

Faubert, C., Boivin, R. et Gendron, A. (2016, septembre) *The development of attitudes regarding use of force in the course of police initial training*. Conference presented at the European Society of Criminology, Muenster, Germany.

Given the visibility of police actions and their impacts on public trust in the police and opinions regarding its legitimacy within society, the ability of police officers to display appropriate behavior adapted to every situation is crucial. In that sense, police use of force is probably the intervention that generates the most worry, fear and criticism on the part of citizens. Previous empirical work - particularly in the field of social psychology - have pointed out the influence of training and education on attitude development, as well as the role of attitudes in guiding behavior (Maio et al., 2006). Hence, education and training programs might be successful in moulding attitudes regarding an object which, ultimately, can contribute to directing future actions. In this regard, the study presented aimed to test whether police initial training exerts an effect on the development of attitudes toward use of force. To do so, a large-scale data collection around the province of Quebec (Canada) was conducted, in which the attitudes toward police use of force of 2 724 post-secondary students were gathered using a self-administered questionnaire; half of the respondents were in-training police candidates (experimental group), while the other half were college students enrolled in other study programs (control group).

The first section of the questionnaire asked respondents a general attitude question: "Do you agree with the following statement: The police resort to force too often toward citizens?" The second section was composed of specific attitude questions that were answered following the presentation of two video-clips of fictitious police interventions, one in which handcuffing was executed and another in which firearm was discharged. Respondents of the two groups showed marked differences in attitude responses for the general attitude as well as for the specific attitude regarding the handcuffing intervention.

To provide an explanation to these observed divergent attitudes, we sought to contribute to the long-lasting debate opposing police selection and socialization. If the selection process can explain the divergences in attitudes - either general or specific - between the two groups, newcomers to the training should already hold these attitudes. In order to test this proposition, we isolated first-year students of both police training and other academic programs. Results show that general attitudes are greatly different between the two groups of newcomers while specific attitudes are similar. Thus, the selection process seems to be a better explanation of divergences in general attitudes. Multivariate analyses confirmed that training progress isn't statistically related to the general attitude.

In view of the fact that the selection hypothesis showed to provide at best a partial explanation of the differences in attitudes between police officers and the general population, the socialization conjecture was put to the test. Results show that for both specific interventions presented, the progress in the training process for future police officers is statistically associated with attitudes in agreement of the interventions. In other words, the more advanced the police students are in their training, the more they tend to be in agreement with the two interventions. Conversely, as students of other academic programs progress in their studies, they tend to disagree more with the two interventions. These results contribute to provide a better understanding of the interplay between the processes of selection and socialization to police work.