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EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION IN PUBLIC SERVICES IN A DIVERSE LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL LANDSCAPE: A CHALLENGE FOR TEACHING AND TRAINING

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Abstract

Constantly changing global events impact local policing and emergency services personnel in their roles as guarantors of safety and security. This paper extends research originally completed in the United States and compares the results with findings from Kosovo police. Police in both Kosovo and Utah (in the United States) serve minority populations. In Utah, the population that was once homogeneous is now very diverse. The population in Kosovo is becoming more and more homogeneous, but with some unique challenges for police and other public safety agencies. In Utah, these population changes have occurred because the state has become a magnet for immigrants as well as refugees. As new country, Kosovo emerged with a minority population which is antagonistic toward the government and its representatives. Minorities have brought challenges for police agencies in terms of dealing with new languages and cultures, client relationships, criminal activities, and other safety considerations. Information for this paper was drawn from interviews of educators and emergency services personnel in Kosovo. Conclusions were drawn which apply to both Utah and Kosovo. Education of public safety personnel is vital in meeting the new challenges of a diverse and multi-cultural population.

Keywords: Multi-culturalism, Population diversity, Public safety education, Effective Communication, Utah, Kosovo.

1 INTRODUCTION

Police officers, firefighters, and paramedics face communication challenges daily as they meet with the public. Some of the people they deal with are hostile. Many are afraid, because they fear the unknown. For some it may be the first encounter with first responders. More often than not they are facing a life-threatening emergency. Often, they are of a different race and may speak a different language.

Manoj and Baker have identified three categories of communication challenges that police face: technological, sociological, and organizational. Technological relates to equipment and its operation in emergencies or disaster situations. Interoperability is important here so the various agencies involved can communicate, because they share compatible equipment, systems, and language. Sociological refers to the broader area of developing trust with the client population. Organizational challenges are created by the pure volume of communication in a disaster. [1]

Manoj and Baker describe the sociological challenges. "Sharing and dissemination of information is both critical and problematic, beginning with whom to trust in unfamiliar settings. Even after a level of trust is established, security issues must still be considered. Another important factor is the emotional volatility of the victim population. Fear, stress, and other emotions are aggravated by the lack of information."

While all three of these communication challenges may have to be dealt with, in this paper, we focus on the barriers to effective sociological communication. We look at the changing demographics in Kosovo and their impact on public safety and other services. We suggest cultural awareness training as a solution to the communication challenges and other problems first responders encounter as they work with a more diverse population.

According to Hennessy, Hendricks, and Hendricks [2], law enforcement educators and researchers divide cultural awareness training for the police into two types: race-relations training and cultural awareness models of training. Race relations models focus on increasing awareness of personal attitudes towards race and understanding of the structural dynamics of racism. Cultural awareness models or intercultural training emphasizes cross cultural understanding and self-awareness.

Race-relations based courses seem to be less effective than cultural awareness models. They have been criticized because they stress the need to sensitive white males to minority issues, by focusing on past racial problems and guilt and "white dominant privilege." They include exercises that can be "demeaning to participants as well as having little real-life value." They deny that cultural or racial characteristics can be defined and hold up the U.S. value system as flawed. The course divorces content from the real lives and activities of police officers.

Cultural awareness models are thought to be more effective because they stress the changing demographics of communities and the changes in the policing profession. The courses are job-related, placing of the job in the context of policing. Typically, characteristics of these programs are:

- An emphasis on cultural awareness rather than "diversity."
- Inclusive intercultural approaches, relating many cultures (including the Euro-American cultures) to the issues.
- Content and exercises that are work-related.
- Discussion of current, relevant issues on policing a diverse community.
- Emphasis on the benefits of understanding minority issues and practical skills.
- On-going programs which reflected the values of the department.
- Allowing time for change.

The content of cultural awareness courses involves demographics and psychographics, describing how the world is changing and what those changes mean to the policing. Issues involving the aging, minority and non-English speaking populations are discussed. Content involves dealing with personal value systems and how humans deal with change. Also included are discussions on historical perspectives and how people may react to previous experiences with police. A part of the cultural awareness curriculum involves communication in a cultural context and cultural applications with police.

More cultural awareness and language training would improve the relationship between public servants and their minority clients, particularly among police and paramedics and minority groups. Fisher and Asllani [3] studied police and other public service communication in the state of Utah in the United States of America (USA). According to the authors, cultural sensitivity is best achieved through understanding the history and background of the minority people and interacting with them. Public servants resist and soon forget classroom sessions in diversity and "sensitivity" training. Trainers should be selected from among community members by community organizations.

Fisher and Asllani postulated: "The greater people's experience and interaction with minority populations the better they are able to serve and work with understanding and empathy in the public services."

One study stands out about police and minority relations in the Balkan states. Konstantinov [4] surveyed the close interaction between the nation-state institutions and the Bulgarian minority communities, namely the mass media, national holidays, educational bodies, army and police. The paper argued that a careful and critical appraisal of existing attitudes with respect to these domains is necessary if ethnic conflicts of post-totalitarian changes were to be avoided.

Konstantinov investigated ethnic problems in post-totalitarian Bulgaria by examining two types of discourse — 'nation-state discourse' and 'minority discourse'. Nation-state discourse practiced by the Bulgarian majority centered around language, history, tradition, and religion and defended the existence and sustainability of the nation-state. The nation-state culture was centered on 'visible' codes, like language, that provided proof of the homogeneity and historical origin of the nation-state. In contrast, minority discourse, used by the Islamic populations of Turks, Pomaks, Turkish Gypsies, revolved around issues of integration and accommodation of either a demographic and/or economic character. The minorities were concerned with 'ethno-methodologies' of survival, especially during the very critical post-totalitarian period.

The majority had the power to introduce changes, according to Konstantinov, by attending to the current problems rather than concentrating on "diachronic 'proofs' of nation-state rights." This meant turning away from nation-state romanticism and myths. A "veil of secretiveness" had to be lifted, and greater significance needed to be placed on regional rather than nation-state values. A critical reappraisal of existing attitudes and approaches was needed to alleviate conflict situations and to

reduce feelings of insecurity. Such efforts would involve content changes in secondary-school and higher education and the mass-media and attitudinal changes in national institutions like the army and the police force. National holidays and other festive occasions needed to become more inclusive of minorities. Konstantinov concluded: "Balkan ethnic conflicts between majority and minority communities stem to a significant extent from a feeling of insecurity the nation-states themselves experience. In this sense, a long-term solution requires a much wider effort for bringing a sense of stability and security to this much-troubled part of Europe."

1.1 Police officers and communication

In regard to the reasons for police officer failure to communicate, Glennon claims, "I have found that most of the time when a police officer angers a member of the general public, he does it unintentionally. Sometimes it's simply because the officer isn't paying attention to his own delivery system. Sometimes it's because she isn't paying attention to how the citizen is receiving her message. Sometimes it's because the officer lacks technical skills in the area of communication. And sometimes, we have to admit, it's simply because the officer doesn't give a damn about the citizen's needs, thoughts, issues, etc." [5]

Police learn to protect themselves and this spills over into communications. Glennon writes, "Cops are pretty good at ... establishing a command presence, and/ or communicating alternatives and consequences in order to discourage physical assaults." While this is an important skill to have, the attitude of command can cause poor communication, especially among minority groups, where it actually prevents rapport building.

Glennon found that police officers often unintentionally escalate hostilities, even in situations like pulling over a car. Hostility can cause harm to the public image of the police force, and also hurt the police officer, because complaints to superior officers can be career stoppers.

The alternative is to become effective communicators. A first step in becoming effective communicators is to overcome communication barriers. Hogan and Stubbs suggested eight barriers of communication, many of which may occur in police communication with minorities. [6]

- 1 Failure to make a good first (and second) impression
- 2 Flubbing the story
- 3 Not listening
- 4 Arguing with the intent to do harm
- 5 Criticism
- 6 Hostility and contempt
- 7 Ignoring body language
- 8 Ignoring the cycle of communication

A police officer himself, Glennon describes the communication barriers police often set up for themselves. Many of these parallel the barriers suggested by Hogan and Stubbs. Police, Glennon writes, tend to view everyone not in a uniform as "them." They forget to individualize people.

While a bike theft may seem trivial in relation to other crimes, the victim of a bike theft is still "experiencing some level of trauma." [7]

Glennon writes that the best way for police to get in trouble is to make a suspect or victim feel like an idiot. "The surest way to provoke someone's IDIOT is to make that person feel as though you view him or her as less significant than yourself, as having less or no value, as being unimportant." [8] Unconsciously, they pick up the message that the officers don't care and that they view them as having less worth and less importance.

Police learn to use communication skills to convey confidence, conviction, power, and authority. They can take charge when necessary, writes Glennon. He described a woman officer he worked with. She knew how to "use her command voice, her glare, her facial expressions, and her general body language to communicate to others—no matter what their size—that she is no one with whom to mess." The uniform conveys authority and says to others the police officer is in control. [9]

So how then can police officers show they care. How do they say, "Hi, I'm a people person and I'm here to help you"? Glennon claims two characteristics show others that police officers care. "Our

natural appearance and what that generally conveys to others and our communication skills.” If you want to convey openness, caring, and concern, “display a genuine smile and make eye contact with those you encounter.” [10]

In a foundational work on defensive communication, Gibb distinguished between the characteristics of defensive and supportive climates. To make changes in communication, Gibb suggests people look at communication as a people process rather than a language process. One area of change is to be supportive toward others rather than defensive. Effective communication is supportive. [11]

Defensive behavior occurs when an individual perceives a threat or anticipates a threat. The result is that the person behaves defensively, and spends energy defending himself or herself. A defensive person thinks about how he can win, dominate, impress or escape punishment to avoid or mitigate a perceived attack. If a police officer takes a defensive posture, it is likely the other person will also adopt a defensive attitude. Rather than listening to the message, the defensive person distorts the message and produces non-verbal cues that raise the level of defensiveness in the receiver.

On the other hand, the more "supportive" the climate, the less distorted the message is to the receiver and the less the receiver shares his own anxieties, negative motives and concerns. When defensive attitudes are lessened, the more senders and the receivers concentrate on the true meaning of the message.

1.2 Kosovo Demographics

Kosovo emerged as a new country following the Kosovo War in 1998-1999. It declared its independence on February 17, 2008. Prior to the war and independence, the Kosovo population was 81.6 percent Albanian and 9.9 percent Serbian (1991 Census). Following independence, the population was 92.9 percent Albanian and 1.5 percent Serbian (2011 Census). Utah's population is becoming more diverse, mainly because of immigrants. Utah's minorities are 23%, mostly Hispanic. Kosovo's population is becoming more homogeneous. The 2019 population estimate was 1.9 million. [12]

Ethnic groups:

- Albanians 92.9%,
- Bosniaks 1.6%,
- Serbs 1.5%,
- Turk 1.1%,
- Ashkali 0.9%,
- Egyptian 0.7%,
- Gorani 0.6%,
- Romani 0.5%,
- other/unspecified 0.2%

Religions: Muslim 95.6%, Roman Catholic 2.2%, Orthodox 1.5%

1.3 Problem Statement

At this time of globalization, in a diverse language and cultural landscape, effective communication may be a challenge for the police officers and the community they serve. Such is the case with Kosovo Police, especially in the minority populated areas in the north of Kosovo. Hence, this paper intends to find out whether language and cultural barriers exist between the police and community.

1.4 Research Questions

Do barriers exist that make communication difficult between police and minority populations? What are these barriers? What can be done to eliminate or decrease these barriers? How can relationships and policing be improved?

2 METHODOLOGY

The study uses the qualitative research interview to describe the central themes in the life world of the subjects. In interviewing the goal is to understand the meaning of what interviewees say. The interview seeks to cover both a factual and a meaning level, although it is more difficult to interview on a meaning level. [13] Through comprehensive interviews, interviewers get the story behind a participant's experiences and pursue in-depth information around the topic. Interviews are useful in following-up questionnaires by further investigating responses. [14]

Thematic analysis is used as a means of safeguarding the subjective viewpoint of respondents. In thematic analysis, the researcher first summarizes data and arrives at initial themes. Then codes are used to further analyze the data. These are connected to the initial set of themes and further themes are developed. Themes and codes are corroborated to confirm the findings. From the themes, propositions are developed that may or may not confirm the theory proposed by the theoretical framework. [15]

This study is a pilot to a future larger study that will include a questionnaire administered to Kosovo police officers and follow-up interviews. Two Kosovo police officers of Serbian background were interviewed about their experience, particularly as it related to working with the Serbian minority. One officer was a male, the other a female, both in their twenties. They had worked for Kosovo police since 2014 and served in one of the mainly Serbian areas of the country. They are both getting bachelor's degrees at the Kosovo Academy for Public Safety in addition to working as full-time police officers.

3 RESULTS

Seven themes emerged from the interviews with the two ethnic-Serbian officers in the Kosovo police force: ethnic representation in the police force, integration into the Kosovo police, training, career opportunities, language usage and acquisition, decreasing size of Serbian population, and working with minority population.

3.1 Thematic Analysis

The following is a summary of the findings of interviews grouped under the seven themes.

3.1.1 *Ethnic representation in the Kosovo police force*

The number of ethnic-Serbians in the Kosovo police force is not large. Ethnic-Serbian officers serve mainly in the Serbian municipalities. Few ethnic-Albanian officers serve in the Serbian areas of the country. Of 42 police in the special fast reaction unit only one is Albanian. In the special investigation unit about half (9 or 10) are Albanian.

About 15 ethnic-Serbians are in the current class of 480 police cadets at the Kosovo Academy for Public Safety (KAPS).

3.1.2 *Integration into the Kosovo police force*

After the war Serbian areas of Kosovo had separate Serbian and Kosovo police. In 2013 they were integrated into one Kosovo police force. Most police in the integrated police force in Serbian areas of the country are Serbian. Both of the interviewees are located in a Serbian municipality, but their unit may be called on to intervene in the south. The integrated police force has been mostly a positive experience, according to the interviewees.

3.1.3 *Training of ethnic-Serbians*

Both interviewees were recruited in 2014 soon after the integration of the Serbian police into the Kosovo police force. After cadet school, the male police officer served a year in Pristina, Kosovo's capital and largest city, and the female served for 6 months, in a neighboring Albanian municipality and in Pristina. Both are pursuing bachelor's degrees at KAPS.

3.1.4 *Career opportunities*

Older police receive a pension from Serbia and salary from Kosovo. The newer police receive both pension and salary from Kosovo. The rumor is that Serbia might take over the police service in

Serbian municipalities in Kosovo. The female interviewee said she would prefer to be paid by the Kosovo police, which pays 510 euros monthly. The Serbian police only pay 450 euros.

3.1.5 Language usage and acquisition

Albanians expect both police officers to speak Albanian. The male officer is fluent in Albanian, while the female officer speaks some Albanian. The female officer indicated that she would speak to her partner in Serbian and he would always answer back in Albanian. Both speak English very well and are taking an advanced English course at KAPS.

As they grew up, they learned a few words of Albanian, but not enough to be fluent. Both had little education in English, since Russian and French were taught in their schools. English has become the common language between the younger police and young Albanians. Most of the young people speak some English.

3.1.6 Decreasing size of Serbian population

Following the war about 4 percent of the Kosovo population was ethnic-Serbian. That number has fallen to about 1.5%, partly because many Serbians have left because of few employment possibilities. Serbian youth mostly take their final years of university studies in Serbia because there are no jobs in Kosovo. They described one Serbian police officer, who had been trained as a nurse. When an opportunity came available in her field in Germany, she took it.

3.1.7 Working with the Serbian minority

After the war Kosovo police couldn't do their job in Serbian areas, but since integration of the Serbian police into the Kosovo police, policing has become more effective. Still sensitivity remains on both sides between Albanian and Serbian police because of what may have happened during the war. Older people might refuse to communicate with Kosovo police because of the strong feelings left over from the war.

During the transition period the instructors in Serbian areas were Albanian, but policing was done solely by Serbian police. Incidents of violence occurred against police like the burning of police vehicles.

The male interviewee feels at times he is serving two masters. While the Kosovo law may require a certain action, he found he had to respond with sensitivity to the ethnic-Serbian people. He indicated policing requires a balanced response. Strictly following all police procedures would get him into trouble with his ethnic-Serbian community. Police officers have to be sensitive to the differences in culture.

4 CONCLUSIONS

This study explored whether language and cultural barriers exist between the Kosovo police and its ethnic minority community. It examined whether barriers exist that make communication difficult between police and minority populations. It offers some suggestions that might eliminate or decrease these barriers so that relationships and policing can be improved.

Ethnic-Serbian and Albanian police officers serving the Serbian minority community face some challenges that go beyond the typical problems western police officers face in working with minorities. Language and cultural barriers exist. Older people may refuse to communicate with the police, irrespective of whether they are ethnic-Serbian or Albanian. (Many of the older Albanians speak Serbian; fewer of the older Serbians speak Albanian.) Younger people rely on English as a means of communication, because the Serbian population is not learning Albanian and the Albanian population is not learning Serbian. Hostilities exist among both populations and deep feelings from the Kosovo war make communication and good relationships difficult.

Will cultural awareness training suggested by Hennessy, Hendricks and Hendricks make a difference in this situation? Can some of the barriers identified by Hogan and Stubbs be overcome from smiling and showing real concern like Glennon suggests? Can defensive behavior described by Gibb be changed by developing a supportive climate? Avoiding arguments, criticism, and hostility and contempt in this situation may go along way to assuage some of the deep feelings that remain between the ethnic groups in Kosovo. Fisher and Asllani [3] suggested that public servants need to develop "characteristics of compassion, empathy, humility, patience, and respect." These

characteristics can help to build trust. Police can work with community leaders and use community organizations to train them in cultural awareness and identify areas of need and concern.

As Konstantinov concluded “ethnic conflicts between majority and minority communities stem to a significant extent from a feeling of insecurity the nation-states themselves experience.” This insecurity seems to exist between Kosovo police and the minority populations they serve. Only time and a new generation may resolve some of the hard feelings that exist.

Qualitative studies, such as this study, are limited in a number of ways: by sample size, methodology, and reliability checks. The results require validation through repetition and further study. This study served as a pilot in generating a survey and follow-up interview questions. Even as limited as this study was as information was gathered and analyzed common themes appeared. Ethnic representation is important in an integrated Kosovo police force. Language acquisition and usage requires not only learning Albanian, but also Serbian and English. Career opportunities, including further education and promotion, need to be provided for minority ethnic-officers. It is important to be sensitive to cultural differences and to develop trust between ethnic communities.

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