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## Reduction of Threats and Violence Toward Ticket Inspectors and Police Officers Through Systematic Analysis of Conflict Behavior

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Netherlands Institute for the Study  
of Crime and Law Enforcement



## Summary

Threats and violence can be prevented and deescalated by altering people's actions during a conflict. This report introduces a situational approach to studying violence in the field of workplace aggression. We employ a novel methodology of video observations to examine conflict interactions between citizens and two kinds of frontline worker groups: police officers and ticket inspectors. We conclude: 1) The actions of employees, in both ticket inspection and policing, significantly influence whether citizens act threateningly or violently. These influences cannot be reduced solely to the identities of those who are involved or to wider environmental structures. Thus, interactional dynamics directly shape the risk of threats and violence in work-life contexts. 2) In both policing and ticket inspection, we observed that overly justice-seeking attitudes and behaviors among employees could escalate conflicts. Employees who viewed citizens' behavior in moral terms often sought to punish them for their transgressions. This desire to correct wrongs and address negative attitudes increases the risk of escalating threats and violence and risk-taking behaviors. 3) Finally, using video data is a valuable method for understanding workplace aggression. Video analysis allows for objective and systematic analysis of how interactions unfold over time and space. Based on our findings we offer hands on guidelines for how ticket inspectors and police officers can prevent and deescalate threats and violence from citizens.



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*For transparency, it should be noted that the textual cash advance content of this report overlaps with and modifies content from the original research grant application, the two subsequent PhD projects, and the conflict training material developed from the research findings (see [tinyurl.com/k5znetzp](https://tinyurl.com/k5znetzp)). Consequently, the current report should be viewed as a secondary publication designed to present our results in a concise manner.*

## Introduction and Research Questions

Can ticket inspectors reduce the risk of violence during a conflict with a passenger by sitting down next to them? Does a calm body posture by police officers when issuing fines have a de-escalating effect? This project seeks to answer such questions about behavior in conflict situations involving police officers, ticket inspectors, and unruly citizens. The goal of this project was to enhance the psychosocial work environment for police officers and ticket inspectors by systematically identifying behavioral patterns among employees that can prevent conflicts with citizens and avoid escalation into threats and violence.

Police officers and ticket inspectors are at a higher risk of facing threats and violence compared to other sectors. Unlike the general decline in societal violence, the frequency of self-reported violence and threats in these sectors remains high (NOA-L, 2023). The seriousness of this issue is underscored by well-documented evidence that exposure to violence and threats is a risk factor for long-term consequences, such as sick leave and post-traumatic stress disorder (Lanctôt & Guay, 2014).

We utilized new research based on analyses of video-recorded conflict situations, which shows that specific behavioral patterns can minimize violence. The project leveraged this research to systematically analyze video recordings of conflict situations encountered by ticket inspectors and police officers, aiming to answer three related research questions (RQs)

- **RQ1:** What types of situations with citizens pose an elevated risk of escalating into violence against employees?
- **RQ2:** What kinds of employee behaviors increase or decrease the risk of being subjected to violence?
- **RQ3:** What kinds of profession-specific ‘first aid kits’- containing conflict management tools with concrete examples of appropriate and inappropriate conflict behavior - can be developed based on the results of the project?

These questions have been addressed in two PhD projects, each focusing on one occupational group: “Ticket Inspection in Action: Managing Impressions, Status, and Emotions in Contested Everyday Encounters” by Camilla Bank Friis, and “Policing in Action: An Interaction-Ethological Study of Police Violence and Conflict Management” by Hans Myhre Sunde (thesis to be defended in 2024).

This work is among the first research attempts to provide a detailed, systematic, and non-retrospective perspective on behavioral patterns during conflicts in ticket inspection and policing. It is also unique in examining conflicts with varying degrees of threats and violence, focusing on the role of the victims in conflicts, and using body camera recordings (including both audio and video) for systematic behavioral analysis during conflicts. The findings of these studies have resulted in training material for the two occupational groups, and have had a direct impact on the working environment of, in first instance, the ticket inspector group.



## Background

Public employees in law enforcement or passenger transportation, including police officers and ticket inspectors, report a high prevalence of workplace violence (NOA-L, 2023). Both in Denmark and internationally, the occurrence of violence and its negative health and economic consequences for employees and employers are well-documented (Lanctôt & Guay, 2014; Møllerhøj et al., 2016).

Explanations for workplace violence often rely on statistical analyses of the *individual* characteristics of those involved or the *institutional* characteristics of workplaces. Personal traits associated with perpetrators of violence include mental disorders, substance abuse, and previous criminal convictions (Møllerhøj et al., 2016). Victim statistics and workplace studies further show that women, young, and inexperienced employees are overrepresented among victims (Hogh & Viitasara, 2005). Additionally, a high-pressure work environment can increase the occurrence of conflicts and the risk of threats and violence (Sharipova et al., 2010), making employees less equipped to handle them (Muller & Zeestraten, 2015).

However, research on violence indicates that its occurrence and severity cannot be explained solely by personal traits or broader institutional factors; they are also significantly shaped by the interaction dynamics of the *situation* itself (Collins, 2008; Felson & Steadman, 1983), including the behavioral reactions of employees during the conflict event (Luckenbill, 1980; Tark & Kleck, 2004). For example, victims who resist an assault have a good chance of escaping, but their resistance can also increase the risk of violence if they fail to get away (Ullman, 1998). In nightlife settings, the risk of serious violence increases if the victim ends up on the ground (Weenink, 2014). This research is relevant for occupational health as it suggests that violence against employees can be prevented through appropriate employee behavior during conflicts.

In occupational health research, the lack of knowledge about which behaviors de-escalate or escalate specific conflict situations poses a challenge for existing preventive measures (Biering et al., 2017). This is highlighted in systematic reviews of workplace violence prevention interventions (Price et al., 2015). Additionally, the Danish Working Environment Authority also emphasizes the importance of gathering knowledge about conflict situations in their guidelines for preventing violence and threats in the workplace. They stress the need to document circumstances such as “where” and “when” violent episodes occur, “what” happened before the episodes turned violent, and “how” the violent episodes were handled as a crucial prevention tool. This is a commendable ambition given the evidence from violence research that situational dynamics play a crucial role in the course of conflicts.

However, the challenge is that fulfilling this ambition relies on a documentation practice that depends on the subjective memory and retrospective reporting of the employee (victim), which is a data source known to be affected by cognitive limitations (e.g., memory lapses) and lacking behavioral details about the handling of the incident (Baumeister et al., 2007; Vrij et al., 2014).

A central methodological advancement in violence research is the use of video recordings for systematic analyses of behavior patterns as they unfold during the conflict itself (Nassauer & Legewie, 2018). Video recordings of conflict situations are unique for research and practice because they offer, for the first time, an accurate picture of how violence concretely occurs without being influenced by the methodological biases inherent in more subjective data sources. Additionally, video recordings provide highly detailed and reliable insights into specific action sequences and emotional expressions, as these can be closely examined and finely coded through numerous replays and slow-motion (Lindegard & Bernasco, 2018; Nassauer & Legewie, 2018).

The tangible nature of results based on video behavior analysis makes them highly applicable for developing violence prevention recommendations. For example, our existing research based on video recordings has shown that employees who move toward the perpetrator during a shop robbery are at greater risk of violence than those who move away (Mosselman et al., 2018). Such tangible behavioral insights illustrate how systematic video behavior analysis can provide preventive knowledge about risk factors and appropriate behavioral reactions in situations where occupational life is threatened by violence.

## Design

This project relies on video recordings of conflicts between police officers and citizens on the street, and between ticket inspectors and citizens in public transport. This video-based approach was supplemented by interviews with employees and shorter field observations to gain insight into their experienced conflict encounters and how these experiences might shape their behavior during future conflicts. A strength of our design is the combination of objective insights into the behavioral aspects of conflicts with subjective insights from participants' self-reported feelings, motives, and thoughts. Such synthesis of objective behavior and subjective experience allows the social sciences to provide robust causal explanations of social life (Kaas et al., 2024), including violent interactions.

We focused on these two occupational groups to examine empirically to what extent escalation and de-escalation dynamics are job-specific or similar across professions. Importantly, the formal prerequisites for conflict management differ for the two groups: police officers, unlike ticket inspectors, have the authority to use force against citizens and engage in a wider range of activities, such as maintaining public order and investigating crimes. This makes it unlikely that all conflict de-escalation behaviors can be generalized across the two professions, although we believe that some dynamics generalize across contexts and possibly most cases of interpersonal human aggression.

## Data

Police officers and ticket inspectors were chosen because they are at a relatively high risk of threats and violence in their work (NOA-L, 2023), and because we succeeded in gaining access to video recordings of their conflict interactions. Video recordings of conflicts between police officers and citizens were provided by the Dutch Police and were captured using public CCTV cameras. These recordings, stored for investigation purposes, were made available to us with permission from Netherlands Public Prosecution Service under strict security measures (e.g., not revealing identities, not connecting insights from video with other data sources, screening staff, not using phones during analysis, and working in a room without windows). Interviews with police officers were conducted in Norway.

Video recordings of conflicts in public transportation were provided by a Danish bus company, captured using body-worn cameras (BWCs) that inspectors carry for prevention purposes. The bus company also facilitated contacts with inspectors for interviews and allowed field observations on buses.

In selecting conflicts, we relied on CCTV camera operators detecting incidents on the street and inspectors pressing the record button on their BWCs. To avoid selecting only cases where conflict and violence occurred, we included incidents of varying severity levels. CCTV recordings of police and citizen interactions involved conflictual encounters in the street in Amsterdam during the period 2020-2021. BWC recordings of inspector and passenger interactions involved fining events (with and without aggression and violence) during the same period.

## Analysis

The video recordings were coded using an 'ethogram method' originally developed in behavioral biology (Jones et al., 2016). This method involves creating meticulous descriptions of possible observed behavior types in a catalog, which is then used for systematic behavior quantification. The observed behavior types include specific actions such as hitting and pushing, movements towards and away from the conflict partner, bodily expressions of emotion, types of touch, eye contact, and types of verbal communication (Levine et al., 2011; Lindegaard et al., 2017; Parks et al., 2013). The coding incorporated existing knowledge on how such micro-behaviors can be interpreted as expressions of different types of emotions, including dominance, submission, and hierarchical interpersonal relationships (Tracy & Matsumoto, 2008). The data were analyzed both qualitatively and using statistical methods.

## Findings

Since the work for the project was carried out in two PhD projects (each comprising four papers), we will summarize the findings of those projects, and reflect on how those findings helped us to address each of the three research questions of the project.

### Regarding RQ 1: Types of conflict situations

First, we summarize our results regarding RQ1, which concerns the types of situations that employees should be particularly aware of to prevent conflicts with citizens from escalating into violence.

#### Ticket Inspector Paper 1: "Citizen Self-Presentation and Aggression in Ticket Fining Events: A Video Observational Study."

This study examined how bus passengers present themselves when challenging or questioning a ticket inspector's announcement of a fine. Data comprise video footage of 40 events recorded with occupational body-worn cameras. By qualitatively analyzing passengers' verbal and nonverbal behaviors, we identified five self-presentation types: the innocent, the honest, the wronged, the defiant, and the superior. We found that passengers who convey a defiant or superior impression typically also act aggressively toward inspectors. Additionally, aggressive passengers are more likely to change their self-presentation throughout the event. Encounters lasting more than two minutes are correlated with a higher risk of aggression and violence.

*Conclusion:* In contested encounters with citizens, inspectors should be particularly alert when passengers convey a defiant or superior impression, as these self-representations correlate with aggression toward inspectors. Frequent shifts in passenger self-representations also indicate a higher risk of aggression and violence. Inspectors should consider pulling back or asking for assistance from colleagues or bystanders if the encounter lasts more than two minutes.

#### Ticket Inspector Paper 2: "Group Styles of Justice or Service: How Ticket Inspectors Manage Contested Citizen Encounters."

This analysis examined different approaches to ticket inspection. Data were 11 interviews with ticket inspectors and 88 body-worn camera recordings. By comparing ticket inspector actions in contested encounters with their moral positions and job understandings, we identified two enforcement styles among inspectors. One style focuses on providing a service, while the other emphasizes justice by catching fare evaders. These two styles reflect distinct group cultures among ticket inspectors.

*Conclusion:* Ticket inspectors operate with two different enforcement styles: service-oriented or justice-seeking. In teams driven by justice motives, employees face a higher risk of aggression and violence from passengers. Inspectors should frequently shift teams to prevent the development of a justice-seeking culture and should be offered alternative ways of achieving justice that do not compromise their safety.

Police officer paper 1: "Revisiting the 'Demeanor Hypothesis': A Video-Observational Analysis of Encounters Between Law Enforcement Officers and Citizens in Amsterdam."

We investigated the 'demeanor hypothesis,' which suggests that police officers are more likely to arrest and use force against citizens displaying a 'bad attitude.' We observed 78 encounters captured on surveillance cameras in Amsterdam. The video material allowed us to code specific behaviors (e.g., 'citizen pointed at officer') rather than relying on the more ambiguous interpretations of behavior (e.g., 'citizen was disrespectful') used in prior studies. We employed two regression analyses to estimate the extent to which different types of citizen behaviors – 'bad attitude,' non-compliance, and aggression and crime – relate to physical coercive behavior by law enforcement agents.

After controlling for non-compliant, aggressive, and criminal behaviors, as well as situational and individual features, we found that citizens' 'bad attitude' behaviors remain associated with physical coercion. However, the effects of aggressive and criminal behaviors are far stronger than those of 'bad attitude' behaviors. Despite this, an observable 'demeanor effect' exists in our sample. Conceptually, we provide a more thorough behavioral description of what a 'bad attitude' looks like. Practically, our findings can be used in training, such as scenario or VR training, to raise officers' awareness of citizens' behaviors and help prevent escalation in their encounters with the public.

*Conclusion:* When citizens are engaging in argumentative gesturing, pointing directly at an officer, videotaping or photographing an officer, yelling at an officer, and non-friendly touching, which we interpreted as expressions of "bad attitude", officers are more likely to use physically coercive behaviors towards citizens as compared to when citizens do not display such behaviors. As such, officers do not only respond to whether citizens are breaking the law but also to whether they are well behaved. This indicates that in situations where officers notice bad attitude behaviors of citizens, they need to carefully consider whether physical coercion is necessary to manage the situation.

Police Officer Paper 2: "Systematic Video Analysis of Policing in Action: An Ethogram Approach to Quantify Behavior in Policing Situations."

Police research increasingly use video material to study policing behaviors and situations. This has several benefits: it allows researchers to capture behavior in a reliable way, it is cost efficient, and it reduces or removes observer reactivity. In this paper, we briefly review the systematic social observational methodology. We argue that using videos can improve our understanding of policing action and address some of the limitations of the SSO. We propose capturing behaviors by using a methodological tool from behavioral biology known as "ethograms." Then, we offer practical insights on how to conduct behavioral research on police. We draw on ethograms that we have developed in our research to code policing behaviors. We discuss the benefits and challenges of using these ethograms, and reflect on what kinds of behaviors are possible, difficult, and impossible to code reliably. We offer concrete insights into how research could investigate behaviors of police officers to make projects more inobtrusive, efficient, and reliable. These insights can push the field forward with a novel and ground-breaking approach to study policing in action. Where biologists have species- and behavior-specific ethograms, police researchers do not. This is a call for precisely such effort across the field.

*Conclusion:* This paper highlights the potential of drawing on video observational methods for a more objective and systematic study of police and citizen interactions. This methodology is relevant for studies of frontline workers and interactions with citizens beyond the field of policing. We propose that video analysis offer new ways of explain human behavior, emphasizing the way behavior is driven by the actions of others rather than by personal preferences and institutional contexts.

### Regarding RQ 2: Employee de-escalation behaviors

Second, we summarize our results regarding RQ2, examining which employee behaviors increase and decrease the risk of being subjected to violence.

#### Ticket Inspector Paper 3: "Ticket Inspectors in Action: Body-worn Camera Analysis of Aggressive and Nonaggressive Passenger Encounters."

This study examined how ticket inspector actions such as blocking, sympathetic words, and references to rules shape the risk of aggressive reactions from ticketless passengers. Data were a video sample of 123 ticket fining events, which were coded and analyzed with regression tools. The results show that the way ticket inspectors act influences the course of events and the risk of aggression. When inspectors confine a passenger's physical space or use verbal authority, there is a greater risk of passenger aggression, whereas phrases showing understanding reduce this risk.

*Conclusion:* Ticket inspectors can shape the risk of aggression and violence at work through their behavior in interactions with citizens. They should avoid: 1) confining the space of passengers by physically blocking their movements, holding onto the passenger, or announcing to the bus driver that the bus should stop or that the doors should remain closed (i.e., preventing the passenger from leaving); and 2) using verbal authority in an assertive manner towards the passenger (e.g., "Sit down"), directly placing responsibility on the passenger ("You should have thought of that before getting on the bus"), or mentioning or calling the police.

#### Ticket Inspector Paper 3: "Managing Status with Sympathy and Dominance: A Video Observational and Interview Study of Emotion Strategies in Ticket Inspection."

We examined different defensive and protective emotion strategies that inspectors use to issue fines and manage contested encounters. Based on 30 body-worn camera-recorded ticket-fining events and 11 interviews, the analysis shows that ticket inspectors strategically use displays of dominance and sympathy to avoid escalation and control the progression of events, involving microprocesses of either claiming or giving status. For example, inspectors may act humbly during encounters to give status. When these emotion strategies do not work as expected, inspectors sometimes become emotionally caught up in these processes.

*Conclusion:* Ticket inspectors use emotions strategically on the job to avoid the escalation of contested encounters with passengers and control situations that expose risks. Displays of emotion are important tools for managing conflicts with passengers but also pose risks for escalation. Inspectors should be trained in recognizing the emotional dynamics of encounters with citizens, including their own emotional responses and displays.

### Police Officer Paper 3: "How Does it End Well? An Interview Study of Police Officers' Perceptions of De-Escalation."

Conflict de-escalation in police-citizen encounters is an under-researched topic despite increased focus from the public and the media. This paper aims to increase the understanding of how police officers attempt to de-escalate conflict through detailed accounts of actual conflicts. The study is based on seven qualitative interviews with Norwegian police officers and has a case-control-inspired design. The informants were asked to describe three ordinary encounters: one verbal conflict, one conflict involving threats, and one physical conflict involving force or violence. The interviews specifically focused on the behaviors the informants reported doing. The analysis revealed three ways de-escalation can be performed to manage conflicts. First, the informants emphasize verbal and nonverbal communication in three ways: calming, autonomy-enhancing, and commanding. Secondly, they describe how they reduce physical opportunities in order to de-escalate, by either delimiting physical space or by the use of force. Lastly, the informants also report on ways to prevent a conflict from escalating in the first place. These accounts highlight the informants' understanding of de-escalation and are useful to understand how officers de-escalate conflicts in action. The relevance of the findings and the fruitfulness of the case-control-inspired interview technique are discussed.

*Conclusion:* The study reveals that police officers use a variety of verbal, nonverbal, and physical strategies to de-escalate conflicts. Effective de-escalation involves calming communication, enhancing the autonomy of individuals, and providing clear commands. Additionally, limiting physical opportunities for conflict and using force judiciously are critical components. Preventive measures are also essential in avoiding the escalation of conflicts. Training programs should incorporate these findings to improve police officers' de-escalation skills and overall conflict management.

### Police Officer Paper 4: "Exploring Police Use of Force as An Interactional Process: A Qualitative Video Analysis of How Dutch Police Officers Use Physical Force."

This article examines how interactional dynamics draw police-citizen conflicts towards the use of force. The analysis is based on a small-scale qualitative analysis of 18 video-recorded encounters in Amsterdam that all escalate to some form of physical force. We coded and analyzed these videos inductively and qualitatively to identify common patterns, leading to a categorization of force processes. We focus primarily on how the behaviors of officers and citizens function in these encounters, and how they interplay and influence each other in conflict, ultimately leading to police use of force. We observed two distinct processes that may help us understand this: officer-driven and citizen-driven escalations. We discuss some implications for theory and practice.



*Conclusion:* This study reveals that police use of force is influenced by interactional dynamics between officers and citizens. Understanding the distinct processes of officer-driven and citizen-driven escalations can inform training and policies aimed at reducing the use of force. Police officers should be trained to recognize and respond to these dynamics to manage conflicts more effectively and minimize the need for physical force.

### Regarding RQ 3: Conflict management recommendations

Third, we summarize our results regarding RQ3, aiming to translate the above findings into tangible conflict management tools and recommendations.

#### Recommendations for ticket inspectors

Based on our results and validated against existing evidence, we formulate the following recommendations for efficient ticket inspector conflict management:

- Avoid restricting the passenger's movement. Blocking the doors, physically blocking, or grabbing the passenger can escalate the situation to aggression or violence.
- If a passenger becomes agitated, do not mirror their anger. Instead, stay calm and composed.
- Balance authority by being friendly but firm. Be mindful that body language and speech can signal unnecessary power and dominance, which can complicate the situation.
- Prevent the passenger from feeling a loss of face when issuing a fine. Losing face and status can lead to anger and escalate the conflict.
- Remain impartial so that the passenger does not feel targeted. This can be achieved by referring to and explaining official rules or allowing the passenger to explain without interruption.
- Observe the passenger's behavior and be alert to authority-challenging and superior reactions. Different reactions to avoid fines can indicate a higher risk of aggression.
- Pay attention to changes in the passenger's reactions. Passengers who change their reaction patterns are likely to show aggression. For example, a passenger who starts as honest, then aggrieved, and finally superior is likely to exhibit aggression.
- Be aware that prolonged situations increase the risk of escalation. Time is a crucial factor in conflict management.
- For the company, it is important that management prioritizes conflict management with ongoing efforts. Employees need clear instructions on acceptable and unacceptable behaviors during conflicts.
- The company should recognize that different working methods can develop among employees working together. Fixed teams can lead to idiosyncratic ways of handling situations. Mixing employee groups and holding regular staff meetings can help align conflict management strategies.

- The company should acknowledge that ticket inspection requires emotional labor. Conflict situations are intense and it can be challenging to manage one's emotions. Management must recognize that the inspector's job involves more than just issuing fines.

### Practice changes among ticket inspectors

It was outside the scope of the current project to run an intervention study to test the behavioral effects of our recommendations. However, the public transport company we collaborated with took steps to implement a range of initiatives based on our recommendations and results. First, a number of initiatives aimed to change the *technological* architecture of the work routines:

- The company has implemented a technical solution that alerts the inspector when the fare situation drags out a risk factor for escalation. Inspectors now have a digital watch that starts when a fare inspection begins. The numbers on the watch are green but turn red if the situation drags out. In the episodes studied, there was a significantly increased risk the longer the events lasted.
- Change in the camera procedure so that the inspector does not have to explicitly state that the camera is being activated. According to our data, stating that the camera is being turned on can contribute to escalating a conflict. The company has also explored whether it is possible to keep the cameras running continuously. This has not been possible due to battery capacity constraints.
- When purchasing a mobile ticket in the new DOT Tickets app, launched in the summer of 2019, an orange marker shows for about three minutes that the ticket has just been purchased. Additionally, in the spring of 2019, the company ran an information campaign focusing on the requirement that tickets must be bought before boarding the bus, as our data concludes that passengers with tickets bought late of-ten react aggressively.
- Work is underway on a control device on the inspector's equipment that can show the customer that it is the system, not the inspector, rejecting the ticket. There is currently no specific timeline for implementation.

Second, a number of initiatives were *behavioral* in nature.

- Emphasis on the danger of blocking the passenger's way.
- Emphasis on the company's instruction that the inspectors should not touch or hold the passenger.
- Prefer going to fetch help, rather than calling a colleague.
- Ongoing external training program and continuous focus on learning from experiences collectively.
- The bus company has initiated a comprehensive training program.

Lastly, a number of *communication* initiatives was set in motion.

- Information campaign, which ran on buses and Facebook, aimed to make bus and local train journeys a pleasant experience for everyone, including the staff. This was part of the follow-up on the broadcasts “The Disrespectful Danes,” which aired in November 2017 on TV2. The broadcasts highlighted the harsh tone towards, among others, ticket inspectors.
- Information campaign: The bus company launched a new campaign emphasizing the importance of buying a ticket before boarding the bus. The campaign followed up on a research report on threats and violence against ticket inspectors and the often harsh tone directed at inspectors in public spaces. The campaign was displayed on buses and local trains and in the media.

### Recommendations for police officers

Based on our results and existing knowledge in the field, the following general recommendations can be formulated for how police officers can prevent or de-escalate conflict when interacting with citizens:

- Be clear about why you have stopped and are checking a citizen.
- Carefully assess whether the citizen is in a psychological crisis; if so, other mechanisms come into play and professional negotiators/psychiatric personnel should be consulted.
- Listening is more than just hearing. Active listening techniques can strengthen the dialogue between citizens and the police.
- Be cautious in interpreting fear and frustration as aggression.
- Offer the citizen a “way out” by providing clear instructions (“if you do this, then that will happen”).
- Enable the citizen to end the conflict without losing face, which can dismantle a central source of anger and aggression.
- Control your own stress and avoid becoming annoyed by difficult citizens.
- Be aware of your de-escalating body language.
- As far as possible, use physical force only to de-escalate the situation to the point where it is possible to use verbal and non-verbal de-escalation techniques.
- When physical force is used, it should be executed in a manner that resolves the conflict as quickly and decisively as possible, to reduce the risk of injury to all involved parties.

## Project Conclusion and Future Perspectives

Our project began with new research and theories on violence suggesting that violence can be prevented and deescalated by altering people's actions during a conflict. Our perspective adds to theories focusing on modifying the individuals involved or the broader environment (e.g., organizational setting). Due to the scarcity of methods enabling researchers to study actions during violent situations, such situations have rarely been systematically investigated in empirical studies. This report introduces a situational approach to studying violence in the field of workplace aggression. We employ a novel methodology of video observations to examine conflict interactions between employees and citizens in ticket inspection and policing. Based on these empirical studies, we conclude the following:

First, the actions of employees, in both ticket inspections and policing, significantly influence whether citizens act threateningly or violently. These influences cannot be reduced solely to the identities of those who are involved or to wider environmental structures. Thus, we conclude that interactional dynamics directly shape the risk of threats and violence in work-life contexts. It remains for future studies to determine whether similar actions in different work-life contexts have consistent effects on conflict outcomes. For example, we found that restricting the movement of citizens in ticket inspections is risky and should be avoided at all times. In a recent pilot study with colleagues in a Dutch retail store, we observed that limiting customer space had a similarly escalatory effect on conflicts (Pallante et al., 2024). Further research is needed across occupational contexts, while appreciating that some occupations, like policing, need to constrain unruly citizens as part of the job.

Given that our findings highlight that the actions of employees play a key role in the risks of exposure to threats and violence from citizens, training employees in conflict management skills is highly recommendable. Conflict management trainings are common across most frontline worker groups, however, a key problem with these trainings is that they are rarely evidence-based, let alone rarely tested in terms of effect on actual behavior of the employees (Engels et al. 2020). Based on our findings from ticket inspection and policing, we propose that conflict management trainings need to be tailor made for each frontline worker group, as currently, we do not know what kinds of actions that work and do not work across worker groups. While investing in general conflict management trainings might be attractive for employers who want to take responsibility for the safety of their employees, they might be a waste of money, and even worse potentially work counter intuitive, if there are not based on specific insights from the particular frontline worker group. In other words, before employees start implementing conflict management trainings, they need to generate a knowledge base about the effect of employee behaviors on the risk of threats and violence in their specific work environment context. For prevention purposes the government should invest in large scale programs aiming at understanding each working environment contexts and comparing findings across sectors and over time.

Second, in both policing and ticket inspection, we observed that overly justice-seeking attitudes and behaviors among employees could escalate conflicts. Employees who viewed citizens' behavior in moral terms often sought to punish them for their transgressions. This desire to correct wrongs and address negative attitudes increases the risk of escalating threats and violence and risk-taking behaviors. This finding underscores the importance of addressing employees' motivations, creating a supportive work environment for sharing experiences and perspectives, and preventing an excessive moral investment in enforcing rules. Varying motivations for actions within worker groups should be included in conflict management trainings, and tested within and across sectors.

Finally, we conclude that using video data is a valuable method for understanding workplace aggression. Video analysis allowed us to objectively and systematically analyze how interactions unfold over time and space, rather than relying on biased self-report studies. Accessing video material is time-consuming and complex, but it is a promising methodology for advancing the field of workplace aggression. We propose combining video analysis with field observations and interviews to gain a broader understanding of the contexts in which threats occur and to integrate the perspectives of employees and citizens into the analysis.

## List of Research Outputs

Friis, C. B., Liebst, L. S., Andersen, L. S., and Lindegaard, M. R. (under review). Workplace violence: Toward a microsociological explanation. *International Journal of Workplace Health Management*.

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