CITIZENS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS LOCAL OFFICIALS - FREQUENCY, PREVENTIVE MEASURES AND CONSEQUENCES OF AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR

Jelena Dujmović Bocka, PhD, Associate Professor
Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, Faculty of Law
Stjepana Radića 13, 31000 Osijek, Croatia
jdujmovi@pravos.hr

Danijela Romić, PhD, Senior Lecturer
University of Applied Sciences „Lavoslav Ružička" in Vukovar
Blage Zadre 2, 32000 Vukovar, Croatia
dromic@vevu.hr

Željka Vajda Halak, LLM, Senior Lecturer
University of Applied Sciences „Lavoslav Ružička" in Vukovar
Blage Zadre 2, 32000 Vukovar, Croatia
zeljka.vajda@vevu.hr

ABSTRACT

A safe working environment is one of the fundamental rights of workers, regardless of the type of job or employer. All previous research on workplace aggression has primarily focused on intra-organizational forms, while aggressive behaviour from external stakeholders (such as users or citizens) has been studied far less frequently, particularly in relation to public officials. Research findings indicate that citizen aggression significantly affects employees' overall well-being and health, their organizational commitment and performance. Public officials work in the public interest, follow the rules and cannot always meet citizens' demands and needs.
Under the influence of New Public Management, officials are expected to do more with fewer resources, leading to overwork, stress, and potentially declining service quality and trust in public administration. At the same time, citizens are becoming more demanding and better informed, while trust in public services is declining. Along with other classic predictors, these factors may contribute to increased citizen aggression toward public officials.
In this paper, the focus of research is on officials in local government units in Osijek-Baranja and Vukovar-Srijem counties. The questions posed in the research are: how frequently do citizens exhibit aggressive behaviour toward officials in local government units, what are the consequences of such behaviour for officials and what preventive measures have been implemented to prevent aggression?

To collect data, a survey questionnaire was created using Google Forms, containing seventeen questions, and was sent to respondents in October 2024. The collected data underwent qualitative and quantitative analysis using classical statistical methods. Relations were made between independent variables (such as gender, type and size of the local government unit, length of service, and job type) and dependent variables.

The results align with comparative research. The respondents report a high frequency of citizen aggression toward officials in local government units, with verbal aggression being the most common form. This type of aggression causes officials to feel moderately to highly distressed, yet a significant number of incidents go unreported. Additionally, many reported incidents receive no response. The most commonly cited preventive measure is the presence of security cameras.

Following the introduction, which highlights the importance of officials' sense of security for organizational efficiency, the second part of the paper analyses the existing legal framework based on Council Directive 76/207/EEC, Directive 2002/73/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council, and other documents of European social partners. Furthermore, the results of comparative research on the frequency and consequences of citizen aggression toward officials, their well-being and work performance in the member states of the European Union are presented. The third part of paper explains the research methodology, while the fourth presents and analyses the results. In the conclusion, the authors emphasize the need for further research on this phenomenon in order to reduce and prevent its harmful effects on officials and the local government units in which they work.

The scientific contribution of this paper is reflected in initiating a comprehensive discussion— previously non-existent in Croatia—on the causes and consequences of citizen aggression toward local officials. The practical implications include raising awareness of this phenomenon, which should lead to a more frequent reporting of citizen aggression and more appropriate organizational responses to these challenges.

Keywords: *local officials, prevention, stress, violence, workplace aggression*

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the last thirty years within a wider concept of workplace safety significant attention of professional and academic community, international organisations and legislators has been oriented towards safety of public officials at their workplace. One of its key indicators is the absence of any undesirable behaviour exhibited by the coworkers, employers, users of public services or wider public in general (citizens). Undesirable interaction can be expressed either by words or behaviour, or actual physical threats and violence. Special emphasis is placed on the importance of prevention of discrimination, female inequality and sexual harassment of women. The research conducted so far have mostly been oriented towards intra-organisational conflicts (among employees and employers), whereas significantly less focus has been placed on citizens themselves even though it has been proved that the largest number of affective behaviour originates from that group.[1] Research

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[1] Grandey, A. A., *Affective States and Traits in the Workplace: Diary and Survey Dana from Young Workers*, Motivation and Emotion, Vol. 26, No.1, 2002, pp. 31 - 55; Barling, J. Dupre; K. E., Kelloway, K., *Predicting Workplace Aggression and Violence*, Annual Review of Psychology, Vol. 60, 2009, pp. 671 - 692;

has shown that aggressive workplace behaviour (regardless who it is exhibited by) considerably influences the workers well-being, increases the risk of burn-out,[2] lowers work motivation, leads to emotional distraught and stress,[3] causes tension, anxiety and low levels of work satisfaction,[4] creates worry for personal safety.[5] Even if the individual has not directly been the object of aggression, but has merely seen or witnessed it on others, the consequences remain the same.[6] On the organisational level, the consequences are visible in low morale and work ethics, more frequent absence from work, high turnout rates[7] as well as poor quality of service providing[8] as a result of officials` sceptical attitude and loss of confidence in citizens.[9] When officials experience any kind of negative behaviour, they lose their

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Liegat, M. C.; Hensel, D.; Vogel, D.; Vogel, R., *Aggressions and associations: How workplace violence affect what public empoloyees think of citizens*, Public Administration, Vol. 102, Iss. 1, 2022, pp. 222 – 248.

[2]   Borst, R. T.; Knies, E., *Well-Being of Public Servants Under Pressure: The Role of Job Demands and Personality Traits in the Health-Impairment Process*, Review of Public Personnel Administration, Vol. 43 No. 1, 2023, pp. 159 – 184; Papavasilopoulou, K., *Dutch Local Government Employees at risk: The effects of public initiated aggression on local government employees' well-being. Do aggression practices and transformational leadership help?* 2023, available at:
[https://studenttheses.uu.nl/bitstream/handle/20.500.12932/45154/Research%20Project-%20Thesis%20-%20Konstantina%20Papavasilopoulou.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y], Accessed 10 December 2024.

[3]   Enosh, G.; Tzafrir, S. S.; Gur, A., *Client Aggression Toward Social Workers and Social Services in Israel – A Qualitative Analysis,* Journal of Interpersonal Violence, Vol. 28, No. 6, 2013, pp. 1123 – 1142.

[4]   Schablon, A.; Wendeler, D.; Kozak, A.; Nienhaus, A.; Steinke, S., *Prevalence and Consequences of Aggression and Violence towards Nursing and Care Staff in Germany – A Survey*, International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 15, 2018, pp. 1 – 18.

[5]   Hershcovis, S.; Barling, J., *Towards a multi-foci approach to workplace aggression: A meta-analytic review of outcomes from different perpetrators*, Journal of Organizational Behavior, Vol. 31, No. 1, 2009, pp. 24-44; Liegat *et al., op. cit.*, note 1, p. 235; Ngwimba, V. Y.; Chinyamurindi, W.; Dywili, M., *The role of incivility aggression on decent work: A local government sector case*, Journal of Local Govrnment Research and Innovation, Vol. 5, 2024, available at:
[https://jolgri.org/index.php/jolgri/article/view/197/423], Accessed 10 December 2024.

[6]   Dupre, K. E.; Barling, J., Dawe, K. A., *Harm to Those Who Serve: Effects of Direct and Vicarious Customer-Initiated Workplace Aggression*, Journal of Interpersonal Violence, Vol. 29 (13), 2014, pp. 1 – 23.

[7]   Enosh *et al., op. cit.*, note 3, p. 1132; Hershcovis, S., „*Incivility, social underminig, bullying…Oh My!*“: *A call to reconcile constructs within workplace aggression research*, Journal of Organizational Behavior, Vol. 32, 2011, pp. 499 – 519.

[8]   Lee, K. J.; Youm, J., *Effect of Citizen incivility on Self-sacrifice of Public service Motivation and Turnover Intention of Street-level Bureaucrats: Mediating Effect of Emotional Exhaustion*, Public Performance & Management Review, Vol. 47(6), 2024, pp. 1376 – 1398.

[9]   Moyson, S.; Van de Walle, S.; Groeneveld, S., *What do public officials think about citizens? The role of public officials' trust and their perceptions of citizens' trustworthiness in interactive governance*, in: Edelenbos, J.; Van Meerkerk, I. (eds.), Critical Reflections on Interactive Governance. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

motivation and desire to assist others which is the core of any public service.[10] The attention of the academic community has lately also been focusing on forms of deviant behaviour which cannot be identified as violence or disturbance due to their low intensity. This refers to any type of impolite and rude behaviour towards others, behaviour that breaks the rules of the standard social and/or workplace norms for which the term incivility is used. The term is more difficult to define since intra-organisational behaviours can be perceived as acceptable to one organisation whereas be regarded as completely unacceptable to the other.[11] Different forms of inappropriate low intensity behaviours of citizens towards the officials can also be referred to as mistreatment.[12] Research has shown that less intense unwanted behaviours identically affect the personal outcomes (have the same consequences on individuals) as do the more intense behaviours indicating they should therefore be prevented.[13] The majority of the so far conducted research has been focusing on specific services, which are considered high risk services, such as police, social services, healthcare and similar whereas very little research has so far been oriented on officials working in the units of local self-government.[14] In addition, in Croatia there have been records of research of frequency of aggression towards police officers and its consequences,[15] however, not a single paper has yet been published focusing on frequency and occurrence of citizens` aggression towards officials working in the units of local self-government. Thus, the primary motive of this paper is to initiate a scientific and professional discussion about the issue. Finally, it is to be added, that scientific researchers have proved that a significant percentage of participants has experienced at least some type of aggression, verbal attack being most frequent. Fischer et al. discovered that 50% of local officials in the Netherlands had experienced violence, *Liegat et al.* reported that only 13% of participants had not experienced any type of aggression, whereas *Schablon et al.* established that 94% of their participants had been exposed to verbal abuse in the

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[10] Guerrero, S.; Lapalme, M. E.; Bentein, K., *Employees' Reactions to a Citizen Incivility Climate: A Multilevel Multisource Study*, Review of Public Personel Administration, Vol. 44, No. 4, 2024, pp. 821 – 841.

[11] Andersson, L. M.; Pearson, C. M., *Tit for Tat? The Spiraling Effect of Incivility in the Workplace*, The Academy of Management Review, Vol. 24, No. 3, 1999, pp. 452 – 471.

[12] Kozjek, T.; Brezovar, N., *Citizens Mistreatment Among Public Servants in Social Public Services*, Danube, Vol. 13, No. 2, 2022, pp. 82 – 106.

[13] Hershcovis, *op. ci*t., note 6, p. 507; Lee; Youm, *op. cit.*, note 8.

[14] In this paper, the term „officials" refers to individuals who perform the administrative and professional tasks from the scope of activity of the bodies they work for within the local self-goverment units.

[15] See in: Kovčo Vukadin, I., *Napadi na policijske službenike: pregled aktualnih spoznaja*, Policijska sigurnost, No. 3, 2011, pp. 273 - 305; Capan, M.; Sindik, J., *Sociodemografska obilježja i viktimizacija kod policijskih službenika,* Časopis za kriminalistiku, kriminologiju i sigurnosne studije, No. 3-4, 2015, pp. 21 - 36; Borovec, K., Balgač, I., Gluščić, S., *Doprinos institucionalne podrške u smanjenju rizika radnog mjesta zadovoljstvu poslom policijskih službenika*, Hrvatski ljetopis za kaznene znanosti i praksu, Vol. 27., No. 2, 2020, pp. 819 – 855.

year prior to research.[16] It is especially important to highlight that the source of these affective behaviours originates from third parties.

Following the introduction, the second part of the paper provides insight into the legal framework which creates the foundation for normative organisation of protection and prevention against the citizens` aggressive behaviour towards the officials. In addition, it introduces comparative research analysing the citizens and users` aggression towards the officials. Moreover, in this part of the paper various forms of unwanted citizens` behaviours have been described and defined. The central part of the paper clarifies the methodology used in the conducted research, defines its aim and analyses the obtained results. The authors have used the final part of the paper to compare the research results with comparative research as well as to offer suggestions for future research and possible solutions of the issues.

2. LEGAL FRAMEWORK OF PROTECTION AGAINST AGGRESSIVE AND VIOLENT BEHAVIOUR OF CITIZENS (THIRD-PARTY VIOLENCE)

2.1. INTERNATIONAL AND EU LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Awareness of possible forms of aggression of citizens` towards the officials has been developed only recently, within the concept of protection against harassment, violence and discrimination. The beginning of legal regulation is found in several European Parliament Directives referring generally to harassment and discrimination.[17] Based on these Directives, social partners BUSSINESEUROPE, UEAPME, CEEP and ETUC signed in 2007 the Framework Agreement on Harassment and Violence at Work (hereinafter: the Framework). Partners signed the agreement in full awareness of the facts that violence and aggression can have rather unfavourable consequences for workers, that there is a necessity of raising awareness of all the stakeholders about this issue as well as the need to offer the common

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[16] Fischer, T.; Van Reemst, L.; De Jong, J., *Workplace aggression toward local government employees: target characteristics*, International Journal of Public Sector Management, Vol. 29, Issue 1, 2016, pp. 30 - 53; Liegat *et al., op. cit.*, note 1, p. 230; Schablon *et al., op. cit.*, note 4, p. 1.

[17] Directive 2000/43/EC implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin [2000] OJ L180, Directive 2000/78/EC establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation [2000] OJ L303, Directive 2002/73/EC amending Council Directive 76/207/EEC on the implementation of the principle of equal treatment for men and women as regards access to employment, vocational training and promotion, and working conditions [2002] OJ L269 and Directive 89/391/EEC on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health of workers at work [1989] OJ L183. Subsequently, the Directive 2006/54/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation (recast) [2006] OJ L204.

framework for finding suitable solutions to the issue at hand.[18] The aims of the document are focused on developing awareness of all the stakeholders (employers, employees and their representatives) about the issue of violence and harassment at work and offering precise framework for activities focusing on prevention and management of the discussed issues. The Framework defines violence and harassment as unacceptable behaviours of an individual or a group of individuals from which some can be identified and recognized more easily than the others depending on the form they occur in. It is clearly stated that the work environment itself affects the level of a person`s exposure to violence and harassment. The concept of harassment is defined as a situation in which one or more workers or managers, are repeatedly and intentionally harassed, are under the threat or humiliated referring to the work-related circumstances. Violence is present in case these persons are attacked in work-related circumstances. It is important to emphasize that this document refers exclusively to intra-organisational harassment and violence. The importance of the document lies, however, in its clearly set demands for employers who are thereby obligated to promote zero tolerance for these types of behaviour. Not soon after, in 2010, third-party violence and harassment (e.g. customers, clients, patients and members of the public in general) against the persons performing their duties at their workplace gains its attention among the European social partners[19] who mutually concur on common guidelines "Multi-sectoral guidelines to tackle third-party violence and harassment related to work" (hereinafter: the Guidelines 2010). In 2018, the Guidelines 2010 were additionally signed by two social partners representing the public administration sector[20] which implied that the scope of the Guidelines 2010 now referred to all the persons who could be harassed or violated on a work-related basis. Even though the Guidelines 2010 are not a legally binding act, the document still carries great significance due to its clearly defined terms and aims that focus on raising awareness of all the stakeholders about the importance of preventing harassment and violence as well as about the necessary prevention mechanisms. The Guidelines 2010 stipulates that

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[18] Framework Agreement on Harassment and Violence at Work, UEAPME – ETUC/CES, 2007, available at:
[https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B9RTV08-rjErYURTckhMZzFETEk/view?resourcekey=0-buzTan-zA3dlfJHzVf4TmmQ], Accessed 2 January 2025.

[19] The Guidelines 2010 was signed by two European trade union federations – the European Federation of Public Service Unions (EPSU) and UNI Europa – and six EU employer organisations, namely the European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE), the European Hospital and Healthcare Employers' Association (HOSPEEM), the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), the European Federation of Education Employers (EFEE), EuroCommerce and the Confederation of European Security Services (CoESS).

[20] Trade Unions' National and European Administration Delegation (TUNED) and European Public Administration Employers (EUPAE).

both employers and employees are obliged to ensure their own safety and as well as the safety of others within the work environment. It places particular emphasis on the fact that third-party violence and harassment (hereinafter: TPVH) pose a serious threat to the health and dignity of individuals, while also producing significant economic consequences for society, including increased absenteeism due to medical leave, diminished employee morale, and higher turnover rates. The Guidelines 2010 indicate that violence and harassment can take many forms, such as mental, psychological and verbal; they can occur as individual cases or repeated behaviours; they can vary from disrespect to physical assault; they can be caused by mental issues or be motivated by emotional reasons; they can strongly affect victim`s personality, dignity and integrity; they can occur at or outside work and they can be inflicted through modern information-communication technologies.[21] The aim of the Guidelines 2010 is to support all the activities of employers, employees and their representatives regarding prevention, diminishment and mitigation of third-party violence and its consequences. Social partners are aware of the fact that practical measures for prevention and management of work-related violence and harassment are yet to be developed. They emphasise that the measures should focus on three segments:

- raising awareness and understanding of third-party violence;
- expressing dedication of social partners for common work and development of good practice oriented towards prevention and management of these issues in order to diminish their consequences on health and well-being
- presenting the Guidelines 2010 to all stakeholders on all levels with the aim of identifying, preventing and coping with issues of work-related harassment and violence.[22]

In addition, in 2019 the International Labor Organisation brought the Violence and Harassment Convention (No. 190) (hereinafter: the Convention No. 190)[23] in order to further regulate this issue. The Convention No. 190 is the first international treaty acknowledging the right of everyone to a world of work free from violence and harassment. Article 1 of the Convention No. 190 offers the first international definition of violence and harassment in the world of work by stating that "violence and harassment" in the world of work refers to "a range of unacceptable behaviours

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[21] Multi-sectoral guidelines to tackle third-party violence and harassment related to work, available at: [https://www.epsu.org/sites/default/files/article/files/TUNED%20EUPAE%20sign%20off%20 guidelines%2017%20Dec%202018%20with%20signatures.pdf], Accessed 11 November 2024.

[22] Guidelines 2010, *op. cit.*, note 19.

[23] Violence and Harassment Convention (No. 190), [https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/nrmlx_en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE: C190], Accessed 15 February 2025.

and practices, or threats thereof, whether a single occurrence or repeated, that aim at, result in, or are likely to result in physical, psychological, sexual or economic harm, and includes gender-based violence and harassment". The Convention No. 190 emphasizes that it applies to all sectors, as well as to violence and harassment perpetrated by third parties. The member states are obligated to explicitly forbid violence and harassment; to adopt comprehensive strategies for implementing the measures necessary for prevention and violence management; to secure adequate tracking and sanctioning mechanisms; to ensure victim support and to develop appropriate tools for training of all the stakeholders on coping with harassment and violence. The European Parliament expressed their approval of the draft of the Council`s decision through which the member states are encouraged to ratify the Convention No. 190 whereby emphasizing that the European Union should promote ratification of all international conventions while at the same time taking further steps to ensure protection of employees in every environment including the digital.[24] The Convention has so far been ratified by 47 countries in total, 18 of which are European, the Republic of Croatia excluded.[25]

European public administration network designed a document (e-News) about the presence of threats, harassment and violence against civil servants. 26 European countries (including the Republic of Croatia) participated in its creation. According to the accessible data, these types of behaviour were most frequently reported (in order of frequency) in healthcare, police, justice department, working with illegal immigrants, correctional institutions system, social services, education and tax services. A considerable number of countries have no records at all about the issue, however the most frequent form is verbal violence. Models of assistance and prevention include various educations (risk management), education and tracking of the persons who have been exposed to violence, e-desks to prevent direct contact with users and protective equipment (alarm systems). Interestingly, not a single state has identified the presence of security personnel as a preventive measure. Several countries claim that according to their legislation, an attack on officials is regarded as a serious offence.[26]

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[24]   European Parliament, 2020/0011(NLE) Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190) of the International Labour Organization (ILO): inviting Member States ti ratify it, [https://oeil.secure.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/en/procedure-file?reference=2020/0011(NLE)], Accessed 15 February 2025.

[25]   International Labour Organization, Ratifications of C190 – Violence and Harassment Convention, [https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/nrmlx_en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:11300:0::NO:11300:P11300_IN-STRUMENT_ID:3999810:NO], Accessed 15 November 2024.

[26]   European public administration network, eNews, available at: [https://www.eupan.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/EUPAN-eNews-threats-and-violence-against-civil-servants.pdf], 13 December 2024.

According to the research of the European Services Workers Union, 85% of the victims of violence and harassment are female, while 64% claim that their sector has seriously or very seriously been affected by TPVH. Psychological violence and verbal threats are considered as the most frequent forms of violence, while physical violence occurs in 14% of the cases.[27] This document proposes several measures oriented towards prevention of unwanted behaviour including: dissemination of TPVH ban by placing written "no TPVH" signs within the spaces visited by third parties, reducing the number of situations in which an official is alone and isolated at work, professional training to avoid and cope with conflict, ensuring the process of reporting, anonymity of the process and similar.

During the period of observation of efficiency and implementation of the Guidelines 2010 among social partners, it was established that 80% of the participants believe that TPVH is an extreme and a rather serious issue, 42% that it has a very big or big influence on the quality of services while 70% of the participants had no idea that the Guidelines 2010 even existed. Similarly to previous research, this one has also demonstrated that women are more frequently exposed to TVPH than men, whereby evidence was found to support the existence of casual link between TVPH and the occurrence of type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular diseases.[28]

2.2. LEGAL FRAMEWORK IN THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA

The issue of workplace violence and harassment, especially if originating from third parties, does not receive adequate attention in the Republic of Croatia neither from the legislators nor from the academic community.

The Labour Act, regulates a general obligation of the employer to organise work in a manner that guarantees the protection of life and health of workers in accordance with special laws and other regulations.[29] Article 5 of the Occupational Health and Safety Act states that life, health and preservation of working capacity are values of particular social interest in the Republic of Croatia, and that occupational health and safety, as an organized and systematic activity, is a matter of

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[27] EU Cross-Sectoral Guidelines on Violence and Harassment at Work, VS/2021/0041, [https://www.uni-europa.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2023/11/EU-Cross-Sectoral-Guidelines-on-Violence-and-harassement-at-work_Official.pdf], Accessed 11 November 2024.

[28] The research was conducted within the social partners project in autumn 2021 and spring 2022 invoving participants from 165 institutions and organisations according to: Pillinger, J., *The role of social partners in preventing third-party violence and harassment at work*, available in: Third-party violence and harrasment, [https://www.thirdpartyviolence.com/], Accessed 31 January 2025.

[29] Article 28 of the Labour Act, Official Gazette number 93/2014, 127/2017, 98/2019, 151/2022, 64/2023.

public interest. Article 51 of the same Act proscribes that the employer is obliged to implement stress prevention at work or in relation to work in order to minimize the employee's need to overcome difficulties of long-term exposure to intense pressure and to eliminate the possibility of impairing the employee's work efficiency and of the deterioration of his condition. If there are indications of stress at work or in relation to work, the employer is obliged to pay special attention to, among other things, exposure of employees to violent behaviour.[30] These regulations are evidently quite general therefore implying questionable quality of mechanisms of prevention and protection against violence and harassment at work. The right of officials and employees in the units of local and regional self-government (hereinafter: local officials) for protection against threats is defined in Article 31 of the Act on Civil Servants and Employees in Local and Regional Self-Government.[31] Local officials are entitled to protection against threats, attacks and other forms of imperilling while performing their service or in relation to their service. The protective measures are organized by the chief of the administrative body for officials, and by the executive officer for the chief of administrative body. By introducing the Act on Amendments to the Criminal Code in 2019, our criminal legislation expanded the criminal protection of official persons working on positions of public interest or in public services (Article 315.b).[32] According to this article, whoever, by force or threat of immediate use of force, prevents an official from performing an official act falling within the scope of his authority or, by using the same means, coerces him to perform an official act shall be punished. In addition, whoever, in the course of committing the criminal offense, maltreats an official, inflicts bodily injury upon him or threatens to use a weapon shall also be punished. When applying this regulation, each individual case is to be assessed separately to determine whether the person had been performing public service or an official act within one`s authority since there are no legal definitions of the mentioned terms. Local officials should definitely be acknowledged as persons performing a service of public interest. Another disputable question refers to the fact that there are no grounds for a qualified criminal offense if the force or threat against a person is inflicted while the person is not performing their service (e.g. while having a break, in the admission rooms, in the process of arriving to or leaving from work and similar) or when there is no intent to prevent a person form

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[30] Occupational Health and Safety Act, Official Gazette No. 71/2014, 118/2014, 154/2014, 102/2015, 94/2018, 96/2018.
[31] Official Gazette No. 86/2008, 61/2011, 4/2018, 112/2019.
[32] Criminal Code, Official Gazette No. 125/2011, 144/2012, 56/2015, 61/2015, 101/2017, 118/2018, 126/2019, 84/2021, 114/2022, 114/2023, 36/2024.

performing an act.[33] That would mean that the threat and/or physical assault on an official in their office while doing their job (object which is not related to the perpetrator) cannot be perceived as an assault against an official person, but may only be prosecuted as a general criminal offense against life and health, or against personal freedom, depending on the consequences. This is obviously not synchronized with the Guidelines 2010 where it is explicitly stated that regardless of the official`s activity at the moment of TPVH, safety at and outside work has to be ensured, as long as harassment or violence occurred due to work-related issues.

3.   THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Human aggression is every behaviour oriented towards another individual with the intent of inflicting damage to that individual. The perpetrator has to be convinced that the exhibited behaviour will damage someone, while the other person has a motive to avoid this type of behaviour.[34] This means that causing damage accidentally is not perceived as aggression. On the other hand, according to the research results obtained by Dupre et al., indirect aggression, even though not consciously oriented toward a particular individual and without the intent of damaging the same individual, has the exact same unwanted consequences. Therefore, they proposed the definition of aggression to be changed by including indirect aggression in its scope.[35] Violence is aggression in its extreme form, every violence is therefore aggression, however, not every aggression is violence.[36] Considering the aim one wishes to achieve through aggressive behaviour, aggression can be hostile or instrumental. Hostile aggression is unplanned, impulsive, a furious response to a provoking event (which does not have to be a real provocation) and the only aim is to cause damage to someone. Instrumental aggression, on the other hand, is premeditated, focused on achieving other benefits for the perpetrator, whereby the act of inflicting damage to the victim only represents the means for achieving another goal.[37]

The danger of violence and harassment is not only immediate (in inflicting damage and having consequences on the victim`s health and work) but also affects the forming of long-term behavioural patterns. In an attempt to explain the causes leading to

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[33]   Maršavelski, A.; Juras, D., *Kritička analiza prijedloga pete novele Kaznenog zakona,* Hrvatski ljetopis za kaznene znanosti i praksu, vol. 26, No. 2, 2019, pp. 529 – 559.

[34]   Bushman, B.J.; Anderson, C.A., *Is it time to pull the plug on the hostile versus instrumental aggression dichotomy?* Psychological Review 108, 2001, pp. 273 – 279; Barling *et al., op. cit.*, note 1.

[35]   Dupre *et al., op. cit.*, note 6, p. 13.

[36]   Anderson, C. A.; Bushman, B. J., *Human Aggression*, Annual Review of Psychology, Vol. 53, No. 1, 2002, pp. 27 – 51.

[37]   *Ibid.*, p. 29.

aggressive behaviour, theoretics have defined five possible theories, two of which are particularly interesting to analyse - the Social Learning Theory and Social Interaction Theory. According to the first one, people acquire violent and aggressive behaviour as any other type of behaviour, by learning from direct experience or observing behaviour of others. Every violent or aggressive behaviour is thus a potential pattern leading to the same type of behaviour.[38] The research among the Dutch police officers has shown that the police officers who have experienced more aggression have less patience and apply force more frequently when compared to the police officers who have not been a target of aggressive behaviour.[39] According the Social Interaction Theory individuals display aggressive behaviour because they expect this to be the easier way of achieving the wanted effect, they consciously choose aggression since they expect it to be the means of accomplishing a desired social influence.[40] A certain number of scientific research negate the possibility of explaining aggressive behaviour through theories but rather claim that aggression primarily occurs under the influence of external factors, which means in situations individuals interpret as provoking.[41] Belonging to a certain social class with emphasis on difficult living conditions, have been analysed as possible predictors of aggressive behaviour. However, the research conducted by Chen et al. confirmed that these differences are not crucial to occurrence of aggression.[42] Discontent with the official`s performance is certainly an important trigger of aggression, even though discontent is a subjective experience and does not have to be linked to a specific situation.[43] Taking female physiological traits into consideration, it is to be expected that women are more frequently targets of aggressive behaviour.[44] However, it has also been proven that

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[38]   Anderson *et. al.*, *op. cit.*, note 35, pp. 31 - 32; Dupre *et al.*, *op. cit.*, note 6, p. 4.

[39]   van Reemst, L.; Fischer, T.; Weerman, F., *Aggression Against Police Officers and Behavior Toward Citizens: Reciprocal Influence or Common Causes?* Frontiers in Psychology, Vol 13, 2022, pp. 2 – 10.

[40]   Anderson *et. al., op. cit.*, note 36, pp. 31 – 32.

[41]   Those factors can be emotionally motivating factors of aggression (anger), cognitive information factors (interpretation of situations and the acquired information from the environment), social factors (personality traits and characteristics of the person who is provoking) and situational factors of an aggressive response (intensity of emotional excitement at the moment of provocation), according to: Paušek, K.; Bračić, M.; Paušek, D.; Sindik, J., *Čimbenici koji djeluju na pojavu agresivne reakcije – mogućnosti prevencije?* Hrvatski časopis za javno zdravstvo, Vol. 13, No. 49, 2017, pp. 115 – 118.

[42]   In the cited paper the authors list different research that have shown that persons of lower social status might be aggressive since there are real threats to their living conditions. They live in unpredictable and unorganized relations, have significantly less financial and social resources to manage conflicts at their disposal. On the other hand, some authors describe persons of higher social status as more arrogant, narcissistic and envious which leads to the possibility of showing aggression more intensely. More in: Chen, B.; Zhang, C.; Feng, F.; Xian, H.; Zhao, Y., *The association between social class and aggression: A meta-analytic review*, Social Science & Medicine, Vol. 340, 2024.

[43]   Lee *et al., op. cit.*, note 8, p. 1394.

[44]   Liegat *et al., op. cit.*, note 1, p. 234.

they are more likely than men to perceive certain bahavior as aggresive [45] and, as a result of the aggression they experience, may themselves exibit intolerance, even aggression, toward citizens.[46] One of the most challenging factors for public officials is the contact with citizens, officials who work in positions that do not involve direct contact with citizens are less exposed to direct aggression and physical violence.[47] Other situational risks involve night work, field work or working alone.[48] An additional consequence of the victimization of officials is the appearance of secondary victimization, as the official's actions are scrutinized and assessed, with an emphasis on determininig to what extent the officials are „responsible" for the experienced aggressive behaviour.[49]

As has been mentioned earlier, some occupations are more exposed to aggressive reactions than the others. The aim of this research is TPVH against the officials employed in units of local self-government (hereinafter: ULS). What is specific about this proffesion lies in the fact that officials work in the public interest, are required to comply with legal norms, and cannot always fully satisfy the wishes and needs of citizens or treat them as „queens and kings", as may be the case in private enterprises.[50] Due to reforms influenced by the New Public Management ideas, citizens have been losing their trust in administration, which can also be a trigger for aggressive behaviour.[51] However, for a proper implementation of principles of good management, the officials` trust in citizens is of outmost importance, however, it is on a constant decrease due to the TPVH.[52] Officials are trapped in a magic circle: attempting to deal with the consequences of the New Public Management reform they are expected to form an open and collaborative relationship with the citizens, while on the other hand, it is rather challenging to form this type of a relationship with citizens who are untrustworthy and aggressive towards the officials. In Fukuyama`s words, trust is the expectation which appears within a community and demands fair, adequate and collaborative behaviour based on

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[45] Anton, C.; Grueso - Hinestroza, M. P.; Espinosa, J. C.; Turc, M., *Workplace aggression, wellbeing, and job satisfaction: The specificity in border police organizations*, Frontiers in Psychology, Vol. 13, 2022, pp. 1 – 13.

[46] van Reemst *et al., op. cit.*, note, 38, p. 8; Liegat *et al., op. cit.*, note 1, p. 234.

[47] Liegat *et al., op. cit.*, note 1, p. 225; Grandey, *op. cit.*, note 1, p. 48.

[48] Fischer *et al., op. cit*, note 27, p. 32.

[49] Kovčo; Vukadin, *op. cit.*, note 14, p. 274.

[50] Kozjek *et al., op. cit.*, note 12, p. 83.

[51] Van de Walle, S., *New Public Management: Restoring the Public Trust through Creating Distrust*? In: Christensen, T.; Laegreis, P. (eds), Ashgate Research Companion to New Public Management, Aldershot: Ashgate; Raaphorst, N., Van de Walle, S., *Trust in and by public sector*, in: Searle, R.; Nienaber, A.; Sikin, S. (eds.), Routledge Companion to Trust, London: Routledge, pp. 469-482.

[52] Moyson *et al., op. cit.*, note 9, p. 4.

common norms of the community.[53] Mutual trust depends equally on everyone, officials who should interpret legal regulations in a way reflecting real life needs and the citizens who should show respect to officials.[54] The officials` job description is becoming more and more complex due to numerous external factors, more demanding citizens` requests in combination with the pressure of achieving excellent results while enforcing cost-saving measures and undergoing organizational restructure.[55] Officials have less and less authority, they are expected to do more work with less resources, whereas there are no alternative service providers in case citizens are not satisfied with their performance.[56] Local units represent the most visible level of authority to citizens and are considered to contribute sigificantly to the image and credibility of public administration. Local officials operate close to the citizens and have frequent immediate contact with them while dealing with the issues strongly affecting their well-being. According to the research conducted in the Netherlands, 52,3% of local officials has been exposed to verbal aggression, 17,3% has been threatened to and 8,5% has experienced physical violence.[57] These results show a worrying tendency and need to be thoughtfully considered. The most important thing is to make officials aware that violence and aggression are not a constituent and acceptable part of their work. Officials are required to report every such experience, an appropriate response is required.[58]

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

There are various forms of aggression, however, its assessment is challenging due to it being subjectively interpreted. When assessing aggression, it is possible to rely on the following criteria - the frequency of occurrence (how frequently it occurs, most often by self-assessment method) and its severity (physical force being the most severe form)[59] both of which have been used for the purposes of this research.

[53] Van de Walle, S.; Lahat, L., *Do Public Officials Trust Citizens? A Welfare State Perspective*, Social Policy & Administration, Vol. 51, No. 7, 2017, pp. 1450 – 1469.

[54] Pečarič, M., *Be Attentive to Public Employees: They Are the Source of Mentality and Health of Public Administration*, in: Azevedo, G.; Oliveira, J.; Marques, R. P.; Ferreira, A. (eds.), Tools, Strategies, and Practices for Modern and Accountable Public Scector Management, IGI Global Scientific Publishing, pp. 1 – 40.

[55] Borst *et al., op. cit.*, note 2, p. 160.

[56] Tummers, L.; Brunetto, Y.; Teo, S. T. T., *Workplace aggression: Introduction to the special issue and future research directions for scholars*, International Journal of Public Sector Management, Vol. 29, No. 1, 2016, pp. 2 – 10.

[57] Fischer *et al., op. cit.*, note 27, p. 47.

[58] Papavasilopoulou, *op. cit*, note 2, p. 54.

[59] van Reemst, L.; Jongerling, J., *Measuring and Modeling Exposure to External Workplace Aggression in Three Types of Emergency Responders*, Journal of Interpersonal Violence, Vol. 36, No. 17-18, 2021, pp. 7978-8003.

For the purposes of collecting data, an anonymous voluntary questionnaire was prepared and sent by e-mail to the participants. There were certain difficulties in the process of gathering potential participants` e-mail addresses since officials` e-mail addresses are not always publicly available. A link for filling out the Google form was sent to all the officials whose e-mail addresses were publicly available. In cases where e-mail addresses were not available, an official letter was sent to the official e-mail addresses of the ULS along with a polite request to forward the questionnaire to the officials. The data was collected during October 2024 in all the ULS in Osijek-Baranja and Vukovar-Srijem counties (there were 73 ULS, 12 cities and 61 municipalities in total). The questionnaire contained 17 mixed type questions, whereby 4 questions allowed multiple answers. The first five were general questions to identify the participants and their ULS (type (city or municipality), number of residents in the ULS, participant`s gender, length of work experience in the ULS, type of workplace, participant`s education and occupation). One question referred to reasons why citizens had been dissatisfied, two questions were about the frequency and types of the experienced aggression, one question was about the feelings triggered by the experienced aggression. Three questions referred to the frequency of reporting aggressive behaviours and the reaction of the supervisors, while four questions investigated the preventive measures against TPVH. In the final part there was an open-ended question in which participants offered their own suggestions for improvement of the officials' safety at their workplace. 106 participants answered the questions from the questionnaire, however, the participants who had not had previous experience with aggression were excluded from the second part of the questionnaire which referred to frequency and types of aggression, and the supervisors` reactions. The gathered data was processed by descriptive statistical method and qualitative and quantitative analysis was conducted along with the description of the relation between the dependent and independent variables. Independent variables were gender, size of the ULS, length of participants` work experience and type of participants` workplace.

5.   RESEARCH RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Majority of participants are officials employed in cities (76,4%), even though ULS constitute only 16,4% of the sample. An approximately equal number of participants work in ULS with 5.000 to 10.000 residents (34,9%) and more than 10.000 residents (34,9%), while only 5 cities form the total of 73 ULS have more than 10.000 residents, whereas 78,38% ULS have less than 5.000 residents.[60]

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[60]   Source: author`s interpretation based on the data provided by the Croatian Bureau of Statistics, Census 2021, available at:
[https://podaci.dzs.hr/media/bz5hplcj/gradovi-u-statistici.xlsx], Accesssed 27 January 2025.

Most of the participants are female (67%), the largest number of participants have been working in the ULS for less than 10 years (57,5%) and have university education ISCED level 7 (54,7% - five year professional study or college study), whereby chiefs of administrative bodies represent 17,9% of the total number of participants.

**Chart 1.** Frequency of citizens` aggressive behaviour
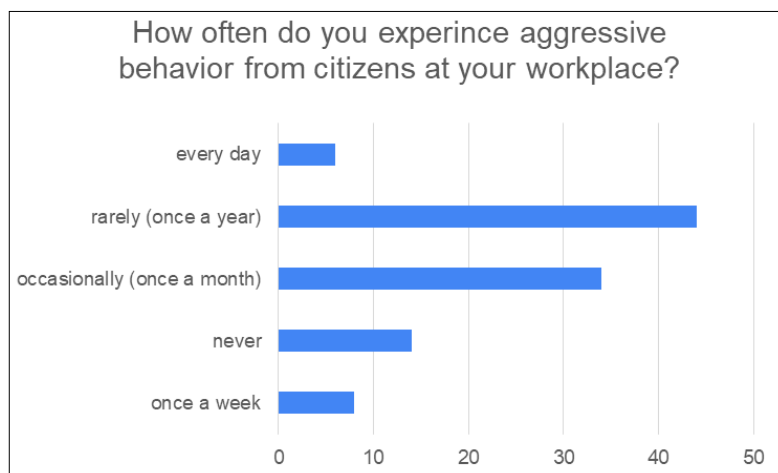
Source: authors` interpretation

The research results regarding the frequency of aggressive behaviour of citizens towards the officials in ULS are shown in Chart 1. Only 13,2% of participants have never been exposed to aggression, while the largest number of participants (41,5%) have rarely been exposed to it. Considering that comparative research indicates that women and persons with shorter work experience are likely to experience aggression more frequently, Chart 2. shows the relation between the self-assessed experience of aggression, gender and length of work experience in the ULS. The length of work experience is shown at the bottom of the table presented in five-year spans (e.g. <5 – less than 5 years).

Chart 2. Relation between work experience, gender and experienced aggression
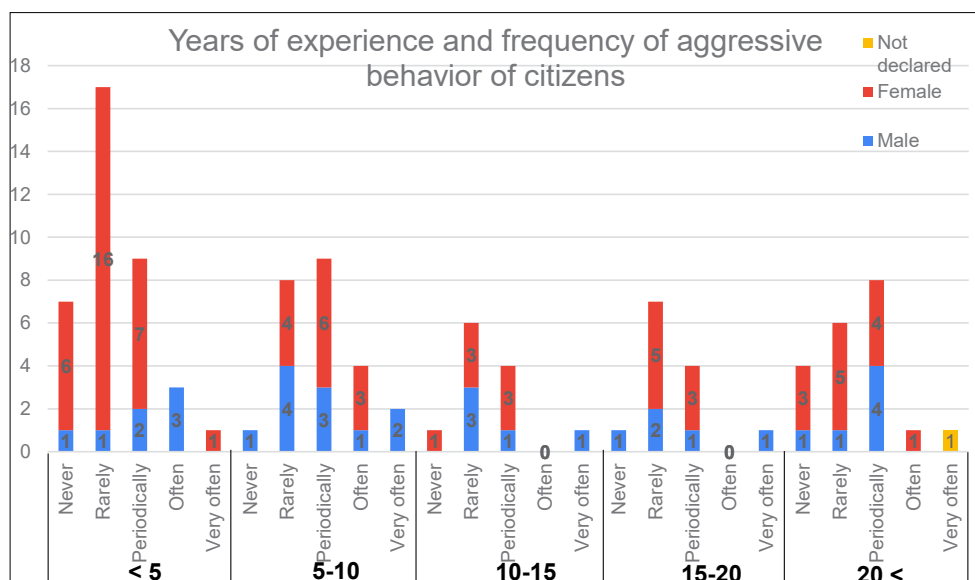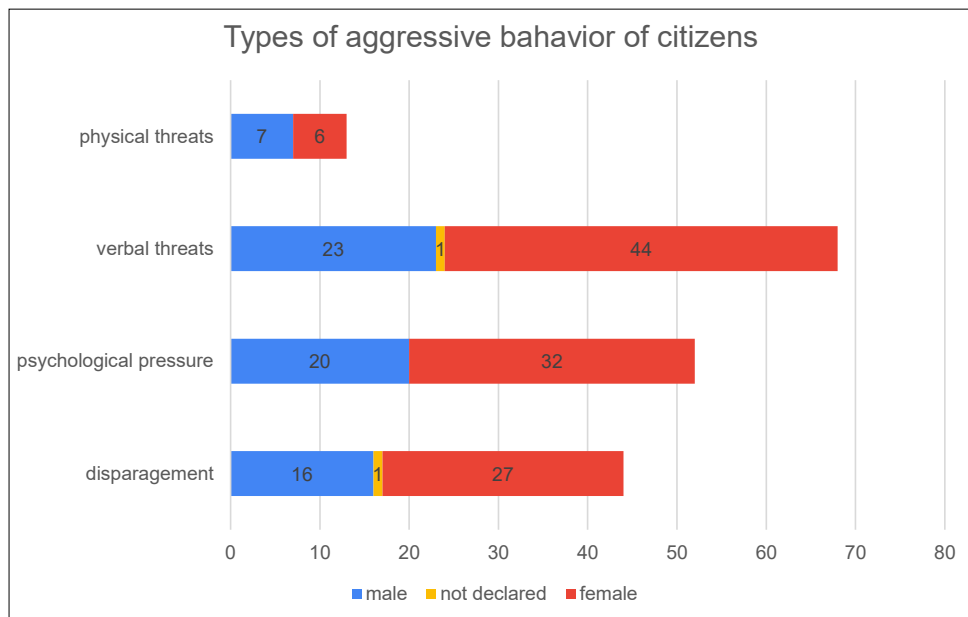

Source: authors` interp1retation

From Chart 2., we can see that the highest number of women who have been working for less than 5 years in ULS reported experiencing some form of aggression, which is expected given the general characteristics of our sample. The results, however, do not undoubtedly offer the conclusion that the experience of aggression is linked to gender or length of work experience. It is evident that an equal number of men and women working longer than 20 years claim to have on occasion experienced aggression, as is the case with persons working between 10 and 15 years who have rarely experienced aggression. Taking into consideration the fact that the number of women prevails in the participant sample, it can be concluded that the experienced aggression is not connected neither with gender nor the length of work experience in the ULS.

Participants who answered the question whether they had experienced aggression with a negative answer, did not answer the questions from the second part of the questionnaire. 92 participants answered the question about the type of aggression they had experienced. This question allowed multiple answers since one form of aggressive behaviour is frequently followed by other types as well. According to the results, a high 73,9% of participants had experienced verbal threats, 56,5% had been exposed to psychological pressure, 47,8% had been disparaged, while 14,1% had experienced physical threats. Chart 3. illustrates the distribution of answers about the types of experienced aggression considering the participants`

gender. Having in mind that most participants are female, we can conclude that men experience physical threats more frequently than women, while there are no indications of significant difference according to gender for other types of aggressive behaviour.

Chart 3. Illustration of types of experienced aggression based on the participants` gender

Types of aggressive bahavior of citizens

Source: authors` interpretation

Aggressive behaviour can evoke different emotional responses based on which the participants assess whether to activate the existing protective measures or not. From the total number of participants who had experienced a particular form of aggression, only 35,9% or 33 participants had reported the event to their supervisors. Chart 4. shows the emotional state of the participants after having experienced aggressive behaviour from citizens in relation to gender and the number of participants who had reported the event to their supervisors.

Chart 4. Emotional response after having experienced citizens` aggression in relation to gender and the frequency of reporting the events
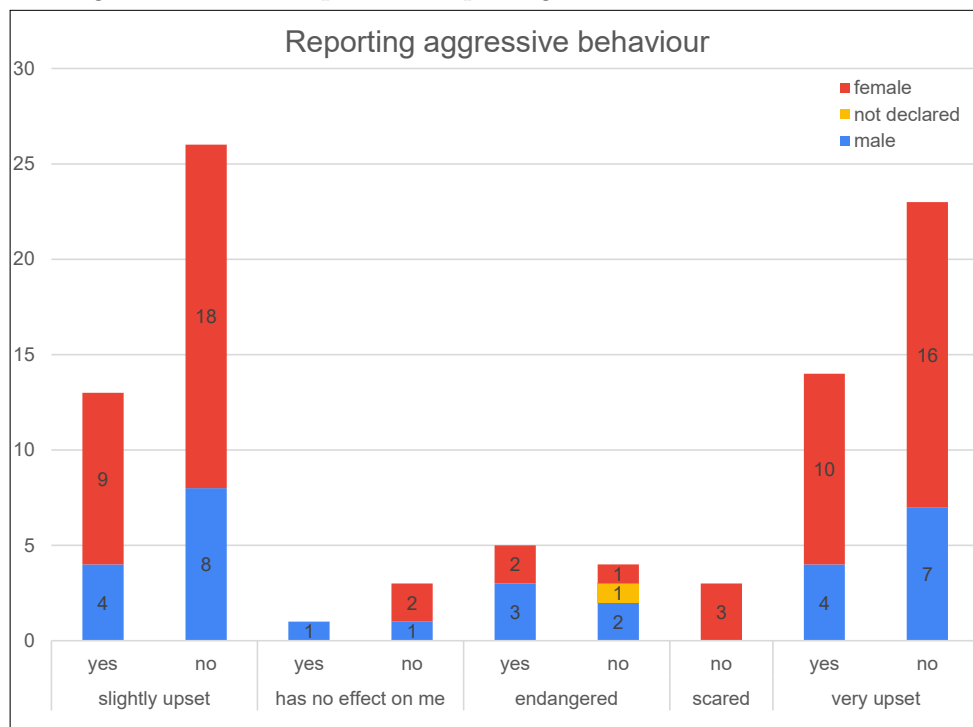
Source: authors` interpretation

It is visible from Chart 4., more than 40% of the participants felt very upset, 42,4% felt scared, while only 4,3% claim not to have been affected by it at all. There is no significant difference in experiencing aggression based on gender. The only difference related to gender is that only women answered that they felt scared. What is worrying is the fact that most of the participants, even those who felt very upset, regardless of their gender, did not report the unwanted event to the authorities, including the women who felt scared. The sense of fear or high levels of agitation considerably affect the employees` work and health and such situations should be urgently resolved. Thus, the question arises as to why have the officials not reported the aggressive citizens` behaviours? According to our research 42,4% of the participants think that their chief/mayor is completely uninterested in such matters, while only 25% of the participants think that their chief/mayor considers their work safety important and shows concern for them. This can definitely be seen as an explanation as to why the most officials do not report citizens` aggressive behaviours.

Chart 5. The relation between the reported cases of aggression and the mayor's/ municipal mayor's attitude

The relation between the reported cases of aggression and the mayor's/municipal mayor's attitude
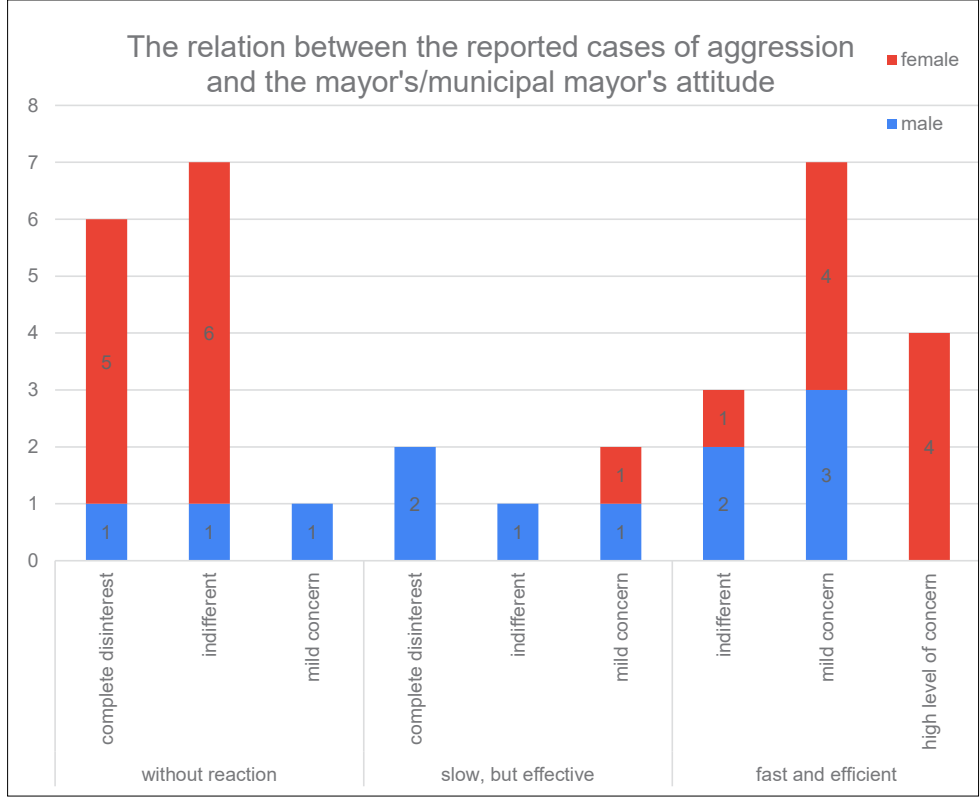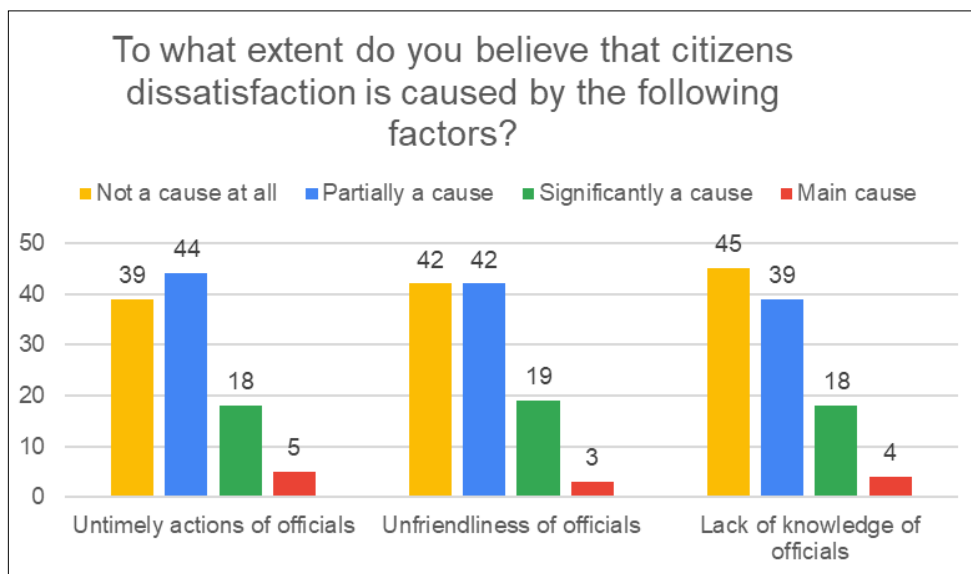
Source: authors` interpretation

Chart 5. illustrates that there had been no reactions of the supervisor in 42,42% of the reported cases, so it is no wonder that the participants think their chief officers are uninterested in the problem of citizens` aggression against the officials, regardless of the gender. 42,42% of the participants, especially women, consider that their supervisors show an appropriate level of concern due to their quick and efficient reactions. These results prove that there are mechanisms, sometimes even the supervisors` will and intention to react, but due to officials not reporting the events, nothing can officially be done. In the last question, the participants were asked to suggest certain measures their ULS could apply with the aim of lowering the frequency of citizens` aggression against the officials. 12,26% claim that education of the chiefs about the importance of this topic and their stronger support in these types of situations would be considered an appropriate measure. Moreover, 6 participants say that the problem of citizens` aggression could be handled when the justified reasons for citizens` discontent would be decreased, such as prioritiz-

ing the cases based on the connections and other forms of irregular work of officials. In addition, 4 participants think that citizens should be educated about the role and possibilities officials have at their disposal. These 10 participants indicate the problem of ULS as political organisations, clearly being themselves unsatisfied with their position and possibilities to do their work professionally and in high quality. Chart 6. illustrates the results to the question asked with the aim of gaining insight into the extent to which the participants believe the citizens` aggression is caused by internal organisational factors, in other words their performance. Participants were presented with three statements that describe possible reasons for citizens` discontent where participants needed to choose the extent to which they think the described situations trigger aggression of the citizens towards the officials. According to participants` opinions, none of the described behaviours is considered the main cause of the citizens` aggression, however, the results indicate that they greatly influence citizens. 58,49% of the participants believe that the citizens` discontent is partially or significantly caused by officials` non-systematic work and untimely actions, 57,55% think that the citizens` discontent is partially or significantly caused by officials` impoliteness and unfriendliness, while 53,77% claim it is due to officials` ignorance. Considering that the participants work as officials in ULS, the obtained results are rather indicative and worrying. It is evident that even officials are aware of the specific internal organisational issues which they alone cannot influence.

Chart 6. Reasons of citizens` discontent

Source: authors` interpretation

The questionnaire contained four questions about preventive and protection measures that are either on disposal or it would be good to have on disposal in the ULS from our sample. Chart 7. shows protection measures which ULS have on disposal where participants had the option of marking multiple answers. Most of ULS already have security cameras (60,4%), security guards are present in 26,4% of the ULS, while one third of the ULS have no protection measures at all. In only 5,7% of the cases participants marked the implementation of professional training for the officials to acquire skills necessary to resolve conflict situations. In the expert analysis and implementation supervision of the Guidelines 2010 of the European public administration network,[61] security guards are very rarely mentioned as preventive measures while on the other hand, various forms of professional training of the officials are considered a rather important tool in the process of preventing and resolving conflicts. Similar information is found in comparative research emphasizing the importance of education and professional training for empowering the officials and reducing the influence of inappropriate behaviour of the citizens on their emotions. The officials who participate in such educations, consider their organisation as just and fair.[62] 55,7% of the participants consider the existing protection measures to be insufficient, while 21,7% describe them as partially sufficient.

**Chart 7.** Available protection measures in ULS
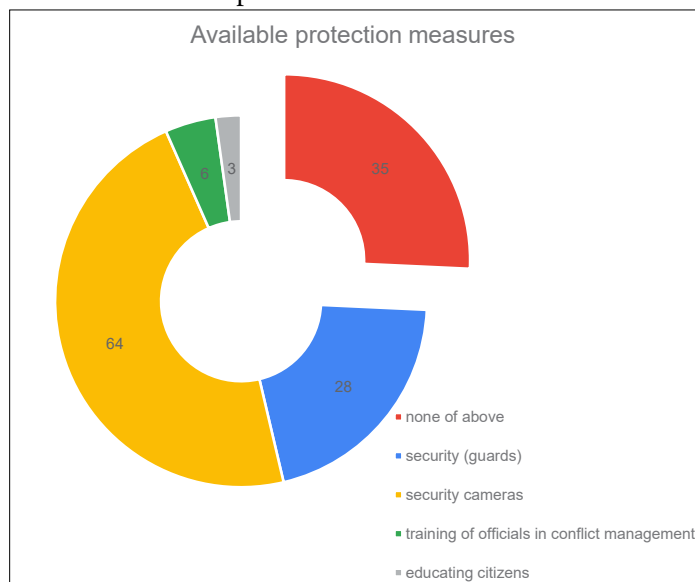
Source: authors` interpretation

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61   EUPAN eNews, *op. cit.,* note 24; Research, *op. ci*t., note 26.
62   Kozjek *et al., op. cit.*, note 12, p. 88; Kovčo Vukadin, *op. cit.*, note 14, p. 298; Capan *et al., op. ci*t., note 14, p. 34; Schablon *et al., op. cit.*, note 4, p. 11.

With the aim of gaining insight into officials` opinions about providing them even more efficient protection, the participants were asked to mark additional security measures illustrated in Chart 8. The results indicate that the largest number of participants believe that there is a need for additional physical protection measures (security guards and security cameras 72,65%). They are, however, aware of importance to participate in professional training in conflict management and to receive psychological support for coping with the consequences of the aggressive citizens` behaviour. The emphasis on physical protection measures implies that the focus is on resolving the aggression issues once they occur rather than attempting to prevent such unwanted occurrences from happening at all. The reasons behind these attitudes are only to be speculated about and are most probably the result of mistrust in other types of preventive measures.

Chart 8. Additional security measures necessary according to participants` opinions
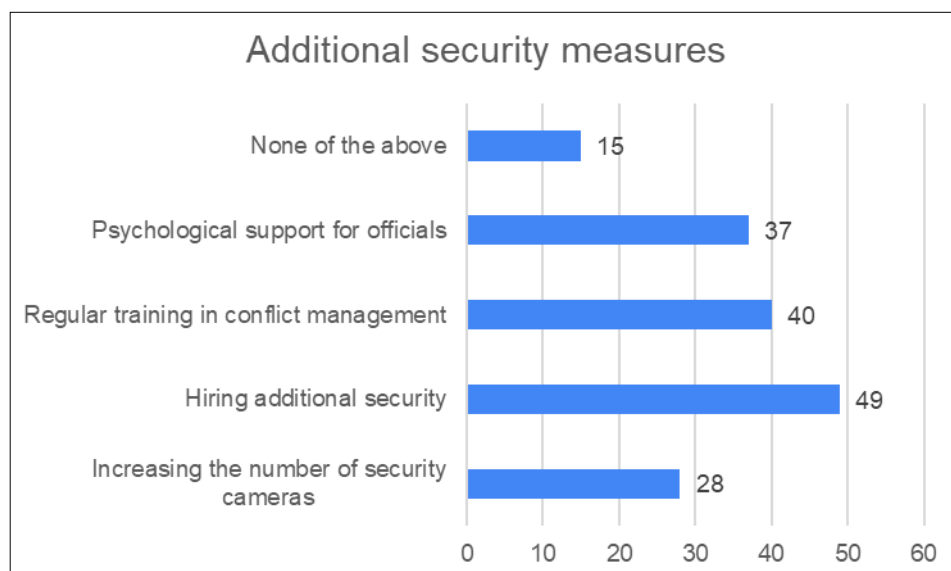
Source: authors` interpretation

Since comparative research emphasize the importance of education programs and professional training, the questionnaire contained an additional question in which the participants were asked to mark the type of training programs they think are needed.

Chart 9. Types of necessary education and training programs
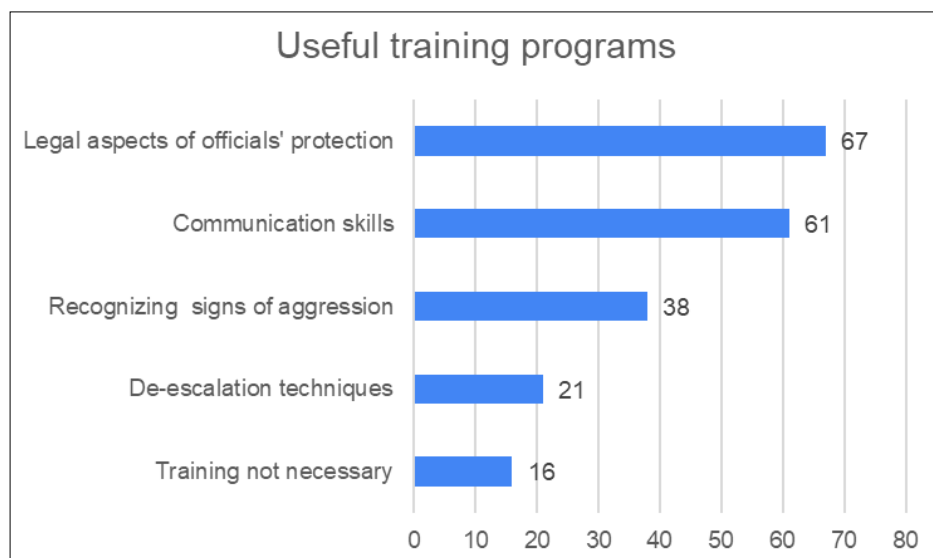
Source: authors` interpretation

As can be noticed in Chart 9. 15,1% of the participants believe there is no need for any training programs whatsoever. However, most of the participants still recognize the importance of additional education and training especially highlighting the need for education in developing communication skills (57,5%) and legal aspects of officials` protection (63,2%). Additionally, some of the suggestions from the final question in the questionnaire follow the same pattern by emphasizing the importance of helping officials with reporting and processing the perpetrators. This kind of education is again oriented towards solving the existing problems, not preventing them which is specific for this research and Croatian context.

The last question from the questionnaire was an open-ended question in which the participants proposed what ULS could do for their officials in case of aggressive citizens` behaviours. Surprisingly, 62% of the participants left their comment confirming the importance of this research with regard to its current and relevant topic. The answers were coded in three key groups. The first one refers to protection measures since almost one third of the suggestions refer to employing security guards, while security cameras, male officials and self-defence classes are proposed as alternative methods. Suggestions for education and training programs of the officials regarding conflict prevention and de-escalation techniques also belong to this group. The second group of proposals focuses on better criminal legal protection, help with reporting incidents, protection after the unwanted event and better support by the executive officers. 16,66% of the collected suggestions referred

to education and training proposals and raising awareness of executive officers about the need to sensibilize the issue related to aggressive citizens. The third group of comments consisted of suggestions and comments oriented towards the citizens. The common thought of these comments focuses on the fact that citizens are unsatisfied, and they express their dissatisfaction to the officials, since they are the closest and most available to them, even though oftentimes unable to provide assistance. It is therefore of outmost importance to remove the reasons for civil discontent and build better cooperation with the citizens.

6.   CONCLUSION

The occurrence of TPVH against public officials is not rare, but it has not yet raised the appropriate research interest in Croatian scientific and professional literature. The aim of the paper is to research the frequency of TPVH against the officials, its consequences and preventive measures on a sample of officials from ULS in Osijek-Baranja and Vukovar-Srijem counties. Research results indicate that the officials from the observed ULS experience aggressive behaviour equally frequent as do their European colleagues, whereby verbal harassment belongs to most frequent forms as opposed to physical violence which is the least frequent. TPVH causes considerable levels of distress among officials, which inevitably impacts the quality and effectiveness of their performance. The worrying trend of low rate of reporting TPVH can be a result of numerous factors: accepting TPVH as a constituent part of work, not being familiarized with the legal framework, fear of lack of understanding of the environment and superiors, lack of trust in protection mechanisms and similar. Even though comparative research prove that women are more frequently targets of aggressive citizens` behaviour, that assumption has not been proved in this research. The reason for that might be an uneven sample of participants, however, further statistical analysis should be conducted in order to determine statistically significant correlations between individual variables. Especially interesting are the results regarding preventive measures. This research places special emphasis on the importance of physical protection mechanisms (security cameras and security guards), while on the other hand, comparative research results highlight the importance of conducting various types of education and training to develop the officials` skills to avoid, recognize and resolve conflict without relying on physical protection.

The importance of this research is reflected in initiating a scientific and professional discussion about TPVH against the officials from ULS in Croatia as well as in obtaining the first original data regarding the occurrence of TPVH in ULS in the two observed counties. Future research should include all the ULS in Croatia with focus

on analysing the data and providing suggestions for improvement. The first step is obviously raising awareness among the stakeholders (officials, mayors/executive officers and citizens) about the fact that violence and aggression are neither acceptable nor an inherent part of the job. Implementation of these types of research is one of the ways of raising the awareness about the issues, however there are other numerous mechanisms such as promotional campaigns or public discussion about the topic. Officials should undoubtedly be educated to recognize and resolve conflict situations. In cases when TPVH does occur, there should be a clear, publicly available protocol on how to proceed and report the incidents. Therefore, ULS should conduct a self-assessment of the safety conditions of their officials and, based on the findings, establish response protocol. In particular, it should provide support to affected officials, as suggested in the Guidelines 2010. The problem of TPVH against the officials in ULS should become nationally recognisable before it escalates and results in a tragedy. Therefore, central bodies of state administration should also be included in the processes of detecting, analysing and resolving the issues since they are in a position, due to their authorities and scope, to place the TPVH issue on a high level of priorities. More intensive research, professional and scientific discussion, engagement of local officials` unions, associations in cities or municipalities and other interested parties could help to raise awareness of TPVH issue and through corresponding lobbying activities might lead to political readiness to ratify the Convention No. 190 of the International Labour Organization and by doing so enable better protection of all employees on their workplaces.

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