Officer Trust Towards Community Members and Critical Incidents: a Comparison of Factors

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Abstract
Current scholarship suggests attention should be focused on differences in specific job-related conditions to understand help-seeking behavior among police officers. This project examines how officers’ feelings of department satisfaction and on-the-job emotions may be associated with trust in members of the community they police. Specifically, officers were asked to report trust levels both in a general sense and in the context of a potential officer-involved shooting (OIS) incident. Print and electronic surveys were completed by 169 police officers across 9 agencies located in 5 New Jersey counties between September 2019 and March 2020. Survey questions covered frequency of on-the-job emotions, satisfaction with department administration, and knowledge of local culture. Bivariate comparisons show officers’ levels of both general and post-OIS community trust significantly differ based on reported frequency of emotion, assessment of job satisfaction and department administration, and wider cultural context. Furthermore, multivariate analyses indicate significant factors associated with trust levels include frequency of both positive (fulfillment) and negative (frustration) emotions, satisfaction with training, and attitudes towards the importance of understanding local culture. Findings suggest the complexity of police–community relationships should be more fully explored in relation to supporting aspects of job-related mental wellness in police officers.

Keywords Policing · Trust · Community · Attitudes · Job satisfaction · Officer-involved shootings

Police work exists within community “ecologies,” contextualized, in part, by how officers experience the workplace and community support for their professional actions, including response to critical incidents (Brunson and Gau 2015; Ellison 2010; Shjarback et al. 2018). Pasciak and Kelley (2013) report that 92% of their sample of police officers experienced at least one critical incident, with 31.1% of those having been involved in a duty-related shooting. In the same study, 75.5% of officers reported critical incident exposure through knowing a colleague involved in an officer-involved shooting (OIS) (Pasciak and Kelley 2013). Consequences of an OIS incident can involve negative public attention, internal investigation, and distress from being a causal factor in a death. These consequences can create conditions of escalated stress for officers directly involved, as well as for peer officers (Addis and Stephens 2008; Regehr et al. 2003). Experiencing an OIS or witnessing colleagues coping with OIS outcomes is commonly cited in scholarly literature as an occupational stressor among police officers (Carlier et al. 2000; Gershon et al. 2009; Violanti et al. 2016b). Perception of public negativity, apathy, and lack of support has also been documented as a source of stress for officers (Allison et al. 2019; Liberman et al. 2002). Sources of occupational stress have been given specific focus in examinations of the troubling rate of suicide and suicidal ideation among police officers (Berg et al. 2006; Chae and Boyle 2013; Gershon et al. 2009; Violanti 2004, 2010; Violanti et al. 2017). As current literature continues to document the correlations between profession-based stressors and negative mental health outcomes in police officers, it stands to reason these factors may also impact officers’ evaluation of the relationship they have with the public they serve.
Among studies assessing stressors on police officers, some document the aftermath of OIS incidents as a specific stressor, including the impact of critical debriefing, investigative procedures, resistance to, and acceptance of new policies (Addis and Stephens 2008; Beehr et al. 2004; Engel et al. 2020; Regehr et al. 2003). Analysis of officer involvement in OIS events in the USA is complicated by relatively low incidence (relative to the number of police personnel) and the geographic size of the country. However, as evidenced by recent high-profile incidents of police violence, officers both proximal to the event (for example, in the same department) and distal (in different departments, counties, states, or countries) are subject to the personal and professional impact of negative public sentiment and erosion of trust (Galovski et al. 2016; Nix et al. 2018; Turchan 2021). Whereas scholarly attention has focused on factors that erode community trust in policing, less has been paid to the reciprocal trust officers hold in the communities they serve. This paper aims to address this gap by examining how levels of trust officers hold towards communities they serve fluctuate with differential assessment of workplace conditions, community culture, and frequency of certain on-the-job emotions. Moreover, this paper specifically examines officers’ perceptions about the aftermath of an officer-involved shooting incident and how their trust assessments differ in this context from a more generalized model.

In considering generalized trust held by police officers towards their communities, as well as the mutual effects between OIS events and trust, our approach reflects the public safety role of officers as active stakeholders in creating and maintaining community relationships. As stakeholders, officers are also key agents of change implementation (through policy adoption and altered practice), but this fact may be overlooked during consideration of reform processes (De Angelis and Kupchik 2007). As noted by Engel et al. (2020), the decentralized nature of policing in the USA means local jurisdictions and individual agencies will take on the lion’s share of implementation, assessment, and associated cost for reform efforts (as opposed to federal-level strategies). Policing decentralization in the USA can also result in inconsistencies in policy and practice change (or lack thereof) from one municipality or state to another.

Thus, OIS in the USA occur not only within a localized context of police practice but are also subject to wider community assessment, based partly on media coverage across the nation. As such, analysis should examine not only community-based impact of critical events and reform, but also impact on officers’ experience within their own working environments (Farrell et al. 2020). Our paper extends the growing base of scholarship exploring police officers’ attitudes by examining whether feelings of trust, frequency of on-the-job emotions, attitudes towards community culture, and workplace conditions might be factors to consider in strengthening police–community dynamics.

### Literature Review

This paper explores how trust levels held by police officers towards community members they serve differ if officers are asked to consider trust, first generally, and then again in relation to a critical incident. Investigation of an OIS incident — including the timeline of investigatory steps — can create or exacerbate tension between and within policing agencies and communities. In addition to being a noted source of stress for officers (Chopko 2010), OIS incidents also dramatically test police–community relationships (Kochel 2019), particularly if community members place an incident within local, regional, or national trends of inequity in policing and use-of-force (Cesario et al. 2019; Jetelina et al. 2020; McElvain and Kposowa 2008; Shjarback and Nix 2020). In the aftermath of an OIS incident, not only do community members grapple with the impact of the event, but police departments and individual officers must balance several emergent needs. On one hand, there is the desire to gather information and testimonies as soon as possible to direct investigations and respond to questions that may arise from the external community. Delays between the time of the incident and recall of information may result in a decrease in memory accuracy. Additionally, delays in interviewing provide a longer time for officer memory to be contaminated by access to media coverage, other sources of evidence (e.g., body worn camera footage), or contact with colleagues (Grady et al. 2016). Another factor is concerned about the impact of the stress on both an officer’s physical and emotional health (Regehr et al. 2003).

The role trust plays in a variety of policing contexts has been explored in a number of frameworks, including, but not limited to, constructing police legitimacy, creating community–police partnerships, developing democratic policing practice, and recognizing the impact of inequities in police practice policy (see Cao 2015; Hamm et al. 2017; Mazurzel et al. 2013; Peck 2015; Smith et al. 2017; Tyler 2004 for literature reviews). In these frameworks, the focus of investigation often includes trust as a basis of feelings of legitimacy the public has towards police officers and their work. Measuring community attitudes, however, is complicated by subtle differences inherent in measuring aspects of trust, confidence, and satisfaction in policing services (Cao 2015). As Goldsmith (2005) writes, “trust, through its presence or absence, is innately linked to feelings of existential safety” (p. 444). Although we could have adopted any one of several models of trust, we borrowed from Stoutland’s (2001) study on policing activities in Boston, wherein four dimensions of community trust towards the police were examined — competency, dependability, respect,
and shared priorities. In Stoutland’s framework, operational aspects of policing included officers having access and utilizing appropriate resources to fulfill their policing responsibilities (dependability) and having knowledge and skills necessary for policing (competence). The two remaining dimensions arguably represent more relational aspects of policing. The dimension of respect includes feeling whether police could be seen as respectful, courteous, and fair in their interactions with the community. When a sense of shared priorities was built, police officers were perceived to share similar concerns with community members in their planning and implementing of policing strategy (Stoutland 2001). Loss or lack of trust could, accordingly, be tied to perceived lack of any one of the dimensions (competence, dependability, respect, or shared priorities). The community participants of Stoutland’s (2001) study generally assessed the police as competent and dependable; however, community members were dissatisfied with the respect shown them by officers and doubted the police shared the same priorities for implementing community safety and crime reduction strategies. Witnessing acts of disrespect also predicted juvenile trust in police in a subsequent study using Stoutland’s model (Flexon et al. 2009).

Stoutland’s results in Boston suggest that trust between community members and policing institutions is multifactorial and localized, extending beyond documentation of police activities (i.e., lowering of police response time or number of arrests) or priorities set in other municipalities (Brunson and Gau 2015; Carr et al. 2007). Full examination of the conditions that create (or erode) community trust in policing structures is beyond the scope of the present manuscript. Examples of recent literature reviews covering both American domestic and international contexts demonstrate challenges not only with assessment of community–police relationships (including levels of legitimacy and trust), but with interpreting and comparing results based on constituency identity (for example, immigrants, ethnic minorities, sexual and gender identities, or crime victims) (Koster et al. 2016; Peck 2015; Stotzer 2014; Wu 2010; Wu et al. 2017).

Here, we utilize elements of Stoutland’s trust model with a focus on the direction of assessing levels of trust officers hold in their communities (rather than the more common community-to-police direction). In doing so, our goal is to highlight additional factors that likely impact community–police relationships, recognizing that officers, themselves, are part of an overall community ecology of policing.

The relationships between police officers and the communities they police are contextualized by power dynamics that define the professional and civil role of policing organizations. Bottoms and Tankebe (2012) argued legitimacy is created through an ongoing dialogic relationship, wherein perspectives of both an “audience” (community) and “power-holder” (police) are considered, rather than through a unidirectional audience-based assessment. Radburn et al. (2020), however, challenge the notion of police holding a uniform position of power, noting officers describe their experience of procedure and fair practice from a disempowered position in certain interactions with citizens. In a study using a national sample of police officers and sheriff’s deputies, Nix (2017) found officers do recognize the influence of both procedural and distributive justice on citizen trust and willingness to obey but assess the importance of police performance (crime control) on trust as higher in low-crime areas.

More recently, Mourtgos et al. (2020) examined the relationship between officers’ trust in the public and their perception of community members’ attitudes using both an online nationwide survey of officers (N = 990) and a survey of one department’s patrol and bike officers (N = 140). The authors found officer trust in the public depended on whether they felt community members had the ability to understand the unique stressors of police work. Trust was also dependent on whether officers perceived benevolence from the community and to what extent they believed residents’ complaints were accurate and correct. Officers with greater levels of trust were more likely to engage in behaviors that put them personally at risk, whereas low levels of trust were associated with lower levels of willingness to conduct proactive police work (“de-policing”).

The authors suggested further work was required to understand patterns of police trust in the public, including examination of the impact of memory and emotions.

Here, we explore whether officer assessment of their own trust in members of the communities they serve is influenced by factors previously connected to police stress (department satisfaction, working conditions, and on-duty emotions). In addition, we study whether levels of trust vary by the extent to which officers feel they share the similar values and beliefs with members of the communities they serve and the extent to which officers place importance on having in-depth knowledge about the communities they serve. We work under the assumption that police officers build their own framework of trust in community members and that this framework, like police legitimacy, intersects and interacts with community members’ views on their own trust in police. Further, we hypothesize officer assessment of trust is likely influenced by factors that create occupational stress — satisfaction in agencies, working conditions, and experiences of on-duty positive and negative emotions. If connections between officer trust and these community- and work-related variables are identified, trust then may be a factor to consider more fully in developing programs and post-incident interventions aimed at addressing mental wellness among officers.

A wide-ranging body of literature documents how aspects of police work — working with victims, experiencing threats to personal safety, responding to community dynamics, and
dealing with intra-organizational challenges — create occupational stressors for practitioners. In this paper, we examine whether selected organizational and administrative-related factors associated with police stress impact levels of trust in community members held by officers. Although the scholarship is too expansive to comprehensively summarize in this limited space, occupational and organizational culture continues to be identified as a major stressor for police officers and serves as an obstacle to both proactive and reactive approaches to mental wellness among police personnel (Allison et al. 2019; Cohen et al. 2019; Hart and Cotton 2002; McCreary et al. 2017; Shane 2010). For example, Violanti et al. (2016a) found feelings of hopelessness among officers rose not mainly with duty-related stress or danger, but with higher levels of administrative stress and lack of organizational support. In another study of officers \( n = 365 \), frequent stressors linked to deficient departmental support included inadequate colleague performance and lacking (or using substandard) equipment (Violanti et al. 2016b). Officers interviewed by Radburn et al. (2020) contextualized their beliefs about procedural justice and fairness by assessing how much support they would receive from supervisors and organizational leaders regarding citizen complaints. In the present study, four dimensions of organizational satisfaction are utilized — perceptions of overall department satisfaction and adequacy of equipping, training, and communicating with officers about their roles and responsibilities — to investigate potential impact of organizational factors on levels of trust officers hold in community members.

Studies of officers’ mental wellness also demonstrate the stress officers feel when disguising or downplaying emotional responses to day-to-day contact with the public (Bakker and Heuven 2006) and to work activities. In numerous studies, officers expressed lack of support from supervisors and colleagues if they experienced a mental health crisis — in fact, display of emotions and support-seeking may be conceptualized as a threat to one’s identity, professional or personal status, or as a barrier to success as an officer (Bullock and Garland 2018; Deschênes et al. 2018; Pasciak and Kelley 2013; Turner and Jenkins 2019). In their work on the mediating effect of emotions (both positive and negative), Basinska et al. (2014) found officer fatigue was associated with low-arousal/intensity negative emotions and higher degrees of exhaustion. Additionally, an excess of high-arousal/intensity negative emotions in the absence of positive emotions deteriorated officers’ attitudes and motivation towards working on behalf of society. In a survey of Dutch police officers, Bakker and Heuven (2006) found in-role performance was negatively impacted by burnout, with emotional dissonance as a mediating factor. In terms of contexts for high emotions, officers risk exposures not only by nature of their interactions with the public, but also through secondary experiences such as internal investigations and funerals of colleagues who have died in the line of duty. Gershon et al. (2009) documented officers involved in OIS incidents experienced high emotional affect due to the event (32.4% of officers) and the resulting investigation (51.7% of officers). High emotional responses were also found among 66.4% of officers who had attended a police funeral.

Although the focus of the present paper is levels of trust held by officers in relation to community members, emotional experiences can be tied not only to officer–citizen interactions but to the aftermath of critical incidents (if officers are directly involved) or to indirectly witnessing other officers manage the process of an investigation. Thus, in recognition of the role emotions have in police work and in response to critical incidents, we use frequency of experiencing three emotions on-duty — anger, frustration, and fulfillment — to examine fluctuations in officer trust.

A final set of variables used herein to examine variation in officer trust focuses on police and community culture. Prominent in public and academic discussions of police–community relationships is the concept of a unique “police culture” and the extent to which officers use their professional identity to frame judgements about the communities they serve. “Police culture” is characterized as stereotypically masculine, with display and deference to authority, utilization of “us/we-versus-them” categories (both at a police–citizen level and between “street” and administrative ranks), adherence to a crime-fighter/law enforcement orientation, social isolation, cynicism, and group loyalty (see Chan 1996; Loftus 2008; Paoline 2003; Sklansky 2007 for in-depth review). Extensive debate continues on the uniformity of this “culture” among officers (for example, across departments and within and between ranks), including how individuals officers experience police culture and the extent to which they feel agency to enact or support change (Bayley 2008; Haake et al. 2015; Toch 2008). In their analysis of youth programming in Baltimore, Caldas et al. (2018) note officers felt an “us vs. them” attitude, stemming from department leadership, was a factor in disengagement from community interventions.

As previously discussed, as the human face of local and state governments, police officers hold a position of structural power in their communities, including the use of deadly force in the course of their duties. In contrast, Radburn et al. (2020) notes officers may actually perceive themselves as disempowered in relationship to their communities, as well as subject to public scrutiny and oversight (see also Regehr et al. 2003). Further, qualitative interviews by Vera Sanchez and Rosenbaum (2011) on trust in policing in minority communities detail officers’ descriptions of feeling victimized by community abuse and being resented by minority residents for interrupting law-breaking behavior. In the same study, officers described the relationship, at times, as being
“at war” or being treated as “enemies” by community members. As such, two questions from a 2017 Pew Research Poll (Morin et al. 2017) were utilized to examine officers’ relationships to communities they serve — the importance placed on knowledge about local community culture and perception of shared values and beliefs — and to explore how their assessments of connection to community may impact levels of general trust and trust following a critical incident (OIS).

**Hypotheses**

We expect this study to complement previous studies to deepen insight on the relationship between officers and their communities, particularly in the context of a potential OIS incident, resulting community response, and aspects of workplace conditions that may be associated with stress. One set of hypotheses (H1A-D) examines the relationship of study variables with general community trust, whereas the second group (H2A-D) will focus on the variables’ association with post-OIS community trust. Rather than asking officers about a generalized American public, our study specifically asks officers to reflect on the community members they serve (see Carr and Maxwell 2018). The first two individual hypotheses examine the relationship of overall department satisfaction with general community and post-OIS community trust:

- **H1A**: negative perceptions of *department satisfaction* will be associated with decreased levels of general community trust. Alternatively, positive perceptions of department satisfaction will be associated with increased levels of general community trust.
- **H2A**: negative perceptions of *department satisfaction* will be associated with decreased levels of post-OIS community trust. Alternatively, positive perceptions of department satisfaction will be associated with increased levels of post-OIS community trust.

The second set of individual hypotheses focus on four independent variables conceptualized as “working conditions,” including perceived adequacy of department equipping of officers, communication of roles to officers, and available training:

- **H1B**: negative perceptions of *workplace conditions* (adequate equipping, training, and communication) will be associated with decreased levels of general community trust. Alternatively, positive perceptions of workplace conditions will be associated with increased levels of general community trust.
- **H2B**: negative perceptions of *workplace conditions* (adequate equipping, training, and communication) will be associated with decreased levels of post-OIS community trust. Alternatively, positive perceptions of workplace conditions will be associated with increased levels of post-OIS community trust.
- **H1C**: perceptions of lack of *shared community values* and attitudes de-valuing *local cultural knowledge* will be associated with decreased levels of general community trust. Alternatively, perceptions of shared values and valuing local cultural knowledge will be associated with increased levels of general community trust.
- **H2C**: perceptions of lack of *shared community values* and attitudes de-valuing *local cultural knowledge* will be associated with decreased levels of post-OIS community trust. Alternatively, perceptions of shared values and valuing local cultural knowledge will be associated with increased levels of post-OIS community trust.
- **H1D**: experience of negative *on-the-job emotions* (anger and frustration) will be associated with decreased levels of general community trust. Alternatively, experiencing positive *on-the-job emotions* (fulfillment) will be associated with increased levels of general community trust.
- **H2D**: experience of negative *on-the-job emotions* (anger and frustration) will be associated with decreased levels of post-OIS community trust. Alternatively, experiencing positive *on-the-job emotions* (fulfillment) will be associated with increased levels of post-OIS community trust.

Finally, the fourth set of individual hypotheses includes the frequency of three “on-duty” emotional responses (fulfillment, anger, and frustration):

- **H1D**: experience of negative *on-the-job emotions* (anger and frustration) will be associated with decreased levels of general community trust. Alternatively, experiencing positive *on-the-job emotions* (fulfillment) will be associated with increased levels of general community trust.
- **H2D**: experience of negative *on-the-job emotions* (anger and frustration) will be associated with decreased levels of post-OIS community trust. Alternatively, experiencing positive *on-the-job emotions* (fulfillment) will be associated with increased levels of post-OIS community trust.

**Methods**

**Sampling Framework**

The purpose of this study was to explore whether mean scores for two scales — general community trust and post-OIS community trust — were associated with satisfaction with workplace conditions, frequency of three on-the-job emotional responses, and shared community values. Between September 2019 and March 2020, a total of nine police departments were recruited through non-random, purposive sampling of departments located in the eight...
southernmost counties in New Jersey (Atlantic, Burlington, Camden, Cape May, Cumberland, Gloucester, Ocean, and Salem counties). New Jersey is the most densely populated state in the USA; however, the distribution of population across the state is not uniform. The eight southernmost counties (those sampled here) represent 48.9% of the land area of New Jersey but only 27.1% of the total state population. Thus, policing in “southern New Jersey” represents an activity that largely occurs in less densely populated areas than in other areas of the state.

Cooperating police departments were approached both through “cold contact” emails by the first author and through personal communication between retired policing professionals on the research team and known contacts in available departments. Convenience sampling using different contact strategies was employed, in part, to address difficulties often experienced when recruiting police departments and officers for academic study (Bacon et al. 2020). The research team made an effort to approach the largest departments in each county (in anticipation of low participation) and recruit at least two departments in each county. At the end of the recruitment period, three departments were recruited from one county, two departments each from two counties, and one department each from two additional counties. Department recruitment failed in three of the eight southern New Jersey counties. Surveys were distributed via web-based survey link (eight departments) and paper copies (one department) for a calculated total of 590 officers across the nine departments — 178 officers attempted to complete the survey (30.15% response rate). Initial individual department response rates varied between 12.3 and 81%.

The sample used for analysis consisted only of respondents who answered at least 50% of the questions in each section measuring levels of workplace satisfaction, on-duty emotional experiences, and trust in community and law enforcement colleagues (169 of the original 178 survey attempts). Whereas random questions may have been skipped, if an officer did not complete a majority of items in each of these three sections of the survey, they were removed from the analysis. Prior to distribution, the survey project was reviewed and accepted by the [Blinded University Name] institutional review board.

**Independent Variables**

The independent variables assessing working conditions and department satisfaction, on-duty emotions, and community knowledge used in this study were adapted from questions deployed in a recent Pew Research Center poll (Morin et al. 2017) of 7,917 American sworn law enforcement officers. On-duty working conditions were measured by asking respondents about overall satisfaction with the department as a place to work and the department’s performance on communicating job responsibilities, adequacy of training, and adequacy of equipping officers. Mirroring the Pew Research Center poll, each of these items was measured on a 4-point scale (“very satisfied” to “very dissatisfied” or “very well” to “not well at all”). Participants were also given a “prefer not to answer” option. For on-the-job emotions, participants were asked how often their work as a police officer caused them to feel (1) frustrated, (2) fulfilled, and (3) angry. Each of these items was measured on a 5-point scale (“nearly always” to “never”). The third and final question set adapted from the 2017 Pew Poll concerned knowledge of the community. The first question prompted participants to respond to the statement, “In order to be effective at their job, how important is it, if at all, for law enforcement officers to have detailed knowledge of the people and culture in the areas where they routinely work?” on a 4-point scale (“very important” to “Not at all important”) with a “prefer not to answer” option. The second question asked officers to respond to the question, “Thinking about the neighborhoods where you routinely work, how many of the people in these neighborhoods do you think share your values and beliefs?” with a 4-point scale (“all or most of them” to “none of them”) and a non-response option.

**Dependent Variables**

In the current study, the six measures of trust were utilized, based, in part, on elements of Stoutland’s (2001) framework of trust and included aspects of competency, dependability, respect (including fairness), and perception of shared interests. Each of these items was measured on a 7-point Likert scale developed by the authors (where 1 indicated “completely disagree” and 7 indicated “completely agree”). From these, two scales of trust were calculated:

1. General community trust: a 2-item measure of community trust
2. Post-OIS community trust: a 4-item measure of trust in community members under conditions of an officer-involved shooting incident

**Control Variables**

To account for fear of identification as a deterrent to participation, demographic information was limited to years of service in total in policing and at the current department, rank (later aggregated to sergeant and lower and lieutenant and higher), and political leaning. Gender and racial/ethnic demographic variables were not collected to counteract potential concern about compromising anonymity. According to data reported in the 2017 Uniform Crime Report, no county sampled in the current study had more than 9.4% (range 4.2–9.4%) representation of women in total municipal
and county police departments. Although racial and ethnic data were not available for the sampled departments (in contrast to gender), racial and ethnic diversity in the sampled counties is moderately low. According to 2019 US Census Bureau data, the frequencies of residents in the sampled counties who identify as “White alone” range between 53.2 and 98.05% (with an average of 83.21%) (United States Census Bureau 2019).

Analysis

All statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS 27. Following examination of individual frequencies, the authors conducted bivariate analyses including one-way ANOVA, independent sample t tests, and Pearson’s r correlation. Finally, two ANCOVA models were run, one for each dependent variable, and included all independent and control variables found to be statistically significant in the bivariate analyses.

Results

Univariate Analysis

Table 1 includes respondents’ career and available demographic information. Participating police officers worked in five different counties in southern New Jersey, with participation rates ranging between 13.6 and 27.8% from each county. The modal response for years of policing experience was 11 to 20 years, with 39.1% of respondents reporting being employed in law enforcement for that length of time. Slightly more than ten percent (10.1%) of officers worked in the policing field for 5 years or less, 20.1% had 5 to 10 years’ experience, 27.2% had 11 to 20 years’ experience, and 3.6% had more than 25 years’ experience.

Table 2  Trust scale question text and internal consistency of scales (1 = completely disagree → 7 = completely agree)

|                      | N   | Mean | SD   | α   |
|----------------------|-----|------|------|-----|
| General community trust | 169 | 8.22 | 2.62 | .709|
| In general, to what extent do you agree community members you police understand the needs and priorities of police officers in fulfilling their duties? | 3.56 | 1.50 |
| I can generally expect residents to treat me fairly as I perform my duties as a police or law enforcement officer in the community | 4.66 | 1.48 |
| Post-OIS community trust | 168 | 14.19 | 5.22 | .899|
| If an officer-involved shooting were to happen in the community I police, residents would understand the needs and priorities of police officers | 3.65 | 1.50 |
| If an officer-involved shooting were to happen in the community I police, residents would understand the procedures used to investigate the incident | 3.43 | 1.44 |
| If an officer-involved shooting were to happen in the community I police, residents would keep a non-judgmental attitude until an investigation came to an end | 3.08 | 1.52 |
| If an officer-involved shooting were to happen in the community I police, residents would still be respectful to me as I perform my duties | 4.02 | 1.49 |
experience, and 27.2% were employed for 21 to 25 years and just under 4% for more than 25 years. For purposes of analysis, employment length categories were condensed to three groupings — 10 years or less, 11 to 20 years, or 21+ years. The most common response for officers’ political leanings was conservative (33.7%). Just under twenty-one percent (20.7%) were somewhat conservative, 20.1% identified as politically moderate, and almost six percent were either somewhat liberal or liberal. Almost nineteen percent (18.9%) of officers preferred not to indicate their political leaning. Almost 85% percent of respondents held the rank of officers or sergeants, and 15% were lieutenants or higher-ranking officers. Just under 62% of officers lived outside of the community they policed.

Frequencies for the two dependent variables are presented in Table 2. The general community trust construct was measured by summing two statements, both measured on a scale of 1 (“completely disagree”) to 7 (“completely agree”). Higher scores on either scale indicated higher levels of trust. The mean score for general community trust was 8.22 (SD = 2.62), and a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.709 was calculated, indicating good reliability for the construct. Post-OIS community trust was measured with four items, each of which were measured on the same aforementioned 7-point scale. The mean summed response for post-OIS trust was 14.19 (SD = 5.22) with a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.899.

Bivariate Analysis

Tables 3 and 4 include descriptive data for the independent variables. Due to lack of response variability, department satisfaction and each indicator of workplace conditions were reduced to three, where the lower end of the scales (“dissatisfied” and “very dissatisfied” and “not too well” and “not well at all”) were condensed. Most officers reported overall satisfaction with their departments as a place to work, with approximately 40% indicating that they were “very satisfied” and almost 50% responding “satisfied.” Regarding specific workplace conditions, 54.2% of officers reported that their department handled training “very well,” with another 36.6% indicating training was handled “somewhat well.” Responses for satisfaction with department communication were nearly identical, with about 54% responding that the department communicated “very well,” and almost 37% reporting “somewhat well.” Satisfaction with equipping officers to adequately perform their jobs was slightly higher, with 57.4% responding “very well” and 39.6% responding “somewhat well.” Only 2.4% (n = 4) responded “not too well” or “not well at all” when asked about the efficacy of their departments’ efforts to equip officers. Due to the lack of variability in the dataset, the equipping variable was removed from bivariate and multivariate analyses.

Officers were also asked about the extent to which their values mirrored those of the communities they served and how important officer knowledge of community culture was to being an effective police officer (Table 3). Both were originally measured on a four-point scale, with responses ultimately condensed to two categories due to lack of variability. Notably, most participating officers felt their personal values were incongruent with those of the communities they served, with 85% of police stating that they shared only

### Table 3 Officer perceptions of workplace satisfaction, adequacy of working conditions, and community culture

|                        | Very satisfied |          | Satisfied       |          | Dissatisfied/very dissatisfied |          |
|------------------------|----------------|----------|-----------------|----------|-------------------------------|----------|
| Overall satisfaction   |                |          |                 |          |                               |          |
| Very well              | 65             | 40.4     | 80              | 49.7     | 16                            | 9.94     |
| Satisfaction of workplace conditions |                |          |                 |          |                               |          |
| Department training    |                |          |                 |          |                               |          |
| Very well              | 91             | 54.2     | 59              | 36.6     | 18                            | 10.7     |
| Department communication |                |          |                 |          |                               |          |
| Very well              | 97             | 57.4     | 67              | 39.6     | 4                             | 2.4      |
| Values and community   |                |          |                 |          |                               |          |
| Officer shares values of the community | 25 | 15.2 | 140 | 84.8 | - | - |
| Very important         | 132            | 78.1     | 37              | 21.9     | -                             | -        |

Bivariate Analysis

Tables 3 and 4 include descriptive data for the independent variables. Due to lack of response variability, department satisfaction and each indicator of workplace conditions were reduced to three, where the lower end of the scales (“dissatisfied” and “very dissatisfied” and “not too well” and “not well at all”) were condensed. Most officers reported overall satisfaction with their departments as a place to work, with approximately 40% indicating that they were “very satisfied” and almost 50% responding “satisfied.” Regarding specific workplace conditions, 54.2% of officers reported that their department handled training “very well,” with another 36.6% indicating training was handled “somewhat well.” Responses for satisfaction with department communication were nearly identical, with about 54% responding that the department communicated “very well,” and almost 37% reporting “somewhat well.” Satisfaction with equipping officers to adequately perform their jobs was slightly higher, with 57.4% responding “very well” and 39.6% responding “somewhat well.” Only 2.4% (n = 4) responded “not too well” or “not well at all” when asked about the efficacy of their departments’ efforts to equip officers. Due to the lack of variability in the dataset, the equipping variable was removed from bivariate and multivariate analyses.

Officers were also asked about the extent to which their values mirrored those of the communities they served and how important officer knowledge of community culture was to being an effective police officer (Table 3). Both were originally measured on a four-point scale, with responses ultimately condensed to two categories due to lack of variability. Notably, most participating officers felt their personal values were incongruent with those of the communities they served, with 85% of police stating that they shared only

### Table 4 Officer reported on-duty emotions (1 = never 5 = nearly always)

|                  | N    | Mean | SD  |
|------------------|------|------|-----|
| Frustrated       | 166  | 3.31 | 0.71|
| Fulfilled        | 166  | 3.50 | 0.87|
| Angry            | 165  | 2.66 | 0.78|
some or few of their beliefs and values with the community members they police. While they did not necessarily share the beliefs or values of community members, 78.1% of officers did indicate that detailed knowledge of the culture of the communities they patrolled was important to their jobs. The mean values for officers’ self-reported frequency of three on-duty emotions — anger, frustration, and fulfillment (each measured on a 5-point Likert scale) — are listed in Table 4. Higher scores indicate a higher frequency of feeling the given emotion. The mean response for frequency of officer frustration was 3.31 (SD = 0.71) and 3.5 (SD = 0.87) for feeling fulfilled. Officers appeared to be less angry than frustrated or fulfilled with their jobs, with a mean of 2.66 (SD = 0.78).

The results of bivariate analyses used to test the two groups of hypotheses are presented in Tables 5, 6, 7, and 8. Table 5 includes one-way ANOVA results with the overall department satisfaction measure and both dependent community trust variables. Overall, officer satisfaction was significantly correlated with both measures of officer trust (general and post-OIS) in the community (supporting hypotheses H1A and H2A). Officers who reported being “very satisfied” or “satisfied” with their departments had higher levels of both general community trust and post-OIS community trust than those who were “dissatisfied” or “very dissatisfied.” Measures of adequacy of departmental working conditions — training and communication — were also significantly related to levels of both general and post-OIS community trust (Table 6) (supporting hypotheses H1B and H2B). As with department satisfaction, officers with more positive assessment of their departmental conditions demonstrated higher levels of trust in their communities. It should be noted that most of the responses to the measures of job satisfaction lacked variability, with most of the respondents being either satisfied or very satisfied with their jobs and the ways their departments handled various matters.

Independent sample t tests were conducted to test for differences in community trust using the two measures representing shared values and cultural knowledge (Table 7). Supporting hypotheses H1C and H2C, officers who believed that all or most of their values mirrored those in the communities they policed were significantly more likely to demonstrate higher levels of both types of community trust compared to officers who reported that only some or few of their values were shared by the community (p < 0.05). Participating police officers who thought it was “very important” to have detailed knowledge of the community’s culture had higher levels of both measures of community trust than officers who felt knowledge of culture was “somewhat” or “not very important” (p < 0.001). As with the job satisfaction measures, officer responses on sharing values with the community lacked variability, with 84.8% of responding officers reporting that they shared only few or some of the community’s values.

Pearson’s r correlation coefficients are included in Table 8, with frequency of on-duty emotions as independent variables. Officers reporting higher frequency of frustration and anger had lower levels of both general and post-OIS community trust, while officers who felt fulfilled on the job more often had higher levels of both measures of

### Table 5 One-way ANOVA with overall department satisfaction

|                        | Very satisfied | Satisfied | Dissatisfied/very dissatisfied |
|------------------------|----------------|-----------|-------------------------------|
| **General community trust** |                |           |                               |
| Department satisfaction | 8.74 2.86      | 8.29 2.11 | 6.38 2.58                      |
| **Post-OIS community trust** |                |           |                               |
| Department satisfaction | 15.54 5.39     | 14.05 4.67 | 10.67 6.00                      |

**p < .01; **p < .001

### Table 6 One-way ANOVA with specific department satisfaction

|                        | Very well     | Somewhat well | Not too well/not well at all |
|------------------------|---------------|---------------|------------------------------|
| **General community trust** |               |               |                              |
| Department training    | 8.89 2.82     | 7.54 2.38     | 6.83 2.77                      |
| Department communication | 8.53 2.74    | 8.25 2.30     | 6.25 2.52                      |
| **Post-OIS community trust** |               |               |                              |
| Department training    | 15.67 5.03    | 12.41 4.54    | 12.44 6.20                      |
| Department communication | 14.92 5.21   | 14.45 4.77    | 9.56 5.14                      |

**p < .01; ***p < .001
trust. Both scales of trust were also positively correlated, meaning officers with higher levels of general community trust also reported higher levels of post-OIS community trust ($r = 0.773, p < 0.01$).

Bivariate analysis was also conducted to examine the relationship between the control variables of officers’ years of experience, whether they resided in the communities they policed, rank, and political leaning. None was associated with general community trust, but years of policing experience were significantly related to levels of post-OIS community trust. In this case, mid-career officers (11 to 20 years; $M = 12.71$) had significantly lower post-OIS community trust (at the $p < 0.05$ level) compared to both newer (10 years or less; $M = 15.23$) and late-career (21 + years; $M = 15.06$) officers (table available upon request).

### Multivariate Analysis

Two ANCOVA models were run, one for each dependent variable, and included all significant independent and control variables from the bivariate analyses. Prior to inclusion of variables into the multivariate models, Spearman’s rho correlation coefficients were run to check for high levels of inter-correlation. All included variables had correlation coefficients below 0.70, suggesting a low probability of multicollinearity. Additionally, Levene’s tests of homogeneity of variance were non-significant for both models, indicating that error variance in the dependent variable is equal across groups. The two ANCOVA models differed only in that the years of law enforcement variable was included in the post-OIS community trust model but not general community trust, as it was only one significantly associated with the former in the bivariate calculations.

Table 9 includes the model with general community trust as the dependent variable. Officer emotions of frustration and fulfillment (but not anger), officer satisfaction with departmental training, and value placed on understanding the community’s culture remained significantly associated with general community trust. Partial eta squared values denote the effect size for each statistically significant variable. Satisfaction with training had little effect ($\eta^2 = 0.045$), while the frustration ($\eta = 0.080$) and fulfillment ($\eta = 0.076$) variables had stronger relationships with general community trust levels. Officers’ belief that it was important to understand the community and its culture had little effect ($\eta^2 = 0.30$). The overall model explained 29% of the variance in the dependent variable (adjusted $R^2 = 0.293$). Once all independent variables were considered together, overall job satisfaction, congruence of officer values with the community, officer assessment of communication, and frequency of officer anger were not significantly associated with general community trust.

Table 10 includes the multivariate model with post-OIS community trust as the dependent variable. The model explained 28% of variance in the dependent variable (adjusted $R^2 = 0.279$). In contrast to general community trust, only two independent variables were statistically significant in the model. Officers’ sense of fulfillment

### Table 7 Independent sample $t$ tests for trust scales and community values and culture

|                      | All/most | Some/few |
|----------------------|----------|----------|
|                      | $M$ | $SD$ | $M$ | $SD$ | $t$ | $d$ |
| **General community trust** | | | | | | |
| Officer shares values of the community | 9.3 | 2.69 | 8.06 | 2.57 | −2.244* | −.487 |
| **Post-OIS community trust** | | | | | | |
| Officer shares values of the community | 16.25 | 5.11 | 13.91 | 5.21 | −2.036* | −.450 |
| Very important | Somewhat/not too important | | | | | | |
| **General community trust** | | | | | | |
| Importance of detailed knowledge of community culture | 8.57 | 2.57 | 6.97 | 2.40 | −3.379*** | −.629 |
| **Post-OIS community trust** | | | | | | |
| Importance of detailed knowledge of community culture | 15.05 | 5.01 | 11.16 | 4.84 | −4.192*** | −.780 |

*p < .05; ***p < .001
and officers’ opinion about the importance of understanding the community’s culture ($\eta = 0.060$) were statistically significant, with similar effect sizes. Officer level of frustration was just beyond the statistical significance threshold of $p \leq 0.05$ ($p = 0.07$).

**Discussion**

The goal of the present study was to assess police officers’ levels of trust in the members of the community they police, both as a general measure and relative to community response to officer-involved shooting incidents. Examination of officer attitudes and experiences remains an understudied aspect of police–community dynamics but is vital to addressing the complex interactional nature of these relationships. Officers were asked to indicate their agreement on statements exploring aspects of trust (based, in part, on Stoutland’s (2001) framework), as well as items adopted from a 2017 Pew Survey of over 7,000 officers on feelings towards department administration, job satisfaction, frequency of on-duty emotions, and cultural knowledge and values (Morin et al. 2017). Results support the recognition among a growing number of scholars that understanding the dialogic nature of police–community dynamics requires a more nuanced examination of stakeholders’ perceptions, including those held by police officers themselves.

Bivariate and ANOVA analyses supported all four hypotheses proposed for both general and post-OIS community trust scales. For officers participating in the survey, higher trust in the community is significantly related to higher overall department satisfaction, more positive relationships. Officers were asked to indicate their agreement on statements exploring aspects of trust (based, in part, on Stoutland’s (2001) framework), as well as items adopted from a 2017 Pew Survey of over 7,000 officers on feelings towards department administration, job satisfaction, frequency of on-duty emotions, and cultural knowledge and values (Morin et al. 2017). Results support the recognition among a growing number of scholars that understanding the dialogic nature of police–community dynamics requires a more nuanced examination of stakeholders’ perceptions, including those held by police officers themselves.

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feelings about adequacy of specific working conditions (training and communication), attitudes valuing community knowledge, perception of sharing common values with community members, lower frequency of negative on-duty emotions (anger and frustration), and a higher frequency of positive on-duty emotion (fulfillment). However, once multivariate analyses were conducted, overall department satisfaction, perceptions of adequacy of communication, and assessment of shared values and beliefs were no longer significant predictors for either trust scale. For each trust scale, frequency of different emotion variables had the strongest effects.

In terms of general community trust measured here, the mean officer score (8.22 out of a maximum 14) indicated a moderate level of trust among the survey participants. ANCOVA analyses revealed four variables significantly explained the variance in trust. Lending partial support to hypothesis H1B, officer assessment of adequacy of training was associated with general community trust, with officers’ higher satisfaction with training predicting higher levels of trust. Of the three on-duty emotions variables, frustration and fulfillment remained significant when controlling for other variables, providing partial support for hypothesis H1D. When officers were asked to reflect on feelings of trust in community members contextualized by an OIS incident (post-OIS community trust), predictive factors of trust shifted to attitudes towards importance of knowing community culture (partial support for hypothesis H2C) and frequency of on-the-job fulfillment (partial support for hypothesis H2D). The mean score of post-OIS community trust (14.19 out of a maximum 28) suggested a moderate level of trust among respondents.

Of the department administration and satisfaction variables, only satisfaction with training predicted post-OIS community trust. In this case, respondents who indicated their departments met training needs “very well” held higher post-OIS community trust levels than did those indicating “somewhat well” or “not too well/not well at all.” These results are difficult to interpret and may signal a reliance on demonstrating a professional record of training involving use of force if an OIS incident becomes the subject of public scrutiny. The design of the survey, however, did not include data collection on training background or on whether officers considered tactical skills-based training or training aimed at strengthening connection to community or encouraging reflection on personal biases when answering. Previous research findings measuring the impact of training, particularly training involving building community connection, present mixed results. In a systemic review of training focused on rape myths and providing services to victims of sexual assault, Parratt and Pina (2017) conclude the impact of training on officer attitudes remains inconsistent. On one hand, some studies demonstrated officers’ increased willingness to engage victims’ advocates and development of interviewing skills. On the other hand, training does not necessarily alter officers’ attitudes about rape and acceptance of rape myths.

Similar variation in operational and attitudinal outcomes is noted for trainings to improve response to mental health crises and crisis intervention team training (e.g., Rogers et al. 2019; Taheri 2016; Tartaro et al. 2021; Wittmann et al. 2021). Miles-Johnson (2016) found training about police relationships with transgender community members was not effective in reducing negative beliefs or stereotypes among officers working in Australia. Instead, the overarching influence of a male-dominated police culture paired with a lack of regular gender-based training, practical advice about interaction, and discussion of policy may have countered the intended design and strengthened perceptions about intergroup difference. Notably, Miles-Johnson (2016) recommended reflection on the language trainers and community guest speakers use to discuss police–community relationships to avoid reinforcement of negative perceptions through “us vs. them” comparisons. In a qualitative study, Rees and Smith (2008) present British officers’ feelings of not having venues for discharging emotions about their experiences, sometimes emerging as resistance or frustration with certain training scenarios. Participants of training courses mentioned feeling vulnerable to judgment by colleagues, especially those who saw particular training topics as “hairy fairy” (p. 276).

Future research could focus on the content of training officers had previously completed, whether they volunteered or were required to complete such training, and their learning experiences during different training programs. Given the relationships among general trust, training, and other attitudinal factors (frustration, fulfillment, and cultural knowledge), it might be beneficial to examine officer’s reflections on strengths and weaknesses of training aimed at attitudinal reflection, diversity awareness, and community relationships.

On-duty frustration served as one predictor of general community trust. In this case, the greater the frequency of on-the-job feelings of frustration, the lower the levels of trust an officer held in community members. The research team did not ask the officers to specify in what contexts they experienced frustration, or whether frustration was felt most often as a product of interacting with members of the public or as a function of their department-level interactions (for example, with their colleagues or administrative superiors). For instance, previous research indicates officers feel frustration about limitations of their own legal capacity to contribute to larger prevention efforts regarding social issues like drug availability and overdose (Green et al. 2013). Other studies focus on the time and effort required for response to incidents like domestic and intimate partner violence as a source of frustration (DeJong et al. 2008; Gover et al. 2008).
Frustration has also been discussed as a product of officer dissatisfaction with role expectations (Huey and Ricciardelli 2015) and overall trust of the criminal justice system (which they represent as front-line workers) (Cebulak 2001; Terpstra and Kort 2016). Therefore, future research in this area might benefit from exploring a more micro-oriented view of the relationship between sources of frustration and community trust to best design approaches to intervention (e.g., changes of administrative policy vs. programs designed to empower officers in their interactions with the public).

As mentioned, previous research indicates both administrative concerns and negative public sentiment are key stressors for police officers. Police work inherently involves a high degree of person-to-person interaction, sometimes fraught with high emotions or physical threat. Options for problem-solving with the public is, however, limited in many ways by the confines of how officers understand department policy or predict the responses of their colleagues and supervisors. The results discussed herein do suggest that frequency of experienced frustration — whatever the cause — has a significant relationship (more so than anger and on par with fulfillment) with how officers formulate their generalized feelings of trust with the public they serve.

As with the general community trust scale, the strongest predictor of post-OIS community trust was a factor of on-duty frequency of emotion (in this case, it was fulfillment rather than frustration). Caution should be taken in the interpretation of this finding as, again, the research team did not ask officers to specify in what ways they obtain fulfillment through police work. Thus, fulfillment could be felt by having a successful outcome of an investigation, having a positive interaction with a member of the public, or attaining a professional goal (a new rank or learning a new skill, for example). Fulfillment is a factor less studied in the policing literature — as a positive emotion, it is often discussed as a feeling that becomes diminished due to anger, frustration, or mental strain. For example, in Huey and Ricciardelli’s (2015) investigation of role strain among officers serving in rural areas, the concept of fulfillment is embedded within officers’ perceptions of job expectations versus the reality of police work and what they would prefer to be doing to serve the public. Future investigations of trust might focus on direct sources of experienced fulfillment for officers (as opposed to what they imagine might make them feel more fulfilled) and a deeper examination of how fulfillment acts to strengthen trust in the context of anticipating community response following a critical incident. Those designing training curricula around mental wellness might also open opportunities for officers to share and reflect on their experience with fulfillment, to balance discussions of sources and impact of stress, burnout, frustration, or other negative emotional experiences.

Both general and post-OIS trust levels were significantly predicted by officers’ feelings about the importance of having a detailed understanding of community culture. Higher levels of trust were correlated with increased importance placed on cultural knowledge in both cases. As with the subject of trust, there is relatively more literature exploring how perceptions of community members towards police are contextualized by socio-cultural variables. However, as noted by Shjarback et al. (2018), there are relatively fewer studies focusing on how police officers come to develop attitudes towards the communities they serve and how those attitudes reflect what officers think residents believe about policing. Using concentrated disadvantage and homicide rates as structural indicators, Shjarback et al. (2018) found higher levels of the former were significantly associated with negative officer perceptions of citizen cooperation. The authors suggest that where citizen distrust and officers with negative perceptions are paired, a cycle of mistrust is likely to develop. Jackson and Wade (2005) report that, in addition to variation in crime rates, officers’ negative perceptions of social capital (defined as a community’s capacity to address problems) are important predictors of the use of proactive policing tactics by officers. In their study, proactive tactics referred to using traditional law enforcement powers rather than cooperative strategies to solve community problems; these tactics are suggested to exacerbate, rather than de-escalate, tension and distance between police and community members. Thus, Jackson and Wade (2005) demonstrated officer perception of social culture and capacity, in part, drove decision-making processes to engage in policing tactics that could increase tension and create conditions for abuse of power or authority. Here, in combination with other independent variables, cultural context remained a significant predictor, in that officers who assessed knowledge of community culture as important also reported higher levels of both general and post-OIS community trust.

As a relational concept, trust depends on dual processes of perception between two or more stakeholders in a relationship. Arguably, the impact of policing on community members — or on practitioners — cannot be removed from the interactional nature of their work, both at the workplace and in the community. Results discussed here address a topic less discussed than community member or citizen attitudes towards police and contribute to a growing body of literature highlighting the interactional nature of police work. As summarized by Vera Sanchez and Rosenbaum (2011), the trajectory of police officer attitudes towards residents in minority communities has been driven, in large part, by the extent to which they believed they were respected by the community and the quality of their mutual interactions. In any discussion of police–community trust, the perception of power differentials is fundamental, particularly as legal power placed in law enforcement involves the potential for the use...
of life-threatening force. Mourtgos et al. (2020) emphasize that these power inequities are embedded in the relationship between police and community; the onus, therefore, is on policing agencies to build trust with the community (rather than relying on the public) and to appreciate and understand factors that erode trust for all involved.

However, what may be less recognized are feelings officers hold regarding the power of the community, particularly after events involving use-of-force where consequences for decisions made in their professional role may be life-altering (for example, public critique, internal investigations, and potential criminal charges). During interviews conducted by Radburn et al. (2020), officers utilized language describing community hostility and risk to communicate feelings of disempowerment vis-à-vis community members. Put another way, rather than an “us vs. them” mindset debated as characteristic of a generalized policing culture, some officers instead may adopt what can be envisioned as a “them vs. us” framework of power. This discussion of officer attitudes and trust is not intended to dismiss or downplay the very real effects police violence may have on a community. However, if trust is manifested as a relational concept, the roles and mutual perceptions of all stakeholder parties in event response and change processes should be explored.

Although the results of the current study suggest frequencies of experiencing specific emotions about working conditions may be of interest in exploring police–community dynamics, there are a few caveats to consider. In this project, survey distribution was limited to police officers; no baseline data were collected about the extent to which community members, in general, trust each other. The results presented here are also limited by the cross-sectional nature of the study — interpretations are therefore restricted to a time-delimited period. As such, any new event or situation in a community may drastically change these levels in a relatively short period of time. In fact, the recent combination of escalation of public demonstrations against police violence paired with the response to the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrates difficulties in deconstructing experiences associated with accumulated stress and trauma (Drew and Martin 2020). These data, therefore, are best used as one approach to assessing officer attitudes for purposes of reflection on current departmental and community outreach strategies. A complementary approach would be to develop periodic (longitudinal) assessments of occupational stress and trust to support department leadership in developing new data-driven frameworks (or adjust existing ones) for effective response. These assessments should focus not merely on traditional programs of stress management (i.e., ones aimed at “training” officers to improve coping mechanisms), but also on the organizational and community environments that contextualize police activities.

In the present study, questions about working conditions, department satisfaction, emotional responses, and community culture included in the survey were adopted from a 2017 nationwide Pew Research poll. The items were therefore constructed for a generalized audience and did not examine issues specific to policing in southern New Jersey. Future research might more deeply investigate the micro-contexts of communities to explore how officers come to value and learn intra-community cultures (as opposed to one community “culture”) and how they integrate these perspectives into their approaches to policing. This would also provide researchers the opportunity to examine differences in different policing “ecologies,” even in geographically adjacent municipalities. Future research might also explore using satisfaction and organizational commitment scales designed specifically for use with law enforcement samples. Finally, given the reliance on small departments for this research, a limitation was our small sample size, complicating some of our statistical tests. Between the use of the less specific job satisfaction questions and the sample size, we were left with a lack of variability for some of our measures, with little representation among officers who were dissatisfied with their jobs.

Conclusion

Institutional response to critical incidents and community crisis requires, at some point, police officers and departments act as stakeholders in new policy, practice, and implementation partnerships (Engel et al. 2020). This action is, by the decentralized nature of American policing, localized and subject to officers’ experiences within the communities they serve and with leadership within their own departments or agencies. Results presented here suggest officers’ trust in communities is not uniform and is, instead, dependent on officers’ conceptualizations of general and event-specific conditions. In this sample of officers representing counties in southern New Jersey, general community trust is predicted by officers’ perceptions of adequacy of training offered by their agencies and the frequency of feelings of on-duty frustration. Higher levels of trust in community members contextualized by a critical incident (post-OIS community trust) are, instead, associated with more frequent feelings of fulfillment and with placing value on knowledge of community culture patterns. For both trust scales, the emotional factors were stronger predictors than either attitudes towards training or value for community culture knowledge. Overall, these results reveal complexities in localized community dynamics that form the ecological context of police reform and change implementation.
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Availability of Data and Material  De-identified data can be made available upon request.

Declarations

Ethics Approval  All research procedures were conducted in compliance with the ethical guidelines established by the [blinded university name] Institutional Review Board.

Consent to Participate  Informed consent was obtained from all individuals who participated in the study. Participants were also informed of the authors’ intent to publish using aggregated and individually de-identified data.

Conflict of Interest  The authors declare no competing interests.

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