



Trust between police and the black church

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Abstract

The objective of this study was to evaluate a three-year-old outreach program developed by a predominately African American Church of Christ in Tennessee to enhance trust with the local police. This evaluation answered basic questions about the program's usefulness, and the information gathered was assessed to improve program goals. The outcome of the evaluation presented in this study was to identify which factors of the program enhanced trust from the perspectives of the police and church members that participated in the focus groups. Qualitative research with two focus groups was used to answer the following four research questions: (a) How has the outreach program of this church helped to build trust with the police department?; (b) What is the role of this church in helping the outreach program build trust?; (c) What is the role of the police department in helping the outreach program build trust?; and (d) How does ecological systems theory (collaboration) assist in helping the outreach program build trust? The results of this study present the key themes and subthemes identified from the focus group discussions. Based on these results, the researcher concluded that the outreach program did enhance trust between the church and the local police. The researcher also suggested that these findings can be used to enhance collaborative efforts between the church and police officers in developing trust between police and African American communities.

Key words: Community policing, policing and society, community relations, police and society

Introduction

With the church being the cultural center of African American communities, many believe that the involvement of the church and its members is the ultimate solution to repairing the damaged relationship between these two groups (MacDonald & Stokes, 2006). The role of the church identified in African American culture reflects the church's impact on resolving or exacerbating the prevailing problems in communities. In this study, the researcher examined trust between police and an African American church community. In the United States, public confidence and trust in the police have been low and that this problem has intensified due to recent police shootings of unarmed Black men (Tyler et al., 2015). Trust in the police is a concern for more people than African Americans and that police validity is molded by the perception that police treat people with respect and fairness (Tyler et al., 2015). Furthermore, researchers have suggested that many widely used police practices are viewed as unfair, which compromises the public's opinion of police as legal authorities (Tyler et al., 2015).

Research objectives

The research questions investigated in this study were:

1. How has the outreach program of this church helped to build trust with the police department?
2. What is the role of this church in helping the outreach program build trust?
3. What is the role of the police department in helping the outreach program build trust?
4. How does ecological systems theory (collaboration) assist in helping the outreach program build trust?

Literature Review

Public Trust of Police in Minority Communities

When individuals in the public perceive the police as legitimate authorities, they are more likely to cooperate with the police in personal encounters including following police instructions (Tyler et al., 2015). The view of the police as legitimate authorities correlated with how people viewed the law in their lives, including through community cooperation, crime reporting, and identifying criminals as well as being willing to be witnesses and jurors (Tyler et al., 2015). However, community trust of police involves not only decreased crime and polite service but the experience of community-police interactions (Tyler, 2016). Tyler et al. (2015) identified four critical elements of positive public perceptions of police: public participation, neutrality, respect, and trustworthiness; these elements relate to the involvement of the larger community in developing specific strategies for maintaining social order and encouraging the acceptance of the public as well as their buy-in. The authors defined neutrality as referring to transparent, rule-based decision-making (Tyler et al., 2015). The same authors defined trustworthiness as being understanding to individual needs and distresses, thereby indicating sincerity (Tyler et al., 2015).

Public trust of police is related to social considerations such as socioeconomic status and social stratification (Cao et al., 2012). Cao et al. (2012) stated that trust in police “is related to one’s position in the social stratification with the elite having higher confidence in the police and the poor having lower confidence” (p. 42). Similarly, the National Institute of Justice (2016) reported research findings that people of minority races “are more likely than whites to view law enforcement with suspicion and distrust”. Pertaining to the role and influence of law enforcement, police officers hold the authority to make “discretionary decisions every day about who is likely to commit a crime and who should be targeted by the criminal justice system; about who should be stopped, questioned, searched, and arrested” (Pickett, 2007, p. 74). Police training, biases, and prejudices greatly influence the decisions of police officers about whom to stop and when (Pickett, 2007).

Church as a Political and Social Activator

Trader-Leigh (2008) identified that the “African American Church has a long history of addressing the ‘worldly’ needs of the African-American community (p. 7). The church belongs in the African American community and is continuously shaped by African Americans’ experiences, including issues such as inequality based on race experienced within the community (Trader-Leigh, 2008). Furthermore, the African American church’s assistance in shaping the vision for the civil rights movement, including issues such as justice, peace, and reconciliation (DeYoung, 2011). In terms of reconciliation between police and communities, Black and Kari (2010) suggested that improving the lines of communication between the police and communities is the most important factor in improving relations and rebuilding trust between the two groups. Other authors have expressed that public education and communication were vital in improving the relations between African American citizens and their police forces (Brunson & Weitzer, 2011). Cook (2013) highlighted that the role of the African American church in communities encompasses a great deal more than spiritual guidance; the church plays an active role in the political, social, and other issues that are relevant to communities. The Church of Christ, for example, stimulates the role of leadership and active Christ-like intervention in repairing communities’ relationships with police (Lowe & Shipp, 2014). The question remains of how the church can help its members learn how to communicate with and trust the police. Young, Griffith, and Williams (2014) asserted that pastoral counseling plays a vital part in the overall recovery process between church members and police.

The Role of the Police

Police officers have significant responsibility in their communities as law enforcement is central to community safety. Police are authorities in their communities; however, some officers have abused their discretionary powers and caused harm rather than good (Black & Kari, 2010). To build the relationship between the community and law enforcement, community policing was introduced into the United States criminal justice system to give communities more positive views of the police and positive

steps in building relations with officers (Brunson, 2015). Community policing is a style of policing that presents officers as partners in safety, not as aggressive authority figures whom members of the community must fear (Bain et al., 2014). Lurigio et al. (2009) identified that one-on-one interactions between police and African American youth were positive, and church ministers can achieve these same results in their communities. MacDonald and Stokes (2006) suggested that improving trust between the two groups can increase social capital in African American communities.

COPS and the International Association of Chiefs of Police (COPS-IACP; 2009), in *Building Trust Between the Police and the Citizens They Serve*, defined community trust as “an established and highly honored relationship between the agency and the citizens it has been entrusted to serve” (p. 7). Trust between police and communities is critical for effective policing, and law enforcement leaders are responsible for the competence as well as the legitimacy and the integrity of their departments (COPS-IACP, 2009). To build community trust, these leaders must foster environments in which ethical behavior is expected and individuals are responsible for aligning with those expectations (COPS-IACP, 2009). Both police department leaders and staff must adhere to principles of integrity and professionalism to build or rebuild community trust because these are the foundations of this trust (COPS-IACP, 2009). Every individual police officer represents the whole department, and transparent internal affairs processes are one aspect of building trust in communities (COPS-IACP, 2009). COPS-IACP (2009) determined that “Culture-changing policies, programs, and training are meaningful and effective not only in preventing misconduct and corruption in the department but also in demonstrating the agency’s values and principles” (p. 13). Figure 1 below displays the COPS-IACP suggested model for incorporating internal affairs into building community trust.

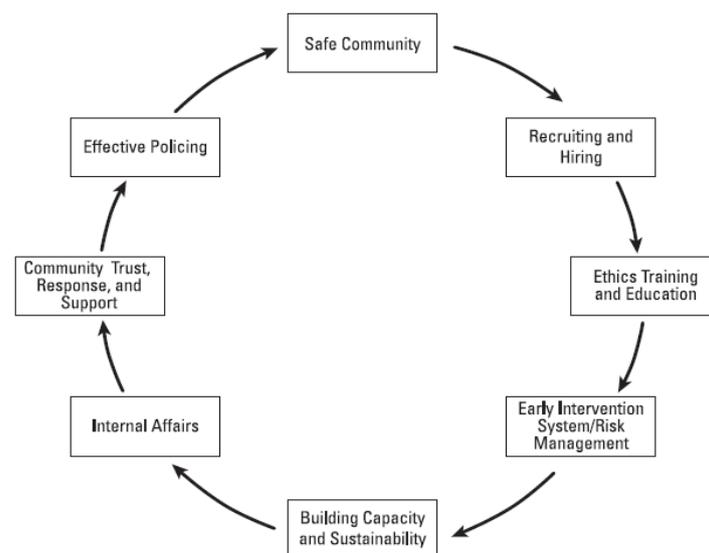


Figure 1. COPS-IACP recommended model for building community trust through internal affairs (2009, p. 8).

Ecological Systems Theory

One of the research questions in this study focused on Urie Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory (1977). Bronfenbrenner (1977) stated that to understand human development, one must consider the entire ecological system in which growth occurs. In this study, the police and church communities comprise systems in which the two groups interact with one another. Bronfenbrenner’s systems comprise five socially organized subsystems that help support and guide human growth: microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, chronosystems, and macrosystems. The interrelations between the police and the church for the benefit of the community are best defined as a mesosystem; communities can profit from healthier teamwork between police and the church.

There have been increasing numbers of cases in the United States of police officers shooting unarmed African American males (Brunson et al., 2015), and there is a need for the church to do more toward developing trust between police and the African American community. This research was conducted during a time of heightened awareness of trust issues between the African American community and police. The focus of this study was to evaluate a three-year-old church outreach program designed to develop trust between police and an African American church community. The emphasis of the analysis was to identify interactions between the church and the police through the outreach program and then to assess results.

Methodology

Research design

This study used a qualitative phenomenological approach to evaluate an outreach program in the state of Tennessee in the United States, sponsored by a local Church of Christ. The purpose of the outreach program was to build trust with the local police. Using two focus groups, the purpose of the study was to explore the experiences and perceptions of African Americans and police about establishing trust through the outreach program; trust between community members and police officers had not been fully explored. Focus groups were used to understand the church's outreach program experiences from police and church viewpoints (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). Both the focus group participants from the police department and the focus group participants from the African American Church of Christ for this research were located in Tennessee. The focus group participants were from two groups, police officers and church community members. The church consists of African Americans from different generations, education levels, and socioeconomic groups, and the police force consists of White males of different ages, education levels, and years on the force. There were nine participants in the church member group and six in the police officer group, and each focus group lasted for approximately 90 minutes. Because the police department selected for this study was small, the sole criterion for the police focus group was not being a supervisor. Participants of the church focus group included members between the ages of 20 to 75. To improve the dependability of the data, the researcher ensured thorough documentation of the methodology for this study (Cope, 2014). The same interview protocol was used for both of the focus groups in this study, including the use of the same interview questions for both groups. A potential bias for this study is that the primary researcher for this study is an African American male in the community of study.

Data analysis

Qualitative thematic analysis of the focus group data was used to identify the most common and meaningful patterns from the participants' responses. The software used in this study was NVivo11 by QSR for coding and tabulating the responses by themes as well as in determining the order of significance of these themes. The focus group data were analyzed using the six-step thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2014). Themes and subthemes as presented in the results and discussion of this study were identified to better detail and separate the major and minor themes.

Ethical Procedures

This study received university institutional review board (IRB) approval and followed IRB's guidelines for how to protect the participants. Each respondent was required to read and sign an informed consent form before participating in the study. The form outlined for participants the potential risks of the study, its purpose, their participation scope, and their individual rights as participants. Participants were informed that they could leave the focus group at any time. Additionally, focus group participants were offered post-study debriefings. To maintain participant privacy, identifying information such as names, addresses, or telephone numbers that could be linked to or identify participants was not collected. In written materials, numbers were used to replace the participants' identifiable information.

Results

Participants in each focus group were asked to define trust. The church members described trust as demonstrating dependability and reliability with others and in turn, believing that people value each other's best interests and will do no harm; church members also considered trust being relaxed and free in the belief that confidences shared will remain private. The police officers in their focus group defined trust in the context of being able to believe that a person who is supposed to complete a task will do so. The police emphasized that trust extends beyond sharing confidential information to also knowing that a person who is asked to do something will complete the request without fail. The results of this study are presented organized by the research questions. With each research question, the themes and subthemes identified through data analysis are presented.

Research Question One: Building Trust Through the Outreach Program

The first research question asked how the church outreach program was helping to build trust with the police department. The majority of church members discussed how the program allowed community members to become familiar with the police department; they identified numerous changes: having the opportunity to communicate openly with the officers, seeing the officers as normal human beings, continuing the officers' presence and visibility, and seeing the officers as community models. Meanwhile, the police officers observed a similar change through the outreach program, familiarization between the two parties. The participants in the police officer focus group also recognized having the opportunity to interact and communicate closely with the community members, modifying their image and perceptions of them, and being seen as normal human beings. Table 1 contains the themes for both focus groups answering the first research question of the study.

Table 1. Themes Answering Research Question One

Focus Group	Theme	Number of References
Church Members	Community member familiarization with the police department	9
	<i>*Having the opportunity to communicate openly with the officers</i>	
	<i>*Seeing the officers as normal human beings</i>	
	<i>*Continuing the presence and visibility of the police officers</i>	
Police Officers	<i>*Seeing the officers as community models</i>	6
	Familiarizing of community members with the police department	
	<i>*Having the opportunity to interact and communicate closely with the community members</i>	
	<i>*Modifying the image and perceptions of police officers</i>	1
	<i>*Seeing the officers as normal human beings</i>	
	Needing to remove the negative link between the police and racism	
	<i>*Opening of dialogues and conversations between the police and the community members</i>	

Note: * = Subtheme/s

The first major theme of the study was the familiarization of community members with the police department. Church members in their focus group shared how trust between the church and the police had improved with the help of the outreach program. Specifically, the major theme was strengthened by four significant factors: having the opportunity to communicate openly with the officers, seeing the officers as normal human beings, continuing the presence and visibility of the officers, and seeing the officers as community models. In the analysis of the police officer focus group, the same major theme was identified – that the church's outreach program was familiarizing the officers

with church community members. One subtheme with the police officer focus group was the need to remove the negative link between the police and racism.

The second major theme was the familiarization of community members with the police department. The three associated subthemes identified were: the opportunity for police and community members to interact and communicate closely, modifying the image and perceptions of police officers, and seeing the officers as normal human beings. As reflected through these themes, constant collaboration and association improved the civilian church members' perceptions of the police.

Research Question Two: The Church's Role in Helping the Outreach Program Build Trust

The second research question asked about the role of the church in helping the outreach program build trust. The thematic analysis of the focus group discussions led to one major theme, four minor themes, and one subtheme. Church members indicated how the church is a strong foundation for the youth community members; the church's ability to build and hone the youth is another factor in increasing the community members' trust through the outreach program. The church focus group members believed in the effectiveness of the church and its program to mentor the youth and lead them to the right path. The police focus group members had few perceptions of the church's role in helping the outreach program build trust; their responses yielded only minor themes in terms of frequency. Table 2 contains the themes related to the second research question of the study for both focus groups.

Table 2. Themes Answering Research Question Two

Focus Group	Theme	Number of References
Church Members	Building a strong foundation for the youth community members	5
	<i>*Mentoring the youth and leading them to the right path</i>	
	Creating interaction opportunities between the community members and the police department	2
Police Officers	Maintaining the positive image of the police officers	4
	Providing the opportunity to build relationships	3
	Building a strong foundation for the youth	4

Note: * = *Subtheme/s*

The third major theme of the study was the role of the church in building a strong foundation for the youth. Five of the participants in the church focus group shared the perception that churches are frequently trusted sources of knowledge, lessons, and values to improve the current state of the youth in local communities; in the church member focus group. For example, one participant in the church focus group shared a short background on the current attitudes and behaviors of the youth today and highlighted the need for the church to play a role in polishing the knowledge and attitudes of today's youth. A separate participant in the church focus group expressed the need for institutions to reach out and help the youth with their problems and issues. Similarly, a third participant in the church focus group shared how there is a need to build trust between the community and the church to improve young people.

A third participant discussed the need for the youth to have activities and programs on basic etiquette and expected behaviors and attitudes, such as respect, accountability, and self-control. Only two minor themes were generated from the analysis of the police officer focus group discussion; the police officers had few perceptions regarding the church's role in helping the outreach program build trust. Police officers' perceptions of how the church should provide the opportunity to build relationships and a strong foundation for the youth may need further research for validation.

Research Question Three: Role of the Police Department in Helping the Outreach Program Build Trust

The third research question was the role of the police department in helping the outreach program build trust. The thematic analysis of the data from the two groups led to two major themes,

one minor theme, and three subthemes. Specifically, the church members revealed in their focus group that they believed the police department was helping to build trust by police officers' allowing themselves to be more visible and approachable to the community members. Meanwhile, participants in the police officer focus group found the need to improve the community's perceptions of the department. Participants within the focus group expressed a belief that people lack appreciation for the hard work of the police. The remaining themes that addressed the third study research question are presented in Table 3 for both the focus groups.

Table 3. Themes Answering Research Question Three

Focus Group	Themes	Number of References
Church Members	Making themselves more visible and approachable to the community members	7
	<i>*Improving the image of the police officers</i>	
	<i>*Needing policemen of color, community members can relate to</i>	
Police Officers	Needing to improve the community's perceptions of the police	4
	<i>*Lacking appreciation for the hard work of the police</i>	
	Creating interaction opportunities between the community members and the police department	5

Note: * = *Subtheme/s*

The fourth major theme of the study was the positive effect of the police department's making itself more visible and approachable to the community. Specifically, the presence of police officers has improved the department's image and highlighted the need for more police of color to enhance communication. In the church member focus group, one participant explained the need for the community to get to know and familiarize themselves with the local police.

The fifth major theme was the need to improve the community's perceptions of police officers as expressed by the police officer focus group members shared this theme. The police officer focus group observed that the police department needed to put in more effort in helping to improve the community's perceptions and increase their trust over time. One participant admitted still receiving criticism from the community. As part of the government institution, the police officer believed that the police and community must work together to remove the current gaps and misconceptions.

Research Question Four: Ecological systems theory's role in helping the outreach program build trust

The fourth research question asked how ecological systems theory assists the outreach program in building trust. Participants from both groups shared how the collaboration through the program led to the willingness of the church and police officers to collaborate and seek ways to help one another. Both groups indicated the same major themes of the study. Table 4 contains the results from the analysis of the data addressing the fourth research question of the study.

Table 4. Themes Answering Research Question Four

Focus Group	Themes	Number of References
Church Members	Developing the initiative to collaborate with and help one another	3
Police Officers	Developing the initiative to collaborate with and help one another	4

Note: * = *Subtheme/s*

The sixth major theme related to how collaboration between the two institutions allowed both to develop trust and work toward better outcomes and benefits for the local community, with three participants making reference to this theme. One participant stated how the church and the police can

work as one and develop resources that can better assist the community members, especially through the outreach activities. From providing transportation to recruiting more members, the participants shared many suggestions. A separate participant added that the church can also give advice and recommendations to the police department, especially when there are negative cases and backlash from the media. The final major theme from the police officer focus group was the development of the willingness and initiative to work as one with the church members. One participant of the police officer focus group expressed that the church's Wednesday activity was a perfect time for the police to show their support and become available to the local community members.

Discussion of findings

There is a reported increase in police injustice toward African Americans (Brunson et al., 2015). Specifically, there are increasing numbers of cases of police officers' shooting unarmed African American males in the United States (Brunson et al., 2015). The church is one of the avenues to developing more trusting relationships between the police and the African American community. Following the structure of the results presented for this study, this discussion section of this article structures the topics organized by research question. A discussion based on the findings of each of the four research questions is presented below.

Building Trust Through the Outreach Program

The first research question addressed how the church's outreach program helped build trust with the police department. The first major theme identified in this study was the church members' familiarization with the local police. In particular, participants in both focus groups expressed that a lack of familiarization might drive mistrust while familiarization could help build trust and open communication. In fact, the majority of the church members mentioned that the outreach program allowed for establishing relationships through the familiarization of church members with the police. The participants noted that the opportunities to communicate openly with the officers, see the officers as ordinary human beings, continue the presence and visibility of the police, and see the police officers as community models provided the foundations for building relationships, all of which were facilitated through familiarization.

These findings might be best explained by Cross's racial identity theory, which holds that the identities of people of color in the United States are predominantly shaped in five stages: pre-encounter, encounter, immersion, internationalization, and internationalization-commitment (Vandiver, et al., 2002). It is during this final stage that people of color incorporate their identities into the broader group identity, which is predominantly African American in many communities (Vandiver et al., 2002). At the pre-encounter and encounter stages of racial identity development, the interactions between people of color and police shape how these individuals come to understand police (Vandiver et al., 2002). Specifically, according to Cross, if people of color only know police officers as coercive forces, then they will be hesitant to trust and assist police (Vandiver et al., 2002). Thus, it is at this stage that familiarization with police should begin if African American community members are to develop trust in the police and be active participants in fulfilling the public functions of police, including both the coercive and noncoercive functions (Vandiver et al., 2002).

The police recognized this need also; the officers had also observed the familiarization that had taken place between the police and the church communities. The focus group discussions also highlighted participants' belief that building trust between church members and police officers required providing opportunities for the two groups to communicate and interact openly. From this perspective, communication may be the primary means of facilitating familiarization. Church members in this study indicated that the outreach program had allowed members to be much more comfortable around police officers, primarily through their increased interactions and conversations with the police. A positive consequence was understanding and viewing the police officers as rational human beings instead of people of coercion (Vandiver et al., 2002).

This finding emerged from the constant communication and interaction between the church members and officers that demonstrated that the church members' perceptions were amendable and

could be transformed from skeptical to accepting, based primarily on their viewing police officers as normal humans. This finding supports an application of Cross's racial identity theory in that it shows that African American communities can transform how they view their identities in relation to the police at the encounter stage of identity (Vandiver, et al., 2002).

Another theme to emerge related to familiarization was the positive influence that the constant presence and visibility of police officers could have on members of African American communities. The establishment of continuous presence and visibility provided the grounds for fostering relations between the community and police officers and may help establish trust. A similar theme that emerged was that the familiarization of church members with the police department provided memories for church members that served to reinforce the positive roles of police officers in the community. This may be integral to the development of black identities in relation to the police in such communities (Cordner, 2014; Walker & Katz, 2012; Wilson, 2013).

The results of this study included that the insight that church members' perceptions of the police had been amendable through familiarization, positive interactions, and communication. For example, church member focus group participants explained that the interactions that occurred during the outreach program had allowed for the civilians at the functions to view the local police officers as more open and amicable, as demonstrating the possibility of noncoercive functions of the police in African American communities (Vandiver et al., 2002). While Cross's theory can help explain the formation and transformation of black racial identity in relation to police officers, the democratic theory of community policing may best explain why these positive interactions shape the image and perceptions of police officers for members of black communities who have primarily negative memories of interactions with the police (Kappeler & Gaines, 2012; Vandiver, et al., 2002).

Under the democratic theory of community policing, communities must be empowered for police functioning to be effective (Fielding, 2005). Police have a coercive role in society, but they also have a role as public servants to help build and support communities (Vandiver et al., 2002). When communities are empowered and have a voice in the functions of police in their communities, the police are going to be more focused on community building and less on coercion. By witnessing the noncoercive functions of police, African American communities can transform how they view law enforcement through both positive associations and memory formation. It is thus a combination of communication and witnessing positive, noncoercive aspects of policing that foster these changes; familiarization may be insufficient if interactions do not promote the image of police as performing noncoercive functions in addition to their coercive duties.

The Church's Role in Helping the Outreach Program Build Trust

The second research question addressed the role of the Church of Christ in helping its community-police relations outreach program to build trust. The majority of the church members in that focus group felt that the church serves as a strong foundation for the youth community members, suggesting that the church and perhaps other community organizations are in a unique position to foster positive relations between communities and police. The ability of the church in particular to influence the youth is another factor in increasing community trust in the police through the outreach program. In this study, the church members believed that the effectiveness of the church and its program to mentor youth were important for the church and for broader community development. In contrast, the police officers had few perceptions of the church's role in helping the outreach program build trust.

Another theme of the study involved the church's role in building a strong foundation for youth. The church members perceived the church to be a trusted source of knowledge and values to improve the current state of the youth in local communities, including involving the police in these communities. Several of the participants indicated that the church played a major role in shaping young people's knowledge and perspectives, and thus, the church should play a major role in facilitating the relationships between African American communities and the police. It should be noted, however, that other community organizations may fill a similar role to that of the church in facilitating these relations.

Role of the Police Department in Helping the Outreach Program Build Trust

The third research question in this study addressed the role of the police department in helping the outreach program build trust. Based on the study results, the church members shared the strong belief that the police department helps build trust through positive interactions with church members, but only by officers' allowing themselves to become more visible and more approachable across the community. This requires a shift from police officers only being visible in African American communities performing coercive functions. Moreover, police officers recognized the need to improve the community's perceptions of the police through increased approachability and more visibility in the positive, noncoercive functions they perform. Cross's racial identity theory can be applied here by recognizing that police visibility in performing noncoercive functions can provide the grounds for Black community members to recognize the positive functions of police during the pre-encounter and encounter stages of racial identity formation (Vandiver, et al., 2002).

Another theme of the current study was the positive effects of increased police visibility and approachability to the church and the African American community at large. Specifically, the present study confirmed that the police officers' presence has improved their image in local communities. However, it was also discovered that church members would likely trust the police more if they saw greater African American representation on the police force. Thus, improving the police department's image among the church community may require ensuring that African American residents are better represented among the police force.

Ecological systems theory's role in helping the outreach program build trust

The fourth research question in this study addressed how ecological systems theory (collaboration) aided the outreach program in building trust. In the current study, participants from both the church member and police officer focus groups were willing to share information about how the collaboration through the outreach program had increased the willingness of both to collaborate and seek ways to help one another. Members of both groups indicated that they recognized the need for increased collaboration for mutual benefit. However, church members expressed a want to see police officers performing more positive, primarily noncoercive functions. This would reflect the empowerment of the church under the democratic theory of community policing. Meanwhile, The police officers want to see more information sharing from the church and the African American community.

The participants in this study expressed that these activities would improve the relations between the church and the police and would facilitate the development of trust between the two groups, which in turn would increase their mutual willingness to participate in such activities. For example, if the police were more active in the church programs and demonstrated noncoercive functions in the community, church members would be more willing to share information, further facilitating relationship development. Furthermore, both groups wanted to be accepted and appreciated by the other, and both believed that the perception that the police were against the community, had to end. Several participants from the church discussed how the two groups could work together to form a better community. For example, participants believed that local police could better assist the church, especially through the outreach program, in a way that would develop mutual trust.

Other areas of improvement identified were more active engagement in transportation services and improved church member safety during worship and Bible classes. Similarly, the police department's willingness and initiative to work with the church was a major factor in enhancing the relationships between the police and the church community; the participants in the police focus group expressed eagerness to develop such relationships through increased involvement. Under Cross's racial identity theory, establishing such connections and relations would allow future generations of the Black community to view the police as facilitators of benefits within the community (Vandiver, et al., 2002).

Limitations of the Study

The first limitation of the study relates to the characteristics of the sample. Specifically, due to the size of the town, the police department, and the church were limitations: The town has a population

of 30,000, the city has 26 police officers, and the church has 150 members, and the findings of this study might not be generalized to other populations or contexts. Although the findings of this study are applicable within this community and may guide other communities in similar situations, more expansive and inclusive research needs to be conducted before the results are generalizable across all African American communities and police departments.

Gender was not considered in this study. The only demographic factors considered in this study were race and age; both police officers and church members had to be at least 18 years old. The police were all White men, and the church congregants were African American members of a Church of Christ in Tennessee. Gender in the context of community-police relations could add another perspective to these relationships. Another study limitation was also that the evaluation was based solely on participant responses. The assumption was that participants were answering honestly and were not exaggerating their responses. Participants were reminded that honest answers would be significant in understanding the experiences of both parties and evaluating the effectiveness of the outreach program.

Recommendations

As noted, the size of the sample in this study was a limitation. Based on this limitation, there is a need for further research from a metropolitan city with a more extensive police department and a church with more congregants. Participants were selected based on race in this study, but additional research should be conducted to identify how the police of different races as well as genders view trust between police officers and community members of minority groups, including how to increase that trust. Such research would also help to determine whether the findings of this study could be generalized to broader populations or a more representative sample of the populations of police officers and African Americans or members of other minority groups. Future studies using quantitative research could also lead to a valid instrument for measuring the trust between police officers and African Americans. Additionally, future researchers could include the perspectives of church and police leaders on how the institutions could work together to improve mutual trust. The leaders of the church could provide their experiences on how they guide their congregants, and the leaders of police departments could share how they guide their officers in treating each person with justice and fairness.

Implications

The major implication of this study is the identification of some of the factors required for the success of outreach programs aimed at bolstering relationships between the police and church community members. Such factors include establishing a visible and approachable police presence in communities, increased familiarization between community members and the police, and police demonstration of noncoercive functions in communities. Members of law enforcement and community churches should reflect on their misconceptions about each other. The two groups need to be open-minded to be able to be sincere in their interactions during such outreach programs to pave the way for trust in their relationships; African-American church congregants and police officers should collaborate with each other to improve these sometimes volatile relationships.

The results of this study provided evidence to support the effectiveness of the Church of Christ's outreach program to develop trust between African American congregants and the local police officers in Tennessee. The results of the study, as reflected from the insights of the focus groups, found that the two groups had positive perceptions of each other related to interactions during outreach program activities. Members of the focus groups from both communities emphasized the need for church members and police officers to work with each other to improve the trust in their relationships. Churches and police departments could develop curricula for similar outreach programs focusing on enhanced collaboration to develop trust between police and African American communities. Churches and police departments can work together to better communicate and develop relationships that incorporate trust and mutual respect.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of the current study, interactions between the church and police can facilitate positive relationships. The public relations theory of policing can serve as a guide in

constructing these relationships: The thematic analysis revealed that fostering positive relations and increasing familiarization between police and the target community are major factors in building trust between these groups. According to the public relations theory of policing, improving the roles of police in suggested, especially communities with low trust in the police, requires direct attempts to improve the relations between these communities and the police force (Lee & McGovern, 2013). Based on the findings of the current study, the researcher proposes the following recommendations to guide churches and police departments to enhance trust between African American communities and the police:

- Community organizations, including churches, should invite police officers to participate in community-building and relation-building events, including dinners, discussions, church services, and festivals.
- Members of the community should reach out to police officers to help solve community problems independent of criminal activity, such as community cleanup efforts and public health campaigns.
- Police departments and organizations should seek to actively participate in community events, including those hosted by predominantly African American churches and organizations.
- Police departments and organizations should establish channels of open communication to foster relationships and encourage transparent two-way communication.
- Police officers should make efforts to familiarize themselves with leaders in African American communities, including church and community organization leaders.
- Police departments and organizations should conduct routine training exercises aimed at developing relationships within communities

These recommendations are supported by Tyler et al. (2015), who found that certain elements are needed for the police to influence positive public perceptions: public participation, neutrality, respect, and trustworthiness. Moreover, involving broad local communities in developing specific strategies for managing social order and encouraging public acceptance would lead to public buy-in (Tyler et al., 2015).

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