

THE EXCESSIVE USE OF FORCE BY MEXICO CITY LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES: CORRUPTION, NORMAL ABUSE AND OTHER MOTIVES*

Carlos SILVA FORNÉ**

ABSTRACT. Although several factors have been cited to explain the excessive use of police force, its relation to corruption has yet been little explored. This is a serious omission when dealing with law enforcement agencies in which corrupt practices are both widespread and deeply ingrained, as is the case in Mexico City. On the basis of an analysis of 575 complaints regarding violations of detainees' right to physical integrity received by the Mexico City Human Rights Commission between 2007 and 2011, many troubling patterns involving the use of excessive police force emerge, including: deeply-rooted and historically-conditioned ways of policing; a form of moral retribution or "punishment" for individuals who resist arrest or challenge authority; poor disciplinary oversight; and lack of professional training (and competence) in resolving conflicts. Above all, the use of excessive force by Mexico City law enforcement agencies is linked to divergent forms of corruption, including extortion, crimes and the misuse of police authority to resolve private matters, among others. In order to address these problems, it is first necessary to recognize their diverse nature and their complex relation to disciplinary structures, accountability and culture.

KEY WORDS: *Excessive use of force, Corruption, Human rights violations, Motivations.*

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** Researcher at the Institute for Legal Research, UNAM.

RESUMEN. *La relación entre el uso excesivo de la fuerza y la corrupción policial ha sido poco explorada. Esta carencia es grave al estudiar instituciones policiales donde las prácticas de corrupción son extendidas, tal como es el caso en la Ciudad de México (Distrito Federal). A partir del análisis de 575 expedientes de queja por violaciones al derecho a la integridad personal que recibió la Comisión de Derechos Humanos del Distrito Federal entre los años 2007 y 2011, se observan distintos patrones problemáticos. El uso excesivo de la fuerza obedece a motivos diversos: como forma normalizada de realizar el trabajo policial cotidiano, como “castigo” a quien se resiste o falta el respeto a la autoridad, por impericia para resolver una situación conflictiva. Pero también el abuso en el uso de la fuerza se vincula a distintas formas de corrupción policial: extorsiones, delitos, resolución de problemas particulares, etc. Es necesario reconocer la heterogeneidad de los problemas de uso de la fuerza de la policía para pensar medidas con mayor probabilidad de éxito en su contención.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Uso excesivo de la fuerza, Corrupción, Violaciones a los derechos humanos, Motivaciones.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Studies of the excessive use of force by law enforcement agencies have generally ignored the correlation between police brutality and corruption.¹ This discrepancy is apparently the result of the different motives seen to be behind each kind of behavior.² In fact, a careful review of cases involving police corruption and other irregularities show that the two practices clearly overlap.³ One example is the use of threats and excessive force as a means to obtain

¹ Kim Lersch & Tom Mieczkowski, *Violent police behavior: Past, present, and future research directions*, Vol. 10, *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 552, 568, (2005). Philip Stenning *et al.*, *Researching the use of force: the background to the international project*, Vol. 52, *Crime Law & Social Change*, 95, 110, (2009).

² SANJA KUTNJAK, *FALLEN BLUE KNIGHTS. CONTROLLING POLICE CORRUPTION* (Oxford University Press, 2005).

³ For example, for the United States: THE CITY OF NEW YORK. THE KNAPP COMMISSION. REPORT ON POLICE CORRUPTION (1973). THE CITY OF NEW YORK. COMMISSION TO INVESTIGATE

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