



Considering the police approach style in the management of people in acute psychiatric crisis

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A historical view on police-public relations... 'your friend, the policeman'



A GOOD CITIZEN

*You can't play the game
until you know the rules*

All girls and boys know that every game must have its rules — without them, how do you know what to do? What's right and what's wrong?

You see, life is a rather serious game.

Two kinds of rules are needed to play this game.

First, there are unwritten ones, you might call these rules of good behaviour. Second, there are written rules which are called LAWS.

It's easy to learn because there are so many people who want to help. Parents, teachers, and your friend, the policeman, all want to help girls and boys to obey the rules and the laws, because this is the first step in learning to be a good citizen.

When Mum or Dad, or your teacher, or maybe your friend, the policeman, sometimes "grows" at you for not obeying the rules, just remember it is only to help you.

One of the first rules a good citizen learns, is to be obedient to those who are helping, and teaching the right way to play the game of life.



What is police work...?

“The job of a police officer is said to be one of tedium punctuated by moments of terror...”

(Ruiz, 1993)





Traditional approach style...

- Police are known to be highly sensitive to behaviours that are considered to undermine their authority and legitimacy
- The compliance of the general public to public law and order is mainly achieved by a rather authoritarian appearance and communication style
- Traditionally, police have approached community encounters with a 'must resolve quickly' mindset - more likely to "go in hard" than to "back off"





It works for most...

While the traditional approach style works in the majority of situations/encounters, there is growing recognition that it may in fact inflame and escalate the situation when the person is experiencing mental illness or intoxicated... thus necessitating the need for force (Brouwer, 2005)

BUT...

Increasingly acknowledged that contemporary police role includes a significant social welfare component

Police contact with people experiencing mental illness is common, some have referred to it as the biggest challenge facing contemporary policing





A complication...

- People in distress commonly misinterpret approach as intruding or threatening as opposed to help seeking (Coffey, 1990)
- Fear and anxiety displayed by person in distress misinterpreted as resistance and non-compliance (Cordner, 2006; Fyfe, 2000)

Empirical support for this...

Consistent findings that mental illness and alcohol intoxication are overrepresented in both fatal and nonfatal use of force incidents (Engel & Silver, 2001; Kesic, Thomas & Ogloff, 2010, 2012; Parent, 2011)





An ongoing conflict...

Conflict for police between the emotional and physiological rush police associate with conflict resolution and an underlying need to achieve a result and resolve the situation and recognition of the need to slow things down, communicate, lengthening time (Baker, 2009; Kesic, Thomas & Ogloff, 2012)

Goal: limit setting with options





Pinizzotto and the 'The Deadly Mix'

Acknowledgement of fluidity of encounters - Need for a detailed consideration of the dynamic interplay between various inter-related factors inherently present in any given encounter:

- **Dynamic factors of the officer** (self-image, appearance, communication, experience, etc.)
- **The perpetrator** (intoxication, emotions towards police, presence of mental disorder etc.)
- **The circumstances** (environment, lighting conditions, distance between, etc.)





A further consideration perhaps...?

- Interpersonal theory – Complementarity vs. non-complementarity in the context of an interaction between two people
- Emerging literature - those with more hostile and dominant interpersonal styles more likely to be violent in inpatient acute psychiatric services (Daffern et al., 2010; 2011).
- Hostile and dominant interpersonal style observed to be stable over time (Podubinski, Daffern & Lee, 2012)
- Skills demonstrated by police are sophisticated and remarkably similar to those of trained MH professionals (de Tribolet-Hardy, Thomas & Kesic, submitted; Martin & Thomas, submitted)



Factors influencing decision making...

- Unclear what factors directly and indirectly impact on police officer decision-making.
- Need to tap into the vast practical policing wisdom arising from their escalated exposure...
- Question as to quality and depth of narratives available and accuracy of recall of previous events, especially those associated with stressful and potentially traumatic events
- Suggestive of a multi-faceted exploration, necessitates a mixed methods approach



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