



Platform Opleiding, Onderwijs en Organisatie (PLATO) B.V.

Institute of Security and Global Affairs (ISGA)



Indicators of aggression and violence

An exploration of indicators of aggression, and violence against police officers, firefighters and special investigating officers (Boas)

Summary



The Gordon Riots by Charles Green

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Dr. J.A. van Lakerveld PLATO BV, Universiteit Leiden

Drs. B.J. Buiskool en G. Hospers (MA, RMA), Ockham IPS BV

L. Klein Kranenburg (MSc), I&O Research

Dr. J. Matthys Institute of Security and Global Affairs, Universiteit Leiden

Colophon

Contractor

Scientific Research and Documentation Centre (WODC)
Department of External Scientific Policy Research
Ministry of Justice and Security
P.O. Box 20301; 2500 EH The Hague

Researchers

PLATO Ltd (Leiden University):
Dr J.A. van Lakerveld

Ockham IPS Ltd:
Drs. B.J. Buiskool
G. Hospers (MA, RMA)

Institute of Security and Global Affairs (Leiden University):
Dr J. Matthys

I&O Research:
L. Klein Kranenburg (MSc)

Supervising Committee

Chairman: Prof. Dr. H. Elffers
Prof. Dr. M. Lindegaard
Ir. M.M. Bökkerink
Drs. F. Willemsen

Summary

Introduction

The consequences of aggression and violence against emergency workers and other professional groups are very diverse. The behaviour is morally and socially unacceptable. First, there are personal health consequences; in addition, an incident of violence affects the psychological resilience of employees. Such consequences may lead to absenteeism and staff turnover. As a result, work productivity comes under pressure. Understaffing, in turn, leads to an overload of work of colleagues. To get everything back on track, costs of therapy, counselling, recruitment, and selection of new staff are incurred. All employers are obliged under the Working Conditions Act (Arbowet) to have a policy aimed at preventing or limiting aggression and violence. The Arbowet, in article 5, requires employers to identify the risks to aggression and violence in a Risk Inventory and Evaluation (RI&E). It is therefore important for future policy and measures that clarity is created on the nature and extent of aggression and violence against different professional groups, the nature of undesirable behaviour and the contexts in which it takes place, based on valid and reliable scientific sources. Therefore, on behalf of the Ministry of Justice, and Security -also for the benefit of the work of the Taskforce *Onze hulpverleners veilig* (Our emergency workers safe) - the Scientific Research and Documentation Centre (WODC) initiated this study.

Research questions

The study identifies three lines of enquiry, each with its own research questions. The research questions for the purpose of the first line of enquiry are as follows:

1. *What proposals can be made for the delineation of aggression and violence against emergency workers, primarily police, special investigating officers(boas), and firefighters including proposals for a applicable and meaningful subdivision within aggression and violence, taking into account the feasibility of the collection of the necessary data by professional groups, or others?*
2. *Which measurable indicators are suitable to determine (validly and reliably) the nature, extent, and trends of aggression and violence against (primarily) police officers, firefighters and boas?*
3. *Which contextual indicators provide (over time) insight into social developments on the one hand, and trends when it comes to aggression and violence against emergency service workers in particular on the other?*
4. *What substantiated proposals are there to arrive at one, or more weighted indices of aggression and violence partly on the basis of developed indicators (such as "the Cambridge Harm index", national security indices and the crime-punishment index of the WODC) with the aim of giving the indicators maximum and unambiguous meaning?*

The research questions for the purpose of the second line of enquiry are:

5. *How may ways of internal reporting, internal registering and reporting to the police, by fire brigade and boas be mapped?*
6. *In what way could these indicators be measured by, among others, the professional groups (measurement method)? Consider employers' own registration and/or a periodic survey system among emergency workers and employers.*

7. *How can these indicators, and the data required for them, be collected by the professional groups and included in the registration systems of police, fire brigades and boats without creating an unnecessary administrative burden?*

Finally, the research question for the purpose of the third line of research:

8. *Based on the findings of lines 1 and 2 of this research, what concrete proposals can be made to arrive at a sustainable data collection and registration system, that meets the needs, and possibilities of the professions, and that maximizes the possibility of comparing the data collected by the various professions, and that enables them to derive mechanisms and medium/long-term trends from it.*

Research Methodology

To answer the research questions, data were collected in the following ways:

- Literature and policy document study: It included policy documents, parliamentary papers, trend studies, research reports and scientific papers.
- Inventory of existing monitoring systems: For the different systems the study determined, where there is overlap, where discrepancies exist, and where any gaps were found.
- (Group) interviews with experts: the experts referred to are policy officers, academic experts, and professionals from the distinguished professional fields.

From the above sources, a picture was derived of the academic and policy approaches, and existing practices with regard to registration and monitoring of data related to aggression and violence against Police, Fire Service, and Boats, together with suggestions for optimization of these systems and practices. On the basis of the overview thus formed, indicators of aggression and violence were determined, conclusions were drawn, and examples of elaboration were developed on how these indicators could be made measurable and useful.

Research findings

1. *What proposals can be made for the delineation of aggression and violence towards emergency workers (primarily police, boats and firefighters) including proposals for a workable and meaningful subdivision within aggression and violence, taking into account the feasibility of the collection of the necessary data by professional groups, among others?*

In the research done, after analysis of scientific literature, policy documents, interviews and discussion of the findings in focus groups, it was concluded that a valid and useful definition of aggression (including violence), should at least distinguish between physical and verbal aggression and (in recognition of demarcation problems) preferably further broken down into:

- Verbal
- Physical aggression
- Threats/harassment (including sexual harassment)
- Discrimination

2. Which measurable indicators are suitable to determine (validly and reliably) the nature, extent and trends of aggression and violence towards (primarily) police officers, firefighters and boats?

The study identified a large number of types of data, on which analyses may be performed to determine the extent to which firefighters, police officers and boats are confronted with insecurity in their work and what developments are taking place in the field of safety. Amidst the multitude of data, it was finally concluded that the following indicators together show the extent to which emergency workers/enforcement officers are safe, and how the situation is developing :

Data derived from registrations on:

- Increase in numbers of incidents.
- Increase in severity of incidents
- Increase in number of serious incidents

From surveys:

- Number of incidents experienced per quarter;
- Number of times reported;
- Safety perception in task performance;
- Work experience and health

The survey data provide insight into the extent to which emergency workers feel safe; the registration-data provide reported facts that form the background against which that perception of safety, work experience and health may be understood.

3. Which contextual indicators provide insight (in time) into social developments on the one hand, and trends when it comes to aggression and violence against emergency workers in particular, on the other?

By collecting and registering the data indicated in the proposed system, an overview emerges of the types of aggression that occur. This overview will arise after analysis of incidents over periods of for instance quarters. A picture also emerges of the numbers involved, and the role of colleagues and bystanders. Also an insight is offered in the nature of the action and the dynamics of the incident, and of series of incidents. Analysis of data collected on individual incidents is supplemented with data on the perceived (lack of) safety by emergency workers/law enforcers over a period (a quarter). This makes it possible to compare or relate developments in the reported facts to the perceived (lack of) safety. Comparing data over the periods shows visible changes in the types of aggression in different contexts with different effects and impacts. Such an approach provides employers and policymakers with guidance on how to anticipate and respond to trends in society and thus in the work of emergency workers/enforcement officers.

4. What substantiated proposals are there to arrive at one or more weighted indices of aggression and violence partly on the basis of the indicators developed (such as "the Cambridge Harm index", national security indices and the crime-penalty index of the WODC) with the aim of giving the indicators maximum and unambiguous meaning?

By explicitly asking in the system of reporting and registration about the nature of the consequences of an incident (in reporting/registration), or of incidents over a period of time (in a survey), a picture emerges of frequency and severity of incidents and any increase in that severity over time. The parallel collection of facts about incidents and of their perception in the performance of work, or in

the perception of work (health and well-being) offer the possibility of an experience-based ranking in the types of incidents according to actual and perceived severity and the relationship between the two. For the safety of law enforcement and emergency workers, besides the actual nature of an incident, it is also about the impact that incidents have on professionals. A system for weighing incidents against them must balance the facts and their perception. To this end, a systematic concerted monitor can gradually provide an increasingly robust empirical basis.

5. How can reporting, registration and reporting by police, firefighters and boas be mapped?

By making a distinction in a system between the actual reporting and registration immediately after incidents on the one hand, and periodic surveys in which the perception of safety and the perception of work are central on the other, but in which reflections are also requested on a past period, the occurrence of incidents and one's own reporting discipline in that period, the possibility of comparison arises. The advantage of a survey over using registration data is that it is not subject to fluctuations in employees' willingness to report. Another advantage of using a survey over registration data is that it also provides insight into the incidents that are not registered ('dark number'). If the number of actual registrations lags behind the number of incidents declared over a period, or if there is a difference in the seriousness of reporting and the perceived seriousness of incidents, this is a signal that too little is being reported. In that case, a discussion can be started about the reasons for this (lack of insight into the usefulness of reporting; preferring to continue rather than having to report an incident over and over again, fear of repercussions, etc.). The same cross check can also be made with the third type of data, if it appears that the well-being, or health of employees is under pressure. The three-track approach has the advantage of that mutual calibration of the three tracks and discussion of any discrepancies between them.

6. In what way could these indicators be measured by professional groups (measurement method), among others? This could include employers' own registration and/or a periodic survey system among social workers and employers.

The answer to this research question is already contained in the answer to the above question. It involves a three-track approach, consisting of data collection per incident and its aggregation; a survey containing questions on incidents, reporting and perception over a period of time and a set of questions on health and well-being. This may involve not only those directly involved and their managers, but also other respondents such as company doctors, HR staff, confidential counsellors, etc. To paint a national picture of the nature and extent of aggression and violence, such a survey should preferably be organised per professional field at national level, based on a representative sample of the total workforce. Such a survey could also be rolled out at the organisational level, as part of existing Employee Satisfaction Surveys.

7. How can these indicators and the data required for them be collected by the professions and included in the registration systems of police, fire brigades and boas without creating an unnecessary administrative burden?

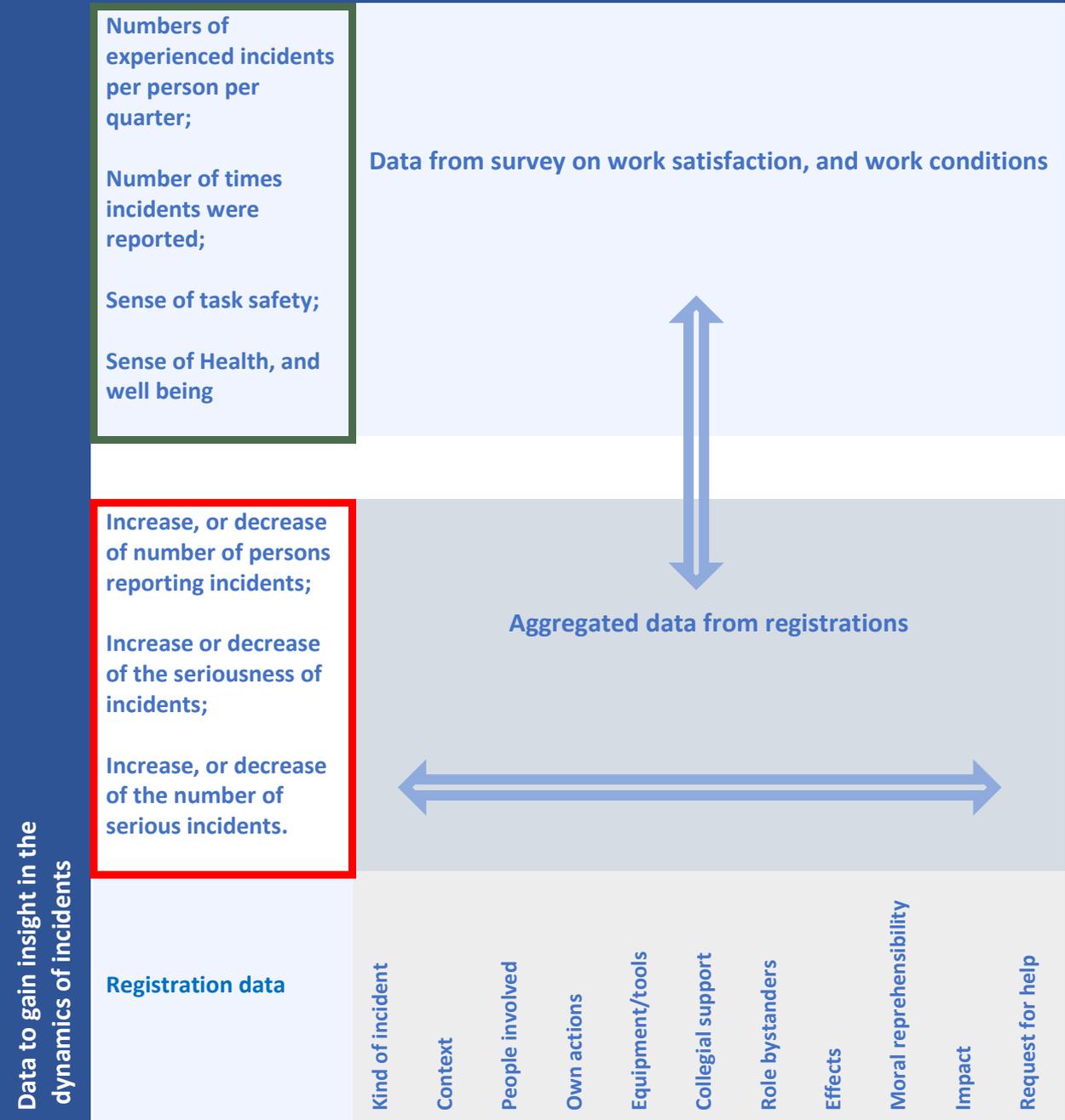
Within the police, the existing systems for reporting and registration are coherent nationwide. This makes it possible there to bring the data together in a national database. In municipalities and fire brigades, the situation is different. There, there is a greater variety of systems, of interpretation. If there is a desire to obtain a broader overview, it is recommended to first strengthen the alignment per professional group (fire brigade, police, boas). Then, given the differences in the nature of the

work of professionals, the priority is to achieve alignment between data and indicators for enforcers on the one hand, and emergency workers on the other. To promote the simplicity of a system, it is advisable to start with only core data on increases/decreases in numbers and severity of incidents and increases/decreases in the number of serious incidents. For each occupational group, since these data are often collected in a similar way anyway, the questions from surveys on perception of safety and perception of work (health and well-being) can be aligned. By focusing in this way, the efficiency may increase and bureaucracy be limited. Over time, the need, and hence the enthusiasm for further alignment will increase, as the analyses of aggregated data begin to prove its usefulness. A growth model is recommended, that expands in directions demanded by employers, and policymakers.

8. On the basis of the findings of lines 1 and 2 of this study, what concrete proposals can be made to arrive at a sustainable data collection and registration system that meets the needs and possibilities/feasibility of the professional groups and makes it possible to compare the data collected by the various professional groups and to derive mechanisms and trends in the long term?

All in all, the structure of a system can be seen as a correlation between a few indicators (figures in red, perception in green) and, in the blue area, the data from the registrations that help interpret the developments. That interpretation leads to progressive insight in which new, and more concise indicators can be formulated and included.

Indicators of experienced safety per quarter



Epilogue

The set-up, as outlined in this report, uses incident-related reporting and registry data and survey data, or other organisational data related to safety perception, well-being, and health. Of these data, the reliability of the reporting data depends most on the reporting discipline and that, in turn, on the organisational culture regarding (lack of) safety. To ensure that incidents are reported and continue to be reported, should they occur, it is important to highlight and discuss the necessity of reporting, and the organisational view on it, with regularity. Only then can reported data provide a valid, and reliable picture of safety realities. The perception data over a period of time can be compared with the actual reports. From this, an impression can be derived of the discrepancy between numbers of reports and perceptions of that number. The greater the discrepancy, the greater the need to reinforce the reporting culture. Regularity is important here because then the influence of those interventions on the numbers can be included in the analyses.

The data collected through monitoring is only of value if it is subjected to de-normal analysis and interpretation. Until now, this has been too often lacking in many cases, which is why it is advisable to involve experts in such an analysis with a certain regularity, so that substantiated and targeted analyses and advice are derived from it, offering action perspectives to policymakers, employers and professionals.

There are several ways of exploiting registration data. One is translating the overviews of incidents into training and exercise materials. Secondly, the available data may be a source of knowledge that can be used to determine meaningful forms of prevention and priorities among them. Systematisation of data also leads to data files, that offer opportunities for further scientific research into the dynamics of aggression, and violence against emergency workers and ways of preventing, or curbing it.