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POLICE TRAINING IN PRACTICE: ORGANIZATION AND DELIVERY ACCORDING TO EUROPEAN LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES

Police training plays a crucial role in the development of police officers. Because the training of police officers combines various educational components and is governed by organizational guidelines, police training is a complex, multifaceted topic. The current study investigates training at six European law enforcement agencies and aims to identify strengths and challenges of current training organization and practice.

This comparatively long period of initial training makes sense when considering that police officers respond to diverse and complex on-duty demands on a daily basis. Police officers are tasked with enforcing laws, protecting civilian life and property, responding to (emergency) calls, and apprehending and arresting criminals, to name only a few. Consequently, it is likely for police officers to encounter complex, high-risk situations [1]. Dealing with these high-risk situations adequately requires expansive knowledge and skills, which police officers ought to acquire in training. Police academies and law enforcement agencies are responsible for equipping officers with the relevant skills to successfully resolve any on-duty demands placed upon them. To ensure that police officers continue to be well prepared for any on-duty incidents, law enforcement agencies provide training content that ensures that officers have the knowledge and skill to resolve situations they encounter on duty

According to the interviewed training coordinators and instructors, police instructors have an essential role in the conceptualization and delivery of a training session. To ensure that trainees learn effectively and efficiently, instructors have a wide range of demanding tasks to fulfill. Across the six interviewed law enforcement agencies, there are differences in tasks that instructors take on. For instance, two law enforcement agencies train their instructors to teach all components of training, whereas the other four law enforcement agencies have instructors that specialize and provide training solely in particular components such as shooting, self-defense, or tactical procedures. Similarly, some instructors specialize in the training of particular trainee groups like police recruits, regular police officers, or specialized teams such as special forces or undercover teams [2].

Independent of any specialization, all interviewed instructors feel a strong sense of responsibility associated with their role as a teacher. Instructors primarily

felt that their responsibility in providing the training is to set up each training session with the aim to advance the knowledge and skill of the trainees and to create a safe environment in which trainees can learn.

For example, when instructors identify areas for improvement in their training, they have to take numerous steps to reach the level at which changes to training structures and curricula can be implemented. This process can be tedious and time-consuming, particularly if the deciding body for approval or rejection of modification to the training framework and curriculum is a governmental organization such as the internal ministry [2].

So, based on our findings on the strengths that European law enforcement agencies share, we are optimistic about improvements in police training. There is generally a solid structure by which training is organized and updated, law enforcement agencies possess self-critical and evaluative qualities at all levels involved with the daily practice of police training, and last, but certainly not least, police instructors are committed to optimizing the training environment for their trainees.

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