BIENESTAR PSICOLÓGICO, INTELIGENCIA EMOCIONAL Y RESOLUCIÓN DE CONFLICTOS EN MIEMBROS DE LOS CUERPOS Y FUERZAS DE SEGURIDAD DEL ESTADO ESPAÑOL: UN ESTUDIO CORRELACIONAL

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Resumen. Introducción: La resolución de conflictos y el bienestar emocional son cruciales ante situaciones de estrés agudo como puede ser el trabajo policial. Es por ello que los objetivos de este trabajo son: (1) identificar el estilo de resolución de conflictos predominante en las Fuerzas y Cuerpos de Seguridad del Estado español, (2) describir la relación entre resolución de conflictos e inteligencia emocional y, (3) describir la relación entre resolución de conflictos y bienestar psicológico. Método: se ha utilizado una muestra de 434 participantes pertenecientes de los Cuerpos y Fuerzas de Seguridad del Estado y se ha medido con distintos cuestionarios el bienestar emocional, la inteligencia emocional y los estilos de resolución de conflictos. Resultados: el estilo predominante era el evitativo en más de la mitad de la muestra. Las variables asertividad y bienestar psicológico pueden explicar el 78.1% de la varianza del estilo integrador. Se han encontrado correlaciones estadísticamente significativas entre la inteligencia emocional y estilos de resolución de conflicto. Discusión: En base a los resultados, podría ser beneficioso instruir a los trabajadores en técnicas de mediación y resolución de conflictos tal y como se ha realizado en algunas ocasiones (ej. Medipol). A diferencia de otros estudios anteriores, se han encontrado correlatos significativos entre algunas variables de inteligencia emocional y los estilos de resolución de conflictos. Sin embargo, el estudio presenta limitaciones a tener en cuenta como el hecho de no incluir variables de personalidad.

Palabras clave: Resolución de Conflictos; Bienestar psicológico; Inteligencia emocional; Fuerzas y Cuerpos de Seguridad

PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING, EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE, AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN MEMBERS OF THE SPANISH STATE SECURITY FORCES AND CORPS: A CORRELATIONAL STUDY

Abstract. Introduction: Conflict resolution and emotional well-being are crucial in acute stress situations such as police work. That is why the objectives of this work are: (1) to identify the predominant conflict resolution style in the Spanish State Security Forces and Corps, (2) to describe the relationship between conflict resolution and emotional intelligence and, (3) describe the relationship between conflict resolution and psychological well-being. Method: a sample of 434 participants belonging to the State Security Forces and Corps has been used and emotional well-being, emotional intelligence and conflict resolution styles have been measured with different questionnaires. Results: the predominant style was avoidance in more than half of the sample. The assertiveness and psychological well-being variables can explain 78.1% of the variance of the integrative style. Statistically significant correlations have been found between emotional intelligence and conflict resolution styles. Discussion: Based on the results, it could be beneficial to instruct workers in mediation and conflict resolution techniques, as has been done on some occasions (e.g. Medipol). Unlike other previous studies, significant correlates have been found between some variables of emotional intelligence and conflict resolution styles. However, the study has limitations to consider, such as the fact that it does not include personality variables.

Keywords: Conflict Resolution; Psychological Well-being; Emotional Intelligence; Security Forces and Corps.

Introduction

Emotional intelligence affects our daily life in different areas such as physical and mental health or education. (Baudry et al., 2018; Li et al., 2021; Martins et al., 2010; Schutte et al., 2007). Despite the importance of our emotions in so many areas, only a few authors had been interested in the emotional field, and it was not until the 1990s when Mayer and Salovey decided to investigate it. Thus, they discovered a construct that they called emotional intelligence and defined it as a set of skills that contribute to the evaluation and expression, regulation, and use of feelings. (Salovey & Mayer, 1990, pg. 189). A few years later, Goleman popularized the term and listed three main components: empathy, assertiveness, and prosocial relationships. (Goleman, 1995; Goleman & Cherniss, 2005).

Today, this concept continues to develop and increase the scientific corpus, demonstrating in a clear way that emotional intelligence affects health and specifically mental health, so it has an impact on our well-being. The concept of well-being is a very important term in health and especially in mental health, and it has been recognized by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a primary objective. (World Health Organization (WHO), 2013). However, there is no consensus among authors to delimit the meaning of the term and there are two perspectives when talking about well-being: the hedonic perspective and the eudemonic perspective. The first is known as subjective well-being and fits in with the affective aspect, according to which the important thing is the pursuit of happiness. The second is more cognitively oriented and is known as psychological well-being. In this current, wellbeing and happiness are no longer synonymous, but rather wellbeing is the development of skills necessary for personal growth.
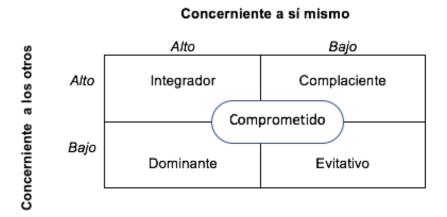
Within the eudemonic perspective or psychological well-being, Ryff stands out (1989, 2014); he developed a multidimensional model and a scale to measure

psychological well-being. In the scale, he distinguished six dimensions (self-acceptance, positive relationships, mastery of the environment, autonomy, purpose in life, and personal growth). Subsequent studies using confirmatory factor analysis have confirmed the existence of these six factors. (e.g., Gallardo Cuadra & Moyano-Díaz, 2011).

Another aspect closely related to emotional well-being is the person's own handling of conflicts since each individual in the organization handles interpersonal conflicts differently, depending on his or her conflict resolution style (Afzalur Rahim, 2000; Afzalur Rahim et al., 2000; M. A. Rahim & Katz, 2019). Conflict management styles can be defined as the ways in which individuals approach the other party in a conflict situation. (Abas, 2010). According to Rahim and Bonoma's model (1979), conflict management styles are defined along two dimensions: with respect to "self" (i.e., the degree to which one tries to satisfy one's own concerns) and with respect to "others" (or the extent to which one tends to satisfy the concerns of others). This structure, which has been confirmed in different decades (Rahim & Katz, 2019), proposes a two-dimensional structure that gives rise to five conflict resolution styles (see *Figure 1*): integrative, compliant, dominant, avoidant, and compromising.

Figure 1

Conflict resolution styles according to Rahim

These styles are described as follows. (Rahim, 2000; Rahim & Bonoma, 1979; Rahim & Katz, 2019):

1. The integrative or problem-solving style (win-win). There is collaboration between the parties as they exchange information and examine differences to find a solution for those involved. There are two distinctive elements in this style: confrontation and problem solving. Through the former, open communication is established that leads to understanding and analysis of the causes. It is therefore a prerequisite for the second element which involves an identification and solution of the problem taking into account the interests of both parties.

2. Complacent or accommodative style (lose-win). The person does not pay attention to existing differences and tends to satisfy others. The person sacrifices him/herself for the other, so it tends to be used by unfriendly people with close bonds of friendship.

3. Dominant or competitive style (win-lose). The orientation of the problem is to win, the objective is to win the conflict for their own benefit, totally ignoring others. It is used by dominant people. If they do not have a position of command or power, they will tend to lie or manipulate to impose themselves on others.

4. Avoidant style (lose-lose). This style tries to postpone or avoid conflict. These people do not satisfy their own needs or those of others, nor are they capable of recognizing the existence of a conflict.

5. Compromised style (neither winning nor losing). It is an intermediate style where the person takes into account his benefits and those of the rest. In this style there is less pressure than in the dominant style but not as much as in the complacent style, and it is more direct than the avoidant style but does not explore as much as the integrative style.

Some authors have tried to relate emotional intelligence to conflict resolution styles. In this line, Morrinson (2008) showed that all dimensions of emotional intelligence (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management) correlated positively with the integrative mode, while only two dimensions correlated negatively with the compliant (self-management and relationship management). The avoidant style had no correlates in any dimension of emotional intelligence, while the compromising one was negatively correlated with self-awareness.

Both emotional well-being and conflict resolution are crucial in the face of high stress events. An example of work under high levels of acute stress is that of the police (Miller, 2007), where high levels of physiological and emotional arousal are experienced (Garcia-Castro, 2015). If we add to this the fact that, "the better a person's job requirements and competencies match, the better the person's job performance and job satisfaction will be" (Spencer y Spencer, 1993, cited in Goleman & Cherniss, 2005, pg. 241), we understand the importance of emotional competencies within the police work environment.

In a study at the European level for more than three years, conducted by the research group of the University of Maastricht and led by Fred Ziljstra, the impact of stress on absenteeism was analyzed. The findings suggest that members of law enforcement agencies are the most stressed professionals at work. (García-Castro, 2015). Therefore, it seems that the effective management and use of emotions is of vital importance. However, very little research has been aimed at this. Along these lines, López-Curbelo and his collaborators (2006) examined emotional intelligence in a sample of local police officers in the Canary Islands. The results of the study show that, although they possessed adequate skills to know, understand, regulate, and control their emotions, most of them needed to improve their competencies to perceive emotions. Another relevant fact that was extracted from this work is that police officers who had the ability to recognize their feelings were more sensitive to what others thought and could give rise to a variety of emotions such as embarrassment or sense of inferiority. On the other hand, those who had good emotional regulation experienced fewer of these negative emotions. The results of this study show that an adequate emotional intelligence within the police environment will improve both their psychological well-being and their mental health, which will result in an improvement in the work tasks of the personnel. All this situation could be the one that leads to a really important number of suicides within the security forces.

The objectives of this paper are (1) to identify the predominant conflict resolution style in the Spanish State Security Forces, (2) to describe the relationship between conflict resolution and emotional intelligence, and (3) to describe the relationship between conflict resolution and psychological well-being.

Method

Participants

The sample was composed of 434 participants with age range between 18 and 45 years ($M = 28.41$, $SD = 11.89$) that belonged to the State Security Forces and Corps; 54.15% ($n = 235$) were from the Civil Guard; 23.27% ($n = 101$) were workers assigned to the National Police; 11.52% ($n = 50$) belonged to the Local Police; 8.06% ($n = 35$) worked within the Police of the Autonomous Communities; 1.84% ($n = 8$) worked as Port Police; and 1.15% ($n = 5$) were forest agents. Of the respondents, 64.75% ($n = 281$) were men, and the remaining 35.25% ($n = 153$) were women.

Instruments

Adaptation of the Ryff Psychological Well-Being Scale. (Rivera et al., 2016). The instrument consists of 29 items assessing 6 dimensions: self-acceptance ($\alpha=.82$) (4 items; e.g., "in general, I feel confident and positive about myself"); autonomy ($\alpha =.77$) (6 items; e.g., "I tend to be influenced by people with strong convictions"); positive relationships with other people ($\alpha =.86$) (5 items; e.g.., "I feel that my friendships bring me many things"); personal growth ($\alpha =.79$) (4 items; e.g., "I have the feeling that over time I have developed a lot as a person"); mastery of the environment ($\alpha =.83$) (5 items; e.g., "in general, I feel that I am responsible for the situation in which I live"); and purpose in life ($\alpha =.87$) (6 items; e.g., "I am clear about the direction and purpose of my life").

Assertiveness subscale of the Inventory of Social-Emotional Competencies for Adults (ICSE). (Mikulic et al., 2015). It consists of 11 items ($\alpha =.73$) (e.g., "It makes me uncomfortable to say that something bothers me") that measure behaviors that allow adequately expressing opposition, expressing disagreements, making and receiving criticism, defending rights, and generally expressing negative feelings.

Empathy subscale of the Inventory of Social-Emotional Competencies for Adults (ICSE). (Mikulic et al., 2015). Consisting of 5 items (e.g., "It is difficult for me to see things from the other's point of view") ($\alpha =.80$), it assesses the emotional reaction produced by and congruent with the emotional state of the other (Mikulic et al.,2015).

Prosocial subscale of the Inventory of Social-Emotional Competencies for Adults (ICSE). (Mikulic et al., 2015). It consists of 6 items (e.g., "I find it hard to accept that other thinks differently") ($\alpha =.72$) that assess voluntary actions performed for the benefit of others (Caprara and Pastorelli, 1993).

Rahim's Conflict Management Styles Inventory (*Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory II, form C; ROCI-II form C*; Rahim 1983). This instrument reports the frequency with which participants perceive themselves to use each of the conflict styles of Rahim's model (1983, 2001). In this study, we used the Spanish version of the

instrument validated by Munduate et al.(1993), which measures five conflict resolution styles: (1) integrative ($\alpha = .91$); (2) dominant ($\alpha = .70$); (3) avoidant ($\alpha = .82$); (4) compliant ($\alpha = .83$); and compromising ($\alpha = .82$) (Munduate et al., 1993).

Regarding the application of the scales, a seven-point Likert-type scale was used since it has been shown that, although it was believed that the higher the number of points on the Likert scale, the greater the reliability, there are no significant differences after seven points. (Lozano et al., 2008).

Procedure

The application of the scales took place in computerized form using the recommendations (Elosua, 2020). Participation in the study was previously informed and voluntary by all participants. The choice of the computerized format was due to several reasons. (Eiroá- Orosa et al., 2018). Firstly, access to the police sample meant greater ease in terms of their levels of participation. On the other hand, the fact that no face-to-face attendance was required made it possible for the questionnaires to be applied to people who were not physically located in the same Autonomous Community as the study, thus allowing greater flexibility. In addition, in the review

Once the data were collected, they were analyzed with the IBM SPSS Statistics software.

Results

Regarding the results obtained when analyzing the conflict resolution styles in the sample of State Security Forces and Corps, 55.07% (*n=239*) of the participants presented an avoidant conflict resolution style; 23.27% (*n=101*) an integrative style; 9.68% (*n=42*) obtained a score referring to a complacent conflict resolution style; 8.53% (*n=37*) a dominant style; and 3.46% (*n=15*) a compromising style.

The correlations between conflict resolution styles and emotional intelligence variables, also psychological well-being, can be observed in Table 1. As can be seen, there is only a statistically significant relationship with the variables analyzed in the integrative, compliant, and compromising conflict resolution styles.

Table 1

Correlations between variables

	Psychological well-being	Assertiveness	Empathy	Prosocial	Years of service
Integrator	**.686***	**-.809***	-.198	-.118	-. 055
Complacent	-.080	-.200	**.416***	-.130	.039
Dominant	-.190	.060	.166	-.092	-.034

Avoidant	-.011	-.151	.093	-.024	-.076
Committed	.221	**-.549***	.124	-.115	-.058

In the integrative conflict resolution style, there is a statistically significant relationship with the levels of this way of handling problems and those of psychological well-being and assertiveness. However, while the higher the level of psychological well-being, the higher the scores in this solution strategy, the relationship between the integrative style and assertiveness takes the opposite path, so that the higher the assertiveness, the lower the levels of this conflict resolution style.

Continuing with agreeableness, this is only directly related to empathy so that the higher the level of empathy, the higher the score in the agreeableness mode.

As for the engaged conflict resolution style, it is only related at least significantly with assertiveness. Moreover, the relationship with assertiveness is again inverse in this conflict resolution style.

After that, the last objective of the present work is the creation of an equation capable of predicting conflict resolution modes. As it has been seen that the relationships between variables were statistically significant only for three conflict resolution styles (integrative, compliant, and compromising), only these three variables will be used as dependent variables. Before proceeding with the linear regression, the necessary assumptions (normality and independence) were checked.

Finally, the integrative style is the only one that can be predicted with the variables studied. Specifically, using assertiveness and psychological well-being we would be explaining 78.1% of the differences in the results obtained for this dependent variable (see Table 2). Furthermore, the regression equation for predicting the subject's score would be represented as follows:

Integrator = .8.836 + .321 (Assertiveness) + .047 (Psychological Well-Being)

Table 2

Determination coefficient in integrative style

	R	R squared
Assertiveness	.809	.655
Assertiveness and psychological well-being	.884	.781

Discussion and conclusions

As seen, and this study being a pioneering one, the conflict resolution styles in the State Security Forces and Corps are quite poor. Specifically, the most predominant was avoidant (55.07%). This means that most of them do not confront their problems, but they try to postpone or avoid the conflict without satisfying their own or others' needs or recognizing the existence of such conflict. (M. A. Rahim & Katz, 2019). The fact that avoidance is a predominant strategy is of particular importance because it has been shown to have an impact on mental health (Goodman et al., 2018), and it may increase sick leave and may be related to some of the news published about these workers, including suicide.

With respect to the relationship between conflict resolution styles and emotional intelligence, the results of this study only support the null relationship between the two constructs suggested by Gambill (2008) in the avoidant and dominant styles. In contrast to the aforementioned work, the following results were found:

- The integrative conflict resolution style shows a negative relationship with assertiveness so that the higher the assertiveness, the lower the levels of integrative conflict resolution.

- Complacent conflict resolution style shows a positive relationship with empathy levels (the higher the levels of the empathy variable, the higher the levels of complacent conflict resolution style).

- The engaged conflict resolution style shows a negative relationship with the levels of assertiveness so that the higher the levels of assertiveness, the lower the levels of engaged conflict resolution style.

The relationship of assertiveness with conflict resolution is noteworthy. While previous research has shown that the correlation is positive. (e.g., Abd El-Rahman et al., 2019). Moreover, it would seem logical that skills that allow one to adequately express opposition, disagreements, make and receive criticism, defend rights, and generally express negative feelings would have a relationship with better conflict resolution skills. Nevertheless, this study shows a negative relationship with all conflict resolution styles, where it was significant (integrative and compromising). The integrative style involves an exchange of information and an examination of differences to find the best solution. The fact that it involves communication could imply, as seen in previous studies, an emphasis on the appropriate way of expressing oneself, i.e., assertiveness. However, this could be due to cultural or even professional differences since no work has been done in this area to date.

On the other hand, the relationship between coping and empathy remains in the same position with respect to previous research (e.g., Luna-Bernal & de Gante-Casas, 2017). In this sense, assessing the emotional reaction in oneself produced by and congruent with the emotional state of the other is of great relevance in the compliant style. For putting oneself in the other's point of view is relevant to the primacy of the other's point of view.

As for the relationship between levels of psychological well-being and conflict resolution styles, this is a fairly new topic that has not previously appeared in the literature. The results obtained highlight that psychological well-being is only related to

the integrative style, with no statistically significant relationship appearing in the rest of the conflict resolution styles.

Since so few correlations were obtained, it was only possible to establish interesting empirical evidence for one conflict resolution style, namely the integrative style, by means of a multiple regression analysis. The 78.1% of the variance for the integrative style can be obtained by measuring assertiveness and psychological well-being.

The results obtained open a line of research: police mediation. That is, the need to take into account the figure of the police mediator who, in addition to the task of intermediary, would teach conflict resolution courses in an autonomous and proactive way. Within this work, it is worth mentioning the figure of Medipol. (Torrens Ibarguren, 2013). The Medipol program was developed in the Guardia Civil but was later extrapolated to the National Police Corps and the Autonomous Police. The program adapts Social Mediation to the police context and makes it possible to distinguish between: mediation between agents called Intra-Corps Mediation or MIC, mediation between an agent and a citizen (Extra-Corps Mediation or MEC), and Public Service Mediation (MSP), which will be carried out between citizens representing a community, where the agent will be the one who intercedes. This program has not been able to be maintained to date due to lack of resources. However, according to the results obtained, it would be very useful and of great interest. Likewise, if in addition to intervening in the context of mediation, we carry out an intervention in emotional intelligence, it could be beneficial for the health of workers both physically and psychologically (Martins et al., 2010). In view of the results obtained by López-Curbelo and his collaborators (2006), it would be necessary a training in emotional intelligence and, specifically, in the subcomponent of emotional perception and emotional regulation.

Despite its contributions, this study is not free of limitations. One of them is related to the sample. Although participants from several State Security Forces and Corps have been obtained, it would be convenient to analyze each corps separately since the working conditions are different. Therefore, it leaves aside environmental factors that could influence and be of special relevance. Neither have personality variables such as the Big Five or specific personality traits like Social Dominance or Authoritarianism been taken into account, which could provide a clearer answer to this question. Furthermore, this is a correlational study that would not indicate causality, only a mere relationship between the variables, and another type of analysis might be necessary to provide more clarity but due to the correlations found it cannot be carried out. It would also be necessary to compare it with workers in other fields who are in equally stressful situations, such as firefighters or health personnel working in the emergency department.

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