The Greater Manchester Police procedural justice training experiment

The impact of communication skills training on officers and victims of crime

Levin Wheller
Paul Quinton
Alistair Fildes
PC Andy Mills

Executive summary

Background

A growing body of research has shown that people's motivations to cooperate with the police and not break the law are shaped more by feeling the police have legitimate authority, and share the same values, than by people's perceived risk of being caught and punished. Given public perceptions of fair treatment are at the root of police legitimacy, improved police-public interactions over the long term could help reduce crime. There is limited evidence on which interventions can improve public perceptions of fair treatment by the police. The Randomised Controlled Trial (RCT) reported in this paper tested the impact of training on the perceived quality of interactions between the police and crime victims in Greater Manchester. The intervention focused on developing officers' practical communication skills. In total, 339 officers were randomly assigned to the treatment group (to receive the training) and 237 to the control group (to not receive the training). As the officers were assigned at random, differences between the groups after the training can be directly attributed to the intervention. RCTs are considered the 'gold standard' in evaluation research as they can establish 'cause and effect' relationships.

Main findings

Officer attitudes

An online survey measured officer attitudes post-training. The intervention was found to have had a positive effect on four out of eight possible outcomes, with no effect on the remaining four. Officers in the treatment group were more likely than those in the control group to: hold positive views about delivering quality of service; recognise the value of building empathy and rapport with victims; and report making decisions that involved victims in the process.

Officer behaviour

Officer behaviour was assessed post-training in a realistic role-play exercise. The intervention was found to have had a positive impact, with officers in the treatment group scoring significantly higher than those in the control group on a 'quality of interaction' scale. In terms of fair treatment, these officers were more likely to give victims a choice about how the incident was to be dealt with (a 14 percentage point difference). A higher proportion were also rated as 'good/excellent' in terms of their overall performance (48% compared to 22%).

Victim perceptions

An existing force survey was used to measure the perceptions of crime victims who had contact with officers in the trial. The intervention was found to have had a significant positive effect on a 'quality of interaction' scale. No effect was found for overall victim satisfaction and willingness to cooperate with the police. Given that most victims were already satisfied and cooperative, it was unlikely the training could produce an effect size large enough to be detected by the survey. It is possible, therefore, that the training might have had a bigger effect in more challenging encounters where public perceptions of the police are more varied.

Conclusions

The trial showed that training which seeks to teach officers a series of practical techniques and improve their general communication skills can be effective at improving the victim experience. While some of the effects were relatively small, the overall pattern of results points consistently to training having had a positive impact on outcomes. Findings from across the outcome measures suggest that – rather than officers adopting specific techniques or skills they were taught on the course – training instead encouraged a more general shift in the way officers approached interactions with the public. Officers in the treatment group developed a greater awareness of the need to listen to and empathise with victims of crime – resulting in improved public perceptions.

Contents

Figures and Tables

Acknowledgements

1. Introduction

The College of Policing has been working in collaboration with Greater Manchester Police (GMP) to test the impact of a communication skills training programme, which was designed to improve the way police officers interact with victims of crime. The training programme was implemented as a randomised controlled trial – the 'gold standard' in evaluation research – which allows strong statements to be made about the impact of the training because it can establish 'cause and effect' relationships. This practitioner report provides an overview of the trial, summarises its main findings, and discusses implications for policing policy and practice. An associated Technical Report provides more detail on the trial, its results and limitations.

Background

The importance of procedural justice in policing

There is a growing body of research on the procedural justice model, which looks at the reasons why people cooperate with the police and do not break the law.[1] The model shows that police legitimacy is central to these motivations, and has more of an influence than the threat of being caught and punished, because it helps foster a sense of obligation and shared values. The evidence suggests police legitimacy is primarily fostered by perceptions of police fairness, and more so than by perceptions of police effectiveness (see Figure 1). Thus, by interacting with members of the public in ways they regarded as procedurally fair, the police should be able to help reduce crime by 'winning hearts and minds', and encouraging voluntary cooperation and compliance from the public. Furthermore, by reducing overall demand levels, fairness might also enable the police to concentrate their resources on the areas of greatest harm.

Figure 1. The procedural justice model

++ strong positive effect
+ weak positive effect
~ no effect

---
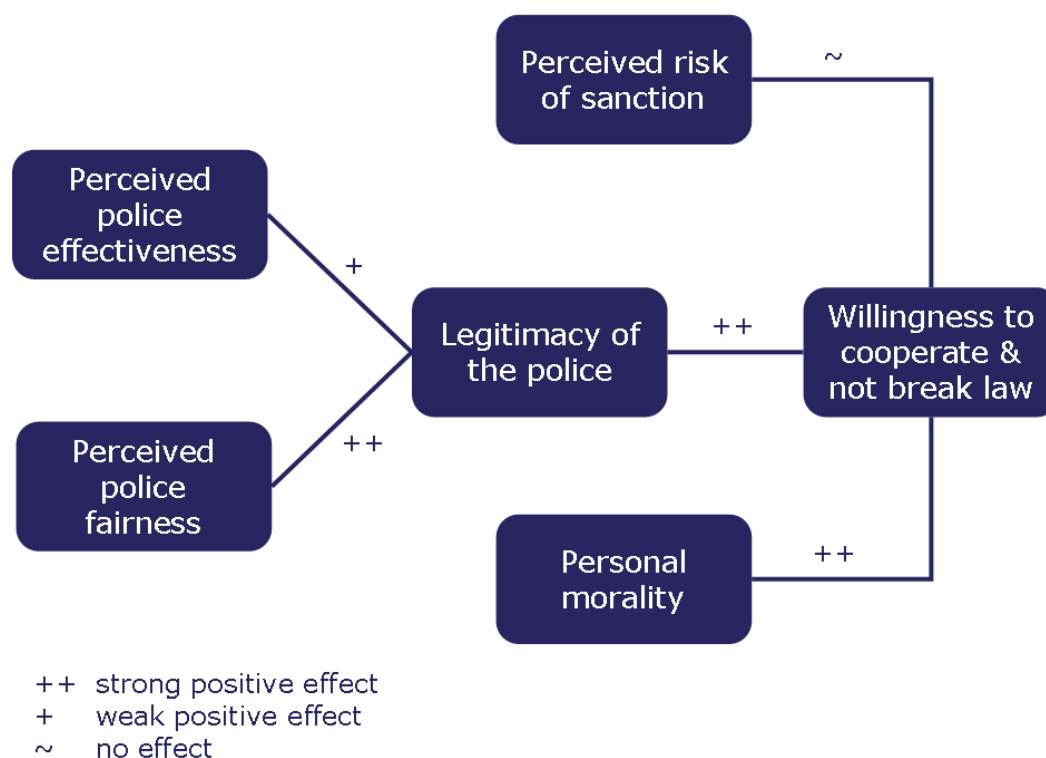
[1] See, for example: Jackson et al. 2013; Myhill and Quinton 2011; and Tyler, T. 2006.

While the relationships in the procedural justice model have been examined in survey data gathered from a range of different contexts (e.g. Australia, Ghana, Jamaica)[2], relatively little attention has been paid so far to how to improve public perceptions of police procedural fairness. Given the gaps in the research evidence, and the potential benefits of the police adopting a more procedurally just approach, there is a need to examine what interventions can improve the way police officers interact with members of the public to improve perceptions of procedural fairness.

A good starting point for thinking about what interventions might be effective in 'triggering' the relationships in the wider model is the concept of procedural fairness. The literature highlights that procedural fairness is made up of two main components:

- **The perceived fairness of police decision-making** – in terms of the police:

    – making impartial decisions, based on fact not opinion
    – giving people a 'voice' or sense of influence during the decision-making process
    – listening to, and taking into account, people's views
    – explaining the outcome of the decision, and how it was reached

- **The perceived fairness of police treatment** – in terms of the police:

    – treating people with respect
    – being polite

Some empirical evidence is also available. A recent systematic review of the research literature on legitimacy in policing has suggested that some interventions focusing on 'dialogue' between the police and the public can be effective in changing perceptions, but noted a lack of randomised experiments.[3] This gap in the evidence is starting to be filled, with two randomised controlled trials having recently reported (see Table 1).

Table 1. Recent experimental studies focussed on police-public interactions.

Location	Intervention	Contact type	Results
Queensland, Australia[4]	A standardised script to direct officer conversations	Random breath test stops	The trial had a positive impact on likelihood of compliance and levels of satisfaction.
Chicago, USA[5]	A new induction course for recruits, including the use of role-play scenarios to develop personalised scripts	All police-public encounters	Promising but mixed. No impact on attitudes of new police recruits, but positive impacts on videotaped and observed behaviour.

An opportunity to test the impact of training

Due to concerns that GMP was not performing as well as similar forces in terms of how satisfied victims of crime were with the service they had received, the force planned to roll out 'customer service' training to all frontline officers and staff. A standard classroom-based training package to explain the value of 'customer service' – but not directly address behavioural issues – was planned. Researchers from the College of Policing identified these

---

[2] See, for example: Tankebe 2009; Reisig and Lloyd 2009; Murphy and Cherney 2012.
[3] Mazerolle et al. 2013.
[4] Mazerolle et al. 2012.
[5] Rosenbaum and Lawrence 2012.

initial plans as a 'naturally occurring' opportunity to apply an evidence-based approach to the design and delivery of the training, and to test the impact of an initial pilot prior to any wider implementation. Since GMP already planned to roll-out some form of training force-wide, the development and testing of a pilot was relatively low-cost and reduced the risk that any investment in training would be wasted.

In collaboration with the College, GMP took an innovative approach to the training pilot:

- The pilot principally focussed on behaviour change in that the training sought to enhance office communication skills to enable better interactions with crime victims.
- The pilot used a range of training techniques that have been shown to be effective in changing attitudes and behaviour. The evidence suggests that training which is integrated into routine practice and encourages self-reflection is more likely to be effective that traditional classroom-based approaches.[6]
- The content of the training was consistent with evidence that quality of treatment is most crucial factor in securing victim satisfaction.[7]
- The pilot was implemented as a randomised control trial to test the impact of the training on officer attitudes, officer behaviour and victim perceptions.

The randomised controlled trial

The focus of the intervention

The intervention consisted of a new training programme for response and neighbourhood officers who were currently serving in GMP. The focus of the programme was on improving officers' communications with victims of crime. The expectation was that by training officers in a series of practical techniques and improving their general communication skills, they would be able to build rapport with victims which would, in turn, improve the perceived quality of interactions.

The design of the intervention was linked to the concept of procedural justice in a fairly broad sense. No explicit attempt was made to map particular aspects of the training programme to specific elements of the theory. For example, officers were not directly taught how to make impartial decisions, take a victim's view into account, or explain the outcome of a decision. Instead, the overall focus on communication skills and building rapport was expected to have a general effect on public perceptions of fair decision-making and interpersonal treatment.

The concentration on communication skills meant the GMP intervention was markedly different to those previously tested in Queensland and Chicago.[8] In these other trials, officers were expected to follow a standard form of words or use personalised scripts when interacting with the public. The use of scripts was rejected in GMP for two reasons. First, it would have been difficult to develop a script that could be applied by officers in all situations. By focusing on officer skills, there would be scope for the intervention to improve the quality of a wider range of interactions. Second, it was anticipated that experienced officers would react badly and resist attempts to 'tell them how to speak to people'. A skills-based training programme also provided an opportunity to engage directly with officers in line with procedural fairness (e.g. giving them a 'voice' and sense of influence, and listening to their views).

---

[6] Wheller and Morris 2011.
[7] Matrix et al. 2013.
[8] Mazerolle et al 2012; Rosenbaum and Lawrence 2012.

The training programme

The training programme was made up of three slightly different courses. While focus and content of these courses were the same, they differed in terms of their:

- overall duration – either two or three days of training (up to 14 hours in total); and
- method of delivery – all the courses included classroom-based training, while two of the three courses also incorporated included a scenario-based component.

The original plan was to examine whether the programme had an overall effect on outcomes, and then to look at whether one course was significantly better than another. In the end (due to attrition in the sample throughout the trial) sample sizes were too small to carry out meaningful comparisons between the individual courses. However, as all three courses were focused on improving officer communication skills and covered the same training material (albeit in different ways and speeds), they are regarded as a single treatment. The three courses were run in parallel in October/November 2011, with some additional courses run in early January 2012 for officers unable to attend during the main period.

Classroom-based learning

The content of classroom-based training focussed on teaching officers how to use a number of specific communication techniques that were broadly linked to procedural fairness (see Table 2). This content was consistent across all three courses. Training was designed by an external provider and delivered by GMP trainers. The classroom-based learning encouraged group discussion and ensured officers had the opportunity to discuss their thoughts and opinions; an approach consistent with the idea of treating the officers in a procedurally fair way. This gave officers the opportunity to voice their frustrations about the challenges of dealing with victims and to 'vent' any concerns with the training.

In practical terms, the trainers made use of white boards, audio and video content, peer discussion, and work in pairs or small groups to practice elements of the different communication techniques.

Table 2. Content of classroom-based learning

Technique	Description	Link to procedural fairness
Using names	Exploring the value of introducing yourself by name, and using the victim's name, to improve rapport	• Respectful treatment • Being polite
Empathy	Using staged verbal communication to build empathy with a victim by getting the officer to recognise the victims' emotional state, acknowledge its effect, and then explain how they can help	• Respectful treatment • Being polite
Rapport	Using non-verbal communication techniques to build rapport (eye contact, nodding, body matching)	• Giving 'voice' • Listening
Positive acknowledgements	Using supportive language, acknowledging the victim's feelings, making it clear they are being listened to (e.g. "I understand", "I can help you")	• Giving 'voice' • Listening

Technique	Description	Link to procedural fairness
Words/ phrases to reconsider	Asking officers to think about words and phrases that could create barriers with the victim. For example using the word 'obviously' when the process may not be obvious to the victim.	• Politeness • Explaining decisions and process
Signposting	Explaining the available options to the victim, raising awareness of the required steps in the process, and reducing unrealistic expectations	• Giving 'voice' • Explaining decisions and process
Saying 'no' positively	Using phrases that focus on what the officer can do for the victim rather than saying 'no' to unrealistic requests (e.g. "what I can do is…", "what I recommend is…")	• Explaining decisions and process
Agreement to go	Before leaving an incident, encouraging the officer to check with the victim that they have done all they can, and to thank them	• Giving 'voice' • Respectful treatment • Being polite

Scenario-based learning

Drawing on the approach used in Chicago, two of the three courses also included a role-play exercise which was designed by GMP training staff and College researchers.[9] The role-play scenarios introduced a practical element to the training, giving officers the opportunity to practice techniques they had learnt in the classroom (see Table 3). In line with recent evidence, the intervention also made use of self-reflection, and provided personalised feedback to officers.[10] While some officers were completing their scenario, other officers received a two hour input on the procedural justice model and its value, and took part in exercises looking at how they thought the public perceived the service provided by GMP.

The study design

The training was implemented as a randomised controlled trial, the 'gold standard' approach in evaluation research for 'cause and effect' to be established. Trial participants were randomly selected from a database of all serving response and neighbourhood constables in GMP (n=2,167). They were then randomly assigned to either:

- the treatment group – to receive one of the three training courses; or
- the control group – to not receive the training.[11]

For convenience, and with the aim of enabling comparisons between the individual courses, the officers were assigned to one of five separate subgroups (see Table 4). Officers were assigned at random, and comparisons of key demographic information show the treatment and control groups to be broadly equivalent before the intervention. Thus, any differences between them post-training can be directly attributed to the intervention.[12]

---

[9] Rosenbaum and Lawrence, 2012.
[10] Wheller and Morris 2011.
[11] These procedures were carried out by College researchers to prevent selection bias.
[12] Shadish et al 2002.

Table 3. Approach to the scenario-based learning

Phase	Content
Practice	Officers were given the opportunity to practice the communication skills developed in the classroom in a role-play exercise. The officer was expected to interact with a 'victim' – played by the force trainer – in a fictional call for service scenario (a minor crime or anti-social behaviour incident). The officer received a short briefing just prior the scenario as they would if they were attending a real call for service. The exercise took place in the force scenario room (a mocked-up living room) and was videoed. The scenario was made more challenging as the victim was portrayed as someone who might be perceived as 'undeserving' (e.g. a known offender) and was acting in an agitated way (e.g. complaining about how long they have had to wait).
Reflect	Afterwards, officers were given about 30 minutes to reflect on the scenario using a debrief sheet (e.g. what went well, what they might do differently).
Feedback	Officers then had a one-to-one review session with a course tutor to ensure they received personalised feedback. Each session lasted around 30 minutes and followed a standardised feedback model. Officers were asked for their thoughts on the interaction and to reflect on their practice. The tutors sometimes played back the video recording of the scenario to the officers to highlight specific behaviours.

While the aim was for all the officers allocated to the treatment group to receive training, in practice, not all of them ended up being trained as intended for a variety of reasons (e.g. sickness, change of role, refusal) (see Table 4). Despite some treatment group officers not being trained, it nevertheless remained important to include these officers in the analysis. Excluding these officers could have biased the results as those who did not attend training could have been systematically different to those who did (e.g. in terms of motivation, their attitudes towards victims). The inclusion of all officers randomly assigned to the treatment group in the analysis – regardless of whether they received the training or not – provides a better 'real world' assessment of the impact of the intervention.

Table 4. Officers assigned to the treatment and control groups

	Officers assigned (n)	Officers trained (n)
Treatment group		
Subgroup A	117	97
Subgroup B	110	101
Subgroup C	112	94
Total Treatment	339	292
Control group		
Subgroup D	119	0
Subgroup E	118	0
Total Control	237	0
Grand Total	576	292

Outcome data

The trial sought to assess the impact of the intervention on officer attitudes, officer behaviour, and victim perceptions. The effect of the training was assessed by comparing outcomes in the treatment and control groups after implementation. The response rates for the main outcome measures were typically high (see Technical Appendix) which reduces the scope for non-response bias. Other, more qualitative data were also gathered to develop a deeper understanding about officer perceptions of the training, and to examine the nature and context of training implementation in order to help explain its impact. The main sources of data are summarised in Table 5.

Analysis

'Intention to treat' analysis was carried out, which involved including all officers who were originally assigned to the treatment and control groups regardless of whether those in the treatment group were trained.

Where possible, the analysis used scaled variables – rather than single indicators – because they would provide a more accurate measure of the outcome. Each scaled variable was created from a combination of single indicators which, together, measured the same underlying concept. For example the scaled variable 'fair treatment' was created from three statements in the attitudes survey:

- 'I treat people with respect regardless of how they treat me';
- 'Regardless of how they behave towards the police, everyone should be treated with the same level of respect'; and
- 'If a member of the public is rude to me, I will be less polite to them'.

A mean score was calculated from responses to these indicators and used for the new scaled variable 'fair treatment'. Differences in mean scores between the treatment and control groups were then compared using a t-test. When it was not possible to use a scale, single indicators were used (in the form of a binary – e.g. yes/no, agree/disagree – variable). Differences between the treatment and control groups were analysed using chi squared tests.

Table 5. Data sources and methods[13]

Data source	Method
Officer feedback	Officers who attended the training were asked to complete a short paper-based feedback questionnaire to gauge their immediate response to the training. The questionnaire asked for opinions on both the classroom and (if they attended it) the scenario-based elements of the training.
Officer attitudes	All officers in the treatment and control groups were asked to complete an online survey about one month after the intervention. The survey was used assess the impact of the training programme on officer attitudes. Respondents were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with a series of attitudinal statements about fair treatment, fair decision making, and attitudes towards the public.
Officer behaviour	Officers from both treatment and control groups were asked to participate in one of three specially designed role-play exercises in early 2012 (2-3 months after initial training). The scenarios were different to those used in the main training, but followed the same process and were developed to the same specifications. Crucially, while the officers were informed about what was to happen during the exercise, the officers were not trained in any of the communication techniques (to maintain the experimental conditions).[14] Each scenario was videoed and coded separately by two researchers from the National Centre for Social Research using a coding framework.[15] The researchers were blind as to whether officers were in the treatment or control group, to prevent biased coding.
Victim perceptions	GMP's existing random telephone survey of crime victims was used. Victims were selected if they had had contact with an officer in the treatment or control group (n=652). Data were analysed for the period January to June 2012, meaning the impact was assessed 3 to 9 months after the training. The analysis focused on questions about the perceived quality of interaction, as well as satisfaction and willingness to cooperate with the police. As a random survey of victims, some officers in the trial would have had more contact experiences than others reflected in the data.

---

[13] In addition, College of Policing researchers observed the delivery of a number of training courses, and interviewed a sample of officers (n=56) and trainers (n=6), in order to develop a deeper understanding of the intervention and the context in which it operated.

[14] While role-play actors were not told which group each officer was allocated to, the process was not completely blind; they may have recognised them from the earlier training course.

[15] For coding, the scenarios were split into three phases (i.e. opening, course of action, and closing). The 'course of action' phase referred to the main period of interaction in which the officer would seek to deal with the incident (when it was assumed they might 'revert to type'). Most officers did not reach the closing stage of the scenario as they ran out of time.

2. Summary findings

This section summarises the main findings from the trial. It starts by discussing officer feedback on the training, and then examines the effect of the intervention on the three main outcomes: officer attitudes, officer behaviour, and victim perceptions.

Officer feedback

Feedback on the training was consistently positive (see Table 6). Over two-thirds of officers were satisfied with the programme (68%) and thought they had developed practical skills that would improve their interactions with victims (68%).

The response to the classroom element of the training was particularly good, with a large proportion of officers saying they received helpful feedback and were able to practice their learning (both 87%); two aspects of learning that have previously been shown to be linked to attitude and behaviour change.[16] In terms of the role-play scenarios, while one-third of those who took part did not feel comfortable with the role-play, a much higher proportion felt it was realistic (65%) and taught them something new (78%). Notably, almost all respondents said they received constructive feedback (94%).[17] In-depth interviews with 56 officers who attended the course suggested that officers generally felt the role-play was a valuable part of the training course even though they often did not enjoy taking part.

Table 6. Officer feedback (binary variables, treated officers only)

Attitude statement	Agreement
Overall attitudes	
Overall I was satisfied with the training course I attended	68%
I developed practical skills on the course that will help me improve the contact I have with victims	68%
Attitudes on the classroom-based learning	
I received helpful feedback in class	87%
I learnt something new from the classroom training	74%
The classroom activities gave me the chance to practice what I had learnt	87%
Attitudes on the scenario-based learning (if completed)	
I did not feel comfortable taking part in the role-play	39%
I thought the role-play was realistic	65%
The role-play gave me the chance to practice what I had learnt	82%
I received constructive feedback after the role-play exercise	94%
I learnt something new from the role-play exercise	78%

Impact on officer attitudes

To assess the impact of the training on officer attitudes, eight scales were created which broadly measured views on the impact of training; opinions about delivering quality of service; attitudes and self-reported behaviour on interactions with the public; and perceptions

---

[16] Wheller and Morris 2011.

[17] The Technical Appendix presents results for the three separate courses. Officers tended to be most positive about the two day 'hybrid' course which contained both classroom and scenario-based learning, but reported the course material was covered too quickly.

of public cooperation. Overall, the intervention was found to have had a positive effect (see Table 7). For four of the eight scales, officers in the treatment group, on average, had attitudes that were significantly more positive than those in the control group.

There seemed to be a cluster of positive effects in terms of officer interactions with the public, which was arguably the central focus of the training programme. The biggest of these effects was in relation to officer attitudes towards building empathy and rapport with victims. The effect was equivalent to approximately half of the officers in the treatment group moving up one point on the seven-point scale. The training also had a positive effect on attitudes about fair decision-making and the importance of delivering a quality service. Perhaps unsurprisingly, treatment group officers were, on average, more likely to report they had received training that had helped them in their interactions with the public. No effect was found in relation to more general officer attitudes and in terms of officers reporting that the public were willing to cooperate with the police (a secondary outcome).

Table 7. Officer attitudes (intention to treat: treatment vs. control, t-tests)

Outcome	Mean score*			Significant difference?
	Treatment	Control	Difference	
Views on the impact of training				
Perceived impact of training	4.57	4.11	0.47	Yes
Opinions about delivering a quality service				
Attitudes towards victims	4.29	4.38	-0.09	No
Perceived value of procedural justice	5.13	4.92	0.21	No
Attitudes towards delivering quality of service	4.64	4.41	0.23	Yes
Attitudes / self-reported behaviour on interactions with the public				
Building empathy and rapport	5.30	4.84	0.46	Yes
Fair treatment	4.44	4.62	-0.18	No
Fair decision-making	5.75	5.58	0.18	Yes
Perceptions of public cooperation				
Perceived public cooperation	4.42	4.24	0.18	No

* Range: 1-7 (more = good).

Impact on officer behaviour

As a substitute measure for officer behaviour in the 'real world', the way officers interacted with a 'victim' during a post-intervention role-play scenario was assessed independently by two researchers who were blind to whether officers were in the treatment or control group. The analysis consistently showed that the intervention had a positive effect.

A single outcome scale was created from coders' responses to seven statements measuring the overall quality of interaction between the officer and victim. Example statements include: 'the officer treated the victim with respect'; 'the officer was friendly'; 'the officer was courteous'; 'the officer was reassuring'. A significant difference was found in favour of the treatment group (see Table 8). In support of this finding, a significantly higher proportion of

treatment group officers (48%) were rated as 'good' or 'excellent' in terms of their overall performance during the scenario compared to those in the control group (22%).

Table 8. Officer behaviour (intention to treat: treatment vs. control, t-tests)

Scale	Mean score*			Significant difference?
	Treatment	Control	Difference	
Quality of interaction	5.42	5.13	0.29	Yes

* Range: 1-7 (more = good).

Further analysis looked at whether officers used some of the communication techniques taught during the training during the role-play. Compared to those in the control group, the officers in the treatment group were, on average, more likely to acknowledge the victim's emotional state and empathise with the victim at different stages of the interaction. Importantly, and in line with the principles of procedural justice, treatment group officers were much more likely than control group officers to give victims a 'voice' about how the incident should be handled (a 14 percentage point difference).

There were significant differences between the two groups in their use of body language, but no consistency in these outcomes. While treatment group officers were more likely to match victims' body language (a taught technique), control group officers were more likely to orient their body towards the victim.

Table 9. Officer behaviour (intention to treat: treatment vs. control, chi squared test)

The officer...	'Yes'		Significant difference?
	Treatment	Control	
During the opening stage of the interaction			
Acknowledged the victim's emotional state	28%	17%	Yes
Empathised with the victim's situation	34%	17%	Yes
Placed blame elsewhere	16%	18%	No
During the main stage of the interaction			
Acknowledged the victim's emotional state	41%	28%	Yes
Empathised with the victim's situation	58%	43%	Yes
Placed blame elsewhere	3%	5%	No
Gave the victim a choice of options	73%	59%	Yes
In general			
Made an apology	65%	63%	No
Identified how issue can be dealt with	27%	20%	No
Oriented their body toward the victim	68%	82%	Yes*
Used body matching	24%	11%	Yes
Adopted a listening position	94%	91%	No
Said 'no' positively	27%	16%	No
Used positive acknowledgements	77%	72%	No
Used police jargon	16%	14%	No

* In favour of the control group.

Impact on victim perceptions

An overall 'quality of interaction' scale was created using ten questions in the victim survey which asked respondents to assess how they were treated by the officer they had contact with. Example questions include: 'the officer treated me fairly'; 'the officer made me feel reassured'; 'the officer treated me with respect'; 'the officer made an effort to understand'. The analysis showed there was a statistically significant difference for this outcome in favour of the intervention group (see Table 8). In other words, victims who had contact with treatment group officers were more likely to say they received better treatment than those who had contact with control group officers. The size of this effect was fairly small – roughly equivalent to one in ten officers scoring one point higher on a four-point scale.

Table 10. Victim perceptions (intention to treat: treatment vs. control, t-test)

Scale	Mean score*			Significant difference?
	Treatment	Control	Difference	
Quality of interaction	3.68	3.59	0.09	Yes
Willingness to cooperate	3.80	3.81	0.00	No

* Range: 1-4 (more = good).

Analysis of the items that made up this quality of interaction scale highlighted two aspects of the interaction where the effect of the training was most greatly felt (see Technical Appendix). A significantly higher proportion of treatment group victims (relative to control group victims) 'strongly agreed' that the police: appeared interested (68% compared to 60%); and made them feel reassured (66% compared to 55%). These results are consistent with results about officer attitudes and behaviour change which appeared to focus on empathy and rapport.

The effect of training was also examined in terms of victims' perceptions of how they were treated and the overall service they received (Table 11). No significant differences were found, possibly because these measures may be subject to other factors unconnected to the intervention (e.g. speed of initial response, quality of follow-up). However, 61 percent of victims who had contact with treatment group officers were 'completely satisfied' with treatment compared with 54 percent of victims who had contact with control group officers. This was close to being significant, but fell just short.[18]

Table 11. Victim satisfaction (intention to treat: treatment vs. control, chi squared test)

Satisfaction with...	'Completely satisfied'		Significant difference?
	Treatment	Control	
The way you were treated	61%	54%	No
The service provided	47%	46%	No

Finally, no difference was identified between the two groups in terms of the willingness of victims to cooperate with the police in the future – a secondary outcome that was much less likely to be affected by the intervention (Table 10). This scale was created using responses to five questions, including: 'How likely would you be to willingly assist the police if asked'.

---

[18] When 'as treated' analysis was carried out (which excluded victims who had contact with officers in the treatment who were **not** trained), the difference became significant.

It was clear from the survey that a high proportion of respondents were 'completely', 'very' or 'fairly satisfied' with the police and said they were willing to cooperate with the police. The skewed nature of the data and the sample size meant that there was limited scope for the evaluation to detect a significant difference between the treatment and control groups. The relatively small sample required the training to have a large effect, which was not likely because victims generally tended to be positive in their views. This situation meant the positive result for the 'quality of interaction' scale is all the more notable. Moreover, it is possible that the training might have a greater impact on more challenging police-public encounters, where people have more varied perceptions of how they have been treated by officers (e.g. police initiated encounters such as traffic stops and stop and search).

3. Conclusions and implications

Conclusions

This study demonstrates that communication skills training can improve the victim experience. Randomised control trials are the 'gold standard' approach when establishing cause and effect in evaluation research, meaning we can confidently ascribe differences between treatment and control groups to the training intervention. Findings from the trial show that the intervention had a consistent and positive impact on officer attitudes, officer behaviour, and victim perceptions. For each broad outcome area, there was some evidence that the treatment group was different to the control group in favour of the intervention. In other words, this study shows that, in the right context, communication skills training can improve attitudes and behaviour. Most importantly, the design of the study allows us to conclude that victims of crime received a better quality of contact from officers as a direct result of this training.

Pattern of results

Looking across the three outcomes, an interesting pattern of results appeared to emerge which might tell us something about that nature of the training's impact. Officers in the treatment group held more positive attitudes in some specific areas, particularly in terms of providing a quality service; showing victims empathy; and making decisions fairly. In broad terms, these attitudinal changes were consistent with our findings on officer behaviour and victim perceptions. Officers in the treatment group were more likely to acknowledge and empathise with a victim's situation, and to seek their views on how the police should deal with the incident (a key element to procedural fairness). Together these findings suggest that – rather than officers adopting specific techniques or skills they were taught on the course – training encouraged a general shift in the way officers approached interactions with the public. Officers in the treatment group potentially developed a greater awareness of the need to listen to, and build rapport with, victims of crime.

Training and behaviour change

This study demonstrates that the right training can change officer behaviour. This is an important finding given the limited evidence of 'what works' in delivering police training. Police training can clearly make a difference, and this study represents a useful starting point for exploring the impact of different approaches to training, building on previous work in other parts of the public sector.[19] In statistical terms, some effects from the training, though important and meaningful, are relatively small, and this suggests training which ignores important aspects of the overall intervention (e.g. practical skills development/ use of scenarios) may risk having no measurable impact. Large scale 'sheep dip' knowledge training therefore may not be a useful approach.

Procedural justice

This trial has demonstrated the efficacy of one mechanism for improving quality of treatment. The findings of the study are subsequently important to our understanding of the procedural justice model. While there was limited scope for the trial to detect any improvement in victims' willingness to cooperate, it did show that – in the right circumstances – training can improve people's perceptions of how they are treated by the police. Training which teaches officers how to communicate and build rapport with victims may provide an 'entry point' to

---

[19] Wheller and Morris, 2011.

the procedural justice model for the police. Due to the design of the evaluation, the impact of training was tested in isolation. In the real world there is scope to support the central messages from communication skills training through other mechanisms such as visible management support and communication strategies.

Further research

This study highlights that police-public interactions are a fruitful area for research. In the UK victim satisfaction is generally strongly skewed to positive outcomes, leaving limited scope for improvement. It is therefore notable that any effect was found in relation to victim perceptions at all. Outside the UK, where victim satisfaction is generally lower, there remains scope for testing the impact of communication skills training on victim perceptions.

In the UK, further research would be valuable to investigate the impact of communication skills training in other areas of policing. This study focuses on crime victims and public-initiated contacts. Testing the impact of training interventions designed to change behaviour in more challenging encounters, for example police-initiated contacts such as traffic stops and stop-and-search, would help fill an important gap in the evidence base. To this end the College of Policing is planning to collaborate with West Midlands Police to test the effect of a similar training programme on the public's experience of stop and search.

Practical implications

Findings from this trial show that communication skills training can improve officer attitudes, officer behaviour, and victim perceptions of treatment. This study suggests that there is value in forces exploring other applications of communication skills training to police-public interactions. However it is important that forces consider the context of implementation; and the possible 'return on investment' before committing to this sort of intervention.

The context of implementation is vitally important. GMP's starting point for the pilot was its low levels in satisfaction among four categories of victim relative to other forces. Not all forces will have as much scope to make improvements if they use the training, and measure its impact, in the same way. It is possible, though, that the training could have more of an effect on other police-public encounters where satisfaction is much less likely or the victim is more challenging – meaning there is more scope to make improvements. Examples might include police contact with repeat victims and victims of ASB, situations where the victim is perceived by officers to be 'undeserving' of a good service (perhaps because he or she has been an offender), and police-initiated encounters such as stop and search.

Return on investment is also important, and the cost of training – which required officers to be abstracted from ordinary duties for a minimum of two days – should be weighed up against the potential benefits. While there may be scope to deliver the training in a more efficient way, any training will have resource implications. There are potential risks to reducing the scenario-based content of the course (the most resource intensive aspect) as some effects of the training (though significant) are relatively small, and 'what works' evidence in general suggests scenario based learning and self-reflection are more likely to improve attitudes and behaviours than classroom-based training alone.[20]

Importantly, this study also demonstrates that it is possible for the police service to evaluate the impact of training on attitudes, behaviour and outcomes on the ground. Given the current financial challenges faced by policing in the UK and around the world, it is increasingly important that the training interventions police services invest in are tested for their efficacy.

---

[20] Wheller and Morris, 2011.

References

Beck et al. (2002) Physician-Patient Communication in the Primary Care Office: A systematic review; Family Medicine vol. 15 (1)

Black, D.J. and Reiss Jr., A.J. (1967) Studies of Crime and Law Enforcement in major metropolitan areas vol. 2, Office of Law Enforcement Assistance, University of Michigan.

Dai, M. (2010) The ways that police deal with people: the theory and practice of process-based policing, Edwin Meller Press, New York.

Elwyn, G., Edwards, A., Mowle, S., Wensing, M., Wilkinson, C., Kinnersley, P., and Grol, R. (2001), Measuring the involvement of patients in shared decision-making: a systematic review of instruments; Patient Education and Counselling; vol. 43 (1); pp.5-22

Enzer et al. (2003) A reliability study of an instrument for measuring general consultation skills: the LIV-MAAS scale; International Journal for Quality in Health Care; vol.15 (5), pp.407-412

Fyfe, J.J. (1996) Training to reduce police-civilian violence in Geller, W.A. and Toch, H. Police Violence: understanding and controlling police abuse of force

Jackson, J., Bradford, B., Hough, M., Myhill, A., Quinton, P. and Tyler, T. (2013) Why do People Comply with the Law? Legitimacy and the Influence of Legal Institutions. British Journal of Criminology Volume 52, Issue 6, pp. 1051-1071.

Mastrofksi et al. (1998) Systematic observation of public police: applying field research methods to policy issues. National Institute of Justice, Washington DC.

Mazerolle, L., Bennett, S., Eggins, E., Antrobus, A., Davis, J., and White, G. (2011) Testing police legitimacy… one breath at a time: The Queensland Community Engagement Trial (Technical Report). Brisbane, Australia: Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence in Policing and Security.

Mazerolle, L.M., Bennett, S., Eggins, E., and Antrobus, E. (2011) Key findings of the Queensland Community Engagement Trial. Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence in Policing and Security Briefing Paper. June 2011.

Mazerolle, L.M., Bennett, S., Antrobus, E., and Eggins, E. (2012) Procedural justice, routine encounters and citizen perceptions of police: Main findings from the Queensland Community Engagement Trial (QCET). Journal of Experimental Criminology, 24 July 2012.

Mazerolle, L., Bennett, S., Davis, J., Sargeant, E. and Manning, M. (2013) Procedural Justice and Police Legitimacy: A Systematic Review of the Research Evidence. Campbell Systematic Reviews 2013:1.

Murphy, K. and Cherney, A. (2012) Understanding Cooperation with Police in a Diverse Society. British Journal of Criminology, 52: 181–201.

Myhill, A. and Quinton, P. (2010) It's a fair cop? Police legitimacy, public cooperation, and crime reduction. National Policing Improvement Agency, London.

Reisig, M. and Lloyd, C. (2009) Procedural Justice, Police Legitimacy, and Helping the Police Fight Crime: Results from a Survey of Jamaican Adolescents. Police Quarterly, 21: 42–62.

Rosenbaum, D.P. and Lawrence, D.S. (2012) Teaching Respectful Police-Citizen Encounters and Good Decision Making: Results of a Randomized Control Trial with Police Recruits. National Police Research Platform, Chicago.

Shadish, W.R., Cook, T.D., Campbell, D.T. (2002) Experimental and quasi-experimental designs for generalized causal inference, Houghton Mifflin, New York.

Tankebe, J. (2009) Public Cooperation with the Police in Ghana: Does Procedural Fairness Matter? Criminology, 47: 1265–1293.

Tyler, T. (2006) Why people obey the law. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Wheller, L. and Morris, J. (2011) What Works in Training, Behaviour Change and Implementing Guidance? National Policing Improvement Agency, London.