ASSOCIATION BETWEEN PERCEPTION OF POLICE PREJUDICE AGAINST MINORITIES AND JUVENILE DELINQUENCY

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ABSTRACT

Criminologists have long studied police prejudice with the assumption that it is a fundamental problem resulting in discrimination against certain racial and ethnic groups. However, little research has examined how individuals’ perceptions of police prejudice (PPP) influences compliance or delinquency behavior among the public. To fill this gap, in this paper, I reviewed relations between police and racial/ethnic groups, theorized an association between PPP and juvenile delinquency, and empirically examined the association.

The long history of racial/ethnic prejudice and discrimination predisposes racial/ethnic minorities to consider themselves targets of discrimination and to feel powerless. Moreover, some minorities justify the current system and tolerate injustice. These mechanisms may then predispose racial/ethnic minorities to internalize police discrimination and prejudice as instrumental factors that potentially threaten their security.

To theoretically associate PPP and delinquency given the asymmetrical relations between police and racial/ethnic groups, I reviewed criminal decision-making theories (procedural justice and deterrence theories). The theories provide consistent implications of PPP on delinquency for racial majorities, in that both theories imply a criminogenic impact of PPP on delinquency. On
the other hand, for racial/ethnic minorities, police prejudice has contrasting implications. For minorities, police prejudice may be a deterrent because it increases sanction risks for minorities, but it may also be a criminogenic influence because it weakens police legitimacy.

To empirically examine the association, I utilized the GREAT dataset and performed a series of group-based trajectory models. I did not find clear associations between longitudinal patterns of PPP and delinquency (e.g., an incremental PPP trend with a decremental PPP trend); nevertheless, membership models show that white juveniles who strongly believe police to be prejudiced tend to belong to criminogenic groups, while there is no association between level of PPP and level of delinquency among African-American juveniles. These results of membership models are consistent with theoretical predictions in this study. That is, both theories of procedural justice and of deterrence predict a high PPP is associated with high involvement in delinquency in racial majorities, and for the implications of PPP to contrast among African-American juveniles. Given these results, I suggested some academic and policy implication.