



Queen's University
Belfast

The Dynamics of Police Legitimacy Among Young People

Lee Devaney, Sam Pehrson, Dominic Bryan & Danielle Blaylock

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This report presents the findings of a longitudinal survey of 14 to 16 year-olds' experiences and perceptions of the police in Northern Ireland. It examines the nature and quality of respondents' direct encounters with police officers, as well as the effects of identification with wider society on young people's perceptions of the police and willingness to cooperate with them.

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Further enquiries should be directed to the principal investigator, Dr Samuel Pehrson at the School of Psychology and Neuroscience, University of St Andrews (email: sdp21@st-andrews.ac.uk).

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The study set out to examine the causal dynamics underpinning young people's relationships with, and views of, the police. In particular, we sought to examine the antecedents of legitimacy and willingness to cooperate with the police, and explored these dynamics in terms of perceptions of police fairness and effectiveness, and identification with wider society.
- We recruited a large diverse sample (N=830) at time 1. Our matched sample of respondents who participated at both time points was smaller (N=319) and less representative. It did, however, permit us to examine causal dynamics, while the larger time 1 sample is more useful for descriptive purposes.
- Positive views and experiences of the police were more common than negative ones. However, we found that knowledge about arrangements relating to the accountability of the police was poor, and a quarter of our sample thought that the police could do whatever they liked without consequences.
- Within the negative experiences of the police, the most common were being assumed to be up to no good, perceiving police behaviour as unfair, and feeling angry. These experiences were correlated with lower perceived legitimacy, as well as a perception of police as not as serving people like oneself.
- A sense of identification with society emerged as an important causal antecedent of police legitimacy. Young people who feel a stronger sense of belonging, pride and investment in wider society were more likely to see the police as serving people like them, and as legitimate. This in turn has consequences for how willing they are to actively support the police and to avoid crime and antisocial behaviour.
- There is little evidence that Protestants and Catholics within this age group have very reliably different views about the police. There is much more variation *within* these groups than between them.
- We suggest some implications for policy and practice. These include a focus on accountability and the police-public relationship when educating young people about the police. We also suggest that young people's relationship with the police largely reflects their relationship with society more broadly. As such, inclusion should be a central concern in policing with the community. Improving community safety depends on the willing cooperation of young people, which is likely to be undermined by practices that make them feel under unreasonable suspicion.

INTRODUCTION

YOUTH-POLICE RELATIONSHIPS IN NORTHERN IRELAND

HISTORICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Policing is a central issue in any society, and in Northern Ireland it has proved to be an extremely emotive and controversial one (Mulcahy, 2006). The policing service previous to the PSNI, the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), was markedly imbalanced along the same religious/community fault line that was at the heart of the political conflict, with just 8% of officers coming from the Catholic Community (Patten Report, 1999). This, along with the related perception of imbalanced policing, led many Catholics and Nationalists to feel estranged from the service and in many cases, antagonistic to it.

This state of affairs was not sustainable, particularly in the context of a developing peace process (Byrne & Jarman, 2010). The 1994 paramilitary ceasefires brought an end to 25 years of armed conflict initiating the peace process and political transition, as well as fierce debate regarding the structure, methods, and practices of the policing system. There was a rapid increase in scrutiny into the police service from this point on. The Hayes report in 1997 introduced changes to how policing was overseen and to its complaints process. This culminated in the establishment of the office of the Police Ombudsman in the year 2000, and the formation of a Policing Board in 2001. These structures were tasked with the oversight of the police in Northern Ireland. However, the Hayes report did not fundamentally address the lack of legitimacy the police service suffered in certain communities in Northern Ireland.

It was the expressed desire of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement to provide the opportunity for a new beginning to policing in Northern Ireland with a police service capable of attracting and sustaining support from the community as a whole. As an outcome of the agreement, a systematic review of all aspects of policing was undertaken by the Independent Commission on Policing. The report produced from the review, known as the Patten Report (1999), set out a series of recommendations to create a policing system based on human rights principles, public accountability, community based policing and transparency. In total, 175 recommendations were outlined in the report, many of which falling under the theme of 'policing with the community', whereby policing was established as a collective responsibility. The report recommended that, "Policing with the community should be the core function of the police service and the core function of every police station". These recommendations were enacted through the Police (Northern Ireland) Act of 2000, the Police (Northern Ireland) Act of 2003, and the *Policing a Shared Future* framework in 2005. These stressed that the goals of the Northern Ireland Police Service would only be achievable to the extent that they were supported by the community and enacted in cooperation with the local community. The recent *Policing with the Community Strategy 2020* again affirms policing with the community as central to the policing model to be pursued for the next 10 years.

Overall, the aims of the police reforms have been to make the PSNI more accountable to the community and as such increase the perceived legitimacy of the police service and its officers to the community. These early reforms did not however focus on addressing the relationship between the police and young people. There then remains the scope to broaden and build this relationship further.

EXISTING EVIDENCE ON POLICE-YOUTH RELATIONS IN NORTHERN IRELAND

ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE POLICE

Surveys conducted in Northern Ireland generally find that young people with overtly negative views of the police are a minority, albeit a substantial one (Byrne, Conway, & Ostermeyer, 2005; Hamilton, Radford, & Jarman, 2003). One of the most comprehensive studies of young people's experiences and perceptions of the police in Northern Ireland was conducted by Hamilton, Radford and Jarman (2003). More respondents in their sample of 16-24 year olds agreed than disagreed that the police were professional, helpful and there to protect them. However this still left around one quarter of young people who were very dissatisfied with the police. Although Hamilton et al.'s sample was not a random sample, so such frequencies should be treated with caution, their general findings are largely replicated by the 2007 Young Persons Behaviour and Attitudes Survey (YPBAS), which takes a random sample of schools in Northern Ireland, and a random sample of classes within those schools. The YPBAS found that while 48 percent were either satisfied or very satisfied with 'the way police in Northern Ireland do their job', 24 percent were either not very or not at all satisfied.

Hamilton et al. (2003) also found young people to be relatively unaware of police oversight structures and how to utilize them. They found that only 52 percent of young people had heard of the Police Ombudsman whilst 43 percent knew what its role was. Only 11 percent knew how to contact the Ombudsman. A higher number had heard of the Policing Board (65 percent), but only 45 percent correctly identified its main function. However it must be noted the study was conducted only a few years after the establishment of these structures.

POLICE-YOUTH INTERACTIONS

Evidence suggests that contact between young people and the police is frequent, perhaps more so than is the case for the adult population. One study of under 25-year-olds from across Northern Ireland found that 70 percent had reported having had some type of contact with the police in their lives (Nelson, McBride, O'Riordan & Smyth 2010). Police officers themselves report that a very significant portion of their time is spent 'policing' young people. This is particularly true of neighbourhood officers, some of whom recount spending the entirety of their time at weekends policing youth (NIPB, 2013). Hamilton et al. (2003) found that 41 percent of their sample of 16- to 24-year-olds, had had some form of contact with the police in the previous year, and in the 2007 Young People's Behaviour and Attitudes Survey (YPBAS) this figure was 50 percent. By comparison, only 20 percent of adults are in contact with police in a 12-month period (based on a general population sample of Northern Ireland residents over the age of 16; Policing Board Omnibus, 2013). The reasons for this discrepancy will be explored shortly, but for now we will examine which groups of young people are most likely to come into contact with the police.

This high level of contact is not spread evenly across the population of young people. Those in working class urban areas have more contact with the police than others do (Hamilton et al., 2003; Roche, 2005). Perhaps surprisingly, though, there is little evidence for a systematic, consistent disparity between young people from Protestant and Catholic backgrounds in their experiences of the police (Hamilton et al., 2003; Byrne & Jarman, 2010). There is however a consistent pattern whereby young males report more contact with the police than young females. Police officers working in North Belfast themselves confirm this, stating that the most of their time in street interactions is spent with young males rather than females (NIPB, 2013).

These studies generally find that being moved on or stopped for no reason are frequent circumstances under which young people – particularly boys - come into contact with the police (Hamilton et al., 2003; Nelson et al., 2010, Young Life & Times, 2010). Thirty-two percent of Roche's (2005) sample of 15-25 year olds from the Derry area, reported being stopped and questioned, and 24 percent reported being moved on. Byrne, Conway &

Ostermeyer (2005), found that 41 percent of the young people in their North Belfast sample felt that they had been stopped for no reason. Similarly, the 2010 Young Life and Times found that 40 percent of young people had been asked to move on by the police. Hamilton et al. (2003) also found that being stopped and questioned and being told to move on were the two most frequently reported types of contact by young people. The 2007 YPBAS found school visits to account for the largest proportion of interactions (42 percent) over the previous year, while police telling the young people to move on accounted for 30 percent.

Police officers' own impressions are largely in line with these findings. In a survey of North Belfast police officers, the three most reported forms of contact with young people reported were attending incidents, routine patrols and 'using police powers' (NIPB 2013). A closer inspection shows that routine patrols and 'using police powers' may be interpreted by young people as stopping and questioning, or moving on. Similarly, an examination of the qualitative interviews in this study reveals that 'attending incidents' frequently refers to incidents whereby the police are called out by residents to disperse large groups of young people who in most cases are not committing any crime.

QUALITY OF INTERACTIONS

Hamilton et al. (2003) found that only 35 percent of young respondents were satisfied with their interactions with officers. Whilst it is true that not all youth-police interactions are problematic (Hamilton et al., 2003) focusing on this dissatisfaction provides an opportunity to identify areas for improvement. When looking for specific causes of this dissatisfaction a number of surveys provide some potential explanations. Significant numbers of respondents across the different surveys reported feeling harassed and angry due to their interactions with police (Byrne et al., 2005; Roche, 2005; Nelson et al., 2010). A feeling of disrespect on the part of the police officers was common across some studies (Hamilton et al., 2003; Nelson et al., 2010). Many respondents felt that they had been discriminated against or wrongly accused based on their youth (Byrne et al., 2005; Nelson et al., 2010). These feelings of anger, harassment and discrimination were particularly strong for young males (Nelson et al., 2010).

REASONS FOR THE PROBLEMATIC ENCOUNTERS

Researchers have highlighted that the youth-police relationship can be regarded as a pattern of reciprocal distrust and suspicion (Ellison, 2001; McVeigh, 1994). This may be in part a legacy of political conflict in Northern Ireland. Mistrust of the police may have been handed down trans-generationally in communities, which have been historically hostile to the police (Byrne & Jarman, 2010). Compounding these issues, some communities have experienced periodic rioting. These riots, although often orchestrated by adults, have largely involved young people (Byrne & Jarman, 2010). However the particular historical context of Northern Ireland is unlikely to provide a full explanation of the difficult relations between young people and the police service as similar problematic relationships exist in many other societies around the world demonstrating that there may be a wider, more generalised difficulty around youth-police relations (Lee 1998, Muncie 1999).

In focus groups, young people and police officers have demonstrated quite contradictory explanations for negative interactions, each locating the responsibility in the other. Some officers located the problem in the socialisation of some young people. They attributed the disrespect they witnessed in their interactions to an upbringing in families with little aspiration and where hostility to the police is the norm, or to the normalization of unemployment and truancy as a key aspect to young peoples' lack of respect (NIPB, 2013). Young people cite the feeling of constant suspicion by police officers who they believe are always thinking that young people were up to no good (Hamilton et al., 2003). They often complain of feeling that their values and practices are unfairly condemned and disrupted by police, who break up their social gatherings and move them on, even though they are not engaging in criminal behaviour (Lloyd, 2009; Byrne & Jarman, 2010).

Adult society in general holds some quite negative views of young people and police actions and perceptions may reflect these views (Nelson, McBride, O’Riordan & Smyth, 2010, Hamilton et al., 2003). Results from Young Life and Times show that young people themselves believe that they are misunderstood and unfairly portrayed by adult society, with 83 percent believing that there is a social stigma concerning young people in society. While communities often blame young people for much of their crime, this is often exaggerated (Hough & Roberts, 2004; Lloyd, 2009). The 2009 crime statistics for under-18s in Northern Ireland show that in total less than 5 percent of Northern Ireland’s young people come into contact with the criminal justice system per year (PSNI Juvenile database).

Much of the behaviour that adults find unacceptable may not in fact be criminal (Waddington, 1999; Jarman & O’Halloran, 2001). Young people report feeling that the behaviours and the activities they engage in are all too often re-interpreted as problematic and criminal by society and by police, simply because they are young (Hansson, 2005). Adult residents often dislike groups of young people gathering in their communities near their houses and local amenities, while young people complain of being made to feel like criminals when they were simply congregating in their social groups. Indeed, the 2010 Young Life and Times found that 65 percent of young people had been told to move on by adults in their community. The problem of societal suspicion of young people is supported by police officers themselves who report that much of their time is spent on dispersing young people on behalf of local residents (NIPB, 2013). Officers report frustration at being called out by residents to low level non-criminal behaviour by young people, when their time could be better spent tackling more serious problems (Byrne & Monaghan, 2008). Thus both young people and officers locate some of the difficulty in their relationship in societal representations of youth.

UNDERSTANDING THE DYNAMICS OF POLICE LEGITIMACY

Legitimacy is the central focus of this study. However, as a word that is used quite frequently, both by the general public and by politicians, ‘legitimacy’ may mean different things to different people. For the purposes of this study, we view legitimacy as a sense of obligation that we ought to obey or defer to some authority (Tyler, 2006). It is therefore a fundamentally subjective thing. Legitimacy entails the *judgements* that people make about their relationship to authorities, such that the legitimacy of an institution like the police cannot be determined on objective or legal criteria alone. We can also say that legitimacy has a moral quality. To the extent that we see an authority as legitimate, we feel we *ought* to do as they ask, whether or not we agree with their particular decisions or requests. Whereas *illegitimate* authority feels like an imposition that violates our sense of agency, willing obedience to a legitimate authority may be experienced quite positively. Indeed, people often regard themselves as ‘law abiding’ with a sense of pride.

Another way to clarify precisely what we mean by legitimacy is to contrast it with other kinds of power (Turner, 2005). On the one hand, legitimacy is not the same as persuasion. Persuading somebody means bringing them around to your point of view, or convincing them that what you are asking of them is the best course of action. Of course, authorities such as the police may benefit from being persuasive on some occasions. A poster campaign, for example, may create a shared understanding among the general public that hate crime is a problem, and should therefore be reported. However, legitimacy does not *require* this kind of persuasion. For example, drivers do not need to be convinced of the reason for temporarily closing a particular stretch of road, so long as they accept that the police are the legitimate authority to make this decision. On the other hand, legitimate authority is not coercion. One obeys or cooperates with a legitimate authority because of a sense of obligation to do so, not out of a fear of punishment or expectation of reward. And, as we have said, willing compliance feels completely different from being coerced into something. Moreover, excessive use of rewards and punishments undermines the sense of being ‘on the same team’ that is needed for sustained cooperation. Thus when we use the term legitimacy we refer to the willing deference to authority through a sense of obligation.

WHY IS LEGITIMACY IMPORTANT?

There are a variety of reasons why police legitimacy is important. Perhaps the most obvious is that police officers are granted powers that enable them to violate citizens' liberty and privacy and, in exceptional circumstances, even to injure or kill them (Waddington & Wright, 2008). Naturally then, the granting of such powers would be considered justifiable only to the extent that there is a sense of popular consent for them, even if such consent is usually implied rather than sought explicitly (e.g. via a referendum). Legitimacy is what makes it acceptable for designated people (i.e. police officers) to do things under designated circumstances that we would not accept from anybody else.

Even more importantly, though, legitimacy is essential in securing cooperation. Policing primarily by coercive powers would not only be undesirable but also impractical. Instead, policing requires the active cooperation of the populations being policed (e.g. Sampson, Raudenbush & Earls, 1997). Of course there are a variety of conceivable reasons why people might choose to assist the police. They might do so because they foresee some personal benefit from having an effective police force, or because they want their neighbours to view them as upstanding citizens, for example. However, empirical research on the matter strongly supports the view that the most important antecedent of cooperation with the police is legitimacy (Sunshine & Tyler 2003; Tyler, 2006; Tyler, 1990; Tyler & Fagan, 2008).

LEGITIMACY AND BELONGING

So why would we be willing to effectively accept somebody else's power over us, without this feeling like an unwanted imposition? Personal self-interest is clearly not enough because, by definition, legitimacy entails accepting decisions that are not in one's favour and with which one may not agree. It has been proposed instead that such legitimacy derives from the perception of authorities as '*morally aligned*' with the values of a community that one feels a sense of belonging to or common fate with (Sunshine & Jackson, 2003). This does not mean that a particular police officer's views about the world are the same as our own, or that they will always make the same decisions that we would make ourselves. However, it does mean that their authority and the institutional arrangements behind it embody a moral order that we care about. To the extent that police authority enables our group's norms and values to be realised, we feel that it deserves to be deferred to. And, if this is the case, we experience obedience to authority as a positive affirmation of our own identity and agency, rather than a curtailment of it. This notion that we obey the police and grant them powers because they, as an institution, are morally '*aligned*' with our own groups or communities receives strong support from the empirical literature (Jackson, Hough, Bradford, Hohl & Kuha, 2012; Sunshine & Tyler, 2003).

This account of how the police acquire legitimacy through acting as the agents and custodians of a shared moral order also suggests the ways in which they may come to lack legitimacy. For example, if we feel no connection to the group whose values or interests are supposedly being served by the police, or if we feel actively excluded from it, then why would we care for their authority? Research on delinquency among adolescents suggests precisely this kind of dynamic (Emler & Reicher, 2005). Some young people conclude that representatives of socially sanctioned authorities are simply not on their side. In part this stems from experiences in education, where being labelled as a failure means that one feels no sense of investment or obligation to formal institutional authority, of which from young people's point of view both teachers and the police are representatives. Delinquency, according to these authors, is not a personal failing in a straightforward sense but rather the 'behavioural expression of alienation from formal authority' (p. 221). This example also highlights how relationships with the police are not a simple matter of 'customer satisfaction', whereby our evaluation follows directly from the service we receive. Rather, it is intimately tied to a deeper set of social relationships, including one's relationship to society itself, which may be only partially related to the police themselves.

THE ROLE OF PROCEDURAL JUSTICE

Procedural justice is defined as the perception that the authorities follow procedures fairly, without bias, and that they are respectful in their interpersonal treatment of people. Studies of procedural justice in encounters with authorities repeatedly find that this kind of fair treatment is more important than whether one receives a favourable outcome from the encounter. For example, among residents of New York City responding to postal surveys, those who saw police as procedurally fair and interpersonally respectful also saw them as more legitimate and thus were more willing to cooperate, such as by reporting crime and providing information (Sunshine & Tyler, 2003). They also showed more willingness to obey laws concerning parking, rubbish disposal and soft drug use, and granted the police more discretion, more powers to conduct searches without judiciary approval and so forth. Thus, citizens' acceptance of police powers and their compliance with the law, as well as their active cooperation, are a function of legitimacy, which in depends on perceptions of fairness. Further longitudinal surveys, conducted in New York City and Chicago, used panel designs to add further support to the claim that legitimacy is underpinned by fairness of decision making, respectful treatment and equality in delivery of services (Tyler, 2006; Tyler & Fagan, 2008). These also showed that prior legitimacy made it more likely that people would view their treatment by police as fair, and consequently more likely to accept their decisions or outcomes.

Findings from a representative UK sample in the European Social Survey similarly suggest the importance of perceived procedural fairness in shaping citizens sense of obligation to obey the law (Jackson, Hough, Bradford, Hohl & Kuha, 2012). It is also evident that general survey indicators of overall confidence in the police reflect public considerations of fairness, perhaps even more than they do effectiveness in instrumental terms. For example, the 'PSA23' confidence item, used until recently in the British Crime Survey, asks respondents for a general 'job rating' of the police in 'dealing with the anti-social behaviour and crime issues that matter in the area'. Yet, analysis of the relationships of between this general evaluation and more specific perceptions of the police reveals quite clearly that the main driver of this kind of 'confidence' is police fairness rather than effectiveness (Jackson & Bradford, 2010).

It is clear then that fairness matters. The public evaluate police according to the fairness of their procedures. Where fairness is lacking, the sense of obligation to comply and cooperate with the police is undermined. So, where the police seek support from the people they are policing – and this is arguably both practically and ethically necessary – they must ensure that their everyday dealings with people convey a sense of fairness. Advocates of procedural justice have tended to stress the importance of the public's relational concerns (e.g. whether the police respect people and embody shared values) as distinct from instrumental ones (e.g. whether the police reduce crime). However, the studies showing the importance of fairness usually find that effectiveness also matters to some extent. It should be therefore be kept in mind that in practice both are important and there may be circumstances under which the instrumental considerations are even more important. In areas with very high crime and disadvantage, for example, a desire for the police to impose order may outweigh the usual fairness concerns (Ellison, Pino & Shirlow, 2012; Ellison, Shirlow & Mulcahy, 2012). We will therefore not dismiss the importance of effectiveness from the outset, but consider it alongside fairness as a potential driver of police legitimacy.

INTERACTIONS WITH THE POLICE

It should be clear from the points we have made that interactions with police are important because conduct during such encounters can communicate both a level of fairness and a sense of common values and interests versus opposition. The aforementioned survey work in Chicago and New York City highlights the particular features of interactions with police that affect fairness perceptions, and thus legitimacy (Tyler, 2008; Tyler & Fagan, 2008). These include impartiality, concern for rights, politeness, quality of decision-making and

'correctability' (i.e. knowing of an agency to which complaints could be directed). Importantly, these are independent of whether or not the encounter had a positive outcome for the individual concerned (such as whether or not someone was charged). It is even suggested that procedural justice perceptions may account for counter-intuitive findings from the British Crime Survey that people who had been stopped and searched were more satisfied than those who themselves initiated contact with the police (Bradford, Stanko and Jackson, 2009). The stop and search procedure requires officers to explicitly communicate the reasons for the person being stopped, and this proactive provision of information may lead to an increased sense of procedural fairness. Of course, such procedures would not ameliorate any negative consequences of poorly or excessively conducted stop and search, but the deliberate provision of information and transparency would explain why someone who had been stopped and searched might see the police as fairer than someone who had contacted the police to report a crime.

Skogan (2006) examines the impact of positive and negative encounters on the police on subsequent evaluations of them. Across samples from several counties, he finds that negative encounters undermine confidence to a much greater extent than positive encounters increase it. That is, members of the public who have had positive encounters with the police differ little from those who have had no encounters. This leads Skogan to the somewhat gloomy conclusion that confidence in the police has much to lose but little to gain from police-citizen interactions. This view is criticised by Tyler and Fagan (2008), who argue that if one isolates the aspects of the interaction related to fairness, it is possible for positive encounters to improve attitudes.

Systematic differences between ethnic groups in the kinds of encounters they have with the police can also at least partly account for why some groups have poorer evaluations of the police or are less willing to cooperate with them than others (Eller et al., 2007; Tyler & Fagan, 2008; Viki et al., 2006). McAra and McVie (2005) also describe how the police may develop implicit rules of thumb as to how to identify potential 'trouble makers', and that these may result in young people from low socio-economic backgrounds coming into more adversarial contact with the police than others. Group differences in experiences such as this may combine with the fact that those from such backgrounds or disadvantaged ethnic groups tend to more frequent victims of crime, such that both fear of crime and negative encounters with the police drive poor relations between these groups and the police.

SUMMARY

Policing has a controversial past in Northern Ireland. The wide-ranging reforms which followed the ceasefires and political resolutions of the 1990s achieved much in improving the policing service's legitimacy across Northern Ireland's two main communities. However there was little specific emphasis on the relationship between the police and young people in these reforms. Whilst overarching confidence in how the police serve wider society in Northern Ireland is reasonably high amongst young people, there continue to be many problematic issues in how young people and the police perceive each other and interact with each other. Some of these issues may be related to Northern Ireland's specific experience with conflict, but the majority of these problems seem to be more related to challenges that arise from a conflict of ways of life and values between young people and society, with the police acting as representative and authorities of adult society. More specifically the mistrust of young people that is evident in adult society filters through to how the police interact with them. Police spend much of their time stopping and questioning young people or dispersing their gatherings in response to call outs and complaints by adult residents. These problematic interactions add to a mutual distrust and strained relationships between police who face disrespect carrying out duties that they see as low priority and young people, particularly young working class males, who feel they are being unfairly targeted.

STUDY AIMS, DESIGN AND SAMPLE

AIMS

This study aims to examine young people's experiences and perceptions of the police in Northern Ireland, with a view to understanding the causal dynamics underpinning police-youth relations.

- To what extent does young people's willingness to obey the law, as well as to assist the police more actively, relate to perceptions of police fairness and effectiveness?
- How does police legitimacy – that is, the view that it is right to sometimes accept police decisions and instructions regardless of whether one agrees with them – play its role in this process?
- What kinds of experiences of policing are frequent and important to young people? Are these experiences implicated in legitimacy or lack thereof?
- Does a sense of belonging to a wider society play a causal role in shaping the relationship between young people and the police? Does a lack of such identification lead to a more oppositional perception of who the police are?
- To what extent are the diversity of views that young people have of the police still tied to traditional sectarian divides, perhaps as a result of inter-generational influences, or to other social divisions such as socio-economic background?

Because our aims included studying the causal dynamics of police legitimacy, our study was longitudinal in nature. By measuring the key variables of interest – relating to a variety of facets of relationships with the police – at two points in time roughly six months apart, we were able to model the changes that took place in the intervening period. This does not mean that we expected average levels of legitimacy and so forth to change within this timeframe. Rather, we were concerned with the individual levels of variation. Some of our respondents were higher on certain variables (such as perceived fairness of the police, willingness to assist them, and so forth) than others. For some, their attitudes towards the police improved during the life of the study, while for others attitudes deteriorated. Our research aimed to look at this relative level of change and variation, not at overall historical trends. In doing so, it sought to understand what underpins the diversity of attitudes and relationships that young people have of the police.

QUESTIONNAIRES

The first wave of data collection took place between March and May 2013. Questionnaires were completed in respondents' classrooms, administered by their teachers. This gives us a reasonable level of confidence that they were completed relatively independently by the respondent (compared to other data collection methods such as, for example, postal questionnaires), of though there is no way to guarantee this is level of independence was absolute. Respondents were asked to provide their demographic information and questions on their current knowledge of policing structures in Northern Ireland. They were also asked to relate the type and quality of an interaction with a police officer that they remembered best (if any) as well their emotional reaction to this interaction and whether they thought they had been discriminated against in the interaction. Respondents were then asked to relay their general perceptions of how police treat people, how fair the police are, the legitimacy of the police, of who the police serve and the efficacy of the police. Respondents were also asked to convey the degree to which they have confidence in the police, how much they trust in the police, how likely they would be to co-operate with the police, how close they believe the relationship between the police and wider society is, as well as their levels of identification with wider society. Each of these variables relating to the perception of the police was measured using a multi-item scale. Some of these scales were adapted from

previous research. For example, the fairness and legitimacy scales are based closely on the work of Tom Tyler (Sunshine & Tyler, 2004; Tyler, 2006; Tyler & Fagan, 2008), while questions about experiences with the police were adapted from Hamilton et al.'s (2003) survey. Some were developed specially for this study. A list of the main variables and the questionnaire items used to measure them is included in the appendix. Prior to administration to the full sample, the questionnaires were piloted with small groups of volunteers from the target age group in order to elicit feedback on the presentation and wording of the measures.

The second wave of the questionnaire was conducted after the summer of 2013, beginning in September but continuing through to February 2014 to allow as many schools as possible to find the time to participate. The time 2 questionnaires mainly measured the same variables as time 1. However there were some changes, additions and deductions. At time 2 respondents were asked to report any interaction they had had with a police officer since they completed time 1. Two new sections were also added: one assessing respondents' perceptions of any police biases towards either of the two main communities in Northern Ireland, and one asking for respondents' perceptions of what important others in their lives think about the police. These questionnaires are available on request.

Simultaneously with the second wave of the questionnaire, the time 1 questionnaire was also administered in some schools that had not yet participated, and these respondents were integrated into the time 1 sample. This was done in order to improve the size and representativeness of the time 1 sample, and we deliberately targeted schools whose pupils came from sections of the population that had initially been under-represented (such as Protestant boys and pupils from poorer backgrounds). However, since these extra respondents did not complete the time 2 survey, they cannot be included in the longitudinal analysis.

SAMPLE

We aimed to sample from as broad a range of schools across Northern Ireland as possible. This was to facilitate the acquisition of a diverse sample in terms of socio-economic background, gender, community background as well as geographical area. We also set out to achieve a substantial enough sample size to enable the desired forms of statistical analysis.

Lists of all secondary schools of all types, along with contact details, were obtained from each of the five Education and Library Boards in Northern Ireland. The Principals of each of these schools were contacted via email with information regarding the study along with an invitation. Responding schools were contacted via telephone to organise data collection. We did not exclude any schools from the sample: all that were willing and able to participate are included in the study. All schools that took part at time 1 were re-approached at the start of the school year to participate in time 2 as previously agreed. Whilst agreement among these schools was initially high, many schools eventually withdrew from time 2. Reasons given for non-participation all surrounded the issue of the year 12 students being too busy with GCSE exams. Similar reasons were given for the loss of participants within schools that were able to participate in the time 2 survey.

In total, 830 individuals completed the time 1 questionnaire. Of these, 319 also completed the time 2 questionnaire (an attrition rate of 62 percent). We refer to these as the **time 1 sample** (all those completing the time 1 questionnaire) and **matched sample** (only those completing both questionnaires).

We targeted respondents who would be aged 14 or 15 at time 1. Ninety-eight percent were in this age bracket, with the remainder aged 16. This reflects that fact that we targeted year 11 pupils for the first wave on the assumption that the majority would be in the same school and class for year 12, and therefore easier to match in the second wave. We also expected this age group to be better able to read and understand questions about policing, legitimacy, trust and wider society than younger pupils would be (an assumption broadly supported by pilot testing of the questionnaire). Female respondents were somewhat in the majority (57 percent) in the time 1

sample, particularly among the Protestants, and made up a larger majority (68 percent) of the matched sample due to uneven attrition. There was a fairly even distribution of respondents across the urban-rural continuum in both the time 1 and matched samples (see figure 1.1). There were slightly fewer respondents who identified as part of the Catholic Community (38.7 percent) compared to the Protestant Community (42.5 percent), and this ratio was relatively unaffected by attrition at time 2 (figures 1.2 and 1.3). A substantial minority of the sample identified as coming from neither the Protestant or Catholic community (18.1 percent). Over 94 percent of the sample described their ethnicity as 'white'. The largest ethnic minority in the sample were Chinese (1.2 percent). No other ethnic group made up more than one percent of the sample. There was also an imbalance of respondents from secondary schools (300) relative to respondents from grammar schools (530).

Pupils from schools in policing district G were also over-represented, making up 46 percent of the time 1 sample (see appendix for a map of policing districts). Participants in district G were not systematically different in their responses compared to those from other districts.¹ Nonetheless, we have therefore statistically controlled for this when examining demographic differences in experiences with the police. This helps us to assess the extent to which respondents from this area differ from others. In most cases any such differences did not reach statistical significance. Statistically controlling for whether or not the participant attended school in district G also means that estimates of other group differences (e.g. gender and urban versus rural) are not spurious effects of particular categories of respondents being drawn more from district G than other districts.

While we had aimed for a *broad* sample, we did not sample randomly from the population. This is an *opportunity sample*, in that we were reliant on the good will and availability of schools, parents and pupils. As such, so none discrepancies such as a relatively high proportion of Protestant females are not surprising and need not be problematic in themselves. However, we will need to keep them in mind if making comparisons between, for example, Catholics and Protestants because any differences that emerge could simply reflect the different gender composition of the subsamples.

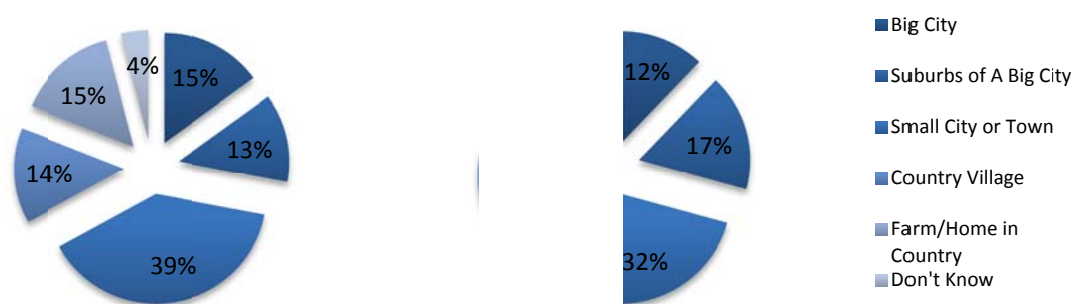


Figure 1.1: Time 1 (left) and matched (right) composition of the sample according to the type of area in which respondents live (values are percentages rounded to the nearest integer).

¹ Based on a multivariate analysis of variance, which found that when controlling for other demographic variables, there was no multivariate effect of being in district G on any of the dimensions of experience or perceptions of the police.

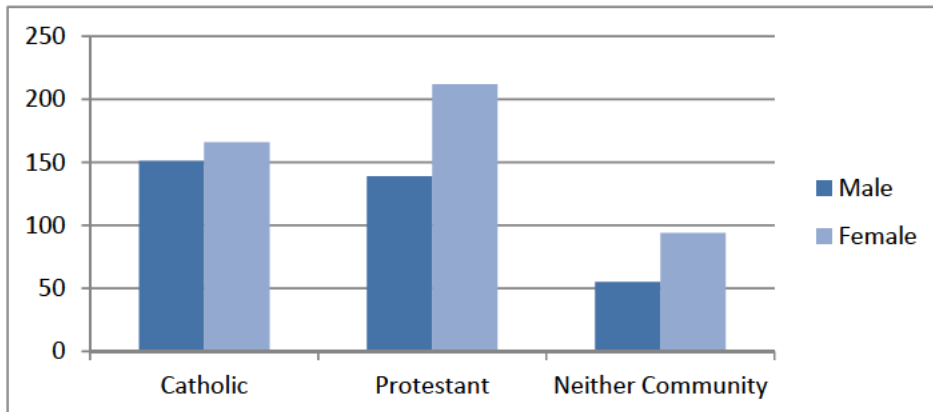


Figure 1.2: TIME 1 Gender composition (total numbers of respondents) for each community background

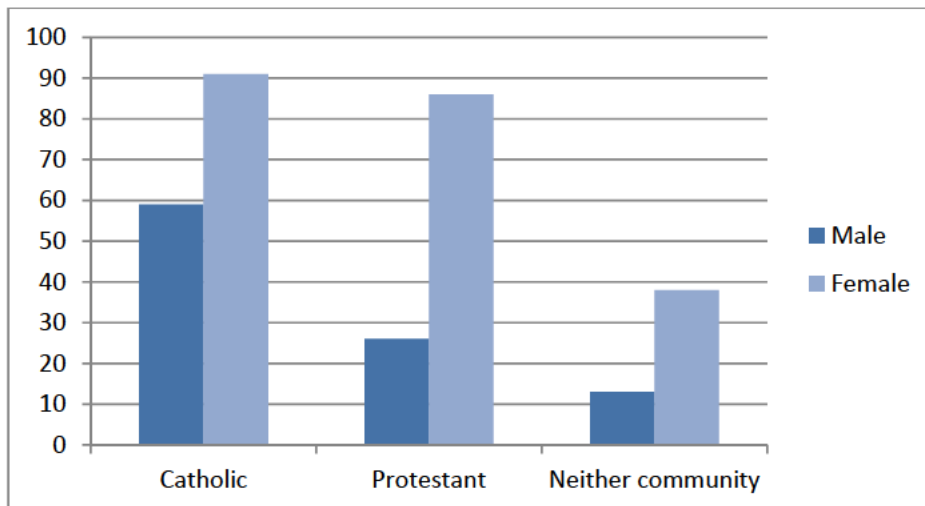


Figure 1.3: Time 2 Gender composition (total numbers of respondents) for each community background

Fifteen percent of respondents in the time 1 sample reported that they are entitled to free school meals (figure 1.4), dropping to 8.8 percent in the matched sample. The NI School Census indicates only 15.8 percent of post-primary pupils on the census day across Northern Ireland took free school meals, although a larger proportion (19.0 percent) are entitled to them. With these figures in mind, and assuming that pupils who do not actually receive free school meals may not be aware of their entitlement to them, we can conclude that young people from the most deprived backgrounds are not under-represented in time 1 sample, but are slightly under-represented in the matched sample.

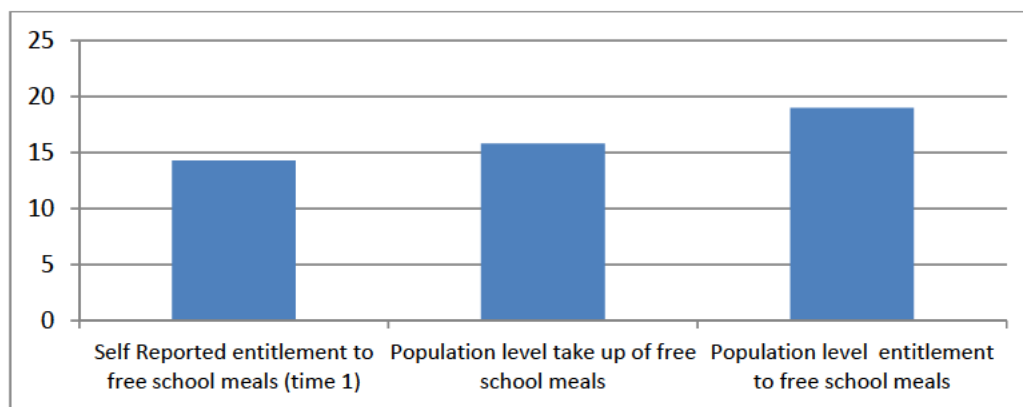


Figure 1.4: Comparison between sample and population level entitlement to free school meals. *Population data based on 2012 NI School Census for post-secondary pupils.*

SUMMARY

We sought to recruit a diverse sample of 14 and 15-year-olds across a number of demographic characteristics. In the main this was well accomplished at time 1, with a good diversity of types of school, across a range of geographical areas in Northern Ireland. We successfully recruited participants across the rural – urban range, and there was a good balance across the different communities in Northern Ireland as well those who do not identify with either. There was also reasonable balance between male and female participants in time 1. Unfortunately, attrition at time 2 was uneven, with boys in particular less likely to be included in the matched sample. This means that we effectively have two samples that are useful for two different purposes. The time 1 sample is similar enough to the population to be reasonably useful for descriptive purposes, while the matched sample is not. However, the matched sample is a large enough longitudinal sample for us to investigate causal dynamics.

GENERAL PERCEPTIONS OF THE POLICE AND KNOWLEDGE OF POLICE OMBUDSMAN, NIPB AND PCSPS

We can begin by considering our respondents' overall evaluation of the police. They were asked to indicate their agreement with the statements "Police do a good job on the whole" and "Police can do whatever they like without consequences" (table 2.1). These responses suggest a broadly positive evaluation of the police with respondents who indicated some level of disagreement with the former statement and agreement with the second being in the minority (14 percent and 25 percent respectively). Of course, the fact that these negative perceptions are in the minority does not mean that they are inconsequential. Indeed, the fact that one quarter of our sample agree or strongly agree that the police can do what they like without consequences might be a real cause for concern.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Police do a good job as a whole	3.9	11.1	32.8	38.1	14.0
The police can do whatever they like without consequences	32.1	27.1	16.6	14.7	9.5

Table 2.1: General perceptions of the police (percentages of responses)

Table 2.2 shows the correlations between the general evaluation of the police ('Police do a good job as a whole'), with their perceived fairness, effectiveness and legitimacy. These are instructive in that they suggest that the strongest relationship is with fairness rather than, for example, effectiveness. This indicates that when the general favourability of the police is measured in surveys, it is likely to be fairness in particular that is being tapped most strongly.

	Correlation with general evaluation
Fairness	.64
Effectiveness	.37
Legitimacy	.45

Table 2.2: Correlation between the general confidence in police item ('The police on the whole do a good job') with our specific multi-item measures of perceptions of the police. All correlation coefficients are statistically significant ($p < .01$; two-tailed).

KNOWLEDGE OF THE POLICE OMBUDSMAN

Most respondents had not heard of the Police Ombudsman (66 percent) and the same number said they did not know whether the Ombudsman was a part of the police or not. Only 22 percent answered correctly that the Ombudsman is independent of the police (though they outnumbered the 12 percent who thought it was part of the police). When asked what the roles of the Police Ombudsman were, a majority of the sample (55 percent) said that they did not know. Thirty-eight percent ticked the box to say that its role is to investigate complaints against the police and 13 percent ticked the box to say its role is to help the police behave better.²

KNOWLEDGE OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND POLICING BOARD (NIPB)

Findings were similar for the NIPB. A minority (42 percent) of respondents had heard of it and most said they did not know whether it was independent of the police or not (54 percent). There were more respondents who thought it was part of the police than who thought it was independent (28 percent versus 18 percent). Most (62 percent) said they did not know what its roles were. A minority (24 percent) ticked the box to say that its role is to 'oversee policing and hold the Chief constable and the PSNI publically to account'. Ten percent of respondents thought the role of the NIPB was to 'direct police operations', and 5 percent thought it was to 'tell the Chief Constable what to do'.

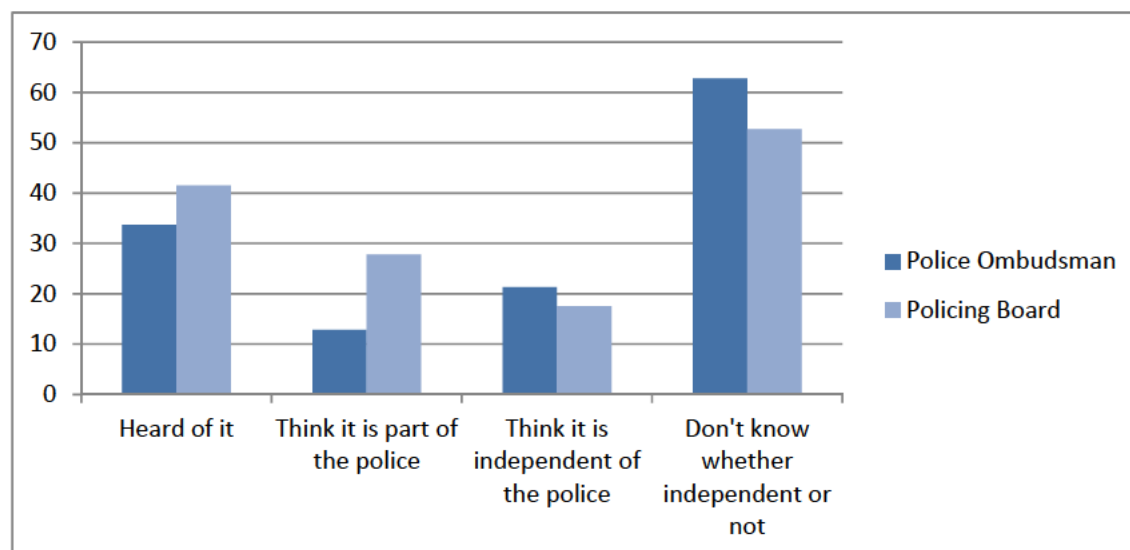


Figure 2.1: Knowledge of the Police Ombudsman and Policing Board (percentages)

POLICING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIPS

Relatively few respondents (17 percent) had heard of Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSPs). When asked whether they felt that the PCSPs had helped to improve policing in their local area, most (75

² Note that these options were not mutually exclusive, which is why the percentages do not add up to one hundred.

percent) reported that they did not know. Few (9 percent) felt they had helped, with the remainder (16 percent) feeling that they had not.

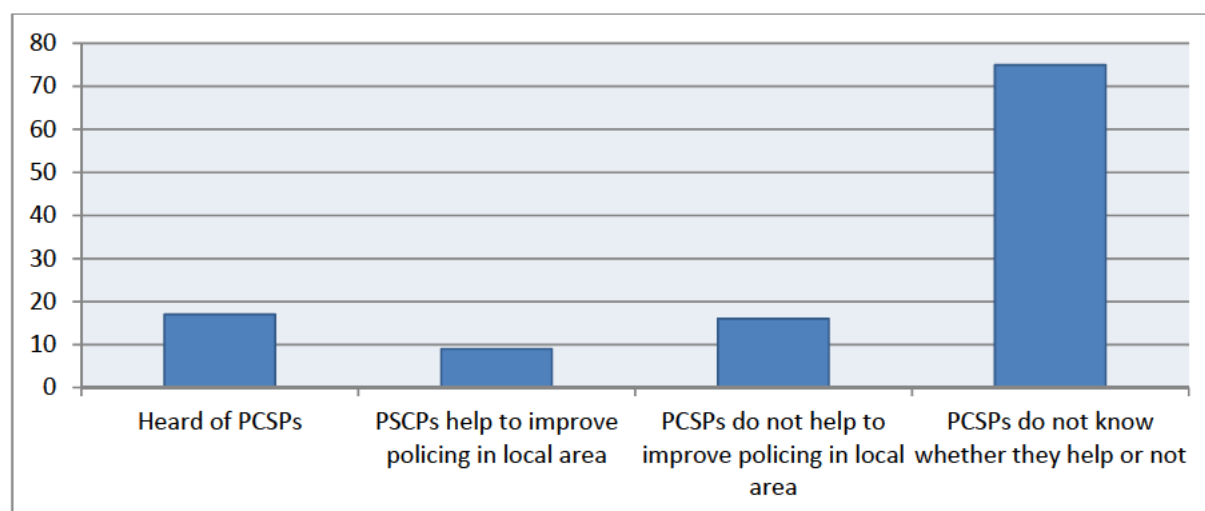


Figure 2.2: Knowledge of Police Community Safety Partnerships (percentages)

SUMMARY

General evaluations of the police tended to be positive. Most of the respondents had rather limited knowledge of the Police Ombudsman, Policing Board and PCSPs. The majority had not heard of any of these. Only a minority were aware of the independence between the NIPB, Police Ombudsman on the one hand and the police service on the other. Most did not know about the roles of either. Few respondents had heard of Policing and Community Safety Partnerships, let alone had a view about their effectiveness. It is therefore interesting to note that young people are often not aware of consultation and oversight structures that exist for the PSNI in Northern Ireland.

INTERACTIONS WITH POLICE OFFICERS

TYPES OF INTERACTION

A central aim of this project is to understand the impact of the quality of young people's interactions with police officers. At this stage we can describe the frequencies of interactions at time 1 and time 2 to see what types of interactions young people are having. Then we use the much larger time 1 sample to examine whether this is linked to their community or economic background, gender or the type of area in which they live (i.e. urban versus rural areas). The longitudinal data will be used to form a comprehensive assessment of the impact of these interactions which will be detailed later in the report.

Most of the respondents (80 percent) have had some form of interaction with police officers. However, of the 271 matched respondents, only 80 (25 percent) had had any contact with police officers in the intervening period (around 7 months). Figure 3.1 illustrates the percentage of respondents reporting each type of interaction at time 1 (for the full time 1 sample) and time 2 (for the matched sample).

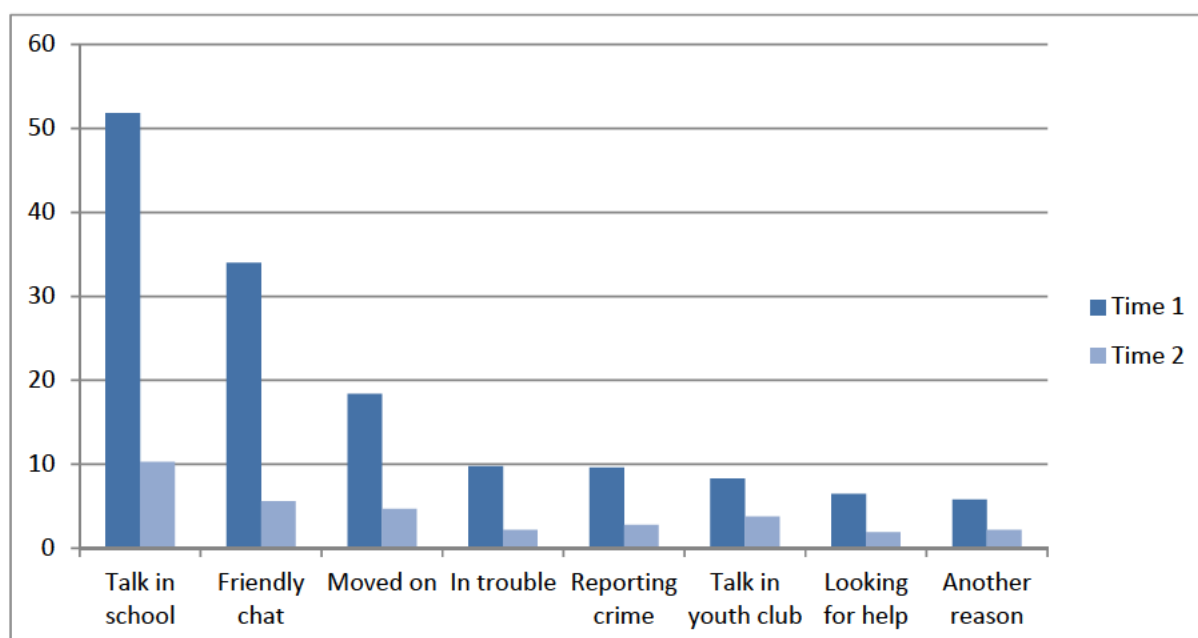


Figure 3.1: The percentages of total samples reporting each type of interaction with the police at time 1 & time 2

We examined whether certain types of interaction were more common among particular groups of our sample, along the lines of gender, community background, economic background (indicated by entitlement to school meals) and home area type (urban versus rural). The following differences were statistically reliable.³

- **Boys** in the sample were around 2 ½ times as likely as girls to have encountered the police due to being in trouble, 1 ½ times as likely to have been moved on and around half as likely as girls to have attended a talk by police in school or in youth clubs
- **Protestants** in the sample were twice as likely to have encountered the police due to being in trouble, than those from the Catholic Community, and twice as likely to have encountered them on a school visit.
- **Urban respondents** in the sample were almost 2 ½ times as likely to have been moved on by police as those from rural areas, and half as likely to have encountered them at a youth club.

QUALITY OF INTERACTIONS

Respondents who had had any type of interaction with a police officer (80 percent of the total sample) were asked to recall the interaction that they remembered the best. Then participants responded to a number of statements regarding the behaviour of the police, as well as emotions and perceptions participants may have experienced. Endorsements of these statements were measured on a 5-point Likert scale, from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much so).⁴

These reported feelings and perceptions of these interactions paint a broadly positive picture. All of the positive feelings were more frequent than negative ones (fig. 3.2), and the same pattern holds for perceptions of police behaviour (figure 3.4). Whilst recognising this, it is important not to overlook the variability within these reports, given that even the most negative feelings and perceptions were experienced 'very much so' by at least some of the young people in the survey.

³ Based on a series of logistic regression models, which account for the uneven gender composition of our Catholic and Protestant subsamples. Due to the over-representation of respondents from policing district G, this was statistically controlled in the model such that other estimates are independent of it. Respondents in district G were around 1 ½ times as likely to have encountered a police officer at school. Details are available on request.

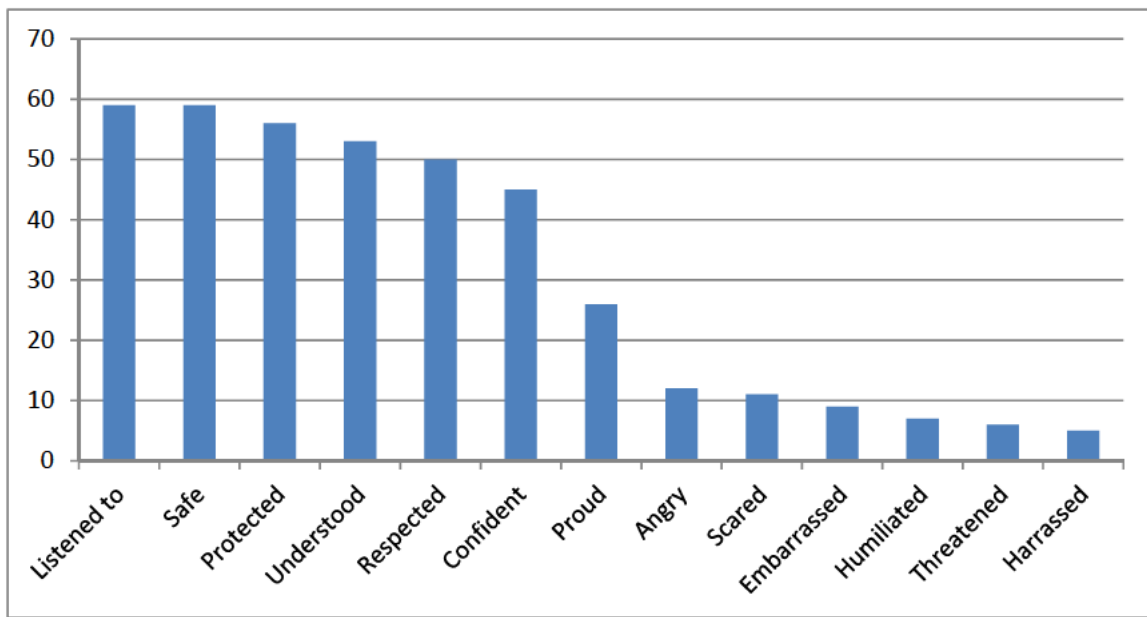


Figure 3.2: Feelings reported by respondents with experiences of different types of encounter with police officers (percentages reporting these feelings at least 'quite a bit')

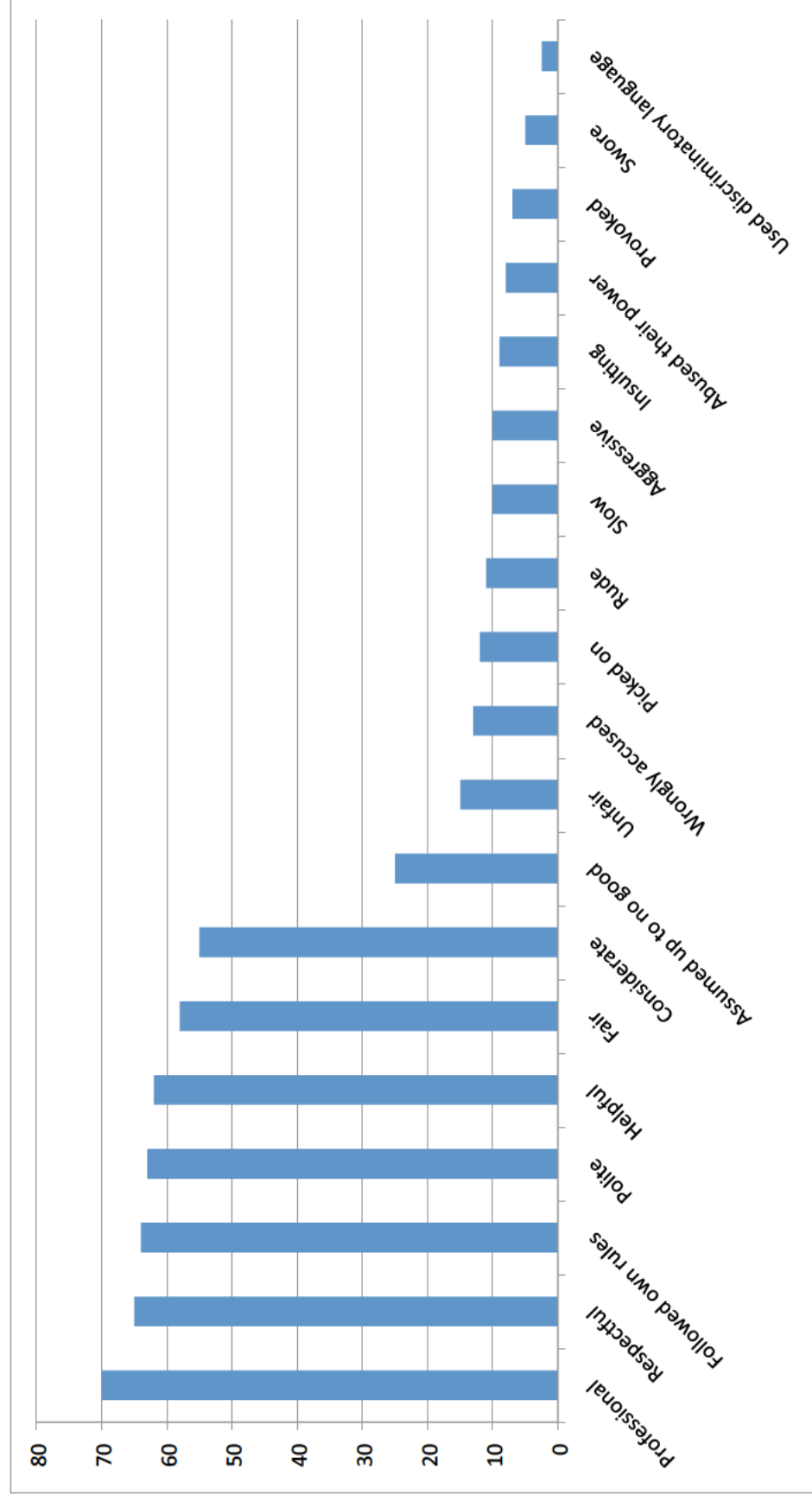


Figure 3.3: Perceptions of police behaviour during the encounter that respondents remember best at time 1 (percentages reporting these feelings at least 'quite a bit')

CLOSER EXAMINATION OF NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES

We explored the negative experiences more closely, not because they were typical (which they were not), but because it is important to understand this minority of negative interactions. We therefore examined the proportions of respondents describing encounters in negative ways. Figure 3.4 shows the percentages of encounters in which respondents experienced each of the negative feelings at least 'quite a bit', broken down according to whether or not they had each type of interaction. This helps to qualify our interpretation of the means reported above. While interactions with the police were on average more positive than negative, there were still quite substantial minorities reporting negative feelings about them. From the time 1 data it is clear that this is particularly so for respondents who said they had been moved on and for those who were in trouble. For them, anger was the most frequently reported feeling. It is interesting that anger stands out, because this particular emotion is typically linked to a sense of injustice or unfairness.⁵

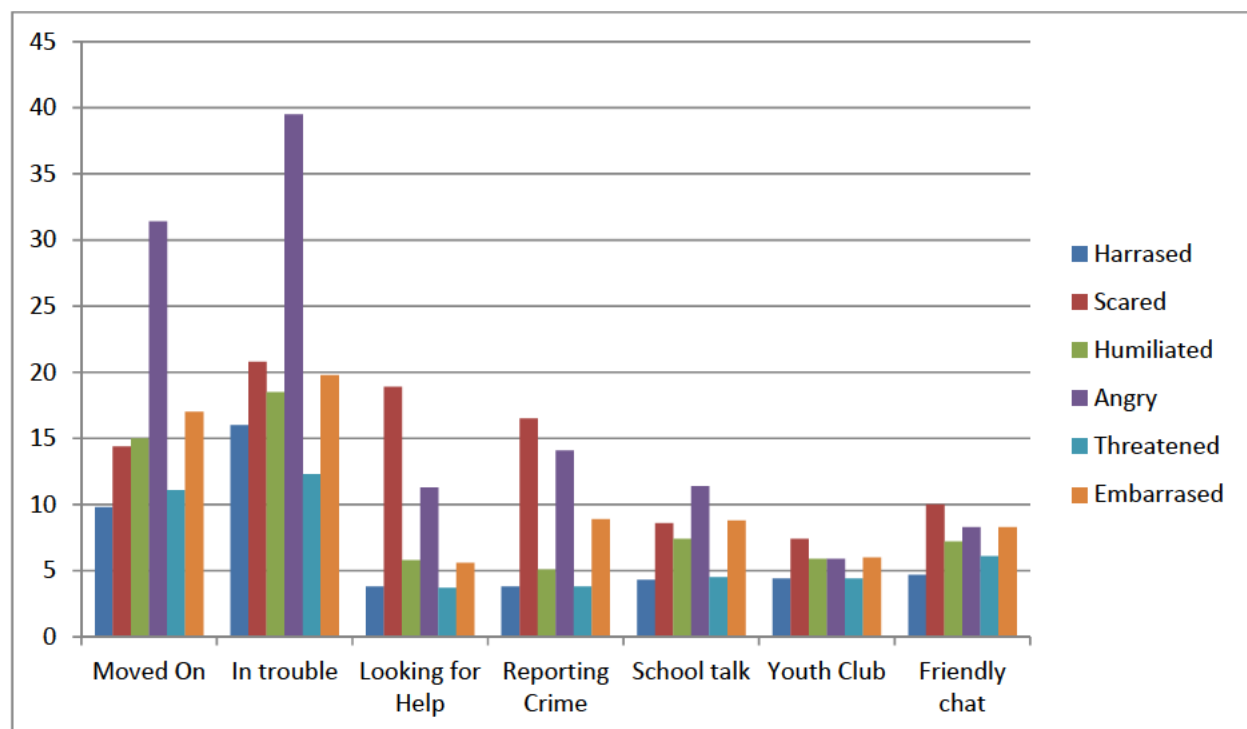


Figure 3.4: Time 1 Feelings reported by respondents with experiences of different types of encounter with police officers (percentages reporting these feelings at least 'quite a bit').

Perceptions of police conduct at time 1 are shown in figure 3.5. Again, these are the proportions of respondents describing the police they encountered being at least 'quite a bit' like this. For those who had been moved on

⁵ Note that respondents could select more than one type of encounter. Some may have had several different types of interaction with the police, so we cannot be certain which one they had in mind when rating the quality of their experience.

or been in trouble, perceptions of rudeness and unfairness stand out as most frequent.

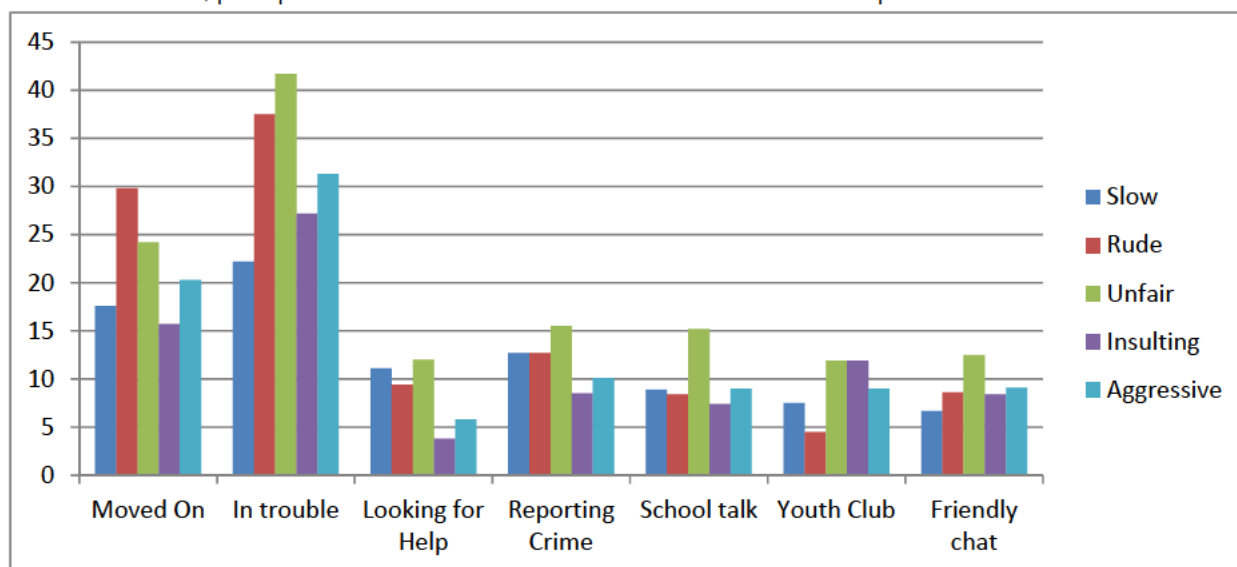


Figure 3.5: Time 1 Perceptions of the quality of police conduct reported by respondents with experiences of different types of encounter with police officers (percentages describing police as behaving at least 'quite a bit' slow, rude, unfair, insulting or aggressive).

Figure 3.6 shows the proportions of encounters in which police were perceived to have done negative things at least 'quite a bit'. Here, the perception that the police assumed the respondent was 'up to no good' clearly stands out as the most frequent negative experience. This is particularly striking for those who had been moved on or who were in trouble, a majority of whom had this experience.

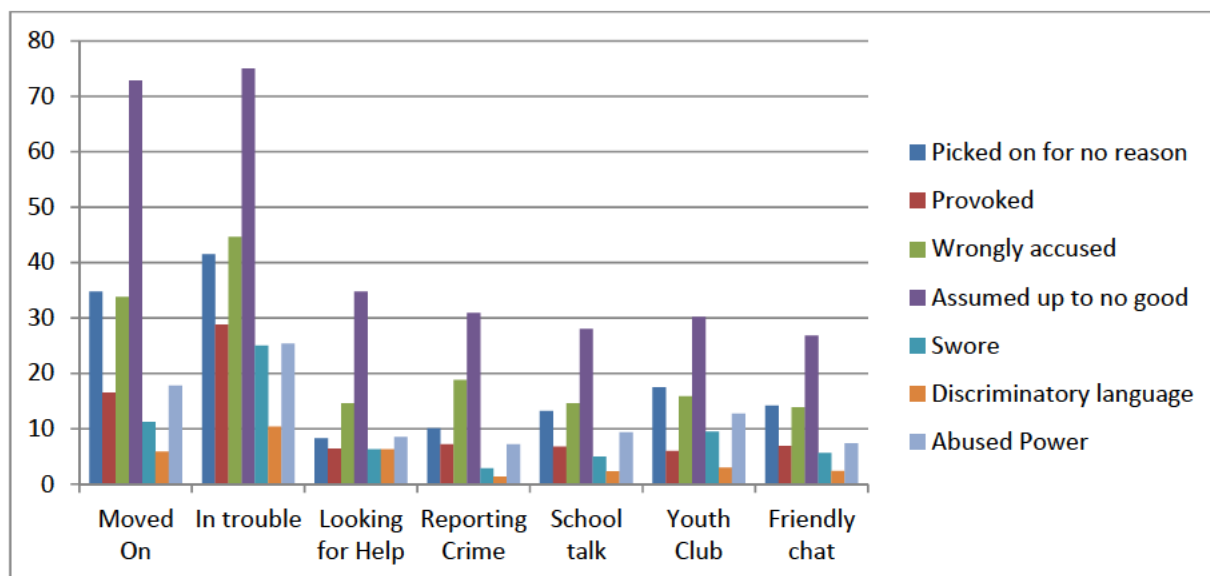


Figure 3.6: Perceptions of police behaviour reported by respondents with experiences of different types of encounter with police officers (percentages describing police as having done this at least 'quite a bit').

GROUP DIFFERENCES IN EXPERIENCES WITH THE POLICE

In order to simplify these data for analysis, we constructed the following five scales, guided by factor analysis, to enable analysis of the relationships between quality of experience and the other variables measured in the questionnaire:

Interpersonal respect/fairness: Considerate, respectful, fair, unfair (reverse coded), polite, insulting (reverse coded), professional, rude (reverse coded) and helpful

Emotional upset: humiliated, embarrassed, threatened, angry and scared

Valued/ secure: understood, proud, safe, protected, respected, listened to, and confident

Unfair suspicion: Picked on for no reason, wrongly accused, assumed you were up to no good

Abuse: used sectarian language, swore, abused power

We then carried out a series of regression analyses on the much larger time 1 sample to test the relationships between these experiences and the demographic variables (gender, community background, economic background and urban/rural area). These suggest the following statistically significant relationships, although these differences were not large in magnitude:⁶

- **Boys** in the sample perceived less fairness/respect, more unfair suspicion and more abuse than girls.
- **Respondents entitled to free school meals** in the sample perceived less fairness/respect, more unfair suspicion and were more emotionally upset than others.
- **Urban respondents** in the sample perceived less fairness/respect and more unfair suspicion and abuse, and felt less valued/secure than rural respondents.

OVERALL TYPES OF EXPERIENCE

Using a method called latent class analysis, we also investigated whether respondents' experiences of the police could be considered in terms of categories of respondents with particular profiles of experiences across the five dimensions considered above. Figure 3.7 shows the profile of experiences reported by the respondents categorised into each of the three categories. These indicate a majority of individuals having had a broadly positive encounter, generally agreeing with the positive dimensions (respect/fairness and valued/secure), while disagreeing with the negative one (abuse, emotional upset and unfair suspicion). Only a small minority reported the reverse pattern, corresponding to a negative encounter. However, it is notable that a further 25 percent of respondents conformed to a pattern that we have termed 'unfair suspicion', whereby they report an encounter that is broadly neutral, but with particular agreement with items corresponding to unfair suspicion. This typology further highlights the particular importance of experiences such as being assumed to be 'up to no good': a substantial minority who otherwise did not have a experience particularly negative police conduct nonetheless felt themselves to be unfairness suspected by them.

⁶ A fuller reporting of the regression analysis can be found in Appendix 1.

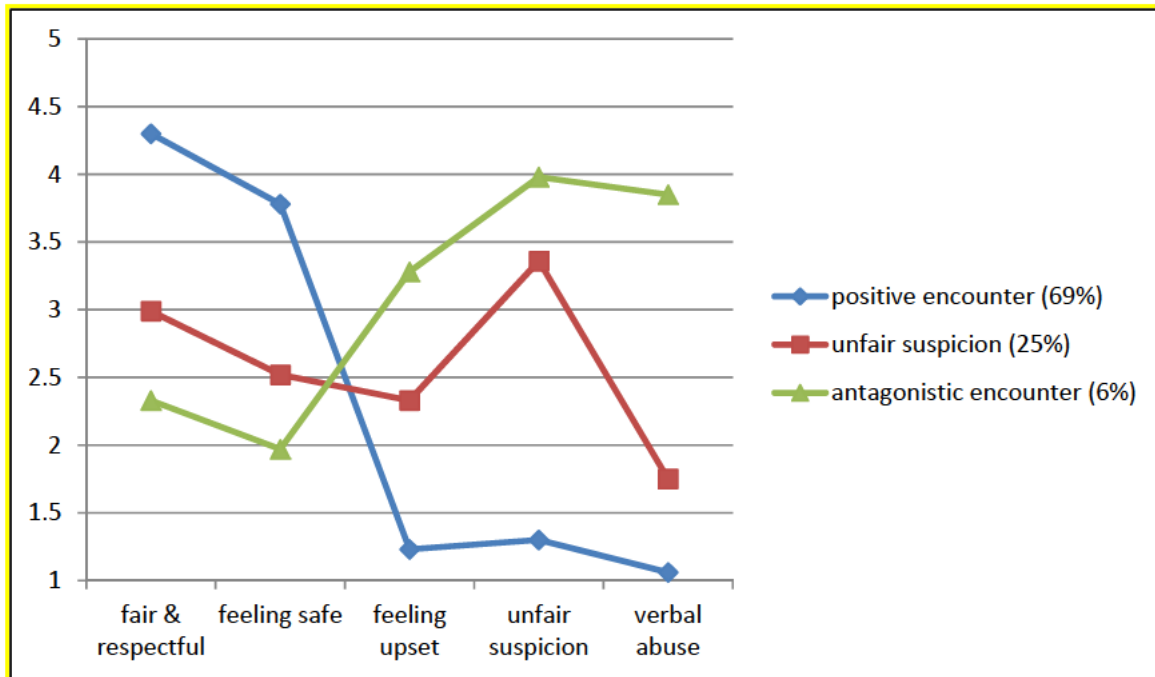


Figure 3.7: Latent class analysis showing the three categories of experience with the police derived from the participants' rating of the five dimensions.

PERCEPTIONS OF BEING DISCRIMINATED AGAINST BY POLICE OFFICERS

Respondents were asked whether, in the situation they were remembering, they felt that the police officer(s) had treated them badly on the basis of age, religion, class, sexual preference, gender or ethnicity. Figure 3.8 shows the proportions of respondents that indicated that they had been treated badly on this basis 'quite a bit' or more.

- **Boys** in the sample were around 3 times as likely as girls to perceive having been treated badly because of their religion, social class or gender.

There were no other statistically reliable relationships between the demographic variables and these perceptions of discrimination.

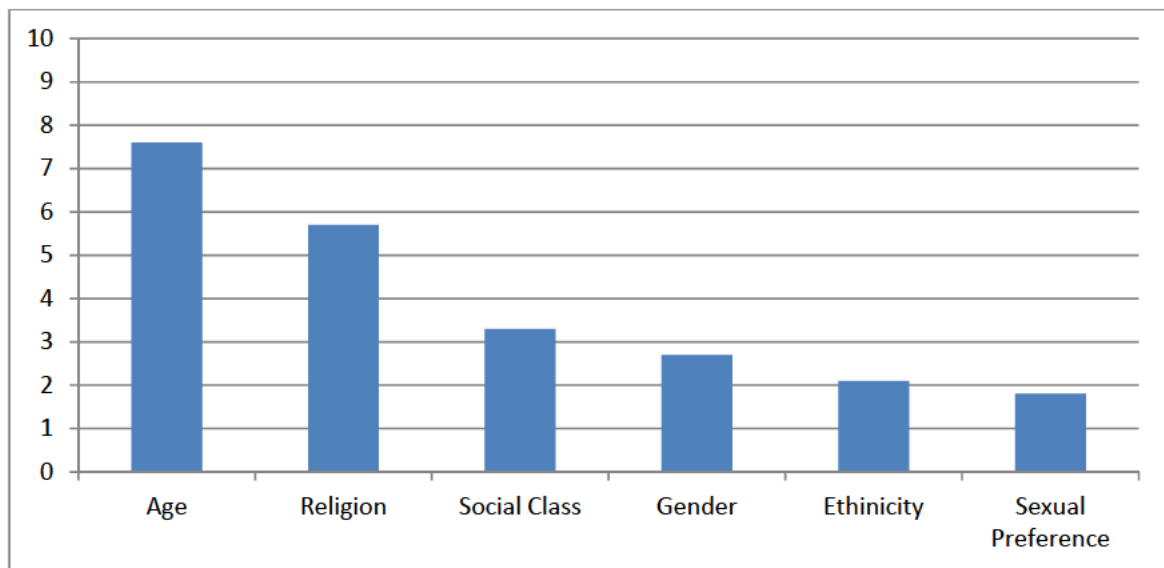


Figure 3.8: Percentages of respondents who felt treated badly (at least 'quite a bit') on the basis of some social category that they belong to (respondents who had not encountered a police officer are not included here).

SUMMARY

The first key point we can draw from this section is that interactions with the police were not overwhelmingly negative for our sample. Most interactions appear to have been experienced positively, and police conduct evaluated favourably. However, negative experiences were reported as well. In particular, feelings of anger and perceptions of police officers being unfair and assuming our respondents to be 'up to no good' stand out as the most common negative experiences. Moreover, some of these experiences, and the types of interactions in which they were most common, were systematically related to gender and economic background.

MODELLING THE DYNAMICS OF POLICE LEGITIMACY ACROSS TIME

Table 4.1 shows the correlations between the main variables of interest at time 1.⁷ We can note here the moderate to strong correlations between fairness and most other variables of interest (particularly legitimacy), as well as smaller but statistically reliable correlations between identification with society and police effectiveness on the one hand and police fairness and legitimacy on the other. This lends some support to the view that fairness, effectiveness and identification may be important precursors of police legitimacy, but a more comprehensive multivariate analysis is needed to confirm this (presented later in this section).

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.
1. Police fairness	3.40 (.77)	.63	.44	.31	.39	.34	.61
2. The police serve people like me		3.35 (.90)	.30	.29	.37	.29	.56
3. Police effective in catching criminals			3.19 (.68)	.27	.35	.20	.25
4. Identification with society				2.72 (.80)	.21	.12	.23
5. Cooperation with police					3.44 (.94)	.20	.38
6. Avoiding crime						3.40 (.69)	.39
7. Legitimacy of the police							3.44 (.74)

Table 4.1: Correlation coefficients and descriptive statistics for the main variables in the study. Bold figures on the diagonal show the means (standard deviation in brackets). The values for variables 1 to 5 are based on data only from those participants who had interacted with a police officer. Shading corresponds to the size of the relationship with darker shades marking out higher correlation coefficients. All correlation coefficients are statistically significant ($p < .01$; two-tailed).

Table 4.2 shows the correlations between some of the most frequent positive and negative experiences and perceptions that the police are legitimate and serve people like oneself. Here we can note that these experiences reliably relate to both key perceptions of the police. Unfortunately, while these suggest that such experiences are important in shaping perceptions of the police, it is not possible to determine whether the experiences are the cause or effect of perceptions (or both) given the cross-sectional nature of these correlations. Moreover, given the low frequency of encounters with the police time 2, it is not appropriate to include them in the longitudinal analysis reported below.

⁷ Pearson's correlation coefficients indicate the extent to which two variables are associated with one another. Values between 0 and 1 indicate a positive relationship, such that respondent high on one variable tend to be high on the other. Values between -1 and 0 indicate a negative relationships, such that respondents high on one variable tend to be low on the other.

	Police legitimacy	The police serve 'people like me'
Police were professional	.24	.27
Police followed their rules	.26	.28
Police were polite	.28	.31
Police were respectful	.24	.27
Police assumed respondent was up to no good	-.24	-.30
Respondent felt angry	-.32	-.33
Police were unfair	-.30	-.30
Police picked on respondent	-.27	-.28
Police wrongly accused respondent	-.25	-.27

Table 4.2: Correlations between the most frequent positive and negative experiences and perceptions that the police are legitimate and serve people like oneself. All correlations in bold type are statistically significant ($p < .05$; two-tailed). Experience variables are coded as dichotomous, contrasting participants who had these experiences at least 'quite a bit' with all others.

We also tested the relationships between demographic variables (gender, economic background as indicated by free school meals, urban versus rural home area, district G versus other districts and Protestant or Catholic community background) and the key perceptions of the police, using a series of regression analyses. We used the time 1 dataset for this analysis in order to capitalise on the larger more representative sample. These analyses suggest only some small effects. We found some gender differences whereby girls rated their likelihood of engaging in crime and antisocial behaviour lower than boys did. Also, those entitled to free school meals rated their likelihood of assisting the police somewhat lower than did those not entitled to free school meals. Those who were less likely to see the police as serving people like themselves. There was no evidence for differences between Catholics and Protestants in these perceptions, even when specifically looking at the male subsample.

At time 2, we also asked about their friends and parents/guardians' views of police legitimacy (that is, whether they think there is an obligation to obey the police). Again, these are relatively unrelated to the main demographic variables. Perhaps contrary to expectations, there is no evidence for a Protestant-Catholic difference in how young people perceive their parents' attitudes. Both groups, on average, think their parents see the police as slightly more legitimate than they do themselves (figure 4.1).

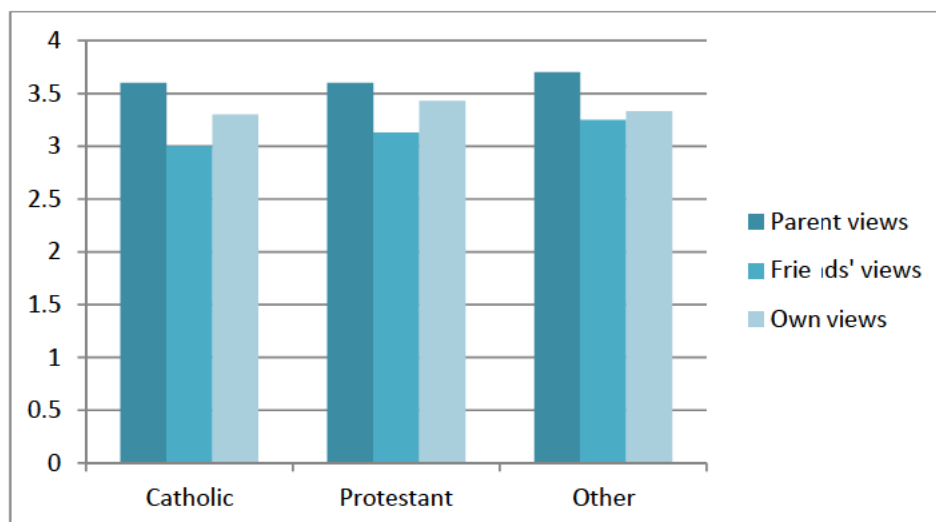


Figure 4.1: Respondents' ratings of their own, parents/guardians' and friends' levels of police legitimacy.

For a more comprehensive test of the causal processes underpinning police legitimacy, we tested a so-called 'cross-lagged' structural equation model.⁸ The model that we specified tested causal effects of effectiveness, fairness and identification at time 1 on legitimacy and perceptions of who the police serve at time 2. It also included further pathways from legitimacy and perceptions of who the police serve to both active cooperation with the police (e.g. reporting crime) and compliance with the law (avoiding crime and antisocial behaviour).

The model indicates that both identification with society and perceived fairness affect the legitimacy via the perception that the police serve people like one self. In turn, legitimacy significantly predicts both active cooperation with the police and compliance with the law. Effectiveness, on the other hand, was not reliably implicated in these processes once fairness and identification were taken into account. Figure 4.2 shows a simplified graphical representation of the model, which is illustrated in full in appendix 4.

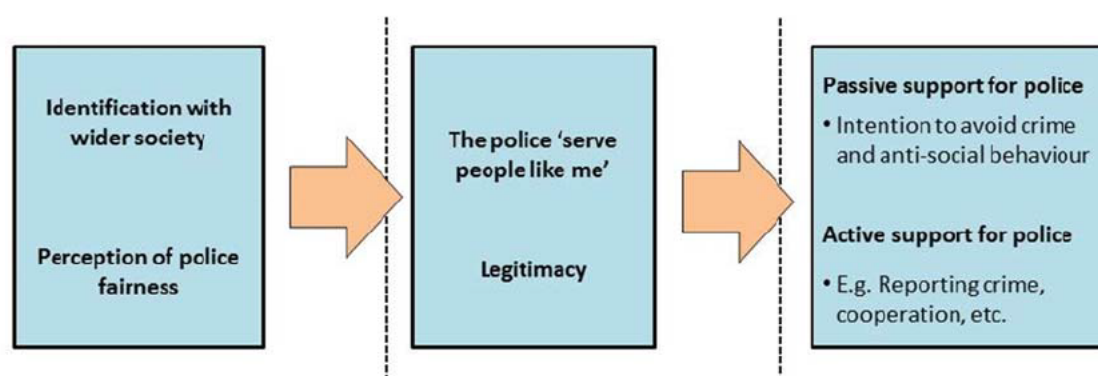


Figure 4.2: Conceptual diagram showing the sequence indicated by the structural equation model (reported in full in appendix 3).

⁸ This method involves using longitudinal data to test hypothesised causal relationships between variables. The outcome variable of interest at time 2 is regressed on itself time 1, as well as the hypothesised predictors. Any significant paths between the predictors and outcomes can then be interpreted as causal with a much greater degree of certainty than is the case with cross-sectional correlations between variables.

CONCLUSIONS AND OBSERVATIONS

In this section, we will draw out some of the key findings from the study, relating them where relevant to previous research. Bringing these together, we will make a number of points of relating them to policy and practice.

1. Broadly speaking, the views of the police expressed by our sample were more positive than negative. Over half of the respondents said that police do a good job overall, and another third had no strong opinion about it. This positive evaluation is important to recognise, whilst also appreciating that disaffected and even antagonistic views also exist. Variation in this general 'job rating' of the police was closely related to how fair the police were perceived to be, in line with the so-called procedural justice perspective on police legitimacy.
2. Having noted that a minority of respondents reported overtly negative views of the police, it is crucial to point out that this minority was not defined by traditional sectarian divides. Indeed, we found no evidence for reliable or systematic differences between young people from Protestant versus Catholic backgrounds. While other survey evidence suggests there may be a more substantial difference for adults, this is not the case for the age group included here, who are not old enough to remember policing before the formation of the PSNI in 2001. Furthermore, Protestant-Catholic or Unionist-Nationalist differences in police legitimacy among the adult population were not reflected in what our respondents said about their parents' attitudes. Irrespective of community background, young people perceived (rightly or wrongly) that their parents were slightly more supportive of the police than they themselves were, and their peers less so.
3. It is noteworthy that around one quarter of the sample saw the police as unaccountable, given that Northern Ireland has perhaps one of the most comprehensive systems of police oversight and accountability in the world. As others have found previously (e.g. Hamilton et al., 2003), our respondents' awareness of the Police Ombudsman and Policing Board was modest to say the least. The lack of knowledge of the Police Community Safety Partnerships (PCSPs) stands out, given that these are intended to be the communities' main point of contact and influence with the police. We suggest, then, that the accountability of the police needs to be better communicated. This is not only a matter of young people knowing how to contact the Ombudsman should they need to, though of course that is important. It is also a matter of citizenship, such that the relationship between the police and the public is properly understood by all. Having an enjoyable encounter with a police officer on a school visit might be of some benefit (though there is evidence that young people simply see the police officers they meet in school as atypical, and distinct from 'police in general'; Hopkins, Hewstone & Hantzi, 1992). It may be more important, however, that they learn that the police are accountable to the public rather than a force unto themselves. This could happen in the context of a school visit, so long as that visit emphasises accountability rather than trappings of authority that set the police apart from the general public. It could also happen in the context of citizenship education.
4. Previous work on youth-police interactions in Northern Ireland had demonstrated that the majority of young people had had some form of interaction with police officers (Nelson, McBride, O'Riordan & Smyth 2010). The majority of these interactions took the form of young people being stopped and questioned on the street, or being moved on by officers (Hamilton et al., 2003; Nelson et al., 2010; Young Life & Times, 2010; YPBAS, 2007). Whilst we too found a large majority of young people having had some form of contact with police, the most frequent types of youth-police exchanges in this study were the less problematic interactions of talks in schools and "friendly chats". However more than 30

percent of the sample had experienced being moved on by, or being in trouble with the police. As with the general perceptions of the police and of police legitimacy, our respondents reported more positive than negative encounters with police.

5. Negative experiences, while in the minority, were frequent enough to merit closer attention. In particular, a sense of being assumed to be 'up to no good' stands out among the negative experiences that we asked about. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this was especially common among those who have been in trouble or moved on. From these data, we cannot know what the police actually said or did to provoke this assessment. What is clear, though, is that our respondents distinguished this aspect of the encounter from other aspects that we asked about. In other words, they were not condemning police conduct in a blanket fashion. Rather, the *particular* question about being assumed to be up to no good appears to have resonated with them.
6. The most common kinds of negative police behaviour reported by our respondents were unfairness and rudeness. This is in line with the academic literature on police legitimacy, which emphasises that fairness and interpersonal respect are the aspects of people's experiences with the police that matter to them the most (e.g. Tyler, 2006). The most frequent negative emotion they felt was anger, which is the emotion most directly linked to injustice (Averill, 1983). These results indicate that the emotional quality of these encounters is tied to respondents' evaluation of whether or not police conduct was fair.
7. In conducting this study, we aimed not just to describe attitudes and experience, but also to assess the causal dynamics of police legitimacy. Our causal model, tested using the matched longitudinal survey, points to the central role of identification with society: that is, the sense of commitment, pride and importance that young people feel in relation to their belonging to wider society. Across time, identification with wider society emerged as the most important antecedent of both police legitimacy and the perception that they serve people like oneself, which in turn predicted participants' self-reported likelihood of cooperating with the police and avoiding crime and antisocial behaviour. Thus, those who lacked such a sense of investment were more likely to see the police as oppositional to their interests, to lack a sense of obligation to them, and hence more likely to say they would engage in crime and antisocial behaviour. The model strongly supports a *relational* account of compliance with the law (whereby the police are seen to be 'on the same team', embodying the norms of a wider social order) rather than an *instrumental* one (whereby people comply in order to avoid punishment). Crucially, individuals lacking such identification were not limited to a particular demographic. Across the range of social and economic backgrounds represented in our study, there are those who feel strongly identified with wider society and those who do not.
8. Our findings suggest that, in order to understand why young people do or do not support the police, we need to go beyond looking narrowly at the police service itself. Oppositional or disaffected views about the police reflect, in part, oppositional and disaffected views about wider society. Without denying the importance of fair and respectful police conduct, we suggest that there is a wider sense of disengagement and identification that needs to be tackled. Even if the police foster strong links with communities and are seen as guardians of the moral order, this will be of limited benefit if it is a moral order from which young people feel excluded.
9. With this in mind, we can consider a point of agreement between police officers and the young people they encounter: that the public frequently expect the police to move young people on when they are not necessarily doing anything wrong (Hansson, 2005; NIPB, 2013). While such requests may be motivated by genuine fears of crime and antisocial behaviour, it is crucial to appreciate that these problems are unlikely to be tackled by excluding young people from public space. On the contrary, it requires the active support of young people themselves, and such support risks being undermined by routinely treating them as suspicious. We therefore suggest that the manner of engagement with the adult population is important if the public are to appreciate what is and what is not a reasonable expectation of how the police use their authority. A desire to engage with the public should therefore

not discourage the police from affirming principles of fairness in dealing with young people, even when this is not the most popular course of action.

10. The finding that views of the police may reflect how young people see their place in society also means that the solutions cannot just be left to police officers themselves. Policing is, as the Patten report put it, a collective community responsibility. In this case, that means a collective responsibility to address the kind of suspicion of young people indicated by the 2010 Young Life and Times finding that 83 percent of young people say that that they are judged negatively simply because of their age.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: GROUP DIFFERENCES IN QUALITY OF INTERACTIONS WITH THE POLICE

In order to test the relationships between the main demographic variables and quality of interactions with the police, we estimated five multiple regression models. Multiple regression allowed us to test the effect of each demographic variable whilst holding the others constant. This is important because we know that, for example, most of our Protestant respondents are female. Were we to consider only one of these at a time, we might erroneously identify differences associated with gender as ascribe them to community background. Multiple regression helps us to avoid such errors.

Because community background and home area type are categorical variables with more than two levels, we needed to recode them for this analysis. The community background variable was recoded into two dichotomous 'dummy coded' variables, one comparing Protestants to Catholics and the other comparison Protestants to those from neither community. We recoded the categorical home area type variable into a dichotomous one (urban versus rural).

	Respect /fairness	Emotional upset	Valued /secure	Unfair suspicion	Abuse
Gender (Male=1/Female=2)	.14**	-.01	.07	-.10*	-.12**
Urban (vs. Rural)	-.15**	.06	-.18**	.13**	.10*
Catholics (vs. Protestant)	.01	.03	.02	-.03	-.13*
Neither community (versus Protestants)	-.01	.05	-.03	-.01	-.02
Free school meals	-.10*	.09*	-.07	.10*	.09
District (G versus others)	.10	.08	-.07	.11*	.09
R square	.057	.027	.051	.057	.046
N	628	626	628	570	570

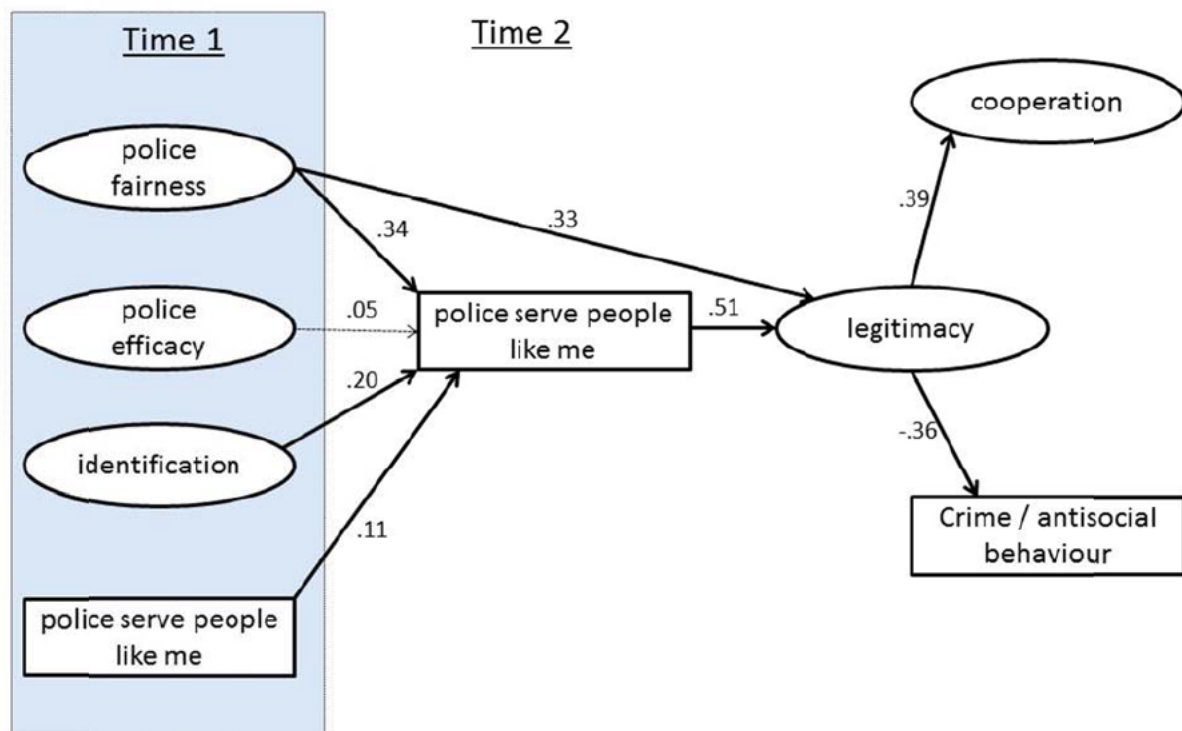
APPENDIX 2: MEASURING PERCEPTIONS OF THE POLICE AND IDENTIFICATION WITH SOCIETY

Fairness	The police treat people with respect The police take time to listen to people The police treat people fairly The police respect people's rights The police are well-mannered to people they come into contact with The police make decisions based upon the facts of the situation The police explain their decisions to the people they deal with The police make decisions based on their own personal opinions The police make decisions to handle problems fairly The police don't listen to all of the people involved before deciding what to do The police provide the same quality of service to everyone The police enforce the law equally with all people The police make sure that all people get what they deserve under the law The police provide better services to wealthier people The police give people who are not White less help because of their race	1 (strongly disagree) – 5 (strongly agree)	To assess how fair and just respondents believe the police are. This scale used items that had previously been used to measure perceptions of procedural justice (fair personal interactions) and distributive justice (fair outcomes across different social groups).
Police Serve People Like Me	What the police do generally benefits people like me Whomever the police are meant to serve, they definitely do not serve people like me In general, when the police succeed in their objectives, people like me benefit	1 (strongly disagree) – 5 (strongly agree)	To assess to what degree respondents believe the police serve the people they identify with.
Identification with Society	I feel a bond with wider society I feel united with wider society I feel dedicated to wider society I am glad to be a member of wider society I think that this society has a lot to be proud of It is pleasant to be a member of this society	1 (strongly disagree) – 5 (strongly agree)	To assess to what degree respondents identify with the society they come from... do they feel that they are an integral part of society and it is a significant part of who they are, or do they feel distant from and alienated from society.

	Being a member of this society gives me a good feeling I often think about the fact that I am a member of this society The fact that I am a member of this society is an important part of my identity Being a member of this society is an important part of how I see myself.		
Co-operation with Police	Call the police to report a crime Report suspicious activity near your house Call the police to report an accident Provide information to the police to help find a suspected criminal	1 (not at all the kind of thing I would do) – 5 (Very much the type of thing I would do)	To assess the degree to which respondents are inclined to co-operate with police in their work.
Legitimacy	It is reasonable for the police to sometimes tell people what to do You should accept police decisions even if you think they are wrong Disobeying the police is hardly ever right The police never have any right to interfere in what people are doing If someone disobeys the police and gets away with it, then good for them You should do what the police tell you to do even if you disagree It is difficult to break the law and still feel good about yourself	1 (strongly disagree) – 5 (strongly agree)	This scale assesses the degree to which respondents believe police are legitimate holders of authority in society.

APPENDIX 3: STRUCTURAL EQUATION MODEL DIAGRAM

All estimated pathways statistically controlled for the main demographic variables. The model also uses latent factors (indicated by the ovals in figure 4.2), which reduce the unsystematic measurement error associated with survey items and thus allow for more precise estimates of relationships between variables. Missing values (e.g. where participants failed to answer particular questions) were imputed using Bayesian imputation. The model was estimated using MPlus 7 and showed good levels of model fit. A more detailed reporting of the structural model is available on request.



N=317; RMSEA = .05; CFI = .93; SRMR = .07

APPENDIX 4: MAP SHOWING POLICE DISTRICTS IN NORTHERN IRELAND

