

An empirical approach to the study of legal socialization in adolescence

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Olalla Baz Cores
and Esther Fernández-Molina 
University of Castilla-La Mancha, Spain

Abstract

Considering research on juvenile delinquency more broadly, few studies have examined the legal socialization process whereby adolescents come to accept legal authority and comply with the law as a result of the interaction with informal and formal socializing agents. Police legitimacy is an important dimension of legal socialization, because the police are the visible face of the legal system and contribute to the internalization of norms and values in society. Therefore, this article aims to analyse police legitimacy perceptions as an element of the legal socialization process in Spain among a subsample of 2041 youths aged from 13 to 18 from the Third International Self-Report Delinquency Study (ISR3D-3). The results using structural equation modelling reveal that adolescents who perceive the police as a legitimate institution commit fewer criminal offences. Additionally, police legitimacy perceptions mediate the association of parental monitoring, school attachment and procedural justice of the police with juvenile delinquency. Other explanations for juvenile delinquency are discussed from a legal socialization perspective.

Keywords

Legal socialization, adolescence, juvenile delinquency, police legitimacy perceptions

Introduction

Despite the large number of theories attempting to explain why youths commit criminal offences, the fact is that most adolescents become adults who voluntarily comply with the law and cooperate with the legal authorities of the justice system, bearing fruit in the form of peaceful coexistence and decreased resources dedicated to deterrence strategies (Tyler, 1990). These positive outcomes are the reason criminological researchers are interested in the legal socialization process that leads youths to adapt to social norms.

Corresponding author:

Esther Fernández-Molina, Criminology Research Centre, University of Castilla-La Mancha, Campus Universitario s/n, Albacete, 02071, Spain.

Email: Esther.Fdez@uclm.es

Socialization includes different processes. One of them is called legal socialization and refers to the acquisition of norms, values, beliefs and attitudes towards the law and legal authorities (Tapp and Levine, 1974; Trinkner and Cohn, 2014). The legal socialization process is influenced by the development of individuals' cognitive structures and by their relationship with the different socializing agents over the course of their lives. Adolescence is a key period in the formation of perceptions of the law and legal institutions, since it is when the sense of morality begins to adapt to social norms and the interactions with agents of socialization broaden towards the formal system (Fagan and Tyler, 2005). For example, an institution that clearly represents the legal system is the police owing to its exposure in the media and contact with citizens in different situations (Boda and Medve-Bálint, 2017). This facilitates people, and especially adolescents, easily acquiring attitudes towards the police through vicarious and direct experiences. Hence, the perceptions of this institution have great relevance in the legal socialization process and should be studied because of its potential to make young people commit less crime and comply with the law.

In this regard, criminological research has demonstrated that, in adolescence, informal socializing agents such as family, school and peers, as well as individuals' personal and vicarious interactions with legal and formal authorities, play a role in the internalization of positive attitudes and values towards the law and legal authorities. Most of these studies evaluate the legitimacy of the police among youths (see, for example, Akinlabi, 2017; Hinds, 2007; Reisig and Lloyd, 2009; Wolfe et al., 2017).

This study aims to explore certain elements of legal socialization in the Spanish context. To this end, we used the cross-sectional data on 2041 youths from the third wave of the International Self-Report Delinquency Study (ISRD-3). Using structural equation modelling (SEM), we have examined several hypotheses regarding the empirical association of factors related to interaction with family, school, peers and the police with two dependent variables: police legitimacy perceptions and juvenile delinquency. In addition, to check whether police legitimacy perceptions function as a dimension of legal socialization, we have analysed the mediating role of this variable, that is, whether or not the aforementioned factors relate to juvenile delinquency through adolescents' police legitimacy perceptions.

Legal socialization

Legal socialization has been defined as a process involving the acquisition of beliefs, attitudes and values towards the law and the social control institutions enforcing the law (Fagan and Tyler, 2005; Tapp and Levine, 1974). This process includes two different aspects relating individuals to the legal system. The first involves the acquisition of the norms and values underlying any legal system, by which individuals develop their sense of right and wrong (Trinkner and Cohn, 2014). That is, people decide to obey or violate the law and to respect or reject authority based on whether or not the behaviour demanded by the legal system is consistent with their own normative value system (Tyler and Jackson, 2013). The second aspect is the development of positive orientations towards legal institutions (Trinkner and Cohn, 2014). Formal authorities such as the police or the courts are the visible face of the legal system and contribute to the internalization of norms and values (Trinkner and Tyler, 2016).

These two aspects – acquisition of norms and orientations towards legal institutions – are translated into two dimensions that research on legal socialization has explored in recent decades: legal cynicism, which is defined as the extent to which individuals feel engaged with the legal norms regulating society (Sampson and Bartusch, 1998); and institutional legitimacy, which refers to individuals' perception of the legal authorities of the justice system such as the police and the courts (Tyler, 1990). The literature has shown that, when people exhibit a low degree of legal cynicism and consider legal institutions to be legitimate authorities, the likelihood of their committing a criminal act decreases and the probability of their compliance with the law and cooperation with the legal authorities increases (Murphy, 2015; Tyler, 1990; Trinkner and Cohn, 2014). The explanation of these findings is the existence of a psychological mechanism driving legal socialization: *internalization*. This mechanism may lead individuals to adopt behaviours as a result of moral convictions or values, either because they consider them useful to resolve a problem or because they are consistent with their view of the world (Kelman and Hamilton, 1989). In short, an effective legal socialization process consists not only of individuals' internalizing knowledge of the sanctions resulting from the laws of a society, but also in their internalizing and perceiving the legitimacy of these norms and the authorities representing the legal system. In this way, individuals substitute their mechanisms of external control with those of internal control.

Despite the importance of legal cynicism, the most internationally explored dimension of legal socialization is the legitimacy of legal institutions such as the police or the courts. Legitimacy has been conceptualized as a social belief in the ruling order, depending on how the state exercises power (Weber, 1964), and as moral values shared between state institutions and citizens (Beetham, 1991). Based on these theoretical statements, criminological researchers have operationalized institutional legitimacy using three non-mutually exclusive dimensions: institutional trust or support, obligation to obey, and moral alignment (Jackson and Gau, 2016). However, there is still a current debate about whether duty to obey is part of the legitimacy concept (Farren et al., 2018; Jackson et al., 2012; Tyler, 1990) or is a consequence of it (Bottoms and Tankebe, 2012; Van Damme et al., 2015).

Police legitimacy perceptions are important for the legal socialization process, because people normally acquire information about the police directly or vicariously through the media or daily contact in different situations (Boda and Medve-Bálint, 2017; Dirikx and Van den Bulck, 2014). Criminological research has shown that individuals who consider that police authority is legitimate feel a moral duty to obey and cooperate with the police, as well as a moral obligation to comply with the law (Murphy, 2015; Reisig et al., 2014). Therefore, police legitimacy perceptions can activate the internalization mechanism and promote law-abiding behaviour without needing punishment as a deterrence strategy (Tyler, 1990).

Additionally, other socializing agents play a major role in the transmission of values and attitudes related to legal norms and legal institutions, leading individuals to respect the legal system of their own free will. These socializing agents are not necessarily other formal institutions representing the law, because the norms underlying the legal system are encoded within the rules of a multitude of informal or 'extralegal' agents such as the family or school (Trinkner and Cohn, 2014). Similarly, other agents that hold no position

of authority, such as peer groups, socialize the individual into acquiring positive or negative attitudes towards the law and legal institutions, either simplifying or complicating the legal socialization process (Fagan and Tyler, 2005). All these ideas suggest that adolescence is an essential period for developing legal socialization and internalize legitimacy perceptions.

Legal socialization in adolescence: Socializing agents developing youths' perceptions of legal authorities

Legal socialization begins in childhood but is especially important during adolescence. This is not only because cognitive development proceeds from concrete operational thought to formal operational thought, which enables adolescents to compare reality with things that might or might not be (Piaget and Inhelder, 1969), but also because the broadening of social interactions takes place during adolescence. This broadening generates new perceptions of the law and legal authorities, as normative systems shift from being informal and closed towards being wider-based and more similar to those of the adult world (Fagan and Tyler, 2005). In this sense, adolescents' legal socialization involves a learning process that takes two complementary paths. The first is through different socializing agents such as family, school or peer groups. These socializing agents transmit beliefs and attitudes that encourage the formation of values and take a position on individuals' vicarious experience of legal authorities. The second arises from an individual's direct interactions with legal authorities as a result of a broader experience of the social control systems during adolescence (Trinkner and Cohn, 2014).

Socializing agents such as family, school and friends are proven to play a key role in explaining antisocial and delinquent behaviour among youths (Haynie, 2002; Stattin and Kerr, 2000; Stewart, 2003). However, recent research has found that they also influence the acquisition of attitudes towards the police and other institutions of the justice system (Ferdik et al., 2014). Regarding family, studies have shown that parents' positive legitimacy attitudes towards legal authorities influence their children's attitudes (Cavanagh and Cauffman, 2015; Wolfe et al., 2017). Higher parental supervision has also been found to be associated with a higher perceived legitimacy of legal authorities (Fagan and Tyler, 2005). Additionally, there is evidence that youths who are more attached to school tend to present positive attitudes towards legal actors such as the police (Wu et al., 2015). Finally, having friends who commit crimes and friends' favourable attitudes towards delinquency are also variables related to negative perceptions of the police and other legal authorities (Augustyn, 2015; Fagan and Tyler, 2005; Ferdik et al., 2019).

The influence of legal authorities on legal socialization has been extensively studied. In this regard, the *process-based model of self-regulation* – also called the procedural justice model – proposed by Tyler (1990) establishes that procedural justice evaluations, that is, the fair treatment applied by legal authorities in their interactions with citizens, have a strong impact on the perceived legitimacy of legal institutions. This in turn results in greater compliance with the law, cooperation with legal authorities, and a decrease in delinquency. An increasing number of studies conducted with adolescents have analysed legitimacy perceptions of authorities within this model in different contexts, for example

the US (Fagan and Tyler, 2005; Piquero et al., 2005; Trinkner and Cohn, 2014), Australia (Hinds, 2007, 2009; Murphy, 2015), Belgium (Dirikx and Van den Bulck, 2014), Jamaica (Reisig and Lloyd, 2009) and Nigeria (Akinlabi, 2017). In addition, the procedural justice model has also recently been examined using data from the 27 countries that participate in the ISRD-3 project, confirming the above-mentioned hypotheses in most of them (Farren et al., 2018).

Objectives and hypotheses

Our study aims to analyse some factors in youths' legal socialization in the Spanish context. This article is an advance over a previous paper analysing the process-based model of self-regulation (procedural justice theory) with the Spanish data from the ISRD-3 project and checking the predictive capacity of some independent variables (Baz and Fernández-Molina, 2018). In addition to procedural justice evaluations, we included other variables such as parental control, attachment to school and delinquent peers to analyse them within a legal socialization framework and see if those variables were associated with police legitimacy perceptions and juvenile delinquency in two separate linear regression models. That article also allowed us to examine some control variables to determine whether or not they leave independent variables without impact.

With the publication of this article we intend to go one step further. SEM is an advance on linear regression, because it allows us to theorize about a legal socialization process that makes young people internalize norms and attitudes towards authority that are conducive to compliance. In this way we can easily test how the model of legal socialization works once we know that there are other important variables (included as controls in the previous paper) that do not detrimentally influence it, and examine the relationships of independent variables with juvenile delinquency through police legitimacy perceptions (indirect relationships).

To meet the general aim of the study, we have established two specific objectives with several hypotheses on the expected relationships between variables. The first specific aim is to verify whether police legitimacy perceptions are associated with juvenile delinquency in Spain. Thus, our first hypothesis is:

H1. The perception of the police as a legitimate institution is related to lower levels of delinquency among adolescents.

The second specific aim is to examine the empirical association of some factors related to family, school, friends and police authority with juvenile delinquency through police legitimacy perceptions. We formulate the following hypotheses regarding the family:

H2. Higher parental monitoring is related to lower levels of juvenile delinquency.

H3. Higher parental monitoring is related to greater legitimacy of the police among adolescents.

H4. Police legitimacy perceptions mediate the relationship between parental monitoring and juvenile delinquency.

Our hypotheses regarding the school are:

H5. Greater school attachment is related to lower levels of juvenile delinquency.

H6. Greater school attachment is related to higher perceived police legitimacy among adolescents.

H7. Police legitimacy perceptions mediate the relationship between school attachment and juvenile delinquency.

The following hypotheses are proposed regarding the peer groups:

H8. Having more delinquent peers is related to higher levels of juvenile delinquency.

H9. Having more delinquent peers is related to lower perceived police legitimacy.

H10. Police legitimacy perceptions mediate the relationship between delinquent peers and juvenile delinquency.

Finally, we propose the following hypotheses regarding procedural justice evaluations arising from interaction with the police:

H11. Higher procedural justice evaluations of the police are related to lower levels of juvenile delinquency.

H12. Greater procedural justice evaluations of the police are related to higher perceptions of police legitimacy among adolescents.

H13. Police legitimacy perceptions mediate the relationship between procedural justice evaluations and juvenile delinquency.

Methods

Data

The cross-sectional data used in this study form part of the ISRD-3 project. The sub-sample comprised 2041 students living in two Spanish cities selected for reasons of convenience: Madrid and Albacete. We used multi-stage random cluster sampling to collect the data (see Table 1). The first selection unit was the schools, which were selected from a sampling frame that included the possible eligible schools in each city (105 in Madrid and 8 in Albacete). This selection process was random but ensured that the schools were representative of each city. Therefore, if a school in one area of the city refused to participate, there was another one with the same characteristics to replace it. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that in Madrid many schools refused to participate in the study. The second selection unit was the classes of the different year groups, and the last unit was the students in compulsory secondary education, Baccalaureate, and vocational training. There is an underrepresentation of Baccalaureate 2nd grade in both

Table 1. Data of the multi-stage random cluster sampling.

Sampling	Madrid	Albacete
No. of schools	165	24
No. of schools in sampling frame	105	8
No. of participating schools	8	7
No. of classes in participating schools	72	94
No. of participating classes	43	63
No. of students	1124	917
Non-response rate (percent)	7.2	12.1

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the background variables.

Background variables	Minimum	Maximum	Mean/Percent ^a	Standard deviation
Police contact	0 (no)	1 (yes)	12.0%	–
Gender	0 (male)	1 (female)	50.9%	–
City of residence	0 (Madrid)	1 (Albacete)	44.9%	–
Age	13	18	15.33	1.30
Socioeconomic status	2	14	8.20	2.06
Immigrant status	0 (native)	1 (minority)	17.5%	–
Victimization status	0	7	0.98	1.17

^aThe percentage of respondents refers to category 1 in categorical variables.

cities, and an underrepresentation of Baccalaureate 1st grade in Madrid, which has been compensated for in the final sample with the students of Baccalaureate 1st grade recruited in Albacete. As shown in Table 1, the non-response rate was higher in Albacete mainly because in Baccalaureate courses the survey was administered in non-compulsory subjects and not all students were in the classroom. In the case of younger students, the non-response rate was lower (6.2 percent) and due to illness or not having informed consent.

Having requested the informed passive consent of the minors and their parents, the former then had to complete a self-administered questionnaire designed for the ISRD project. The questionnaire had to be completed either online or using a hard copy. Table 2 shows the background variables of the sample and their descriptive statistics.

Variables

All the variables except juvenile delinquency and delinquent peers are latent constructs. Composite reliabilities and average extracted variances of these constructs have levels that exceed or approach the recommended levels of .70 and .50, respectively (see Table 4 in the Appendix). Most of the factorial loadings and multiple correlations approach or exceed the recommended levels of .60 and .50, respectively (see Table 5 in the Appendix). Although some of the items related to parental supervision and school attachment showed

low factorial loadings, a decision was made to maintain these indicators in each construct owing to their theoretical sense, the high composite reliability of the constructs and the good general fit of the model.

Endogenous variables

Police legitimacy perceptions. Drawing on the theoretical concept of legitimacy as a moral alignment or values shared by legal authorities and citizens (Van Damme et al., 2015), this variable was measured using the three items from the questionnaire reflecting moral alignment between the police and youths: (a) 'The police generally have the same sense of right and wrong as I do'; (b) 'The police are appreciative of how young people think'; (c) 'I generally support how the police usually act'. The respondents answered on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 'agree strongly' to 'disagree strongly'. The items were recoded with high scores indicating higher perceived police legitimacy ($\alpha = .81$).

Juvenile delinquency. To construct this variable, we generated variety coefficients using the 14 dichotomous response (yes/no) items from the questionnaire that addressed engagement in different criminal behaviours: graffiti, vandalism, shoplifting, burglary, bike theft, car theft, thefts from cars, extortion, personal theft, carrying a weapon, group fight, assault, illegal downloading, and drug dealing. We chose a scale that reports the total number of criminal types committed by the same individual (variety coefficients) because of its greater reliability and validity (Sweeten, 2012). The values of the variety scale constructed ranged from 0 to 14, indicating how many of the 14 types of criminal act had been committed by each adolescent. The higher the number of crimes declared by the adolescents, the higher the level of juvenile delinquency ($\alpha = .72$).

Exogenous variables

Parental monitoring. To measure parental monitoring, we used the seven items related to parents' knowledge of their children's activities and to communication between children and parents: (a) 'My parents know where I am when I go out'; (b) 'My parents know what I am doing when I go out'; (c) 'My parents know what friends I am with when I go out'; (d) 'I tell my parents who I spend time with'; (e) 'I tell my parents how I spend my money'; (f) 'I tell my parents where I am most afternoons after school'; (g) 'I tell my parents what I do with my free time'. The items were scored on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 'almost always' to 'almost never'. They were recoded for the high values to reflect high parental monitoring ($\alpha = .87$).

School attachment. Four items from the questionnaire measuring the adolescents' attachment to their school were used: (a) 'If I had to move I would miss my school'; (b) 'Most mornings I like going to school'; (c) 'I like my school'; (d) 'Our classes are interesting'. Respondents scored each of these items on a four-point Likert scale from 'fully agree' to 'fully disagree'. The scores were subsequently recoded for high scores to indicate higher school attachment ($\alpha = .76$).

Delinquent peers. We used coefficients of variety to generate a variable to measure the indirect delinquency of friends. These coefficients had a range of 0 to 5, counting the number of criminal acts committed by each of the friends. To construct this variable, we used five dichotomous response items (yes/no) in which the adolescents were required to report whether their friends had engaged in any of the following criminal behaviours: drug use, shoplifting, burglary, extortion and assault. The higher the number of different criminal behaviours reported, the higher the level of delinquency in the peer group ($\alpha = .63$).

Procedural justice evaluations. The questionnaire included three items related to the adolescents' evaluations of procedural justice: (a) 'Would you say the police generally treat young people with respect?' (b) 'How often would you say the police make fair decisions when dealing with young people?' (c) 'How often would you say the police explain their decisions and actions to young people?' Each item was measured on a four-point Likert scale ranging from 'almost never' to 'almost always'. The higher the score on the scale, the more positive is the evaluation of procedural justice ($\alpha = .80$).

Analytic strategy

Data analysis was conducted using SEM, examining the direct and indirect relationships between variables and drawing on existing theory in the field. Data transformations were necessary to perform the SEM. Missing cases were substituted using the linear interpolation method, dependent variables were transformed using a logarithm to meet the assumption of multivariate normality, and the existence of Heywood cases was ruled out. The specified relationships resulted in an over-identified model calculated using the maximum likelihood method. To evaluate the fit of the model, we used the chi-square (χ^2), the goodness of fit index (GFI), the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), the adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI), and the comparative fit index (CFI).

Results

Figure 1 shows a diagram of the SEM with the results of the hypothesized relationships. Although the chi-square of the model was significant ($\chi^2(137) = 551.289; p < .001$), other goodness of fit indices confirm that it presents a good fit to the data (GFI = .97; RMSEA = .03; AGFI = .96; CFI = .97).

Table 3 shows the direct and indirect relationships found between the variables and the critical ratio (CR) associated with the significance level. First, a significant direct relationship was found between the two endogenous variables, police legitimacy perceptions and juvenile delinquency ($\beta = -.194$; CR = -5.938 ; $p < .001$). The direction of the coefficient shows that, when adolescents consider the police to be a legitimate authority, their likelihood of engaging in criminal behaviour decreases.

Second, parental monitoring had both direct and indirect effects. We found a direct relationship between parental monitoring and juvenile delinquency ($\gamma = -.164$; CR = -6.742 ; $p < .001$). The negative standardized coefficient means that the higher the level

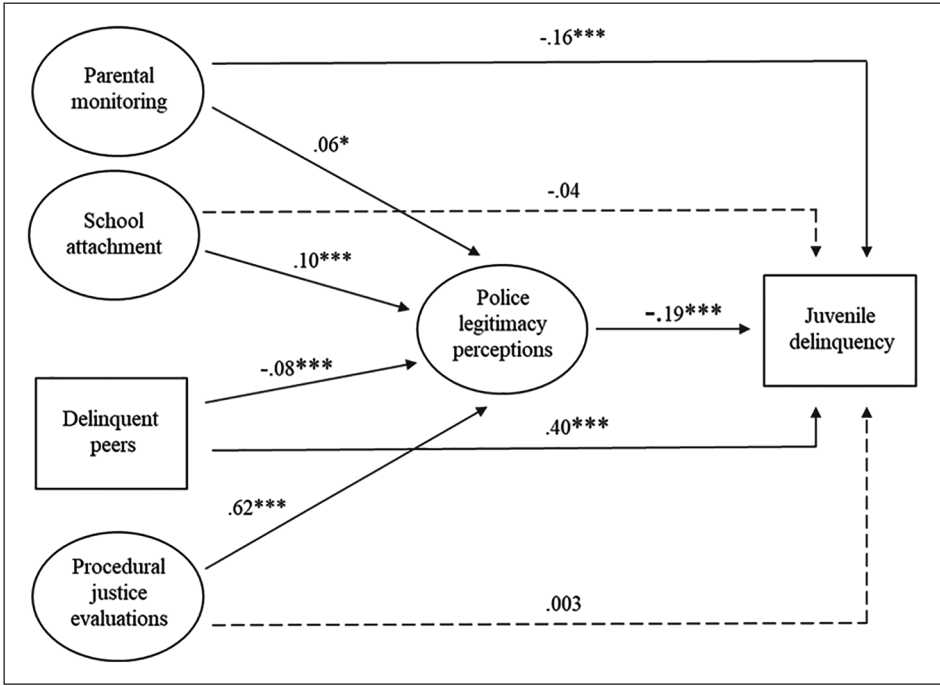


Figure 1. Model explaining the legal socialization process.

Note: The figure contains standardized weights γ and β . The non-significant relationships are depicted by dashed lines.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

of parental monitoring, the lower the likelihood that adolescents will engage in delinquency. We also found a direct relationship between parental monitoring and police legitimacy perceptions ($\gamma = .060$; $CR = 2.182$; $p < .05$). The direction of the coefficient indicates that the higher the level of parental monitoring, the more positive will adolescents' perception of the police as a legitimate authority be. Finally, an indirect relationship was found between parental monitoring and juvenile delinquency with police legitimacy perceptions as a mediating variable ($\gamma = -.011$; $z = 2.004$; $p < .05$). Parental monitoring is related to lower levels of adolescents' self-reported delinquency, which could be partly explained by positive legitimacy attitudes towards the police transmitted through parental supervision.

Third, significant relationships were found regarding school attachment in adolescents' legal socialization. The direct relationship between high levels of school attachment and juvenile delinquency was non-significant in the model ($\gamma = -.042$; $CR = -1.816$; $p > .05$). However, we did find a significant association of school attachment with police legitimacy perceptions ($\gamma = .100$; $CR = 3.754$; $p < .001$). The direction of the coefficient shows that adolescents who are more affectively engaged with school perceive the police as a legitimate authority. Furthermore, despite the lack of a direct relationship between school attachment and juvenile delinquency, there is a significant

Table 3. Coefficients and statistics of the SEM predicting police legitimacy and juvenile delinquency.

DIRECT EFFECTS					
Endogenous variables	Exogenous variables	Estimate (SE)	Standardized coefficient	CR	R ²
Juvenile delinquency					.354
	Parental monitoring	-.049 (.007)	-.164	-6.742***	
	School attachment	-.021 (.012)	-.042	-1.816	
	Delinquent peers	.082 (.004)	.400	19.867***	
	Procedural justice evaluations	.001 (.011)	.003	0.105	
	Police legitimacy perceptions	-.345 (.058)	-.194	-5.938***	
Police legitimacy perceptions					.493
	Parental monitoring	.010 (.004)	.060	2.182*	
	School attachment	.028 (.007)	.100	3.754***	
	Delinquent peers	-.009 (.003)	-.080	-3.512***	
	Procedural justice evaluations	.118 (.006)	.620	20.509***	
INDIRECT EFFECTS					
Endogenous variable	Exogenous variables	Estimate (SE)	Standardized coefficient	z	
Juvenile delinquency					
	Parental monitoring	-.003 (.001)	-.011	-2.004*	
	School attachment	-.010 (.002)	-.019	-3.430**	
	Delinquent peers	.003 (.001)	.015	1.880	
	Procedural justice evaluations	-.041 (.007)	-.119	-5.730***	

Note: All the indirect effects are generated through police legitimacy perceptions.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

indirect relationship through the mediator effect of police legitimacy ($\gamma = -.019$; $z = -3.430$; $p < .01$). This finding suggests that adolescents who are more attached to their school are less likely to engage in criminal behaviour. This effect may be explained by school acting as an agent that influences adolescents' perceptions of police authority as legitimate, leading to lower levels of juvenile delinquency.

Fourth, some interesting relationships were found regarding peers and legal socialization. The direct relationship between delinquent peers and self-reported delinquency is significant ($\gamma = .400$; $CR = 19.867$; $p < .001$). Adolescents with peers who commit a

high number of criminal offences are more likely to engage in criminal behaviour. A direct relationship was also found between having delinquent peers and police legitimacy perceptions ($\gamma = -.080$; $CR = -3.512$; $p < .001$). The higher the number of criminal acts committed by peers, the greater the likelihood of lower police legitimacy perceptions among youths. However, the relationship of delinquent peers with juvenile delinquency is not mediated by perceived police legitimacy ($\gamma = .015$; $z = 1.880$; $p > .05$).

Fifth and finally, the police also play a key role in youths' legal socialization. The direct association of procedural justice evaluations with juvenile delinquency is non-significant ($\gamma = .003$; $CR = 0.105$; $p > .05$). We did find, however, a significant direct association of procedural justice evaluations with police legitimacy perceptions ($\gamma = .620$; $CR = 20.509$; $p < .001$). When adolescents perceive the police's dealings with citizens as fair, they are likely to perceive police authority as legitimate. There is also an indirect relationship between procedural justice evaluations of the police and self-reported juvenile delinquency, mediated by perceived police legitimacy ($\gamma = -.119$; $z = 5.730$; $p < .001$). This finding seems to suggest that, when adolescents believe police actions are fair, they perceive the police as a legitimate authority and, hence, their likelihood of committing criminal acts is lower.

The relationships found in the SEM explain almost 50 percent of the variance in police legitimacy perceptions and approximately 35 percent of the variance in adolescents' self-reported delinquency.

Discussion

Police legitimacy: An important dimension of legal socialization

The first hypothesis (H1) was that higher perceived police legitimacy is associated with adolescents committing fewer criminal acts. The results of the SEM confirmed this hypothesis among our sample of youths, supporting evidence from other studies conducted with adolescents in other countries (Augustyn, 2015; Trinkner and Cohn, 2014). Thus, and from a cognitive-behavioural point of view, these findings reflect a consistency between adolescents' perceptions of police authority and their law-abiding behaviour (Bohner and Dickel, 2011). The social legitimacy of the police forms part of the broad legal socialization process, which is driven by internalization. When individuals perceive legal authorities, such as the police, as legitimate and they identify with the legal system values, they no longer base their obedience on deterrence. Instead, individuals voluntarily comply with the law and respect authority as a result of internal motivation.

Legal socialization develops during adolescence owing to the significant increase in cognitive development during this life stage and the interactions that emerge with different legal and 'extralegal' agents (Trinkner and Cohn, 2014). Therefore, exploring adolescents' legitimacy perceptions of the police might be especially important given their impact on future attitudes towards the legal system as a whole. In this vein, Tyler (2015) states that, although individuals might change their views during different stages of life, the residue of socialization is strong and shapes subsequent attitudes and values influencing behaviour in adult life.

Factors explaining juvenile delinquency through police legitimacy perceptions

Another aim of this work was to analyse some factors related to family, school, friends and the police in adolescents' legal socialization. These socializing agents might impact the legal socialization process through their different activities and interactions with young people, making them internalize values and attitudes supporting police authority. This in turn would generate lower levels of juvenile delinquency. A detailed discussion of each factor has been made, since the results obtained are different depending on the socializing agent analysed.

Regarding family, the results confirm the direct relationship between high levels of parental monitoring and lower levels of juvenile delinquency (H2), as evidenced in other empirical studies (Barnes et al., 2006; Stattin and Kerr 2000), even when other variables are controlled for (Burfeind and Bartusch, 2006). The present work also confirms the direct association of higher parental monitoring with higher police legitimacy perceptions of adolescents (H3), as demonstrated in previous research (Fagan and Tyler, 2005). Lastly, we can confirm an indirect relationship between greater parental monitoring and lower levels of juvenile delinquency with the mediating role of perceived police legitimacy (H4). Thus, although supervision of behaviour may result in obedience because it prevents certain acts from being committed, parental monitoring might also affect legal socialization by contributing to the internalization of positive attitudes and values towards the police. Family is the first environment in which children and adolescents interact with a system of rules on a daily basis. There they begin to acquire their own conception of authority and values, which will shape subsequent experience with formal legal institutions such as the police (Trinkner and Tyler, 2016). Moreover, the way of measuring parental monitoring also provides information that may influence the confirmation of this hypothesis. Research has shown that supervision cannot always prevent criminal behaviour and aid in the internalization of positive values and attitudes towards the law and legal authorities. For example, excessively lax and strict discipline are both risk factors for antisocial and criminal behaviour (Stattin and Kerr, 2000). Likewise, psychological control of adolescents increases the likelihood of pathologies such as depression or anxiety (Barber and Harmon, 2002). As the present work suggests, supervision based on fluid communication between parents and children may result in better knowledge of the latter's activities and activate the mechanism of internalization of prosocial values and attitudes. In contrast, other practices that are based on forcibly imposing behaviour or that lack efficient control and coherent norms do not result in positive internalization.

With regard to school, the present study rejects the existence of a direct relationship between higher school attachment and lower levels of juvenile delinquency (H5). This finding conflicts with the results based on social control theory (Hirschi, 1969). In these studies, higher school attachment is associated with a lower likelihood of adolescents engaging in antisocial or criminal behaviour (Rovis et al., 2016; Stewart, 2003). Nonetheless, we have found a direct association between greater school attachment and higher police legitimacy perceptions (H6). Evidence has traditionally suggested that experience at school substantially shapes individuals' attitudes towards legal authorities,

because the understanding of how institutional systems function is implicit in life at school (Emler and Reicher, 1987). Furthermore, we also found an indirect relationship between high levels of school attachment and lower levels of juvenile delinquency, mediated by the role of police legitimacy perceptions (H7). These findings suggest that affective ties to school may generate a normative internalization process (Ferdik et al., 2016) in which the established rules at school emerge as a frame of reference facilitating self-regulation in the classroom and in the general school environment (Gouveia-Pereira et al., 2003). These school norms would form the second step in adolescents' legal socialization, promoting the acquisition of positive values and attitudes towards the police and leading to voluntary compliance with the law. Therefore, school occupies an intermediate position between family and the formal system in adolescents' legal socialization. This institution utilizes formal procedures with specific norms involving sanctions for disobedience, but at the same time it transmits values and is a more approachable figure of authority than that of the legal system such as the police.

Regarding friends, the present work finds a robust direct relationship between delinquent peers and high levels of self-reported delinquency (H8), confirming the results of prior scientific research (Barnes et al., 2006; Hoeben and Weerman, 2016; Sanchagrin et al., 2017). Also, the direct association of delinquent friends with the development of negative police legitimacy perceptions is confirmed (H9) (Augustyn, 2015; Brick et al., 2009; Fagan and Tyler, 2005, Ferdik et al., 2019). This finding reinforces the principle proposed in differential association theory that delinquent peers are socializing agents with an effect on attitude formation (Sutherland, 1947). Moreover, several authors associate these findings with theories on delinquent subcultures (Cloward and Ohlin, 1960; Cohen, 1955), affirming that peers who transmit delinquent attitudes foster the development of criminal subcultures (Schuck, 2013). Negative perceptions of police legitimacy may form part of these subcultures (Leiber et al., 1998). However, we have been unable to establish an indirect relationship between having friends who engage in high rates of criminal behaviour and high levels of self-reported juvenile delinquency, considering the mediating role of police legitimacy perceptions (H10). This finding might be coherent with the social learning theory proposed by Akers (1997). This approach modifies differential association theory by emphasizing the role of friends as socializing agents who directly transmit behaviour through imitation, reinforcement or peer pressure. A considerable body of empirical research has confirmed the robust predictive capacity of this approach in juvenile delinquency, beyond attitudes, revealing that what youths think does not always actually correspond to what they do (Haynie, 2002; Warr and Stafford, 1991). This is also supported by studies in the field of neuroscience (Steinberg, 2008). Despite the evidence that adolescents have the cognitive ability to understand responsibilities and norms and whether or not the acts they engage in are correct, their psychosocial immaturity means their behaviour is heavily influenced by peer pressure. These findings indicate that friends transmit attitudes towards authority and norms through socialization; however, mechanisms not involving normative internalization, such as peer pressure, have a greater impact on juvenile delinquency.

Considering the interaction with the police, and in contrast to other studies (Penner et al., 2014), we have been unable to confirm the existence of a direct relationship between positive procedural justice evaluations of the police and less criminal behaviour

(H11). However, it has been suggested that the association of procedural justice with delinquency is mediated by other variables such as perceived legitimacy (Murphy, 2015). Indeed, the findings of the present study, which reveal a significant direct relationship between procedural justice and adolescents' police legitimacy perceptions (H12), confirm an indirect relationship between evaluations of procedural justice and lower levels of juvenile delinquency mediated by police legitimacy perceptions (H13). These results suggest that individuals' perceptions of how they should be treated might have a powerful influence on this early stage of development. When the police make fair decisions and treat citizens with dignity and respect, adolescents' positive image of the legal system is bolstered, and they are seen as a legitimate institution that deserves to be obeyed and respected (Trinkner and Tyler, 2016; Tyler, 2015).

Legal socialization: A different contribution to explaining juvenile delinquency

The model proposed in this work explains almost 50 percent of the variance in police legitimacy perceptions and approximately 35 percent of adolescents' self-reported delinquency, which represents a large effect size in social research (Cohen, 1988). This model, as a complement to existing theories of juvenile delinquency, reveals interesting findings.

The legal socialization perspective, rather than referring to instrumental obedience, focuses on normative obedience, that is, the process of internalization in which values, beliefs and attitudes towards the law and legal authorities are generated (Hinds, 2007). This provides an alternative explanation to classic approaches such as social control theory (Hirschi, 1969). The fact that in the present study perceived police legitimacy mediates the association between higher levels of school attachment and lower levels of juvenile delinquency suggests that this relationship is not just the result of the fear of losing a social bond with the school. Affective engagement with the school fosters internalization of positive values and attitudes towards the legal system.

Moreover, higher parental monitoring is another factor associated with lower levels of juvenile delinquency. Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) emphasized the key role played by parents in the development of self-control. Nonetheless, criminological research has shown that the influence of parental supervision goes beyond the relationship with self-control. It reduces the likelihood of association with antisocial peer groups as well as the number of opportunities to engage in criminal activities (Burfeind and Bartusch, 2006). We have also found that parental monitoring generates positive perceptions of police authority, which in turn results in lower levels of juvenile delinquency. Therefore, other explanations of how parental monitoring affects criminal behaviour may exist. It is worth considering which parent-child relationships and which styles of parental monitoring are most effective. In this case, everything seems to suggest that democratic styles are the most effective because they foster the capacity to internalize values, norms and attitudes towards the law and legal authorities.

The association between having delinquent peers and higher self-reported juvenile delinquency has been confirmed by the literature through various theoretical perspectives, such as social control (Hirschi, 1969), differential association (Sutherland, 1947) and

social learning (Akers, 1997). The present study hypothesized that, from the legal socialization perspective, friends might also have an influence on the internalization of attitudes and values related to the police and the law. However, the findings reveal that these attitudes are not associated with a higher engagement in criminal behaviour. Delinquent peers influence socialization mainly through the transmission of behaviours and not through the normative internalization of attitudes and values. Hence, this study reinforces the criminological theories that emphasize group pressure and imitation of criminal behaviour as socializing mechanisms (Akers, 1997; Warr and Stafford, 1991; Steinberg, 2008). Additionally, as Fine et al. (2018) have recently shown in a longitudinal study, attitudes towards the justice system do not influence the most immature psychosocial adolescents. Thus, it is possible that the group of young people in the sample who have delinquent friends was composed of more immature psychosocial subjects, whose legitimacy perceptions do not have any effect on criminal behaviour.

Interaction with the police emerges as the main source of legal socialization during adolescence (Tyler, 1990). Our results show that how the police treat citizens is key to helping youths consider them a legitimate institution, which, in turn, is associated with less juvenile delinquency. Hence, legal authorities such as the police influence the internalization of positive values and attitudes towards the justice system and this undoubtedly has consequences for how policing is practised. The finding complements the traditional ideas derived from the instrumental theories of deterrence and the models of rational choice, which focus on the legal and social consequences of criminality, such as the fear of sanctions, shame or the disapproval of others (Matsueda et al., 2006).

Because the role of family, school, peers and the police varies across countries, it seems important to conclude by reflecting on the social context of Spain, where legal socialization and police legitimacy perceptions have been tested. For example, the importance of family in Mediterranean countries may affect legal socialization. However, it is worth remembering that the main finding of our study is the influence of democratic parenting rather than the role of the family itself. Furthermore, in Spain, school is seen as an institution where knowledge is acquired, and hence educational research has focused more on this aspect than on non-cognitive factors (Krüger et al., 2015). However, school in Spain does seem to play an influential role in promoting positive legitimacy perceptions of the police. Hence, the model should be tested in other countries to determine the elements that make school a socializing agent that helps to reinforce the legitimacy of the legal system and its authorities. As regards the influence of friends, criminal juvenile gangs barely exist in Spain; most groups of adolescents are not violent and they emerge as a space for relationships in which peers establish their emotional independence (Bartolomé-Gutiérrez and Rechea-Alberola, 2006). Thus, it would be interesting to test this model in countries where violent criminal subcultures are more prevalent to see whether values and attitudes towards the law and the police influence adolescents' behaviour and, consequently, shape legal socialization. Finally, the political changes that have taken place in Spain over the last 40 years have led people to be more critical of the police than they are in countries where there is broader support for police institutions (Newburn and Reiner, 2012). Hence, the fact that the police have a profound impact on adolescent socialization confirms the key role of legal authorities in bolstering the legitimacy of the system. Nevertheless, it would be necessary to validate our model in

different contexts because the police in Spain may act in a much more respectful manner than in other countries. Owing to the importance of maintaining the image of Spanish institutions and public trust in the system (which is often questioned), police behaviour in Spain must, by necessity, be exemplary.

Finally, it should be noted that the cross-sectional nature of the data does not allow for the establishment of any causal direction. Therefore, this model only refers to empirical associations that can be discussed from a legal socialization point of view, but it does not exclude alternative explanations for juvenile delinquency. For example, our study establishes that procedural justice evaluations influence legitimacy perceptions of legal authorities (Piquero et al., 2005; Tyler, 1990; Wolfe et al., 2017). However, Gibson's (1991) research showed the possibility of reversing this relationship because legitimacy perceptions of institutions might be the product of different socialization experiences that impact how individuals evaluate the procedural fairness that the legal authorities apply in their actions. According to Gibson (1991), individuals evaluate in detail the manner in which legal authorities act on the basis of their previous general attitudes, instead of forming their general opinion on institutional legitimacy from specific procedural justice evaluations. Another example is the association between delinquent peers and juvenile delinquency. This relationship has been established following a socialization model by which attitudes, values and behaviours respond, in part, to a learning process acquired in peer groups. However, the causal order may be different, since the self-selection hypothesis shows that delinquent adolescents tend to seek peer groups that share the same interest in criminal activity (Haynie, 2002). In this sense, a problematic relationship between these delinquent groups and the police would explain low police legitimacy perceptions.

Limitations

Despite the importance of the results obtained, this empirical study has methodological and theoretical limitations that should be addressed in future research. First, as stated in the previous section, the cross-sectional nature of the data means that we cannot establish any causal inference. Through the SEM analysis we could determine only the magnitude of the influence and the direction of the relationships (direct and indirect) among variables. Second, the items included in the procedural justice section of the ISRD-3 questionnaire depart little from those traditionally used to test the adult population. Although modifications to this section have been attempted (Marshall et al., 2013), no further effort was made to adapt the questions to the language commonly used by adolescents. Third, as Enzmann et al. (2018) pointed out in relation to school-based delinquency research, the poor participation of schools in Madrid and the high non-response rate of older students in Albacete could possibly affect the final results, as long as schools with high proportions of problematic students tend to participate less and antisocial young people tend to be less collaborative. Moreover, it is also worth noting the possibility of social desirability bias that may occur in this type of study. Fourth, a further limitation is working with secondary data and, consequently, with the decisions of other researchers. Aspects of procedural justice such as participation and the legal cynicism scale should be included to determine how the model might change when this second key dimension of legal socialization was incorporated. The last limitation of this work is the way juvenile

delinquency was measured (variety scale) and the possible impact this had on results. There are other ways to assess delinquency, each of which might have delivered different results and, possibly, fresh perspectives.

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ORCID iD

Esther Fernández-Molina  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3103-0232>

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Appendix

Table 4. Factor loadings and squared multiple correlations of the items composing the latent constructs.

Items of the latent constructs	Factor loadings	Squared multiple correlations
<i>Police legitimacy perceptions</i>		
'The police generally have the same sense of right and wrong as I do'	.73	.53
'The police are appreciative of how young people think'	.78	.60
'I generally support how the police usually act'	.80	.65
<i>Parental monitoring</i>		
'My parents know where I am when I go out'	.78	.61
(b) 'My parents know what I am doing when I go out'	.81	.66
(c) 'My parents know what friends I am with when I go out'	.64	.40
(d) 'I tell my parents who I spend time with'	.75	.56
(e) 'I tell my parents how I spend my money'	.66	.44
(f) 'I tell my parents where I am most afternoons after school'	.77	.60
(g) 'I tell my parents what I do with my free time'	.74	.55
<i>School attachment</i>		
(a) 'If I had to move, I would miss my school'	.68	.46
(b) 'Most mornings I like going to school'	.64	.41
(c) 'I like my school'	.79	.62
(d) 'Our classes are interesting'	.57	.32
<i>Procedural justice evaluations</i>		
(a) 'Would you say the police generally treat young people with respect?'	.79	.62
(b) 'How often would you say the police make fair decisions when dealing with young people?'	.82	.68
(c) 'How often would you say the police explain their decisions and actions to young people?'	.69	.48

Table 5. Composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) of the latent constructs.

Latent constructs	CR	AVE
Police legitimacy perceptions	.81	.59
Parental monitoring		
Knowledge	.79	.56
Communication	.82	.53
School attachment	.76	.44
Procedural justice evaluations	.81	.59