

Home Victimization and Preadolescents' Parental and Police Trust

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Abstract

Trust is a foundational element of interpersonal relationships. The present study explored the relationships between preadolescents' perceptions of trust in their parents and their trust in police and the relationship between home victimization and perceived trust levels. This exploration utilized extant data from a longitudinal study conducted in São Paulo, Brazil, in which 800 preadolescent participants completed questionnaires assessing factors related to parental legitimacy among other items. Analysis revealed statistically significant relationships between trust in parents and police, although most correlations were weak. Results indicated a positive relationship between trust in parents and trust in police, while most home victimization measures appeared to be negatively related to trust levels. If a negative relationship exists between home victimization and trust in parents and police, several implications emerge related to preadolescent trust levels, health, and safety. The present study broadens the literature on preadolescent trust in authorities and the impacts of victimization. Future studies could expand upon these findings by incorporating non-self-report measures, other types of victimization, and a more extensive and diverse group of participants.

Introduction

Recent studies have examined perceptions of authority figures and trust in authorities. Many of these studies focused on perceptions of and trust levels in police, finding associations between higher quality of interactions with police and a more positive view of police authority (Adorjan et al., 2017; Hu et al., 2020; Oliveira et al., 2021). Other studies have investigated adolescent trust levels and perceived legitimacy of authority, identifying the importance of trust for adolescent wellbeing and finding associations with interpersonal injustice and institutional trust (Liang & Ma, 2021; Mmari et al., 2016). A final set of studies have narrowed their focus to trust in parent-adolescent relationships, identifying associations with variables such as communication quality, autonomy support, parenting style and rearing behaviors, and self-concept (Clarke et al., 2020; Esteinou et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2018; Smetana et al., 2005; Zafar et al., 2013). No previous study has examined the specific relationships between trust in parents, trust in police, and victimization in the home among preadolescents. Thus, the present study seeks to fill this gap in the literature and provide insight into the interplay between these critical preadolescent wellbeing variables.

Question 1: Is there a relationship between preadolescents' parental trust and preadolescents' trust in police?

Hypothesis 1: There will be a moderate-to-strong positive relationship between trust in parents and trust in police.

Question 2: Is there a relationship between victimization in the home and preadolescents' parental and police trust?

Hypothesis 2: There will be a moderate-to-strong negative relationship between home victimization and trust in parents and police.

Methods

The present study utilized extant data from a longitudinal study conducted among 800 preadolescent participants in São Paulo, Brazil (Edwards et al., 2020). Responses were collected through the São Paulo Legal Socialization Study survey, which included victimization, procedural justice, and legitimacy questions. Data analysis included Spearman's correlations between trust in parents and police, home victimization and trust in parents, and home victimization and trust in police.

Results

Table 1
Spearman's Correlation Coefficients for Study Variables

Measure	Trust in Father	Trust in Mother	Trust in Stepfather/Stepmother	Trust in Police
Trust in Police	.163**	.125**	.169**	1.000
Home Victimization: Have seen fights and arguments between adults	-.109**	-.103**	-.095	-.107**
Home Victimization: Have been assaulted by people of the same age	-.109**	-.015	-.206**	-.076*
Home Victimization: Have been assaulted by any adults	-.030	.040	.042	-.067

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Discussion

Our findings were consistent with our hypotheses for both research questions. Results related to our first research question indicated a statistically significant but weak positive relationship between trust in parents and trust in the police (see Table 1), although we expected the correlation to be stronger. Results related to our second research question generally indicated statistically significant negative relationships between home victimization and trust in father, mother, stepparents, and police, although most correlations were weak (see Table 1).

Because our findings indicate a positive relationship between trust in parents and trust in police, it is possible that higher levels of trust in parent-adolescent relationships could be associated with higher levels of trust in police. Similarly, because our findings suggest a negative relationship between home victimization and trust in parents and police, it is possible that victimization in the home could be associated with reduced trust in these authorities, raising concerns for preadolescent health and safety based on the findings of Mmari et al. (2016). However, the majority of the relationships that emerged were negligible or weak, so it is essential to exercise caution in interpreting and applying the findings of this study.

Limitations:

- Self-report measures
- One-sided perspective (only preadolescents, not authorities)
- Location limited to São Paulo, Brazil

Recommendations: Future studies could measure the perspectives of parents and police as well as those of preadolescents and include other types of victimization outside the home (school, neighborhood, etc.).

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