Police Personality: Need for a New Approach

Bushara Bano, Aligarh Muslim University, India
Parvaiz Talib, Aligarh Muslim University, India

ABSTRACT

Police personnel are often termed as authoritarian, cynical, psychopathological, rude and submissive. On the other hand, they are said to be responsible, determined and dedicated. People have conflicting stereotypes for personality traits of police. The paper analyses the concept of police personality. The paper investigates on the basis of qualitative research whether personality of police is same as other non-police persons or they possess different personality profiles. The paper also critically analyses the contribution of predispositional and socialization factors in the development of working personality within police population. The findings reveal that the phenomenon is not well investigated by the existing studies. The paper suggests the researchers to investigate the concept of police personality more extensively as the available data is ambiguous in nature.

Keywords: Personality Profile, Police Personality, Predisposition, Socialization, Stereotypes

"...There are officers who are ‘experts at turning parking tickets into riots’ as well as officers who can arrest extremely dangerous suspects and ‘leave em laughing’. To say we know both types of officers exist, however, is not to say that we know anything systematic about their personal characteristics or methods.” (Braithwaite, 1996, p. 2)

INTRODUCTION

People have conflicting stereotypes about police personnel and their personality traits. Some are convinced that police officers are responsible, dedicated guardians of society, while others are certain that police officers are authoritarian individuals who are prone to abusing their authority (Yarmey, 1990). The assumptions underlying both of the stereotypes are that police officers as a group are characterized by the same personality traits. This assumption is also reflected in the traditional approach to studying police personality, which postulates there is a “model police personality” that characterizes police officers and distinguishes them from other members of the population (Leftowitz, 1975).

Really, is it so? Do police officers possess certain personality dispositions that make them unique compared to other population? This question has been the subject of an extensive line of research. But, the research has yet not found the exact answer for the question. Several researchers have found evidence of a so-called police personality, while other researchers have
failed to detect personality differences between the police and the non-police population. Also, some researchers have established that officers differ from each other in terms of job performance, and that personality differences predict such variations in performance. This indicates personality differences between officers.

The personality differences of police officers from rest of the population are reflected in many ways, such as, coping strategies officers use to deal with stress. Police officers usually use humor and keeping an emotional distance from themselves and stressful events (Harr et al., 1999). Often, it has been seen that police officers tend to or appear disinterested in the suffering of others. Sometimes, public wrongly assume that this attitude of appearing disinterested indicates that the police are uncaring of society. But this is not always the case. This attitude of police makes them less stressed. The isolated attitude of police officers is due to the police subculture. Police subculture is a crucial concept in the explanation of police behavior and attitudes (Westley, 1970). This police subculture characterizes the public as hostile, not to be trusted, and potentially violent. This outlook of the public requires secrecy, mutual support and unity on the part of the police. The police culture or subculture leads to police officers to the traits what scholars call the police personality or traits common to most officers. Scholars have reported that this personality is thought to include such traits as authoritarianism, suspicion, hostility, insecurity, conservatism and cynicism (Lundman, 1966).

**THE POLICE PERSONALITY: MYTH OR REALITY**

Personality is the unique organization of characteristics that define an individual and determine that person’s pattern of interaction with the environment (Kleinmuntz, 1982). As discussed in introduction, the concept of police personality refers to the question as to whether there is evidence for describing policemen as a somewhat homogeneous group, differing psychologically from the general population and/or other occupational groups (Lefkowitz, 1975).

The view that all police officers have similar personality traits has been primarily explained by predispositional and socialization models (Burbeck et al., 1985). Predispositional model says that certain types of individuals are attracted to the field of police work. While, the socialization model postulates that strong pressures affect individuals after they become police officers, thereby modifying and shaping their personality attributes (McNamara, 1999).

**ARE THEY BORN LIKE THAT OR IS IT THE JOB?**

The researches done by Edward Thibault, Lawrence M. Lynch, and R. Bruce McBride found that in most studies the police working personality derives from the socialization process in the police academy, field training, and patrol experience (Thibault et al., 1985). John Van Maanen also stressed that the police personality is developed through the process of learning and doing police work. According to the psychological paradigm, police officers share certain characteristics in advance that make them choose a career within law enforcement (Vastola, 1978). The statement “cops are born and not made” shows the psychological paradigm better (Bonifacio, 1991, p. 147). As people possess certain stable personality characteristics that endure throughout life (Kappeler et al., 1994), the personality characteristics that officers entail before they join the police, form the basis of the police personality.

Researchers supporting the sociological paradigm perceive the police personality to be a person resulted from occupational socialization. It was found from this point of view that the demands inherent in the work as a police officer shape the personality of individual officers (Twersky-Glasner, 2005; Vastola, 1978). Occupational socialization is the process by which newcomers become full members of organizations or groups (Parker et al., 2004). During the process of socialization, an indi-
Related Content

**Economics of Soil Fertility Management Practices in Nigeria**
Ibukun Joyce Ogwu, Olubunmi Abayomi Omotesho and Abdulazeez Muhammad-Lawal (2018). *Food Systems Sustainability and Environmental Policies in Modern Economies* (pp. 236-263).
[www.igi-global.com/chapter/economics-of-soil-fertility-management-practices-in-nigeria/200101?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/chapter/economics-of-soil-fertility-management-practices-in-nigeria/200101?camid=4v1a)

**Some Considerations Regarding the Social Responsibility of Entrepreneurs in the European Union**
[www.igi-global.com/article/some-considerations-regarding-social-responsibility/77340?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/article/some-considerations-regarding-social-responsibility/77340?camid=4v1a)
The Role of Local Wisdom-Based e-Eco-Innovation to Promote Firms’ Marketing Performance

Use of Mobile Device Apps in Product Design
[www.igi-global.com/article/use-mobile-device-apps-product/80237?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/article/use-mobile-device-apps-product/80237?camid=4v1a)