

REPORT ON RESULTS OF THE SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH
PUBLIC OPINION OF RESIDENTS OF KARAKOL AND POLICE OFFICERS OF THE
KARAKOL POLICE STATION

1. Research methodology

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General and particular issues in evaluating the problems concerning public security matters among residents and police officers of the Karakol City Police Station

Introduction

In the frames of the OSCE Police Assistance Programme for the Kyrgyz Republic, there is a project on introducing principles of community policing at the level of Karakol City Police Station. One of the project realization stages considers conducting a public opinion poll in order to learn the priority issues of community safety among the residents of Karakol City in Issyk-Kul Oblast and police officers of the Karakol City Police Station. Public poll was conducted from the 2nd of October to the 8th of October 2006.

1. Research methodology

Method of standardized interview (face-to-face interview) has been used in order to research opinion about Police Station's activity. Opinion poll has been conducted using one type questionnaire interview.

Interviews were based upon the questionnaires in Russian and in Kyrgyz languages and respondents were interviewed anonymously in accordance with their places of residence (for people). Interviewing of police officers of the Karakol Police Station was conducted in their working stations and in Russian language.

The opinion poll questionnaire for the town residents consisted of 71 questions and the questionnaire for police officers consisted of 58 questions. The questionnaire for police officers did not include questions referring to evaluation of the neighborhood police inspectors' work, but there were questions to learn the opinion of police officers themselves about inefficient types of police activities from the point of view of officers working in the City Police Station.

Sampling for the opinion poll among Karakol residents

In accordance with the Terms of Reference, the overall number of random selection sampling was 400 respondents. This volume of the random sampling ensures a good representatives of results with preciseness (+ - 5%) and reliability level of 0, 95.

Data obtained from the Ministry of the Interior of the Kyrgyz Republic (Mol KR) and directly from the Karakol City Police Station show that there are 7 Public Centers for Preventive Activities. Public Centre for Preventive Activities № 6 is situated on the territory of the sub-station "Kashka-Suu", Public Centre for Preventive Activities № 1 is situated on the territory of settlement sub-station "Jyrgalang". In the result, public opinion poll was conducted in 7 areas of Karakol city.

Sampling for police officers of the Karakol Police Station

Individual interviews have been conducted with officers working in all police units of the Karakol Police Station as all of them due to their job have links to the Neighborhood Police work to some extent.

Following the Terms of Reference, 50 officers of this Police Station have been interviewed, where 20 officers come from Community Safety Branch and who are involved in the work of the Central Office, sub-stations, settlement sub-stations and Public Centers for Preventive Activities in Karakol.

Research tools

The following has been used as research tools:

Paper form for the interview (questionnaire) developed for Karakol city residents and Police Station officers;

A research route map with indication of selection steps for each Public Centre in Karakol (to research public opinion);

A map of the area to be covered by each interviewer (for a mass interviewing);

Processing of the research results were done with the help of the special software called Statistical Package for Social Sciences for statistical and econometric modeling SPSS (v.12.0.0).

2. Results of the public opinion poll among residents of Karakol

Overall evaluation of the situation during opinion poll

Public opinion poll among Karakol residents aiming to research opinion of people about Police Station work and police efficiency caused some difficulties/hesitation/doubts among a certain part of population on the one hand.

Therefore, some critical comments expressed by Karakol residents could be applied not only to an individual officer in Karakol Police Station, but also to the whole Kyrgyz Police in general. Nevertheless, people keep to opinion that police somehow tries to maintain public order in the territory of Karakol at least.

A certain part of respondents during joint interviews expressed their doubts about anonymity of their answers and were quite hesitant to take part in the interviews. Especially such concern was high when questions referred precisely efficiency of Karakol Police Station.

Results of the public opinion among the residents of Karakol city

A nature of public attitude to police activities can be distinguished in a comprehensive set of social problems of the police. The data of the sociological poll, conducted among the residents of Karakol City allow establishing a fact that people living in Karakol permanently have a negative image of police officers in general. Data received shows that this kind of image of a police officer in the mind of city residents does not depend on demographic and social characteristics of the respondents, place of their residence (territory, where there are different police sub-stations or Public Centers of Prevention Activities).

But the positive attitude to the police can also be explained in the context of smaller or bigger settlements, i.e. differing from Bishkek, Karakol is a quite small and compact city, where majority knows each other.

Such share of votes given could have been influenced by a campaign devoted to a "Police Open Day" hold during the researching period and which has been widely highlighted in a local and central mass media.

According to the opinion of the majority of respondents, the matter of corruption is the major cause of deficiencies in police work. 36, 5% of the interviewed respondents indicated to this problem. In this case, according to respondents' understanding, corruption meant bribery, malfeasance and links to criminals.

Respondents were supposed to answer the question «How many times you contacted /dealt with a police officer from your police station during the last two years? » 73,0% of those, who answered this question, had never contacted police; 17,5% of respondents contacted once, and only 7,0% contacted police between two and five times; out of which 60,7% respondents are women. And 2, 5 % of respondents, who had to address the police more than five times – 60% is men.

70, 3% of the interviewed respondents positively estimated police employees' appearance. 19, 0% from the total number of Karakol respondents is quite satisfied with police appearance and only 6, 3% of them negatively evaluated this point. Entrepreneurs constitute the largest group of dissatisfied population. Owners of private business in the given group are 66, 7% from the number of responses.

Evaluating Police Station officers' knowledge level, it is necessary to note that only few respondents differ notions "professionalism" and "knowledge". Apparently, therefore, assessments of the residents on these two questions were almost similar. 30, 8% from the total number of respondents assessed satisfactorily the knowledge of police station officers, 28, 8% and 2, 3% of respondents as "good" and "very good", "bad" and "very bad" - 10, 5% and 1, 5% accordingly. Share of those who were unable to assess knowledge of policemen was 28, 8% from the total number of respondents.

More than half of the respondents (72, 8%) did not agree with the statement that **"Police treats everybody equally"** and 16, 8% believes that it is true.

Approximately the same amount of Karakol respondents (69,8%) agreed that **police officers treat well only their friends and those, who offer money or other favors** (71,6%). 14,8% and 8,3% out of the total number of respondents have a contrary point of view accordingly.

57, 5% of the interviewed consider that **police officers have no choice other than to serve those, who offer money or other favors as they have a very low salary**. And 25, 8% of the interviewed Karakol residents do not agree with such a point of view.

Despite unfavorable image, existing among people, there is enough potential for the constructive cooperation and enlarging the sphere of a positive interaction. Willingness of citizens to render assistance in police activities can be considered as a definite reserve for such cooperation.

Almost all respondents (94, 5%) have not moved or do not intend to move to a new job. It became clear while getting answers to the question whether one had to restrict his/her movement or change the job in the territory of the district due to his/her concern to become a victim of a crime.

Drinking alcoholic drinks at public places is a big problem, which impacts the quality of life of Karakol residents. 36, 5% agreed with this statement. And 73, 5% of respondents noted that street lighting was a potential threat causing insecurity. The other major problems are these: homeless dogs 31%; garbage 29%; drunk driving 19, 5%; committed by youth 18%; hooliganism 14, 5%.

Personal experience of respondents takes a first place (95,3% of the total number of interviewed) while describing a range of sources formulating knowledge and concepts about police, or talking otherwise a person's judgments are basically based on direct communication with police officers. Analyzing this source of information, it is worth to mention that such experience of communication can be of positive or a negative nature. Besides it is important to take into consideration the role of the respondents in communication with the police officers (as a victim, as a witness, a suspect or guilty person and etc).

Conversations with neighbors, friends, familiar people and family members can be considered as a second important source of information, which formulates people's understanding about police work. As a whole, 32, 3% of the interviewed respondents indicated at this course of information.

Unfortunately, taking into account objective reasons, but more exactly: complicated financial situation of the regional mass media, impossibility of often circulation of newspapers and short TV airtime of local TV and radio broadcasting, mass media does not play any significant role in forming public opinion of Karakol residents. Information received from central mass media can also be taken into consideration, but does not make a considerable impact on the evaluations of the citizens. It is not surprising at all as the work done by the regional police hardly becomes a subject of reporting or broadcasting in central mass media. And probably therefore, only 4, 1% of the interviewed respondents indicated to this source, which is a huge source of information.

As it can be concluded depending on the date of the public opinion poll, overwhelming quantity of the respondents (85, 8% out of the total number of the interviewed people) has not had experience of being a victim of a crime during the last two years. However, 19% of the interviewed people answered "yes" to the question about whether "they know people, who became a victim of a crime during last two years".

Share of those, who has become a victim of a crime made 21, 3% out of the number of people, who addressed to police and 18, 5% reported on a crime issue. Only 2, 8% out of the total number of respondents in this group visited a police station as witnesses of a crime. 23, 1% had contacted police due to other reasons. 70, 4% of respondents, who contacted the police, encountered with officers at the police station. And police officers visited 26, 9% of Karakol residents out of the number of respondents. 9, 3% and 2, 8% had contacted police in the streets or at another place accordingly.

Residents of Karakol city make the biggest impact on public order and safety issues in Karakol. 68, 3% out of total number of respondents answered in this way. Police takes a second place in accordance with the frequency of the answers (19, 0% of respondents).

On the basis of conducted public opinion poll for Karakol the following conclusions can be made:

Residents of Karakol are generally satisfied with the activities of the city police station. Just 20, 8% of respondents consider their work as unsatisfactory.

Civic criteria of police work efficiency, as it seems, can be divided into three main stages based upon often-mentioned comments of respondents. Firstly, willingness to help population, secondly, the right level of professionalism of the Police Station officers and thirdly, capability to provide public safety.

Quite high percentage of those who found difficult to answer or avoided from the answering in every position of the questionnaire shows that the level of population interest to the activities of the City Police Station is quite low, which indirectly indicates to indifference of most residents to the events in the City Police Station.

In general, weaknesses of the activities of the City Police Station respondents related to low wages, corruption in law enforcement bodies, non-professionalism and incompetence.

The public opinion poll results bring out clearly that corruption rate in the police institution is high, it cannot manage its tasks and interests of the citizens are ignored. Corruption among the City Police Station contradicts willingness of police to help population. In practice, mercantile self-interest of the police officers prevail performance of their duties and responsibilities. Many things can be explained about the capacity of the police to protect citizens' rights and provide public safety, when not many people addressed to the police officers when have become a victim of a crime.

As the data of the public opinion poll shows, communities do not mind to be involved in the task of reducing crime rate and providing community safety in the city. Majority of the interviewed (87, 5%) think that it is necessary to involve communities in preventive work and assist police to fight against crime.

Many of Karakol residents noted that neighborhood police should and can assist in strengthening relations between people and the police. However, only 21, 0% of the interviewed respondents know their neighborhood police officer.

3. Results of the public opinion poll among the police officers of Karakol City Police Station.

Peculiarities of public opinion poll among the police officers in the Karakol Police Station

Majority of the interviewed police officers declared about their willingness to take part in this research. However, at the same time, there was some kind of provocative nature in their answers and comments for control questions. Their answers were revealing some external impact of "preparedness to answer", i.e., they emphasized the negative and objective factors (lack of material and technical facilities, equipment of the police, social insecurity and other issues).

The basis of the behavior of the both groups lies in conviction/understanding of the following that raising efficiency of the police in overall and efficiency of Neighborhood Police in particular depends not only on implementation of the OSCE Police Assistance Programme, but also mostly depends on political will of the Mol management and state authorities.

In order to ensure anonymity of respondents, answers of police officers have not been analyzed in accordance with such variables as nationality, gender, and location in Centre for Preventive Activities, living in the territory of some sub-stations and etc.

Results of the opinion poll

In the beginning, respondents, officers of Karakol Police Station were suggested to evaluate the work of their police unit in general. In overall, majority of the interviewed officers evaluated the work as satisfactory (62% out of the total number). 34% of respondents gave a positive evaluation for the work and only 4% of the interviewed officers have a contrary opinion and evaluated the work of the Police Station as bad.

Young police officers in the age category of 20-29 years old indicated at the quite high *level of professionalism* of the police officers as exactly half of the respondents in this age group evaluated the level of professionalism as "good".

Interviewed officers with a higher education evaluate police work, particularly a criterion of professionalism as good and satisfactory (41, 3% and 52, 2% out of the total number of respondents in this educational group accordingly).

Evaluation of the *level of knowledge* and professionalism of officers working in the Karakol Police Station does not differ very much. Votes given separated equally to "satisfactory" and to "good" (52% and 44% of the total number of interviewed respondents accordingly).

In this group of evaluation 96, 9% of answers were given by the officers with higher education. All other respondents with vocational education evaluated police station work according to this criterion as satisfactory.

Number of those, who positively evaluated police work according to this criterion, was 44, 8% of respondents from the Community Safety Branch and 55, 2% - officers from the Central Office. Youth group (20-29 years olds) considers police work in this field as good (69, 2% of the number of respondents in this age category) and older age category has some criticism in these terms. In the group of 40-49 years olds, 16, 7% of respondents of this age category consider police work in this field as bad.

Respondents with higher education prevail among those, who positively evaluated honesty and impartiality of the Karakol Police Station officers (52, 2% of the number of respondents in this educational group). Majority of officers with vocational education (66, 7% out of this number) adhere to the contrary point of view and consider police work quite dishonest and not very impartial one.

Respondents indicated mostly to "crime detection" and "arresting criminals" as major priorities of their work. 78% of the overall number of respondents agreed with this statement. And only 8% of the interviewed respondents did not agree with the point and expressed a point that it is not a major role of the police.

Despite a huge percentage of negative attitudes of people towards the police, police officers themselves consider their job as noble and honorary. Overwhelming majority agreed to some extent with this statement (84% of the total number). And on the contrary 70% of respondents did not agree the point that police work gives an opportunity of power or possibility to earn additional money/gain services.

Please, notice that 96% of the overall number of respondents agree or absolutely agree with the point that they have enough education and training to fulfill police duties and responsibilities on a professional level.

Besides, while giving their comments, police officers complained that due to a low salary experienced and professional officers are leaving the police and thus the level of police professionalism is decreasing. Younger officers consider the job in the police as a starting point and try to move to Bishkek in any available chance. According to their opinion "Bishkek has more opportunities and perspectives for career development".

The major problems for Karakol residents are burglary, breaking in the houses and state agencies as 60% of respondents indicated this type of crime. Subjects of the crime in general are young people, who came from villages situated nearby and unemployed people.

Hooliganism, fights, which first of all refer to youngsters have been indicated by 32% of respondents among police officers. Such crimes are usually committed in entertainment locations, in discos and cafes. Therefore, such crimes take place during evening time and nighttime.

4. GENERAL AND SPECIFIC POINTS IN EVALUATING THE PROBLEMS REGARDING COMMUNITY SAFETY BY RESIDENTS AND POLICE OFFICERS IN KARAKOL

Nature of relations in the point of "police and community" demonstrates not only indicators of the situation of interrelations between "authorities and people", but also shows peculiarities of legal awareness of population and police officers. These relations mostly depend on the level of crime situation, prevalence of crimes and weak capacity of law enforcement bodies to resist it.

It is necessary to emphasize that some part of police officers tend to admit blames coming from citizens despite their firm conviction to protect honor of "police uniform" or to refer shortcomings to any other body except their department.

Image of the organization is first of all, image of officers working there. And defining an image of a person, there are two sides to be singled out: evaluation of a person as an individual and a professional. However, residents of Karakol evaluate quite negatively personal qualities of police officers working there. Therefore a conclusion can be made that a police officer is not respected among citizens and that's why his personal qualities are evaluated in a low way.

According to the point of view of people, professionalism of officers cannot be just evaluated calculating their skills and years of experience, but also considers such qualities as good individual personality, feeling of duty, honesty and impartiality.

If violations of police officers could be explained and accepted by officers themselves due to their difficult conditions of work, then such timid behavior and satisfaction of residents with such an attitude towards themselves can be explained with the fact that majority of people are not able to stand up for their rights while having some contacts with the police.

Further on, respondents of both groups were suggested to evaluate police according to the following point: willingness to help. And answering this question respondents' opinion have polarized too much. Interviewed police officers think that their police department is doing its best to help people in community problem solving issues. In other words, officers evaluated this point as "very good" and "good" (58% and 12% of the total number of respondents among police officers).

Citizens do understand necessity of having police institution. It is explicable with their readiness and willingness to help police. The number of such residents, who are willing to help could reach 87, 5% (out of the number of respondents). This could be considered as a significant credit of potential trust to law enforcement bodies and to the state in general.

78% of respondents in the police station do not agree with the statement "police gives preferential treatment to their friends". And on the contrary, 59, 3% and 10, 5% of the interviewed respondents among town residents agreed or absolutely agreed with such statement.

If to consider answers of respondents, there is no considerable difference observed. However, the reasons why people did not contact the police when they became victims of crimes are quite different. Answers like this as the crime was not serious enough prevail among police officers (33, 3% of the victims). And Karakol residents were indicating at reasons like mistrust to police capacity to help or to do something (such answers were given by 56% of the victims, who did not report to the police).

Conclusions:

According to results of the researches conducted in Bishkek in 2004 and 2006 as well as in Karakol in this year, it is worth to announce not very comforting or positive facts. Overall social and economic situation in the country remains as very difficult. Especially it is obviously felt in rural areas and in regions. It is not by chance that more than half of convicted people or blamed in committing crime are those people, who do not have permanent income, unemployed people and those who live for occasional earnings. These are that people, who are "humiliated and assaulted" as a Russian writer used to describe.

There is some kind of tension in mutual relations between police and people. While trying to give a brief characteristics of such relations, then it is worth to admit that police has always to overcome mistrust of the society and public has to accept that police does not want to do professional work over those problems, with which citizens apply to police hoping to get some assistance.

Discontent with the existing legislation, lack of control mechanisms over its implementation – it is the only one trait of overall process – crisis of trust to governmental executive branches of power.

Respondents among town residents indicated to low salary of police and police officers also indicated to the problem of low salary, which is directly correlated with corruption in the police institution.

The most acute problem in mutual relations between police and people is in that the police in reality fulfill its police functions inefficiently. It also does not fulfill its function as guarantee of the human rights, but police itself usually violates human rights.

Data of this research demonstrate that people have a good disposition in case of some conditions created, to develop constructive social cooperation with the police.

Summarizing research results, formulate several suggestions are offered, which may enable to raise police efficiency according to this point of view:

First of all, it is necessary to improve legislation, which is aimed at protecting citizens' interests and rights as well as the rights of the police officers, who are fulfilling their duty.

Secondly, there should be more strict policies in police recruitment and policies on professional development of officers.

Thirdly, solving problems of social protection, improving social and every day conditions of life, making clear for each officer that he/she has a good perspective for professional development and growth and improving financial and logistical support for the police should become another priority issue.

Fourthly, as research results demonstrate, it is necessary to develop measures enabling police "transparency" among local communities. If such conditions created, then the "ice" will break between police and citizens.

Fifthly, it is necessary to increase the number of Neighborhood Police and develop Neighborhood Police Service (**quantitatively and qualitatively**) to improve mutual relations between police and citizens. It is worth to mention that issues of Neighborhood Policing are left beyond attention of police top management. Today, Neighborhood Police is situated at the lowest level of the police hierarchy. Neighborhood Policing is considered as a non-prestigious job. At the same time, for the majority of population, Neighborhood Police officer remains to be a representative of police, law enforcement bodies in general, which impacts in general the public opinion about law enforcement bodies' work in the country?

NOTE: This is a short version summary of the Public Opinion Poll. For the complete version of this document please refer to OSCE Police Assistance Programme office.

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