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Evidence Led Solutions



Confidence Improvement and Guidance Project

Public Confidence in the Police: A Review of Research

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Executive Summary

Introduction

This review of the research on the issue of confidence in the police was commissioned by the Association of Police Authorities as part of its work on the single confidence target introduced for all police forces by the Home Office. It provides an overview of research into the ideas of confidence and trust as well as findings from research conducted into the specific issue of confidence in the police¹.

In July 2007, the Home Office published its crime strategy (Home Office, 2007). This introduced a measure of confidence to support its approach to reducing crime. This formed the basis for Public Service Agreement (PSA) 23. This PSA is associated with making communities safer. This links to a desire from government to ensure the police are responsive and answerable to the public.

The confidence measure is now the single remaining top down target, the Home office having removed all others. Nationally the target is for 60% of the population to have confidence in the police and partners by March 2012. From a baseline of 45%, this will require an increase of 15 percentage points nationally.

What is confidence?

Confidence is by no means an easy concept to grasp. It is in one sense a psychological state and dependent on one's own capacity to trust, as well as one's opinion of the actions and intentions of other parties. It can be based on personal experiences, both past and present, or the vicarious experiences of others. It is therefore important not to underestimate its complexity and to recognise the need to explore it carefully.

It is generally agreed however, that confidence is beneficial for both organisations and individuals. For example, organisations which have high levels of trust and confidence can expect interactions to run more smoothly, as individuals will be more likely to give the benefit of the doubt and to accept decisions taken by others.

Despite this however, research into confidence has shown it to be easier to lose than to gain; relatively easy to lose once gained; and difficult to re-establish once lost.

¹ This review forms the basis for a guidance document on the single confidence also prepared for the Association of Police Authorities which is available separately.

This relates to the fact 'bad' events seem to carry a disproportionately heavier weight than 'good' ones. For example, we tend to dwell more on negative things that happen to us than we do positive things and we tend to forget about the good things that happen to us more quickly. We also tend to feel the impact of a subsequent bad event more intensely than the first bad event whereas a second positive event has no additional impact than a first positive event. In the same vein bad information has more power than good information for attracting attention as we are twice as likely to recall negative information as we are to recall positive information.

Drivers of Confidence in the Police

Research conducted specifically in the field of policing has identified a number of factors which can affect levels of confidence in the police. These are:

- Community engagement and problem solving
- Procedural justice (fair treatment)
- Police effectiveness
- Contact with the police
- Dealing with anti-social behaviour
- Targeted foot patrol

Evidence from such studies can help to direct the activity of police forces / authorities and partners towards those kinds of areas where effective action might be anticipated to bring about an improvement in public confidence in the police.

Conclusions

There are relatively few interventions that have been shown to work in improving confidence, but well implemented neighbourhood policing and targeted newsletters are among those approaches likely to assist.

There is good evidence to suggest that particular attention should be focused on preventing negative experiences as these have a greater and more widespread impact on confidence than do positive experiences. In this context, *doing less bad* is probably more important than *doing more good*.

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1. Introduction

Background

On 17th July 2008, the Home Office published a policing green paper entitled 'From the Neighbourhood to the National: Policing Our Communities Together'. This set out reforms of policing in a number of areas. Chief among these was a renewed commitment to neighbourhood policing and to improving the police-public relationship. This included the introduction of a policing pledge, which set out the service that could be expected from the local police and provided the framework for national standards for accessible and responsive local policing.

Prior to this, in July 2007, the Home Office published its crime strategy (Home Office, 2007). This introduced a measure of confidence to support its approach to reducing crime. This formed the basis for Public Service Agreement (PSA) 23. This PSA is associated with making communities safer and focuses on four key areas:

1. Reducing all violence with injury and tackling the most serious violence, serious sexual offences and domestic violence.
2. Continuing to make progress on serious acquisitive crime through a focus on the issues of greatest priority in each locality and the most harmful offenders – particularly drug misusing offenders.
3. Tackling the crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour issues of greatest importance in each locality, increasing public confidence in the local agencies involved in dealing with these issues.
4. Reducing re-offending through the improved management of offenders.

The confidence measure has therefore been developed to support the third of these issues and will be used by the Treasury to determine the extent to which PSA 23 has been achieved. This links to a desire from government to ensure the police are responsive and answerable to the public.

The confidence measure is now the single remaining top down target, the Home office having removed all others. Each police force has its own individual target and, nationally, the target is for 60% of the population to have confidence in the police and partners by March 2012. From a baseline of 45%, this will require an increase of 15 percentage points nationally.

About this report

There is currently a considerable amount of effort being undertaken to examine the issue of confidence and to both measure it and impact upon it. This document aims to summarise the work undertaken in relation to confidence in an accessible format. It also acts as a foundation for further work that will be undertaken in relation to a guide for police forces and police authorities on the issues that need to be considered in addressing public confidence in the police.

The following pages start by examining the general field of confidence, before moving on to examine research associated with public confidence in the police.

2. What is confidence?

Defining terms

A dictionary definition provides three distinct ways of defining confidence. Firstly, confidence can be defined as trust, faith or reliance on someone or something. Secondly, confidence is synonymous with certainty, assurance and boldness. Finally, it refers to a thing shared confidentially or a trustful relationship.

It is the first of these definitions of confidence which will be the most useful in this discussion. When considering aspects of *confidence* the synonymous term *trust* will often be used, as the literature on trust provides useful insights².

Understanding confidence

Confidence is by no means an easy concept to grasp. As the following section shows, it has different meanings in different contexts and there are different types of confidence that must be taken into account in understanding this issue from a policing perspective.

Academic research into the notions of confidence and trust began in the fields of psychology and sociology and dealt with issues such as the low levels of trust expressed in political leaders and public and private institutions. More recently, the subjects were taken up by management studies from the mid 1980's. Since the mid 1990's interest in the subject has increased with a growth in the fields of management and organisational behaviour. In particular, the internet and e-commerce have become areas of study.

The literature on confidence and trust from these contexts agree that confidence is highly beneficial to the functioning of any organisation. There are a number of different ways in which confidence and trust have been conceived. Kramer (1999) identified three main ways:

- **A psychological state** – Defined by Dirks and Ferrin (2001) as an expectation or belief that one can rely upon another person's action and words and / or the person has good intentions towards oneself. Hence Hwang and Burgers' (1997) contention that trust in an individual / organisation diminishes fear, so that in conditions of complete trust, all fear of an individual / organisation in which trust has been bestowed is eliminated.

² It is recognised that some authors, such as Luhmann (1988) have argued for the distinction between trust, as required in personal relations, and confidence, necessary for participation in functional systems such as politics or economics. In this review, however, treating the two terms as synonymous was considered to be acceptable given its subject.

- **Rational choice** – As in a ‘prisoner dilemma’ situation where trusting another party can be of greater benefit to both parties than not trusting each other. In a classic prisoner’s dilemma, taken from game theory, two parties are placed in a situation in which (perhaps appropriately for the subject of this review) them both admitting to an offence for which they have both been arrested will lead to them both serving six months in prison. If they each blame the other party, they will each serve five years in prison. Crucially however, if one party betrays the other, the betrayer can expect to serve no time and the party he betrays to serve ten years. Therefore, by trusting each other both parties benefit to a certain extent, distrusting leads to the worst pay-off if both parties take this course, but if only one party betrays the other they can expect to benefit to a greater extent. Such a conception of trust assumes that decisions about trust are made in a way to maximise the return for the party concerned.
- **Relational** – Where trust is dependent on the context and also the other party. In this conception, trust is considered to be a three part relation involving a truster, a trustee and a specific context, in which A trusts B to do X (Hardin, 1992). For example, friend A may trust friend B to keep a confidence X. This situation will be affected by the relationship between A and B, B’s likelihood of keeping the confidence and the nature of the confidence X.

All three conceptions of trust are important from a policing perspective. Trust as a psychological state is important in the sense that there will be situations in which one may be vulnerable and rely on the police for support or protection – consider the police response team that is the first to arrive at a serious injury road traffic collision, the child told to find a police officer if they get lost, or the victim of domestic violence. In all these situations, we rely implicitly on the police to do the right thing and to have good intentions towards us.

Where the rational choice model is concerned, there may be circumstances in which an individual places trust in the police, because it is in both of their interests to do so. Consider the case of an informant who provides evidence against his criminal associates. He may receive intensive support in the form of witness protection, which would be both in his interest (for his own security) and in the interest of the police (to help secure a conviction). However, such an arrangement would rely on the informant having sufficient trust in the police to provide adequate protection.

Finally, relational trust recognises that trust may be impacted upon by the characteristics of a particular situation. For example, views of the police may be shaped by demographic characteristics, or on the basis of previous experience of the police. Trust is therefore relative to the characteristics of the individual and the circumstances of the encounter with the police with which they find themselves.

Kramer (1999) also defined a number of different types of trust operating within organisations. These are laid out below, along with considerations of how they might be relevant to the public's confidence in the police:

- **Dispositional trust** – Which recognises that people have different dispositions to trust / or not. Some people may simply be more disposed to trust than others and this may be shaped by both personal characteristics and life experiences. For example, from a policing perspective, it may be that some cultures are more disposed to trust the police than others.
- **History based trust** – Where perceptions of the trustworthiness of others and ones willingness to trust others will depend on past and cumulative experience. This is a relevant consideration for the police, as people's past experiences of interactions with the police may well inform their preference for trusting the police or not in the future. For example, an individual who has been repeatedly burgled may lose confidence in the police if they feel that appropriate action has not been taken by the police to address their victimisation.
- **Third parties as conduits of trust** – Others can pass on information relevant to decisions on whether to trust someone. This is useful as it can be very difficult to acquire knowledge of all individuals in an organisation. However, the quality of this information will depend on the trustworthiness of the third party and on the quality of the information, which can be partial and skewed. The police need to be aware therefore that their interactions with one person can affect the levels of trust that others have in them. This is especially important given findings which show that negative interactions tend to be reported to others much more frequently than positive ones (this is explored in detail elsewhere in this review).
- **Category based trust** – Trust which, rather than being predicated upon personal experience of the other party, is based on their membership of a social or organisational category. This allows for assumptions to be made about them and their trustworthiness. It means that personal knowledge is not necessary – one can judge the trust to have in another based on their membership category. As members of a visible and well known public organisation, police officers might be able to rely on a level of trust based on their membership of such an organisation, without personal knowledge of their individual trustworthiness being necessary. This is especially important as the police service is perceived as an important institution for maintaining social and moral order in society and its symbols of authority (its uniform, badge etc) and its powers are vested only in those that can be trusted to act appropriately.
- **Role based trust** – This is a form of depersonalised trust predicated on a party's role in an organisation. Trust is focused not on the individual fulfilling this role, but on the

organisation itself and its systems for producing and maintaining behaviour appropriate to roles within it. As above then, in relation to the police, its ability as an organisation to ensure role-appropriate behaviour from its officers and staff can generate trust in individual members of the organisation, without personal knowledge of them. However, here it is the role fulfilled by police officers that generates the trust, rather than the symbol of being a member of the police service (as would be the case in category based trust). This could raise the possibility of some roles being more trustworthy than others. For example, one could hypothesise there being greater role based trust for neighbourhood police officers than for detectives (based on stereotypical portrayals of these roles in popular dramas).

- **Rule based trust** – Trust predicated on a shared understanding among parties of the system of rules which regulate behaviour. The nature of the police as an organisation, which is heavily regulated through legislation, policies and procedures means that members of the public can make assumptions about the way in which individual members will behave, which can generate this type of trust.

This typology shows that direct personal experience of the other party is not necessary for trust to exist, as information from a trusted third party can be as valuable and that, in the case of the final three types of trust, a person's membership of a trusted institution can signify their trustworthiness.

This discussion highlights the complexity in generating public confidence in the police. That confidence can take multiple forms and generate multiple outcomes. This points towards the importance of understanding the type of confidence that one wishes to change as this may influence the approach that is taken.

Benefits of Confidence

Authors on the topic of confidence and trust agree that they are valuable resources which can bring benefits to individuals and organisations. While it is noted that trust can be misplaced in some situations and so lead to negative outcomes, overall trusting is considered to bring more benefits than distrusting. For example, Hardin (1993) states that distrust will inevitably result in many lost opportunities. By contrast, trust leads to some losses where trust has been misplaced or was not reciprocated, but also some real gains and that, overall, trust's gains outweigh the losses accrued in distrusting. Similarly, Gambetta states that the outcomes of misplaced trust are not as bad as the effects of consistent distrust. He states that, *'being wrong is an inevitable part of the wager, of the learning process strung between success and disappointment, where only if we are prepared to endure the latter can we hope to enjoy the benefits of the former'* (1988, p.235). Gambetta also notes that trust is not a scarce resource,

depleted through use. Rather, it is a resource created and re-created through use and, indeed, depleted when not used.

Kramer (1999) cites trust as a source of social capital to organisations because it:

- **Lowers transaction costs** – As it provides useful rules of thumb for deciding how to behave in situations and can encourage parties to give the benefit of the doubt to others and hence increase payoffs. Within the context of policing, day-to-day interactions with the public will be easier in situations where the community have trust in the police.
- **Increases spontaneous sociability among members of an organisation** - Because of an expectation of reciprocity. One example given is that in trusting situations, where parties expect trust to be repaid, parties will tend to hold back on using resources they know to be scarce. For example, in an office where employees share teabags, all employees are likely to only use a reasonable amount of them if they can trust that the same will be done by all other employees. Hwang and Burgers (1997) therefore contend that trust helps to contain greed³. It might be assumed then, with reference to the policing context that if members of the public can trust police officers to behave in a reasonable and just manner, that they would be more likely to behave in a similar manner. In a situation in which they do not expect such treatment they may be less inclined to behave in a way beneficial to the police.
- **Facilitates appropriate and adaptive forms of deference to organisational authorities** – Which are necessary to the maintenance of organisations. This would mean members of an organisation would be more likely to accept decisions made and their outcomes, even when they might be unfavourable to them as individuals. Indeed, in settings where distrust and suspicion are common, studies have found that parties tend to be more sophisticated when analysing the motives of other parties and their behaviour. From a policing perspective, public confidence in the police can legitimise their role, thereby making it easier for them to operate, even when politically / socially sensitive tasks have to be undertaken.

These can be seen as the potential benefits for a police force, in which its population has confidence. It could be expected that under such a confident and trustful situation, members of the public would have more reason to behave in a way beneficial to the police, for example choosing to provide them with information or accepting decisions they take and their outcomes. However, as noted in the next section, a level of distrust and suspicion can be important motives for a population to keep their organisations and institutions in check.

³ Although even in fully trusting conditions they argue that there is always a risk of greed.

Loss of Confidence

Trust is considered to be easier to lose than gain, and relatively easy to lose once gained. Kramer (1999) cites Slovic (1993) who argues that, in part, this is because trust-destroying events tend to be more visible than trust-building ones, and because such events tend to carry more weight in people's judgements. Kramer (1999) states that trust can be lost through a breach of a psychological contract such as expectations being unmet or violated. As such, actions that undermine what a person thought they could expect in a certain situation might indeed be expected to carry a significant weight in their judgement of the other party's trustworthiness.

The fact that negative events tend to carry more weight than positive ones, tends to mean that information provided by third parties may focus on negative information more than positive, and that such information provided by third parties may be considered more credible by those receiving it. An example of this from the field of marketing is provided by Arnott (2007, p.286) stated that third parties will tend to share bad experiences more than positive ones. Direct and indirect experiences combine to produce the following outcomes:

- Positive Direct experience + Positive Indirect experience = 'tell your friends'
- Positive Direct experience + Negative Indirect experience = 'defend your views'
- Negative Direct experience + Positive Indirect experience = 'question your evaluation'
- Negative Direct experience + Negative Indirect experience = 'tell everyone'

It shows that, while positive direct and indirect experiences combine to encourage people to share this information with their friends, negative direct and indirect experiences result in the news being shared much more widely.

Once trust is lost and distrust is established, it would seem to be easily reinforced. It was noted by Slovic (1993, in Kramer, 1999) for example to be very difficult to alter distrust through experience, a point also made by Gambetta (1988). Gambetta notes that once distrust is established, it can quite easily become a self-fulfilling position, for which supporting evidence is easy to find. Indeed he notes that evidence of trustworthy behaviour can be much more difficult to provide than evidence of untrustworthy behaviour as the former will often be the absence of a particular action. Indeed, Gambetta states that '*trust is a peculiar belief predicated not on evidence but on the lack of contrary evidence*' (1988, p.234, original emphasis). Good, in the same volume, raises the interesting notion of cognitive inertia. Where it might be possible for a trusted third party or a happy accident to change a person's views, the self-fulfilling nature of distrust means that such events will tend to be interpreted in line with the distrusting views already established. This, Good argues, is a rational way for people

to approach the large amounts of information and data they will be presented with, which they will not be able to consider in detail and so in many cases they instead fall back on assumptions already made.

Bad versus Good

Across a wide range of areas of study, there is a general consensus that bad events have more impact on one than good events. An expansive review by Baumeister et al (2001) found this to be the case across a number of domains of psychology. The most relevant points from this study are presented below:

- **Bad events elicit more thought processing than good events.** We tend to dwell more on negative things that happen to us than we do positive things (Abele, 1985).
- **Bad events tend to be recalled more clearly than good events.** Events involving negative emotions are more salient than events involving good emotions (Finkenauer and Rimé, 1998)
- **Bad events wear off more slowly than good events.** We tend to forget about the good things that happen to us quite quickly. However, negative events tend to stay with us for a much longer length of time and wane slowly (Brickman et al, 1978).
- **There is a snowball effect with bad events.** We tend to feel the impact of a subsequent bad event more intensely than the first bad event. By contrast, a second positive event has no additional impact than a first positive event. This suggests that the experience of bad events can intensify over time with additional bad experiences (Wells et al, 1999).
- **A shift from positive behaviour to negative behaviour has a greater impact on views than a shift from negative behaviour to positive.** This suggests it is harder to change opinion based on improving behaviour than it is when behaviour deteriorates (Afifi and Burgoon, 2000).
- **Bad information has more power than good information for attracting attention.** We are twice as likely to recall negative information as we are to recall positive information (Pratto and John, 1991).
- **Bad reputations are easy to acquire and hard to lose.** The more unfavourable a trait, the fewer the number of instances required for confirmation of a stereotype and the greater the number of instances necessary for disconfirmation of a stereotype. This suggests that we will believe a commonly held stereotype if we see a small number of cases that conform to that stereotype. However, we will need to see far

more cases that go against the stereotype for us to no longer believe that it is true (Rothbert and Park, 1986).

Implications for policing

There are a number of important points for policing in relation to this general literature of confidence and trust:

- When confidence is raised it can have significant benefits for an organisation. The societal benefits from having confidence in the police are likely to outweigh the risks associated with trusting the police.
- There are different types of trust (dispositional, history based, third party as conduits, category based, role based and rule based). The approaches undertaken by police forces to improve confidence in the police are likely to impact on one or more of these forms of trust. It is important to note that some forms of trust rely on direct experience of the police, while others do not. Therefore, for example, interventions that improve police-citizen encounters may have no impact on category based trust or role based trust. In developing interventions to improve confidence, police forces should be clear about the kind of trust they seek to improve, as this will shape the potential for success from any particular approach.
- Negative views held towards the police are likely to be difficult to change. There will need to be a significant investment in fostering positive images and experiences of the police, in the knowledge that this can be quickly undone with a negative experience.
- There may be benefit in focusing on events and circumstances that lead to negative experiences of the police, rather than seeking to improve the overall perception of the police service. This is likely to pay greater dividends in terms of improved confidence in the police than creating greater positive experiences, as the latter are less likely to be recalled or to change opinions. In short, *doing less bad* would appear more important than *doing more good*.

3. Measuring confidence

Introduction

Although the measure of confidence to be used in the police confidence target is a given, it is important to briefly articulate the nature of the measure as this has a bearing on the purpose of the guidance that it is to be produced – whether it is about meeting a target or about improving public confidence in the police.

The Government's approach to measuring confidence in the police

The measure of confidence used as the basis for PSA 23 is collected through the British Crime Survey that reports at the police force level on a quarterly basis. The relevant question asked in the survey is as follows:

“It is the responsibility of the police and local council working in partnership to deal with anti-social behaviour and crime in your local area. How much would you agree or disagree that the police and local council are dealing with the anti-social behaviour and crime issues that matter in this area?”

The response options available are:

- 1 Strongly agree.
- 2 Tend to agree.
- 3 Neither agree nor disagree.
- 4 Tend to disagree.
- 5 Strongly disagree.

The target is based on achieving 60% who strongly agree or tend to agree with this statement. This question has been developed in line with the aims of the Home Office crime strategy and PSA 23, which focus on crime reduction agencies tackling local level crime and anti-social behaviour issues in the local community. However, it has been 'badged' centrally as a measure of public confidence in the police. A press release from the 5th March 2009 quoted the then Home Secretary Jacqui Smith as saying *'I have a single-minded focus on building public confidence in policing and that means the police should be answering to the public, not the government. That is why I have scrapped all but one central target for the police - to raise public confidence'*.

This suggests that there has been attempt to align two important areas of work with a single measure – reducing crime and ASB and improving public confidence in the police.

There are, however, a number of problems with this as a measure of public confidence in the police:

- **It doesn't mention confidence.** The question that is used does not actually mention confidence in the police. Instead, it implies that agreeing that crime and ASB are being dealt with is synonymous with confidence.
- **Both police and local authority are included.** In earlier testing of the question, the term 'partners' was used instead of 'local council'. 'Partners' was the preferred terms as it embodied the notion that crime reduction was a partnership activity. However, the results of these pilots showed confusion among respondents over who was meant by 'partners'. The term 'local council' was therefore included for clarity and was designed to act as a proxy for other partners. There are a number of difficulties with this situation. Firstly, it creates a double-barrelled aspect to the question. It requires respondents to weigh up the contribution of two organisations in reducing crime. We do not know how much weight respondents are placing in their assessment on the work of the police versus the work of the local council. Work by Lancashire Police has shown that, when asked separately about the police and local council, the levels of agreement are consistently higher for the police than for the local council. People view the police as being more effective in dealing with crime and ASB than the local council and the inclusion of the local council in the question has the effect of reducing the overall level of agreement. Secondly, we don't know who is being thought of when local councils are considered. In two tier areas, this could either be the district / borough council, or the county council. Thirdly, the target is only being uniformly applied to the police and not the local council. While local councils could voluntarily sign up to National Indicator 24 (which asks a similar question about the percentage of people that agree that the police and local council are dealing with crime and ASB in the area and which is measured through the Place Survey every two years) as part of their Local Area Agreement, only a minority of councils have done so. This means the police have been set a target over which they do not have full control (although presumably this is countered with the assumption that the police will naturally work in partnership with local authorities to deal with such problems).
- **It asks about both crime and ASB.** This is a second double barrel element to the question, requiring the respondent to weigh up how well both are being addressed.

However, it may be that one of these elements is more salient than the other, or that the organisations are viewed as more effective at dealing with one more than the other. These issues cannot be separated in the current question.

- **It focuses on the issues that matter in the area.** Each respondent may have a different notion about the issues that matter in the local area, but from this question it not possible to identify what these may be.
- **Confidence in the police is treated as being synonymous with reductions in crime and ASB.** The police have many roles that are not associated with crime reduction. These include maintaining public order, road safety, missing persons enquiries and community engagement to name just a few. None of these roles (which may be equally or more important than crime reduction to the public) are covered by the chosen question.
- **The time frame is the present.** The question asks about how crime and ASB are being dealt with in the present tense. This requires the respondent to have a current knowledge of police and local council activity. In practice, respondents will probably base this on their past experience, but with no time reference, this may be based on the experience over a number of years.

The British Crime Survey has included other measures of police confidence in the past. These have included:

“Taking everything into account, how good a job do you think the police in this area are doing?”

“Taking everything into account, I have confidence in the police in this area.”

The latter question is included as one of a number of diagnostics for the current measure of confidence. The change in question to the one currently used poses a problem from the perspective of examining research on the confidence issue as most studies have used alternative wording, which means one must be careful in interpreting the results.

This also raises an important question. Are we focusing on the factors that drive the PSA 23 question, or on the factors that drive confidence in the police? The assumption made here is that the focus is on public confidence in the police per se, rather than on the PSA 23 measure, although it is assumed that driving up confidence in the police will be reflected in the current measure.

Reliability of measures of confidence

There is a question mark of the extent to which survey measures of confidence remain stable over time. Ditton and Farrall (2007) report that a question asked in the 1988 BCS – “*Do the police do a good or bad job*” was accidentally asked twice in the same survey. Of those who answered it twice, 35% gave a different answer the second time (of whom 22% were more positive and 13% were more negative). The assumption in asking these survey questions is that perceptions will be relatively fixed, although this finding suggests this may not always be the case.

Feilzer et al (2008) have shown how measures of confidence in the police are affected by the urban/rural mix of an area. They found that rural areas tend to have high levels of confidence than urban areas. This means that differences in public confidence between police forces could be due (at least in part) to differences in their urban / rural mix and this was still relevant within a most similar group of forces. Although there are no plans to directly compare results between forces, these findings caution against any temptation to do so.

4. Drivers of confidence in the police

Introduction

From a review of the literature associated with confidence in the police, a number of key drivers can be identified. By drivers, we mean those factors (including personal attributes, perceptions and experiences) that are associated with an affect on confidence. By identifying the relevant drivers of police confidence, it should be possible to direct activity towards the kinds of areas where effective action might be anticipated to bring about an improvement in public confidence in the police. The following pages therefore examine the research evidence in relation to public confidence.

The drivers that have been found to be related to confidence in the police are:

- Community engagement and problem solving
- Procedural justice (fair treatment)
- Police effectiveness
- Contact with the police
- Dealing with anti-social behaviour
- Targeted foot patrol

These are ordered roughly according to their strength of association with confidence in the police.

Community engagement and problem solving

Community engagement, as explored here, involves a number of different dimensions. It includes proactive involvement with the public to understand their needs and concerns and it also includes taking action to address those concerns. It incorporates what Flanagan (2008) would call 'answerability' (taking into account people's concerns and being held to account) and 'responsiveness' (action taken by the police that is driven by need and priorities). In many respects, this embodies a problem-oriented style of policing in which community concerns are identified and treated as the focus for action. A number of studies have identified drivers of this kind.

Tuffin et al. (2006) found that an improvement in the perception of police effort to find out what people think, following the introduction of neighbourhood policing as part of the National

Reassurance Policing Programme, was associated with increased confidence in the police⁴. The results showed an odds ratio of 1.75 associated with improved perceptions of police effort to find out what people think. It was one of five factors found to be significantly associated with improvements in confidence. The evaluation of the National Reassurance Policing Programme also found that in combination, community engagement, problem solving and increase foot patrol, were associated with improvements in public confidence (foot patrol is dealt with separately below).

Statistical analysis by Myhill and Beak (2008) found that agreement with the statement '*The police in this area are dealing with the things that matter to people in the community*' had a strong positive association with confidence in the police⁵. This was the strongest factor to emerge in a logistic regression model, with an odds ratio of 4.68 (compared to an odds ratio of 1.00 for those who disagreed with the statement – treated as the reference category).

Using the same measure as used in the single top down target⁶, Thorpe (2009) found that perceiving that the police can be relied on to deal with minor crimes in the area was strongly associated with police confidence. Those that agreed with this statement had an odds ratio of 2.83 compared to an odds ratio of 1.00 for those that were neutral or disagreed in a logistic regression model. Moreover, this was one of two factors that together accounted for 17% of variance in the statistical model⁷.

Jackson et al (2009) found that confidence in police community engagement was the strongest of three factors found to be direct drivers on overall confidence in the local police. This factor explained 13% of the variance in a statistical model that, overall, explained 34% of variance. They also found that confidence in police community engagement was particularly associated with public concerns about local disorder and, to a lesser extent, by concern about collective efficacy, social cohesion and worry about crime.

Implications for policing

Confidence in police community engagement would appear to be a particularly strong driver of confidence in the police overall. It consistently comes out as an important factor in statistical models. This is largely associated with being seen to identify the

⁴ This was based on a measure of public confidence that asked 'Taking everything into account, how good a job do you think the police in your local area are doing?'

⁵ This is based on a measure of public confidence that asked 'Taking everything into account, how good a job do you think the police in your local area are doing?' An almost identical odds ratio was found when an alternative measure of confidence was used as the dependent variable. This asked 'Taking everything into account I have confidence in the police in this area'.

⁶ This measure is worded as 'The police and local council are dealing with the anti-social behaviour and crime issues that matter in this area'.

⁷ The other factor was: perceiving that the police deal with people fairly and / or with respect.

issues of concern in the community and with being seen to take action to address those concerns.

Procedural justice (Fair treatment)

Issues of 'procedural justice' or fair treatment have been highlighted in a number of studies to be associated with public confidence in the police. These show that 'process' issues can be as important for garnering confidence as 'outcome' issues. This is particularly relevant in relation to the way in which people feel they have been treated in encounters with the police. Those that feel they have been unfairly treated will generally have less confidence in the police than those who feel they have been well treated.

A study of public confidence in the police by Jackson and Sunshine (2007) found that a sense of fairness in police procedures (procedural justice) was strongly associated with satisfaction with police effectiveness with cutting crime and with satisfaction with police engagement with the local community. However, they also found that procedural justice was mediated through sharing values with the police. This was felt to be extremely important. People are viewed to judge the authority of a group (in this case the police) on the basis of whether they embody the values and morals of that group. In this case, the public want to identify with the morals and values of the police. These values can be demonstrated in the way in which the police deal with the public, with the expectation of fair treatment. A failure to perceive a sense of fairness in police processes was found to be linked to a failure to perceive that values were shared with the police and this affected confidence in the police.

Myhill and Beak (2008) found that a measure of procedural justice was the second most important factor in their logistic regression model. Agreement with the statement 'The police in this area treat everyone fairly regardless of who they are' was found to be a driver of confidence in the police overall (with an odds ratio of 2.12, compared to a reference category of 1.00 for those disagreeing with the statement).

Jackson et al (2009) found that confidence in police fairness explained 5% of the variance in confidence in the police overall. They also found that confidence in police fairness was to some extent driven by public concern about disorder in an area. High levels of concern about disorder tended to reduce perceptions of police fairness. In the context of the USA, Skogan (2006) suggests a number of reasons for this. These include the fact that the police often act differently in high-crime neighbourhoods; are likely to be more aggressive and suspicious when stopping people in such locations; and may be more prone to abuse of power in poor areas.

Thorpe (2009) identified 'perceiving that the police deal with people fairly and / or with respect' as one of two factors that together explained 17% of the variance in confidence with the police. Those that agreed that the police dealt with people with fairness *and* respect had an odds ratio of 3.37, compared for an odds ratio of 1.00 for those that felt the police dealt with people with neither fairness nor respect.

It should be noted that studies have also found that perceptions of procedural justice have also been found to be associated with the extent to which police action is seen as legitimate (Sunshine and Tyler, 2003) and improve cooperation with the police (Reisig and Lloyd, 2009).

Implications for policing

The way that people are treated in encounters with the police can have an important impact on public confidence in the police. This highlights the importance of treating all members of the public with fairness and respect.

Police effectiveness

Police effectiveness is usually considered in terms of the ability of the police to tackle crime. On this basis, there are a number of studies that have found police effectiveness to be a driver of police confidence.

Myhill and Beak (2008) found that the perception of the local crime rate in the previous two years was associated with local police confidence. This is assumed here to be treated as a proxy for police effectiveness in reducing crime. Those that felt there was less crime now than two years before were more likely to be confident in the local police (odds ratio of 1.54), compared to those who felt there was now more crime (odds ratio of 1.00 – reference category) and those that felt there had been no change (odds ratio of 1.23). This factor was one of three that each explained at least 1% of variance in their logistic regression model.

Thorpe (2009) identified 'not perceiving the crime rate in the local area to have increased a lot' to be associated with local confidence. For example, those that thought there was a lot less crime now were more likely to be confident in the police (odds ratio of 2.40) compared to those that felt there was a little more crime now (odds ratio of 1.24). However, this factor was found to account for only a small amount of the variance in the statistical model (it was one of 14 variables that together explained just 3 percent of the variance in the model).

By contrast, Jackson et al (2009) found police effectiveness to be relatively strongly associated with overall confidence in the police. In their statistical model, confidence in police effectiveness accounted for 12% of the variance in a model that explained 34% of the

variance. They also found that confidence in police effectiveness was particularly associated with concerns about disorder and by worry about crime.

Implications for policing

Perceptions of police effectiveness (especially in terms of falling crime rates) have been shown to be linked to public confidence overall. However, there tends to be some variation in the extent to which the factor is important, although this is likely to be largely due to the quality of the police effectiveness measure used.

Contact with the police

Research has shown that the nature of the contact with police is key to its affect on confidence. A US based study by Skogan (2006) found that members of the public tended to be more satisfied with citizen-initiated encounters (such as when they called for service) than with police-initiated encounters (such as being pulled over by the police in their car). A survey of residents in Chicago, USA, found that 78% of the public were satisfied with citizen-initiated encounters, compared to 58% who were satisfied with police-initiated encounters. Central to Skogan's thesis was that encounters with the police tend to be asymmetrical. Negative encounters with the police tended to reduce confidence in the police, while positive encounters had no impact on perceptions of confidence⁸.

Importantly, Skogan found that negative experiences of citizen-initiated encounters were particularly damaging on police confidence. Indeed, the coefficient associated with a negative experience of contacting the police (-0.46) was 23 times that of having a positive experience (+0.02). This blame-to-credit ratio of 23:1 was much higher than that for police-initiated encounters, which stood at 4:1. It was theorised that this may be explained in part if public expectations were higher in citizen-initiated encounters than in police initiated ones. Therefore, negative experiences of such incidents could have a greater effect.

Both negative police-initiated encounters and negative citizen-initiated encounters are associated with a fall in confidence in the police, but the latter were particularly damaging. This is particularly important as citizen-initiated encounters are more frequent than police-initiated encounters.

⁸ This was based on a regression model that explained 40% of the variance. Positive and negative experiences of police encounters accounted for 17% of the explained variance in the model.

Skogan found that these results held across a number of parts of the USA and also held for the UK, based on a re-analysis of the BCS.

This asymmetrical impact of police encounters was explained in terms of negativity bias – people tend to place more weight on negative experiences than they do on positive experiences. Negative experiences tend to have a more significant and longer lasting impact on shaping attitudes and behaviours and also tend to be recalled for a longer length of time (Baumeister et al., 2001).

Similar results were found by Myhill and Beak (2008). Those who were dissatisfied with a citizen-initiated encounter with the police had a greater impact on confidence (odds ratio of 0.54) than those who were satisfied with the encounter (odds ratio of 1.28), compared to those with no contact (reference category with odds ratio of 1.00). Similarly, those dissatisfied with a police-initiated encounter had lower confidence (odds ratio 0.57) than those with no contact. There was no statistically significant impact of being satisfied with police-initiated encounters on public confidence in the police.

Vicarious contact with the police

People's attitudes towards the police may not only be based on direct experience of the police, but also on indirect, vicarious experiences. These will be obtained from the experiences of friends, family, neighbours and others with whom one comes into contact, as well as through media depictions. Rosenbaum et al (2005) has shown how such vicarious experiences (both positive and negative) can be associated with attitudes towards the police.

Contrary to the discussion on asymmetry of impact above, positive vicarious experiences were found to be strongly associated with changing attitudes (in a positive way) than negative vicarious experiences are with changing attitudes (in a negative way). The primary source of vicarious experiences were found to be from the person who had the encounter with the police (44%), the media (33%) and family, friends and neighbours (17%).

Implications for policing

Negative experiences of the police in citizen-initiated encounters are particularly associated with damage to public confidence in the police – more so than police-initiated encounters. This highlights the importance of ensuring a high quality of service in contacts with the public, such as when dealing with calls for service. However, this should be viewed as ‘damage limitation’. A high quality service resulting in a satisfied member of the public is unlikely to increase confidence in the police, but poor quality service could damage confidence.

It is also important to note that experiences are often transmitted to others. A positive or negative experience with the police may not only affect the person with whom the police come into direct contact, but also others with whom that person associates. The way in which the police act in any given encounter can therefore have a ripple effect through a community.

Dealing with anti social behaviour

An evaluation of the impact of the National Reassurance Policing Programme by Tuffin et al. (2006) found that the introduction of neighbourhood policing improved the perception to which five out of eight types of anti-social behaviour were viewed to be a problem. These were:

- Teenagers hanging around on the street in the local area
- Vandalism to bus shelters / phone boxes in the local area
- Vandalism to other types of property in the local area
- Graffiti on public buildings in the local area
- People being drunk or rowdy in public places

Teenagers hanging around on the street was used as a proxy measure for problem solving by neighbourhood policing teams and, when included in a logistic regression model, was found to have a statistically significant impact on public confidence in the police.

These findings were echoed by Myhill and Beak (2008), who found that those perceiving low anti-social behaviour in their local area were more likely to have confidence in the police than those perceiving high anti-social behaviour. They found that the odds ratio (in a logistic regression model⁹) of being confident in the police were twice as high for those that perceived

⁹ This model explained 31% of variance in the dependent variable.

low anti-social behaviour than for those that perceived it to be high (odds ratios of 1.99 compared 1.00).

Jackson et al (2009) found that public concern about disorder was associated with overall confidence in the local police. Using data from the Metropolitan Police's Public Attitudes Survey, they developed a statistical model of public confidence using path analysis that explained 34% of the variance in confidence in the local police¹⁰. They found that there was a direct impact on overall confidence in the police based on the extent of concern about disorder in an area. This was explained in terms of the police being seen as upholding community values. Increased perceived anti-social behaviour and disorder as seen to diminish moral authority and this raises concerns over the ability of the police to act as symbols of moral authority.

As well as direct associations with overall confidence in the police, there were also mediating effects. Public concern about disorder was associated with reduced confidence in police effectiveness (particularly important for the current target), confidence in police community engagement and confidence in police fairness.

Thorpe (2009) found that those perceiving there to be a low level of anti-social behaviour in their local area were more likely to think the police and local authority were dealing with the crime and ASB issues that mattered (48%) than were those perceiving high ASB (36%).

However, the strength of this finding was not as great as when other measures of confidence have been used by others (see above). The odds ratio for the relationship between those experiencing low ASB was 1.37¹¹.

Thorpe also examined a range of seven types of ASB¹² and found that there was relatively little difference between them in terms of the proportion who thought there was a problem and agreed that the police and local authority were dealing with the ASB and crime issues that mattered. This ranged from 38% (the lowest) for those considering teenagers hanging around to be a problem who thought the police and local authority were dealing with the ASB and crime issues that matters; to 42% (the highest) of those who felt abandoned or burnt out cars were a problem.

¹⁰ This is viewed as high among the studies of public confidence examined in this review.

¹¹ This was based on a logistic regression model that explained 20% of the variance.

¹² These were teenagers hanging around, vandalism / graffiti etc., people using or dealing drugs, people being drunk or rowdy, litter / rubbish, noisy neighbours, abandoned or burnt out cars.

Implications for policing

There is consistent evidence to suggest that those who perceive high levels of anti-social behaviour are less confident in the police than those who perceive low levels of anti-social behaviour. However, the strength of the relationship between anti-social behaviour and confidence in the police (while usually statistically significant) tends to be relatively weak compared to other factors discussed above.

Targeted foot patrol

There is some evidence to show that increasing targeted foot patrol can be associated with improved confidence. For example, the work by Tuffin et al (2006) on the National Reassurance Policing Programme found that an improved perception of regular foot patrol in the local area was a statistically significant factor in a logistic regression model for public confidence in the police.

Thorpe (2009) found that seeing a police officer or PCSO on foot patrol was statistically associated to perceptions of public confidence in the police – particularly for those that recalled seeing an officer more than once a day (odds ratio of 2.97). However, this again explained little of the variance in confidence in the police.

Implications for policing

There is some evidence to suggest that increasing foot patrols are associated with increased public confidence in the police. However, this is generally a weak factor in driving confidence, compared to others examined here.

5. Lessons on improving confidence

Introduction

This section examines approaches that can have an impact on confidence. This includes an examination of things that can improve confidence and things that can reduce confidence. This draws on material from both the general literature of confidence and trust and on the known evaluations of police initiatives.

Things that improve confidence

Neighbourhood policing

Tuffin et al (2006) showed how a model of neighbourhood policing embodied in the National Reassurance Policing Programme led to a 12% net increase in the percentage of people who thought the local police were doing a good or excellent job¹³. This suggests that neighbourhood policing can have an impact on confidence.

However, this was achieved within the context of a relatively high dosage of intervention. For example, the teams covered a single ward, with between 1,250 and 2,450 head of population per officer. By contrast, the areas covered by the roll out of neighbourhood policing teams tend to be larger than a ward and cover larger populations. For example, an examination of nine neighbourhood policing teams by Cannings et al (2007) found there to be an average of 2,820 head of population per officer. This may partly explain why the second year of the Neighbourhood Policing Programme was found to have little impact on outcome measures – including confidence in the police¹⁴ (Mason, 2009). In addition, the quality of the problem solving and community engagement work undertaken by Neighbourhood Policing Teams can effect the impact the roll out has (as demonstrated above) and very different levels of capability were uncovered in the review of the second year.

Disseminating Information

A recent small scale pilot in three London wards (Wunsch and Hohl, 2008) showed that provision of up to date, locally specific and positive messages in the form of a newsletter delivered to people's homes can positively impact upon the levels of confidence people held in their local policing team and also in their police force in general.

¹³ In areas where the National Reassurance Policing Programme was introduced, the proportion of residents who thought the police were doing a good or excellent job rose from 41% to 56%. In the control sites, there was an increase from 44% to 47%.

¹⁴ Measurement issues will also have played a role here as the geographic units of analysis were the force and the BCU, not the neighbourhood.

The three wards¹⁵ were chosen from the seven which are currently part of the Metropolitan Police's Safer Neighbourhoods Survey (introduced as part of the Force's role out of neighbourhood policing). One newsletter was developed in each ward and delivered to homes in these wards¹⁶. This was done at a mid point in rounds of the annual survey, so that the impact they had could be easily measured by the survey. The remaining four wards also provided a ready made control group.

The newsletters provided information on the local Safer Neighbourhoods (neighbourhood policing) team and their work on ward priorities, along with local crime prevention advice, contact details for the local neighbourhood policing team and information on how residents could become more involved. All the newsletters were marked clearly as coming from the police and used an easy to understand, jargon-free style.

Key findings from the analysis of the results of the before and after surveys in the control and sample wards showed that:

- Respondents in test wards reported feeling more informed about their local policing team, and about local and London-wide policing, whereas results from the control group showed no significant changes.
- Test ward respondents also felt more confident in the local and London-wide police, with significant increases in relation to feeling that the police listened to local concerns, were easy to contact and were reliable. In the control wards smaller significant increases were seen in relation to perceived ease of contact and reliability.
- Reported levels of confidence in the police to deal with specific offences remained stable in the test wards and in the case of the issues of gun crime, 'teenagers' and dangerous driving rose significantly. By contrast, in the control wards confidence fell across the board. This leads the authors to argue that the newsletters and the information they contained could have acted as a 'buffer' against negative information about the police presented by other sources, such as other forms of media, which had more of an impact in the control areas which did not receive a newsletter.
- Significantly fewer respondents receiving a newsletter identified a local area as an area of concern. This was not mirrored in the control wards. The provision of the newsletter also had some impact upon respondent's perceptions of levels of a number of crime and disorder issues, including drink driving and dangerous driving, racially motivated attacks, rape and sexual assault. Smaller, significant falls were

¹⁵ Bethnal Green North, Canning Town South and Upper Edmonton

¹⁶ In total 17,117 newsletters were delivered

also recorded in the control wards for some of the same offences. However, in the test wards no impact was seen with regards to drug related offences and gang and knife crime and the perceived levels of anti-social behaviour rose in the test wards. It was reported by the authors that such views may have also been impacted upon by other forms of media.

This pilot showed that provision of even one locally tailored newsletter can have a positive impact upon not only perceptions of and confidence in the local policing team featured in it, but of the force as a whole, suggesting an effective bottom-up type approach. Analysis of this study also shows that the newsletters can act as 'buffers' against negative information on levels of crime received from other sources, such as national media.

A recent evaluation by the Office for Criminal Justice Reform (OCJR) also tested what influence the provision of information could have on levels of public confidence, although in this instance, the evaluation related to confidence in the wider Criminal Justice System (CJS) (Singer and Cooper, 2008). It also sought to test the effect of different forms of delivery of information. The evaluation made use of a randomised control trial design and took place in one Local Criminal Justice Board (LCJB) where confidence in the CJS was relatively low. Confidence was measured on whether people felt that the CJS were effective in bringing offenders to justice.

A professionally designed, public information booklet containing information about crime and the criminal justice system at the national and local level were produced. The content of the booklet was driven by previous research which showed that two key drivers of confidence in the CJS in bringing offenders to justice were perceptions of the severity of sentencing and of changes in the overall levels of crime. Three different types of delivery method were used, posting the booklet (in a personalised envelope), hand delivering the booklet and hand delivering it with an explanation of it. The different forms of delivery and the manner in which this information was presented was informed by research from the world of marketing. The evaluation used the model of informing, persuading and reminding to structure the content of the booklet.

A telephone survey was used both before and after the delivery of the booklets, firstly to establish a baseline level of confidence and then to assess the impact of the booklets. The second run of the survey was conducted one month after delivery and sought the views of a randomly selected sample of 3,000 people who had both received the booklet through one of the methods and who had not received it (the control group). It was found that those who had received booklets reported higher levels of confidence than those who had not. Booklet recipients were statistically more likely to report being confident in the CJS in bringing offenders to justice than those who did not receive a booklet by almost five percentage points.

Further, those who had the booklet hand delivered were more likely than the control group to report confidence in the CJS by six percentage points.

The authors conclude that investing in a quality and well designed, eye catching booklet as worthwhile and report suggestions for further improvement gathered from survey respondents, such as:

- including numbers along with percentages to avoid accusations of spin
- to provide information on all aspects of the CJS, as the selection may be considered biased
- provide information about failures as well as successes
- include cameos or case studies to add human interest

6. Conclusions

This review of the literature, while not exhaustive, provides a number of helpful pointers towards work that should be undertaken to improve public confidence in the police.

General lessons from confidence research

There are number of different types of confidence / trust including dispositional, history based, third party, category, role based and rule based trust. The approaches that forces take to improve confidence may have an impact on different types of confidence. This raises the importance of being clear about what might be expected from any given approach.

There is good evidence to suggest that particular attention should be focused on preventing negative experiences as these have a greater and more widespread impact on confidence than do positive experiences. In this context *doing less bad* is probably more important than *doing more good*. This perhaps calls for greater scrutiny of poorer performing areas of work (especially in relation to citizen initiated encounters) and possibly greater attention to the way in which complaints from the public are handled.

Drivers of confidence

There is an emerging literature that consistently highlights a number of factors that drive confidence in the police. These include:

- Community engagement and problem solving
- Police effectiveness (Fair treatment)
- Procedural justice
- Contact with the police
- Dealing with anti-social behaviour
- Targeted foot patrol

Developing interventions that improve the way in which the public perceive these aspects of police business are likely to pay the greatest dividends in raising confidence. There are relatively few interventions that have been shown to work in improving confidence, but well implemented neighbourhood policing and targeted newsletters are among those approaches likely to assist.

Concluding remarks

It's traditional for research reports to conclude with a call for more research and this report is no exception. The research that has been conducted generally only explains a third of the variance in perceptions of confidence at best. That means there are other factors that explain the majority of the variation in the measure. This suggests there would be benefit in further studies that examine the impact of different factors on public confidence in the police.

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