

Future Policing: Safety Without Force?

The Reykjavík City Library Grófin



Researching the perceptions of ethnic minorities with policing

Difficulties, challenges, and prospects

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FRAMTÍÐARLÖGGÆSLA -
ÖRYGGI ÁN VALDBEITINGAR?

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DISCUSSION CIRCLE

Introduction

- The ambivalence of policing
- Policing entails ensuring security and maintaining a specific social order shaped by collective interests or latent conflicts within social hierarchies (Bowling et al., 2019, pp. 4–5), often addressing immediate, and routine matters with minimal formalities (Montesquieu, 2001, p. 519)
- From homogeneous to multi-ethnic society
- Several studies indicate that policing is often manifested through the selective deployment of coercive powers (Saarikkomäki et al., 2023)
- Ethnic minorities and suspicion (Bowling et al., 2019, p. 140)
- Research on police-minority relations globally, reveal the prevalence of over-policing and profiling of marginalized groups

Methodology

- Based on qualitative research methodology which “inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human phenomenon” (Creswell, 2007, p. 37)
- **Research Question:** ““What are the factors that make experiences of people of color with the police positive or negative?”
- **Interview Design:** qualitative in-depth semi-structured interviews making room for the participants to build their own narrative, semi-structured open-ended questions
- **Participants:** primarily based on whether they have had first-account interactions with the police, and self-identify as being a person of color. Interviewee selection was based of referrals from the first participants (snowball sampling)

Research Findings

Requests for Police Service/Assistance: Positive Encounters

- Main themes were:
 - Positive encounters associated with quick response time, and clear communication
 - Participants in this study expressed willingness to seek assistance, cooperate and follow instructions

“I think I always want to [trust the police...]” Participant 3

“I respect the [position], I respect the police, [and] law and order. I was telling you, the best part with Icelandic police is in their uniform. There is some emblem and writing which in English, it means, with the law, we build the land” Participant 8

Research Findings

Requests for Police Service/Assistance: Negative Encounters

- Main themes were more negative than positive:
 - Interpersonal skills and conflictual communication
 - Subjective perception that their non-Icelandic background influenced the quality of service

“...For this kind of situations, I can talk to the person [myself], and we can resolve the issue ourselves”
Participant 2

“...If I was to be an Icelandic person [...] But I'm a black person so nobody really cares...” Participant 5

“Their primary concern is for their people (...)” Participant 4

““We started to have problems with... the war...But until now, we never saw them here...”
Participant 10

Research Findings

Stop-and-search, and other encounters

- **Negative encounters:** Participants perceived stop & search-based interactions as more negative than calls for service policing
- **Positive encounters:** associated with quick response time, clear and courteous communication; due process

“Last year on a Saturday evening [my son] drove, I said: ‘Ok, you must be home by 22:30” (Participant 7)

“Someone [called the police] and report[ed] maybe they were dealing drugs. I told him: ‘Hand the phone to the police’. And I talked to the policeman”
(Participant 7)

Summary of Research findings

Experiences of researching ethnic minorities and policing

- Complex layers of (private) interests, preconceived notions and stereotypes, ideologies, and politics
- Rhetorical subterfuges: for example, "How did the other Nordic countries deal with this?"
- The ambivalence of policing

(Selected) Recommendations from the participants

- More research conducted by minority representatives in collaboration with community leaders
- Town Hall meetings ensuring closer connection with the community in collaboration with civil society organizations
- For Statistics Iceland (Hagstofan) to collect data on self-identified ethnicity of Iceland's population
- Further research on minority groups and racialized people experiences with law enforcement in the Icelandic context taking into consideration matters of sexual and gender minorities, people with disabilities, experiences of minors and parents

Topics for Discussion

What's next?

Should the Statistics Iceland (Hagstofan) collect data on self-identified ethnicity of Iceland's population?

More "diverse" policing in the future?

Community policing?

Client-centered, community-oriented policing?

The ambivalence of policing

Ethnic minorities or racialized minorities?



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Preliminary Findings

It represents the first study of its kind in the Icelandic setting to include participants from four distinct geographical regions, providing a broad yet in-depth perspective on the interactions between people of color and the Icelandic police

The findings revealed a significant correlation with earlier Nordic police-minority studies. People of color in Iceland reported both positive and negative encounters with the police.

Positive interactions were mainly perceived to be based on timely responses, respect for due process, and courteous communication. Clear and courteous communication - as opposed to the conflictual type (Haller, 2020, p. 13) - associated with the tenets of cross-cultural communication (Koefoed & Simonsen, 2021) which envisages finding common ground, was the common positive denominator during reactive and proactive policing. Contrary to existing literature (Jónsdóttir, 2024), participants in this study expressed willingness to seek assistance, and cooperate with the police.

It brought to light the role of response time, communication, and procedural conduct in shaping the participants' experiences.

References

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