Effects of Attachment, Motivators, Type of Crime, and Relationship to Offender on Willingness of Third Parties to Provide Names to Law Enforcement

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Abstract

This research examined factors affecting individuals’ willingness to provide a suspect’s name to law enforcement if they recognized them in a Crime Stopper-like advertisement. Results indicated a significant relationship between willingness to report names to law enforcement and attachment style, being able to remain anonymous or receive a monetary reward, type of crime committed, and relationship to the suspect.

Methods

- 300 participants
- Experiences in Close Relationships- Relationship Structures (ECR-RS)
- Self-created Willingness to Report Questionnaire (WRQ)
- Data collection was done via social media using Qualtrics

Results

Hypothesis 1
ANOVA analysis revealed an F of 267.55 (12, 287) with \( p = .000 \). The mean score for motivator present was 3.32, and the mean for no motivator present was 3.24, indicating more willingness to provide family member names to law enforcement when a motivator such as anonymity or monetary reward is present.

Hypothesis 2
ANOVA revealed F of 241.67 (12, 287) with \( p = .000 \). The mean score for no motivator present was 3.36, while the mean score for motivator present was 3.41. This indicated that individuals are, indeed, more willing to turn in close friends if there is the added incentive of remaining anonymous or being provided a monetary reward.

Hypothesis 3
ANOVA analysis revealed close friends classification yielded a significance of .035 (no motivator) and .003 (motivator) for willingness to provide names to law enforcement; however, the family members classification and the interaction between family and close friends classification did not yield significant findings. This indicates that there is a significant difference in willingness to report from these two categories and adding motivators increases this significance.

Hypothesis 4
A multiple linear regression was conducted. Significance was measured at \( p = .035 \), therefore partially rejecting the null hypothesis. The beta value for avoidance was -.17 and was .15 for anxiety. This indicates that individuals who are low in avoidance and high in anxiety will be more willing to report names to law enforcement compared to individuals who differ in their measured anxiety and avoidance on the ECR-RS. Those least likely to report names to law enforcement would be high in avoidance and low in anxiety.

Hypothesis 5
ANOVA revealed F of 40.55 (12, 287) with \( p = .000 \). The mean score for burglary was 3.31, and the mean score for homicide was 3.58, indicating individuals are more willing to report individuals for homicide than for burglary.

Discussion

The qualitative findings of this study found certain re-occurring themes:

- mistrust of law enforcement
- believing someone else would act
- loyalty to the suspect

Unexpectedly, the bystander effect appeared to be triggered in this study by individuals who believed someone else was likely to see the same Crime Stopper ad, recognize the suspect, and report them.

Implications:

- Support is provided for law enforcement to offer a motivator such as a monetary reward or being able to remain anonymous to individuals who may have information regarding a crime
- Law enforcement may want to attempt to target acquaintances in their outreach
- They may want to emphasize the importance of not counting on someone else to report

Limitations:

- Use of fictional vignettes
- This study used a self-created survey (WRQ)
- Monetary rewards and remaining anonymous were combined into one hypothesis
- Males, African Americans, Native Americans, and Hispanics were underrepresented in this study sample

Suggestions for Future Research:

- Attempt to further examine the reliability and validity of the WRQ
- The bystander effect and the role it plays in third party crime reporting behavior

References