

Interventions to enhance police legitimacy increase public satisfaction with and confidence in the police, and reduce reoffending



By torbakhopper (runway ninja model with a gun)
[CC BY 2.0]

Police-led legitimacy interventions have positive effects on citizens' perceptions of police legitimacy

What is the aim of this review?

This Campbell systematic review assesses the direct and indirect benefits of public police interventions that use procedurally just dialogue. The review summarises findings from 30 studies conducted in Australia, the United States and England. The participants were individuals (citizen, victim, offender etc.), groups (e.g. community) and third parties (e.g. religious advisors).

Effective policing requires voluntary public cooperation. Citizens are more likely to cooperate when they view the police as legitimate. This review assesses the direct and indirect benefits of interventions to enhance police legitimacy. These interventions increase public satisfaction with and confidence in the police and reduce reoffending.

What did the review study?

Police require voluntary cooperation from the general public to be effective in controlling crime and maintaining order. Research shows that citizens are more likely to comply and cooperate with police and obey the law when they view the police as legitimate.

Procedural justice is the most common pathway used by the police to increase their legitimacy in the eyes of the general public. Procedural justice has four essential components: (1) citizen participation in the proceedings prior to an authority reaching a decision (or voice), (2) perceived neutrality of the authority in making the decision, (3) showing dignity and respect toward citizens throughout the interaction, and (4) the authority conveys trustworthy motives.

This review assesses the direct and indirect benefits of public police interventions that use procedurally just dialogue.

What studies are included?

Included studies were of police-led legitimacy interventions involving either a control condition or quasi-experimental interrupted time-series design. These studies had to have measured an aggregate outcome such as crime rate, in equally spaced time intervals prior to and following the initiation of the police-led intervention.

Included studies reported on at least one of the following direct or indirect outcomes: perceived



By West Midlands Police from West Midlands, UK
[CC BY-SA 2.0]

How up-to-date is this review?

The review authors searched for studies published until April 2009. This Campbell Systematic Review was published in January 2013.

What is the Campbell Collaboration?

The Campbell Collaboration is an international, voluntary, non-profit research network that publishes systematic reviews. We summarise and evaluate the quality of evidence about programmes in the social and behavioural sciences. Our aim is to help people make better choices and better policy decisions.

About this summary

This summary was prepared by Ada Chukwudozie and Howard White (Campbell Collaboration) based on the Campbell Systematic Review 2013:1 Legitimacy in Policing: A Systematic Review by Lorraine Mazerolle, Sarah Bennett, Jacqueline Davis, Elise Sargeant and Matthew Manning (DOI 10.4073/csr.2013:1). Tanya Kristiansen (Campbell Collaboration) redesigned and edited the summary. Financial support from the American Institutes for Research for the production of this summary is gratefully acknowledged.



legitimacy, procedural fairness, willingness to cooperate with police, compliance, satisfaction, social ties, confidence in police, reduction in reoffending, reduction in crime and reduction in social disorder.

Thirty studies containing forty-one independent evaluations were included in the review. The studies focused on the way in which the police interact with individuals, groups and/or third parties. The studies were conducted in Australia, the USA and England.

What are the main results in this review?

Police-led interventions specifically aimed at increasing legitimacy have a significant impact on public satisfaction with and confidence in the police. Such interventions are also associated with significantly increased public compliance/cooperation, procedural justice (fairness, neutrality, etc.) and legitimacy (obligation to obey police/law). Interventions also had a minor effect on reoffending.

What do the findings in this review mean?

The review provides consistent evidence that police-led legitimacy interventions have positive effects on citizens' perceptions of police legitimacy.

The findings show that the dialogue component of front-line police-led interventions is important for promoting citizen satisfaction, confidence, compliance and cooperation with the police, and for enhancing perceptions of procedural justice. In practical terms, this means that police can achieve positive changes in citizen attitudes to police through adopting procedurally justice dialogue as a component part of any type of police intervention.

There is a small, but growing amount of randomized experiments in the international literature that isolate specific interventions and test different modes of delivery, e.g. reassurance policing. The effectiveness of the studies would benefit from future studies on legitimacy policing employing this study design.