



The relationship between police officers' personalities and interviewing styles[☆]



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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between Japanese police officers' personal characteristics and their interviewing styles. Two hundred and seventy-one male police officers who had interviewed serious criminals answered a questionnaire that assessed their personality (using the NEO Five-Factor Inventory (FFI) scale), empathy (using the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI)), and interviewing style. There were some associations between personality and interviewing style but no personal characteristics were related to the presentation of evidence technique. The police officers who scored higher on the "perspective taking" domain of the IRI were more likely to use the active listening technique. Those who had higher levels of "agreeableness" on the NEO-FFI scale tended to employ the rapport building technique. At the time the questionnaire was administered, the Japanese police force had not provided formal training in interviewing techniques that incorporated findings obtained in psychological research. Training might in the future reduce the effect of personal characteristics on the interviewing styles of Japanese police officers.

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1. Introduction

Several studies have shown that a humane or empathic approach is important when obtaining information and confessions from offenders. For example, Holmberg and Christianson (2002), using a self-administered questionnaire for Swedish prisoners, showed that a humane approach that stressed empathy and respect toward suspects was more likely to be associated with suspect confessions. An Australian study by Kebbell, Alison, Hurren, and Mazerolle (2010) interviewed convicted sex offenders about what police interviewing techniques they experienced. Those who answered that they had confessed in the interview were more likely to perceive their interviews as humane than those who denied. Bull (2013, p. 139) comprehensively reviewed the published articles on investigative interviews and concluded that "Research studies ... have come internationally to a consensus that a humanitarian interviewing style is more likely to lead to comprehensive, truthful accounts."

Further, Wachi, Watanabe, Yokota, Otsuka, and Lamb (2015b) conducted a self-report survey of convicted Japanese prisoners to investigate suspect characteristics (e.g., age, marital status, previous arrest), crime characteristics (sexual crime or not) and contextual characteristics

(perceived strength of evidence, and interview styles) associated with full confessions by the suspects. The results showed that suspects who did not intend to confess before being interviewed were more likely to make full confessions when they experienced certain interview styles. This suggested that interview styles affected important outcomes, even when other relevant factors were controlled for.

When considering the importance of interview style on successful outcomes, it is worth examining what factors influence the interview styles employed. According to trait theory, personality can influence an individual's behavior and one would thus expect an interviewer's personality to affect interview style. Consequently, we examined the Big Five personality traits (Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness) and their association with interviewing style. Furthermore, interviewers' empathic behaviors make suspects more willing to confess. Rameson, Morelli, and Lieberman (2012) examined the relationships between trait empathy and neural activities and determined that participants with high trait empathy were more likely to display empathy and stronger neural responses than those with low trait empathy in a cognitively demanding situation. This finding suggests that trait empathy could predict empathic interviewing because suspect interviews are cognitively demanding (e.g., paying attention to a suspect's accounts while considering the evidence) and this study also examined empathic traits.

Few researchers have examined the characteristics of police officers that may be associated with their interviewing techniques or skills. For example, Sear and Stephenson (1997) examined the personalities of 19 British male police officers at a London Metropolitan Police Station

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(assessing five personality traits: Dominance, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness) and the officers' performance in interviews. Of the five traits, Openness was significantly related to the overall interview performance score; however, the direction was negative and contrary to the hypothesis: officers with better interview skills were less likely to exhibit Openness. Sear and Stephenson also failed to find relationships between scores on the other four personality traits and overall interviewing scores.

Ono, Sachau, Deal, Englert, and Taylor (2011) investigated the association between police officers' individual characteristics (such as cognitive ability, the Big Five personality traits, and emotional intelligence) and their training and job performance (including interview skills). In their study, 131 federal law-enforcement agents from the US Air Force Office of Special Investigation participated in an assessment of training performance, and 38 agents and their supervisors participated in a job performance assessment 1 year later. In the first assessment, none of the individual characteristics was significantly related to interview/interrigation performance (rated on a 3-point scale by advisors). In the subsequent assessment, emotional intelligence was the only significant predictor of interview performance.

In all, we know little about the influence of police officers' psychological characteristics on the interview process, and a more detailed investigation of these characteristics needs to be conducted. Therefore, this study addressed the following research questions: (1) what Big Five personality traits were related to interviewing style and (2) was an empathic personality associated with empathic interviewing. This study examined the same Japanese police officers studied by Wachi et al. (2014).

2. Method

2.1. Participants

The sample examined by Wachi et al. (2014) comprised 276 police officers: 271 (98.2%) male officers and 5 (1.8%) female officers. Because there were so few female officers, this study only focused on the 271 male officers. The mean and median ages of the participants were 40.73 ($SD = 8.71$) and 39.00 years, respectively (range, 24 to 59 years). The participants' mean and median years of service as detectives were 11.36 ($SD = 8.17$) and 9.67 years, respectively, (range, 5 months to 32 years). Twenty-four (8.9%) participants were ranked as police officers, 130 (48.0%) were sergeants, 115 (42.4%) were inspectors, and 2 (0.7%) were chief inspectors or above.

2.2. Materials

2.2.1. Empathy scales

We employed the Japanese translation of the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI), which was extracted from the translation by Kikuchi (1999) of a book written by Davis (1994). The IRI is a 28-item questionnaire that comprises four subscales: Fantasy, Perspective Taking, Empathic Concern, and Personal Distress. Each statement was rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 = *does not describe me well* to 5 = *describes me very well*. The Fantasy scale assesses the tendency to imagine behaviors and feelings in fictional situations. Perspective Taking measures one's tendency to consider other persons' perspectives spontaneously in daily life. Empathic Concern assesses "other-oriented" feelings including the tendency to experience sympathy or concern for unhappy people. Personal Distress assesses "self-oriented" feelings, the tendency to experience personal distress or unease in response to others' serious distress (Davis, 1983, p. 114). The IRI has the advantage of examining empathy from both emotional and cognitive perspectives, which can be useful when investigating the kinds of empathy relevant to interviewing. The Japanese translation of the IRI has been employed in many Japanese studies (e.g. Kazaoka & Kawamorita, 2005; Noguchi, Sato, & Yoshikawa, 2008), especially in the legal context when examining offenders' empathy (Kono & Okamoto, 2006; Okudaira et al., 2005).

2.2.2. Personality

The NEO Five-Factor Inventory scale (NEO-FFI, Japanese version) (Shimonaka, Nakazato, Gondo, & Takayama, 1999) was employed to examine the participants' personalities. This scale consists of 60-items tapping the Big Five dimensions. This scale, and the longer version (NEO Personality Inventory-Revised), have been widely used in many types of studies worldwide (e.g., McCrae & Allik, 2002).

2.2.3. Interviewing style reported by police officers

Thirty-nine statements assessing interviewing techniques were derived from previous studies (e.g. Kassin et al., 2007; Leo, 1996; Pearse & Gudjonsson, 1999) and interviews with 11 police officers. In this study, 27 items relating to the five factors identified by Wachi et al. (2014) were employed (Presentation of Evidence, Confrontation, Active Listening, Rapport Building, and Discussion of the Crime; see Appendix). Each item was rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *never*, 2 = *on rare occasions*, 3 = *sometimes*, 4 = *often*, and 5 = *always*).

2.3. Procedure

Between January and September 2008, the self-report questionnaires were completed by police officers across Japan who had interviewed suspects meeting the following criteria: the suspects (1) were arrested for murder, robbery, arson, rape, forcible indecency, or kidnapping after January 1, 2008; (2) were aged 20 years or over at the time of arrest; (3) had no mental disorders and/or intellectual disabilities; and (4) had initially denied the allegations, but had subsequently confessed, either fully or in part. The questionnaires were completed immediately after the police officers had interviewed the suspects. All participants were treated according to the ethical guidelines published by the Japanese Psychological Association.

3. Results

3.1. Preliminary analyses

3.1.1. Empathy scale

The IRI subscale scores were calculated as suggested by Davis (1994). Although the questionnaire used a 5-point scale from 1 to 5, the calculation, as in the original version, used scores of 0 to 4 (instead of 1 to 5). To investigate the subscales' internal consistencies, Cronbach's alphas were examined. One item on each subscale decreased the alpha coefficients¹ so these four items were deleted from the subscales used in the following analyses. The Cronbach's alphas of the Fantasy, Empathic Concern, Perspective Taking, and Personal Distress subscales and of the total scale were 0.82, 0.68, 0.67, 0.67, and 0.72, respectively.

The mean total score was 51.07 ($SD = 7.84$, $N = 259$). The mean scores on the Fantasy, Empathic Concern, Perspective Taking, and Personal Distress subscales were 11.39 ($SD = 4.42$, $N = 265$), 16.42 ($SD = 2.88$, $N = 267$), 14.23 ($SD = 3.33$, $N = 264$), and 8.99 ($SD = 3.11$, $N = 269$), respectively. We only examined the subscales in order to explore the effects of the different aspects of empathy. Since a number of participants failed to answer some questions, the total number of participants included in the analyses reported below differs from variable to variable.

3.1.2. NEO-FFI scale

The NEO-FFI subscale scores were calculated as described in the manual (Shimonaka et al., 1999). The Cronbach's alphas were 0.83 for Neuroticism, 0.80 for Extraversion, 0.63 for Openness, 0.72 for Agreeableness, and 0.73 for Conscientiousness. The mean values for

¹ The following items were deleted: "I daydream and fantasize, with some regularity, about things that might happen to me" from Fantasy; "I am often quite touched by things that I see happen" from Empathic Concern; "I sometimes find it difficult to see things from the 'other guy's' point of view" from Perspective Taking; and "When I see someone get hurt, I tend to remain calm" from Personal Distress.

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