

Josip Pavliček, Darko Dundović, Mirjana Kondor

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CRIMINOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PERPETRATORS OF MURDER AND ATTEMPTED MURDER TOWARD POLICE OFFICERS

This study is dealing with the perpetrator as an important factor within the framework of criminal offenses of murder and attempted murder of police officers. We have described the general characteristics of perpetrators and analysed their possible influence on the perpetration of those criminal offenses. Aside from obtaining the criminological profile of the perpetrator, an important goal is the use of those characteristics for prevention of these very serious criminal offenses.

Key words: perpetrator of murder, murder, attempted murder, police officer

INTRODUCTION

After an assault on a police officer, people usually wonder what kind of people does such things. If they attack the ones who protect us, what are they capable of doing to the people who have not been trained or equipped to defend themselves. Even more questions arise when a police officer gets killed. People look for reasons, make hypotheses and draw conclusions. This research gives answers to some of those questions.

Similar reasons have guided numerous scientists who have dealt with criminological features of perpetrators of violent criminal offenses toward police officers, whether resulting in death or just in injuries. In their study dealing with 1550 cases of attacks on police officers in the territory of Baltimore County Police Department in the period from 1 January 1984 to December 1986 not resulting with death, Kaminski and Sorensen found that the majority of attacks on police officers were committed by younger unarmed attackers. They also concluded that certain situations, like arrests or prevention of attackers' escape represent the increased risk of injury of police officers.¹

In one of his studies Kaminski emphasizes bad economic conditions in countries whose characteristics are low incomes, high degree of poverty and high unemployment rate as circumstances which among others increase the motivation for perpetration of criminal offenses.²

Furthermore, Kaminski, Marvell and Thomas have found in their criminological research that the variables referring to the economic growth decrease of inflation, growth of prison population and state of war influence the motivation of perpetrators as well as the possibility of perpetration of criminal offenses, which indirectly influences the decrease of the number of murders of police officers. They have also found the similarity between the age structure of perpetrators of murder of police officers and those of "other" murders.³

In their study dealing with 226 cases of murders of police officers in Great Britain (Bedfordshire, Greater Manchester and South Yorkshire) Brown and associates have come to the conclusion that one fourth of all the injuries that police officers had suffered, had been received during the arrest of the perpetrators, at which occasions police officers had tried to control the perpetrators, as well as after the primary overpowering of the perpetrators. They have also reached the conclusion that the perpetrators had mostly used firearms as the means of perpetration in direct attacks on police officers, as well as in the cases when the police officers had caught the perpetrators in the perpetration of criminal offenses.⁴

¹ Kaminski, R. i Sorensen, D.: A Multivariate Analysis of Individual, Situational and Environmental Factors Associated with Police Assault Injuries, *American Journal of Police*, vol. 14, no.3/4, 1995,

² Kaminski, R.: *Assessing the County – Level Structural Covariates of Police Homicides*, Homicide Studies, Sage publications, vol.12, 2008,

³ Kaminski, R. i Marvell, T.: A Comparison of Changes in Police and General Homicides: 1930-1998, *Criminology*, vol. 40, num.1, 2002,

⁴ Brown, B. and others: *Assaults on the Police Officers: An examination of the circumstances in which such incidents occur*, Police Research Series, Paper 10, Home Office Police Department, London, 1994.

Ellis and associates have elaborated a study in order to identify the danger of domestic violence for police officers, as well as the factors which increase the risk of injuries for police officers who perform such interventions. The study has shown that domestic violence is much less dangerous than, for instance, robberies and arrests/transportation of the people serving their time.⁵

METHODOLOGY

During the research, the total of 88 police records (known or unknown perpetrators) of criminal offenses of murder or attempted murder collected from the whole territory of the Republic of Croatia have been analysed. Out of that number, in 8 cases they committed murders, and in 80 cases attempted murders. The police records for the period of twelve years (from 1 January 1998 to 31 December 2009) have been analysed.

For that purpose, a special questionnaire had been created and divided into several parts out of which one important part had referred to the perpetrator of criminal offense of murder and attempted murder of police officers viewing the perpetrators through the prism of criminological characteristics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

General characteristics

The share of murders of police officers in the total number of homicides varies by year but does not exceed 2.73%. The average share of attempted murder of police officers in the total number of attempted murders was 5.69%. The most significant deviations recorded 2006th and 2007th when this share was close to 13%.

Analysing general characteristics of murders and attempted murders of police officers it was found that the most common means of perpetration (40.9% of cases) have been personal vehicles driven by the perpetrators, followed by the high percentage of 62.5% for committed murders and 35% for attempted murders of police officers by means of firearms.⁶ The analysis of motives⁷ leading to the perpetration of murder or attempted murder of police officers has shown that avoiding the criminal offense and/or misdemeanour responsibility by the perpetrator dominates to a significant extent (88.1% of cases).⁸

An important characteristic of murders and attempted murders of police officers in the Republic of Croatia is that their perpetrators mostly commit them independently. They are committed by two perpetrators in only 10.7% of cases, while for 1.1% of cases it is not known by how many perpetrators they have been committed because the perpetrators have not been discovered nor is there any reliable information about the number of perpetrators. It is the matter of criminal offenses with a considerably low or nonexistent dark figure, as well as of criminal offenses with a relatively low number of unknown perpetrators. In the analysed sample we find 5.4% of criminal offenses with unknown perpetrators.

The characteristic of the assaulted person, i.e. the awareness of the perpetrator that they are attacking a police officer is very important for the perpetration of these criminal offenses. There is no

⁵ Ellis, D., Choi, A., Blaus, C.: Injuries to police officers attending domestic disturbance: An empirical study, *Canadian Journal of Criminology*, 1993.

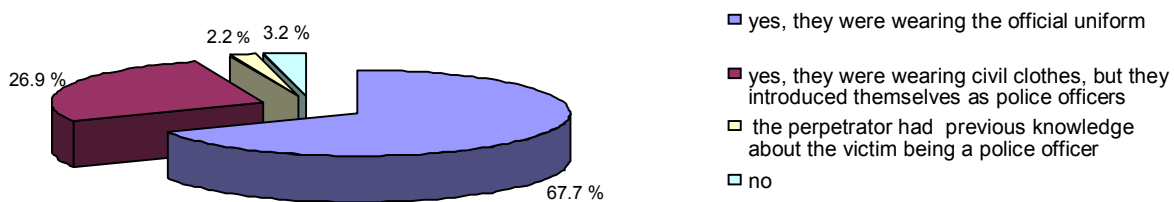
⁶ Within the framework of the research performed in the prisons of Gauteng province, South Africa, Minaar has interviewed 28 perpetrators of assaults and murders of police officers and found that in the total percentage of 88% cases the interviewed prisoners – perpetrators of assaults and murders of police officers had used firearms, out of which in 81% of the cases a pistol. Minnaar, A.: Profiling „Cop killers“ in South Africa, *Crime research in South Africa*, Department of Criminology, vol. 1, num. 1, 2000.

⁷ Minaar also finds that the total 42% of interviewed prisoners – perpetrators of attacks and murders of police officers had committed the criminal offenses in order to avoid the arrest, while 12% of them had been caught in the act of perpetration of criminal offense by the police officers. Minnaar, A, op. cit. (note 7)

⁸ Pavliček, J., Ljubin Golub, T., Kondor-Langer, M.: Criminological and criminalistic characteristics of murders and attempted murders of police officers, *CACLP*, vol. 18, num. 2/2011.

doubt about it in case of assault on a police officer in uniform, which is the most common case. As we can see from Chart 1, the most common targets of attacks have been police officers wearing uniforms, which is logical taking into consideration their share within police structure. In the remaining 26.9% of cases, the perpetrators also knew they were attacking police officers because the officers had introduced themselves in the appropriate way at the occasion of undertaking the official action. The perpetrators were not completely sure that they were dealing with police officers in only 2.2% of cases.

Chart – 1
Perpetrator’s awareness that the victim is a police officer



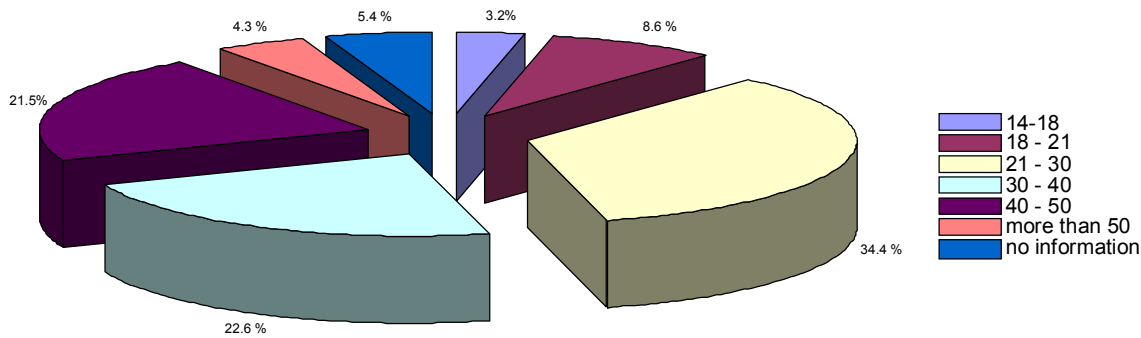
Age and gender of perpetrators

When we consider the age structure of perpetrators of the criminal offenses of murder and attempted murder of police officers, we can see that the perpetrators are mostly adults. However, within that group we should not forget that 8.6% of perpetrators were younger adults who have committed the criminal offenses at the age between eighteen and twenty-one. Children and minors participate in perpetration with 3.2%. If we want to see whether there is a critical age of perpetrators when it comes to the most serious attacks on police officers, we can only point out information that 6.5% of perpetrators were 23 years old at the moment of perpetration, and 5.4% of them were between 20 and 29 years of age. However almost 79% of offenders aged between 18 to 40 years. We can say that these crimes committed by relatively young men.⁹ Kaminski has also found in his research that the police officers are under a bigger risk of being killed in the countries with a relatively bigger number of citizens between 25 and 34 years of age.¹⁰

Chart – 2
Perpetrator’s age at the time of perpetration of criminal offense

⁹ Moxey and McKenzie, 1993 and Noaks and Christopher, 1990 state in their research that the attackers are mostly between 17 and 25 years of age, and on the average in their early or mid-twenties. Brown, B. and others: Assaults on the Police Officers: An examination of the circumstances in which such incidents occur, Police Research Series, Paper 10, Home Office Police Department, London, 1994.

¹⁰ Kaminski, R.: Assessing the County – Level Structural Covariates of Police Homicides, Homicide Studies, vol.12, Sage publications, 2008, p. 370.



As far as gender is concerned, based on the results obtained, it can be concluded that this is a “male” offense, which is confirmed by Minnaar's research in which all the interviewed prisoners – perpetrators were male.¹¹ The relative share of female perpetrators in criminal offenses of murder and attempted murder of police officers was only 2.2%.

Females participated in the commission of two attempted murders. It was about two young women old 26 and 34 years.

Mental disturbances and influence of drugs

The police records of murders and attempted murders of police officers mostly do not contain any information on whether or not the perpetrators had been treated for mental illnesses. We find such information at only 16 out of 93 analysed perpetrators. Out of 16 mentioned perpetrators, it has been found that 10 of them had not suffered from mental disturbances, while 6 of them had been treated for mental disturbances. Out of 6 perpetrators who had been treated for mental disturbances, four had been treated for mental illnesses, out of whom two had schizophrenia, while one of them suffered from the post-traumatic stress disorder.

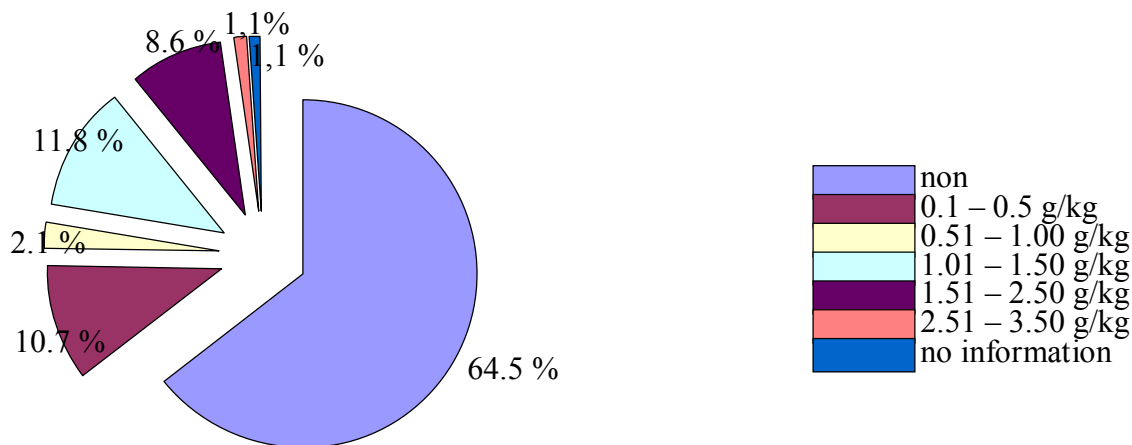
At the moment of perpetration of criminal offenses, most of the perpetrators (64.5%) were not under the influence of alcohol. Among the ones who were, in case of 11.8% of them, the measured concentration of alcohol in blood was between 1.01 and 1.50 g/kg followed by 10.7% of perpetrators with measured concentration of between 0.1 and 0.5 g/kg.

The highest concentration of alcohol in blood has been measured in case of one perpetrator and amounted 3.00 g/kg. The lowest concentration also has been measured in case of one perpetrator and mounted 0.13 g/kg. Alcohol dependence has been found in 3 perpetrators, while 6 of them have been found to consume alcohol from time to time.

The above mentioned results still point to alcohol as considerably present risk factor which can contribute to the perpetration of analysed criminal offenses.

Chart – 3.
Concentration of alcohol in the blood of perpetrators

¹¹ Minnaar, A, op. cit. (note 7)



At the time of perpetration of criminal offenses of murder or attempted murder 90.3% of perpetrators were not under the influence of narcotics. Out of 9 perpetrators who were under the influence of narcotics at the time of perpetration of criminal offense, the presence of hashish or marihuana was found in cases of three of them, in cases of two of them heroin, and in cases of the remaining perpetrators cocaine, heptanone tablets and amphetamines. As regards the drug addictions, the records have showed reliable information on addiction for 60.2% of perpetrators. Out of the abovementioned number, 3.2% of perpetrators were found to be addicts, while in cases of 19.4% of them it has been found that they occasionally take some kind of drugs.

The fact that over one third of perpetrators of murders and attempted murders were under the influence of alcohol, and what is more, mostly under significant concentrations of alcohol in blood, give us the right to point to the necessity of careful behaviour of police officers towards people under the influence of narcotics and intoxicants, especially alcohol.¹² In this matter, it primarily means following safety protocols in police work, but also having protective equipment.

Analysis showed that the protective equipment helped reduce the severity of consequences of 10.1% (12) police officers - victims of attempted murder. The most it could help, with 11 police officers, ballistic vest, and one police officer it could help protector the forearm.

Socioeconomic status of perpetrators

If we analyse the level of education structure, high school education dominates in 53.8% of cases. We also find a high portion (24.7%) of perpetrators who have graduated only from primary school. The share of 6.5% belongs to the perpetrators who have university degree or other high education, but also to those who have not graduated from primary school. In that sense, we can say that the perpetrators of the analysed criminal offenses still have lower to medium education level.

In terms of occupation of the perpetrator, the largest number of perpetrators of crimes of murder and attempted murder at the expense of police officers were involved in service activities (29%). Among service occupations were most offenders who were workers (16.1%) and drivers and cooks (4.3%). This is followed by technical occupations with the relative share of 23.6% of which is dominated occupations for locksmith (4.3%). Only one perpetrator was a farmer by profession.

¹² Conradie has conducted a research during which police officers who had experienced assaults in South African provinces of Western Cape, Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng in the period from 1996 to 1999 voluntarily filled in questionnaires. During that research, he found that 69% of questioned police officers believed that their attackers had been under the influence of alcohol or narcotics. Conradie, H.: The Modus Operandi of Police Killers in Four Provinces of South Africa, Crime research in South Africa, Department of Criminology, vol. 2, num. 1, 2001

At the time of perpetration of a criminal offense, 53 perpetrators or 57% of them were not married, as opposed to 30 perpetrators who were married¹³ and 7 perpetrators living in common-law marriages.¹⁴

At the moment of perpetration of criminal offense the least number of perpetrators lived with someone who was not a member of their family (2.1%), followed by those who lived alone (10.8%), while the relative share of perpetrators who lived with their own family or with their immediate or extended family was by far the biggest (69.9%).

Out of 93 perpetrators 53.76% of them did not have any children at the time of perpetration, as opposed to 37.6% of them who were parents at the time of perpetration of the criminal offense. Thirteen perpetrators had one child each, twelve of them, or 12.9% had two children each, while one perpetrator had six children.

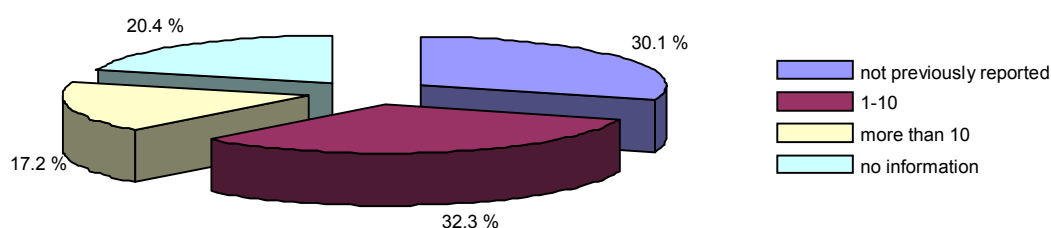
Although nominally the highest number of offenders unmarried and no kids there is no statistically significant difference in this respect.

Recidivism and structure of previously committed criminal acts

Information's about recidivism are very significant for the prevention of criminal offenses. We find that criminal charges had been filed against 49.5% of perpetrators for some other criminal offense before the perpetration of murder or attempted murder of a police officer. Among them are 17.2% perpetrators who had been reported for 10 or more criminal offenses.

Chart – 4

Perpetrators' previous criminal offenses



If we analyse the type of criminal offenses committed by the perpetrators before the murders or attempted murders of police officers, we find that it was the matter of criminal offenses of violence in 3.2% of cases, in 31.2% of cases non-violent criminal offenses, and in 15.1% of cases criminal offenses and violence and non-violent criminal offenses.

When it comes to non-violent criminal offenses, we find that 29 perpetrators have been reported for the total of 72 criminal offenses without the elements of violence.

The highest number of non-violent criminal offenses for which the perpetrators had previously been reported are criminal offenses against property (62.5%) with the prevalence of thefts and burglaries, followed by criminal offenses against values protected by international law (8.3%) whereby the criminal offense of drug abuse is the most represented one. They are followed by reports for criminal offenses against general safety of people and property and traffic safety (6.9%), whereby the most represented criminal offense is the one of endanger life and property by a generally dangerous action or means.

Out of the total of 93 perpetrators, 14 of them had previously been reported for criminal offenses with elements of violence and other non-violent criminal offenses. The abovementioned 14 perpetrators have committed altogether 86 criminal offenses among which the relatively highest

¹³ As opposed to that, Minnaar in his research finds that 42% of interviewed prisoners – perpetrators were married. Minnaar, A, op. cit. (note 7)

¹⁴ Pavliček, J., Ljubin Golub, T., Kondor-Langer, M., op.cit. (note 9), p.750.

portion consists of the criminal offenses against property (53.5%) committed in concurrence with some non-violent criminal offense. Among the criminal offenses with elements of violence occurring in concurrence with non-violent criminal offenses, the relatively biggest number of them has been criminal offenses against life and body (9.3%).

If we consider special recidivism, we find that only 8.6% of perpetrators had previously been reported for criminal offenses towards police officers, and only 1.1% had previously been reported for both criminal offenses and misdemeanours towards police officers.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Although in the Republic of Croatia murders of police officers can be classified as rare offenses¹⁵ the case with attempted murders is somewhat different, and their frequency is somewhere between 2% and 12.8% compared to other attempted murders. Such share of criminal offenses gives us certain bases upon which we can observe certain characteristics of perpetrators.

It is clear that there is actually no unique perpetrator type¹⁶ so, we can also agree with that fact when it comes to such criminal offenses towards police officers. We can still say that the perpetrators of the analysed criminal offenses are younger male persons, lower to middle educational status and relatively low socioeconomic status, who have committed the criminal offenses under considerable influence of intoxicants (higher presence of alcohol¹⁷, lower of narcotics) and it was usually not their first criminal offense.

Since no research of this kind has been conducted in the Republic of Croatia so far, a need is arising for this field to be given more attention in order to study more closely the etiological and phenomenological side of these criminal offenses as well as the perpetrators themselves, which could influence the decrease in their number, but also the mitigation of consequences of such criminal offenses. As to the prevention of these criminal offenses, the adequate equipping of police officers occupies the most important place, but what is equally important is the training that could help them recognize potential danger and train them for the adequate reaction in case of attack.

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¹⁵ Out of 12 analysed years, no murder has been committed in 6 years, there were two murders per year in two years, and in other years one murder per year. The annual MUP report on the situation and developments in delinquency for the period 1998 - 2009.

¹⁶ Singer, M. and others: Criminology, Third amended edition, Globus publisher, Faculty of Education and Rehabilitation, Zagreb, 2002, p. 443

¹⁷ Brown also finds that 42% of perpetrators were under the influence of alcohol at the time of perpetration, while 6% of them were under the influence of narcotics, which was also one of the factors contributing to the perpetration of attack on police officers. Brown, B. and others, op.cit. (note 5), p. 14.

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