

**Document Title:** The Prevalence and the Nature of Police Cynicism in Slovenia

**Author(s):** Branko Lobnikar and Milan Pagon

**Document No.:** 207979

**Date Received:** December 2004

This paper appears in *Policing in Central and Eastern Europe: Dilemmas of Contemporary Criminal Justice*, edited by Gorazd Mesko, Milan Pagon, and Bojan Dobovsek, and published by the Faculty of Criminal Justice, University of Maribor, Slovenia.

This report has not been published by the U.S. Department of Justice. To provide better customer service, NCJRS has made this final report available electronically in addition to NCJRS Library hard-copy format.

Opinions and/or reference to any specific commercial products, processes, or services by trade name, trademark, manufacturer, or otherwise do not constitute or imply endorsement, recommendation, or favoring by the U.S. Government. Translation and editing were the responsibility of the source of the reports, and not of the U.S. Department of Justice, NCJRS, or any other affiliated bodies.

BRANKO LOBNIKAR, MILAN PAGON

## THE PREVALENCE AND THE NATURE OF POLICE CYNICISM IN SLOVENIA

*The paper is about the police cynicism in Slovenian police organization. Authors define police cynicism as the officers' attitude characterized by three elements: the feelings of hatred, envy and distrust; incapacity of expressing these feelings openly towards the individuals and structures that caused them, and continuous experience of anger arising from the feeling of impotence and continuous adversity. The survey on sample of 541 Slovenian police officers and police supervisors was conducted in year 2003. The results of study parallel the findings of other researchers that police cynicism is a multidimensional concept. Similar to their results, our research reveals four dimensions of police cynicism: (a) cynicism towards the police supervisors, (b) cynicism towards the community where the officers perform their duties, (c) cynicism towards the working rules and procedures that the officers have to observe, and (d) cynicism towards the rules and the regulations governing the police work. Findings that police cynicism is closely related to a host of personal, interpersonal, and organizational factors, stress the importance of studying and understanding this phenomenon in police settings. It has been shown that interpersonal relationships within the police organization are a determining factor of the officers' and the organization's well being. In Slovenian case, it turned out that social undermining, as well as violent and aggressive behaviors in the workplace were positively correlated with police cynicism, while the correlation between social support and cynicism was a positive one.*

### POLICE CYNICISM

Cynicism is an attitude of "contemptuous distrust of human nature and motive" (Behrend, 1980; cit. in Graves, 1996). Dean, Brandes and Dharwadkar (1998; cit. in Brandes, Dharwadkar, and Dean, 1999) define organizational cynicism as a negative attitude toward one's employing organization comprising: a belief that the organization lacks integrity; negative affect toward one's employing organization; and disparaging and critical behaviors toward the organization that are consistent with these beliefs and affect. Many of the initial studies of cynicism at work came from the field of police administration (e.g. Niederhoffer, 1967; Regoli, Crank, and Rivera, 1990). Brandes et al. (1999) summarized some literature from this field: O'Connell, Holzman, and Armandi (1986; cit. *ibid.*) identified two underlying dimensions of police cynicism: critical attitude about their work and about their employing organization. Regoli, Culbertson, and Crank (1991; cit. *ibid.*) found that police cynicism toward the organization was positively related to anomie, and negatively related to length of service and professionalism. Cynicism toward organizational outsiders was positively related to anomie and work alienation, and negatively related to length of service. Regoli, Crank, and Rivera (1990) suggested that officers with more cynicism toward decision makers had better working relations with department personnel, less job satisfaction, more arrests, and more hostile citizen encounters. Officers with more cynicism toward rules had worse relations with department personnel and fewer arrest. When officers were more cynical about the respect the public had for officers, they had worse working relation, and more hostile citizen encounters.

Pagon (1993), building upon the Niederhoffer's approach, defines police cynicism as the officers' attitude characterized by three elements: (a) the feelings of hatred, envy and distrust; (b) incapacity of expressing these feelings openly towards the individuals and structures that caused them, and (c) continuous experience of anger arising from the feeling of impotence and continuous adversity (Niederhoffer, 1967; cit. in Pagon, 1993: 390). O'Connell et al. (1986; cit. *ibid.*) defined the police cynicism as contempt and distrust towards the employing organization. Contempt means that officers do not respect their organization, while distrust expresses doubts that the police organization could be efficient and trustful. Although in the beginning the researchers studied police cynicism as a one-dimensional concept (that is, as integral and undivided concept), they later established that this was not the fact, so they divided it into the organizational and the workplace cynicism.

Organizational cynicism is directed against the methods of managing their organization, and against the procedures, rules and regulations used by their leadership. The workplace cynicism is shown in a contemptuous distrust towards law enforcement and the services for the community where officers do their work. It can be described as the loss of respect and pride for the police profession (Pagon, 1993: 390-391).

Regoli et al. (1990, cit. *ibid.*) described four dimensions of police cynicism: (a) cynicism towards the police leadership, (b) cynicism toward norms and laws governing the behavior of officers during their work, (c) cynicism towards the legal system restricting the police activities, and (d) cynicism concerning the respect of the public for officers.

Chandler & Jones (1979; cit. *ibid.*) describe similar dimensions of police cynicism: cynical attitude towards the public, cynical attitude towards the organization; cynicism is reflected also by officers' attitude towards their work, towards the solidarity with the community, and by a cynical attitude towards the education and training for the police profession.

Graves (1996) defines two negative factors arising from police cynicism: withdrawal from the society and antipathy towards the idealism. Withdrawal from the society appears because many of the situations that police officers experience make them lose faith in others and develop an 'us-versus-them' view in the process. Police officers soon begin to trust only other police officers; the only people who they believe understand how the world really is. As officers withdraw further and further from the society, they lose their social safety network (the norms and values that help them make sense of the world) and fall deeper into a state of confusion, alienation, apathy, and frustration. This social estrangement is compounded as officers eventually lose respect for the law. Almost simultaneously, they learn to manipulate the law and their everyday dealings with what they believe to be a dysfunctional judicial system (Niederhoffer, 1969; cit. *ibid.*).

As police officers lose respect for law and society, they lose their self-respect as well. Embittered, they cannot attack the public they have sworn to protect; so they nurse their hatred and become victims of cynicism. Cynical officers no longer show concern for the values that led them to police service in the first place (Graves, 1996).

The results of a research on the nature of police cynicism among officers in Slovenia are presented below.

## METHOD

### SAMPLE

Data were obtained from 541 Slovenian police officers and police supervisors. In the sample, 90.7 % of respondents were men, and 9.3 % women. The number of police officers at police stations included in the survey varied from 10 to 200, with an average of 82 police officers. The respondents' average age was 31.75 years. They had an average of 12.81 years of work experience, with an average of 6.32 years in the current position. 73.7 % had secondary-school education, 10.3 % had an unfinished 3-year-college or bachelor's degree, 5.1 % had a 2-year-college degree and 10.7 % had a bachelor's degree.

### MEASURES

*Police cynicism.* For measuring police cynicism, we developed a 16-item scale. The similar scale was used on the sample of police officers in Slovenia in 1993 by Pagon (1993); it was a modified scale of police cynicism by Regoli and his co-workers (1990). For this study, we slightly modified the scale text. The respondents answered on a 5-point Likert-type scale, with answers ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Cronbach's alpha for police cynicism scale was 0.86. This scale was used in analyses as a *dependent variable*.

For measuring workplace aggression and workplace violence, we developed a 35-item survey instrument. The questionnaire was divided in three parts; all contained a set of 35 items about negative and potentially harassing acts. The first part measured the workplace victimization, the second the perception of workplace victimization, and for the third we developed a self-reporting measure of aggressive and violent behavior in the workplace. Cronbach's alpha for the first scale (*victimization in the workplace*) was 0.91. Cronbach's alpha for the second scale (*perception of victimization in the workplace*) was 0.92. Cronbach's alpha for the third scale (*aggressive and violent behavior in the workplace*) was 0.89.

*Social undermining from co-workers* consists of a 27-item scale, measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale (Cronbach's alpha was 0.96). *Social undermining from supervisors* consists of a 23-item scale, measured in same manner (Cronbach's alpha: 96). *Social support from co-workers* consists of a 13-item scale, respondents answered on a 5-point Likert-type scale (Cronbach's alpha was 0.95); *social support from supervisors* consists of a 19-items scale (Cronbach's alpha was 0.96). *Self-efficacy* was measured with three items on a 7-point Likert-type scale (alpha was 0.84); *depressiveness* was measured with the 20-item NIMH Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CES-D). Cronbach's alpha for depressiveness scale was 0.87. *Workplace frustration* was measured with five items on a 7-point Likert-type scale (alpha 0.53). *Well-being* was measured with three items and the alpha coefficient of consistency for well-being was 0.76.

The concluding part of the questionnaire consisted of questions relating to the socio-demographic factors. The following factors have been included in this analysis: gender, age, education, years of work experience and years in the current position, work position and the number of employees at the police station.

### PROCEDURE

We conducted the survey from April to May 2003 at different police stations and CID divisions across the county in a manner that the sample represented the whole police organization in Slovenia. Data collection was conducted during the police officers'

working time. Their participation was voluntary; all the respondents were guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows the results of a factor analysis of the police cynicism measure. It can be established that the police cynicism in the Slovenian police is also divided in four essential factors, very similar to those that were found by the researchers of police cynicism world-wide. The four factors explained almost 62 % of the total variance, while content-wise the factors were named (a) cynicism towards the police supervisors, (b) cynicism towards the community where the officers perform their work, (c) cynicism towards the working rules and procedures that the officers have to observe, and (d) cynicism towards the rules and the regulations governing the police work. Each of those factors was subsequently used as a dependent variable.

*Table 1: A factor analysis of the police cynicism measure*

|   | Factor  |   |   |  |
|---|---|---|---|--|
|   | Factor 1<br>(33.48 %)<br>cynicism<br>towards<br>police<br>supervisors | Factor 2<br>(10.80 %)<br>cynicism<br>towards the<br>community | Factor 3<br>(9.63 %)<br>cynicism<br>related to<br>working<br>procedures | Factor 4<br>(7.99 %)<br>cynicism<br>toward norms<br>and laws |
| It seems that the responsible people in the police lack adequate respect towards their officers who eventually perform the fundamental police work. | .868  |   |   |  |
| The main problem in the police is that the decision makers ignore the problems encountered daily by average police officers.                        | .839  |   |   |  |
| The responsible people in the police are primarily concerned with their own interests and do not care what happens with others.                     | .757  |   |   |  |
| Promotion in the police depends more on one's connections than knowledge.   | .559  |   |   |  |
| In the last few years, the image of the police has deteriorated.  |   | .919  |   |  |
| Many citizens have a bad opinion on police officers.  |   | .842  |   |  |
| Nowadays people have a much more negative attitude towards the police than ever before.   |   | .798  |   |  |
| Police should have more powers to apply special investigating measures when these are deemed necessary.   |   |   | .859  |  |
| More often, perpetrators should be detained after their arrest the until the court hearing, if the police deems it necessary.                       |   |   | .780  |  |
| Courts and laws provide so many rights to perpetrators that it is very difficult to maintain peace and order.                                       |   |   | .675  |  |
| When officers appear at courts as witnesses, they are often treated in the same manner as the criminals.  |   |   | .285  |  |
| The rules and regulations are not clear enough to be able to discern what we are allowed and what we are not allowed in doing our work.             |   |   |   | .832   |
| The rules that should be observed by the police are not clear enough.   |   |   |   | .749   |
| Many laws or regulations whose enforcement should be guaranteed by the police are rather absurd.  |   |   |   | .714   |
| The instructions I receive from my superiors are often ambiguous or even controversial.   |   |   |   | .583   |
| New changes and reforms are weakening the police image.   |   |   |   | .443   |

CORRELATION OF POLICE CYNICISM WITH OTHER FACTORS IN THE POLICE ORGANIZATION

Next, we examined how the individual factors of police cynicism found by the factor analysis correlate with some organizational factors. We analyzed the correlation of the police cynicism with the personality factors (e.g., the degree of officers' depressiveness, frustration well being, and self-efficacy), with interpersonal and organizational factors observed in the police organization (e.g., the victimization degree in the workplace, the degree of aggressive and violent behavior of officers, the degree of social undermining and social support in the workplace), and some other demographic factors (e.g., age, the size of police organization, the length of service). The results of correlation analysis are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Correlation of police cynicism with various factors within the organization**

|   | Cynicism towards police supervisors | Cynicism toward community | Cynicism toward work procedures | Cynicism toward norms and laws |
|---|-------------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Cynicism toward police supervisors                                      | 1.000                               |                           |                                 |                                |
| Cynicism toward community   | .333**                              | 1.000                     |                                 |                                |
| Cynicism toward work procedures   | .263**                              | .260**                    | 1.000                           |                                |
| Cynicism toward norms and laws  | .413**                              | .268**                    | .279**                          | 1.000                          |
| Co-workers: social support  | .051                                | .047                      | .119**                          | -.003                          |
| Co-workers: social undermining  | .114*                               | .080                      | .105*                           | .178**                         |
| Supervisors: social support   | -.231**                             | -.033                     | -.045                           | -.166**                        |
| Social support: social undermining                                      | .227**                              | .103*                     | .079                            | .245**                         |
| Depressiveness  | .167**                              | .124**                    | .095                            | .239**                         |
| Frustration   | .314**                              | .111*                     | .117**                          | .304**                         |
| Self-efficacy   | .108*                               | -.058                     | .105*                           | .047                           |
| Well being  | -.090                               | -.105*                    | -.052                           | -.200**                        |
| Victimization due to hostile behavior and disregard                     | .217**                              | .128**                    | .016                            | .166**                         |
| Victimization due to sexual harassment                                  | -.013                               | .024                      | -.051                           | .021                           |
| Victimization due to restrictions of work competences                   | .195**                              | .083                      | .023                            | .191**                         |
| Victimization due to work overload                                      | .275**                              | .074                      | .150**                          | .220**                         |
| Violent and aggressive behavior: disregard                              | .108*                               | .102*                     | .073                            | .142**                         |
| Violent and aggressive behavior: paternalistic attitude and ignorance   | .072                                | .014                      | -.012                           | .154**                         |
| Violent and aggressive behavior: hostile behavior and sexual harassment | -.061                               | -.007                     | -.024                           | -.135**                        |
| Age   | -.068                               | -.056                     | -.064                           | .080                           |
| Total number of the years of employment                                 | -.008                               | -.033                     | -.012                           | .099*                          |
| Years of service in the current position                                | .076                                | .016                      | .033                            | .133**                         |
| Education   | -.185**                             | -.114*                    | -.224**                         | -.111*                         |
| Number of officers in a police unit                                     | .145**                              | .038                      | .003                            | .044                           |

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level. \* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level.

In analyzing the correlation of various factors of police cynicism, it should be observed, above all, that all the factors of cynicism show a statistically significant mutual correlation. It means that although the police cynicism is not a one-dimensional concept, the factors of police cynicism are strongly correlated. When an officer starts to develop one type of police cynicism, other factors of cynical behavior will begin to appear, as well.

#### a) Police cynicism and personality factors

Correlation analysis showed that almost all factors of police cynicism strongly correlate with personality factors measured in our research. Thus, depressiveness is significantly and positively correlated with all the factors of police cynicism, except the cynicism related to working procedures. More depressive officers are more cynical towards the chiefs of police; they are characterized by strong cynicism towards the community where they perform their work, and a strong cynicism towards the norms that define the police work. Beside depressiveness, the factors of police cynicism are also correlated with frustration. The officers, who encounter barriers in their work or who are significantly hindered in attaining the goals set by their organization, will develop a cynical attitude toward all forms of police work. The result of the correlation of self-efficacy with the police cynicism is very interesting; we would expect that their correlation would be inversely proportioned, but this is not the case. Those officers who believe they are able to do their work successfully are also more cynical toward their supervisors and towards the norms defining the police work. Probably the officers, who believe they are able to do their work successfully, see the police supervisors and norms as a restrictive factor of their work, so they develop a cynical attitude toward them. However, the result of the correlation of well-being and police cynicism was more expected: the officers, who show a high degree of well-being, were also less cynical toward the community and toward the norms they have to observe in their work.

#### b) Police cynicism and the interpersonal and organizational factors

The factor that positively correlates with police cynicism is social undermining. Social undermining is a concept defining a negative interaction in the workplace (Duffy, 1998). Duffy, Ganster, and Pagon (1998) distinguish between the social undermining as a process, and social undermining as behavior. Social undermining as a process represents the exchange of negative interactions at their workplace and has a gradual and a cumulative effect weakening one's self-esteem, efficacy or ability to achieve goals set individually and/or by their organization. Social undermining as behavior is defined as any kind of behavior aimed at weakening one's individual and/or social achievements. Social undermining has consequences for individuals both at the affective as the cognitive and behavioral sphere (Mandler, 1984; Skarlicki and Folger, 1997; Taylor, 1991; cit. in Duffy, 1998). This is also reflected in the results of our research: social undermining is significantly and positively correlated with all forms of police cynicism. Due to the consequences of the police cynicism (these will be described below), it turned out again that the cure, which the officers develop to cope with a negative organizational atmosphere, is worse than the disease itself.

Social support, however, correlates negatively with the police cynicism. Social support, both by co-workers and the supervisors, describes the feelings of help and emotional support that individuals receive from their co-workers or supervisors in performing their duties. A comprehensive literature exists in support of the benefits of social support for mitigating work stress and improving the well-being of individuals (Ganster and Victor, 1988; Ganster, Fusilier and Mayes, 1986; cit. in Ganster et al, 1996). The latter is proven by our research, since the social support by the supervisors negatively correlates both with police cynicism toward the supervisors and toward the rules. A strong organizational subculture, which is typical of the police organization, can explain the positive correlation between the police cynicism towards the work/procedural norms and the social support by the co-workers. It is very important that the officers, who work together, find support in their group. The working procedures and norms often hinder their achievement of goals or they seem superfluous, therefore officers as a group show solidarity in trying to avoid them.

The research showed many statistically significant correlations between the police cynicism and violent and aggressive behavior in the workplace. Let us first take a look at the correlation between the police cynicism and the victimization in the workplace. All forms of police cynicism (except work/procedural cynicism) significantly and positively correlate with victimization due to hostile and contemptuous behavior. It is a behavior described with acts like detraction, constant criticism and spreading of gossip on individuals. The officers who experience such victimization in the workplace (in the Slovenian police this is the most frequent form of victimization; see details in Lobnikar et al., 2004), are also very cynical toward the chiefs of police, the community, and the laws they are supposed to observe during their work. The form of victimization, which strongly correlates with the police cynicism, is also victimization due to work overload. This type of victimization is understood as the situation described by the officers as follows: "I was asked to carry out unreal or unfeasible tasks"; "I was charged with more work than I am able to do"; and "I was asked to do the work that does not fall under the scope of my responsibilities" (Lobnikar, 2004).

We also examined a correlation between violent and aggressive behaviors and the police cynicism. Those officers, who often behave contemptuously toward other employees, are characterized by a high degree of cynicism toward the chiefs of police, toward the normative regulation of the police work, and towards the community where these officers perform their work.

#### c) Police cynicism and social-demographic factors

The analysis also shows that the police cynicism is correlated with some social-demographic factors. There is a positive and significant correlation between cynicism toward the rules defining the police work and the employment tenure of the officers. Officers with a longer period of employment or longer work experience in the current position are more cynical towards the normative regulation of police work than officers with less work experience.

Next, officers in bigger police units are more cynical toward their chiefs than officers in smaller police units. Also very important is the result of correlation between the police cynicism and the degree of officers' education. For all forms of police cynicism, we found a significant and negative correlation with the degree of education. Therefore, the more educated officers are less cynical than are their less-educated counterparts.

Finally, significant differences in police cynicism toward the norms of the police work are observed based on gender. It is interesting that female officers are more cynical towards the police rules than male officers ( $t = 2.06$ ;  $p = .043$ ), which can be explained by the degree of victimization of female officers at their workplace. Female officers are by far the most victimized group among officers (Lobnikar et al., 2004; Lobnikar, 2004); therefore it is not surprising that they do not trust the rules that are supposed to protect them.

## **CONCLUSION**

Our results parallel the findings of other researchers (e.g., Regoli et al., 1990; Chandler & Jones, 1979, cit. *ibid.*) that police cynicism is a multidimensional concept. Similar to their results, our research reveals four dimensions of police cynicism: (a) cynicism towards the police supervisors, (b) cynicism towards the community where the officers perform their duties, (c) cynicism towards the working rules and procedures that the



officers have to observe, and (d) cynicism towards the rules and the regulations governing the police work.

Our findings that police cynicism is closely related to a host of personal, interpersonal, and organizational factors, stress the importance of studying and understanding this phenomenon in police settings. It has been shown, as so many times before, that interpersonal relationships within the police organization are a determining factor of the officers' and the organization's well being. In our case, it turned out that social undermining, as well as violent and aggressive behaviors in the workplace were positively correlated with police cynicism, while the correlation between social support and cynicism was a positive one. This corresponds with the findings of previous research (e.g., Duffy, Ganster, and Pagon, 1998; Lobnikar, 2004).

Therefore, it is in the area of management, leadership, and people skills that the cure for police cynicism should be looked for. Graves (1996) describes some measures managers can use for dealing with police cynicism. He stresses the role of police leadership. Police leaders must demonstrate their commitment to the ideals of honesty, fairness, justice, courage, integrity, loyalty, and compassion. Leaders, who fail to prove themselves trustworthy, help spread the seeds of cynicism. By explaining the intent of rules and providing comprehensive and continuous training on the subject, police managers can help police officers feel confident and empowered in the legal area that police officer can build trust to the judicial system. The author also emphasizes that police leaders need to build a culture of integrity within their agencies, so that officers have something to believe in when all else seems to fail (*ibid.*).

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Branko Lobnikar**, Ph. D., is Head of Police Administration and Management Department and Senior Lecturer of Sociology and Theory of Police Work at the Faculty of Criminal Justice, University of Maribor. He is also Senior Lecturer of Human Resource Management at the College of Entrepreneurship.

**Milan Pagon**, Sc. D., Ph. D., is the Dean and Professor of Police Administration and Management at the Faculty of Criminal Justice and Professor of Organizational Behavior at the Faculty of Organizational Sciences, University of Maribor.

## LITERATURE

Brandes, P.; Dharwadker, R.; Dean, J. W. Jr. (1999). Does organizational Cynicism Matter?: Employee and Supervisor Perspective on Work Outcomes. EAM 1999 – Electronic Proceedings. Internet: <http://eaom.org/AnnualMeetings/Philadelphia1999/Papers/Papers1999.html>.

Duffy, K.M. (1998). Social Undermining at Work: A conceptual framework and empirical test. Dissertation thesis. Department of Management, University of Arkansas.

Duffy, M. K., Ganster, D. C., & Pagon, M. (1998). Social undermining and social support in the workplace. Fifty-eighth Annual Meeting of the Academy of Management, San Diego, California, August 7-12.

Ganster, D. C., Pagon, M., & Duffy, M. (1996). Organizational and interpersonal sources of stress in the Slovenian police force. In: Pagon, M. (Ed.) Policing in Central and Eastern Europe. Ljubljana: College of Police and Security Studies, 425-433.

Graves, W. (1996). Police Cynicism: Causes and Cures. Internet: <http://www.fbi.gov/publications/leb/1996/june964.txt>.

Lobnikar, B. (2004). Model upravljanja nasilja in agresivnega vedenja na delovnem mestu. ŠThe model for managing violence and aggressive behavior in the workplace.Ć Dissertation thesis. Faculty of organizational sciences, University of Maribor.

Lobnikar, B., Pagon, M., & Ovsenik, M. (2004). Frequency and causes of violence and aggressive behavior in the workplace. *Organizacija* (In press).

Niederhoffer, A. (1967). *Behind the Shield: The Police in Urban Society*. New York: Doubleday & Company.

Pagon, M. (1993). Policijski cinizem: vzroki, značilnosti in posledice. ŠPolice cynicism: the causes, characteristics and consequences. *Č. Revija Policija*, 4-5, 389-403.

Regoli, B., Crank, J. P., & Rivera, G. F. (1990). The construction and implementation of an alternative measure of police cynicism. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 17(4), 395-409.