



## Research Article

# Aggression and Social Competence in Police Officers: An Analysis of Role and Gender Differences

Asma Younis

Department of Applied Psychology, Bahauddin Zakaria University, Multan, Pakistan

\*Correspondence: [asmayounis483@gmail.com](mailto:asmayounis483@gmail.com)

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### Abstract

The relationship between aggression and social competence is typically inverse in general psychology. However, the unique, high-stakes environment of policing may complicate this dynamic, as assertive and commanding behaviours—often instrumental for safety and control—may be perceived differently. This study investigated the effects of aggressive behaviour on social competence among police officers, examining differences based on work designation (office vs. field) and gender. A correlational study was conducted with a sample of 200 officers (100 male, 100 female) from the Punjab Police in Multan, Pakistan. Participants completed the Youth Social Competence Scale (YSCS) and the Aggression Questionnaire (AQ). Data were analyzed using Pearson correlation, linear regression, and independent samples t-tests in SPSS v23. Contrary to conventional literature, a significant positive correlation was found between aggression and social competence ( $r = .359, p < .01$ ), with aggression accounting for 12.5% of the variance in social competence scores. No significant differences were found between office and field officers on either measure. However, a significant gender difference emerged in social competence, with male officers reporting higher levels than females ( $t = 2.144, p = .033$ ). No significant gender difference was found in aggression levels. The findings suggest that within the policing context, traits measured as aggression may be functionally linked to perceptions of social competence, reflecting the value of instrumental assertiveness in law enforcement. The results highlight the context-dependent nature of psychological constructs and underscore the need for role-specific and gender-sensitive approaches in police training and support programs.

**Keywords:** Aggression, Social Competence, Police Psychology, Gender Differences, Work Designation, Instrumental Assertiveness, Law Enforcement



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### Introduction

The profession of law enforcement is universally recognized as one of the most psychologically demanding occupations, characterized by exposure to critical incidents, public scrutiny, and the constant imperative to make split-second decisions under pressure (Baldwin et al., 2022). Within this high-stakes environment, the personal attributes of police officers, particularly their social competence and behavioural tendencies, are critical determinants of their effectiveness, community relations, and overall well-being (Huhta et al., 2021). Social competence—the ability to interact effectively and appropriately with others—is a cornerstone of effective policing. It encompasses skills such as communication, empathy,

conflict resolution, and the building of public trust (Junge et al., 2020). Conversely, aggression, often defined as behaviour intended to cause harm or assert dominance, represents a significant risk factor, potentially leading to excessive use of force, citizen complaints, and erosion of community confidence (van Reemst et al., 2022). Extensive research in general psychology typically posits an inverse relationship between these constructs, suggesting that aggressive tendencies can impair prosocial behaviour and damage interpersonal relationships (Obsuth et al., 2015).

However, the unique context of police work may complicate this established dynamic. The occupational culture of law enforcement often values assertiveness, command presence, and the controlled use of authority, traits which may functionally overlap with instrumental forms of aggression necessary to control volatile situations and ensure officer safety (Batic and Gogov, 2023). This raises a critical question: within the specific subculture of policing, could behaviours typically classified as aggressive in general populations be perceived or experienced as components of effective, socially competent performance?

Furthermore, it remains unclear how these psychological constructs are distributed across different roles and demographics within a police force. Differences between officers working in administrative roles versus those in frontline, field-based positions may arise due to varying job demands, stressors, and operational cultures (Chen and Wu, 2022). Similarly, gender differences in social competence and aggression have been widely studied in other contexts, often noting societal expectations that can influence self-perception and behaviour (Del Giudice, 2015). Understanding these potential differences is vital for developing targeted training and support programs.

Despite the importance of these factors, there is a paucity of empirical research examining the interplay between aggression and social competence specifically within the context of Pakistani law enforcement. The Punjab Police, as one of the largest police forces in the world, operates within a distinct socio-cultural framework that necessitates localized study.

Therefore, the present study aims to investigate the effects of aggressive behaviour on social competence among officers of the Punjab Police. Specifically, it seeks to:

- Examine the relationship between self-reported aggression and social competence.
- Compare levels of aggression and social competence between officers working in administrative offices and those working in the field.
- Investigate gender differences in aggression and social competence among police officers.

By exploring these objectives, this research seeks to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of officer psychology, ultimately informing strategies for human resource development, mental health support, and professional training within police organizations.

## Methodology

### Study Participants

A sample of 200 police officers was recruited from various police stations in the district of Multan, Punjab, Pakistan. The sample consisted of an equal number of male (n=100) and female (n=100) participants. The selection criteria required that all participants be serving officers of the Punjab Police, with the cohort further divided between those whose primary duties were administrative (working in offices) and operational (working in the

field). This purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure the sample represented the two key groups under investigation.

### **Instruments**

Data were collected using two self-report questionnaires.

**Youth Social Competence Scale (YSCS):** Social competence was measured using the Youth Social Competence Scale (Lyons, 2005). This 14-item instrument assesses an individual's comfort and confidence in various social situations. Participants rate each item on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. Four of the items are negatively worded and are reverse-scored prior to analysis. The total score is calculated by summing all items, with possible scores ranging from 14 to 56, where higher scores indicate higher perceived social competence. The scale has demonstrated acceptable internal consistency in previous research (Lyons, 2005).

**Aggression Questionnaire (AQ):** Aggression was measured using the Aggression Questionnaire (Perry, 1992). This 29-item instrument is designed to assess an individual's level of aggression across different contexts. Participants respond to each item on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Extremely Uncharacteristic to Extremely Characteristic. Two items are negatively worded and are reverse-scored. The total score is obtained by summing all responses, with higher scores indicating higher levels of self-reported aggression. This measure has established internal consistency in prior academic use (Perry, 1992).

### **Procedure**

A correlational research design was employed to investigate the relationship between the two primary variables: aggression and social competence. After obtaining necessary permissions, researchers visited multiple police stations in Multan. Officers who met the selection criteria were individually approached, and the purpose of the study was explained to them. Participation was voluntary. Those who provided informed consent were administered a demographic information sheet followed by the two questionnaires. Standardized instructions were provided for each scale to ensure consistent understanding among participants. The completed data were then compiled and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 23. Data analysis techniques included Pearson correlation, linear regression, and independent samples t-tests to examine the relationships and group differences central to the research objectives.

### **Results**

The internal consistency of both measurement tools was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha. The Social Competence scale (14 items) yielded an alpha of .527, and the Aggression Questionnaire (29 items) yielded an alpha of .533. Both values are below the conventional threshold of .70, indicating low reliability. This suggests that the items within each scale may not be consistently measuring the same underlying construct. This is a significant limitation, and any conclusions drawn from the data must be tempered with caution, as the measurements contain a substantial amount of error.

Table 1. Cronbach's Alpha of social competence and aggression questionnaire.

Sr.#	Scale	Cronbach's Alpha	No of items
1	Social competence scale	.527	14
2	Aggression questionnaire	.533	29

Table 2. Correlation between social competence and aggression.

	Variable	SC	AQ
1	Social competence	-	.359**
2	Aggression	-	-

A Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between social competence and aggression (Table 2). A statistically significant positive correlation was found ( $r^* = .359, p < .01$ ). This indicates that as levels of aggression increase, levels of social competence also tend to increase, contrary to the expected inverse relationship.

Table 3. Regression between social competence and aggression.

Model	B	Std.Error	B	T	Sig
Constant	18.921	3.190		5.932	.000
AQ	.194	.036	.359	5.392	.000

R = .359 Adjusted R square = .125, F = 29.079

A simple linear regression was performed to predict social competence based on aggression (Table 3). The regression model was statistically significant,  $F(1, 198) = 29.079, p < .001$ . Aggression accounted for approximately 12.5% of the variance in social competence scores (Adjusted  $R^2 = .125$ ). The aggression score was a significant positive predictor of social competence ( $B = 0.194, \beta = .359, p < .001$ ). This means that for every one-unit increase in the aggression score, the social competence score is predicted to increase by 0.194 units.

Table 4. The difference between an officer and a field officer.

Scales	Designation	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	St Error Mean	T	Df	Sig	Mean Diff
SC	Officer	100	35.850	3.955	.395	-.764	198	.446	-.4500
	Field	100	36.300	4.361	.436	-.764	196.136	.446	-.4500
	Worker								
AQ	Officer	100	88.602	8.255	.833	.730	196	.467	.80204
	Field	100	87.800	7.185	.718	.729	191.224	.467	.80204
	Worker								

An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the social competence (SC) and aggression (AQ) scores of officers working in offices and those working in the field (Table 4). No significant difference was found in social competence scores between office officers ( $M = 35.85, SD = 3.96$ ) and field officers ( $M = 36.30, SD = 4.36$ );  $t(198) = -0.764, p = .446$ . Moreover, no significant difference was found in aggression scores between office officers ( $M = 88.60, SD = 8.26$ ) and field officers ( $M = 87.80, SD = 7.19$ );  $t(196) = 0.730, p = .467$ . The findings indicate

that there is no significant difference in either social competence or aggression levels based on the work designation (office vs. field) within the police force.

Table 5. The difference between male and female workers and officers.

Scale	Gender	N	Mean	Std . Dev. Mean	Std.Error Mean	T	DF	Sign	Mean Difference
SC	Male	100	36.700	4.407	.4407	2.144	198	.033	1.250
	Female	100	35.450	3.814	.3814	2.144	194.012	.033	1.250
AQ	Male	100	8.242	8.242	.8242	1.519	196	.130	1.662
	Female	100	7.101	7.102	.7174	1.522	192.853	.130	1.622

An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare scores based on gender (Table 5). A statistically significant difference was found in social competence scores between males ( $M = 36.70$ ,  $SD = 4.41$ ) and females ( $M = 35.45$ ,  $SD = 3.81$ );  $t(198) = 2.144$ ,  $p = .033$ . The mean difference was 1.25, indicating that male officers reported significantly higher levels of social competence than female officers. No significant difference was found in aggression scores between males ( $M = 88.24$ ,  $SD = 8.24$ ) and females ( $M = 86.62$ ,  $SD = 7.17$ );  $t(196) = 1.519$ ,  $p = .130$ . (Note: There appears to be a data entry error in the female AQ mean in the table; it is listed as 7.101, but the SD and context suggest it should be in the 86-87 range. The interpretation is based on the mean difference of ~1.66). Gender differences were observed in social competence, but not in aggression. Male officers perceived themselves to be more socially competent than their female counterparts. Levels of self-reported aggression were not significantly different between genders.

### Discussion

This study aimed to investigate the effects of aggressive behaviour on social competence among police officers and to explore differences based on work designation and gender. The findings present a complex picture that challenges conventional assumptions and highlights the unique socio-professional context of law enforcement.

The most salient and unexpected finding of this research is the positive relationship between aggression and social competence. Contrary to the predominant literature in general psychology, which often documents a negative correlation between these constructs (Obsuth et al., 2015; Shah et al., 2024), our results indicate that higher self-reported aggression is associated with higher self-reported social competence. This paradox may be specific to the high-stakes, authority-based environment of policing. Within this context, traits such as assertiveness, decisiveness, a commanding presence, and the ability to take control of volatile situations—characteristics that may be perceived or self-reported as aggression on a standard questionnaire—are likely integral to, and synonymous with, effective performance. What is measured as "aggression" in a general sense may, for a police officer, represent instrumental aggression: a controlled, goal-directed behaviour necessary to establish authority, ensure public safety, and command compliance. Consequently, officers who perceive themselves as capable of deploying such instrumental aggression may also rate themselves highly on social competence items related to leadership, influence, and effectiveness in social interactions, thus explaining the positive correlation. This suggests that the operational definition and functional

value of aggression are fundamentally different within the policing subculture (Torres and Glazer, 2023).

A further significant result is the absence of significant differences in both social competence and aggression levels between officers working in offices and those working in the field. This null finding is highly informative and endorsed by the conclusions from Aniței et al. (2014). It suggests that the overarching organizational culture of police work—often characterized by a strong shared identity, common training, and a values system emphasizing authority and cohesion (the so-called "blue wall")—may exert a more powerful influence on these traits than specific job duties or environmental exposures. Whether an officer is processing paperwork or patrolling the streets, they are part of a unified structure that likely socializes its members into a specific behavioural and cognitive framework. This result implies that the psychological profile related to assertiveness and social interaction may be consistent across the force, potentially selected for during recruitment or cultivated during early training experiences.

Regarding demographic differences, the analysis revealed a significant gender effect for social competence but not for aggression. Results are more or less similar to those of Walker (2005). Specifically, male officers reported significantly higher levels of social competence than their female counterparts. This finding can be situated within the extensive literature on women in male-dominated professions, particularly policing (Sousa and Gauthier, 2008). Female officers often navigate a dual challenge: performing their duties effectively while contending with traditional gender stereotypes that can conflict with the assertive, authoritative aspects of the police role (Chikwe et al., 2024). The lower self-reported social competence among females may not reflect an actual skills deficit but rather a difference in self-perception influenced by these external pressures and biases. It may indicate that women are socialized to, or feel compelled to, evaluate their competence by different, often stricter, standards. The lack of a significant difference in aggression scores is equally noteworthy, challenging stereotypes of male officers being inherently more aggressive and suggesting that professional socialization may mitigate innate gender differences in these traits.

Several important limitations must be considered when interpreting these results. Primarily, the low Cronbach's Alpha values for both measurement scales indicate problems with the internal reliability of the instruments in this specific sample. This raises the possibility that the unexpected positive correlation is an artifact of measurement error rather than a true phenomenon. The scales used may not have been adequately adapted to capture the nuances of these constructs within the unique context of policing. Future research should employ instruments with proven reliability and validity for this population or develop context-specific measures that can better distinguish between maladaptive aggression and functional, instrumental assertiveness.

Despite these limitations, the study offers valuable insights. It underscores that psychological constructs cannot be understood in a vacuum but must be interpreted within their specific professional and cultural context. The positive aggression-competence link invites a re-evaluation of what constitutes effective behaviour in high-authority professions. For practice, these findings underscore the need for leadership training that enables officers, regardless of gender or role, to refine assertive, command-presence skills into forms of social competence that foster community trust rather than undermine it. Future research should employ longitudinal

designs and more robust, context-tailored measures to unravel further the complex relationship between these pivotal traits in law enforcement professionals.

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