

STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN POLICE SERVICE IN DURBAN, SOUTH AFRICA: A NON-JUDGMENTAL ASSESSMENT

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—Abstract —

Public trust in the police is an important indicator of effective policing in a democratic system. While this assertion holds true for most police research, hardly any prior studies in this field explored university students' perceptions of the police. In light of this gap, the study on which this paper is based sought to elucidate students' perceptions of the South African Police Service. A quantitative approach was adopted and a sample of 682 (n=682) participants was drawn at one of the largest universities in South Africa for a cross-sectional survey of students' perceptions. The specific goal was to assess whether students' trust in the police was shaped by their perceptions of the Police Service in general, and police officers' behaviour in particular. The findings indicated that students generally had an unfavourable disposition towards the police and that this disposition affected their trust in police officials. The findings also suggested that male students' perceptions of the police differed a great deal from those of female students. In general, it was found that university students viewed the police as unfair and corrupt and that these negative perceptions consistently engendered mistrust in the police. These findings corroborate broader assertions that the relationship between the police and the public in South Africa is poor and that police brutality, corruption, and a range of other police misconducts erode public trust in the South African Police Service. It was concluded that, if students' perceptions have to be changed, the contributory factors to police misconduct must be addressed as a matter of urgency. Moreover, programs that will aid and

sustain positive student–police relationships should be introduced and encouraged.

Keywords: *Students, perceptions, trust, police, South Africa.*

JEL: L84

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the motivations for introducing community policing in different parts of the world, including South Africa, is to create a confluence point where the police can collaborate with people in communities in order to help them solve their crime problems (Corder, 2010; Brogden & Nijhar, 2005). Researchers have argued that for such a relationship to be sustained, public trust in the police institution is fundamental (Jackson & Bradford, 2010; Tyler, 2005; Sunshine & Tyler, 2003) and that such a partnership will also engender effective policing (Murphy & Cherney, 2012; Tankebe, 2010).

Awareness of the significance of public trust and confidence in the police as preconditions for effective policing has prompted several studies on public attitudes towards the police, and various studies have focused specifically on how public trust and confidence in the police can be achieved and sustained (Boateng, 2012; Miller & Davis, 2008; Weitzer & Tuch, 2005). A common focus of these studies was to explore citizens' attitudes towards the police from the general public's perspective, with little consideration for the views of specific segments of the population. South African universities have become hot-spots for criminal and protest activities in the last decade regardless of the democratic principles that underpin their structure and functioning, and therefore a quagmire has been created because of a dearth of research that explains students' attitudes towards the police. It was against this backdrop that this study sought to examine the views of university students pertaining to the South African Police Service and its officers. A representative sample from one of the largest South African universities was targeted in the effort to explain university students' perceptions of the police and to determine how these perceptions impacted their relationship with police officers. The justification for this study was propelled by the need to know whether students – some of whom may later become police officers, policy makers or academics – have a sound understanding of the dynamics of policing

and the roles that the police play in society, with specific reference to their role in combating crime. Moreover, it is imperative that academics are acquainted with the perceptions, attitudes and opinions of university students concerning the police, and how these views could change, or be influenced over the course of their academic pursuits. The study thus addressed two pertinent research questions: (1) What are the exact perceptions of the police among South African university students? (2) What factors shape South African university students' perceptions of the police?

With reference to the views of a sample of 682 respondents from a survey that was conducted among students at one of the largest university in 2018, this article assesses some specific perceptions that were held by these students regarding the South African Police Service (SAPS) as well as the factors that shaped these perceptions. More specifically, the study explored whether university students' experiences of police corruption had a significant effect on any of the three dimensions of public confidence in the police. It is envisaged that the findings of the study will contribute to police reform in South Africa and, more particularly, that the recommendations that are offered will be implemented to enhance student-police relationships at universities across the country.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

As was earlier indicated, several studies have been conducted on public-police interactions and many have explored the public's attitudes towards the police. However, these studies focused primarily on the general population with little attention being given to factors that shape university students' attitudes towards the police. Previous studies have elucidated that public perceptions and evaluations of police officers' behaviour shape how people respond to the police in general (Akinlabi, 2017; Jackson & Bradford, 2010; Kaariainen, 2008). Moreover, the public's attitude to the police also shapes the manner in which they cooperate with the police and impacts people's willingness to assist the police in crime control operations. Broadly speaking, findings from previous studies across the globe maintain that positive encounters with the police increase public confidence in them, but that negative experiences reduce confidence in the police (Jackson & Bradford, 2010; Tankebe, 2010; Jackson & Sunshine, 2007; Weitzer & Tuch, 2005). Most studies in this field have also shown that there is an inverse relationship between public fear of crime and confidence in the police and that

increased public fear of crime, especially in neighbourhoods, reduces people's trust and confidence in the police. It thus follows that a reduction in fear of crime will increase trust and confidence in the police (Tankebe, 2010; Weitzer & Tuch, 2005; Schneider & Thurman, 2002). However, previous studies have also shown that fear of crime and people's negative attitudes towards the police are unrelated (Zevitz & Rettammel, 1990). For example, Zevitz and Rettammel (1990) argue that, regardless of the level of fear of crime in neighbourhoods, the public's assessment of the police will not change.

As a related issue, several studies have also been conducted on police corruption (Oluwaniyi, 2011; Ivkonic, 2005; Punch, 2000). However, in contrast to the many studies that have explored the public's fear of crime, the effects of the public's experiences of police corruption to predict public attitudes towards the police have rarely been surveyed, especially in developing countries (Tankebe, 2010). The few studies that focused on the public's experiences of police corruption and their attitude towards the police predicted negative outcomes (Akinlabi, 2017; Sabet, 2012; Tankebe, 2009). For instance, in a study on the public's perceptions of the Nigerian Police, Akinlabi (2017: 243) found that extortion of money from citizens, solicitation of bribes – what is referred to as *egunje* in local parlance – and a range of other police misconducts negatively affected public perceptions of the police. In general, many studies have concluded that while significant progress has been made to combat police corruption in the developed world, this menace has remained endemic in several developing and less-developed countries in Africa and that this problem has persisted in South Africa.

In addition to fear of crime and experiences of police corruption, studies have also explored the relationship between public attitudes toward the police and neighbourhood crime rates (Blumstein & Wallman, 2000; Hennigan, Maxson, Sloane, & Ranney, 2002; Boateng, 2016). These studies have revealed a progressively negative connection between high crime rates and trust in the police. In a survey conducted in the United States of America (USA), Hennigan et al. (2000) found that people residing in communities with high crime rates and communities that were considered to be crime ridden and dangerous had low trust and confidence in the police.

Some studies on public attitudes towards the police also considered the effect of demographic features such as gender, age, economic status, race and ethnicity as

drivers of the public's attitudes towards, confidence in and perceptions of the police (Merry, Power, McManus, & Alison, 2012; Powell, Skouteris, & Murfett, 2008; Schafer, Huebner, & Bynum, 2003). On the nexus between gender and confidence in the police, some studies found that females had higher confidence in the police than males because they were less likely to experience peaceful enforcement (Myhill & Beak, 2008; Wu & Sun, 2009), while others opined that females had lower confidence in the police than males (Hurst & Frank, 2000). In terms of age, it was found that older individuals were more likely to have more positive attitudes towards the police than younger persons (Merry, Power, McManus, & Alison, 2012; Powell, Skouteris, & Murfett, 2008).

The focus of the studies that were referred to above, and many others, was clearly to evaluate the general public's perceptions and attitudes towards the police. However, relatively few studies in the policing field across the globe specifically assessed university students' attitudes towards the police. The studies that could be traced showed that students' attitudes towards the police were shaped by factors such as demographic features, frequency and levels of contact with the police, police behaviour, and fear of crime. For example, using a sample of undergraduate students, Avdija (2010) found that police behaviour strongly affected students' assessment of the police and that their experiences and/or perceptions of negative police behaviour reduced their trust and confidence in the police.

In a bid to address or find possible solutions to social phenomena, researchers often adopt different strategies. One strategy is the measurement and analysis of the relationships between variables. In this context, it was found that public encounters with or experiences of police corruption undermined the public's perception of police trustworthiness, procedural justice and police effectiveness (Tankebe, 2010). Unfortunately, earlier measurements and analyses predominantly focused on populations at large, without consideration for specific segments of the population such as students, educators, medical staff and the like. It was this gap in scholarly knowledge, with specific consideration of the threats that recently occurred at South African universities such as the #Fees Must Fall initiative, violent strikes and many reported rapes on campuses that gave impetus to the study.

2.1. The Public's Attitudes towards the Police

There is a sizeable body of literature on various aspects of and the extent of public confidence in criminal justice institutions, with particular focus on the police. This article will thus consider procedural fairness, the execution of justice, trust in the police, and police effectiveness as key drivers of the public's confidence – or lack of confidence – in the police.

Procedural justice essentially focuses on how legal authorities generate and sustain legitimacy in the eyes of the public. This summation stems from the procedural justice theory which holds that legal authorities build legitimacy by acting in conformity with the principles of procedural fairness (Tyler & Huo, 2002; Sunshine & Tyler, 2003). Pragmatically, it will be impracticable for a single procedure to be universally acceptable as fair (Tyler, 2003). However, a spectrum of factors determines the degree to which citizens assess the procedures of a legal authority (the police for instance) to be fair. These factors include, but are not limited to, trust, quality of decision making, quality of treatments, actions, comprehensibility, social bonds and the aptitude of such procedures to address different problems (Tyler, 2003; Tyler & Huo, 2002). It is undeniable that the police are perceived to be procedurally just only if the public rates the quality of their decision-making and treatment of people positively (Tyler, 1990; Tankebe, 2010).

Besides procedural justice, citizens need to have confidence in the police whom they should trust. But when citizens experience unfair or abysmal treatment by the police, or when they rate their actions and decisions as partial and unjust, their confidence in the institution is eroded (Olutola & Bello, 2016). In this context, Tankebe (2010) argues that trustworthiness typifies the value or premium attached to people or public institutions regarding the future reliability or consistency of their actions and behaviour.

In a similar fashion, public confidence in institutional effectiveness is built on the capacity of the institution to serve the public effectively. For example, the police should help prevent crime by providing adequate security in neighbourhoods and by helping communities solve domestic or other related problems. However, studies have shown that there is no correlation between public confidence in the police and a decline in crime rates (Tyler, 2005; McArdle, & Erzen, 2001). Therefore, public confidence in the police seems to portend something more

significant that outweighs the stereotyped issues of fear of crime, victimisation, or neighbourhood crime levels (Tankebe, 2010; Tyler, 2005; McArdle & Erzen, 2001).

It has often been argued that corruption is the main extinguisher of trust, procedural fairness and the effectiveness of the police as a public institution. Anderson and Tverdova (2003:92) corroborate this assertion by arguing that when corruption is present, issues of procedural and distributive fairness become a myth. Public experience of police corruption can nurture distrust in two ways: it can either solidify bad memories of past experiences and encounters with and about the relevant institution, or it may lay a fresh foundation for an abysmal disposition and cynicism towards compliance.

2.2. Policing and Corruption in South Africa

The South African Police Service (SAPS) is the principal law enforcement institution in the country. However, since its formation, the SAPS has consistently been fraught with unprofessional misconduct and corruption (Faull, 2017; O'Regan & Pikoli, 2014; Newham & Faull, 2011). For instance, in his article entitled 'Our Cops can't be trusted: too many police linked to too many gangsters and killers', Justice Malala (2011) argued that some SAPS officials were at the centre of "the most heinous crimes and ominous acts" in the country. This view is a miniature of the impact of police misconduct on the country where, in a post-apartheid context, corruption has lingered and has continued to be a significant problem for the SAPS. However, it will be fallacious to exculpate the police under the apartheid regime from corruption. For instance, there is extensive evidence to validate accusations of atrocities committed by the "Kitskonstables" [instant constables] who, in addition to being poorly trained, extorted and took bribes from members of the public during the apartheid era (Leggett, 2005).

Parallel to practices in the commission of various crimes, police corruption could best be explicated from two broad lenses: the citizen-initiated lens and the police-initiated lens (Tankebe, 2010; Skogan, 2005; McAra & McVie, 2005) (for details, see Sherman, 1978). While the former often takes a non-coercive approach, the latter is coercive. There were also instances when the transaction was consensual (Sherman, 1978). However, various authors found that police-initiated transactions negatively affected citizens' attitudes towards the police (Tankebe, 2010; Avdija, 2010; McAra, & McVie, 2005; Skogan, 2005). Conversely, citizen-

initiated transactions with the police have not really been shown to be a significant variable in predicting public confidence the police (Avdija, 2010).

In 2012, the Independent Police Investigative Directorate (IPID) – an oversight body that monitors and ensures that police officers comply with professional ethics and that recommends appropriate sanctions where necessary – was established by the SAPS (Kinnes & Newham, 2012). However, this structure has not yielded the desired results as public confidence in the SAPS is still staggeringly low (Burger, 2011). Narrow insights into the dynamics of police corruption in South Africa often arrogate the scourge to ‘a few bad apples’, whereas reports and evidence have shown that it is not just a horizontal or vertical nuance, but a discreditable propensity for misconduct that permeates almost all echelons of the SAPS. For instance, in 2011 a national weekly newspaper reported that there were irregularities in a R500 million lease agreement between former SAPS National Commissioner, General Bheki Cele, and a businessman, Roux Shabangu, an associate of the ruling ANC, for a new police property in Pretoria (Burger, 2011).

In 2011, a survey was conducted by the South African Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) in which respondents were asked to identify the section of public services where they felt corruption in the forms of bribery and abuse of power for personal gain was noticeably widespread. Two-thirds (66%) of the respondents perceived the SAPS as the most corrupt institution where bribery and corruption were endemic (HSRC, 2011). Moreover, in 2012/2013 the IPID opened 120 cases of corruption against members of the SAPS. According to Oosthuizen (2013), 90 of these cases were for extortion or soliciting a bribe; 11 were for the sale or theft of evidence; 10 were for the sale, theft, or destruction of police dockets; 6 were for aiding an escape from custody; and 3 were for issuing fraudulent documents.

One key challenge that policing faces in post-apartheid South Africa is the rise in general crime levels. It is inarguable that crime, which is often a by-product of democratic governance, is not exclusive to South Africa but a common denominator in most transitional societies (Tankebe, 2010; Karstedt, 2003; 2008). However, many reports of human rights abuses and procedural improprieties have been levelled against the SAPS. Scholars have attributed these misconducts to improper training and widespread police corruption (Pigou, 2002).

It is widely accepted that, regardless of incessant press reports, restructurings and State strategies at professionalising the SAPS, corruption in this organisation has persisted. It is therefore a pity that research-based evidence on the public's experiences of corruption is lacking – especially in terms of how corruption is shaped by factors such as lack of trustworthiness, procedural injustice and ineffectiveness. If these gaps are not addressed in a sustainable manner, corrective measures will never be effective or successful. It was against this backdrop that the study on which this paper is based explored the effects of police corruption from university students' perspective, with specific reference to their trust and confidence in the police.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Data collection and sampling

Data for this study were collected in 2018 from students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, which is one of the largest public universities in South Africa. The institution had a total enrolment of over 30 000 students at the time of the study. The data were collected by the first author with the assistance of four field research assistants who were compensated for their participation and support.

The convenience sampling technique was adopted in selecting the study participants. The choice of this method was premised on the authors' consideration for students' busy schedules and the limited resources available. However, every effort was made to obtain a sample that would be representative of the academic diversity and demographic composition of the students.

Questionnaires in hard copy (paper) format were administered to students in lecture theatres after the necessary permission had been granted by all relevant gatekeepers. Prior permission was subsequently obtained from the lecturers teaching the specific courses to conduct the survey during the first few minutes of their lectures. On entering the lecture rooms, the trained research assistants were allowed to give a brief introduction by explaining the purpose of the study and what the students were expected to do. A total of 800 questionnaires were administered and 682 were retrieved, which was a highly satisfactory response rate of 85.3%. The socio-demographic structure of the sample is presented in Table 1.

3.2. Measures

3.2.1 Dependent variables

Three dependent variables were considered in this study: trust in the police, police effectiveness and police procedural fairness. These three variables were used to measure university students' perceptions of the police.

Trustworthiness

The first of the three dependent variables, *trust in the police*, was measured using a scale of five items with a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). This variable assessed university students' perceptions of police trustworthiness and the data revealed a Cronbach alpha of $\alpha = 0.81$; Mean = 13.73; SD = 3.48.

Police effectiveness. University students' perceptions of police effectiveness were measured using a five-item scale that was measured on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The Cronbach alpha was $\alpha = 0.78$; Mean = 13.19; SD = 3.94.

Procedural fairness. University students' perceptions of the procedural fairness of the police were measured using a seven-item scale that was measured on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The Cronbach alpha was $\alpha = 0.86$; Mean = 19.35; SD = 4.95.

3.2.2. Independent variables

The effects of the above-mentioned dependent variables were examined on the independent variables which were experiences of police corruption, fear of crime, and demographic features. The university students' perceptions of police corruption were also measured in relation to two factors: personal experience and vicarious experience.

Personal experience of police corruption

Students' personal experiences of police corruption were measured using a three-item scale. The items assessed the assumption that students' personal experiences of police corruption shaped their confidence in the police. The instrument was adapted from the work of Tankebe (2010), and Sunshine and Tyler (2003). It had

a Cronbach alpha of $\alpha = 0.88$; Mean = 6.92; SD = 3.30 and was measured on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (almost always).

Vicarious experience of police corruption

Students' vicarious experiences of police corruption were measured using a three-item scale. The items evaluated if university students' vicarious experiences of police corruption shaped their confidence in the police. The instrument was adapted from the works of Boateng (2016), Tankebe (2010), and Sunshine and Tyler (2003). It had a Cronbach alpha of $\alpha = 0.88$; Mean = 7.03; SD = 3.37 and was measured on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (almost always).

Fear of crime

The university students' fear of crime in the areas where they resided was measured using a five-item scale. The items measured whether the students' perceptions of safety and security in their neighbourhoods shaped their confidence in the police. The instrument was adapted from the work of Boateng (2016). It had a Cronbach alpha of $\alpha = 0.79$; Mean = 12.79; SD = 4.33 and was measured on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Table 1. Mean and standard deviation of the items pertaining to each variable

Corruption	MN	SD
<i>Personal experience^a (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.88)</i>		
(1) Payments or promises made to an officer to overlook your unlawful behaviour.	2.33	1.24
(2) Police refused to investigate, arrest, charge or prosecute me because I was related to a police officer.	2.34	1.20
(3) I have used someone related to a police officer to prevent a case from being prosecuted against me.	2.25	1.23
<i>Vicarious experience^a (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.88)</i>		
(4) I witnessed someone making payments to a police officer to overlook an unlawful behaviour.	2.35	1.27
(5) I know of a situation where the police refused to investigate, arrest, charge or prosecute because of relations to a police officer.	2.36	1.21
(6) The police use more force than is legally allowed when making an arrest.	2.32	1.28
<i>Fear of crime^b (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.79)</i>		

(8) I feel safe walking in my neighbourhood during the day.	2.72	0.99
(9) Crime levels in my neighbourhood have changed for the better in the last year.	2.57	1.21
(10) There are not many instances of crime in my neighbourhood.	2.66	1.21
(11) I feel safe walking in my neighbourhood at night.	2.29	1.27
(12) Overall, my neighbourhood is a good place to live in terms of security.	2.54	1.18
<i>Trust in the police^b (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.81)</i>		
I trust the police in my neighbourhood to protect lives and properties.	2.79	0.87
I am proud of the decisions made by the police in my neighbourhood.	2.78	1.00
I have confidence in the police.	2.76	0.96
The police are usually honest.	2.70	0.85
The police always act within the law.	2.71	0.95
<i>Effectiveness^b (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.78)</i>		
The police respond promptly to calls about crimes (e.g., robbery & assault).	2.48	1.16
The police are always ready to provide satisfactory assistance to victims of crime.	2.76	0.94
The police are doing well in controlling violent crime (e.g., armed robbery).	2.66	1.07
Overall the police are doing a good job in my neighbourhood.	2.51	1.12
When the police stop people they usually handle the situation well.	2.76	1.04
<i>Procedural justice^b (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.86)</i>		
The police treat everyone with respect and dignity.	2.47	0.97
The police treat everyone equally.	2.39	0.94
The police respect people's rights.	2.76	0.96
The police take account of the needs and concerns of the people they deal with.	2.93	0.90
The police sincerely try to help people with their problems.	3.25	0.91
The police clearly explain the reasons for their actions.	2.82	1.04
The police use rules and procedures that are fair to everyone.	2.73	0.99

^a Response set arranged from 1 = not at all to 5 = almost always.

^b Response set arranged from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Students' perceptions of and trust in the police

In order to establish university students’ perceptions of the South African Police Service (SAPS), frequency distributions and descriptive statistics were conducted and the results are presented in Table 2. Three general inferences can be made from the observed patterns. The participants had moderately low trust in the police. More specifically, 58% of the students reported that the police were not honest, while 59% reported that they did not trust the police to protect lives and properties. In terms of police effectiveness, a similar percentage (54%) reported that the police were not doing a good job in protecting lives and properties in their neighbourhood. A similar result was obtained for the students’ assessment of the procedural fairness of the police, as 57% reported that the police did not treat everyone equally

Table 2. Descriptive statistics

Variable items	1	2	3	4	5
<i>Trust in the police^a</i>					
I trust the police in my neighbourhood to protect lives and properties.	8.4	50.7	23.6	15.5	1.8
I am proud of the decisions made by the police in my neighbourhood.	11.9	23.6	43.7	16.3	4.5
I have confidence in the police.	11.6	44.6	23.9	17.3	2.6
The police are usually honest.	8.1	49.6	29.3	10.9	2.2
The police always act within the law.	9.7	31.5	39.4	16.7	2.6
<i>Police effectiveness^b</i>					
The police respond promptly to calls about crimes (e.g., robbery & assault).	26.7	22.4	30.9	16.0	4.0
The police are ready to provide satisfactory assistance to victims of crime.	10.4	25.4	44.3	17.7	2.2
The police are doing well in controlling violent crime (e.g., armed robbery).	15.4	29.2	33.6	17.3	4.5
Overall the police are doing a good job in my neighbourhood.	19.1	35.0	28.2	11.1	6.6
When the police stop people they usually handle the situation well.	12.9	24.3	41.8	15.7	5.3

<i>Procedural fairness^c</i>	15.2	38.9	32.1	11.1	2.6
The police treat everyone with respect and dignity.	16.7	40.2	32.8	7.6	2.6
The police treat everyone equally.	11.0	24.9	43.4	18.0	2.6
The police respect people's rights.	7.3	20.7	45.5	24.8	1.8
The police take account of the needs and concerns of the people they deal with.	3.5	16.3	36.7	38.9	4.7
The police sincerely try to help people with their problems.	11.0	27.6	34.3	22.9	4.3
The police clearly explain the reasons for their actions.	9.4	33.7	36.7	15.2	5.0
The police use rules and procedures that are fair to everyone.					

^{a, b & c} (1) strongly disagree; (2) disagree; (3) neutral; (4) agree; (5) strongly agree.

4.2 Determinants of University Students' perceptions of the South African Police Service

To establish the factors that influence university students' perceptions of the police in South Africa, analyses were conducted using three different Ordinary Least Square Regression (OLSR) models (Table 3). The first model assessed the effect of police corruption on university students' trust in the police. In this model, students' personal experiences of police corruption engendered a significant effect on their level of trust in the police. A unit increase in students' personal experiences of police corruption resulted in a .26 decrease in their trust in the police. Also, students' fear of crime resulted in a reduction in their trust in the police. A unit increase in students' fear of crime resulted in a .49 reduction in their trust in the police. However, unlike the findings that were reported in previous studies, demographic variables did not show any significant impact on students' trust in the police. All the variables in the model revealed an 8% variation in trust in the police; i.e., R^2 of .08.

In the second model (i.e., the procedural fairness [justice] model), it was only *gender* among the demographic variables that exerted a significant effect on students' confidence in the procedural fairness of the police. More specifically, a

unit increase in female students' experiences of police corruption resulted in a .11 decrease in their confidence in the procedural fairness of the police. Similarly, students' fear of crime resulted in a reduction in their confidence in the procedural fairness of the police. A unit increase in students' fear of crime resulted in a .51 reduction in their confidence in the procedural fairness of the police. The model revealed a 14% variation in terms of police effectiveness.

The third model tested the effect of police corruption on university students' perception of the effectiveness of the police. The model revealed a 14% variation in police effectiveness. In this model, students' vicarious experience of police corruption was related to a reduction in students' confidence in police effectiveness. A unit increase in students' vicarious experiences of police corruption resulted in a .24 decrease in their confidence in police effectiveness. Also, students' fear of crime resulted in a reduction in confidence in police effectiveness. A unit increase in students' fear of crime resulted in a .71 reduction in their confidence in police effectiveness. However, unlike previous studies' findings, the demographic variables in the current study did not show any significant impact on students' confidence in police effectiveness.

Table 3: The effects of corruption on students' perceptions of Police trustworthiness, procedural justice and police effectiveness

	Trust in the police		Procedural fairness		Effectiveness	
	S.E.	β	S.E.	β	S.E.	β
Age	0.45	0.07	0.68	-0.01	0.42	-0.07
Educational level	0.10	0.01	0.13	-0.04	0.08	0.09
Personal Exp	0.04	-0.26*	0.06	-0.01	0.03	0.02
Vicarious Exp	0.04	0.03	0.05	-0.03	0.03	-0.24*
Fear of crime	0.03	-0.49	0.04	-0.51	(0.03)	-0.71*
F		36.6***		8.95***		8.45***
R ²		0.08		0.11		0.14

Note: Entries are standardised coefficients (β) and standard errors (S.E.).

* P < 0.05, ** P < 0.01, *** P < 0.001

5. DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to determine the factors that shape university students' perceptions of the police. Using the data that were delimited to University of KwaZulu-Natal students, the current study corroborates and also extends previous studies' findings in terms of the factors that shape university students' perceptions of the police. This study was the first of its kind to empirically document university students' perceptions of the police in South Africa and it was unique in that it explored the predictors of these perceptions, namely trust in the police, police procedural fairness, and police effectiveness. The study therefore not only augments, but also extends the findings of previous studies that focused on the general population. Generally, the findings revealed that students had unfavourable perceptions of the police. Fundamentally, the effect of their fear of crime had a significant impact on their assessment of the police. The students believed that crime levels in their neighbourhoods had not changed for the better in the year prior to the study. Their unfavourable disposition towards the police vis-a-vis the fear of crime could also be a reflection of the extent or the level of crime and insecurity in their neighbourhoods or communities.

There are several plausible explanations for this critical assessment of the police. First, the general crime level in South African communities seems to be increasing. The South Africa Victim of Crime Survey Report 2016–2017 that was released by Statistics South Africa indicates that there has been an increase in household perceptions of crime in this country in general (Statistics South Africa, 2017). The crimes that were mostly feared by households were: housebreaking/burglary (61.7%) followed by robbery outside the home (42.5%) and home robbery (36.5%) (Statistics South Africa, 2017:59). All these crimes are often committed in neighbourhoods and communities in South Africa and this fact may have elicited significant feelings of fear in the students as members of public. Therefore, their experiences and/or knowledge of crimes that have become endemic in their neighbourhoods could account for the decline in their trust in the police, police procedural fairness and police effectiveness.

The findings also confirmed that the students' personal experiences of police corruption shaped their confidence in the police. Similarly, their vicarious experiences of police corruption shaped their confidence in police effectiveness. A number of reasons can be offered for these conclusions. One reason is that, apart

from incessant media reports and studies on police corruption in South Africa, the students could have been on the receiving end of police misconduct. Some could have been required to bribe police officials in order to defeat the ends of justice or evade civil actions for breaking the law. Findings from previous studies have shown that public attitudes towards the police are significantly shaped by public perception of police corruption (Akinlabi, 2017; Boateng, 2016; Tankebe, 2010). These studies argue that police corruption erodes public trust and confidence in the police, which is an argument that was corroborated by this study.

Another plausible reason for the low respect among university students for the police may be connected to the recent ‘fees must fall’ protests that often pitted the police against South African students. In the process of dispersing student-protesters, the police often fired rubber bullets and teargas at students, even when the protests were seemingly peaceful (Rowe, 2016). Such unprofessional behaviour often exacerbated the situation, and in some instances an ordinary, peaceful protest erupted into full scale student-police face-offs.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The current study sought to assess students’ perceptions of the police. In order to achieve this objective, a number of variables were evaluated, including the factors that influenced their perceptions. While the findings of the study have some implications for policing in South Africa, it is imperative to indicate that the study was had its own peculiar limitations.

First, because this was essentially a cross-sectional study, it is challenging to make causal conclusions. To address this problem, a longitudinal study may be conducted in order to make broader and more accurate causal inferences regarding students’ perceptions of the South African Police Service. Secondly, not all the relevant variables were considered due to the need to delimit the scope of the project. Therefore, because the data were collected at one university and in one province of South Africa, the results should be viewed with caution. Although University of KwaZulu-Natal is one of the largest universities in South Africa, it cannot replicate the diversity of the entire South African university population. Future studies on students’ perception of the police can therefore consider the diversity of South African university students’ population and investigate the subject matter holistically.

Putatively, an analysis of the data illuminated some reasons for students' negative perceptions of the South African Police Service (SAPS). The results thus largely buttress the demographic pattern of attitudes towards the police and validate the predictive influence of individual factors that shape university students' perceptions of the police (Boateng, 2016; Myhill & Beak, 2008).

It also became evident that police corruption significantly affects students' perceptions of and attitude towards the SAPS. It is therefore imperative that steps be taken by SAPS to ensure that high ethical standards are maintained at all times by its officers. To this end, police authorities in South Africa must devise and implement strict accountability mechanisms that will not only ensure that officers are held accountable for their actions, but that they are also punished for misconduct and acts of corruption (Boateng, 2016).

The results of this study clearly indicate that students have unfavourable perceptions of and a low regard for the police. Therefore, programs that aim to bridge this gap and that will sustain positive police-student relationships should be launched by SAPS authorities as a matter of urgency. Moreover, police officers should be urged to refrain from shooting at student protestors and to adopt more professional tactics in containing and combating student demonstrations in a peaceful manner.

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