

## **Police Performance Measure:**

### **An evaluation of the training of Military Police of São Paulo<sup>1</sup>.**

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**Abstract:** This study tests the impact of training on police performance. The research was developed within the Military Police of the State of São Paulo, Brazil. Results show a real measure of the basic principles employed when stopping and searching suspects. The central hypothesis in this study predicts that training is capable of changing police officers' behavior, steering their conduct towards institutionalized standards. The main objective is to verify whether the diffusion of new knowledge, by means of training, was effective enough to influence changes in officers' behavior during a stop-and-search procedure. Data were collected in controlled experiments, from 24 selected police officers of the city of Sao Paulo, Brazil. The officers were observed performing stopping and searching procedures through the systematic social observation, a technique of direct observation. The sample gathered 199 police stops and searches, collected in two stages: (1) from July to August 2006; and (2) from February to March 2007. In between the stages, one of the groups received 60 hours of training. The observation was registered on video camera and the images were codified through a questionnaire, thus forming the data base for analysis.

**Keywords:** Police training; police performance; police stop-and-search procedure; systematic social observation.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Police departments are significant, even essential, public agencies. They are important in the practical results they try to achieve (Moore & Braga, 2003). These results are directly related to the control of conflicts, which affect social order and impact the lives of people. In this sense, the main objective of police work is to create an environment where people can have their rights assured<sup>3</sup>.

For purposes of this study, police performance can be understood as *the procedures adopted by police in the public space*

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<sup>3</sup> This study focuses on the performance of the military police because its competence to make ostensive policing and mission to preserve the public order in Brazil.

*which promote direct or indirect contact with non-police.* In practice, this means the routine activities carried out during policing activities.

Police performances, as well as some other public services, are extremely difficult to measure (Lipsky, 1980). Traditionally, police performance has been measured by crime rates and, more recently, by the satisfaction of the community (Dadds & Scheide, 2000).

Crime rates and community satisfaction as traditional indicators are admittedly insufficient to create a reliable measure of police performance (Dadds & Scheide, 2000). Thus, this study seeks to contribute to the creation of new indicators, testing a new method that uses the systematic social observation (SSO)<sup>4</sup>, a technique of direct observation, where the police officer is not aware of the observation.

In addition, the methodology tested the impact of training on behavior of a group of police officers. It was possible to measure their behavior during stop and search suspects. In this sense, the study tests the hypothesis that the training is capable of changing police officers' behavior, steering their conduct towards institutionalized standards. Data were collected from controlled experiment, gathered from a sample of 199 stops and searches.

### **MEASURING PERFORMANCE: CRITICAL TO TRADITIONAL PATTERNS.**

In the last two decades, governments of several countries have implemented strategies and goals to ensure that public services, including policing, are managed effectively (Drake & Simper, 2005). This implies the responsibility of the police to formulate standards of conduct that can be followed by the police officers during the policing activity.

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<sup>4</sup> Systematic Social Observation - SSO is a technique of direct observation that has been used in several researches about crime (Sampson & Raudenbush, 1999) and police work (Reiss, 1971), in other countries.

Public safety, or its absence, impacts the lives of everyone. Moore & Braga (2004) point out that people want to know a reliable measure of police performance, to ensure that the police are producing something of value with the investments and funds received. It is important to note that public spending on the police is substantial.

On the other hand, administrators or managers of the police also want to know a measurement of police performance, to evaluate the practices of certain internal policies (Moore & Braga, 2004). Creating a reliable measure of police performance is a big challenge both for policymakers and for researchers. Using crime rates as a performance measure requires demonstrating the relationship between the decreases of crime with the increase of the quality police service.

Despite the logic of this argument, the drop in crime rates, must be considered as being possibly relevant to other factors, such as changing the behavior of people who have to prevent crime, or even to change the public environment, which became more observant, offering fewer opportunities to promote the criminal practice. Therefore, this indicator can't produce a real measure of police performance because other variables may be related to this result.

Besides the crime rate, other indicators such as the number of arrests, and the weapons and drugs seized by the police, are also used as a measure of police performance. According to Lipsky (1980), there is a relationship between the measurement of performance and the behavior of the police officer. The general rule is that the behavior of the organizations tends to move in towards the ways that the organization is evaluated. Let's see how this applies to our case.

In Brazil, the Military Police plan policing activities with the objective of reducing the number of crimes, besides seeking to reduce police lethality with investments in formal control. Moreover,

the behavior of police officers during policing activities is focused on increasing the number of arrests, weapons and drugs seized.

Regarding the standard of management and police performance, this strategy has shown results that prove the efficiency of this choice, especially in the state of Sao Paulo. However, working to control social conflicts requires other efforts by the police, which cannot be measured by these indicators.

Another performance measurement commonly used is the public opinion poll. These studies tend to qualify the police work, asking to the respondents whether the police did a good job. Moore and Braga (2004) put into doubt this criterion arguing: (1) what is the behavior that deserves to be evaluated in police performance?; and (2) what police activities does the political community evaluate? The result of opinion poll cannot establish a relationship between these two perspectives.

These authors also question whether everyone in the political community would be able to evaluate the police work as "good" or "bad," considering that direct contact with the police, when it occurs, is established in different conditions.

Users of police services vary depending on the type of police action. The police can work in a reactive way, when it is requested by someone, directly, or through an emergency call. In this situation, the public needs the police to resolve a problem that they couldn't solve or they may be identified as victim. The other way is a proactive action, when the initiative is that of the police officer, which occurs during the policing activity. In these circumstances, as a rule, the police officers work in a coercive way, through stopping and searching suspects and also through arrests.

There is still a category of people who have never had direct contact with the police. They know about the police, hear about them or see them on the streets. They pay their taxes for their services. Besides, people who were arrested tend to evaluate police

performance in a different way from who were victims and received help from police.

## **INSTRUMENTS AND METHODS**

The study presented in this paper proposes to test a new type of measurement of police performance. This measurement can help police administrators to know how certain internal policies are being practiced, in particular after the training. Moreover, this method addresses the need to clarify and educate the public, as to what is police behavior during their routine activities, especially in relation to those activities with the use of non-lethal force.

In order to verify the impact of the training on performance, this research performed a controlled experiment, by selecting two groups of police officers. The groups were observed during stopping and searching suspects for two months. After, one group was trained. In the end, both were observed for two months again.

Systematic Social Observation (SSO) was the direct observation technique used, which allowed observing the police officers without their knowing they were being observed<sup>5</sup>. The main idea of this technique is to record the conduct of police officers in a public space in order to register their natural behavior.

On the other hand, the police stop-and-search procedure is one of the most frequent encounters between the police and the public (Pinc, 2007), for this reason this event was selected for observation. In Brazil, police officers can stop and search someone based on behavior. They have the discretion to evaluate the conduct without necessarily needing objective evidence.

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<sup>5</sup> Albert Reiss (1971) was the first to employ this technique in 1968 to study the use of excessive force by police in Boston, during the encounters with the public.

The observations were videotaped<sup>6</sup> and the images were codified by a questionnaire, thus creating the database for analysis.

The questionnaire was based on institutionalized procedures of the Military Police of São Paulo that standardized the police conduct during the stop-and-search procedure. The standardized conducts are a precondition for the programs of quality, implemented in the private sector and, more recently, in the public sector, in Brazil.

**Table 1**  
**Characteristics of the Sample**

	<i>Stage 1(*)</i>			<i>Stage 2(**)</i>	
	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>		<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Police Officers per group					
Control Group (CG)	12	(50)		12	(50)
Trained Group (TG)	12	(50)	(***)	12	(50)
Total	24	(100)		24	(100)
	<i>Stage 1</i>			<i>Stage 2</i>	
Police Officers per gender	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>		<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Men	24	(100)		24	(100)
Women	0	(0)		0	(0)
Total	24	(100)		24	(100)

(\*) Stage 1 of OSS: Jul and Aug 2006

(\*\*) Stage 2 of OSS: FEB and Mar 2007.

(\*\*\*) Training – 60 hours to TG: from September 2006 through January 2007.

Standard Operating Procedures (SOP)<sup>7</sup> built a pattern of police behavior to be used during the encounters with the public. In this sense, individual conduct can be managed and controlled by the organization. In addition, this pattern may assure the civil and social

<sup>6</sup> OSS on video was used by Sampson & Raudenbush (1999) in the Project Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods - PHDCN to study the impact of neighborhood characteristics on youth development, in particular the variables related to crime and violence.

<sup>7</sup> SOP were established by the Military Police of São Paulo in 2002 and has been reviewed periodically because is part of quality process.

rights of the citizen, thus decreasing the risk for the police officer. The instrument used in this research created a measure of performance. It allowed evaluating the extent to which the new pattern was assimilated by police officers.

In this study, we selected 24 policemen<sup>8</sup>, divided into two groups<sup>9</sup>, as described in Table 1. The officers worked with patrol cars to attend to the demands of emergency calls. Both groups worked in the same geographical area and on alternate days during the period from 6:00 am to 6:00 pm.

The SSO was conducted in two stages, lasting two months each. The first lasted from July through August 2006 and the second from February through March 2007.

The purpose of the observation was to record the police officers stopping and searching suspects. Whereas it is difficult to predict the place and time that this event will occur, the police officers were observed in a predetermined time and place. This way the observer arrived early and wasn't perceived by the observed. Only two places in that area<sup>10</sup> provided favorable conditions for the SSO.

## **TRAINING**

This paper presents a descriptive analysis of data collected by direct observation of the police stop-and-search procedure, whose main focus is to measure the impact of the training on police performance. In Brazil, there have been almost no studies which have measured the relationship between training and performance.

Training is perceived by police departments as a luxury, says Goldstein (1976)<sup>11</sup>. Such investment will just be made if time, resources and personnel permit. Training is still not considered

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<sup>8</sup> There was no intention to exclude policewomen; we respected the original formation of groups.

<sup>9</sup> Each group was comprised of by one sergeant and 11 soldiers.

<sup>10</sup> This area is on the outskirts of North São Paulo and concentrates on the high number of homicides.

<sup>11</sup> Although this statement was published in 1976, the studies that followed did not indicate changes in this context.

essential for such a complex and serious job as police work. For purposes of this study, *police training* is regarded as the *process of updating and improving of knowledge concerning police practices*. The training is given throughout the career, as a means of continuing education.

In Sao Paulo, the Military Police maintain rigorous planning, where every police officer who is involved or not in operational activities, must attend a week of training each year.

In this research, the training program was conducted from September 2006 through January 2007 and implemented to only one of the groups. Thus, the research design allowed analyzing the behavior of the trained group, as opposed to the behavior of the other group not trained, the control group.

The experiment used a training program within the traditional parameters. First, it displayed the model - *what* to do during a stop-and-search procedure based on the SOP. After, the model included teaching role playing - *how* to do, simulating real situations. The training lasted 60 hours and the instructors were sergeants with recognized knowledge and experience.

Some care was adopted in order to create favorable conditions for the assimilation of new knowledge, such as: implementing the training in service, providing transport and food, and selecting instructors capable of teaching according to SOP. There was a significant investment in the workload.

## **RESULTS FOUNDED**

Each day an average of four police officers were observed with two patrol cars. They stopped and searched five vehicles in a period of forty minutes. The police officers were observed in 38 days, half in each phase. The sample gathered 199 police stops and searches, which is the unit of analysis of this research.



Although each phase was comprised of the same number of observed days (19), the data show that the number of police stops and searches in the second phase (87) was lower than the first (112). It is important to explain that these data represent the police stop and search which were able to be codified.

**Table 2**  
**Characteristics of the Sample**  
**Police Stop and Search Activities**

Vehicles and Pedestrians	<i>Stage 1</i>		<i>Stage 2</i>	
	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Cars	31	(27,7)	13	(14,9)
Motorcycles	79	(70,5)	73	(83,9)
Pedestrian	2	(1,8)	1	(1,2)
Total	112	(100)	87	(100)

  

Gender	<i>Stage 1</i>		<i>Stage 2</i>	
	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Men	128	(94,8)	102	(86,4)
Women	7	(5,2)	16	(13,6)
Total	135	(100)	118	(100)

### **Impact of training: hypothesis testing**

The central hypothesis predicts that training is capable of changing police officers' behavior, steering their conduct towards institutionalized standards. The group that was not trained was used as the control group.

The instrument used for codifying allowed gathering the indicators into four dimensions: (1) police officers' safety, (2) verbal communication, (3) abusive practices, and (4) crime prevention.

### **Dimension 1: Police Officers' Safety**

The indicators represent factors that affect the police officers' safety during the police stop-and-search procedure (Table 3). The expectation is that the police officers will consider the possibility of the suspect reactions. If the suspect is armed and is a criminal, the risk of death increases for the police officer. Although the chance of death is small, the police officer can only be assumed of the absence of a weapon after a search of the suspect<sup>12</sup>.

Besides the investment in equipment and weapons, the Military Police of São Paulo created the SOP to increase the protection of all police officers. SOP is a new knowledge that was produced to reinforce certain conducts, change others, and introduce innovations.

In this dimension, the research used indicators that represent some kind of change of conduct. The percentages that are presented in the tables refer to valid cases.

**Table 3**  
**DIMENSION 1: Police Officers' Safety**

Observed Conducts	<i>Stage 1</i>		<i>Stage 2</i>	
	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Interlacing the fingers				
CG	35	(50,0)	18	(32,7)
TG	8	(24,2)	7	(23,3)
Putting the weapon close to the suspect				
CG	44	(62,9)	44	(80,0)
TG	19	(57,6)	14	(46,7)
Exposing the partner on the firing line				
CG	45	(64,3)	51	(92,7)
TG	23	(69,7)	22	(73,3)

<sup>12</sup> There are records of other events in which the suspect was disarmed and reacted trying to take the officer's weapon, as occurred in November 2008 in the central city of Sao Paulo. Two police officers stopped a man who was driving a stolen car. On that occasion, the police officers were not hurt and arrested the criminal.

Prior to 2002, when the SOP was created, the orientation was to place the suspect with his hands against the wall or on the vehicle in order to search him. The SOP changed this procedure. The suspect now has to place his hands on his head and interlace his fingers. This procedure works the same for both male and female suspects.

This position becomes a more difficult reaction and the police officers use less physical strength because they can immobilize the suspect by holding two or three fingers. The data indicate that the trained group did not evolve in this parameter, after training. In addition, their level in the Stage 2 remained lower than the control group (see Table 3).

To stop and search a suspect, there must be at least two police officers, one to search and the other to ensure safety.

Another change made by the SOP was the position of the police officer who did the search. The expected conduct is: before coming up to the suspect, the police officer has to put the weapon in the holster and button it. Because of the proximity to the suspect<sup>13</sup>, the police officer has to be careful to keep the holster as far away from the suspect as possible, in order to prevent the removal of the weapon and its use. The data indicates that the trained group improved their conduct, exposing the weapons less often than the control group.

The police officer who maintains the safety posture must be positioned at a 90-degree angle in relation to his or her partner. This position decreases the possibility of putting the partner on the firing line, if he or she has to make use of the firearm.

The analysis shows that both control group and trained group increased the frequency of exposure the partner on the firing line, from first to the second stage. However, more pronounced in the control group.

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<sup>13</sup> The police officer who searches must put one foot forward and other behind, to keep the balance. The foot that is behind is of the same side that is his/her holster.

## Dimension 2: Verbal Communication

Verbal communication is part of the continuum of force and is the degree of nonlethal force used most often in police stop-and-search procedure (Pinc, 2007). During this encounter, the police officer controls the situation through verbal communication.

Besides, this communication requires some rigor in the tone of voice, so that the suspect will obey the commands. However, after concluding the procedures and if the person hasn't broken the law, the rigorous manner will be completed and the police officer may start talking in a normal voice with the citizen.

**Table 4**

### **DIMENSION 2: Verbal Communication**

Observed conducts	<i>Stage 1</i>		<i>Stage 2</i>	
	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Does not obey the verbal command				
CG	64	(91,4)	54	(94,7)
TG	30	(85,7)	25	(83,3)
Gesticulating to indicate the place				
CG	51	(76,1)	48	(88,9)
TG	23	(76,7)	21	(84,0)
Gesturing in the end				
CG	6	(7,9)	3	(5,3)
TG	2	(5,6)	1	(3,3)

The first two indicators in Table 4 show some difficulty of the police officer to control the situation using only verbal communication. This result could happen because the police officer gesticulated or didn't speak with clarity.

As the video equipment was not able to record the voice of the police officer, the indicator used to measure the change in rigor with the citizen was the gesture at the end.

The perceived changes were that the trained group gesticulated more and made fewer gestures in the end of the second stage than the first, which shows a negative change. However, all results indicate that there is difficulty in verbal communication.

### **Dimension 3: Practice Abusiveness**

It's important to say that these procedures are the basic principles employed when stopping and searching suspects. Ignoring some of these procedures can produce unwanted results.

In Brazil, studies about abusive practices tend to focus on facts with a big impact in the media, leading to events such as injury and death. Although these results are serious, they are not representative of the police work. Besides, these procedures require treatment after the fact, that is, punishment.

The desirable treatment to prevent abusive practices is those that precede the event, because the intervention occurs before the damage. This study measured certain conducts that can contribute to prevention.

It is important to remember that the SOP establishes procedures considering the higher risk, which is the event where the suspect uses a firearm. Although this event is rare, the police officer has to be prepared. On the other hand, the SOP can't guide the encounters where the suspect doesn't use a firearm but doesn't obey the commands. The unpredictability of human behavior represents a big problem for the police.

In Brazil, it is very common for suspects to want to show their documents or to announce who they are when they are stopped by police officers. Since the objective of SOP is to standardize the procedures, there is no difference in the conduct of the police officer because of the social position of the suspect. Everyone receives the same treatment. Whoever is stopped by the police has the opportunity to present their documents, but it will be done after the

search. This encounter is conducted by police officers and they will do what they can do to control the encounter.

When the suspect tries to interfere, the suspicion tends to increase. The police officers' options are in a gray area, because they can be faced with a non-offender who refuses to be searched, or an offender seeking to take control, which can be fatal.

In this sense, the hypothesis is that working in accordance with the basic principles, which are stated by SOP, decreases the probability of police abuse.

We consider that some conducts go against the basic principles like as: pointing the weapon to indicate the place to suspect stay; or by some physical contact. These are conducts that were reinforced by SOP.

**Table 5**  
**DIMENSION 3: Abusive Practice**

Observed conducts	<i>Stage 1</i>		<i>Stage 2</i>	
	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Using the weapon to indicate the movement				
CG	15	(22,4)	15	(27,8)
TG	4	(13,3)	2	(8,0)
Using the physical touch				
CG	9	(13,4)	3	(5,6)
TG	1	(3,3)	3	(12,0)

The main inference from the data in Table 5 is the low frequency of these behaviors. This is a positive factor of this dimension.

The number of observed cases was small; however, this observation also shows that the trained group decreased in the percentage where the weapon was used to indicate movement to place, but increased physical contact.

### **Dimension 4: Crime Prevention**

The quality of stop-and-search procedure is directly related to crime prevention. The more the police conduct was closer to the SOP, the greater the probability of finding an illegal weapon that could be used to perpetrate a crime, or that drugs could be marketed, distributed, or possession.

**Table 6**  
**DIMENSION 4: Crime Prevention**

Observed conducts	<i>Stage 1</i>		<i>Stage 2</i>	
	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Using logical sequence to search				
CG	7	(10,0)	1	(6,8)
TG	0	(0)	4	(13,3)

During the search, the police officer has the chance to find any illegal object. Therefore, it is important that the police officer search the whole body of the suspect. After, if the suspicion persists, the police officer can still ask the suspect to remove his clothes, in private. It is not uncommon to find drugs introduced in female genitals.

This procedure was also reinforced by the SOP.

Although the incidence of this indicator is low, the data show that the trained group began to use this behavior in Stage 2, which represents positive change, while the control group decreased the frequency of use.

### **DISCUSSION**

The analysis presented in this paper selected 9 observed conducts and distributed these various points of conduct in 4 dimensions.

The expected result would be that the conduct of the trained group had a positive change after training, and that the percentage of improvement was higher than the control group. Only three points of conducts reached this desired parameter: (1) putting the weapon close to the suspect, (2) using the weapon to indicate movement, and (3) using a logical sequence to search.

Five other behaviors did not show positive change by the trained group in the second phase: (1) interlacing the fingers on head, (2) gesturing in the end, (3) exposing the partner on the firing line, (4) not obeying the verbal command, and (5) gesturing to indicate the place. Moreover, the frequency of use of the expected behavior was below 30%.

Finally, the conduct – using the physical touch, showed a negative trend, however, the number of cases was very small.

In short, the analysis of the trained group, from the first to the second stage, shows that: (1) the positive perceived changes were not significant, and (2) most of the conducts analyzed did not show a positive change. Thus, the training program used in this experiment did not reach the expected result. However, this result does not preclude the hypothesis that the training steered the police behavior to the standard institutionalized by the organization.

Even in the face of this result, this study affirms that police training matters as a positive result. What the result allows to see is that traditional programs of training, where the central focus is verbal persuasion, is not sufficient to change the police behavior. Law enforcement agencies need to develop alternative programs that could influence changes. "The influence requires much more than the right combination of words" (Patterson et al., 2008: 5).



## **FINAL COMMENTS**

This study presents a new instrument for measuring police performance, in order to evaluate the routine activities, which represents a large portion of the interaction with the public.

In this sense, exploring the basic principles, which were developed to produce a pattern of response to protect the police officers, ensures the rights of citizens and prevents crime. Although this is the first time that the methodology has been implemented to evaluate police work in Brazil, we can say that this is a resource that allows for the real measurement of performance and creates a direct measurement of the basic principles.

Besides, the study tests the hypothesis of the impact of training on police performance during stop-and-search procedures. The objective was to determine whether the diffusion of new knowledge (SOP), which was produced through a training program, was effective enough to influence change in the behavior of police officers who work in policing activities.

The quality of SOP was not an object of study. This research assumes that the mere existence of a framework of standard procedures is good. However, the success will be complete when the police officer has used the procedures during the routine. The test of the hypothesis shows that the training used in this study did not achieve the desired result. The training didn't change the police behavior.

The conclusion is that this result is directly related to the selected model of training, which focused on verbal persuasion. We believe that an alternative model of training could influence the change of behavior.

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