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Anna Szeliga-Duchnowska
WSB University in Wrocław

Mirosława Szewczyk
Opole University of Technology

Uniformed service officers' age as a variable differentiating the perception of counterproductive work behaviors

KEYWORDS

Counterproductive Work Behavior (CWB), age, uniformed service

ABSTRACT

At the foundation of this research lies the belief that the age can directly differentiate the perception of counterproductive work behaviors. The aim of the article is to identify and present the relationship between age and the perception of counterproductive work behaviors. The survey research was carried out in June 2017, with the use of Internet-based survey questionnaire (CAWI). There were altogether 198 officers examined. The results confirm the existence of variety counterproductive behaviors according to the classification proposed by P.E. Spector. The analysis results confirm the appearance of dependence between the age of officers and their perception of counterproductive behaviors. The conclusions which come from the research can have significant implications to superiors in the scope of prophylactic actions aimed against counterproductive behaviors.

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Introduction

It was already the father of scientific management, F. Taylor, who fought against bad organization of work, waste of means, unrealistic and exorbitant norms and incentive schemes, in which it was not the best accomplishments that mattered,

as well as criticized the existing disparities between requirements of work stations and workers' capabilities. He believed that an empirical approach towards organization of work would result in productivity gains (Hamel, 2008).

According to B. Westwood, productivity can be treated as a belief in human abilities, as a state of mind directed towards continuous improvement, as well as making unceasing effort intended to apply newer and newer technologies and methods to secure affluence and happiness to mankind. Moreover, productivity is "training of minds and development of people's attitudes within the whole of society as such – which will be decisive in whether the population of the given country will attain a high productivity and affluence or low productivity and poverty" (1994: 146). The researcher also argued that it is boredom which kills productivity and that it can be counteracted by making work more attractive. "If work is more interesting and provides satisfaction, society benefits by it through:

- products of better quality,
- a higher level of living conditions,
- a lower number of accidents at work,
- a lower staff turnover,
- fewer social problems such as absenteeism and alcoholism" (Westwood, 1994: 152).

Since the second half of the 1990s the literature of the subject dealing with management and organizational behaviors has seen an increasing number of publications devoted to workers' behaviors directed against their organization, including also those affecting the drop in productivity. Researchers undertake to explain economic, social and psychological consequences of counterproductive work behavior (CWB) with the aim to make society aware of the severity of threats resulting from such conducts. Despite the rich literature concerned with behaviors at work in organizations, both positive and negative ones (e.g., Dalal, 2005), it needs observing that there are very few publications available, which treat about counterproductive behaviors encountered in uniformed forces.

So far there still has not been established one uniform definition of CWB or types of these. The majority of conceptualizations that have been indicated by researchers define counterproductive behaviors as measured/intentional behaviors which are detrimental to the organization or, in their intention, are meant to impair the organization and its stakeholders. They are commonly of the volitional character and are justified by the worker (e.g., Marcus & Schuler, 2004). It can be inferred from the definition that behaviors which are results of unintentional acts are not counterproductive ones. Some researchers are not wholly satisfied with this kind of definition. They ponder over whether counterproductive behaviors are

indeed intentional, purposeful by nature and whether they are an effect of a free choice made by the given worker, or perhaps they include also behaviors when the worker does not act with the intention to impair or such an intention cannot be ascribed to them. The richness of terminology, which is present in the literature, causes the term 'counterproductive behavior' to have earned the name of a semantic jungle (Neumann and Baron, 2005; Maćko, 2009).

Although the literature of the subject presents a variety of terms and typologies relating to CWB, researchers concentrate on convergent problems which concern reactions detrimental to the existence of an organization. These reactions lead to lowering of the organization's effectiveness, irrespective of whether it is to concern the effectiveness of processes, social climate or economic results of the company (Maćko, 2009).

Part of the authors consider CWB in the category of individual types of behaviors which are detrimental to the organization, e.g., absenteeism from work (Bakker, Demerouti, de Boeri and Schaufeli, 2003), abuse of workers (Tepper, 2000; Szeliga-Kowalczyk, 2005), stealing (Vardi and Weitz, 2016) or abrupt behavior in contacts with clients (Perlow and Latham, 1993). In turn, part of the researchers group individual instances of behavior into categories, such as aggression and violence in the organization (Neuman and Baron, 1998, 2005), anti-social behavior (Giacalone and Greenberg, 1997), dysfunctional behavior and offence against the organization (Hogan and Hogan, 1989), downward envy (Yu, Duffy and Tepper, 2018) (Schaufeli, Bakker and Van Rhenen, 2009) or acts of sabotage in the organization (Gestman, 2001).

For the needs of the present study, the classification of types of counterproductive behavior at work, which was proposed by Spector and colleagues, was chosen. The classification was elaborated on the basis of analysis of the literature of the subject and exploratory factor analysis (Spector, Fox, Penney, Bruursema, Goh and Kessler, 2006):

- abuses – cover such behaviors as physical aggression, verbal aggression, or ignoring co-workers (Richman, Rospenda, Flaherty and Freels, 2001). These acts are aimed directly at colleagues and persons connected with the organization (stakeholders). They are intended to do physical or psychic harm;
- stealing – understood as appropriation of items of organization's property; stealing is categorized as a manifestation of aggressive behavior against the organization as a whole (Neuman and Baron, 1998);
- sabotage – classified as an active form of CWB; it is intended to impair the organization as a whole and consists in destruction of the official property belonging to the employer, etc.;

- deviation of production – qualified as a passive form of CWB; covers such forms of behavior as: not complying with recommendations and not following procedures, intentional making mistakes, etc. (Hollinger, 1986);
- worker's retreat – consists in purposeful decreasing the time spent performing official duties, as well as limiting the amount of energy dedicated to working, e.g., shortening the working time, "cyber loafing" – surfing the Internet while being at work, intended lateness for work.

One of the determinants of workers' behaviors is their socio-demographic dimension. Researchers point to the fact that, among others, it is men who manifest counterproductive behaviors more often than women (Hollinger and Clark, 1983; Gruys and Sackett, 2003; Kishamore et al., 2010; Ocel and Aydin, 2010; Vardi and Weitz, 2004). Such behaviors are also more characteristic of younger people, in particular young men (Jones, 2009; Markus and Schuler, 2004) and those with short length of service (Gruys and Sackett, 2003).

A number of studies in different countries reveal that policing is a particularly stressful occupation. Age appears to be an important factor in predicting CWB (Smoktunowicz, Baka, Cieslak, Nichols, Benight, and Luszczynska, 2015). However, no research including the criterion of age of functionaries in uniformed services and their perception of counterproductive behavior in the service, according to the classification proposed by Spector et al. (Spector, Fox, Penney, Bruursema, Goh and Kessler, 2006) has been conducted to date.

Material and methods

The survey research on counterproductive behaviors observed by functionaries of uniformed forces in the place of their service was carried out in June 2017. In order to accomplish the aim, an Internet-assisted questionnaire (CAWI) was used. In the questionnaire, instead of the expression "counterproductive behaviors", those of "behaviors detrimental to the organization" and "behaviors detrimental to co-workers" were applied. The obtained results enabled the authors to verify the hypothesis concerning the existence of a dependence between the age and the perception of counterproductive behaviors in the service. For this purpose the chi-square independence test was made use of. In the analysis, the division of the examined group according to the respondents' age was accepted.

For the needs of this study the assumption was accepted that the measure will cover the level of recognizing/observing of counterproductive behaviors among co-functionaries by subjects who belong to three age groups: 27–35 years, 36–50

years, 51 years and over. This assumption results from the fact that the above-described measure seems more accurate than asking the respondents directly about manifestations of such a type of behavior spotted while in the service. The point is that the examined (in the majority of cases) do not admit to negative behaviors, like stealing or isolating a colleague. Consequently, the authors wished to avoid the appearance of Rosenberg effect, which manifests itself in that the assessment of one's own conduct can be inadequate, not objective or/and falsified, since the questions under study are personal and sensitive – in such cases, the examined person endeavors to present himself/herself in a positive light, yet also wants to satisfy the researcher, interprets the tool and behaves in compliance with the expectations assumed by the researcher.

Because of the hermetic nature of the professional environment, which is characteristic of uniformed forces, and also due to the high degree of hierarchical organization of the services, carrying out survey research, or other studies, by researchers from outside the environment is practically an unworkable task. Additionally, the sensitive nature of the examined matter of "counterproductive behaviors" makes obtaining the official permission to conduct such research very difficult if not possible at all. Hence, the authors, being particularly interested in obtaining information on functionaries' conducts which are detrimental to their organizations, decided to proceed and carry out the research in the on-line fashion. The questionnaires were completely anonymous and sent out to functionaries' private e-mail addresses. The feedback received made it possible to elaborate on the below-presented results and discuss the subject matter in some detail.

Results and discussion

The CAWI research covered 198 respondents, that is 78 females and 120 males, grouped into three age ranges: 27–35 years, 36–50 years and 51 years and more. The structure of the respondents only partially reflected the differences existing in the general population (Table 1), since the percent of women in uniformed service is decidedly lower than that of men. Year after year, however, the difference is becoming narrower due to the growing interest on the part of females in taking employment in the forces. Still, it is males who "dominate" the number of the employed in uniformed forces. Hence, men constituted the majority of examined (61%) in the present study. Regarding the level of education, women-respondents, more often than their male counterparts, hold higher education ($\chi 2 = 19.195$; $df = 1$, $p = 0.000$) and are more often found to belong to the younger age groups ($\chi 2 = 15.319$; $df = 2$, $p = 0.000$).

Table 1. Structure of the respondents due to their sex, age and level of education (n = 198)

Education	Sex	Age			Total
		27-35 years	36-50 years	51 years and more	
Secondary	Females	6	0	0	6
	Males	18	24	0	42
Higher	Females	48	24	0	72
	Males	36	30	12	78
Total		108	78	12	198

Source: Own calculations on the basis of the research results

The length of women's service is shorter than that of men (Table 2), that is among the 78 women-respondents: 8% have been serving for up to one year, 38% – between 1 and 5 years, 23% – between 6 and 10 years, and 31% – for over 10 years. On the other hand, among the 120 men-respondents: 25% have had the length of service between 1 and 5 years, 30% – between 6 and 10 years, and 45% – of over 10 years.

Table 2. Structure of the respondents according to their sex and length of service

Sex	Length of service				Total
	Up to 1 year	from 1 to 5 years	from 6 to 10 years	over 10 years	
Females	6	30	18	24	78
Males	0	30	36	54	120
Total	6	60	54	78	198

Source: Own calculations on the basis of the research results

The principles of equality of chances and equal treatment of women and men in the sphere of employment and work (apart from the women's greater interest in the service resulting from, e.g., stability of employment and stable pay) have an influence on the rise in the number of women admitted to the service. Hence, the above-presented structure of the respondents according to their sex, age, education and length of service can result from the changes in the policy of admission to the uniformed forces and the necessity of complying with the EU requirements.

In their work places, the respondents observe, among others, verbal aggression (e.g., shouting, calling names), offensive conduct (e.g., humiliation, offensive gestures), ostracism (e.g., isolating a co-worker, neglecting somebody's contribution), as well as incitement (e.g., forcing/persuading colleagues to perform

dangerous or forbidden acts). What is interesting, none of the respondents observed physical aggression in their place of work. The examined in the oldest age group did not observe manifestations of verbal aggression, abusive behavior or instances of instigation, either. On the other hand, those belonging to the age group 27-25 years of age, more often than those in the 36-50 years age group, observe verbal aggression, abusive behavior and instigation in their work places (Table 3, Figure 1).

Table 3. Distribution of the responses to the question "Do you notice any of the following abuses with reference to the workers in your work place?"

	Physical aggression			Verbal aggression			Offensive conduct			Ostracism			Incitement		
	I	II	III	I	II	III	I	II	III	I	II	III	I	II	III
No	108	78	12	54	42	12	54	42	12	66	48	6	96	78	12
Yes	0	0	0	54	36	0	54	36	0	42	30	6	12	0	0
	-			χ^2=10.92; p=0.004***			χ^2=10.92; p=0. 004***			χ^2=0.61; p=0.739			χ^2=10.65; p=0.005***		

I – 27-35 years age group, II – 36–50 years age group, III – 51 years and more age group

Statistically significant: * – at p < 0.10, ** – p < 0.05, *** – p < 0.01

Source: Own calculations on the basis of the research results

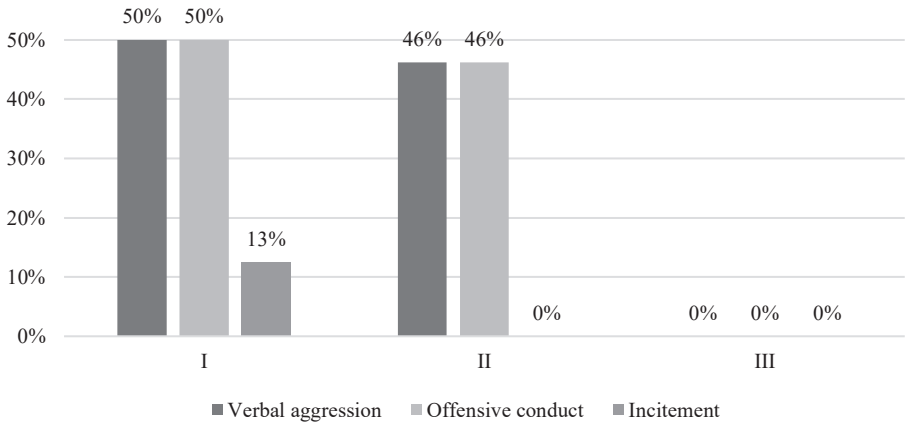

Figure 1. Reported manifestations of abuses of co-workers, by age group (p<0.05).

I – 27–35 years age group, II – 36–50 years age group, III – 51 years and more age group

Source: Own calculations on the basis of the research results

I – 27–35 years age group, II – 36–50 years age group, III – 51 years and more age group

Statistically significant: * – at p < 0.10, ** – p < 0.05, *** – p < 0.01

Source: Own calculations on the basis of the research results

In their work places, younger people, more often than older respondents, notice the following: intentional lowering of productivity and quality of work, failure to obey orders and to comply with procedures, not notifying the superiors of problems or abuses occurring in the work place (Table 4, Figure 2). The purposeful committing errors was observed only by members of the youngest age group.

Table 4. Distribution of the responses to the question: "Do you notice in your work place any of the following workers' behaviors (the so-called passive) which are detrimental to the organization?"

	Intentional lowering of productivity and quality of work			Reducing work efficiency			Failure to obey orders and to comply with procedures			The purposeful committing errors			Not notifying the superiors of problems or abuses occurring in the work place		
	I	II	III	I	II	III	I	II	III	I	II	III	I	II	III
No	84	72	12	42	24	6	66	48	12	102	78	12	48	48	12
Yes	24	6	0	66	54	6	42	30	0	6	0	0	60	30	0
	$\chi2$=9.72; p=0.007***			$\chi2$=2.32; p=0.314			$\chi2$=7.30; p=0. 026**			$\chi2$=5.16; p=0.077*			$\chi2$=15.98; p=0.000***		

I – 27-35 years age group, II – 36-50 years age group, III – 51 years and more age group

Statistically significant: * – at $p < 0.10$, ** – $p<0.05$, *** – $p < 0.01$

Source: Own calculations on the basis of the research results

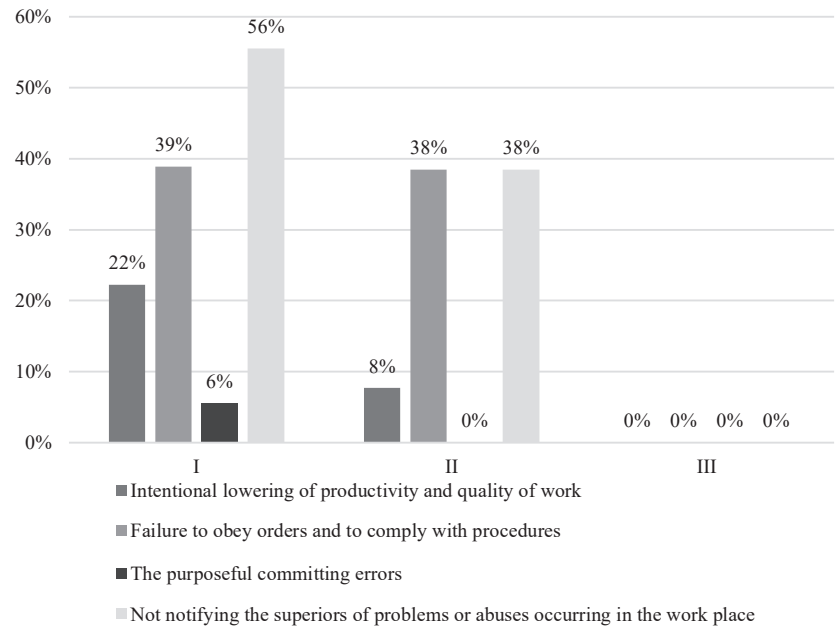

Figure 2. Reported manifestations of passive behaviors, by age group ($p<0.10$).

I – 27–35 years age group, II – 36–50 years age group, III – 51 years and more age group

Source: Own calculations on the basis of the research results

Among the active workers' behaviors which are detrimental to the organization, the respondents observed the following: damaging equipment, using up a larger number of materials than it is necessary and creating a negative image of the organization (Table 5).

Table 5. Distribution of the responses to the question: "Do you notice in your work place any of the following workers' behaviors (the so-called active) which are detrimental to the organization?"

	Destruction of employer' property			Damaging equipment			Using up a larger number of materials than it is necessary			Intentional soiling of the workplace			Creating a negative image of the organization		
	I	II	III	I	II	III	I	II	III	I	II	III	I	II	III
No	108	78	12	108	66	12	66	48	6	108	78	12	78	54	12
Yes	0	0	0	0	12	0	42	30	6	0	0	0	30	24	0
	-			$\chi2$=19.65; p=0.000***			$\chi2$=0.61; p=0.748			-			$\chi2$=4.99; p=0.082*		

I – 27–35 years age group, II – 36–50 years age group, III – 51 years and more age group

Statistically significant: * – at $p < 0.10$, ** – $p<0.05$, *** – $p < 0.01$

Source: Own calculations on the basis of the research results

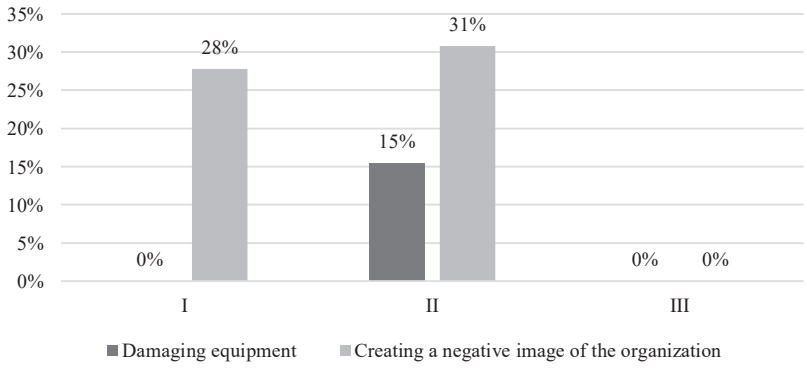

Figure 3. Reported manifestations of active behaviors, by age group ($p < 0.10$).

I – 27–35 years age group, II – 36–50 years age group, III – 51 years and more age group

Source: Own calculations on the basis of the research results

The respondents noticed also purposeful lateness for work, shortening time of work, prolonging breaks, leaving the work station, intentional performing the work more slowly, taking days off without being entitled to that, simulating sickness, as well as "cyber loafing". Again, it is younger respondents, more often than their older colleagues, who observe the instances of prolonging breaks and "cy-

ber loafing", i.e., surfing the Internet during the time which should be devoted to working (Table 6, Figure 4).

Table 6. Distribution of the responses to the question: "Do you notice in your work place any of the following workers' behaviors (the so-called purposeful doing-nothing) which are detrimental to the organization?"

	Lateness for work			Shortening time of work			Prolonging breaks			Leaving the work station			Intentional performing the work more slowly			Taking days off without being entitled to that			Cyber loafing		
	I	II	III	I	II	III	I	II	III	I	II	III	I	II	III	I	II	III	I	II	III
No	108	66	12	84	54	12	48	48	6	102	60	12	90	48	12	54	60	12	42	42	12
Yes	0	12	0	24	24	0	60	30	6	6	18	0	18	30	0	54	18	0	66	36	0
	χ^2=19.65; p=0.000***			χ^2=5.89; p=0.053*			χ^2=5.31; p=0.070*			χ^2=14.82; p=0.001***			χ^2=15.80; p=0.000***			χ^2=21.49; p=0.000***			χ^2=17.63; p=0.000***		

I – 27–35 years age group, II – 36–50 years age group, III – 51 years and more age group

Statistically significant: * – at p < 0.10, ** – p<0.05, *** – p < 0.01

Source: Own calculations on the basis of the research results

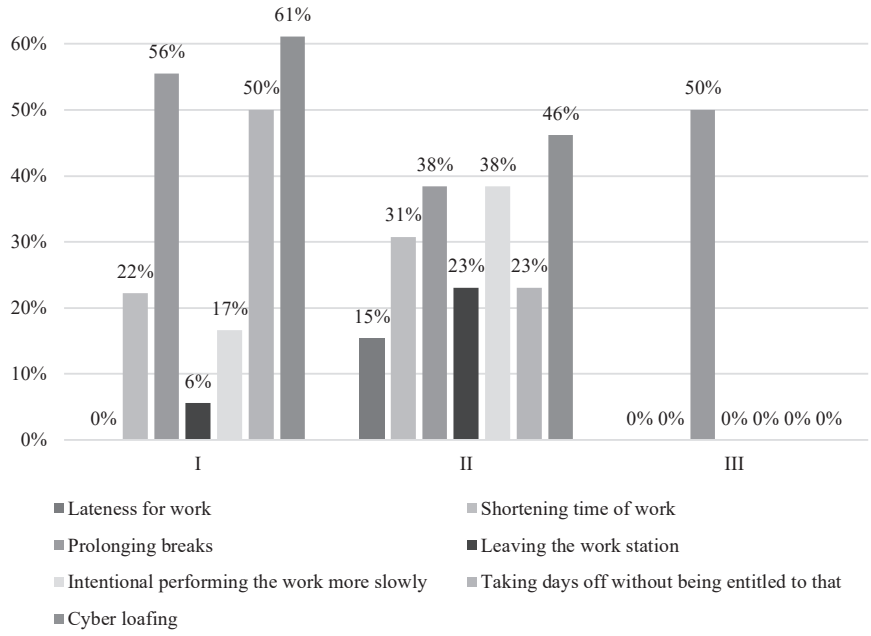

Figure 4. Reported manifestations of „doing-nothing" behaviors, by age group (p < 0.10).

I – 27–35 years age group, II – 36–50 years age group, III – 51 years and more age group

Source: Own calculations on the basis of the research results

Persons in the 27–50 years age group declare noticing manifestations of appropriation of items of official property by a co-worker/co-workers in their place of work (Table 7).

Table 7. Distribution of the responses to the question: "Do you observe in your work place manifestations of appropriation of the organization's official property by a co-worker/co-workers?"

	I	II	III
No	96	60	12
Yes	12	18	0

I – 27–35 years age group, II – 36–50 years age group, III – 51 years and more age group

Source: Own calculations on the basis of the research results

Among the reasons for appropriating items of official property which belong to the organization, the respondents listed, among others: the sense of being treated unfairly in the organization, low satisfaction with the performed work and ineffective system of control (Table 8, Figure 5). 5.6% of the respondents in the 27-35 years age group and 15.4% in that of 36-50 years point to the feeling of injustice as the reason for appropriation of official property; 15.4% of the respondents at the age between 36 and 50 years indicate low level of satisfaction with their job, whereas 7.7% of the examined in this age group point to the poorly functioning system of control in the organization as the main reasons.

Table 8. Distribution of the responses to the question: "What are the reasons for appropriation of the organization's official property?"

	Economic reasons (e.g., lack of financial resources)			The sense of being treated unfairly in the organization			Low satisfaction with the performed work			Ineffective system of control			I don't know the reason			Other		
	I	II	III	I	II	III	I	II	III	I	II	III	I	II	III	I	II	III
No	108	78	12	102	66	12	108	66	12	108	72	12	102	72	12	102	78	12
Yes	0	0	0	6	12	0	0	12	0	0	6	0	6	6	0	6	0	0
	-			χ^2=6.57; p=0.037**			χ^2=19.65; p=0.000***			χ^2=9.52; p=0.009***			χ^2=1.19; p=0.552			χ^2=5.16; p=0.076*		

I – 27–35 years age group, II – 36–50 years age group, III – 51 years and more age group

Statistically significant: * – at $p < 0.10$, ** – $p<0.05$, *** – $p < 0.01$

Source: Own calculations on the basis of the research results

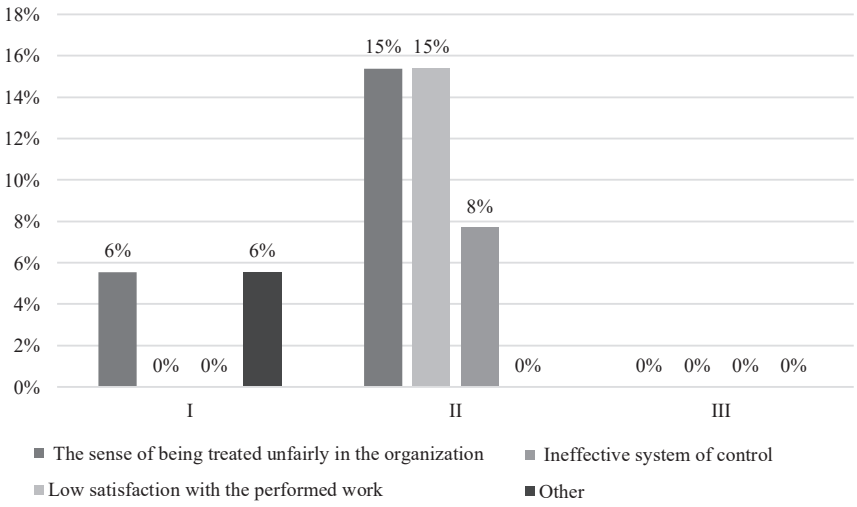

Figure 5. The reasons for appropriation of the organization's official property ($p<0.10$)

I – 27–35 years age group, II – 36–50 years age group, III – 51 years and more age group

Source: Own calculations on the basis of the research results

Conclusions

Summing up the above-presented results of the research, the following conclusions can be formulated:

1. It is a worrying phenomenon, which occurs in uniformed services, that respondents in each age group, i.e. 27–35, 36–50 and 51 years and over, observe instances of all the types of counterproductive behavior distinguished by Spector and colleagues among their co-functionaries. These conducts include: abuses, deviation of production, sabotage, stealing and worker's retreat (Spector et al., 2006), which means that such behaviors do occur. On the other hand, the fact that respondents are able to declare observing conducts of this type should be acknowledged to be the positive aspect of the examined functionaries' indications, as the functionaries can notice them and present the awareness of their being detrimental to the organization.
2. None of the respondents observed instances of physical aggression in the place of their service. The respondents of the oldest age group did not notice manifestations of verbal aggression, offensive behavior or instigation against co-functionaries, either. On the other hand, functionaries in the

27–35 years age group, more often than those in that of 36–50 years, can observe verbal aggression, offensive behavior or instigation (category: abuses of co-workers).

3. Similarly, younger functionaries, more frequently than their elder colleagues, observe counterproductive behaviors which belong to the groups of the so-called active or passive workers' behaviors detrimental to the organization, and also prolonging breaks and "cyber loafing" – surfing the Internet while being supposed to be performing regular duties at work, which – in turn – is qualified as the so-called "intentional doing-nothing".
4. Persons in the 27–50 years age group notice instances of stealing in their work environment. Among the reasons for appropriating items of official property which belong the organization, the respondents list, among others, the sense of unfair treatment in the organization, low level of satisfaction and ineffective system of supervision/control.

The results of the survey research which are presented above depict a fairly complex picture of counterproductive behaviors in uniformed forces, which confirms – at least partially – the hypothesis of the existence of a dependence between the age and perception of counterproductive behavior in the service. Younger functionaries, more often than their elder colleagues, notice behaviors which are detrimental to the organization to occur among co-functionaries in their work environment. This can result from the fact that they possess higher awareness of how individual types of conduct affect (worsen) the productivity of work than older persons.

The frames of the present study provide an opportunity of continuing an earlier work which dealt with differences between women and men as regards perception of counterproductive behaviors in uniformed forces and somehow confirm the regularity that older functionaries (the so-called Generation X and Generation of *PRL* [People's Republic of Poland]) can represent a completely different perception of acts which affect the productivity in the service, e.g., in terms of appropriation of items of the organization's official property, than their younger colleagues. It can be supposed that the younger functionaries perceive stealing of official property as an instance of counterproductive behavior (they are fully aware of this and hence notice such acts more often), while their older colleagues can evaluate this kind of conduct as negative, yet do not have the awareness of the impact of stealing on worsening of productivity or they just show a neutral attitude towards the issue of appropriation of official property (in the wake of watchwords popular in the times of the People's Republic of Poland: "I'm entitled to it!", "This is after all 'only' a ballpoint pen, fuel, …").

In the opinions expressed by both functionaries' superiors and specialists (psychologists) – there is a thorough identification of causes behind different levels of perceiving counterproductive behaviors among the groups of younger and older functionaries of uniformed services. The above-presented conclusions carry considerable implications for working out appropriate procedures in the sphere of management of human resources in uniformed forces, with a special emphasis laid on values which should be observed in this type of professionals and which aim to improve productivity of each functionary employed in the service.

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