

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 effecting 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.

Relevant Research

Law enforcement often depend on the public to help solve crimes and they attempt to do this through public outreach. In order to reach the public law enforcement use means such as newspapers, television news segments, social media, and television shows.

- The more serious a crime is perceived to be the more likely the crime is to be reported to law enforcement (Tarling & Morris, 2010).
- Research examining victim reporting of crime and their relationship to the offender indicates a benefit-cost analysis takes place in determining whether they report the crime (Tarling & Morris, 2010).
- Remaining anonymous is a desirable feature among individuals when considering reporting a crime and money serves as a powerful motivator for employees according to research (Goudriaan, 2006; Rynes, Gerhart, & Minette, 2004).
- Jurors with higher attachment anxiety are more punitive when deciding domestic violence cases (Meloni, 2009).

Hypotheses

1. Participants will be more willing to turn in family members if there is a monetary reward or guarantee of anonymity than if there is no such incentive.
2. Participants will be more willing to turn in close friends if there is a monetary reward or guarantee of anonymity than if there is no such incentive.
3. Participants will be more willing to turn in acquaintances than close friends or family members regardless of monetary reward or guarantee of anonymity.
4. Participants who are low in avoidance and low in anxiety as measured on an attachment scale will be less willing to turn in names to law enforcement than will those of any other attachment style.
5. There will be more willingness among participants to turn names into police when the crime is for homicide than for burglary regardless of relationship to offender.
6. There will be more willingness among participants to turn names into police when the crime is for sexual assault than for burglary regardless of relationship to offender.

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 differed 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.

Results Continued

Hypothesis 6

ANOVA indicated F of 19.78 (12, 287) with $p = .000$. The mean score for burglary was 3.31, and the mean score for sexual assault was 3.90, indicating more willingness to provide names to law enforcement for sexual assault 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:

- Examine the replicability of this study in real-world situations
- 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

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