



Copyright © 2021 International Journal of Criminal Justice Sciences (IJCJS) – Official Journal of the South Asian Society of Criminology and Victimology (SASCV) - Publisher & Editor-in-Chief – K. Jaishankar ISSN: 0973-5089 January – June 2021. Vol. 16 (1): 146–160. DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.4764275 / IJCJS is a Diamond Open Access (Authors / Readers No Pay Journal). Indexed in Scopus and Emerging Sources Citation Index (Web of Science).

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Police v Capital Punishment

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Abstract

This paper compares the personality traits of experienced Australian Police officers, as scored by the HEXACO, to their opinions regarding capital punishment. Results indicated that while experienced Australian Police opinions regarding the death penalty were overwhelmingly different to the opinions of United States of America (US) and United Kingdom (UK) police officers, with 81.1% of Australian police opposing the death penalty, Australian Police personality traits were consistent with Canadian and Dutch police (i.e., higher in Honesty Humility, Extraversion, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness, and lower in Emotionality than the general population samples). The findings challenge traditional views regarding police being prejudicial and severe. The paper recommends recruitment of police officers from more diverse groups to better represent the community they serve.

Keywords: Police, Capital Punishment, Death Penalty, HEXACO.

Introduction

Police around the world are often type-cast across various media sources as being severe, authoritarian, conformist, cynical, pessimistic, distrustful, suspicious, hard, practical and prejudicial (Colman & Gorman, 1982; Fielding & Fielding, 1991; Skolnick, 2000). The descriptions are predictable considering the paramilitary hierarchy in most police agencies around the world, and the role of police which is to enforce law and order (Whetstone, Reed Jr, & Turner, 2006). Therefore research conducted prior to 1969 regarding experienced British police, which revealed that policemen were conservative

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and scored highly in the personality traits of extroversion and tough-mindedness (see Colman & Gorman, 1982), corresponded with prevailing public perceptions reported in the media during and after this time. Explanations for the police profile of personality types vacillates between attraction of specific personality combinations to police work (Colman & Gorman, 1982), selection processes choosing people with a particular personality trait set, and officers developing the police mind-set through socialisation (Bennett, 1984) and/or experience in the role (Fielding, 1988; Malmin, 2012).

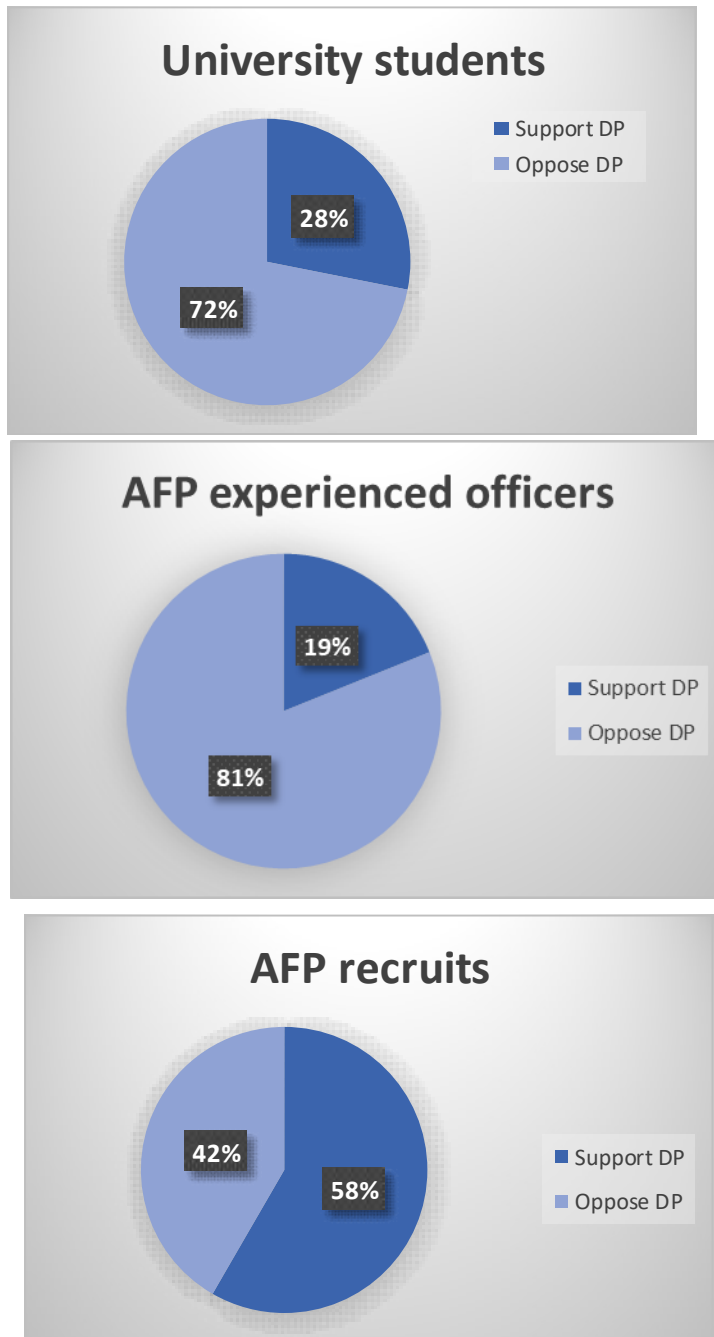
Importantly, selection testing using personality traits has a long history in predicting job performance. Social scientists have repeatedly found that personality traits and emotions influence personal opinion and behaviour (Ellsworth & Gross, 1994; Robinson & Beaver, 2009), a finding that is relevant for police behaviour, police opinion regarding matters of public interest, and public opinion of police. Public opinion regarding police more generally impacts both the trust and compliance in the community, and therefore government confidence in police agencies, which in turn impacts funding for the number and type of applicants for police forces which has lasting effects for the police agencies and the broader community (Whetstone et al., 2006). The perception of police is therefore important to attract suitable applicants from a diverse range of the community to ensure that police reflect and represent the communities they serve (Whetstone et al., 2006) and as such the personality traits of police officers is an important consideration for all law enforcement contexts.

Research exploring the personality traits of police officers in the United States of America (US) found a correlation between some police traits and the personality traits of supporters of the death penalty (Hughes & Robinson, 2013), a highly emotive topic to many people around the world. This correlation is unsurprising when considering that the socio-demographics of people supporting capital punishment in the US are predominately male, white, and conservative (Worrall & Schmalleger, 2013), which is consistent with 2013 statistics regarding police officers in the US which was predominantly white (94%) and male (85%) (Hughes & Robinson, 2013). Similarly, the male to female ratio in the Australian Federal Police (AFP) as at 30 June 2019 was 76% male to 24% female, yet until now, Australian Police attitudes towards capital punishment and corresponding personality traits were unknown. Whereas once requirements for acceptance into policing as a career were a height-and-fitness prerequisite, changes in the last 2-3 decades have meant more focus on personality testing and a preference for tertiary qualifications (McCafferty, 2003; Semrad, Vanags, & Bhullar, 2012). Thus, the types of people attracted to and accepted into policing has also changed from those with a relatively low level of education (Colman & Gorman, 1982), limited travel and conservative views, to a (somewhat more) sex and culturally varied group of university graduates with more liberal and diverse views (McCafferty, 2003). Currently 67% of serving police officers in the AFP hold one or more tertiary qualifications; with a male/female breakdown showing a slightly higher percentage of women (69%) holding degrees than men (66%). What is unknown is whether this increase in police officer education and diversity is sufficient to change the 'police personality', and the perception of any police mind-set, or whether people from diversity groups who join the police adapt to the police mind-set and have-, or develop-, the personality traits of the broader policing group.

As part of a larger research project examining selection processes within law enforcement (Semrad, 2019), which was approved by Australian University Human Research Ethics Committees (2014/743 and S181227), police officer's ($N = 53$, 38 men) opinions were obtained regarding six, at times, potentially contentious questions. Two were closed questions seeking personal preferences for non-emotive topics, followed with 'why' or 'why not' questions to elaborate upon reasoning. Two questions requested personal opinions on topics which may be described as emotive, and two questions were open, seeking personal preferences for non-emotive topics which required descriptions. The closed-answer questions and scores (yes%: no%) included; Do you have a dog? (41.5: 58.5); Do you like to fly? (64.1: 35.9); Is circumcision child abuse? (22.6: 77.4); and Should the death penalty be used in Australia? (18.9: 81.1). While the ratio of positive and negative scores for five of the six questions were within the parameters expected (i.e., not more than 65% in either direction – see Appendix A for results regarding opinions on whether circumcision is child abuse) the responses for one of the emotive questions emerged with results which were inconsistent with findings for US police results (Hughes & Robinson, 2013); that is the majority of the AFP officers surveyed (81.1%) do not support capital punishment. Examination of the differences in opinion between sexes was also interesting with a higher percentage of female police officers being supportive of the death penalty (21.4%) than male police officers (18.0%).

Prima facie, the difference between Australia and the US police beliefs may be expected based on differing political and legislative positioning regarding capital punishment in the countries. However the Australian findings are also contrary to research regarding police opinion in the United Kingdom (UK) (Fielding & Fielding, 1991; Hughes & Robinson, 2013), which like Australia, is opposed to the death penalty. Interestingly, while the AFP officer findings are slightly different to the opinions regarding the death penalty of Australian university students (see Figure 1), they are *vastly* different to AFP Recruits (data from Semrad & Scott-Parker, 2020a; Semrad, Scott-Parker, Paterson, & McCann, 2018; Semrad, Scott-Parker, & Vanags, 2020). These findings put into question the currently-understood profile of personality traits of police, particularly AFP officers. Even more illuminating were the reasons the Australian police participants gave for their opposition (or support) of the death penalty. Prior to exploring these opinions, it is vital to understand the context of Capital Punishment in Australia and the collective understanding of the purpose of the death penalty.

Figure 1. Proportions of support and opposition for the death penalty (DP) for University students, AFP recruits, and AFP experienced covert officers (data from Semrad & Scott-Parker, 2020a; Semrad et al., 2018; Semrad et al., 2020).



Capital Punishment in Australia – History

The last execution in Australia was by hanging and took place in Melbourne, in the state of Victoria, in 1967. Capital punishment was formally abolished in Australia in 1973,

and in 2010 the passing of the *Crimes Legislation Amendment (Torture Prohibition and Death Penalty Abolition) Act* ensured that the death penalty could not be reintroduced anywhere in Australia's 6 states and 2 territories. The debate regarding the death penalty was reignited in Australia in May 1986 following a national survey by the Australian Institute of Criminology, which received 2,551 responses from people over the age of 14 years (Potas & Walker, 1987). Notwithstanding the timing of the survey (just four months after the brutal and widely broadcast kidnapping, sexual assault, and murder of 25 year-old nurse Anita Cobby by five men with previous convictions for rape and assault) the survey revealed that only 26% of respondents supported the death penalty for murder (Potas & Walker, 1987). In comparison, 17% supported the death penalty for 'serious' drug trafficking (Potas & Walker, 1987), a common practice in nations such as Malaysia. The low support rates for capital punishment in Australia, especially post a heinous and violent, widely-publicised murder, are indicative of Australian public opinion in the years following the abolition of the death penalty. Throughout the countries and jurisdictions which still employ capital punishment, the death penalty is restricted to certain crime types, such as drug importations (for example Australians Barlow and Chambers were hanged in Malaysia on 7 July 1986 for drug trafficking) (Potas & Walker, 1987), acts of terrorism, political or military offences, murders with a sexual element, acts of violence against children, or the killing of an emergency service worker (police, prison, ambulance, fire officer or medical persons) (Potas & Walker, 1987; Stinneford, 2018). Whilst associated with the highest penalty or punishment for crimes, the purpose and rationale for using the death penalty is still highly debated.

Capital Punishment and the Australian Federal Police – Procedural change

The AFP is Australia's national law enforcement agency with a community policing (uniform) role in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), a national role throughout Australia, and an international role in various locations overseas including London, England, Jakarta, Indonesia, New York, US, and Pretoria, South Africa. In April 2005, the AFP, who regularly and actively engage with international law enforcement agencies to detect, prevent, deter and prosecute transnational crimes (e.g., terrorism, human and drug trafficking, child abuse), came under great scrutiny for their role in an investigation which was referred to in the media as 'the Bali Nine'. The Bali Nine were nine Australian citizens who were arrested in Bali, Indonesia, in relation to their attempt to import heroin from Indonesia to Australia (Finlay, 2011). The location of the offenders' arrest meant that they were subject to the legislation and penalty of that country. In Indonesia the penalty for drug trafficking is the death penalty. This placed the Australian government and community's opposition to the death penalty, and the actions of the AFP which resulted in the arrest of Australians who were then subject to the death penalty, at odds, resulting in wide-spread condemnation of the AFP (Neighbour, 2010). This matter subsequently changed the way the AFP share information internationally.

Purpose of Capital Punishment

Numerous arguments are made by police and other proponents of the death penalty as the justification for taking a life. The most common reason is punishment, closely aligned with the concepts of retribution and/or justice. Supporters believe that the death penalty is

an atonement for crimes, often wrapped in religious ideology of the biblical taking ‘an eye for and eye’ for sinful behaviour, thereby perceiving offenders as people who should be shunned and hated (Fielding & Fielding, 1991). Historically executions took place in public to further reiterate the messages of condemnation and community education (Bandes, 2018; Stinneford, 2018). Notably, while killing the ‘perpetrator of evil’ is thought to provide closure for victim’s families (Hughes & Robinson, 2013), that is not always the case. Furthermore, history has shown the potential for judicial error through the tragic instances where individuals who have been convicted of crimes and put to death, or were on death row, were subsequently found to be innocent. Examples exist across continents in the UK (e.g., Timothy Evans; hanged in 1950 and pardoned in 1966), Australia (e.g., Edward Splatt, wrongly convicted of murder in 1978, released and pardoned in 1984) and the US (Ruben Cantu, 17 years-old at the time of the offence, was executed in 1993. Several people including the District Attorney have subsequently made statements which cast doubt on the conviction) (Dieter, 2016; Potas & Walker, 1987). While proponents of the death penalty could argue that current technology (DNA testing, increased video footage etc) has significantly reduced these errors, police officers in the US acknowledge that investigative errors may still occur and/or persist, and likely there will be an unknown representation of innocent people on death row (Hughes & Robinson, 2013). Even with this knowledge, a portion of police in Australia, the US, and the UK still support the death penalty (Fielding & Fielding, 1991; Hughes & Robinson, 2013; Semrad, Scott-Parker, & Nagel, 2019).

An alternative reason for not administering the death penalty comes from police and academics who have identified that in cases of terrorism, the death penalty may elevate the criminal to a martyr, encouraging others to act in a similar manner (McDonnell, 2004). In addition, in Australia, research pre-abolition identified that juries were less likely to convict for murder where the offender may be sentenced to death, preferring to err on the side of caution (Johnston, 1962) and thus avoiding contributing to another person’s death. In the Australian state of New South Wales, after the abolition of the death penalty, not only did the percentage of manslaughter verdicts rise, there was a commensurate reduction in the number of murder and manslaughter cases resulting in acquittals (from 26% to 17%) (Mukherjee, Fitzgerald, Jacobsen, & Walker, 1981). This finding is supported by more recent research from Tennessee, US, which showed a substantial reduction in support of the death penalty when an alternative sentence of life in prison without the possibility of parole is available (Moon, Wright, Cullen, & Pealer, 2000).

Another justification for the death penalty falls within the scope of general deterrence; that is, the death penalty deters people from committing crimes, and therefore, reduces crime in society (Ellsworth & Gross, 1994; Fielding & Fielding, 1991; Stinneford, 2018). This theme is often used in political arguments to support the death penalty with the general premise being that people who intend to take the life of another will consider the consequences of killing a person *prior* to the act. As a result the potential offender considers the consequences of their actions prior to engaging in homicidal behaviour, and likely abstains (Adinkrah & Clemens, 2018). The logical counterargument is that if would-be murderers considered the consequences, prior to their acts, then life in imprisonment would also serve as a likely deterrent. Instead in the Australian state of Queensland, the crime rate decreased in the decade following the abolition of capital punishment (Barber

& Wilson, 1968), and homicide rates across the whole of Australia in the two decades between (1965 to 1985) evidenced a decrease in the homicide rate per capita (Potus & Walker, 1987). Similar results were found in the US state of California, such that as death penalties decreased, so too did the murder rate (Hughes & Robinson, 2013). Moreover, the prevalence of homicides/murder rates across several countries including the US, indicates that murder rates have not risen with the abolition of capital punishment (Beyleveld, Bottoms, & Wiles, 1979; Forst, 1971; Rahav, 1983; Zeisel, 1976).

Another rationalisation for the death penalty is its ultimate and complete method of incapacitation to prevent recidivism. Life in prison may afford offenders the opportunity to reoffend, by escape and/or parole, while the death penalty removes all future risk including the risk of assault and/or murder of other inmates and/or corrections officers. However, research indicates that the death penalty is not more effective than life imprisonment (no parole) in preventing murders, and the majority of murderers are unlikely to murder again (Hughes & Robinson, 2013). The possibility of recidivism is often argued most strongly in cases of child abuse material (CAM) and child sexual assaults, where up to 94% of UK police believed that prison-based treatment is ineffective and carries too great a risk, and therefore long term imprisonment is an insufficient option (Fielding & Fielding, 1991). Finally, the concept of fair and just application has been the subject of numerous studies which found a racial and socio-economic bias to the sentencing of death penalty (Baldus, Woodworth, & Pulaski, 1990; Steiker & Steiker, 2016). Some researchers have suggested that whilst ever lawyers make money they will continue to fight for their client; however, when the money runs out, so too does the legal advocacy, meaning that minority groups are often disadvantaged (Fielding & Fielding, 1991).

Capital Punishment – Perceptions of Australian Federal Police

The comparison of police opinions with those of the community and other nations provides an insight into like-mindedness (or otherwise) of the groups with which police interact. A social system where community members and police hold similar ethics and values is likely to be more harmonious, supportive and conforming, than a system where police opinions are contrary to general public beliefs. Selection processes which identify and select-in valued traits (often related to opinions) and improve diversity of police applicants, also improve the goal of policing agencies which is to be valued and more representative of the community they serve. Similarly, ascertaining Australian police views and how those views compare with International policing agencies can inform the direction and methods of engagement. The topic of capital punishment is of particular interest as it is an emotive topic and related to law and order through legislation, policing, court systems and incarceration. However most importantly, capital punishment is primarily concerned with fairness and equity, which are also the basis of trust, good selection processes and good policing.

For AFP officers supporting or opposing the death penalty, fairness was identified most as the reason for their position. AFP officers *supporting* the death penalty, cited that some offences such as child abuse were so abhorrent that recidivist offending was an unacceptable risk (60%) as offenders cannot be rehabilitated, echoing the views of UK police (Fielding & Fielding, 1991). In the first author's professional experience, in

Australia, recidivism for child offenders is not uncommon. AFP officers *opposing* the death penalty (49%) referenced their lack of confidence in the judicial system to “get it right” (Participant 19) and the irreversibility and unacceptably high cost of error which could result in the death of an innocent person. Of those opposing the death penalty, some also spoke about the “barbaric” and “inhumane practice” of killing a person (Participants 1 & 47), with others explaining that their faith guides them to believe that “it’s not up to us to decide who lives and who dies” (Participants 28 & 37). Other AFP officers argued that not only does the death of the perpetrator fail to remedy the situation (e.g., returning a loved one), but if ‘justice’ is served by putting a murderer to death (as is the case in some states of the US) (Bandes, 2009), then the limited number of executions (especially outside of US states which formally allowed the owning of slaves) (Bandes, 2018) mean that justice is rare (Hughes & Robinson, 2013). Research examining the number of and contributors to deaths on California’s death row found that government-sanctioned execution ranked third, with old age ranking number one, followed by suicide (Steiker & Steiker, 2016). Other AFP officers took an alternate path with 27% of those opposing the death penalty indicating that “death is not an adequate punishment” (Participant 42), and that a far greater punishment would be for the offender to spend the rest of their days in prison. Other reasons for opposing the death penalty were that the death penalty does not impact on crime and is therefore not a deterrent (9%), which is supported by research noted above; that incarceration for life is cheaper than the death penalty (5%), and the impact that killing a person, even if sanctioned by the government, would have on the people tasked with the death process ($n = 1$). This point is especially topical with movements such as INVICTUS Games and Beyond Blue which bring more awareness regarding the impact of work by military and emergency services. Similarly, the impact on witnesses, including when the execution is botched which is more often the case with lethal injections (>7% of instances) than gas chambers (5.4% of cases), hanging (3%) or electric chairs (<2%) (Sarat, 2014). Despite this, on 27 July 2019, US President Trump announced that as of 1 August 2019, the Department of Justice would be resuming executions of inmates on federal death row by lethal injection after a 16 year hiatus (Risberg, 2019).

Personality traits and Capital Punishment

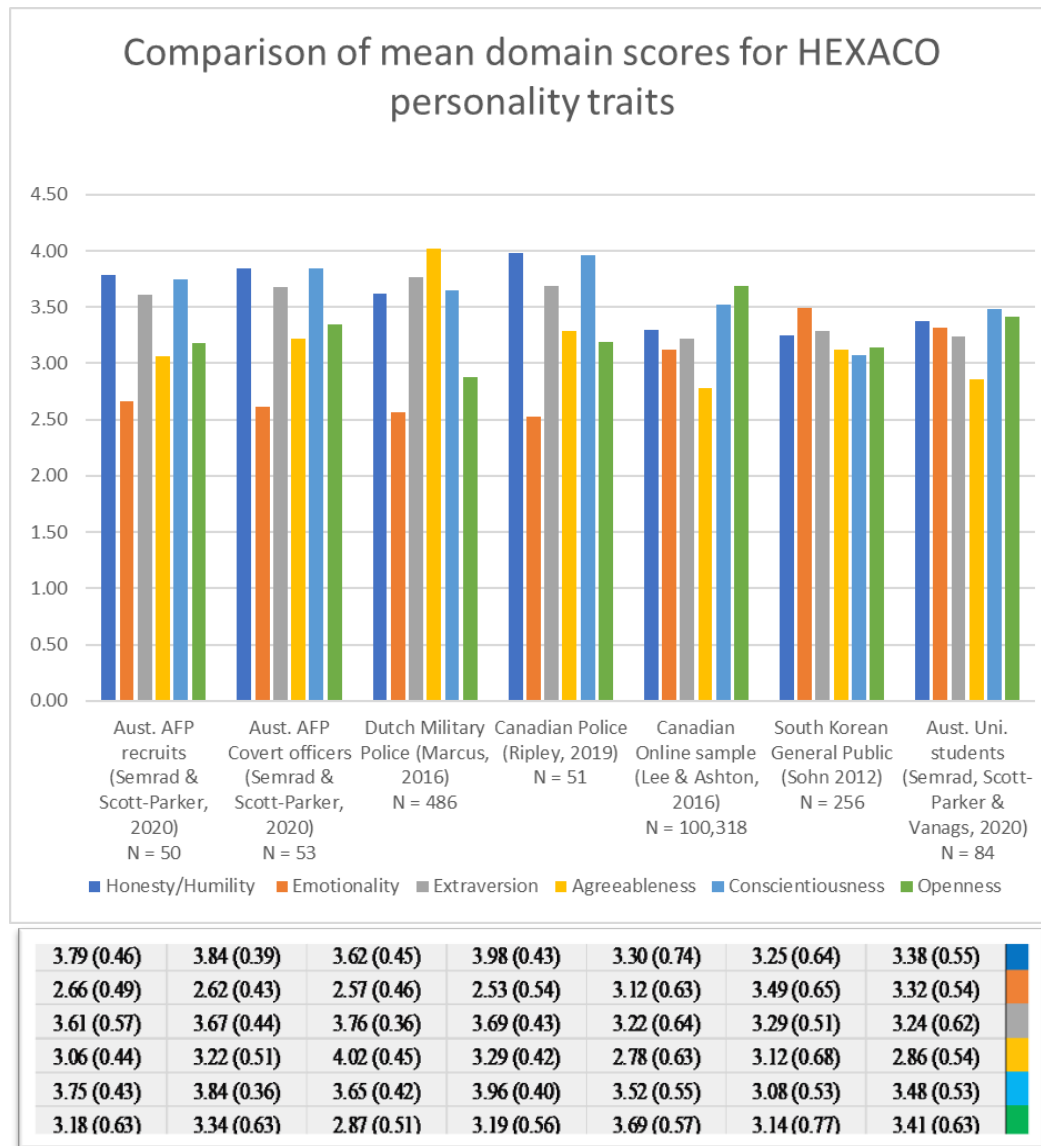
The differing opinions regarding the death penalty between Australian Police and other policing groups (Fielding & Fielding, 1991; Hughes & Robinson, 2013; Semrad & Scott-Parker, 2020a) warrants further examination. Police opinions could be representative of and highly influenced by the community they serve, or they could be related to the personality traits of the officers. Unfortunately, there is a dearth of research exploring the relationship between police personality traits and their opinion regarding the death penalty. Studies examining the personality traits of people in the general public and their death penalty opinions in the US indicated that although there was no significant difference between men and women’s opinions regarding capital punishment (Robbers, 2006; Stack, 2000), people (both sexes) who were likely to support the death penalty were higher in extroversion, neuroticism, and conscientiousness (Robbers, 2006). People who were less supportive of the death penalty, scored highly on empathy, compassion, and forgiving (Unnever, Cullen, & Applegate, 2005), while men who were less supportive of

the death penalty scored highly on openness to experience and agreeableness (Robbers, 2006; Unnever, Cullen, & Fisher, 2005). Research investigating personality traits and attitudes towards the death penalty in Canada found support for the death penalty was positively related to extroversion (McKelvie, 1983; McKelvie & Daoussis, 1982). Furthermore, while US research found support for the death penalty to be positively related to neuroticism (Lester, 1990), and negatively related to openness and agreeableness (Robbers, 2006), other predictors were age (i.e., older individuals were more supportive) (Robbers, 2006; Stack, 2000) and racially prejudiced Caucasians (Unnever & Cullen, 2005). Of interest here is the relationship between the personality traits of Australian police and their respective views on capital punishment.

Australian police personality traits

The data collected as part of the third experiment for a larger research project (Semrad, 2019; see also Semrad & Scott-Parker, 2020a; Semrad et al., 2019; Semrad et al., 2020), included a series of personality tests (i.e., HEXACO, Ethos/Credibility Scale; Sociability/Extraversion Scale and the Attractiveness, Politeness, Competence, Popularity and Extraversion Self-perception scale) for experienced AFP officers with covert policing experience. Results showed that the AFP officers who were opposed to the death penalty were higher in *social boldness* ($r(35) = .290, p < 0.05$) (a sub-score of the *Extraversion* branch of the HEXACO), are more *talkative* ($r(35) = .284, p < 0.05$) and more likely to *make a party more lively* ($r(35) = .338, p < 0.05$) than people who are supportive of the death penalty (the latter two scales are both measures of the Sociability/Extraversion scale). There were no significant findings for *age*, *neuroticism*, *conscientiousness* or any of the other measures applied. The findings do not support previous research findings, and regarding the personality trait of *Extraversion*, reported the *opposite* finding to previous research, in that people high in *Extraversion* were *opposed* to the death penalty. Perhaps governments are more likely to act on the presentations and views of their nation's extraverts, which would explain the correlation between *Extraversion* and Australia's position on capital punishment. This explanation is also consistent with the findings that AFP traits reflect Canadian and Dutch Police traits, which is unsurprising given the many similarities between the three nations generally and their stance on capital punishment specifically. Comparisons of the AFP officers' mean scores with the other policing group's mean scores in non-death penalty countries, AFP recruits, Australian University students and general population mean scores (Figure 2), indicated that all police groups were similar in that they were higher in *Honesty Humility*, *Extraversion*, *Agreeableness* and *Conscientiousness* than the general population samples. All groups were also lower in *Emotionality* than the general population sample groups, with all four policing groups scoring within the results obtained for the online and general population samples for *openness*. Unfortunately, HEXACO data for police employed in death penalty countries could not be located.

Figure 2. Comparison of mean domain scores for HEXACO personality traits for Australian, Dutch and Canadian Police, Australian police recruits, Australian University Students, a large Canadian online sample, and a South Korean general public sample (Data sourced from Lee & Ashton, 2016; Marcus, te Nijenhuis, Cremers, & Heijden-Lek, 2016; Ripley, 2019; Semrad & Scott-Parker, 2020a, 2020b; Semrad et al., 2019; Semrad et al., 2020; Sohn & Lee, 2012).



General Discussion

The four-way relationship between police selection, personality traits, police opinions and perceptions of police, led to the inclusion of the death penalty question in the larger research project (Semrad, 2019) examining selection processes for covert police. This paper identified a previously unknown inconsistency: AFP officers, unlike their US or UK

colleagues, overwhelmingly do not support the death penalty, yet AFP recruits, who are selected via similar methods, do support the death penalty. The paper explored the perceptions of police, the influence of personality in personal opinion, the purpose of the death penalty, and the relationship between a nation's legislation and opinions, before comparing personality traits of police and the general public across a variety of samples. The finding that AFP officers do not support capital punishment might be concerning when considering that most law enforcers in Australia do not have full confidence in the justice system they serve. Alternatively, this finding may represent the self-awareness, the possibility of error, and the change in cultural mindset for policing in Australia. Importantly the AFP officers' opinions reflect the opinion of the community they serve. As equal rights are increasingly ratified by legislation in Australia (equal pay, same sex marriage etc), perhaps the police mind-set is changing with Australian cultural perceptions and norms. It could also be that police who volunteer to participate in research are also more open to change or may have engaged more generally with global media regarding executions of innocent persons in judicial systems such as in the US.

The similarity between HEXACO scores for the police groups (see Figure 2) are expected from a selection process perspective, particularly the similarity between AFP officers and AFP recruits which are likely to have undergone comparable testing despite potential cohort effects. More broadly, as police selection processes world-wide are likely to be seeking similar attributes (e.g., self-discipline, patience, communications skills, attention to detail, reliability, resilience, tolerance) (Black, 2000; Whetstone et al., 2006), the consistency between personality traits is also expected. The broader range of scores for the policing groups compared to the general community and University groups is also expected given the sub-set of people tested (police) and the selection processes used to create the sub-set groups. Interestingly, the mean scores for *Agreeableness*, which are similar within the non-policing groups and similar for the AFP recruits, AFP covert officers and Canadian Police, is significantly higher than that found for Dutch military police. Also, *Openness* mean scores which are similar across the entire group, are again lowest for the Dutch military police. Both are likely to be indicative of the military mindset, i.e., the requirement to follow orders without question, with little consideration required for alternative methods, direction or possibilities.

When comparing HEXACO results to each group's opinion regarding the death penalty (where available), the difference between the two AFP groups (officers and recruits) becomes even more striking. Although the personality measures are similar, opinions regarding the death penalty are extremely different (officers 19% support; recruits 58% support). One explanation could be that the recruits saw the larger research project's deception testing, the question regarding the death penalty, and psychometric measures as a test of their loyalty and/or belongingness to their new policing 'family'. Alternatively, perhaps the death penalty questions reflect part of the groups' motivation to join law enforcement. Also of note were the similar scores regarding capital punishment opposition between Australian University students (28%) and experienced AFP officers (19%) which may reflect the changes in recruitment strategies (i.e., tertiary education, greater cultural diversity), or conversely may be a result of on-the-job experiences.

Related research examining relationships between personality traits and opinions is also of interest as it further informs the reader regarding values, beliefs and personality traits, in

this case, as they relate to police officers. Police opinions regarding circumcision being child abuse are of interest as the topic is similarly emotive to the death penalty for some people and results may be associated with less rigid and more forward-thinking and/or educated beliefs. Conspicuously, the debate regarding circumcision is very different as globally, it remains a legal activity and is performed by surgeons, albeit with considerably less frequency in contemporary society. Statistics reveal that while approximately 85% of men in Australia were circumcised in the 1950s, current estimates are 4% of male children being circumcised now, with at least one country (Iceland) debating whether the practice should be outlawed (Yosufzai, 2018). Notably circumcision is also a medical requirement in some instances, which may lead some to believe that although the procedure is somewhat 'optional', it is not abuse. Further, for police who are required to investigate and report the specific details of horrific and brutal reports of child abuse, circumcision may be so vastly dissimilar that the term 'abuse' is not perceived as appropriate for both acts. The broad support for circumcision not being child abuse may also be indicative of the older age group of the police (45% were in 35-44-year-old age group) and/or the specific set of police personality traits for the group tested (particularly given changes over time). Data analysis indicated that AFP officers who did not believe that circumcision was child abuse were higher in *fairness*, *perfectionism*, *creativity* and *competence* (all $p < .05$), while those who believed that circumcision is child abuse were more *sincere*, and more likely to make a *party more lively* (both $p < .01$). These AFP officers were also higher in *honesty-humility* and more *informed* (data from Semrad et al., 2019), which is illuminating when considering the current AFP entry requirements (e.g., education), the selection processes including personality traits, and the expectations of police officers in varying roles.

Overall, the ability of police to apply unambiguous law without fear or favour provides the general public with security and confidence, and selection into such positions of trust should be conducted with rigor, consistency and transparency. Notwithstanding the personality (and morals and values) of police officers, which, like anyone, are partially formed through life experiences, it is significant to note that police are likely to experience more-than-most in terms of seeing the best and worst of humanity. It is unknown whether innate personalities and/or their pre-policing experiences lead people to policing, and/or their personalities, once exposed to police duties, are impacted by their experiences; likely each are inextricably intertwined in their influence and impact. Regardless of the process of personality development, the relationship between personality traits and personal opinion is well-established and reaffirms the importance of personality traits in selection processes for employment and specifically specialist areas of policing, and the importance of public opinion regarding police.

The importance of the police image should not be underestimated as perceptions influence the public in terms of diversity of applicants, and government and community confidence, and therefore funding. Each police officer makes an impression regarding policing with every interaction. The lack of police from diverse groups becomes a type of self-fulfilling prophecy in terms of limited applications from people with diverse background. It is the recommendation of this research that more varied methods of recruitment should be explored to increase officer diversity (see Whetstone et al., 2006). Furthermore, future research should examine the HEXACO personality traits of police

forces in countries which utilise the death penalty to allow for further comparison and examination of the relationship between personality and police opinion. A longitudinal study regarding the opinions of the AFP recruits as they progress within their policing career may provide further insight regarding socialisation and experiences of police and the impact on their opinions, behaviours and personalities. Findings from such research can inform future selection and personal and professional development of officers around the world, and public opinion of police. In summary, this research identified the relationship between personality traits and opinion through exploring police attitudes regarding the death penalty. The findings were somewhat unexpected, and may allow for modification of police image from severe, authoritarian, and prejudicial, to honest, agreeable and conscientious, which more accurately reflects the modern Australian police officer and their view regarding capital punishment.

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