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BUREAU OF JUSTICE STATISTICS
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POLICE STOP WHITE, BLACK AND HISPANIC DRIVERS AT SIMILAR RATES ACCORDING TO DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE REPORT

WASHINGTON – An estimated 19 percent (43.5 million) of U.S. residents age 16 or older had a face-to-face contact with a police officer in 2005, according to a new report by the Justice Department's Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS). This was a decrease from the 21 percent who had contact with police in 2002. Contact between police and the public was more common among males, whites, and younger residents. Overall, about 9 out of 10 persons who had contact with police officers in 2005 said the police acted properly.

An estimated 1.6 percent of those who had contact with law enforcement officers during 2005 said the police used force against them or threatened them during their most recent contact — 4.4 percent of blacks and 2.3 percent of Hispanics said the police used force, compared to 1.2 percent of whites. Four out of five persons who experienced force felt it was excessive.

About 15 percent who experienced force said they were injured. About 17 percent of those against whom force was used acknowledged that they had done something to provoke the officer or officers, such as using threats or resisting arrest.

The findings from this special report are based on the Police-Public Contact Survey, conducted for BJS during the last 6 months of 2005 by the U.S. Census Bureau.

The most common reason for police contact in 2002 and 2005 was a driver in a traffic stop, accounting for about 40 percent of all contacts. The second most common reason for contact with police was to report a crime or a problem.

Almost 18 million people said their most recent contact with police in 2005 was as a driver in a traffic stop. This represented about 8.8 percent of drivers in the United States in 2005, a percentage unchanged from 2002. In both years the vast majority of stopped drivers said they were pulled over for a legitimate reason.

(MORE)

The 2002 and 2005 surveys found that whites, blacks and Hispanics were stopped at similar rates. Male drivers were pulled over at higher rates than female drivers, and younger drivers were more likely than older drivers to be stopped.

In both 2002 and 2005 police searched about 5 percent of stopped drivers. Male drivers were more likely than female drivers to be searched by police. In 2005 police searched 9.5 percent of stopped blacks and 8.8 percent of stopped Hispanics, compared to 3.6 percent of white motorists. Drivers younger than 30 (8.4 percent) had a greater likelihood of being searched than drivers 30 or older (2.7 percent).

While the survey found that black and Hispanic drivers were more likely than whites to be searched, such racial disparities do not necessarily demonstrate that police treat people differently based on race or other demographic characteristics. This study did not take into account other factors that might explain these disparities.

The report, *Contacts Between Police and the Public, 2005* (NCJ-215243), was written by BJS statisticians Matthew R. Durose, Erica L. Smith and Patrick A. Langan. Following publication it can be found at <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/abstract/cpp05.htm>.

For additional information about the Bureau of Justice Statistics please visit the BJS Web site at <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs>.

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