Trust in Law Enforcement

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Abstract

Trust exerts positive effects upon both objectives and self-rated health variables. Unconditional respect, when practiced in policing, induced higher levels of trust which in turn leads to enhanced communication, information sharing and joint problem-solving, and consequently more effective policing and a safer community. It is argued that subsequent to the genesis of trust, higher levels of positive effect, and changes in neurobiological processes underlying well-being affirmatively positive health-outcomes are assured.

Keywords: Trust; Respect; Unconditional respect; Health; Health-outcomes; Positive affect; Police; Law enforcement

Short Communication

Trust is essential in all interpersonal interactions and the building of social networks [1,2]. Moreover, trust has been shown to be positively related to health [3]. The Psychology Dictionary [4] define trust as "a main element in mature unions with other people, whether therapeutic, social, or intimate". It also states that "Trust is vital to the success of any relationship, romantic or otherwise". Moreover, as trust has been shown to be essential in interpersonal interactions the definition of interpersonal trust might be of relevance. The Psychology Dictionary [5] defines interpersonal trust as "The confidence a person or group of people has in relying on another person or group. The degree which a person can depend on others to do what they say they will" and Gambetta [6] states that "trusting a person means believing that when offered the chance, he or she is not likely to behave in a way that is damaging to us". Hommel & Cozato [7] suggest that trust is associated with how people do represent themselves, the contextual situation and the trustor's mindset in a specific situation. The authors also suggest that a "core aspect of trust consists in social predictability" and that trust increase depending on knowledge based on earlier interpersonal interactions.

Regarding the association between health and trust it has been shown that trust is positively associated with health and health-outcomes [1,8-11]. In a longitudinal study focusing on trust between type-2 diabetic patients and physicians Lee & Lin [12] found that trust was positively related to both the objective outcome variable, glycosylated haemoglobin, and self-rated physical health status and satisfaction. Two other longitudinal studies on aging people [1,10] confirmed the results of above showing that mortality was higher among men with low levels of trust, and that high level of trust was associated with good self-rated health. Moreover, Lee & Lin [8] found that patients trust in their physicians both reduced uncertainty and increased sense of control. It has also been found that trust induce a placebo-type of healing process [13,14]. Moreover, patients trust in their physicians has been shown to increase exchange of information, help problem-solving, and increase involvement in decision making [15].

Law enforcement has always been complicated and hazardous. That is as true today as at any time in history. Effective policing is not just about what is done, i.e. practicing work-methods that have been proven to be effective, for example 'problem-oriented policing' [16] and 'dialogue-based policing' [17,18] instead of traditional policing such as 'zero-tolerance' and 'stop-and-frisk' which both are based on interactions between police and citizens that may be construed as more negative than positive with long-term costs like harm of police-community relations, diminished trust along with disruptions to community safety [19-21]. Effective policing is also about how policing is executed [22].

The above indicates that building trust might be as an important part of the relation between police officers and citizens as between patients and physicians and therefore a vital ingredient in policing. Someone who early in police history

addressed this was Sir Robert Peel, who has been said to be the founder of modern policing, and that in his "Nine Principles" dictated that the ultimate mission of policing is to build high trust relationships instead of drawing lines of distinction between police and public.

Respect can be seen as a base ingredient for building trust [22] and presents a very important element in our interpersonal relations and to create a just society [23] and its presence or absence largely determines how we relate to one another and society at large. Respect encompasses both how we relate to others (accepting and caring) and how we relate to society (adherence to rules and social power) [24]. Moreover, respect-oriented treatments exerted by authority augment commitment and rule compliance [25]. The ultimate goal regarding respect within interpersonal relations pertains to the notion of mutual respect. But as this unfortunately is not always the case when it comes to interactions between the police and the public Colwell & Huth [22] advocates for the importance of 'unconditional respect' when it comes to policing practiced by for example the 1910 Squad, Kansas City, Missouri Police Department. The philosophy of unconditional respect implies that the responsibility for engendering respect during interactions between the police and the public be placed on the representatives of law enforcement. It dictates that those in authority (police) should demonstrate respect for others independent of any reciprocation on the part of the public and focus on the respect each person by virtue of their humanity. The effects of this approach have been shown to have a raft of positive effects [26] such as a 100% elimination of community complaints; a three-fold increase in productivity of guns and drugs taken off the streets in Kansas City. On the one hand, the team deserves credit for these results, but the people of Kansas City merit equal recognition. Collaborative results hinge upon a collective way of seeing people and challenges that enables the effective employment of Peelian Principles-building trust. As the build-up trust, through the practice of unconditional respect, between the Kansas City Police department's 1910 Squad and the citizens in the area of development, collaboration emerged, through which the police obtained more tips from citizens, there was better information sharing, and joint problem-solving. This, in turn, may explain the improved results that occurred after the implementation of the protocol of unconditional respect.

As people often trust more according to information that allows predictions of behaviours and those predictions is related to knowledge obtained in previous interpersonal interactions the behaviour of police officers when interacting with citizens is of outmost important for the building of long-term trust. This assumption is also enhanced by the above introduced results from the introduction of unconditional respect as an approach between police officers and citizens has proven to be successful.

Hommel & Cozato [7] argue that there are three ways to improve interpersonal trust:

1.   Through external reward and positive mood;

2.   Facial similarity; and

3.   Inclusive processing mode promotes trust.

Here we focus on the positive association between affect and trust, meaning that high level of trust is associated with positive affect and that trust increase as a function of both trust or and trustee mood [27]. Positive effect, in turn, have been associated with lower levels of stress, higher intrinsic motivation, internal locus of control and greater optimism and lower levels of impulsiveness [28,29]. This pattern of self-fulfilling affective personality may be described neuropsychologically by a preponderance of prefrontal cognitive and left frontal hemispheric positive affect functioning over the craving behaviour emanating from limbic system activity [30,31].

We assume also that these processes will be strengthened and enhanced by the neural processes associated with positive mood (dopamine/serotonin), enhanced trust within in-group and out-group from intranasal oxytocin administration (oxytocine) [32], and L-tryptophan, a precursor to serotonin, promoted trust through the induction of a more integrative mode [33].

In conclusion, we argue that just as the relation between patient and physician is related to better health-outcomes [1, 9-12] and lower mortality [1,10] a respectful interaction between police and citizens will lead to a built up knowledge that will lead to higher level of trust [22]. And trust will in addition to more effective law enforcement by increase exchange of information, help problem-solving, and increase involvement in decision making [15] but also to higher level of positive affect [27] that in turn are associated with better health variables [28,29] which also will be enforced by neurobiological processes [30,34]. As a side effect, unconditional respect may lead to better health to citizens who by positive experiences in the interaction with the police have built up trust to the police as an institution will, except for that leading to enhanced cooperation thereby forming a safer community also will have better health both objectively and subjectively. Moreover, since trust has been suggested to mediate the association between income inequality and population health this would be true even for without regard to local economic status [35].

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