

# New Aspects of Health and Safety at Work in the Police Operational Environment

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## Abstract

The current paper seeks to bring in front one of the most serious emerging risks with which policemen are confronted in their work, a risk which often falls within the usual term of work-related accident, namely the results of the actions of a certain category of citizens directed against police officers involving striking or other violence, bodily injury, injuries causing death or even murder.

These kind of risks harm the physical integrity or influences health and sometimes even leads to the death of the police officer and to show this risks we took into account the statistical indicators of the main operational structures within the Romanian Ministry of Internal Affairs for the period 2017-2018, by comparison with those available at the Moldavian National Police level retrieve from open source databases. The analysis of the specific indicators of work-related accidents caused by the aggressions at the level of the police structures in the Romanian Ministry of Internal Affairs is an area rarely analyzed at national level, because the national data refer to the total of work-related accidents, being difficult to classify them according to how these accidents occurred.

**Keywords:** Human Resources, Occupational Health and Safety, Policing Management, Organizational Factors, Job Stressors, Emerging Risks, Work-Related Injuries

## Introduction

Every community has the policemen they deserve because policemen are not born and form somewhere isolated, far away from the influences, traits and morality that society itself exerts on them. Often, the community in which the policeman carries out his work is virtually his faithful reflection, giving the measure of the degree of civilization that the policeman protects, and according to how it works, it can be seen to what extent he is burdened by vices and to what extent vices and dysfunctions negatively affects the policeman working for the society.

For major stakes, criminals throw a sophisticated arsenal into the battle, meticulously built in the vast world of crime, while the policeman protects with the only shield offered by society to do its duty, namely the law, which is often superficial and indifferent to its own protection. That makes this profession one of the most difficult to practice, and those who practice it are supposed to have special qualities that cannot normally be found in most of the individuals that make up a community.

As for the accidents suffered by policemen as a result of an aggression, the interviews with police officers in the operational area have identified as main dangers: tracking and catching offenders, prosecution of suspects robbery, pursuit of offenders in road traffic, investigation and arresting of suspects, close body fight, interactions with armed perpetrators, actions related to drug detection, ongoing theft, interference with family quarrels, interactions with detainees, unprovoked attacks and also interactions with mentally unbalanced people.

Another category of work accidents relatively well represented in the case of police officers is that of accidents due to wrong actions, which can often be attributed to stress and fatigue.

Awareness of physical hazards, injuries and deaths of policemen and fear of all these dangers leads to stress. On the list of stress-specific sources those interviewed also included permanent contact with poverty, suffering and death, feelings of worthlessness, boredom and apathy, dramatic rhythm changes in the work process, the responsibility for the lives of others, the need to control emotions, bearing firearms and the fragmented nature of police work.

In addition to the above statements, Ryan (2007) identified twelve high-risk critical tasks that impact law enforcement operations: the use of force, search and seizure including arrest, pursuit and emergency vehicle operations, care, custody, and control of prisoners, property and evidence, sexual harassment or misconduct, domestic violence, selection and hiring, internal investigations, off-duty conduct, dealing with people who have mental illnesses or other emotional disturbances and special operations.

This paper investigates how aggressions against Romanian police officers have evolved over the last two years and the general finding comes from the analysis of the number of cases of aggression against police officers in the period 2017-2018 and shows that we cannot speak of a magnitude of this phenomenon for the time being, the recorded increase of the specific indicators being just contextual through the fact that there have been numerous protests against the Romanian Government between 2017 and 2019. In particular, the protest of August 10 in 2018 was marked by high levels of violence against law enforcement in comparison with other protests in 2017-2018, and led to a continuous replication of mass protests in Romania. Therefore, this study will enhance the literature by identifying and analyzing the underlying factors of aggression against police officers. Moreover, the empirical evidence from the Romanian police departments will help decision-makers to analyze the phenomenon to include necessary changes while implementing policies.

## **Literature Review**

Taking into consideration the nature of his profession, the policeman directly interacts with the society, having the most important role in suppressing the manifestations and deviant tendencies of an individual or group of individuals that the same society is often rising to the surface. Of course, there are always moments of true magic when the policeman turns abnormal states of violence, clutter and insecurity into normality, order and safety.

It is an absolute and well-known truth that policemen interact with dangerous individuals who would like to hurt them and all police officers recognize that kind of risks, but there are also other hidden dangers that the policeman faces when they accept this job.

Dealing with some harsh aspects of the community cause complex processes and changes in terms of working conditions, along with the other types of dangers present in the police work environment, so it requires a new management approach to occupational health

and safety within the police organization to enable police managers to take account of the principles of health and safety at all operational levels and for all types of operational activities, by transforming them into appropriate measures of individual protection at regular time intervals.

There is an increasing number of scientific studies regarding policemen as victims, (Brandl and Strohshine, 2012; Kent, 2010; Wilson and Zhao, 2008; Kaminski, 2008; Batton and Wilson, 2006; Kaminski, Jefferis and Gu, 2003; Darwish, 2016). Although extensive scientific research has been carried out in the US, Australia and UK on the risks of police aggression, in-depth searches on the Internet have revealed minimal research on this issue in most European countries, so that while statistical data are available for the indicated countries, few European police organizations have provided free data that can be analyzed.

Policemen are three times more likely to have non-fatal injuries at the workplace than all other workers, and if wounds from the attacks of violent citizens resulting in deaths among police officers are statistically known, however, data on non-fatal injuries are almost non-existent in databases (Tiesman, 2018). So, studies of attacks against policemen that resulted in minor injuries for them are less common, although this type of injury is more widespread and costs police agencies and governments, large amounts of money and other resources like lost work time, medical care, reduced-duty capacity, legal and psychological counselling.

Violence against police officers is a complicated issue and only an in-depth theoretical approach that takes into account individual, contextual and social factors will be useful in explaining such negative events.

For example, according to Kaminski (2010), only foot pursuits alone resulted in minor injuries for policemen such as bruises and sprains as well as more serious injuries such as fractures and human bites. Very often suspects resist arrest, being passive or active in assaulting the policeman. Garner and Maxwell (2002) show that offenders use physical force during an arrest in about 1 in 6 situations. Regarding the weapons used for attacking policemen, the most frequently type of weapons used include blunt objects, knives and body parts like the head, hands and feet (Brandl, 1996).

Physical force is the most common cause of injury, followed by contact with body fluids, impact with solid bodies, blunt instruments or pointed objects. Policemen are also at an increased risk of assault when investigating suspicious situations, robbery and domestic disturbance (Ellis et al., 1993). In such cases, firearms are rarely used for attacking police officers in European countries, but in other countries where the law of possession of a firearm is more permissive, police officers find themselves in a great danger of being assaulted especially when attending unpredictable domestic disputes or engaging in traffic pursuits.

However, police officers are exposed simultaneously to a great deal of risk factors, taking into consideration the wide range of tasks and responsibilities they have to perform and the work environments where they do their job. Traffic is a huge threat to policemen, in the first place for those responsible for traffic control.

Patrol officers spend a great deal of time driving the police car or the police motorcycle, which increases the risk of becoming a victim of an accident. The increased risk comes from driving in emergency response or police pursuits and on top of their own driving, many police agents work outside on busy streets, whether at scenes of traffic crashes or traffic stops, they are in extremely vulnerable positions and risk getting hit intentionally or unintentionally by drivers.

Of course, the nature of intensive police training might cause injury or even death among policemen, having a relatively high potential for injury when incur during shooting practice, defensive tactics and physical training.

Also, according to some studies, there are two primary components that contribute to significant health issues for policemen: shift work and stress. Prolong, irregular working hours and rotating shifts encourage poor sleeping, eating habits and fatigue. When policemen overwork and under sleep, taking into account also the fact that the police officer is already working in a stressful environment, these elements could have a negative side effect which can be translated in an increased risk of being assaulted, injured or killed by a suspect, inattentive motorists or in training accidents.

In the UK, up to 14% of officers are assaulted each year, most commonly constables or sergeants (Budd, 1999; Brown, 1994; Mayhew et al., 1989).

The data source for assaults on UK police officers is the police recorded crime series which are published within the Crime in England and Wales, release by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). The main key figures for the period 2017-2018 shows that for the period of 2017-2018 there were over 26.000 assaults on police officers in England and Wales of which: 18.114 were crimes of assault without injury on a constable recorded across all police forces, an increase of 10% compared with 16.536 in the previous year and 8.181 crimes of assault with injury on a constable recorded across all police forces. There were also just over 250 assaults involving injury reported to force health and safety teams by Police Community Support Officers based on data from 41 of the 43 police forces in England and Wales.

In the US, assaults resulting in homicide is common among policemen doing undercover work, conducting drug raids, making arrests, pursuing speeding offenders or attending domestic disputes (Clarke and Zak, 1999; Knight, 1999; Flannery, 1996).

According to data retrieved from The National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund, in the US there have been 61.995 assaults on police officers in 2017, an increase of 5% compared with the previous year and there were 158 policemen killed in the line of duty in 2018, a decrease of 7% compared with the previous year. An average of 158 deaths per year results from the analysis of data available between 2009 and 2018.

### **Database and Methodology of Research**

For this paper, we collected data regarding cases of violence against policemen at the level of the Romanian and Moldovan Police for the period 2017-2018, . The paper analyzes the number of cases seen an indicatorsreported by the general police inspectorates within the Romanian Ministry of Internal Affairs, some assessments made being corroborated with the particular aspects resulting from the evaluation of the cases of aggression at the level of other operational institutions within the ministry. Also, data sets are presented both separately and cumulatively.

The differences in value between years can be attributed, on the one hand, to the lack of staff, and on the other hand, by the larger number of events to which the police structures ensured intervention in the field of public order and emergency situations, facts which represented for police personnel a greater risk for being subjected to violent actions.

The analysis of the cases was fully exploited, which provided a basis for a qualitative assessment, defining some of the vulnerabilities that have competed to increase the phenomenon and, implicitly, negatively influenced the police personnel's authority.

## Results and Discussion

The year 2018 may be characterized by the radicalization of a part of the population, and in relation to civic activism, which has increased the number and magnitude of protests, with a few highlights during the analyzed period, namely daily protests against the President of Romania, protests against the Romanian Government, nationwide campaigns for collecting signatures to stop changes in the criminal law, etc. At the same time, the border zone has been extensively tested by criminal entities, which has seen an increase in the diversity of modus operandi and, at the same time, an increase in the level of violence among people with criminal concerns related to cross-border criminality, such as the traffic of migrants or smuggling of products or cigarettes.

In 2018, at the level of the entire police institutions, there were 378 cases of violent actions against policemen compared to 337 cases in 2017, representing an increase of 12.1%. In these situations 575 officials were involved, compared to 473 officials in 2017, representing an increase of 21.5%.

Out of the total of 378 cases of aggression, 139 cases had no material object, as they were committed through verbal threat, and 226 cases were committed by physical aggression.

Overall, from the quantitative data analysis of 2018, the figures show that the number of violent actions committed against police personnel increased, with an upward trend registered in previous years, in the context in which 378 cases were registered at the level of operational police institutions, with 12.1% more than in 2017, when 337 cases were recorded. Also, the total number of policemen subjected to violent actions was 575 and increased by 21.5% compared to 2017. As in previous years, it seems that most of the cases of violence were directed against police officers of public order and were registered within the Romanian Police and the Romanian Gendarmerie.

Table 1

*Descriptive statistics. Total cases of staff aggression in the Romanian Ministry of Internal Affairs*

| Year | Cases | Variations | Staff | Variations |
|------|-------|------------|-------|------------|
| 2017 | 337   | +12.1%     | 473   | +21.5%     |
| 2018 | 378   |            | 575   |            |

Regarding the Romanian Police, the number of violent actions against policemen registered at the level of public order structures increased by 7.7% compared to 2017. Thus, 209 cases occurred in 2018 compared to 194 cases in 2017. Aggressions against police personnel were committed during current patrolling activities, respectively 86 cases in 2018 against 111 cases in 2017, a decrease of 22.5%; investigation and intervention in 39 cases in 2018 compared to 2017 when there were 135 cases, a decrease of 71% being recorded; missions for controlling road traffic 32 cases in 2018 compared to 36 cases in 2017, representing a decrease of 11%.

By comparison, at the level of the Romanian Gendarmerie, out of the total of 66 cases of aggression registered in 2018, almost 1.5 times more than in 2017, 17 of them were committed during the daily patrolling activity, 17 as a result of the missions resulting from emergency calls 112 and 17 during the activities of ensuring and restoring public order. The remaining cases of violent actions directed against the gendarmes, namely 10 cases, were committed during the maintenance of public order and 5 cases during other activities like

assuring legal mandates for bringing offenders to justice and cooperation with the police. The data are quantitatively influenced by the protest against the Romanian Government in august 2018, when 9 cases of violent actions against 75 gendarmes were reported during the mission.

Table 2

*Descriptive statistics. Romanian Police vs Romanian Gendarmerie staff aggressions*

| Year | Cases (Romanian Police) | Variations | Cases (Romanian Gendarmerie) | Variations | Ratio (Police vs Gendarmerie) |
|------|-------------------------|------------|------------------------------|------------|-------------------------------|
| 2017 | 194                     | +7.7%      | 99                           | +21.5%     | 1.95                          |
| 2018 | 209                     |            | 66 (+9*)                     |            | 3.16                          |

Notes: \*The 9 cases were not included in the analysis because the results of the investigations are not yet finalized.

Depending on the place the incident occurred, most cases were recorded in the urban area by more than 65% during public order missions, a trend similar to those recorded in 2015 and 2016.

For the sixth year, the number of acts of aggressions against police personnel is relatively high. Thus, of the total number of policemen injured, 77.2% participated in patrol missions, 5% were patrolling with the gendarmes and 4.8% carried out individual tasks.

Taking into consideration this facts, compared to 2015 and 2016, the situation in 2017 is the same, respectively, there is a an inverse ratio concerning the above-mentioned indicators. Thus, while the number of policemen who acted individually, accompanied by gendarmes or local public guards declined, the number of patrol missions increased by 11.7% compared to 2017 and by 36% compared to 2016. There is also an increase in violence in the case of policemen carrying out specific activities accompanied by border policemen, 5 cases in 2018 compared to 2017, when no cases of this kind have been recorded.

Firearms were used by policemen very rarely, so out of the total number of violence cases against police officers recorded in the year 2018, in only 5.3% cases firearms were legally used, similar trends being recorded in the years of 2015 (7.3%), 2016 (6.8%) and 2017 (4.6%). Regarding the gendarmes, out of the total of 66 violent incidents against gendarmes, in 91.3% of the cases the gendarmes did not use firearms to stop the aggression in legal situations, but in 72.7% of the cases they used the specific equipment like rubber batons, irritant-lacrimogenic sprays and handcuffs.

In the Romanian Police, out of the total cases registered in 2018, , in 48.3% of them (101 cases), the aggressors were intoxicated with alcohol, most violent acts manifested through the use of physical force (50%) or in the form of verbal threat (40.4%), compared to previous years, in 2018 decreases were recorded of 4% - physical force and respectively 9% for verbal threats.

Table 2

*Descriptive statistics. Romanian Police vs Moldovan Police staff aggressions*

| Year | Cases (Romanian Police) | Variations | Cases (Moldovan Police) | Variations | Ratio (Romanian Police vs Moldovan Police) |
|------|-------------------------|------------|-------------------------|------------|--|
| 2017 | 194                     | +7.7%      | 223                     | -73%       | 0.86                                       |
| 2018 | 209                     |            | 60                      |            | 3.48                                       |



Regarding the Police of the Republic of Moldova in 2017, compared to the previous year, the aggression cases against police officers dropped by 13.5%, with 223 cases of aggression involving 268 police officers. In 2018, there were 60 cases of aggression against 93 police officers, with a drastic decrease over 73% in the number of police officers who have been subjected to violence by citizens. This radical change took place amid the 2016 as a result of tightening the specific law for sanctioning the acts of violence against police officers.

Taking into account also the interviews with police officers and analyzing the figures obviously results a strong relation between the existing at a given moment of a tension in society, a tension that negatively affects precisely those who have to protect the society.

Carrying out a comprehensive analysis requires a systemic assessment of all generating conditions and circumstances, as well as a concrete examination of all objective and subjective factors, including perceptual analysis of policemen and civilian population. Thus, the most accurate presentation of these aspects that compete with the emergence of this criminal phenomenon would lead to the establishment of complex measures to reduce the crime in the field.

From the interviews taken, it results that the daily activity of the policemen is one that involves great risks, the violent actions against them being implicitly one of these risks. Every policeman working in a operational unit can interact daily with a few dozen citizens and the activity of the operational units is largely coercive, so it is natural for them to encounter sometimes aggressive opposition or violence. Also, the policeman is aware that his mere presence, as a representative of authority, will not in any case impose the respect and compliance of those interacting with him, in the same way he considers it unrealistic to expect the support of peaceful citizens. Most of the cases involved the participation of violent people, who consume alcohol on a regular basis, who resort to crimes against police officers in an attempt to avoid sanctions for the offenses committed. Policemen consider that when they are better professionally trained, the number and severity of violent actions directed against them will diminish, but this will also be achieved as a positive reflex in the general improvement of the police activity.

As highlighted in the interviews taken, some actions should take into account the re-evaluation of the regulatory framework by updating and completing procedures for police actions including the experience of police forces in other countries regarding stopping offenders, legitimating, handcuffing, extracting, using other means of preventing or constraining, using firearms under legal conditions etc. Moreover, equipping with more effective means of preventing and constraining, such as electric shock devices and non-lethal weapons, would of course be useful, but with the enforcement of national legislation.

Also, intensive and effective physical training and self-defense programs coupled with the use of body-cams would be useful for protecting police officers.

Policemen take into account psychological counseling those most frequently exposed to high-risk activities, in order to acquire the ability to control their own emotions (fear, anger) and hesitations that can lead to self-victimization.

Another important aspect requested by those questioned would be the use of lessons-learned and by analyzing the situations that occurred in the past, it would be useful to create databases with known people who frequently have behavioral disorders, drink frequently and are becoming aggressive, including those with a history of violent actions against police officers, data that could be considered by police officers acting on the ground, in order to increase their attentiveness and readiness towards these violent citizens.

## Conclusions

The aim of this study was to provide questions and further research about the relationship between policemen, citizens and the causes that lead to the occurrence of such reprehensible acts within society.

The results are showing us that indeed occupational injury is a major health issue and is regarded as a particularly important safety problem in the police organization as it contributes substantially to the image of the institution. Also it has a great impact on the policemen's health and security and has a negative impact on the costs of the organization especially resulting from increased medical expenses and loss of workdays.

Considering these consequences, it is important that police organizations engage in preventive initiatives to mitigate the risk of occupational accidents.

The existence of these kind of acts of violence against policemen creates the prospect of formulating strong questions, each of which requires analysis and hypothesis on the causality and possibility of initiating appropriate measures to mitigate such negative events.

One of the questions would be the reason why some citizens resort to acts of aggression against police officers and what this means for the perception of the institution's level of authority. Another question we should be asking is to what extent the police workers involved have contributed to creating these tensions and what trigger them to happening. In other words, under the same conditions, we must ask whether another policeman would have been equally and in the same extent assaulted or whether the events would have taken place in the same way. One last question must take into consideration in what extent police workers can do to limit the effects of aggression, to control the tensions or the conflicting situations in order to exert their duties, but also to reduce the risk of being exposed to the harmful actions of the aggressors' intentions.

Starting from the causality of committing, the first starting point in research should involve economic, social and cultural causes, those common to romanian specific criminality and being close to an area over which the police institutions do not have means to influence it in a certain sense.

The second starting point could take into account the organizational factors related to the number of personnel, technical means, training, skills, tactical procedures, mission management, attitudes and perceptions regarding the social and organizational environment of the activity, self-perceptions about the role in the society, etc. This latter category is an area where police institutions have the competence and, to a great extent, the resources to determine the meaning of causal actions, but, as in the case of the first category, its effects are not specifically reflected in the evolution of stopping the violent actions against own personnel, but in the overall efficiency of everyday police work.

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