Importance of Issues of Diversity to Police Operational Practice

This essay aims to examine the various ways in which issues of diversity are important to police operational practice.

Over the years, the police force in the United Kingdom has always faced stigmatisation, particularly in regards to race relations. Typically, the UK police force mainly constituted white males. Gaddis and Ghoshal (2019) note that most citizens felt that the police force embraced racists and sexist culture. Primarily, minority groups such as the black community, Asians, and females were not recruited. Nonetheless, this situation began to change with the implementation of the Race Relations Act of 2000, which required police authorities to avoid racism whilst promoting equality and good relations between members of different communities. All the forty-three police forces in the UK and Wales had an obligation to meet the government set guideline, which called for a significant increase in the number of minority groups recruited. Ideally, the UK government set targets that were region-specific. The past decade has experienced a significant increase in the number of minority groups individuals recruited into the UK police force.

Predominantly, a trusted police force is more likely to get the job done. Nonetheless, it is challenging for officers to earn public trusts as they often appear in a civilian's life during stressful conditions. A diverse police force represents a variety of backgrounds and groups; including race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, faith and age, factors that make the community gain a sense of representation. Hickman, Atherley, Lowery, and Alpert (2015) note that society is often naturally inclined towards trusting and opening up to people with whom they share certain elements, whether they attend the same place of worship, have a similar preference in music, or have similar family backgrounds. In a study conducted by Lytle (2010), it was found that police forces that are diverse have a higher likelihood of acquiring individual trust as they are reflective of the community. This element matters beyond the general perception of the public. Typically, a police officer can easily execute their roles and solve problems faster if they have the trust of the community. Stergioulis (2017) asserts that a representation of various individuals from different backgrounds enables members of the police force to serve effectively and easily gather any information necessary to fulfil their mission.

The underrepresentation of minority communities in the police force is one of the main reasons why most minority civilians have a strained relationship with law enforcement officers. For example, as of March 2019, only 7% of UK police officers hailed from minority groups (Taylor, 2019). Taylor (2019) notes that this was one of the highest statistics recorded. Ideally, representation alone could go a long way in fixing larger societal issues, particularly regarding racism. Currently, the UK government has introduced a new Police Education Qualification Framework aimed at training law enforcement officers to be more representative of the citizens. The new framework will serve to create trust between the community and police officers as more and more minorities who want a career in the police will be able to access it.

Taylor (2019) notes that aggressive tactics among law enforcement officers have created an environment of distrust within the community. Conflicts between police officers and the civilians

often stem from deeper issues, ones that the police have not been trained to resolve. From this perspective, it can be argued that diversity within the police force is not enough to gain community trust. Instead, police officers must also be attuned to the concept of diversity so as to avoid unnecessary conflicts with the minority. With such a police force, it becomes easier to interact with various citizens, as they feel understood and protected. Todak, Huff and James (2018) mention that adopting a police culture that discourages racial and ethnic bias will aid in reducing police shootings. In order to get members of law enforcement more attuned to diversity, it is necessary to develop training programs that teach officers about their implicit biases or prejudicial behaviour that they develop unconsciously. A training program that teaches law enforcement officers that being respectful to the public creates trust and justice is also instrumental in instilling an appreciation for diversity.

Clements (2008) suggests that within a diverse workforce it would become unacceptable for officers to express prejudice towards certain individuals based on their own preconceived bias. It is just as unacceptable, if not more so, to avoid offering a policing service to these same groups or individuals based on such prejudice. This makes it evident that where police response is not applied fairly and without the bias that springs from prejudice, then overt discrimination will be taking place. Therefore, by cultivating a police force attuned to diversity you are able to root out any form of prejudice and in turn discrimination. This will improve the public's confidence within the force to operate fairly and provide them with an unbiased service.

Turner (2016) points out that traditional police training focused on providing information about the law as well as police procedures. Police officers who underwent this form of training were not taught about their role in society and what society expected from them. In this regard, they were not aware that a diverse society with different cultures and customs had diverse demands that must be dealt with differently. While Community Race Relations training existed in the 1970s in the UK, the would-be police officers were not taught how to effectively deal with ethnic minorities. For example, the 1982 riots in Brixton, a district whose residents were mostly of Afro-Caribbean descent, forced the UK police force to start trainings on community relations to make police more attuned to diversity. The Brixton riots illustrated the issues that come with policing a multi-racial society and created the need to direct more attention towards diversifying the UK police force.

In most cases, the police are regarded as a separate entity within society. Hickman, Atherley, Lowery, and Alpert (2015) note that various forms of police brutality have alienated police from society. Nonetheless, it is necessary to understand that the police operate on a basis of consent from the public. Mostly, police officers are recruited from the community. In this regard, Lytle (2010) argues that implementing diversity in the police force is an instrumental way of improving relations and ultimately legitimising the police within the community. Ideally, a police department that constitutes individuals from diverse backgrounds and individualities sends the message that the police force is willing to partner with the community. Moreover, diversity within a police force exhibits a mentality of acceptance of the diverse composition of the community. Additional benefits from this include additional skills for the workforce, including language, familiarity with the local community as well as the creation of more avenues to investigate. Consequently, civilians become more willing to cooperate with investigations, a factor that significantly improves police operations.

The success of the police in any society is dependent on their responsiveness and accountability. Primarily, responsiveness entails providing the appropriate police service in a

competent manner. This element requires police officers to understand the role of the public. Stergioulis (2017) argues that diverse police are more responsive and accountable. In a less diverse police force, it is not uncommon for officers to neglect parole responsibilities and ignore distress calls in some neighbourhoods. This reaction could be related to racial discrimination as well as other forms of inequitable behaviour. On the other hand, Hickman, Atherley, Lowery, and Alpert (2015) maintain that diversity allows police officers to dedicate the resources available for the benefit of all communities. This strategy can be accomplished by partnering with the community, a factor that can be achieved with the diverse police force or one that is attuned to diversity in society.

Accountability is also a key value needed for police officers to establish and maintain positive relationships with members of the community. Lytle (2010) mentions that this virtue can be acquired by providing periodic reports on police activities as well as using police resources to help all communities. A police force that is attuned to diversity is keen on ensuring that all members of the community understand the role of law enforcement officers and the steps that have been taken to execute. Periodic reports act as an assurance technique for the community and the society at large.

Clements (2008) notes that within a diverse community officers will unavoidably be called to deal with potential incidents involving hostility around discrimination. In some cases, these calls may not amount to serious crimes but will still however be of great concern to the individual or individuals discriminated against. With the need to increase trust and confidence in communities and the obligation for officers to interact with its members, it is inevitable that more challengers of diversity will need to be listened to and afford access to policing services for a force to be seen as legitimate, especially within the context of community-based policing.

In conclusion, good community relations result in good policing practice. Typically, the lack of public support negatively affects the police as they lose access to community resources that may be helpful in apprehending offenders. With a diverse police force, police operations become successful as the officer can more easily attend to a multicultural society. Furthermore, a police force that is attuned to diversity is more accepted within its community, and their legitimacy is unquestionable. Therefore, a diverse police force that is trusted by their community are more likely to receive help when conducting investigations and as such, the general public perceives them as an avenue through which they can be protected. Ultimately, diversity in the police force allows the officers to conduct their work faster and reduce cases of police misunderstandings.