

Part III:
Findings on Special Groups

6. Police Officers as Victims of Violence: Findings of a Germany-wide Survey

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6.1 Introduction and research questions

In the line of duty police officers are confronted with a wide range of difficult and dangerous situations. Although most police-public interactions are without conflict, sometimes a situation escalates and police officers are subject to violent assault. In a study conducted by Klemisch et al. (2005), 64 percent of the police officers surveyed had been physically injured while on duty; 55 percent had been in life-threatening situations. Various studies confirmed that such events are a source of severe stress in police officers (cf. Hallenberger et al. 2003, Neugebauer and Latscha 2009).

For Germany, no official statistics on the prevalence of violent assaults on police officers exist. Thus the number of reported cases of resistance to state authorities as published in the Police Crime Statistics is often used as a proxy. Over the period 2000 to 2008 this statistic shows an almost constant increase of such offences, adding up to a three-fold (35 percent).¹ This trend is often seen as an indication of a growing readiness to use violence against the police. But based on these figures, conclusions regarding the prevalence and trends in police exposure to violence cannot be easily drawn: Firstly, up to the year 2008, the reported number of resistance offences related to persons in law enforcement in general. This does not permit separate analysis of cases involving solely police officers. Secondly, the Police Crime Statistic documents only the most severe offence in each case. If a resistance offence is accompanied by an assault, only the latter is counted in the statistics. The registered cases of resistance therefore underrepresent serious assaults on police officers. Thirdly, no conclusion can be drawn from the Police Crime Statistics about the circumstances leading to assaults on police officers, what groups of police officers are especially

1 From 2009, a decline in the number of cases of resistance against state authorities can be stated in the Police Crime Statistics.

vulnerable to violence, or the consequences that can arise from such assaults. This information is, however, necessary for use in vocational and further training to better prepare police officers for such dangerous situations and to provide them with appropriate support if they experience assault.

Both national and international studies have focused on a phenomenological description of typical situations in which police officers are assaulted (cf. Bragason 2006, Brown 2004, Falk 2000, FBI 2010, Jäger 1988, Ohlemacher et al. 2003).² In German research, the topic has been addressed from a range of different perspectives, which among other things restricts the possibility to compare findings. Apart from studies on murder and attempted murder of police officers (Ohlemacher et al. 2003, Sessar et al. 1980), others exist which focus on police officers being rendered unfit for work for periods of several days following an assault (Jäger 1988, Ohlemacher et al. 2003). Other studies address resistance offences against police officers (such as Falk 2000) which, although they need not necessarily result in violent assaults and injury, still involve confrontational situations in police-public interaction.

The most recent comprehensive study on violence against police officers was conducted in 2000 (Ohlemacher et al. 2003). The study focused on serious violence against police officers who were subject to either an attempted murder or at minimum needed seven days' absence from work as a result of a violent assault. Since then, available information on the extent of violence against police officers on duty is restricted to the before mentioned registered cases of resistance against state authorities reported in the Police Crime Statistics. To gain current data at the start of 2010 an online survey on violence against police officers was conducted. Ten of 16 German federal states decided to take part in this study. The sample consists of 20,938 police officers, making for a response rate of 25.1 percent (Ellrich et al. 2012, p. 36). Around one in five officers was female. The age of the respondents varied between 19 and 62, with an average of 41.3

2 In general these studies are based on an analysis of those cases in which assaults occur (Johnson 2011, Ohlemacher et al. 2003). This allows conclusions to be drawn as to the circumstances in which the violence occurred and the assailants involved. It is not, therefore, possible to conduct risk analyses, meaning to evaluate which situations and which individuals are particularly dangerous. To do so, information is needed regarding the frequency with which police officers are confronted with certain situations and individuals during their day-to-day work.

years. Mostly the participants were out on the beat or on vehicle patrol (44.3 percent), or conducting investigations (23.2 percent). Just under one-twelfth (8.4 percent) served in special units (other types of duty: 23.9 percent). In addition, most of them (72.8 percent) operated in areas, which had fewer than 250,000 inhabitants. Compared with overall police numbers in the ten German federal states surveyed, female officers, young police officers and police officers from regions in western Germany (including Berlin) were overrepresented in the sample (Ellrich et al. 2012, p. 42).

The aim of the survey was to gain a comprehensive overview of police officers' experience of violence in the course of their duties. In this regard, answers were sought to the following questions, which also shape the structure of this paper:

- To what extent are police officers exposed to different forms of violence during the course of their duties?
- What characterises share a) officers affected by violence, b) assailants who carried out assaults, and c) the situations in which violence against police officers occurred?
- How have trends developed in respect of violence against police officers in the period 2005 to 2009?
- How do violent assaults affect the officers involved?

6.2 Findings

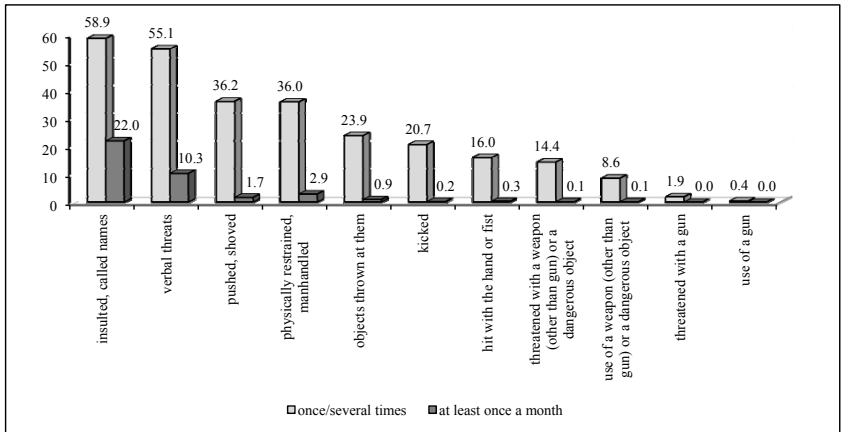
6.2.1 *To what extent are police officers exposed to different forms of violence in the course of their duties?*

Violence can take many forms, and not just in physical assaults or the use of weapons. Threats and insults can also be defined as violence. The frequency with which police officers were exposed to violence while on duty in 2009 is shown in Figure 6.1.

It can be stated that 80.9 percent of police officers had been insulted or called names while on duty, with one in five experiencing this at least once a month. The rate is somewhat lower as regards threats, at 65.4 percent, although here, too, the majority of respondents had rarely been exposed to this form of violence (once/a few times). Taking together police officers are relatively frequently confronted with verbal violence in the line of duty. All other forms of violence listed in figure 6.1 were experienced significantly less frequently. That the number of officers affected

decreases relative to the increasing degree of violence is also shown in other studies (cf. Bosold 2006, Manzoni 2003). Slightly more than a third of all respondents reported mild physical violence in the form of pushing, shoving, being held or manhandled, while one in five or one in six police officers had been kicked and/or hit by a citizen at least once in 2009. More serious forms of violence, such as threatening with or the use of weapons/dangerous objects are rarer in comparison. Nonetheless, almost one in eleven officers said they had been assaulted with a weapon or a dangerous object at least once in a given year.

Fig. 6.1 *Frequencies of different experiences of violence while on duty in 2009 (in percent)*



6.2.2 *What characterises share officers affected by violence?*

From a preventive standpoint, it is important to know whether there is a link between characteristics of the officers and the likelihood of an assault. According to Schmalzl (2005, p. 10), for example, negligent behaviour, mistakes in ensuring personal safety, and lack of coordination with fellow officers on the beat or patrol can act as an accelerator of violence, making it more likely for an officer to be assaulted while on duty.

In general a distinction can be made between visible and non-visible characteristics of police officers (Baier/Ellrich 2012). Visible traits include gender, physical stature and age, all of which citizens can readily recog-

nize. Non-visible traits manifest themselves when the two sides interact. Factors that play a role are attitudes and abilities, both of which affect the behaviour of police officers and of citizens. Because the survey provides no information on the non-visible traits of police officers, the analyses presented in this paper are based on the visible factors only. These include the usual demographic factors such as gender, age, body height, body weight and ethnic origin of the police officers surveyed. For analysis, victims of violence were operationalized as all officers who reported at least one physical assault (pushing, restraining, kicked, and hit) in 2009. This applies to just over half of the respondents surveyed (50.7 percent). The selection was based on two criteria: firstly, when compared with the use of dangerous objects/weapons, these forms of violence are experienced relatively frequently. Secondly, the physical integrity of a police officer is damaged by their experience of violence, so assaults have serious consequences. To identify which factors influence an officer's risk of victimisation, logistic regression analysis was used (cf. Backhaus et al. 2003). This highlights the impact of a variable (such as gender) given the influence of other variables (such as age). As shown in Table 6.1, two models were run. The first focuses solely on the named characteristics of the affected police officers, while the second model considered the additional influence of duty-related factors (type of duty, area of operation). These factors describe the police officers' everyday working situation and thus determine to a certain extent the kind of situations they are generally exposed to. To interpret the influence of individual variables, reference is made to the exponential coefficient B ($\text{Exp}(B)$). If this has a value of over 1, the concerning variable raises the risk of an officer being physically attacked. Values below 1 state that the concerning variable has a reducing effect on the risk.

As the analysis shows, male officers have a significantly higher risk of being subject to physical assault compared to their female colleagues. So 52.1 percent of all male officers were assaulted at least once in 2009, but only 45.2 percent of female officers. There is also evidence that age influences the likelihood of experiencing violence. While around two-thirds of all officers under 30 (69.6 percent) had been victims of an assault while on duty, this applies to only around one third of all those over 50 (31.8 percent; and 52.4 percent of officers aged 30 to 49). There are also indications that the officers' body height increases their risk, while their weight plays no role at all. Where the officers have an immigrant background, i.e. at least one of their biological parents is not of German origin, their risk of

falling victim to violence is greater compared with their German colleagues who have no immigrant background. As the second model shows, apart from the personal factors stated, the type of duty they perform also plays a significant role. Those out on the beat or patrol are more than five times (69.6 percent) as likely to be physically assaulted compared with those performing other duties such as criminal investigations (22.3 percent). For officers belonging to special units, the risk is more than six times as high (73.3 percent). By way of contrast, the area of operation – measured in terms of inhabitants – has, according to the analyses, no direct influence on their risk of being exposed to violence.

Table 6.1 *Officer-related influencing factors of physical attacks in 2009 (logistic regression; coefficient: Exp(B))*

| | Model I | Model II |
|--|---------------|---------------|
| Gender: Male | 1.826*** | 1.655*** |
| Age: Under 30 | Reference | Reference |
| Age: 30 to 49 | 0.408*** | 0.583*** |
| Age: 50+ | 0.156*** | 0.300*** |
| Height: Small (under 1.76 m) | Reference | Reference |
| Height: Medium (1.76 m to 1.83 m) | 1.098* | 1.109* |
| Height: Large (1.83 m and over) | 1.145* | 1.177** |
| Weight: Light (under 78 kg) | Reference | Reference |
| Weight: Average (78 kg to 90 kg) | 0.959 | 0.943 |
| Weight: Heavy (91 kg and over) | 0.955 | 0.904 |
| Immigrant Background | 1.280* | 1.313* |
| Type of Duty: Other | | Reference |
| Type of Duty: Special unit | | 6.460*** |
| Type of Duty: Regular beat (including on foot) | | 5.247*** |
| Area of operation: Rural/urban (less than 250,000 inhabitants) | | Reference |
| Area of operation: Town/city (250,000+ inhabitants) | | 0.929 |
| Number of cases | 18.101 | 18.101 |
| Nagelkerke's R² | .085 | .243 |

*** p < .001, ** p < .01, * p < .05

Looking at Nagelkerke's R² it becomes clear that demographic characteristics only explain a small portion of the variance (Model I, 8.5 percent). The percentage rises almost three-fold (24.7 percent) when the type of duty is also taken into account. As a result, visible characteristics appear to

have only a small influence on the risk of being physically assaulted. Of more importance are structural factors like the type of duty and the associated activities. That police officers on the beat or patrol are frequently exposed to violence is also confirmed by earlier studies (cf. Falk 2000, Griffiths/McDanie 1993, Manzoni 2003). Given that they interact daily with citizens who are emotionally upset, drunk, aggressive and helpless, it is not surprising that they have a higher risk of being victimized. The same applies for officers assigned to special units where the duties involved expose them to a greater risk of violence (such as demonstrations). It is much more difficult to explain the victim-related differences found as regards gender, age, immigrant background, and body height. The following offers a number of possible explanations for these findings, which should be analysed in future studies.

Evidence that female police officers are rarely exposed to violence while on duty can be found in the works of Bosold (2006), Bragason (2006), and Burke and Mikkelsen (2005). One possible explanation could be that assailants, who are mostly male, are more reluctant to assault a woman officer than a male officer. It might also be possible that female officers are assigned to less violence-related tasks than their male colleagues. Evidence of a gender stereotype in the assignment of duties, where female officers especially deal with situations involving children and women, can be found in Rustemeyer and Tank (2001). In addition, male officers could have a natural 'protector' instinct why they place themselves in front of their female colleagues as a protective barrier especially in dangerous situations (Manzoni 2003). Further, it has been suggested that female officers due to their socialisation are more communicative, empathetic, supportive, and less aggressive in police-citizen interactions than their male peers (Rabe-Hemp 2008). Hence female officers could have a calming effect on conflict situations, which in turn lessens their risk of being assaulted. However, the assumption that female officers are more supportive towards citizens is only partly confirmed by empirical evidence (Rabe-Hemp 2008). Rather, when compared with their male colleagues, they are less likely to use extreme controlling behaviours such as threats and violence in interactions with citizens (Garner et al. 1996, Manzoni 2003, Rabe-Hemp 2008, Schuck/Rabe-Hemp 2005). So the fact that the use of violence by citizens and by the police are mutually dependent (cf. Garner et al. 1996, Mazoni 2003), could be the reason why female police officers report fewer assaults.

The finding that younger officers are more frequently exposed to violence than older officers while on duty can be assumed to be relatively reliable based on the findings of other studies (cf. Bosold 2006, Bragason 2006, Griffiths/McDaniel 1993, Manzoni 2003). It would appear that older officers are more familiar with other types of activities than their younger colleagues, so that the latter have a greater risk of experiencing an assault. A comparison of the two models (see Table 6.1) provides evidence, at least in part, to support this because the coefficients are weakened by the inclusion of the type of duty performed. Another reason for the differences observed could lie in the fact that, due to their experience, older officers are better able to assess the level of danger in a given situation or with a certain type of citizen (e. g. drunken person), and can take the necessary action to prevent possible escalation. It is also possible that younger officers in particular are under pressure to prove themselves. They may respond less calmly to provocation, issues threats far faster, and thus foster conflict.

Although by determining a minimum body height for police officers it can be implicitly suggested that physical stature plays a role in the profession, little empirical study has been conducted to confirm this assumption. The few studies that have taken account of the height and weight of officers who have suffered assaults provide inconsistent results (cf. Garner et al. 1996, Griffiths/McDaniel 1993, Rabe-Hemp/Schuck 2007). Thus, the findings of this study are to be interpreted with caution. Some of the explanations discussed in connection with the gender effect revealed could also be true in this case. For example, selection effects could be responsible for the fact that officers of bigger stature are more frequently assaulted by virtue of their larger size, and are frequently assigned to attend dangerous situations or place themselves in front of their colleagues in such situations. But it could also be possible that an assailant deliberately targets a bigger officer because they see them as the greatest threat. A further explanation could be that the officers themselves, on account of their knowledge of their physical strength, are less likely to shy away from confrontation.

Another issue to be treated with caution is the risk-increasing effect of an immigrant background, due to the low number of such cases.³ The dif-

3 Only 2.5 percent of the officers surveyed had an immigrant background. They also came from various countries, meaning that the existence of an immigrant background was not necessarily evident.

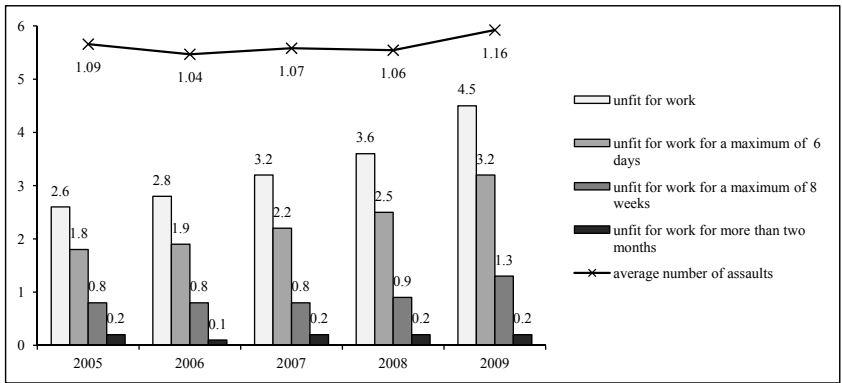
ferences shown could be explained at least in two ways: First, it may be possible that, due to a lack of acceptance, officers with an immigrant background have a greater need to win the public's respect. They thus react harshly when confronted with an obvious lack of respect. Second, it could also happen that a citizen demonstrates a racist attitude towards a migrant officer, thus escalating the situation.

6.2.3 *How have trends developed in respect of violence against police officers in the period 2005 to 2009?*

To obtain detailed information on trends in violence against police officers, all participants were asked how often they had been experienced an assault in the period 2005 and 2009 which resulted in being unfit for work for at least one day. The reference period of five years was chosen in line with the retrospective focus of the survey. It can be assumed that violent events and its circumstances (such as the location of the assault, and the number of assailants) which occurred in the past five years are easier to recall than those experienced far earlier. For this reason, also the criterion of being unfit for work following an assault was chosen which highlights particularly serious, consequential attacks.

Of all 20.938 police officers in the survey, about one in eight (12.9 percent) had suffered at least one assault that had rendered them unfit for work for at least one day between 2005 and 2009. Over the five-year period, the number of victimized officers rose steadily from 2.6 percent to 4.5 percent (Figure 6.2), while the average number of assaults per victim remains relatively constant (1.09 in 2005, 1.16 in 2009). A differentiated analysis of assaults according to the length of time an officer is unfit for work shows various trends. Extremely serious assaults leading to officers being unfit for work for periods of over two months remain at a constantly low level over the reporting time. The rate of assaults resulting in officers being away from work for at least one week and at most eight weeks is relatively stable over the first four years. The only significant increase is between 2008 (0.9 percent) and 2009 (1.3 percent). Thus, the increase in assaults with a maximum of six days' sick leave is responsible for the rise observed between 2005 and 2009. However, the problems involved in retrospective surveys must be taken into account (distorted recall, for example).

Fig. 6.2 Police officers assaulted and made unfit for Work (in percent)



One key question that must be answered is how to explain the evident rise in violent assaults that render officers unfit for work. In many instances, reference is made to a general increase in the lack of respect shown towards police officers, especially by teenagers and young adults. This is contradicted by studies that show that most school children and adults have a positive attitude towards the police (Baier et al. 2010, Baier et al. 2011). The assumption that the increase is due to a greater willingness in society to use violence does not hold up given the decline in violent crime recorded by German Police Crime Statistics since 2007, and which was previously shown in self-report studies (Baier et al. 2009). As a possible cause of the rise in violence against police officers, Ellrich et al. (2012, p. 49) point to an increasing polarising trend in society. This sees a greater divide between societal groups. Polarisation is evident in various areas, such as a polarisation between low-income and high-income families, and between nationals and immigrants. In recent years, greater polarisation has occurred regarding political views (left and right-wing tendencies) in society. Such gaps cannot in themselves explain the phenomenon of the rise in violence against the police. The increased polarisation can, however, be seen in connection with the fact that today, more and more communities are emerging which do not share the same standards and values as the rest of Germany. Within these communities, no-one fears the thought of exercising violence against police officers. Violent assaults are seen as a way to gain recognition within the community; they also serve to underpin political ideologies, as is the case among left-wing groups. Over the past few years, reports by Germany’s Ministry of the Interior show a correlation

with rising violence among left-wing extremists, especially against police officers (BMI 2011). Because this hypothesis has yet to be supported by empirical evidence, other explanations must also be thought of (for example, an increasing tendency for teenagers and young adults to spend their free time on the street and in public places).

6.2.4 *What characterises share assailants who carried out assaults, and the situations in which violence against police officers occurred?*

As part of the survey, officers who had suffered an assault between 2005 and 2009 that rendered them unfit for work were asked to describe such a case in detail.⁴ Data collected on 2,603 cases comprises not only statements regarding the assailants, but also on the circumstances and the outcomes of the assaults.

The following conclusions can be drawn regarding the assailants involved in violent assaults:

- Almost three out of four assaults were carried out by one assailant (74.8 percent)
- The assailants were almost exclusively male (92.9 percent)
- Younger individuals are over-represented among the assailants when compared with their numbers among the overall German population. A total of 59.3 percent of assailants were under 25 at the time of the assault.
- In six out of ten cases (59.4 percent), officers stated the assailants to be German, 36.1 percent were non-German, with the most frequent countries named being the former Soviet Union (e.g. Russia and Kazakhstan), Turkey and other Muslim countries (such as Iran and Iraq).
- In almost three-quarters of cases, the assailants were alcohol affected at the time of the assault (71.7 percent). There is also a rise in the percentage of drunken assailants in the past five years.
- In two out of three assaults (64.8 percent), individuals were involved who were already known to the police.

4 The choice of assault for the detailed description was made based on two criteria: the most serious assault experienced by an officer which was operationalised via the length of sick leave days, or the most recent assault (Ellrich et al. 2012, p. 51).

- The assailants mostly used physical violence in the form of jostling with, hitting or kicking a police officer (84.0 percent). The use of weapons or other dangerous objects (such as fence planks) was reported for one in five assaults (19.3 percent). Therefore violent attacks against police officers seem to occur in the course of the interactions rather than be planned.

Similar findings on assailants are reported in various national and international studies (cf. Brown 1994, Falk 2000, FBI 2010, Griffiths/McDaniel 1993, Ohlemacher et al. 2003). However, based on this description, no conclusion can be drawn regarding which assailants pose a greater risk of the officers being assaulted. Because police officers are often confronted with drunken people, it is not really surprising that many of those drunken people are among their assailants. To conduct a risk analysis, it is necessary to compare police-citizen interactions that result in a violent assault with those that proceed peacefully. Few studies have performed such analyses so far (Johnson 2011). As part of a supplemental survey module, in which respondents are asked about their most recent incident involving domestic violence, the question of which factors might increase officers' risk of being injured on duty can be analysed (Ellrich et al. 2012, p. 163 ff). Apart from the composition of the police team, respondents were also asked about origin and gender of the offender of domestic violence, and whether they were affected by alcohol. Further, the officers should answer if they or their colleagues had been injured in this most recent incident. As such, the injury of an officer serves as a measure with which to assess the degree of danger involved in certain types of situation. The analysis was restricted to incidents in which only two officers were present. It can be stated that one in seventeen incidents involving domestic violence ends with at least one officer being injured (6.0 percent). The variables influencing this risk are listed in Table 6.2, which also presents findings of logistic regression analysis.

As can be seen, in cases of domestic violence, the offender's gender plays no role in terms of a police officer's risk of being injured. Incidents of domestic violence in which women were the offender ended just as frequently with an officer being hurt as with male offenders. Where other offender constellations are involved (e.g. both women and men as joint offenders), there is evidence of a slightly greater risk that officers will be hurt. It is possible that the parties join forces against the police and launch an assault together.

Table 6.2 *Influencing factors in the injury of at least one officer in the most recent incident of domestic violence (only two-person teams, logistic regression; coefficient: Exp(B))*

| | Model I |
|---|------------------|
| offender: only woman | <i>Reference</i> |
| offender: only man | 0.924 |
| offender: Other | 2.097 |
| offender drunk | 5.546*** |
| Family with immigrant background | 1.439* |
| Woman officer on team | 0.786† |
| Officer with immigrant background on team | 1.749 |
| Number of cases | 3.819 |
| Nagelkerke's R² | .067 |

*** p < .001, ** p < .01, * p < .05, † p < .10

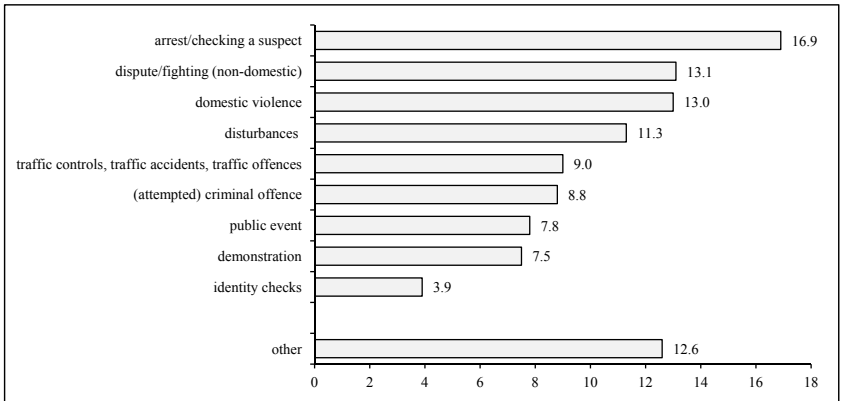
The greatest influencing factor as regards injury involves alcohol consumption on the part of the offender of the domestic violence. Police who are confronted with drunken offenders have a 5.5 times greater risk of being injured when compared with non-alcohol situations. That alcohol is a key risk factor for assaults on police officers attending incidents of domestic violence has been shown in other studies (Johnson 2001, Rabe-Hemp/Schuck 2007). A lack of self-control resulting from alcohol consumption, along with increased emotional responses in the form of anger, bitterness, frustration and fear could all be responsible for this effect (Johnson 2011, Schmalzl 2005).

In addition, there is evidence that officers are injured slightly more frequently in incidents involving families with immigrant backgrounds. One explanation is that police ‘interference’ in the private affairs of people with other cultural backgrounds is far less accepted than by families of German origin. It is also possible that failure to observe certain behavioural norms (e.g. if a male officer speaks alone with the woman of the household) can lead more easily to escalation.

If there is at least one woman officer in the team, the risk of injury lessens when compared with exclusively male teams. The assumption that when dealing with such incidents, female officers mainly focus on the victims, and thus the likelihood of injury for them is less, provides no explanation here: Supplementary analyses show that the presence of a woman officer reduces the risk of both officers being injured (Ellrich et al. 2012, p. 179). These indicate that female officers have a de-escalating effect in

such conflict situations. Whether this is due to particular skills that female officers possess or to greater reluctance on the part of the offenders to attack a mixed-gender team remains unclear. The extent to which the findings on domestic violence situations can be transferred to other incidents attended by the police must be subjected to future analysis.

Fig. 6.3 Situations resulting in assaults where officers are made unfit for work (in percent)



The situations with the most frequent occurrence of assaults which render officers unfit for work involve arrests and checking suspects (16.9 percent, see Figure 6.3). Arrests in particular can be perceived by the people involved as a massive intrusion and a severe restriction of their personal freedom which they try to escape (Haller et al. 1999, Schmalzl 2005). About the same frequency is reported by officers attending disputes/fighting and domestic violence (13.1 percent and 13.0 percent resp.). Also, one in nine respondents stated that the attack had occurred while they were attending a disturbance (e.g. unruly behaviour by drunkards; 11.3 percent). Similar findings are shown in other studies (Bragason 2006, Brown 1994, Falk 2000, FBI 2010, Griffiths/McDaniel 1993, Manzoni 2003, Ohlemacher et al. 2003). Publicly debated police activities such as demonstrations and soccer matches are named relatively rarely. But this does not allow the assumption that officers are confronted with less violence when performing such duties compared with before mentioned incidents. Rather, it can be suggested that demonstrations for example result in fewer attacks that lead to an officer being unfit for work because the officers are better

equipped (particularly with protective gear), and are trained to deal with such dangerous situations.

With regard to timing and locality, the following was found:

- At weekends in particular, there is an increased concentration of assaults. Almost two-thirds of all assaults (63.1 percent) occurred between Friday and Sunday.
- The assaults occurred largely in the evening and during the night (between 8 pm and 4 am: 53.2 percent).
- With regard to the nature of the area, it can be said that the assaults occurred in largely residential areas (44.0 percent), while more socially problematic areas were rarely cited (27.4 percent). On the one hand, that problematic areas are not the prime location for assaults can be explained by their small share in a town. On the other, it can be assumed that the officers expect these areas to be more dangerous and are thus more observant and respond more cautiously than in more residential areas.
- Almost one in two assaults (47.0 percent) occurred in a public space (street, square, or park), while 23.6 percent of officers were attacked in private homes or gardens. In most cases the place where the assault occurred is not deemed to be dangerous for the police (80.3 percent).

Similar findings regarding timing and locality can also be seen in other studies (cf. Bragason 2006, Falk 2000).

Data was also collected on the information available to the police officers, how they assessed the situation prior to the assault, and how they behaved towards the offenders. Analysis showed that:

- The officers rarely had detailed information regarding the individuals involved in the incident (e.g. if they were armed or had a police record), or the level of escalation (12.4 and 21.5 percent respectively, Ellrich et al. 2012, p. 67ff). Perhaps compared with officers with no information better informed officers are more able to prepare themselves to deal with the situation and the assailants, and can adopt a situation-specific strategy.
- Only two out of five officers (39.8 percent) assessed the situation as (fairly) dangerous prior to the assault.
- In 74.4 percent of cases, the subsequent assailant was deemed (fairly) aggressive prior to the attack.

- The officers in three out of four cases (75.4 percent) had communicated with the subsequent assailant before the assault occurred.
- The officers themselves frequently used physical restraining measures when dealing with offenders (84.0 percent). Significantly rarer was their use of a pepper spray or a baton to fend off an assault (26.2 and 29.9 percent respectively). Only in 35 assaults (1.5 percent) it was necessary for them to use their firearms.

Against the backdrop that in most cases, the assault was preceded by communication with the subsequent assailant (who had been assessed as aggressive), the question arises as to why the assaults could not be prevented given that there were signs that the situation could escalate. In other studies, assaults mostly came to the officers as a surprise, although most assaults did not occur immediately the officers arrived on the scene, but rather in the course of interaction with the individuals concerned (Ohlemacher et al. 2003, Sessar et al. 1980). In reference to this, Schmalzl (2005) questions whether there might not have been an indication or warning signs for the apparent sudden assault which were not sufficiently recognised or assessed. He points to the development of a psychological early warning system or risk radar (also Füllgrabe 2002) which would enable better awareness and risk assessment.

6.2.5 *How do violent attacks affect the officers involved?*

Exposure to violence can be a life-changing experience. One's previously assumed 'invulnerability' and perceived ability to deal with situations (even difficult ones) can be shattered by such events, inducing fear and anxiety (Reiser/Geiger 1984). This is confirmed by the findings of the survey.

With regard to physical consequences resulting from a violent assault, the officers surveyed cited injuries to the hand and arm as the most frequent incurred (46.6 percent, Ellrich et al. 2012, p. 120 f). Significantly less frequent were injuries to the face/head (29.6 percent), and to the neck, throat, shoulder and back area (22.6 percent). However, the latter type of injury appears to be the most serious. Officers with neck, throat, shoulder and back injuries not only were unfit for work for longer periods, but they were often deployed to other duties after an assault or were declared unfit for active duty and assigned to a desk job.

Problems in other areas of life also play an important role. More than one quarter of those affected said they had difficulties sleeping after the assault (27.7 percent), and one in seven officers (14.9 percent) said their relationships had been affected, i.e. interaction with their partner or others in their social environment. Additional analyses found, that the longer an officer is unfit for work, the more they are affected by such problems. Because police officers are confronted in the line of duty with a wide range of extreme, stressful and potentially traumatic events, including their own experience with violence, many studies have addressed the issue of post-traumatic stress disorder (cf. Gasch 2000, Schneider/Latscha 2010). This psychological syndrome takes in nightmares, withdrawal, avoidance behaviour, and psychosomatic complaints such as anxiety and disturbed sleep patterns following a traumatic experience (Saß et al. 2003). In the sample, a total of 4.9 percent of officers who had been assaulted showed signs of post-traumatic stress disorder four weeks after the attack (Ellrich et al. 2012, p. 124 f). There were no significant differences regarding gender, age or type of duty performed. However, there is evidence of a link between the length of time an officer is unfit for work and a diagnosis of suspected post-traumatic stress disorder. Officers who were unfit for work for more than two months were nine times more likely to be suspected of suffering from the disorder than those with a maximum two days away from work (18.6 versus 2.1 percent respectively). In addition, a number of other assault-related characteristics were linked to the psychological disorder. These include the officers' perceived reasons for the attack. Those who claimed the assailant was anti-police/state, or had personal differences or a desire to kill were far more likely to be suspected of suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. If the assault involved weapons or other dangerous objects, the number of cases of officers suspected to have the disorder doubled.

Up to now, little attention has been paid to the potential psychological effects of facing legal consequences in the form of a complaint, charges being pressed or a disciplinary hearing after the assault. While this is rarely the case – only about two out of ten officers (17.7 percent) faced any legal charges – the effect on the police officers involved should not be underestimated (Ellrich et al. 2012, p. 134 ff). As can be seen, the greater the legal measures, the greater the stress an officer is exposed to. Disciplinary hearings are shown to be particularly stressful. Around one in five officers (19.6 percent) who faced a criminal investigation or a disciplinary hearing showed symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, while only

4.1 percent of officers who faced no legal consequences did so. Available data allows no conclusions to be drawn regarding the underlying reasons. It is possible that some officers are aware that they made mistakes during an assault and are afraid of the consequences. Others, by way of contrast, may feel they have been wrongly accused, and cannot understand that the assailant-victim relationship has been reversed. In addition, legal consequences spark existential fears, which also result in severe mental stress. Against this backdrop, the provision of support for the officers concerned would be of help, especially in such situations.

Apart from physical and mental problems, experience as a victim of violence can also cause changes in attitudes and perceptions. This is supported, for example, for the concept of fear of crime (Skogan 1987). One component of this construct is cognitive fear, and the expectation of falling victim to crime in the near future. In the context of this survey, this included the likelihood of experience an assault in the next twelve months. The analysis shows that officers who experienced such attacks in the five years between 2005 and 2009 were eight times more likely to believe they would be a victim of a further assault within the next year than their colleagues who had not been assaulted (31.7 versus 4.1 percent).⁵ As a result, the officers who had had been attacked were accompanied by greater fear while on duty. It can be assumed that such fear manifests itself in precisely those situations that follow a similar pattern to the one in which the officer suffered a violent assault. The associated strong emotional stress can in turn have a negative effect on the officer's ability to make a decision and to act, thus increasing their risk of re-victimization.

What also can be shown is that exposure to violence can be linked to a police officer's self-image on the job. Those who had been victimized agreed more frequently with the statement that they were emotional dustbins or scapegoats. It can be suggested that officers who feel they are society's scapegoats tend to take a harder line when dealing with citizens. This in turn can lead more easily to escalation when attending an incident, and to a repeated violent assault.

5 Given the cross-sectional design of the survey, a reversed causal relationship cannot be ruled out where greater fear of crime might have resulted in officers experiencing a violent attack.

6.3 *Summary*

The aim of this paper was to provide an insight into the subject of violence against police officers in Germany. Findings were taken from a survey of police officers concerning their exposure to violence. Conducted in early 2010, the study showed that police officers are often exposed to various types of violence, with verbal and mild physical assaults the dominant forms. They also experience serious assaults that lead to them being unfit for work: About one in eight officers had experienced at least one such assault in the five-year period covered by the survey. Regarding the latter mentioned cases an increase especially in assaults with less serious outcomes could be stated between 2005 and 2009. In line with the findings of previous research studies, the assaults (causing officers to be unfit for work) mostly followed an arrest or a dispute where the assailant acted alone, was male and young, had a police record, and was affected by alcohol. Further, it can also be concluded that apart from physical and mental problems, exposure to violence can result in a heightened fear of repeated assaults, and to a negative self-image.

One area of focus in the survey was to identify factors which are linked to the risk of an assault on a police officer. Only a few studies have so far attempted to conduct this type of risk assessment (Johnson 2001, Rabe-Hemp/Schuck 2007). As was shown using the data collected in the survey, young male officers of large height, and officers with an immigrant background have a greater risk of being assaulted. Also, officers out on the beat or on patrol in a vehicle, and those belonging to special units, are more likely to fall victim to violence compared with colleagues who perform other duties. Looking at the assailants, the influence of alcohol and an immigrant background increase the risk of an officer being assaulted while attending an incident in which domestic violence is involved.

The specific processes responsible for certain officers being assaulted more frequently than others cannot be sufficiently illustrated with available data. In general, however, it can be assumed that several factors play a role. Explanations for the gender differences involved can be apportioned to structural effects (e.g. differing tasks), an assailant's hesitance in attacking a woman, and the de-escalating skills of female officers on account of their social skills. Looking at the development of suitable vocational and further training measures for police officers in respect of violence prevention, a study of non-visible characteristics, meaning certain attitudes and abilities in which male and female officers differ, appears

useful. If female officers experience less violence because they are less frequently exposed to dangerous situations or because the assailants are hesitant to assault them because of their gender, special training would not be necessary. But if female officers were less at risk of a violent assault because they have better social skills than their male colleagues, use fewer threats, exercise less force and are generally more cautious in their interaction with citizens indeed, these findings could be used to develop special programmes (such as communication skills training).

What needs to be analysed also is the extent to which certain constellations raise the risk of a violent confrontation. Different people will react differently in different situations and in interaction with different police officers. Indications of such differing effects can be seen, for example, in the study by Rabe-Hemp and Schuck (2007). They report that for female police officers, the greatest risk of assault occurs when they are confronted with drunken individuals while attending incidents of domestic violence. In other words, the combination of alcohol, gender and situation play a key role in their victimisation risk. To reveal such complex causal structures, additional studies are needed which use a range of different methodological approaches (such as questioning and observation, and quasi-experimental design).

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