

POLICE PERCEPTIONS OF MENTAL ILLNESS



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Abstract

Police officers' perceptions of individuals with mental illness were studied. Specifically, the difference between officers with Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training on perceptions was examined. Surveys were administered to 118 police officers at the New Haven Police Department to assess attitudinal differences toward individuals with mental illness. Overall, the findings suggest that there is little difference between officers who have completed CIT training and those who have not completed CIT training.

Background

- **Hanafi, Bahora, Demir, & Compton (2008):** Qualitative focus group - CIT trained officers reported greater understanding of mental illness
- **Taheri (2014):** Meta-analysis of CIT research - Little evidence supporting CIT; however, authors suggested program improvements
- **Day, Edgren, & A.E. (2007):** Likert-type scale to measure seven factors of attitudes toward people with mental illness

Methods

- Attended 8 day, evening, and midnight roll calls at New Haven Police Department
- Administered surveys after Shift Commander finished addressing officers
- Day's survey was used in this study, with the addition of three questions related to policing and mental health
- $n = 118$
- Response rate = 90%

Results

Descriptive statistics:

- CIT training:
 - 51.3% trained ($n = 58$)
 - 48.7% untrained ($n = 55$)
- Mean years as officer: 6.97
- Education:
 - 11.2% High School ($n = 13$)
 - 36.2% Some College ($n = 42$)
 - 45.7% Bachelor's ($n = 53$)
 - 6.9% Master's ($n = 8$)
- Mean age: 33.94
- Gender:
 - 87.9% Male ($n = 102$)
 - 12.1% Female ($n = 14$)
- Race:
 - 62.6% White ($n = 72$)
 - 16.5% Hispanic ($n = 19$)
 - 15.7% Black ($n = 18$)

Independent samples t-tests:

(3 exploratory findings at $\alpha = 0.10$)

People with mental illnesses tend to neglect their appearance. (Hygiene)		
CIT Trained	CIT Untrained	p-value
2.96	3.40	0.09

When I am around someone with a mental illness I worry that he or she might harm me physically. (Anxiety)		
CIT Trained	CIT Untrained	p-value
2.53	2.93	0.08

Psychiatrists and psychologists have the knowledge and skills needed to effectively treat mental illnesses. (Professional Efficacy)		
CIT Trained	CIT Untrained	p-value
4.40	4.93	0.06

Discussion

Preliminary data analysis:

- Little difference was found between CIT trained and CIT untrained officers' perceptions of PMI
- Officer stigma toward PMI may be greater in certain categories of attitudes than others
- The CIT curriculum may need modification to render practical value for police agencies

Future steps:

- More data collection at other Connecticut police departments
- Further analysis:
 - Factor analysis
 - The constructs that demonstrated exploratory differences ($p < 0.10$) should be explored further
 - Regression analysis including other variables that may be important (i.e. time since training, frequency of contact with PMI, family member w/ mental illness, friends w/ mental illness)
- Compare police perceptions of PMI to general population perceptions of PMI

References

- Hanafi, S., Bahora, M., Demir, B. N., & Compton, M. T. (2008). Incorporating crisis intervention team (CIT) knowledge and skills into the daily work of police officers: A Focus Group Study. *Community Mental Health Journal*, 44(6), 427-432.
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