Police departments all over the United States are addressing the issue of bias-based policing. Assessment of bias-based policing has focused traditionally on officer and citizen interaction during traffic stops. This research project sought to broaden the assessment of bias-based policing beyond traffic stop data by surveying officers in urban and rural police departments within the Commonwealth of Virginia to determine whether they are aware of bias-based policing practices in their department or in others. Our research found that while a large number of officers indicated that bias-based policing is not a problem, a significant number of them believe it is a problem. In addition, significant differences in the perception of bias-based policing exist between White officers and minority officers in both urban and rural police departments throughout the Commonwealth. This article reports our findings and explores these differences in-depth.

Key Words: Racial profiling • Bias-based policing • Racial prejudice • Urban policing • Rural policing • Community oriented policing

The issue of biased-based policing and racial profiling began to capture the attention of practitioners and researchers alike because of a number of highly publicized events involving racial bias-based policing/racial profiling (Harris, 2002; Martin, 1999). Until recently, research focused on reviews of secondary data—primarily, traffic citations and arrest reports—or surveys of citizens' perceptions. Most of the research in this area examined traffic stops as the source of data, and from this data the researchers drew conclusions as to the extent of biased policing.

Lundman and Kaufman (2003) argue that secondary data and citizen self-reports are a valid means of measuring the effects of race, ethnicity, and gender on citizen reports of traffic stops and police actions; however, these sources do not take into consideration other factors that may explain what appears to be biased police actions. Lundman and

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Kaufman recognize that current research in biased policing has limitations; therefore, they recommend use of triangulated data from police reports, citizen reports, and reports of trained observer, a method that has also been promoted by other researchers (Pfaff-Wright & Tomaskovic-Devey, 2000; Riksheim & Chermak, 1993; Sherman, 1980; Singleton & Straits, 1999; Weitzer, 1999; Weitzer & Tuch, 2002). One important consideration missing from previous research is that police do more than make traffic stops, and bias-based policing has a potential to present itself in other areas equally. As an example, bias can exist in how police treat minority citizens who become victims of crime. The authors of this article believed that solely evaluating traffic stops to determine the extent of bias-based policing ignores all other potential situations for biased-based policing to occur. They recognized a need for additional research that assesses bias-based policing in other areas of police service.

To this end, this research provides a completely different approach to the study of bias-based policing. In reviewing the literature, the researchers could not find any substantial research project that looked at biased-based policing from the police officers' perspective. Wanting to understand the biased-based or racial profile issue from a broad perspective, the researchers focused on both citizens and officers.

The researchers conducted focus group meetings with citizens and separate focus group meetings with police officers in six Virginia cities to determine the extent bias-based policing or racial profiling was an issue. From these meetings, the researchers developed two separate questionnaires that they administered to both citizens and officers throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia. The researchers' approach was to compare the views of each toward this highly controversial topic. A summary of the citizens' views appears in an early article (Ioimo, Becton, Meadows, Tears, & Charles, 2008). In this article the researchers specifically compare the views of the rural police agencies of Virginia with those of the urban police agencies.

While this extensive study addressed many other issues relating to bias-based policing, this article focuses on the assessment of police officers' views of bias-based policing and racial profiling in both rural and urban environments. In this component of the study, the researchers assessed the differences in responses between urban and rural police officer views. This article describes what we learned.

**Literature Review**

*Traffic Stops*

As stated previously, a review of past research shows that researchers focus primarily on traffic stops as a means of assessing bias-based policing practices. This past research also has relied on citizen self-reports, and little research has been done that incorporates
the police view. Police traffic stops are attractive to researchers for many reasons. Secondary data are available for evaluation. Traffic stops often lead to negative encounters with minority citizens. Perhaps the most compelling reason relates to complaints from Blacks and Latinos that police stop these groups more frequently even when they have done nothing wrong. Some refer to this situation as “Driving While Black” (Harris, 1997, 1999; Lamberth, 1998; Lundgren & Kaufman, 2003; Martin, 1999; Rice, Reitzel & Piquero, 2004).

Some researchers believe that the war on drugs fosters negative encounters with minorities (Coker, 2003; Harris, 1999; Harris, 2002). The basis of racial profiling is the premise that minorities commit most drug offenses (Coker, 2003). The premise is factually untrue, but it has nonetheless become a self-fulfilling prophecy (Coker, 2003; Harris, 1999). Because police look for drugs primarily among Blacks and Latinos, they find a disproportionate number of them with contraband. This perception creates the profile that results in more stops of minority drivers (Coker, 2003; Harris 1999; Harris, 2002).

The difficulty appears to be in defining exactly what is bias-based policing. While researchers find that police stop Blacks, Latinos, and other races more frequently, it is difficult to say with any degree of certainty that these stops are because of bias policing tactics. We know from other research that not only are minorities stopped more frequently, but police subject them to searches at a rate ranging from two to two-and-a-half times that for Whites (Traffic-stop data fails to clear up profiling question, 2003).

Most of the research focusing on traffic stops concludes that racial bias exists based on the analysis of the proportion of minorities stopped compared with other groups or the population as a whole. McMahon, Garner, Davis, and Kraus (2002) raised this issue in their study, stating that too often researchers base their conclusions on comparing preliminary data on traffic stops with the demographics of the jurisdiction. Melchers (2003) points out that the assumption that proportions of minority drivers stopped by police should be identical to their proportions within the population has two problems. The first relates to the use of population data and the second to the assumption of randomness in police vehicle stops. Melchers also points out that comparing incidence to population inevitably creates the false impression that any group with some number of members who are stopped frequently is over-represented as a whole. This creates serious statistical errors. When the nominator and the base in a rate do not have the same units of count, or when the units of counts are insufficiently interrelated, this is a base error. Base errors lead to false conclusions about the analyzed data. Melchers also points out that large errors in interpretation can occur when researchers use incidence statistics to infer prevalence. This is an aggregation error. The combination of base errors and aggregation errors leads to faulty findings. The publication of these findings leads to false
assumptions, and agencies develop corrective measures based upon these incorrect assumptions (McMahon et al., 2002; Melchers, 2003).

Actions taken in response to these faulty findings can prove costly to the local, regional, and even state government (Melchers, 2003). For example, to address these issues, many police departments took costly measures such as mounting video cameras on patrol cars to track officer stops.

One valuable measure some agencies initiated in response to research findings is specialized training to address racial profiling. Some researchers have found that cultural diversity training heightens awareness of the historical and contemporary plight of minorities and sensitizes officers to their own covert and even overt forms of prejudice and discrimination (Coderoni, 2002; Meehan & Ponder, 2002). However, study findings suggest that a focus on individual attitudes and behavior misses the underlying societal and occupational structural problems that produce racial profiling (Meehan & Ponder, 2002). Meehan and Ponder found that even the most racially sensitive officers engaged in what is perceived as racial profiling, although it is not clear that prejudicial attitudes or intentions motivated officer behavior (2002). What is clear is that curtailing racial profiling requires the commitment from top management (Coderoni, 2002).

Some police departments have undertaken a significant effort to collect data on traffic stops and field interviews to determine whether police officer's actions are bias-based. In some instances, departments require by law that officers track whom they stop, the purpose for the stop, and the result of the encounter. While accurate and meaningful data collection on traffic stops may have some social science and management value, many researchers recognize that much of the research accomplished to date has major pitfalls (Kruger, 2002; Fridell, Lunney, Diamond, Kubu, Scott, & Laing, 2001) and believe it is critically important that this research occur properly or it can lead to misrepresentations and drive a bigger wedge between the police and the communities they serve (Gold, 2003; Kruger, 2002; Smith & Alpert, 2002; Wortley & Tanner, 2003).

Good science requires that researchers distinguish carefully between situations in which the police are using race and where they are finding race (Gold, 2003). Police officers make stops based upon traffic violations or in search of known offenders. Biased officers can use the first reason to stop a vehicle because the driver is Black or Latino; that is very different from stopping a person who fits the description of a person the police are looking for, who happens to be Black. Statistics on police stops must exclude stops involving the police looking for a racially identified perpetrator (Gold, 2003; Walker, 2001). Gold also points out another circumstance in which there can be greater than random contact with visible minorities. If police activity is stepped-up in response to community concerns about local drug pushers or local speeders and that community is more heavily
populated with visible minorities, statistics will be skewed toward more police-minority
interactions even though police are giving greater attention to that area only in response
to community concerns (Gold, 2003).

During our on-site meetings with the various Virginia police agencies, the officers
raised this very point as an issue. The areas of highest demand for police service tend to
be in minority communities. The calls-for-service logs of the agencies we visited support
this claim. If citizens in minority communities call for police service more frequently than
other portions of the community because of criminal activity, then it makes sense that
police will likely engage a higher number of people in that area. This contact includes
more traffic stops, more field interviews, and more arrests. Still, much of the current
literature infers that police contact should be proportionate to population demographics
and ignores all other intervening variables.

The Relationship Between Community Oriented Policing, Crime Reduction, and Bias-
Based Policing

The views the Virginia police agencies expressed during our discussions may have larger
support. In an article printed in the TELEMASP (Texas Law Enforcement Management
and Administrative Statistics Program) Bulletin (2002), the author stressed that police
deploy to where the police are needed; thus, more traffic stops occur in areas of high
service demand (Interpreting racial profiling data, 2002). The author makes the point that
research has shown that deployment patterns significantly influence racial proportion of
traffic stops (Interpreting racial profiling data, 2002). In Richmond, Virginia, the average
Part I crime rate (the eight major crimes specified by the FBI) is 45% higher in majority
Black census tracts compared with majority White census tracts (Smith & Petrocelli,
2001). And analysis shows that Richmond police stop more Black citizens. Officers in
other cities also stop minorities at higher, disproportional rates than they do Whites
(Carter, Katz-Bannister, & Schafer, 2001). The TELEMASP author states that because
police go to where the crime is occurring and take a proactive approach to preventing
crime and identifying suspects, more minorities are stopped. The author further states that
no one suggests that deploying the police proportional to crime or call-for-service demand
constitutes racial discrimination, and the opposite would be the case if the police deployed
absolutely proportionately across a jurisdiction, ignoring crime rates and demand for
service. The quality of police service in minority neighborhoods would plummet, and
criminal victimization would increase if deployment occurred proportionately (Interpreting
racial profiling data, 2002).
Proactive policing encourages officers to get involved with the communities they service—even with events and incidents that are outside the scope of policing but of interest to the community. Proactive policing is supported and promoted by community oriented policing. The premise of community oriented policing is service. Service is a different concept from crime fighting. There is growing support for the concept of police as service organizations. The problem is in police achieving a service mentality.

Agencies that establish a culture primarily focused on crime reduction foster an attitude focused on reducing crime by any means necessary and, in many cases, target people based on race, biases, and stereotypes (Davis, 2001). As a result, these agencies are more likely to experience bias-based policing and increases in incidences of officer misconduct. Davis points out phrases such as the “War on Drugs,” “War on Crime,” “Scorched Earth,” and “Zero Tolerance” may contribute to a culture of intolerance toward the community that the police serve and a “we versus them” mentality, which ultimately contributes to poor community relations.

Laws Enacted to Prevent Racial Profiling
The concern of many researchers is that traffic stops become the pretext for police motivated by other concerns such as observation of drivers and passengers for signs of drug use or possession (Harris 2002; Lamberth, 1998; Lundman & Kaufman, 2003; Meeks, 2000; Rubinstein, 1973). Police may stop vehicles in an area known to be a high drug use area, searching for signs of drugs. If the driver does not show signs of being under the influence of drugs, the officer lets the driver go without a citation. Minorities may exit from these stops with the view that the police did not have a reason for the stop and argue that if they did not violate a traffic law, then the reason for the stop was the person’s race or color (Lundman & Kaufman, 2003). Laws are being enacted to address this issue.

Some states, such as Texas, passed legislation requiring agencies to keep data on traffic stops. Texas, Minnesota, Maryland, and other states are enacting legislation that makes racial profiling illegal and in some instance, a felony. The State of New Jersey has already made racial profiling by police a felony (New Jersey, 2003). This law addresses the crime of official deprivation of civil rights, making it illegal for law enforcement officers to use race, color, religion, ethnicity, handicap, gender, age, or sexual orientation to discriminate against any individual (New Jersey, 2003). However, this law creates confusion as to when these elements can be considered a legitimate part of investigations and as a part of normal patrol functions.

The courts have sent mixed signals at best on the issue of probable cause for traffic stops. While the Fourth Amendment protects all of us against unlawful searches and seizures, the courts have provided support to police officers stopping someone on mere
suspicion of wrongdoing. In *United States v. Arvizu*, the Supreme Court held that the Fourth Amendment does not prohibit investigatory stops as long as the facts and circumstances lead to a reasonable suspicion the driver is engaged in criminal activity (Pelic, 2003).

In other words, officers can stop vehicles without a traffic violation. In *Whren v. U.S.* 517 U.S., 806 (1996), the Supreme Court ruled that it is lawful for police to stop and search a vehicle as long as they have a legitimate excuse to stop the vehicle. Since *Whren*, the court has supported this decision through other cases. *Ohio v. Robinette*, 519 U.S. 33 (1996) provided that officers do not have to tell the subject that he or she can refuse the officer the authority to search a vehicle. *Maryland v. Wilson*, 519 U.S. 408, 410 (1997) gave officers the authority to order everyone out of a car even in the absence of a safety issue. These cases provide legitimacy to an officer's stopping and searching a vehicle without a real basis for doing so.

Other case law also supports this assertion: *United States v. Sokolow*, *United States v. Cortez*, and *United States v. Brinoni-Ponce* all support that an officer may make an investigatory stop if the totality of the circumstances leads to a reasonable suspicion that criminal activity is afoot (Pelic, 2003).

Such legal decisions make the identification of biased policing practices more difficult. Scholars criticize the reasonable suspicion analysis for encouraging racial profiling and permitting an officer to stop a vehicle for any reason (Pelic, 2003). Critics complain that this invites racial profiling, because it uses stereotypes and profiles (Harris, 1997). Others contend that racial profiling is not encouraged and certainly not allowed in a reasonable suspicion analysis (Pelic, 2003).

At one time, the Supreme Court permitted race as a factor (Brignoni-Pounce, 422 U.S. at 885). Additional confusion was recently interjected into this bias-based policing issue when the Justice Department adopted a new policy banning racial profiling in all federal law enforcement agencies, except in cases that involve identification of possible terrorism suspects (Justice dept. bars race profiling, 2003). This confusion strongly suggests that the concept of racial profiling remains poorly defined and arbitrarily used.

**Attempts to Define Bias-based Policing**

So much of what we learned in reviewing the work of other researchers is that the data do not support the broad-based conclusions that the findings represent biased policing practices. A number of people perceive bias-based policing to exist on a large scale, but the evidence does not support these perceptions (Kruger, 2002; Melchers, 2003; McMahon et al., 2003). The issue of bias-based policing is confusing to most officers and
to some extent, citizens. During our on-site meetings with police officers, we were often asked, “What do you mean by bias-based policing practices?” This was a legitimate question because most people cannot define bias-based policing (Malti-Douglas, 2002; Smith & Albert, 2002). Racial bias is just one of the many forms of bias. Religious bias, sexual bias, cultural bias, and other forms of bias are also part of the social equation in which police find themselves engulfed.

To add to the confusion, as previously stated, the U.S. Justice Department adopted a new policy banning racial profiling in all federal law enforcement agencies except in cases that involve identification of possible terrorism suspects (Justice dept. bars race profiling. 2003). This raises many questions. Why is it permissible to use race as a discriminator where terrorism is involved and not in other serious crimes? Since September 11, 2001, the arrests and detention of hundreds of people has created considerable controversy. Many of these people would not have been subject to this treatment were it not for ethnic characteristics, and the government has not yet provided evidence linking them to terrorist activities. Furthermore, it is not likely that ethnic profiling will be any more useful or constitutional than racial profiling (Rudovsky, 2002).

Prior to the 1970s, racial prejudice was still the basis for many state and local laws, and many police administrators and police officers argued publicly that racial prejudice was appropriate and reasonable (Engel, Calnon, & Bernard, 2002). Modern research is no longer consistent with earlier research on the extent to which race per se directly influences police decisions (Engel, Calnon, & Bernard, 2002; Sherman, 1980; Zatz, 1987). This recent research suggests that police officers’ behavior is predicated primarily on legal and situation-specific factors, and the influence of race and other extra-legal factors is diminishing (Mastrofski, Worden, & Snipes, 1995; Riksheim & Chermak, 1993; Engel, Calnon, & Bernard, 2002). During our on-site visits with the various departments, we often heard that the officers do not look at race as an issue. They indicated that individual’s behavior was the determining factor for stopping individuals.

Methods

This article describes what we learned about the differences between urban and rural police agencies’ views of bias-based policing in the Commonwealth of Virginia, focusing on a significant research question that we attempted to answer, which was:

**Do rural and urban police agencies differ in the way they deal with biased-based policing or racial profiling?**
To address this question the researchers held focus group meetings with various police departments and conducted a survey of the officers at both urban and rural police departments throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia.

**Development of Police Survey**

The researchers developed an Officer Questionnaire survey instrument based upon the comments and recommendations the officer focus groups provided. The Officer Questionnaire included instructions on completing the survey, general information regarding the project as a whole, and 45 survey questions. We pre-tested the instrument with 50 officers and command staff in the Montgomery (Alabama) Police Department. The research staff, in a meeting with a number of officers and command personnel, reviewed the completed surveys. These meetings were held so the researchers could discuss issues of survey content, question presentation, difficulties in completing the survey, survey instructions, method of distribution and collection of completed surveys, and various other survey process issues. After the pilot test, we made changes, and the survey was prepared for mailing to both urban and rural Virginia police departments. The authors mailed the survey to all police departments in Virginia.

**Urban Police Department Sample**

We mailed 3,437 surveys to seven urban departments. We received 1,265 surveys from these departments, representing a 37% response rate. Respondents to the survey from the urban departments were 87.8% male and 12.2% female. Moreover, 83% reported their race as White, 11.6% as Black, and 5.2% as Other, which included American Indian, Aleut, Eskimo, Asian Pacific Islander, and Other. Respondents included upper level management, mid-level management, and officers. These response rates closely coincide with the demographic breakdown of urban police departments within the Commonwealth of Virginia.

**Rural Police Department Sample**

We classified rural departments as those in areas with a population of 2,000 or less. The rural agencies represented a stratified random sample, which was selected to ensure inclusion of the racial mixture of the Commonwealth’s population. Forty-four rural departments received the police survey. We sent 773 surveys to officers in these 44 rural departments. We received 321 valid survey returns from 24 rural departments, resulting in a 42% response rate.

Respondents to the rurally distributed survey were 82.5% male and 17.5% female. Moreover, 87.5% reported their race as White, 10.9% reported their race as Black, and
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1.5% reported their race in a category that included American Indian, Aleut, Eskimo, Asian Pacific Islander, and Other. Respondents included upper level management, mid-level management, and officers. The number closely corresponded with the demographic breakdown of the rural departments within the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Results

Analyses were run on various police officer survey items to reveal any differences in responses from officers in urban departments compared with officers in rural departments. What follows is a description of those analyses categorized by survey item themes. Chi-square is the statistical measure we used to compare the various responses between officers in the rural and urban departments.

Urban and Rural Officer Demographics

Three percent of urban officers indicated their rank as that of Senior-Level Management (i.e., Chief, Deputy Chief, Major, and Captain), 17.4% indicated a rank of Mid-Level Management (i.e., Lieutenant and Sergeant), and 79.3% indicated a rank at the Officer Level (i.e., Corporal and Officer).

Overall, officers in rural and urban police departments were very similar in gender, age, and race; however, officers in urban departments reported a greater percentage of officers who had obtained more education. Table 1 reflects the educational differences between urban and rural police departments as obtained from our study.

Table 1. Urban and Rural Police Educational Levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Urban (N = 1,233)</th>
<th>Rural (N = 321)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GED</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Diploma</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>27.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed Some College</td>
<td>29.3%</td>
<td>39.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate's Degree</td>
<td>17.8%</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor's Degree</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master's Degree</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did Not Report Education Level</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Comparing Urban and Rural Police Views of Bias-based Policing

Bias-Based Policing Knowledge and Training
When asked to evaluate the bias-based policing training that officers received in Virginia, urban and rural officers responded similarly, with the majority of officers evaluating the training as “average” (57.3% of urban officers, 47.4% of rural officers). It should be noted that somewhat large percentages of officers in both urban and rural departments reported that no bias-based policing training was provided (16.9% and 28.7%, respectively). A number of agencies within Virginia do not provide any form of bias police training, which can account for the large number reporting not having received any training. Manpower shortages in many of the agencies has limited the amount of training; therefore, many newly hired officers have not received this training. In urban departments, responses followed a similar pattern regardless of race with the majority of officers evaluating the training as “average” (57.9% of White officers, 54.5% of Black officers, and 53.1% of Other officers). The difference between White officers and Other officers evaluating the training as “average” and “poor” was significant ($p < .043$). Minority officers in urban departments reported having no bias-based policing training at a higher rate than White officers (24.5% of Black officers, 23.4% of Other officers, and 15.4% of White officers). Officers in rural departments were somewhat impressed with the quality of their training with 48.4% of White officers, 40% of Black officers, and 40% of Other officers rating the training as “average,” and 21.7% of White officers and 22.9% of Black officers rating it as “excellent.” As with urban departments, minorities in rural departments reported receiving no training at a higher rate (23.1% for White officers, 34.3% for Black officers, and 60% for Other officers).

Officers were asked whether all supervisors were required to attend training to assist them in identifying officers and staff who might be engaging in bias-based policing practices. In response to this question, the majority of both urban and rural officers (50.4% and 51.1%, respectively) reported that they did not know. A greater percentage of urban officers (37.8%) compared with rural officers (26.5%) responded affirmatively, and a greater percentage of rural officers (21.8%) compared with urban officers (10.3%) responded negatively. In urban departments, 42.1% of Senior-Level Management, 49.3% of Mid-Level Management, and 35.1% of Officers answered affirmatively. A significant difference between the affirmative responses of management and officers were found in urban departments ($p < .000$). In rural departments, 44.8% of Senior-Level Management, 29.1% of Mid-Level Management, and 23.7% of Officers answered affirmatively. A significant difference between affirmative responses among management and officers were found in rural departments ($p < .000$). These findings suggest that urban departments provide more in-service training, specifically to officers and middle managers than do rural agencies. Because all officers are required to attend academy training, the
initial training for officers is equal throughout the state. However, it is common for rural agencies to have less access to in-service training in comparison with their urban counterparts due to such issues as financing and officer scheduling. Additional efforts need to be extended to ensure that all command staff receive such training.

Nearly half (44.5%) of rural officers reported that they believed that more bias-based policing training should be required in their department compared with only 28.8% of officers in urban departments who felt similarly. In urban departments, White officers were less likely (22.3%) to indicate that more training should be required in comparison with minority officers (77% for Black officers and 42.6% for Other officers). This difference was significant between White officers and both Black and Other officers ($p < .000$ and $p < .006$, respectively). In rural departments, similar results were found (43.2% for White officers, 68.8% for Black officers, and 80% for Other officers). The difference between Black and White officers was significant ($p < .006$).

This desire for additional training on bias-based policing by rural officers is not surprising given the larger percentage of rural officers, compared with urban officers, who reported that such training was not available in their departments. In fact, compare this report with that of many officers from urban departments, who during focus group meetings, expressed to the researchers that they had more bias-based police training over the last few years than they wanted and they did not want to attend any more training on the issue. These officers indicated that bias-based policing is excessively discussed and they did not feel that further training would make a difference. Such comments suggest at least three alternatives: (1) the issue of bias-based policing is resolved; (2) some officers have received sufficient training on this issue, as it is provided currently; or (3) continued training for these officers would provide little added benefit. Because the first alternative has yet to be accomplished, the second and third alternatives remain. The comments of those officers in urban departments who indicate they have received sufficient training suggest the need for departments to support training on policies, supervision, and police culture. That training should emphasize a zero tolerance for police bias. Further, instruction should include more robust training on police bias and not be limited to issues of cultural diversity and racial profiling. Training alone achieves only so much toward addressing bias-based policing. Training is not always the answer, nor is it ever the final solution. Proper management must lead, or training serves no purpose.

Bias-Based Policing Policies and Practices

More officers in urban areas (62.7%) reported that their department has a written bias-based policing policy compared with officers in rural areas (48%). In urban departments, 84.2% of Senior-Level Management, 78.6% of Mid-Level Management, and 58.4% of
Officers answered affirmatively. A significant difference in affirmative responses between management and officers was found in urban departments ($p < .000$). In rural departments, 51.7% of Senior-Level Management, 55.7% of Mid-Level Management, and 45.9% of Officers answered affirmatively with a significant difference between upper management and officers ($p < .015$) and middle management and officers ($p < .021$) in rural departments.

Two important issues to consider regarding the responses to this question: (1) it is obvious that there is confusion among the ranks as to whether a policy exists; and (2) fewer rural departments have bias-based policing policies in place compared with their urban counterparts. It should be understood that these two conditions are not unique to the Commonwealth of Virginia. These shortcomings exist throughout the police profession. The senior researchers have discovered such discrepancies in numerous police agencies. This, however, does not mitigate the condition but further demonstrates the need for all departments to have policies on bias-based policing, for improved training in departmental policies, and for enhanced efforts to ensure that rural and urban agencies receive the requisite training needed for a modern police agency.

When asked how written policies were shared with departmental members, the majority of urban officers (52%) reported that policies were shared through training. This percentage is more than twice the percentage of rural officers (20.9%) reporting similarly. Conversely, the most popular method of training reported by rural officers was the distribution of the written bias-based policing policy with officers’ signatures indicating proof of training (27.1%). Only 18.6% of urban officers indicated that their departments used this method.

It is not unexpected that the majority of rural departments do not have a written bias-based policing policy. In fact, it is encouraging that so many do, as rural departments can be as small as one or two officers, and they are frequently resource-poor. Both rural and urban departments need to provide such policies to their officers so officers are made aware of the department's position on bias-based policing and thoroughly trained on the policy and its implementation. Further, while it is not surprising that rural departments rely on distribution of the policy with the officers' signature as proof of training more frequently than urban agencies, it does not negate the poor training standard such a method produces.

Urban and rural officers differed in the percentage of officers who indicated that they believe officers in their department currently practice bias-based policing. Twenty-three percent of urban officers compared with 13.7% of rural officers indicated they believe such practices exist in their departments. It should be noted that 41.4% of urban respondents and 59.2% of rural respondents reported that they do not believe that officers in their departments practice bias-based policing. In urban departments, a greater percentage of
minorities reported believing bias-based policing is practiced in their department: 20.2% of White officers, 41.3% of Black officers, and 26.6% of Other officers answered “Yes.” White and Black officers in urban departments differ significantly ($p < .000$) in response to this question. In rural departments, a similar trend occurs with 12.8% of White officers, 20% of Black officers, and 20% of Other officers answering “Yes.” White and Black officers in rural departments also differ significantly ($p < .014$) in response to this question.

In urban departments, 34.2% of Senior-Level Management, 15.8% of Mid-Level Management, and 24% of Officers reported that they believe officers in their department currently practice bias-based policing. Significant differences between Mid-Level Management and Officers were found in urban departments ($p < .001$) and between Mid- and Senior-Level Management ($p < .022$). In rural departments, 24.1% of Senior-Level Management, 13.9% of Mid-Level Management, and 12.1% of Officers answered affirmatively. Significant differences between upper management and officers ($p < .000$) and middle management and officers ($p < .011$) were found in rural departments.

It is of interest to note that in both urban and rural departments, managers were more likely to report that they believed officers in their departments currently practice bias-based policing than were officers. Certainly, there is a disconnect between officer perceptions and management perceptions, especially at the senior management level. There could be any number of reasons for this disconnect between management and officers; however, such a variance strongly suggests the need for additional research in this area.

Differences between rural and urban officers were also found when officers reported the extent to which they believed bias-based policing was an issue for their departments. Specifically, 21.2% of urban officers reported that bias-based policing was “somewhat” of an issue and 2.4% reported that it was a “serious” issue for their department. Only 11.5% of rural officers reported that bias-based policing was “somewhat” of an issue and 0.9% reported that it was a “serious” issue for their department. Collectively, 23.6% of urban officers compared with only 12.4% of rural officers reported that bias-based policing was at least “somewhat” of an issue for their department. In urban departments, 17.2% of White officers, 49% of Black officers, and 23.4% of Other officers reported bias-based policing was at least “somewhat” of an issue for their department. Officers of all races in urban departments differed significantly ($p$-values ranged from .000 to .002) in indicating that bias-based policing is “not an issue” or “somewhat” of an issue. In rural departments, 8.2% of White officers, 37.1% of Black officers, and 20% of Other officers reported bias-based policing as at least “somewhat” of an issue. White officers differed significantly from both Black ($p < .000$) and Other ($p < .035$) officers in rural departments. The lack of adequate in-service training on bias-based policing practices might account, in part, for the large disparity between White and Black officers.
In urban departments, 39.5% of Senior-Level Management, 20.9% of Mid-Level Management, and 20.4% of Officers reported bias-based policing as at least “somewhat” of an issue for their department. Officers differed significantly from Senior-Level Management ($p < .014$) and Mid-Level Management ($p < .023$), and Senior-Level Management differed significantly from Mid-Level Management in urban and rural departments ($p$-values ranged from .028 to .046) in response to this question. In rural departments, 17.2% of Senior-Level Management, 6.3% of Mid-Level Management, and 12.6% of Officers reported bias-based policing as at least “somewhat” of an issue. In rural departments, Senior-Level Management differed significantly from Mid-Level Management ($p < .046$) in response to this question.

Several reasons are likely why, overall, rural officers perceive the issue of bias-based policing to be less of a problem for a department compared with their urban counterparts. It could simply be due to the fact that fewer minorities actually live in many of these jurisdictions; hence, the issue does not present itself on a regular basis. It is also generally believed that small police agencies have a closer relationship with citizens in their jurisdictions, especially sheriffs’ offices. The office of sheriff is, with few exceptions, an elected office. Also, many smaller departments hire locals who have grown up in the area and know the people they serve. Finally, additional research efforts designed to understand better the relationships between the police and the public in urban and rural areas and how these relationships effect police services would be valuable to both urban and rural agencies.

In urban departments, 34.2% of Senior-Level Management, 26% of Mid-Level Management, and 25.6% of Officers answered affirmatively. In rural departments, 31.4% of Senior-Level Management, 23.8% of Mid-Level Management, and 21% of Officers answered affirmatively.

Twenty-six percent of urban officers and 25.5% of rural officers reported that they believe that officers in other Virginia police departments practice bias-based policing. It should be noted that the majority of officers responding to this question in both urban and rural departments indicated that they did not know whether officers in other departments practice bias-based policing (59.7% and 60.7%, respectively). Furthermore, only 12.7% of urban and 11.8% of rural officers responded definitively that such practices do not occur in other Virginia police departments. In urban departments, Black officers were much more likely to report that other departments practice bias-based policing (24.1% for White officers, 40.6% for Black officers, and 23.4% for Other officers). Significant differences between Black officers and White officers ($p < .000$) and Black officers and Other officers were found ($p < .009$). In rural departments, responses by race were more similar with 25.6% of White officers, 25.7% of Black officers, and 20% of Other officers answering affirmatively. In urban departments, 34.2% of Senior-Level Management, 26% of Mid-Level Management, and 25.6% of Officers answered affirmatively. In rural departments,
31% of Senior-Level Management, 31.6% of Mid-Level Management, and 22.2% of Officers answered affirmatively.

While the majority of both urban and rural officers reported that they had not witnessed bias-based policing activities by other officers in their department (81.5% and 88.5%, respectively), 16.5% of urban officers and 9.7% of rural officers reported having witnessed such activities. In urban departments, Black officers reported witnessing bias-based policing at the highest rate (36.6%) followed by Other officers (20.3%) and White officers (13.8%). Black and White officers differed significantly ($p < .000$) in response to this question. In rural departments, Other officers reported witnessing bias-based policing at the highest rate (40%) followed by Black officers (17.6%) and White officers (8.3%). In urban departments, 7.9% of Senior-Level Management, 13% of Mid-Level Management, and 17.9% of Officers answered affirmatively. In rural departments, 25% of Senior-Level Management, 10.1% of Mid-Level Management, and 6.9% of Officers answered affirmatively. These data clearly suggest that bias-based policing exists within the Commonwealth of Virginia.

While it is relatively easy to ignore statements by individual and group outsiders regarding the presence of bias-based policing in the Commonwealth of Virginia, the reports of such concerns by organizational insiders are not as easily dismissed. It is important, however, to keep in mind those officer responses could be limited to a single incident, and/or any number of respondents could be referring to the same incident. For this reason, it is not possible to determine with accuracy precise numbers or percentages of perceived or reported witnessing of bias-based policing by officers in Virginia.

Urban and rural officers were very similar in their response when asked whether they ever avoided taking necessary action due to concerns that it would be perceived as bias-based policing behavior. More than 70% of both urban and rural officers reported that they “never” avoided taking necessary action (76.5% and 74.8%, respectively). Surprisingly, 19.3% of urban officers and 19% of rural officers responded that they “sometimes” avoided taking necessary action, and 2.1% of urban and 1.9% of rural officers responded that they “always” avoided taking necessary action that might be perceived as bias-based policing. In urban departments, 75.3% of White officers, 86% of Black officers, and 73.4% of Other officers indicated that they never avoided taking necessary action due to perceptions of bias. White officers differed significantly from both Black and Other officers on all three possible responses with $p$-values ranging from .001 to .003. In rural departments, 74.6% of White officers, 77.1% of Black officers, and 60% of Other officers responded that they never avoided taking necessary action due to perceptions of bias. White officers and Black officers differed significantly ($p < .047$) when comparing those who responded “never”.

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Discovering that officers avoided taking necessary action in urban and rural areas because they were concerned that it would be perceived as bias-based behavior is a serious issue for the police and the communities they serve that must not be ignored. Interestingly, this fear was present regardless of officer race. A number of White, Black, and Other officers reported that there were times when they avoided taking necessary action due to a concern that it would be perceived as bias-based behavior. Departments and communities must realize the effect of their decisions in declaring certain police actions as biased-based, address possible negative outcomes, and make informed decisions on how best to deal with unwanted results.

**Enforcement of Bias-Based Policing Policies**

Among those respondents who said their department has a bias-based policing policy, considerable percentages of both urban and rural officers reported that bias-based policing policies were enforced in their departments, although they are less vigorously enforced in rural departments compared with urban departments. Specifically, 35% of urban officers reported that such policies are “somewhat” enforced and 36.6% reported that policies are “vigorously” enforced. This results in 71.6% of officers in urban areas reporting that bias-based policies are at least “somewhat” enforced. In rural departments, 23.1% of officers reported that such policies are “somewhat” enforced and 32.7% reported that policies are “vigorously” enforced. This results in 55.8% of officers reporting that such policies are at least “somewhat” enforced.

In urban departments, 34.3% of White officers, 39.9% of Black officers, and 35.9% of Other officers indicated that such policies are “somewhat” enforced, while 39.8% of White officers, 22.4% of Black officers, and 17.2% of Other officers reported that they were “vigorously” enforced. Significant differences were found between all racial groups with p-values ranging from .000 for “somewhat” enforced to .039 for “vigorously” enforced. In rural departments, 21% of White officers, 37.5 of Black officers, and 40% of Other officers reported that such policies are “somewhat” enforced while 35.6% of White officers, 11.4% of Black officers, and 20% of Other officers indicated they are “vigorously” enforced. Significant differences were found between White and Black officers and Black and Other officers with p-values ranging from .005 for “somewhat” enforced to .024 for “vigorously” enforced.

In urban departments, 21.1% of Senior-Level Management, 35.5% of Mid-Level Management, and 35.9% of Officers indicated that such policies are “somewhat” enforced while 63.2% of Senior-Level Management, 48.8% of Mid-Level Management, and 32.9% of Officers reported that they were “vigorously” enforced. Significant differences were found between officers and management reporting that policies are “somewhat” and
“vigorously” enforced with $p$-values ranging from .000 to .001. In rural departments, 13.8% of Senior-Level Management, 21.5% of Mid-Level Management, and 25.1% of Officers indicated that such policies are “somewhat” enforced while 48.3% of Senior-Level Management, 34.2% of Mid-Level Management, and 30.9% of Officers reported that they were “vigorously” enforced.

It is interesting to note that managers, overall, believe that policies are enforced more than officers do. The important point is that officers at all levels should report that policies are vigorously enforced. From an organizational perspective, there is no legitimate reason to have a policy that is not enforced.

To assess departmental support of bias-based policing practices, officers were also asked whether their department supports such practices unofficially. While the majority of both urban officers (55.9%) and rural officers (48.3%) responded negatively, 12.1% of urban and 15.9% of rural officers indicated that their department does support such practices unofficially, and 30.2% of urban and 33.6% of rural officers reported that they do not know whether their department supports bias-based policing practices. In urban departments, 11.2% of White officers, 16.8% of Black officers, and 15.6% of Other officers answered affirmatively. White officers differed significantly from Black and Other officers collectively ($p < .000$). In rural departments, 15.3% of White officers, 22.9% of Black officers, 0% of Other officers answered affirmatively. White officers and Black officers differed significantly ($p < .041$) in affirmative response to this question. In urban departments, 2.6% of Senior-Level Management, 7.9% of Mid-Level Management, and 13.4% of Officers answered this question affirmatively. Significant differences were found between officers and both levels of management combined who answered affirmatively ($p < .000$). In rural departments, 13.8% of Senior-Level Management, 20.3% of Mid-Level Management, and 15% of Officers answered this question affirmatively. Significant differences were found between officers and upper management ($p < .000$).

The finding that both urban and rural officers at all levels reported that bias-based policing is supported unofficially is discouraging. The fact that it was reported in substantial numbers in both areas by officers and both levels of management is further distressing. It is perhaps most disappointing to find that both levels of management reported that unofficial support exists as they perceive the condition. Certainly, this is an issue needing further research.

When asked whether they believed that any Virginia police department officially supports bias-based policing, 11.6% of responding urban officers and 14.3% of rural officers answered “Yes,” 47.7% of urban and 44.2% of rural answered “No,” and 38.9% of urban and 40.2% of rural indicated that they did not know. In urban departments, 10.8% of White officers, 18.2% of Black officers, and 9.4% of Other officers answered affirmatively.
White officers differed significantly from both Black ($p < .000$) and Other ($p < .001$) officers in response to this question. In rural departments, 13.2% of White officers, 22.9% of Black officers, and 29% of Other officers answered affirmatively. White and Black officers differed significantly ($p < .045$) in response to this question. In urban departments, 2.6% of Senior-Level Management, 9.3% of Mid-Level Management, and 12.4% of Officers answered this question affirmatively. Significant differences were found between officers and management with $p$-values ranging from .000 to .005. In rural departments, 27.6% of Senior-Level Management, 12.7% of Mid-Level Management, and 13.5% of Officers answered this question affirmatively.

It is troublesome that officers at all levels in both urban and rural areas reported that they “believe that any Virginia police department officially supports bias-based policing.” As with other questions in the survey, these responses do not allow for precise clarification of the issues at hand. They do, however, present a heretofore unsubstantiated view of bias-based policing conditions.

As non-supervisory police officers, survey respondents were asked what they would do if they witnessed an officer engaging in bias-based policing practices. In rural departments, 24.6% of White officers, 34.3% of Black officers, and 0% of Other officers indicated that they would “talk to the officer,” 29.9% of White officers, 25.7% of Black officers, and 80% of Other officers indicated that they would “report the officer’s behavior to a supervisor,” 1.1% of White officers, 2.9% of Black officers, and 0% of Other officers indicated that they would “ignore the incident,” 0.4% of White officers, 0% of Black officers, and 0% of Other officers indicated that they would “report the incident only if it occurs again,” and 7.1% of White officers, 8.6% of Black officers, and 0% of Other officers indicated that they were “not sure what they would do.”

Black officers and Other officers collectively differed significantly when comparing those who would “talk to the officer” to those who would “ignore the incident” ($p < .046$) and those who would “report the officer’s behavior to a supervisor” to those who would “report the incident only if it occurs again” ($p < .015$).

Table 2 depicts management’s response to this question for both urban and rural agencies surveyed.

Responses between urban and rural departments indicate the need for the same actions discussed in the previous section regarding this issue: Efforts need to be extended to train officers and supervisors in urban and rural departments better on actions they should take when they observe bias-based policing practices.
Table 2. Management Response to Witnessed Bias-based Policing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>Rural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mid-Level Management (N = 214)</td>
<td>Senior Management (N = 33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counsel</td>
<td>24.7%</td>
<td>18.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommend Training</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduct Formal Investigation</td>
<td>38.1%</td>
<td>63.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ignore</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Sure</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question Not Applicable</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did Not Respond</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Urban and rural officers differed in their responses to a question regarding their beliefs on the treatment of minority individuals by minority officers. Significant differences were found between all three racial groups with p-values ranging from .000 to .002. In rural departments, 11% of White officers, 34.3% of Black officers, and 40% of Other officers reported that they believe minority officers are more fair in dealing with minorities. Only the difference between White and Black officers in rural departments was significant (p < .000). In urban departments, 10.5% of Senior-Level Management, 6% of Mid-Level Management, and 11.5% of Officers answered affirmatively. A significant difference (p < .000) between Officers and Mid-Level Management was found. In rural departments, 17.2% of Senior-Level Management, 16.5% of Mid-Level Management, and 12.6% of Officers answered affirmatively.

Interestingly, the issue of officer fairness was not perceived by officers in the focus groups to be problematic. This might be because most White officers do not perceive a difference in treatment. Of course, what occurs in the mind of an individual officer is known only to him or her, and the true underlying reason for an officer’s action is, similarly, known only to that officer. Further, officers often work alone and do not observe their fellow officers in all enforcement situations.

Black and White officers agreed in officer focus groups that Black officers were often treated more harshly by Black citizens than were their White counterparts. Black officers reported that they believed that to be true because Black citizens would ask for consideration (i.e., non-enforcement action on the part of the Black officer).
consideration was not forthcoming, some Black citizens would berate the officer with racial epithets and slurs in expression of their anger toward the officer for “not helping a brother out.” Needless to say, such behavior on the part of Black citizens toward Black officers is injurious to the officer’s concept of self and often difficult for the officer to understand. In our discussions with officers, it was clear that regardless of their race, they were there to help both members and non-members of their race. For both Black and White officers, accusations of bias or verbal criticism for performing their job to protect citizens, while seen as a part of the job, was nonetheless hurtful.

There is another aspect to a question that asks, “Do you believe that minority officers are more fair in their dealings with minorities?” Such a question has a potential inherent bias-based policing factor. For example, if Black or Other officers grant requests for special consideration from members of their own race, is this not bias-based policing? Is such a situation any different from a White officer granting a similar request from a White citizen? Any number of acceptable or unacceptable reasons might sway the officer’s decision not to enforce the law, and it is likely that others will never know that reason. Furthermore, it is unlikely that everyone would agree with the reason the officer gives for not enforcing the law in a particular situation. The reader should consider these issues when assessing the responses to this question.

The officers’ response to this question suggests the following: (1) follow-up research on this subject is needed for a better understanding of the issue of bias-based policing when officers deal with members of their own race; (2) training on bias-based policing should address the issue of minority bias-based policing, considering that the criminal justice literature is essentially silent on this issue; and, (3) in the end, citizens must rely on the integrity of their officers to act within the law but also be compassionate without the fear of being labeled biased.

Bias-Based Police Data Collection and Distribution

The survey revealed differences between rural and urban officers’ beliefs regarding bias-based policing data collection. Specifically, 42.1% of rural officers reported that they believe that the police should collect bias-based policing data compared with only 26.4% of urban officers reporting similar beliefs. Several explanations are possible for this difference between urban and rural officers. It is likely that officers in rural departments in Virginia are less concerned about the time or funds needed to accomplish the data collection task. It also is likely that officers in rural departments have not had the experience with data collections issues or media implications nor are they aware of the methodological failings and resultant problems that data collection has caused for larger departments. However, regardless of the actual reasons for this discrepancy, it is possible
that requiring officers to collect bias-based policing data would meet less resistance in rural areas of the Commonwealth of Virginia.

In urban departments, 23.3% of White officers, 49% of Black officers, and 25% of Other officers reported that they believe the police should collect such data. Significant differences were found between White officers and Black officers ($p < .000$) and between Black officers and Other officers ($p < .002$) in rural departments. In urban departments, 40.2% of White officers, 57.1% of Black officers, and 40% of Other officers reported believing that the police should collect such data. Only the difference between White and Black officers’ responses was significant ($p < .018$) in rural departments.

In urban departments, 34.2% of Senior-Level Management, 30.7% of Mid-Level Management, and 25.2% of Officers answered affirmatively. A significant difference ($p < .013$) between officers and middle management was found. In rural departments, 51.7% of Senior-Level Management, 49.4% of Mid-Level Management, and 38.2% of Officers answered affirmatively.

When posed with the question of whether they believed that the police department shares information openly with the public, 65% of urban officers responded favorably compared with 57% of rural officers responding similarly. In urban departments, 68.2% of White officers, 50.3% of Black officers, and 45.3% of Other officers believed that the police share information openly. Significant differences were found between White officers and both Black and Other officers ($p < .000$ and $p < .001$, respectively). In rural departments, 60.1% of White officers, 37.1% of Black officers, and 20% of Other officers believed that the police department shares information openly with the public. A significant difference was found between White officers and Black officers ($p < .018$).

In urban departments, 86.8% of Senior-Level Management, 79.1% of Mid-Level Management, and 61% of Officers believed that the police department shares information openly with the public. A significant difference was found between officers and management ($p < .000$ and $p < .004$). In rural departments, 58.6% of Senior-Level Management, 67.1% of Mid-Level Management, and 53.1% of Officers answered affirmatively. A significant difference was found between officers and middle management ($p < .027$).

Small differences were found among rural and urban police officers on the topic of their beliefs regarding the media’s honest portrayal of bias-based policing incidents. Specifically, the majority of both urban (79.6%) and rural officers (68.2%) reported that they believe the media is not honest in the portrayal of such incidents. Similarly, 6.9% and 8.7%, respectively, reported that they believed the media was honest, but a larger percentage of rural (22.4%) compared with urban officers (11.9%) indicated that they did not know. It is clear that even in the rural areas of Virginia, a large number of police officers at all levels do not think that the media is honest in their portrayal of bias-based
policing incidents. In urban departments, only 6.4% of White officers, 11.2% of Black officers, and 4.7% of Other officers believed the media portrays bias-based policing incidents honestly. A significant difference \( (p < .002) \) was found between White and Black officers responding to this question. In rural departments, only 6.8% of White officers, 25.7% of Black officers, and 0% of Other officers believed the media portrays bias-based policing incidents honestly. A significant difference \( (p < .000) \) was found between White and Black officers responding to this question. In urban departments, 10.5% of Senior-Level Management, 7% of Mid-Level Management, and 6.7% of Officers believed that the media portrays bias-based policing incidents honestly. A significant difference \( (p < .013) \) between officers and middle management was found. In rural departments, 0% of Senior-Level Management, 10.1% of Mid-Level Management, and 9.7% of Officers answered affirmatively.

Despite the small differences between urban and rural officers on the topic of the media and their portrayal of bias-based policing incidents, the majority of both urban (83.2%) and rural (76%) officers reported that they believed that the police department should hold the media and other members of the community responsible for the dissemination of misinformation. Perhaps more surprising than the fact that the vast majority of officers at all levels believe that the media and other members of the community should be responsible for the dissemination of misinformation is the fact that some officers (34%) do not believe that the media and other members of the community should be held to a similar standard as the police.

*Police Officers Working Cooperatively With the Community*

When asked whether they believed it would be possible for community members to openly discuss racial issues, urban and rural officers responded similarly: 56% of urban and 57.6% of rural officers indicated that they believed it would be possible. This finding was somewhat of a surprise to the researchers. It was originally thought by some that officers in rural areas would find it easier than officers in urban areas to address issues in an open manner. It is generally held that small rural communities are more sociable and friendlier and that people know one another throughout the community; however, it is also held that rural areas are less integrated, more isolated and closed, and generally conservative. Further, many rural communities also have a legacy of discrimination and racial bias. Finally, individuals living in rural areas are less likely to encounter other cultures and beliefs on a regular basis. Quite simply, when the issue of race is raised, regardless of location, it can be a highly sensitive issue. This, again, suggests that rural and urban communities have similar problems with regard to racial issues and their ability
to discuss such issues openly. Of course, the good news is that the majority of officers in both urban and rural areas believe that such discussions can occur.

In urban departments, 56% of White officers, 55.9% of Black officers, and 56.3% of Other officers believed that it is possible for members of the community to discuss racial issues honestly and openly. In rural departments, 57.7% of White officers, 57.1% of Black officers, and 60% of Other officers answered affirmatively to this question. In urban departments, 60.5% of Senior-Level Management, 62.8% of Mid-Level Management, and 54.4% of Officers answered affirmatively. A significant difference \( (p < .003) \) between officers and middle management was found. In rural departments, 65.5% of Senior-Level Management, 60.8% of Mid-Level Management, and 55.6% of Officers answered affirmatively. Interestingly, officers in both urban and rural communities were more convinced than upper level managers that such discourse could occur.

Regarding police officers and community members working cooperatively to develop workable solutions to address a bias-based policing problem, 69.3% of urban officers, compared with 76% of rural officers, indicated that they believed this would be possible. Moreover, a similar percentage of urban (28.1%) and rural (23.7%) officers indicated that they did not know or believe that working cooperatively on such an issue would be possible. Rural officers did show a slightly stronger belief that a cooperative effort between the police and the community would result in a successful outcome. It is encouraging to note that in both urban and rural settings, the police generally agree that cooperation would be successful.

In urban departments, 70.4% of White officers, 69.2% of Black officers, and 53.1% of Other officers answered affirmatively to this question. There was a significant difference between the responses of Other officers and both White \( (p < .001) \) and Black \( (p < .011) \) officers. In rural departments, 75.4% of White officers, 80% of Black officers, and 80% of Other officers answered affirmatively to this question. In urban departments, 89.5% of Senior-Level Management, 80.5% of Mid-Level Management, and 66.2% of Officers answered affirmatively. A significant difference \( (p < .013) \) between Officers and Mid-Level Management was found. In rural departments, 89.7% of Senior-Level Management, 75.9% of Mid-Level Management, and 75.4% of Officers answered affirmatively.

**Summary and Conclusion**

In summary, analysis of the survey responses from officers in rural departments compared with officers in urban departments highlighted some noteworthy differences.

First, officers in rural departments, compared with officers in urban departments, reported receiving less bias-based training and were less likely to report that their departments had a written bias-based policing policy. Rural department officers,
compared with their urban colleagues, reported a desire to have additional bias-based policing training and policies developed within their departments with greater frequency.

Second, a larger percentage of urban officers, compared with rural officers, reported that they believed that bias-based policing was an issue for their departments. Despite this difference, both urban and rural officers appear to hold similar beliefs regarding the presence of bias-based policing in other Virginia police departments, which is that it does occur.

Third, rural officers, compared with urban officers, appear more inclined to believe that police departments should collect data on bias-based policing incidents. This finding could be indicative of workload differences between urban and rural departments or officer experiences with bias-based policing issues.

Finally, chi-square analyses revealed significant differences between management and officers in response to several of the survey questions. These differences were more profound between mid-level management and officers. Significant differences were also found among White, Black, and Other officers in regard to issues such as the existence of training, whether more training should be required, the practice of bias-based policing in Virginia, and cooperation between the police and the community. Moreover, as with the differences among the police ranks, the disparity in perceptions among the races is just as great. While some of this disparity could be attributed to experience and culture, these findings indicate that more training and research on the bias-based policing issue is needed.

In reviewing the works of other researchers, it becomes clear that much more research is necessary if we are ever to gain a true perspective of bias-based policing issues in the United States. The research to date focuses on statistics and citizen reports. While we found surveys intended to assess actions police chiefs have taken to alleviate bias-policing practices (Fridell et al., 2001), we were unable to find any survey intended to measure the officers’ perspective. In addition, the research to date focuses on traffic stops and ignores other critical tasks officers perform daily where bias policing would have a much bigger effect on police-community relations.

Most of the research completed to date focuses on Blacks and proclaimed police bias. Hispanics also claim to experience a disproportionate number of stops. Hispanics fall within a unique category. Hispanics are more favorable toward police than are Blacks but less favorable than Whites (Dunham & Alpert, 2001; Weitzer & Tuch, 2002; Carter, 1983; Cheurprakobkit, 2000). As was learned during our on-site reviews with the various departments, the Hispanic population within the Commonwealth of Virginia is growing at a rapid rate. Hispanics are the fastest growing group in the U.S and represent the largest minority in the U.S. The U.S. Census bureau reports 1.7 million Black Hispanics and 36.3 million White-Hispanics (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002). These growing Hispanic populations
have differing effects on bias-based policing issues. A recent study looked at how Black Hispanics and White Hispanics view racial profiling, and the researchers found important race/ethnic differences. Black Hispanics were more likely to believe that racial profiling was widespread, and that they were racially profiled more than were white Hispanics (Rice, Reitzel, & Piquero, 2004). The Rice et al. research suggests the necessity to carefully look at Black Hispanics and White Hispanics and compare their opinions with that of Black non-Hispanic and White non-Hispanics.

Another significant issue the authors found is that research tends to focus on police and ignores, almost entirely, the potential for other biased criminal justice practices among District Attorneys, the Courts, and Corrections officers. During our on-site focus group meetings, many of the legitimate concerns raised were not incidents of bias-based policing but pertained to actions of the District Attorney or the judge. The authors recommend that future research projects explore bias-based actions of these components of the criminal justice system.

Finally, Virginia is considered part of the southern region of the United States. The authors believe similar studies in other parts of the country could prove significant.

Note
1. Harris points out that Blacks constitute 13% of the United States’ drug users; 37% of those arrested on drug charges; 55% of those convicted; and 74% of all drug offenders sentenced to prison (1999).

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Comparing Urban and Rural Police Views of Bias-based Policing


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