Chapter 3
Preference Does Not Have to be Personal: Explaining Police Perception within a Cross-Cultural Perspective in Finland

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ABSTRACT

Research has shown that minorities, particularly Blacks are six times more and Asian are twice likely to be stereotyped, suspected, stopped and searched, as well as arrested, cautioned as these groups are more likely to be prosecuted on weaker evidence when compared to Whites in many countries in Europe. Some reasons adduced for this phenomenon has been minorities’ engagement with deviant and criminal behaviour, while neglecting the accumulated degrading treatment minority receive in the Criminal Justice System (CJS). However, in Finland interestingly very little research has examined minority perceptions of police fairness in the country. The aim of the paper is to examine the experiences of 650 immigrants from Africa, Asia, and Eastern European Countries, Middle East, as well as Latin Americans perception of the legitimacy of the police in view of the fact that experiences can influence the perception of fairness in the CJS. Secondly, we will explore why minorities feel they are treated differently to increase our understanding of minority contact with the police. The participants with constant contact with the police tend to be more negative towards the CJS. Additionally, household identified with specific referent groups significantly see the CJS as being biased.

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INTRODUCTION

Every citizen has the need for a long term security to be safe, obey the law and be lawful in their daily living as social order, equity and justice are all necessary in all democratic or not too democratic countries of the world in the twenty-first century. However, the history of degradation in relations between the police and minority is not new as exemplified by tension and conflicts from racial differences across Europe, even when there is no bias, police fairness is often questioned by minorities (Walker, 1998; Brown & Benedict, 2002; Weitzer & Tuch, 2006). Although race differences in perception have been scholarly researched, (Weitzer, 2012; Brunson, 2007; Klinger & Brunson, 2009), the findings suggest that Black people are more likely to express dissatisfaction with the police than White people because of the aggressive nature of policing directed at minorities. Quite often this behaviour tends to weaken the ability of the police to fight crime and protect citizens equally within societies. Moreover, negative attitude or dissatisfaction towards the police can undermine police legitimacy and erode public trust in the criminal justice systems as police legitimacy can be based on the strength of the social mechanism available in the country. For example, police have the mandate of social control; fighting crime and protecting citizens at all level in the society. Hence, police need legitimacy if they are to be effective and legal in the sight of citizens and minorities. In other words, whenever the citizens see the police as legitimate, cooperating with and obeying police orders is taken in good faith, while the opposite is the case when citizens question the legitimacy of the police. In Finland few studies have examined the influence of interpretation of police encounter within a minority group in the country.

The available research in the country race is being seen as a core determinant of defining, and constructing negative attitude towards the police. (Egharevba, 2005, 2006). Supporting this kind of findings is a recent study by Warren (2011), suggested that police – citizen negative relations is a consequent of the cumulative effect of the general trust in social institutions on racial difference as regard the perception of disrespect and racial profiling by the police. In other words, a minority that views dominant institutions in society such as (Police, Courts, and Prisons, as well as education and housing) as being biased or discriminatory are more likely to generalise these beliefs to all institutions within the countries (Sears et al, 2000). Similarly, research has also affirmed that other factors such as socio-economic status, age, gender and police practices as well as the environment can influence minorities expectation for social equity in police protection, however, different experiences can provide us with insight into the variation in minority attitudes toward the police in different ways (Weitzer, 2010; Miller, 2010; Tyler, 2010). Available research in Finland has largely focused on the Africans’ negative view of the police than Finns (Egharevba, 2014; Egharevba & White, 2007; Egharevba, 2005, 2006). While this
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