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Extended Abstract

Police Officers' and Candidates' Views on Professionally Unethical Behaviors: The Elazığ and Malatya Case

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Abstract

This study aims to determine the views of police officers and police candidates regarding professionally unethical behaviors of police officers as observed by the former. For this purpose, a descriptive study model was employed in this research. The study group comprised 89 police officers and 231 police candidates working/studying at Malatya and Elazığ Police Vocational Colleges. The related research data was collected using an "Unethical Behavior Scale" developed by the researcher. In the analysis of obtained data, descriptive statistics and *t*-test were used and the quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS software program. The results of the study can be summarized as follows: in the context of the overall arithmetic mean of the police officers, they believe that their colleagues "Never" perform any professionally unethical behavior. According to the police officers in this study, the most unethical behavior performed by their colleagues is "using bilateral relations for improper appointment," while the least unethical behavior is "accepting a bribe while conducting his duty." However, the police candidates in this study generally think that police officers "very rarely" perform professionally unethical behaviors. Police candidates also considered "using bilateral relations for improper appointment" as the most unethical behavior performed by police officers and "accepting a bribe while conducting his duty" as the least unethical behavior. Although the views of the participants remained unchanged in terms of the school variable, they differed according to the job variable. Based on the findings, it is suggested that training programs should prepare police officers and candidates in their pre-service and in-service training to help them become more sensitive to professional ethics and principles, and the necessary precautions and controls that need to be taken on this issue.

Keywords

Law enforcement • Police officers • Police candidates • Professional police ethics • Unethical behavior

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Not all actions performed by people can be considered to be within the scope of ethical values, but at the same time it is very difficult to think of any human activity that has no relationship with ethical values (Aydm, 2006). Ethics is the basis of all kinds of human relationships, thus wherever there is an individual, there exists an absolute ethical relationship that should not be overlooked (Kuçuradi, 2006). Cerrah (2011) implies that in addition to existing regulatory rules, professional ethical principles are needed for police officers to raise the standards and quality of services they provide, considering the breadth of powers held by security personnel in law enforcement. The healthy operation of security services and the mitigation of human rights abuses depend on the establishment and acceptance of professional ethical principles and rules by police officers. In this regard, although comprehensive studies have been done on this issue and the principles of professional ethics and unethical behaviors have been clearly defined in European Union (EU) countries, the implications of this issue in our country is quite new (Sevinç, 2000). Therefore, in this study, views about professionally unethical behaviors of police officers have been determined according to the observations of police officers and candidates.

A search of the literature on ethics reveals that there is no single consensual definition of the concept of ethics. The word “ethics” was originally derived from the word “ethos,” which means “character” in Greek (Arda & Pelin, 1995; İnal, 1996). Ethics examines and discusses the moral problems of a man’s personal and social life (Akarsu, 1998). İşgüden and Çabuk (2006) define the concept of professional ethics as the sum of the ethical principles and standards that guide what will or will not be done and that govern people’s behaviors accordingly in their professional lives. In sum, ethical principles and standards that direct and guide specific behavior in any profession or occupation are known as “professional ethics” (Payam, 2015). Based on this definition of professional ethics, professional police ethics can then be described as “the whole of principles regarding policing services which aim at protecting the ideals of the whole profession, organizing the professional domestic competition, educating the members of the professions that are determined to be unprincipled or inadequate for policing or excluding these members from the profession, exclusive to create in relation to the profession of the police as a group of professionals has developed, limiting the personal tendencies during the provision of security services and compelling police to act in a certain way during their duties” (Beren, 2002, p. 292; Beren, 2003, p. 6).

Although the ethical principles of various occupations are fairly similar to one another, the principles of professional police ethics can be listed as follows: professional responsibility, compliance with the order contrary to the law, upholding of duty, refraining from violence and torture, civic responsibility, professionalism, trustworthiness, professional activity, self-improvement, love, tolerance, frugality, loyalty and teamwork, avoidance of subservience and sycophancy, not mixing

politics with business relationships, being a model person, eschewing bad habits such as gossiping and undesirable traits including bigotry, selfishness, and being dogmatic, respect for human beings and being open to human relationships and criticism, respect for privacy, confidentiality, protection of rights and freedoms, the principle of equality, the rule of law, impartiality, non-discriminatory, integrity and honesty, not accepting bribes and gifts, not turning a blind eye to corruption, avoidance of embezzlement, exploitation, and abuse (Karababa & Gökçegöz, 2002, pp. 324–329; Pehlivan, 2002, pp. 105–132).

Besides these ethical principles, there are also some universally unethical behaviors that police officers must refrain from in their practices, decisions, and relations with people while performing their duties. These include: discrimination, nepotism, bribery, intimidation-provoking, neglect, exploitation, selfishness, corruption, torture, cozying-flattery, violence, oppression, aggression, mixing policy in relationships, insults and curses, physical and sexual abuse, bad habits, abuse of power and duty, gossip, embezzlement, dogmatic behavior, and subservience and sycophancy (Ataberk, 2003; Aydın, 2002, pp. 60–69; Karababa & Gökçegöz, 2002, pp. 329–330; Pehlivan, 2002, pp. 105–132). It is crucial to always remember that every unethical behavior exhibited by police officers will not only damage the image of the police force but will also reduce the public's confidence in them (Cerrah & Eryılmaz, 2001). However, every ethical behavior in the conduct of police officers will improve their image and also enhance public confidence in them.

This study aims to determine the views of police officers and candidates regarding the professionally unethical behaviors of police officers as observed by them. In line with the overall aim of the study, the following questions were considered: (i) what do the study group of police officers and candidates think about the professionally unethical behaviors of police officers? and (ii) is there a significant difference between the opinions of these police officers and candidates related to police officers' professionally unethical behaviors in terms of job and school variables? To address these questions, a descriptive study model was employed in this research. The study group comprised 89 police officers and 231 police candidates working/studying at Malatya and Elazığ Police Vocational Colleges. The related research data was collected using an "Unethical Behavior Scale" developed by the researcher. In the analysis of obtained data, descriptive statistics and *t*-test were used before the quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS software program.

The results of the study can be summarized as follows: in the context of the overall arithmetic mean of the police officers, they believe that their colleagues "Never" perform any professionally unethical behavior. According to the police officers in the study group, the most unethical behavior performed by their colleagues is "using

“bilateral relations for improper appointment” and the least unethical behavior is “accepting a bribe while conducting his duty.”

However, the police candidates in the study group generally think that police officers “very rarely” perform professionally unethical behaviors. Police candidates also listed “using bilateral relations for improper appointment” as the most unethical behavior performed by police officers and “accepting a bribe while conducting his duty” as the least unethical behavior. Although the views of the participants remained unchanged in terms of the school variable, it differed according to the job variable. Based on these findings, it is suggested that training programs should prepare police officers and candidates in their pre-service and in-service training to help them become more sensitive to professional ethics and principles and the necessary precautions and controls that need to be taken regarding this issue.

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