

Perception of conflict situations before and after graduation from the police school

Authors' Contribution:

- A** Study Design
- B** Data Collection
- C** Statistical Analysis
- D** Manuscript Preparation
- E** Funds Collection

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Abstract

Background and Study Aim:

Comparing the differences in the police knowledge acquisition process in various stages of the professional career of police officers serves as feedback for police training centers. The pilot study points out whether the training in conflict resolution is sufficient or not, then, how the policemen themselves feel when dealing with conflict situations and, last but not least, how they assess their professional performance or how they approach the citizens. The aim of the study is the knowledge about the differences between the levels of perception of conflict situations in newcomers to the basic training and freshly graduated police officers after having undergone the training.

Material and Methods:

For data collection, the author of the study used the Questionnaire Solution of Conflict Situations and Circumstances of Assaults (SoCon). The quantitative data were analysed on the basis of the descriptive statistics and t-test method. The research samples were the policemen of the Czech Republic (n = 140).

Results:

The policemen after graduation rather agree that it is easy to respond to verbal conflict and that they are quite confident in solving it. The policemen do not know whether it is easy for them to react to physical conflict and whether they feel confident in its solution. They rather disagree that they are psyche burdened by conflict situations at work and do not know whether they are qualified and competent to the police work. They rather agree that they are kind, trustworthy, reliable, willing, receptive, accessible, fair, professional, honest and fair.

Conclusions:

Most areas have remained unchanged, yet the research has pointed out to some differences that could affect police officers in their dealing with conflicts. Perceptions of verbal and physical aggression differ from one case to another. This fact points to the need of addressing these differences while mapping physical confrontations.

Keywords:

conflict situation • coping strategy • physical attack • police education • physical aggression • verbal aggression • verbal attack • violence on police

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Coping skills – plural noun learned methods of managing strong feelings in response to events so that they do not detract from a generally positive mindset [17].

Coping strategy – noun coping skills [17].

Self-defence – noun fighting techniques used for defending oneself against physical attack, especially unarmed combat techniques such as those used in many of the martial arts [17].

Training – noun the process of improving physical fitness by exercise and diet [17].

Skill – noun an ability to perform an action well, acquired by training [17].

Stress – noun **1.** physical pressure on an object or part of the body **2.** a factor or combination of factors in a person's life that make him or her feel tired and anxious **3.** a condition in which an outside influence such as overwork or a mental or emotional state such as anxiety changes the working of the body and can affect the hormone balance [17].

Competence – noun the ability to do something well, measured against a standard, especially ability that you get through experience or training [17].

Aggression – noun the state of feeling violently angry towards someone or something [17].

Aggression (in psychology) – is deliberate behaviour by the perpetrator intended to either hurt the opponent, harm or distress him/her in any other way, cause pain (regardless of whether this aim is achieved), or destroy things [18, 19].

Aggression (in praxeology) – is to initiate the destructive fight or move in a verbal dispute from material arguments to those causing distress to the opponent [20].

Aggressiveness – a human characteristic manifesting itself in inclinations to hurt others, to destructive behaviour. **Aggressive** = virulent, truculent, attacking [20].

Bravery – means efficiency in good deeds, efficiency combined with estimable aspirations [20].

INTRODUCTION

Police education is the basis for police work, especially when we talk about the resolution of conflict situations. This notion gave rise to this pilot study which detects ways of solving conflict situations by police officers before and after graduation from the police school. The study reveals as well whether the police officers feel competent for the police work after having graduated from the police school.

Police education is a complex process. In a relatively short time that is approximately in one year, the police officers learn police skills. The police skills include coping strategy with conflict situations. Previous studies have found that police work is rather stressful [1, 2]. In the police work, there is a tendency to a nearly daily occurrence of verbal and physical attacks and subsequent injuries [3]. That is why it is so necessary to be familiar with the theoretical and practical skills for managing verbal and physical confrontation within self-defence [4].

For this reason, self-defence is a crucial competence for understanding and resolving conflict situation [5, 6]. The police become an organisation of quality only if good police officers are employed there. Therefore, it is necessary to concentrate not only on the culture of the organisation itself but also on revealing opportunities and possible threats [7, 8]. Besides, attention needs to be paid to the development of skills in police officers through continuous education. Effective education, training, and continuous testing are ways of bringing valuable information to new police officers in a relatively short time. Police schools should focus on upgrading the educational process and on multidimensional development [9]. This upgrading could help the overall effectiveness of solving conflict situations, and it could increase competence in the police work.

The aim of the study is the knowledge about the differences between the levels of perception of conflict situations in newcomers to the basic training and freshly graduated police officers after having undergone the training.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Participants

The research sample was 140 respondents in total (we focused on police officers of the Czech Republic who freshly graduated from the Police

School): 125 male (89.29%); 15 female (10.71%); age 24.24 ±3.22, min 19, max 34, the ratio between genders was 125:15.

Study design

The work is conceived as descriptive and quantitative. What was used for data collection was the Questionnaire Solution of Conflict Situations and Circumstances of Assaults (SoCon). This research tool was developed within the Comparative Police Study in the EU project, the biggest security project in Europe. The first part identifies types of conflicts between citizens and police officers and the ways of solving them. The second part deals with the detection of the abilities of police officers to work with the police principles. In the quantitative part, the data were generated into the Microsoft Office Excel spreadsheet.

Afterward, the data were transferred into the Statistica software where they were analysed. As the very first step, the descriptive statistics was used in order to detect extreme values and describe the research sample. The next step was to choose the statistical significance value of α 0.05. Then, when testing the normality with $p \leq \alpha$, the normality of the data wasn't confirmed. Therefore, based on these results, hypothesis of the normality was rejected for all the questions. These facts have shown that it is necessary to use nonparametric tests in further statistic analyses.

After executing the basic statistical and normality tests, the research focused on the t-test. Hypotheses about data normality were rejected and therefore it was chosen to use the nonparametric Wilcoxon t-test for the dependent variables.

RESULTS

From the overall comparison, it is legitimate to state that the testimony in September 2016 coincided with testing in March 2017. Although they have not recorded a statistically significant difference, the variance of the particular responses has pointed to different answers of the respondents. While unchanged results were obtained in questions concerning verbal conflict, physical conflict, and professional skill, a change occurred only in one case in the variable of "Sensitive during police work".

The policemen after the graduation agree that it is easy to respond to verbal conflict and that they are quite confident in solving it. As for the

physical conflicts, the policemen either agree or disagree when answering whether it is easy for them to react to physical conflict and whether they feel confident in its solution. Besides, police officers tend to disagree that they are psyche burdened by conflict situations at work. As for the questions focused on professional performance, the policemen agree that they are mostly kind, trustworthy, reliable, willing, receptive, accessible, fair, professional, honest and just in their performance. In the first questionnaire, the answer was “agreed”. In the second questionnaire, the answer was similar, but there was a more significant variance (Table 1).

The police officers either agree or disagree that they are qualified and competent to the police work – the variable “feel competent to the police work” (Figure 1).

DISCUSSION

Police education is an essential element to pursue the profession of the policeman. It is a process of learning and passing information. This study, therefore, or the results of the study, point to the effectiveness of the future police training system.

Furthermore, it gives evidence of how fresh police officers can face verbal and physical conflicts. It should also be pointed out that these findings are as suitable feedback for police education staff.

Police officers face everyday pitfalls and, of course, conflict situations. For this reason, the author believes that it would be appropriate to test police officers during police training and to identify not only the development of police competences but above all whether they are self-confident and able to face conflict situations. This brings to the frequently discussed issue of psychological stress resistance. Psychological resilience is highly conditioned by age and work experience [10]. Therefore, in preparing new police officers, it is appropriate to work with critical incidents and monitor the physiological changes in police officers [11]. Increased heart rate, respiratory rate and skin resistance are clear physiological indicators of stress. These remarks refer to the need for a scientific approach. All educational practices should be based on scientific evidence [12]. This approach can not only increase self-confidence and the ability to react under stress, but it can also improve verbal and non-verbal communication and tactical skills in solving conflict situations.

A Likert scale – is a psychometric scale commonly involved in research that employs questionnaires. It is the most widely used approach to scaling responses in survey research, such that the term (or more accurately the **Likert-type scale**) is often used interchangeably with a rating scale, even though the two are not synonymous [21].

Table 1. The results of t-test of the Questionnaire Solution of Conflict Situations and Circumstances of Assaults (SoCon) Czech police officers (n = 140).

Pair of Variables (September 2016 & March 2017)	Wilcoxon Matched Pairs Test (marked tests are significant at $p < 0.05$)			
	Valid (n)	T	Z	p-value
Able to respond to a verbal conflict	88	1924.000	0.141	0.89
Confident in solving a verbal conflict	86	1795.000	0.325	0.74
Able to respond to a physical conflict	76	1236.500	1.173	0.24
Feel confident in solving a physical conflict	82	1605.500	0.444	0.66
Worried about word during the conflict	87	1872.000	0.178	0.86
Emotionally disturbed by conflict situation at work	97	2300.000	0.275	0.78
Kind during police work	80	1255.000	1.751	0.08
Reliable during police work	78	1350.500	0.946	0.34
Sensitive during police work	88	1488.500	1.954	0.05
Feel competent to police work	88	1735.000	0.928	0.35
Feel professional during police work	87	1483.500	1.822	0.07
Honest and fair acting at police work	79	1344.500	1.151	0.25

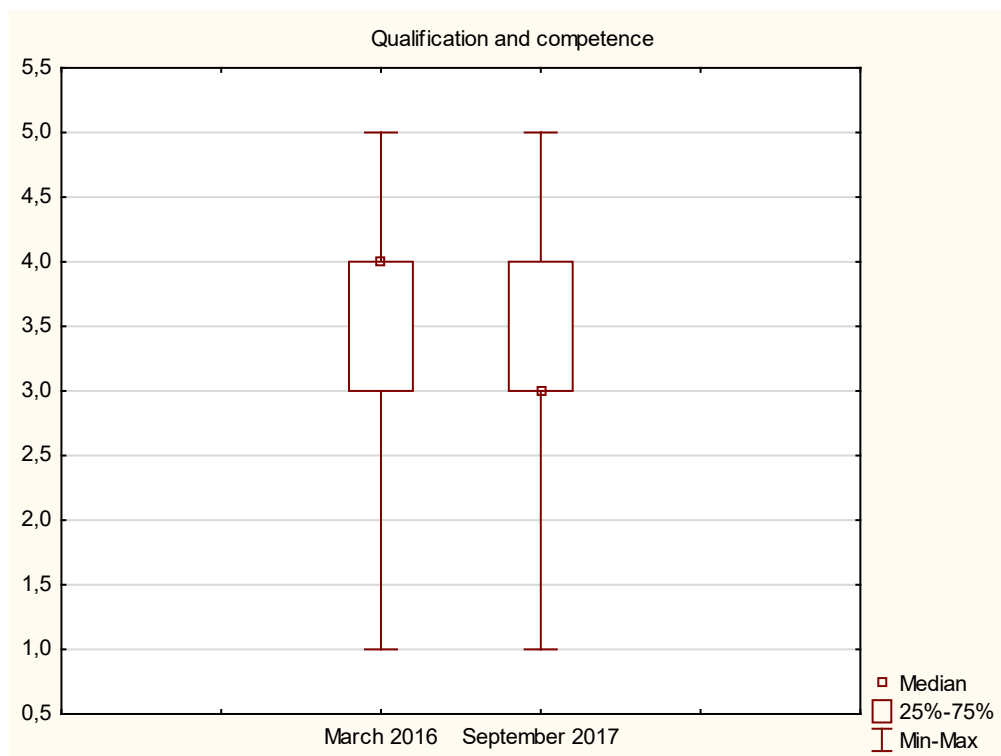


Figure 1. Estimation on a variable “feel competent to the police work” in March 2016 and September 2017.

Further interesting diagnostic and adaptive (educational) effects can be expected by combining the method used in these studies with multidimensional tests [9, 13]. The results of simulation studies (two similar situations of acute interpersonal conflict) by Klimczak et al. [14] provided evidence that when the intervening policeman using pro-social aggression modifies aggression, the declaring actions migrate. Migration of activities in the male population is more diverse (16 such relationships were revealed) and in the female population by half.

Studies performed by Kałużny Kalina Grzegorz. [15] (the authors analysed the results of the KK'98 questionnaire – the verbal simulation method employed enables one to estimate bravery in an indirect way) on a large sample from Polish population (n = 1472, ten years after socio-political transformation in Poland 1998-1999) revealed that the awareness of aggressor's goal and a target of physical assault are the factors which highly influence the behaviour of people who are in social environment and certain relationship with the aggressor. Kałużny and Płaczek [16] used the same tool (KK'98 – the bravery criterion applied was the declared way of action in the situations in which there was a threat of physical aggression) and studied 124 police

of-ficers in 2010, and the results were then compared to the 126 police officers studied in 1998. The police officers studied in 2010 do not differ from those studied in 1998 as regards the level of bravery. However, the result of the study obtained in 2010 is an indication of negative tendencies. Police officers are more inclined to resort to violence (instead of counteracting it in the way typical of brave people) in the case of a physical assault on a person whose relations with the respondent (i.e. a police officer) and the degree of violence of the assault have not been determined [16].

CONCLUSIONS

This pilot study has shown a possible development of police officers in the process of education. Admittedly, most areas have remained unchanged, yet the research revealed differences, that could affect police officers in dealing with conflicts. These differences can be found in the perception of verbal and physical aggression.

Although they have not recorded a statistically significant difference, the variance of the particular responses has pointed to different answers of the respondents. The policemen mostly feel

confident in a verbal confrontation. However, in a physical confrontation, they are most insecure, as we have shown in the results.

In dealing with collision situations, it is essential to feel competent to perform police work. This research has revealed differences in the perception of police work before and after graduation

from the police school. In general, the police officers do not know whether they are or not competent for the police work.

The findings highlight the need to upgrade education in order to build self-confident police officers who believe in their work and who can solve efficiently verbal and physical aggression.

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