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Property Victimization, Perception of Neighborhood Safety, and Perceived Fairness of the Criminal Justice System Within the Chinese Context

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Abstract
Although prior research has widely tested the public's perceived fairness of the criminal justice system, such as the police, the court, and the prosecutor's offices, such research is mainly conducted within Western contexts. Empirical research conducted in the Chinese context remains relatively limited. Based on survey data randomly collected from Guangzhou, China, this study rigorously examines the linkage between victimization, including physical victimization and property victimization, and the perceived fairness of the criminal justice system. It also examines the mediating effect of the perception of neighborhood safety on this linkage. The study finds that people's property victimization experience, rather than the physical victimization experience, would negatively and significantly influence their trust in the fairness of the criminal justice system. Such a negative effect was partially mediated by people's perception of neighborhood safety, and the direct effect was found to be stronger than the indirect effect. Based on these findings, policy implications are explored in this study.

Keywords Property victimization · Perceived fairness of criminal justice system · Perception of neighborhood safety · China

Introduction

Public perceived fairness of the criminal justice system (CJS), primarily consisting of the police, the courts, the prosecutor's offices (known as procuratorates in China), the correctional facilities, and the prison system, is always of high importance for the construction of the rule of law in society, whether in Western countries or in China. It has been suggested that people's positive attitudes are a key incentive for national authorities to work more effectively and economically (Hough et al., 2003; Lappi-Seppälä, 2011). As previous research has confirmed, people's positive views encourage them to comply with the law

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(Hough, 2010; Jackson et al., 2012; Tyler, 2011, 2013) and to cooperate with the CJS, such as abiding by requests from law enforcement officials (McCluskey et al., 1999), reporting crime incidents, sharing witness information, and actively contributing to crime prevention (Jackson et al., 2012; Tyler, 2011). If people perceive that the CJS is fair, then they will do what the CJS asks of them. Like the West, China has paid increasing attention to people's perceived fairness of the CJS, especially since 2012, when the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) was held to promote the construction of the rule of law in China. Xi Jinping's thoughts on the rule of law in modern China placed high emphasis on the public's subjective feelings and perceptions of the CJS, that is, "striving to make the people feel fairness and justice in every case" (Creemers, 2014). Based on Xi's thoughts, the public's perception and recognition of the fairness of the CJS as a key yardstick for evaluating the performance of the Chinese CJS have become the focus of theory and practice in China. This puts forward high requirements for accurately grasping and scientifically predicting factors affecting people's perceived fairness of CJS.

The present study considers China as an ideal site for research on the public's perceived fairness of the CJS for two reasons. First, most of the studies regarding the perception of fairness were carried out in developed countries or Western societies (Alda et al., 2020). Research on this topic in non-Western countries, such as China with diverse characteristics different from the West, is especially limited. Second, China has recently paid increasing attention to the public's perceived fairness of the CJS. Exploration of Chinese people's perceptions of fairness of the CJS is of high importance for its rule of law construction. The present study focuses on exploring the relationship between Chinese people's victimization and their perceived fairness of the CJS. Because the victimization resulting from different crimes can have different impacts on the victims, which might have different effects on their perceived fairness of the CJS, this study particularly explores the effects of people's physical victimization and property victimization on their perception of fairness. The mediating role of the perception of neighborhood safety is also analyzed for a better understanding of the relationship. This study aims to provide implications for improving people's perceived fairness of the CJS.

Literature Review and Research Hypotheses

Perceived Fairness of the CJS in China

In Western settings, a considerable number of studies have explored factors that influence people's perceived fairness of the CJS. During the early years, researchers focused on exploring the impact of demographic characteristics on people's attitudes toward the CJS (Brandl et al., 1994; Hale & Uglow, 1999; Jang et al., 2010; Jones et al., 2008; Murphy, 2009; O'Connor, 2008). Recently, researchers have become more interested in the effect of experience-related variables, such as victimization, perception of neighborhood safety, and contact with the CJS, on people's perception of the CJS (Bradford, 2011; Cao, 2011; Gill et al., 2014; Harris & Jones, 2020; Langton & Durose, 2013; Scarborough et al., 2010; Wu et al., 2015). They have reported convoluted rather than straightforward findings.

In China, despite the increasing emphasis on the public's perceived fairness of the CJS, empirical research on this topic remains limited and inadequate (Cao & Hou, 2001; Hu & Dai, 2014; Jiang et al., 2010; Lambert & Jiang, 2006). Most of the domestic studies focus on examining the people's perception of the police (Cao & Hou, 2001; Jiang et al., 2012;

Wu et al., 2011; Wu & Sun, 2009; Wu & Sun, 2010). For example, studies conducted in China by Cao and Hou (2001) and by Wu and Sun (2009) both found that most respondents had confidence in the police, and demographic variables played a significant role. A more recent study based on a victimization survey in four places in China (Hong Kong, Shenzhen, Shanghai, and Xi'an) found that about half of the respondents were satisfied with the police, while respondents from Mainland China showed more dissatisfaction with the police due to corruption and ineffectiveness (Broadhurst et al., 2011). In addition, studies have found an association between public attitudes toward China's CJS and the perceived fairness of criminal justice procedures, that is, whether people perceived that their rights were protected in practice (Hu & Dai, 2014). However, this effect appeared to be weaker than in Western countries (Boda & Medve-Bálint, 2017), which might be due to the circumstance that in China, people care more about the outcome than the procedure (Sun et al., 2013).

Physical Victimization, Property Victimization, and Perceived Fairness of CJS

Victimization mainly refers to an individual's experience of criminal infringement, which will not only cause physical and property damage to the victim but also cause individuals to have negative emotions such as anger, anxiety, uneasiness, and fear. Studies have confirmed that negative emotions resulting from the victimization experience will lead to people's dissatisfaction with public institutions that are responsible for supervising and protecting social security. Specifically, people who have been victimized in the past year tend to have a more negative and dissatisfied attitude toward the local police (Hale & Uglow, 1999; Park et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2015), especially those who believed that they received little assistance from the police (Skogan, 2005). They are more inclined to support the imposition of severe criminal sanctions on perpetrators (Rosenberger & Callanan, 2011). However, this finding has also been questioned. Some scholars have proposed that what matters about the perceived fairness of the CJS is not the experience of being victimized but rather the resulting contact between the victim (or the family of the victim) and the police, this being the direct factor that affects people's confidence or trust in the CJS (Myhill & Beak, 2008).

Despite the numerous studies on the effect of victimization on the perceived fairness of the CJS, rarely has research distinguished the involved victimization types when examining the effect. Lahm (2009) discussed different predictors of physical victimization and property victimization when examining inmate victimization. Cook and Fox (2011), dissatisfied with the prior studies focusing on discussing the fear of crime in general or fear of particular types of violent crimes, focused on exploring the effect of individuals' victimization and perceived risk on their fear of property crime. We found that most of the research involved with the victimization types regards the different types of victimization as dependent variables, discussing their predictors. For example, McNeeley and Wilcox (2015) examined the effect of the belief in what Anderson calls the street code on the risk of different types of property and violent victimization experiences; Chan (2019), taking Hong Kong adolescents as a sample, explored the criminogenic risk factors of their property victimization. Most of the previous studies ignored the diverse effects of the different types of victimization as independent variables, especially on the perceived fairness of the CJS. Given the sharp increase in property victimization risk resulting from the developed cyberspace, exploring the effects of different types, especially physical victimization and property victimization, appears to be of critical importance.

Mediating Role of Perception of Neighborhood Safety

Perception of safety involves an individual's subjective feelings about the safety and stability of the environment. It is an important indicator of social security and the stability of social operating mechanisms and people's lives. From a spatial perspective, safety can be categorized as national safety, urban security, and neighborhood safety (Cummins, 2011). Given that the neighborhood is the area where people perform their most routine day-to-day activities, the current study chose neighborhood safety as an important variable to measure the level of people's daily security. Neighborhood safety comes from a series of positive emotional experiences brought about by neighborhood order, stability, and so on, which make people feel secure and valuable in neighborhood life (mainly including work, family, and social life) (Huang & Xu, 2021; Jiang et al., 2022).

Studies have found that people's perception of neighborhood safety will affect their judgment and evaluation of the CJS. Residents who perceive that their neighborhoods are safe usually have more satisfactory and positive attitudes toward the police, while those who are concerned and skeptical about neighborhood safety tend to have a negative evaluation of the police (Gainey & Payne, 2009; Gill et al., 2014; Jackson et al., 2009; Myhill & Beak, 2008; Scarborough et al., 2010). Furthermore, studies have found that some other neighborhood-related factors, such as neighborhood violence or collective efficacy, significantly affected people's attitudes toward CJS (Harris & Jones, 2020; Kirk & Matsuda, 2011; Kirk & Papachristos, 2011) through people's perception of neighborhood safety. Meanwhile, the experience of victimization has been commonly recognized as a key variable affecting people's perception of neighborhood safety. It has been reported to greatly reduce an individual's perception of neighborhood safety, or greatly increase an individual's feeling of neighborhood insecurity (Lane et al., 2014). This impact or effect varies with the different types of victimization experience. For example, direct victimization experience has a significant negative effect on Chinese people's perceptions of neighborhood safety; however, indirect victimization experience does not show a significant impact (Xu & Zhang, 2022). Considering the above effects together, we further postulate that people's perception of neighborhood safety will have a mediating influence on the relationship between victimization and the perceived fairness of CJS, which will be explored below.

The Present Study

There is no doubt that prior studies have conducted useful explorations into how the experience of being victimized affects people's perceived fairness of CJS. However, most of these studies focus on foreign countries, and it is not yet clear whether there is a significant association between victimization experience and people's perceived fairness of CJS in China. Furthermore, studies have found that an individual's experience of being victimized has a significant impact on his or her perception of neighborhood safety, which has been proven to be significantly related to the degree of the perceived fairness of the CJS. However, few studies have explored whether the perception of neighborhood safety has mediated the effect of victimization on people's perceived fairness of CJS. In addition, prior research has not unpacked and distinguished the different effects of physical victimization and property victimization on perceived fairness, which will be explored in this study. The present study attempts to address these problems, thereby aiming to contribute to a better

understanding of the relationship between people's victimization experience and their perception of fairness in the CJS. Four research hypotheses are thus proposed:

H1. Individuals' physical victimization experience will significantly reduce their perceived fairness of the CJS.
H2. Individuals' property victimization experience will significantly reduce their perceived fairness of the CJS.
H3. The effect of individuals' physical victimization on their perceived fairness of the CJS, if observed, will be mediated by their perception of neighborhood safety.
H4. The effect of individuals' property victimization on their perceived fairness of the CJS, if observed, will be mediated by their perception of neighborhood safety.

Research Methods

Data Collection

This study is a survey on the governance of urban neighborhoods, based on the permanent residents of Guangzhou in 2019.[1] As one of China's coastal provincial capitals, Guangzhou is located within the Pearl River Delta Economic Zone and the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area. According to the Guangzhou Statistics Bureau (2019), as of the end of 2018, Guangzhou had approximately 14.9 million permanent residents, which constitutes the sampling frame of this study. The questionnaire survey was structured according to a multi-stage probability sampling approach, establishing a desired coverage of all 11 administrative districts of Guangzhou. About 100 people were selected from each administrative district to ensure the same accuracy. We first coded and sorted all *jiedao* (towns) in the city according to the ratio of the permanent residents of each *jiedao* (town) to form a sampling sorting list of *jiedao* (towns) and then selected two to four *jiedao* based on the random number table. After that, we used the same method to perform the coding and sorting based on the ratio of the number of permanent residents of the neighborhood (village) committee areas in the selected *jiedao* to form a sampling sorting list of neighborhood (village) committee areas. According to the random number table, within each *jiedao*, two neighborhood (village) committee areas were randomly selected. Then we determined the number of households that needed to be selected from each neighborhood (village) committee areas, based on the household ratio of each neighborhood (village) committee area, and randomly selected a corresponding number of households from each neighborhood (village) committee area. Finally, we randomly selected individuals from households using the birthday method. From each selected household, a person aged 18 or over whose birthday is closest to July 1 was selected as the respondent. If the selected person refused to participate in or failed to access the survey, another adult in the household whose birthday is the second closest to July 1 would be selected, or another household would be selected. This study eventually collected 1113 questionnaires. After eliminating questionnaires with serious flaws (such as missing main information or obvious inconsistencies in filling out), 1039 valid questionnaires remained.

[1] After the outbreak of COVID-19 around the world at the end of 2019, China implemented mitigation measures such as staying at home and social distance restrictions, which hindered the surveys offline and therefore failed to provide updated data.

Measurement

Dependent Variable (DV)

The dependent variable is the perceived fairness of CJS. With regard to perceived fairness, the academic community has not yet formed a unified understanding. Most Western scholars define perceived fairness with reference to the concept of perceived justice, which usually involves distributive justice, procedural justice, interactional justice, and informational justice (Peiró et al., 2014). In China, scholars often define perceived fairness as reasonable systems, just procedures, definite conclusions, an upright image of agency personnel, and a good judicial environment (Wang, 2013). Measurements are different when perceived fairness is defined differently and when researchers focus on different dimensions or perspectives. For example, when studies focus on exploring the perceived fairness of the criminal justice procedure, researchers might have to measure four dimensions of the procedure justice: "having your say," "neutrality," "treatment," and "motive-based trust" (Tyler, 2007; Tyler et al., 2014; Tyler et al., 2015). The present study is interested in the public's overall opinions on the fairness of judicial enforcement by the police, court, procuratorate, and other institutions (and the institution personnel) in the CJS. Hence, it measures the public's overall evaluation or perception of the fairness of CJS. Specifically, it measures the degree of respondents' perceived fairness of CJS by asking them the following question: "do you perceive that the criminal justice system, including the police, the court, and the procuratorate systems, is fair on the whole?" There are often four options for answering this question, namely: 1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = disagree, and 4 = strongly disagree. In the statistical analysis, this type of four-point Likert scale was regarded as a continuous interval scale (Knapp, 1990). For the convenience of data analysis and result observation, this study reversely codes the dependent variable, that is, 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, and 4 = strongly agree. Thus, the higher the answer score, the higher the degree of the individual's perceived fairness of CJS.

Independent Variable (IV)

The present study measures the victimization experience as the independent variable. From the perspective of the victim, victimization experience usually includes direct victimization (or primary victimization) and indirect victimization (or vicarious victimization): the former refers to the direct victimization experienced by the individual; the latter refers to the indirect victimization caused by the individual's family or relatives being violated (Smith & Hill, 1991). From the crime perspective, victimization experience usually involves physical crime and property crime; the former leads to bodily or physical infringement while the latter leads to property infringement. This study does not specifically distinguish direct and indirect victimization but rather distinguishes between physical and property victimization. The specific measurement questions are as follows: "in the past year, have you or your family suffered from physical crimes (such as intentional injury, robbery, rape)?" and "in the past year, have you or your family suffered from property crimes (such as theft, fraud)?" The answer options are dichotomous, that is, yes (coded as 1) and no (coded as 0).

Mediating Variable

The mediating variable is the perception of neighborhood safety. The question used in this study to measure people's perception of neighborhood safety is "do you feel the neighborhood where you live is safe?" (Booth et al., 2012; Sun et al., 2012). It attempts to capture the respondent's emotional response within a daily residential environment such as the neighborhood. Response options are often set on a four-point Likert scale: 1 = very safe, 2 = safe, 3 = unsafe, and 4 = very unsafe. For the convenience of research in the present study, however, this variable was also reverse-coded. In this way, a higher score indicates a higher positive perception of neighborhood safety.

Control Variables

Demographic variables. The study collected demographic data including gender, ethnicity, *hukou* (a household registration system applied in mainland China), age, education level, marital status, and income. Among them, gender (male = 1, female = 0), ethnicity (Han = 1, ethnic minority = 0), and *hukou* (rural *hukou* = 1, urban *hukou* = 0) are all dichotomous variables. Age is defined as a numerical variable and is mainly an integer of 18 and above (this study selected adults as respondents). Education level is coded as an ordinal variable: 1 = primary school or lower, 2 = junior middle school, 3 = senior high school, and 4 = undergraduate or graduate or higher. In the statistical analysis, we use the variable "undergraduate or graduate or higher" as the reference group, and the other three groups are coded as three dummy variables. Marital status is a categorical variable that is also divided into four categories: 1 = unmarried and single, 2 = in love or cohabitation, 3 = married, and 4 = divorced or separated or widowed. Among them, the "unmarried and single" group is set as the reference group, and the other three types of marital status are coded as three dummy variables. The study set seven income levels to specifically measure the income status of respondents last year: 1 = less than 20,000 yuan; 2 = 20,000 yuan and above and less than 40,000 yuan; 3 = 40,000 and above and less than 60,000 yuan; 4 = 60,000 and above and less than 80,000 yuan; 5 = 80,000 and above and less than 100,000 yuan; 6 = 100,000 and above and less than 120,000 yuan; 7 = 120,000 yuan and above. This variable is measured as an ordinal variable in statistical analysis. As a survey on the attitudes of Chinese residents, whether the respondent is a member of the CPC is an issue that needs to be taken into consideration. For the purposes of this study, whether people are members of the CPC may have a certain connection with their perceived fairness of CJS. Members of the CPC may have a higher degree of the perceived fairness of CJS. Therefore, this study includes information on whether the respondent is a CPC member as an important control variable in the questionnaire, where members of the CPC are coded as 1, and non-members of the CPC are coded as 0.

In addition to the demographic variables mentioned above, this study also measures some special control variables involving an individual's personal experience: fear of crime and contact with CJS. (1) Fear of crime. Although the public's perception of crime and anti-social behavior is sometimes inconsistent with the actual conditions, research has confirmed that the public's fear of crime or the fear of anti-social behavior will affect their attitude toward CJS (Jackson et al., 2009; Sprott & Doob, 2009). Therefore, this study sets "fear of crime" as one of the important control variables, and it is measured by the question "how afraid do you feel when walking near your home alone at night?" (Michalos, 2014).

There are usually four categories of answer options: 1 = very afraid; 2 = afraid; 3 = not afraid; and 4 = not afraid at all. This variable is also reverse-coded here, indicating that the higher the score, the greater the degree of the individual's fear of crime. (2) Contact with CJS. People's contact with CJS is usually considered a key factor in predicting their attitude toward CJS (FitzGerald et al., 2002; Skogan, 2006). Research has found that groups who have had contact with the police, especially those who have had direct, involuntary, or vicarious contact with the police (such as being stopped for inspection while driving), will be more likely to hold a negative attitude toward criminal justice agencies (Bradford, 2011; Bradford et al., 2009; Cao, 2011; Harris & Jones, 2020; Hough et al., 2013; Langton & Durose, 2013; Skogan, 2009; Wu et al., 2022) Therefore, this variable was also measured in this study, and the question used was "to date, have you ever been in contact with the police, court, or procuratorate for any reason (for example, as a suspect, defendant, victim, witness, or family member of the above person)?" The answer has two choice options: 1 = yes, 0 = no.

Data Analysis and Results

This study has used IBM SPSS24.0 software for data statistics and analysis, including (1) using descriptive statistics to analyze and present the overall characteristics of the sample; (2) using the Pearson correlation analysis method to explore the bivariate relationships among various variables, particularly the relationships among victimization experience, perception of neighborhood safety, and perceived fairness of the CJS; (3) using the multiple linear regression method to analyze the impact of victimization experience on the perceived fairness of the CJS under the intervention of control variables; and (4) using the bootstrapping approach developed by Hayes (2017) to test the mediating effect of the perception of neighborhood safety on the relationship between victimization and the perceived fairness of CJS.

Descriptive Statistics and Results

The descriptive statistics present the basic data of the variables, including the frequency, minimum and maximum values, mean, and standard deviation (see Table 1). Table 1 first describes the demographic variables. Among the respondents, there were 462 males (44.5%) and 577 females (55.5%). Although the gender ratio is relatively balanced, there is a large difference in the ethnic proportion, with ethnic minorities accounting for only 4%. The age span of the respondents is also very wide, ranging from 18 to 86 years old, and the average age is 30.80 (SD = 11.24). Perhaps because of this, the marital status of respondents is different. Among them, singles (465, accounting for 45%) and married people (419, accounting for 40%) each account for a large proportion. Due to the government's emphasis on education, the educational level of respondents is very high. Those who have received higher education, that is, those who have graduated from university (or college) or have a postgraduate degree, account for more than half of the total respondents (679, accounting for 65.4%). This study also considers demographic variables with Chinese characteristics such as *hukou*. The results show that only about 31% of the respondents have rural *hukou*, indicating that most respondents in developed coastal cities have urban *hukou*. In terms of the identity of the respondents, those with CPC membership accounted for nearly 10% of

Table 1 Descriptive analysis of variables($N = 1039$)

Variables	Frequency (%)	Min.	Max.	Mean	S.D.
Male	462 (44.5%)	0	1	0.44	0.50
Han	1002 (96.4%)	0	1	0.96	0.19
Rural *hukou*	322 (31%)	0	1	0.31	0.46
Age	–	18	86	30.80	11.24
Education level					
Primary school or lower	30 (2.9%)	0	1		
Junior middle school	106 (10.2%)	0	1		
Senior high school	224 (21.6%)	0	1		
Marital status					
In love or cohabitation	123 (11.8%)	0	1		
Married	419 (40.3%)	0	1		
Divorced/separated/widowed	32 (3.1%)	0	1		
Yearly income	–	1	7	2.89	2.12
CPC member	102 (9.8%)	0	1	0.10	0.30
Fear of crime	–	1	4	2.06	0.67
Perception of neighborhood safety	–	1	4	3.04	0.45
Contact with the CJS	138 (13.3%)	0	1	0.13	0.34
Physical victimization	26 (2.5%)	0	1	0.03	0.16
Property victimization	89 (8.6%)	0	1	0.09	0.28
Perceived fairness of the CJS	–	1	4	3.06	0.49

The reference category of education level is "undergraduate or graduate or higher." The reference category of marital status is "unmarried and single."

the total respondents, which was higher than the proportion of CPC members nationwide in 2019.[2]

Information on respondents' personal experiences and feelings is as follows: as reported in Table 1, about 78.5% of the respondents said that they felt "not afraid at all" (178, 17.1%) or "not afraid" (638, 61.4%) when walking near their homes at night, indicating that level of fear of crime of the respondents is low. Correspondingly, their perception of neighborhood safety should be very high, which was confirmed by the statistical results. That is, the majority of the respondents (92.3%) expressed confidence in neighborhood safety (122 people felt "very safe" and 837 people felt "safe"), and the average score of residents' perception of neighborhood safety reached 3.04 (the score range is 1 to 4). This low level of fear of crime and the high level of perception of neighborhood security indicate the good and safe environment where the residents live. According to Table 1, only 2.5% of the respondents said they had been physically victimized, and more respondents experienced property victimization (89, 8.6%). Despite this, most of the respondents reported no experience of being victimized. This low victimization rate means that respondents may have

[2] According to the statistical data from the Organization Department of the CPC Central Committee, as of the end of 2019, the total number of the CPC members was 91.914 million. In the same year, the total population of China was about 1.408 billion. So, the proportion of CPC members among the total population in that year was approximately 6.565%. Retrieved September 28, 2023, from http://cpc.people.com.cn/n1/2020/0630/c419242-31765286.html.

few opportunities to have contact with the CJS. In fact, this is indeed the case. Only 13.3% of the respondents said that they had such experiences. As shown by the statistical results, the overall experience and feelings of most respondents are positive. It may explain why most of the respondents (793, 76.3%) agreed that CJS is fair on the whole and even a small number of people strongly agreed with this (153, 14.7%). The average score of respondents' perceived fairness of CJS is 3.06 (the score range is 1 to 4).

Significant Factors Affecting the Perceived Fairness of CJS

After the descriptive statistical analysis, we now explore the significant factors that affect the perceived fairness of the CJS. First, the Pearson correlation analysis is employed to explore the bivariate relationships among various variables, especially the relationship between victimization and the perceived fairness of the CJS. According to Table 2, only a few demographic variables, including gender ($r = 0.06$, $p < 0.05$), being in love or cohabitation ($r = 0.07$, $p < 0.05$), and the identity of CPC member ($r = 0.08$, $p < 0.05$), are positively correlated with the perceived fairness of the CJS. Unlike the demographic variables, all the variables involving the respondents' personal experiences and feelings are shown to be significantly related to the perceived fairness of CJS. Among them, the fear of crime and contact with CJS are negatively correlated with the perceived fairness of CJS, and both their coefficients are -0.10 ($p < 0.01$), indicating that respondents with a higher degree of fear of crime or having more contact with CJS are more likely to have a lower level of perceived fairness of CJS. Different from the negative effects, there is a positive correlation between people's perception of neighborhood safety and their perceived fairness of CJS ($r = 0.15$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that people's perception of neighborhood safety will increase people's perceived fairness of CJS. As for the victimization, we find that only the property victimization experience shows a significant correlation with the perceived fairness ($r = -0.12$, $p < 0.001$), while the physical victimization reports no significant correlation effect.

Secondly, multiple regression analysis was employed to further examine the factors that significantly predict the perceived fairness of CJS. As shown in Table 3, the *R*-squareds of the three regression models gradually increase, indicating that with the gradual input of additional variables, the model fitting becomes better, that is, the model has a stronger explanatory power concerning the dependent variable. At the same time, the *F* value of each model is significant, demonstrating that the fitting equation is meaningful. In addition, the tolerance of all variables in the three models is greater than 0.3 and less than 1, and all the corresponding variance inflation factors (VIF) are greater than 1 and less than 3, indicating that there is no multicollinearity. Due to the limited length of the table, the statistical indicators of collinearity are not shown in Table 3.

Model 1 tests the impact of respondents' demographics and identity variables on the perceived fairness of CJS. Results show that only gender ($b = 0.069$, $p < 0.05$) and CPC membership ($b = 0.137$, $p < 0.01$) have a significant, positive influence on the perceived fairness of CJS, indicating that men have a higher level for the perceived fairness of CJS than women, and members of the CPC have a higher level of the perceived fairness of CJS than non-CPC members.

Model 2 adds some variables related to the personal experiences and feelings of the respondents. The results showed that the gender variable that was significant in model 1 was no longer significant in model 2, but instead, the variable of "in love or cohabitation" that shows no significant effect in model 1 shows a positive and significant effect ($b = 0.112$, $p < 0.01$) in model 2. In other words, compared with the "unmarried and single"

Table 2 Pearson correlation matrix for perceived fairness of CJS ($N = 1039$)

Variables		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
1	Gender	1.00																	
2	Ethnicity	−0.04	1.00																
3	*Hukou*	−0.01	0.039	1.00															
4	Age	0.09**	−0.00	0.06	1.00														
5	Primary school	−0.07*	−0.06	0.13***	0.27***	1.00													
6	Middle school	0.01	−0.00	0.16***	0.31***	−0.06	1.00												
7	High school	0.06	0.00	0.02	0.17***	−0.09**	−0.18***	1.00											
8	In love or cohabitation	0.06	0.05	−0.01	−0.21***	−0.05	−0.08**	−0.05	1.00										
9	Married	0.03	0.05	0.09**	0.70***	0.15***	0.24***	0.18***	−0.30***	1.00									
10	Divorced/separated/widowed	0.05	−0.12***	0.03	0.16***	0.07*	0.05	−0.01	−0.07*	−0.15***	1.00								
11	Yearly income	0.15***	0.02	−0.01	0.40***	0.01	0.00	0.04	−0.08**	0.45***	0.05	1.00							
12	CPC member	−0.04	−0.04	0.06	0.01	−0.04	−0.04	−0.02	−0.01	−0.01	0.07*	0.05	1.00						
13	Fear of crime	−0.37***	0.00	−0.01	−0.11***	−0.03	−0.00	−0.00	0.03	−0.11***	0.00	−0.16***	0.04	1.00					
14	Perception of neighborhood safety	0.15***	0.02	−0.01	0.05	−0.03	−0.06	−0.02	−0.02	0.03	−0.00	0.08*	−0.02	−0.32***	1.00				
15	Contacts with CJS	0.03	−0.05	−0.01	−0.04	−0.03	−0.00	−0.08**	0.04	−0.03	0.06*	0.06	0.02	−0.02	−0.00	1.00			
16	Physical victimization	0.06	0.03	0.01	0.02	0.08**	0.03	−0.01	0.04	−0.00	0.08*	−0.02	0.01	0.11***	−0.08**	0.03	1.00		

Table 2 (continued)

Variables		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
1	Gender	1.00																	
17	Property victimization	−0.06	−0.02	0.08*	−0.04	0.01	−0.01	−0.01	−0.02	−0.05	0.07*	−0.08**	0.03	0.12***	−0.10**	0.23***	0.19***	1.00	
18	Perceived fairness of CJS	0.06*	0.03	−0.05	0.01	0.03	−0.04	−0.01	0.07*	−0.02	0.00	−0.01	0.08*	−0.10**	0.15***	−0.10**	−0.05	−0.12***	1.00

*$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$

Table 3 Multiple regression model for victimization and perceived fairness of CJS ($N = 1039$)

Model 1 R^2 (F): 0.022 (1.946*)				Model 2 R^2 (F): 0.054 (3.923***); F change: 11.588***				Model 3 R^2 (F): 0.061 (3.931***); F change: 3.826*			
Predictors	Unstandardized		t	Predictors	Unstandardized		t	Predictors	Unstandardized		t
	B	SE			B	SE			B	SE	
1 Gender	0.069*	0.031	2.208	1	0.034	0.033	1.029	1	0.032	0.033	0.983
2 Ethnicity	0.104	0.083	1.258	2	0.086	0.082	1.052	2	0.090	0.081	1.105
3 *Hukou*	−0.056	0.034	−1.647	3	−0.057	0.033	−1.724	3	−0.051	0.033	−1.533
4 Age	0.002	0.002	0.832	4	0.001	0.002	0.372	4	0.001	0.002	0.407
5 Primary school or lower	0.099	0.100	0.989	5	0.106	0.099	1.075	5	0.114	0.099	1.150
6 Junior middle school	−0.057	0.057	−0.994	6	−0.033	0.057	−0.589	6	−0.036	0.057	−0.631
7 Senior high school	−0.021	0.040	−0.535	7	−0.017	0.039	−0.433	7	−0.016	0.039	−0.415
8 In love or cohabitation	0.098	0.050	1.962	8	0.112**	0.049	2.276	8	0.109*	0.049	2.230
9 Married	−0.003	0.051	−0.054	9	0.003	0.050	0.057	9	0.001	0.050	0.012
10 Divorced/separated/widowed	−0.010	0.097	−0.099	10	0.023	0.096	0.239	10	0.039	0.096	0.410
11 Yearly income	−0.008	0.008	−0.992	11	−0.009	0.008	−1.045	11	−0.010	0.008	−1.211
12 CPC member	0.137**	0.051	2.677	12	0.148**	0.051	2.919	12	0.149**	0.050	2.955
13 Fear of crime				13	−0.042	0.025	−1.643	13	−0.035	0.025	−1.376
14 Perception of neighborhood safety				14	0.139***	0.035	3.961	14	0.132***	0.035	3.755
15 Contacts				15	−0.144**	0.044	−3.257	15	−0.118*	0.045	−2.589
16 Physical victimization				16				16	−0.096	0.098	−0.980
17 Property victimization				17				17	−0.134*	0.056	−2.372

*$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$

respondents, respondents who are "in love or cohabitation" have a higher degree of perceived fairness of CJS. At the same time, the CPC membership still shows a significant positive impact ($b = 0.148$, $p < 0.01$) on the perceived fairness of CJS. We imagine that respondents with CPC membership are more likely to be staff or officers within the CJS, so their level of perceived fairness of CJS, to a certain extent, indicated their recognition of their own job. Among the newly entered variables, the effect of fear of crime on the perceived fairness of CJS is not significant, but the perception of neighborhood safety and contact with CJS are significant predictors of the dependent variable with the effects being positive ($b = 0.139$, $p < 0.001$) and negative ($b = -0.144$, $p < 0.01$), respectively. These results suggest that an increased level of the perception of neighborhood safety is associated with an increased level of the perceived fairness of CJS. Compared with those who have not had contact with CJS, people who have had contact with CJS hold a lower level of the perceived fairness of CJS. The comparison between model 2 and model 1 demonstrates that with the intervention of factors related to personal experience or feelings, the significant effect of demographic factors will become weakened or less stable.

Model 3 shows the multiple regression results for the effects of victimization on the perceived fairness of CJS. After the independent variables "physical victimization" and "property victimization" are added, all variables that showed significant effects in model 2 are still significant in model 3, including being in love or cohabitation ($b = 0.109$, $p < 0.05$), member of the CPC ($b = 0.149$, $p < 0.01$), perception of neighborhood safety ($b = 0.132$, $p < 0.001$), and contact with CJS ($b = -0.118$, $p < 0.05$). These variables' effects in model 3 are only slightly different from those in model 2, sufficiently showing that factors related to personal experience or feelings have a relatively stable significant impact on the perceived fairness of CJS. Meanwhile, people's CPC membership identity shows a stable, significant association with their perceived fairness of the CJS. Under the intervention of these stable control variables, the effect of property victimization experience on the perceived fairness of CJS as an independent variable still exists and is significant and negative ($b = -0.134$, $p < 0.05$). It indicates that compared with respondents without property victimization experience, the degree of perceived fairness of CJS among respondents with property victimization experience is significantly reduced. Like the effect shown in the correlation matrix, the effect of physical victimization on the perceived fairness of the CJS shown in model 3 is not significant, indicating that people's physical victimization experiences will not significantly influence their perceived fairness of the CJS.

The Mediating Role of the Perception of Neighborhood Safety

Based on the correlation and regression analyses results, the present study further explores the mediating role of the perception of neighborhood safety on the linkage between property victimization and the perceived fairness of CJS. We adopt the bootstrapping approach, which involves using a bias-corrected bootstrapping method with 5000 bootstrap samples to estimate confidence intervals (CI) for model parameters accounting for total, direct, and indirect effects. As shown in Table 4, the relationship between property victimization and the perceived fairness of CJS is found to be partially mediated by the perception of neighborhood safety, and the indirect effect is significant ($b = -0.025$, CI [−0.048, −0.007]). Specifically, concerning the impact of property victimization experience on the perceived fairness of CJS, the direct effect ($b = -0.184$, CI [−0.289, −0.079]) became bigger after including the perception of neighborhood safety as a mediating variable, and the total effect was still significant ($b = -0.209$, CI [−0.314, −0.103]). It is worth noting that this

Table 4 Total, direct, and indirect effects of property victimization on perceived fairness of CJS($N = 1039$)

Mediating variable	Estimate	SE	P	[LLCI, ULCI]
Perception of neighborhood safety				
Total effect	**−0.209**	0.054	0.0001	[−0.314, −0.103]
Direct effect	**−0.184**	0.054	0.0006	[−0.289, −0.079]
Indirect effect	**−0.025**	0.011	–	[−0.048, −0.007]

Note: Bold entries denote the coefficients are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level (confidence intervals do not contain zero)

mediating analysis generally shows that the direct impact of property victimization on the perceived fairness of CJS is greater than its indirect impact, revealing the prominent impact of property victimization on the perceived fairness of CJS.

Discussion and Conclusion

This article conducts an empirical test on the relationship between victimization and people's perceived fairness of CJS. It reports several important findings. The first finding is that significant factors that affect people's perceived fairness of CJS include demographic factors and factors closely related to personal experiences and feelings, such as victimization experience, perception of neighborhood safety, and contact with CJS. When factors related to personal experience or feelings are involved, the effect of demographic factors will become weak or unstable. Just like Maxson et al. (2003) have said, factors that have the greatest influence on the public's perceptions appear to be experiential factors; other factors, such as demographic factors, may have a stronger impact in the absence of direct experience. In this study, victimization, as an experience-related variable, has been partially confirmed to be an indicator that significantly predicts people's perceived fairness of CJS in China. Compared with persons without property victimization experiences, those who have been victimized by property crimes are more likely to have negative evaluations of the perceived fairness of CJS. Despite the influence of other control variables with significant predictive effects, the significant effect of property victimization as an independent variable is still very prominent, supporting research hypothesis 2. However, unlike the significant effect of property victimization, physical victimization shows no significant relationship with the perceived fairness of CJS in this study, which leads to the rejection of hypothesis 1. The possible reason might be that very few people have experienced physical or violent crimes. Regardless, this finding is partially consistent with conclusions from prior research mainly conducted in Western countries (Hale & Uglow, 1999; Skogan, 2005; Wu et al., 2015). Another important finding involves the mediating effect of the perception of neighborhood safety on the linkage between property victimization and the perceived fairness of CJS. This study finds that property victimization experience indirectly affects people's perceived fairness of CJS by affecting their perception of neighborhood safety, which supports the research hypothesis 4. Of course, such an indirect effect is much smaller than the direct effect of property victimization experience on the perceived fairness of CJS.

Based on the research findings, this article puts forward policy implications, particularly focusing on crime prevention and control. On the one hand, the government should promote effective measures for preventing and controlling crime, so that the public can experience no or fewer crimes and then perceive more neighborhood safety. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Western studies found that public confidence in the CJS is largely associated with neighborhood cohesion, efficient law enforcement, and effective crime control (Maxson et al., 2003), which has been further confirmed in this study within Chinese contexts. According to the statistical yearbook data released by the Chinese National Bureau of Statistics, n.d., the number of criminal cases filed by China's public security organs has been declining year by year from 2016 (approximately 6.43 million cases) to 2020 (approximately 4.78 million cases), but the rate of decline has leveled off. In fact, the number of cases dropped by less than 100,000 in 2020 compared with 2019; by 2021, the number of criminal cases filed even began to rise, reaching more than 5.03 million cases. Although China has made major breakthroughs and achievements in crime control, in recent years, especially under the deepening global integration, new types of crime, especially through cyberspace, have emerged and gradually become the main form of criminal victimization of Chinese residents (Jin et al., 2021). Therefore, the government must take measures, like making full use of big data and artificial intelligence technology to prevent and control such crimes (Chang & Whitehead, 2022; Lee & Park, 2022). At the same time, the traditional crime prevention measures should remain and be strengthened in the neighborhood, such as carrying out neighborhood patrols and promoting crime prevention skills training. As potential victims, the public themselves should advance their abilities of risk identification and prevention. Such a positive combination of "government-neighborhood-residents" jointly contributes to the effective prevention of victimization and improves neighborhood cohesion and safety, thereby increasing the perceived fairness of CJS.

Although this study provides implications for improving the public's perceived fairness of CJS, it does have some limitations. First, the study's measurement scales were not ideal. The independent variables and dependent variables were all measured by a single item, which may not be able to examine the effects from a thorough perspective (McIver & Carmines, 1981). Though for certain constructs, single-item scales appear to be sufficient (Bergkvist & Rossiter, 2007; Wanous et al., 1997), multi-item scales are more likely to indicate further information. Second, the sample in this study comes from a city on the southeastern coast of China. There may be certain differences in the perceptions of people in this area from those in inland cities or even cities in the northwest. Accordingly, further empirical research is necessary in other regions to determine whether the results of this study can be replicated. Further work on the perceived fairness of CJS is thus warranted, using broader samples and refined measurements.

Data Availability The data that support the findings of this study are not publicly available, but available from the authors upon reasonable request.

Declarations

Conflict of Interest The authors declare no competing interests.

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