Exploring the perceived extent of and citizens’ support for consumer racial profiling: Results from a national poll

Kareem L. Jordan a, Shaun L. Gabbidon b,⁎, George E. Higgins c

a Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice, University of North Florida, 1 UNF Drive, Jacksonville, FL 32224, United States
b School of Public Affairs, Pennsylvania State University-Harrisburg, 777 West Harrisburg Pike, Middletown, PA 17057, United States
c Department of Justice Administration, University of Louisville, Louisville, KY 40292, United States

A B S T R A C T

Using data from a national Gallup poll, this article examines several hypotheses related to citizens’ perceptions regarding the prevalence of consumer racial profiling (CRP) in the retail setting in America, as well as their support for the practice. The oversampling of Black and Hispanic respondents allowed for analyses that tested for racial differences in perceptions concerning the extent of CRP, and also for racial differences in the support for the use of CRP. The multivariate analysis found that Blacks were more likely than Hispanics and Whites to believe that CRP was widespread; there were no differences in the views of residents from urban and suburban areas; there were no differences between racial and ethnic groups regarding whether profiling was justified; and the more liberal the respondents were, the more likely they felt CRP was widespread and not justified. The authors also discuss the implications of these findings and present some future directions for CRP research.

⁎ Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 717 948 6054; fax: +1 717 948 6320.
E-mail address: slg13@psu.edu (S.L. Gabbidon).

Introduction

In October 1971, Ms. Inez Settle, a seventy-year-old Black woman, entered a retailer named Mack’s Stores of Shallotte, Inc. After browsing in the store, Ms. Settle headed for the exit, when she was grabbed by the manager and accused of shoplifting. Though she did not consent to it, she was taken to the back of the store at which time she was detained and searched. After finding nothing, the manager released Ms. Settle. Shortly thereafter, Ms. Settle filed a civil suit against the manager and the retailer, alleging both that “the defendants willfully and intentionally deprived her of personal freedom and were motivated because of…[her] race” (Settle v. Fred Burris and Mack Stores, 1973). On appeal, Ms. Settle scored a partial victory that resulted in her case being sent back for trial in the lower courts; however, there is no record that she later received any damages for the actions taken by the retailer.

Ms. Settle’s suit would be among the first of a steady flow of litigation in which racial and ethnic minorities would allege racially discriminatory treatment by store personnel in retail settings (Gabbidon, 2006). In fact, in 1997, more than twenty-five years after her unfortunate experience, three Black men were awarded one million dollars for compensatory and punitive damages for similar treatment experienced at an Eddie Bauer clothing store (Henderson, 2001; Russell, 1999). These anecdotal incidents highlight the fact that race and ethnicity were used in the decision-making process. In other words, in each of these situations specific forms of profiling based on race and ethnicity were used.

Therefore, it is apparent that racial profiling is not isolated to traffic stops. Thus, when store employees target a shopper or shoppers for discriminatory treatment based on their race or ethnicity, it is referred to as consumer racial profiling or retail racism (Fifield, 2001; O’Connell, 2001; Williams, Harris, & Henderson, 2001). In this article, the practice will be referred to as consumer racial profiling (CRP).

Considering the nature of these CRP incidents, one would think that it has been a central area of focus among criminologists. This, however, has not been the case. The reason is likely because not long after the Eddie Bauer incident, racial profiling related to traffic stops was caught the attention of legal scholars (D. A. Harris, 1997, 1999, 2002; Russell, 1999, 2001), criminologists (Ramirez, McDevitt, & Farrell, 2000; Smith & Alpert, 2002; Weitzer & Tuch, 2002), as well as policymakers and funding agencies—which, in essence, doomed any significant interest in what was occurring in retail establishments. The significance of the problem in retail settings was further overshadowed by the terrorist attacks on 9/11 that produced an emphasis on profiling people of Middle Eastern descent (Onwudie, 2005). Even with the understandable emphasis on these critical areas of profiling, the reality is that private security personnel outnumber public police officers 3 to 1 (Dempsey, 2008), and that retailers lose billions of dollars each year (Hollinger & Langton, 2006). Considering these staggering losses, it is important to examine the methods used by retailers to minimize such losses.

Please cite this article as: Jordan, K.L., et al., Exploring the perceived extent of and citizens’ support for consumer racial profiling: Results from a national poll, Journal of Criminal Justice (2009), doi:10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2009.06.003
This article aims to investigate the public’s perceptions regarding the extent of CRP in the United States. In addition, the authors examine whether citizens support such measures. These two related areas have yet to be examined by researchers. Thus, given the nature of citizens’ responses to these critical questions, there might be the need for researchers and funding agencies to turn their attention to racial profiling in the retail sector. The article begins with an overview of the CRP literature.

Consumer racial profiling in the literature

Though limited in volume, the CRP literature has been diverse in its focus. Before beginning a review of that literature, it is important to recognize that there are two types of CRP studies. The first type of CRP research examines the nature of the service received by racial and ethnic minorities in retail establishments. This type of research deals with incidents where such customers enter retail establishments and allege that they were not given equal service as other customers, or in the most egregious situations, they aren’t served at all. In the last decade, most people have heard of such cases against major restaurants such as Denny’s (see Adamson, 2000) and Cracker Barrel Stores (see A. G. Harris, 2003). The focus here, however, is on those research studies that have examined CRP as it relates to customers being racial and ethnically profiled as potential thieves in retail environments. The body of scholarship in this area is even more limited than the more general CRP literature. Nevertheless, the literature remains diverse in that there have been qualitative and quantitative studies that relate to the topic. Consequently, the literature review is separated into sections that highlight the various types of studies that have been conducted. The review begins with a section on the few interview-based qualitative studies that have been done that focus in whole or part on CRP.

Interview-based qualitative studies on consumer racial profiling

One of the earliest research projects related to CRP was conducted by Feagin (1991). Using in-depth interviews, he queried thirty-seven Black middle-class residents living in several American cities on their experiences involving discrimination. More specifically, Feagin was particularly interested in three aspects of discrimination: First, Feagin sought to determine the types of public places where the participants experienced discrimination. Second, Feagin explored the nature of the discrimination experienced. Lastly, Feagin wanted to know how his subjects coped with the discrimination. In response to the first question, the interviews revealed that the respondents often reported poor service in retail establishments and restaurants. In addition, they reported being frequently followed around retail establishments. Of this treatment by retailers, Feagin (1991) wrote: “The excessive policing of Black shoppers and the discourtesy of clerks illustrate the extra burden of being Black in public places. No matter how affluent and influential, a Black person cannot escape the stigma of being Black, even while relaxing or shopping” (p. 107). To cope with this discriminatory treatment, the respondents either confronted the person, left the site of the incident, or accepted the incident and did nothing.

Nearly a decade after Feagin’s research, Lee (2000) examined the shopping experiences of Black residents in five mostly Black neighborhoods in New York and Philadelphia. The interview-based study found positive interactions taking place between residents and the merchants in their neighborhood. Mirroring Feagin’s research, however, Lee found that Black males were treated with an undue level of suspicion. Black shoppers were treated better based on their perceived class status, but they still were not treated the same as White shoppers. Interestingly, the respondents reported using the same coping strategies as noted in the Feagin study.

Crockett, Grier, and Williams (2003) focused solely on the coping strategies of African American males who encountered marketplace discrimination. Based on ten in-depth interviews, their research revealed their respondents engaged in either problem-focused or emotion-focused coping responses. Problem-focused coping responses involve directly confronting the purveyor of the perceived discrimination and “seeking immediate redress of grievances” (Crockett et al., 2003, p. 8). Such actions included informing the public about the discriminatory practices, filing a formal complaint to the offending corporation, and using “word-of-mouth” to warn others about the practices of the retailer. Emotion-focused coping included the use of humor “to minimize the psychological and emotional strain of perceived discrimination, and internalization” (Crockett et al., 2003, p. 10). The researchers also noted that the respondents often try to dress more “up-scale” in hopes of deflecting discriminatory practices.

In closing, the researchers urged scholars to continue to examine marketplace discrimination in a variety of settings and populations.

Analyses of consumer racial profiling litigation

Another way in which researchers have explored the nature and extent of CRP is through the analyses of litigation in which plaintiffs allege they have been profiled by retailers. Gabbidon (2003) conducted the first such analysis of twenty-nine cases originating in state and federal appellate courts. The research identified cases originating in the early 1970s, and mostly involved adult Black plaintiffs. As for the nature of the incidents, clerks (38 percent) were the ones most likely to initiate the incident that resulted in the litigation, with security personnel being the next largest share of store personnel who initiated the incident (31 percent). Two-thirds of the CRP incidents were found to have been initiated by store personnel who acted on unsubstantiated hunches or the “feeling” that they thought the plaintiff had stolen. Brutality and the use of racial slurs were alleged in 21 percent of the cases. As for the outcome of the cases, the plaintiffs were either victorious or partially victorious in 58 percent of the cases. The author closed by arguing that additional training, education, legal suits, and in the most serious situations, boycotts, might be necessary to combat CRP (Gabbidon, 2003).

A. G. Harris, Henderson, and Williams (2005) also examined court cases involving allegations of CRP. Their examination included eighty-one recent cases (1990-2002) from federal courts. Their analysis examined three primary aspects of the cases: the type of discrimination (subtle or overt), level of service (degradation or denial), and criminal suspicion (present or absent) (A. G. Harris et al., 2005, p. 165). The authors found that the largest share of the cases (35 percent) involved subtle discrimination in which it is more difficult to prove discrimination existed in a particular retail setting. It is notable, though, that there was “outright denial of service...[in] more than one-fourth (21) of all CRP and discrimination incidents” (A. G. Harris et al., 2005, p. 168). The research also found that in 40 percent of the cases, there were allegations of CRP involving customers being perceived as criminals. A year later, the researchers returned to the topic by analyzing twenty-nine cases from both the Illinois courts (state and federal) and the Human Rights Commission (Williams, Harris, & Henderson, 2006). They again found support for the notion that CRP was being practiced in a variety of retail establishments.

Experimental and observational research on consumer racial profiling

Employing a one-group pretest post design, Asquith and Bristow (2000) sought to determine the discriminatory perceptions of students enrolled in an introductory marketing course. The researchers were also interested in whether education can remediate any stereotypical views as they relate to the racial and ethnic composition of shoplifters. Their three-stage design involved a pretest involving the administration of a questionnaire to determine the students’ perceptions regarding the demographics of the typical shoplifter. Next, the students were shown a video of highlighting the actual
demographics of shoplifters. Then, an hour later, the researchers re-administered the original questionnaire. The “stimulus” (video) was shown to be effective in reducing some of the stereotypical views students had of who shoplifted the most (Whites). The researchers did note, however, that “the classroom exercise was simply not sufficient to overcome the preconceptions, attitudes, and/or other biases” (Asquith & Bristow, 2000, p. 274).

Dabney, Hollinger, and Dugan (2004) used an observational approach to study “who actually steals” in a retail setting. After securing permission from a drugstore located in a racially diverse section of Atlanta, the authors set out to try and “generate an unbiased demographic and behavioral profile of the contemporary retail shopper” (Dabney et al., 2004, p. 699). In this effort, they hired and trained observers to randomly select and monitor the behavior of shoppers. After an initial period, due to methodological limitations and cost, they instructed the trained observers to randomly follow shoppers who had some way to conceal merchandise (e.g., baggy clothes, purse, or a bag), or who, within ten seconds of entering the store, exhibited some widely accepted behavioral cues for those intending to steal (e.g., looking around, looking for anti-shoplifting measures, etc.). Their two key findings were that 8.5 percent of the shoppers engaged in theft, and contrary to what some believe, Black and Hispanic shoppers did not steal at levels higher than that of Whites (Dabney et al., 2004, p. 714). The authors concluded by noting that behavioral cues are much stronger tools to locate potential shoplifters than demographic characteristics such as race (see also, Dabney, Dugan, Topalli, & Hollinger, 2006).

Victimization surveys on consumer racial profiling

Recent attitudinal research has attempted to gauge the prevalence of CRP in society. Using the equivalent of a victimization survey, Gabbidon and Higgins (2007) conducted a phone survey of Philadelphia-area residents. Among the questions asked was whether the respondent had experienced CRP. Overall, 43 percent of the respondents stated that they had experienced CRP. Blacks were ten times more likely than Whites to report having experienced CRP. In addition, they found that males were twice as likely as females to report having experienced CRP. Those with higher levels of education were more likely to report having experienced CRP. Income was not significant in determining who was most likely to report having encountered racism in retail settings (Gabbidon & Higgins, 2007). In another article based on the same research, Higgins and Gabbidon (2009) also noted that the CRP incident took an emotional toll on respondents. Thus, the participants reported that the CRP incident brought on negative emotions.

A third stream of scholarship from the Philadelphia research examined the CRP encounters involving Whites. Since the definition of CRP provided to respondents was race neutral, Gabbidon and Higgins (2008) found a small number of Whites (n = 45 or 21.7 percent of sample) who felt they had been profiled in a retail setting. Most Whites, however, stated that they only occasionally experienced CRP, and mostly in clothing retailers. Other notable findings included the perception that 59 percent of the profilers were reported to be Black, 23 percent White, and 8 percent Asian. Whites also reported experiencing negative emotions after the experience. The authors concluded arguing that, while Whites reported encountering CRP less frequently than Blacks, highlighting the fact that all shoppers are affected by this type of profiling might, in the end, help toward solving the problem (Gabbidon & Higgins, 2008).

One final study is worthy of note here. To examine the extent of CRP, Gabbidon, Craig, Okafo, Marzette, and Peterson (2008) replicated the research by Gabbidon and Higgins (2008). They surveyed students from several southern historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). Overall, their findings aligned with the findings in the Philadelphia study. For example, 73 percent of the Black students reported having experienced CRP. Sales clerks, as opposed to security personnel (who were second), were found to be the ones who most often initiated the encounter. The students identified Whites as the largest share of profilers (68 percent). Turning to the actual nature of the profiling, most students reported being followed around the store, approached repeatedly, or bluntly accused of theft. Following the incident, only 18 percent of them reported the incident to a representative of the company. Moreover, a sizeable number of the students still made a purchase (49 percent) and later returned to the store. As revealed in the previous study, the students also expressed negative emotions concerning the experience. In closing, the authors called for the examination of CRP using a wider population base that would include other racial and ethnic minorities.

In sum, as noted earlier, the CRP literature is rather diverse. The current literature has examined the nature of CRP litigation, examined the prevalence and nature of CRP incidents among diverse samples, and sought to determine if racial and ethnic minorities do, in fact, commit theft at higher rates than Whites. Even with this diversity of scholarship, there remain notable limits to the existing literature. First, the early qualitative studies, though insightful, were based on limited number of participants. This makes it hard to determine the representativeness of the findings. Similarly, the legal analyses were based on a limited number of cases that actually made it to court. Thus, one is left wondering if the cases that were located differed from those that were settled out of court. Second, the experimental studies conducted had been limited to students from one university and residents who patronized one drug store. The victimization surveys were limited by their focus on students at HBCUs and to the residents of one major city (Philadelphia). Undoubtedly, such studies provide useful insights into CRP, but their limited scope, again, leads one to question their generalizability. Third, most of the existing CRP literature involves a heavy emphasis on the experiences of Blacks. Since Latinos are now the largest minority group in America, scholars need to consider their experiences and views concerning CRP.

This research addressed some of the weaknesses in the existing CRP literature. It expanded on the existing literature by exploring the public’s perceptions related to CRP. The study also used a nationally representative data set. In addition, the data set included an oversample of Blacks and Hispanics. Based on the strengths of the data set, the authors were able to study the following two key questions related to CRP. First, what is the public’s view concerning the prevalence of CRP incidents? Second, do they support the use of CRP in retail environments? Beyond these two guiding research questions, the study examined the veracity of the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1. Blacks and Hispanics are more likely than Whites to believe that CRP is widespread.

Hypothesis 2. Urban residents are more likely than suburban and rural residents to believe CRP is widespread.

Hypothesis 3. Blacks and Hispanics will be less likely than Whites to believe CRP is justified.

Methods

The data for this research were taken from the 2004 Minority Rights and Relations/Black-White Social Audit poll conducted from June 9–29, 2004, by the Gallup organization. Every few years, the Gallup organization examines the perceptions of Whites and racial and ethnic minorities concerning a host of issues. The 2004 poll included more than 2,000 randomly selected Americans, which included an over sample of Hispanics, Blacks, Whites, and “other” races. Since there were an extremely small number of those respondents falling into the “other” race category, the authors included
only Blacks, Hispanics, and Whites for this study, resulting in a final sample size of 1,828 respondents.

**Measures**

**Dependent variables**

There were two dependent variables utilized in this research. These included whether respondents felt CRP was widespread and or justified. These two variables were measured through the use of two questions on the poll. First, respondents were asked whether or not they believed CRP was widespread (i.e., regarding shoppers in malls/stores being questioned by police/security guards about possible theft) (widespread = 1, not widespread = 0). The second dependent variable examined whether respondents believed it was ever justified in an attempt to prevent theft in shopping malls/stores (yes = 1, no = 0).

**Independent/control variables**

There were three race/ethnicity variables: Black, White, and Hispanic. The authors then included the type of area in which respondents lived: urban, rural, or suburban. Several control variables also were included in the analyses: age was measured continuously, gender (male = 1), income (measured in five ordinal categories), whether or not respondents had children enrolled in school (yes = 1), employment status (employed = 1), education (measured in four ordinal categories ranging from less than high school to postgraduate), marriage status (married = 1), ideology (measured in five ordinal categories ranging from very conservative to very liberal), region of the country based on United States Census classifications (i.e., South, East, Midwest, or West). Table 1 presents descriptive statistics of all the variables employed in the current study.

**Results**

Due to each dependent variable being measured as a dichotomy, logistic regression was chosen as the appropriate method of estimation for multivariate analyses (Menard, 2002). Hypotheses 1 and 2 are examined in Table 2.

As can be seen, the first hypothesis was partially supported. Blacks were significantly more likely than Whites to believe that CRP is widespread (b = .98; p < .01). There was no significant difference between Hispanics and Whites (b = .18; p = .29), suggesting that these groups had similar views as to the perceived prevalence of CRP.

The second hypothesis was not supported. There was no significant difference between suburban and urban residents (-.13; p = .26) and rural and urban residents (b = -.25; p = .12) regarding how widespread they felt CRP was. This finding implied that there was no difference in the dependent variable, based on the type of neighborhood.

Several other factors reached statistical significance in the model. Age had a significant and negative impact: as respondent’s age increased, beliefs in CRP being widespread decreased. Males were significantly less likely than females to believe CRP is widespread. Finally, as respondents became more liberal, the more likely they believed CRP is widespread. The pseudo r-squares indicate that the variance explained by the model explains between 9 percent and 12 percent of the variance in the dependent variable.

Table 3 examines Hypothesis 3, which is partially supported. Blacks were significantly less likely than Whites to view CRP as being justified (b = -.31; p < .05). There was no difference, however, in CRP being justified between Hispanics and Whites (b = .02; p = .91).

There were two other significant factors in the model. As the level of education increased, respondents were less likely to believe that CRP was justified. In addition, the more liberal the respondent, the less likely s/he believed CRP is justified.

In addition, although gender was not statistically significant, the coefficient suggests that males were more likely than females to believe that CRP was justified (b = .19; p < .10). The pseudo r-squares 390
areas or residents. This finding also goes counter to recent research that revealed that males were nearly more than two times likely than females to report experiencing CRP (Gabbidon & Higgins, 2007). If these results held true across the nation, it would make more sense that males would be more likely to perceive CRP as being widespread. This finding regarding education and citizens’ beliefs concerning the prevalence of CRP also aligned with previous research. In the earlier research, those respondents who were more educated were more likely to report having experienced CRP than less educated respondents (Gabbidon & Higgins, 2007). Thus, the finding that as education increased so did the belief that CRP is widespread makes sense. It is also noteworthy that in polls centered on racial policing during traffic stops, it has been found that educated Hispanic respondents are more likely to believe that profiling is widespread (see Reitzel, Rice, & Piquero, 2004).

The third hypothesis centered on the belief that Blacks and Hispanics would be less likely than Whites to view the practice of CRP as being justified. This hypothesis was partially supported—race/ethnicity did matter here in that Blacks were significantly less likely than Hispanic and White respondents to view CRP as being justified. Interestingly, if one compares this finding with recent racial profiling poll data, Whites (73 percent) and Hispanics (77 percent) tend not to support racial profiling at equal levels, while the opposition of Blacks (90 percent) to profiling was appreciably higher (Weitzer & Tuch, 2005, p. 1017). The results seem to suggest that these views also hold true with CRP. On the whole, with such little support for the practice, it leads one to believe that there should be more attention paid to disseminating these views more broadly. Why? Well, as noted previously, past research has shown that Blacks were ten times more likely than other groups to report believing that they experienced CRP. This is a staggering figure—considering the minimal support for the practice. In short, there needs to be more of an emphasis on making retailers aware of this sentiment. Beyond simply making them aware, though, there needs to be efforts to hold them accountable when they condone such practices. In the past, retailers have been held accountable through litigation and protests/boycotts. Notably, this is the same path citizens had to take to push police agencies toward the elimination of race-based traffic stops.

Three additional findings are worthy of note. First, the results suggest that one’s politics seems to matter when it comes to whether the practice of racial profiling in retail settings is justified. It is well established that politics has a long history of being tied to criminal justice practices (Scheingold, 1984). Moreover, it is also well known that the two competing models of criminal justice—the crime control (typically Republicans) and due process (typically Democrats) models produce different policy proclivities (Packer, 1968). Thus, since the crime control model is known to give the police more leeway in carrying out their duties, it stands to reason that they will see CRP as being justified. In short, citizens with conservative (Republican) political leanings are more likely than liberal (Democrat) to believe that, if profiling is used by the police—in any context—it is probably justified (see MacDonald, 2003; Taylor & Whitney, 1999).

The second finding of note here pertains to the finding that as one’s level of education increased, respondents were less likely to support CRP. This could be an indication that educated citizens might have a greater understanding of the complexities and pitfalls of using profiling in retail settings. It might also suggest that educating the citizenry might yield tertiary benefits for reducing the support for discriminatory practices in criminal justice administration. While more research is necessary, this result is promising.

### Table 3

Logistic regression estimates for how justified CRP (n = 1,829)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>Wald</th>
<th>Exp(B)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (male = 1)</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>0.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>-0.31</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>5.61</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>0.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>-0.30</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>23.54</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>0.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children in school</td>
<td>-0.21</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>9.33</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideology</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>1.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>0.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>-0.15</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-0.29</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>0.38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\n
* \( p < 0.05 \)

\( \text{Note: } \text{ Wald } \leq 2 \text{ log likelihood} \ 2008.35 \)

\( \text{Model chi-square} \ 62.41 \)**

\( \text{Cox and Snell } R^2 \ 0.03 \)

\( \text{Nagelkerke } R^2 \ 0.05 \)

* indicates that the model only explains between 3 percent and 5 percent of the variance in the dependent variable.\( ^{1} \)

### Discussion

This research investigated three hypotheses related to citizens’ beliefs concerning the widespread nature of CRP, and whether the respondents felt the practice was justified. First, the authors tested the hypothesis of whether Blacks and Hispanics were more likely than Whites to believe that CRP is widespread. This hypothesis was partially supported in that Blacks were more likely than Hispanics and Whites to believe that the practice was widespread. In contrast to the stated hypothesis, the views of Hispanics and Whites aligned more so than those of Blacks and Hispanics. To a certain extent, these findings aligned with results of polls that have found that Hispanics’ views concerning racial bias in policing are between those of Whites and Blacks (Weitzer & Tuch, 2005). It also could be that since non-African Americans are less likely to report experiencing CRP (Gabbidon & Higgins, 2007), they are less likely to see it as a problem. Going further, another potential explanation for this finding is that, unlike most Blacks, Hispanics can pass for White, and are, thus, less likely to encounter CRP. In general, this represents an under-explored area of profiling research. Scholars know very little about whether dark-skinned as opposed to light-skinned racial and ethnic minorities receive disparate treatment in retail establishments, which might influence their level of support for CRP.

The second hypothesis postulated that urban residents would be more likely than suburban residents to believe CRP is widespread. This was not supported. Thus, those who felt racial profiling was widespread did not vary by location. This finding was not surprising since a previous study centering on the perceived CRP experiences of Philadelphia-area residents found that many of them reported that they had been profiled in suburban areas (Gabbidon & Higgins, 2007). Thus, since racial and ethnic minorities from inner cities tend to shop in suburban malls because of the presence of better stores with a wider selection of merchandise, research on the CRP experiences of suburban residents and inner city shoppers in suburban malls is required. Hence, it is likely that the practice is not limited to urban areas or residents. This finding also leads one to think that, as has been found with traffic stops, there might be an “ecology” of CRP (Meehan & Ponder, 2002). Thus, when racial and ethnic minorities step outside the boundaries of their communities, they have an increased likelihood of being profiled in retail establishments.

The authors also examined the impact of a host of other demographic factors on citizens’ views concerning CRP. The finding that males were less likely than females to believe CRP was widespread also goes counter to recent research that revealed that males were nearly more than two times likely than females to report having experienced CRP (Gabbidon & Higgins, 2007). If these results held true across the nation, it would make more sense that males would be more likely to perceive CRP as being widespread. The findings regarding education and citizens’ beliefs concerning the prevalence of CRP also aligned with previous research. In the earlier research, those respondents who were more educated were more likely to report having experienced CRP than less educated respondents (Gabbidon & Higgins, 2007). Thus, the finding that as education increased so did the belief that CRP is widespread makes sense. It is also noteworthy that in polls centered on racial policing during traffic stops, it has been found that educated Hispanic respondents are more likely to believe that profiling is widespread (see Reitzel, Rice, & Piquero, 2004).
Conclusion

This research found mixed support for several hypotheses related to citizens’ perceptions pertaining to CRP. Even so, it was not without limitations. First, this study was cross-sectional which did not tell the authors whether the views of the respondents might change over time. In addition, since there were so few other minorities besides Blacks and Hispanics in the data set, the additional respondents were excluded from the analysis. Investigating the views of Asian Americans, Native Americans, and Arab Americans, would have also illuminated the perceptions of racial/ethnic groups who receive limited attention in criminal justice. Too often, they get collapsed into the meaningless category of other or non-White/non-Black. Future studies might want to include over samples of these groups. A final limitation relates to the authors not knowing whether the respondents believed they had been profiled in retail settings. This information would have been useful because without it, the authors cannot say whether their views on CRP were colored in any way by their own personal experience. Again, this represents a fruitful area for future CRP research.

Notes

1. The authors also checked for collinearity between the independent variables. The tolerance and variance inflation factor values indicated the collinearity was not a serious concern and all of the tolerance scores were greater than .5. Also none of the VIF values exceeded 2.5 (Kutner, Nachtsheim, Netter, & Li, 2005; Menard, 2002).

References


Notes

1. The authors also checked for collinearity between the independent variables. The tolerance and variance inflation factor values indicated the collinearity was not a serious concern and all of the tolerance scores were greater than .5. Also none of the VIF values exceeded 2.5 (Kutner, Nachtsheim, Netter, & Li, 2005; Menard, 2002).

2. The authors recognize that some may consider the statistical models as being misspecified because they did not take prior experience with the police into account. Two issues, however, are of note regarding this concern—one theoretical and one empirical. Theoretically, the authors believe that the models are not misspecified given that the article is not examining a procedural or distributive justice view. Thus, the lack of prior experience does not misspecify the models any different than omitting a number of other measures. Empirically, the measure of prior experience in the data was limited. That is, the measure (i.e., single item) was asked to only Black respondents. This would restrict the variation of the analysis and reduce the sample size. Even with these arguments, the authors conducted this analysis and found that substantively the results were the same and they can be obtained from the third author on request.

Acknowledgements

The authors thank Dr. Mukund Kulkarni at Penn State Harrisburg for research support that was instrumental in securing the data used in this article.


**Case cited**