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PERCEPTION OF THE POLICE AND PEER INFLUENCE AS PREDICTORS OF TENDENCY TO REPORT CRIME AMONG A SAMPLE OF AWKA RESIDENTS

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Abstract

The study investigated perception of the police and peer influence as predictors of tendency to report crime among a sample of Awka residents. Purposive sampling method was utilized in the selection of three hundred and eighty four (384) permanent residents within the Jurisdiction of the B Division of the Nigerian Police, Awka, Anambra State. They included 218 males and 166 females whose ages ranged from 20 to 70 years, with mean age of 39.99 and standard deviation of 13.32. Three instruments: Perceptions of the Police Survey, Peer Influence Scale, and Tendency to Report Crime Questionnaire were used for data collection. Correlational design was employed as the design for the study, while Multiple Regression Statistic was adopted for analyses. The result showed that perception of the police positively and significantly predicted tendency to report crime at β=.29, t= 4.577, p<.001. However, the study also found that peer influence negatively and significantly predicted tendency to report crime at β= -.41, t= -2.900, p<.01. The interaction of perception of the police and peer influence negatively predicted tendency to report crime at β= -.32, t= -2.449, p<.05. Based on the findings, the researchers recommended among others, that there is need for public awareness on the need for citizens to fully cooperate with police officers by giving right and valid information that would help them in fighting crime.

Keywords: Perception, Police, Peer influence, Tendency, Report, Crime

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Introduction

Crime is an endemic global challenge that affects all societies in the world; and Nigeria is not exempted from the menace (CSL Research, 2024). Crime has assumed divergent dimensions, due to the upsurge of advanced technology (Kleffmann, et al., 2024; Onuoha et al., 2025). Hence, it is common to hear of internet fraud, and social media blackmail (cybercrime) (Okeke et al., 2024; Okafor et al., 2024); and other sorts of crimes which have become common in Nigeria. However, even at the face of this stark reality, and the high rate of crime in the Country, citizenry seems reluctant to report crime to security operatives; particularly, the police. Indeed, available statistics showed that there are large gaps and under-reporting of crime (Ofikhenua, 2024). According to Addeh et al. (2024), Nigerian's households recorded around 51,887,032 crime incidences across the nation between May, 2023 and April 2024. Among 4,142,174 households that were robbed in their homes, only 36.3% reported the matter to the police (Akinwunmi, 2024). Furthermore, with respect to sexual offences, only 22.7% of the victims reported the incidents to the police (Addeh et al., 2024). These data suggest that the citizenry could be lacking confidence in the law enforcement agency. Arguably, there may be other factors that could be affecting tendency of Nigerians to report crime; such as perception of the police and peer influence, which this study examined.

Crime reporting or tendency to report crime can be seen as the willingness to cooperate with the law enforcement agency by giving them relevant information on crime that were experienced; either as victims or as eye witnesses. According to Alemika (2009) crime reporting is viewed as reporting the experience/s of criminal victimization to law enforcement agencies, including non-

law enforcement agencies, depending on the perception of the cost of doing so, as well as individual's perception of personal gratification. Furthermore, Ariyibi (2024) opined that crime reporting is the act of victims or witness notifying the relevant agencies about criminal offence that has occurred, making victims' or eyewitness reports among the important sources of information for the police to know where crimes are committed and where police efforts are needed (Greenberg & Ruback, 1992; Mayhew, 1993); hence, tendency to report crime is a crucial factor in shaping data collection, and providing broader information, and understanding of how crime impacts different individuals, communities and neighborhoods (Tarling & Morris, 2010).

Notwithstanding, concern about the factors that predispose residents of a given area to a high level of criminal victimization with a disproportionate level of crime reporting, led analysts to point to a weak criminal justice system as among the factors that discourages crime reportage (Yishau, 2005; Adeyinka et al., 2024). Again, Olonishakin (2008) identified corrupt socio-economic and political institutions as among the factors that discourages crime reporting. For instance, Ologun (2010) reported that, a former Inspector General of Nigerian Police, acknowledged the fact that some policemen were working with criminals. Thus, the foregoing considerations may have shown the likely causes of the disproportional relations of crime events with crime reporting practices of victims. Persuasive as these correlates may seem, contemporary research milieu seems to neglect these correlations in the eastern part of the Country; particularly the area under study. Therefore, investigating the nexus between perception of the police, peer influence and tendency to report crime within the area in perspective becomes important in bridging the seeming identified research gaps.

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Perception of the police, could be defined as the citizens' view of police effectiveness. It is the perceived way in which police treat citizens and the fairness of the decisions that police make (Reisig & Lloyd, 2009; Sunshine & Tyler, 2003). Perception can be two fold; such as positive or negative, and positive perception towards police can lead to law-abiding behaviour that is derived from a perceived moral obligation to obey legal authorities (Tyler, 2006). This moral obligation is generated when legal authorities, such as the police exercise their power in a fair and procedurally just manner. In brief, procedurally just behaviour by officers (police) leads to enhanced perception of police legitimacy (Mazerolle et al., 2013). Hence, citizen's cooperation and compliance with the police; and is largely determined by the positive perception they have about the police. While the reverse becomes the case with negative perception (Tyler & Fagan, 2008).

Research has consistently shown that positive perception of police can lead to greater levels of cooperation and compliance with the law (Tyler, 2006; Tyler & Fagan, 2008). On the contrary, negative perception of police could lead to civil disobedience, law breaking, corruption, terrorism and all sort of social vice. Researchers have demonstrated that public perception of police in the low-middle income countries tends to be generally negative and many people perceive police to be unfair and sometimes abusive (Callanan & Rosenberger, 2011; Fratello et al., 2013; Maduka, 2014). As such, could negatively impact the perception of the citizenry on police legitimacy, as well as the approval of their peers reporting crime to the police; either as victims, or witnesses.

Peer influence could be referred to as the impact on people's behaviour by peers. According to Laurse and Veenstra (2021), peer influence involves a change in one's behaviour as a result of others that are similar in age. It is the direct or indirect alteration in behaviour, resulting from the

desire to fit into the said group norms (Onuoha, 2025). For an individual, peer influence can have either positive or negative effect (Onuoha et al., 2025). By distinction, this concept has been differentiated from peer pressure, with the latter (peer pressure) referring only to direct forms of persuasion, encouragement or coercion to manifest certain behaviours, whereas the former (peer influence) referring to indirect forms (Urberg et al., 2003). Savin-Williams and Berndt (1990) suggested that peer influence includes different aspects of peer relationships, and thus no single definition can capture all the complexity of peer influence.

Peer exert influences in multiple ways, and could manifest with either positive or negative behaviour (Onuoha et al., 2025). From a criminological perceptive however, there is an association between peer influences and criminal behaviour (Weerman, 2011). For example, peer delinquency increases an individual's risk of victimization (Ousey et al., 2008). Undeniably, peer association have great influence on the lifestyle of their members. As proposed by Nsofor (2013), peer group association is an agent of socialization, and determines to a large extent, what social codes an individual learns as they share common norms and values that impacts their behaviour. Thus, peer group can determine individual's behaviour towards crime, and crime reportage (Rokven et al., 2017).

Theoretical Framework/Empirical Review

Theoretically, this study was anchored on Rational Choice Theory of Bowles et al. (2009), and Social Learning Theory of Akers (1973). Rational Choice Theory views man as a reasoning actor that weighs means and ends, cost and benefits to make rational choice. The theory emphasizes that people have preferences for outcomes with benefits that are more than their cost. These potential

benefits and cost include monetary, emotional, social, opportunity, and external. However, the potential benefits are assessed, and such assessments are influenced by the information collected. Thus, how people perceive the police as friendly, or hostile, transparent or corrupt influences their acceptance of police as legitimate, as well as their willingness to encourage their friends and family members to report crime/s or give relevant information to the police; including eye witness accounts. Social Learning Theory on its own part hold that we learn from observation and imitation of others. This explain how people's view of police legitimacy can be influenced by those of their peers. Inferring from this theory, people's view of the police can be positively or negatively influenced by the persuasion of their peer, and their choice of reporting a crime either as a victim or eye witness could be learned and unlearned through social interaction.

Empirically, some scholars have attempted to explore the association between these study variables (perception of the police and peers influence) and crime reportage. For instance, Nwachukwu et al. (2024) examined the perception of the Nigerian's public on police force effective crime control and management, and found that the perception of the public on the police is on the negative side which also negatively influence their confidence and trust of the police. Boating (2016) had examined the relationship between attitudes toward the police and crime reporting behaviour of victims, and found that victims that are happy with police performance are more likely to report crime than those that are not satisfied with the police. Ayodele (2015) investigated the impact of crime involving market women on crime reporting practices in Oyo town, Oyo State, Nigeria, and found that the market women prefer to report crime either as victims or witnesses to the traditional ruler than the police due to lack of confidence in the police.

Hypotheses

1. Perception of the police would positively predict tendency to report crime among a sample of Awka Residents.
2. Peer influence would positively predict tendency to report crime among a sample of Awka Residents.
3. Perception of the police and peers influence would jointly predict tendency to report crime among a sample of Awka Residents.

Method

Participants

The participants for this study were three hundred and eighty four (384) residents within Nigeria Police Force Division B jurisdiction, Awka, Anambra state. They included 218 (56.8%) males and 166 (43.2%) females, whose ages ranged from 20 to 70 years, with the mean age of 39.99, and standard deviation of 13.32. They were selected using purposive sampling technique. The inclusion criteria were: (1) being a resident within the Nigeria Police Force Division B, Awka in the past 6 months (2) being able to read and understand English Language, and (3) having not had any criminal case or issue with the law (4) accepting to participate in this study by signing a consent form.

Instruments

Three sets of instruments were utilized in this study namely; Perceptions of Police Survey, Peer

Influence Scale and Tendency to Report Crime Questionnaire.

Perceptions of Police Survey (POPS)

Perception of Police Survey developed by Nadal and Davidoff (2015) is a 12-item instrument that measures an individual's perceptions of police. It is measured on a 5-point likert type response format such as I = strongly agree and 5= strongly disagree. Sample items include: "Police officers protect me", "Police officers are friendly", and "Police do not discriminate." All the items on the scale are positively worded. Higher scores indicate more favorable perceptions of the police, while lower scores indicate less favorable perceptions of the police. Nadal and Davidoff (2015) reported a Cronbach's alpha of .92 for the scale. From a pilot test in the course of this study that involved hundred (100) students from the Department of psychology of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, a Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient of .78 was obtained for perception of the police survey.

Peer Influence Scale

Peer Influence scale developed by Rigby and Slee (1993) is a 10 items statement that measure the extent to which one is influenced by his/her peers. These statements are measured on a 5-point likert-type response format ranging from 1= SD (Strongly Disagree) to 5 = SA (Strongly Agree). Sample items include: Pressure to follow the rules. Rigby and Slee (1993) reported internal consistency that ranged between 0.38 and 0.76. With an overall coefficient of 0.88. The authors also reported the Guttman Split half coefficient of 0.78, equal length Spearman Brown of 0.73, and unequal length of 0.71. More so, the scale have been used in Nigeria, and Onuoha et al. (2025) reported a reliability coefficient of .83 for PIS, among undergraduates of Nnamdi Azikiwe

University Awka. Furthermore, from the pilot test conducted in this study involving one hundred (100) participants from Psychology department of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, the scale showed a high reliability coefficient of .84.

Tendency to Report Crime Questionnaire (TRCQ)

Tendency to Report Crime Questionnaire was developed for this study. It is a 7-item questionnaire that elicits people's voluntary decision to assist criminal justice officials (Police) through relevant information about a crime. It is scored on a five-point likert format, and measured as 5 (very likely), 4 (likely), 3 (not sure), 2 (somewhat likely), and1 (unlikely), with a higher score indicating greater tendency to report crime. Sample items include: "Willingly assist police if asked?" The questionnaire was initially 9-items that were generated, and were subjected to both face and content validity through peer review, and 7-items came out as suitable and clear. It was subjected to pilot test, involving hundred (100) students from the Department of Psychology of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. In the pilot test, TRCQ was correlated with Crime and Violence Scale, and a convergent validity of .69 was obtained. TRCQ was also correlated with Beck's Depression Inventory, and a divergent validity of .23 was obtained. Furthermore, a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of .87 was as well obtained from the pilot test.

Procedure

Instruments for assessment were collapsed into one questionnaire with four sections to which participants responded to. At each of the residence, the researchers established adequate rapport with each of the participants, and through a brief discussion on the reason for the study, the

participants' informed consent were obtained. After this, copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the participants.

With the help of two research assistants 390 copies of the questionnaires were administered to the selected participants. Afterwards, the administered copies of the questionnaire were collected, screened, and 384 properly filled copies were coded in SPSS, and were used for data analysis.

Design and Statistics

This study utilized a correlational design and multiple regression statistic was adopted as appropriate to analyze the data and to test the three hypotheses, using SPSS version 25

Results

Table: 1 Summary table of multiple regression analysis for perception of the police and peer influence on tendency to report crime

Model	R^2	Adjusted R^2	df1	df2	F	B	SE	T	Sig
Model 1	.69	.68	3	376	272.17				
PP						29	48	4.577	000
PI						-.41	68	-2.900	004
PP*PI						-.32	03	-2.449	015

Note, *PP=perception of the police, PI=peer influence, PP*PI= perception of the police interacting with peer influence*

The result from Table 1 above showed that perception of the police positively and significantly predicted tendency to report crime. Hence, the first hypothesis that started that perception of the police would positively predict tendency to report crime among a sample of Awka residents was

accepted at (β=.29, t= 4.577, p<.001). It was also found from Table 1 that peer influence negatively predicted tendency to report crime. Thus, the second hypothesis which stated that peer influence would positively predict tendency to report crime among a sample of Awka residents was rejected. Though, the prediction was significant; however, a negative significant was found at (β= -.41, t= -2.900, p<.01). Furthermore, it was found that there was a significant but negative interaction between perception of the police and peer influence on tendency to report crime. Hence, the third hypothesis which stated that peer influence and perception of the police would jointly predict tendency to report crime among a sample of Awka residents was accepted at (β= -.32, t= -2.449, p<.05).

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the predictive relationship between perception of the police and peer influence on tendency to report crime among a section of Awka Residents. Findings of the study showed that perception of the police positively and significantly predicted tendency to report crime. This implies that the more people have positive view and attitude toward the police, the more the likelihood that they would voluntarily decide to assist criminal justice officials through relevant information about a crime. On the contrary, the more they hold negative view of the police, the less the likelihood that they would voluntarily divulge relevant information about crime to the police.

This finding validates the theoretical assumption regarding people's perception and how they influence their decision in situations, especially their communication with the police in matters relating to crime and reporting of same. For instances, the theory of procedural justice by Tyler

(1990), which assumes that if citizens are treated in procedurally just ways, they would perceive that they have been fairly treated. Such perceptions, in turn, increase the citizens' perception of the legitimacy of police agents, which in turn increases compliance with the law. This assumption legitimacy was duly justified by this finding. It makes sense therefore to opine that a sample of Awka residents would actually assists the police with vital information about a crime, if they appraise police performance as legitimate or a thing that validates its mandate. The reverse however, maybe the case if such appraisal defines the police performance as illegitimate/unfair or that lacking in confidence and satisfaction with the police performance of their core/primary duties, which are to protect the lives and properties of the citizenry, to maintain law and order and to prevent crime occurrence.

Empirically, this finding is in line with the studies of Ayodele (2015), and Boating (2016) that found that peoples' satisfaction and confidence in police work had significant influence on their decisions to disclose incidents of crime to the police. Thus, victims who expressed being satisfied and confidence in police work are more likely to report crime to the police compared with those that are not satisfied with police work. On the contrary, the result disagrees with the study of Ayodele and Aderinto (2014) that found that public confidence in the police is not significantly related to crime reporting. However, this observed difference between the present study and that of Ayodele and Aderinto (2014) could be as a result of cultural variations between the study participants, and the differences in the research designs adopted in the studies. This present study adopted a quantitative study, involving urban participants; while Ayodele and Aderinto (2014) adopted a mix-method; and their participants were dwellers of both urban and rural area of Lagos State.

The finding from the second hypothesis showed that peer influence negatively but significantly predicted tendency to report crime. This finding indicated that as negative peer influence increases, tendency to report crime decreases. It also implies that the more an individual is swayed by behavior, attitude, values or belief of persons of approximately the same age, statues, and interests, the more the probability that they would conform to same (that is, behavior, attitude, values or belief) across situations, including the voluntary decision to assist criminal justice officials through divulging of relevant information about a crime. This further suggest that if one's peer (who exert influence on his/her behaviors/values) sees crime reportage as unnecessary risk that is not worth taking, such could affect their behavior in the instance of voluntary revealing of information about a crime to the police officials.

This finding validates the theoretical assumption of social learning theory by Akers (1973), whose core concept relies on the influences of peers and significant others on an individual's behavior. According to this theory, new behavior can be acquired by observing and imitating others. By implication, individual that associate with friends and relative that sees criminal justice as unjust or have had a negative experience from their interaction with the police will learn to avoid any form of interaction with the police; even crime reportage. On the contrary, those who associates with friends and relative that sees police as friendly and legitimate will as well learn from such association that police are friendly; as such, could increase their tendency to report a crime they experienced either as victims or eyewitness to the police.

Empirically, the study is in line with the finding of Rokven et al. (2017) that investigated how friends' involvement in crime influences such involvement in those around them, as offenders or

victims, and extent to which such friendship effect vary with contact frequency, friendship intimacy, and geographical proximity, and found that living close to delinquent friends increases people's own risk of offending, and daily interaction with these friends' decreases the risk of victimization. Furthermore, Kim and Fletcher (2018), examined the effect of delinquent peers on an individual's criminal activity by leveraging quasi-experimental variation in exposure to peers, separating confounding and causal effects. They observed that an increase in peers that engage in criminality, the higher the chances of involving in crime. Furthermore, Onuoha et al. (2025), and Onuoha (2025) in their studies found an association between peer influence and callous-unemotional traits. In as much as the empirical studies discussed above are not on the studied hypothesis which is peer influence and tendency to report crime. However, the discussed empirical finding was able to establish the fact that peer influence impact peoples' behaviour which could be either positively or negatively; depending on the group norm. As such, aliens with the finding of this current study which observed that negative peer influence negatively impacts tendency to report crime.

From the third hypothesis, it was found that perception of the police and peer influence negatively predicted tendency to report crime among the participants. This finding indicated that peer influence is a strong factor that determines tendency to report crime among these population since it was found from the first hypothesis that perception of the police positively predicted their tendency to report crime. However, when peer influence was introduced in the third hypothesis, its interaction altered the outcome of perception of the police on tendency to report crime, leading to a negative though significant prediction. This means that even though one's perception of the

police could be positive, and would result to the likelihood of providing helpful information to police officer on crime fighting, peer influence however is a strong factor that could alter the individual's willingness on divulging such relevance information to police personals. By implication, being swayed by behavior, attitude, values or belief of person of approximately the same age, and interests is a crucial factors in determining whether or not people's view and attitude toward the police will tilt towards a positive or negative direction; and this finding could be influence by the desire for belongingness, and peer approval.

This again authenticates the theoretical assumption of social learning theory by Akers (1973), which states that people develop motivation for certain behavior through the people whom they associate with. In simply terms, people learn new behavior, values, and attitude by direct experience and observing other people's behavior through positive or negative stimuli. By this theory, however, individuals are explained as being completely malleable and would believe what they were told by their significant others, such as their peer, and act accordingly. Overall, the finding corroborate with Rational Choice Theory that essentially views man as a reasoning actor, that weighs means and ends, cost and benefits to make a rational choice. It emphasizes that people have preference for outcomes, which are influenced by the expected benefits of an outcome, relative to its cost.

More so, this potential benefits are assessed and such assessments are influenced by the information collected (Brunisma & Weisburd, 2014). By this explanation, the findings of the present study suitably justify the Rational Choice Theory and Social Learning Theory by demonstrating that behavioral choices such as the choice to report crime to the appreciate

body/criminal justice system official (such as the police) are based on intent/premeditation, the appraisal of possible benefits, which outweigh the risk, and by extrapolation, depends largely on several factors, such as the perceived image of the police, as well as the influence of peers**.**

Implication of the study

The study examined the perception of the police and peer influence as predictors of tendency to report crime among residents within the jurisdiction of Nigeria police Force (NPF) Division B awake. Theoretically, the study has provided documented literature in the area of crime reporting. With this research, future researchers, who seek to carry out their investigation on crime reporting can access this documentation for reference purposes.

Empirically, the study has shown critical nexus that exist between psycho-social factors and crime reporting. In this instance, the cognitive factor of perception of the police, and social factor of peer influence on the likelihood of crime reportage. Hence, offering insight into the strategies that can be adopt to enhance people's willingness to report crime to the police.

Policy wise, stakeholders of the police force, and the government should make, and enforce policies that will paint a positive picture of the police, by ensuring that police officers strictly perform their duties as stipulated in their rules of engagement. Education stakeholders should as well improve curriculum to make room for positive character education so that peers at the youth stage could impact more positively on crime reporting

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the researchers recommended that:

1. Nigerian Police Force should improve policies on public relations, and terms of engagement by police officers.

2. There is need for police periodical training on adequate, and ethical mode of engagement, as well as how it impacts the citizen's willingness and cooperation in crime fighting.
3. Furthermore, there is need for public awareness on the need for citizens to fully cooperate with police officers by giving right and valid information that would help them in fighting crime.

Conclusion

The study examined the predictive role of perception of the police and peer influence on tendency to report crime among a sample of Awka residents. From the findings of the study, the researchers conveyed the fact that how the citizens see the police either as friendly and professional or as corrupt and hostile influences their willingness to report crime that they experienced to the police. Also, peer influence as an important factor in this study was observed to influence tendency to report crime. For instance, when a person that had a bad experience with the police narrates the embarrassing experience he had with the Nigerian police for reporting a crime as a witness, his friends and relatives will learn not to report their encounter to the police; hence limiting the chances for good policing. Based on these findings, it is important that police should be professional while performing their duties and also paint a good picture of themselves which if consistent over time could positively influence how others sees them; as such, could improve the citizens' tendency to report crime.

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