FACTORS FORMING THE IMAGE OF THE POLICE OFFICER

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Abstract *The article analyses the overall attitude that society holds towards serving police officers who swear an oath to serve the law and humans. On this basis, officials must maintain a close relationship with the public and foster a positive image in its eyes. Due to the dynamic social changes taking place in society, the image and its determinants need to be constantly explored. Otherwise, the work of police officers with the population will be meaningless and unsuccessful. Failure to reach this goal could negatively affect the performance of the police force, the stability of our societal norms may also be at risk. An image is generally seen as a set of factors that affect emotions, behavior, relationships, and include communication and personal feelings when evaluating an organization. A positive image increases the public trust, support and willingness to cooperate. Public relations are considered as one of the most important factors shaping the image.*

The object of the article is the image of a police officer, the main object of this thesis is to reveal the overall image of a modern police officer and unveil factors that affect it. To achieve this aims the thesis set out three tasks: to examine the concept of the image and its importance to public relations, identify the factors influencing the image of police officers, and investigate how society values police officers. The methods of systematic-structural analysis of scientific literature, questionnaire and mathematical analysis, as well as generalization are applied in the thesis.

The article has concluded that the public holds a positive overall image of police officers. The image of officers is formed by personal, relatives and friends experiences, media reports, and by legal acts and normative documents regulating police activities. Also, the personal qualities, legal competence, appearance in the service, corruption and conduct on and off duty. Quantitive research participants opinion the formation of the image in society works strongly is: first of all, the personal qualities of officials, followed by the competence, work knowledge and professionalism of officials.

Keywords: image, police officer, society, factors of image

Introduction

Modern police officers represent the interests of the population, serve for the law and the human. A police institution that has become a provider of social services must understand that the main evaluators of its activities are the population of the country. As a result, officials must maintain a close relationship with the public and foster a positive image in its eyes. According to R. Mikailienė, the creation of a positive image is one of the most important factors that help to create and maintain good relations with the society, strengthen the reputation and favorable opinion[1]. Therefore, this aspiration is also relevant for the police authority. "Close interaction

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[1] Rita Mikailienė, „Viešieji ryšiai ir muziejaus įvaizdžio formavimas", *XXI amžiaus muziejininkų kompetencijos ir gebėjimų ugdymas*, (2008): 50, https://museums.lt/wp-content/uploads/XXI-amz-muziejininku-kompetenciju_leidinys_2008.pdf.

between the police and the population, i. y. mutual positive effect and assistance, mutual cooperation, is one of the most important indicators of effective law enforcement in the country and security and public order of the population". According to R. Tidikis, "public opinion of citizens, like the image of the police, is not unchanged. It is formed and is shaped by various social factors. However, without examining the degree and direction of its formation, it is impossible to cooperate closely and rely on the help of the population."[2] Due to the dynamic social changes taking place in society, the image and its determinants need to be constantly explored in order to build close relationships and a positive image.

The image of police officers in modern society is poorly analyzed. Both in Lithuania and abroad, there are studies conducted by the police institution by C. Meier-Welser (1984), J. Ashcroft and others. (2003), K. Kasciukevičius (2009), E. Vaidelytė and G. Žvaliauskas (2010), C. L. Rusa and others. (2012), M. Krasauskas (2016), but the image of the police has not been systematically studied. In Lithuania the most researches is conducted on trust in the police institution and officers, and the image is mentioned only as an indicator of trust, so its focus are not studied in detail. The peculiarities of the formation of the image of police officers in Lithuania are also relatively little studied. However, in order to form, maintain or improve an image, one must know what criteria to focus on first. In order to create and maintain a positive image of police officers, it is necessary for the police authority to be aware of the factors that affect the formed image of police officers. Based on this, the crucial *problematic question* of this work is – what factors can maintain a stable positive image of police officers in modern society?

In this content, the **subject** of this article is the image of a police officer and the factors that shape it.

The **purpose** of the article is to analyze the factors that determine the image of a police officer.

The following **tasks** are set in the work:

1. To review the concept, importance and connection of image with public relations.

2. Identify factors that affect (both positive and negative) the image of police officers.

3. To study the evaluation of the image of police officers in society and the factors determining it.

In order to implement the set goal and tasks, the methods of systematic-structural analysis of scientific literature, questionnaire, mathematical analysis and generalization were applied.

The concept of image and its importance to the police authority

The term image is used in the scientific literature in various senses. According to G. Drūteikienė, the concept of image is widely studied in various fields of science - marketing, strategic management, marketing, graphic design, personnel management and organization, psychology, communication (Drūteikienė, 2003). There is no single and precise definition of image, as each branch of science applies it differently. Some authors use the term image when talking about a person's individual characteristics, clothing, and behavior, while others emphasize the importance of an organization's image (Marčinskas et al., 2015). Such an application of that definition reveals its ambiguity.

N. Lukianskaitė and J. Kartašova state that an image is "variously understood, more or less structured - the totality of ideas, feelings, perceptions and imaginations that a person or a

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[2] Rimantas Tidikis, „Policijos mokslų sisteminimo metodologinės prielaidos", *Jurisprudencija* 35, 27 (2002): 11, https://ojs.mruni.eu/ojs/jurisprudence/article/view/3495/3288.

group of persons have for a certain phenomenon or object" (2015). The above-mentioned author reveals the image as a consequence of the cognitive process. S. Lakačauskaitė expresses a peculiar approach to this phenomenon, who explains that "an image is an organization formed through a communication process, its services perception in society (externally)" (2012). She emphasizes the importance of communication in image building. The definition of G. Drūteikienė's image highlights several tendencies. According to her, image is the totality of ideas, feelings, perceptions and imaginations that a person or their group has in relation to an organization, which is influenced by the tangible and intangible elements of the organization, communication, personal and social values. This definition includes both the cognitive and communicative process (2003). The given definitions of image allow us to assume that an image is a set of ideas, feelings, impressions, perceptions and imaginations about an object, person or organization, the formation of which is determined by the external environment, communication and personal values.

The image is also assessed from a psychological point of view. According A. Diržytė et al., an image is "a particular psychological image that affects our emotions, behaviors, and relationships with other individuals or groups" (2012). M. Taljūnaitė agrees with these authors and adds that the image is a socio-psychological phenomenon (2001).

Besides, the image can be changed, it is not stable, static. The image can be both positive and negative. A negative image is not purposefully formed, it occurs spontaneously (e.g., without meeting public expectations), and creating a positive image is a complex process. However, both a negative image can be replaced by a positive one and a positive image can turn into a negative one due to certain events that are viewed unfavorably in society. This variability in image reveals that planning can create a positive image that is important to all organizations, but takes a lot of effort and time to form.

A positive image is considered to be one of the key factors that help to gain public support and trust in a particular institution and its staff. As a result, image formation should not be left to its own devices, as people more often believe in the image formed than in reality. Thus, a positive image of an organization cannot be accidental, it must be created and managed together, and it must be borne in mind that the result of image creation does not appear immediately, it takes time.

The positive image of the police authority and officers is important for a number of reasons. According to G. Valickas et al., a positive image can help attract the best candidates to a police force that can successfully address emerging issues and achieve significant performance. Secondly, the successful performance of the functions assigned to them by police officers requires the cooperation of the public and their voluntary support, which is linked to the perceived fairness and legitimacy of their actions. Thirdly, the image of the police and officials is also important from an organizational point of view, as a positive image can be associated with greater self-confidence and job satisfaction, which can increase the efficiency and quality of their work (2015). Thus, in order for the police to be able to properly perform the functions assigned to them, a positive image of officials must be formed in society. The image is also important for public safety. A positive attitude towards the police encourages greater cooperation between citizens in reporting violations of the law and criminal offenses. And this helps to prevent crimes and violations of the law. By the way, according to G. Valickas et al. the resulting attitude of the people towards the police may be related to the attitude towards other state authorities (2015). Thus, by creating and maintaining a positive image of its institution, the police at the same time foster the image of other law enforcement institutions in society.

Closely related to the image of the police in society and playing an important role is the public relations function. Every organization should engage with the public in shaping its image and use it to inform the public about its activities. Public relations is one of the most important tools for shaping the image of an organization and its importance is extremely important, as public relations also include the means of mass communication, i. At the same time, it informs a large audience, on the evaluation of which the image of the organization depends. This is especially important for the police authority, as the main evaluator of the activity is the state. The Internet is an effective communication channel, according to the Official Statistics Portal, in 2020 83 percent of the population aged 16-74 used the Internet (Skaitmeninė ekonomika ir visuomenė Lietuvoje, 2021). First of all, the Lithuanian Police publishes information about itself and the results of its work on the website of the Police Department under the Ministry of the Interior *www.policija.lrv.lt*. On this website you can find a lot of publicly available information, such as the structure of the Lithuanian police, contacts, areas of activity, administrative and legal information, services provided, police advice, news. The police also started using social networks in their activities, and the Lithuanian police created their *Facebook* and *Instagram* accounts. On these social media, the police provide relevant information to the public, publish preventations, raids, upload various photos and videos from the police service, thus enabling the state to see the daily day of the police service. In this way, the Lithuanian police maintains relations with the public, raises information about the activities of officers, shows the service of a police officer up close, and presents its position in the event of certain events that cause public dissatisfaction.

Thus, the police focus not only on improving their activities, increase the security of the population, but also on developing their image. Thanks to its image and public relations, the image of the police is improving; the public is better informed about police activities, which leads to greater public confidence in the police.

According to E. Vileikienė (2017), the data of 2016 research provided 67 % of the respondents trusted the Lithuanian police, 78 % of the respondents rated the work of the police as good, and 17 % as bad. According to the 2020 According to the survey data, it can be seen that 78 % of the respondents said they trusted the Lithuanian police, 48 % considered the police work prestigious and 79 % of the respondents rated the police work as "very good and good" and only 15 % "rated it as bad and very bad" (Vileikienė, 2021). Based on such survey data, policing performance and trust indicators are rising, but it is important to identify what, in addition to the public relations already discussed, the laws governing police activities and the media shape the positive or negative impact of police work image in society.

G. Paurienė (2019) writes, "sociological research and the media form the opinion that the morality and culture of an official are qualities that are expected and highly valued by all, and it can be said that they are often more important to people than even legal competence". It is difficult to disagree with this, because it is natural that the opinion of the country's population about officials is formed from the very beginning by the official's communication with them, their communication culture, and then only by legal competence. Therefore, first of all, it is appropriate to reveal which aspects of communication between police officers are perceived positively and negatively by the public.

"The image of an official may be determined by individual actions, decisions, language and inappropriate appearance, clothing, disregard for ethical principles in the service and at other times. Many public sector codes contain an obligation not to humiliate, not to discriminate against the name of the state, an official, a service both in the service and in the free service, to set an example for others in accordance with generally accepted moral norms" (Seniutienė et al., 2017). Thus, the factors that shape the image of police officers include in-service and out-

of-service actions. Every immoral behavior of a police officer has a strong resonance in society, which damages the reputation and trust of the entire police institution. Any unethical behavior by police officers destroys the image of the police and undermines public confidence in the institution. The actions of police officers taken out of office also shape the image of the police, so officers must act in accordance with generally accepted rules of conduct, not violate the law, and not degrade their name and leave the police officer. The image of police officers is positively influenced by the assistance provided by officers during and out of service, such as police assistance to the mother to reach the hospital[3], the officials help and assistance to people in outside of duty, such as the a police officer saved a woman's life[4].

Factors that shape the image of police officers include the appearance of police officers in the service. According to K. Vitkauskas (2015) wearing a tidy uniform in the service raises not only the self-confidence of officials but also the image of the police in society.

Another factor is corruption. The positive public image created by police officers is being undermined by corruption in the police. According to J. Tankebe (2010), the manifestations of corruption in the police undermine the public's attitude towards its credibility, procedural justice and efficiency. In order to improve the image of the officers, the police authority has started to develop prevention programs, to encourage the population not to bribe police officers and to report incidents when they are provoked to give them.

It is clear that the image of police officers in society depends on many different factors. The image can be formed by the communication aspects of the officials, their competence, knowledge of the work, actions performed both in the service and in their free time, the appearance of the officials and manifestations of corruption.

Analysis of the image of police officers

In Lithuania, surveys of the Lithuanian population are launched every year, in which the most frequently asked questions are: do you trust the police, how do you assess the activities of the police? However, general questions presented in public surveys do not reveal or identify what factors affect the image of officials in society. Therefore, this article presents an analysis of the image of police officers and identifies the factors that affect the image.

The image of police officers is a constantly evolving phenomenon, so the purpose of quantitative research is to determine how modern society values the image of police officers and to reveal what police officers should do to improve their image. Therefore, it is important to examine which general factors, in the opinion of the public, have the strongest influence on the formation of a positive and negative image of an official.

A quantitative survey method - a questionnaire - has been chosen to investigate the image of police officers. As the aim of this study was to examine the image in society, the selected questionnaire survey helped to collect a larger number of respondents' responses. The method of mathematical analysis was used to systematize the data results.

75 % of women and 25 % of men participated in the study (see Table 1). It should be noted that the majority of respondents were women, and this gender distribution shows that women appear to be more likely to participate in surveys than men.

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[3] „Trakų r. pareigūnai sėkmingai palydėjo gimdyvę į ligoninę: už tai sulaikė padėkų", 15min, 2021 m. rugsėjo 21 d., https://www.15min.lt/video/traku-r-pareigunai-sekmingai-palydejo-gimdyve-i-ligonine-uz-tai-sulauke-padeku -208554.
[4] „Pareigūnė ne tarnybos metu išgelbėjo moters gyvybę", Lietuvos policija, žiūrėta 2021 m. rugsėjo 27 d., https://policija.lrv.lt/lt/naujienos/pareigune-ne-tarnybos-metu-isgelbejo-moters-gyvybe.

Table 1. Respondent demographics

Gender	WOMEN			MEN	
	75 %			25 %	
Age	18–25	26–35	36–45	46–55	56 and more
	50,3 %	18,8 %	11,8 %	10,7 %	8,4 %
Education	Basic	Secondary	Professional	Higher non-university	Higher University
	3,1 %	29,8 %	12,6 %	18,5 %	36 %

The majority of respondents aged 18 to 25 participated in the survey by age - as many as 50.3 %, from 26 to 35 - 18.8 %, from 36 to 45 - 11.8 %, from 46 to 55 - 10.7 % and 56 and older - 8.4 % of respondents. The largest share of respondents to the survey has a university degree, 36 %. The other 29.8 % of respondents have completed secondary education, 18.5 % have completed non-university education, 12.6 % have vocational education and 3.1 % of the respondents have completed basic education.

The survey found that a majority of respondents (98 %) agree that a positive public image is crucial for police officers. Only 1.7 % disagreed, with 0.3 % not answering this question. Thus, it can be argued that a positive public image is particularly important for police officers, and the degree and directionality of their image needs to be examined.
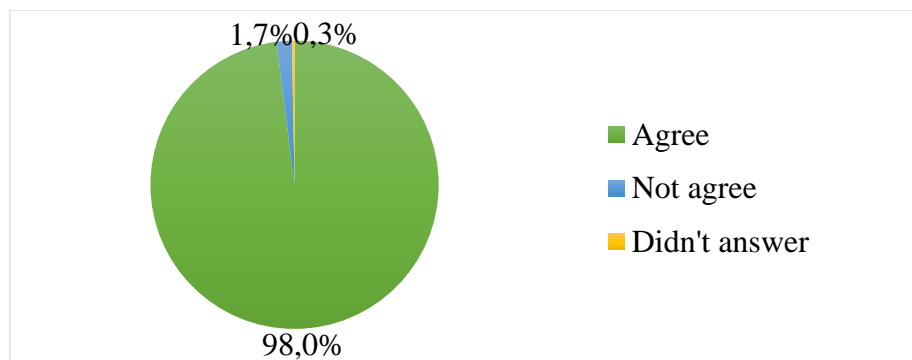

Figure 1. The importance of image for police officers

Respondents not only claim that their own image is important to the police, but also consider it to be positive.
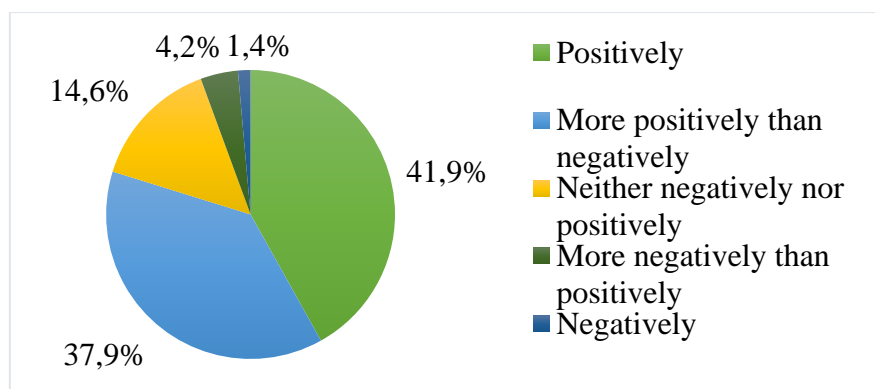

Figure 2. Assessment of the image of Lithuanian police officers

The obtained data reveal that 41.9 % of respondents evaluate the image of Lithuanian police officers positively, a similar percentage of respondents (37.9 %) evaluate the image of police officers more positively than negatively, and 14.6 % of respondents are neutral - neither positive nor negative. The image of officials is assessed more negatively than positively by 4.2 % and only 1.4 % negatively. Thus, if we sum up the answers "positively" and "more positively than negatively" and "more negatively than positively" and "negatively", we would get the following results: 79.8 % of the respondents who participated in the survey tend to evaluate the image of Lithuanian police officers positively and only 5, 6 % tend to view it negatively.

The image is usually determined and shaped by certain external factors. The image of the police is also shaped in society by certain actions that the public experiences or is informed about. Thus, the image of police officers formed by 31 % of respondents is shaped by their own personal experience (see Figure 3). It should be noted that a similar percentage of respondents indicated that the image is formed by the experience of relatives, friends - 24.1 % and the media - 23.9 %. A smaller share (20.7 %) of respondents stated that their opinion about the image of officials is formed by social networks. Only 0.4 % of the respondents, answering this question, chose the answer "other" and stated that the image is formed by the image formed by each person when confronted with them. Consequently, the strongest source of the image of police officers is the personal experience of the residents themselves when meeting with police officers.
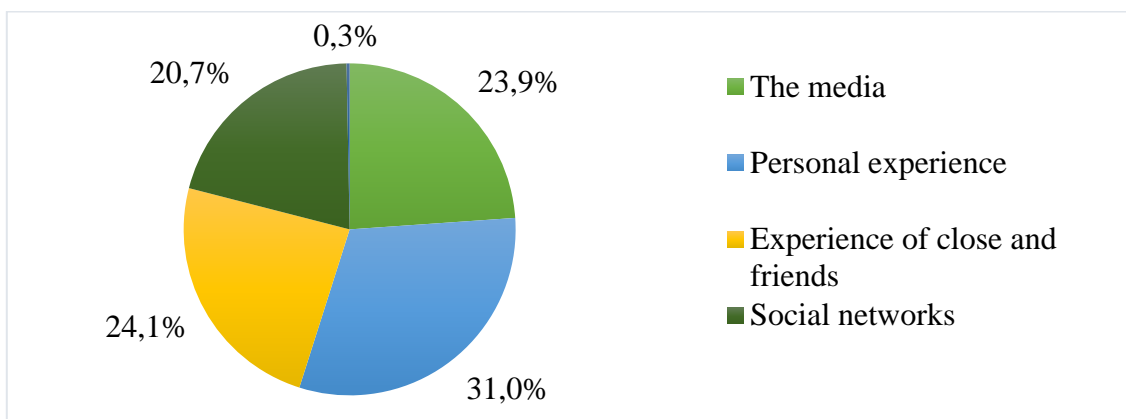

Figure 3. Sources form respondents' opinions about police officers.

It remains to be seen what factors influence the image of a police officer, which is formed by the public mostly from their own experience. The analysis of the results showed (see Figure 4) that the same percentage of respondents, that is 25.2 % each, equivalently evaluates the positive personal qualities of officials and the competence, professionalism and work knowledge of officials. Such data reveal that it is important for the public that police officers not only be knowledgeable and competent in their work, but also that they have positive personal qualities - being polite, understanding and sincere.

Part of the respondents (13 %) indicated (see Figure 4) that adherence to ethical principles contributes to the formation of a positive image of police officers, and 12.1 % of respondents attributed the assistance provided by police officers during their service to the strongest factors forming a positive image, such as assistance. a woman to change an exploded car tire on the road. As mentioned earlier, the image of the police is shaped not only by the actions taken by the officials during the service, but also by the actions taken by the officials in their free time - 10.2 % of the respondents indicated that the positive image of the officers is formed by the assistance provided by the police officer.
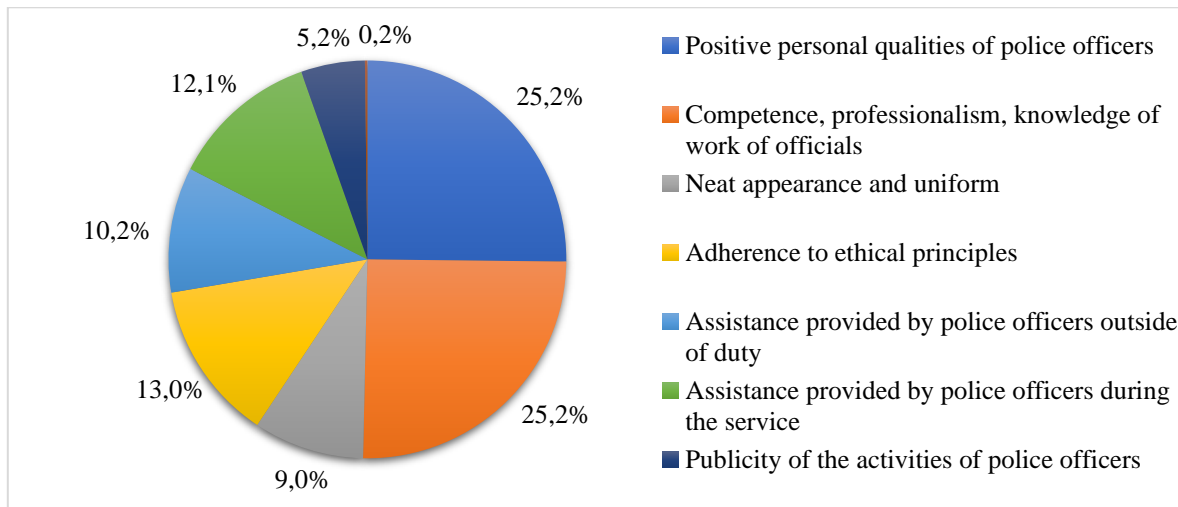
Figure 4. Factors influencing the image of police officers

Also, 9 % of respondents mentioned a neat appearance and uniform, and 5.2 % said that a positive image is most strongly formed by the publicity of police officers' activities. 0.2 % of respondents who chose the answer "other" stated that all the given answers have a strong influence on the formation of a positive image of police officers.

Similarly, respondents were asked to indicate no more than three factors that had the greatest impact on the formation of a negative image of police officers (see Figure 5). A review of the results showed that the majority, 21.9 % of respondents, chose negative personal characteristics of police officers as the strongest negative factor. It should be noted that a negative share of respondents - 17 % - chose the lack of competence and unprofessionalism as negative factors, as opposed to the positive ones. The third most negative factor, according to the respondents, is bribery (14.9 %), followed by police offenses committed by police officers (12.4 %) and abuse of the law (12.4 %). , 2 %) and unlawful behavior of police officers outside office (8.6 %). 3.1 % of respondents chose a messy appearance and uniform as a negative factor in the image of the police. Respondents who chose the answer "other" stated that the image of officials is negatively affected by: impunity, lack of motivation to perform their duties properly, use of status as a police officer for personal purposes or aspirations that may harm others, and one respondent image formation.
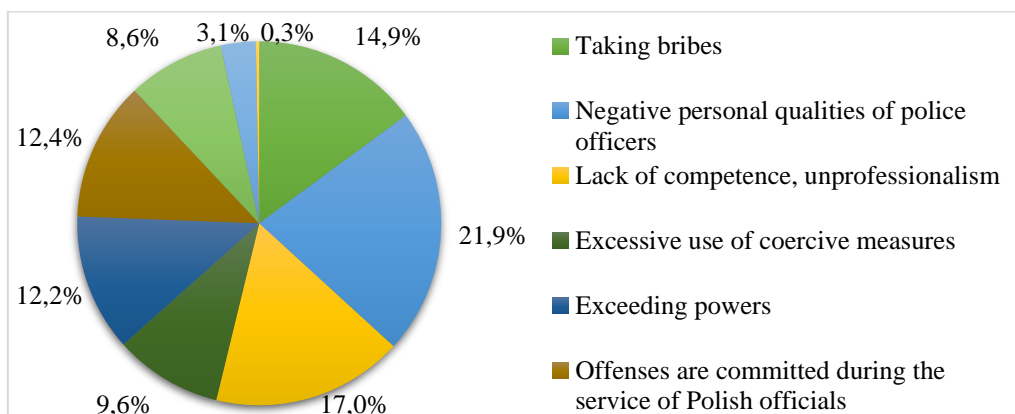

Fig. 5 Factors negatively affecting the image of police officers

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Thus, the formation of both positive and negative image is strongly influenced by the personal qualities of officials and their competence, knowledge and professionalism, but in assessing negative factors, negative personal qualities of officials received more votes than incompetence and unprofessionalism of officials. Therefore, it can be assumed that the population tends to value the personal qualities of officials more than their professionalism and competence. Whether the public agrees with this assumption was asked further in the study.

Respondents had to choose between two statements - "people value the personal qualities of police officers (courtesy, sincerity, etc.) rather than professionalism and competence" and "the immoral behavior of one police officer has a strong impact on society". with whom they agree or disagree; partly agrees and partly disagrees.
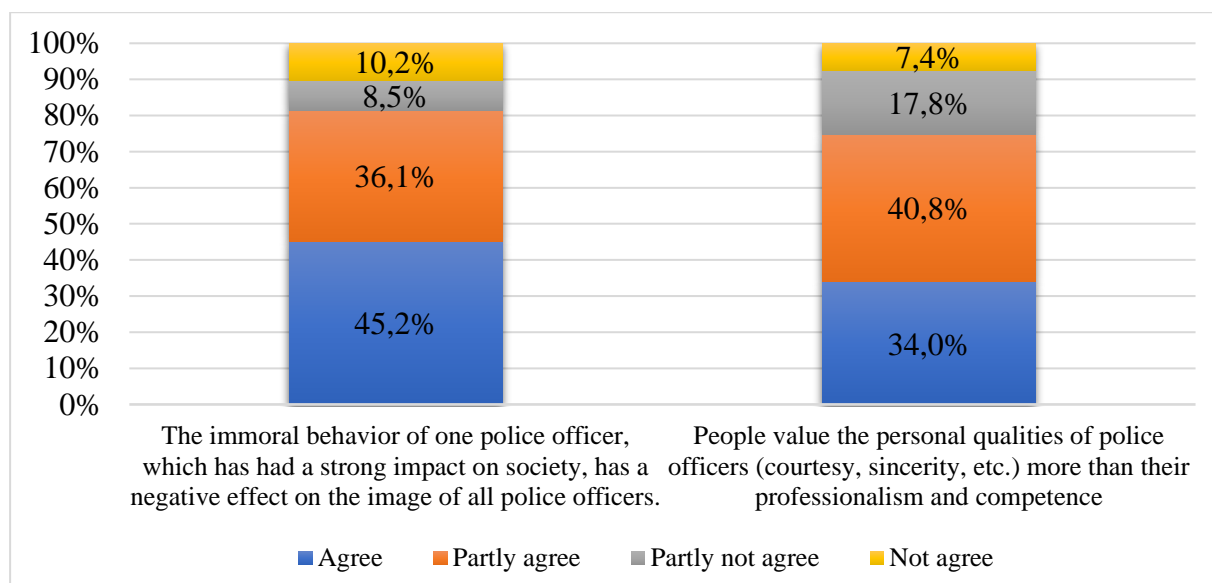

Figure 6. Allegations about the image of police officers

The results of the survey showed (see Figure 6) that 34 % of respondents agreed with the statement that people value the personal qualities of officials more than their professionalism and competence, 40.8 % partially agreed, 17.8 % partially disagreed and disagreed. 7.4 % of respondents to the study. Summarizing the answers "positively" and "partially positively" and "partially negatively" and "negatively", it can be said that people tend to agree with the assumption that the population values the personal qualities of officials more than their professionalism and competence.

The aim was also to find out what impact the immoral behavior of one police officer had on public opinion. 45.2 % of respondents agreed with the statement that it has a negative effect on the overall image of the police, 36.1 % tended to agree only partially, 8.5 % partially disagreed and 10.2 % tended to disagree. In summary, it can be said that the personal qualities of police officers are one of the most important factors in a positive image of a police officer, so that every police officer must adhere to the principles of proper communication and ethics, as well as knowledge of their work. Behavior can simply ruin the image of police officers in society as a whole.

Conclusions

Perception of an image as a result of a cognitive or communicative process and in a psychological aspect determines its evaluation as a set of factors affecting emotions, behavior,

relationships, and encompassing communication and personal feelings in evaluating an organization. A positive image leads to officers' self-confidence, improved quality of work, public confidence, willingness to cooperate and support for police officers. All this strengthens the close relationship.

The sources of image formation of police officers are: personal, experiences of relatives, friends and media reports. The formation of a positive and negative image of officers in society is influenced by: legal acts and normative documents regulating police activities and other general factors: personal characteristics of police officers - personal qualities, legal competence, appearance at work and behavior during and out of work.

The results of the investigation, it can be stated that the image of Lithuanian police officers is assessed positively by the majority of the population participating in the investigation. The obtained results suggest that police officers are valued well in modern society. The formation of such indicators is mainly influenced by the personal qualities of police officers, followed by their competence, professionalism and knowledge of work. Thus, although the image of police officers is considered to be quite positive, the public believes that in order to achieve even better indicators, police officers should pay more attention to maintaining closer relations with the public and improving their communication skills. It can also be mentioned that the competence and professionalism of officials should be improved, as these are among the strongest indicators influencing the formation of a positive and negative image.

So the image of police officers is shaped by personal experience, and the strongest influencing factors are, first of all, the personal qualities of the officers (courtesy, understanding, sincerity), and only then are competence, work knowledge and professionalism mentioned.

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