

Term paper on ethnic social relations and community policing

[Sociology](#), [Population](#)



Throughout the history of the United States policing, there has been strenuous or tensions between the police and other law enforcement agencies and the minorities and people in low social economic classes. However in the recent past there have been efforts to address the situation through community policing.

Policing in the United States has been analysed by different experts and researchers in terms of law enforcement efforts. There have been concerns that there is racial and ethnic discrimination in terms of court proceedings, corrections and incarceration. In studies carried out in 2005, 1. 525M people were in prison in the United States. 40% of these people were African American, 35% were Caucasian while 20% were Hispanics (Harrison & Beck, 2006).

It is a disproportionate outcome considering that in the overall population of the United States, African Americans are only 12% of the total population yet in the prisons, they form two fifths of the population in prison. When the research was carried out on the male population, the disparities were even more outstanding. 8. 1% of the African American male population between the ages of 25-29 years were in prison.

For the Hispanic and Caucasian population the percentage was 2. 6% and 1. 1% respectively.

In the area of court sentencing, it was found that the Hispanics and African Americans were more likely to be imprisoned for drug offences than the Caucasians. The research showed that 24% and 23% of the African Americans and Hispanics were imprisoned for drug offences compared to

14% of the Caucasian population. Other findings also showed that generally, African Americans and Hispanics face a higher risk of incarceration especially when it comes to lifetime imprisonment compared to the Caucasians.

As per the incarceration rates, one in three African Americans will face lifetime imprisonment compared to one in six Hispanics and one in seventeen Caucasians. It has been observed that the young and unemployed African American and Hispanics have been incarcerated more severely than their Caucasian counterparts in similar situations. These disproportionate findings indicate that there may be cases of discrimination.

Discrimination refers to the unequal treatment of persons due to their races or ethnicity when it comes to policing practices and procedures. There have also been observations when it comes to the high rates of arrests and incarcerations in the lower social economic class which is yet tied to the race or ethnicity angle.

African Americans are highly represented in the lower social economic classes compared to the Caucasian population. The people in the lower classes are usually arrested for certain crimes such as homicide and drug offences. At the same time however, the Caucasians are highly represented in the white collar crimes in the middle and upper social classes. The underrepresentation of African Americans in these white collar crimes may be simply due to lack of opportunities for them.

There have also been negative perceptions of policing in the African American and Hispanic communities than in the Caucasians communities. In

a study carried out, respondents both Caucasians and African Americans felt that the police treated the African Americans more harshly. The Caucasians speculated that it could be due to the high rates of crime in the African American communities.

The African Americans had a negative view of the police due to the proactive methods that they used such as asking them what they were doing when they were carrying out their patrols. The African Americans felt harassed by the police (Weitzer, 2000)

This historical background gave rise to the concept of community policing in order to bridge the gaps between the police and the people especially the people in the minority communities (Mirsky, 2009). Comparisons between traditional policing and community policing have shown that community policing has been more successful. First of all, traditional policing was based on the mentality that the law enforcement officers had all the answers. Secondly, the focus was on the arrest of the bad guys.

Community policing however on the other hand is concerned with addressing the root causes of the crime. It is not simply arresting the bad guys but how can the police and the community come together to make the place safer and the people law abiding citizens. It is about getting the community involved and accepting that they might actually have some of the answers in addressing crime and its adverse impact in the community.

Community policing is concerned with the macro -economic causes of crime such as lack of education and work opportunities, economic disparities,

ethnic and racial oppression and lack of health resources. It is a more holistic approach that will benefit the people or community more than the traditional forms of policing.

There are significant steps being made in improving the relations between the police and the minorities however there is still room for improvement. Studies conducted on community policing show that the perception of the police has become better more in the Caucasians and Hispanic communities than in the African American communities.

Community policing requires a higher than usual presence of the police in the community which the African Americans are not yet comfortable with. The heavy presence makes them feel that there is actually a crackdown in their community. The studies conducted on arrests and incarcerations among the different races have also caused them to be even more wary of the police.

References

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