

Perception of the Value of Higher Education Among Police Officers

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Abstract: The subject of this paper is the perception of the value of higher education among police officers. The basic idea is to examine whether police officers perceive higher education as important in terms of the quality of performance of police affairs and tasks and in terms of advancement in the service. The dependent variable is the perception of higher education, while the independent variables include: gender, age, current level of education, years of experience in the service and the type of work and tasks within the police organization. The main goal of the research is to describe the perception of police officers about the value of higher education. The research instrument that was applied is a survey on the perception of police officers about the value of higher education in the context of the quality of their work and the possibility of advancement in the service. This means that the general attitudes of police officers on the value of higher education for the police will be presented and described, as well as the relationships between the dependent variable and the independent variables. The results indicate a moderately positive but stable perception of higher education among police officers, with significant differences related to gender, age, years of service, and level of education. Higher education is more strongly associated with perceptions of career advancement and managerial recognition than with perceived operational effectiveness.

Keywords: police education, higher education, police attitudes, professionalization, career advancement.

INTRODUCTION

Debates about the importance of higher education for police officers and the police profession have been going on for decades. Proponents of higher education argue that college-educated police officers possess more developed communication skills and show a better understanding of different social groups, leading to better discretionary decisions. They are also considered to be less authoritarian, more tolerant, have more professional attitudes, receive fewer complaints from citizens, have fewer disciplinary sanctions, and

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are less prone to the use of force (Novak et al., 2022). These questions were treated through certain qualitative research on the perception of police officers about the value of a university degree for their daily work and all the challenges that this job brings. The first studies were conducted in the 1970s, but these studies have often yielded contradictory results (Bruns & Magnan, 2014; Edwards, 2019). Undoubtedly, the results of such research cannot be spatially generalized, because they depend on the climate in which the research is carried out, and even on local social conditions.

The importance of higher education for police officers has been recognized by the modern state, in the context of improving its police and security function. For example, a working group appointed by President Barack Obama offered certain recommendations for improving police practice in the United States. In its report, the working group pointed out the importance of encouraging and stimulating higher education among police officers through the application of innovative approaches in the field of police services. The process of recruiting police personnel, with the aim of developing a more educated workforce, equipped with character traits and social skills necessary for effective law enforcement and building positive relationships with the community (Rosenfeld et al., 2018). Therefore, the intention of the modern state to organize the police in accordance with its needs and socio-political circumstances is visible (Šetka & Đukić, 2024). In this sense, the United States recognizes the importance of highly educated police personnel, especially in the context of improving the community policing and relations with the citizens themselves.

For the police, as an organization, the question of the value of highly educated personnel has been further actualized by the introduction of the Bologna system of higher education. ECTS credits have become an indispensable part of planning internal organizations and job systematization in numerous organizations, including the police. In this regard, dilemmas have arisen as to which jobs, within complex police organizations, require a certain level of higher education – 180, 240 or even 300 ECTS credits. It is a well-known fact that police organizations in some countries, for managerial positions, even require a master's degree. Of course, in addition to the question of degree, there is also the question of the type of high school diploma. A variety of police jobs and tasks, but also the so-called systemic support in the police, is necessary for police organizations to hire highly educated experts of different educational profiles (Novak et al., 2022). Our intention in this paper is to examine whether police officers, basically, perceive higher education as important in terms of the quality of police work and tasks in various aspects and in terms of advancement in the service.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ever since the organization and affairs of the police have become part of the scientific discourse, the need and value of higher education of police officers have been discussed and written about. The issues of education and training are certainly an important segment of human resource management in the police (Novak et al., 2022; Jovičić & Šetka, 2023). However, it should be noted that more serious scientific research on this problem has only been present for a few decades. The largest number of scientific publications dealing with this issue are related to English-speaking countries – the United States of America and



the United Kingdom. Topics related to the relationship between higher education and the attitudes of police officers, aspirations for promotion in the service, as well as the behavior of police officers were explored (Edwards, 2017; Nugba, 2023).

Rydberg & Terrill (2010) investigated the relationship between higher education and police behavior, analyzing over 3,300 citizen-police interactions in two cities in the USA. The authors examined the impact of education on three key police decisions: deprivation of liberty, raid, and use of force. The results showed that a higher level of education does not have a significant impact on decisions on deprivation of liberty and searches of persons, but significantly reduces the likelihood of the use of force. The findings suggest that, in areas where police officers have greater discretion, such as the use of force, higher education can have a positive impact. However, the authors caution that further theoretical and empirical elaboration of this impact is needed – especially in light of the evolution of police education.

Telep (2011) presents an extensive analysis of the impact of higher education on police officers' attitudes towards abuse of power. The survey was conducted on a nationally representative sample of 925 U.S. police officers. The results showed that officers with a four-year college degree showed less support for abuse, whether the degree was earned before or during police service. This study also pointed to the relatively limited impact of standard police training in the field of communication and ethics.

Hilal et al. (2013) examined the attitudes of police officers in Minnesota, the only U.S. state that requires a minimum of two years (above) of education for admission to the police service. An analysis of the responses of 627 police officers showed that only about 30% of them support the introduction of a four-year university education as a condition for admission, although 70% of them would still enter the service if such a condition existed. The results of these authors' research indicate that while there is a recognized value of formal education (at least in Minnesota), there is a certain reservation about formalizing academic requirements, which is important to consider when creating human resource management policies in the police.

Bruns and Magnan (2014) interviewed 61 police officers from 16 different police departments in two U.S. state for their qualitative research. These authors conclude that it is obvious, both from the literature and from the respondents' responses, that police organizations value educated police officers. In addition, they came to an interesting conclusion, in the sense that politics greatly influences whether a certain level of education of police officers will be required or only recommended.

Bruns and Bruns (2014) examine in their paper the relationship between the level of education of police officers and their work performance. A part of the study has been a survey of a total of 650 police officers, employed by medium-sized police organizations, from three Midwestern U.S. states. The study compared levels of education with performance indicators such as the number of incarcerations, the use of force, and the number of complaints from citizens about the work of the police. The results showed that there was no consistent and statistically significant association between higher levels of education and better work performance in the analyzed categories.

The work of Paoline et al. (2015) is one of the most comprehensive studies on the impact of education on the professional attitudes of police officers. Based on a sample of more than 2,100 police officers from seven U.S. police departments, the authors analyzed how



the level and type of higher education affect job satisfaction, attitudes toward senior management, and career orientations. The results show that highly educated police officers have less confidence in leadership and are less satisfied with their work compared to those who do not have a university degree. When it comes to the type of faculty, respondents with a degree in criminology showed a more negative attitude towards the organization, while the differences in other majors did not show statistically significant. These findings indicate that neither the level nor the type of education has a consistent impact on the attitudes of police officers, which calls into question the one-sided assumptions about the necessity of university education as a condition for the professionalization of the police.

Rosenfeld et al. (2018) analyzed over 60,000 traffic stops by the police, with the aim of examining the impact of higher education of police officers on their behavior during stops, searches and deprivation of liberty. The authors found that police officers with a college degree were more likely to stop drivers for less serious offenses compared to colleagues without a college degree. Furthermore, highly educated officers were more inclined to take those measures and actions that were not mandatory, i.e. which are undertaken on the basis of discretionary decision-making (e.g. search with the driver's consent). The authors conclude that these results are consistent with the findings of previous research, which suggest that college-educated police officers are often more achievement-oriented and promotion-oriented.

Research similar to the above has rarely been carried out in the Western Balkans, i.e. the area of the former Yugoslavia. However, the research of Rydberg et al. (2010) represents a significant contribution to the understanding of the perception of the value of higher education among police officers in the Republic of Slovenia, as a post-socialist country in transition. An analysis of the responses of 995 police officers across the country found that they value professional experience far more than academic education – as many as 80% of respondents believe that they have learned more through work than in a formal educational context. Likewise, education was perceived with reservations – only 10% of respondents expressed clear support for its importance. Police officers with a higher level of education, as well as women, showed fewer negative attitudes towards higher education than other colleagues. These findings indicate a strongly rooted trust in practice and experiential learning in police (sub)culture, which has important implications for curriculum planning and professional development in the police education system, especially in developing democratic societies. Certain pioneering research has also been done in the Republic of Srpska and the Republic of Serbia. In their paper on the results of the work of police agencies and prosecutor's offices in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Šetka et al. (2015) indirectly confirm the importance of education for the police profession. Analyzing the data from 2007 to 2013, they see an “unacceptably poor crime rate” and an “unsatisfactory level of work” in police structures, with less than half of criminal charges resulting in convictions. As the causes of these problems, they cite shortcomings in the education system and poor selection of staff, in addition to non-cooperation and omissions in treatment. This indicates that adequate education can directly affect the improvement of the professionalism and efficiency of police work, thus providing additional support to the thesis on the key role of education in the professionalization of the police. In this regard, a group of authors from Serbia, in their work focusing on the role of education and training in the fight against organized crime, point out that the process of professionalization of the police is inextricably linked to the development of educational capacities. The authors



point out that “without acquiring, but also constantly upgrading and updating relevant knowledge, skills and habits, one cannot expect a successful police practice, regardless of specific social contexts” (Banović et al., 2003: 36). Similarly, Kešetović et al. (2017) examine contemporary challenges in security education and training, noting a tendency to gradually lose the sharp boundary between training and education. The paper also draws attention to the importance of lifelong learning and the functional connection of curricula with the needs of practice. Models of education in several European and transition countries, which the authors analyze, show that successful reforms of police education are based on partnerships between academic institutions and police organizations, with systematic efforts to train participants in educational programs not only for technical law enforcement, but also for independent and critical thinking. Furthermore, the research of Velić and Orlović (2018), which referred to the perception of police officers about the education systems in the Croatian police, showed that police officers highly value professional, social and managerial knowledge and skills. At the same time, respondents express dissatisfaction with the fact that higher education, especially police education, is not recognized as a key factor for progress, which indicates the need for a comprehensive reform of the education system and human resource management in the police. In addition to the above, some authors, such as Silvio Bratković (2019), discuss the concept of lifelong education of police officers in the Republic of Croatia. This author, within the complex system of police education, recognizes higher education, but does not see it as an end in itself, but as a means to strengthen public trust and raise the level of professionalism in police work. Although the previously presented literature provides valuable insight into the complexity of the relationship between higher education and various aspects of the organization and work of the police, it is noticeable that the results are not unambiguous and often depend on the context, methodological approaches and specifics of the institutional environment and organizational culture. These findings, in turn, point to the conclusion that higher education can have a positive impact on the value attitudes of police officers, especially in the field of ethics, control of the application of police powers and relations with citizens and the community. However, the impact of higher education on work effectiveness and organizational culture is limited and contextual. The successful integration of academic competencies into police practice requires systemic support, adaptation of curricula and transparent career development mechanisms. Differences in attitudes, organizational cultures and models of human resource management indicate the need for a deeper understanding of this phenomenon in a specific local context, i.e. in our areas. For this reason, we decided to carry out this research project, the results of which are presented in the continuation of this work.

METHODS

Empirical research on the perception of the value of higher education among police officers was carried out by collecting data through a survey. The data were collected on the territory of the Republic of Srpska, in the time period from January 2025 to June 2025. The total number of respondents was 821 police officers of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Srpska (Govedarica & Vujić, 2015; Jovičić, 2017). Informed consent was obtained from all participants. The survey proposed Likert's five-day scale with the



offered answers related to the value attitudes of police officers on the perception of higher education. The attitudes of police officers employed in the police of the Republic of Srpska must be taken as a significant benchmark in the overall perception of the value of higher education among police officers. Among other things, their views must be respected because the quantified sample makes up over 50% of police officers who have at least 11 years of work experience in a police agency.

The questionnaire was used to survey (collect data) of police officers and consisted of 8 questions with offered answers. It was developed based on previous empirical research on police education and professional attitudes. Although the instrument relies on self-reported perceptions, it provides a valid insight into officers' attitudes toward higher education within the organizational context of policing. The survey was dedicated to collecting the attitudes and opinions of police officers on the contribution of higher education to the acquisition of skills and knowledge that are necessary for a police officer to be able to perform his or her job in a more efficient and high-quality manner, to find out how much higher education contributes to faster and easier advancement in the hierarchy of the police agency, then to what extent higher education contributes to a better understanding of modern concepts of police work and how much it contributes to a better communication with citizens and greater self-initiative and creativity of police officers, as well as on the extent to which the type of higher education affects the performance of police tasks. In addition to the above, respondents were asked to give their opinion on how much police executives value highly educated personnel in the police agency. Given that the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Srpska operationally covers almost 50% of the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina and that the survey was conducted at all levels of the territorial organization of this police agency, as well as in all regional centers, this survey can be considered very representative.

The empirical research aimed to achieve a level of description of scientific-empirical analysis of the perception of police officers about the value of higher education among them. The collected data were processed with the help of a software program (IBM, SPSS statistics, version 26) and enabled us to get a complete and clear picture of the situation, at least according to the results of the survey, since we can see a clear attitude of the respondents who gave answers to the questions that arose from the problems of our research. The respondents were selected randomly, but care was taken to ensure that all parts of the police organization were represented in terms of the territorial organization of the police agency. As we have said, the basic set (quantified picture) represents a sample of 821 respondents (police officers) in the Republic of Srpska. For a clearer and unambiguous picture of the sample, i.e. the basic set, the respondents – police officers, are analyzed in detail according to: gender, age group, professional qualifications (level of education), years of service and jobs they currently perform.

RESULTS

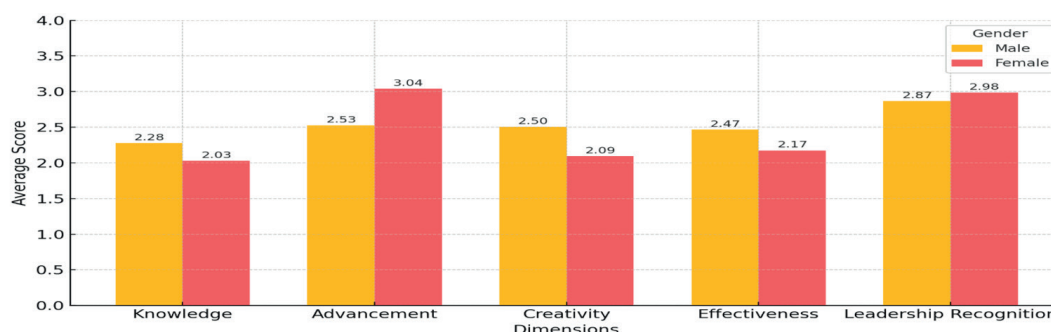
Through our research, we wanted to determine the impact of certain socio-demographic characteristics on the perception of the value of higher education in the police service (police agency), and the results of the research will be presented in aggregate for certain



groups and certain answers to the questions posed in our research. Respondents were asked on a five-point Likert scale (1 = not contributing at all, 5 = fully contributing).

The highest average value was achieved by the following statement: “To what extent do police managers value highly educated personnel” ($M = 2.89$; $SD = 0.93$), which indicates that the respondents mostly recognize the importance of higher education in hierarchical evaluation within the police organization (agency). On the other hand, the lowest average score was given to the statement: “To what extent higher education contributes to the acquisition of skills and knowledge necessary for better performance of work” ($M = 2.17$; $SD = 0.81$), suggesting that respondents are not fully convinced of the direct correlation between formal education and professional effectiveness in the field when performing police jobs.

Besides, it is noticeable from the results that all statements on average range between 2 and 3, which indicates moderate support of respondents for the evaluation of higher education, but also possible reservations in relation to its practical importance in everyday affairs.



Graph 1. Average Ratings by Gender

Graph 1 graphically shows the comparative average scores given by respondents classified by gender (men and women) within five analytically separated categories, based on the content of the survey statements: acquisition of knowledge and skills, promotion in the service, creativity, efficiency in the execution of police tasks and perception of managers about the importance of educated people. In terms of the analytical group related to *the acquisition of knowledge and skills (Knowledge)*, this dimension includes views on the extent to which higher education contributes to the acquisition of knowledge and skills needed by police officers in performing police tasks, as well as the understanding of modern concepts of police work. When the analysis of the results obtained is performed, it is observed that men ($M = 2.28$) have a slightly higher average score compared to women ($M = 2.03$). This indicates a slightly more pronounced belief of men that higher education contributes to the acquisition of knowledge and skills for more efficient performance of police tasks, as well as a better understanding of modern trends and concepts in police work, which can generally be interpreted as a contribution of higher education to a more efficient way of performing police tasks by police officers. However, it should be emphasized that respondents of both sexes are in an interval of moderate agreement with this statement.

When looking at *Advancement* as a separate analytical category, it can be seen that it is the only category in which women gave a significantly higher average grade ($M = 3.04$) compared to male respondents ($M = 2.53$). The results indicate that women perceive higher

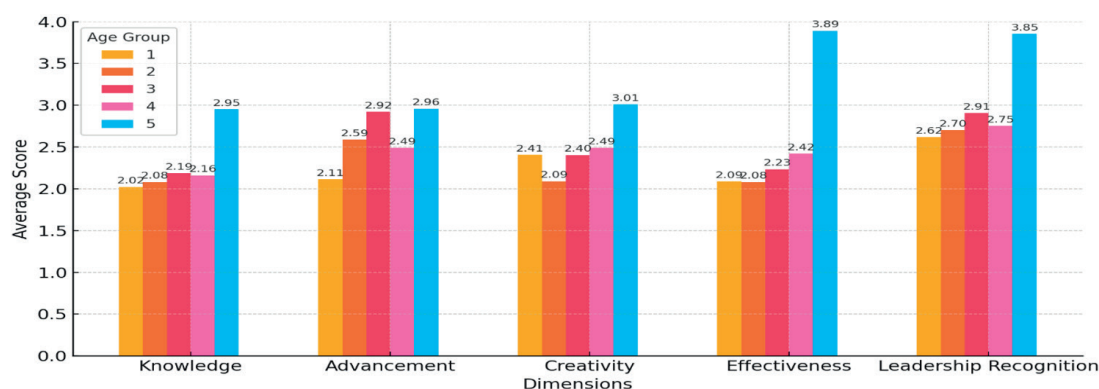


education to a greater extent as a means for accelerated and easier promotion within the police agency, or more specifically, the police hierarchy. Such attitudes can be a reflection of the experiences that the respondents have had in their previous work in the police, and we can see them as subjective attitudes of the respondents regarding the possibilities of career development in police agencies.

In relation to *self-initiative and creativity (Creativity)*, as a separate category, men rated on average with 2.50, which is significantly higher than women ($M = 2.09$). This result can be understood as a statement that men to a greater extent believe in the influence of higher education on the development of self-initiative and innovation in the work of police officers in the performance of their jobs and tasks. The difference in answers in this analytical category between women and men may be a reflection on their expectations of professional autonomy in different gender roles.

Communication and quality of work (Effectiveness) is an analytical category that includes issues related to better communication with citizens, sharing their problems, as well as communication with vulnerable groups and the impact of the type of education on the quality of police work. Average scores of men ($M = 2.47$) and women ($M = 2.17$) show that men have a somewhat more pronounced belief in the functional connection between higher education and the quality of everyday police work. In addition, this indicates that male respondents are more likely than women to believe that higher education has a positive effect on better communication between the police and citizens, the exchange of problems in the community, as well as better communication with vulnerable groups in the social community.

Analytical category related to the *attitude of managers (Leadership Recognition)*, i.e. how much managers value highly educated personnel, the respondents gave the highest average score to the perception of appreciation of education by managers within the police agency. With their attitudes, women indicated that they give a higher score ($M = 2.98$), compared to men ($M = 2.87$), which indicates that gender can have an impact on how police officers perceive institutional mechanisms for rewarding and recognizing (evaluating) academic knowledge (and titles) within the hierarchical structure of a police agency. Therefore, according to the attitudes of the respondents of the female sex, in a certain number of cases, compared to men, they believe more that managers respect the higher education of police officers.



Graph 2. Average Ratings by Age Group



Graph 2 shows the average scores of respondents' value attitudes given by respondents of different age categories within five analytically separated categories. The age groups are divided in accordance with the usual demographic classifications, and the analyzed analytical categories are the same as we have stated above, which are: acquisition of knowledge and skills, advancement in the service, creativity and self-initiative, efficiency in the execution of police tasks and managers' perception of the importance of education.

According to these results, we can conclude that the highest average score in the analytical category that we marked as *Knowledge* was given by respondents belonging to the age group over 56 years of age ($M = 2.95$), while the lowest score was recorded in the youngest respondents in the group of 18 to 25 years of age ($M = 2.02$). This indicates the fact that older police officers, with decades of life experience, and at the same time probably great work experience, recognize and value the importance of an academic title (higher education) to a greater extent in the context of its importance for the acquisition of knowledge and skills necessary to perform police duties.

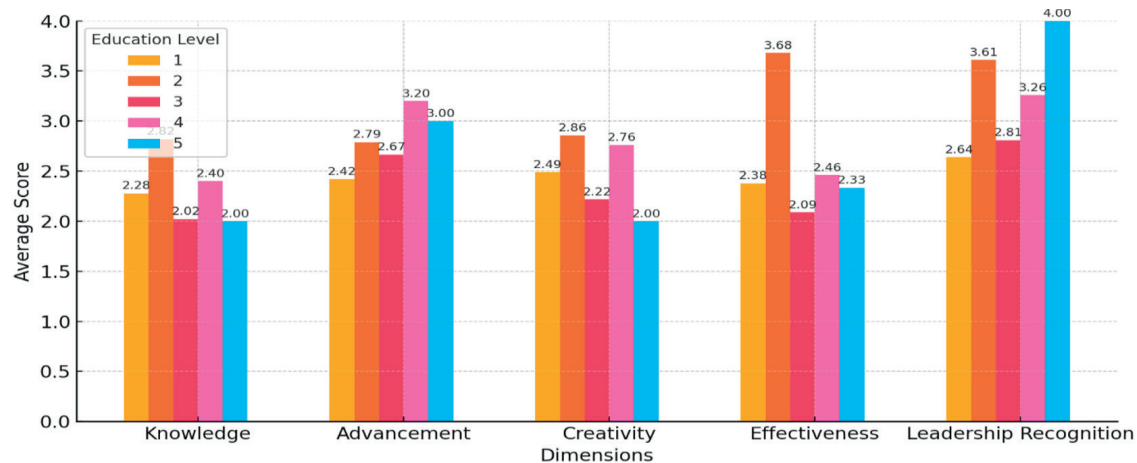
In terms of *Advancement*, respondents belonging to the oldest age group expressed the highest degree of agreement with the statement that higher education enables faster and easier promotion in the service ($M = 2.96$). This may reflect the personal experience of older police officers who, during the decades of service, have been able to observe institutional patterns of career advancement.

The analytical category related to *creativity and self-initiative (Creativity)* received the highest marks from the respondents belonging to the category of people aged 56+, while significantly lower scores were given by younger police officers ($M = 3.01$). Such results indicate that the oldest respondents probably declared themselves in this way because they have the highest degree of professional freedom, experience and security in making decisions when performing police tasks, which allows for self-determination.

Communication and quality of work (Effectiveness) is an analytical category to which respondents from the age group (56+ years) gave subjectively the highest score ($M = 3.89$). This may indicate that police officers, who are the oldest in terms of age, appreciate the contribution of higher education to the quality of performing post-judicial tasks, as well as to communication with citizens, and especially the contribution to the quality of communication with vulnerable groups in the social community. The attitude can probably be found in their greater communication capacity, as well as knowledge of institutional logic, which contributes to a better perception of higher education as a resource that improves efficiency in the work of the police and better interaction with citizens.

The highest level of agreement with the statement that executives value highly educated staff, within the analytical category marked as the *attitude of executives (Leadership Recognition)*, was expressed by respondents in the age groups 36–45 ($M = 2.91$) and older than 56 years of age ($M = 3.85$), with the group older than 56 significantly ahead of everyone else. This may indicate a greater inclusion of these categories in formal or informal hierarchical structures, but also the better understanding how the reward and recognition system works within the police organization.





Graph 3. Average Ratings by Education Level

After processing and analyzing the results, Graph number 3 shows the average scores of respondents' value attitudes given by respondents of different educational levels within five analytically separated categories. In this way, we wanted to look at how the level of education of the respondents affects the evaluation of higher (academic) education within the police system (agency).

Looking at the first analytical category, which we marked as *Knowledge*, we notice that respondents with a two- or three-year college degree ($M = 2.82$) gave the highest average score to this analytical category, and based on this it can be stated that they believe that higher education is important for acquiring knowledge and skills that police officers need in their work. The lowest average grades were given by respondents with a university degree – Bachelor ($M = 2.02$) and those who have the title of Doctor of Science ($M = 2.00$). Such a result may indicate that these categories have a certain skepticism towards theoretical knowledge or that they believe that academic education has little relevance for the conduct of the police in practice. Here, it should also be emphasized that this attitude, primarily of those who have a university education, is probably the result of the fact that in the police agency in which we conducted this research, a significant number of police officers have a degree from a faculty that is not related to the areas of Internal Affairs. According to previous research, there are 83 different educational profiles of employees in the Police of the Republic of Srpska, of which a significant number of police officers, according to the educational profile of their university education, are not compatible with the police profession (Šetka, 2016).

The highest agreement with the statement that higher education enables advancement in the service was expressed by respondents with a master's degree ($M = 3.20$) in the analytical category marked as *Advancement*. In addition, high marks were also recorded by those who have a PhD degree ($M = 3.00$). These groups most likely occupy managerial positions within the police service, and they know that in order to be promoted, i.e. to be in a certain position in the hierarchy, it was necessary to possess certain academic qualifications.

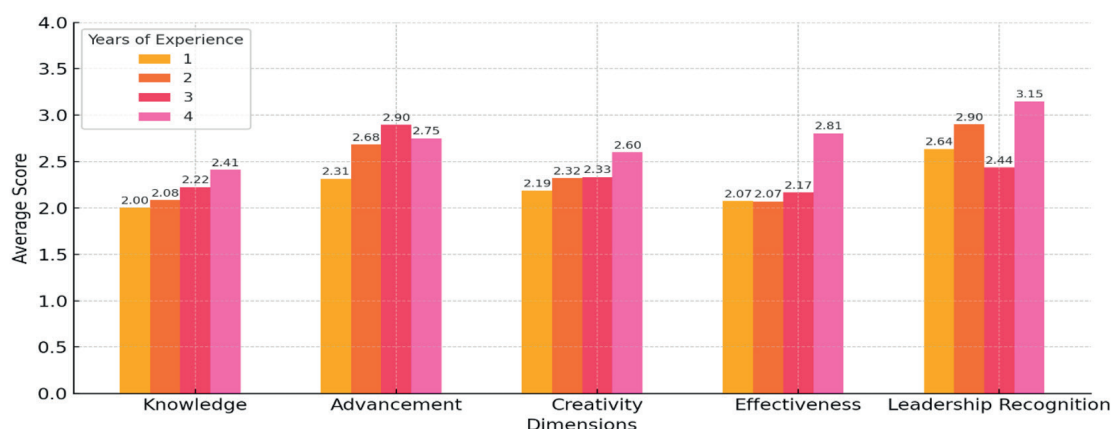
Creativity is an analytical category in which the highest average result was recorded in respondents with a two- or three-year college degree ($M = 2.86$), and slightly lower, but still relatively high scores were given by respondents with a master's degree ($M = 2.76$).



This suggests that these groups mostly associate academic education with encouraging creativity and self-initiative in the work of the police.

In the analytical category of communication and job quality (*Effectiveness*), the highest score was given by respondents with a two- or three-year college degree ($M = 4.00$), which is interesting because they are often assigned to positions that require intensive application of communication and operational skills. However, respondents with a university degree ($M = 2.09$) and a master's degree ($M = 2.09$) gave the lowest marks, which could indicate a more critical attitude towards the effects of academic preparation in practical tasks of police engagement related to the quality of police work, as well as communication with citizens.

And finally, *the attitude of managers (Leadership Recognition)* as an analytical category indicated that the highest scores in this category were given by respondents with a doctorate ($M = 4.00$), which indicates that they perceive the recognition of academic titles within the formal management structure in a police agency the strongest. Respondents with a two- or three-year college degree ($M = 3.61$) and university education ($M = 3.26$) also give high marks, while the subjects with a high school diploma gave the lowest average marks ($M = 2.64$). This may indicate that respondents with the lowest level of education are distanced from police officers who make decisions (managers) in a police agency.



Graph 4. Average Ratings by Years of Experience

Differences in the perception of the importance of higher education in the police by the length of service of the respondents are shown in Graph No. 4. The graphic presents a comparison of average grades in five analytical categories on the perception of the importance of higher education, viewed through the prism of the work experience of the respondents. Analyzed groups of respondents with different work experience: up to 5 years, 6–10 years, 11–15 years and over 15 years of service in the police service.

The analytical category of *Knowledge* in terms of the perception of respondents in relation to their work experience indicates that respondents with over 15 years of service ($M = 2.41$) expressed the highest confidence in the contribution of higher education to the acquisition of skills and knowledge necessary for police work, as well as in the understanding of modern concepts of police work. The lowest level of agreement was expressed by the youngest police officers who have the least work experience ($M = 2.00$), which may indicate an in-



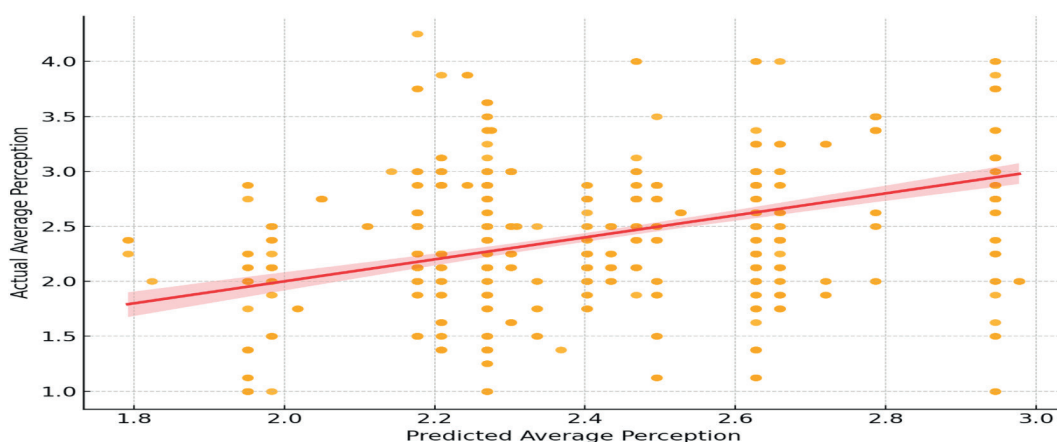
sufficient experiential connection between academic and practical knowledge, or a certain beginner's disappointment in the real application of higher education in police practice.

When we look at the analytical category of *Advancement*, we see that the highest result is found in police officers with significant work experience (11–15 years) – ($M = 2.90$), which can represent the phase in which police officers most intensively assess the importance of formal education for career advancement. Officers with over 15 years of service gave slightly lower grades ($M = 2.75$), which may indicate the achievement of the maximum in the hierarchy or a decline in ambition in terms of further advancement. The most inexperienced respondents are the least in agreement with the statement that higher education contributes to advancement in the service ($M = 2.31$), which may be indicated by the fact that they have not had the opportunity to advance in their careers so far, so they could not even make a judgment about it.

Creativity and self-initiative (*Creativity*) – the highest score in this analytical category was recorded in respondents with over 15 years of service ($M = 2.60$), which is indicative of the phase in which police officers use experience and professional security as a basis for a higher degree of individual action. This indicates a correlation between work experience and openness to new ideas and approaches within the organizational context.

Communication and quality of work (*Effectiveness*) – in this analytical category, the highest result was also recorded in respondents who have over 15 years of service ($M = 2.81$), which may indicate accumulated communication experience and the ability to apply the knowledge acquired during higher education in various situations in practice. The lowest results in this analytical category were recorded in police officers with less than 10 years of service ($M = 2.07$), which can point to the fact that the most inexperienced police officers have problems in their communication with citizens, and that they believe that the knowledge acquired through higher education does not help them enough in their police practice.

Respondents with over 15 years of work experience in the analytical category of *Leadership Recognition* expressed the highest degree of belief that managers value highly educated personnel ($M = 3.15$). This is somewhat logical, because they are most often in direct contact with the middle and high level of management (management structures in the police agency) or even have experience in management (they have held or currently hold managerial roles in the police force hierarchy).



Graph 5. Regression Plot: Predicted vs Actual Average Perception



The regression graph (Graph 5), which shows the relationship between the predictive and actual perception of the significance of higher education among police officers, provides visual support for the linear regression analysis carried out. The horizontal axis shows the values predicted by the model as the average perception of the significance of higher education (based on eight attitudes: P1–P8 grouped into five analytical categories), while the vertical axis represents the actual, empirically recorded values obtained on the basis of a survey questionnaire.

The red line of best fit illustrates a trend in the data and indicates a positive but relatively weak linear relationship. Although the dots show an increasing tendency, their wide dispersion around the line indicates that the predictive power of the model is limited and that there are additional factors, not included in the analysis, that affect the perception of the importance of higher education in policing practice.

Table 1. Results of Linear Regression Analysis

Predictor	Coefficient (B)	Stand. Error	T-value	p-value	95 % CI
Intercept	3.209	0.112	28.71	<0.001	[2.989, 3.429]
Gender (male = 1)	-0.128	0.042	-3.06	0.002	[-0.210, -0.046]
Years of service	0.017	0.005	3.51	<0.001	[0.008, 0.026]
Education level	0.091	0.022	4.14	<0.001	[0.048, 0.134]

Table 1 presents the results of linear regression analysis, and their interpretation indicates that *Intercept* (cross-section) of the value of 3,209 represents the average perception of the importance of higher education among respondents who are women, without work experience and with the lowest level of education. This indicates an already formed positive attitude without the influence of independent variables.

Gender (Male = 1): A negative and statistically significant coefficient (-0.128 , $p = 0.002$) indicates that men on average have a slightly lower perception of the importance of higher education compared to women. This relatively small difference in effect size is a result of the fact that the analytical category we labeled as *Advancement* is the only category in which women gave a significantly higher average score ($M = 3.04$) compared to male respondents ($M = 2.53$). However, this particular difference influenced the result of the linear regression analysis.

Years of Service: A positive coefficient (0.017 , $p < 0.001$) indicates that with each addition of work experience, the evaluation of the importance of academic education increases slightly. This is in line with the assumption that through long-term professional engagement, a deeper understanding of the complexity of police tasks is developed, which increases awareness of the role of knowledge and skills acquired through education.

Education Level: This variable shows the strongest positive impact in the model ($B = 0.091$, $p < 0.001$). This means that higher levels of formal education significantly predict a higher degree of affirmation of the value of education. The result is consistent with a number of empirical findings suggesting that more educated individuals develop a stronger identification with academic values.



Although the visual representation indicates the limited predictive power of the model, the results of the regression analysis show that educational level and length of service have a stable and significant impact on the perception of the importance of higher education. Gender differences also exist, but they are moderate in size. The model provides a basis for further elaboration of structural impacts on the valuation of academic resources in a police context.

DISCUSSION

An analysis of differences in the perception of the importance of higher education depending on gender and age indicates important educational and personnel implications. Given that older respondents and men value the role of higher education in the work of the police to a greater extent, it is recommended to formulate internal strategies and development programs that would raise the level of perception of other categories of employees (junior police officers and women) to a higher level, and if it is assessed that it is necessary, to acquire additional knowledge and skills through formal education.

The results of this research indicate a stable and relatively homogeneous positive opinion of police officers on the importance of higher education in the context of performing police duties and the possibility of advancement in the service. The descriptive analysis shows that the largest number of respondents agree or fully agree with the statements related to all examined aspects of the perception of higher education, which suggests a broad consensus within the police organization on the positive role of higher education. Such results correspond with the results of Edwards (2019), which also records positive attitudes of police officers towards academic education, especially in the domain of acquiring social and communication skills.

The stability of positive attitudes is particularly pronounced in responses to questions concerning the practical benefits of higher education, such as the efficiency and quality of police performance, better communication with citizens and vulnerable groups, as well as increased creativity and independence in work. This suggests that police officers do not perceive higher education solely as a formal obligation or a prerequisite for advancement, but rather recognize its inherent value in everyday police practice. Such findings coincide with the results of research by Bruns and Magnan (2014), which point out that police officers see education as a means of better contact with the public and greater professional self-confidence.

Correlation analysis further confirms the internal consistency of these attitudes, showing statistically significant and positive correlations between all the variables examined. The connection between the perception of the importance of higher education for better communication with the community and its impact on creativity and initiative is particularly pronounced, which indicates that respondents perceive a high level of education as a multifunctional resource – both in operational and communicative terms.

The results of the regression analysis provide a deeper insight into the relationship between demographic variables and the perception of the value of higher education. The most significant predictor of perception was the level of education of the respondents themselves, which is in line with the findings of Rydberg et al. (2010), which showed that



highly educated police officers positively value education to a greater extent compared to colleagues with a lower educational level. This result is theoretically expected: the higher the level of education, the more likely it is that the respondent will perceive and believe in its benefits.

The gender structure shows certain variations – women police officers showed slightly greater agreement with the statements regarding the importance of higher education, especially in the domains of communication with citizens and promotion in the service. This finding is consistent with the findings of Geurkink et al. (2020), which highlight the greater preference of women towards the values of professional development and education as a means of social mobility.

The age structure reveals that older police officers recognize the value of academic education to a greater extent. At the same time, even more experienced police officers have the same values. This indicates that age – as an indicator of life experience and maturity – is significant, implying that the design of educational programs should be flexible and adapted to the different life and career stages of police officers.

Finally, the type of work in the police structure may have an indirect impact on the perception of the value of education, although it was not specifically statistically tested in this study. However, it is assumed that police officers in managerial and analytical positions have a greater awareness of the importance of academic competencies, which is in line with the findings of Bruns and Bruns (2014) and Velić and Orlović (2018).

Given the cross-sectional nature of the study, the findings should be interpreted as associations rather than causal relationships. Longitudinal research designs would be necessary to examine causal effects of education on police performance and professional development.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study indicate that police officers in the Republic of Srpska generally express a moderately positive but stable perception of the value of higher education across all examined dimensions. The highest level of agreement is expressed in the attitudes related to the contribution of education to the acquisition of knowledge and skills, better communication with citizens and independence in work. However, none of the analyzed aspects achieved extremely high average scores, which suggests a balanced evaluation of higher education that recognizes its importance while simultaneously reflecting reservations regarding its direct applicability in everyday police work. This finding is consistent with previous research emphasizing the contextual and institutional nature of education–practice relationships in policing.

The empirical analysis demonstrates that perceptions of higher education differ significantly according to level of education, years of service, gender, and age. Officers with higher academic qualifications and longer professional experience tend to evaluate the importance of higher education more positively, particularly in relation to career advancement and managerial recognition. Gender differences are also evident, with female officers expressing stronger agreement regarding the role of education in promotion and institutional recognition, which may reflect the function of education as a resource for professional legitimization within a traditionally male-dominated occupational structure.



However, when all variables are included in a multivariate regression model, age stands out as the strongest single predictor, while seniority loses statistical significance. This indicates that age – as an indicator of general life experience and maturity – is more significant than the formal duration of service, which also has implications for the design of educational programs: they should be flexible and adapted to the different life and career stages of the service. Regression analysis also confirms that gender and level of education have stable and significant effects on the perception of the value of education, while seniority is marginalized when other variables are controlled. These findings support the thesis of a complex but explainable structure of influence, where biological, social, and occupational factors collectively shape attitudes.

It should be emphasized that, due to the cross-sectional design of the study, the observed relationships should be interpreted as associations rather than causal effects. Future research based on longitudinal or mixed-method designs could provide deeper insight into the causal mechanisms through which higher education influences professional behavior, performance, and career development in policing.

From a practical and strategic perspective, the findings point to several important implications for police management and policy-making. First, higher education should be institutionally valorized through transparent and consistent promotion criteria that clearly recognize academic qualifications. Second, police organizations should strengthen support mechanisms for education, including financial, organizational, and administrative incentives. Third, the development of lifelong learning programs focused on communication, ethical reasoning, and analytical skills is essential for adapting police practice to contemporary security challenges. Fourth, closer cooperation between police agencies and academic institutions is necessary to align educational curricula with the real needs of police work. Finally, special attention should be directed toward younger officers and gender-sensitive human resource policies, in order to enhance motivation for education and ensure equal opportunities for professional advancement.

Overall, the study confirms that higher education represents an important, though not unconditionally decisive, resource for the professionalization of the police. Its effective contribution depends on organizational support, career structures, and the meaningful integration of academic knowledge into police practice.

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