An empirical classification of perpetrators of hostage and barricade incidents in Quebec

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The illegal detention of a person against their will and the refusal to submit to law enforcement forces result in high-risk situations that require immediate and concerted police intervention. These hostage and barricade incidents are triggered by individuals "in a temporary state of upset and disorganization, characterized chiefly by an individual's inability to cope with a particular situation using customary methods of problem solving" (Slaiku, 1990, p. 15). In these individuals, who have little to fall back upon and few coping strategies, extraordinary stress may generate intense negative emotions that facilitate the development of a crisis state favourable to the recourse to expressive and violent behaviours. It has been shown that the prediction of imminent violent behaviour is of crucial importance to decision makers managing hostage and barricade incidents (Michaud, St-Yves & Guay, 2008). A review of the principal empirical studies on hostage and barricade incidents notably indicates that police decision-making is currently handicapped by the inability to effectively organize empirical knowledge. The present work was therefore undertaken to address this limitation.

The study examined 534 hostage and barricade situations that occurred in Quebec between 1990 and 2004 and were managed by the Sûreté du Québec's specialized intervention structure. Its main objective was to practically organize available empirical knowledge on crisis incidents, using classification analyses. In order to overcome some of the limitations of pre-existing typologies, taxonomic two-step cluster analyses were conducted. Four distinct types of perpetrators were identified: 1) depressive, 2) utilitarian, 3) reactional and 4) furious. Generated profiles were subsequently tested empirically to assess their prototypic and predictive values. Results indicate that the profiles are mutually distinct with regard to the external criteria, indicating good discriminating validity. To maximize the practical relevance of the four types established by the analyses, a case study is presented for each one.