

How do lay people think about the police?

Anniina Jokinen & Elina
Ruuskanen, Ljubljana 10.9.2009

h e u n i



Case: Finland

- 16 cognitive interviews were carried out to test specific survey questions → how people understand certain concepts and how did they decide which answer to give
- 21 questions cover the performance of the CJS, feelings about the police and feelings about the court system



General findings

- Finns' high level of trust in the police became quite evident in all interviews
- The interviewees say that their views are based on information got from the media, as few have personal experience



How good a job the police are doing?

- Majority of interviewees think that the police do a good job (1-5 scale, 1=excellent, 5=very poor)
- Many respondents explained that they chose option 2 (good) because they have heard some negative things about the police, and that was the reason why they did not choose option number one (excellent).

h e u n i
⋮

Police Effectiveness

- The respondents think that the police are effective and that they enforce the law consistently when dealing with all people.
- Some say that they don't even want the police to be very effective (0-10 scale, = 10 very effective)
- "It is hard for me to think that I would have said 10 because if I had, it would mean that the police are always ready and always present and would interfere even in the smallest offences. If I had said 10, it would mean that the police work even too effectively."

h e u n i



Enforcing the law

- The interviewees think the police may be prejudiced to a certain degree against people such as immigrants, the Roma, young people, bums
- This does not however affect the way the police enforce the law, because “the law is the same for everybody”
- “The first impression here was that does a police officer intervene if he sees a fight or vandalism somewhere. And I believe that if the case or offence is even slightly more serious, the police are equally eager to intervene, no matter who the offender is.”

h e u n i



Obligation to obey the police

- Respondents think that they have a moral obligation to obey the police unless something really untoward was asked of them → most critical people were thinking of very specific situations
- “It’s hard to imagine a situation where I would have a reason to resist the police when they asked me to do something”
- “If I myself have a strong notion of the situation, that they are wrong, then I don’t listen to them.”

