AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

Developmental Psychology

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ISSN: 0012-1649

https://doi.org/10.1037/dev0001361

The Policing Paradox: Police Stops Predict Youth's School Disengagement Via Elevated Psychological Distress

Juan Del Toro[1], Dylan B. Jackson[2], and Ming-Te Wang[1]

[1] Learning Research and Development Center, University of Pittsburgh

[2] Department of Population, Family, and Reproductive Health, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

Negative interactions with the legal system can inform adolescents' relationships with schools. The present daily-diary study examined 13,545 daily survey assessments from 387 adolescents (M_{age} = 13–14; 40% male; 32% Black, 50% White, and 18% Other ethnic-racial minority) across 35 days to assess whether police stops predicted adolescents' school disengagement through their psychological distress as a mediator. Results showed that 9% of youth experienced at least one police stop, and 66 stops occurred in total over the 35-day study course. Youth stopped by the police reported greater next-day school disengagement, and youth's psychological distress mediated the link between police stops and school disengagement. Disengagement did not predict youth's next-day police stops. In addition, ethnic-racial minority youth reported more negative police encounters than did White youth, and the effect of a police stop on next-day psychological distress was more negative for Other ethnic-racial minority youth. Implications for reducing police intervention in adolescents' lives are discussed.

Keywords: policing, school engagement, psychological distress, daily diary study

Supplemental materials: https://doi.org/10.1037/dev0001361.supp

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School engagement is foundational to healthy adolescent development (Wang et al., 2019). It also represents an intervention point from which to address problems associated with low achievement, increased problem behaviors, and high dropout rates (Wang et al., 2019). Despite the importance of school engagement for diverse life outcomes, evidence suggests that, on average, adolescents become increasingly disengaged as they progress through middle and high school (Wang et al., 2019). While scholars have devised strategies to promote students' engagement through improving school climate efforts (Wang et al., 2020) and enhancing parental involvement (Hill & Tyson, 2009), it may be the case that neighborhood-level influences—that are often overlooked in the school engagement literature—are also contributing to students' school disengagement (Sharkey et al., 2014).

Law enforcement is a pervasive presence in adolescents' ethnic-racial minority communities (Del Toro, 2021; Jackson et al., 2021). For youth of color, exposure to police encounters emerges as early as the onset of adolescence (Weaver & Geller, 2019). During this period, youth acquire more autonomy to venture out to places with less parental supervision and may elicit treatment from strangers in accordance with negative stereotypes. Stereotypes paint a picture of youth of color as older and less innocent than their same-aged White peers (Epstein et al., 2017; Goff et al., 2014). This picture frames individuals' perceptions toward teenagers of color as adult-like criminals (Steinberg, 2017) and contributes to their overrepresentation in police encounters. In New York City in recent years, for example, adolescents constituted only 12% of the city population, but they represented 47% of people subjected to police stops, with White individuals accounting for only 7% of such stops (New York Civil Liberties Union, 2019).

Despite the documented prevalence of policing, there are complexities regarding the consequences of policing. First, there are competing hypotheses regarding the longitudinal interrelations between police stops and school disengagement. Some scholars have suggested that when used as a severe form of punishment, police stops increase youth's distrust toward the police. This distrust is said to diffuse across youth's attitudes toward all authority figures, including school adults (Brayne, 2014). Alternatively, others have asserted that academically disengaged youth are more likely to experience police stops because they have individual qualities (i.e., poor self-control, high sensation seeking) that make them susceptible to police efforts preventing truancy and related delinquency (Mazerolle et al., 2017). Due to this contention, we sought to test both hypotheses in the present study. Second, few researchers have examined how policing affects school-based outcomes (Gottlieb & Wilson, 2019; Legewie & Fagan, 2019). An assessment

Juan Del Toro https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8625-026X

This research was supported by Grants 1315943 and 1561382 from the National Science Foundation, Grant 201600067 from the Spencer Foundation to Ming-Te Wang, and Grant 202100287 from the Spencer Foundation to Juan Del Toro. The present study was not preregistered. The data and study materials are not publicly available, but they are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Juan Del Toro, Learning Research and Development Center, University of Pittsburgh, 3420 Forbes Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15260, United States. Email: juan.deltoro@pitt.edu

of the underlying psychological mechanisms connecting these two phenomena is critical to identifying possible intervention points. Lastly, when measuring police stops, most studies have relied on retrospective approaches, which raise concerns for recollection bias. A daily diary limits such bias as youth complete surveys on a daily basis (Bolger & Laurenceau, 2013).

To address these gaps, we used a daily diary to examine the momentary relations among youth's self-reported police stops, school-based disengagement, and psychological distress across 35 days. We tested (a) whether police stops predicted increased school disengagement among adolescents, (b) whether school disengaged youth were more likely to experience police stops, (c) whether psychological distress mediated the link between police stops and school disengagement, and (d) whether our results differed for youth from different ethnic-racial groups.

Police Stops Lead Youth to Disengage From School

Individuals are likely to engage in behaviors that challenge all authorities when they experience unfair punishment or sanctions at the hands of any authority figure (i.e., Defiance Theory; Sherman, 1993). These defiant behaviors are primed when a person believes a sanction was unfair, feels stereotyped during the sanctioning, and has poor relationships with the sanctioning agent (Sherman, 1993). Due to worldviews that law enforcement targets criminal activity, police stops can be considered as sanctions (National Academies of Sciences, 2017; Weaver & Geller, 2019). Moreover, police officers have been found to stop ethnic-racial minority and low-income adolescents for unjustifiable reasons (Brunson & Weitzer, 2009, 2011). What may be more important, though, is that adolescents are aware that police officers stereotype them as delinquents (Brunson & Weitzer, 2009; Rios, 2012); thereby, activating feelings of shame and distrust that prime defiance. Police officers may be contributing to ethnic-racial minority and low-income adolescents' defiance toward all authority figures.

Because law enforcement represents a surveilling institution, youth's defiance toward other institutions with similar discipline practices (i.e., schools) is likely also at stake (Brayne, 2014). Law enforcement and schools require individuals to adhere to rule and order, with both keeping formal records of disciplinary transgressions and their associated sanctions (Brayne, 2014; Hirschfield, 2008). These similarities between law enforcement and schools make it possible for youth to ascribe qualities of an authority figure from one setting (i.e., police officers) onto a separate authority figure in another setting (i.e. schools). In addition, research has indicated that defiance after an unfair sanction is more likely when the individual has a poor relationship with the sanctioning institution (Sherman, 1993). During adolescence, youth have a weak attachment to school due to conflicts between their developmental needs and features of the school environment (e.g., regimented learning environments; Wang et al., 2019). Taken together, youth may more likely defy and disengage from school after police encounters.

In turn, youth's police stop experiences are correlated with school maladjustment. In a cross-sectional study of American youth from 20 large cities, Gottlieb and Wilson (2019) found that those with exposure to police stops were more likely to incur low school grades and negative attitudes toward their teachers. In another study using administrative data from 250,000 youth in New York City, the implementation of aggressive policing was associated with reduced test scores and school attendance among Black boys (Legewie & Fagan, 2019). However, cross-sectional designs fail to disentangle the temporal ordering between police stops and school disengagement (e.g., Gottlieb & Wilson, 2019), and administrative records prevent the holistic understanding of youth's phenomenological experiences with police encounters (e.g., Legewie & Fagan, 2019). A daily-diary approach can provide a depiction of adolescents' momentary policing experiences and real-time consequences of such experiences to their school adjustment.

Law Enforcement Targets Disengaged Youth

Children have a legal responsibility to attend school in the United States (Mazerolle et al., 2017). When children are continuously and illegitimately absent from school, particularly if they are loitering while unsupervised in public during school hours, they are more likely to be approached by the police (Mcara & Mcvie, 2005). In many cases, police-school partnerships employ restorative and procedural justice approaches to mitigate students' truancy (Mazerolle et al., 2017). In other cases, police officers take truant youth in the absence of an adult guardian to a unit (Bazemore et al., 2004), where they are processed in a fashion that mimics being arrested and questioned for serious offenses. These police-youth efforts are potentially problematic given that police officers receive little to no training on how to effectively interact with youth (Fix et al., 2021). Unsurprisingly, then, chronically truant youth are at a high risk for receiving sanctions from law enforcement (Dembo & Gulledge, 2009; Reimer & Dimock, 2005).

Research has shown that school disengaged youth are more prone to experiencing police encounters than engaged youth (Mcara & Mcvie, 2005; Monahan et al., 2014). In one study, nearly 78% of youth who have truanted more than five times in the previous year experienced adversarial police contact, compared with only 40% who truanted less frequently or not at all (Mcara & Mcvie, 2005). In a 2-year longitudinal study, youth were more likely to experience an arrest when they engaged in more truancy than when they engaged in less truancy (Monahan et al., 2014). Other studies found similar patterns: Juveniles with truancy as their first offense had higher rates of criminal justice system referrals, commitments, and probations later in life than youth with other offense types (Farrington, 1996; Zhang et al., 2010).

To expand on what is known, we examine the longitudinal interrelations between police stops and school disengagement in a single study to illustrate the contextual nature of police stops. On the one hand, police stops characterized as unfair may contribute to youth's defiance and disengagement from surveilling institutions, including schools. On the other hand, school-disengaged youth are more likely to elicit police-initiated contact due to police officers' pursuits addressing truancy and related behaviors. To unpack the nature of police stops, we test both possibilities.

The Mediating Role of Psychological Distress

Individuals develop anger, discomfort, shame, and distrust when institutions engage in unfair punishment (Agnew, 1992; Sherman, 1993). In the past several decades, police departments across the United States have shifted from reacting to crime to using aggressive,

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in-the-moment means to deter the escalation of criminal acts, including proactive, hot spot, and broken windows policing (National Academies of Sciences, 2017). These models emphasize active surveillance for suspicious activity and aggressive enforcement of minor civil violations. As a result, many youth have experienced intrusive and interrogative police-initiated encounters, such as stop-and-frisks, use of harsh language, verbal threats, or use of physical force (Geller, 2021). When youth experience a police stop followed by a stop-and-frisk for mischaracterized suspicious behaviors or for minor violations (e.g., minor possession of marijuana; Henning, 2017), they unsurprisingly develop cynicism toward the law (Geller & Fagan, 2019) and perceive police stops as unfair (Slocum & Wiley, 2018). This negative reaction to police stops may be a key mechanism that drives how youth map their experiences with law enforcement onto their relationships with other surveilling institutions, including schools.

Youth who feel disempowered by a police officer may develop negative affect toward other authority figures with similar power differentials. Specifically, the power difference between youth and law enforcement can lead adolescents to feel vulnerable and unable to defend themselves during negative police encounters (Rios, 2012). As a result of feeling powerless, youth may feel upset and angry. Police stops can also trigger vigilance and anxiety when youth anticipate being unfairly stopped again in the future (Jackson et al., 2019). In turn, youth may project these negative emotions onto other authority figures, such as school adults who also hold a position of power and engage in similar disciplinary practices as law enforcement (Brayne, 2014). Feeling sad, anxious, and angry with authority figures, including educators, may unequivocally lead youth to distrust and develop cynicism toward educational institutions, which can discourage youth's participation and engagement in school.

Although studies have not examined how psychological distress may facilitate the link between police stops and school disengagement, such links are possible. For instance, studies found that individuals with greater exposure to police stops experienced more negative affect, including psychological symptoms commensurate with acute and posttraumatic stress (Gottlieb & Wilson, 2019; Sewell et al., 2016). Unfortunately, elevated psychological distress has been associated with diminished school outcomes (Sharkey et al., 2014). One cross-sectional study found that youth who were stopped by the police reported more psychological distress, which in turn predicted lower grades (Gottlieb & Wilson, 2019). However, due to most extant studies' retrospective nature, estimates regarding the longitudinal link between police stops and youth's development may be conservative, especially considering recollection bias when youth report their involvement with the criminal justice system (Geller et al., 2016; Kirk, 2006). Given that psychological distress is malleable and responsive to youth's environments (Das et al., 2016), an understanding of youth's mental state after police encounters can be used to inform interventions aimed at reducing negative police-youth interactions. For instance, the role of youth's psychological distress vis-à-vis police stops can call law enforcements' attention to the training needs for more developmentally appropriate police-youth interactions.

The Present Study

Adolescence brings about increases in unsolicited police encounters (Hagan et al., 2005; Weaver & Geller, 2019) and school-based misbehaviors (Theriot & Dupper, 2010). Police stops and youth's school disengagement are interconnected processes that are challenging to temporally disentangle without the use of intensive longitudinal designs. Using two waves of intensive longitudinal data with up to 35 daily diaries, we examined the longitudinal interrelations between police stops and youth's school disengagement not as a single cross-sectional snapshot, but rather as a dynamic process that could change over time. This daily diary enabled us to buttress the literature with a rich perspective of the immediate consequences of police stops. In examining the effects of police encounters on educational outcomes, researchers have overlooked the possible day-to-day interpersonal processes between youth and law enforcement that may have implications for youth's long-term school outcomes. To address this omission, we posed four research questions: (a) Do adolescents who experience a police stop report greater school disengagement the next day; (b) does adolescents' psychological distress (i.e., depressive symptoms, anxiety, and anger) mediate the longitudinal link between police stops and school disengagement; (c) are youth who are disengaged from school more likely to experience police stops the next day; and (d) does adolescents' ethnicity-race moderate these links among police stops, psychological distress, and school disengagement?

Our hypotheses are as follows: As unwarranted police stops may lead youth to develop animosity toward authority figures (Sherman, 1993), we predicted that youth who experienced a police stop would report greater next-day school disengagement. In recognition of the stress associated with involuntary police stops (Brunson & Miller, 2006), we also hypothesized that youth who were stopped by the police would report more psychological distress (i.e., greater depressive symptoms, anxiety, and anger), which in turn would predict more school disengagement. Furthermore, we predicted that youth's disengagement would be linked to a higher likelihood of experiencing a next-day police stop because school-disengaged youth often exhibit truant behaviors that elicit police intervention (Monahan et al., 2014). These processes are tinged by stereotypes that portray youth of color as older and less innocent than White youth (Goff et al., 2014); hence, we predicted that youth of color would report more negative police encounters and report more adverse maladjustment after a police stop than White youth.

Method

Participants

Data came from 387 adolescents (M_{age} = 13–14; 40% male; 32% Black, 50% White, and 18% Other ethnic-racial minority; 69% qualified for free lunch) from eight public middle and high schools in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Whereas most students attended predominantly Black schools, 25% and 10% of the sample attended a predominantly White school and an ethnically-racially diverse school, respectively. In addition, 50% of participants attended schools where low-income students were the numerical majority, 25% of students attended a school where low-income students were the numerical minority, and the remaining 25% attended schools where students came from socioeconomically diverse backgrounds. Overall, our adolescent sample reflected participating schools' aggregated population demographics (i.e., 33% Black, 59% White, and 8% Other; 64% qualified for free lunch).

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Procedure

In the fall and spring semesters of the 2019–2020 academic year, we invited all students from eight schools to participate in two waves of daily diaries. The research team recruited these schools as the school district leaders were particularly interested in partnering with researchers to understand factors contributing to racially disparate juvenile justice court referrals in their surrounding neighborhoods. For instance, Black youth in these counties were referred to court at higher rates than Black youth nationally (Elliott et al., 2020). In addition, the rate of police officers in our sample of schools has doubled from 2015 to 2019, and school security guards are located in districts with the highest concentration of students of color (Eddins & Lapp, 2020). Due to these racial disparities in students' contact with the police, school leaders were eager to work with researchers to address disciplinary issues in students' schools and neighborhoods.

With assistance from school staff, the research team distributed letters with the study description and consent or assent forms for students and their parents who were already participating in several ongoing studies. Students who were participating in these studies were recruited, and interested students were provided an information letter detailing the study and elements of consent to review with their parents. The information letters included a weblink to a parental consent form. Parents provided parental consent via the online consent form, and students completed a child assent form before starting the online survey. More than 98% of students and parents agreed to participate, and this procedure was administered at both waves.

The two waves added up to 35 days (i.e., Wave 1: October 28, 2019 to November 17, 2019; Wave 2: March 2, 2020 to March 15, 2020). In each day, students used their Internet-capable devices to complete daily diaries between 5 p.m. and 12 a.m. and received two to four daily reminders via e-mail or text message to complete their daily diary. For participants who missed a diary entry on any given day, text messages were sent the following morning to troubleshoot any issues. To address potential literacy difficulties, we audio-recorded all questions. The present study was not preregistered. The data and study materials are not publicly available, but they are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request. All materials and procedures as part of the study, "Assessing Youth STEM Engagement and School Engagement and Positive Youth Development" (Protocol number: STUDY19070366), were reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Pittsburgh.

Measures

Daily Police Stops

Each day, adolescents were asked a single question to identify whether the police had stopped them (0 = *not stopped*, 1 = *stopped*). This question came from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study (Geller & Fagan, 2019), a national cohort study of adolescents from primarily low-income families in 20 large cities. To characterize the nature of police stops, adolescents responded to a one-time set of questions from the *Police Intrusion Scale* (four-item; e.g., "Did the police frisk or pat you down?" 0 = *no*, 1 = *yes*) at the end of the daily-diary period. These items were summed into an index with high scores indicating greater types of intrusion.

Daily School Disengagement

Adolescents completed four items regarding their behavioral disengagement from the school context (see online supplemental materials for a detailed validity assessment). Two items were from a modified disengagement checklist (e.g., "I skipped school or cut/skipped class today." 0 = *no*, 1 = *yes*; Wang et al., 2017), and two items came from a well-validated behavioral engagement subscale (i.e., "I stayed focused in school today." 1 = *not at all*, 5 = *very much*; Wang et al., 2017). To account for the variation in Likert scale responses, a single latent variable represented the four items as a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) produced acceptable fit indices, $\chi^2(4) = 44.64$, $p < .001$; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .03; comparative fit index (CFI) = .99; standardized root mean square residual, $SRMR_{within} = .03$, $SRMR_{between} = .08$. The reliability of our school disengagement measure to detect change over time was acceptable ($\alpha_{change} = .87$). All items were coded so that high scores reflected greater school disengagement.

Daily Psychological Distress

Psychological distress was assessed as a latent variable using adolescents' self-reported anxiety, depressive symptoms, and anger. Anxiety (two-item; e.g., "How often did you feel anxious today."), depressive symptoms (two-item; e.g., "How often did you feel depressed or sad today."), and anger (one-item; i.e., "Often did you feel angry today.") were assessed using 5-point Likert scales (1 = *not at all*, 5 = *extremely*) from the Center for Epidemiological Studies (Radloff, 1977). A CFA showed acceptable fit indices for the five-indicator latent variable, $\chi^2(8) = 235.37$, $p < .001$, RMSEA = .05, CFI = .97, $SRMR_{within} = .00$, $SRMR_{between} = .06$. The reliability of psychological distress to detect change over time was acceptable ($\alpha_{change} = .95$); thus, psychological distress was a latent variable with higher scores representing greater distress.

Covariates

In all analyses, we adjusted for demographic variables to reduce the possibility that the relation between police stops and school disengagement was due to potential confounding variables. Between-person covariates included youth's ethnicity-race, gender, grade level, school-recorded eligibility for free lunch, recruitment, school-recorded number of infractions that participants committed in the last academic year, school grade level, police intrusion, and school ethnic-racial diversity. To account for possible fatigue effects of study participation, day was included as a within-person covariate. Detailed information on our covariates is included in our online supplemental materials.

Missing Data

Among the 387 adolescents, 285 participated in Wave 1, 292 participated in Wave 2, and 190 participated in both waves. Specifically, out of the 285 adolescents who were recruited in Wave 1, 190 of them also participated in Wave 2, and an additional 102 adolescents were recruited in Wave 2. Due to the study design, adolescents' participation across waves contributed to missing data at the daily level as 95 participants (i.e., those who participated in Wave 1 but did not return in Wave 2) missed at least 14 diaries and 102 participants (i.e., those who did not participate in the study in Wave 1 but did in Wave 2) missed at least 21 diaries.

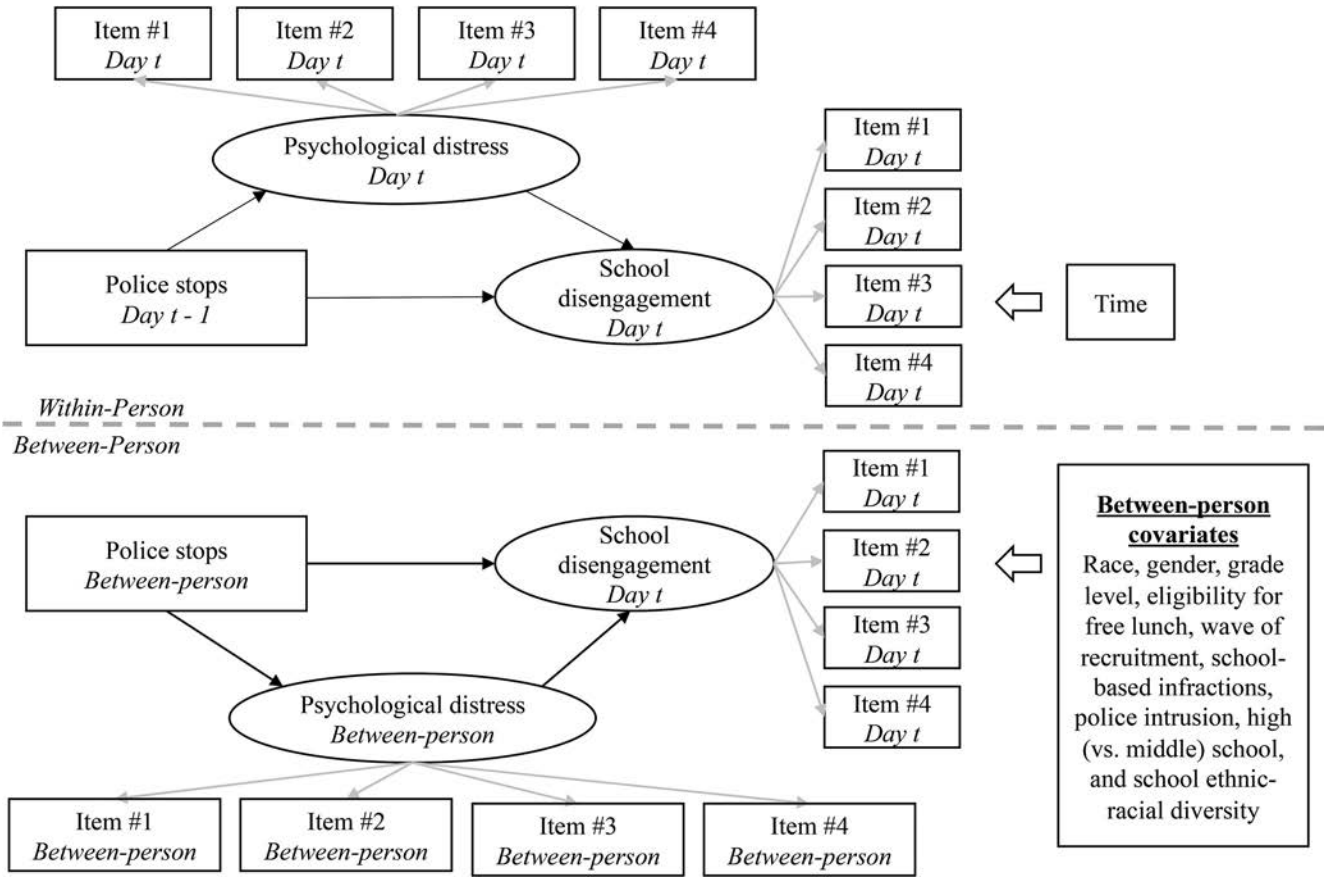
Thus, 197 adolescents (51% of the analytic sample) missed at least 14 diaries. When we examine missing rates at the daily level across Waves 1 and 2, adolescents on average missed 11 out of 35 diaries. Specifically, 30% of adolescents missed 0–1 diary, 10% missed 2–3 diaries, 4% missed 4–5 diaries, and the remainder 56% of adolescents missed 6 or more diaries. To ensure that missingness did not bias our results, we assessed missing data patterns across wave- and daily-level participation and reestimated our final models under conditions when missingness was minimal (see online supplemental materials for details). Ultimately, after we found wave- and daily-level participation was related to our covariates and unrelated to our key constructs (i.e., police stops, psychological distress, and school disengagement), our data were categorized as missing at random (Enders, 2013). In addition, the pattern of results in our main analysis did not differ across conditions when missingness was minimal. To retain sample variability and diversity, we used Full Information Maximum Likelihood to retain all 387 participants (Enders, 2013).

Analytic Plan

All analyses were conducted in M*plus* Version 8.3 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2019) using maximum likelihood with robust standard errors to account for the nonnormal distribution of the data. In addition, we used TYPE=COMPLEX to account for the nested structure in which 35 daily assessments were nested within 387 adolescents who were nested within eight schools. We used five multilevel models to address the study questions by assigning time to Level 1 and students to Level 2 while accounting for school random effects (see Table S1 in online supplemental materials for intraclass correlations, ICCs). Because the school-level ICCs and sample size were small, we were unable to reliably estimate school as a Level 3 category. Model 1 was an unconditional model, Model 2 only included police stops, and Model 3 included both police stops and psychological distress. In Model 3, we tested whether police stops predicted adolescents' next-day school disengagement via psychological distress as a mediator (see Figure 1 for a visual depiction). The "Model Indirect" command in M*plus* was used to estimate direct and indirect effects across significant pathways (MacKinnon et al., 2002). Given that lagged dependent variables tend to introduce error in mixed models (Allison, 2015), our fourth model aimed to establish temporal precedence among key constructs by examining whether school disengagement predicted next-day police stops. In Model 5, we used youth's ethnicity-race as a grouping variable for multigroup analyses and tested whether we can constrain path coefficients to be equivalent across ethnic-racial groups without causing a

Figure 1

The Multilevel Structural Equation Model in the Present Study



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significant decrement in model fit. Across all models, we distinguished between key constructs at Levels 1 and 2 to understand whether relations between constructs were motivated by within- versus between-person differences.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for the full sample and each ethnic-racial group. Throughout the 35 days, 66 police stops were documented, and 9% of youth (n = 34) were stopped at least once. The rate of police stops did not differ across ethnic-racial groups, but the degree of police intrusion did as 12% of Black and 19% of Other minority youth had at least one intrusive experience, whereas 5% of their White peers did, $\chi^2(2) = 11.30$, $p < .01$. Black and Other ethnic-racial minority youth also experienced more types of intrusion than did White youth, $F(2, 309) = 4.72$, $p < .01$. Turning to school disengagement, 61% of youth disengaged from school at least once, and youth engaged in at least three types of school disengagement behaviors (M = 2.99, SD = 4.92). More Black (74%) and Other minority youth (65%) disengaged from school at least once than did White youth (52%), $\chi^2(2) = 16.07$, $p < .001$.

Table 2 presents zero-order bivariate correlations among key study variables for the full sample (N = 387). Findings indicated that police stops were associated with more school disengagement (r = .12, $p <$ .05) and higher psychological distress (r-range = .14–.24, p-range = .01–.05), and higher psychological distress was associated with more school disengagement (r-range = .21–.28, p-range = .01–.05). In Table S2 in online supplemental materials, the zero-order bivariate correlations for each ethnic-racial group supported the overall pattern of findings documented within the full sample.

Unconditional Multilevel Model

The left-side panel of Table 3 includes Model 1, which presents results for an unconditional multilevel model with adolescents' school disengagement as the outcome while the predictor and the mediator are absent in the equation. The model fit the data well, $\chi^2(40) = 510.59$, $p < .001$, RMSEA = .03, CFI = .96, $SRMR_{within}$ = .05, $SRMR_{between}$ = .08.

Police Stops and School Disengagement

The center panel of Table 3 presents Model 2 examining daily relations between police stops and next-day school disengagement when psychological distress was absent in the model. After controlling for within-and between-person covariates and school random effects, youth who were stopped by the police also reported more school disengagement than youth who were not stopped by the police. In addition, youth who were themselves stopped by the police reported more next-day school disengagement relative to their own average. The model fit the data well, $\chi^2(49) = 344.15$, $p < .001$, RMSEA = .03, CFI = .97, $SRMR_{within}$ = .04, $SRMR_{between}$ = .08.

The Mediating Role of Psychological Distress

The right-side panel of Table 3 includes Model 3, in which psychological distress was assessed as a mediator between police stops and school disengagement after controlling for within- and between-person covariates and school random effects. Youth who encountered police stops did not differ from those who were not stopped by the police on psychological distress, but youth who reported more psychological distress were more likely to disengage from school than youth who reported less psychological distress. After controlling for these between-person

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics of Key Demographic Variables for the Analytic Sample of Adolescents

Demographic variables	Full sample (n = 387)	Black youth (n = 124)	White youth (n = 195)	Other youth (n = 68)
Age: M (SD)	15.35 (1.45)	15.03 (1.38)	15.62 (1.43)	15.20 (1.50)
Gender				
%Girls	60.20	65.30	56.90	60.30
%Boys	39.80	34.70	43.10	39.70
Lunch status				
%Free lunch	68.70	89.80	52.60	78.00
%Pay lunch	31.30	10.20	47.40	22.00
School (n; racial diversity score; %student body is low-income)				
School 1 (.52; .56)	74	27	29	18
School 2 (.23; .78)	9	7	1	1
School 3 (.37; .73)	28	12	9	7
School 4 (.47; .74)	34	12	14	8
School 5 (.50; .62)	55	27	19	9
School 6 (.59; .59)	42	18	15	9
School 7 (.47; .80)	52	20	26	6
School 8 (.12; .24)	93	1	82	10
Key study measures				
Daily police stops	0.09 (0.28)	0.09 (0.29)	0.08 (0.27)	0.10 (0.31)
Daily school disengagement	0.00 (1.00)	0.05 (1.03)	−0.05 (1.04)	0.03 (0.85)
Daily depressive symptoms	1.64 (0.74)	1.53 (0.59)	1.74 (0.82)	1.58 (0.74)
Daily anxiety	1.83 (0.75)	1.65 (0.60)	1.99 (0.82)	1.72 (0.68)
Daily anger	1.69 (0.62)	1.75 (0.67)	1.69 (0.61)	1.61 (0.57)

Note. Other youth = other ethnic-racial minority youth.

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Table 2
Zero-Order Bivariate Correlations Among Key Study Variables for the Full Sample of 387 Adolescents

No.	Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1	Police stops	1														
2	School disengagement	**.12**	1													
3	Depressive symptoms	**.15**	**.28**	1												
4	Anxiety	**.14**	**.21**	**.76**	1											
5	Anger	**.24**	**.25**	**.67**	**.69**	1										
6	Black youth (vs. White youth)	.04	.04	**−.11**	**−.17**	.07	1									
7	Other youth (vs. White youth)	.02	.01	−.04	−.07	−.06	**−.32**	1								
8	Boys (vs. girls)	.00	.03	**−.14**	**−.18**	**−.15**	−.07	.00	1							
9	Ineligible (vs. eligible) for free lunch	−.09	.01	.05	**.13**	.01	**−.31**	−.09	.00	1						
10	Grade level	.00	**.10**	**.11**	**.14**	−.06	**−.15**	−.05	**−.15**	**.31**	1					
11	Recruited Wave 2 (vs. Wave 1)	−.02	.04	**.13**	**.18**	.02	**−.33**	−.06	−.07	**−.67**	**.44**	1				
12	School-based infractions	.03	.06	**−.11**	**−.11**	−.05	**.29**	−.07	.02	−.08	−.05	**−.12**	1			
13	Police intrusion	**.13**	.09	.01	.01	.03	.08	**.12**	−.02	−.08	.02	−.04	.08	1		
14	High (vs. middle) school students	.03	.09	**.10**	.09	−.05	−.08	−.06	**−.17**	**−.16**	**.79**	**.25**	−.04	.01	1	
15	School ethnic-racial diversity	.01	−.05	**−.11**	**−.16**	−.01	**.32**	**.10**	.05	**−.70**	**−.51**	**−.88**	**.14**	.05	**−.40**	1

Note. Other youth = other ethnic-racial minority youth. Bolded values indicate $p < .05$ and nonbolded values indicate $p \geq .05$.

differences, youth who experienced police stops also reported elevated next-day psychological distress (relative to their own average), which in turn predicted increased school disengagement (relative to their own average). The within-person indirect effect of a police stop on next-day school disengagement via psychological distress was significant ($B = .02$, $SE = .01$, $p < .05$). The within-person effect of a police stop on next-day school disengagement remained significant ($B = .41$, $SE = .19$, $p < .05$), suggesting that psychological distress was a partial mediator. The within-person effect size of a police stop on youth's next-day school disengagement was $\beta = .34$, which is considered meaningful and large due to the present study's observational nature (Dynarski, 2017). The model fit the data well, $\chi^2(147) = 898.69$, $p < .001$, RMSEA = .02, CFI = .97, $SRMR_{within} = .03$, $SRMR_{between} = .07$.

Were School Disengaged Youth Likely to Get Stopped by the Police?

Table 4 presents a model examining whether school disengagement predicted next-day police stops after controlling for within- and between-person covariates and school random effects. Specifically, the top panel of Table 4 presents our outcome (i.e., next-day police stops) regressed on our predictors, which are presented in the left-side panel of Table 4. Here, youth's school disengagement did not predict next-day police stops. The model fit the data well,

Table 3
Multilevel Structural Equation Model Predicting Next-Day Psychological Distress and School Disengagement Over 35 Days Among the Full Sample of 387 Adolescents

Predictors	Model 1: Baseline model School disengagement *day t*	Model 2: Main effects without mediator School disengagement *day t*	Model 3: Main effects with mediator	
			Psychological distress *day t*	School disengagement *day t*
Within-student				
Day	.01 (.00)***	.01 (.00)***	.01 (.00)***	.01 (.00)***
Police stops *day t −1*		.57 (.18)**	.58 (.15)***	.41 (.19)*
Psychological distress *day t*				.30 (.09)**
Between-student				
Police stops		.26 (.07)***	.20 (.13)	.19 (.09)*
Psychological distress				.36 (.11)**
Black youth (vs. White youth)	.03 (.15)	.02 (.14)	−.14 (.06)*	.09 (.14)
Other youth (vs. White youth)	.06 (.11)	.06 (.10)	−.15 (.05)**	.11 (.10)
Boys (vs. girls)	.11 (.09)	.11 (.07)	−.18 (.04)***	.16 (.08)*
Grade level	.01 (.05)	.01 (.04)	.01 (.04)	.02 (.03)
Youth ineligible for free lunch (vs. eligible youth)	−.07 (.10)	−.06 (.09)	−.01 (.09)	−.05 (.07)
Recruited Wave 2 (vs. Wave 1)	.13 (.13)	.15 (.13)	.21 (.09)*	.05 (.11)
School-based infractions	.01 (.01)	.01 (.01)	−.01 (.00)***	.01 (.01)
Police intrusion	.04 (.04)	.02 (.03)	.02 (.02)	.03 (.05)
High school (vs. middle school)	.15 (.17)	.15 (.14)	.04 (.11)	.11 (.16)
School ethnic-racial diversity	.04 (.41)	.10 (.39)	.34 (.23)	−.05 (.40)

Note. Other youth = other ethnic-racial minority youth.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

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Table 4
Multilevel Structural Equation Model Predicting Next-Day Police Stops Over 35 Days Among the Full Sample of 387 Adolescents

Predictors	Police stops *day t*
Within-student	
Day	.01 (.00)***
School disengagement *day t − 1*	.01 (.01)
Between-student	
School disengagement	.01 (.00)*
Black youth (vs. White youth)	.00 (.01)
Other youth (vs. White youth)	.00 (.00)
Boys (vs. girls)	.00 (.00)
Grade level	−.01 (.01)
Youth ineligible for free lunch (vs. eligible youth)	−.01 (.01)
Recruited Wave 2 (vs. Wave 1)	−.01 (.01)
School-based infractions	.00 (.01)
Police intrusion	.01 (.01)
High school (vs. middle school)	.00 (.01)
School ethnic-racial diversity	−.02 (.02)

Note. Other youth = other ethnic-racial minority youth.
* $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

$\chi^2(46) = 495.19$, $p < .001$, RMSEA = .03, CFI = .96, $SRMR_{within}$ = .04, $SRMR_{between}$ = .08.

Ethnic-Racial Group Differences

Multigroup analyses suggested that youth's ethnicity-race moderated our results, $\Delta\chi^2(4) = 20.88$, $p < .001$. The effect of police stops on next-day school engagement was equivalent across groups, $\Delta\chi^2(2) = .57$, $p = .75$, but the effect of police stops on next-day psychological distress was stronger for Other ethnic-racial minority youth than for their Black and White peers, $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 10.41$, $p < .01$, who did not differ between each other $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 3.07$, $p = .08$. Nonetheless, the effect of police stops on each outcome was negative for all ethnic-racial groups.

Sensitivity Analysis

We assessed whether our results were robust to alternative models. To add validity to the daily diary design, we examined whether same-day effects were stronger than next-day effects, as we would expect that the effect size of a police stop on same-day school disengagement would be larger than the next-day effect. Ultimately, the same-day effect of a police stop on school disengagement was large ($\beta = .98$). Also, Allison (2015) argued against including lagged dependent variables, but we examined whether our results stayed the same after we controlled for prior-day psychological distress as sensitivity analyses; ultimately, they did (see Table S3 in online supplemental materials).

Discussion

In the current era of proactive policing, American adolescents are experiencing police-initiated encounters at disproportionate rates (Weaver & Geller, 2019). We sought to understand whether these encounters have ramifications for youth's engagement in school. Using intensive longitudinal data, we found that adolescents who were stopped by the police reported increased next-day school disengagement. In addition, adolescents' psychological distress mediated the day-to-day links between police stops and school disengagement. Adolescents who were stopped by the police experienced elevated next-day psychological distress, which in turn predicted increased school disengagement. Adolescents who were disengaged from school were neither more nor less likely to be stopped by the police the next day. Adolescents' ethnicity-race moderated our results, as Black and Other ethnic-racial minority youth experienced more negative police intrusion than White youth, and Other ethnic-racial minority youth in particular experienced more adverse psychological distress after a police stop.

Police Stops and Adolescents' School Disengagement

Over the course of 35 days, 9% of adolescents were stopped by the police at least once. Prior studies have found that approximately one-in-four urban adolescents experienced at least one police stop in their lifetime (Geller & Fagan, 2019), and 40% of non-White boys experienced police stops at least once in the past 2 years (Del Toro et al., 2019). Whereas most studies found high rates of police stops over lengthy periods (i.e., lifetime and 2 years), our prevalence rate was expectedly lower as we examined rates of police stops during an intensive 35-day period. The present study's low prevalence rate may be conservative as some adolescents had fewer opportunities to report police encounters when they did not participate in both waves of the study. Nonetheless, the 9% rate of adolescents with police encounters during this 35-day period should raise concerns, as we found that these stops were associated with decrements in adolescents' school engagement. For school leaders working to reduce risks to students' academic achievement, we suggest that adolescents' daily experiences and interactions with law enforcement in the neighborhood warrant attention as they can spill over and undermine adolescents' engagement in the classroom. Notably, extant studies asking participants to reflect on their experiences with police stops occurring within at least the last 6 months have reported small effects (Del Toro et al., 2019; Legewie & Fagan, 2019). However, our effect was large and likely attributed to our assessment of key constructs within 1–2 days, as effect sizes are generally larger when outcomes are measured immediately after the predictor (Kraft, 2020).

Supporting our hypotheses, adolescents who were stopped by the police reported enhanced next-day psychological distress, which in turn predicted increased school disengagement. The role of psychological distress in linking police stops and school disengagement speaks to the mechanism embedded within extant theory (Agnew, 1992). Police-initiated encounters—especially those related to normative defiance or experimentation (e.g., loitering, possession of small amounts of marijuana)—convey to youth that authority figures in their community view them as criminals. Moreover, being mislabeled as a delinquent engenders anger and sadness that impact youth across settings. Because schools are likely the surveilling institutions that youth encounter after a negative police encounter, stopped youth's emotions can manifest into the classroom and exacerbate poor institutional bonds toward school. Although we could not measure institutional bonds, school disengagement may be a proxy for it. We found that most youth reported at least one form of school disengagement with an average of three instances of disengagement. Unfair punishment from policing in tandem with preexisting poor school engagement potentially motivated youth to stay disengaged.

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School disengagement failed to predict next-day police stops. This finding challenges the efficacy of police-involved truancy prevention programs, but our proposition is speculative as we did not explicitly examine such programs. Nonetheless, the absence of a significant effect of school disengagement on next-day police stops raises questions about officers' motivations in stopping youth. Youth have previously expressed feeling unfairly targeted by the police (Brunson & Miller, 2006; Jones, 2014). Supporting our results, Legewie and Fagan (2019) found that Black boys showed greater school truancy after exposure to aggressive policing, but there was no effect on their attendance before the aggressive policing program's implementation.

Police stops predicted within-person changes to youth's psychological distress but not between-person differences in psychological distress. Our distinction between *within-person changes* versus *between-person differences* in psychological distress is important, as most studies have examined the effect of police stops on between-person differences in psychological distress and likely provided biased estimates due to differences between individuals. Recall that a strength of a daily diary versus other approaches (e.g., biannual/annual surveys) is the ability to examine youth's phenomenological experiences while reducing recollection bias (Bolger & Laurenceau, 2013). Because more significant effects emerged at the within-person than at the between-person levels, proximal experiences may matter more for adjustment than more distal experiences that may be saturated by between-person differences and memory.

Ethnic-Racial Group Differences

The intrusion and associated consequences of police stops varied across ethnic-racial groups of adolescents. Specifically, both Black and Other ethnic-racial minority youth reported more police intrusion than did their White peers. These disparities associated with police contact are unsurprising considering the documented police mistreatment of adolescents of color (Geller, 2021). Structural issues within law enforcement may be shaping these disparities. For instance, most police officers receive little to no training on how to understand and interact with adolescents (Fix et al., 2021), suggesting that many police officers are unaware of the difference between developmentally normative behaviors (Steinberg, 2017) and how biases portray misbehaviors from particular ethnic-racial groups as more aggressive and troubling than White youth's behaviors (Goff et al., 2014). Because these issues of policing in ethnic-racial minority communities have been pervasive across generations (Stuart & Miller, 2017), changes to the institution of law enforcement are warranted.

All ethnic-racial groups experienced negative consequences the day after a police stop, but the effect of a stop on psychological distress was more negative for Other minority youth than for their Black and White peers. Considering that 9% of our sample was stopped, this rate is problematic for Other ethnic-racial minority youth who experienced a more substantial negative effect size than their peers. Other minority youth's vulnerability may be attributed to their ethnic-racial identification as most of them identified as multiracial. Because multiracial individuals have reported lower belonging and fit with mono-racial groups (Kelcholiver & Leslie, 2007), our sample of Other minority youth may have struggled to find support to cope with police stops from their school peers who predominantly identified as mono-racial Black or White. With multiracial children representing a growing segment of the U.S. population, scholars must investigate factors shaping multiracial youth's vulnerability to police stops.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The present study has several limitations that can guide future research. First, our community sample was recruited from a small segment of a mid-Atlantic metropolis, limiting our ability to make broad generalizations. Second, the manner in which we recorded police stops may have resulted in a conservative estimate. The study occurred during the winter; thus, the avoidance of cold outdoor weather in conjunction with spending most of their days in school may have resulted in fewer chances for youth to encounter the police. Third, we did not specify the police stop location (i.e., school), which can specifically affect school disengagement (Jackson et al., 2019). Fourth, we did not measure and could not account for crime rates, which likely biased the consequences linked to police stops (Boxer et al., 2020). Fifth, police-related deaths and other forms of criminal justice contact in youth's neighborhoods have predicted their physiological stress responses (Browning et al., 2021; Del Toro et al., 2022), but whether such stress mediates the link between police encounters and youth's academic functioning is unclear. Sixth, we did not account for police officers' social demographics (e.g., ethnicity-race), which can moderate their engagement in stops (Ba et al., 2021). Seventh, students' active participation toward learning is important for their academic success (Boaler, 2013), but other forms of engagement (i.e., school liking) matter as well. Lastly, we did not examine possible internal or external protective factors (e.g., ethnic-racial socialization; Del Toro & Wang, 2021a, 2021b) that may buffer the impact of police stops. Scholars should take these omissions into account in future research.

Implications and Conclusion

Our results suggest two potential points of intervention, with the first being at the institutional level that propagates police presence in ethnic-racial minority communities. Specifically, due to proactive policing practices, police officers are disproportionately assigned to communities with high concentrations of ethnic-racial minorities. Police interactions that result in a stop can have profound adverse implications for youth's school engagement, as school disengagement can have cascading consequences on youth's academic trajectories. For instance, studies have positioned school engagement as a strong predictor of youth's academic achievement (e.g., better grades and higher education aspirations) and psychosocial functioning (e.g., lower substance use and delinquency; Wang et al., 2019). School disengagement may be a means through which policing shapes racial inequality in school, as ethnic-racial disparities in achievement and police stops mirror one another (Del Toro et al., 2021). Indeed, we found that our results were worse for ethnic-racial minority youth than their White peers. Thus, reducing youth's exposure to the criminal justice system represents a potential point for intervention.

The second point for intervention is at the individual level that prioritizes adolescents' psychological well-being. A national debate persists regarding whether neighborhoods and schools

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should increase police presence to improve youth safety. Our study contributes to this debate by suggesting that police stops can adversely affect youth's psychological distress. Rather than subjecting them to police surveillance, youth should be equipped with opportunities to feel autonomous and competent when addressing local-level problems through funding community agents that promote children's healthy development (Weaver & Geller, 2019). Youth who collaboratively work with one another to address community issues are more likely to stay engaged civically and in school (Weaver & Geller, 2019). We hope that optimizing youth's community participation and engagement will lead to increases in youth's agency and subjective well-being, which can have implications for their persistence and perseverance in education.

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Received April 17, 2021
Revision received January 24, 2022
Accepted February 14, 2022 ■

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