Research Brief

What Do Police Recruits Identify as Strategies to Deal with Their Triggers/Biases to Deliver Fair and Impartial Policing?

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Introduction

The JIBC Police Academy moved away from the traditional lecture based curriculum delivery model and adopted a new competency based education model in 2016. Under the new curriculum the recruits learn concepts and skills through case based and practical scenarios in order to move towards professional competence (JIBC Police Academy proposal, ca. 2015). Post scenario debriefs focus on both practical and reflective skills. The main objective of this project is to learn how police recruits identify their biases and what strategies they utilize to deal with such biases and triggers to ensure their investigations are fair and impartial in the scenario-based training environment.

Methods

The study examined the training material from one class of 48 police recruits who had already completed the first part of their training (Block I of recruit training). After receiving the ethics approval from the JIBC Ethics Review Board, the data was obtained from the debrief forms that recruits filled out after each scenario. The answers to questions *"What strategies did you use, or could you have used, to ensure your investigations were fair, impartial, and bias free?"* and *"Is there anything that the subjects did/said that caused you to react negatively to them (what are your triggers)?"* were analyzed using NVivo version 11.4.

A qualitative research method and the grounded theory was used for this study to analyze the recruits' responses to the questions in their scenario debrief forms related to bias and strategies for fair and impartial policing. The responses were anonymous.

Results

The final review of the seven selected articles focused on different aspects of implicit bias in police officers including:

- The impact of internal stressors
- The environmental impact or constant exposure to established attitudes,
- Situational adaption of bias,
- Bias driven by faulty perception.

The recruits identified three categories of triggers in their scenario training such as:

- Subject actions

- Subject characteristics
- Call characteristics.

The strategies recruits used to deliver fair and impartial were:

- Assertiveness
- Focus on investigation objectives
- Building rapport
- Interpreting events with an open mind
- Remaining calm
- Respect

Discussion

The literature review provided context for the discussion on implicit bias in a broad policing context, however the literature only focused on racial aspects of bias. Block 1 recruits, however, did not identify any racially based biases from the scenarios. Recruits focused on subject actions, subject characteristics and call characteristics as the source of their triggers. The majority of the literature comes from the U.S. where the racially based tensions are very different than those in Canada. Implicit biases are not limited to racial friction between officers and subjects. The literature does not identify other sources of bias, such as subject behavior or call characteristics that can be important, particularly in a developing police recruit.

Limitations

The sample size was small and limited to the 48 recruits in one class in Block 1of training at JIBC. The second challenge was due to the coverage of Canadian police topics and its volume of research literature being very low (Huey, 2016). There is a gap between the literature findings and those of the current JIBC police recruit study. This opens doors for new topics to be explored, and, existing topics to be built upon.

Conclusion and future research

The awareness and practice of self-reflection are two vital components of the JIBC Police Academy's training curriculum. It prepares recruits to recognize and mitigate any implicit bias triggered in any situation on their own. Recommendations for future research include expanding the study by involving Block 3 recruits to find additional themes for triggers, bias or strategies to mitigate such issues. Also, to follow up with the recruits who have graduated from the Police Academy and are working in the field to examine whether the self-reflection practice at the Police Academy did, or did not, actually build the reflective practice in the real world.

Key References

Huey, L., (2016). What one might expect: A scoping review of the Canadian policing research literature. *Sociology Publications,* (Paper 36). Retrieved from http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/sociologypub/36

Justice Institute of British Columbia. (ca. 2015). *Aligning recruit training with principles of competency based education.* New Westminster, BC: Author