

Assaults on Police Officers in Slovenia – The Profile of Perpetrators and Assaulted Police Officers

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In the paper, the authors present the results of studying the circumstances of assaults on police officers in Slovenia, with an emphasis on the means of assault, place, time, area of work, and the presence of third persons in committing the crime of assaulting a police officer. The authors evaluated 363 criminal charges submitted to district prosecutors' offices in Slovenia for 2005 and 2006. A total of 531 police officer victims, of whom 514 or 96.8% were men and 17 or 3.2% women, aged between 21 and 50, were registered. Most of the attacked police officers have 5 years of active service. The longer the number of years in service, the lower the risk level, i.e. the rate of potential victims decreases. The proportion of assaults on police officers are most frequent at the smaller police directorates, Nova Gorica and Novo mesto, where every 5th–6th police officer was assaulted, followed by the (former) Slovenj Gradec Police Directorate, where every 9th–10th police officer was assaulted, preceding the largest police directorate in Slovenia, the Ljubljana Police Directorate. Based on the analyses, some proposals for managing the assaults on police officers are discussed in the conclusion of the paper. The proposals are focused on the appropriate composition of patrols, the appropriate technical equipment and the use of protective means at work, and on psychosocial support for police officers; if they have been assaulted in their official duties.

Keywords: police, assault on police, coercive measures, Slovenia

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1 Introduction

Violence against police officers is a widely held concern for the law enforcement profession (Kaminski, Jefferis, & Gu, 2003). Prior research into this problem has focused almost exclusively on individual, situational, or ecological correlates at the city or higher levels of aggregation, rather than at the neighbourhood level, potentially masking important local variation. The aim of this paper is to study assaults on police officers based on criminal charges brought to the District State Prosecutor's Office.

The term assault on police officers will include criminal acts defined in the Penal Code (Kazenski zakonik RS [KZ], 2004): obstructing an official act or revenge on an official person, assault on an official person when performing tasks of security, collaboration in a group which prevents an official performing an official act, and incitement to rebellion. All of these forms of assault on police officers were defined as crimi-

nal acts in the chapter *Criminal acts against public order and peace* (KZ, 2004)³. The victims may be police officers and other officials performing official duties under powers conferred on them by law or the regulations issued pursuant thereto (KZ, 2004: Article 126). The analysis will focus only on criminal acts in which police officers were injured.

Both the domestic and foreign literature state that assaults on police officers are becoming more frequent. In 2013, the FBI collected assault data for the entire country from 11,468 law enforcement agencies that employed 533,895 police officers. These officers provided service to more than 247 million persons, or 78.2 percent of the nation's population. Law enforcement agencies reported that 49,851 officers were assaulted while performing their duties in 2013. The rate of officer assaults in 2013 was 9.3 per 100 sworn officers (FBI, 2013).

Authors commonly identify: (a) which group of police officers are most at risk, (b) when is the most critical time for an assault to take place, (c) in which official acts of assault occur, and (d) the most common places where assaults happen (Bebbington, 2010; Brezovar, 2012; Čas, 1989; Flajšman,

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³ At the time of analysis, the Penal Code from 2004 was valid. In 2008, the new Penal Code was adopted. The new penal code form 2008 did not introduced any significant changes in chapter of criminal acts against public order and peace.

2010; Gomboc, 1996; Mužič, 1995; Novak, 1996; Podjed, 2008; Strmec, 2008; Vidmar, 1993). Ignjatović (2006) has extended these approaches to study assaults on police by interviewing suspects or those convicted of these criminal acts in order to determine the reasons why they decided to assault the police officer.

Police officers were most often victims of assault while performing tasks in the field of road transport, in maintaining peace and order, and investigating criminal acts (Pinizzotto, Davis, & Miller, 2000). Brown (1994) reported findings from the UK that assaults on police officers occurred in several different situations. In diminishing order of the number of incidents, police officers were assaulted when dealing with a public disorder, dealing with disputes, carrying out traffic stops, carrying out foot stops, attempting to detain criminals, taking part in organized operations, and dealing with prisoners and other members of the public on police premises. In the USA for the fifteenth consecutive year, the largest percentage of assaults on officers (15.1 percent) took place from 00:01 to 02:00. The smallest percentage of assaults on officers (2.5 percent) occurred between 06:01 and 08:00 (FBI, 2013). Of all officers who were assaulted in 2013, 31.2 percent were responding to disturbance calls (domestic disputes, bar fights, etc.), 16.3 percent were attempting other arrests, and 12.8 percent were handling, transporting, or maintaining custody of prisoners (FBI, 2013).

As a means of assault, perpetrators most commonly use physical force, tools or weapons and means of transport. In the UK, Brown (1994) found that almost one-third of all assaults occurred before police officers had the opportunity to speak with assailants, and one-fifth of all assaults occurred when police officers tried to calm or pacify individuals. One-quarter of all injuries were sustained when police officers attempted to restrain suspects at the time of arrest, and one-quarter of all injuries were sustained after an assailant had been initially detained. Seventeen percent of police officers suffered serious injuries. Weapons were used primarily in direct, immediate attacks on police officers, often to escape situations where police officers had surprised offenders involved in committing a crime. In 83 percent of the assaults, police officers felt that additional equipment would not have helped them prevent or deal with an assault (Brown, 1994).

In the FBI (2013) analysis, 79.8 percent of officers who were assaulted in the line of duty were attacked with personal weapons (e.g., hands, fists, or feet), 4.5 percent of the officers were assaulted with firearms, and 1.8 percent of the officers were assaulted with knives or other cutting instruments. The remaining 13.9 percent of the officers were assaulted with other dangerous weapons. To deter assaults, police officers use coercive measures, usually physical force and their stick, handcuffing

and binding, gas spray, and firearms. In the criminal acts examined, injuries are sustained by the attackers and police officers.

2 Methodology

For the purposes of the study, we have set up a data assembler on criminal charges filed for assaults on police officers that occurred in 2005 and 2006, and was made to organize the data obtained from the official records of the police and the subsequent statistical processing. The assembler contained 40 variables for each case of assault.

We include those cases in the analysis where a criminal charge against one attacker was filed and where there has been one police officer victim. In cases where the number of attackers and number of victims were different, we organized data in such way that we entered individual combinations, which allowed subsequent statistical analysis. The data assembler consisted of three parts, namely:

- a) information on the perpetrator/s,
- b) information on the police officer/s,
- c) information on the criminal act.

In setting up the data assembler, we had to consider the coding system, based on how the police enter the data from filed criminal charges in an official database. In the assembler, we used the same terminology in variables as used by the police.

3 Results

In following section, the results of analysis are presented, divided on profile of perpetrators of assault on police officers, followed by characterization of assaulted police officers and description of the situation where the assault occurred.

3.1 The Profile of Perpetrators/Attackers

The total number of police attackers was 436, of whom 31 (7.1 percent) were women and 405 (92.9 percent) were men. This number applies to charged attackers and known perpetrators. The age of the attackers is between 14 and 61 years, with women attackers between 16 and 68 years of age. The average age of male attackers was 29.4 years, and of women 28.2 years. The majority of attackers are 23 years (7.1 percent) of age, followed by those 21 years (6.9 percent), 17 years (6.0 percent), 19 years (5.7 percent), 24 years (5.3 percent) and 22 years (4.6 percent) of age. Attackers younger than 25 account for a total 39.7 percent share of the attackers. Age groups are shown in figure number 1.

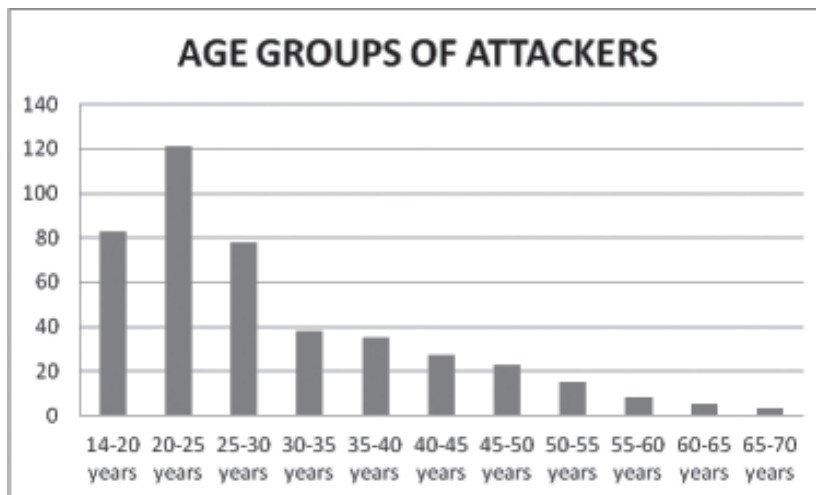


Figure 1: Distribution of attackers of police officers in each age group

The vast majority (416 or 95.4 percent) of the attackers are Slovenians, followed by 7 citizens from Bosnia and Herzegovina (1.6 percent), 5 citizens from Croatia (1.1 percent) and 3 citizens from Serbia and Montenegro (0.7 percent). Two or 0.4 percent of the attackers were Hungarian citizens, and one each (0.2 percent) was from Algeria, Moldova and Bulgaria. Among women, 30 were Slovenian and one was a Bulgarian citizen. Among all foreign attackers, a total number of 15 (75 percent) are citizens of the former republics of Yugoslavia.

Data about level of education is incomplete. Information about the level of education is available for only 151 or 33.6 percent of attackers. On this basis, we find that most attackers have a low education level – primary school (70.2 percent) – followed by attackers with secondary education (25.2 percent), then higher education (2.6 percent), and the rest have a college degree or higher. There is exactly the same number of entered data on the occupation of attackers. Most assaults were committed by skilled workers, specifically in 48 cases (10.7 percent), followed by secondary school students in 41 cases (9.1 percent), unskilled workers in 22 cases (4.9 percent), auto body mechanics in 7 cases (1.6 percent), students in 6 cases (1.3 percent), butchers in 5 cases (1.1 percent), waiters in 4 cases (0.9 percent) and drivers in 4 cases (0.9 percent). We have data on the occupations of attackers for 1/3 of the cases, but they still do not give a complete picture.

Data on marital status are available for only 36.2 percent of attackers, and we found that 125 (76.7 percent) of them are single, 27 (16.6 percent) married, 8 (4.9 percent) of them live in non-marital partnerships, and 3 (1.8 percent) are divorced. Given the fact that most attackers are aged 23 years, data on

marital status is not so important. A total of 53 offenders (12.2 percent) were treated for repeat criminal acts, while the remaining 382 offenders (87.8 percent) were not reoffenders.

Assaults were committed for the first time by 88.3 percent, for the second time by 10.3 percent and for the third time by 1.4 percent. Looking at recidivism for offenses against public order in the same subjects, we find that 373 (85.7 percent) of attackers are not reoffenders for offenses against public order. The remaining 62 attackers (14.3 percent) are reoffenders including in offenses against public order.

In reviewing the number of attackers and police officers, we see that in 55.5 percent of cases the ratio was one attacker to one police officer. In 4.1 percent of cases, the ratio was two attackers to one police officer and in 1.6 percent of cases, the ratio was three attackers to one police officer. In 22 percent of cases, the ratio was one attacker to two police officers. In 61.1 percent of cases, the police officer was alone during the assault, including in cases where there were multiple attackers. In 29.4 percent of cases there were two police officers at the time of the assault, in 3 percent of cases there were three police officers and in 1.3 percent of cases there were four police officers. There were more than four police officers at the time of the assault in the same percentage of case. From the above, we see that the possibility of assaults on police officers decreases with increasing numbers of police officers in the procedure.

During assaults on police officers 31 attackers were injured (7.1 percent), and 405 (92.9 percent) of the attackers were not injured, and all injuries were classified as light (not

serious) injuries. There were no severe or serious injuries to attackers in the 2005-2006 period. Most injuries occurred in the use of coercive measures, namely physical force, followed by an expert hold combined with the use of means of restraint and physical force – an expert throw in combination with the use of means of restraint – followed by use of means of restraint, use of stick and expert hold with a professional punch as coercive measure. In deterring assaults, police officers used only lenient coercive measures, namely physical force (expert hold, expert blow and expert throw), means of restraint and stick. Two warning shots were also used.

To summarize the finding of our analysis, the profile of the attacker is as follows:

- a) male;
- b) he will carry out the assault alone;
- c) will be around 23 years old;
- d) Slovenian citizen;
- e) worker with lower education (primary school);
- f) single;
- g) will commit assault for the first time;
- h) will have clean record of violations against public order and peace;
- i) will not be under the influence of alcohol or drugs;

j) will assault with physical force (choking, slapping by hand etc.), and

k) in the assault and deterrence of assault he will not be injured.

3.2 The Profile of Assaulted Police Officers

During the period in question there were a total of 531 police officer victims, of whom 514 (96.8 percent) were men and 17 (3.2 percent) were women, between the ages of 21 to 50. In the analysed period from 2004 to 2005, the most assaulted group of police officers were 25 to 30 years of age. Exactly the same considerations also apply to our sample, if we would group the assaulted police officers into five year age brackets, but we find a more complete picture if we use 1-year increments, as presented in figure 2. Most assaults were on police officers who were between 25 and 29 years of age. There is an interesting trend in the number of assaults on police officers 21 to 22, followed by a fall and a rise of up to 25 years of age. Depending on the method of education and training of police officers in the Secondary Police School, we can conclude that officers are about 21 years old when they finish school and internship, and start working independently.

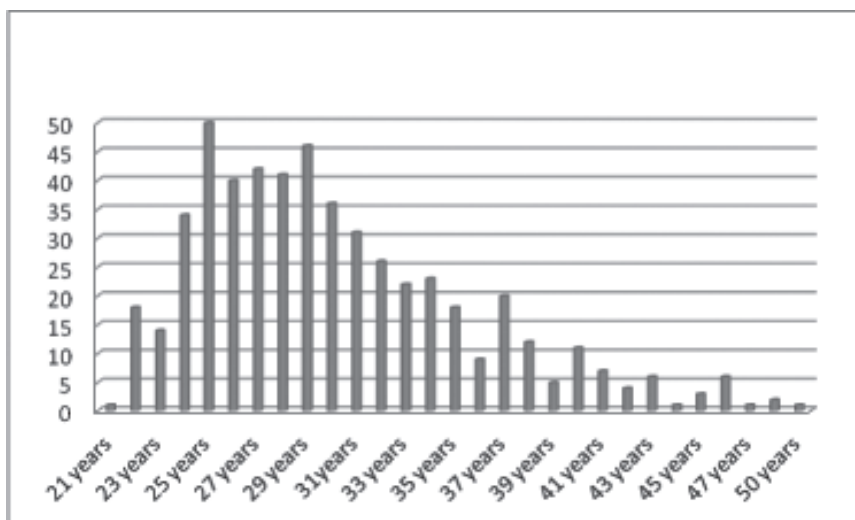


Figure 2: Age of assaulted police officers

The longer police officers work the lower their risk of being a potential victim. This can be explained by the fact that police officers with more years of service are promoted to other jobs and thus somehow out of operational work (permanent duty, assistant commander etc.). The analysis revealed that the first

five years of work are a critical period for becoming a victim of assault. In Table 1, the distribution and the frequency of assaults among police directorates in Slovenia are presented (11 PDs + UPD GPD at the time of the analysis).

Table 1: Number of assaults by Police Directorates

Police Directorate	Assaulted for the 1 st time	Assaulted for the 2 nd time	Assaulted for the 3 rd time	Assaulted for the 4 th time
Celje	40	10	2	0
Maribor	54	9	0	0
Murska Sobota	21	5	3	0
Slovenj Gradec	23	2	0	0
Krško	16	2	0	0
Novo mesto	56	16	3	0
Ljubljana	87	19	12	0
Kranj	31	2	0	0
Postojna	13	0	0	0
Koper	27	2	0	0
Nova Gorica	48	5	9	4
Uniformed Police Directorate at GPD	8	0	0	0
Total	424	72	29	4

Table 2: The ratio between the number of employed police officers and the number of assaults on them by Police Directorates

Police Directorate	Number of assaults	Number of employed police officers	Assault on each police officer
Nova Gorica	66	380	5,75
Novo mesto	75	440	5,86
Slovenj Gradec	25	247	9,88
Ljubljana	118	1351	11,44
Celje	52	650	12,5
Kranj	33	478	14,48
Maribor	63	1025	16,26
Postojna	13	353	27,15
Murska Sobota	29	583	20,10
Koper	29	607	20,93
Krško	18	521	28,94
Uniformed Police Directorate at GPD	8	248	31,06

As can be seen from Table 2, it was the smaller police directorates, Nova Gorica and Novo mesto, where every 5th-6th police officer was assaulted, followed by the Slovenj Gradec Police Directorate, where every 9th-10th police officer was assaulted. The Ljubljana Police Directorate is in fourth place, where every 11th police officer was assaulted, and in Slovenia as a whole, every thirteenth police officer has been attacked.

During the period in question, 147 police officers (27.8 percent) were injured. Of these, 144 (27.2 percent) suffered light injuries and 3 police officers (0.6 percent) were seriously injured. By gender, most of the assaulted police officers were men and only 6 were women. A total of 383 police officers were not injured. Most injuries were sustained by police officers who were victims of assault for the first time, and of these 119 had light and 3 serious injuries. With the number of assaults the degree of injuries decreases. Thus, of the 72 police officers who have been victims of assault for the second time, only 20 were injured and 52 were not injured. Of the 29 officers who were assaulted for the third time, 5 had light injuries. Of 4 police officers who were assaulted for the 4th time no one was injured. Female police officers were assaulted only once.

Most of the injured police officers have from 4 to 6 years of active service, and there were 19 police officers with light injuries and one police officer with 6 years of active service seriously injured.

To summarize the finding of our analysis, the profile of assaulted police officers is:

- a) will work alone;
- b) will be around 25 years old;
- c) will be assaulted for the first time;
- d) will be not physically injured;
- e) will be assaulted while determining a person's identity;
- f) will use coercive means, mostly physical force, and
- g) at the time of the assault will have a total of 5 years active service.

To summarize the findings regarding place and time of assault, on average, the assault on a police officer will take place between 11pm and 2am on an early morning Saturday (21.5 percent), the assault will be perpetrated in a public place, on the road, street or village square.

4 Discussion

Various measures are suggested to reduce the frequency of assaults on police officers. Based on their analyses, authors (e.g. Bebbington, 2010; Bristow, 1963; Chapman, 1986) give recommendations to police officers that should be taken into

account in police procedures to reduce the likelihood of becoming victims of assaults. Many (Dempsey & Forst, 2005, Mikola, 1996; Naraglav, 2006; Nemanič, 1995; Vidmar, 1993) are trying to influence the process of police education and training on the basis of their research. An improved assault management information system within the police organization is also recommended to identify training needs and design preventive strategies.

For the Slovenian police, we suggest some additional organizational measures to manage assaults on police officers. For example, all information on assaults should be centralized and systematically analysed; only this will give the managers the possibility to understand the nature of situations where assaults on police officers occur. If not, all of the assaults will be managed as individual cases and therefore no preventive measures can be developed. Interdepartmental cooperation is needed, and should be coordinated between the General Police Directorate (the service in the office of the Director-General of Police), the Police Directorate (the service of the Director of Police Directorate) and commanders of local Police stations should also be included. An improved assault management information system demands that for each case of assault on a police officer, a standardized questionnaire should be completed, providing quality input information for further analysis and developing preventive programmes.

Here we should mention the need to reinforce special psycho-social support for each assaulted police officer, regardless of whether they used coercive measures or whether the police officer was injured or not in defending against an assault. In addition, the police should be actively involved in monitoring criminal cases against those attacking the police, providing public prosecutors with all the information needed for successful prosecutions and in doing so, providing motivation to protect police employees at all levels.

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Napadi na policiste – profil napadalcev in napadenih policistov

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V prispevku avtorja predstavita rezultate raziskave o napadih na policiste. Študija je obsegala analizo 363 podanih kazenskih ovadb na okrožna državna tožilstva v Sloveniji za obdobje 2005 in 2006. Raziskava je bila osredotočena na okoliščine napadov, predvsem sredstva napada, kraj, čas, področje dela in prisotnost tretjih oseb pri izvršitvi kaznivih dejanj napadov na policiste. V analiziranem obdobju je bilo napadenih 531 policistov, od tega jih je bilo 514 (96,8 %) moškega in 17 (3,2 %) ženskega spola. Žrtve napada so bile stare med 21 in 50 let, pri čemer je imela večina policistov, ki so bili napadeni, v povprečju pet let delovnih izkušenj. Avtorja sta ugotovila, da z izkušnostjo (merjeno z leti delovne dobe) upada tudi nevarnost, da bi policisti postali žrtve napada. Rezultati kažejo, da so napadi na policiste najbolj pogosti na manjših policijskih upravah, kot so Nova Gorica in Novo mesto, kjer je bil v času analize žrtev napada vsak peti do šesti policist. Na policijski upravi Ljubljana pa je bil v času analize žrtev napada vsak deveti do deseti policist. Na podlagi analize avtorja razpravljata o posameznih predlogih za celovito upravljanje napadov na policiste, vključno s predlogi za primerno sestavo policijskih patrolj, zagotavljanjem tehnične opreme in zaščitnih sredstev, do poudarjanja potrebe za psihosocialno pomoč napadenim policistom.

Ključne besede: policija, napadi na policiste, prisilna sredstva, Slovenija

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