**Police officers’ support for corruption: Examining the impact of police culture**

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**Author Biography**

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**Abstract**

**Purpose:** This study examines the relationship between police culture and support for corruption among Ghanaian police officers.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The study draws on data from a survey of 616 police officers across three regions in Ghana. The research questions and hypotheses are addressed through a multiple linear regression analysis.

**Findings/results:** The results show that perception of corruption prevalence, lack of deterrence (i.e., perceived oversight measures) and the Upper East Region significantly predicted officers’ support for corruption. Particularly, lack of deterrence was a consistent predictor of support for corruption across different models compared to corruption prevalence. Contrary to previous studies, code of silence was found not to predict officers’ support for corruption.

**Originality/value:** This paper contributes to the police culture and corruption debate an African perspective, where little research has explored the relationship between police culture and corruption. The code of silence not predicting support for corruption contradicts previous studies and contributes to the debate, literature, and theory development.

**Keywords:** Ghana, corruption, police culture, code of silence, deterrence, prevalence

# Introduction

This study explores Ghanaian police officers’ support for corruption. Corruption – the (mis)use of official authority and power for personal or institutional gain and/or for furthering a career (Amagnya, 2022b) – is a form of misconduct. It often arises from wide discretionary powers, lack of strict frontline supervision in policing, and a part or emanate from police culture that stems from interactions between policing and organisational knowledge (Chan, 1996). Evidence shows that police culture can contribute to negative attitudes such as misconduct, corruption, cynicism, close-mindedness, bias, prejudice, non-scientific tactics, loyalty, alienation, masculine hegemony, promotion or entrenchment of “us versus them” mentality, and less professional relations with the public (Fitzgerald Commission, 1989; Knapp Commission, 1972; Kutnjak Ivković, Haberfeld, & Peacock, 2018; Kutnjak Ivković, Sauerman, Faull, Meyer, & Newham, 2020; McCartney & Parent, 2015; Reiner, 2010). However, it is important to note that police culture can engender safety, camaraderie, empathy, perseverance, support, and teamwork that help officers cope with emotional and challenging jobs or post-traumatic stresses (McCartney & Parent, 2015; Reiner, 2010)..

Considerable research has explored police culture in the form of informal values, norms, attitudes, and behaviours in police agencies (e.g., Chan, 1996; Crank, 2015; Faull, 2017; Paoline & Gau, 2017; Sherman, 2020; Skolnick, 2008; Waddington, 1999). Similarly, the link between police culture and corruption has been examined mostly through public perception surveys (e.g., Bikos, 2014; Lee, Lim, Moore, & Kim, 2013). However, most of the research is conducted in western jurisdictions with little from Africa. This paper addresses this gap by examining the relationship between police culture and corruption using survey data from Ghanaian police officers. This study is one of a few quantitative analyses of the police culture-corruption link in the African context. In this way, it adds to a small body of literature that focusses on police culture’s relationship with a specific area of misconduct, police corruption. Such a context-specific approach can help establish areas of corruption where police culture might be important and less important.

Examining police culture’s role in shaping support for corruption in an African context is vital for various reasons. First, social practices like patronage and gift-giving that breed corruption are ingrained in African cultures (Amagnya, 2020, 2022a). Also, corruption, which negatively affects professionalism, is a constant feature in police-citizen interactions in most African countries (see Amagnya, 2020; Beek, 2017). In addition, most African societies hold high cultural norms, values, kinship networks, and familial relations that promote corruption (Amagnya, 2020). For instance, Tankebe, Karstedt, and Adu-Poku (2019) found that prospective elites in Ghana were willing to engage in corruption to support relations or sustain kinship networks. So, examining the police culture-corruption nexus using Ghanaian data will offer insight into how such association shapes out in developing contexts. Also, the results can provide far-reaching outcomes for Africa and advance knowledge on the cross-cultural applicability of police culture and corruption. For instance, understanding the link between police culture and corruption from street-level police officers can help mitigate corrupt practices and their causes. This can restore public faith in the police and prevent adverse reactions to issues such as the ‘End SARS’ protest in Nigeria and the ‘Fix the Country’ demonstration in Ghana (BBC News, 2020, 2021; Graphic Online, 2021).

# Police Corruption and Culture

Police corruption is defined by Kutnjak Ivković (2005) as any action or omission or a promise of action or omission by a police officer or a group of police officers through the (mis)use of official positions to achieve a personal or organisational benefit or further a career (see also Newburn, 1999; Punch, 2000; Punch & Gilmour, 2010). It could be overzealous policing, and deviant, dishonest, improper, unethical, or criminal behaviour of police officers for personal progress or to meet organisational goals (Prenzler, 2009; Roebuck & Barker, 1974; Wood, 1997). There are different typologies of police corruption, which depend on the motives, ends, level of gain, means, actors involved, and the scale (Newburn, 1999; Punch, 2000; Punch & Gilmour, 2010; Roebuck & Barker, 1974). It could be grouped into predatory, subversion of justice, gifts and discounts, grass eaters, and meat-eaters (see Knapp Commission, 1972; Ross, 2012). This paper focusses on police officers’ (mis)use of authority or power to further organisational goals or personal careers.

While police officers are obligated to show professionalism when performing their duties; however, they sometimes face several unforeseen circumstances, difficulties, emotionally taxing jobs, and post-traumatic stress when exercising legal and discretion powers that lead officers to engage in or support corruption (Chan, 1996; Waddington, 1999). Indeed, police officers sometimes protect themselves, colleagues and citizens from danger through police cultures such as the code of silence – reluctance to report colleagues –, safety, camaraderie, empathy, support, teamwork, loyalty, and sacrifice (McCartney & Parent, 2015). However, some of those practices promote us-versus-them mind-set between police officers and the public, weak internal disciplinary and accountability systems, and failure to supervise and take responsibility for misconduct (Crank, 2015; Prenzler, 2009; Skolnick, 2008). In the end, police officers protect each other’s misconduct and criminality, engage in misconduct, entrench misconduct and a culture of impunity, and breed solidarity and occupational pathology, adversely impacting officers’ support for corruption (Kutnjak Ivković et al., 2020). Therefore, this study assesses the impact of the code of silence, deterrence, and corruption prevalence on Ghanaian police officers’ support for corruption.

# Code of Silence

The code of silence, also known as ‘blue shield’, ‘blue wall of silence’, ‘blue curtain’, ‘code of secrecy’, is a practice where police officers are forbidden or unwilling to report their colleagues’ misconducts to authorities for disciplinary or legal actions (Punch, 2000; Sherman, 1978; Westmarland, 2005). Policing is inherently an anomic profession with distinct sets of norms and values that are often unaligned with those of the larger community (Bleakley, 2020). Therefore, police officers are subject to extreme intra-organisational loyalty that gives rise to practices like the code of silence (Kutnjak Ivković, 2005; Rothwell & Baldwin, 2007). Evidence from policing studies and investigations shows that the code of silence is part of a culture ingrained in police agencies across the world (see Knapp Commission, 1972; Kutnjak Ivković et al., 2018; Mollen Commission, 1994). For instance, Westley (1970) found that 73% of police officers would not report their colleagues who took money from citizens arrested for drunkenness (p. 113). Weisburd and Greenspan (2000) also found that 52% of police officers agreed that it is not unusual for a police officer to turn a blind eye to improper police conduct by other officers. In the same study, one in six police officers supported the view that the code of silence is an essential part of good policing.

The code of silence in policing is regarded as a serious obstacle to controlling misconduct effectively (e.g., Mollen Commission, 1994). Evidence shows that the code of silence amongst officers links to police integrity and accounts for the existence and persistence of misconduct and corruption in policing (den Heyer & Beckley, 2013; Klockars, Kutnjak Ivković, & Haberfeld, 2006). It creates strong peer or group solidarity that allows officers to develop a corrupt subculture and even force members to engage in corruption (Gino & Galinsky, 2012). For instance, Sundström (2016) found in South Africa that inspectors who do not take bribes were threatened directly by their colleagues. Also, the code of silence creates situations where police officers who are not corrupt remain silent about corruption in the police. For instance, Westmarland (2005) found that police officers were relatively unwilling to report colleagues’ unethical behaviour. Also, police officers are reported to be exposed to physical and mental harassment, job suspension and termination, ostracism, and loss of backup in emergencies are consequences of not being silent (Skolnick & Fyfe, 1993).

Studies have reported that police officers’ perception of the code of silence in police agencies influences their support for corruption. For instance, the Wood Commission in New South Wales, Australia, found that the code of silence contributed to honest and inexperienced officers accepting corruption as part of the job (Wood, 1997). Similarly, Quinn (2011) found that the code of silence made many police officers tolerate bad police officers, including corrupt ones. A study of 2480 police officers by Lee et al. (2013) found that the code of silence strongly predicted police officers’ tolerance of gratuities and corruption. In this context, the current study explores how Ghanaian police officers’ perceptions of the code of silence in the police influence their support for corruption by addressing this hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 1: The more police officers perceive a culture of silence in the police, the more likely they will have positive support for corruption.*

# Corruption Prevalence

Even though there is no comprehensive definition of corruption prevalence, it refers to the widespread nature of corruption. Some public enquiries and studies into corruption have reported on the prevalence of corruption in institutions, including the police. For example, the Fitzgerald Commission (1989), Wood (1997), Knapp Commission (1972), and Mollen Commission (1994) are public enquiries that reported on the prevalence of corruption in the police. Also, Transparency International, the World Bank and some empirical studies have appraised the prevalence of corruption worldwide through public surveys amongst countries and institutions (see Amagnya, 2022a; Salihu & Gholami, 2018; The World Bank, 2014; TI, 2020, 2021). For instance, Amagnya (2022a) explored the prevalence of corruption in the Ghanaian justice system through interviews with justice officials. Also, Salihu and Gholami (2018) explored the prevalence of corruption in the Nigerian justice system through secondary data in published journal articles, online articles and books. Equally, Chak man Lee (2018) through interviews and surveys of members of the public and police officers and Warf (2016) explored the prevalence of corruption in and between countries using data from Transparency International.

Perceptions of the prevalence of corruption in institutions or countries can impact officials’ support for corruption. Theoretically, it is possible that perceiving others as corrupt can create a normative expectation that corruption is okay and encourages officers to support corrupt behaviours. However, little research has examined the relationship between corruption prevalence and support for corruption. The work of Köbis, Prooijen, Righetti, and Paul (2015) is one of a few studies that test whether perceived belief about the prevalence of corruption influences corrupt behaviour. Their results showed that belief about the prevalence of corruption highly correlated with corrupt behaviour when measured before or after a behavioural measure of corruption. Similarly, a study by Amagnya (2020) examined judges, police officers and prosecutors’ explanations of the prevalence of corruption in Ghana’s criminal justice system. In this context, the current study explores whether Ghanaian police officers’ perceptions of corruption prevalence in the police influence their support for corruption. It does that by addressing the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 2: The more police officers perceive corruption to be prevalent in the police, the more likely they are to have positive support for corruption.*

# Deterrence

Deterrence is the notion that the threat or reality of punishment reduces the level and probability of offending by deterring people from committing crimes (Paternoster & Bachman, 2012). Vital elements of deterrence are certainty of punishment – the likelihood of being caught and punished for criminal conduct (i.e., oversight and guidance) – and severity. Studies have consistently shown that perceived certainty of detection and punishment has greater effects on criminal behaviour than the severity of sanctions (Nagin, 2013; Tankebe, Karstedt, et al., 2019). This applies to corruption. For instance, Olken (2007), in an Indonesian study, found that fear of detection through increased monitoring reduced corruption incidences. Also, Tankebe, Karstedt, et al. (2019) found that perceived certainty of punishment, which acts as a deterrent, reduces prospective elites’ intention to engage in corruption in Ghana. Similarly, Tankebe (2019) found that deterrence perceptions were the main correlates of young Ghanaian adults’ willingness to cooperate with the police against corruption. Other studies found that formal and visible punishment achieves deterrence effects through informal stigmatising reactions: exclusion, rejection, and negative reputation or “disesteem” (Nagin, 2013; Sherman, 1978). Thus, when punishment results or is expected to result in severe loss of status and esteem, fear of the stigma offers some deterrent effects on officials’ corruption decision-making.

In contrast, some studies have found punishment not to provide any deterrent effect. For instance, in a study of sentencing purposes in Australia, Warner, Davis, Spiranovic, Cockburn, and Freiberg (2019) found that jurors believed that punishment does not deter much and questioned judges’ reliance on deterrence for sentencing decisions. Low support for deterrence was also found in a Tasmanian jury study (Warner, Davis, & Walter, 2010), an Australian national public opinion study (Spiranovic, Roberts, & Indermaur, 2012), a Canadian study (Roberts, Crutcher, & Verburgge, 2007), a New Zealand study (Paulin, Searle, & Knaggs, 2003), and Victorian study (Gelb, 2011). As a result, the deterrence hypothesis has received strong criticisms and is often branded as ineffective and a ‘rhetoric’ (Robinson, 2008). Indeed, it is usually argued that deterrence depends on potential offenders’ subjective evaluation of risks and preferences (Bottoms & von Hirsch, 2010). However, not all people can adequately assess the risk associated with criminal activity. The discussions clearly show that controversy characterises the impact of deterrence on corruption as a form of criminal behaviour. However, most corruption researchers often regard deterrence as irrelevant and, at best, the approach is perfunctory (Tankebe, 2019). Therefore, the current study explores the perceived lack of deterrence influence on officers’ support for corruption. It tests the following:

*Hypothesis 3: The greater the perceived lack of deterrence, the more likely police officers would have positive support for corruption.*

# Context of the Current Study

British colonial administrators instituted formal policing in the then Gold Coast (now Ghana) in 1831 predominantly to aid the extraction of mineral and agricultural resources and facilitate trading activities (Tankebe, 2008). As a result, mistrust by the public has been a problem for the Ghanaian police. Although efforts to build trust in the police happened after colonial rule, detrimental police cultures and police officers’ attitudes and actions impede those efforts (Tankebe, 2008). For instance, police enforcement of arrests, investigations and prosecution of criminal offences in Ghana is often influenced by extra-legal factors such as police officers’ desire to make quick wealth (Tankebe, 2013). Also, Ghana scored 43 on the 2020 and 2021 Transparency International Corruption Perception Index on a scale from 0 (‘highly corrupt’) to 100 (‘very clean’), which is similar to its 2019 and 2018 scores of 41 (TI, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022). Those scores, the lowest since 2012, suggest growing perceptions of institutional corruption in Ghana (Tankebe, Boakye, & Amagnya, 2019).

Similarly, evidence from Freedom House, an international pro-democracy organisation, shows that despite increased democratic consolidation in Ghana, criminal justice agencies, especially the police, do not adhere to constitutional provisions of due process in criminal proceedings (Freedom House, 2018). There is also evidence of high perceptions of police corruption and deep-seated public distrust of the police (Tankebe, Boakye, et al., 2019). For instance, the latest Afrobarometer survey showed that over 89% of Ghanaians believed that some, most, or all police officers are corrupt (2020). In the same study, only 15% of Ghanaians expressed high trust in police officers. Beyond general perceptions, traffic police officers use threats of prosecution to collect bribes from drivers suspected of breaking the rules (Daily Graphic, 2017; Human Rights Watch, 2010). Despite these widespread public perceptions of corruption, few studies have explored corruption through the perspectives of police officers (Amagnya, 2020). Addressing this gap, this study explores conditions in the police that influence officers’ support for corruption.

# Methods

## Data

The study uses cross-sectional survey data from police officers collected across three regions of Ghana: Greater Accra, Ashanti, and Upper East. The Greater Accra and Ashanti regions provide urban dynamics, with the Upper East Region providing rural dynamics. Between July 2017 and February 2018, the author and a research assistant administered surveys to a sample of police officers in each region. Before administering the surveys, the researcher obtained ethical approval from Griffith University to research corruption in Ghana’s criminal justice system. Permission was also sought from the Ghana Police Service. The research team visited various police stations and briefed police officers present at police stations about the study and informed them of the voluntary, anonymous, and confidential nature of the study.

Surveys were then distributed to every police officer present with boxes placed at commanders’ offices for completed and non-completed surveys to be dropped in them. All officers were given surveys to ensure that nobody knew those who participated in the study. On average, each survey took 25 minutes to complete. After two weeks, the researcher went back to each police station to collect the surveys dropped in the boxes. Out of 900 surveys distributed, 626 were returned. Ten surveys were not sufficiently completed and excluded from the data, leaving 616 surveys, representing over 68% response rate. Table 1 presents the characteristics of the sample and key variables. Overall, 38.3% of participants came from the Upper East, and 64.3% were males. While 55.3% of participants had education below the tertiary level, 82.2% of participants earned an income of GH₵2000 or less. Most officers are ranked below the inspectorate level (77.7%) and worked at the General Policing (51.4%) and CID (40.1%) units.

**Table 1: Sample characteristics and key variables**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Items | Valid n | Mean/Percent | SD | Min | Max |
| *Dependent variable* |  |  |  |  |  |
| Support for Corruption | **600** | 7.33 | 2.71 | 3 | 15 |
| *Independent variables* |  |  |  |  |  |
| Corruption Prevalence | **579** | 24.05 | 7.51 | 8 | 40 |
| Deterrence | **591** | 17.41 | 3.81 | 6 | 30 |
| Code of Silence | **608** | 3.00 | 1.32 | 1 | 5 |
| *Control variables* |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Age** (Average) | **568** | 37yrs | 8.29 | 20 | 59 |
| **Gender** MaleFemale | **616** | 64.3%35.7% |  | 0 | 1 |
| **Area of Work**UrbanRural | **596** | 60.9%39.1% |  | 0 | 1 |
| **Education**High School or LessTertiary | **611** | 55.3%44.7% |  | 0 | 1 |
| **Monthly Income**GH₵2000 or lessAbove GH₵2000 |  | 82.2%17.8% |  | 0 | 1 |
| **Region**Upper East Greater AccraAshanti | **616** | 38.3%32.6%29.1% |  | 1 | 3 |
| **Rank**Corporal or LessSergeant Inspector and above  | **613** | 59.4%18.3%22.3% |  | 1 | 3 |
| **Police Unit**Criminal Investigation Department (CID)General Policing & AdministrationMotto Traffic and Transport Unit (MTTU) | **612** | 40.1%51.4%8.5% |  | 1 | 3 |

## Measures

The study measured four key variables: (i) support for corruption, (ii) corruption prevalence, (iii) deterrence, and (iv) code of silence. Except for a single item on code of silence, a principal component analysis was used to extract the other constructs, which rotated factor loadings are presented in Appendix A. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was .909, *p* < .001, confirming the data’s appropriateness for such an analysis (see Hutcheson & Sofronniou, 1999, pp. 224–225). The Cronbach’s alpha coefficient for the corruption prevalence and deterrence scales were above the conventional cut-off point of .60, indicating the reliability and strength of these constructs. Support for corruption has a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient less than the conventional cut-off point of .60. However, this construct is acceptable due to the small number of items in the scale.

### Support for Corruption

This is the dependent variable. It was measured with three items where police officers were asked to reflect on certain wrongdoings amounting to corruption. The items were ‘It is okay to bend the rules in order to get the job done’; ‘The end always justifies the means in police work’; and ‘It is acceptable for an officer to hide evidence that may help the prosecution of a case’. They were measured on a five-point scale ranging from 1 = ‘strongly disagree’ to 5 = ‘strongly agree’. The three items were combined to create a ‘support for corruption index’ (Cronbach’s alpha (α) = .455; M= 7.33). The scores range from 3 to 15, with a higher score indicating stronger support for corruption. In terms of skewness, the index was fairly symmetrical (skewness = 0.474; SE = .100).

### Corruption Prevalence

This was the first of the independent variables. It was measured using an eight-item scale drawn from Kutnjak Ivković (2003). Examples of items include ‘Police officers at road checkpoints/barriers *accept* money from commercial drivers who violate the law’; ‘Police officers at road checkpoints/barriers *demand* money from commercial drivers who violate the law’; ‘Police officers sometimes do not pursue cases against persons related to ‘Powerful People’; and ‘Police officers do not pursue unlawful behaviours when money is paid or promised’. The questions were measured on a five-point scale, ranging from (1) ‘strongly disagree’ to (5) ‘strongly agree’. The scale’s scores ranged from 8 to 40, with a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.855 and a mean of 24.05. A higher score means greater perceptions of corruption prevalence in the police. This scale was fairly symmetrical (skewness = -.300; SE = .102).

### Deterrence

This was the second independent variable that focussed on police officers’ perceptions of oversight measures for corruption in the police. This scale was measured with six items: ‘Corrupt police officers get lenient punishment’; ‘Police leadership do not take reports of police officers’ corrupt behaviour seriously’; and ‘There is a low risk of corrupt police officers being caught’. The response was a five-point scale from (1) ‘strongly disagree’ to (5) ‘strongly agree’. With a Cronbach’s alpha of .632 and mean of 17.41, the scores ranged from 6 to 30: a higher score depicts greater perceptions of a lack of deterrence. The index was fairly symmetrical (skewness = .085; SE = .101).

### Code of Silence

The last independent variable was measured with a single item: Police officers are unwilling to report corrupt behaviours of colleagues. The responses ranged from (1) ‘strongly disagree’ to (5) ‘strongly agree’ (*M* = 3.00; *SD* = 1.32). A higher score represents a stronger perception of increased police officers’ unwillingness to report colleagues’ corrupt behaviours. This index is almost perfectly distributed (skewness = .005; SE = .099).

### Control Variables

Research has found that factors such as gender, area of work, education, age, region, rank, income, and department influence support for misconduct and behaviours (Zhao, Zhang, & Xu, 2019). As a result, the current study included the mentioned items as control variables. Age and years of service were continuous variables and treated as such in the analysis. However, gender (1 = male, 0 = female), area of work (1 = urban, 0 = rural), monthly income (1 = above GH₵2,000, 0 = GH₵2,000 or less), and education (1 = tertiary, 0 = high school or less) were dummy coded. Three categories were used to measure region (1 = Greater Accra, 2 = Ashanti, 3 = Upper East), rank (1 = Corporal or less, 2 = Sergeant, 3 = Inspector and Above), and department (1 = MTTU, 2 = CID, 3 = General Policing & Administration). However, for the analysis, they were dummy coded with Greater Accra, Inspector and above, and MTTU as reference categories for region, rank, and department, respectively.

Bivariate correlations between the variables depicted in Table 2 were calculated. Corruption prevalence (r = .13, p < .01) and deterrence (r = .17, p < .001) were significantly correlated with support for corruption but code of silence (r = .03, p < .133) did not. The

**Table 2: Bivariate correlations between variables.**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** | **6** | **7** | **8** | **9** | **10** | **11** | **12** | **13** |
| 1. Support for Corruption | 1 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 2. Corruption prevalence | .13\*\* | 1 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 3 Deterrence | .17\*\*\* | .39\*\* | 1 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 4. Code of silence  | .03 | .55\*\* | .25\*\* | 1 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 5. Region | .24\*\*\* | -.07 | -.03 | -.11\*\* | 1 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 6. Gender | .02 | -.07 | -.04 | -.05 | -.12\*\* | 1 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 7. Age | -.12\*\* | .05 | .07 | -.02 | -.26\*\*\* | -.23\*\*\* | 1 |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 8. Education | -.09\* | .09\* | .02 | .04 | -.22\*\*\* | -.12\*\* | .14\*\*\* | 1 |  |  |  |  |  |
| 9. Rank | -.12\*\* | .06 | .08\* | .03 | -.34\*\*\* | -.10\* | .84\*\*\* | .22\*\*\* | 1 |  |  |  |  |
| 10. Years of Service | .09\* | .05 | .01 | .02 | -.34\*\*\* | .09\* | .12\*\* | .12\*\* | .15\*\*\* | 1 |  |  |  |
| 11. Department | -.04 | .06 | .03 | .02 | -.24\*\*\* | .18\*\*\* | .09\* | .24\*\*\* | .20\*\*\* | .16\*\*\* | 1 |  |  |
| 12. Area of Work | -.09\* | .12\*\* | .10\* | .15\*\*\* | -.39\*\*\* | -.00 | .17\*\*\* | .22\*\*\* | .24\*\*\* | .18\*\*\* | .21\*\*\* | 1 |  |
| 13. Monthly Salary | -.10\* | .15\*\*\* | .10\* | .12\*\* | -.17\*\*\* | -.11\*\* | .54\*\*\* | .24\*\*\* | .63\*\*\* | .05 | .18\*\*\* | .22\*\*\* | 1 |

N= 533 – 608; \*p < .05; \*\*p < .01; \*\*\*p < .001.

correlations between dependent and independent variables were positive but weak: as perceptions of corruption prevalence and deterrence increase, so is support for corruption. For the control variables, apart from gender and department, all the others significantly correlated with support for corruption. The correlations show no multicollinearity problems, making the data appropriate for regression as the chosen statistical analysis.

## Analysis

The analysis proceeded in three stages. First, a bivariate correlation of the variables was calculated to establish relationship and the absence of multicollinearity (see Table 2). In the second step, the relative importance of the hypothesised correlates was estimated through a multiple linear regression analysis (see Olive, 2017) where the control variables were used first. The independent variables were entered one after the other in subsequent models. Focussing on the R2 and the beta coefficient results, the relative contribution of corruption prevalence, code of silence, and deterrence to support for corruption in the form of misconduct was evaluated. Establishing the relative importance of the hypothesised correlates can have significant policy implications for changing support for corruption and combating corruption in the police. In the final step, the importance of variables and interaction terms for the key correlates (i.e., code of silence, corruption prevalence, and deterrence) on the outcome measure (support for corruption) were estimated. The beta coefficients help establish the complex relationship between the measured variables and conditions under which the hypothesised correlations influence support for corruption. The sample for the regression analysis reduced from 616 to 480, but this does not affect the results as the minimum number of 30 participants per predictor variable when using three independent variables is met with the 480 samples (Hsieh, 1989).

# Results

Table 3 presents the results of the multiple linear regression regarding support for corruption. Model 1 explored the main effects of the control variables with the model

**Table 3: Multiple linear regression of support for corruption on lack of deterrence, corruption prevalence, and code of silence.**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | MODEL 1 | MODEL 2 | MODEL 3 | MODEL 4 |
|  | *β* | *β* | *β* | *β* |
| Age  | .014 | .015 | .013 | .009 |
| Years of Service | -.003 | -.004 | -.004 | -.005 |
| Gender (Female) | -.202 | -.254 | -.250 | -.237 |
| Education (High School or Less) | -.046 | -.041 | -.043 | -.025 |
| Monthly Salary (GH₵2000 or less) | .263 | .368 | .400 | .393 |
| Area of Work (Rural) | .184 | .102 | .061 | .100 |
| Region(Greater Accra)AshantiUpper East | -----.1301.648\*\*\* | -----.1871.625\*\*\* | -----.1081.583\*\*\* | -----.0891.552\*\*\* |
| Department(MTTU)CIDGeneral Duties/Administration | -----.565.302 | -----.483.282 | -----.483.316 | -----.518.380 |
| Rank (Inspector & Above)Corporal or LessSergeant | -----.763.047 | -----.733.037 | -----.740.137 | -----.671.123 |
| Corruption Prevalence | ---- | .052\*\* | .032 | .043\* |
| Deterrence | ---- | ---- | .112\*\*\* | .114\*\*\* |
| Code of Silence | ---- | ---- | ---- | -.127 |
| Intercept | 5.276 | 4.039 | 2.649 | 2.880 |
| F-Test  | 4.770\*\*\* | 4.866\*\*\* | 5.458\*\*\* | 5.188\*\*\* |
| R2 | .099 | .119 | .141 | .143 |

NOTE: *N = 480*, \**P* < .05, \*\**p* < .01, \*\*\**p* < .001, Reference categories are in brackets.

accounting for 9.9% of the variance. Only the Upper East Region (*β* = 1.648, *p* < .001) significantly predicted support for corruption. In Model 2, which accounted for 11.9% of the variance, corruption prevalence was added to Model 1. Corruption prevalence (*β* = .053, *p* < .01) and the Upper East Region (*β* = 1.625, *p* < .001) significantly predicted support for corruption positively. Thus, the tendency of officers to positively support corruption are more likely when they perceive corruption in the police to be pervasive and working in Upper East Region in compassion to Greater Accra. In Model 3, which accounted for 14.1% of the variance, deterrence was added to Model 2. The Upper East Region (*β* = 1.583, *p* < .001) and deterrence (*β* = .112, *p* < .001) significantly predicted support for corruption positively. Thus, as police officers perceive a lack of oversight measures to deal with corruption, the more likely they are to positively support corruption. However, adding perceived lack of deterrence resulted in a significant change (∆*R2* = .022; *p* < .001), leading to the significant predictive power of corruption prevalence recorded in Model 2 disappearing (*β* = .032, *p* < .066).

In Model 4, accounting for 14.3% of the variance, code of silence was added to Model 3. The results show that code of silence did not significantly predict support for corruption (*β* = -.127, *p* = .247). However, Upper East region (*β* = 1.552, *p* < .001), corruption prevalence (*β* = .043, *p* < .05), and lack of deterrence (*β* = .114, *p* < .001) significantly and positively predicted support for corruption. Adding code of silence in Model 4 slightly increased the predictive power of corruption prevalence (*β* = .043, *p* < .05) and lack of deterrence (*β* = .114, *p* < .001) recorded in Model 3. However, the change was not statistically significant (∆*R2* = .002; *p* = .247). Based on the results, we accept hypotheses 2 and 3 and reject hypothesis 1.

# Discussion

The results reveal that officers’ support for corruption is heavily linked to perceptions of deterrence in the police. Deterrence research shows that law-breaking is less likely if potential offenders believe there is a significant chance they will be apprehended and punished and vice versa (Tankebe, Karstedt, et al., 2019; Wikström, Tseloni, & Karlis, 2011). So, it is understandable and reasonable that officers’ support for corruption would be more positive if they perceived oversight measures and procedures (deterrence) in the police as weak. The result reinforces the argument that institutions characterised by a lack of oversight and accountability breed a greater likelihood of high solidarity and impunity amongst officials (United States Department of State, 2019; UNODC, 2011). This result suggests that more control and oversight measures as well as certainty and severity of sanctions against corruption can contribute positively to corruption control (Tankebe, Karstedt, et al., 2019 for a similar suggestion). Furthermore, more control and oversight measures and certainty of apprehension for engaging in corrupt transactions and severity of sanctions against corruption can result in citizens willing cooperation with the police to fight corruption (Tankebe, 2019).

Another noteworthy result is working in the Upper East Region positively predicted support for corruption across all four models. This result is difficult to interpret considering that the Upper East Region is one of the rural regions in Ghana. One would have expected that working in that region will lead to negative support for corruption. A possible explanation of this result is that officers working in rural regions may not have access to opportunities available in urban regions and hence see corrupt proceeds as replacement for lost opportunities available in urban regions. Further studies are vital in unravelling reasons for such result.

The impact of the prevalence of corruption on officers’ support for corruption is a significant result. The result indicates that as officers perceive corruption in the police to be pervasive, they tend to positively support corruption. This result is consistent with the finding of Köbis et al. (2015) on corruption prevalence and support for corruption in the Netherlands. It is also consistent with the theoretical argument that when officers perceive corruption as widespread (i.e., believe or see their colleagues engaging in corruption), they have a normative inclination that corruption is okay and hence support it. The implication of this result is that police agencies must take necessary actions to reduce the perception of corruption pervasive in the police. This is very important as studies often report the police as the most perceived corrupt public institution worldwide (see Pring, 2015; Pring & Vrushi, 2019). Working to reduce such perceptions or reality of corruption can reduce positive support for corruption and encourage the reporting of corrupt acts to disciplinary authorities.

The non-significant effect of the code of silence on officers’ support for corruption in this study is very surprising. It contradicts several previous studies that have found the code of silence to be a significant predictor of support for or engagement in corrupt behaviour (see Lee et al., 2013; Quinn, 2011; Wood, 1997). While the single item for the code of silence might have contributed to the non-significant impact, the result is still relevant. It suggests that future studies should explore the impact of the code of silence on support for corruption and misconduct generally in different contexts and using varying number of items. The result is a possible indication that the code of silence is so routined that it does not affect officers’ support for corruption. If this is true, it will be essential for police leadership in Ghana to take steps to reverse the situation.

# Limitations and Conclusion

Though this study has remarkable strengths, including a large sample across three regions, multiple measures and controls, and robust analysis, some limitations should be noted. First, the conclusions drawn should be taken cautiously as the study surveyed junior officers predominantly, who are only a subset of police officers. Also, the data came from a non-random sample, limiting the scope for generalisation. Future studies drawing on a representative sample will help establish how robust these findings are and their extension to other police officers. Second, because the study measured police officers’ self-reported support for corruption, the results may be affected by social desirability bias – the tendency for research participants to present themselves in a positive light rather than sharing actual experiences (see Amagnya, 2022b; Nederhof, 1985). Future studies need to explore methods beyond self-report such as experimental design that can capture actual support for corruption.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the results have important implications for future research and efforts to control corruption in the police. In terms of research, the results suggest that corruption studies should focus on how different police cultures influence support for corruption. It is evident from this study that such an exploration can produce significant insights and extend the literature on police culture and corruption. Perceived lack of deterrence predicting officials’ support for corruption suggests deterrence theory may still be relevant in crime prevention, particularly in an African context. Finally, the results suggest that police administrations can negate support for corruption by reducing perceptions of corruption pervasiveness and strengthening control and oversight systems and procedures. Specifically, police administrations can strengthen existing measures for monitoring officers’ activities to increase detection of misconduct. Also, rigorous investigation and punitive sanctions should be applied when officers engaged in misconduct are reported or caught.

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**Appendix A: Results of principal component analysis differentiating the three scales.**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Item | Factor Loadings |
| *Support for Corruption* |  |
| 1. It is acceptable for an officer to hide evidence that may help a case. | .748 |
| 2. It is okay to bend the rules to get the job done. | .706 |
| 3. The end justifies the means when it comes to police work. | .581 |
| *Corruption Prevalence* |  |
| 1. Police officers at road checkpoints/barriers *accept* money from commercial drivers who violate the law | .810 |
| 2. Police officers at a road checkpoint/barrier *demand* money from commercial drivers who violate the law | .794 |
| 3. Police officers do not pursue unlawful behaviours when money is paid or promised | .732 |
| 4. Police officers fail to pursue cases involving persons related to ‘Powerful People’ | .715 |
| 5. How likely is it that a police officer who stops a motorist for over speeding will agree to accept money that is half the amount the motorist will pay if the case goes to court? | .659 |
| 6. Lower-level police officers’ give ‘kickbacks’ to superiors after attending road duties.  | .644 |
| 7. Superior police officers serve as bad examples. | .544 |
| 8. How likely is it that a superior police officer who is related to a suspect arrested for an offence would instruct that the suspect be released without charges or case closed? | .492 |
| *Deterrence* |  |
| 1. Lenient punishment of corrupt police officers  | .783 |
| 2. Police officers who report colleagues’ corrupt behaviour are not protected. | .774 |
| 3. Police authorities do not take reported corrupt behaviours seriously. | .714 |
| 4. Low risk of corrupt police officers being caught | .677 |
| 5. Police leadership do not take reported corrupt behaviour against officers seriously? | .666 |
| 6. Too little transparency and accountability of the police service to the public | .575 |

Note: Principal components factoring with varimax rotation. Only loadings greater than 0.40 are displayed. All the variables were entered into a factor analysis and the three components were chosen based on eigenvalues. The factors were rotated, and the rotated solution given in the appendix. There was no factor loading of more than .30 across different scales.