

# Study links juveniles' views of police with likelihood of aggressive behavior

September 21 2017

---

Although many juvenile offenders report that they believe they have experienced police injustice, little has been known about how this perception of police injustice may impact future behavior.

A new Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis study of [juvenile offenders](#) finds that when youth perceive [police](#) injustice, it affects not only how they view the justice system, but also their rates of aggression.

The study found that youth who tended to justify behaviors that violate general moral standards, such as believing it is OK to lie or fight, were also more likely to be aggressive. However, this relationship was found only among juvenile offenders who also reported high levels of perceived police injustice.

"Future aggression appears to be highest among youth who do not believe that ethical standards apply to them, which we refer to as moral disengagement, but only when they also perceive injustice by police," said clinical psychologist Tamika Zapolski, the lead author of the study.

"We need to understand the contexts in which these juvenile offenders live so we can foster things like community policing to counter perceptions such as 'the police are out to get me' or 'the police hate everyone in my neighborhood,'" she said.

Zapolski is an assistant professor of psychology in the School of Science

at IUPUI and directs PRISM, the Prevention Research in Substance Use and Minority Health Lab in the School of Science. PRISM focuses on risk for substance use and other health behaviors among African-Americans.

"Other studies have looked at community views of [police officers](#) and how that impacts juvenile offenders' behavior and recidivism," said study co-author Matthew Aalsma. "What this study adds is the insight that moral disengagement, or believing ethical standards don't apply to you, when combined with perceptions of negative interactions with police officers, is associated with increased aggression." Aalsma is a juvenile forensic psychologist and a professor of pediatrics and psychology at Indiana University School of Medicine.

The study surveyed 95 juvenile offenders. The researchers concluded that intervention programs that address perceptions of perceived police injustice as well [moral disengagement](#) may be beneficial at reducing [aggression](#) among youth involved in the juvenile justice system.

"Perceived Police Injustice, Moral Disengagement, and Aggression Among Juvenile Offenders: Utilizing the General Strain Theory Model?" is published in *Child Psychiatry & Human Development*. Authors in addition to Zapolski and Aalsma are Devin E. Banks of the School of Science at IUPUI and Katherine Lau of State University of New York at Oneonta.

Provided by Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis School of Science

Citation: Study links juveniles' views of police with likelihood of aggressive behavior (2017, September 21) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2017-09-links-juveniles-views-police-likelihood.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.