

POLICE, HIGHER EDUCATION, AND CITIZEN COMPLAINTS IN THE UNITED STATES*

Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'nde Polis, Yükseköğrenim ve Vatandaş Şikayetleri

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Özet

Bu çalışmada çok sayıda yükseköğrenim görmüş personelin çalıştığı polis teşkilatlarının bir çok eğitim seviyesi düşük personeli bulunan polis teşkilatlarına göre daha az vatandaş şikayetleri ile karşılaştıkları varsayılmaktadır. Bu hipotez, Antony M. Pate ve Lorie E. Fridell'in 1991-1992 yılları arasında ABD genelinde 1,697 adet polis teşkilatına anket uygulayarak elde ettikleri data ile test edilmiştir. Polis teşkilatları arasındaki yapısal farklılıklar, nüfus yoğunluğu, cinsiyet ve polisin vatandaşa karşı aşırı güç kullanımını önleyecek kurum içi yönetmelikler de dikkate alınarak yapılan araştırma sonuçları göstermektedir ki, az eğitilmiş polislerin çalıştığı teşkilatlar yüksek düzeyde eğitim görmüş polislerin çalıştığı teşkilatlara göre önemli ölçüde daha fazla vatandaş şikayetleri ile karşılaşmaktadırlar. Bir de hizmet içi eğitim ile vatandaş şikayetleri arasında herhangi bir ilişki bulunamamıştır. Bu nedenle sağlam polis-halk ilişkileri ve suçla mücadelede başarı açısından polisler ve polis teşkilatları için yükseköğrenimin önemi vurgulanmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Polis, Vatandaş, Zor Kullanımı, Şikayetler, Yükseköğrenim, Başarı.

Abstract

In this study, it is hypothesized that police agencies with higher educated officers will get fewer complaints than the other police agencies with less educated officers. This hypothesis was tested by using data from a national survey that Antony M. Pate and Lorie E. Fridell collected by mailing to 1,697 law enforcement agencies in the United States in 1991-1992. The results, which were controlled for the type of the agency, population size, gender, and legal policy implications, showed that agencies with less educated officers received significantly more complaints than the agencies, which have many higher educated officers. Also, any association between in-service training and citizen complaints could not be found. Therefore, the importance of higher education for the officers and police agencies is emphasized in terms of good police-community relations and the success in fighting crime.

Key Words: Police, Citizen, Use of Force, Complaints, Higher Education, Success.

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Introduction

This paper examines the relationship between citizen complaints against officers and the level of police training. As known, the police job is very difficult and “A police department is the only city service that citizens can turn to 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for assistance with an unspecified range of problems” (Kessler, 1993:485). Police services are directly related to community and police always try to find solutions for problems for the sake of citizens. Moreover, citizen complaints are an unavoidable issue during the police-citizen encounter because police often face citizens in crises situations to solve the problems. That’s why police may frequently face citizen complaints as a result of their difficult duty. However, there is still something to prevent police from getting a lot of complaints. Although police have many responsibilities and difficulties they should be on the proper line while they are working. If they use improper force, citizens will complain more than ever. Hence, police should accomplish difficult tasks without getting a complaint functioning at the maximum efficiency.

Therefore, this paper will focus on the circumstances under which police will have fewer citizen complaints. The purpose of this study is to test the effects of higher education for officers on their efficiency while they are functioning in day-to-day work. Average number of sustained citizen complaints due to abuse of authority, excessive use of force, harassment, improper language etc. is used as a dependent variable to provide a measurement of officers’ success.

The research questions are: What kinds of factors are associated with citizen complaints? How can police performance be improved? If education has an effect on officers’ efficiency, which is important in terms of police-citizen encounter, how should police be educated or trained? First, I hypothesized that if police agencies have higher educated officers-the more, the better, those agencies will face fewer citizen complaints than the other agencies with less educated officer. Second, I assumed that if the agencies provide in-service training programs for their officers they also would get fewer citizen complaints.

I used the data from a national survey (Pate and Fridell, 1994), which examines the extent to which complaints of policy violations were reviewed, and violations punished. Additionally, the survey sought to determine the extent to which departments kept records on the use of force. The data was collected from those agencies that recorded this information data relating to how frequently officers used force, the characteristics of officers who did and did not have complaints filed against them.

Police, Higher Education, and Citizen Complaints

Police come across a wide variety of situations in their work. They encounter problems that range from relatively minor to very serious. They also interact with people exhibiting various mental states, including persons who are hysterical,

nervous, angry, confused, upset, worried, annoyed, or calm. Use of force is more likely to occur when police are dealing with persons under the influence of alcohol or drugs or with mentally ill individuals (Adams, 1999). However, no matter how difficult situation is, police should avoid any misdemeanor such as use of force, which undermine police-public cooperation.

Good police-community relation is the most important thing for success in providing public safety. Recently, several programs have been designed and implemented arranging the relationship between police and community in order to make an arrangement all over any region. Community policing has emerged as an approach to establish better relationships with the community in order to improve service through cooperative efforts. So, most scholars have been interested in the results of community-oriented policing and community oriented policing training.

Hollis examined (1978:28) the effect of citizens' knowledge of mistreatment by the police to citizens' propensity to report victimization and found "proportionately more of those knowing of mistreatments did not report victimization due to lack of faith in police than those ignorant of such police behavior." Individuals who have never had an unsatisfactory encounter with the police are generally supportive of the police or at least ambivalent (Flanagan and Vaughn, 1996:127). Aggressive policing can undermine citizen cooperation. Citizens with more favorable views of the police are more likely to report victimization than other citizens (Hahn, 1971; Block, 1974; Decker, 1981; Decker and Wagner, 1982). On the one hand, police performance will be at the highest degree if there is assistance provided by citizens.

On the other hand, the officers should be either well educated or have much experience to be successful. "The intent of the training is to provide a broad based learning experience to enable recruits to perform more effectively as police officers" (Meadows, 1985:197). However, police training based on practical courses, which lacks the theoretical framework, is not sufficient for officers to function at maximum efficiency.

Education helps someone think intensively and shape character. The function of education is very important in the day-to-day work of police. Theoretical education provides vision that helps officers look broadly while training provides the mission perspective that deals with performance of officers.

In short, it is expected that higher education provide motivation and efficiency for officers in order to help them be successful in their job. It is assumed that an officer who has availed himself of opportunities for higher education is likely to be more intelligent and more highly motivated than his colleagues who have only high school degrees. This means that the more intelligent and more highly motivated the officer, the more successful the personnel will be. Therefore, there is a positive correlation between higher education, fewer disciplinary actions, and

fewer citizen complaints. Using aggregate agency level data I demonstrate that higher education for police is associated with fewer citizen complaints.

Measures and Methods

My first hypothesis is that an agency with higher educated officers will get fewer complaints. My second hypothesis is that there is an association between in-service training programs related to police-community relations and citizen complaints. I developed a model to test the relationship between the degree of education and citizen complaints. Also, I included the variables describing in-service training programs to test whether in-service training is associated with citizen complaints or not. This multiple regression model demonstrates that there is an association between the level of police training and citizen complaints. I used agency level aggregated data from a national survey. I obtained this data from ICPSR (Title Number: 6274), which was conducted between 1991-1992. The units of analysis are nationwide law enforcement agencies. The national survey was designed to collect information on police departmental policies and practices pertaining to the use of physical force—both deadly and less than lethal—by law enforcement officers. They used a list of law enforcement agencies from the Law Enforcement Sector portion of the 1990 Justice Agency List (JAL) produced by the Governments Division of the Bureau of the Census. They also used a stratified sampling procedure to select agencies within jurisdiction size categories to ensure adequate representation of all agencies. Twenty-eight selected agencies were removed as ineligible after stratification procedure was applied. However, in terms of some variables, there are several missing values in this data set and thus they were excluded.

There are two types of questions in the Police Use of Force and Police Killing questionnaire. These are described as pre-coded questions and short open-ended questions. Pre-coded questions are also subdivided into two categories like; first, “Does your jurisdiction have a Civilian Complaint Review Board or Agency?” Answer options include: Yes or No. Second, “Does your department have a written policy for the following?” Answer options include:

- a. Lethal Force Policy / Yes or No
- b. Less Lethal Policy / Yes or No
- c. Pursuit Policy / Yes or No
- d. Body Armor Policy / Yes or No

Short open-ended questions asked agencies to record the actual number of citizen complaints (How many? or How much?). In terms of response categories, there are boxes to check the exact number and there is also “Other Specify” response category other than checking the box that matches the exact number because all possible responses cannot be anticipated. There are other codes for mis-

sing values that cannot be analyzed like “Not Applicable” “Don’t Know” “No Data” “No Answer” and “Refused”.

The dependent variable is “Average number of sustained complaints”. The researchers were interested in complaints that are based on encounters prior to arraignment and were not interested in complaints that occur in jail. I also disregarded the complaints, which are internally generated, and took into account the citizen-generated complaint. According to the diversity of police-citizen encounters, there were six different types of complaints. These are:

- The complaints against excessive/undue/unnecessary use of force,
- The complaints against false/unlawful arrest/improper detention,
- The complaints against illegal search and seizure,
- The complaints against harassment/intimidation/threats/verbal abuse,
- The complaints against abuse/ misuse of authority,
- The complaints against improper language (Pate & Fridell, 1994).

While there were many complaints only a few of them were sustained. Therefore, I chose the complaint variables sustained that measured by the number of complaints to get accurate/reasonable results. After choosing those separate dependent variables I wanted to get average number of sustained complaints by adding up those variables and dividing by the number (6) of separate dependent variables. Before I did get the average number of the complaints by calculation I wanted to be sure if there are any missing values that will be effective on any compute commands. I recoded all missing values into (0) if there is any concern. Measurement level for dependent variable is interval. The research question for these variables was how many citizen complaints filed against officers of your department and the disposition of the complaints in 1991. The answers would be the actual number of citizen-generated complaints.

I wanted to explain the dependent variable by the degree of the education and in-service training courses as independent variables. There were five different/separate variables related to the level of education such as high school, less than two years college, associate, bachelors, and advanced degree. I put two of them, less than two years college and advanced degree, into the model because there was a multicollinearity problem. I realized this problem after looking at the tolerance column under the collinearity statistics. I removed those variables below .10 from the equation. It was also good because less than two years college degrees represent less-education and advanced degrees represent higher education. Measurement level of these variables is interval. The research question: “Please indicate the number of sworn personnel in your department as of December 31, 1991, by levels of education”. As for the type of the police training, I used variables that represent whether any law enforcement agency provides courses in their in-service training program to develop better police-community relations such as cultural sensitivity,

human relations, and stress management. The research question was which types of IN-SERVICE TRAINING are provided for your officers (Check whether the training is “Mandatory”, “Optional”, or “Not provided”). I recoded this type of variables into binary (dummy) variables as “1” and “0”. I chose “Not Provided” as a reference. To obtain Mandatory variables, I recoded Mandatory equaled to “1” and Optional equaled to “0”, “Not provided” is also equal to “0” because it is reference and all others as system missing. To obtain Optional variables, I recoded Optional as “1” and repeated the other stages in each variable.

I controlled for the type of the agency (Sheriff), population, gender and legal policy implications. Policy variables were Yes/No type, so, I recoded those three policy variables into “1” and “0”. I did not consider the “Body Armor Policy” variable because I thought it may not be related to citizen complaints, but lethal force policy, less lethal policy do. However, according to the results of the model, none of them is associated with the number of sustained complaints. As for the type of the law enforcement agency variable, this variable was coded as 1=sheff, 2=county, 3=city, 4=state. I chose “state” as reference group and recoded into three different dummy variables as sheriff, county, and city. I removed county and city variables from the model because of the collinearity problem. In terms of population, I recoded this variable by giving a large number for the largest population size. Gender was coded as total males and total females.

Findings

According to (OLS) multiple regression model, the results demonstrate that agencies with higher educated police officers are associated with fewer sustained citizen complaints. The F-test shows us the equation of the regression model is statistically significant and there is a strong relationship between the dependent and independent variables. In terms of F value, it is very large (55.278) and its significance level is $.000 < .05$. In this model, the dependent variable can be explained by independent variables at 65.2%.

Below, Table 1 shows that there is an association between the educational level of officers and citizen complaints; departments with higher educated officers receive fewer complaints than departments with less educated officers. According to multiple regression model, the officers with less than two year college degrees get more complaints, whereas the officers with advanced degrees get fewer complaints. In terms of the association between less than two year college degree and average number of sustained complaints, the relationship is significant and the direction is positive, $p (.00) < .05$ and $t = 3.85$. However, an advanced degree is associated with fewer complaints. The relationship is significant and the direction is negative. It means that an agency with more police officers who have advanced degrees will receive fewer citizen complaints.

Table 1: Police, Higher Education, and Citizen Complaints

VARIABLES	Average number of sustained complaints		
	β (se)	p	t
Less than two year college	.001(.000)	.00	3.85
Advanced degree	-.03(.004)	.00	-7.65
Cultural sensitivity course(M)	-.187(.124)	.13	-1.51
Cultural sensitivity course(O)	-.029(.136)	.83	-.21
Human relations course (M)	.07(.141)	.61	.50
Human relations course (O)	.06(.144)	.62	-.48
Stress management (M)	-.213(.129)	.09	-1.65
Stress management (O)	.002(.109)	.98	.01
Sheriff Department	-.37(.100)	.00	-3.73
Population Served	.229(.039)	.00	5.88
Lethal force policy	.219(.276)	.42	.79
Less Lethal Policy	-.119(.168)	.48	-.70
Male	.002(.000)	.00	13.84
Female	-.009(.001)	.00	-6.43
Constant	-.406(.198)	.04	-2.05
Adjusted R Square	0.718		

Statistically significant relationships are in bold ($p < .05$). Data Source: The data was obtained from a national survey that Antony M. Pate and Lorie E. Friedell collected by mailing to 1,697 law enforcement agencies in the United States in 1991-1992.

As for the association between in-service training programs and sustained citizen complaint, three different in-service training courses such as cultural sensitivity, stress management, and human relations were used as independent variables. However, none of them could explain the dependent variable. It means that in-service training programs either mandatory or optional are not associated with average number of citizen complaints. Law enforcement agencies that provide for their officers in-service training courses may review their programs to make them more useful and beneficial.

There is a significant relationship between sheriff department and average number of complaints. After choosing the state police as a reference group I tested the association with the dependent variable. According to results, sheriff departments are associated with fewer complaints than state police. The probability is (.00) smaller than .05 and t value is -5.03 . As for the direction, it is negative, $b = -.54$. So, sheriff departments get fewer complaints than state police. In other words, the state police who are selected will get more complaints than the police (sheriffs) who are elected.

There is another statistically significant association between the size of the population that an agency serves and citizen complaints. If an agency serves in a large population its officers will get more complaints than the agency serving in a small size of the population. T value is 6.84 above than 2, and the significance level is .00 smaller than .05. The direction is positive. I would suggest larger populations bring more incidents and more police-citizen encounters cause more citizen complaints. This is because police will face citizens during critical incidents in general to solve a problem or to gain control. It is very difficult for police to set up everything without any complaints.

In terms of gender, the results demonstrate that agencies with more female officers will get fewer citizen complaints while agencies with more male officers receive more complaints. It means that female officers may have an important role regarding police-community relations.

WHAT MATTERS

UNDER WHAT CIRCUMSTANCES WILL POLICE AGENCIES GET FEWER SUSTAINED COMPLAINTS?

- **If their officers are not HIGHER EDUCATED.**
- **If they are ELECTED NOT SELECTED.**
- **If they serve in a SMALL POPULATION.**
- **If they are FEMALES**

Conclusions

The level of education for police is statistically associated with average number of citizen complaints against officers. Of all control variables population, gender and the type of law enforcement agencies (Sheriff) are associated with average number of sustained complaints. Controlling for the effects of spuriousness the results show us that there are statistically significant associations between the level of education for police and citizen complaints. The police agencies, which have many higher educated police officers are getting fewer citizen complaints than the agencies with less educated officers.

None of the in-service training courses (mandatory or optional) are associated with citizen complaints. Although higher education has an indirect effect on reducing citizen complaints in relation to different types of matters to complain such as misconduct, use of force, and misdemeanor etc., surprisingly, police in-service training courses has not any positive effect.

In terms of Beta values, the officers less than two years college degrees are highly correlated with more complaints. The police officers with advanced degrees are the third group that is highly associated with fewer citizen complaints in the model.

Regarding the results, higher educated police officers perform better than the less educated officers. Therefore, I believe that the results of the police-citizen encounter or the satisfaction of police service will be better and more positive if the agencies hire higher educated officers and reorganize in-service training programs for their officers.

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