

## Cases of Bodily Injuries During Arrest and in Custody

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Cases of bodily injuries to two groups of victims are presented: 1) police officers during their professional duties by persons subject to detention or detained; 2) detainees (citizens) – during arrest, in pre-trial detention or in custody (cells or prison). A retrospective study was performed for all cases of examination of living persons for a 5-year period (2005-2009). The number of cases of police violence slightly prevail over the number of police officers who were victims of detainees' violence. In all of the cases examined there was a minor injury (low battery) ruled, with the exception of one case of the detainee – victim to another inmate, ruled as a medium grade of battery. The violence in the studied two groups is relatively rare and there are no serious cases of physical violence or death from the described period.

*Key words:* police violence, violence against police officers, medico-legal investigation.

### Introduction

The incidence rate of injured law enforcement officers – police officers, judicial security and prison officers is not high, but have a social importance as accidents while performing their professional duties. On the other hand, during the arrest of citizens by police and at the places of detention (pre-trial detention or in custody), detainees complain from physical violence exerted on them.

The aim of this work is the parallel study of these two groups to compare the incidence of violence based on the collected data from forensic medicine units.

A cases of physical violence and a grade of bodily injuries to two groups of victims are studied: 1) police and judicial security officers during their professional duties by persons subject to detention or detained; 2) Physical abuse of detainees (citizens) – during arrest, in pre-trial detention or in custody (cells or prison).

## Material and Methods

A retrospective study was performed and all cases of examination of living persons in the Department of Forensic Medicine in Medical University of Varna were analyzed, for a 5-year period (2005-2009), total number of 854.

## Results

Of these 854 examinations of living persons, 11 relate to the subject, which are 1,29% of all examinations. From the first group there were 4 cases of police officers at work (0,47% of all the examined persons). There were 3 cases of violence during arrest of suspected persons, and the 4th case is during the attempted escape from the district police office. The police officers were struck, tossed, pressed or bitten by the detainees. The average age of police detainees was  $42,3 \pm 3$  years. The examination revealed a number of abrasions, bruises and wounds, which differ by localization and grade, and one case of 5th finger of the left hand sprained (by bending and twisting). Objects by which were inflicted the injuries were basic blunt objects – hands, feet, teeth (bites), etc. Injuries were interpreted as minor injuries (lowest level of battery). From the second group (trauma during arrest or in custody) there were 7 citizens (0,82% of total reviewed). Six of them were injured by police in various incidents in detention or prison, and one was injured by another prisoner. The average age of the group was  $34,6 \pm 5$  years. In all the 6 cases there were external mechanical injuries – abrasions, bruises and superficial lacerated wounds, which also were justified as minor battery.



Fig. 1, 2. A strangulation mark on the neck of a living person

The injuries were inflicted by hands, kicks, handcuffs, sticks (batons). The seventh case was a prisoner injured by another prisoner who has tried to strangle him by thin rope from behind. The examination took place on the third day after the incident and found a double groove strangulation on the anterior surface of the neck. Since the patient had severe pain on swallowing and a fully hoarse voice, an oedema of plica vocalis (consulted and established by ENT specialist), the injury was qualified as a medium grade of battery (temporarily life-threatening disorder). There were no recorded cases of severe injury or death occurred for the processed period.

## Discussion

Our country lacks a system for investigation and registration of physical and mental violence, both for the police and prison officers and for citizens detained or in custody.

Kruse M et al. [2] presented data from three sources in Denmark — from a national register of the patients, statistics of victims and death register. Over 70% of the victims were men. Data for most of the victims can be found in emergency units or from the police reports, and some from the death register. Sometimes there was an overlap of data, so the authors concluded that there is a potential disadvantage in the use of different sources for the accuracy of incurred epidemiological, health, social and other analysis and conclusions.

Chaudhry M. A. et al. [1] studied police violence in Pakistan on forensic documents and court files. They found that most frequent was a blunt trauma. At the time of the survey most of the victims had visible evidence of psychotrauma and the distribution of the data by sex was markedly in favor of men.

Lorin de la Grandmaison G. et al. [3] investigated the police violence in the suburbs of Paris in 2004. In over 60% of the examined the authors established superficial injuries, localized mainly in the head and neck. All the recorded injuries were verified by police reports. In less than 2% of the victims there were secondary neurological complications from being handcuffed. There was no death case observed during the survey period, and in approximately 5% of the cases needed an emergency hospitalization.

We did not find out any published data on the subject in Bulgaria.

## Conclusion

The violence in the studied groups is relatively rare – 1,29% of all the examined living persons for the period of 2005-2009 and there were no serious cases of physical violence nor a cases of death. The number of cases of police violence (0,82% of all the examined living persons) slightly prevail over the number of police officers who were victims of detainees' violence (0,47%). In all of the cases examined there was a minor injury (low battery) ruled, with the exception of one case of the detainee – victim to another inmate, ruled as a medium grade of battery – an attempted strangulation.

The problem discussed did not attract researchers' interest in Bulgaria so there is no data for other regions, and therefore more global conclusions can not be made.

It would be a good idea to consider creating a national register in forensic medicine units, for registration and in-depth study of this kind of violence.

## References

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