# Resident perceptions of police mistreatment and use of force in a troubled Trinidadian neighborhood

Joseph B. Kuhns [a] , Devon Johnson [b] & William R. King [c]

[a] Department of Criminal Justice & Criminology, University of
North Carolina at Charlotte, Charlotte, NC, USA

[b] Department of Criminology, Law and Society, George Mason
University, Fairfax, VA, USA

[c] College of Criminal Justice, Sam Houston State University,
Huntsville, TX, USA

Available online: 31 Oct 2011

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

# Resident perceptions of police mistreatment and use of force in a troubled Trinidadian neighborhood

Joseph B. Kuhns[a]*, Devon Johnson[b] and William R. King[c]

[a]*Department of Criminal Justice & Criminology, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Charlotte, NC, USA;* [b]*Department of Criminology, Law and Society, George Mason University, Fairfax, VA, USA;* [c]*College of Criminal Justice, Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, TX, USA*

This study examines public perceptions of police mistreatment and use of force in a disadvantaged neighborhood in a developing Caribbean nation. This research describes residents' perceptions of, and experiences with, police misbehavior before and after the implementation of a community-oriented policing initiative. Multivariate analyses examine whether the factors influencing perceptions of police use of excessive force varied across time. The initial results suggest that the introduction of community policing did not positively influence citizens' views of, or experiences with, police mistreatment in this neighborhood. Results from the multivariate analyses suggest that the factors predicting public views about the frequency of excessive use of force by police did change over time. We offer several explanations for why change in residents' views of police misbehavior did and did not occur.

**Keywords:** police; use of force; citizen attitudes; Caribbean; Trinidad and Tobago

## Introduction

Citizens are often direct observers of police behavior within the community and, as suspects and witnesses, can substantially influence others' perceptions about police activity (Davis 2000). The nature and quality of police–citizen interactions also plays an important role in improving citizen perceptions of police legitimacy (Tyler 2004). Further, the perceived legitimacy of an entire police department can fluctuate based on how officers use and apply force, and there are multiple perspectives to consider the appropriateness of force in a given situation (Terrill and Paoline 2010).

While police use of force in the USA is a relatively rare occurrence (Adams 1996), the extent to which police use force in other nations is more unclear and/or can vary considerably (Kuhns and Knutsson 2010). More specifically, police use of force in developing nations is likely to be less transparent because these countries are still establishing a government system, creating effective data collection processes, refining agency rules and, in some cases, establishing continuity of order in particularly challenged communities. Few studies have attempted to measure citizen or officer perceptions regarding the legitimacy of police use of force in developing

nations although it is likely that the determinates of perceived excessive use of force may be different in Caribbean nations as compared to the USA and the UK (Bennett 1997). In addition, a related concern that merits research attention is developing an understanding of the steps that can be taken to manage citizen perceptions about police use of force and, more directly, to help citizens understand and respect the laws, policies and practices associated with use of force. One strategy for building police–community relations, which has been widely adopted over the last two decades in some countries, is community policing (CP).

This study explores citizen perceptions of police misbehavior in a particularly challenged neighborhood in Trinidad and Tobago, a developing two-island nation in the southern Caribbean. We examine residents' perceptions of, and experiences with, police mistreatment and use of force over a two-year timeframe as a pilot community policing program was developed and implemented within the neighborhood. Further, using multivariate analyses, we examine the factors that influence residents' views about the frequency of police use of excessive force and how these changed over time. Finally, we offer some explanations for why change in residents' views did and did not occur and how police might improve citizen perceptions of the legitimacy of police use of force in comparable community settings.

## Background

### International perspectives on police use of force

Scholars have examined the history and laws associated with police use of force in Europe (Cassese 1986) and in Canada (Wortley n.d.) and have completed studies of police killings in Australia (Harding 1970). However, compared with the USA, research and knowledge about police use of force in other countries is lacking and, in some cases, unavailable altogether (Kuhns and Knutsson 2010).

What little research exists from other countries suggests that: (1) police use of force policies in many countries are rather varied (Knutsson and Norée 2010) and perhaps far less restrictive (Constanzo and Redlich 2010) compared with the USA; (2) police officer training is sometimes ineffective, less comprehensive, and/or outdated (Buttle 2010), which is also sometimes the case in the USA (see Morrison 2010); (3) officer practices with use of force are inconsistent (Knutson 2010) and sometimes conflict with societal and citizen interests (Belur 2010); (4) access to various use of force instruments varies considerably (Waddington and Wright 2010) as does officer training in the proper use of these instruments (Kaminski and Adang 2010, White and Ready 2010); and (5) governmental investigations into systematic police abuses of force are uneven or sometimes non-existent altogether (Huggins 2010).

A number of likely explanations exist for the limited international understanding and inconsistency of police use of force, particularly in developing nations. First, there is often a lack of access to reliable and valid crime and policing activity data (Van Dijk 2008) in many countries, given government practices, historical context, and evolving technological infrastructure. Further, there is sometimes limited transparency and law enforcement accountability in non-democratic (and some democratic) countries and regions of the world, particularly those in which media access is governmentally-controlled, severely restricted or missing altogether, and/or where concerns with officer and organizational corruption further jeopardizes the validity of information that is made available (Gomes 2007). In addition, there is

tremendous variation in the ratio of officers to citizens around the world, as well as substantial variation of resource investment in criminal justice systems (Van Dijk 2008), which results in police prioritizing some activities (e.g., fighting crime) over others (e.g., restricting use of force). One potential response to improving data systems, law enforcement transparency, media and citizen access to information, and overall criminal justice accountability is to initiate and integrate community policing practices (Kelling *et al.* 1998).

## Police use of force within a community policing context

Community policing, problem solving, and systematic community engagement have been widely implemented in the USA over the past two decades (US Department of Justice 1994). This national effort facilitated, or at least contributed to, some reductions in fear of crime (Adams *et al.* 2005), widespread adoption of community policing policies and practices (Maguire *et al.* 1997), improved problem-solving effectiveness (Weisburd *et al.* 2010), and increased police presence in neighborhoods, which also can reduce fear of crime. These various changes have been observed in small (Lord *et al.* 2009), medium, and large cities/communities (Zhao *et al.* 2002) across the USA.

Arguably, enhancing community policing might also decrease the prevalence and incidence of police use of force and could help citizens understand the need for, and the limits associated with, use of force. These subtle changes may take some time to measure and observe but nevertheless could occur for a number of reasons. First, as community policing evolves, citizen participation in the policing process expands through involvement in community meetings (where officers might effectively explain use of force policies or help defuse emotional reactions to a recent local use of force incident), serving on citizen review boards (Terrill 2001), or active engagement in the law enforcement process. Second, to the extent that community policing and problem-solving practices facilitate apprehension of the most dangerous offenders, the number of officer–citizen encounters that involve force may drop. To the extent that crime prevention efforts are effective, other future offenders may be appropriately discouraged from active offending. Third, community policing officers may resort to alternative, perhaps less formal, strategies for resolution in an effort to avoid using force. Finally, citizen observations of officers and their behavior can subsequently impact citizen perceptions.

## Citizen perceptions of police use of force

Our knowledge of citizen perceptions of police use of force comes primarily from research conducted in the USA. This literature covers a wide swath of ground, from studies of the public's views about the prevalence of excessive force, to attitudes about the appropriateness of use of force in different situations (Flanagan and Vaughn 1996). Generally, the literature indicates that public perceptions of use of force (either its appropriateness, prevalence, or the prevalence of excessive force) are affected by the respondent's race, age, and level of education (Flanagan and Vaughn 1996, Johnson and Kuhns 2009). Neighborhood class, as separate from class of individuals, has been found to trump the effects of race, with residents of lower-class neighborhoods reporting higher levels of perceived use of excessive force (Weitzer 1999). Perceptions of use of force are also influenced by a single incident of police use

of force (or excessive force) which is widely publicized or visible (Jefferis *et al.* 1997). Finally, a number of scholars opine that attitudes about use of force are likely influenced when people experience force firsthand, or when they know someone who has experienced force firsthand.

Taken as a whole, these prior findings are salient for informing the present study. The study site is an economically-challenged community with high crime rates and generally low levels of education (as compared to the rest of the nation). The prior literature predicts that citizen's attitudes about the police and police use of force would be less favorable than elsewhere and may be influenced by both the characteristics of the neighborhood (such as the prevalence of a significant drug or crime problem) and the respondent's personal characteristics (such as age or race/ethnicity). The literature also suggests that the implementation of community policing in this neighborhood might alter or improve citizen's attitudes, although we know little about how long it might take for this change process to be observed.

### Broader study setting

Trinidad and Tobago is a small, two-island, Caribbean nation located about seven miles off the northeast coast of Venezuela. Trinidad and Tobago obtained its independence from Great Britain in 1962, although the British influence is still evident throughout the country. Currently, policing is the responsibility of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service (TTPS), a force of approximately 7000 officers. Service delivery to the general public is provided by 78 geographically dispersed police stations (K. King 2009). Like most police forces in the Caribbean, the TTPS still exhibits vestiges of its history as a colonial police force (Ottley 1972, Trotman 1986). Recent assessments of the TTPS have characterized the force as paramilitary in nature (K. King 2009). A tense relationship between the police and Trinidadian citizens (especially the working class) continues to this day. Alleged incidents of police abuse of citizens are common (Deosaran 2002). Police use of deadly force is a particularly salient issue; a series of police shootings of suspects in 2007 and 2008 received extensive criticism in local newspapers and prompted demonstrations against police (Gonzales 2008). Concerns about police killings of suspects in custody have gained the attention of international rights organizations (Amnesty International 2006). Obviously, the historical legacy of coercion and control endemic to colonial policing presents a substantial impediment to community policing and changing the attitudes of residents. Nevertheless, the Ministry of National Security and the TTPS embarked on a series of reforms of the police service (Mastrofski and Lum 2005). The Gonzales Project, described below, was one of these initiatives.

### The Gonzales neighborhood and Gonzales officer community policing training

Gonzales, the site of our study, was one of many squatter communities established by former slaves in the hillsides surrounding the capital city after emancipation (Trotman 1986). Housing, infrastructure, and overall living conditions were and continue to be poor in these communities, and much of the homicide and gang activity in Trinidad today is concentrated in these areas (Maguire *et al.* 2008). The Gonzales community suffers from violence, disorder, and intense fear of crime and its residents have a historic and concentrated distrust of the police. Unlike many

distressed communities that are hopelessly disorganized, Gonzales also has a grassroots community development movement, known as the Pride in Gonzales project (Pride in Gonzales 2011), in which residents are organizing to improve their community. These conditions were ideal for developing a strong citizen–police partnership, and as a result a pilot community-policing initiative was launched in Gonzales in 2005.

Beginning in the spring of 2006, and over the course of about 18 months, a core group of Gonzales-assigned officers was trained in community policing, problem solving, and situational crime prevention concepts. The training was adapted from the Model Problem Oriented Policing (POP) Curriculum (Kuhns and Leach 2011) and specifically tailored to crime and disorder problems in the Gonzales neighborhood. The original POP curriculum included 14 learning modules that focus on the evolution of policing, community and problem-oriented policing, the SARA (Scanning, Analysis, Response, Assessment) process, crime theories and situational crime prevention, strategies for responding to offenders, places, and victims (the crime triangle), and assessing and dealing with some challenges inherent in the problem-oriented policing process. Given technology and time limitations, the Gonzales training did not include Modules 7–9. However, by September 2007, four supervisors and six constables successfully completed the rest of the training, which involved in-class training sessions, group exercises, field homework assignments in the Gonzales community, and four multiple choice exams. To our knowledge, this is the most extensive training in POP/CP that has occurred in Trinidad and Tobago to date.[1]

During and following the training process, the Gonzales officers, with ongoing input from Gonzales community members, identified a series of persistent problems in the community. Those problems initially included excessive trash, derelict vehicles, abandoned lots and houses, truancy, poor road and lighting conditions, limited access to water, and open-air drug dealing. Over the course of the training initiative, the Gonzales officers worked to address these community concerns using POP strategies. Throughout the project, citizen surveys were conducted to evaluate the success of this pilot community-oriented policing initiative on reducing crime, fear of crime, and disorder, and improving police–community relations.

Using data from these surveys, we examine resident perceptions of police misbehavior, with an emphasis on police use of excessive force. We focus on resident views of, and experiences with, police mistreatment at two points in time, and investigate the factors associated with public perceptions of police use of excessive force.

### Data and methods

Data for this study are drawn from waves 1 and 2 of the IMPACT Study, a multi-wave survey of residents in Gonzales, a community located just outside Trinidad and Tobago's capital city, Port of Spain. A local research firm conducted face-to-face interviews with 599 randomly-selected Gonzales residents (301 in wave 1 and 296 in wave 2).[2] Interviews were completed 18 June to 12 August 2006 for wave 1 and 6 July to 28 August 2007 for wave 2. The AAPOR Response Rate #1 was 76% for wave 1 and 81% for wave 2 (American Association for Public Opinion Research 2008).

Reflecting its roots, the neighborhood is predominantly African. At the time of the surveys, Gonzales had a fairly high unemployment rate, and many residents only

worked on a part-time basis or relied on government pensions or family income. A fairly large portion of adult residents attained only a primary school education (comparable to elementary school in the USA) and relatively few had a college degree. Most of the respondents reported living in the Gonzales neighborhood for more than 10 years and at least a quarter had resided in Gonzales for more than 30 years, demonstrating the stability of the neighborhood. About 12% of the respondents had contacted the police for assistance in the four months prior to each survey.

Topics in the IMPACT survey included community cohesion, fear of crime and victimization, perceived crime and neighborhood problems, and attitudes toward the police. The instrument was carefully constructed, based on a review of the relevant literature and focus group feedback in the communities of study. Many of the survey items were drawn from previous research in the USA but the questionnaire was also reviewed by several local professionals to ensure that it reflected Trinidadian language and culture, and was appropriate for a community with low literacy.[3] The instrument was further refined after pre-testing with a small pilot sample. Coding for the variables included in the analyses follows, and descriptive statistics are shown in Table 1.

### Dependent variables

Three items on the survey addressed citizen perceptions of police mistreatment across a continuum: (1) How often do you think police officers stop people on the streets of your neighborhood without good reason?; (2) How often do you think police officers use insulting language when talking to people in your neighborhood?; and (3) How often do you think police officers use excessive force (more force than is necessary under the circumstances) against people in your neighborhood? Response options ranged from 'very often' (coded 4) to 'never' (coded 1). The three perception items were summed to produce the police mistreatment index, which ranged from 3 to 12 (higher scores indicated perceptions of more frequent misbehavior) and had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.86.[4]

Table 1. Descriptive statistics (waves 1 and 2).

| | *N* | Min. | Max. | Mean | SD | % | Alpha |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Dependent variables | | | | | | | |
| Police stop people for no reason | 548 | 1 | 4 | 2.76 | 1.00 | | |
| Police use insulting language | 485 | 1 | 4 | 2.74 | 1.12 | | |
| Police use excessive force | 494 | 1 | 4 | 2.67 | 1.03 | | |
| Police mistreatment index | 457 | 3 | 12 | 8.13 | 2.80 | | 0.86 |
| Independent variables | | | | | | | |
| Age | 595 | 18 | 91 | 42.17 | 17.52 | | |
| Educational attainment | 595 | 1 | 6 | 3.70 | 1.21 | | |
| Male | 594 | 0 | 1 | | | 53.2 | |
| Afro-Trinidadian | 596 | 0 | 1 | | | 66.4 | |
| Personal experience with police mistreatment index | 593 | 0 | 3 | 0.19 | 0.63 | | 0.83 |
| Neighborhood drug/alcohol problem index | 558 | 2 | 8 | 4.33 | 1.90 | | 0.67 |
| Neighborhood serious crime index | 547 | 4 | 20 | 10.03 | 4.99 | | 0.90 |
| Perceived police effectiveness | 571 | 1 | 4 | 2.24 | 0.94 | | |

### Independent variables

A series of independent and control variables, including personal experiences with police mistreatment, perceptions of alcohol and drug problems in the neighborhood, perceptions of serious crime in the neighborhood, and perceived police effectiveness, were used in the analyses. Given prior research, it is likely that personal experiences with police mistreatment may influence a respondent's perception of police misbehavior in the neighborhood more generally. In addition, some past research shows that police use of force is more likely to occur when the police are dealing with individuals who are intoxicated or under the influence.

A set of three items measured respondents' recent experiences with police misbehavior: (1) In the last four months, have you been stopped by police without good reason?; (2) In the last four months, have the police used insulting language toward you?; and (3) In the last four months, have the police physically mistreated or abused you? Response options to these items were 'yes' (coded 1) and 'no' (coded 0). These three items were combined into an additive index labeled personal experience with police mistreatment. This index ranged from 0 to 3 (higher scores indicated more experience with misbehavior), and had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.83.

The neighborhood drug/alcohol problems index was measured with two items. The first item was: How much of a problem are people drunk in public/on the street? Response options ranged from 'a big problem' (coded 3) to 'not a problem at all' (coded 1). The second item read: Please tell me how serious the following problems are in your community. How serious is drug use/abuse? Response options ranged from 'extremely serious' (coded 5) to 'not serious at all' (coded 1). The correlation between these two items was 0.51 and the standardized Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.67.

The neighborhood serious crime index was measured with four items where respondents were asked to rate how serious a variety of problems were in their community. They were asked: How serious is/are: (1) robberies; (2) assaults or violent disputes; (3) homicide; and (4) gangs? Response options ranged from 'extremely serious' (coded 5) to 'not serious at all' (coded 1). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the neighborhood serious crime index was 0.90.

Perceived police effectiveness was measured with the following item: How effective are the police at controlling violent crime in your neighborhood? Response options ranged from 'very effective' (coded 4) to 'not at all effective' (coded 1). Finally, several demographic variables were also included in the analyses. Age was a continuous variable ranging from 18 to 91. Afro-Trinidadian was a dummy variable, coded 1 for African, 0 for East Indian, Afro/Indian or other. Educational attainment was a six-category variable, ranging from 'none' (coded 1) to 'Tertiary/University' (coded 6). Gender was a dummy variable (coded 1 for male, 0 for female).

### Results

A large number of Gonzales residents believed that the police frequently engage in a variety of misbehaviors. As shown in Table 2, approximately one-third of respondents reported that police 'very often' stop people in their neighborhood without good reason and approximately the same number indicated that police use insulting language toward neighborhood residents 'very often.' More importantly, one in four residents believed police use excessive force 'very often.' These

Table 2. Perceptions of police mistreatment (percentage distribution and mean scores).

| | Wave 1 | Wave 2 |
|---|---|---|
| How often do you think police officers stop people on the streets of your neighborhood without good reason? | | |
| Never | 14.7 | 8.2 |
| Not too often | 23.6 | 36.3 |
| Somewhat often | 29.8 | 28.9 |
| Very often | 31.8 | 26.6 |
| N | 292 | 256 |
| Chi square = 13.74** | | |
| Mean (F = 0.33) | 2.79 | 2.74 |
| How often do you think police officers use insulting language when talking to people in your neighborhood? | | |
| Never | 19.0 | 16.5 |
| Not too often | 21.9 | 28.8 |
| Somewhat often | 21.5 | 21.8 |
| Very often | 37.6 | 32.9 |
| N | 242 | 243 |
| Chi square = 3.48 | | |
| Mean (F = 0.41) | 2.78 | 2.71 |
| How often do you think police officers use excessive force (more force than is necessary under the circumstances) against people in your neighborhood? | | |
| Never | 19.2 | 11.9 |
| Not too often | 23.6 | 31.1 |
| Somewhat often | 33.2 | 29.1 |
| Very often | 24.0 | 27.9 |
| N | 250 | 244 |
| Chi square = 8.19* | | |
| Mean (F = 1.41) | 2.62 | 2.73 |
| Perceived police mistreatment index | | |
| Mean (F = 0.58) | 8.04 | 8.24 |
| N | 234 | 223 |

$*p < 0.05$, $**p < 0.01$.

perceptions are consistent with scholarly descriptions of policing in post-colonial Caribbean nations (Harriott 2007, Mars 2007), and suggest that the Trinidadian police may still use force and intimidation to exert control.

The results also suggest there was some change in residents' views over time, although the change was not always statistically significant, and the pattern was not consistent across all three mistreatment behaviors. For example, fewer respondents reported that police stopped people without good reason or used insulting language 'very often' in wave 2 compared to wave 1, but more residents reported that the police used excessive force 'very often' in wave 2 than had reported the same frequency of this behavior in wave 1.

Examining mean scores on these variables provides better purchase on any significant change over time in resident perceptions of police misbehavior. The results for this analysis are also shown in Table 2, and demonstrate that resident perceptions of the frequency of the three police behaviors did not change significantly from wave 1 to wave 2. The over-time trend suggests that residents perceived the police as slightly less likely to engage in mistreatment at the lower end

of the continuum (e.g. to stop people without good reason or to use insulting language) in wave 2, but reported that the police used excessive force against residents slightly more often than they did in wave 1. However, even when summed into an index of police mistreatment, the overall results show no significant change in residents' views over time.

Residents were also asked about their personal experience with police mistreatment. As demonstrated in Table 3, about one in 10 respondents in wave 1 reported that they had recently been stopped by the police for no reason; slightly fewer reported that the police had used insulting language when speaking to them. Just over 2% of respondents reported that they had been physically mistreated or abused by the police in the four months preceding the survey. Taking into account the limited timeframe of four months, the number of people who reported personal experience with police mistreatment (at all ends of the continuum) is noteworthy.

A comparison of wave 1 and wave 2 data shows statistically insignificant differences in resident experiences of being stopped for no reason and police using insulting language. In contrast, about twice as many respondents in wave 2 reported being physically abused by the police than had reported such experiences in wave 1 (5.2% in wave 2 versus 2.3% in wave 1), a statistically significant increase. Mean scores on the additive index of personal experience with police mistreatment show no significant difference over time (see Table 3).

The results presented above suggest that many Gonzales residents believed the police mistreated community members, and that a substantively significant minority personally experienced such mistreatment. An examination of these views over time suggests little change in public perceptions of police misbehavior at the less serious end of the continuum, but an increase in the number of people who believe the police

Table 3. Personal experience with police mistreatment (percentage distribution).

|  | Wave 1 | Wave 2 |
|---|---|---|
| In the last four months, have you been stopped by the police without good reason? | | |
| No | 90.1 | 92.1 |
| Yes | 9.9 | 7.9 |
| N | 303 | 292 |
| Chi square = 0.75 | | |
| In the last four months, have the police used insulting language toward you? | | |
| No | 93.7 | 92.8 |
| Yes | 6.3 | 7.2 |
| N | 303 | 290 |
| Chi square = 0.22 | | |
| In the last four months, have the police physically mistreated or abused you? | | |
| No | 97.7 | 94.8 |
| Yes | 2.3 | 5.2 |
| N | 303 | 291 |
| Chi square = 3.37* | | |
| Personal experience with police mistreatment index | | |
| Mean | 0.18 | 0.20 |
| N | 303 | 290 |
| F = 0.05 | | |

*$p < 0.05$.

use excessive force very often, and a doubling of the number of residents who report being physically mistreated or abused by the police. In the section below, we use ordinary least squares regression analysis to further examine the factors that influenced public perceptions of police use of excessive force.

The standardized beta coefficients from the multivariate analysis are shown in Table 4. In wave 1, age, education, personal experience with police mistreatment, and the neighborhood serious crime index are significant predictors of residents' views of police use of excessive force. Those who are older and have more education believe that police use of excessive force is less common than do those who are younger and have lower educational attainment. Those who have experienced police mistreatment in the last four months and those who rate the crime problem in the neighborhood as more serious believe police use of excessive force occurs more often in Gonzales than their respective counterparts. The most important explanatory variable in the model was the perceived neighborhood crime problem, followed by age, education and personal experience. Together these variables explain about one-quarter of the variation in the dependent variable. Gender, race, perceptions of the drug and alcohol problem in the neighborhood and perceived police effectiveness were not significant.

The results for wave 2 differ from wave 1. In wave 2, age, race, personal experience with police mistreatment and perceived effectiveness of police are all significant predictors. Those who are older and those who believe the police are more effective at dealing with violent crime report that the police use excessive force less often. Those who have experienced police misbehavior in the last four months (stopped with no reason, insulting language, or physical abuse) and those who are Afro-Trinidadian perceive police use of force occurs more often in Gonzales than those who have not personally experienced mistreatment or who have a different racial background, respectively. In contrast to the results from wave 1, the most important variable in wave 2 was perceived police effectiveness (followed by personal experience, age and race). The variables in the model explain about one-fifth of the variation in citizen perceptions of police use of excessive force. Education, gender, and perceptions of the drug and the serious crime problems in Gonzales were not significant here.[5]

Table 4. OLS regression predicting perceived police use of excessive force.

| | Wave 1 Standardized Coefficients (Beta) | Wave 2 Standardized Coefficients (Beta) |
|---|---|---|
| Age | −0.24*** | −0.16* |
| Educational attainment | −0.23*** | −0.12 |
| Male | 0.02 | 0.05 |
| Afro-Trinidadian | 0.09 | 0.15* |
| Personal experience with police mistreatment index | 0.17** | 0.16* |
| Neighborhood drug/alcohol problem index | 0.09 | −0.01 |
| Neighborhood serious crime index | 0.30*** | 0.18 |
| Perceived police effectiveness | 0.04 | −0.29*** |
| | | |
| Adjusted R Square | 0.24 | 0.22 |
| N | 230 | 185 |

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

**Discussion and conclusions**

This study examined residents' perceptions of, and experiences with, police mistreatment and use of force in a small Trinidadian neighborhood before and after the implementation of a community policing project. Previous research indicates significant positive change in public perceptions of the police and the Gonzales neighborhood following the introduction of the pilot community policing program. For example, Johnson (2008) found that resident views of police service quality and effectiveness improved between wave 1 and wave 2 of the IMPACT survey. In addition, she found that fear of crime, perceptions of disorder in the neighborhood, and reported crime problems decreased. In contrast, the present study suggests that the community policing initiative in Gonzales may not have influenced residents' views of police misbehaviors in a similarly positive manner. In particular, it did not decrease residents' perceptions of how often police use excessive force, nor did it reduce personal experiences with police mistreatment.

Why did the implementation of community policing in a distressed community within a developing nation fail to positively affect residents' perceptions of police use of force? An initial explanation, of course, is that community policing may not impact citizen perceptions of police use of force at all, or perhaps may not do so within this challenging context. However, this explanation is counter-intuitive to the general notion that police–community relations will improve citizen perceptions of police activities, effectiveness, and legitimacy. Further, as the findings from the multivariate analyses above suggest, it may be that community policing initially impacts perceptions of police effectiveness, which in turn influence the perceived legitimacy of, or tolerance for, police use of force. Along those lines, perceptions of police effectiveness may be more directly linked to personal victimization and fear of future victimization, a documented finding in drug-infested neighborhoods in other countries (Payne and Gainey 2007). In addition, neighborhood context has been one of the more important predictors of police satisfaction (US Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice 2002). To the extent that the Gonzales community conditions improve over time, in part because of community policing and effectively-implemented POP projects, resident perceptions of police effectiveness may also improve, which may then impact perceptions about police use of force.

We hypothesize, however, that a number of factors may have limited these results. First, during the project we simultaneously gathered an indirect measure of the dosage of community policing, measured as the number of hours per month that the community policing officers spent patrolling the neighborhood (including car, foot, and mobile unit patrol) between February 2006 and November 2007. These data were gleaned directly from patrol logs during the project, and only captured the activity of the Gonzales community policing officers. A review of that data over time demonstrated that a substantial drop in neighborhood patrol occurred about six months after project implementation (at about the time of the wave 1 data collection), and that drop in patrol remained lower and variable for the rest of the study timeframe.

This patrol variability reflected several implementation challenges the officers faced. Although the project plan called for a permanently-assigned mobile unit to ensure the officers were firmly entrenched in the neighborhood, the mobile unit was only available sporadically after 2006. Further, while the community policing unit had access to two patrol cars at the beginning of the project (patrol cars are not

readily available to most police officers in Trinidad), one or both of these vehicles were regularly in the shop for repairs and unavailable for extended time periods. Finally, although foot patrols (a novel concept in Gonzales) were integrated into the training process and were required as a part of the training activities (e.g., gathering information regarding community concerns), they were rarely undertaken due to very hilly terrain, persistent heat, and a lack of protective gear (vests, firearms, radios, etc.). Although not a perfect measure of dosage, the decline in the amount of time dedicated to patrol provides one possible explanation for why the community policing initiative did not affect residents' views.

Second, we cannot precisely measure the fidelity of the community policing project because we have limited quantitative indicators of officer activities while on patrol. For example, we do not know if the community officers regularly initiated interactions with community residents, gathered relevant information, continued to engage in problem solving between observation visits, or routinely considered crime prevention measures. We do have extensive qualitative evidence collected from interviews and observations suggesting that the officers were engaging with the community by participating in community activities and events, mentoring school children, mediating disputes, and working to improve lighting and trash collection in the neighborhood. In addition, despite the concerns with patrol, there were a number of POP projects that demonstrated considerable progress during this timeframe [the most obvious was the removal of dozens of abandoned cars from the community (Bethel 2008)]. In light of this qualitative evidence, it is evident that officers spent a measurable amount of time in the community. We see this as a hopeful sign that community policing was being implemented.

A third explanation for the continuity of citizen attitudes in Gonzales may be attributed to contagion, caused by the activities of other police and police/military units (task forces) that operated in Gonzales during the study timeframe. A variety of police units, from homicide investigators and a repeat offender/anti-gang unit, to tactical anti-crime officers and a police/military unit called SAUTT (Strategic Anti-crime Unit of Trinidad and Tobago) often patrolled and responded to violent crimes. Gonzales and its neighboring communities were home to several warring gangs, and homicides and gang-related violence were a significant challenge. Although residents were fearful of crime and called for more police protection (Johnson 2006), many of the units patrolling the neighborhood were criticized for being overly aggressive when dealing with citizens. To the extent that aggressive police personnel were active in Gonzales, it is perhaps unsurprising that resident views of, and experiences with, police mistreatment did not change over time. The community-oriented work that was being done by one unit may have been undone or counteracted by other entities.

Finally, the historically tense relationship between citizen and police combined with the short timeframe of observation may explain the lack of observed changes. Citizens react slowly to changes in policing styles, particularly in a neighborhood that has had a substantial and sustained mistrust of the police. Community policing is a relatively new concept for Trinidad and Tobago (Deosaran 2002). It is likely that the community policing program did not have sufficient time to impact residents' perceptions and attitudes on some dimensions. Sustained changes in policing and communities may take decades (W. King 2009).

As Bennett (1997) observed, elements that are necessary for controlling excessive force were essentially non-existent in three Caribbean nations at the turn of the century, including Trinidad. Bennett (1997) further noted that a change in leadership

and a shift in organizational culture may be necessary to manage and reduce excessive force, which would improve citizen perceptions of police legitimacy. Community policing may offer such promises for developing nations, but substantial, sustained investments in training, officers, and projects are necessary before significant and persistent change in citizen views is likely to be observed.

## Acknowledgements

## Notes

1. In addition to the POP/CP training, the Gonzales officers were to receive substantial improvements in equipment (firearms, protective vests, communications equipment, computers, etc.) and permanent access to a mobile unit. In practice, however, there were serious delays in purchasing equipment (most requests went unfulfilled) and access to the mobile unit was severely limited during the study timeframe.
2. The sampling boundaries for Gonzales were based on those identified by community residents because the boundaries of Gonzales are debated. The official boundaries from the Port of Spain Corporation and Central Statistical Office used for statistical purposes are smaller than the boundaries identified by community residents (see Pride in Gonzales Committee 2005). Gonzales was then split into eight zones (chosen to reflect smaller neighborhoods within the community), and the sample was drawn proportional to the population in each zone. In order to select respondents, GIS maps for each area were generated showing roads and housing. A start house was located and a sampling interval calculated so that interviewers canvassed every '*n*th' house from the start location. Once the household was identified, adult respondents in each household were selected using the 'last birthday' method to ensure that the probability of selecting an individual in the household was the same for all eligible respondents. If selected participants were not at home, interviewers made three call backs before the case was coded as a non-response using AAPOR final distribution code 2.25 (American Association for Public Opinion Research 2008).
3. English is the official language in Trinidad, so language translation of survey items was unnecessary. However, colloquial terms differ across cultures, and we wanted to capture these in the survey.
4. Due to persistent and widespread fear and mistrust of the police, some residents refused to answer survey questions that asked about police corruption or misbehavior. For this reason, the rate of missing data on these three questions is higher than for other topics on the survey.
5. Given the change in predictors from wave 1 to wave 2, we tested for an interaction between serious crime problem and police effectiveness in each of the models. The interaction was not significant.

## Notes on contributors

Joseph B. Kuhns is an Associate Professor in the Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Prior to arriving at UNCC, Dr. Kuhns served as a Senior Policy Analyst at the US Department of Justice (Office of Community Oriented Policing Services). His recent research focuses on drug and violence relationships, police use of force, and community policing/problem solving. From 2005 to 2009, he worked with a number of scholars and with the Trinidad and Tobago Police Services to help to reduce violent crime and improve law enforcement services in that developing country. He also recently co-edited a book about police use of force, firearms, and non-lethal weapons in various countries around the world.

Devon Johnson, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor in the Department of Criminology, Law and Society at George Mason University. Her research focuses on public perceptions of crime and the criminal justice system, punishment preferences, and police–citizen relations in the USA and abroad. Prior to her appointment at Mason, she was a research associate at the W.E.B. Du Bois Institute for African and African American Research at Harvard University and a research fellow at the Center for the Study of Urban Poverty at UCLA.

William R. King, Ph.D., received his degree from the University of Cincinnati in 1998 and is an associate professor of criminal justice at Sam Houston State University. His primary research interests involve change and continuity in police organizations. This research focus encompasses studying trends in police–civilian employees, long-term structural change in US police organizations, police hierarchy and rank structure, and the adoption of innovation. He recently was involved in assessing the organizational capacity of agencies in the nation of Trinidad and Tobago to process physical evidence and to respond to violent crime.

## References

Adams, K., 1996. Measuring the prevalence of police abuse of force. *In*: W. Geller and H. Toch, eds. *Police violence: understanding and controlling police abuse of force*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 52–93.

Adams, R., Rohe, W., and Arcury, T., 2005. Awareness of community-oriented policing and neighborhood perceptions in five small to midsize cities. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 33, 43–54.

American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR), 2008. *Standard definitions: final dispositions of case codes and outcome rates for surveys*. 5th ed. Lenexa, KS: AAPOR.

Amnesty International, 2006. *Frequent police killings in Trinidad & Tobago go unpunished, says Amnesty International* [online]. Available from: http://www.amnestyusa.org/document.php?id=ENGUSA20060425001&lang=e.

Belur, J., 2010. Police 'encounters' in Mumbai. *In*: J. Kuhns and J. Knuttson, eds. *Police use of force: a global perspective*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger Security International, 52–62.

Bennett, R., 1997. Excessive force: a comparative study of police in the Caribbean. *Justice Quarterly*, 14, 651–686.

Bethel, C., 2008. Old vehicles removed in Gonzales clean-up. *Trinidad Express*, 1 March.

Buttle, J., 2010. Officer safety and public safety: training the police to use force. *In*: J. Kuhns and J. Knuttson, eds. *Police use of force: a global perspective*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger Security International, 32–42.

Cassese, A., 1986. *The current legal regulation of the use of force*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Constanzo, M. and Redlich, A., 2010. Physical and psychological force in criminal and military interrogations in the United States. *In*: J. Kuhns and J. Knuttson, eds. *Police use of force: a global perspective*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger Security International, 43–51.

Davis, R., 2000. *The use of citizen surveys as a tool for police reform*. New York: Vera Institute of Justice.

Deosaran, R., 2002. Community policing in the Caribbean: context, community and police capability. *Policing: An International Journal of Police Strategies and Management*, 25, 125–146.

Flanagan, T. and Vaughn, M., 1996. Public opinion about police abuse of force. *In*: W. Geller and H. Toch, eds. *Police violence: understanding and controlling police abuse of force*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 113–128.

Gomes, C., 2007. Police accountability in the Caribbean: where are the people? Paper presented at the Workshop on Police Accountability, Civicus World Assembly 23–27 May 2007, Glasgow.

Gonzales, G., 2008. Cops kill 2: residents claim 'execution' in Laventille. *Trinidad and Tobago Express*, 22 February.

Harding, R., 1970. The legality of police killings in Australia. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 7, 177–187.

Harriott, A., 2000. *Police and crime control in Jamaica: problems of reforming ex-Colonial constabularies*. Barbados: University of the West Indies Press.

Huggins, M., 2010. Systematic police violence in Brazil. *In*: J. Kuhns and J. Knuttson, eds. *Police use of force: a global perspective*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger Security International, 73–82.

Jefferis, E., Holmes, S., and Hanley, D., 1997. The effect of a videotaped arrest on public perceptions of police use of force. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 25, 381–395.

Johnson, D., 2006. *Preliminary survey results from the Gonzales IMPACT Study*. Research report submitted to the Ministry of National Security and the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, September.

Johnson, D., 2008. *Results from the Gonzales IMPACT Study: wave 1 and 2 comparisons*. Research report submitted to the Ministry of National Security and the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, February.

Johnson, D. and Kuhns, J.B., 2009. Striking out: race and support for police use of force. *Justice Quarterly*, 26, 592–623.

Kaminski, R. and Adang, O., 2010. Pepper spray: practice, policy and research. *In*: J. Kuhns and J. Knuttson, eds. *Police use of force: a global perspective*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger Security International, 167–176.

Kelling, G., Wasserman, R., and Williams, H., 1998. *Police accountability and community policing*. Perspective on Policing No. 7. Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice, US Department of Justice.

King, K., 2009. Policing your brother as the other: an analysis of policing in Trinidad and Tobago [online]. Paper presented at SALISES 10th Annual Conference 25–27 March 2009. Available from: http://www.cavehill.uwi.edu/salises/conferences/2009/documents/KingKeron-PolicingyourBrotherastheOther.pdf.

King, K., 2009. Towards a life course perspective of police organizations. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 46, 213–244.

Knutsson, J., 2010. Police use of firearms in Sweden. *In*: J. Kuhns and J. Knuttson, eds. *Police use of force: a global perspective*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger Security International, 105–109.

Knutsson, J. and Norée, A., 2010. Police use of firearms in the Nordic countries: a comparison. *In*: J. Kuhns and J. Knuttson, eds. *Police use of force: a global perspective*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger Security International, 115–123.

Kuhns, J. and Knutsson, J., eds., 2010. *Police use of force: a global perspective*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger Security International.

Kuhns, J. and Leach, N., 2011. *Model POP curriculum* [online]. Available from: http://www.popcenter.org/learning/model_curriculum/ [Accessed Feb 2011].

Lord, V., Kuhns, J., and Friday, P., 2009. Impact of community policing on small city citizens. *Policing: An International Journal of Police Strategies and Management*, 32, 574–594.

Maguire, E., *et al.*, 1997. Patterns of community policing in non-urban America. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 34, 368–394.

Maguire, E., *et al.*, 2008. Spatial concentrations of violence in Trinidad and Tobago. *Journal of Caribbean Criminology and Public Safety*, 13, 48–92.

Mars, J., 2007. Rough justice: political policing and colonial self-rule in Guyana. *In*: R. Deosaran, ed. *Crime, delinquency and justice: a Caribbean reader*. Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers, 265–283.

Mastrofski, S. and Lum, C., 2008. Meeting the challenges of police governance in Trinidad and Tobago. *Policing*, 2, 481–496.

Morrison, G., 2010. Deadly force in the United States. *In*: J. Kuhns and J. Knuttson, eds. *Police use of force: a global perspective*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger Security International, 132–140.

Ottley, C., 1972. *A historical account of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service*. Trinidad and Tobago: Syncreators.

Payne, B. and Gainey, R., 2007. Attitudes about the police and neighborhood safety in disadvantaged neighborhoods. *Criminal Justice Review*, 32, 142–155.

Pride in Gonzales, 2011. *Pride in Gonzales* [online]. Available from: http://www.prideingonzales.org/ [Accessed Feb 2011].

Pride in Gonzales Committee, 2005. 4.1.1 Population size & growth. *In*: *Gonzales community profile, East Port of Spain, Trinidad*. Trinidad and Tobago: Pride in Gonzales Committee.

Terrill, W., 2001. *Police coercion: application of the force continuum*. New York: LFB Publishing.

Terrill, W. and Paoline, E., 2010. Non-lethal force by police: the various lenses through which appropriateness is examined. *In*: J. Kuhns and J. Knuttson, eds. *Police use of force: a global perspective*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger Security International, 6–13.

Trotman, D., 1986. *Crime in Trinidad: conflict and control in a plantation society, 1838–1900*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press.

Tyler, T., 2004. Enhancing police legitimacy. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 593, 84–99.

US Department of Justice, 1994. *Fact sheet: violent crime control and law enforcement act of 1994*. Washington, DC: US Department of Justice.

US Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice, 2002. *Satisfaction with police: measuring what matters*. Research for Practice series. Washington, DC: US Department of Justice.

Van Dijk, J., 2008. *The world of crime*. Los Angeles: Sage.

Waddington, P. and Wright, M., 2010. Police use of guns in unarmed countries: the United Kingdom. *In*: J. Kuhns and J. Knuttson, eds. *Police use of force: a global perspective*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger Security International, 87–94.

Weisburd, D., Telep, C., Hinkle, J., and Eck, J., 2010. *Crime prevention research review no. 4: the effects of problem-oriented policing on crime and disorder*. Washington, DC: US Department of Justice Office of Community Oriented Policing Services.

Weitzer, R., 1999. Citizens' perceptions of police misconduct: race and neighborhood context. *Justice Quarterly*, 16, 819–846.

White, M. and Ready, J., 2010. Police use of the TASER in the United States: research, controversies and recommendations. *In*: J. Kuhns and J. Knuttson, eds. *Police use of force: a global perspective*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger Security International, 177–186.

Wortley, S., n.d. *Police use of force in Ontario: an examination of the data from the special investigations unit. Final report* [online]. Available from: http://www.attorneygeneral.jus. gov.on.ca/inquiries/ipperwash/policy_part/projects/pdf/AfricanCanadianClinicIpperwash Project_SIUStudybyScotWortley.pdf [Accessed 15 Mar 2011].

Zhao, J., Scheider, M., and Thurman, Q., 2002. Funding community policing to reduce crime: have COPS grants made a difference? *Criminology and Public Policy*, 2, 7–32.