

Is the "Police Personality" Predisposed To Domestic Violence?

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Using meta-analytic techniques, we profiled the personalities of law enforcement personnel and men who battered their female domestic partners. Our results indicate little correspondence between the profiles. The "police personality" has nonclinical elevations on the K, Pd, and Ma scales of the MMPI. In contrast, the "batterer personality" has elevations on the F scale and all clinical scales except Si of the MMPI. A comparison of the profiles suggests nothing in the personality profile of police officers that would predispose them toward domestic violence.

In studying domestic violence by police officers, it is important to ask if there is something about law enforcement personnel that makes them particularly likely to engage in domestic violence. If the answer to this question is yes, it is important to determine whether the increased level of domestic violence is due to characteristics of the officer (e.g., personality, background), conditions of the job itself, or an interaction between the two. The notion that the "police personality" might be prone to domestic violence may be a subset of the more general suggestion that the personality characteristics of police officers make them prone to a variety of inappropriate or antisocial behaviors and that it may sometimes be difficult to discriminate between the "good guys and the bad guys" (Reming, 1988). On the other hand, several studies have found police officers in general to be self-confident, effective individuals (Hogan & Kurtines, 1975) and have concluded that the evidence shows that the overall level of adjustment of police officers is generally good (Lefkowitz, 1975; Nowicki, 1966).

It was the purpose of our study to determine if law enforcement personnel as a group have personality characteristics that might predispose them toward domestic violence. To do so, we gathered MMPI data on both police officers and identified batterers, and used meta-analytic techniques to combine the data to create profiles of the "police personality" and the "batterer personality." We could then compare the two profiles to determine if the police personality was similar to the batterer personality.

Method

Literature Search

Our goal was to find all relevant published journal articles and unpublished dissertations and theses covering the period 1970 to the present. When found, articles prior to 1970 were included in our analysis but they were not directly sought. To find relevant studies, we used several computer databases (e.g., Psychlit, Infotrac), *Dissertation Abstracts International*, and bibliographies from articles, books, and dissertations. In addition, some previously unpublished MMPI data were obtained directly from researchers. Ninety-one percent of our data set used the MMPI and nine percent used the MMPI-2.

Studies were included in our analysis only if they reported a complete set of personality test scores. That is, several articles used the MMPI but did not report any scale scores. Several other articles used the MMPI but only reported scores from one or two of the scales. Such articles could not be included in the analysis. The results of our literature search are summarized in Table 1. As shown in Table 1, only the MMPI had a sufficient number of studies for analysis. Thus, the CPI, 16-PF, CAQ, and MCMI will not be discussed in this article. However, the data are located in Tables 4-6 at the end of this article.

Table 1: Summary of Literature Search

Personality Test	Police Profile		Batterer Profile	
	Studies	Subjects	Studies	Subjects
MMPI	44	6,604	13	625
CPI	17	1,996	2	110
16-PF	14	20,837	2	246
MCMII	0		4	502
CAQ	5	15,573	0	

Meta-Analysis

The data were cumulated using the method described in detail by Hunter and Schmidt (1990). Our profiles were formed by multiplying the sample size from each study with the respective scales scores, summing the products from each study, and then dividing this figure by the total sample size. In some cases, articles presented their data plotted on a profile sheet rather than providing actual means. In such cases, we did our best to estimate the actual *T* score from the profile.

Results

As shown in Table 2, the batterer and law enforcement samples had similar racial and educational compositions but differed by eight years in their mean age and differed of course, in the reason they took the MMPI. As shown in Table 3, the mean MMPI profiles of the police officers and the batterers have almost no overlap. On all of the validity scales with the exception of the L scale, and all of the clinical scales, the mean score of the batterers is significantly higher than the mean score of the police officers.

Table 2: Demographics

	Batterers	Police
Mean Age	32.95	24.71
Mean years of education	12.62	13.68
Race		
European American	79.3%	79.3%
African American	14.1%	11.1%
Hispanic American	3.0%	6.9%
Other	3.6%	2.7%
Reason for taking the MMPI		
Court ordered therapy	41.6%	0.0%
Self-referral to therapy	43.1%	0.0%
Incarceration	15.3%	0.0%
Employment	0.0%	100.0%
MMPI Form		
MMPI	91.2%	100.0%
MMPI-2	8.8%	0.0%

Table 3: Mean MMPI T-Scores of Police Officers and Batterers

MMPI Scale	Police Officers (k = 44, n = 6,604)	Batterers (k = 13, n = 625)
L	52.04	51.96
F	49.58	62.20
K	59.27	50.68
Hs	49.50	59.65
D	51.20	63.91
Hy	54.66	60.17
Pd	57.19	71.00
Mf	55.25	61.23
Pa	51.59	62.89
Pt	52.14	64.63
Sc	52.58	65.78
Ma	56.95	62.05
Si	46.41	50.57

Validity Scales

In looking at the validity scales of the two groups, both scored similarly within the average range on the L scale. On the F scale, however, the batterers as a group scored significantly higher than the police officers, and appeared to be admitting to more deviant attitudes and behaviors than the police officers. In a valid profile, higher F scale scores are associated with increased psychopathology, and also serve as a rough measure of the severity of the psychological distress experienced by the individual. On the F scale, the officers as a group answered as most people do. People who have scores in this range are likely to be free of disabling psychopathology. On the K scale, the batterers' mean score was in the average range, suggesting that they were open in their self-descriptions. The officers' mean score, while still in the average range, was significantly higher, suggesting that they did not report as many symptoms and problems as the batterers. This type of score may be achieved by truly well-adjusted persons with good ego strength. On the other hand, it may also be achieved by persons with some adjustment difficulties who are trying to present themselves more favorably, as in an employment situation.

Clinical Scales

On the clinical scales, as noted above, the batterers' mean scores were significantly higher than the police officers' mean scores on every scale. None of the officers' mean scores would be considered elevated outside of normal limits, and would typically not be interpreted clinically. Such a profile is often associated with individuals whose personalities do not demonstrate any significant pathology. On the other hand, the batterers' mean scores on all of the clinical scales except scale 0 (Si) show at least moderate elevations, and the scale 4 (Pd) elevation reaches clinical significance. A person obtaining such a profile would be more likely to be described as rebellious and resentful, with more limited frustration tolerance, and a tendency to blame others for his difficulties. He may be more hostile and aggressive, and may act on his impulses without consideration of the consequences. Compared with the police officers, the batterers as a group are more tense, anxious, restless, and overly sensitive. They report more vague somatic symptoms and complaints. They are more likely to feel that they are getting a bad deal from life, and more likely to feel dissatisfied with their life situation. They are more likely to feel distrust and suspicion toward others, and more likely to brood or feel resentful of others' treatment of them. They also show more signs of mild depression, worrying, and pessimism. Overall, the batterers as a group obtained a profile that suggests a higher probability that psychopathology will be present, in contrast to the police officers' profile that suggests a reasonably good psychological adjustment.

Discussion

We have used a behavioral description approach to the use of the MMPI (Lachar, 1974; Graham, 1993; Green, 1991) to describe the profiles of the batterers and police officers. In that approach, the clinician looks at the scores on particular scales or groups of scales, and attributes to that person certain characteristics and behaviors that have previously been shown to be typical of other individuals obtaining similar scores on that scale. We have used that approach with the mean profiles obtained by these groups to generate some descriptions and inferences about the atypical police officer or batterer. Clinical inferences were based on the levels of scores on each of the individual scales (Graham, 1993).

Using that approach, we have concluded that in general police officers tend to be without serious psychopathology, although they may have been more motivated than the batterers to present unrealistically favorable impressions of themselves, as they were most likely evaluated in the context of an application for employment. The police officers reported fewer symptoms and problems in their lives, which may or may not be an accurate reflection of their situations. The batterers, on the other hand, admitted to more deviant attitudes and behaviors, and consistently obtained more elevated clinical scale scores than the police officers, increasing the probability of psychological and behavioral difficulties consistent with domestic violence. Overall, from these data, it would be appropriate to conclude that the police officers' profile is not suggestive of personality characteristics that are similar to the batterer, or that would make them prone to domestic violence.

The batterers as a group obtained a high point and a clinically significant elevation on scale 4, suggesting the probable presence of the very types of aggressive, impulsive behaviors that could result in domestic violence. Green (1991) described persons who elevate on scale 4 as showing impulsive behavior, rebelliousness, lack of insight, low tolerance for frustration, and poor self-control, which could result in outbursts of physical aggression. They may be able to form superficial relationships, but have difficulty with more intimate relationships. In view of these results, it may be, as others have suggested, that the basic personalities of most men who batter predispose them to having difficulties with intimate relationships in general (Hamberger & Hastings, 1986), and may under certain conditions predispose them to commit violence. The batterer MMPI profile also provides some general support for suggestions made in the literature that batterers demonstrate more psychopathology than nonbatterers in general. Other studies, using other measures, have also found that batterers are more likely to show tendencies toward depression (Sugarman, et al., 1996; Nesca, 1998; Maiuro, et al., 1988), higher levels of anxiety (Hastings & Hamberger, 1988), higher levels of hostility and irritation (Holtzworth-Munroe & Smutzler, 1996), and higher levels of somatic complaints (Hastings & Hamberger, 1988).

Scale 4 (Pd) was also the high point for the police officer group, coupled with an almost equally high scale 9 (Ma), followed closely by scales 3 (Hy) and 5 (Mf). All of these scales, however, are still within normal limits, in spite of the fact that a high K contributed to them, and all are significantly lower than the corresponding scores of the batterer group. Any inferences derived from them should be made very cautiously, with these qualifiers in mind. These data could be interpreted to provide some support for the notion that in general people who choose to enter the law enforcement field may have some tendency to have milder versions of the characteristics described by scale 4 (Pd), that at higher elevations might contribute to the tendency to become involved in domestic violence or other inappropriate behaviors. At the elevation obtained by the law enforcement group, however, no suggestion of clinical symptoms or clinically problematic behavior would be made. Whatever characteristics described by scale 4 that they possess, the officers as a group, apparently have sufficient psychological resources to reduce the likelihood that they will be expressed in a problematic manner.

In fact, it might be argued that the characteristics found at the lower elevations of scale 4 might actually contribute to success as a police officer. At lower elevations, these individuals may be independent enough to make decisions autonomously, aggressive enough to actively pursue their goals and maintain their own point of view, and have a tendency to reject self-blaming, which might enable them to cope with a job in which they must often take actions that result in hostility from others. At higher elevations of scale 4 (Pd), there is an increasing probability that the officers' job performance would be negatively affected. However, in a meta-analysis conducted by Aamodt (1996), there is no empirical support for any relationship between Scale 4 scores in the normal range and police performance.

There are, of course, difficulties with interpreting grouped data in this way to make inferences about the personality characteristics of individuals or of the groups themselves. For example, although the batterers' scores on the clinical scales were all moderately elevated, it may be surprising to some that their scores did not exceed the cutoff score of 70T for identifying clinical pathology, with the exception of scale 4. Other authors have obtained similar results using the MCMI (Faulkner et al., 1988, cited in Tolman & Bennett, 1990; Hastings & Hamberger, 1988). As Hastings and Hamberger (1988) have argued, however, this type of result should not necessarily be interpreted as a general lack of psychopathology among batterers. Individual batterers may show clinically elevated scores on different groups of scales, but these elevations may disappear when researchers group all batterers' scores together to study general group differences, as was done in the present study.

In fact, it is likely that there is not a single "batterer personality" as several studies using cluster analytic techniques have suggested that batterers tend to be a heterogeneous group consisting of two (Flournoy & Wilson, 1991), three (Hale, Zimostrad, Duckworth, & Nicholas, 1988; Hamberger & Hastings, 1986; Holtzworth-Munroe & Stuart, 1994; Rothschild, Dimson, Storaasli, & Clapp, 1997), four (Wilcox, 1992), or six clusters (Caesar, 1985), so there may be several subtype" personality profiles that describe the group better than a general combined profile. By combining data from all batterers and all police officers to obtain group profiles, we may have obscured the presence of identifiable subtype personalities in either or both of these groups. Identification of such subtypes might make future comparisons between these groups even more meaningful, and might enable us to more accurately identify individual police officers who do have an increased potential for domestic violence, so that appropriate intervention might occur. Of course, it can also be argued that the individual who obtains an MMPI profile similar to that obtained by the overall batterer group, or a profile similar to any identified subtype of the batterer group, should not be accepted as a police officer in the first place, as the same characteristics that might contribute to domestic violence might also be expected to lead to other types of inappropriate behavior on the job.

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* indicates study was used in the batterer meta-analysis

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Notes

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Table 4
Mean 16-PF Stanine Scores of Police Officers and Batterers

16PF Scale		Police Officers (k = 14, n = 20,837)	Batterers (k = 2, n = 259)
A	Warm, outgoing	5.19	4.94
B	Bright	5.48	5.05
C	Emotionally stable	5.21	5.06
E	Dominant, forceful	6.38	5.91
F	Lively, spontaneous	4.85	5.49
G	Rule-conscious, dutiful	6.19	6.20
H	Socially bold, venturesome	6.12	5.31
I	Sensitive, sentimental	4.19	4.67
L	Vigilant, suspicious	5.40	5.07
M	Imaginative, idea oriented	3.98	5.54
N	Private, discreet	4.90	5.69
O	Apprehensive, self-doubting	4.01	5.73
Q1	Open to change, experimenting	4.07	5.51
Q2	Self-reliant, individualistic	5.06	6.20
Q3	Perfectionistic, organized	7.17	5.67
Q4	Tense, high energy	3.92	6.69

Table 5
CPI T-Scores of Police Officers and Batterers

CPI Scale		Police Officers (k = 17, n = 1,996)	Batterers (k = 2, n = 110)
Do	Dominance	56.23	
Cs	Capacity for status	50.99	
Sy	Sociability	53.44	
Sp	Social presence	55.38	
Sa	Self-acceptance	56.05	
Re	Responsibility	48.77	
So	Socialization	52.42	
Sc	Self-control	54.04	
Gi	Good impression	53.88	
Cm	Communality	54.21	
Wb	Sense of well being	52.92	
To	Tolerance	51.56	
Ac	Ach via conformance	56.06	
Ai	Ach via independence	54.92	
Ie	Intellectual efficiency	52.01	
Py	Psych mindedness	56.11	
Fx	Flexibility	49.35	
F/M	Femininity	45.35	

Table 6
CAQ Sten Scores of Police Officers and Batterers

CAQ Scale	Police Officers (k = 5, n = 15,573)	Batterers (k = 0, n = 0)
Hypochondriasis	4.25	
Suicidal depression	3.40	
Agitation	5.18	
Anxious depression	3.94	
Low energy depression	3.82	
Guilt and resentment	4.49	
Social introversion	4.38	
Paranoia	5.57	
Psychopathic deviate	6.58	
Schizophrenia	4.49	
Psychasthenia	5.10	
Psychological inadequacy	4.24	