

# Two Methods of Policing: Will the Resources of the Police Officers and the Local Communities be Spiraling Upwards or Downwards?



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## Abstract

From the viewpoint of Swedish vulnerable areas this article focusing on the potential consequences of two methods of policing (Zero-tolerance and boundary-relation) from the perspective of factors connected with officers' health, professional work performance, and the effect on the resources of the local community such as work against crime. The authors put forward different patterns of loss of resources that result from officers stressful and traumatic experiences. The article further discuss the effects on society connected to signs of loss of resources in the areas of health, such as cynicism, and performance. The two methods of policing play very different parts in whether resources will be lost or gained when the officers approach the local community. Reflecting the principles of Sir Robert Peel wherein the good relations between the police and the public is emphasized as the basis of effective policing.

**Keywords:** Occupations; Mutilation; Witnessing; Shootings; Dealing; Normalcy; Exposure

## A Heightened Need for Resources of Officers

It has long been established that working as a police officer is associated with stress and health problems Habersaat et al. [1]. When compared to other occupations, a heightened level of risks with regard to on duty actions resulting in ill-health or injuries has been documented Mayhew [2]. These risks included also an elevated frequency of threats. Consequently, Violanti [3] has compared US police officers day to day work with warfare: "The police officer is expected to be combat-ready at all times...[facing] a continual sense of danger from an unknown enemy..While the Vietnam veteran was at war for a minimum of nine months, police officers alternate between the violence of the street (e.g., shootings, witnessing death and mutilation, dealing with abused children) and the normalcy of civilian life on a daily basis."

### The different contexts of potentially traumatic exposure

Regarding the Swedish Police force an increased exposure for on duty risks documented by Mayhew [2] from the perspective of 61 s.c. vulnerable areas having been defined. Out of these 29, were named "specially vulnerable areas". Both varieties of vulnerable

areas are together described in terms of low socioeconomical status, high criminal activity, and high level of narcotic related crimes NOA, 2015, & 2016 [4]. From research findings, it has also been suggested a dynamic or circular process where in these areas increased rates of crime undermine both the informal as well as the formal local control. Under more favorable circumstances, these local control conditions would regulate or abate deviant behavior whereas the wearing out instinctively of both varieties of control instances consequently allows crime to advance Klinger [5].

### Methods on offer

The different work methods pertaining to how the police officers handle their tasks in the vulnerable areas are of greatest importance. Two well-known and defined methods can be described as representing two different rationales where one is more leaning towards zero-tolerance and the other more towards a balance between setting boundaries and building relations to the local community. Similar to both methods is that working in these areas expose the police officers to high frequencies of stressful events. This including effects from the above two different work

methods on the police officers and thereby also on the community is here in the center of attention of the authors.

The work method of zero-tolerance is a strategy based on repeated activities targeting even minor crimes and focusing on order-maintenance Bratton et al. [6], Greene [7]. Through this method, the frequency of interactions between citizens and police officers are aimed to be very high. Moreover, the interaction between the two parts can be described as having a negative tone where one part (police officers) is to take control over the other part (citizens). This logically also implies increasing the likelihood of traumatic encounters.

In the other work method setting boundaries (including arrests and punishments), there is a balance between the building of relations to the local community and singular citizens. The stressful negative interactions between police officers and citizens are mixed with positive interactions between the two parts. This is a work method more in tune with Sir Robert Peel's principles where the relations between law enforcement and the public are emphasized as the base of effective policing Peel [8].

### Potential Health Effects from Specific Demands and Resources

When regarding those two work methods with the focus on both possible health effects on police officers and its indirect effects on society; stress is an important factor to examine. Stress in general has been shown to generate negative effects both physical and psychological Ohira et al. [9]. Being a police officer is associated always with presenting one of the most stressful occupations often resulting in physical as well as psychological ill health Habersaat et al. [1], Maguen et al.[10], Berg et al.[11] showed that both frequency and severity of job stress among police officers was associated with anxiety symptoms and burnout. Moreover, these authors found that the frequency, not the severity, of stress factors was associated with cynicism.

Recurring trauma of police officers means a psychological sensitization effect that was identified by Regehr et al. [12]. Sensitization was manifested as an ongoing (prolonged) psychological response after stressful exposure. In turn, the amelioration of the stress response was related to awareness of access to social support if needed.

Cynicism is, in itself, a long-recognized sign of burnout Maslach [13]. Cynicism refers to being distrustful of others sincerity or integrity and beliefs regarding others as motivated purely by self-interest (Oxford dictionary, on line). The cynicism that is referred to in this article is regarded in line with Maslach [14] as a state rather than as a personal trait thereby connected to attitudes, behavior, and cognition Dean, Brandes, & Dharwadkar [15]. In general, cynicism is found to have negative impact on interpersonal relations and work performance Leiter et al. [13]. Leiter and Maslach discussed the premise that even though there are strong correlational links between the three subscales of the Maslach Burn out Inventory (MBI) these patterns does not fully

mirror the person centered reality of the match between on one hand and the individual employee and the organizational conditions on the other. They therefore employed a latent profile design with large samples of participants and hypothesized profiles of firstly a total of the three dimension (Overextended, Disengaged/Cynicism and Ineffective) meaning the BurnOut (BO) score profile and MBI, secondly the separate existence of the three MBI dimensions and thirdly a healthy profile named Engagement.

Furthermore, the person-centered BO scores were analogously examined together with also different dimensions of the work organization. e.g. workload or resources. Concerning the profile of disengagement or cynicism this showed to be the closest to the total score profile of BO consequently also closer than the separate Exhaustion score. Interestingly, the cynicism profile was not distinguished by high work load. However, cynicism occurred in a unique organizational context of low scores concerning the three dimensions of resources doing the job (reward, community, fairness, professional network etc), low scores regarding social context at work (e.g. civility or incivility from manager or co-worker) and satisfaction with work (e.g. accomplishment or overall satisfaction with work). Leiter et al. [13] suggested cynicism was a more central aspect of BO than fatigue, but also, in itself, a fork where the work process seemed to go wrong. Therefore, its "sources and outcomes" (p 98) also need to be better understood.

### Repeated exposure is sensitizing exposure

Researchers such as Regehr et al. [12] or Chopco et al. [16] examined the nature and consequences of repeated exposure to potentially traumatic situations in the policing profession. The findings of Regehr and colleagues (2007) concerning the consequences of recurring exposure to stressful situations are interesting while they are contra intuitive or challenging to notions about a protective effect from being psychologically accustomed to traumatic situations at work. Instead, when the researcher examined police officer's individual history of traumatic stress exposure together with psychological and biological responses to acute stress, they found a very different storyline. Regehr et al. [12] used a police training video simulator and the simulator recounted a domestic violence situation. The situation included an injured (through harm) female victim, the ongoing presence of the perpetrator and the need for safety precautions regarding the officer herself or himself in the current situation.

From collected anamnestic data and from different recordings in conjunction with the simulated stressful situation the researchers found an outcome of psychological sensitization to stressful situations associated to the quantity of (repeated) exposure to traumatic stress in police officers. This prolonged psychological response to stress was not accompanied by a prolonged physiological response (concerning heart rate or cortisol measures). Instead, the physiological response of the repeatedly exposed officers did not differ from that of the lesser exposed officers. This latter finding may be elucidated by results

reported by Ohira and colleagues (2011) on lack of parallelism between the psychological and the physiological responses in conjunction with chronic job stress. Expressed differently, what Ohira and colleagues (2011) observed was a psychophysiological dysregulation where the brain to a lesser extent exhibited control over the cardio vascular system in term of “accelerating it” during stress when compared to the more vital regulatory dynamics of a non-job-stress group.

### Support from colleagues as resources

Moreover, a further important finding by Regehr et al. [12] was that the level of reported social support was negatively associated with to the reported level of stress all through the different stages of the experiment. This dynamic was the most pronounced for the period of measurement that was the furthest in time away from the simulated traumatic situation concerning subjective level of stress. While the main finding of repeated exposure being related to a prolonged subjective stress response, the researchers underline the importance of availability and maintenance of social support along with the policing career (Regehr et al., 2007). Essentially, the experimental condition suggested that the amelioration of the stress response did not rely on actual access to support or consolation; but rather on that support available if needed. In parallel, the phenomenon of disengagement or cynicism occur in a situation where civility from manager and/or co-worker is sparse and satisfaction with work is low (Leiter et al., 2016) this might give evidence of this event and an urgent need for a supporting atmosphere among colleagues must be put to the fore in order to protect the health of the officers.

### Varieties in post-traumatic development may undermine close relationships

In order to secure these needs in the light of trauma, mere cognitive post-traumatic growth (PTG) seemed not sufficient but needed to be complemented with active means or improved behavioral skills i.e. behavioral PTG. In turn, the results presented by Chopco et al. [16] themselves, indicated that the benefits of behavioral growth need to be further scrutinized while behavioral PTG but not cognitive PTG was positively associated with PTSD symptoms. Moreover, behavioral PTG was associated with relationship stress potentially undermining availability of social support. The researchers discussed behavioral PTG and relationship stress from the perspective of increased action orientation coping and a vicious circle deterring close relationships including communication about traumatic experiences in turn resulting in less cognitive processing and more symptoms of PTSD. This kind of process may also be confirmed by the finding that that behavioral PTG tended to increase with age in police officers.

### Stress undermines the quality of professional performance

By definition, the workload tends to be higher in high crime vulnerable areas than in low crime areas. Thereby the workload is

initially high independently of what work method is chosen when policing these areas. To temporarily leave a potential ameliorating effect from collegial support aside, stress is from experimental design known to narrow the understanding of the actions of fellow humans towards “making malicious” etc.. This tendency is termed “the fundamental attribution error”.

The attribution error phenomenon was examined by Kubota et al. [10] who found that the level of current stress was associated with the degree of making the attribution error and to a larger degree attribute action(s) to (uncivil) inherent qualities of the performer. This tendency could be explained by a three step model presented by Gilbert et al. [17] where under load (stress) the brain simplifies interpretation and excludes a demanding qualified third interpretative step of wider explanations (to actions). Moreover, the interpretations of actions (of others) relies on both higher and lower order cognitive functions, e.g. Arnsten [18] describes how higher order functions are vulnerable to stress and more or less “shut down” from stress hormones. Consequently, this leaves the individual to make interpretations using his or her lower order cognitive functions meaning a fundamental attribution error tendency also not corrected by higher order cognitive resources. These effects could also shed light on the psychological functioning of cynicism and complement the perspective of professional burnout that also includes a dimension of reduced personal professional accomplishment as described by Maslach [13].

Furthermore, in the FBI Enforcement Bulletin article Graves [19] states that “Cynicism often adversely affects officers” productivity, impacts the morale of their colleagues, and chills community relations. It also tends to breed a poor quality of life for officers and their families.” When examining the s.c. zero-tolerance work method that is based on a high frequency of citizen – police officer interactions it has been described as aggressive Green [7], Fischer [20]. By frequent interactions law enforcement overrule the tendency, otherwise often found in high crime areas, to only charge more serious deviances and accepting and letting go of not so serious deviances Klinger [5]. With a focus on police officers health the frequent interactions of zero-tolerance tend to lead to not only a higher level of stress but also to increased level of cynicism Berg et al. [11]. Research indicates also that officers working in high-criminal areas tend to show more cynicism than officers in other areas Sobol [21]. This can be understood out of a more general assumption that cynicism is associated with “tendencies toward negative, and often disparaging, behavior” Dean, Brandes & Dharwadkar [15].

### Doing good

In the work method whereby setting boundaries is balanced with building relations the more negative stressful interactions associated with for example making arrests are mixed with more positive interactions with the citizens. Building relations between individuals is in general considered as having positive effects both for the individuals as well as for the society at large.

For example, interpersonal relationship has been found to be associated with lower levels of psychological distress and the perceiving of fewer social constraints in challenging situations Danoff-Burg & Revenson [22]. It has also been shown that positive and fair interactions initiated by the police will enhance citizens' willingness to cooperate and obey police Tyler & Fagan [23]. Mazerolle et al. [24] found that even short, respectful and fair interactions between police and citizens had positive effects on the citizens' willingness to comply and cooperate with the police.

When observing the two work methods described above and their plausible direct effect on police officers and indirect effect on citizens and society it is rather clear that a mix of setting boundaries and building relations in the long run will be the most effective work method. Regarding the health of police officers, the balance between more stressful interactions in regard to for example arrests can be counterpoised by the more positive relationship building interactions thereby lowering the risk of risking development of cynicism among police officers. Moreover, a crucial side effect of this work method would be enhanced cooperation between police and citizen thereby creating a more effective policing and a safer society.

### Discussion

Weitzer & Tuch [25] argued that citizens' dissatisfaction with the crime rates in relation to their neighborhood high-crime area will influence their view of the police in a negative way. There are several findings that point to the importance of well-established relations between police and citizens and how those relations are built. The police have to build knowledge of the expectations of people in high-criminal areas Skogan [26]. There is the importance of how police are acting when interacting with citizens (procedural justice). Here respectful and polite are the leading words as citizens "tend to focus more on process than the outcome" Tyler TR [27].

As discussed earlier, police officer's ability to form trust Andersson Arntén & Archer [28] and acting with respect Andersson Arntén et al. [29] may have profound effects on the society which points to the advantage of the balanced work method. Moreover, that same balanced work method is also beneficial as the result of an interaction between law enforcement and citizens is associated with who is initiating the contact. Rosenbaum et al. [30] found that when a contact between citizens and police were of a negative nature there was a tendency of citizens being less satisfied when the contact was initiated by the citizen itself. The authors discuss this propensity from the angle that expectations rather than outcome may predict the experience. A further suggestion may be that a healing dynamic or a positive spiraling process of building resources in the vulnerable communities needs as a first step to be initiated by the police in terms of relating in a caring way.

So, when a high rank officer of the Swedish Police on national TV SVT Aktuell July 5th 2018 requested that the people living

in the vulnerable and special vulnerable areas needed to take a considerably bigger responsibility for the criminal development in their neighborhood it was done despite research results [31]. To make residents in those areas be able to take a bigger responsibility starts with

- 1) An understanding and responds to the expectations of these residents regarding police and citizen encounters;
- 2) The building of good through police initiated interactions;
- 3) Building trust through showing respect in all interactions even in situations including those characterized of setting boundaries and making arrests, and
- 4) Continuing police training to make this happen. Furthermore, this high rank officer seemed to be unaware of the conditions for health of police officers.

Chopco et al. [16] relied on Deci and Ryans' (2000), self-determination notion, and discussed traumatic experiences among police officers from the perspective of being a challenge to fundamental psychological needs of experiencing own competence, autonomy and relatedness.

In line with this, van der Werff et al. [32] found that resilience to severe stress among police officers was related to personal resources of increased structural connectivity of the brain tentatively meaning the use of higher order cognitive resources in regulating emotion. The resilient officers also rated less of a stance of acceptance when regulating cognition and emotion. Instead of accepting negative circumstances, those officers being the most resilient, showed more of genuine presence in terms of a suggested emotion and cognition regulating style of proactivity and willingness to change. The above logically promotes both resources of the local community and the health of officers. In parallel, cynicism also shines with its absence and all three fundamental human needs, not least 'caring' exemplifies relatedness in its most advanced form.

### As a conclusion the authors would like to quote Tyler (2005)

"Public consent and support of law enforcement are two of the most critical tools on a police officer's "belt." People who believe that the police are performing their duties with professionalism and integrity are more likely to obey laws and support the system by acting as witnesses, for example."

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