

Neutrality in Croatian Police Attitudes and Behavior – Is it Affected by Police Officers' Satisfaction with Internal Police Communication?

Ana Marija Dunaj¹

This quantitative study examines how internal police communication affects neutrality, controlling for socio-demographic variables, using a convenience sample of 1,190 Croatian police officers. The questionnaire measured satisfaction with eight communication dimensions and police neutrality in two dimensions. Hierarchical regression analysis showed that satisfaction with horizontal communication and communication media quality predicts attitudes towards neutrality, while satisfaction with horizontal communication and corporate information are statistically significant predictors of neutral behavior. Socio-demographic variables are weak predictors. The study highlights the importance of improving internal communication to enhance police neutrality, though a limitation is the use of a universal instrument, suggesting future research should develop more tailored tools.

Ključne riječi: Croatian police, police neutrality, attitudes, behaviour, internal police communication

1. Introduction

This paper explores the relationship between internal police communication and police neutrality in Croatia, a young democracy in Southeastern Europe. For former socialist countries like Croatia, achieving police neutrality

¹ Ana Marija Dunaj, univ. spec. in national sec., University of Zagreb, Faculty of Croatian Studies, Department of Sociology and Department of Communication Studies, Brongajska cesta 83d, Zagreb, 10 000, adunaj1@fhs.unizg.hr.

was a key reform goal during the transition to democracy (Cajner Mraović et al., 2003). Police neutrality involves treating all citizens equally, regardless of characteristics like gender, age, or political preference, and is central to democratic policing (Meško, Klemenčič, 2007; Solihah et al., 2018). In totalitarian regimes, the police protect political elites, making neutrality difficult.

Effective policing relies on communication, both internal and external (Borovec, 2011). Good internal communication strengthens organizational culture, improving performance (Broom, Sha, 2013; Hoffmann, 2012). In post-socialist Central and Southeastern Europe, police cultures are often authoritarian, despite efforts to promote more participatory models (Cajner Mraović, Faber, 2016; Meško et al., 2013). However, little research examines how internal police communication affects neutrality in post-socialist states. This paper explores this relationship utilizing the example of the Croatian police.

2. Research concepts

Police neutrality reflects fairness in police-citizen relations and requires impartial, consistent decisions based on facts, rules, and the law (Tyler, 1990; Skogan et al., 2015). In democratic societies, ensuring equal rights for all citizens is challenging, especially in policing minority groups (Nicholson-Crotty et al., 2017), the homeless (Kyprianides et al., 2021), and migrants (Murphy, Mazerolle, 2018). A major obstacle to neutrality is subjective perception, as there are no universal standards to measure it (Tyler, 2003). Citizens primarily evaluate police based on interpersonal relations and the quality of decision-making (Tyler, 2003). The professional standard in democratic societies is to treat everyone equally and without discrimination (Van Crean, Skogan, 2017).

The European Code of Police Ethics (Council of Europe Publishing, 2002) and Croatian legislation emphasize respect for human rights and dignity. Croatian laws, including the Act on Police Affairs and Authorities (Official Gazette no. 76/09, 92/14, 70/19) and the Code of Ethics of Police Officers, require officers to protect individuals' reputations, identify themselves, and treat citizens fairly and politely (Official Gazette no. 145/23).

Different authors define and operationalize internal communication in various ways (Douglas et al., 2000; Quinn, Hargie, 2004; Roberts, O'Reilly, 1974). This study adopts an approach that identifies eight dimensions of internal communication: communication in meetings, horizontal communication, media

quality, communication climate, informal communication, communication with superiors, corporate communication, and feedback (Tkalac Verčič et al., 2009).

Effective communication in meetings boosts motivation and productivity, though frequent or lengthy meetings can harm productivity (Rajhans, 2012; Kauffeld, Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2012). Horizontal communication involves interactions among colleagues at the same level (Beigi, Mozayani, 2016), while vertical communication conveys top-down or bottom-up information about strategy and goals (Bartels et al., 2010). Satisfaction with communication media is crucial for internal communication effectiveness (Men, 2014). A positive communication climate helps employees feel valued by sharing organizational goals and values (Neill et al., 2020). Corporative communication refers to sharing formal information about the organization's success, such as work regulations, turnover, and finances, helps employees understand work rules and procedures (Tkalac Verčič et al., 2009). Feedback provides insights into task quality, helping employees correct errors and maintain good practices (Johnson, 2015). Informal communication, while influential, can lead to negative outcomes like deviant behavior (Dores Cruz et al., 2011).

Police organizations face challenges in communicating with both internal and external stakeholders (Pal et al., 2023). External communication typically serves purposes such as informing, advising, warning, or engaging with the public (Fielding, 2023) and is seen as a strategic tool for managing media relations and building the police's image (Borovec, 2011; Pal et al., 2023). Individual officers also play a crucial role in shaping the police's image through their interactions with citizens (Borovec, 2011), often in stressful situations that require skilled communication (Davis et al., 2018; Cajner Mraović et al., 2003).

While much attention is given to external communication, internal communication is equally important, as police organizations rely on effective internal relations to succeed (Borovec et al., 2011). Poor internal communication can hinder quality communication with citizens, as internal communication styles often reflect how officers interact with the public (Borovec et al., 2011). Authoritative, one-way communication within the organization may result in similar patterns in public interactions, which undermines relationship-building efforts that require listening and understanding (Fielding, 2023).

3. Methods

3.1. Research design

This study aims to answer the research question: What dimensions of internal communication are predictors of police officers' neutrality towards citizens? Hierarchical regression analysis was used to verify this. In the first step, socio-demographic variables were included, followed by eight dimensions of satisfaction with internal communication. This approach allowed for understanding the contribution of internal communication to police neutrality, independent of socio-demographic factors. The first regression examined how internal communication dimensions predict police officers' attitudes about neutrality, while the second focused on their neutral behavior towards citizens.

This approach, based on the theory of planned behaviour, suggests that while behaviours often stem from attitudes, the connection isn't always guaranteed (Ajzen, 2020). In policing, officers may hold positive attitudes about neutrality but fail to apply them in practice. Conversely, due to police professional culture (Cajner Mraović, 2002), officers may express negative attitudes toward neutrality but still act neutrally towards citizens.

3.2. Sample

The study was conducted on a sample of 1,190 police officers (5.91% of the Croatian police population) from police stations in all 20 police administrations in Croatia. Upon examining the data of the Human Resources Directorate of the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Croatia the sample is representative in terms of sex, police rank, and unit type, with 20.2% women in the police force. Most were sergeants (41.2%), followed by officers (36.2%) and inspectors (19.6%). The only notable deviation is in the superintendent rank (2.6%) due to the exclusion of the General Police Directorate where higher ranked employees work. In terms of unit type, in Croatia, there is 30.2% of uniformed police officers, 16.5% of criminal investigation police and 8.7% of traffic police. There is a slight deviation in community police (2.2%) likely due to the COVID-19 pandemic when community police officers were more present in police stations than the rest of the police force. Other police roles, including those in the Police Operational Communication Centre (7.7%) and administrative positions (11.0%), are also represented.

Table 1 shows that the sample is dominated by respondents aged 31-40 (32.4%) and 41-50 (31.5%). Those under 30 make up 20.5%, and those aged 51-60 make up 14.8%. Most police officers have secondary education (65.1%) and over 20 years of experience (44.3%), with 79% being non-managerial staff. The distribution of urban (48.7%) and rural (51.3%) respondents is nearly equal.

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents

	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Gender		
Male	937	78.7
Female	253	21.3
Age		
20-30	245	20.5
31-40	390	32.8
41-50	375	31.5
51-60	176	14.8
>61	5	0.4
Education		
Secondary police or other school	775	65.1
Bachelor	206	17.3
Master	204	17.1
PhD	5	0.4
Rank		
Police officer	455	38.2
Police sergeant	487	40.9
Police inspector	213	17.9
Chief police inspector	28	2.4
Police superintendent	7	0.6
Work experience		
up to 5	173	14.6
6 to 10	166	13.9
11 to 15	242	20.3
16 to 20	82	6.9
more than 20	527	44.3
Police unit type		
Uniformed police officers	495	41.6
Criminal investigation police	282	23.7

Traffic police	96	8.1
Community police	94	7.9
Police Operational Communication Centre	92	7.7
Other	131	11
Managerial status		
Yes	250	21.0
No	940	79.0
Type of housing settlement		
Urban	579	48.7
Rural	611	51.3

3.3. Instrument

Tkalac Verčić and colleagues (2009) developed an instrument to measure employees' satisfaction with internal communication, based on an eight-dimension model. Each dimension is operationalized through four variables listed in Table 2. Satisfaction levels were measured on a Likert scale from 1 - very dissatisfied, 2 - dissatisfied, 3 - somewhat dissatisfied, 4 - neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, 5 - somewhat satisfied, 6 - satisfied and 7 - very satisfied. The questionnaire showed high reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.97$) and good internal consistency, as confirmed by previous studies its structure of eight factors (Borovec et al., 2011; Tkalac Verčić et al., 2009).

Attitudes towards police neutrality and neutrality in police professional behaviour were measured by variables (Table 3), which were also scaled on a Likert scale, ranging from 1 to 6. The values are: 1 - I fully agree, 2 - mostly agree, 3 - agree, 4 - disagree, 5 - mostly disagree, and 6 - I fully disagree. In the original questionnaire (Van Crean, Skogan, 2017) the variable *police neutrality - attitude* was operationalised using six items. This study used four items because the items with the opposite direction were excluded. For each scale, a principal component analysis was performed using Varimax rotation and after translation into Croatian and recoding, two variables did not work well with other questions and had low factor loadings and Cronbach's alpha values.

In the original questionnaire (Van Crean, Skogan, 2017), the variable *police neutrality - behaviour* was operationalised using four items. In this study, one variable was omitted because it had the opposite direction after the translation into Croatian and recoding. This variable also had a weak projection on the factor with low values (Cronbach's alpha and factor loading). These measurement

scales in the earlier research (Van Crean, Skogan, 2017) also showed a high reliability and a good internal consistency: *police neutrality – attitude* (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.81$) and *police neutrality - behaviour* (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.86$).

The last part of the questionnaire contains eight socio-demographic variables: sex, age, type of settlement, education, police rank, years of experience in the police, police unit type and managerial status.

3.4. Predictor variables

Predictor variables in this study were *eight dimensions of satisfaction with internal communication* operationalised through 32 variables (Table 2). Table 2 presents a description of the variables included in the study, and for all variables, arithmetic means, standard deviations, median, mode, factor loadings, Cronbach's alpha, Bartlett's test and KMO are shown. It should be noted that higher values mean higher levels of satisfaction with internal communication

Table 2. Summary statistics of predictor variables

Variables	Mean	Median	Mode	SD	Factor Loading
1. Satisfaction with feedback (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.89$; KMO=0.816; Bartlett's test=0.000; Mean= 4.14; SD=1.35)					
1. Feedback on consequences from bad performance at work	4.36	4.00	4	1.45	0.75
2. Feedback on how much they contribute to the mutual success	4.17	4.00	4	1.56	0.89
3. Feedback on how much my work is appreciated within the organisation	3.85	4.00	4	1.67	0.90
4. Feedback on how I am doing my job	4.15	4.00	4	1.57	0.91
2. Satisfaction with communication with a superior (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.93$; KMO=0.830; Bartlett's test=0.000; Mean=4.94; SD=1.48)					
5. Availability of my direct superior	5.52	6.00	6	1.49	0.87
6. The extent to which my superior is familiar with the problems I encounter at work	4.93	5.00	6	1.62	0.94
7. The extent to which my superior understands my problem	4.68	5.00	6	1.67	0.94

8. The recognition of my potential by my direct superior	4.66	5.00	6	1.64	0.89
3. Satisfaction with horizontal communication (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.90$; KMO=0.822; Bartlett's test=0.000; Mean=5.23; SD=1.17)					
9. Availability of colleagues	5.29	6.00	6	1.32	0.87
10. How successfully I communicate with the members of my team	5.62	6.00	6	1.22	0.91
11. The results of communication with colleagues	5.47	6.00	6	1.19	0.92
12. The readiness of my colleagues to accept criticism	4.65	5.00	5	1.45	0.81
4. Satisfaction with informal communication (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.82$; KMO=0.790; Bartlett's test=0.000; Mean=4.15; SD=1.12)					
13. The number of decisions reached based on informal communication	4.36	4.00	4	1.30	0.83
14. The quantity of gossip in the organisation	3.40	4.00	4	1.68	0.70
15. The quantity of time I spend in informal communication	4.43	4.00	4	1.27	0.85
16. The usefulness of information conveyed informally	4.42	4.00	4	1.27	0.87
5. Satisfaction with corporate information (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.93$; KMO=0.839; Bartlett's test=0.000; Mean=4.32; SD=1.33)					
17. Information on the rulebook	4.43	4.00	4	1.43	0.90
18. Information about the results and success of the organisation	4.47	5.00	4	1.42	0.91
19. Information on changes in the organisation	4.02	4.00	4	1.52	0.89
20. Information on legal regulations that affect the operations of my organisation	4.35	4.00	4	1.49	0.90
6. Satisfaction with communication climate (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.95$; KMO=0.841; Bartlett's test=0.000; Mean=4.47; SD=1.27)					
21. The extent to which the communication in the organisation helps me feel like an important part of the organisation	4.52	5.00	4	1.39	0.92

22. The extent to which the communication in the organisation helps me identify myself with the organisation	4.44	4.00	4	1.33	0.95
23. The extent to which the communication in the organisation promotes the organisation's values	4.41	4.00	4	1.37	0.93
24. The extent to which the communication in the organisation encourages me to achieve the organisation's goals	4.51	5.00	4	1.38	0.92
7. Satisfaction with the quality of communication media (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.93$; KMO=0.829; Bartlett's test=0.000; Mean=4.38; SD=1.36)					
25. The communication media (written notifications, intranet, oral communication and the like)	4.31	4.00	4	1.49	0.89
26. The possibility to communicate through contemporary media	4.41	5.00	6	1.52	0.94
27. The quality of communication through contemporary media	4.34	4.00	5	1.52	0.94
28. The manner others choose to communicate with me	4.50	5.00	4	1.41	0.87
8. Satisfaction with communication in meetings (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.94$; KMO=0.843; Bartlett's test=0.000; Mean=4.36; SD=1.47)					
29. How well the meetings I participate in are organised	4.28	4.00	6	1.59	0.93
30. The usefulness of information obtained in meetings	4.32	4.00	6	1.58	0.94
31. Whether I receive information important for my job on time	4.46	5.00	6	1.59	0.89
32. The duration of meetings	4.36	4.00	4	1.56	0.88

Scale: 1 – very dissatisfied, 2 – dissatisfied, 3 – somewhat dissatisfied, 4 – neither satisfied, nor dissatisfied, 5 – somewhat satisfied, 6 – satisfied, 7 – very satisfied.

3.5. Criterion variables

The criterion variables in this study were *police neutrality - attitude and police neutrality - behaviour*. Table 3 describes the dependent variables included in the study and shows the values for arithmetic means, standard deviations, median, mode, factor loadings, Cronbach's alpha, Bartlett's test, and KMO.

Table 3. Summary statistics of criterion variables

Variables	Mean	Median	Mode	SD	Factor Loading
1. Neutrality (citizens) – attitude (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.68$; KMO=0.691; Bartlett's test=0.000; Mean=3.82; SD=0.80)					
1. In this job, making judgments based on appearances is inevitable.	4.21	4.00	4	1.18	0.61
2. There is little sense in officers trying to be impartial, because that is impossible in this job.	3.85	4.00	4	1.11	0.70
3. It is impossible to always be objective in this job, because your decisions are partly based on your own views and values.	3.68	4.00	4	1.10	0.81
4. It is impossible to always be neutral in this job, because your actions are partly caused by your own opinions and values.	3.54	3.00	3	1.11	0.74
2. Neutrality (citizens) – behaviour (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.80$; KMO=0.705; Bartlett's test=0.000; Mean=1.75; SD=0.72)					
1. For the same perpetration, sometimes I take action more strictly than in other cases.	1.76	2.00	1	0.88	0.82
2. I reprimand a person for a certain behaviour while I turn a blind eye to the same behaviour in another person.	1.64	1.00	1	0.81	0.85
3. For some people, I turn a blind eye more easily than for others.	1.84	2.00	1	0.87	0.87

Scale: 1 - I fully agree, 2 – mostly agree, 3 – agree, 4 – disagree, 5 – mostly disagree and 6 – I fully disagree.

3.6. Data collection and research ethics

The study targeted all Croatian police officers working in various roles, including uniformed, criminal investigation, traffic, community police, and the Police Operational Communication Centre. Conducted from 15 to 30 December 2020 across all 20 police administrations, police stations were randomly selected. Officers on duty had equal opportunities to participate, completing the questionnaire during working hours, either at the start or end of their shifts, using the paper-pencil method. The questionnaires were distributed by police officers trained in research ethics, who were not in a supervisory role in relation to the participants. Participation in the study was voluntary, and by returning the completed questionnaire, respondents agreed to participate. They could withdraw, skip questions, or stop at any time without consequences. This was communicated verbally and in writing. Completed questionnaires were placed in a box to ensure anonymity. The 1384 police officers were offered the questionnaires, but only two refused to participate. Such a large response to participation in the study is most likely because the survey was conducted during working hours. However, 194 respondents did not answer all the questionnaire questions and were excluded from the data processing.

4. Results

A standard multiple regression analysis was conducted, and preliminary analyses proved that the assumptions of normality, linearity, multicollinearity and homogeneity of variance were not violated. The results of the diagnostics of the collinearity of the predictor variables are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Values of the variation factors and tolerance in the regression model for predictor variables

Criterion variables	Tolerance	VIF
Satisfaction with corporate information	0.419	2.386
Satisfaction with horizontal communication	0.704	1.420
Satisfaction with the quality of communication media	0.568	1.760
Satisfaction with communication with a superior	0.669	1.496
Satisfaction with communication in meetings	0.476	2.101
Satisfaction with informal communication	0.726	1.378
Satisfaction with communication climate	0.425	2.355
Satisfaction with feedback	0.610	1.641

Sex	0.916	1.092
Age	0.256	3.906
Type of settlement	0.971	1.030
Education	0.419	2.386
Police rank	0.228	4.393
Years of experience in the police	0.214	4.683
Police unit type	0.631	1.585
Managerial status	0.551	1.815

In the first step the model includes socio-demographic variables. The results (Table 5) show that the set of socio-demographic variables has a statistically significant share in predicting the attitudes of police officers towards their neutral treatment of citizens ($R = 0.206$; $R^2 = 0.042$; $F(8;1179) = 6.449$; $p = 0.000$). Among the socio-demographic variables, sex ($\beta = 0.075$, $p < 0.05$) and police rank ($\beta = 0.139$, $p < 0.05$) are statistically significant predictors. Considering the sign of the standardised partial regression coefficients (β), we can conclude that women and police officers with higher ranks have more positive attitudes towards the neutral treatment of citizens. Although statistically significant, this model explained the small share of the variance of the criteria (4.2 %).

After entering eight variables of satisfaction with internal communication into the model, the entire model explained an additional 3.5% of the variance of the criteria ($R = 0.277$; $R^2 = 0.077$; $F(16, 1171) = 6.064$, $p = 0.000$). A statistically significant predictor of police officers' attitudes towards neutral treatment of citizens is their satisfaction with the following dimensions of internal police communication: *horizontal communication* ($b = 0.118$, $p < 0.01$) and *quality of communication media* ($b = 0.084$, $p < 0.05$). Given the sign of the Beta coefficient and the manner how the degrees on the response scale are scaled, a positive sign means that a higher level of satisfaction for these two dimensions is associated with positive attitudes towards neutral treatment of citizens. However, the results show that the attitudes of police officers towards neutral treatment of citizens depend, to a large extent, on some other predictors that were not included in this study.

Table 5. Regression analysis for the criterion: Police neutrality – attitude

	Predictor variables	Beta	Sig	Model summary
Step 1	Sex	0.075	0.012	R=0.206
	Age	0.058	0.306	R2=0.042
	Type of settlement	-0.037	0.199	F(8; 1179)=6.499
	Education	0.001	0.981	p=0.000
	Police rank	0.139	0.020	
	Years of experience in the police	-0.026	0.671	
	Police unit type	0.054	0.136	
	Managerial status	-0.004	0.912	
Step 2	Sex	0.066	0.027	R=0.277
	Age	0.051	0.365	R2=0.077
	Type of settlement	-0.017	0.556	F(16; 1171)=6.064
	Education	0.001	0.982	p=0.000
	Police rank	0.130	0.028	
	Years of experience in the police	-0.010	0.876	
	Police unit type	0.050	0.156	
	Managerial status	0.014	0.719	
	Satisfaction with corporate information	0.052	0.233	
	Satisfaction with horizontal communication	0.118	0.001	
	Satisfaction with the quality of communication media	0.084	0.025	
	Satisfaction with communication with a superior	0.042	0.227	
	Satisfaction with communication in meetings	0.051	0.211	
	Satisfaction with informal communication	-0.055	0.096	
	Satisfaction with communication climate	-0.024	0.578	
	Satisfaction with feedback	-0.18	0.618	

The results of the hierarchical regression analysis for the criterion *neutral*

behaviour of the police towards citizens are shown in Table 6. The model that includes socio-demographic variables as predictors proved to be statistically significant ($R = 0.228$; $R^2 = 0.052$; $F(8;1181) = 8.074$; $p = 0.000$). Statistically significant predictors are sex ($\beta = -0.097$, $p < 0.005$), age ($\beta = -0.227$, $p < 0.001$), type of settlement ($\beta = 0.110$, $p < 0.001$), years of experience in the police ($\beta = 0.139$, $p < 0.05$) and managerial status ($\beta = 0.080$, $p < 0.05$). Although statistically significant, this model explained a small part of the variance of the criteria (5.2%). By entering the eight dimensions of internal communication into the regression model, an additional 3.8% ($R = 0.299$; $R^2 = 0.090$; $F(16; 1173) = 7.223$; $p = 0.000$) of the criterion variance was explained. In the second step, among the socio-demographic variables, the variable years of experience in the police is not statistically significant, while the significant variables are sex ($b = -0.096$, $p < 0.001$), age ($b = -0.212$, $p < 0.001$) and type of settlement ($b = 0.088$, $p < 0.05$). Statistically significant predictors of the neutral behaviour of police officers concerning the internal police communication are *satisfaction with horizontal communication* ($b = -0.116$, $p < 0.01$) and *satisfaction with corporate information* ($b = -0.096$, $p < 0.05$). Considering the sign of the Beta coefficient and the manner how the degrees on the response scale are scaled, a positive sign means that a higher level of satisfaction (for these two components) is associated with positive attitudes about the neutrality of police officers. It is obvious that the neutral behaviour of police officers depends a lot on predictors that were not included in this study.

Table 6. Regression analysis for the criterion: Police neutrality – behaviour

	Beta	Sig	Model summary
Step 1 Sex	-0.097	0.001	R=0.228
Age	-0.227	0.000	R2= 0.052
Type of settlement	0.110	0.000	F(8; 1181)=8.074
Education	0.024	0.581	p=0.000
Police rank	-0.074	0.212	
Years of experience in the police	0.139	0.023	
Police unit type	0.045	0.204	
Managerial status	0.080	0.037	
Step 2 Sex	-0.096	0.001	R=0.299
Age	-0.212	0.000	R2= 0.090
Type of settlement	0.088	0.002	F(16; 1173)=7.223
Education	0.029	0.501	p=0.000
Police rank	-0.074	0.207	
Years of experience in the police	0.119	0.051	
Police unit type	0.047	0.186	
Managerial status	0.066	0.081	
Satisfaction with corporate information	-0.096	0.027	
Satisfaction with horizontal communication	-0.116	0.001	
Satisfaction with the quality of communication media	0.007	0.841	
Satisfaction with communication with a superior	0.016	0.651	
Satisfaction with communication in meetings	0.061	0.131	
Satisfaction with informal communication	0.012	0.710	
Satisfaction with communication climate	-0.050	0.234	
Satisfaction with feedback	-0.043	0.233	

5. Discussion and conclusion

This study examined whether police officers' satisfaction with internal communication affects their neutral behavior and attitude towards citizens in Croatia. Effective internal communication is crucial for building trust between the police and the community, which improves cooperation and crime reporting (Barton, Beynon, 2015). The results show that satisfaction with one dimension—horizontal communication—is a significant predictor of both neutral attitudes and behaviors. This includes communication with colleagues at the same level, such as availability, teamwork, and openness to criticism, which influences how officers interact with citizens (Tkalac Verčič et al., 2009). This result can be explained by the importance of same-level communication, which requires teamwork and collegiality, with internal communication patterns reflected in police interactions with Croatian citizens (Beigi, Mozayani, 2016).

Relying solely on collaborative communication among Croatian police officers is insufficient; attention must also be given to corporate information. The study shows that satisfaction with this aspect of internal communication predicts neutral behavior towards citizens. Corporate information includes formal details about the organization's operations, such as the rulebook, financial success, legal regulations, and familiarity with work procedures (Tkalac Verčič et al., 2009).

Satisfaction with the quality of communication media is a significant predictor of police officers' attitudes toward neutral behavior, indicating that the police should also consider the channels used for communication. This includes satisfaction with media like email and contemporary communication tools (Tkalac Verčič et al., 2009). Research supports the importance of choosing appropriate and effective communication media for successful internal communication (Men, 2014; Tkalac Verčič, Špoljarić, 2020).

Although statistically significant, internal communication satisfaction dimensions in this study are weak predictors of police neutrality towards citizens. This may be because the questionnaire used doesn't fully capture the specificities of communication in the police system, despite its success in prior job satisfaction research (Borovec et al., 2011; Borovec, Balgač, 2017). This is a limitation of the study, suggesting future research should develop better tools to measure interactional justice in police organizations. The study also found that socio-demographic variables significantly predict police neutrality. Women and

higher-ranking officers have more positive attitudes toward neutral treatment, while sex, age, settlement type, experience, and managerial status predict neutral behavior. Police officers' sex is a predictor for both attitude and behavior.

A possible explanation is that female police officers tend to have better verbal communication skills (Johnson et al., 2014) and higher empathy (Rueckert, Naybar, 2008; Toussaint, Webb, 2005), making them valuable to the police force. In Croatia, women more often handle cases involving domestic violence, child protection, and sexual offenses (Cajner Mraović et al., 2002; Balgač, 2017), where neutrality is crucial to prevent secondary victimization. Additionally, higher-ranking officers, with more education and experience, likely have more positive attitudes toward neutrality due to more extensive training throughout their careers.

According to the theory of planned behaviour, predicting an individual's behaviour involves not only attitudes but also subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, intention, and normative beliefs (Ajzen, 2020; Sniehotta et al., 2014). Intention indicates readiness to act and directly influences behaviour, with the likelihood of action depending on the strength of the intention (Ajzen, 2020).

Police neutrality depends on many factors beyond socio-demographics and internal communication, such as organizational values and professional integrity. Additionally, officers may not act neutrally toward minority groups, migrants, or other vulnerable populations due to local stereotypes. This study was conducted on the sample of police officers in all twenty police administration in Croatia. Future research on police neutrality should focus on even more local contexts to accurately measure all relevant factors within the community and police organization in different parts of Croatia.

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Nepristranost u stavovima i ponašanju hrvatske policije – ovisi li o zadovoljstvu policijskih službenika internom komunikacijom?

Sažetak

Ova kvantitativna studija istražuje kako interna komunikacija policije utječe na nepristranost policije uz kontrolirani utjecaj sociodemografskih varijabli, koristeći prigodni uzorak od 1190 policijskih službenika u Hrvatskoj. Upitnik mjeri zadovoljstvo internom komunikacijom u osam dimenzija i nepristranost policije u dvije dimenzije. Hijerarhijska regresijska analiza otkrila je da su zadovoljstvo policijskih službenika horizontalnom komunikacijom i kvalitetom medija komunikacije statistički značajni prediktori njihovih stavova o nepristranom ophođenju prema građanima, dok su zadovoljstvo policijskih službenika horizontalnom komunikacijom i korporativnom informiranošću statistički značajni prediktori nepristranog ponašanja. Sociodemografske varijable su slabi prediktori. Studija ističe važnost poboljšanja interne komunikacije kako bi se unaprijedila neutralnost policije, iako je ograničenje korištenje univerzalnog instrumenta, što sugerira da bi buduća istraživanja trebala razviti preciznije alate.

Ključne riječi: hrvatska policija, policijska nepristranost, stavovi, ponašanje, interna komunikacija policije.

