

Legitimacy of and Cooperation with the Police among Adolescents at Risk: A Comparison between Normative and Instrumental Considerations

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Research in the field of policing has consistently demonstrated that normative concerns, which center on issues of procedural fairness, have a central role in shaping perceptions of police legitimacy in comparison to instrumental concerns, which center on police effectiveness and deterrence. Moreover, research has further suggested that perceptions of police legitimacy are a key factor in driving people's willingness to actively and voluntarily cooperate with the police. Nevertheless, most of this research has been conducted on the adult population. Only a handful of studies to date have examined the underpinnings of legitimacy among adolescents, and even fewer studies have examined adolescents at-risk. The current study seeks to fill this gap in the existing literature. Specifically, we examine three basic questions pertaining to perceptions of the police among adolescents at-risk: (a) the role of perceptions of police effectiveness and deterrence in comparison to perceptions of police procedural fairness in shaping police legitimacy; (b) the role of perceptions of police effectiveness and deterrence in comparison to perceptions of police procedural fairness in shaping the tendency to cooperate with the police; and (c) the role of perceptions of police legitimacy as a mediator of the tendency to cooperate with the police. The findings of this research indicate that among adolescents at-risk, instrumental concerns pertaining to police effectiveness serve as a stronger predictor of police legitimacy as compared to deterrence. We further find that deterrence concerns have greater weight in shaping the tendency to cooperate with the police as compared to perceptions of police legitimacy, effectiveness or procedural fairness. We discuss the theoretical, empirical and practical contribution of these findings to policing research.