A study on how past criminal activities influence attitudes towards the police

'The impact of past criminal behavior on police attitudes'

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**Abstract**

In this study we attempted to give a further understanding on how past criminal activities have an impact on attitudes towards the police. We also looked at the impact of having delinquent peers on police attitudes. For this research we used the dataset from the Pathways to Desistance study. This data included serious adolescent offenders between the age of 14 and 18 years old. The main interest was in trying to find and understand how criminal activities from the past influenced views of police legitimacy. Also, we were looking if the effect from criminal activities on police attitudes will differ between people with and without delinquent peers. We investigated these objectives by running two multiple regression analysis. Based on multiple regression analyses, the findings support that there is a negative impact of past criminal activities on police legitimacy, that having delinquent peers leads to more negative attitudes towards the police. The theoretical and practical implications of these findings are discussed.

*Keywords:* criminal behavior, delinquency, police legitimacy, police attitudes, peers, attitudes; criminal activities.

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Over the last year during the 'Corona pandemic', the pressure on and violence against law enforcement has grown (NOS, 2020). There have been protests and riots on a scale which are highly unusual for Holland and have not happened for over 40 years since the 'krakersrellen' in the 1970's (NOS, 2021). These outbursts of anger against law enforcement make it interesting to look at how attitudes towards the police are shaped and which factors have had an impact on these attitudes.  In this research we focus on what the influence is of past criminal activities on how people view and behave towards the police. Earlier studies concluded that fair decision making and acting respectfully resulted in a bigger belief in the legitimacy of law enforcement (Jackson et al., 2012b). One of the most well-known theories on this topics is the procedural justice theory, which argues that fair treatment results in an increasing likeable attitude towards the police (Hough et al., 2013; Trinkner et al., 2019). In contrast, there are also researchers who argue that perceptions of police agencies are not determined by their performance as stated in the procedural justice theory, but rather by isolated experiences with law enforcement officials (Skogan, 1975). Furthermore, a recent study done by Nagin and Telep (2017) showed a critical attitude towards the procedural justice theory, stating that the causality described in the procedural justice theory could also be reversed. In this research we will be looking at the impact of past criminal activities on police attitudes, since not many studies have explored the reverse pathways. Besides the impact of past criminal activities on police legitimacy , we will also focus on the effects of peer delinquency and someone's social environment on police legitimacy. The

effect of having delinquent peers is often left unexplored in prior research regarding this topic (Ferdik et al., 2019).

During explosions of aggression and violent attitudes towards the law, the police is most likely the first target. This makes it important to look at how those moments with the police are experienced and how society and the delinquents see the police after an incident. We expect to find in this research that the impact of earlier criminal behavior will be either a positive (more bright look at police) or a negative (more tension towards police) one, depending on the personal believes towards the law, known as substantive morality (Skogan & Frydl, 2004). We also expect to find that having delinquent friends would negatively impact your attitudes towards the police. If the values of the people that have committed criminal behavior in the past coincide with the law, police can have a positive impact by putting them back on the right track. Another theory that links moral beliefs and the law is the theory of moral neutralization. Criminologists Sykes and Matza (1957) developed a conceptual framework, that explains juvenile delinquency by stating that crimes can be the result of convincing yourself that certain criminal actions are morally acceptable. This 'moral neutralization' is a cognitive process to justify acting outside the law and moral boundaries, and because it could justify past criminal activities, it could also lead to negative police contacts (Kvalnes, 2015).

If the people that have committed criminal activities in the past feel that the degree to which the law operates is not consistent with their own values, than that is clearly a factor we expect to be shaping a more negative law-related attitude, and also one that negatively impacts the views towards police, towards law enforcement, and their legitimacy. In this research we will focus on how past criminal behavior influence attitudes towards the police, and in what way this does have an impact.

**Theoretical Framework**

**Past Criminal Activities and Attitudes towards the police**

In the criminological literature there is a distinction made between effectiveness and fairness regarding the attitudes of the police and how we expect them to behave (Jackson & Bradford, 2019). According to Jackson and Bradford (2019) we expect that the police achieves certain goals such as catching criminals, but also that they behave in an appropriate way with the right intentions. Jackson and Bradford (2019) furthermore state that in earlier research about police attitudes the police is mostly viewed as a collective actor. "trust can be best seen as a process, even though it adds complexity to the definition of trust" (Jackson & Bradford, 2019, p. 9). Police attitudes have been divided by trust and legitimacy, and having negative experiences with police harms and negatively shapes this trust and legitimacy (Tyler et al., 2014).

There is plenty research on police attitudes through the eyes of the regular population, but not many research has focused on police legitimacy through the eyes of the citizens that have interacted with the police recently (White et al., 2016). Brown and Benedict (2002) found that the more negative one's past experiences with the police are, the more stigmatizing and biased the attitudes towards the police can be formed. 'the worse one's own past treatment has been, the more one may come to view police actions as heavily biased against certain segments of society and preferential toward others' (Brown & Benedict, 2002, p. 552). Any kind of contact with the police in the past had made their attitudes less positive (Nicholas & Walker, 2004). A research done by Reisig and Parks (2000) came with similar findings, namely that negatively experienced police stops had a six times larger effect compared to a positive rated police stop.

A lot of research has found that prior contact with the police shapes the attitudes and expectations towards the police, and how individuals expect to be treated in future encounters (Skogan, 2006). Hough et al. (2013) found that negative police contacts had a strong predictive power of having trust in the police and positive contact had only a little predictive power for trust in the police. In a British crime survey they found that the most favorable attitudes towards the police were formed by people who had zero encounters with the police in their life. Furthermore, Skogan (2006) stated in his research that having a bad experience results in a four to fourteen times stronger impact compared to the impact of having a positive encounter with the police. This is in line with a statement from Hillard (2003) who said the following comment on a symposium regarding racial profiling: "you have ten positive encounters with the police and that's good; but one negative encounter, and all the positives disappear".

People who have committed criminal activities and been arrested are typically less satisfied with the police performance than other towards the police (Skogan, 2006). Most research on police attitudes relied on the general population, instead of delinquent citizens that had frequently interacted with the police (White et al., 2016). Tyler (1988) interviewed in his study over 628 individuals that had been accused of felony offenses, and his findings were that procedural justice had a strong influence on the perceptions of police legitimacy. The procedural justice theory is often discussed in topics regarding police legitimacy, and the key point in this theory is that if law enforcement and the police uses its power in a fair way and with good intentions, this increases the reputation of the police and it increases the legitimacy (Tyler, 1990). Papachristos et al. (2012) concluded in their study that people that had committed criminal activities as a whole have negative opinions towards the law and legal authority. Within these people with a past of criminal activities, gang members with a strong criminal network had

substantially more negative attitudes towards the police (Papachristos et al., 2012).  Brown and Benedict (2002) explain the importance of past police arrests on attitudes towards the police, and how bad experiences result in stigmatizing views towards the police. Hough et al. (2013) found that negative police contacts after criminal activities had a strong predictive power of having low trust in the police. The more negative someone has experienced their contact with the police, the more stigmatized and biased their attitudes towards police legitimacy are formed. There is a difference in effect depending on the type of arrest, namely a sought or unsought arrest (Clancy, 2001). Unsought arrest could mean being stopped at a traffic control, which is an arrest but not specifically targeted towards you. sought arrest is when you are a specific target for the arrest. The experience of a sought arrest creates more tension towards the police (Clancy, 2001). Since most arrest are experienced as a negative experience, the following hypothesis can be derived:

*H1: Past Criminal behavior results in lower support for the police and more negative attitudes towards the police.*

**Peer delinquency and attitudes towards the police**

The effect of past criminal activities on police legitimacy, the effect of peer delinquency on police legitimacy is often left unexplored in prior research (Ferdik et al., 2019). Every individual grows up in certain environment, which can be a prosocial environment with respect for the law. In other cases this environment can be more criminal endorsing a deviant lifestyle and supportive for delinquency. These varying socialization experiences are explained in the differential association theory by Sutherland (1947). The theory explains how ideologies, values, and criminal mind-sets can be socially transmitted due to intimate social interactions with criminal

others from your environment. These ideologies and values can lead eventually into criminal behaviors (Ferdik et al., 2019).  According to this theory, if individuals can create criminal values based on their social environment and relations, this would mean that having criminal friends that are close to who have been arrested can predict general attitudes towards the police (Brick et al., 2009; Romain & Hassell, 2014).

The 1947 differential association theory (transformed later by Ronald Akers into the Social learning theory) stated that most adapting of criminal behaviors is formed in social interactions with other people (Bernard, 2007) . The theory remains relevant today, by explaining how groups in society differ in terms of how they have been raised and in what societal environment, since that explains their views towards the law and attitudes towards the police. Growing up and being exposed around rule violating behavior versus growing up in environments that rejects certain attitudes. According to Sutherland and Akers this forms a mind-set more tolerant for crime and less tolerant for police. These mind-sets are transmitted throughout intimate social relations, such as family or close friends.

Where the focus of Sutherland was mostly on how criminal attitudes transmitted from an environment to the individual, Lieber et al. (1998) started looking more at how these social relationships also shape attitudes towards law enforcement and the police. What they found was: "that a measure of their friend's attitudes supportive of delinquency promoted greater disrespect for police officers" (Leiber et al., 1998, p. 7). Brick et al. (2009) came with similar findings in their study, and they saw how a friends delinquent attitudes statistically significant predicted the negative attitudes of someone towards the police. Romain and Hassell (2014) found that the respondents who reported to have many delinquent friends also shared less favorably attitudes towards law enforcement. Furthermore, Fine et al. (2016) found that the participants with

arrested and delinquent friends shared negative evaluations towards the legitimacy of the entire justice system and the police. Dirikx & Van den Bulck (2014) found that an increased exposure to criminal behavior lead to more negative perceived police legitimacy. Therefore, the following hypothesis can be derived:

*H2: Being friends with delinquent peers leads to more negative attitudes towards the police.*

**Past Criminal activities + Peer delinquency and attitudes towards the police**

Attitudes towards the police are not positively promoted by past criminal activities or peer delinquency. Within the network of criminals, the benefits of crime and illegal behavior are probably expressed and discussed, leading to the acceptance of these perspectives and ultimately the commission of these crimes (Ferdik et al., 2019). This is in line with work from Bandura (2001), who suggested that the worldviews of any individual are based on others peoples statements and ideas around him. This is for example a phenomenon we see in places with a dominant religion, resulting in the people assimilating these same religious ideas and worldviews from the people close around you.

Lieber et al. (1998) found in their study that friends did impact the police attitudes of the respondents. "a measure of their friend's attitudes supportive for delinquent behavior promoted greater disrespect for police officers" (p.10). This is in line with later work from Zhang et al. (2014) who also found that delinquent involvement negatively influence attitudes towards the police. Friends who have been arrested share their mostly negative experiences with their peers. Past criminal activities negatively influence police attitudes, and this impact is even worse when also hanging out with deviant peers. Papachristos et al. (2012) found that being a member of a gang, and being surrounded by delinquent peers, creates a strong criminal social network and

less sympathy for law enforcement and the police compared to the criminal network and sympathy for police of non-gang members. In Miller (1992) a street gang was defined as a "self-formed association of peers, united by mutual interests, with identifiable leadership and internal organization, who act collectively or as individuals to achieve specific purposes, including the conduct of illegal activity and control of a particular territory, facility, or enterprise" (p.136) Being a gang member results in committing criminal activities together with your peers, and according to Papachristos et al. (2012) it leads to more negative police attitudes compared to the police attitudes of non-gang members.

It is argued in this study that respondents who share friendships with individuals who have been arrested in the past or are still active with criminal activities will likely view the police more as an enemy, meaning they are less likely to respect or trust the police. This is perhaps the case because although one of your friends showed unacceptable behavior, it is still a friend of you who is in your social network and can be seen as a 'group member' or a 'gang' member. When the shared thoughts in your social network coincide with the law, the environment is supportive for criminal activities and the shared believes contradict with those of law enforcement (Ferdik et al., 2019). This can results in feelings of mistreat and unfairness during an arrest. Therefore, our third and last hypothesis can be derived:

*H3: past criminal behavior and having delinquent friends lead to more negative attitudes towards the police.*

**Data and Methods**

**Data Description**

For our analysis we used the wave 1 of the Pathways to Desistance study. The Pathways to

Desistance study is a multi-site and longitudinal study. The intention of the study was to find out

how certain factors, such as social context, intervention and sanctioning, but also the

developmental process result in a desistance from crime. The people included in the study are

serious adolescent offenders with a focus to look at their transition from adolescence into

adulthood (Schubert et al., 2004) The adolescents have been recruited based on the seriousness

of their charges and criminal record, but with enough variability to inspect the relative influence

of interventions, sanctions, and life events. 1354 youths have been enrolled into the study within

a time frame of three years (November 2000-January 2003). The enrolled adolescents had a

minimum age of 14 years but were no older than 18 and came either from Pennsylvania or

Arizona. Reasons for these areas were because they could provide high enough rates of serious

crime committed by juveniles needed to provide a large enough sample and because of a diverse

racial and ethnic mix of potential participants. Furthermore, it gave the opportunity to include

enough numbers of female serious offenders to look at sex differences and it made it possible to

look and contrast the way different systems operate (Phoenix and Philadelphia differ in

rehabilitation programs). Parent consent was obtained for all youths under the age of 18 at the

time of enrollment in the study. All enrolled youths had been found guilty for committing serious

crimes such as selling drugs, carjacking, credit card fraud and shoplifting. Each individual

participant has been followed for a period of seven years. The study was designed to identify the

initial pathways out of the juvenile system and also the characteristics of the adolescents who

progress along each of these pathways. Furthermore, the goal was to describe the role of social context and development changes in promoting desistance or continuation of criminal behavior. Lastly, there was a goal to look and compare the effects of different forms of sanctioning and different forms of interventions and finding out which way resulted in the the most progression.

The Pathways studied got its data mostly from self-report information from their participants. All participants completed a baseline interview. After this baseline interview, there have been follow-up interviews 6, 12, 24, 30, 36, 48, 60, 72 and 84 months after the baseline interview. The baseline and later interviews cover six topics. 1. Background characteristics such as demographics, history of offenses and personality. 2. Indicators of individual functioning such as work, school or mental disorders. 3. Psychosocial development and attitudes such as impulse control and peer influence. 4. Family context. 5. Personal relationships. 6. Community context such as the neighborhood conditions. The interviews are conducted on laptop computers, with the interviewers and participant sitting next to each other.

**Data selection & operationalization**

We have selected for 'Criminal behavior' and 'Peer Delinquency' as our independent variables. Furthermore we've selected for 'Police Legitimacy' as our dependent variable. The variable 'Criminal Behavior' has been operationalized as a variety scale. The scale includes a total of 18 items with all different criminal felonies (e.g., sold drugs, shoplifted, carried a gun). We have decided to not include all variables that included criminal activities. The variables that measured speeding, forcing someone to have sex, murder, joyriding, and stealing a car have been left out. Reason for not including these measures was due to either masked data for confidentially, too much missing values, or a to low response. After all, this leaded to results varying from 0 when committing none of the criminal activities, and 18 when the respondent has committed every

single criminal activity on the scale. Our second independent variable 'Peer Delinquency' has been operationalized as the proportion up to the 4 closest friends ever arrested. After all the missing's this resulted in an N of 1332.

The dependent variable is Procedural Justice- Legitimacy. This variable was formed to look at the adolescent's perception of fairness and equity connected with arrest and court processing. "The police treat me the same way they treat most people my age" "I feel people should support the police." They looked at several way of measuring the experience of fair treatment. The answer options were divided into a scale with 4 answer options and a valid N of 1353. 1 = Strongly Disagree 2 = Somewhat Disagree 3 = Somewhat Agree 4 = Strongly Agree.

The first variable we control for is ethnicity. This means what is the ethnicity of the respondent. There are 4 answer categories, 1 = White, 2 = Black, 3 = Hispanic, 4 = Other. We have included this variable into our analysis because we believe ethnicity could play a role in the attitudes that people have towards the police and vice versa (Edwards et al., 2019). Earlier research found how African-American people are more skeptical in their attitudes towards the police compared to other ethnicity (Skogan, 2006). Explanations for these attitudes could be them being disproportionally stopped by the police (Langan et al., 2001), and being more likely to be victimized by the police (Catalano, 2004).

Our second variable that we control for is Neighborhood conditions. This variable is a scale with four answer categories, 0 = never, 1 = rarely, 2 = sometimes, 3 = often. The respondent got questions about things that happen or have happened in their neighborhood. This included the physical disorders of the neighborhood such as cigarettes and trash on the streets, and graffiti or tags around. Furthermore it also contained questions regarding social disorders in the neighborhood. For example, "adults fighting or arguing loudly" or "people using drugs on the

streets". We have included this variable because we expect to find that the neighborhood conditions someone grew up in shape the attitudes towards the police (Reisig & Parks, 2000).

Lastly, we have controlled for if a family member of the respondent has ever been in jail or prison. The answer categories are, 0 = no, 1= yes. This variable had 303 missing's, resulting in an N of 1051. We expect to see an impact on police attitudes when a family member of the respondent has ever been in jail or prison.

**Analysis**

To test the hypotheses, we have decided to run two linear regression analysis. We first ran a regression with criminal behavior and peer delinquency as our independent variables. With these variables and by controlling for family member in jail, neighborhood condition, and ethnicity we looked at the effects of past criminal behavior on police attitudes. Furthermore, we looked at what the effects are of peer delinquency on the respondents attitudes towards the police and what kind of effects they have. Secondly we ran a regression in which we looked at the interaction effect between criminal behavior and peer delinquency. We were looking if the effect from criminal activities on police attitudes would differ between people with and without delinquent peers.

# Results

## Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 shows the descriptive variables used for our analysis. This table includes a valid n of 999

Adolescents, all aged between 14-17 years. We see that the mean score of police legitimacy is

2,29, and that on the criminal behavior scale the mean score is 6,82.

**Tabel 1. Descriptive Statistics**

|  | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **General Data** |  |  |  |  |
| Police Legitimacy | 1,00 | 4.00 | 2.29 | 0.57 |
| Criminal Behavior | .00 | 18.00 | 6.82 | 4.32 |
| Peer Delinquency | .00 | 1.00 | 0.45 | 0.37 |
| Ethnicity |  |  |  |  |
| White | .00 | 1.00 | 0.20 | 0.40 |
| Black | .00 | 1.00 | 0.41 | 0.49 |
| Hispanic | .00 | 1.00 | 0.33 | 0.47 |
| Other | .00 | 1.00 | 0.04 | 0.21 |
| Neighborhood Condition | 0,00 | 3.00 | 1.34 | 0.75 |
| Family member in jail | 0,00 | 1.00 | 0.84 | - |

Valid n = 999

Table 2 shows the results of the regression analysis that was used to test our hypothesizes. By looking at the table, we see that for every extra criminal activity, the police legitimacy declines with -.034. The effect is statistically significant (b = -.034; p<.001), which means that H1 is supported. The second independent variable in our analysis was peer delinquency. The variable peer delinquency measured the proportion of your 4 closes friends and if they have ever been arrested. The results show that the higher that percentage of your friends is that have been arrested, the less positive the respondents attitudes are towards the police (b= -.098; p= 0,020), which confirms H2. Our hypothesis is one-sided, so we have divided our p-value by two. When looking at the standardized coefficients of both variables we find that for criminal behavior the ß =-.265. Looking at the standardized coefficient for peer delinquency the ß =-.065. Looking at the size of both standardized coefficients, we find that past criminal behavior has a stronger effect on police legitimacy compared to peer delinquency.

For our analysis we controlled for three variables. When we look at the effect of a family member in jail or prison and how this influences police legitimacy we do not find any significant effect (b=.034; t =.707; p=.480). Having a family member in jail or prison does not significantly influence the respondent's attitudes towards the police. This is also the case for our second control variable neighborhood condition, which measured the physical disorders of a neighborhood. In this variable we don't find any significant relations (b =-.022; t=-.893; p =.372). This means that there is no significant effect between our respondent's attitudes regarding police legitimacy and the activities that happen or have happened in their neighborhood.

The last variable tested as a control variable in our analysis was ethnicity. There were 4 categories, namely White, Black, Hispanic, and Other. For our regression we used the category

'Black' as our reference category, and compared the effects of 'White', 'Hispanic', and 'Other' in comparison to our category 'Black'. After putting the variable 'Black' as a reference group, we did find significant effects on 'White' and 'Hispanic' (b=.229; t=5.768; p<.001) but not on the variable 'Other' (b=.159; t=1.815; p<.070). These results are in comparison to that of 'Blacks'. The way we interpret these results is that there is a difference in attitudes towards the police between different ethnicities, and significant differences in police legitimacy between 'White' 'Hispanic' compared to 'Black's. White and Hispanic respondents show significant more positive attitudes towards the police compared to the 'Black' respondents.

The Adjusted $R^2$ of our model is .103. This implies that after controlling for ethnicity, neighborhood condition, and family member in jail, the criminal behavior and peer delinquency explains for 10,3% of the variance in the attitudes of the respondent towards the police. This R2 is significant (F(5,991) = 8,537 , p<.001).

Model 2 in Table 2 show the results of the interaction effect between criminal activities and the proportion of delinquent peers that the respondent has. We created this variable to find out if the effect from criminal activities on police attitudes differ between people with and without delinquent peers. We can interpret the results of the interaction effect by looking at figure 1 below. This figure illustrates the interaction effect between criminal behavior and peer delinquency on police legitimacy. We have recoded both variables into low/high variables. The y-axis is the predicted outcome, the x-axis is a scale of criminal behavior, and the lines represent the number of delinquent peers. What can be confirmed from the figure and our data, is that there are zero respondents with three or more delinquent friends, who themselves had never committed any form of criminal activity on the criminal behavior variety scale. This is why those two lines stop  at 'low' criminal behavior. By looking at the figure we can interpret that people who score

high on the variety scale in criminal activities (13 thru 18) do not get affected in their police attitudes due to having any delinquent peers. Respondents that have committed zero, low or medium amounts of criminal activities (0 thru 12) do experience an impact on their police attitudes based on the amount of delinquent friends they have. This impact is shrinking between 'low' and 'medium' compared to the results between 'zero' and 'low'.

Model 2 shows us that there are significant effects regarding the impact of criminal behavior on police attitudes and how this differs between people with more delinquent peers (b = ,020; p=028). We hypothesized that the larger the proportion is of friends that have been arrested, the stronger the negative effect of past criminal behavior on attitudes towards the police. We can confirm that having delinquent friends and a history of past criminal activities, negatively impacted police attitudes. Therefore, this resulted in our p-value of (.056)

The standardized coefficients gave the option to compare the relative importance of our independent variables on Police legitimacy, Our model shows that with every increase of one standard deviation in criminal behavior, Police legitimacy declines by -.260 standard deviations, assuming that peer delinquency is held constant. For peer delinquency we see that with an increase of 1 standard deviation, police legitimacy declines by -.065, assuming that criminal behavior is held constant.

*Figure 1: Interaction effect between criminal behavior and peer delinquency on police legitimacy.*
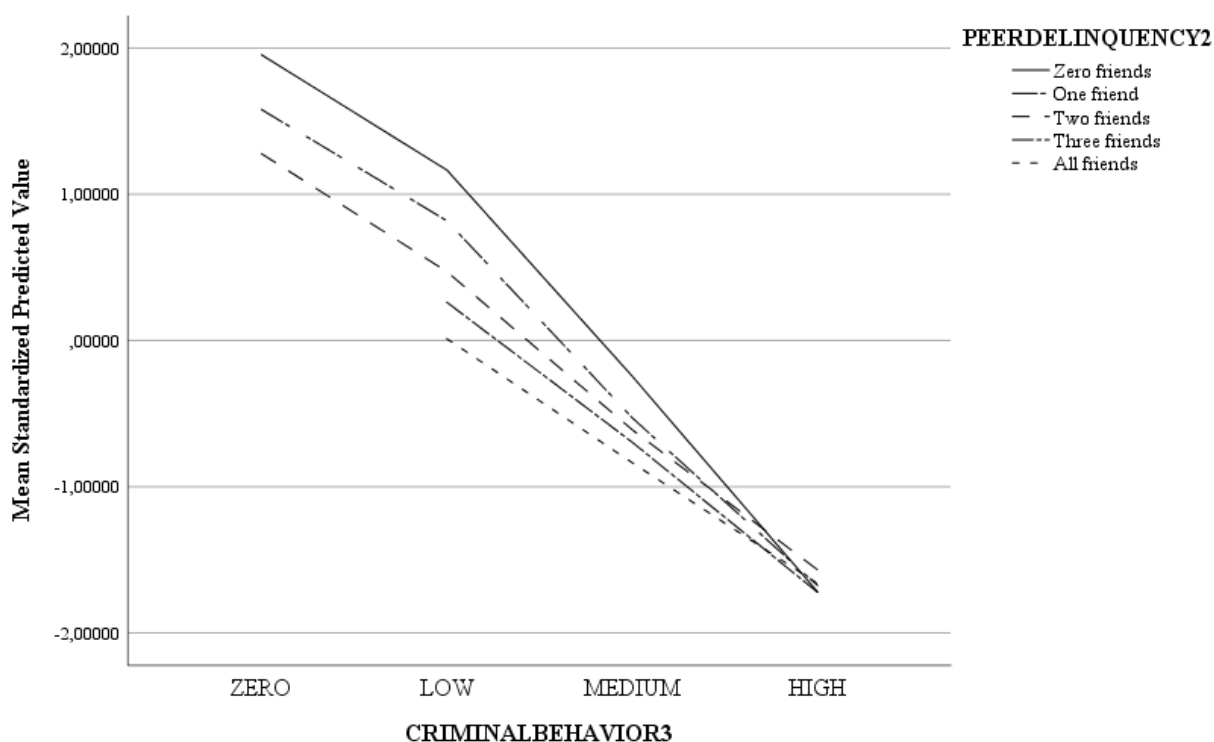


*Table 2:Lineair regression analyses on Police attitudes. B = unstandardized coefficients, SE = standard error ß = standardized coefficients*

|  | Model 1 | | Model 2 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | B(SE) | ß | B(SE) | ß |
| **Independent Variables** | | | | |
| Criminal Behaviour | -0.034 (.004)*** | -0.260 | -.044 (.007)*** | -0.339 |
| Peer Delinquency | -0.098 (.048)* | -0.065 | -.244 (.090)** | -0.161 |
|  | | | | |
| **Control Variables** | | | | |
| Family member in jail | 0.034 (.048) | 0.022 | 0.034 (0.047) | 0.022 |
| Neighbourhood condition | -0.022 (.024) | -0.028 | -0.25 (0.024) | -0.032 |
| Ethnicity | | | | |
| Black | Ref. | | Ref. | |
| White | 0.201 (.048)*** | 0.141 | 0.201 (.048)*** | 0.141 |
| Hispanic | 0.229 (.040)*** | 0.194 | 0.228 (.040)*** | 0.193 |
| Other | 0.159 (.088) | 0.056 | 0.159 (.087) | 0.056 |
|  | | | | |
| **Interaction-effect** | - | | - | |
| Criminalbehavior* | | | 0.020 (0.011)* | 0.154 |

Peerdelinquency

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Constant** | 2.652 (.062) *** | 2,520 (0.071)*** |
| **Model Information** | | |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | 0.103 | 0.105 |
| F | 8,537*** | 15,642*** |
| DF | 5 | 8 |
| | | |
| N | 991 | 990 |
| R2 | .109 . | .112 |

*\*\*\*p<.001; \*\*p<.01; \*p<.05. p-values regarding 1-sided hypotheses are divided by 2*

## Conclusion and Discussion

In this study, our aim was to answer the question "*what is the impact of past criminal behavior on police attitudes"*. To answer this question, we have formed 3 hypotheses which stated that past criminal behavior negatively influences attitudes towards the police, that having delinquent peers negatively influences attitudes towards the police, and that an interaction between these two also negatively influences attitudes towards the police. Our findings support our hypothesis that the quantity of criminal activities have a negative impact on police attitudes, and are in line with prior research (Skogan, 2006). Attitudes towards the police become more negative when committing more criminal activities. The impact of past criminal behavior on police attitudes is negative, and more delinquencies create a stronger effect. This could be possibly interpreted and explained by the procedural justice theory that we discussed in our introduction, which stated that fair treatment is a key point towards police legitimacy (Hough et al., 2013; Trinkner et al., 2019). More criminal behavior leads to more police contact and a higher chance that one of these police contacts is a negative one. Hillard (2003) strengthens this

idea and explained that you can have 10 positive police encounters and nothing happens, but one bad moment and all the positive disappears.

Next to this, our ideas about the effects of having friends who are delinquent or have been delinquent, also have been supported by the data in our results section. Having friends who have been delinquent negatively influence someone's attitudes towards the police, and someone with delinquent friends has a more negative outlook towards the police compared to someone with no delinquent friends. These findings are in line with the findings from prior research (Brick et al., 2009) and could possibly be explained by growing up in the same social environments and adapting certain values.

On top of that, our findings show that the more delinquent friends someone has, the stronger the effect is on the attitudes towards the police. So for every extra delinquent friend in your friend group, police legitimacy declines. We expect that this is the case due to higher chances of negative police encounters, and possibly due to stronger social environments with norms and values that coincide more with the law. Lastly, we found that the effect from criminal activities on police attitudes is stronger for people with delinquent peers compared to people that have committed criminal activities but that don't have any delinquent peers. In other words; The larger the proportion of friends that have been arrested, the stronger the negative effect of past criminal behavior on attitudes towards the police. These findings were also in line with our third hypothesis. A possible explanation for these differences could be that when one of your friends gets arrested you maybe identify with him as a group member, and therefore his arrest impacts you personally. This was also found in gang member literature from Papachristos et al (2012).

In this research, multiple arguments could be made that explain a lack of evidence for the effects between past criminal activities and peer delinquency on police legitimacy.

Methodological limitations also play a part in this case. The dataset that has been used was quite fragile, ending with an N of under a thousand participants. In 2000, the year that the dataset was gathered, the number of juvenile arrests was estimated on 2.15 million based on persons under the age of 18 (National Center for Juvenile Justice, 2000). Therefore, The N in this research could be seen as a potential limitations that can possibly lead to unreliable conclusions. Furthermore, the dataset was derived from a timeframe between 2000 and 2003. We can conclude that the data is pretty outdated, and the impact of for example the internet and social media on police legitimacy has not been taken into account. Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram were nonexistent during this period. In a study from Grimmelikhuijsen and Meijer (2015) about the impact of twitter on police legitimacy was found that generally speaking social media offers opportunities for the police to highlight their successes to the general public, and they concluded that Twitter slightly increases police legitimacy. Other work highlights how social media also exposes more cases of police brutality such as the George Floyd case, and how social media has created a topic regarding police brutality that has become a debatable issue and reasons for protest (Gale, 2016). This publicly exposure of actions by the police, and how it is shared on social media would be interesting to look at in further research. Furthermore, we see a problem with generalizing our results to people from other countries. The participants from our research are from The United States. Police legitimacy towards police in the United States is hard to generalize to for example Europe, since there is a difference in police culture (Cheatham, 2021). To illustrate, in 2019 alone 999 people have been shot and killed by the police in the United States (Washington Post, 2019). Compared to Europe, where the leading country was France with a reported number of 26, and with certain countries such as Denmark and Switzerland who had zero reported police killings (Statista, 2021). Therefore, my suggestion for further research

would be to use more recent data, and to maybe make a comparison between different countries. This would be interesting because it could look at how different operating tactics by the police on criminal activities can lead to different outcomes in how positive or negative attitudes are shaped towards the police.

Concluding, we have found that past criminal activities have a negative influence on police attitudes, also in combination with other variables such a peer delinquency. These findings are line with earlier work that investigated the effects of criminal activities on police attitudes and the effects of peer delinquency on police attitudes (Ferdik et al., 2019). The findings of our study demonstrate how certain variables influence police attitudes, and this information could be useful for law enforcement to gain a better understanding in how police attitudes are formed and how important it is to put effort in making a police contact a positive one. The findings of our study furthermore confirm that social environments play a large role in shaping someone his attitudes towards the police.

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