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The John F. Finn Institute
for Public Safety, Inc.

Features of Contemporary Early Intervention Systems: The State of the Art

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The John F. Finn Institute for Public Safety, Inc., is an independent, not-for-profit and non-partisan corporation, whose work is dedicated to the development of criminal justice strategies, programs, and practices that are effective, lawful, and procedurally fair, through the application of social science findings and methods. The Institute conducts social research on matters of public safety and security – crime, public disorder, and the management of criminal justice agencies and partnerships – in collaboration with municipal, county, state, and federal criminal justice agencies, and for their direct benefit. The findings of the Institute's research are also disseminated through other media to criminal justice professionals, academicians, elected public officials, and other interested parties, so that those findings may contribute to a broader body of knowledge about criminal justice and to the practical application of those findings in other settings.

The Finn Institute was established in 2007, building on a set of collaborative projects and relationships with criminal justice agencies dating to 1998. The first of those projects, for which we partnered with the Albany Police Department (APD), was initiated by John Finn, who was at that time the sergeant who commanded the APD's Juvenile Unit. Later promoted to lieutenant and assigned to the department's Administrative Services Bureau, he spearheaded efforts to implement problem-oriented policing, and to develop an institutional capability for analysis that would support problem-solving. The APD's capacity for applying social science methods and results thereupon expanded exponentially, based on Lt. Finn's appreciation for the value of research, his keen aptitude for analysis, and his vision of policing, which entailed the formulation of proactive, data-driven, and – as needed – unconventional strategies to address problems of public safety. Lt. Finn was fatally shot in the line of duty in 2003. The Institute that bears his name honors his life and career by fostering the more effective use of research and analysis within criminal justice agencies, just as Lt. Finn did in the APD.

Introduction

Early intervention (EI) systems are widely considered a best practice for promoting police accountability and addressing officer performance. However, they can take many different forms, and we have much to learn about how those forms work in practice. In the fall of 2013, the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) funded The John F. Finn Institute for Public Safety and its partners from The University of Central Florida, The University of Massachusetts-Lowell, and The Urban Institute to undertake a study of EI systems, *Early Intervention Systems: The State of the Art.*[1] The project is designed to better inform police practitioners, policy-makers, and academics about the best practices of early intervention. The first phase of the project involved a national survey of agencies that operate EI systems. The agency survey was designed to provide data on the structural characteristics of EI systems, including practices related to identification (performance metrics examined as potential indicators of misconduct and thresholds applied), selection, intervention, and post-intervention monitoring. The second phase of the project provides for a more intensive description and analysis of several agencies' EI systems. Agencies will be selected based, in part, on the structural characteristics of their EI systems, such that different types of systems will be examined. The case studies will describe how each of the EI systems functions and estimate the magnitude of the impacts of the interventions on the performance of the officers who are subject to intervention. This report focuses on Phase I of the project. The report begins with a description of our methods and sample. We then describe EI system indicators, examine post-identification review and selection processes, review intervention options available for selected officers, and describe practices in place for post-intervention monitoring. We conclude with a summary of project findings to date, and a brief discussion of next steps.

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[1] The principal investigators are: Robert E. Worden (Finn Institute and University at Albany), Sarah J. McLean (Finn Institute), Eugene A. Paoline,III (The University of Central Florida), Christopher J. Harris (The University of Massachusetts-Lowell), and KiDeuk Kim (The Urban Institute).

Methods

EI systems are recognized as a "best practice" in policing and a key component to departments' efforts to promote police accountability, yet there is a rather small empirical evidence base behind the best-practice label. In fact, available literature is arguably insufficient to support even a comprehensive description of the structure of EI systems. The last (and only) comprehensive picture of EI systems was drawn by Samuel Walker and his colleagues in a 1998-99 survey of 571 police agencies.[2] In the summer and early fall of 2014 we administered a survey to all agencies that participated in the 2007 Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics (LEMAS) survey and reported that they utilized an EI system. In the 2007 LEMAS survey, 344 of 883 agencies (39 percent) reported that they had an EI system. Of these 344 agencies, 80 percent (N=274) responded to our survey, and among those 274 agencies, 243 reported they had an EI system in 2014. The findings presented below are based on the 243 agencies operating these "mature" EI systems (that is, their system dates back to at least 2007).

Description of agencies

Of the 243 agencies whose systems we examined, 64 percent (N=155) had fewer than 500 sworn officers, 18 percent had a sworn force between 500 and 999, and the remaining 18 percent had a force of 1,000 or more. The majority of agencies (73 percent) were municipal police departments, followed by fifty sheriffs' offices and fifteen state police agencies. Refer to Table 1.

Figure 1 below displays the spatial dispersion of responding agencies, with the darker shading indicating more respondents in a particular state, compared to a state with lighter or no shading. Florida had the most agencies represented in our sample (N=42), compared to four states with no agencies responding our agency survey (Idaho,

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[2] Samuel Walker, Geoffrey P. Alpert, and Dennis J. Kenney, *Responding to the Problem Police Officer: A National Study of Early Warning Systems*, Report to the National Institute of Justice (Washington: National Institute of Justice, 2000).

Maine, Vermont and Wyoming). Among the five states with the greatest number of respondents, North Carolina had 12, Texas 16, Virginia 16, California 19 and Florida 42.

Table 1: Agencies by Size and Type								
Agency size				Type of agency				
< 500	500 - 999	1000+		Municipal	Sheriff	State		Totals
(N=155)	(N=43)	(N=45)		(N=178)	(N=50)	(N=15)		243

Figure 1

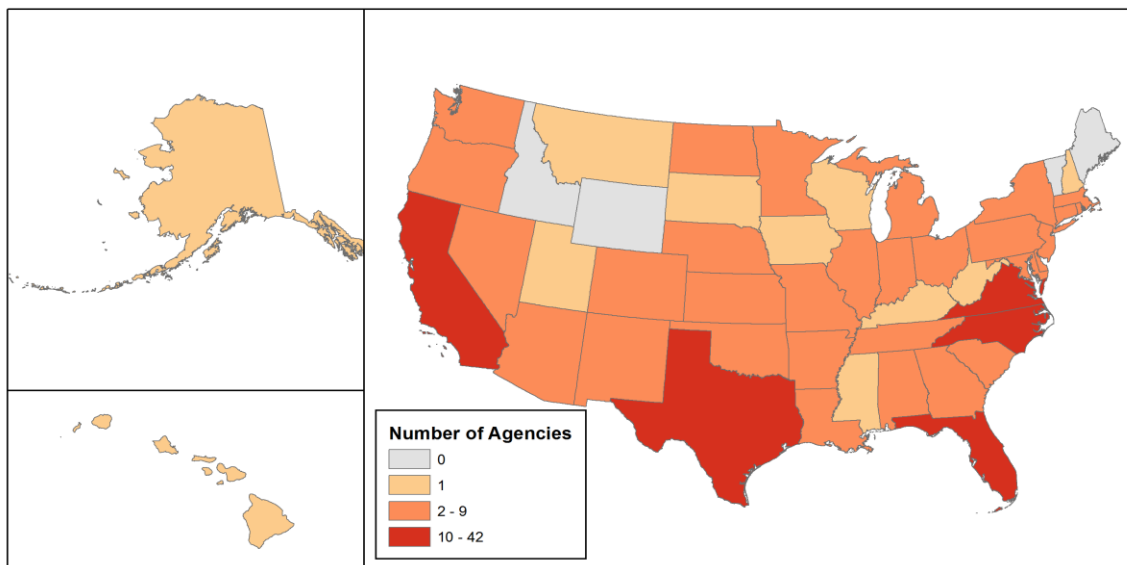## Findings

Generally, EI systems consist of four components: (1) the performance metrics employed as potential indicators of misconduct; (2) the thresholds applied to identify officers with performance problems; (3) the interventions used to address those performance problems; and (4) post-intervention monitoring. The highlighted findings presented here from our national agency survey are organized around these four components.[3]

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[3] Samuel Walker, *Supervision and Intervention within Early Intervention Systems: A Guide for Law Enforcement Chief Executives.* (Washington: Police Executive Research Forum, 2005).

Identification: Individual Performance Metrics

The survey provided a list of twenty-three indicators along with a space to write in additional indicators not listed; respondents were asked to designate whether or not each individual indicator was part of their EI system. For each identified indicator respondents were also prompted to specify the threshold (number of times) set for each indicator and the period of time over which counts are formed. If an EI system did not utilize a straight time and numbers approach, respondents were asked to specify the alternative formula used (e.g. peer comparison or ratio). Table 2 below provides a listing of the individual performance indicators assessed by EI systems, broken down by agency size and also by type of agency.

The picture that emerges shows that a wide range of performance metrics are included in EI systems as indicators of potentially problematic police performance. The types of indicators assessed as a means to identify early signs of problems include those that might be indicative of problems in interactions with citizens (e.g. use of authority, complaints, discretionary arrests), abuse or misuse of personal and/or sick time, failure to follow department rules and regulations (e.g. failure to complete trainings or annual physicals) and other assorted indicators. The five most commonly considered indicators included:

- Citizen complaints
- Non-lethal force
- Internal complaints
- Vehicle damage/accidents
- Internal investigation

Fifty-four percent of responding agencies consider all five of the top five indicators and 46 percent of agencies include ten or more indicators on which selection for intervention could turn.

Table 2	Agency size				Type of agency				
Indicator	< 500	500-999	1000+		Municipal	Sheriff	State		Totals
	(N=155)	(N=43)	(N=45)		(N=178)	(N=50)	(N=15)		243
Citizen complaints	138	41	42		164	43	14		221
Non-lethal force	140	37	39		161	43	12		216
Internal complaints	128	36	41		151	40	14		205
Vehicle damage/accidents	133	35	33		148	41	12		201
Internal investigations	113	38	34		138	35	12		185
Officer-involved shootings	98	34	34		125	31	10		166
Vehicle pursuits	114	25	27		124	31	11		166
Internal policy violations	100	28	32		116	34	10		160
Officer-involved firearm discharges	95	29	34		117	30	11		158
Internal reprimands	90	28	23		106	28	7		141
Failure to appear in court	47	18	18		69	12	2		83
Sick days used	49	9	13		52	16	3		71
Officer injury	48	9	14		56	14	1		71
Citizen injury	45	11	13		57	11	1		69
Tardiness	47	9	10		51	13	2		66
Loss of equipment	30	11	18		43	11	5		59
Civil suits	31	9	13		45	7	1		53
Failure to complete training	32	8	12		42	9	1		52
Unsatisfactory performance eval.	34	3	2		29	9	1		39
Sick leave linked w days off	30	2	5		27	9	1		37
Sick leave linked w vacation	29	2	4		26	8	1		35
Discretionary (secondary) arrests	17	6	8		24	7	0		31
Failure to take annual physical	12	1	5		17	1	0		18

Identification: Time-and-numbers for Selected Performance Metrics

Both the total number of indicators and the threshold set for each indicator have implications for the number of officers who will be identified by the system. For example, an EI system that considers a large number of indicators using a low threshold (e.g. 2 uses of force in 12 months) will "flag" more officers for review than a system that considers fewer indicators or a similar number of indicators but sets a higher threshold (e.g. 3 uses of force in 6 months). We turn now to a description of time and numbers thresholds for selected indicators. Refer to Table 3.

Our survey data clearly indicate that most systems rely on a straight time and numbers approach like those shown in Table 3 below.[4] Selection criteria take the form of thresholds associated with the indicators, and officers who exceed a count on the indicator in the specified time frame are identified for review and/or intervention. In Table 3 the numbers in the cells represent the number of agencies that set a particular combination as a basis for identifying an officer. For example, 24 agencies set 3 uses of non-lethal force in 12 months as the threshold for "flagging" officers for review and/or intervention.

Several themes emerge from the survey data. First, it is uncommon for departments to consider a time frame longer than twelve months. Secondly, departments most commonly consider the counts of events or outputs over the preceding six to twelve months. Third, the "tolerance" that departments have for the same performance metric varies across departments. For example, 8 agencies identify officers based on 3 citizen complaints in the preceding 3 months while 51 agencies identify officers who exceed 3 citizen complaints in the preceding 12 months. The threshold set and the time period over which counts are accumulated represent a

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[4] We are continuing to sift the data so that we can succinctly describe agencies' use of peer comparisons and ratios (e.g., uses of force to arrests), which were not captured in closed-ended survey items. A small fraction of agencies use such approaches.

tradeoff. The lower the threshold is set, the greater the number of officers who are likely to be identified by the system.

Table 3					
	Time Frames				
Thresholds – Non-lethal force	1 month	3 months	6 months	12 months	Totals (agencies)
1				2	2
2	4	1	5	8	18
3	5	10	17	24	56
4		5	4	8	17
5	1	5	2	8	16
6		4	5	17	26
7				1	1
8			1	1	2
10				3	3
12				2	2
15				1	1
Other	72				72
Column Totals (agencies)	10	25	34	75	216
Thresholds – Citizen complaints	1 month	3 months	6 months	12 months	Totals (agencies)
1		1		1	2
2	1	8	11	18	38
3	2	8	14	51	75
4		2	3	12	17
5	1			8	9
6			1	1	2
12				1	1
Other	77				77
Column Totals (agencies)	4	19	29	92	221

Table 3 (cont.)					
Thresholds – Officer-involved shootings	1 month	3 months	6 months	12 months	Totals (agencies)
1	2		1	9	12
2	2	2	6	20	30
3	1	2	8	15	26
4		1	1	5	7
5				3	3
6				1	1
12				1	1
Other	76				76
Column Totals (agencies)	5	5	16	54	166
Thresholds – Vehicle pursuits	1 month	3 months	6 months	12 months	Totals (agencies)
1		1	1		2
2		3	5	20	28
3	1	7	13	32	53
4		2		8	10
5				7	7
6			1	3	4
7				1	1
8				1	1
10				1	1
12				2	2
Other	57				57
Column Totals (agencies)	1	13	20	75	166
Thresholds – Failure to appear in court	1 month	3 months	6 months	12 months	Totals (agencies)
1	1			1	2
2	1	2	8	4	15
3	1	2	1	13	17
4	1			2	3
5				1	1
Other	45				45
Column Totals (agencies)	4	4	9	21	83

Post-Identification Review

Our survey data indicate that most departments provide for a second-stage review of officers who meet EI system thresholds. While initial identification is mechanical, turning on numerical counts, most departments introduce discretion into a second stage of officers who reach thresholds, for which nearly two-thirds of all agencies provide. Smaller departments (under 500 sworn) are somewhat more likely to provide for a review of officers who reach thresholds compared to the largest agencies (1,000 or more sworn), 64 percent and 58 percent, respectively. State police agencies are the least likely to provide for a second-stage selection process (47 percent) compared to municipal agencies and sheriff's offices. Refer to Table 4.

Among the agencies that provide for second-stage review, immediate supervisors are most commonly (42 percent) responsible for reviewing officer performance and arriving at a judgment of whether and, if so, what kind of intervention is needed. This holds true regardless of agency size or type. Internal affairs/professional standards is solely responsible for conducting the second-stage review in 21 percent of agencies.

Table 4								
	Agency size				Type of agency			
	< 500	500 - 999	1000+		Municipal	Sheriff	State		Totals
	(N=155)	(N=43)	(N=45)		(N=178)	(N=50)	(N=15)		243
Performance review conducted	99	31	26		122	27	7		156
Review conducted by:									
Immediate supervisor	40	17	8		50	14	1		65
Training personnel	1				1				1
Command staff	18	4	6		21	5	2		28
IA/professional standards	21	6	5		26	3	3		32
Other/multiple	19	4	7		24	5	1		30

Interventions

Respondents were asked to select from among seventeen various interventions those that are available in their agencies, and they were also provided the opportunity to write in interventions that were not included among the seventeen listed. We would highlight several points that emerged from the responses. First, there is much less variation in interventions compared to performance metrics. Second, the large majority (89 percent) of EI systems provide for counseling by one's immediate supervisor. Third, interventions include training in a host of topics, from review of departmental policies to human relations and stress awareness. Last, the type of interventions made available are, for the most part, similar across agencies of different sizes and types. Refer to Table 5, below.

Post-Intervention Monitoring

In order to better understand accountability mechanisms in place around EI systems, we asked respondents to describe their practices for post-intervention monitoring, which are detailed in Table 6, below. Two-thirds of all agencies provide for post-intervention monitoring. The largest agencies (1,000 or more sworn) are less likely than agencies with fewer sworn to provide for post-intervention monitoring. There is wide variation in the duration of post-intervention monitoring, with a range from one month to two years. A twelve-month post-intervention monitoring period was the most commonly reported time frame (26 percent of agencies).

Among those agencies that require post-intervention monitoring, most (78 percent) require a written report as part of the follow-up process. Here again, an immediate supervisor is most often responsible for completing the written report (in 66 percent of the agencies requiring written follow-up).

Table 5								
	Agency size				Type of agency			
Intervention	< 500	500 - 999	1000+		Municipal	Sheriff	State		Totals
	(N=155)	(N=43)	(N=45)		(N=178)	(N=50)	(N=15)		243
Immediate supervisor counseling	137	41	39		160	45	12		217
Professional counseling (e.g., EAP)	128	37	39		148	46	10		204
Training – departmental policy	132	38	33		152	40	11		203
Training – defensive tactics	125	38	31		142	41	11		194
Training – driving	128	38	28		141	43	10		194
Training – verbal de-escalation	119	37	34		140	38	12		190
Training – ethics	119	32	34		136	38	11		185
Counseling by other command staff	120	35	29		134	39	11		184
Training – cultural diversity	115	33	31		130	39	10		179
Training – weapons care	115	32	28		129	37	9		175
Training – communication skills	105	36	33		125	38	11		174
Training – human relations	106	30	30		123	35	8		166
Training – stress awareness	100	32	33		123	33	9		165
Reassignment/transfer	98	30	24		115	33	4		152
Peer officer support program	49	19	27		74	16	5		95
Crisis intervention teams	53	20	21		68	24	2		94

Table 6								
	Agency size				Type of agency			
	< 500	500 - 999	1000+		Municipal	Sheriff	State		Totals
	(N=155)	(N=43)	(N=45)		(N=178)	(N=50)	(N=15)		243
Post-intervention monitoring	110	29	22		126	28	7		161
Duration of monitoring									
1 month	3				2	1			3
2 months	2				1	1			2
3 months	9	1	4		10	4			14
4 months	1				1				1
6 months	19	3	6		22	5	1		28
12 months	29	9	4		33	5	4		42
24 months	2	1			3				3
Other	9	4	2		11	4			15
Varies	24	8	3		32	3			35
Continuously	8	5	3		11	3	2		16
Written performance report required	86	21	18		99	22	4		125
Written report primarily by:									
Immediate supervisor	61	12	10		65	16	2		83
Training personnel	2		1		2	1			3
Command staff	11	6	3		17	1	2		20
IA/professional standards	3				3				3
Other/more than one	9	2	4		11	4			15

Summary and Next Steps

The information provided by the many agencies that responded to our survey offers valuable insight into the features of EI systems in operation today, and we thank all of those agencies for taking the time to share this information with us. This report was intended to provide a summary description of the most up-to-date information available on EI systems in operation across the country. While EI systems today exhibit broad structural commonalities, as they did when Walker and his colleagues examined them in the late 90's, when we "unpack" practices at a finer level we find a substantial range of structural variation in EI systems. The survey data provide information that will allow practitioners and academics to take stock of what practices are in place today and also serve as the springboard for further examination. Phase II of the current project provides for a more in-depth description and analysis of several agencies whose EI systems vary structurally. Through the case studies we will examine how the system functions in practice, how they are perceived by the rank-and-file, the predictive utility of indicators, and the magnitude of intervention impacts (both intended and unintended) on the performance of the officers who are subject to intervention.

About the authors

Robert E. Worden is the director of the John F. Finn Institute for Public Safety, Inc., and associate professor of criminal justice at the University at Albany, State University of New York. He holds a Ph.D. in political science from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Professor Worden's scholarship has appeared in *Justice Quarterly*, *Criminology*, *Law & Society Review*, and other academic journals, and his research has been funded by the National Institute of Justice, the Bureau of Justice Assistance, the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services, and other sponsors.

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