# Management Challenges in Law Enforcement: The Case of Police Misconduct and Crime

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Revised research article submitted to the International Journal of Law and Management c.gale@bradford.ac.uk February 9, 2011

# ABSTRACT

*Purpose*: The purpose of this paper is to study police crime, which is defined as crime committed by police employees on duty.

*Methods*: Based on an empirical study of all police court crime cases in Norway for the last four years, relationships between coded variables from court cases are explored in this paper.

*Results*: The court sentence measured in terms of days in jail is influenced by motive, source of information and police culture.

*Conclusions*: Based on court documents, this study developed measures, coded court text and analyzed relationships between constructs. The analysis identified crime motive, police culture and information source as predictors of jail sentence length. The extent of physical versus non-physical crime by police employees on duty was influenced by crime motive. The source of information tends to be police officers internally when a colleague has committed a physical rather than non-physical crime.

**Keywords**: Police crime; content analysis; police complaints; court sentence; police imprisonment.

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# Management Challenges in Law Enforcement: The Case of Police Misconduct and Crime

### **INTRODUCTION**

Policing is the most apparent aspect of the criminal justice system, and a wellregarded police service is a prerequisite for the positive perception of law enforcement and justice (Schafer, 2009; UNODC 2006). Management is one of those obvious elements required for integrity and accountability in policing, but how to generate and maintain professional leadership is a difficult question (Prenzler, 2009: 175):

One point to note is that when it comes to ethical policing, inspiring good conduct by example is unlikely to be sufficient. Good leaders need to be good managers, with a detailed knowledge of the workings of their organization, facilitating and driving the successful pursuit of organizational goals.

One of the issues in police management is the code of silence. It is often argued that the code of silence is commonly found in police forces all over the world. Individual police officers belong to the occupational group consisting of police. Members of this group possess specialized knowledge and expertise and characteristic skills that are developed and transmitted within the group. The individual police practitioner draws on the special skills and knowledge of colleagues (Miller et al., 2006: 11):

Unsurprisingly, members of such occupational groups tend to develop a high degree of solidarity, and this is particularly true in the case of police, who depend on each other to a great extent. The results of studies by Ivkovic and Shelley (2005) and Maljevic et al. (2008) indicate that the code of silence provides stronger protection for the acceptance of gratuities and use of excessive force than for opportunistic thefts and shakedowns. The role of the police culture in terms of protection of each other reduces the likelihood of being caught for corruption. This called the code, the code of silence, or the blue curtain, or the blue wall of silence - the informal prohibition in the occupational culture of policing against reporting the misconduct of fellow police officers.

According to the United Nations (UNODC, 2006), the great majority of individuals involved in policing is committed to honorable and competent public service and consistently demonstrates high standards of personal and procedural integrity in performing their duties. However, when serious misconduct occurs there seems to be a tendency to consider police crime as a result of bad practice, lack of resources or mismanagement, rather than the criminal acts. Unfortunately, examples illustrate that criminal acts are intentionally carried out by police officers on duty. Police crime does not only occur in countries such as Mexico (Davis, 2007) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (Maljevic et al., 2008). It is found in the UK (Porter and Warrender, 2009), USA (Klockars et al., 2006), Australia (OPI, 2008) and Norway (see this study) as well.

The purpose of this paper is to create new insights into police misconduct by analyzing court cases. Rather than offering a case-by-case discussion often found in the literature, this study develops measures from the analysis of 57 court cases from Norway where police officers were prosecuted from 2005 to 2009. This research is important, since quantitative variables enable relationships between concepts often found in court documents to be explored based on reviewed literature.

### POLICE MANAGEMENT

Leadership of police departments, large and small, consists of several parallel management roles (Mintzberg, 1994). Sewell (2008) found that some of the most important lessons learned in police management are that command hurts, change is difficult to implement and often not desired, politics are everywhere, and the police chief is a public figure.

It is often argued that leadership represents a crucial determinant of police organizational efficacy (Schafer, 2008):

Supervisors and others in formal positions of power must engage, motivate, and guide subordinates, community members, and other local officials. The evolving vision of patrol officers has led to a rethinking of the role of leadership even among those not possessing conventional supervisory control.

Effective leadership is important for all organizations including the police. Densten (2003) argues that the significance of the leader-follower relationship for police is similar to other organizations because of the imperative for followers to be aware of the importance and value of task outcomes. Police leaders need to use a range of behaviours to influence their followers. Such influence can change behaviours by activating the higher-order needs of followers and by encouraging followers to transcend self-interest for the sake of the organization.

Schafer (2009) finds that the importance of police supervisors (formal leaders) in shaping organizational contexts and outcomes in police organizations is generally accepted. Although external pressures and the culture of a police organization can be powerful forces shaping and influencing officer conduct, the tone set by supervisors throughout the organization seems to play a key role in these processes.

#### INTEGRITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Integrity in public office demands open and transparent decision-making and clarity about the primacy of a public official's duty to serve the public interest above all else. Conflict between this duty and a person's individual interests cannot always be avoided but must always be identified, declared and managed in a way that stands up to scrutiny. This particularly applies to police officers who are sworn to uphold the law (OPI, 2007).

Integrity is defined as the quality of being honest and morally consistent (UNODC, 2006). Practices that impugn the integrity of the police range from obtaining or maintaining evidence without following proper procedure, to direct violations of the rights of suspects. This includes the coercion of confessions (sometimes through torture), plating and fabricating evidence, or giving false testimony in court (perjury). This latter situation can often arise where an otherwise conscientious officer loses faith or trust in the criminal justice system and acts through a misplaced sense of duty or zeal in seeking to secure a conviction against someone of whose guilt the officer is convinced (UNODC, 2006).

Police integrity is the normative inclination among police officers to resist temptations to abuse the rights and privileges of their occupation. It is an inclination to resist various forms of temptations, not only for-gain temptations such as police corruption, but also other forms of temptations to abuse the rights and privileges that policing as an occupation entitles them to have. According to Ivkovic (2009), police integrity does not necessarily imply that police officers will have the same inclination to resist all types of temptation. Potentially, even within the same police agency, the contours of police integrity with respect to one form of police misconduct may be quite different from the contours of police integrity with respect to another form of police misconduct.

Police integrity is an important element of what is called public integrity. According to Fijnaut and Huberts (2002), public integrity denotes the quality of acting in accordance with the moral values, norms and rules accepted by the body politic and the public. A number of integrity violations or forms of public misconduct can be distinguished: corruption including bribery, nepotism, cronyism, patronage; fraud and theft; conflict of interest through assets, jobs and gifts; manipulation of information; discrimination and sexual harassment; improper methods for noble causes; the waste and abuse of resources; and private time misconduct.

Integrity is sometimes defined as the absence of misconduct, where misconduct is generally understood as being an attempt to deceive others by making false statements or omitting important information concerning the work performed, in the results obtained by or the sources of the ideas or words used in a work process (Cossette, 2004). According to Cossette (2004), the intention to deceive, even if difficult to determine, is a key element in this conception of misconduct.

Accountability refers to situations in which someone is required or expected to justify actions or decisions. It also refers to situations where an officer bears the responsibility to someone or for some activity. Accountability has been called "the mother of caution", and as such it has a prophylactic and deterrent effect (UNODC, 2006).

Accountability is a feature of systems, social institutions as well as individuals. It means that mechanisms are in place to determine who took responsible action and who is responsible. Systems and institutions in which it is impossible to find out who

took what action are inherently incapable of ethical analysis or ethical action, according to Laudon and Laudon (2010).

Civilian accountability of the police has been one of the critical issues facing the transformation of the police in countries like South Africa. Emerging from a totalitarian past and a legacy of hostility, a police service accountable to the people through strong oversight mechanisms was seen as one of the cornerstones of the new democracy. The danger of complacency, together with an ever present and natural resistance to accountability, can erode the effectiveness of oversight mechanisms and the democratic gains made in emerging democracies (OSJI, 2005). A strong and robust system of accountability has been consistently shown to be key enabler in developing trust between police and communities (OSJI, 2005).

Effective accountability is often vital to the achievement of police goals. Law enforcement agencies that reduce problematic officer behavior will enjoy greater trust among citizens and thus receive greater cooperation from citizens in programs and actions designed to reduce crime and investigate crime (Walker, 2006). In the US, the most important area in this regard involves the perceived legitimacy of the police and relations with racial and ethnic minority groups. Walker (2006) argues that racial and ethnic tensions have beset the American police for many decades and persist despite the introduction of many different reforms.

#### **RESEARCH FRAMEWORK**

Five concepts were selected in this study. The suggested relationships between these concepts are illustrated in Figure 1. Each concept is explained in the Methodology section of this paper.

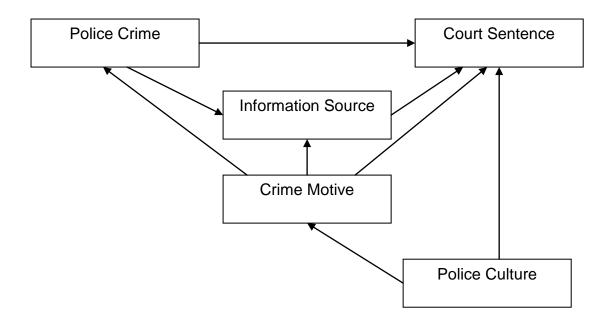


Figure 1. Research framework to study relationships in coded police crime cases

The research framework suggests a number of causal relationships between concepts. The source of information about the crime is influenced by the crime category and influences the sentence in terms of imprisonment days. The sentence is also influenced by crime category and crime motive. The motive is influenced by organizational culture in the police organization.

### METHODOLOGY

In this study, data from court cases in Norway were analyzed. The Norwegian Bureau for the Investigation of Police Affairs prosecutes police officers in court. The Norwegian Bureau is similar to police oversight agencies found in other countries, such as the Independent Police Complaints Commission in the UK, the Police Department for Internal Investigations in Germany, the Inspectorate General of the Internal Administration in Portugal, the Standing Police Monitoring Committee in Belgium, the Garda Siochána Ombudsman Commission in Ireland, Federal Bureau for Internal Affairs in Austria, and the Ministry of the Interior, Police and Security Directorate in Slovenia.

Since 1988, Norway has a separate system to handle allegations against police officers for misconduct. The system was frequently accused of not being independent of regular police organizations (Thomassen, 2002). In 2003, the Norwegian Parliament decided to establish a separate body to investigate and prosecute cases were employees in the police service or the prosecuting authority are suspected of having committed criminal acts in the police service.

The Norwegian Bureau for the Investigation of Police Affairs has been effective since January 2005. The Bureau is mandated to investigate and prosecute cases where employees in the police service or the prosecuting authority are accused of having committed criminal acts in the service. The Norwegian Bureau has both investigating and prosecuting powers and in that way it differs from some comparable European bodies. The Norwegian Bureau does not handle complaints from the public concerning allegations of rude or bad behavior that does not amount to a criminal offence (Presthus, 2009).

Since the operations started at the Norwegian Bureau in January 2005 and until February 2009, a total of 57 police officers have been placed on trial in Norwegian courts. This group formed the sample for the study. There were 3 prosecuted officers in 2005, 14 in 2006, 16 in 2007, 21 in 2008, and 3 so far in 2009.

The unit of analysis applied in this study is the individual, rather than the court case. An individual police officer may appeal his or her case to a higher court. Therefore, there were more court cases than individuals on trial. There were a total of 75 court cases for the 57 prosecuted individuals. The unit of analysis is the individual, rather than the organization. This is because an organization is never prosecuted in criminal

court for jail sentence. Therefore, this study is based on the rotten-apple thesis, although it is clear from existing academic research (e.g., Perry, 2001; Punch, 2003) that police crime might be explained at the organizational level as well.

The seriousness of the crime is an important variable in this research. The court decides on the seriousness of the crime in its court sentence. A fine is less serious than a prison sentence. The longer the prison sentence, the more serious is the crime considered to be. Prison sentence is measured in terms of imprisonment days. Thus, *sentence* is a variable in this research measured on a metric scale of imprisonment days.

If a court case is dismissed, then the days of imprisonment are zero. Even if a case is dismissed from court, the case remains in the sample to illustrate causality when the dependent variable sentence has the value of zero. A total of 22 cases out of 57 cases were dismissed from court with the verdict that the police officers prosecuted by the Norwegian Bureau were found not guilty.

The dependent variable sentence has at one extreme the value zero and at the other extreme the maximum case value of 730 days, which is more than two years imprisonment. The average among all prosecuted police employees was 42 days imprisonment. If 22 dismissals are excluded, then the convicted police officers had to go to jail for 69 days on average, which means that he or she spends 3 months in prison.

In this study, no distinction is made between primary and secondary prison sentence. While some police officers were sentenced directly to jail, others were sentenced to a fine and only alternatively to prison for a few days if they did not pay the fine.

To measure another important variable *crime*, an interval scale was developed. The interval scale is defined from physical crime to non-physical crime. According to the

United Nations (UNODC, 2006), physical abuse is indiscriminate and careless use of powers delegated to police officers. The interval scale for the independent as well as dependent variable crime was defined as follows along the physical to non-physical dimension: (1) physical abuse; (2) sexual misconduct; (3) prisoner mistreatment; (4) traffic violation; (5) extortion; (6) corruption; (7) evidence manipulation; (8) unauthorized disclosure of information. While Porter and Warrender (2009) in their empirical study concentrated on corruption (6 on the scale), they also reflected on the scale dimension of police deviance by including extreme violence, manipulating evidence, sexual harassment, and racism.

The resulting eight crime categories are here organized along a scale or axis starting at mainly physical crime and ending at mainly non-physical crime:

- <u>Physical Abuse</u>. Indiscriminate and careless use of powers delegated to police officers is a major factor in alienating the public. When and where police apply their powers is usually a matter of individual discretion. Because officers often are required to make people do something, or refrain from doing something, police action may be met with resistance, conflict, or confrontation. Under such circumstances, members of the public may wish to complain. The validity of such complaints will depend on the context and will be judged against standards of police conduct enshrined in law or regulation.
- 2. <u>Sexual Misconduct</u>. Sexual misconduct of law enforcement personnel with witnesses, suspects or informants has also been known to lead to corruption or other integrity failure. For example, an officer may ignore a sexual partner's criminal activity, alter evidence that implicates him or her, or even provide that partner with confidential information. Such misconduct also leaves the officer open to extortion.

- 3. <u>Prisoner Mistreatment</u>. Persons are sometimes held in police custody. Experience has shown that the conditions under which suspects make confessions or admissions can be related to their treatment in custody before the confession or admission has been made. This may be because of the threat or direct use of violence (i.e. torture), because of other indirect intimidation or menacing behavior on the part of the interviewers or because the experience is otherwise physically and mentally distressing.
- 4. <u>Traffic Violation</u>. There are limits to what police officers can do when driving a car. Even in cases of emergency, police cars are not allowed to create dangerous situations. Whether the car is a uniformed police car, a nonuniformed police car or a private car, other cars should be informed about the police driving by light and/or sound signal. If there is no emergency, the police have to follow speed limits and other traffic regulations.
- 5. <u>Extortion</u>. A common abuse of integrity in some countries relates to the enforcement of road traffic regulations (or other minor infractions) where informal on-the-spot fines (or bribes) are negotiated with the alleged offender, rather than pursuing a formal prosecution or other legal process. In extreme circumstances, this can be regarded by some as the normal way of doing business. Assessors may experience this first hand.
- 6. <u>Corruption</u>. Personal gain is a primary motivation for all criminal behavior. Because of the special trust and responsibilities placed in police officers, the opportunities for them to abuse that trust to obtain money or advantage are considerable. At the same time, because police officers have inside information, understanding and influence over the criminal justice system, they are also often in a position to shield themselves from detection.

- 7. Evidence Manipulation. There can be at least two motives driving the falsification or destruction of evidence. Firstly, an officer may wish to make the case against a suspect stronger than it already is. For example, the officer has forgotten to do something or has failed to find sufficient evidence to prove an important element of a case, or may be hiding something that appears to show the suspect is not guilty. Secondly, an officer may have been paid by a suspect to ensure that the evidence is lost or tampered with in order to sabotage the prosecution case.
- 8. <u>Unauthorized Disclosure of Information</u>. Police organizations collect, hold, or have access to a significant amount of information, some of it of a private nature about victims, witnesses, crimes, and suspects, and much of it is confidential. That same information will have a market value for criminals, journalists and private investigators that can be realized by unscrupulous police staff with access to it.

Another important variable, *motive* was measured on an interval scale from professional into personal: (1) professional concern; (2) efficient police service; (3) negative reaction; and (4) personal gain. A similar distinction was made by Porter and Warrender (2009), who analyzed whether there was noble cause corruption, which consisted of the type of corruption in order to obtain a conviction, or personal gain, which included the other types of corruption in the coding dictionary that did not have the interests of the police force and the public in mind. Efficient police service (2) implies a professional attitude of not wasting time even if some damage is caused, while negative reaction (3) implies a personal satisfaction of causing damage to someone or something.

There are conceptual links between the dependent variables crime and the independent variable motive. For example, the motive for extortion for corruption (crime types) may be personal gain (motive). As argued by Gerber and Mendelson (2008), police corruption can occur as extortion by police officers for personal gain and be part and parcel of corrupt police practices.

It is often argued that the code of silence is commonly found in police forces all over the world (e.g., Miller et al., 2006; Loyens, 2009). For example, conformity to the code of silence was found in the Victorian Armed Offenders Squad in Australia by the Office of Police Integrity (OPI, 2008). The code of silence was reinforced by those in the 'brotherhood' through implied or explicit threats of reprisals, exploiting fears of being shunned or labeled by the peer group, and feeding anxieties about an individual's career prospects. Individuals in the Squad were called upon to sacrifice their autonomy and personal interests for sake of the brotherhood. The code of silence prevents police officers from reporting misconduct. Thus, *source* of information is introduced as the next independent as well as dependent variable, where we distinguish between (1) whistle blowing by colleague police officer and (2) complaint by person in the public.

The variable labeled source reflects the fact that allegations of officer misconduct may come from either internal or external sources. Allegations of officer misconduct may come from either internal or external sources. Internal allegations involve reports by supervisors or other department employees. External allegations involve formal or informal complaints by citizens. In the USA, an Internal Affairs Unit (IAU) or a Professional Standards Unit (PSU) investigates all internally generated allegations. A number of cities and counties in the USA have also established external citizen oversight agencies with original jurisdiction for investigating citizen complaints. While many of the issues related to internal and external misconduct investigations overlap, Walker (2006) argues that it is necessary to discuss them separately.

Organization *culture* is another important independent variable in this research. Police culture has been studied by many researchers (e.g., Barton, 2004; Christensen and Crank, 2001; Jaschke et al., 2007; Lahneman, 2004). In this research culture of police organization is measured on a 5-point scale from (1) closed organization culture to (5) open organization culture.

# Coding

Each court case is documented in a verdict of 2 to 15 pages written by a judge. These documents were studied by content analysis (Riffe and Freitag, 1997). Some of the variables were easy to find in the documents, such as age. More difficult to find in court documents was source. Most difficult to find and classify were crime, motive, structure and culture. One researcher familiar with police crime classified all court cases. An alternative would be to have several researchers classify so as to enable calculation of reliability among rating researchers.

Based on this coding approach, the sample of 57 court cases was classified into crime categories. In the sample, there were 13 cases of physical abuse, 5 cases of sexual misconduct, 2 cases of prisoner mistreatment, 11 cases of traffic violation, 0 cases of extortion, 9 cases of corruption; 4 cases of evidence manipulation, and 13 cases of unauthorized disclosure of information.

In the sample for motive, there were 5 cases of professional concern, 22 cases of efficient police service, 12 cases of negative reaction, and 18 cases of personal gain. In the sample for source, there were 22 whistle blowing by colleague police officer and 35 cases of complaint by person in the public. In the sample for culture, there were 17 cases of completely closed organization culture (1), and 10 cases of completely open organization culture (5), and 30 cases in between as 20 were classified as (2), 4 as (3), and 6 as (4).

# Coefficients

Correlation coefficients were calculated for all paired combinations of variables. Correlation coefficients are listed in Table 1. Each coefficient indicates the strength of association between two variables. According to Hair et al. (2010), correlation coefficients are only meaningful for metric variables. Figure 2 applies correlation coefficients to Figure 1. Some associations are significant and have the coefficient next to the relevant arrow. Other associations are not significant and are labeled 'No'.

	Crime	Sentence	Motive	Source	Culture
Crime		.106	.250	161	.051
Sentence			.340*	338*	.398*
Motive				523**	.017
Source					211
Culture					

*Table 1. Correlation coefficients for coded court cases where police employees were convicted* 

It is interesting to note that the court sentence in terms of days in prison is not influenced by crime category. It is influenced by information source, where internal whistle blowing leads to a much more severe sentence than if the information source is an external complaint. A crime motive of person gain leads to a much more severe sentence than a motive of professional conduct. An open police culture leads to a much more severe sentence than a closed organizational culture.

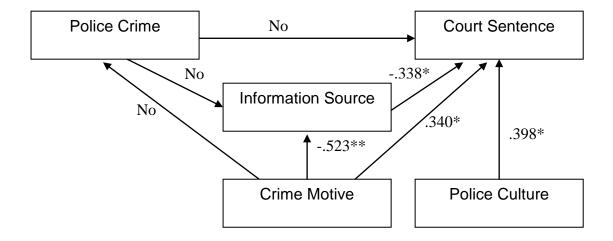


Figure 2. Empirical results for the research framework

Furthermore, a crime motive of professional conduct is more often causing external complaints by the public as information source. This means that professional concern and efficient police service are typical motives when there are complaints; while negative reaction and personal gain are typical motives when there is internal whistle blowing.

### DISCUSSION

There is a debate in the research literature whether to view police misconduct and crime as acts of individuals perceived as 'rotten apples' or as an indication of systems failure in the police force (Perry, 2001; Johnson, 2003; Punch, 2003; Tiffen, 2004; O'Connor, 2005; Iomo et al., 2009; Porter and Warrender, 2009). Some researchers

are favoring the individualistic model of police deviance, which is a human failure model of misconduct and crime. This rotten apple view of police crime is a comfortable perspective to adopt for police organizations as it allows them to look no further than suspect individuals. It is only when other forms of group (O'Connor, 2005) and/or systemic (Punch, 2003) corruption and other kinds of crime erupt upon a police service that a more critical look is taken of police criminality. When serious misconduct occurs and is repeated, there seems to be a tendency to consider police crime as a result of bad practice, lack of resources or mismanagement, rather than acts of criminals.

The 'rotten apple' metaphor has been extended to include the group level view of police cultural deviance with a 'rotten barrel' metaphor (O'Connor, 2005). Furthermore, Punch (2003) has pushed the notion of 'rotten orchards' to highlight police deviance at the systemic level. Punch (2003:172) notes, "the metaphor of 'rotten orchards' indicate(s) that it is sometimes not the apple, or even the barrel, that is rotten but the *system* (or significant parts of the system)". That is, deviance that has become *systemic* is:

... in some way encouraged, and perhaps even protected, by certain elements in the system. .... "Systems" refers both to the formal system – the police organization, the criminal justice system and the broader sociopolitical context – and to the informal system of deals, inducements, collusion and understandings among deviant officers as to how the corruption is to be organized, conducted and rationalized." (Punch, 2003:172)

These metaphorical extensions represent increasing deeper level meanings associated with police crime. For instance, in regard to the 'rotten apple' thesis this level of explanation for police deviance is as Perry (2001: 1) notes "...most major inquiries

into police corruption reject the 'bad-apple' theory: 'the rotten-apple theory won't work any longer. Corrupt police officers are not natural-born criminals, nor morally wicked men, constitutionally different from their honest colleagues. The task of corruption control is to examine the barrel, not just the apples, the organization, not just the individual in it, because corrupt police are made, not born.'"

Furthermore, Punch (2003:172) makes the point that "The police themselves often employ the 'rotten apple' metaphor – the deviant cop who slips into bad ways and contaminates the other essentially good officers – which is an individualistic, human failure model of deviance." One explanation for favoring this individualistic model of police deviance is provided by O'Connor (2005:2) when he states, "Police departments tend to use the rotten apple theory... to minimize the public backlash against policing after every exposed act of corruption."

Hence, it follows according to this individualistic view of police criminality that anticorruption strategies should be targeted at finding the 'rotten apples' through measures like 'integrity testing' (Commission on Police Integrity, 1999), and putting policies and procedures in place reduce the opportunity for engaging in misconduct and/or corrupt practices.

In a police management perspective, it is important to be open to both a rotten-apple approach as well as a rotten-barrel approach, where police misconduct and crime has consequences for both individuals and systems. In police departments, Murphy and Drodge (2004) found that the way police officers perceive their treatment by the leader and the organization affect both the quality of their performance and the service they provide to the community. Thus, in a transition from a semi-military to a knowledge-oriented organization in many countries all over the world, the role of the personnel leader might very well be applied with the servant leadership style to succeed.

There are several avenues for future research. This article rests on the premise that one has to agree with the rotten-apple thesis and the appropriateness of analysis at the individual level. If one does not accept this premise, future research needs to account for organizational factors in analysis that lead to police crime. One source of information whether individual or system failure is motive that can be deducted by means of contents analysis of each court sentence. When organizational level is the unit of analysis, then organizational culture in terms of values expressed in court case documents need to be explored.

# CONCLUSION

Based on court documents, this study developed measures, coded court text and analyzed relationships between constructs. The analysis identified crime motive, police culture and information source as predictors of jail sentence length. The extent of physical versus non-physical crime by police employees on duty was influenced by crime motive. The source of information tends to be police officers internally when a colleague has committed a physical rather than non-physical crime.

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