The Impacts of Arrest
Lessons from Research

While sometimes arrest is necessary, in some cases it may not be. Police are in an important position of authority to make this determination and should consider its consequences.

Costs to the Criminal Justice System

- Consider the costs weighed against benefits. Despite these costs, there is little empirical evidence that arrests for misdemeanor offenses reduce serious crimes or recidivism. Failure to address causes of criminal behavior may lead to a revolving door of arrest.

- An average arrest, including search, transport to booking facility, evidence collection, and completing a case report can take two hours or longer. Diverting a low-level or non-violent offender takes less than 30 minutes.3

- The United States spends approximately $80 billion on corrections annually, including detention center, prison, jail, parole, and probation expenditures.1 By considering alternatives to arrest, this amount could potentially be significantly lowered.

- Over $22.1 billion was spent on jails in 2011.2 By lowering the number of arrests, these costs to the community can be significantly reduced.

Long-term Collateral Consequences for Arrestee

- Arrest can have adverse consequences—with or without a conviction—that perpetuate criminal activity.

- Housing – Millions of Americans who have been convicted of a misdemeanor or arrested but never convicted of an offense, can be excluded from public housing based on their criminal record.4

- Employment – Individuals who were previously arrested, but not convicted earned $2,000 less per year, on average, and were 8 percent more likely to be in poverty than those who had never been arrested.5

- Education – Arrested juveniles are 22 percent more likely to drop out of school compared to their non-arrested counterparts. The likelihood of arrested juveniles enrolling in a four-year college was 16 percent lower than non-arrestees.6

- The negative consequences listed disproportionately affect certain populations such as juveniles, racial and ethnic minorities, and individuals with mental illness or behavioral issues.


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Key Takeaways for Police Agencies

- The impacts of arrest are multidimensional, occurring at the agency, the officer, the community, and the individual level.

- Through community partnership-based arrest alternative programs, an agency can focus more resources on community caretaking functions, officers spend less time on report-writing and other time-consuming arrest-related tasks, the community can focus on quality of life factors in partnership with the police, and the individual is provided with the opportunity to address underlying concerns that may have been the impetus for criminal activity.

- The collateral consequences of arrest often outweigh the formal penalties imposed upon arrestee contact with the police and may include negative impacts related to employment, education, and housing.

- By considering alternatives to arrest, law enforcement agencies have the potential to:
  - Prioritize available time to crime prevention activity.
  - Target violent crime rather than low-level nuisance calls.
  - Reduce crime and recidivism.
  - Improve individual health outcomes by referral to treatment, counseling, and other community services to low-level or non-violent offenders.
  - Enhance public trust by redirecting officer time previously spent on arrests towards community-policing activities.

- Police are the gatekeepers in the process of arrest and its collateral consequences. While sometimes arrest might be the best solution, other times it might not be.

This publication is one in a series and is based on a literature review examining the factors associated with arrest and alternatives to arrest. To access the full literature review and more information and resources from the IACP/UC Center for Police Research and Policy, please visit:

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