

Community Perceptions of Police Intervention in Mental Health Crises

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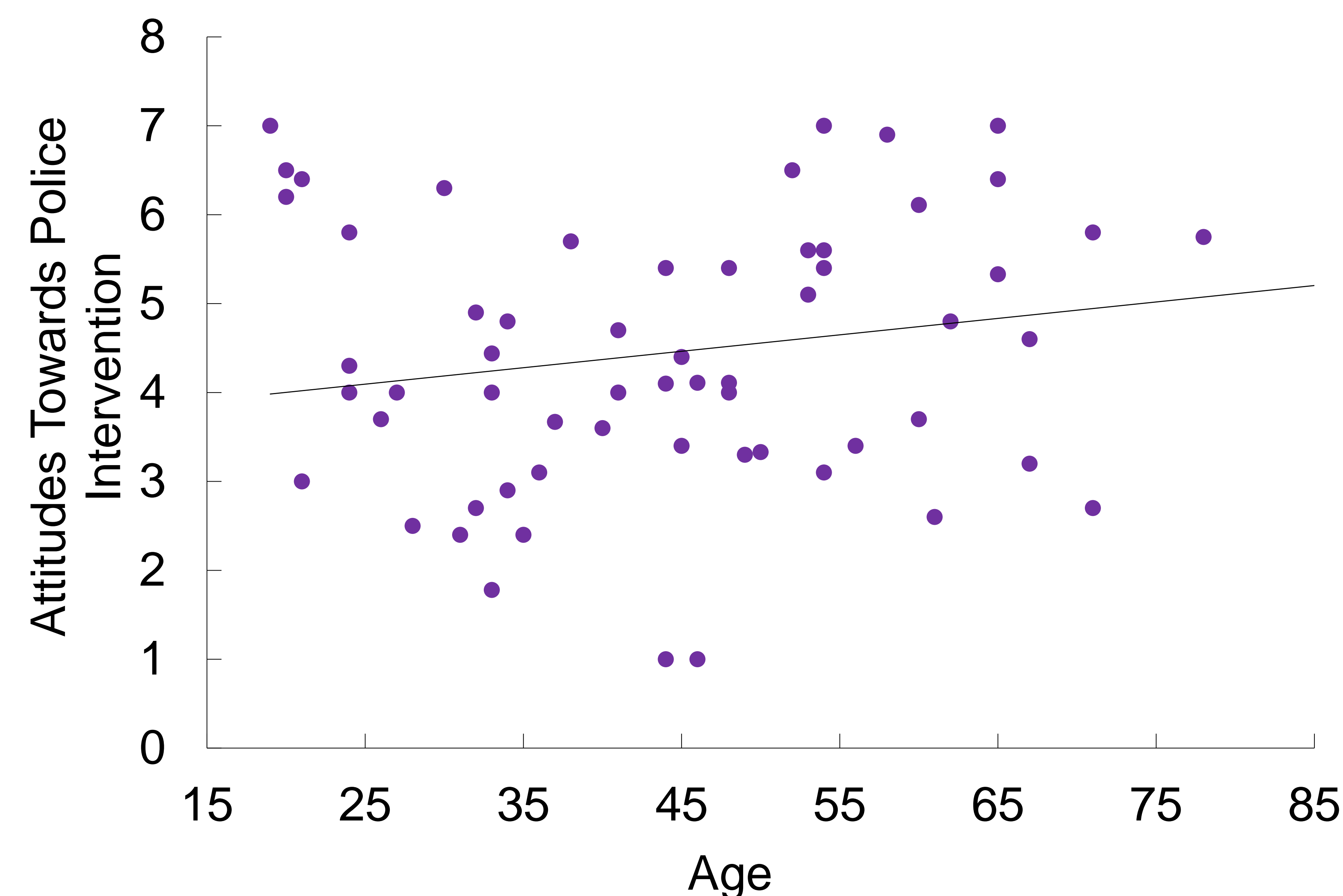
Background

- In light of the ongoing discussions about law enforcement in recent years, there are varied opinions regarding the use of police officers to respond to mental health-related incidents (Watson et al., 2010).
- As 20% of police calls for service are mental health- or substance use-related, it is crucial that the general population is confident in the role of police as mental health interventionists (Abramson, 2021).

Aims

- The current study sought to assess how sociodemographic factors (age, sex, and race) influence individuals' perceptions of the police's ability to intervene in mental health crises.

Attitudes Towards Police Intervention in Mental Health Crises as a Function of Age



Demographics

N = 77	Total (n)	Percent (%)
Sex		
Male	39	52.7%
Female	35	47.3%
Race		
White	35	47.9%
Black or African American	23	31.5%
Bi-racial or Multiracial	6	8.2%
Other	9	12.3%
Age		
M = 44.18 (SD = 15.18), min = 19, max = 78		

Methods

- Demographic and attitude data were gathered from Tarrant County residents (N = 77) utilizing in-person and online surveys.
- Attitudes Towards Police Intervention in Mental Health Crises were measured using the Police Contact Experience Scale (PCES; Watson et al., 2010) Perceived Procedural Justice Subscale.
 - The PCES was modified for future mental health crises (i.e. "Imagine you are experiencing a mental health crisis, and police are called to respond").
 - Responses were given via a 7-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree).
 - Sample items include: "The officer(s) will treat me respectfully" and "The officer(s) will go out of their way to be helpful."

Results

- PCES scores ranged from 1 to 7, with $M = 4.48$ ($SD = 1.54$).
- A forward stepwise multiple regression examined the effects of race, sex, and age on attitudes towards police intervention in a mental health crisis. The overall model was significant, $F(1, 63) = 5.32$, $p = .024$.
- The only variable retained was age, $b = 0.02$ ($SE = 0.01$), $t = 2.31$, $p = 0.024$, $R^2 = 0.08$. All other variables were non-significant and therefore excluded from the model, $ts \leq 1.06$, $ps \geq 0.292$.

Conclusion

- Older individuals demonstrated greater trust in the police's ability to intervene in mental health crises while younger individuals expressed less confidence.
- Results revealed no significant differences in trust between sexes or races, highlighting a generational difference in police trust.
- This study is limited by the small sample size and the use of a modified version of the PCES. Future work should be done to validate the modifications in a larger sample or develop an original scale measuring community attitudes towards police intervention in varied scenarios.
- Further efforts should be made to improve attitudes towards police intervention among younger individuals.

References

- Abramson, A. (2021). Building mental health into emergency responses. *Monitor on Psychology*, 52(5). <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2021/07/emergency-responses>
- Watson, A.C., Angell, B., Vidalon, T. and Davis, K. (2010), Measuring perceived procedural justice and coercion among persons with mental illness in police encounters: the Police Contact Experience Scale. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 38: 206-226. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.20360>