THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES
(Wave 2)

By: **Cynthia Lum, Carl Maupin,** and **Megan Stoltz**

June 25, 2020

A joint report between the International Association of Chiefs of Police and the Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy, George Mason University

COVID-19 has had significant impacts on all facets of everyday life. Within only three months, the U.S. reached a grim milestone of more than 100,000 deaths attributed to the disease. To document the unfolding impacts of COVID-19 specifically on law enforcement agencies and public safety, the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) and the Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy (CEBCP) at George Mason University began a partnership in March 2020 to administer a multi-wave survey.

The first wave of the survey was implemented on March 25, 2020, and asked agencies to describe their challenges and concerns with the COVID-19 pandemic as of March 23, 2020, during the rapidly rising death rate and increasing implementation of stay-at-home orders. The findings from Wave 1 are located here: https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/IACP-GMU%20Survey.pdf. The second wave of the survey (reported here) was administered on May 12, 2020, asking agencies to respond to questions **as of May 10, 2020**. At that time, the number of deaths from COVID-19 was declining, and many states had just begun to relax their stay-at-home orders. New questions were added to the survey, and some previous questions were amended, given the rapidly evolving environment presented by COVID. A total of **1,141 valid agency responses** were received during Wave 2 (see survey methodology appendix). A third wave of the survey is planned for later this summer, which will take into account the impacts of the nationwide protests for police reform, increases in travel and social gatherings, as well as new upticks in COVID-19 infections.

CHANGES IN CALLS FOR POLICE SERVICE

In Wave 1, we noted that a majority of responding agencies had experienced reductions in their overall calls for service in March, compared to prior months. For the Wave 2 survey, we asked agencies about trends in specific categories of calls. Table 1 shows responding agency assessments of their overall levels of calls for service, as well as calls specifically for violence, domestic-related incidents, commercial burglaries, traffic crashes and fatalities, and calls related to people in mental distress during April 2020, compared to trends for that agency in April 2019. **One-third of agencies indicated that overall calls for service were substantially lower in April 2020 compared to April 2019 (by more than 20%).** However, this was not the case for all types of calls. Notably, **42% of responding agencies experienced increases in domestic incidents, and 47% experienced increases in calls related to people in mental distress.**

Table 1. Percent of responding agencies (N=1,141) experiencing an increase or decrease in certain types of events during the month of April 2020 compared levels in April 2019.

	Increase	Stable	Decrease
Overall calls for service	8%	16%	76%
Domestic incidents (violent and non-violent)	42%	37%	20%
Violence	14%	41%	45%
Commercial burglaries	16%	45%	38%
Traffic crashes and fatalities	6%	25%	68%
Calls related to mental distress	47%	40%	12%

CHANGES TO AGENCY OPERATIONS

The Wave 2 survey continued to show that COVID-19 had substantially changed law enforcement agency operations. As of May 10th:

- **95%** of responding agencies had provided patrol officers with formal written criteria and guidance specific to the COVID-19 crisis on how to respond to calls for service in person. **85%** of agencies had also provided formal guidance to detectives on how to modify their investigative activities.

- **70%** of responding agencies were responding to at least 10% (if not more) of dispatched calls by telephone, internet, or videoconference, rather than in person. **22%** of responding agencies were handling more than 30% of calls remotely.

A substantial reduction in the use of arrest and jail intake had already occurred by Wave 1 and continued into Wave 2. As of May 10th:

- **72%** of responding agencies had formally and officially mandated their officers to reduce the use of physical arrests for minor offenses (this finding was similar at Wave 1).

- **73%** of responding agencies noted that the jail or correctional facility that intakes agency arrestees had restricted the types of arrestees they would intake (e.g., misdemeanants or those who appeared ill) because of COVID-19. This was up from the 65% of agencies who noted this during Wave 1.

Although slightly down from the trends reported in Wave 1, a substantial proportion of agencies continued to limit their proactive and community engagement activities as of May 10th (we note that 3-4% of the 1,141 agencies in this sample did not respond to these questions):

- **53%** of responding agencies continued to formally limit self-initiated or proactive enforcement behaviors (traffic or pedestrian stops), which was less than in Wave 1 (61%).

- **64%** had continued to formally limit community-oriented policing activities, also less than in Wave 1 (73%).

By early April, at least 42 states in the U.S. had implemented stay-at-home orders, most of which did not start expiring until May.[1] This meant that many jurisdictions in April might have had to contend with enforcing physical distancing and stay-at-home regulations for businesses and individuals. As of May 10th:

- **39%** of responding agencies (similar to Wave 1) had adopted formal policies to proactively increase community presence at certain places, specifically in response to new COVID-19 challenges (grocery stores, hospitals, or other public spaces).

- **63%** of responding agencies had provided formal criteria and guidance for officers about enforcing physical distancing regulations (this was a new question in the Wave 2 survey).

Given these significant changes in both agency operations and crime, we asked agencies about their communication activities with the public:

- **19%** of responding agencies had led an official press conference specifically addressing law enforcement activities and concerns of COVID-19.

- **66%** of responding agencies had not significantly changed their use of social media to communicate with the public, while **27%** had increased their use of social media because of COVID.

- **79%** of agencies rated themselves as "excellent" or "good" in their ability to answer the community's questions and concerns about COVID-19 with confidence (similar to Wave 1).
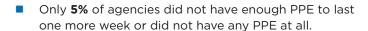
We continued to ask agencies about their hiring and training of new officers during this time, but set the cut-off date as April 30, 2020 due to the ending of some stay-at-home orders at the beginning of May. **As of April 30th:**

- **35%** of responding agencies had suspended academy training without offering an alternative, similar to findings at Wave 1.

- However, **31%** of agencies, although suspending their in-person academies, had provided some training using online platforms (an increase from the 18% noted during Wave 1). Much fewer agencies (**16%**) were using a hybrid online/in-person approach, and **13%** of agencies had continued in-person training.

- **43%** of agencies were continuing their recruitment and hiring activities during this period of time, which was down from the 52% reported at Wave 1.

COVID-19 PREPAREDNESS

At the start of the pandemic and as noted from the Wave 1 results, agencies had quickly responded to COVID-19, and the majority had already provided some form of training and guidance to their officers as well as personal protective equipment (PPE) to ensure officer safety. Preparedness continued through April. As of May 10th:

- **83%** of responding agencies had provided all officers with specific and formal training on how to prevent contracting COVID-19.

- Of those who had provided their officers with training, the source of training usually came from the CDC (**37%**) or other state or local health agency (**43%**).

- **76%** of responding agencies stated that they had enough PPE to sustain employees for at least 30 days (an additional **17%** had enough PPE for at least the next two weeks).

---

1   See https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-policy-watch/stay-at-home-orders-to-fight-covid19/. See also https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/us/states-reopen-map-coronavirus.html.

- Only **5%** of agencies did not have enough PPE to last one more week or did not have any PPE at all.

- **62%** of responding agencies received their PPE supply internally or through their local municipality, while another **13%** received the majority of PPE from donations and private companies and individuals. As of May 10th, only **2%** of agencies relied on the federal government for PPE supplies.

- The most common forms of PPE supplies that agencies had were face masks for nose/mouth covering (**94%**), gloves (**96%**), and disinfectants (**95%**).

- **74%** of responding agencies had tasked their first-line supervisors with regularly inspecting, monitoring, and supervising the use of PPE – a significant increase from Wave 1 (57%).

- Agency confidence in sustaining provisions of PPE was also much higher in Wave 2 compared to the Wave 1 survey. **74%** of respondents rated their abilities as "excellent" or "good" (up from 53% in Wave 1).

WORKFORCE CHANGES[2]

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on civilian and officer human resources remains a rapidly evolving area. Since Wave 1, these proportions have readjusted, given the reopening of some states. As of May 10th:

- **46%** of responding agencies indicated that less than 10% of its civilian workforce was working remotely. This is up from the 11% noted in the Wave 1 survey, suggesting that in some agencies, civilian employees had returned to in-person work by the beginning of May.

- However, similar to Wave 1, **18%** of responding agencies still had 75% of its civilian workforce working remotely.

- Similar to Wave 1, **30%** of responding agencies confirmed that COVID-19 had led to a decrease in the average number of hours civilian employees worked.

During Wave 2, we asked additional questions of agencies concerning officer overtime and sick leave for both COVID-19 and non-COVID reasons. As of May 10th:

- **46%** of responding agencies noted that overtime hours worked by officers had decreased (while 12% reported an increase and 37% reported no change).

- **60%** of responding agencies did not report noticeable officer sick leave due to COVID. However, **28%** reported a 1-5% reduction in officer workforce due to COVID-19 infections or quarantining, and another **8%** reported 5% or more of their officer workforce was on sick leave due to COVID-19.

- **These percentages were still relatively lower than the proportion of officers on sick leave due to other reasons** (38% of agencies reported 1-5% on non-COVID sick leave, and about 9% of agencies reporting 5% or more of their officer workforce on leave due to non-COVID reasons).

- By the Wave 2 survey, agencies were more confident about managing officers exposed to COVID-19 in the field. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being "very poor" and 5 being "excellent," **agencies had rated themselves 3.7 in Wave 1, but by Wave 2 had increased this average rating to 4.2**.

BUDGET CONCERNS

During Wave 2, we asked additional questions of agencies related to budget concerns and COVID-19:

- **36%** of agencies anticipated budget reductions of less than 10% in the fiscal year 2021; **34%** anticipated budget cuts between 10% and 20%; **25%** expected budget cuts greater than 20%.

- When asked to rank what aspects of operations would be most affected by budget cuts, **31%** of agencies ranked staffing as most affected, while **25%** felt capital improvements would be most affected. The next highest-ranked anticipated cuts were for equipment maintenance and replacement.

IDEAS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AGENCIES TO CONSIDER

- Given these findings, agencies should consider planning for increases in certain types of calls for service (domestic and family violence, individuals in mental distress) in the event of another wave of COVID-19 infections or stay-at-home orders. Plans should include implementing problem-solving activities that attempt to address vulnerable individuals proactively. Agencies should consider developing protocols to ensure that victims can continue to request help safely and link victims directly with victim service providers.

2   The proportion of missing answers were slightly higher for these questions, at about 5%.

◆ A significant number of agencies have transitioned to remote response to some calls for service. Agencies should carefully monitor both the costs and benefits of remote responses to police-community relationships as well as the effective delivery of public safety services. Some individuals or communities may be more (or less) amenable to remote response than others, and differential responses across communities should be monitored for service disparities.

◆ COVID-19 has reduced some of law enforcement's proactive community engagement activities. However, some agencies have used the pandemic as an opportunity to leverage other types of community engagement through social media, virtual meetings, and other outlets. Agencies might continue to use some of the strategies that worked well even after the pandemic subsides, adapting short-term fixes into long-term solutions.

◆ Enforcing stay-at-home and physical distancing orders has presented new challenges to law enforcement agencies. Officials should work closely with community members and government officials to understand their precise legal responsibilities in enforcing these orders.[3] Agencies should also consider how they might promote voluntary compliance with orders effectively, fairly, and safely, and in collaboration with various communities. There should be a unified, consistent, and clearly understood approach across the organization regarding order enforcement.

◆ Both Waves 1 and 2 surveys hint that police academies may have been not well-equipped for agile adaptation during COVID compared to other learning institutions such as colleges and universities. Police academies might consider consulting with local universities to learn about and validate online learning strategies and techniques, especially in subjects that may be harder to teach online (judgment, social skills, and emotional intelligence). A new learning environment may also present opportunities to include training that reflects the evidence-base for effective and fair policing, as well as to test the effectiveness of alternative forms of training.

◆ Finally, pandemic restrictions, changing social norms, and law enforcement responses may disproportionately affect communities of color. Further challenges to police-community relations will also be raised by current protests and reform movements on top of the changing landscape of public safety that COVID-19 presents. We hope to better understand some of these issues in the next survey wave. However, agencies should carefully consider and analyze the differential impacts of their activities across different groups and communities within their jurisdictions, and find ways to ensure that their response does not exacerbate criminal justice disparities.

CITATION FOR THIS BRIEFING

Lum, C., Maupin, C., & Stoltz, M. (2020). *The Impact of COVID-19 on Law Enforcement Agencies (Wave 2).* A joint report of the International Association of Chiefs of Police and the Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy.

Note: A more detailed analysis of this multi-wave survey is forthcoming by the authors.

A joint report between the International Association of Chiefs of Police and the Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy, George Mason University

APPENDIX: SURVEY METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE

The sample of U.S. and Canadian agencies for this survey wave came from those with chief executives who are members of the IACP. The IACP is the oldest and largest nonprofit membership organization for law enforcement executives. The survey was an agency-level survey, and agencies were given explicit instructions that surveys were to be filled out once for each agency by a chief executive with direct knowledge of operational adjustments due to COVID-19. Surveys were sent to members of approximately 5,800 unique law enforcement agencies.

A total of 1,495 surveys were returned by May 25, 2020 after three reminders. 229 responses were blank or appeared to be duplicates from the same agency and were removed. Another 125 responses had more than 85% missing responses and were removed. This resulted in a final sample of 1,141 agencies responding (an estimated 20% response rate). While a national sample of all U.S. and Canadian agencies would have been ideal, the authors believed that surveying the IACP membership agencies was the quickest way to obtain an estimate of current and ongoing impacts of COVID-19 on law enforcement agencies.

The agencies who answered the survey reflect a range of agencies (in terms of number of sworn officers and population of jurisdictions) as shown in the statistics below. Responses were received from agencies in all 50 U.S. states and five Canadian provinces, although 99% of responses came from law enforcement agencies. We note that in the U.S., almost three-quarters of local agencies have fewer than 25 officers, and approximately 95% of local agencies have fewer than 100 officers.[4] The returned sample, therefore, over-represents agencies with more than 25 officers, and a greater proportion of larger agencies responded to Wave 2 than Wave 1.

Missing Responses. After removing duplicate surveys and surveys with over 85% of questions unanswered, the level of missing responses for each question was very low across the 1,141 surveys for most questions (less than 2%). For those questions in which missing responses were higher than 2%, these values were specifically noted.

Sworn officers	%
Less than 25	32.1%
25-49	23.6%
50-99	18.1%
100-499	14.9%
500 or more	6.5%

Civilian employees	%
Less than 10	46.8%
10-19	16.7%
20-29	8.9%
30-49	w
50-99	6.3%
100 or more	8.8%

Population	%
Less Than 25,000	50.8%
25,000 - 49,999	17.0%
50,000 - 99,999	11.5%
100,000 - 249,999	6.5%
250,000 - 499,999	2.2%
500,000 - 999,999	2.7%
1 million or more	4.1%

Approximately 5% of agencies did not respond to each of these questions.

4   See https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/lpd16p.pdf.