

Informal Social Control and the Endorsement of Police Legitimacy: A Confirmatory Factor Analysis

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ABSTRACT High-profile shootings by police officers and the mass protests that followed have highlighted the necessity of social work scholars to address new perspectives in community safety. Collective efficacy is a theoretical framework that explores how individual-level interactions impact community-level outcomes. Despite evidence that indicates collective efficacy is an effective mediator to community-level crime and violence, criticisms of the model question the influence of informal social control and whether or not it represents policing in another form. This paper seeks to understand the relationship between informal social control and police legitimacy to understand how residents' inclination to intervene reflects a replication of the worst aspects of formal institutions of social control. I performed a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) across 15 endogenous variables and two latent exogenous variables to create two pathways that assessed the relationship between informal social control and police legitimacy. Results from the CFA pathways indicate that increased levels of informal social control among neighborhood residents was related to decreased levels of police legitimacy. Implications of these findings for abolitionist social work scholars are discussed along with the study's limitations and future directions for research.

KEYWORDS abolition, informal social control, collective efficacy, police legitimacy, social work

CONTINUOUS HIGH-PROFILE police shootings and the mass protests that followed have highlighted the growing resentment toward the institution of policing. State violence at the hands of police officers, and the institutional crisis it has caused, however, is not a new phenomenon (Beardall, 2022; Hinton, 2021). As the role of police officers in our communities comes under increasingly contentious scrutiny, research into the role of neighborhood-level interactions as a means of crime prevention has become ever more important. Research into understanding the impact of police legitimacy on crime has shown that perceived moral alignment with police appears to promote further cooperation with police on matters of criminal activity in neighborhoods by residents (Kochel, 2018). In a time of growing recognition of the schism between the perceived moral duties of police and the day-to-day realities of their relationship to particular communities, however, it is not fully understood if this moral alignment replicates the actions of police or the actions of the good of the community.

Abolitionist social workers believe that a world without police and incarceration are not only possible, but necessary. It is the work of abolitionist social workers, then, to provide a framework for how public safety and community cohesion, without the institutional violence of policing and

incarceration, should look. One of the larger questions that needs to be answered by abolitionist scholars is how we address issues of police legitimacy—that is, is police legitimacy a necessary prerequisite to community safety, and if so, how do we go about decoupling community safety from the perceived necessity of the police? The distinction outlined by Brock-Petroshius and colleagues (2022) between liberal social justice and abolitionist praxis plays a role here. The liberal social justice line of thinking would link improved police legitimacy among the community as ultimately beneficial, in that improved community relations theoretically align with improved community safety (Brock-Petroshius et al., 2022). Abolitionist scholars, however, are tasked with showing how police legitimacy perpetuates institutional violence, particularly in marginalized communities (Critical Resistance, 2021).

One theoretical framework that seeks to predict community-level outcomes of safety and well-being is collective efficacy (Gearhart, 2019). Collective efficacy is composed of two interactive constructs: informal social control, or the willingness for neighbors to intervene to solve social problems, and social cohesion, or the social ties among neighbors (Sampson et al., 1997; Sampson & Raudenbush, 1999). Policing is believed to be an antecedent to collective efficacy; however, the mechanisms in which police legitimacy interact with collective efficacy is not completely understood. As we look toward mechanisms of community safety that move beyond the need to interact with the institution of policing, it is important to understand the extent to which already established community mechanisms of control replicate the worst aspects of formal policing institutions.

The goal of this paper is to understand how a new model of public safety might look—that is, a public safety completely detached from formal systems of control in the police and the criminal legal system. This paper seeks to understand the relationship between informal social control and police legitimacy to understand if residents' inclination to intervene in community conflicts replicates the formal systems of social control. I begin by providing an overview of the theoretical frameworks that ground my research: collective efficacy and abolitionist social work. I then discuss the empirical evidence into the relationship between policing and informal social control, how we understand police legitimacy, and methods of public safety outside of police intervention. Using the model of collective efficacy, I provide a description of the confirmatory factor analysis used in this study and the intervening results as they relate to the theoretical and empirical frameworks discussed. Finally, I reflect on the impact of the findings on the future directions of social work, in particular abolitionist social work, as they relate to public safety and community practice.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Collective Efficacy

Collective efficacy forms the broad theoretical framework of this study. Prior to the concept of collective efficacy, it was thought that social ties between neighbors, and the social capital they build, was the primary factor driving healthy communities (Kubrin & Weitzer, 2003). Social capital, or the intangible resources produced in relations between people acting in mutual benefit, contends that social relations often have the capacity to create an identified trust and obligation toward one another (Coleman, 1988). While social networks and ties seem to have a relationship to social control, they do not appear to be sufficient in and of themselves (Kubrin & Weitzer, 2003). What appeared to be missing was the collective willingness to take action on behalf of a neighborhood

that is fostered by social ties (Kubrin & Weitzer, 2003). While social capital may have this capacity, it is by definition a byproduct of other social activities and thus rarely recognized and employed as a means of social control (Coleman, 1988; Kubrin & Weitzer, 2003).

Sampson and colleagues' (1997) concept of collective efficacy, or the way community members work collectively to solve problems, relies on purposive communal action. Collective efficacy was created through the combination of two existing concepts: social cohesion and informal social control. Social cohesion is generally defined as the mutual trust between neighbors, the willingness of neighbors to help other neighbors, and the closeness of the community (Sampson et al., 1997; Sampson & Raudenbush, 1999). Informal social control, on the other hand, is generally defined as the willingness of neighbors to intervene on matters of perceived disorder, crime, or interpersonal violence within the neighborhood (Sampson et al., 1997; Sampson & Raudenbush, 1999). This construct of collective efficacy, linking communal trust and collective intervention for the common good, is largely believed to mediate multiple levels of community outcomes, such as violence, crime, and disorganization (Gearhart, 2019; Kubrin & Weitzer, 2003; Lyons et al., 2017; Morenoff et al., 2001; Sampson et al., 1997; Sampson & Raudenbush, 1999).

Informal social control. Conceptual criticism of collective efficacy suggests that the two constructs that make up collective efficacy—informal social control and social cohesion—are in fact separate constructs that should be modeled separately (Gearhart, 2019). Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls (1997) themselves cautioned that the view of informal social control as a group of community residents “working collectively to solve their own problems” (p. 923) may not be entirely the case, and that a more complete picture needs to be formed. Racial homogeneity and bonding social capital, for instance, has been found to be a mediating factor between the two constructs (Collins et al., 2014; 2017). These findings seem to indicate that social cohesion may in fact be the driving force behind collective efficacy as opposed to social control (Gearhart, 2019).

Informal social control itself has been shown to have a complicated relationship to community safety and well-being. For example, informal social control has been shown to have a nonlinear effect on intimate partner violence (IPV), where IPV rates were higher in neighborhoods with both high and low levels of informal social control (Valentine et al., 2019). This suggests that there may come a point where informal social control prevents individuals from coming out against violent offenders (Valentine et al., 2019). Individual endorsement of measures indicating informal social control have also been found to be related to endorsement over more formal social control mechanisms, i.e., police forces (Renauer, 2007). This endorsement of social control may also lead to stereotyping, shaming, and vigilantism among community members (Walby & Joshua, 2021).

Abolitionist Social Work

In response to the growing public outcry against the legitimacy of the police, there has been a growing attitude toward public safety among certain sectors of the profession that involves bringing in social workers to either 1) respond alongside the police, or 2) to respond *instead of* the police (Rasmussen & James, 2020). Both scenarios demonstrate a fundamental dissonance within the social work profession—despite the values espoused in our code of ethics (NASW, n.d.), the social work profession has a long history of aligning itself with oppressive systems (Kim, 2013; Jacobs et al., 2021; Rasmussen & James, 2020). What's more, in aligning itself with systems of policing, it has in turn further legitimized their existence and thus the attitude towards punishment already

pervasive in our neoliberal system of governance (Wacquant, 2012). One cannot simply escape the punitive powers of the state by changing the faces of *who* is doing the punishing (Rasmussen & James, 2020).

Contemporary abolitionist praxis is rooted in the history of Black radicalism and understands the necessity to eliminate the institutional violence of policing and incarceration (Brock-Petroshius et al., 2022). Abolitionist praxis is therefore not the process of tearing down, but in building and re-imagining institutions and communities that make prisons and policing in their current form obsolete (Davis, 2005). The re-building and reimagining of institutions and communities outside of the violent structures of state-imposed social control create a tension between liberal “reformist reforms” and abolitionist steps (Brock-Petroshius et al., 2022; Critical Resistance, 2021). The former attempts to solve the problem of racism within the carceral state through policies that address the symptom and ultimately provide more power to these institutions (i.e. body cameras, racial bias training), while abolitionist reforms attack the root of social injustice and racism within the carceral state (i.e., reducing the size of the police and increasing funding towards community health, education, and housing) (Brock-Petroshius et al., 2022; Critical Resistance, 2021; Jacobs et al., 2021).

Brock-Petroshius and colleagues (2022) describe multiple ways in which abolitionist praxis can be embedded into social work praxis, including the development of “interventions to eliminate and address the effects of racism” (p. 233). Community organizing and building cooperative economic structures, such as mutual aid, are some such suggestions, each of which rests on the necessity of building and maintaining strong and efficacious communities (Brock-Petroshius et al., 2022). The goal here is to decenter the social worker and social work institutions while promoting community practices and problem-solving instead (Jacobs et al., 2021). The relationship here between informal and formal social control—that is community-driven social control and state-driven social control—is the interest of this research project.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Police Legitimacy

Institutional legitimacy generally refers to the obligation the public has toward obeying the authority of an institution, without which the institution will no longer be able to operate (Kochel, 2018; Tyler, 2011; Weber, 1947). For Weber (1947), it is necessary that this obligation of legitimizing the institution is done voluntarily on the part of the citizenry for institutional legitimacy to be actualized—that is, force is the antithesis of legitimacy as legitimacy. As an institution that is theoretically tasked with controlling “crime,” police officers and policing institutions themselves fall under the necessity of institutional legitimacy (Beardall, 2022; Kochel, 2011).

Police legitimacy is broadly understood as the obligation that community members must trust and obey police officers and policing institutions (Tyler, 2010). This definition of legitimacy would include public support for ideas that police adequately prevent neighborhood crime and are generally helpful to neighborhood residents. In line with the belief in institutional legitimacy, public support in the legitimacy of the police is thus theoretically necessary in order for the police to perform the functions of their job (Beardall, 2022; Kochel, 2011; Tyler, 2010). The consequences of this view of police legitimacy, then, is that general acceptance of the role of the institution of policing in our lives also means the internalization of the laws, social rules, and enforcement methods of the police

(Kochel, 2011). Thus, in areas of high views of police legitimacy from residents, we should also see lower abilities of residents to collectively solve problems, i.e., informal social control.

One of the greatest impacts on police legitimacy appears to come from the perception of procedural justice (Kochel, 2011). Procedural justice is the impartial process in which people feel as though they are treated with respect by institutions of higher authority, outside of their race, gender, sexuality, age, or other demographic information (Kochel, 2011; Leventhal, 1976). Here, the police are viewed as legitimate insofar as they maintain a general belief in the equal treatment of citizens regardless of their demographic identities.

Policing and Collective Efficacy

It is largely believed in the literature that efficacious neighborhoods are preceded by police legitimacy (Yesberg & Bradford, 2021). This belief necessitates that police must be seen as legitimate prior to individual-level interactions that build social cohesion and trust among neighbors. Prior scholarship has suggested that when individuals believe in a competent and just police force, they are more willing and empowered to act against perceived local threats of deviant behavior (Silver & Miller, 2004). The opposite appears to be true as well, where residents do not feel comfortable acting against perceived deviant behavior in their neighborhood if the police are not seen as a viable resource due to feeling as though their actions are more risky and less effective (Drakulich & Crutchfield, 2013; Kubrin & Weitzer, 2003).

Conversely, some scholars believe that the absence of police legitimacy may promote engagement of informal social control in neighborhoods, as residents react to perceived inadequacies in their local police departments (Kochel, 2018; Kubrin & Weitzer, 2003; Silver & Miller, 2004). Earlier research found that communities where older adults were seen as having a higher degree of social control on the youth of the neighborhood lowered the perception of antisocial behavior and led to a decrease in police mobilization in those neighborhoods (Nash & Bowen, 1999).

Further complicating this relationship, some scholars believe that it is the individual-level interactions, norms, and values of a community that influence attitudes toward the police at the community-level (Jackson & Bradford, 2009; Jackson & Sunshine, 2007; Jackson et al., 2013; Nix et al., 2015). In other words, faith and trust in the legitimacy of the police are strongest when there is already a strong sense of accepted social norms and values within the community (Jackson & Bradford, 2009; Jackson & Sunshine, 2007). Under this framework, we can see the view that the institution of policing is intertwined with communities such that the attitudes of one directly influences the attitudes of the other.

Public Safety Alternatives to Policing

The carceral logics that govern neoliberalism and the current state of the social work profession would have us believe that there is no meaningful disentanglement of public safety from policies of punishment (Rasmussen & James, 2020; Wacquant, 2014). However, it is the necessity of abolitionist social workers to develop a model of public safety that is detached from these formal systems of control. One such model is mutual aid. Mutual aid is both a theoretical and action-oriented practice rooted in the ideals of political participation in which people take responsibility for caring for one another and changing political conditions, not just through symbolic acts, but by actually building new social relations that are more survivable (Littman et al., 2022; Spade, 2020). Rooted in anarchist-communist social praxis and codified as a social science by Kropotkin in the

early 20th century, mutual aid can take a myriad of forms, from resource distribution (i.e., food, clothing, sanitary supplies) to emotional support networks (Littman et al., 2022; Spade, 2020).

While the research surrounding mutual aid as a public safety measure is thus far limited, public safety is among the priorities of most mutual aid networks (Littman et al., 2022; Spade, 2020). Historically, the Black Panther Party, the Brown Berets, and the Young Lords prioritized the safety of their respective communities as part of their broader mutual aid projects (Littman et al., 2022). In a recent study that sought to understand the emergence of mutual aid networks as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, creating spaces of safety, liberation, and cooperation ranked among the top priorities of mutual aid organizers (Littman et al., 2022). Similarly, community organizing around harm reduction is intentional in creating spaces outside the criminal legal system (Spade, 2020). What these approaches have in common is their adherence to community capacity building and cooperation outside of employing traditional, formal social control. How these alternatives employ informal social control, and the degree to which these replicate organizational legitimacy in the police, has yet to be fully explored.

The Present Study

It is necessary to understand the relationship between elements that contribute to community informal social control and elements that contribute to the endorsement of police forces. As such, I will be operating under the following research question: Do individuals who engage in informal social control within their community also endorse the legitimacy of the social control of police forces? Prior research suggests that individuals who engage in informal social control within their neighborhoods will be less likely to hold positive beliefs about the police (Jackson et al., 2009). Thus, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was employed to confirm the internal factor structure emergent from these prior hypotheses between police legitimacy and informal social control (Gearhart, 2019; Jackson et al., 2009; Yesberg & Bradford, 2021).

METHODS

Sample

Data for this study are taken from Part 1 of Warner's (2000) study on the effect of cultural disorganization on informal social control within neighborhoods of high levels of drug-related arrests in Louisville and Lexington, KY. Participants in this study were evenly distributed between homeownership (49%) and renter-occupied (49%), with residents living in the neighborhood for 10 years on average (Warner, 2000). Participants largely identified as female (67%) and were nearly evenly distributed across racial demographics, with 46% identifying as White and 48% identifying as Black (Warner, 2000). Data were collected through face-to-face and telephone interviews with households within 66 targeted census block groups. The sample (N=2,304) completed a survey of 140 majority multiple choice questions regarding their perceptions of their neighborhood.

Variables

Fifteen exogenous variables are spread across two models, each with their own latent endogenous variables identified as informal social control and police legitimacy. Before the analyses, the data were cleaned and variables were coded. The breakdown of the exogenous variables related to each latent exogenous variable is described below.

Informal social control. Twelve exogenous variables were identified through the survey to match the theoretical framework of informal social control. Each variable related to the informal social control latent factor describes an individual respondent's likelihood of intervening on particular criminal and/or delinquent acts in their neighborhood. The variables chosen are as follows: watchprp - watch neighbor's house or property when they are away, lookout - lookout the windows during the day to determine if anything out of the ordinary is occurring, recstrng - recognized strangers in the neighborhood, teenaway - ask a teenager who is off school grounds during school why they aren't in school, childaway - ask an elementary age child who is off school grounds during school why they aren't in school, tellprnt - tell parent that their child isn't in school, stppaint - stop graffiti, stpdiscr - stop a child from disrespecting an adult, stpfight - stop a fight, stpbrkin - stop a break-in, stpdrgch - stop someone from selling drugs to a child, and stpdrgad - stop someone from selling drugs to an adult. Each of the items was on a 4-item Likert scale with "1" indicating that the participant "strongly agreed" with the statement and "4" indicated that they "strongly disagreed". The 12 thematically related items were chosen to create the informal social control scale with a good internal consistency ($\alpha = .859$). This model created an over-identified model with $df = 54$.

Police legitimacy. The second factor was specified using 3 exogenous variables identified through the survey and matching theoretical assumptions. Each variable relating to the police legitimacy latent exogenous factor describes an individual respondent's endorsement of particular positive relations to the police. The variables chosen are as follows: rvpolprv - police play an important role in preventing crime in the neighborhood, rvpolres - police do a good job responding to people who have been victims of crime, and rvpolhel - police are generally helpful to neighborhood residents.

The three variables chosen to represent police legitimacy were on a 4-item Likert scale, where "1" indicated that the respondent "strongly agreed" with the statement, and "4" indicated that they "strongly disagreed." Responses were dropped if the participant responded either "I don't know" or refused to answer, indicated in the data as "REF." Internal consistency reliability was calculated at 0.84. This model created a just-identified model with $df = 0$.

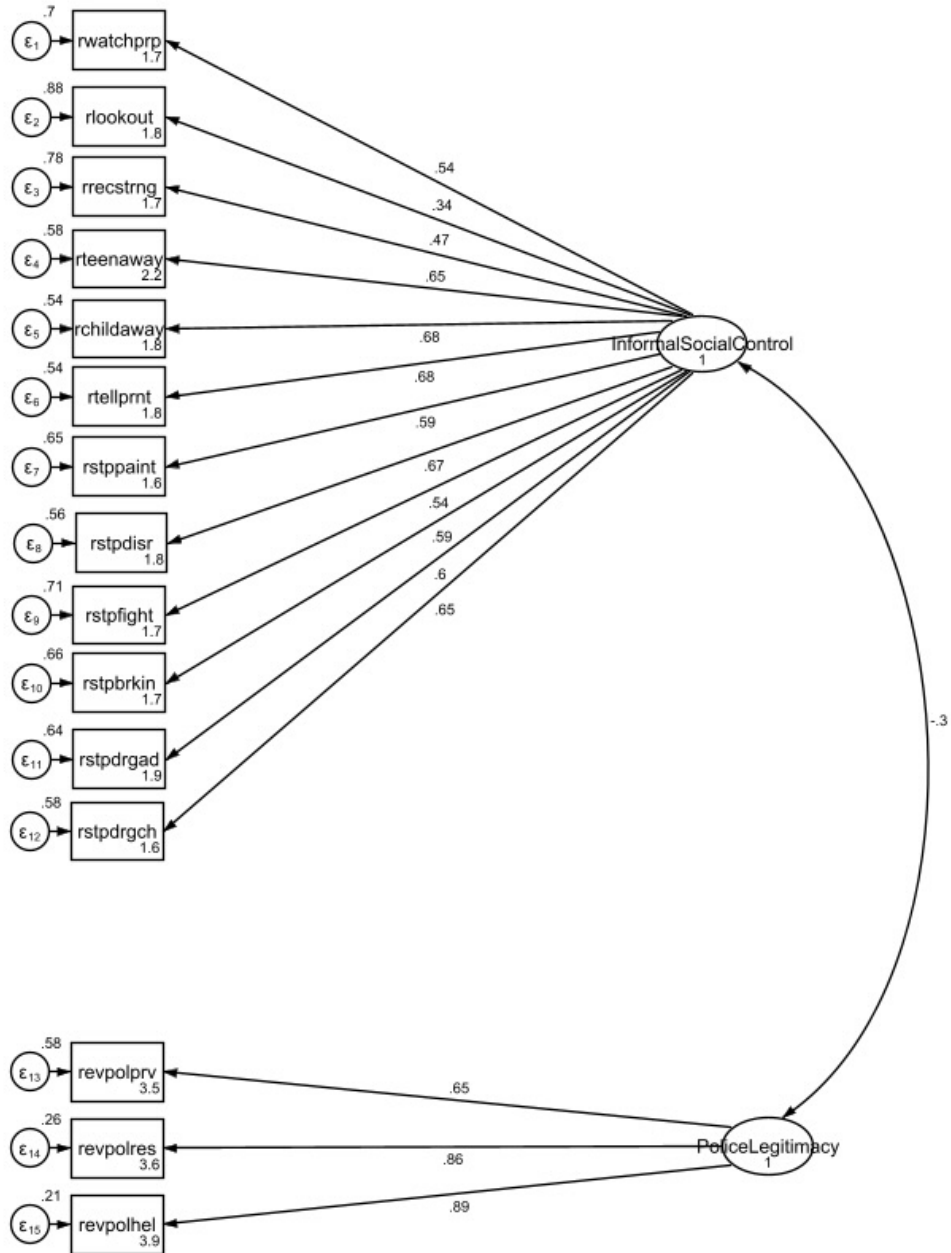
RESULTS

Initial CFA Model

Confirmatory Factor Analysis models were run using STATA 17. In consideration of the nonnormal nature of the data, maximum-likelihood estimation was used to handle the missing data (Kline, 2016; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). No items were missing more than 1.3% of their values and this missingness was random. Most of the items had a skewness and kurtosis below |1.5|.

An initial, misspecified model was created in order to analyze the relationship between variables associated with each latent exogenous factor (See Figure 1). The results of this analysis estimate that each of the variables correlated significantly and positively load with each of their latent factors at the $p < .001$ level. Informal social control and police legitimacy were also significantly correlated with one another ($r = -.105$, $p = 0.000$). The negative correlation between each latent factor seems to indicate that respondents who endorse increased levels of informal social control also endorse lower levels of feeling as though the police are helpful toward the community.

Figure 1: Initial CFA Model



An analysis of goodness of fit statistics, however, showed multiple problems with this model. The chi-square (Chi-square = 1921.66, $p=.000$) was high compared to the degrees of freedom ($df=89$), and the p value fell within significance. The root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) also fell outside the range of acceptability at .109, as did the comparative fit index, (CFI=.813), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI=.780), and the root mean squared residual (SRMR=.073). The lack of confirmatory goodness of fit statistics suggests that this model is not a particularly good fit.

Following this, an analysis of the modification indices was performed. This analysis suggested adding six covariances across nine endogenous variables, each in the model related to informal social control: watchprp-lookout, teenaway-childaway, teenaway-tellprnt, childaway-tellprnt, stpfight-stpbrkin, stpdrgch-stpdrgch. Not only did each of these indices provide substantial modifications to the misspecified model, but each made theoretical sense as well. For example, an individual who responds that they are likely to watch out for their neighbor's property when they are away (watchprp) are also likely to look out their window during the day to keep an eye out on the neighborhood (lookout). In the same sense, an individual who is likely to ask a child or teen why they are not in school (childaway and teenaway, respectively) are likely to also tell their parents that they weren't in school (tellprnt).

Final CFA Model

The above modifications were accounted for and the suggested covariances were added to the initial model. The initial model, with the aforementioned modifications, created the final, specified model for understanding the relationship between variables related to the two latent exogenous factors (Figure 2). As in the initial model, each of the variables positively load and are correlated significantly with their latent factors at $p<.001$. This is also true of each of the covariances, where the error of each varied significantly with one another at the $p<.001$ level. The correlation between informal social control and police legitimacy also remained significant at the $p<.001$ level ($r = -.115$), although this correlation was still weak. The correlation's negative direction still points to a relationship between the two latent factors where informal social control leads to lower endorsement of police legitimacy, and vice versa. Table 1 below shows the CFA estimates for both the initial and final model.

An analysis of goodness of fit statistics shows a considerable improvement in the final model compared to the initial model. The RMSEA fell within the range of acceptability at .05, as did the comparative fit index, (CFI=.95), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI=.94), and the root mean squared residual (SRMR=.04). The Chi-square analysis, however improved, was still high as compared to the degrees of freedom with a p value within the level of significance at the .001 level (Chi-square=523.45, $df=83$, $p=0.000$). Taking all of the statistical goodness of fit measures into account, we can conclude that this second model is generally a good fit.

Figure 2: Final Specified CFA Model

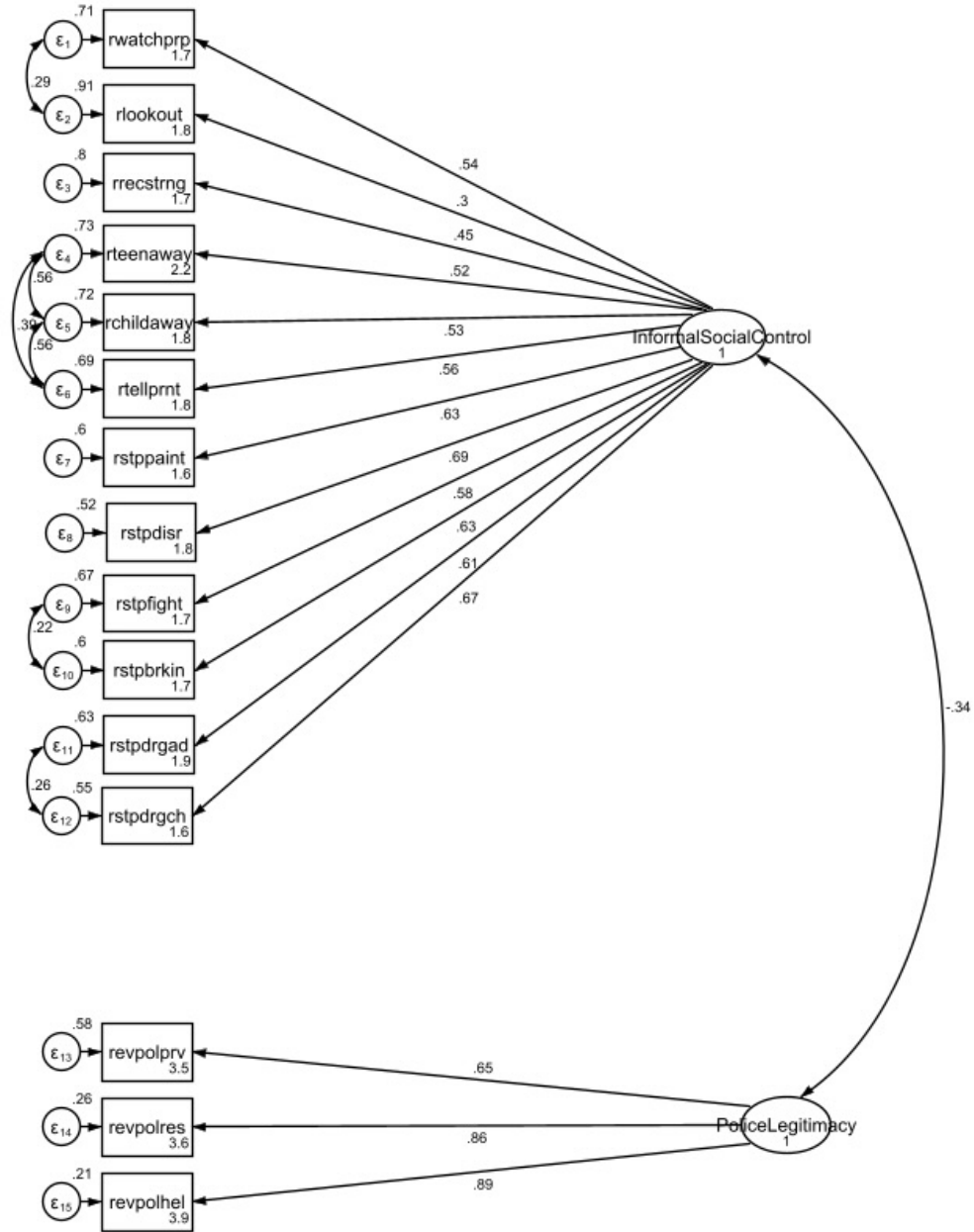


Table 1. CFA Estimates and Select Fit Indices for Initial Model and Final Model

<i>Factor Loadings</i>	Initial Unspecified Model		Final Specified Model	
	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients
<i>Informal Social Control</i>				
→ <i>watchprp</i>	1	.543	1	.540
→ <i>lookout</i>	.545***	.341	.479***	.298
→ <i>recstrng</i>	.838***	.473	.798***	.447
→ <i>childaway</i>	1.40***	.648	1.13***	.522
→ <i>teenaway</i>	1.46***	.675	1.15***	.530
→ <i>tellprnt</i>	1.45***	.675	1.21***	.557
→ <i>stppaint</i>	1.11***	.593	1.19***	.633
→ <i>stpdizr</i>	1.30***	.666	1.35***	.689
→ <i>stpfight</i>	.870***	.537	.941***	.578
→ <i>stpbrkin</i>	.946***	.586	1.02***	.628
→ <i>stpdrgad</i>	1.32***	.597	1.36***	.609
→ <i>sptdrgch</i>	1.15***	.647	1.21***	.672
<i>Police Legitimacy</i>				
→ <i>rvpolprv</i>	1	.651	1	.650
→ <i>rvpolres</i>	1.28***	.863	1.28***	.862
→ <i>rvpolhel</i>	1.24***	.887	1.24***	.888
<i>R Square</i>				
<i>watchprp</i>		.295		.292
<i>lookout</i>		.116		.089
<i>recstrng</i>		.223		.201
<i>childaway</i>		.420		.273
<i>teenaway</i>		.455		.281
<i>tellprnt</i>		.456		.310
<i>stppaint</i>		.352		.401
<i>stpdizr</i>		.443		.475
<i>stpfight</i>		.288		.334
<i>stpbrkin</i>		.343		.395
<i>stpdrgad</i>		.356		.371
<i>sptdrgch</i>		.419		.452
<i>rvpolprv</i>		.423		.423
<i>rvpolres</i>		.744		.744
<i>rvpolhel</i>		.788		.789
<i>Covariance</i>				
<i>watchprp, lookout</i>			.215***	.287
<i>teenaway, childaway</i>			.598***	.556
<i>teenaway, tellprnt</i>			.407***	.388
<i>childaway, tellprnt</i>			.583***	.559
<i>stpfight, stpbrkin</i>			.118***	.224
<i>stpdrgad, sptdrgch</i>			.192***	.260
<i>Correlation of IV</i>				
<i>Informal Social Control and Police Legitimacy</i>	-.105***	-.304	-.115***	-.335

	Initial Unspecified Model		Final Specified Model	
<i>Factor Loadings</i>	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients
<i>Selected Fit Statistics</i>				
<i>Chi-Square</i>		1921.66		523.451
<i>P-value</i>		0.000		0.000
<i>RMSEA</i>		.11		.05
<i>CFI</i>		.81		.95
<i>TLI</i>		.78		.94
<i>SRMR</i>		.07		.04

*p<.1, **p<.05, ***p<.01

DISCUSSION

The focus of this study was to understand the hypothesized relationship between informal social control and police legitimacy among residents. This analysis created a model to test the relationship between two scales that measured the endorsement of informal social control and police legitimization in the neighborhood, respectfully. There was good internal consistency for both informal social control (.86) and police legitimacy (.84). Goodness of fit statistics, including RMSEA, CFI, TLI, and SRMR, indicated that the final model was a good fit both statistically and theoretically. Through the process of respecification, six covariances across nine variables were performed to create the final model. The results of respecification were not only made based off of the results of the modification indices, but also due to theoretical and behavioral understandings of the relationship between one's likelihood to keep a lookout in the neighborhood in general and their raising concerns with other neighbors on activities they deem as suspicious. As an example, an individual who sees a child skipping school is also likely to tell their parents that their child was skipping school.

The results from the two confirmatory factor analyses indicate support for the hypothesis that increased levels of informal social control among respondents is associated with a lower opinion about the good police do in their neighborhood. This result runs counter to some prior evidence critical of informal social control as a construct but does however make theoretical sense (Drakulich & Crutchfield, 2013; Kubrin & Weitzer, 2003). As the police are viewed generally by society as an institution of social control, a dissatisfaction with this institution would lead one to take more control over the safety of the community themselves (Kochel, 2018; Kubrin & Weitzer, 2003; Silver & Miller, 2004). We could also see how the opposite would be true, where individuals more satisfied with the institution of policing would feel less of a need to be engaged with their community at a level that informal social control operates. These findings do not necessarily show the direction of this relationship, though future research would do well to test whether informal social control leads to a result of distrust in the police or as a predecessor of distrust in the police.

These results advance findings from Kochel (2012) and Yesberg and Bradford (2021) that found higher police legitimacy was not an indicator of high collective efficacy. This study in particular highlights informal social control outside of collective efficacy to show that the belief neighbors have towards intervening on social problems in the neighborhood appear to be separate from how they view the police. The significance of this is that the belief a neighbor has on the importance of intervening in their neighborhood may lie more with the relationship they have with

their neighbors than their perceptions of formal institutions of social control. That is to say, building strong neighborhoods may create the conditions in which the necessity of police among residents becomes lessened. These results lend credence to prior scholarship that has found social cohesion to be more influential on neighborhood safety than institutional social control, though future research is needed to make this relationship more clear (Armstrong et al., 2015; Gearhart, 2019).

Implications for Abolitionist Social Workers

These results suggest that abolitionist social workers build structures of power outside of carceral control by understanding community perceptions of informal social control. If informal social control has an inverse relationship to perceptions of police legitimacy, then this provides avenues for abolitionist social workers and activists to build liberatory structures of justice within these neighborhoods. These results also help to provide a framework for how social work scholars can begin to develop tools to intervene on community safety that do not involve engaging with carceral systems of policing. While there is still much to study and understand about the relationship between informal social control and mechanisms of public safety, informal social control does appear to be an alternative to formal systems of policing in communities that are already distrustful of the police. Interventions that lean into this tendency, while also promoting liberatory structures of transformative justice, can help to build communities that are better equipped to solve problems collectively.

Finally, there is a growing media discourse around the fears to public safety that abolitionist praxis would bring (Craig & Reid, 2022). My research adds to the growing literature that calls for the reevaluation of how we determine neighborhood safety. If we are to trust these results, on top of the work from other scholars such as Kochel (2012, 2018), Beardall (2022), and Yesberg and Bradford (2021), abolitionist scholars can begin to remove police legitimacy as a prerequisite for neighborhood safety. In doing so, we can help to move the profession, and the communities we work within, toward embodying a greater sense of equity and justice.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study is not without limitations. Despite these results, we cannot with exact certainty say that the relationship between informal social control and police legitimacy is one that is not spurious. That is, we cannot at this time claim that there isn't a third factor driving or influencing this relationship that was not included in the analysis. In order to determine this with greater certainty, analyzing the relationship between police legitimacy and other latent factors, such as neighborhood violence, social disorganization, and social cohesion would be beneficial. We also cannot say at this point that informal social control operates differently than other forms of social control in that it could be that those engaging in more informal social control are engaging in control-type behavior similar to that of the police. Again, more research into how informal social control and more formal means of social control operate and are engaged with would need to be done in order to understand this more fully.

There are also limitations with the data set used in this study. In particular, the responses in the data set used in this study were from 2000. This gap in time means that the data does not account for intervening events that may influence attitudes toward neighbors and the police, most significantly being the recent Black Lives Matter movement that grew out of the public murders of Black men and women at the hands of police. What's more, this does not account for the rise in

opioid-related deaths and arrests, an issue of particular significance to the regions of Kentucky where this data set is focused. The result of the opioid crisis has been shown to have a significant effect on the social cohesion of communities (Dasgupta et al., 2018; Ray, 2021; Sered, 2019). Each of these events may have had an impact on both informal and formal social control within the neighborhoods in the study that are not accounted for. Despite its limitations, this study can help provide a way toward building strong neighborhoods that strengthen public safety without the necessity for police involvement.

CONCLUSION

Throughout the past five years, as the contradictions embedded into the neoliberal capitalist system and its use of state violence as an enforcement measure through police departments have begun to grow untenable, calls from activist groups to abolish the police and the justice system have been given a new life. As we begin to reimagine what community cohesion and public safety should look like, we can look toward community-driven informal social control as a possible solution toward separating public safety from policing. It is important here to also acknowledge that community-driven social control is not inherently liberatory, and itself may turn toward vigilantism against individuals who do not fit within enforced social norms of the neighborhood (Walby & Joshua, 2021). The promotion of liberatory practices of transformative justice and uplifting collective problem-solving is an area that social workers can embed themselves in. As social workers are brought into the conversation of community responses to public safety and police abolition, the difficult work of disengaging from the institutions of policing and paternalistic patterns of managing and controlling historically oppressed communities must begin (Brock-Petroshius et al., 2022; Jacobs et al., 2021).

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