



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

International Journal of Intercultural Relations

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/ijintrel

Interracial public–police contact: Relationships with police officers' racial and work-related attitudes and behavior

Kristof Dhont*, Ilse Cornelis, Alain Van Hiel

Ghent University, Department of Developmental, Personality and Social Psychology, Henri Dunantlaan 2, B-9000 Ghent, Belgium

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Accepted 12 July 2010

Keywords:

Intergroup contact
Prejudice
Police
Procedural fairness
OCB
Racism

ABSTRACT

In a sample of Flemish police officers ($N=172$), we examined whether interracial public–police contact is associated with police officers' racial and work-related attitudes and self-reported behavior. Complementing previous studies, it was revealed that interracial contact (both positive and negative) is related to prejudiced behavior toward immigrants via the mediating role of racial attitudes. Moreover, intergroup contact was also shown to be related to police officers' organizational citizenship behavior toward colleagues and superiors via their perceptions of organizational fairness. We elaborate on the severe impact of negative contact as well as the applied consequences of our findings within police organizations.

© 2010 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Ethnic minorities are likely to hold negative attitudes toward the police, often perceiving police officers as being unfair and prejudiced (Hurst, Frank, & Browning, 2000; Tyler & Huo, 2002; Weitzer & Tuch, 2005). Examination of police officers' attitudes and behavior has shown that these negative perceptions are not completely unwarranted. Indeed, studies across different Western countries have indicated that police officers effectively obtain relatively high racial prejudice scores compared to the general population (Colman & Gorman, 1982; Pitkänen & Kouki, 2002; Wortley & Homel, 1995), which might result in an increased likelihood of ethnic minority members being accosted by police officers on the streets (e.g., Home Office, 2004).

Evidently, police officers often interact with members of ethnic minorities during the exercise of their duty, and several authors have shown that minority members' negative attitudes toward the police arise from negative personal experiences (Hurst et al., 2000; Tyler & Huo, 2002; Weitzer & Tuch, 2005). An underinvestigated issue, however, is the possibility that police officers' attitudes and behavior are related to those daily intergroup experiences as well, which can, as we discuss below, be reasonably expected based on the existing contact literature and Allport (1954). Therefore, the present study examines the associations between the frequency of positive and negative contact and police officers' levels of prejudiced attitudes and (self-reported) behavior toward immigrants (i.e., ethnic minorities with non-European roots). Furthermore, because interracial public–police contact constitutes such a vital part of police work, the present study extends the traditional intergroup contact approach of studying prejudice-related variables by also addressing the relationships with global work-related attitudes and behavior. These two focal issues are addressed in the following sections.

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +32 0 9 264 64 24; fax: +32 0 9 264 64 99.

E-mail addresses: Kristof.Dhont@UGent.be (K. Dhont), Ilse.Cornelis@UGent.be (I. Cornelis), Alain.VanHiel@UGent.be (A. Van Hiel).

1.1. Intergroup contact hypothesis

The intergroup contact hypothesis formulated by Allport (1954) proposed that under optimal conditions contact between members of different groups reduces intergroup prejudice. Allport listed four essential features for successful intergroup contact to occur: (1) equal status between the groups, (2) intergroup cooperation, (3) common goals, and (4) support of authorities, norms, or customs. Later on, two factors were added to the list: opportunity for personal acquaintance and the development of intergroup friendships (Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew, 2008). A recent meta-analysis of more than 500 studies (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006) provided clear evidence for the association between intergroup contact and positive outgroup attitudes. Of course, part of this association can be explained by the tendency of prejudiced people to avoid intergroup contact, but several studies adopting non-recursive structural equation models (e.g., Pettigrew, Christ, Wagner, & Stellmacher, 2007) or longitudinal designs (e.g., Brown, Eller, Leeds, & Stace, 2007) have demonstrated that contact has a stronger impact on prejudice than the reverse (Pettigrew, 2008). Hence, the available empirical evidence has led to the consensus that “intergroup contact typically reduces prejudice” (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006, p. 751).

However, the majority of studies has typically focused on positive contact and the necessity of Allport's ‘ideal’ conditions, triggering recent criticism that “everyday contact between groups bears little resemblance to this ideal world” (Dixon, Durrheim, & Tredoux, 2005, p. 699). Dixon et al. (2005) argued that this focus not only resulted in theories that are sometimes unusable or even meaningless in practice, but also “has produced a picture of intergroup processes that increasingly obscures and prettifies the starker realities of everyday interactions between members of different groups” (p. 700). While this criticism does not devalue the importance of contact as a mechanism to reduce prejudice, it emphasizes the need to investigate intergroup contact in its societal context (see also Pettigrew, 2008). Moreover, because of the traditional focus on positive intergroup contact, little is known about intergroup encounters that lead to an increase of prejudice and conflict (Pettigrew, 2008).

Interracial public–police contact constitutes a good example of everyday intergroup encounters devoid of most (if not all) optimal contact conditions. Status inequality, for example, is intrinsic to police work. Nevertheless, based on their meta-analysis, Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) concluded that even though Allport's (1954) conditions facilitate the contact effect, positive outcomes even emerge in the absence of several of the proposed conditions. An important question arising here is how interracial public–police contact is related to the attitudes of police officers toward immigrants, given the situational conditions that are in contradiction to the proposed conditions. Suggestive but inconclusive evidence regarding this issue has been obtained by Liebkind, Haaramo, and Jasinskaja-Lahti (2000) who examined attitudes toward immigrants among various professional groups including police officers. It was reported that contact quality, as indicated by the degree of familiarity of the immigrant who respondents knew best, improved attitudes toward immigrants, even in unequal and non-voluntary contact situations.

Unfortunately, instances of negative intergroup contact may occur more frequently during police work, overruling the potential effects of high quality contact. Dhont and Van Hiel (2009) found in a general community sample that even though negative contact occurs less frequently than positive contact, negative contact had the strongest impact on prejudice, which may be attributed to a higher emotional salience of negative experiences. Along similar lines, Boniecki and Britt (2003) discussed the relationship between negative contact and prejudice of soldiers during peacekeeping operations abroad. Similar to police officers, soldiers often hold negative outgroup attitudes (e.g., Bosman, Richardson, & Soeters, 2007). However, peacekeeping forces are also likely to experience hostile encounters with the local population that foster feelings of threat and anxiety, which eventually strengthen their negative attitudes even more (Boniecki & Britt, 2003).

Given the likelihood of negative contact with ethnic minority members during police work, the relationship between negative contact and racial prejudice may also be exacerbated in a police context. Indeed, police officers may be forced to deal with a lot of unpleasant situations involving members of ethnic minorities, leading to stronger associations between the amount of negative contact with prejudiced attitudes and, eventually with their behavior toward ethnic minority members.

In sum, the available evidence suggests that positive interracial public–police contact is linked to less prejudiced attitudes among police officers, and ultimately to less racially biased behavior. Conversely, negative contact between police officers and immigrants is expected to be related to more prejudiced attitudes, and eventually to more racially biased behavior. Therefore, the present study investigates the relationships between interracial public–police contact (positive and negative) and police officers' attitudes and behavior toward immigrants and aims to demonstrate an indirect relationship between intergroup contact and their behavior through police officers' prejudiced attitudes.

1.2. Intergroup contact and work-related outcomes

A host of studies has examined the relationships between intergroup contact and specific intergroup variables (e.g., prejudice, intergroup anxiety, discrimination, and stereotyping). However, bearing in mind Pettigrew's (2008) argument that intergroup contact also needs to be viewed in its specific institutional settings and larger societal context, it is somewhat surprising that other, relatively more distal outcome variables have received little attention. Indeed, the study of intergroup contact within, for example an organizational context makes it possible to investigate relationships with a broader range of variables that are highly relevant in that particular context as well. Frequent intergroup contact ‘on the job’ may thus be related to workers' perceptions and attitudes toward their work and organization. In the context of police work, there are regular interactions with immigrants and the valence and amount of this contact constitutes an inherent and important part

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/947358>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/947358>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)