Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.
CONTACTS WITH, AND ATTITUDES TOWARD, THE MENTALLY ILL IN THE NEW ZEALAND POLICE

A dissertation in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts in Psychology at Massey University

Tracey Marie Rowe
2001
Abstract

Deinstitutionalisation and changes to the Mental health Act (1992) relating to committal and treatment for those with a mental illness has resulted in increased numbers of people with a mental illness living in the community. Internationally these changes in the care of mentally ill people have resulted in increased contacts between the police and the mentally ill. The present study investigated the amount, and nature of, contacts between the New Zealand police and the mentally ill and the attitudes of the police toward mentally ill persons using Cohen and Struening's Opinions about Mental Health (OMI) scale. Self-administered questionnaires were distributed to all police stations within region three of the New Zealand police districts and a total of 261 sworn police participated. The results show that New Zealand police, like their international colleagues, experience regular contacts with the mentally ill that are time consuming, stressful and largely non-criminal in nature. While the police expressed a dislike to attending call outs involving the mentally ill, their attitudes as measured by the OMI were overall positive and accepting of mentally ill people. The participants expressed a desire for additional training and education to better prepare themselves to deal with the mentally ill.
Acknowledgments

Firstly, I would like to express my sincere thanks to my ever patient supervisor, Malcolm Johnson. Without your gentle persuasion and your willingness to keep me on your books long after I had closed mine, this thesis would have forever remained uncompleted. Thank-you.

Thanks is also extended to Dr Ian Miller, Coordinator of psychological services for the New Zealand police for your assistance, and also to Heather Clinton, Staff Welfare Officer, Palmerston North, for your assistance in distributing the questionnaires.

To the police who took time to complete the questionnaire, thank-you. Without your participation this thesis could not have been produced. It is hoped that your participation and the findings of this thesis can go a little way in producing change to promote better job satisfaction and conditions, and just as importantly, improve services for the mentally ill.

Thanks also to my family and friends who have supported and encouraged me throughout this long journey. Mum, your endless phone calls have paid off; Dad, Geoff, Lyn, Denise, Phill, Ken and Bev - thanks for your support. Anita, your weekends at the computer went beyond the duty of friendship, and Lea, my introduction has to be dedicated to you! Thanks to all who have laughed at and with me - when all else fails, you have to have the ability to laugh.

Finally, and most importantly, to Ton. Thanks for always knowing the right thing to say at the right time, for believing I could do this and not letting me forget that in myself.
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter/Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF APPENDICES</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW
1.1 Introduction .............................................. 1
1.2 Attitudes .................................................. 1
1.3 Attitude Definition ........................................ 1
1.4 Attitudes and Related Concepts ......................... 4
1.5 Attitude Formation ....................................... 5
1.6 Functions of Attitude ................................... 7
1.7 Attitudes and Behaviour .................................. 8

## CHAPTER 2: ATTITUDES TOWARD THE MENTALLY ILL
2.1 Public Attitudes toward the Mentally Ill .................. 10
2.2 Factors Influencing Attitudes toward the Mentally Ill .... 11

## CHAPTER 3: POLICE AND THE MENTALLY ILL
3.1 Police Contact with Mentally Ill Persons ............... 14
3.2 International Police Attitudes Toward the Mentally Ill .... 18
3.3 New Zealand Police and the Mentally Ill ................ 20

## CHAPTER 4: THE PROPOSED RESEARCH
4.1 The Proposed Research .................................... 22

## CHAPTER 5: METHOD
5.1 Respondents ............................................... 26
5.2 Procedure .................................................. 27
5.3 The Measures ............................................... 28
CHAPTER 6: RESULTS
6.1 Sample Description ................................................. 32
6.2 Police Service ......................................................... 33
6.3 Police Contacts with the Mentally Ill ............................. 35
6.4 Urban Police Contacts vs Rural Police Contacts with the Mentally Ill ...... 38
6.5 Police Perceptions of their Work with the Mentally Ill .................. 40
6.6 Police Perceptions of Training ..................................... 41
6.7 Police Perceptions of the Mentally Ill ................................ 41
6.8 Police Attitudes (OMI Findings) .................................... 42
6.9 OMI Scores and Demographics ...................................... 43
6.10 OMI Scores and Police Service .................................... 45
6.11 OMI Scores and Experience with the Mentally Ill .................... 45

CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION
7.1 Review of Main Aims and Findings .................................. 48
7.2 Limits of Study and Methodological Issues ......................... 53
7.3 Further Research ....................................................... 55
7.4 Conclusion ............................................................... 56

APPENDICES
Participants Information Sheet ........................................... 58
Questionnaire ............................................................... 60

REFERENCES .............................................................. 70
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Age Distribution of Respondents</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Summary of Police Demographics</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Summary of Police Service Information</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Police Contacts with the Mentally Ill while on Duty</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Mean Ranks and Sum of Ranks for number and duration of contacts involving the mentally ill and police based at large urban, small urban, and rural stations</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Mean Scores and Standard Deviations for the first five factors of the OMI of New Zealand Police, New Zealand Community and a United States police sample</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Mean and Standard Deviations of factors A, B, C, D, and E of the OMI for Personal Contact, Gender, and Education</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Mean and Standard Deviations of factors A, B, C, D, and E of the OMI for Police Service and Experiences While on Duty</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Appendices

1. Participants Information Sheet ........................................ 66
2. Questionnaire .......................................................... 68