

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/looking-beyond-the-stop-and-frisk-statistics>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

Search online for stop and frisk. You'll quickly amass a mountain of news articles, blog posts, editorials, opinion pieces, and other evidence that there are a lot of strong feelings about this policing practice.

In New York City, the police department uses the technique of stopping people on the street and patting them down, sometimes searching them, in a small percentage of instances, arresting them particularly in the most highly patrolled neighborhoods. It has sparked a torrent of reaction about its efficacy as a crime-prevention strategy, its constitutionality, and the meaning of the seeming overrepresentation of people of color among those stopped. While some say the low rates of weapons seized and arrests are evidence that the policy casts too wide a net, others argue that low arrest and seizure rates are evidence of the policy's strong deterrent effect.

To gain a greater understanding of the experience of stop, question, and frisk among New Yorkers who are most likely to be stopped, Vera's [Center on Youth Justice](#) began in November 2011 to conduct an 18-month, mixed methods [study](#), systematically investigating how young people and their families process these interactions with the police. There's been previous research focused on the numbers, using the publicly available NYPD data; some journalists and advocates have been cataloging people's stories. Vera set out to give a voice to the numbers by conducting a rigorous study that examines what stop and frisk means to young people living in neighborhoods with high rates of violent crime, and high levels of police presence.

In five neighborhoods—the South Bronx, East Harlem, Bedford-Stuyvesant, East New York, and Jamaica—Vera researchers are interviewing young people 13-21 years old and their families with a focus on their experiences with police, perceptions of justice and safety, and perceptions of self. We've also surveyed more than 500 young adults (18-25 years old) in high-stop areas, measuring frequency and content of police interactions, perceptions of police efficacy, competency, and misconduct, willingness to report a crime, feelings of safety, and perceptions of self.

In the coming months, the researchers will hold focus groups with people who work with the youth and families in these communities, including staff at community-based organizations and after-school programs.

By homing in at street level on young people in New York City's most highly patrolled neighborhoods, Vera's researchers aim to shed light and report on what it's like for them to live in these areas—how they experience safety, a sense of community, and their relationships with the police.

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