



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Experimental Social Psychology

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jesp

Racial discrimination and belief in a just world: Police violence against teenagers in Brazil[☆]

Khalil da Costa Silva^{a,*}, Ana Raquel Rosas Torres^a, José Luis Álvaro Estramiana^b,
Alicia Garrido Luque^b, Layanne Vieira Linhares^a

^a Universidade Federal da Paraíba, Cidade Universitária, João Pessoa 58051-900, Brazil

^b Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Campus de Somosaguas, Pozuelo de Alarcón 28223, Spain

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Racial discrimination
Police violence
Belief in a just world

ABSTRACT

Discrimination against black people is analyzed based on tolerance for police violence, support for lowering the age of criminal responsibility, and support for the payment of compensation by the police to teenage offenders. Three studies were conducted, all with university students and high school students. In Study 1 ($N = 118$), the influence of the type of crime (*robbery* versus *drug trafficking*) and the target of criminal action (*identifiable* versus *unidentifiable*) on the variables studied were analyzed. Study 2 ($N = 343$) examined the effect of the relationship between the type of crime (*robbery* versus *drug trafficking*), the target of criminal action (*identifiable* versus *unidentifiable*), and the teenage offender's race (*white* versus *black*) on discrimination. Study 3 ($N = 316$) replicated Study 2 by adding belief in a just world as a moderator of discrimination. Together, the results indicate racial discrimination through a greater tolerance for police violence and support for lowering the age of criminal responsibility for crimes committed by black teenagers. Another finding was a greater support for the payment of compensation by the police to the teenage offender when crimes are committed by white teenagers. High levels of adherence to belief in a just world accentuate racial discrimination.

1. Introduction

In the context of public security, it is possible to verify the presence of discrimination against black people based on several indicators. According to the Map of Incarceration - Adolescents in Brazil (*Mapa do Encarceramento - Os jovens no Brasil, 2014*), the more the prison population in Brazil grows, the more black people are overrepresented in the prison population. In 2005, blacks accounted for 58.4% of the prison population. In 2012, that proportion increased to 60.8%. In the cases of deaths due to police action, the victims are predominantly black (61%), most of whom are men (97%), and young persons between 15 and 29 years of age (78%) (*Sinhoretto, Silvestre, & Schlittler, 2014*).

Given this scenario of inequality, this paper aims to analyze racial discrimination against blacks based on the context of tolerance for police violence and support for lowering the age of criminal responsibility. The choice of this subject is justified by the social relevance of these topics. Faced with increasing levels of violence, Brazilian society takes security measures through police action (*Minayo & Adorno, 2013*;

Peres, Ruotti, Carvalho, & Regina, 2015) and simultaneously tolerates acts of violence by the police (*Torres, Faria, Guimarães, & Martignoni, 2007*). These actions violate principles of the rule of law and are violent and abusive (*Guimarães, Torres, & Faria, 2005*; *Ruotti, Freitas, Almeida, & Peres, 2009*). In the context of the increase in violence, reducing the age of criminal responsibility has gained prominence in Brazil, considering that police action is increasingly expressed against young people living on the outskirts of urban centers (*Minayo & Adorno, 2013*; *Peres et al., 2015*), in addition to the population's support for lowering the age of criminal responsibility (*Galvão & Camino, 2011*; *Menin, 2005*).

Support for severe punishments against an offender varies depending on the type of crime and the identifiability of the target of the criminal action. It is known that an identifiable target mobilizes greater cognitive and emotional resources than do statistical targets (*Chaiken, 1980*; *Petty & Cacioppo, 1986*). Regarding the type of crime, there is greater support for the use of severe punishments for crimes involving innocent victims, such as robberies and crimes involving violence

[☆] This research had the financial support of Capes/DGPU (307/15).

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: kdacosta@ucm.es (K. da Costa Silva).

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2017.10.009>

Received 6 March 2017; Received in revised form 18 October 2017; Accepted 21 October 2017

0022-1031/© 2017 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

(Bastian, Denson, & Haslam, 2013; Bastian, Laham, Wilson, Haslam, & Koval, 2011; Gromet & Darley, 2009; Viki, Fullerton, Raggett, Tait, & Wiltshire, 2012). Support for more stringent punishments is also greater when it is perceived that the crime causes greater harm to its victims (Gromet & Darley, 2009).

On the other hand, support for the use of severe punishments and police violence can also be analyzed from the scope of intergroup relations. Studies converge in noting that there is greater tolerance for police violence when it is directed at members of minority groups (Álvarez et al., 2015) and that these groups are assessed as more dangerous, as lacking self-control, and as being less sensitive to pain (Bastian et al., 2011; Goff, Jack, Cullota, DiLeone, & DiTomasso, 2014; Haslam & Loughnam, 2014; Viki et al., 2006), which would result in negative actions against social minorities (Cuddy, Rock, & Norton, 2007; Zebel, Zimmermann, Viki, & Doosje, 2008) and in more severe forms of judgment in the face of the transgressions committed by members of these groups (Goff, Eberhardt, Williams, & Jackson, 2008).

In the penal system, the offender's racial group has an effect on the jury's decision-making, such that blacks receive more severe sentences than whites, and the latter are subject to greater complacency (Eberhardt, Goff, Purdie, & Davies, 2004; Mitchell, Haw, Pfeifer, & Meissner, 2005; Sommers, 2007; Sommers & Ellsworth, 2009). These racial disparities are also found in cases in which the offender is under 18 years of age. The simple suggestion that a teenage offender is black mobilizes people to perceive the offender as being similar to an adult in terms of guilt and to express greater support for severe legal measures against him/her (Rattan, Levine, Dweck, & Eberhardt, 2012). By the age of 13, black teenage offenders are prematurely viewed as being responsible for their actions and as the target for stricter police actions, whereas white teenagers at this age are still perceived as innocent (Goff et al., 2014).

Therefore, the type of crime, the target of criminal action, and the race of the offender may explain support for severe punishment measures and tolerance for police violence. To date, however, studies have not been conducted to explain the support for lowering the age of criminal responsibility and tolerance for police violence against teenagers based on the interaction between the type of crime, the target of the criminal action, and the teenage offender's race. In this sense, the general objective of this study is to analyze racial discrimination against blacks from the context of support for reducing the age of criminal responsibility, tolerance for the use of violence by the police, and support for compensating the victim of such violence. To that end, we investigate whether there would be differences in these variables depending on the type of crime and the target of criminal action (Study 1). In addition, we verify the effect of the interaction between the type of crime, the target of criminal action, and the teenage offender's race on tolerance for police violence, support for compensating the victim of such violence, and support for lowering the age of criminal responsibility (Study 2).

Because intergroup behaviors are influenced by beliefs about the stability and legitimacy of existing relationships between groups (Tajfel, 1981), we also try to verify the moderating role that belief in a just world exercises in the relationship between the teenage offender's race on tolerance for police violence, support for compensating the victim of such violence, and support for lowering the age of criminal responsibility (Study 3). We understand that this variable can moderate the severity of punishment attributed to members of dominant and minority groups because belief in a just world represents a central principle according to which good people are rewarded and bad people are punished (Hafer & Bègue, 2005; Lerner, 1971).

The three studies conducted here involve the participation of high school students and university students in their first academic year. Previous studies have indicated that it is important for studies related to support for lowering the age of criminal responsibility from 18 to 16 years to analyze the population that would be directly affected by this legislative amendment (Galvão & Camino, 2011; Menin, 2005).

This work was also approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Federal University of Paraíba (Universidade Federal da Paraíba) and conformed to all American Psychological Association (APA) guidelines for research with human participants¹.

2. Study 1

The objective of this study is to verify whether there is a difference in the level of tolerance for police violence, support for the payment of compensation by the police to the teenage offender, and support for lowering the age of criminal responsibility, depending on the type of crime and the target of criminal action. Specifically, we analyze whether the type of crime committed by the teenager (drug trafficking versus robbery) and the target of the criminal action (identifiable versus unidentifiable) influence (1) tolerance for police violence, (2) support for lowering the age of criminal responsibility, and (3) support for the payment of compensation by the police. This is an experimental study with a between-subjects design.

The crimes of robbery and drug trafficking were included in this investigation because they are the most common infractions committed by teenagers in Brazil (*Mapa do Encarceramento - Os jovens no Brasil*, 2014). These crimes were also chosen because they are distinct in terms of offensiveness. The crime of robbery has greater offensiveness because it necessarily results in victim(s), whereas the crime of drug trafficking, although it consists of a transgression, does not involve victims but clients. Because drug trafficking is a criminal act that does not result in victims, it is likely to elicit less support for the use of punishments. Research on processes of social attribution and judgment indicate that when a person involved in a negative event is perceived as being responsible for this situation, this perception results in greater responsibility for the event and a lesser degree of empathy for him/her (Weiner, 1995).

Attitudes toward criminal conduct have been analyzed in several studies in social psychology (e.g., Bastian et al., 2013; Carlsmith & Darley, 2008; Sommers, 2007). In expressing attitudes about the guilt of victims of misfortune, people place little emphasis on the potential benefit and damage that punitive sanctions can have for society and tend to support a retributive model of justice based on the premise that punishments should be proportional to the seriousness of the crime committed, regardless of whether the punishment is capable of preventing further occurrences of the crime or of minimizing the harm caused to the victim (Carlsmith, 2006; Carlsmith & Darley, 2008).

Support for retributive forms of justice can therefore be explained by the severity of the crime. As regards the type of crime, the more the crime is perceived as being morally wrong, the greater the support for punishment (Carlsmith, 2008; Gromet & Darley, 2006). Crimes that generate the greatest moral offense are those that are committed intentionally and that involve innocent victims, such as robberies and crimes involving the use of violence (Bastian et al., 2011; Bastian et al., 2013; Gray, Gray, & Wegner, 2007; Gromet & Darley, 2009; Viki et al., 2012). For these types of crimes, people tend to support the application of stricter punishments, such as stricter criminal sentences involving the deprivation of liberty (Bastian et al., 2013), and consent to the use of violent actions against criminals and their social exclusion (Viki et al., 2012).

Not only the type of crime but also the target of criminal action influences the support for severe punishments. The influence of the presence of the victim on our attitudes and judgments about negative situations has been researched by studies on the “effect of identifiability” (Small, 2003; Small, Loewenstein, & Slovic, 2007), such that simple forms of identifying victims evoke more empathy than the mention of victims in statistical terms. This effect can be explained by

¹ We clarify that in these studies we report all measures, manipulations, and exclusions, as well as the method of determining the final sample size.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7324286>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7324286>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)