

Forensic Research & Technology

October 31-November 02, 2016 San Francisco, USA

A forensic psychological paradigm on ethnoracial legitimacy and trust for police officer safety: The Ferguson effect

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Policing in the 21st century means that departments must consistently be mindful of perceptions and misperceptions of bias as it relates of police officer safety. In this case, recurring incidents of alleged police misconduct and excessive use of force along with what is viewed as a lack of accountability have been ongoing subjects of dispute for many years in diverse communities worldwide. For example, high profile incidents occurring in Ferguson, Missouri, Baltimore, Maryland and Charleston, South Carolina are problematic in that a significant amount of erosion in the trust in their own police departments and concerns about negligent hire or retention as well as officer safety. The complaints about police officers range from a variety of issues, with a sharpened focus on the selection of police officers. This discontent has resulted in communities feeling less confident in the process by which police officers are screened, selected, trained and supervised. When perceived high profile excessive force incidents occur, the screening and selection process of police officers is often questioned. High profile misconduct incidents occurring in Ferguson and Baltimore have sparked a series of protests due to the incidents raising questions among the public surrounding police misconduct. For example, the Ferguson incident started when two individuals were asked by the responding police officer Darren Wilson to move from where they were walking. One of these individuals (i.e., Michael Brown) fit the description of a man who was previously identified as a suspect in a convenience store theft. After Officer Wilson called out a dispatch about Brown, an altercation ensued which resulted in Wilson firing multiple shots ultimately killing Michael Brown. Wilson's testimony indicated that he believed Brown was reaching for a gun and charged toward him before he was shot. Although some witnesses on the scene stated that this was not the case, the officer claimed that he feared for his life. In time, a grand jury chose to not indict Officer Wilson in the shooting death of Michael Brown. The failure of the grand jury to indict Wilson seemed to fuel a "wave of anger" in the public. Buildings were set on fire, and there was widespread looting of businesses nearby. Officer safety was threatened as protestors threw a variety of objects at police officers, and the officers retaliated by using military-style equipment and tear gas to disperse crowds. This presentation uses a forensic psychological perspective to explore what has been dubbed the Ferguson Effect with respect to officer safety.

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The ethical advantages of using strengths based approaches to support the risk assessment of sexual offenders

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Risk assessment tools that predict sexual recidivism are an essential part of formal risk management planning processes. They are critical in helping criminal justice agencies deploy appropriate resources in accordance with perceived risk. Thus, they serve to protect the public from harm and manage public resources effectively. However, one of the consequences of a risk reduction approach is that while public protection concerns are addressed, the legitimate needs of the client tend to be ignored. Instead, because of the controls and restrictions placed upon them they become stigmatized and prevented from fully reintegrating back into society. A more ethical approach to risk assessment might be one that considers the strengths and needs of the client. Indeed, strengths based approaches enable people to build personal capacity, develop community and social bonds and ultimately contribute to society by living a meaningful and offence free life. Strengths based approaches inevitably serve the needs of the public, criminal justice agencies along with those of the client. However, little empirical evidence exists of the relationship between strengths based risk assessment approaches and public protection. This paper therefore presents the findings of a systematic review of the literature. Preliminary findings indicate strengths based risk assessment provides ethical advantages by: Improving risk prediction; developing meaningful treatment and rehabilitation plans; enhancing practitioner motivation; and improving the quality of client experience in the criminal justice system.

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