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PUBLIC TRUST IN LAW ENFORCEMENT AUTHORITIES: LEGAL MECHANISMS AND FOREIGN EXPERIENCE

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Abstract: This article examines the procedural and legal mechanisms for strengthening trust between law enforcement agencies and citizens. The study compares the experience of the United Kingdom, the European Union and the United States with the practice of Uzbekistan, and interprets the results of a sociological survey involving more than 77,000 respondents. Drawing on procedural justice theory, it demonstrates the link between external and internal justice. Gaps in national legislation are identified, and proposals are made for introducing standard operating procedures, regulating the use of body-worn cameras and improving officers' working conditions.

Keywords: procedural justice, public trust, law enforcement agencies, internal affairs bodies, body-worn cameras, standard operating procedures, legitimacy.

Introduction

The relationship between law enforcement agencies and society is a key indicator of the legitimacy of state authority. Public trust in the police and other law enforcement bodies directly impacts the effectiveness of crime prevention and the maintenance of public safety. In recent decades, a shift has been observed in policing from a coercive model to a collaborative, human rights-centered model (community policing) [1]. The concept of "procedural justice" forms the theoretical basis of this process.

The aim of this study is to improve the procedural-legal mechanisms designed to enhance public trust in law enforcement agencies, as well as to identify gaps between legislation and practice. To achieve this objective, the experiences of the USA, the UK, and the European Union are compared with Uzbekistan's legislation and law enforcement practices. The study is premised on the view that strengthening the interaction between law enforcement agencies and citizens through transparent procedural standards, independent public oversight, and open evaluation mechanisms enhances officer accountability, mitigates corruption risks, and boosts public trust in the state law enforcement system.

Research Methods

The study employed systemic-structural, comparative-legal, and socio-legal methods. In addition to analyzing the texts of existing regulatory legal acts, their practical implementation and societal impact were also evaluated.

The results of a sociological survey served as the empirical basis for the study [2]. A total of 77,015 respondents participated in the survey, divided into three groups: internal affairs personnel (9,550; 12.4%), students and youth (24,380; 31.7%), and the local population (43,085; 55.9%). For the comparative analysis, the UK's PACE codes, the Council of Europe's Code of Police Ethics, and US practices regarding the use of body-worn cameras were selected, as these models

implement principles of procedural justice in distinct institutional forms across various legal systems.

Results

Procedural justice theory is based on the research of American legal scholar Tom R. Tyler. According to his findings, citizens' voluntary compliance with the law depends not on the threat of punishment, but on trust in the legitimacy of the legal system. Legitimacy, in turn, is determined more by the fairness of the decision-making process than by the utility of the decision itself. According to Tyler's theory, procedural justice rests on four elements [3]:

voice and participation: the opportunity for a citizen to express their point of view;

impartiality: decisions not being based on personal or social characteristics;

respect: upholding the citizen's dignity;

trustworthy intentions: the officer's actions being grounded in sincere motives. When these four principles are upheld, citizens accept police actions as legitimate, voluntarily comply with the law, and are inclined to cooperate with law enforcement agencies [1].

Recent studies also highlight the concept of "internal procedural justice," suggesting that an officer's interaction with a citizen depends largely on how they are treated within their own organization. According to the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, occupational risks and workloads can only be balanced if sufficient organizational resources—such as fair leadership and psychological support—are available [4]. Injustice within the organization leads to professional burnout and a sense of indifference toward the public among officers.

In the United Kingdom, the balance between police powers and citizens' rights is maintained through the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE) and the associated Codes of Practice [5]. These codes—designated A through I—provide detailed regulations for every stage of stop-and-search, arrest, and interrogation procedures. For example, the Code requires an officer to immediately explain their name, the reason for the search, and the legal grounds for it, while also prohibiting racial or religious discrimination. If the Code's requirements are violated, evidence obtained may be deemed inadmissible in court—a rule that compels officers to strictly adhere to the procedure [6].

In the European Union, the 2001 European Code of Police Ethics defines the primary role of the police as serving citizens and protecting human rights. According to the code, officers should be easily identifiable and personally accountable for their actions, and the police should operate independently of the courts and prosecutors, under civilian control [7].

In the United States, body cameras were widely introduced after incidents of police brutality. Studies show that when cameras are constantly on, unfounded complaints from citizens and cases of use of force decrease, a phenomenon called the "civilization effect". However, cameras alone are not enough - their effectiveness is only evident when there is a transparent internal policy and open access to the public of records [8].

Article 8 of the Law "On Internal Affairs Bodies", adopted on September 16, 2016 in Uzbekistan, establishes the principle of openness and transparency [14]. However, these norms are mainly declarative in nature, and the results of sociological research are important to evaluate their implementation in practice.

Table 1. Key indicators of sociological survey results (77,015 respondents in total) [2]

Social group	Positive evaluation	The main complaint	Offer
Population (43,085)	72.9% feel safe in the neighborhood	45.0% are dissatisfied with the rudeness of the treatment	61.3% – increasing open communication and mobile receptions
Youth (24,380)	71.8% positively evaluate the modern form	36.9% do not trust employees	Improve friendly communication and visual image
Employees (9,550)	–	74.3% are dissatisfied with the material supply, 50.7% with the work regime	Regulation of workload, psychological support

A survey of the population showed that 42.2% complained about the processing of applications, and 34.3% about waiting and paperwork. 15.5% of young people lost their trust, mainly due to negative content on social networks. A survey among employees shows a different picture: 32.7% complained about the biased attitude of the management, and 33.4% about conflicts with the manager.

Discussion

The results show a direct relationship between external and internal procedural justice. While the high level of security felt by the population (72.9%) indicates that the operational task is being fulfilled, dissatisfaction with the treatment (45.0%) indicates that the "voice" and "respect" elements of procedural justice are not sufficiently provided [3]. This is a situation predicted by Tyler's theory, that is, citizens value the process itself more than the result.

The results of the survey among employees indicate the root of the problem. According to the JD-R model, workload, violation of the rest schedule and the biased attitude of the management cause professional burnout in employees, which affects their behavior in communication with citizens [10]. In other words, the indicator of "rudeness" that the population complains about is largely an external manifestation of the imbalance within the system.

A comparison of national legislation and international experience made it possible to identify the following gaps:

1) The declarative nature of the legislation - the law "On Internal Affairs Bodies" proclaims the principle of openness, but does not establish a mechanism for its implementation, detailed procedures such as PACE.

2) Weakness of public participation - the bodies operate mainly reactively, the "community policing" model is not sufficiently institutionalized.

3) Internal governance problems - the labor rights and psychological state of employees are not sufficiently taken into account in reform programs.

4) Visual and institutional factors - uniform design and appearance of employees are underestimated as factors influencing public trust.

Conclusions and proposals

Based on the results of the study, the following proposals were developed.

In the regulatory and legal sphere:

– adoption of a mandatory document establishing the procedural rules of police-citizen dialogue, stipulating that procedural requirements violated by an employee will lead to inadmissibility of evidence;

– strengthening in law the procedure for using body cameras and making their recordings available to the public.

In the organizational and managerial sphere:

– distribution of employees' work and rest time through an automated system;

– introduction of training in management psychology and stress management for employees appointed to management positions, expansion of psychological support services.

In the sphere of public relations:

– modernization of standards for uniform design and appearance of employees;

– expansion of the activities of mobile receptions and public councils, strengthening the institutional image through positive information content.

In conclusion, the legitimacy of a law enforcement system is measured not only by crime statistics, but also by the respect and fairness that each citizen feels in each individual encounter. Transparent procedural standards and internal legal protection for employees are the main ways to achieve this.

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