

IMPROVING POLICE EMPLOYER IMAGE AND PERSONNEL SECURITY: EMPIRICAL FINDINGS FROM POLAND

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Abstract: *The aim of the conducted studies was to identify socially desirable changes, the implementation of which may improve the image of the Police as an employer in Poland, as well as solutions contributing to the enhancement of personnel security within this uniformed formation. This goal was achieved through empirical research on a sample of 768 respondents. The results of the research, which were subjected to statistical analysis, revealed not only the changes that should be implemented in the area of employer branding within the Police but also highlighted the diversity in social perception regarding the image of the Police, which resulted, among other factors, from the generational diversity of the respondents.*

Keywords: image, improvement, personnel security, employer branding

1. Introduction

The image of the Police as an employer and a public institution, given the number of officers in Poland and the significance of this employer, as well as the importance of the daily efforts of police officers in ensuring protection, safety, and public order, should be the subject of constant analysis [1]. The conclusions drawn from the research enable an understanding of the social perception of the image and the quality differentiation of the image among specific target groups. The outcome of these actions is the ability to select employer branding [2] tools, including the proper shaping of employment and retirement policies, as well as making significant structural, organizational, or legal changes.

Society, as the primary stakeholder of the police, is a diverse and heterogeneous group. Considering this, the article presents the results of research on the police's image

as an employer, supplemented with statistical analyses that illustrate the diversity of social perceptions across different generational groups. Analyzing employer branding in the Police, attention as paid to social views on changes that may improve the image of the Police as an employer. The analysis also examined actions aimed at filling vacancies within the police, thereby improving, among other things, the recruitment and selection process. No previous research has been conducted in Poland on the social perception of changes in the police aimed at improving the image and increasing personnel security, thus the conducted studies fill the identified research gap.

2. The Image of the Organization – Theoretical Aspects

The Polish Police, as an employer, has a specific brand, which is a set of functional, economic, and psychological attributes that

are subject to evaluation [3]. According to Ph. Kotler, a brand encompasses both the attributes of the institution as an employer, its value, culture, personality, and the user (a specific type of employee, job candidate, and the target of undertaken actions) [4]. The Police brand is not limited to a logo. It represents a promise made to society, officers, and candidates for service through communicated messages (regarding working conditions, provided values, satisfied needs, offered opportunities, and the ability to guarantee safety and public order). It can be illustrated both in terms of a community – defined by views, beliefs, needs, and values that influence and shape interpersonal relationships – and as a distinguishing feature of this institution, such as job stability and the use of the term 'service' instead of 'work,' which emphasizes the significance of the calling to service.

Police, being part of society, imprints itself in people's consciousness, drawing its positive or negative image [5]. This image is the subjective perception of the police by an individual, based on a cumulative assessment. It draws from knowledge, feelings, previous experiences, or opinions - whether heard in whole or in part - and translates into an opinion about the institution and behaviours toward it.

The brand image of the Police as an employer is built on the same foundation of norms and values as the image of the entire institution; however, it is not synonymous

with the general image. In the case of the Police, we can distinguish between the image of the institution as a brand - a provider of public services ensuring universal access to public goods [6] and guaranteeing safety and public order - and the image of the Police as an employer - the employer brand image.

3. Personnel Security in the Police

Presenting changes in the personnel status of the Police, it should be emphasized that due to emerging security challenges and threats, the number of positions increased from 96 225 in 2012 to 103,309 in 2017 and to 105,309 in 2022. The target for 2025 is to have 110,000 officers [7].

In 2012, conducting a 13-year analysis, the Police employed the lowest number of officers, totalling 96,225, with 6,084 vacancies. After the change in the number of positions in 2017, 98,771 officers were employed in the Police (with 4,538 vacancies). At the turn of 2022/2023, the Polish Police had 101,000 officers, which can be considered a historic moment, as never before had so many people been part of this formation [7]. Analyzing only the personnel status does not fully reflect the overall personnel situation within the Police force. Additionally, presenting information on admissions and dismissals provides a clearer picture of the employment dynamics within the Police force (Table 1).

Table 1: Number of Police officers and admissions and dismissals from service in 2012-2024

Year	Number of Police Officers	Vacancies	Admissions	Dismissals
2012	96 225	6 084	5 150	6 305
2013	97 697	4 612	5 787	4 333
2014	98 804	3 505	4 073	2 983
2015	98 843	3 466	3 033	3 007
2016	99 938	2 371	5 092	3 989
2017	98 771	4 538	4 151	5 364
2018	98 759	4 550	4 518	4 470
2019	98 820	4 489	4 655	4 567
2020	97 899	5 410	4 373	5 234

Year	Number of Police Officers	Vacancies	Admissions	Dismissals
2021	100 557	2 752	6 684	4 053
2022	101 000	4 309	5 169	4 726
2023	96 698	10 411	5 174	9 458
2024	97 242	11 667	6 445	5 907

Source: <https://dane.gov.pl/pl/dataset/540,dane-kadrowe-policji> (accessed on 10.01.2025)

Between 2010 and 2024, a total of 73,133 individuals were admitted to service, while 74,728 dismissals were recorded. The highest number of admissions occurred in 2021 (6,684 individuals) and 2014 (6,445 individuals). The most officers left the service in 2023 (9,458) and 2012 (6,305 individuals). Staff shortages in the police are also visible in subsequent years. They reached a level of 9.72% in 2023 [8].

Ensuring personnel security in the Police, considering the scale of turnover, poses a significant challenge, especially in the context of changes occurring in the labour market in Poland, including the needs and expectations of employees.

4. Research Results

4.1. Research Methodology and Sample Structure

The main objective of the conducted research was to identify the changes that should be implemented to improve the image of the police as well as to enhance personnel security. Additionally, the study aimed to determine whether the recommended changes differ in the opinions of men and women, as well as representatives of three generations. Identifying these differences allows for a more comprehensive understanding and prediction of the effectiveness of the changes, and most importantly, their social acceptance. Fulfilling the purpose of the research the author used of a diagnostic survey method (CAWI). The research was conducted on a sample of 384 Poles in 2021 and on the same sample in 2022 [9]. The

structure of the research sample reflected the structure of the general population by gender, generational affiliation and province – place of residence.

In the statistical analysis examining the quality of the police image, the Kruskal-Wallis test was used to assess differences in median ratings between different generations of employees. The Mann-Whitney U test allowed for the comparison of image ratings between men and women. The two indicated non-parametric tests were used due to the failure to meet the assumption of normality in the distribution of variables. Considering the variables expressed on a nominal scale, Cramér's V was used to examine the strength of the association. The Cramér's V measure was used to evaluate the strength of the association between gender, generation of employees, and the assessment of areas where changes should be implemented to improve the police image, as well as the recommended changes themselves. In the case of dichotomous variables, the Phi coefficient was calculated to measure the strength of the association.

4.2. Quality of the Police Image

The perception of the Police as an employer is closely tied to the overall image of the institution, which has evolved over time. To capture the changes in social perception regarding the quality of the Police's image, respondents were asked to evaluate the general image of the Police over the past 10 years during the conducted research (Figure 1).

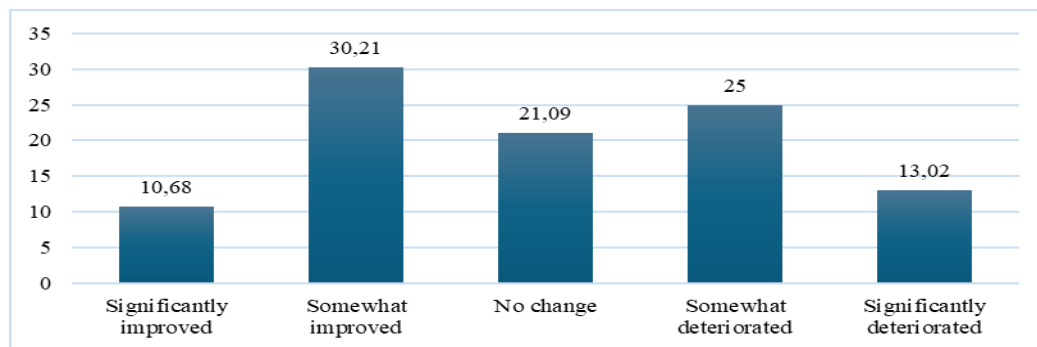


Figure 1: Respondents' Opinions on the Change in the Police Image over the Last 10 Years
Source: Own research results.

Despite the diversity of respondents' opinions regarding the direction of the image change, the largest group of respondents (40.89%) noticed an improvement in the Police image over the analyzed years. 38.03% of respondents stated that the Police image had deteriorated (with 13.02% indicating a significant deterioration), and 21.09% indicated no change in the image quality.

To verify the diversity of respondents' views based on independent variables such as gender, generational affiliation, voivodeship, place of residence, and education level, Kruskal-Wallis and Mann-Whitney U tests were performed. The research indicates that generational

affiliation significantly differentiated opinions regarding the change in the Police image (differences at the level of statistical tendency $p=0.06$). Positive changes were more frequently declared by Generation Z, while negative changes were more often noted by Generation X.

Narrowing the time frame for assessing the quality of the Police image to the years 2021 and 2022, the research revealed that in 2021, 46.61% of respondents indicated a positive image of the Police, while in 2022 only 36.98% did (a decrease of 9.63 percentage points compared to the previous year). In 2021, 35.42% of respondents rated the Police image negatively, while in 2022, this figure was 40.1% (Figure 2).

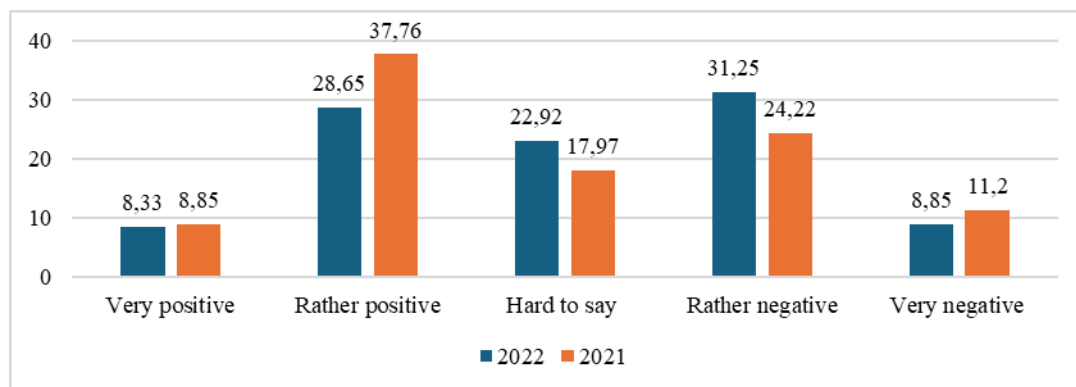


Figure 2: The Image of the Police
Source: Own research results.

The analyses of the research results using the Kruskal-Wallis test confirmed the diversity of respondents' views in 2021 regarding the general image of the Police.

Differences were identified between groups of respondents with education levels lower than secondary and those with higher education. Respondents with education

levels lower than secondary significantly rated the quality of the general image of the Police higher than respondents with higher education. No statistically significant dependencies were found during the 2022 research.

The social assessment of the Police image as an employer was also analyzed (Figure 3). According to 45.83% of respondents, the image of the Police as an employer was positive in 2021, while in 2022, 40.37% of respondents declared a positive image of the Police (a decrease of 5.46 percentage points). In the analyzed time frame, the

percentage of respondents declaring a negative image of the Police as an employer increased by 8.07 percentage points (from 19.53% to 27.6%). Additionally, it was shown that the quality of the Police image as an employer was determined by the place of residence (Kruskal-Wallis test, $p=0.023$). Poles living in towns with fewer than 50,000 inhabitants rated the image of the Police as an employer higher compared to respondents living in cities with a larger population.

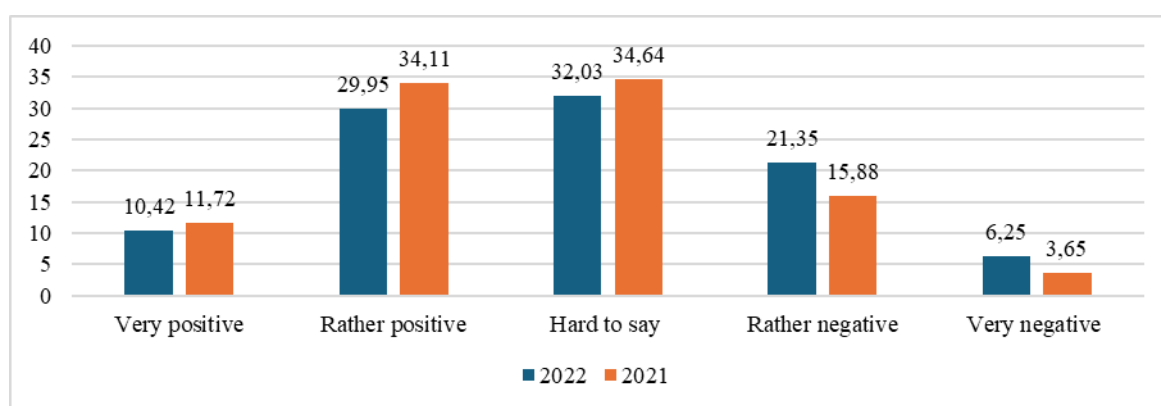


Figure 3: The Image of the Police as an Employer
Source: Own research results.

No statistically significant differences in respondents' views regarding the quality of the general image and the image of the Police as an employer were revealed.

4.3. Improving the Image – Respondents' Opinions

The majority of respondents (46.88%) indicated that improving the competencies of officers would be desirable for enhancing the image of the Police as an employer. 44.27% of respondents emphasized the need for more frequent media presentations of positive police behaviours, while 32.03% saw the rationale in publishing films/TV programs showing the actual conditions of service. 30.99% highlighted the need to modernize the equipment used by officers, while 28.91% stressed the importance of

withdrawing police from participation in demonstrations/protests and replacing them with other services. 26.04% of respondents believed that the image of the Police could be improved through police participation in picnics and festivals, and 23.96% emphasized the importance of officers' participation in national holidays. The necessity of promotional campaigns was indicated by 22.44% of respondents, while 21.35% highlighted the need for cooperation between the Police and uniformed classes. Additionally, 20.05% of respondents believed that increasing the number of women in the Police would most significantly improve the image of the Police as an employer (Table 2).

Table 2 Desired Image Changes

Answers	%
Improving officers' competencies	46,88
More frequent media presentations of positive police behaviours	44,27
Publication of films/TV programs showing actual service conditions	32,03
Modernization of the equipment used by officers	30,99
Withdrawal of police from participation in demonstrations/protests and replacement with other services	28,91
Participation of police officers in picnics and festivals	26,04
Participation of police officers in national holiday celebrations	23,96
Promotional campaigns	22,44
Establishing cooperation between the police and, for example, uniformed classes	21,35
Increasing the number of women in the police	20,05

Source: Own research results.

The analyses indicate that the justification for using promotional campaigns to improve the image of the Police was significantly more often indicated by men (Phi 0.14). The possibility of using films/TV programs showing actual service conditions was emphasized by individuals with secondary education (Cramer's V 0.14). Participation of police officers in festivals and picnics was seen as a potential way to improve the Police image by representatives of Generation Z and Y (Cramer's V 0.14). Women declared the need for more frequent media presentations of positive police behaviours (Phi -0.13), as did respondents aged 31-34 and 50 and older (Cramer's V 0.22), and representatives of Generation Z and X (Cramer's V 0.16). The importance of modernizing equipment was highlighted by respondents aged 18-25 and 50 and older (Cramer's V 0.21), as well as representatives of Generation X (Cramer's V 0.20). Increasing the number of women in the Police was seen as a way to improve the employer's image by women (Phi -0.11) and individuals with higher education (Cramer's V 0.14). Representatives of Generation X significantly more often than other respondents indicated that improving the image of the Police as an employer is possible by withdrawing police from

participation in demonstrations and protests and replacing them with other services (Cramer's V 0.13).

4.4. Towards Personnel Security

Respondents also expressed opinions on actions that could fill vacancies in the Police. 51.56% of respondents indicated that increasing the level of offered salaries is justified (salary levels remain one of the main factors of employer attractiveness in Poland and a determinant of the effectiveness of recruitment processes). Polish respondents also pointed to solutions such as: conducting selection for specific types of service (42.97%), organizing recruitment meetings in secondary schools/universities (40.89%), and introducing additional points for students of uniformed classes applying for service in the Police. Nearly one-third of respondents considered the introduction of harsher penalties for violating the personal integrity of police officers to increase their sense of security as helpful in solving personnel problems in the Police (31.25%). They also emphasized the introduction of an application facilitating the recruitment process to the Police, shortening and simplifying the entire process (28.91%), as well as offering selected students service in the Police (26.82%). Some respondents also saw the need to introduce free preschool

care for the children of officers (23.18%), and 21.35% of respondents considered it appropriate to lower recruitment requirements. On the other hand, 12.24% of

respondents believed that filling vacancies is not possible (Table 3).

Table 3 Actions to increase personnel security in the Police

Answers	%
Increasing the level of salaries offered to police officers	51,56
Conducting selection for specific departments in the Police – selection for dedicated service, e.g., for prevention, criminal service, selection for district officers, etc.	42,97
Organizing recruitment meetings in secondary schools/universities	40,89
Introducing additional points for students of uniformed classes applying for service in the Police	33,59
Introducing harsher penalties for violating the personal integrity of police officers to increase their sense of security	31,25
Introducing an application to facilitate the recruitment process to the Police, shortening and simplifying the entire process	28,91
Offering selected students service in the Police	26,82
Introducing free preschool care for the children of police officers	23,18
Lowering the requirements for future officers	21,35
Filling all vacancies is not possible	12,24
Hard to say	1,04

Source: Own research results.

Analyzing respondents' suggestions regarding actions to fill vacancies in the Police revealed that lowering the requirements was considered a rational solution by individuals aged 31 to 44 (Cramer's V 0.20). This action was also statistically more often emphasized by representatives of Generation Z and Y (Cramer's V 0.13) and individuals with education levels lower than secondary (Cramer's V 0.15).

The necessity of increasing salary levels was mainly highlighted by men (Phi 0.11), while women supported the introduction of additional points for students of uniformed classes applying for service in the Police (Phi -0.15), as did individuals aged 18-25 (Cramer's V 0.19) and respondents with secondary education (Cramer's V 0.16).

Furthermore, the justification for conducting selection for specific departments in the Police was significantly more often indicated by individuals aged 18-25 and 55 and older (Cramer's V 0.19).

5. Conclusions

Identifying the changes recommended by society allows for understanding public opinion regarding the quality of the police image and the direction of changes that can be implemented in the police, including predicting the level of social acceptance. In the context of significant shortages of officers, socially desired changes may translate into increasing the attractiveness of the police as an employer and attracting a larger number of candidates to the service. The suggested solutions in the areas of image and personnel activities illustrate the significant challenges the Police must face to increase personnel security.

Some of the solutions indicated by respondents as actions to streamline recruitment processes and improve the image of the Police as an employer, including its attractiveness, have been the activities carried out by the Police for many years. The emphasis on the importance of these actions suggests that the scale or

frequency of informing the public about them is insufficient, highlighting the need for change. The revealed lack of public knowledge about already implemented solutions indicates the need to pay special attention to making necessary changes in promotional activities, as the low level of knowledge should be linked to the inadequacy of the tools used to promote police activities to its stakeholders. Emphasizing the significance of generational differences among society in Poland, further research directions should include a thorough analysis of key proposals by possessing the opinions of police authorities, who are responsible for implementing changes (changes, including

in the area of legal foundations). The conducted scientific research can therefore serve as a starting point in identifying areas of change in the police. Researching public opinion - key stakeholders in the case of public entities becomes a crucial activity that many researchers emphasize [10], highlighting the importance of a human-centred approach to management. The present research results confirm the validity of studying needs and their generational differences, which becomes the basis for a better understanding of the organization's environment and the rationality of the implemented solutions.

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