



The Role of Psychologists in Working with Crisis Negotiators

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Keywords

Crisis intervention; psychology; law enforcement; communication; education

Abstract

Aim: Crisis negotiation is one of the extremely effective police tools for resolving crisis interventions peacefully, i.e., without the use of force. This paper will try to clarify the role of psychologists in working with crisis negotiators, depending on the different areas of work of negotiators to which psychologists can contribute. **Materials and Methods:** Psychologists have been involved in this type of police activity since the very beginning of crisis negotiations in the world. Many police organizations across the globe have psychologists in their negotiation units. Communication techniques are only some of the skills of crisis negotiators, and existing methods are based on different psychological models and concepts. **Conclusion:** The entire negotiation process involves various steps and phases and, among other things, is imbued with numerous principles and legalities of the psychological profession.

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Introduction

Crisis negotiation is one of the most effective police tools for solving crisis interventions [1]. The above has been continuously and consistently confirmed by re-

search and everyday police practice for decades. Oostinga according to Booth) states that crisis negotiation involves communication between a trained negotiator and the perpetrator with the aim of achieving a change in the perpetrator's behavior while minimizing the possibility of injury and loss of life [2]. Alexander and Klein (according to Booth) point out that today crisis negotiation is the first intervention option for police crisis situations in Western countries [2].

Crisis negotiation is a demanding and complex process that implies specific techniques and tactics in the operational police context and regarding communication skills. To an observer who watches the negotiation process, it looks like a conversation between (most often) two people, one of whom is the perpetrator and the other a police officer/negotiator. In this context, in the communication itself as part of the negotiation process, principles from the field of psychology come to light the most. There are similarities between this type of police work and psychology as an activity. In the crisis negotiation literature, one often comes across the mentioned comparison, which is most often done in the context of specific processes and phenomena that occur during psychotherapy treatments and the negotiation process.

The previous is mostly visible in the so-called expressive crisis situations, that is the ones with expressive perpetrators. Namely, crisis situations are most often divided into two categories concerning the type of perpetrators, their behavior, and their attitude toward the hostages. The first category includes perpetrators who

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have a clearly defined goal and for whom the hostages serve exclusively as a means to achieve their goal, and their primary intention is not to injure the hostage. The second category includes perpetrators who are very agitated, irrational, often self-destructive, and who do not have clear goals and sometimes show their frustration by taking hostages or victims. Therefore, two approaches to police negotiation were developed - instrumental and expressive. The first was created based on the concepts of social exchange and bargaining theory, while the expressive one was built on psychotherapeutic principles and practices [3]. It involves emotions as key factors and the greatest emphasis is placed on creating a relationship and trust between the perpetrator and the crisis negotiator. The majority of perpetrators in police interventions belong to the expressive profile. Further, Charles elaborates on the comparison of crisis negotiation and systemic therapy and states that negotiators as well as systemic therapists use a process-oriented approach, flexible communication, and the development of relationships with a person who refuses to talk and cooperate [4]. He cites the examination of the context as a similarity with systemic therapy. One of the key principles of this therapy is to consider how the context gives meaning to any behavior. Negotiators do not focus on psychological dysfunction or psychiatric diagnoses, but instead, they focus on contextually relevant information related to the incident. They investigate or examine the situational factors that led to the emergence of the crisis to find ways to resolve it safely [5]. In a therapeutic and negotiation context, gathering information related to the event itself helps to understand and appreciate the factors behind the client's or perpetrator's behavior, and this contributes significantly to the possibility of influencing their behavior. However, the author points out that although the development of crisis negotiation was connected with traditional psychotherapeutic directions and techniques - traditional models proved to be ineffective and were rejected because in crisis negotiation psychiatric labeling and diagnosis are considered unnecessary and ineffective. For example, in the FBI's negotiation course, the instructors do not emphasize classical therapeutic teaching models but emphasize a brief, problem-focused, interactional approach to negotiation that focuses on skills such as active listening. Systemic therapy had a similar development path as crisis negotiation, according to which both areas rejected the classic psychiatric typology as the primary way of approaching conversation with people, and both areas focus more on an interactive conversational process that is not limited by psychological labeling [4].

It should be emphasized that despite certain similarities between psychology and crisis negotiation as a field, crisis negotiators are police officers whose work is

completely different from the work of psychologists. It is interesting how even the skills they share, such as active listening techniques, are used by negotiators in quite different conditions. In contrast to a psychotherapy session, which first of all involves the client's voluntary seeking of help as well as a pleasant atmosphere (from lighting, temperature to the noise level in the room) in safe conditions - the negotiator uses the same skill in completely different circumstances. This usually means perpetrators who refuse to talk and cooperate, as well as action in public spaces in the presence of an audience in the form of other police officers, firefighters, medical personnel, media representatives, the perpetrator's relatives, etc., as well as many physical stimuli such as noise, cold, etc. Charles states that, unlike therapists, negotiators do not have several weeks or months available to influence the client's/perpetrator's behavior, but must quickly find out what is effective and continue the conversation in that direction [4].

Psychology as a discipline has been present in crisis negotiation since the very foundation of this type of police work. Namely, one of the two pioneers of crisis negotiation - detective Harvey Schlossberg was a psychologist as well. More precisely, crisis negotiation began in the 70s of the last century in the USA. Dissatisfaction and concern over the large number of victims during crisis interventions led to changes in the paradigm and approach to solving crisis situations in the police. Among the pioneers of the new approach were the aforementioned detective Schlossberg and lieutenant Frank Bolz, both police officers of the New York City Police Department. The duo began to develop and promote an approach to resolving crisis interventions that was different from the previous one, which was exclusively based on the use of force. Murillo points out that Schlossberg is called the "father of modern police psychology" precisely because of his role in changing police tactics in hostage crisis situations and states that Schlossberg was the first New York police officer to receive a PhD degree in psychology and that he represents a pioneer of police psychology. Crisis negotiation units and teams around the world have police psychologists in their formation, with the fact that in some countries they are more represented than in others [6]. Grubb, for example, points out that psychologists are very often involved in crisis negotiation in the USA, while in England they are somewhat less involved [7]. In Croatia, crisis negotiators have had their psychologist since 2022. The role of psychologists depends on the very structure of police organizations, which differs from country to country, and Hatcher and associates, for example, describe two types of roles - consultant or advisory and one as an integrated member of the negotiation team. In general, the role of psychologists in crisis negotiation

units is diverse - from assistance during the intervention to the preparation of negotiators before the intervention and psychological post-intervention after its completion [8]. Psychologists are present in educational and selection processes as well as in scientific and research work, which will be presented in more detail in this paper.

Psychology in the Background of Police Negotiation

Education

The education of crisis negotiators implies a very demanding education program, for a start - a basic negotiation course, such as the one we have in Croatia.

As stated in the introduction, the work of a psychologist and a crisis negotiator has some similarities, at least in the context of a conversation as part of the negotiation procedure, therefore specific knowledge in the field of psychology is extremely important in terms of the education of crisis negotiators.

Regarding psychological skills and knowledge that can be used in the field of crisis negotiation, the first thematic area logically is communication skills. However, negotiation is a complex process that requires knowledge of different areas of psychology. It can be said that communication techniques and skills are only a manifestation of negotiation tools visible to the observer, while a more complex process takes place in the background. The choice of specific communication techniques is actually an indicator of the negotiator's correct interpretation of the perpetrator's behavior, motives, desires, fears, and ultimately the correct interpretation of the background or situational context.

Considering the above, areas of psychology that are very useful in police negotiation include clinical, social, cognitive, health psychology, psychological counseling and psychotherapy. Regarding clinical psychology - for crisis negotiation, it is important to know the symptomatology of various clinical disorders, with an emphasis on depressive, psychotic, traumatic, and personality disorders. Knowledge of symptomatology does not of course mean establishing a diagnosis by the negotiator, but implies knowledge of the etiology of the difficulties themselves to select communication techniques as well as areas or topics for conversation with the perpetrator, predicting the perpetrator's behavior and planning the negotiation process itself. In an excellent review of psychological skills that can be used in crisis negotiation, Miller provides guidelines for dealing with perpetrators suffering from various psychological disorders as those most often dealt with by crisis negotiators [9]. Furthermore, given that negotiators do not act exclusively to-

wards mentally ill individuals, it is important to understand the social factors that in specific circumstances and conditions can lead clinically healthy individuals to extreme behaviors. Therefore, in this context, knowledge from the social psychology field is also useful for crisis negotiators. It is necessary to clarify that the type of education for crisis negotiators described here does not only refer to knowledge that can be useful in negotiators' actions but also includes skills that can significantly help them in terms of their own mental health, ways of approaching different phenomena as well as organizational and operational stressors. Furthermore, the field of cognitive psychology, which includes mental processes such as learning, memory, perception, decision-making, and attention - is very useful both for the negotiators themselves as well as for the negotiation procedure and the negotiation process as a whole. Health psychology, above all the field of the relationship between stress and health, is important in the form of prevention of the development of mental difficulties and in general in the form of preserving the mental health of crisis negotiators, which will be described in more detail in the next chapter. Regarding the field of psychological counseling and psychotherapy, on which principles the recent negotiation models were ultimately created, for crisis negotiators it is important to adopt certain skills such as cognitive-behavioral techniques like problem-solving, cognitive restructuring, positive thinking or the technique of cognitive distancing or defusion from ACT (Acceptance and Commitment Therapy) therapy, which help the perpetrator to see the situation and problem from a different angle - which contributes to rethinking and giving up on the original intention.

Finally, regarding the previously mentioned communication skills necessary in crisis negotiation, the unavoidable topic is active listening. Numerous authors emphasize the usefulness and effectiveness of active listening techniques in police work in general, and especially in crisis negotiation [4,5,10,11,12]. Active listening calms the perpetrator, helps build relationships, gathers information, and leads to the desired change in the perpetrator's behavior, and these are all important crisis negotiation steps. However, it should be noted that authenticity, sincerity, acceptance, and acting without prejudice are necessary for the successful use of active listening techniques. If these techniques are used superficially and artificially, there is a possibility that they will have the opposite effect, that is, they will be a trigger for unwanted behavior of the perpetrator.

Science

There are many publications on crisis negotiation since it is a fascinating field that intrigues the public and the scientific community, and includes techniques and

skills that can be used in almost all activities and types of work outside the police context.

The existing literature is largely focused on the types of negotiation models and specific communication techniques useful in crisis negotiation, such as the aforementioned active listening. Review papers are more frequent, and fewer published articles refer to original scientific papers that include research designs, i.e. the implementation of research on the topic of crisis negotiation or the population of crisis negotiators. Noesner, Vecchi, Grubb, Van Hasselt, and others stand out as researchers and authors in this field [13-19]. For example, Van Hasselt and associates conducted the first empirical test of the effectiveness of the FBI negotiation course and confirmed its effectiveness [19]. Furthermore, there is less literature regarding the specific characteristics of crisis negotiators. Although in the beginnings of crisis negotiation, it was believed that any police officer could become a negotiator, research soon showed that this is not the case, but that they must possess specific qualities to be successful in this job [20]. In this regard, psychologists are quite useful, considering the methodological and research skills they acquire during their education, as well as the skills regarding selection processes, the use of psychological tests, and so on. Grubb and associates for example, conducted several studies on the topic of examination of the characteristics of crisis negotiators [15,16].

Previous negotiation practice and literature show that crisis negotiation is undoubtedly effective. But from a scientific point of view, although there are many publications on crisis negotiation, including correlational research, there are not many experimental research designs like, for example, validation of existing crisis models. Negotiation effectiveness is partly based on specific psychological principles, therefore the analysis of the effectiveness of these phenomena in the background of the entire process is very interesting, and psychologists can significantly contribute by validating specific negotiation techniques, models, etc. It is therefore important to carry out experimental verification of the effectiveness of negotiation courses and trainings, like the research mentioned above by Van Hasselt and associates [19]. An additional challenge is the validation of the effect through biological parameters as indicators of CNS and ANS activity, such as HRV or cortisol release, which are often used in examining physiological responses to stressors. Since the ability of self-control, emotion regulation, and concentration is extremely important in negotiation work, the validation of training with biological parameters is really useful in terms of testing its effectiveness in mastering the body's physiological reaction to stress during crisis intervention.

Furthermore, regarding the scientific contribution of psychologists, it is very interesting and above all useful

to examine the effectiveness of negotiation techniques outside the crisis negotiation context, that is, to examine their practical use in other domains. Namely, the largest percentage of crisis negotiation work involves dealing with expressive perpetrators who experience strong emotions and are very upset. Negotiating methods of calming the perpetrator and generally conducting the conversation are unquestionably useful in everyday communication, regardless of the type of interlocutor. Well-known crisis negotiators such as Cris Voss, Gary Noesner, and others have demonstrated that with their publications and activities outside of police systems. Therefore, the creation of psychological measures as well as research designs and their implementation on this topic can be very useful, since it implies a practical implication in all remaining types of police activities as well as in other areas of work, beyond the police.

Selection

As already mentioned, it was initially assumed that any police officer could do the negotiation job, but police practice and studies showed that this was not correct. The job of a crisis negotiator is very specific, demanding, and stressful therefore it requires that the negotiator possess certain traits or characteristics necessary for the successful performance of this type of police work.

A review of the literature shows that the following stand out as the most important qualities of a successful crisis negotiator: specific personality structure, rational and intuitive decision-making style, great ability to regulate emotions, mental resilience, adaptive stress coping mechanisms, high degree of emotional intelligence, authenticity, teamwork skills and adaptability [2,4,9,15,17,21-24]. Therefore, in the selection process, psychologists should look for individuals with the above-mentioned characteristics. Selection procedures should be very extensive and detailed, and negotiation courses should also serve as a selection tool. Namely, during simulation and other exercises, it is possible to assess which police officer possesses the necessary qualities and characteristics required for the negotiation job and which of the candidates can endure the pressure and stressors that crisis negotiators face. Grubb and associates point out that, for example, in Great Britain, police officers as candidates for the job of negotiator go through a very serious and extensive selection process and must go through a rigorous assessment and training in order to qualify for that position [18]. In another study by Grubb and associates, the participants stated that the negotiation education was the most intensive form of training they attended during their entire career in the service and that the negotiation course was created to, among other things, test endurance or resilience [25]. Therefore, psychologists should be involved in the

course throughout its whole duration for the purpose of additional selection checks.

However, it should be emphasized that even the greatest selection of police officers in general, as well as crisis negotiators, cannot guarantee that police officers will be able to perform their work maximally efficiently until the end of their careers and that they will not feel consequences of their job regarding their physical and mental health. In general, the selection of police officers primarily involves testing the personality structure. But for example, that desirable low score on measures of neuroticism is not a guarantee that the emotional stability of police officers or crisis negotiators will be preserved forever unless continuous care for their mental health is ensured. The next chapter deals with the role of psychologists in care of crisis negotiators' mental health.

Treatment

Police work is undoubtedly one of the most stressful and demanding jobs in the world, and crisis negotiation is one of the most stressful police jobs [26]. Caring for their mental health is therefore essential. The two classic stressors of police officers are organizational and operational, and the public is often surprised by the fact that police officers evaluate organizational ones as more stressful [27,28]. They are exposed to them more often, and after completion of police training, they are more prepared for operational stressors which they consider part of the nature of police work. At the same time, they do not expect difficulties of an organizational nature.

Mental health care of crisis negotiators as well as all other police officers is extremely important, not only in terms of preserving their stability but also regarding their work efficiency and productivity. Namely, stress and psychological difficulties related to stress are significantly negatively correlated with work efficiency, errors on work, as well as huge financial costs related to absenteeism, sick days, and lawsuits [29].

Without underestimating the importance of treatment after exposure to traumatic as well as all other intervention stressors, the emphasis in crisis negotiators' mental health care should be on preventive action. Namely, considering the nature of crisis negotiators' work, it is unquestionable that they will encounter truly challenging, stressful as well as traumatic situations. Therefore, the mental health care of crisis negotiators must include creating and maintaining mental resilience and toughness. Although similar, the above terms are different. Psychological or mental resilience implies a process, capacity, or outcome associated with successful adaptation despite adverse life circumstances [30]. Mental toughness is defined as a general feeling that the environment is satisfactory, which leads the individual to approach different situations with curiosity and enthusiasm

or engagement [31]. Resilience is best developed with the help of mental training, such as the MBCT (Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy) program. MBCT is one of the most effective mental and treatment programs in the world that affects, among others, cognitive abilities (concentration, learning, memory), emotion regulation, decision-making ability, and stress regulation. All of the above is extremely important for the performance in crisis negotiation. The effectiveness of this program has also been proven on police officers [32,33].

Furthermore, psychologists in negotiation units should be available to negotiators in the classic counseling and therapeutic sense - related to life and personal difficulties in general. Namely, the police work, and thus the crisis negotiation work, are very specific, and difficult to understand for the public and the population outside the police world. Police officers encounter difficult phenomena and situations daily, and they are best understood by those who perform the same job. Research continuously confirms that colleagues are the best source of social support in the police population [34]. It is also shown that police work significantly affects the private life and family dynamics of police officers, and divorce rates are high among the police population [35]. Therefore, an important task of the psychologist is to take care of this type of negotiator's stressors as well. Furthermore, the psychologist must continuously monitor the potential symptoms of the negotiator's burnout. Emotional dissonance, which implies a discrepancy between our feelings and those we express externally, is very common in police and crisis negotiation and significantly contributes to the development of burnout [36,37]. Therefore, the psychologist must continuously monitor phenomena such as the above as well as all other possible consequences of this type of work on the negotiator's mental health and functioning.

The role of psychologists is also important after the interventions, regardless of their type and final result. Post-intervention psychological debriefing is important not only for stabilization and calming but also to check the presence of symptoms of acute stress disorder as well as any other possible difficulties that are important to notice as early as possible to act and prevent the development of more serious mental difficulties.

Assistance during intervention

Psychologists in the negotiation team/units or as collaborators of crisis negotiators in general (depending on the existing structure of a particular police organization) can be very useful during the actual negotiation or intervention.

First of all, they can profile the perpetrator and help in choosing a technique to approach the perpetrator and start the conversation - depending on the symptomatol-

ogy of certain mental disorders, if they are present. Psychologists can also assist during the negotiation process itself, with suggestions they propose to the negotiator. However, it should be pointed out that the psychologist must communicate this type of help to the negotiators (the first and second negotiator), that is, to suggest it as an option that the negotiator can use if it suits him. In this regard, the psychologist's assistance must not be intrusive in any case but should serve to create an additional sense of security or help that the negotiator can rely on. Namely, although the crisis negotiation literature constantly emphasizes teamwork and crisis negotiation is truly a team activity in practice, from the moment when the conversation with the perpetrator starts, the first negotiator, i.e. the one who leads the conversation - feels a great responsibility for the progress and completion of the entire intervention [38]. In this context, the psychologist, together with other members of the team, should create a sense of trust, security, and togetherness for the first negotiator to reduce the pressure and the feeling of enormous responsibility. On the other hand, he must not impose ideas and thereby interfere with the negotiator's thought process or the content of what was said by the first negotiator. A non-invasive and pre-arranged approach is therefore the best way to potentially help crisis negotiators. For example, if the negotiation takes place over the phone, the psychologist can communicate the ways to help negotiators which best suits them - to let them know if they noticed something while listening to the conversation which could be useful for the further course of the negotiation. This can be a slight shift of the negotiator's gaze to the board, paper, or any medium in which ideas are normally recorded. Furthermore, if the psychologist as well as the other team members are in the negotiator's immediate vicinity, they also must pay attention that while giving the suggestion they must not shatter the negotiator's self-confidence and create a feeling of dependence on these suggestions. Therefore, the psychologist's presence should be pleasant for the crisis negotiator, unobtrusive, and should not interfere with the negotiator's sense of independence in making decisions.

Furthermore, during the intervention itself, the psychologist is useful in terms of regulating the emotions and stress of the negotiator, but also of everyone involved in the crisis, such as family members of the perpetrator, etc. Psychologists are also useful for information gathering since the information that can be useful for the further course of negotiations can be obtained from the conversation with the offender's relatives. Before the actual intervention, the psychologist is important in terms of the psychological preparation of the negotiator. During the intervention itself, the psychologist is also useful in assessing the negotiator's effectiveness, fatigue, or the manifestation of certain moods and

emotions that can make it difficult for him to work. The psychologist assesses the need for a negotiator's replacement, i.e. introducing another negotiator into the negotiations. Furthermore, Dimitrovska states that in addition to observing the relationship between the crisis negotiator and the perpetrator, the psychologist also assesses the relationship between the perpetrator and the hostage/victim with an emphasis on the occurrence of Stockholm syndrome, considering that the aforementioned can make the negotiation process difficult even though it sometimes helps to preserve life from the hostages [39]. The syndrome must be recognized on time for the most appropriate reaction of the negotiation team.

In conclusion, during the intervention, the psychologist can be helpful by observing and analyzing all the processes that take place at the same time. The aforementioned includes the perpetrator and his behavior, the negotiators themselves, all police officers involved in the intervention as well as all others involved in the crisis. The most important thing regarding the psychologist in the negotiation unit is that he needs to be at the disposal of the negotiator and to primarily communicate his assistance with the negotiator. A psychologist should take care of the atmosphere and functioning of the entire team, trying to keep it at an optimal level. A psychologist must be very gentle, insightful, and attentive. Paraphrasing McMains, who calls active listening techniques the "aspirin of negotiation" - it can be said that in a negotiation team, a psychologist must try to be a "team aspirin" [40].

Conclusion

Crisis negotiation is one of the most effective police tools for resolving crisis interventions peacefully, i.e. without the use of force. One of the important negotiation tools is specific communication techniques and skills, and conversation with the perpetrator as part of the negotiation process implies certain concepts from psychological practice. In literature, one often comes across the analysis of the crisis negotiation process in the context of specific processes and phenomena that occur during psychotherapy treatments, and most often regarding the so-called expressive crises in which the perpetrators are very upset and experience strong emotions.

Psychology as a discipline has been present in crisis negotiation since its beginning. As a pioneer of crisis negotiation - Harvey Schlossberg, a New York detective and psychologist together with lieutenant Frank Boltz developed a new approach to solving crisis interventions, different from the previous one which was exclusively based on the use of force. The duo developed a new model for dealing with crises as a reaction to dissat-

isfaction and concern over the large number of casualties during crisis interventions.

Crisis negotiation units and teams around the world have police psychologists in their composition, with the fact that in some countries they are more represented than in others. In general, the role of psychologists in negotiation units is comprehensive - from assistance during intervention to preparation of negotiators before intervention and post-intervention psychological debriefing. Psychologists are present in educational and selection processes as well as scientific work, all of which are presented in detail in this paper.

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Conflict of Interest

None to declare.

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