



**BSc in Psychology**  
**Department of Psychology**

Perceptions of the Police and Perceived Police  
Legitimacy Within a Sample of Young Adults  
in Iceland

**June, 2022**

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## **Foreword**

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the BSc Psychology degree, Reykjavik University, this thesis is presented in the style of an article for submission to a peer-reviewed journal.

This thesis was completed in the Spring of 2022 and may therefore have been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The thesis and its findings should be viewed in light of that.

### Abstract

Public support toward the police and cooperation is a crucial component for the police to be successful in maintaining law and order in a society. Furthermore, the police depend on the public to obey the law, report crimes, provide information and help identify offenders. Therefore, it is important to ensure positive views of the police and voluntary compliance among the public. This study examined trust and perceptions toward the police within a sample of young adults, aged 18-25, in Iceland. Previous research strongly indicates that youths and young adults have less favorable views of the police than older individuals and that crime reporting has a positive correlation with victims' trust and satisfaction with the police. Results did not show significant correlations between either age or gender and perceptions of the police. Additionally, perceptions of the police were not found to be affected by whether young adults reported offences to the police. However, participants' perceived accessibility to the police, previous experiences of violent offences and perceived views of others toward the police had a positive significant correlation with participants' perceptions of the police. Perceptions of the police were more positive among those who had not experienced a violent offence.

*Key words:* young adults, police, perceptions, trust, police legitimacy

### Útdráttur

Stuðningur og samstarfsvilji almennings eru mikilvægir þættir svo að lögregla geti sinnt því hlutverki sínu að halda uppi lögum og reglu í samfélaginu. Lögreglan stólar á almenning til þess að fylgja lögum, tilkynna afbrot, veita upplýsingar og aðstoða við að bera kennsl á afbrotamenn. Af þessum ástæðum er mikilvægt að tryggja að almenningur hafi jákvæð viðhorf til lögreglu og vilji fylgja fyrirmælum hennar. Þessi rannsókn skoðaði traust og viðhorf gagnvart lögreglu í úrtaki af ungu fólki á aldursbilinu 18-25 ára á Íslandi. Niðurstöður fyrri rannsókna hafa sýnt fram á að ungt fólk hefur neikvæðari viðhorf til lögreglu heldur en fólk sem er komið lengra inn á fullorðinsaldur og að það að tilkynna brot hefur jákvæða fylgni við traust og ánægju gagnvart lögreglu á meðal þeirra sem hafa orðið fyrir afbrotum. Niðurstöður þessarar rannsóknar sýndu hvorki fram á marktæk tengsl viðhorfa til lögreglu við aldur né við kyn. Af þeim sem höfðu orðið fyrir afbroti, virtist ekki vera munur á viðhorfum þeirra sem tilkynntu afbrotið og þeirra sem tilkynntu það ekki. Jákvæð marktæk tengsl voru þó að finna á milli viðhorfa til lögreglu og þess hvort að lögreglan þótti aðgengileg, að hafa orðið fyrir ofbeldisbroti og þess hvernig þátttakendur töldu viðhorf annarra í kringum þá vera gagnvart lögreglu. Þeir þátttakendur sem höfðu orðið fyrir ofbeldisbroti höfðu neikvæðari viðhorf til lögreglu.

*Lykilorð:* ungt fólk, lögregla, viðhorf, traust, lögmæti

## **Perceptions of the Police and Perceived Police Legitimacy Within a Sample of Young Adults in Iceland**

Positive perceptions of the police largely influence the public's readiness to comply and cooperate with the police (Boateng, 2018). Furthermore, public support and cooperation is crucial for the police to be successful in maintaining law and order in a society (Tyler, 2004). In addition, support and cooperation among the public is associated with perceptions of police legitimacy. Thus, when people are willing to cooperate, it is most likely because they view the police as legitimate lawful authorities, who should be obeyed. A major predictive factor of how the public perceives police legitimacy is the public's assessment of how the police practice their authority. Moreover, while being a public service institution, the police depend on the public to obey the law, report crimes, provide information and help identify offenders. Therefore, it is important to ensure positive views of the police and voluntary compliance among the public for people to be willing to seek justice for crimes committed at their expense. These findings emphasize the significance of strengthening public views of police legitimacy (Tyler, 2004).

Police legitimacy is a term used to define the trust and confidence held by the public toward the police, as well as their acceptance of police authority and their beliefs of police officers being fair (Gilbert et al., n.d.). Moreover, police legitimacy has been explained as the public's experienced obligation to obey the police (Worden and McLean, 2017). Therefore, police legitimacy is the most significant component regarding motivation among people to cooperate and refrain from breaking the law (Myhill and Quinton, 2011). Furthermore, Myhill and Quinton have found that shared values and trust are crucial for legitimacy.

In this context, trust involves the public's evaluation of the police being effective in fulfilling its duties, treating people with fairness, and providing them with information, along with acknowledging the community's needs and listening to people's concerns (Jackson and

Bradford, 2010). According to Jackson and Bradford (2010), trust can promote participation of the public in priority setting, make people more responsible and receptive, as well as motivate the public to comply with the law and cooperate with the police.

Despite the importance of the public's perceptions of the police, there haven't been many studies conducted on the views of adolescents and young adults toward the police (Fine et al., 2021). However, over the last couple of years, more emphasis has been set on examining younger age groups, as they may frequently come into contact with the police or get arrested (Hurst and Frank, 2000). Young adults are among those who are most frequently involved in crimes and for that reason it is critical that the police have their trust and cooperation for the purpose of gathering valuable information to solve crime cases (Richardson and Budd, 2006; Mbuba, 2010). Trust in the police is also important to promote people's willingness to seek justice and report crimes to the police (Boateng, 2018).

Findings from previous studies show that young people have less favorable views toward the police than adults and that those adolescents who have more positive attitudes toward the police are more inclined to assist the police (Hurst and Frank, 2000; Hinds, 2009; Lyons, 2015). Young people's perceptions of the police are especially susceptible to change and can be influenced by experiences, either directly or indirectly through those of others (Sindall et al., 2016). For instance, parents can play a role in shaping their children's attitudes and when merging into adolescence, they may encounter the police more frequently, as they are more likely to be stopped and searched by the police (Sindall et al., 2016; McAra and McVie, 2005; Sharp and Atherton, 2007).

A study conducted by Boateng in 2018 examined the association between perceptions toward the police and crime reporting behavior among victims, as well as exploring how victims' characteristics impact their decisions of reporting crimes to the police. Boateng's results showed that victims' decisions to report robbery and sexual abuse to the police were

positively affected by the level of confidence that they had in the police and satisfaction with the police's work strategies. Additionally, he found that age is among the major predictors of whether victims choose to report crimes (Boateng, 2018).

Leslie et al. (2018) have suggested that both age and social maturity impact how people perceive the police's actions and behavior. Results from their study on young adult recreational drug users showed that participants' perceptions of the police and its work had become more positive as they grew older.

Similarly, Fine et al. (2021). found that police legitimacy perceptions followed a U-shaped curve that showed a decline throughout adolescence, whereas the most negative perception was at the age 18, and then became more positive during the transition into young adulthood. Fine and colleagues concluded that perceptions of police bias were consistently and negatively related to the perceptions of police legitimacy among youth and young adults. Similar findings emerged from a study by Hurst and Frank (2000), who concluded that attitudes among youths grew more positive over time, because adults have more positive attitudes toward the police in general.

Another study by Williams and Nofziger from 2012 found that college students have lower trust in the police and are twice as likely to express feeling unsafe compared to the general population. This reduced trust and confidence in the police applied to those who had been in police contact and those who had not. Findings from the study suggested that subgroup identity can affect trust and feelings of safety, even in small and rather similar communities. Furthermore, women were found to experience more confidence in the police, but they also expressed feeling less safe. However, opposite results were found for men. Despite their emphasis on the group of college students, that mainly consists of young adults, Williams and Nofziger's results suggested that being in college reduces trust, rather than age. In addition, results showed that college students held significantly more negative beliefs of

the police than other young adults and the general public. Researchers estimated that some explanations behind that might be that college students are mostly located around campus, and they tend to gather in groups to enjoy the nightlife, whereas alcohol consumption may cause disturbances and bring about more police surveillance around campus (Williams and Nofziger, 2012).

In a study by Margrét Valdimarsdóttir (2021), a random sample from the Icelandic population showed that compared to older individuals, 18–25-year-olds had lower trust in the police and its work. Approximately 59 percent of the participants in the age group 18-25 reported having trust in the police, which was lower than in any other age group over 25 years. Results showed that trust in the police increased with age and when it came to perceived police legitimacy, 18–25-year-olds also had the lowest percentage compared to older individuals.

Accessible research strongly indicates that youths and young adults have less favorable views of the police than older individuals. Factors that can influence young people's views include that they frequently come into contact with the police and are more often stopped and searched than adults. Negative previous experiences with the police, either directly or indirectly through others, can also impact attitudes toward the police. These findings indicate that there is much room for improvement in how the police are viewed by the younger generation and authorities should put more emphasis on establishing better relationships between young adults and the police. Whilst previous studies have gathered some knowledge over the years on the views and perceptions of the police among younger generations, there is a lack of research in the literature when it comes to examining whether people are willing to seek justice for crimes committed at their expense.

Therefore, the goal of this study is to examine whether there are significant correlations between factors involving police perceptions, such as trust in the police and

police accessibility, and whether young adults are willing to report crimes to the police.

Considering previous research, this study will aim to answer the following research questions: Are young adults who have more positive perceptions of the police (i.e., those who have more trust toward the police and agree with the police being legitimate and honorable) more likely to report crimes to the police? Do young adults who have more positive perceptions of the police assume that others around them also have positive perceptions of the police?

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Participants in the study were young adults in Iceland, ranging from 18 to 25 years old, who could access the study on social media or were introduced to the study by their teacher. The only inclusion criterion was that participants belonged to the age group 18-25 years old and that they could understand Icelandic. A total of 437 participants answered the questionnaire, including 120 (27.6%) males and 310 (71.3%) females. Five participants chose the option "Other" and two did not answer the question about gender. The response rate in this study was approximately 1.1% according to population numbers from Statistics Iceland for this age group in the year of 2020. According to Statistics Iceland, the gender distribution for this age group was rather equal in 2020, whereas males were 20.470 and females were 19.467 at the time. Therefore, gender distribution for this age group in Iceland does not count for the unequal gender distribution in this study. Participants varied within the span of eight years ( $M = 20.86$  and  $SD = 1.93$ ). The study used a combination of a convenience sample, a snowball sample, and a self-selected sample, considering that the questionnaire was shared with certain classes in three schools and was distributed on social media. Additionally, people were asked to share the study further along, for it to be accessible to more people, and participants could easily choose whether to participate in the study or not. Therefore,

participants were likely very similar and the sample might not have reflected on the entire young adult population in Iceland. Participation in the study was totally optional and no payment or reward was provided to participants for taking part in the study.

### **Measures**

This study was conducted using an online questionnaire, which consisted of nineteen questions and contained only closed questions on both a nominal scale and a Likert-scale, which is a type of ordinal scale. Three background questions were asked at the beginning of the questionnaire. First, participants were required to answer a question about their age for the researcher to capture the target group, which included people 18 to 25 years of age. Therefore, those who answered the question “What is your age?” by checking the option “Younger than 18 years old” or “Older than 25 years old” went directly to the thank you page of the questionnaire. Only those who chose one of the eight response options from “18 years old” to “25 years old” were able to continue answering the questionnaire. Second, participants were asked to answer the question “What is your gender?”, with the given options “Male”, “Female” and “Other”. Males were coded as 0 and females were coded as 1. Third, participants were asked to answer which of the following options applied to them, whether they were in high school, university, had a job, were unemployed or whether they were on leave from work.

The questions used in the questionnaire for this study were based on questions from previous studies carried out by the Icelandic police. Questions that were applicable for this questionnaire were gathered from a few different opinion polls as referred to in reports found on the official website for the Icelandic police. For instance, participants were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the following statements: “I have trust in the police and its work”, “I have trust in other public institutions (e.g., the parliament, the health care system, the national church, etc.)”, “The police are a legitimate authority that should be obeyed” and

“The police in my district are generally honorable”. The response options provided for the previous statements were on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neither agree nor disagree, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree).

Furthermore, the questionnaire included questions about how accessible the participants found the police to be (1 = Very inaccessible, 2 = Rather inaccessible, 3 = Rather accessible, 4 = Very accessible), whether participants had ever needed to seek police assistance (1 = Yes, 2 = No), and how pleased they were with the assistance they received (1 = Very displeased, 2 = Rather displeased, 3 = Rather pleased, 4 = Very pleased). Participants were also asked if they had ever been exposed to a violent offence or a financial offence of some sort (1 = Yes, 2 = No), with a few examples provided with the question (see Appendix). Then, they were asked if the violent or financial offences had been reported to the police (1 = Yes, 2 = No) and if not, why they were not reported. Lastly, there were three questions in the questionnaire regarding how participants perceived the views of others in their environment to be toward the police and whether media coverage about the police, both in Iceland and abroad, had impacted participants’ views of the police in a positive or negative way. The final three questions were all coded on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Very negative, 2 = Rather negative, 3 = Neither positive nor negative, 4 = Rather positive, 5 = Very positive).

### **Research Design**

This study was a quantitative cross-sectional study, as data were collected through a questionnaire. Therefore, a causal relationship could not be determined, whereas external factors could not be ruled out. Thus, this study examined possible relationships between multiple variables. The independent variables in this study were age, gender, perceived police accessibility, experience with police assistance, experienced violent offences and financial offences, reporting offences, perceived views of others toward the police and impact of media coverage in Iceland and in other countries. The dependent variable consisted of three

variables, trust in the police, perceived police legitimacy and police honorability, combined into one variable, which measured participants' perceptions of the police. The computed variable took the values 4 to 15, whereas 4 was the lowest agreeableness and 15 was the most agreeableness.

### **Procedure**

An online questionnaire was distributed to participants through the social media platforms Facebook and Instagram, and via email to four teachers in three different schools. A description of the study was emailed to teachers, along with a request for permission to distribute the questionnaire to their students. After the teachers had given their consent, a website link was provided for the students to answer the questionnaire on their own electronic devices. The link to the questionnaire was also shared on the researcher's Instagram stories, Facebook profile and in two Facebook groups, to gather more participants. Relatives and close friends of the researcher were also asked to spread the word and share the website link to the questionnaire with others around them. Before answering the questionnaire, participants were required to read a description of the study and check a box agreeing to the terms and conditions of the study. The description clearly stated that all answers were anonymous and could not be traced back to participants. Additionally, participants were aware that they could withdraw from taking part in the study at any given time. After giving their informed consent, participants were able to move on to the first question. After the participants had answered the final question in the questionnaire, they were brought to a page where they were thanked for their participation.

### **Data analysis**

The program SPSS was used to process the data. Multiple regression analysis was used to analyze the relationship between the multiple independent variables and the dependent variable. The predictor variables were placed in the regression model with the

hierarchical method to determine whether they had a significant correlation with the dependent variable, perceptions of the police.

Missing values for all of the variables were not specifically defined and they indicate both those who did not receive the question and those who chose not to answer. To ensure that the sample size was adequate to meet the criterion for one of the assumptions of regression analysis, only questions that all participants were able to answer could be utilized as predictor variables in the same regression model. Therefore, three separate regression analyses were performed with questions examining whether those participants who had experienced a violence offence on one hand and financial loss on the other hand, had reported the incident to the police. The third model, examined both of the previous variables as one computed variable, whether a participant had reported a crime. That variable, which took two values (0 = did not report and 1 = reported), measured whether those who had experienced offences, either violent, financial or both, had reported the offence to the police. The computed variable did not consider those who had experienced both types of offences and had only reported one of the two.

The first four assumptions for multiple regression were met. The sample size was sufficient. Independent variables were recoded into variables on two-point nominal scales and a few variables were computed into one dependent variable for more distribution. Each individual took part in the study only once and participants answered the questionnaire independently. After performing the multiple regression analysis, the independent variables that were not significant were removed from the model and another regression analysis was performed with only independent variables that had a significant correlation with the dependent variable. This was performed to ensure that only significant independent variables were part of the regression model.

The fifth assumption for linearity was broken. The assumption for multicollinearity was met, as none of the independent variables had a lower tolerance value than 0.2. The same applied to the assumptions of homoscedasticity and normality. Both assumptions were met for the most part, as the error distribution was rather even and the residuals were mostly normally distributed.

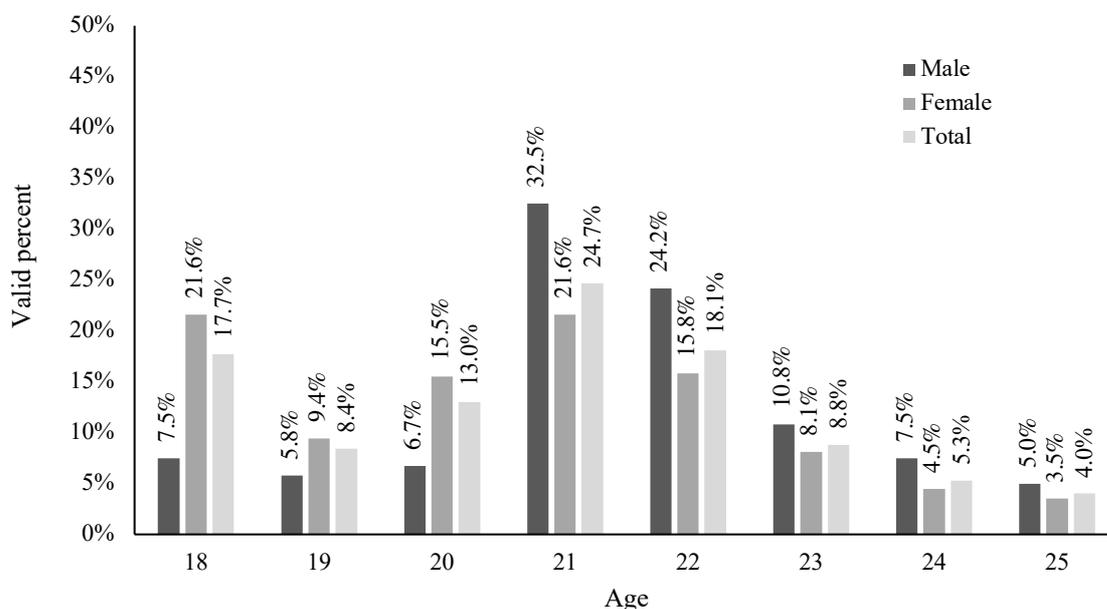
## Results

### Descriptive statistics

This study consisted of 437 participants in total, however, only 363 participants completed the questionnaire. The most frequent value for age was 21, whereas the average age of participants was 20.86 ( $SD = 1.93$ ). Out of the 437 valid participants, 435 answered the question about gender. Figure 1 shows the distribution for both males and females, along with the total percentage of participants, for each year of age. A total of 292 participants were students, of which 106 were in high school and 186 were studying at a university, 212 participants had a job, 24 were unemployed and 4 participants were on leave from work.

**Figure 1**

*Proportion of participants in each age group by gender*

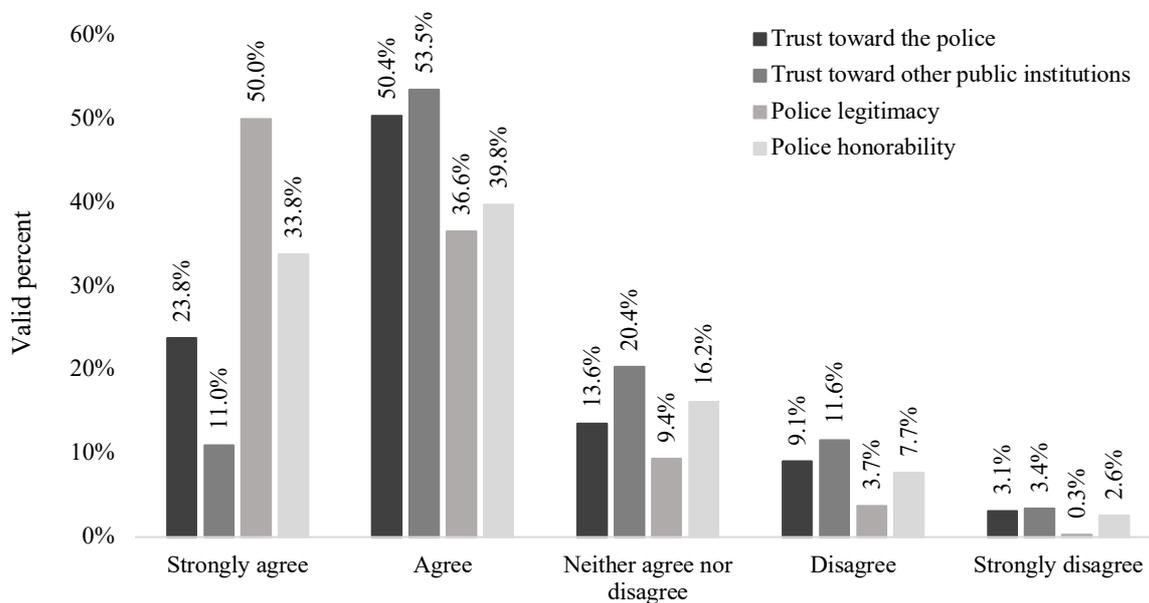


### *Trust and legitimacy*

Trust in the police and its work, perceived legitimacy among participants toward the police and whether instructions from the police should be followed, were combined into one continuous variable, along with opinions regarding whether participants found the police to be honorable. The mean for that variable, perceptions of the police, was 12.09 ( $SD = 2.43$ ), which indicated rather positive views among participants toward the police. One participant scored only 4 points on the scale, while 60 participants scored 15 points on the scale. Figure 2 shows the response distribution for each of the three variables individually, including the variable trust in other public institutions.

**Figure 2**

*Distribution in trust toward the police, trust toward other public institutions, police legitimacy and police honorability*



### *Police accessibility and satisfaction with police assistance*

When asked whether they had sought police assistance in the past, 53.1% of the participants answered that they had, 42.5% had not and 4.5% did not remember whether they

had sought police assistance. Table 1 shows participants' perceived accessibility to the police and their satisfaction with police assistance in the past.

**Table 1**

*Response distribution for the variables police accessibility and satisfaction with police assistance*

	<i>N</i>	Very accessible	Rather accessible	Rather inaccessible	Very inaccessible
Police accessibility	352	30.7%	52.6%	15.2%	0.9%
	<i>N</i>	Very pleased	Rather pleased	Rather displeased	Very displeased
Satisfaction with police assistance	187	23.9%	42.8%	25.6%	7.8%

### *Experience with offences and crime reporting*

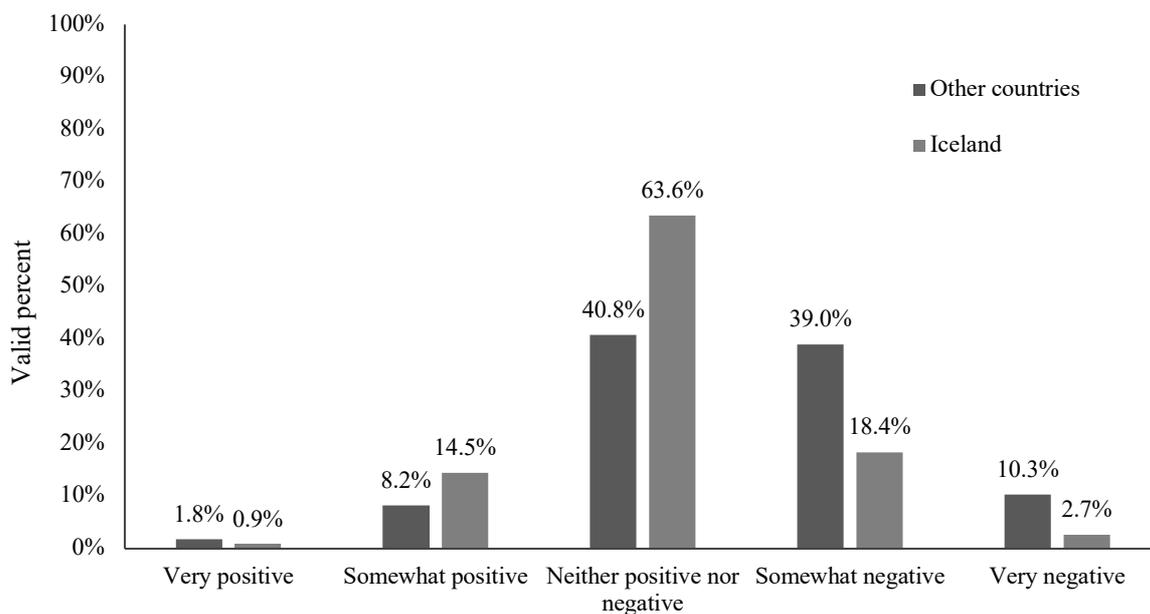
Out of the 344 who answered the question about having experienced a violent offence, 33.4% of participants answered that they had, 60.8% had not and 5.8% of participants were unsure. Out of those who had experienced a violent offence, only 30.4% reported the offence to the police. According to participants' responses, the two main reasons for why the violent offence was not reported were because the victims did not think that the offence was severe or serious enough (28.7%) and because they did not think the police would want to do anything about the matter (26.3%). Fewer participants had experienced a financial loss from an offence committed by others (28.6%). Out of the participants who had experienced a financial offence, 76.3% reported the incident to the police. Furthermore, out of those who did not report the incident, 36.4% did not think that the financial loss was serious enough and 22.7% solved the case on their own, or knew who the offender was.

### *Perceptions of the police*

When asked about police perceptions among other people around them, 9.6% of participants thought that other people close to them had very positive perceptions of the police, 46.1% thought that others perceptions were rather positive, 19.7% thought that they were neither positive nor negative, 14.5% thought they were rather negative and 1.5% thought other people's perceptions of the police to be very negative. Lastly, Figure 3 shows whether participants felt that media coverage of the police in other countries and in Iceland had impacted their perceptions of the police in a positive or negative way.

**Figure 3**

*Distribution for the impact of media coverage of the police, both in Iceland and in other countries, on perceptions toward the police*



### **Inferential statistics**

Results from the first regression model showed that a significant correlation could not be found between the dependent variable, perceptions of the police, and the predictor variable, reported violent offence ( $p > 0.05$ ). Similar results were found for the predictor variable, reported financial offence, whereas the second regression model did not show a

significant correlation with the dependent variable ( $p > 0.05$ ). The third regression model, likewise, did not show a significant correlation between the combined variable, reported offence, and the dependent variable, perceptions of the police ( $p > 0.05$ ). Table 2 outlines the unstandardized coefficients (B), standardized coefficients (Beta) and the significance probability ( $p$ ) for the first three regression models.

**Table 2**

*Coefficients, significance and collinearity for the three individual predictor variables, reported violent offence, reported financial offence and reported offence*

Regression model	Unstandardized coefficients B	Standardized coefficients Beta	$P$	Tolerance
1	-0.957	-0.162	0.085	1.000
2	-0.257	-0.040	0.695	1.000
3	-0.384	-0.071	0.350	1.000

Nine variables were placed in the fourth regression analysis model in four steps. The first step included gender and age, where no significant correlation was found with the dependent variable. The variables regarding accessibility to the police and whether participants had sought police assistance were added in the second step, where a significant correlation was found between police accessibility and perceptions of the police ( $p < 0.001$ ). Experience of violent offences and experience of financial loss because of offences committed by others were added in the third step, which showed a significant correlation between the variables experience of violent offences and perceptions of the police ( $p < 0.05$ ). Lastly, the variables regarding participants' perceived views of others toward the police and whether participants thought that their own perceptions of the police had been impacted positively or negatively by media coverage of the police in Iceland and in other countries, were added to the regression analysis, which showed a significant correlation between the

predictor variable, perceived views of others toward the police, and the dependent variable ( $p < 0.001$ ). Table 3 shows results from the final step, where all nine predictor variables had been added, in the fourth regression analysis.

**Table 3**

*Coefficients, significance and collinearity for the nine predictor variables in the fourth regression model*

	Unstandardized coefficients B	Standardized coefficients Beta	<i>P</i>	Tolerance
Gender	-0.002	0.000	0.994	0.895
Age	0.020	0.015	0.748	0.927
Police accessibility	1.292	0.366	<.001*	0.819
Sought police assistance	-0.021	-0.004	0.931	0.864
Experience of violent offences	0.660	0.126	0.010*	0.881
Experience of financial loss because of others offences	0.285	0.055	0.245	0.949
Perceived views of others toward the police	1.100	0.396	<.001*	0.778
Impact of media coverage in other countries	0.093	0.033	0.496	0.917
Impact of media coverage in Iceland	0.255	0.072	0.147	0.859

\* $p < 0.05$

When all nine predictor variables had been added to the fourth regression model, the correlation between each of the three following variables, accessibility to the police, experience of violent offences and perceived views of others toward the police, and the

dependent variable remained significant. When the variables that were not found to have a significant correlation to the dependent variable were removed from the regression model, the correlation between the three independent variables and the dependent variable was 0.697 and the three variables statistically predicted 48.5% of perceptions toward the police in the sample. The correlation was significant,  $F(3, 306) = 96.207, p < 0.001$ . By removing the insignificant variables from the regression model, the correlation between the predictor variable, experience of violent offences, and the dependent variable, perceptions of the police, increased as the  $p$  value went from 0.010 to  $< 0.001$ .

### **Discussion**

The primary goal of this study was to examine young adults' perceptions toward the police and whether there was a correlation between perceptions and likelihood to report offences to the police. In addition, the aim was to examine multiple predictor variables in association with the dependent variable, perceptions of the police.

The main results of the study were that perceptions of the police might have been positively affected by perceived accessibility to the police, experiencing a violent offence and how young adults perceive the views of others around them towards the police. Although these variables were significantly correlated, assumption of a causal relationship could not be made and which variable preceded the other. Therefore, it could only be assumed that with increased positive perceptions of the police, the young adults in the sample believed that the views of others around them were more positive and vice versa. Additionally, the more accessible the young adults found the police to be, the more positive perceptions they had towards the police. However, results indicated that having experienced a violent offence was associated with having more negative perceptions of the police. These results indicate that the authority might be able to improve perceptions of the police by being more accessible to young adults in Iceland.

Previous research strongly indicate that perceptions of the police among young adults were less positive than those of older individuals (Hurst and Frank, 2000; Hinds, 2009; Lyons, 2015). Although this study only collected data from a sample of young adults, the mean score for perceptions of the police was rather high, or 12.09 out 15 points available on the scale. Additionally, responses displayed for trust in the police, perceived police legitimacy and honorability, indicated that a majority of the participants in the study either agreed or strongly agreed that they had trust in the police and that the police was legitimate and honorable. Despite what previous results from Boateng's study from 2018 found regarding victims' decisions to report offences to the police and the positive correlation with the level of confidence and satisfaction they had with the police, this study did not find a significant correlation between reporting offences and perceptions of the police.

Furthermore, perceptions of the police were not affected by gender or age, which is inconsistent with previous findings that suggested that age had an impact on people's perceptions of the police (Boateng, 2018; Fine et al., 2021; Leslie et al., 2018). This study, however, only examined participants within a narrow age range and different results might have been found by including participants older than 25 in the sample.

### **Limitations**

Limitations of the study include the unequal gender distribution, whereas male participants were a minority compared to females, and the unequal distribution for each year of age between 18 and 25. Furthermore, the background data on participants' school enrollment, work status, residence and parental status, was not collected in a sufficient way and could therefore not be used as variables in the multiple regression analysis. Another limitation applies to how participants were selected in the sample for this study. Considering that a convenience sample and a snowball sample was used to reach participants and collect data, there is a strong possibility that participants were very similar and therefore, their

answers are likely similar as well. Additionally, although the answers were anonymous, it is possible that participants answered the questionnaire in a certain way because of their connections to the researcher. Results might also have been affected by participants' abilities to choose whether they wanted to take part in the study distributed on social media, posing a possible bias because of the reasons why certain people choose to participate and others do not. Those who chose not to participate might have answered the questionnaire differently than those who did. Finally, other limitations include that because participants were not randomly selected, this study did not reflect the entire young adult population in Iceland, and because it was a cross-sectional study, causal inferences could not be determined.

### **Strengths**

The strengths of this study include the size of the sample, which consisted of 437 participants. Furthermore, this study was among the first ones to examine perceptions of the police within a sample of young adults in Iceland. This study also added to the knowledge the impact of media coverage of the police on young adults' perceptions of the police, both in Iceland and in other countries.

### **Future studies**

This study examined only young adults aged 18-25 in Iceland. Future studies should aim to examine a more representative sample of the general public in this age range, along with studying gender differences with more equally distributed groups. It would also be interesting to further examine the relationship between perceptions of the police and crime reporting behavior, along with studying the effects of police intervention on young adults' perceptions of the police.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, this study found perceptions of the police to be quite positive in a particular sample of young adults in Iceland. Perceptions of the police were affected by

participants' perceived accessibility to the police, experiencing a violent offence and perceived views of others toward the police. Thus, perceptions of the police were found to be more positive when participants felt that the police was more accessible and when they thought that others around them had more positive views toward the police. However, perceptions of the police were more negative among those who had experienced a violent offence. Age, gender and reporting offences did not have an effect on perceptions of the police.

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## Appendix

### Questionnaire

1. Hver er aldur þinn?

- Yngri en 18 ára
- 18 ára
- 19 ára
- 20 ára
- 21 árs
- 22 ára
- 23 ára
- 24 ára
- 25 ára
- Eldri en 25 ára

2. Hvert er kyn þitt?

- Karl
- Kona
- Annað

3. Hvert af eftirfarandi á við um þig (Vinsamlegast hakaðu við alla þá valmöguleika sem eiga við):

- Er í framhaldsskóla
- Er í háskóla
- Er í vinnu
- Er atvinnulaus
- Er í leyfi frá vinnu
- Á barn/börn
- Er barnlaus
- Bý í foreldrahúsum
- Bý á eigin vegum

**Hversu sammála eða ósammála ert þú eftirfarandi fullyrðingum?**

4. Ég ber traust til lögreglu og starfa hennar

- Mjög sammála
- Frekar sammála
- Hvorki né
- Frekar ósammála
- Mjög ósammála

5. Ég ber traust til annarra opinberra stofnanna (Hér er t.d. átt við Alþingi, bankakerfið, heilbrigðiskerfið, Þjóðkirkjuna o.s.frv.)

- Mjög sammála
- Frekar sammála
- Hvorki né
- Frekar ósammála
- Mjög ósammála

6. Lögregla er lögmætt yfirvald og fyrirmælum hennar ber að fylgja

- Mjög sammála
- Frekar sammála
- Hvorki né
- Frekar ósammála
- Mjög ósammála

7. Lögreglan í mínu byggðarlagi er almennt heiðarleg

- Mjög sammála
- Frekar sammála
- Hvorki né
- Frekar ósammála
- Mjög ósammála

8. Þegar þú hugsar um aðgengi þitt að lögreglunni, t.d. til að fá þjónustu eða aðstoð þegar á þarf að halda, hversu aðgengileg eða óaðgengileg finnst þér lögreglan vera í þínu byggðarlagi?

- Mjög aðgengileg
- Frekar aðgengileg
- Frekar óaðgengileg
- Mjög óaðgengileg

9. Hefur þú þurft að leita eftir þjónustu/aðstoð lögreglu með einhverjum hætti yfir ævina?

(Hér er t.d. átt við að hringja í Neyðarlínuna, hringja á lögreglustöð, senda lögreglunni tölvupóst, fara á lögreglustöð, nýta sér samfélagsmiðla lögreglunnar o.s.frv.)

- Já
- Nei
- Ég man það ekki

10. Hversu ánægð(ur) eða óánægð(ur) varst þú með þá þjónustu/aðstoð sem þú fékkst þegar þú leitaðir til lögreglunnar?

- Mjög ánægð(ur)
- Frekar ánægð(ur)
- Frekar óánægð(ur)
- Mjög óánægð(ur)

11. Hefur þú orðið fyrir einhvers konar ofbeldisbroti eða tilraun til ofbeldis um ævina? (Þá er t.d. átt við að vera lamin/nn, kýld/ur, áreitt/ur kynferðislega, nauðgað o.s.frv.).

- Já
- Nei
- Ég er ekki viss

12. Var ofbeldisbrotið tilkynnt til lögreglu?

- Já
- Nei

13. Hvers vegna var ofbeldisbrotið ekki tilkynnt?

- Mér fannst brotið ekki nægilega alvarlegt
- Leysti málið sjálf(ur), vissi hver brotamaðurinn var
- Lögregla ekki nauðsynleg (ekki lögreglumál)
- Tilkynnti atvikið til annarra yfirvalda
- Fæ tjónið ekki bætt frá tryggingarfélagi
- Taldi að lögregla gæti ekkert aðhafst, vantaði sannanir
- Taldi að lögregla myndi ekki vilja gera neitt í málinu
- Var hrædd(ur) við lögreglu, vildi ekki blanda henni í málið
- Þorði ekki að hafa samband við lögreglu vegna ótta við geranda/gerendur
- Aðrar ástæður

14. Hefur þú eða fjölskylda þín orðið fyrir einhvers konar fjárhagstjóni vegna afbrota annarra, sem þú manst eftir? (Hér er t.d. átt við innbrot eða tilraun til innbrots, fjársvik (m.a. þar sem einhver hefur náð að plata út úr þér/ykkur peninga), eignaskemmdir (þ.e. veggjakrot eða skemmdir á ökutæki), o.s.frv.)

- Já
- Nei
- Ég er ekki viss

15. Var fjárhagstjónið tilkynnt til lögreglu?

- Já
- Nei

16. Hvers vegna var brotið ekki tilkynnt?

- Mér fannst brotið ekki nægilega alvarlegt
- Leysti málið sjálf(ur), vissi hver brotamaðurinn var
- Lögregla ekki nauðsynleg (ekki lögreglumál)
- Tilkynnti atvikið til annarra yfirvalda
- Fæ tjónið ekki bætt frá tryggingarfélagi
- Taldi að lögregla gæti ekkert aðhafst, vantaði sannanir
- Taldi að lögregla myndi ekki vilja gera neitt í málinu
- Var hrædd(ur) við lögreglu, vildi ekki blanda henni í málið
- Þorði ekki að hafa samband við lögreglu vegna ótta við geranda/gerendur
- Aðrar ástæður

17. Telur þú að annað fólk í þínu nærumhverfi hafi jákvæð eða neikvæð viðhorf til lögreglu?

- Mjög jákvæð
- Frekar jákvæð
- Hvorki né
- Frekar neikvæð
- Mjög neikvæð

18. Nú hefur umræða um lögreglu í öðrum löndum eins og Bandaríkjunum aukist nokkuð, t.d. í tengslum við andlát einstaklinga eftir samskipti við lögreglu. Telur þú að þessi umfjöllun hafi haft einhver áhrif á viðhorf þín til lögreglu?

- Mjög jákvæð
- Frekar jákvæð
- Hvorki né
- Frekar neikvæð
- Mjög neikvæð

19. Telur þú að umfjöllun íslenskra fjölmiðla um lögregluna hérlandis hafi haft einhver áhrif á viðhorf þín til lögreglu?

- Mjög jákvæð
- Frekar jákvæð
- Hvorki né
- Frekar neikvæð
- Mjög neikvæð