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Police Officer as a Victim

Introduction

Research activities of the Department of Social Sciences of the Police Academy of the Czech Republic in Prague have long been aimed at identifying and reflecting on the practical problems in the police field. The main aim and goal of our research is to **collect, analyse and scientifically interpret data on the psychological and ethical aspects of professional activity of police officers** (on the impact of sociopsychological factors on the experience and behaviour of police officers, on their performance) and **their subsequent implementation into the content of psychological preparation at the Police Academy of the Czech Republic in Prague.**

The systematic search for current phenomena and problems occurring in the practical activities of police officers, their clarification in the spirit of the latest theories, and gradual integration of research results into the teaching of police and forensic psychology is the **basic philosophy of our approach** and, at the same time, the main focus of long-term research activities at the Department of Social Sciences of the Police Academy of the Czech Republic in Prague.

These scientific and research tasks share the following common characteristics:

- The subject of research interest (formulated as research problems) consists of various **forms, structure and dynamics of social interactions**, which police officers find themselves in while performing their professional activities.
- The aim of the research is to **map the social and psychological factors** that affect the course of the interaction between police officers and citizens and their **reflection in the experience and behaviour of the participants in this interaction** (with an emphasis on the identification of factors that cause disorders in the interaction).
- An important phenomenon that affects the course of role-based interactions between police officers and citizens, which we examine in various forms and contexts in our research, is the **problem of approaching power and support** (or power and powerlessness).
- Research tasks continuously follow up on each other, i.e., when formulating new research tasks, research problems, theoretical and methodological bases, we follow up on our conclusions and findings from previous research carried out by us.
- From a methodological point of view, all research projects carried out are **mapping research projects**. When collecting empirical data from the police field, we use the methodology of quantitative and qualitative research.
- When formulating the research problems, we started from the **requirements and needs of practice**, and we directed the research findings and results **back to**

practice (in the form of publications, training, lifelong learning courses, drawing up a study course).

Research objective

The research¹ implemented by the Department of Social Sciences FBM PA CR shows that police officers and other members of the IRS get into psychologically challenging situations in the scope of their professional activities. Failure to cope with these situations results in feelings of professional failure, loss of omnipotence, lack of competence, powerlessness, experience of harm, fear of possible consequences, i.e., feelings typical also for the experience and behaviour of a victim (one who makes a sacrifice or who becomes a victim).

In the spirit of this philosophy and in close connection with the conclusions and findings of the research carried out so far, a research project of the partial scientific-research task 1/4 - **Current issues of forensic victimology** was prepared for the period 2016-2023 (or 2022).² In 2020, after the departure of the researcher in charge, the research team was expanded to include other members of the Department of Social Sciences and external co-investigators,³ and while maintaining the continuity of the research task, its focus was modified more significantly towards the needs of police practice into the form of **identification and subsequent analysis of professional interactions of police officers (IRS members) with a high probability of developing feelings (and consequently actions) typical of a victim.**

The aim is to create an empirical basis for the development of methodologies for strengthening the social competences of police officers when dealing with these interactions.⁴ We perceive social competences as a set of abilities, skills and qualifications enabling to cope with certain situations,⁵ in which the effort to define the current readiness of police officers (IRS members) for the performance of

¹ See research tasks investigated by the Department of Social Sciences PA CR: Uplatnění experienciálních přístupů v psychologické přípravě vyšetřovatelů (1996–1998), Komunikačně emergenční situace v policejní praxi (1999–2003), Agresivní projevy hromadného chování v policejní praxi (2004–2010), Specifika prožívání a chování jedinců a sociálních souborů v krizových situacích (2011–2015).

² Partial research task (1/4) - Aktuální otázky forenzní viktimologie (Current Issues of Forensic Victimology) was investigated in 2016-2020 under the leadership of doc. Čírtková, who focused the outputs on optimizing the behaviour of police officers towards all types of victims of crime. The author's conception was based on her long-term criminologically oriented interest in this issue, including the possibilities she had for its implementation (expert activity, BKB, contact with the victims).

³ Existing research team: researcher in charge Mgr. Ludmila Fonferová, Ph.D., internal members doc. JUDr. Joža Spurný, Ph.D., PhDr. Jitka Veselá, Ph.D., Ing. Viktor Červený, Ph.D., doc. David Krámský, Ph.D., PhDr. Petr Nesvadba, CSc., external member PhDr. Hedvika Boukalová, Ph.D.

⁴ HARTL, Pavel a Helena HARTLOVÁ. Velký psychologický slovník. 4th ed., 1st by Portál. Praha: Portál, 2010. 797 pages. ISBN 978-80-7367-686-5.

⁵ The usefulness of such an innovative focus of the research task is also confirmed by the knowledge from the police field and the related interest of the potential user of the research results - namely the Union of Security Forces, declared by the president of this union in discussions with the secretary of the department on 9. 3. 2020., and further from the meeting with the chief psychologist of the Police Presidium on 31. 8. 2020.

their duties is reflected as accurately and comprehensively as possible. We consider the ability to identify, address and cope with the demands of psychically and ethically demanding interactions to be a fundamental skill in shaping their social competences.

Research problem

In this research and its objectives, we assume the importance of understanding the psychological nature of these situations, the ethical dimension in them, ability to identify them in time, and mastering the means and procedures to solve them.

We have identified the research problem as follows:

Occurrence and management of victimogenous situations of a police officer (IRS member)

In the research on the identification and analysis of victimogenous situations in police officers (IRS members), 2 main research questions (MRQ) and 4 partial research questions (PRQ) were formulated.

MRQ1:

Which psychically and morally demanding interactions in the professional activities of police officers (IRS members) evoke feelings of a victim (victimogenous situation) in them, and why?

PRQ1: Which factors influence the emergence and course of these interactions, and how?

PRQ2: What is the content, the essence of the experience?

(Cognition: what they think in a given situation, physical manifestations; emotions: what they feel; behaviour: how it is manifested in their behaviour, reactions.)

PRQ3: How did they cope with the situation and its consequences?

PRQ4: What do they take away from this situation? What do they think would help them manage the situation better?

MRQ2:

Which social competences are crucial for coping with these stressful situations?

Selection and justification of the research methodology

The concept of the victim and the manifestations of its role in the experience of police officers comprise a phenomenon that is not easily and directly accessible in the respondents' statements. From the long-term monitoring of problem interactions within the supervision activities of the department of social sciences members and the partial conclusions of previous research activities, problem feelings of police officers resembling or expressing the victim's experience began to emerge in such a form that the attention in the research shifted from the police officer - victim interactions to exploring what is behind the feelings of guilt and inability disrupting the realistic self-image, contributing or directly affecting the disappearance of work motivation and appearance of feelings typical for the burnout syndrome. From the conducted research on the subject of a police officer as a victim, the issue of police service related stress and ways of coping with it prevails. In a direct connection, this issue was discussed as

an impact of the performance of police service, when there was an injury or possibly a killing.

For the purposes of research, we have **operationalised the concept of a victim as follows:**

Victim is an individual who experiences feelings of harm (physical, mental) in connection with the performance of the content of their professional (current social) role (before, during, after taking care of work situations). As a result of the resulting harm, the individual experiences (at the cognitive, emotional, and therefore conative level) feelings of helplessness, injustice, fear, anger, disappointment, disrespect, misunderstanding, social discomfort, inability (or unwillingness) to fulfil the requirements of social (or current) role in interaction, etc., which in turn can be manifested in their attitudes and behaviour.⁶

When exploring a complex area and from the point of view of the research question, we have chosen a qualitative research design. According to Hendl, the methodology⁷ of qualitative research - **thematic analysis - enables researchers not to stay on the surface** of cases, but **to make an in-depth comparison and monitor their development**, while sensitively reflecting local conditions. It focuses on the interpretation of subjective meanings together with the description of the context of actions and behaviour, while being interested in subjective theories of individuals in the given environment. The research design is based on the principles of the grounded theory (B. Glaser, A. Strauss).

The qualitative research strategy is chosen because, after the experience from the previous research of the Department of Social Sciences PA CR, it seems to be functional for the implementation of the mapping research project. Functionality is seen in **its openness** (the research plan is completed during the research), **inclusion of subjectivity** (partial identification with the studied phenomena enables access to subjective interpretations of the examined persons), **processuality** (research act as a process in which its individual elements - methods, ways of interpretation - change), **in the possibility of reacting to new moments, constellations** (reflexivity), **in the focus on the case** (description of specific victimogenous interactions).

The legitimacy of the choice of this methodology lies primarily in the essence of the concept of a police officer as a victim, in terms of the novelty of its processing, the content and the more difficult accessibility of this phenomenon. With this research approach, we want to:

1. **support the ongoing quantitative research into mentally challenging situations, namely by gaining a deeper insight from the questionnaire survey** ('handled / not handled', 'managed / not managed' stress analysis);
2. **map and become familiar with the newly conceived and difficult-to-access area;**

⁶ The list of possible feelings, emotions, thoughts will be further supplemented and refined during the research.

⁷ HENDL, Jan. *Kvalitativní výzkum: základní metody a aplikace*. 1st ed. Praha: Portál, 2005. 407 pages. ISBN 80-7367-040-2.

3. **understand the subjective experiences of individuals** and their significance in a stressful situation, in a target group of police officers, in which social, cultural and political factors influence the interaction between the individual and the environment.

Conducting the research:

The collection of empirical data, its analysis and evaluation, including the processing of research findings, is (will be) carried out within the following steps and deadlines:

Pre-research (pilot research): September 2020 - September 2021

The aim was to obtain information - data on the ability and willingness of respondents/informants to identify feelings characteristic of a victim's experience.

The source of information was a questionnaire survey and content analysis of the situation described and analysed by the informants according to the given curriculum.

Interrogation technique:

Questionnaire with open questions: An analysis of a stressful situation that 'I could not handle'. The **critical event method** was used. This data collection procedure relates to behaviour in a defined specific situation.⁸

Characteristics of the theoretical selection:

The type of sampling chosen in the pre-research stage is that of **purposive sampling**. We have chosen information-rich cases related to the purpose of our pilot study. Total number of analysed cases: 90. Examined group: students of bachelor's studies at PA CR, field B60, daily and combined forms, 1st and 2nd year.

Respondents were briefed on the intentions of the research (with the informed consent obtained) and were instructed to focus on specific aspects of the stressful situation they considered unmanaged, including feelings experienced in the stressful interaction.

All statements of respondents who provided informed consent to the research objectives were analysed. We excluded the following respondents from the sample:

- a) who withdrew their consent during the research;
- b) who did not meet the condition of police service;
- c) where the description of the uncontrolled stress situation extended to personal life;
- d) whose descriptions were brief, unsuitable for further analysis.

Data analysis:

For the organization and analysis of data, we used Atlas.ti software, version 9. In order to ensure greater validity of the research, we used the triangulation of researchers, i.e., the deployment of a wider research team.⁹ After determining the

⁸ HENDL, Jan. *Kvalitativní výzkum: základní metody a aplikace*. 1st ed. Praha: Portál, 2005. 407 pages. ISBN 80-7367-040-2. P. 187.

⁹ PhDr. Hedvika Boukalová, Ph.D., Mgr. Ludmila Fonferová, Ph.D., PhDr. Jitka Veselá, Ph.D., doc. JUDr. Joža Spurný, Ph.D.

MRQs, the research team proposed and established the **basic categories (codes)** based on which the data was processed in the pilot phase of data analysis using the **open coding** technique:

- I. Prior significant effects (PVV)
- II. Event: specific stressor type (STR)
- III. Endangered value (OH): OH_A_physical security of self / other persons, OH_B_social, OH_C_identity, OH_D_moral value, OH_E_internal and external threats, OH_F_physical x social x communication stressor
- IV. Reaction to the event: RvS_A_physical, RvS_B_emotional, RvS_C_thought, RvS_D_behaviour
- V. Reaction of other parties: RDS_2nd_3rd parties
- VI. Coping with the situation in the short term: VSKH_Emotion: coping with the situation immediately after, VSKH_Cognition: coping with the situation immediately after, VSKH_Action: coping with the situation immediately after
- VII. Coping with the situation in the longer term: VSDH_Emotion_coping with the situation in the longer term, VSDH_Thinking_coping with the situation in the longer term, VSDH_Behaviour_coping with the situation in the longer term

Data at this level of analysis indicated the need to add another separate category to the list of preliminary codes:

VIII: Defects in coping: SV_burnout syndrome, FO_victim factor

The method of working with the obtained empirical data is illustrated (in the spirit of qualitative methodology) on the following example: see example in Table 1.

Table 1: Sample data, categories and topics

Text data	Category	Topic
<i>"... a tendency to bring any complaint to the punishing the police officer. Ethically very inappropriate, but the performance of the unit depends on the number of detections, which is also not appropriate..."</i>	<i>STR_victim of the system OH_D_moral value</i>	
<i>"In the current covid situation, I came to my predefined work place. There was an isolated compartment at the site. Unfortunately, we did not have sufficient protective equipment from the employer. I told my supervisor that until they provided me with sufficient protection, I was not willing to go to the respective compartment, due to the danger to my own health and, consequently, the health of my family. Unfortunately, I was told that I had to go to the compartment, that it was my duty as an officer. So, I had no choice but to obey and go to the location. I consider</i>	<i>STR_victim of the system, STR_pressure_obe dience to authority, STR_bad decision, RVDH_cognition</i>	THE VICTIM FACTOR

<p><i>this situation to be my personal failure, as I was subsequently tested covid-positive. I was not able to achieve my goals.”</i></p>		
<p><i>“Every time this happened, I thought about getting it over with as soon as possible, someone coming in or the phone ringing and interrupting it. Since then, he started making my job uncomfortable. I lost all my bonuses, I had several interviews about doing my job wrong (which was not true). It reached such a stage that my supervisor threatened me that if I said anything to anyone, he would take my job and put me to shame in the organization.”</i></p>	<p><i>OH_D_moral value</i></p>	
<p><i>“There were bystanders watching out of curiosity and trying to disrupt the intervention with their comments. As a result, it was not possible to focus 100% to the person under the influence of drugs. The notifier/victim did not accept this and began to use his contacts in the mass media, which contacted me on a daily basis and asked about the course of the investigation, even if they were repeatedly referred to the press department. In fact, some false statements have already been published on the Internet (social networks) and I think that they will continue to do so.”</i></p>	<p><i>OH_F_physical x social x communication stressor RDS_2nd_3rd parties</i></p>	

Main research findings from this stage of research (pre-research):

- The basal and most strongly experienced stress interaction, wherein police officers experience the feelings of a victim, is the communication of tragic news (“Why me?”).
- Frequently mentioned situations from the “victimogenous” category include the interactions of “incompetent” (unfair) decisions and actions of superiors (stressors resulting from the vertical plane of communication - “Apologize to the offender so that we do not have problems.”).
- Another category of victimogenous interactions includes situations where police officers lack the feeling of ‘backing’ (feeling safe) from superiors in the cases of assessment (evaluation) of their actions by the control bodies (OVK, GIBS)
- A relatively frequent source of auto-victimogenous feelings stems from the situations of interpersonal conflicts, associated with the inability of police officers to ‘complete’ the intervention (“So as not to further aggravate the situation, I did not continue the conflict.”).

- Another type of victimogenous interaction consists of situations saturated with manifestations of bullying (by colleagues, superiors).
- The statements of informants from the pre-research confirmed the assumption that the feelings of a victim were present in their actions rather implicitly (“I may have been in the role of a victim, but I do not realize it or I do not admit it.”).

These findings play the role of descriptors in the next stages of research (which we will further flexibly supplement and specify).

The first stage of research (October 2021 - August 2022):

In the first stage, the proposed categories were identified, supplemented and dimensioned (characterised). The aim was and continues to be to explore the meanings that individuals attribute to their experiences with a specific critical stress event.

This stage of the research is characterised by focusing our attention more on the occurrence of victimogenous feelings among police officers (IRS members) by obtaining empirical data from **unstructured and semi-structured interviews** with informants who have the necessary adequate information. We will be focusing on a small number of individuals, where we expect a large amount of data, nevertheless.

The information sources created in this way will be analysed in the form of open coding. Its result will be analysed data (open codes) in the intentions of qualitative methodology as a prerequisite for their further conceptualization. We want to strengthen the validity of the obtained data by using other methods or triangulation.

The next step of the research, which is currently underway, is to formulate relationships between the monitored categories, in which we consider the concept of a police officer as a victim, its causes and consequences, and the conditions in which it occurs. This stage of axial coding links topics and concepts and may open up further questions that will need to be explored in greater depth.

The second stage of research (September 2022 - March 2023)

At this stage of the research, we plan to synthesise the obtained data and formulate conclusions and research findings on the main research issue, including the development of methodologies to strengthen competences for coping with mentally and ethically demanding interactions and training programs to increase the ability to cope with the feelings of a victim.

Conclusion

Information about experiencing the feelings of a victim by IRS members (police officers) is an issue that is still absent in the available information sources (domestic or foreign).

However, from the conclusions and findings of our research, this phenomenon appears in various forms and manifestations - **although it is not explicitly expressed** (admitted by the respondents) - and is reflected in the actions of intervening police officers or IRS members (in the form of communication disorders, aggressive manifestations caused by the existence of situational stressors, professional failure of

police officers during the intervention, dealing with psychologically and morally demanding situations, etc.).

Therefore, its occurrence, forms, social-psychological sources of its origin, types of interactions in which it appears, including the consequences in experiencing and behaviour of the participants of these interactions, has been chosen as the root problem of the research, carried out by the Department of Social Sciences in 2018-2023, aimed at deepening and strengthening of the social competences of police officers (IRS members). It is the above-mentioned 'novelty' of the tackled problem (including practical topicality, which has been confirmed to us during the implementation of the research) that places considerable demands on the theoretical and methodological elaboration of its solution. Our paper informs about the philosophy of our approach, the steps taken, methodology and methods, partial results and further progress in dealing with the research problems.

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S U M M A R Y

Can a police officer feel as a victim? If so, when and in what kind of situations? Are police officers able to admit such feelings? And how do these auto-victimogenous feelings affect the police officers' actions? By what methods and strategies is it possible to identify such feelings? Searching answers to these questions is the subject and the main goal of the research carried out by the Department of Social Sciences in the period 2018-2022 (2023). The following article informs about the nature of this research and its partial results.

Keywords: police officer, victimogenous situations, social interaction, qualitative research, thematic analysis, social competence.

R E S U M É

FONFEROVÁ, Ludmila, SPURNÝ, Joža: POLICISTA JAKO OBĚŤ?

Může policista zažívat pocity oběti? Kdy a v jakých situacích? Je ochoten si tyto pocity připustit? A jak se „viktimogenní“ pocity projeví v jeho jednání? Pomocí jakých metod a postupů lze tyto pocity identifikovat? Hledání odpovědí na tyto otázky je předmětem výzkumu katedry společenských věd na léta 2018–2022 (2023), o jehož podstatě, průběhu a dílčích výsledcích informuje následující text.

Klíčová slova: policista, viktimogenní situace, sociální interakce, kvalitativní výzkum, tematická analýza, sociální kompetence.