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PERCEPTIONS OF THE POLICE ORGANIZATION
A SOCIOMETRIC ANALYSIS

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June, 1974

One Dollar and Fifty Cents

ABSTRACT

This study explores the significance of an officer's perceptions of his police agency as a variable in the study of assaults. The agencies selected for participation in this study were the police departments of Lake Charles, Louisiana; Abilene, Texas; and Galveston, Texas. Hemphill's Index of Group Dimensions Description Questionnaire was submitted to members of each agency; statistics on assaults were also collected. Both interdepartmental and intradepartmental analyses are used. In general, it was found that those officers who have a lower opinion of their agencies also have a higher assault rate. This finding should not be construed as having any predictive power; the results merely indicate that an officer's perception of his organization may assist in explaining that officer's potential to be assaulted.

PERCEPTIONS OF THE POLICE ORGANIZATION:
A SOCIOMETRIC ANALYSIS

Introduction

Much of the work undertaken by the Police Assaults Study has been based upon the premise that assaults on police officers are not entirely random or unpredictable occurrences. On the contrary, assaults are considered to be predictable and to be attributable to certain causative factors which, if understood, can be translated into development of preventive measures. If the researcher presumes that assaults on police are not entirely random occurrences, the task then becomes one of isolating and identifying those factors which seem to be associated with assaults on police. In other words, what factors "explain" the assault event?

This study explores a broad array of organizational characteristics which may help explain assaults on police. Of particular interest are the environmental and situational factors within the police agency itself, as well as the informal and formal operating procedures within the agency.

The original plan for evaluating the environmental and operational facets of the police agency called for in-depth case studies of several police agencies. First-hand observations of several police agencies could perhaps illuminate those organizational characteristics which may contribute to an explanation of assault behavior. To test this concept, an experimental case study was conducted in one police agency employing about 100 police and civilian support personnel. A team of four project members conducted an on-site evaluation to observe, first-hand, the operation of the agency as well as to collect factual data relating to the department's organization and operation. The evaluation was designed to identify relevant factors related to the problem of assaults on police.

The pilot study illustrated that on-site objective evaluation of police agencies is inadvisable because of time and fiscal constraints. A comprehensive case study of police agencies would probably require at least one man-week for every 100 personnel in the department. Therefore, other, perhaps more effective, means of evaluating police organizations were sought.

After considerable deliberation, the most feasible manner of assessing characteristics of police organization and their influence on police behavior appeared to be through use of a questionnaire administered to members of the several police agencies. Some of the advantages of the questionnaire technique of evaluation are:

- 1) It is less costly and time-consuming than direct observation. The Police Assaults Study had neither the time nor

the resources to employ sufficient trained observers to gather the type of data necessary to study the complex nature of police organizations.

2) It is less obtrusive than direct observations. Police agencies are traditionally wary of outsiders who come into their midst and who seem to probe areas which are often considered confidential by the law enforcement community. Police officers appear much less reluctant to answer questions on a printed form, particularly when they are protected with assurances of anonymity.

3) It provides meaningful insight into the informal, as opposed to the formal, structure of the police agency. This type of information is difficult to gather through more traditional research techniques. As Hall has observed:

It is recognized that the perceptions of participants of their organizations may well be at variance with the officially prescribed structures. The official structure, however, is as important as the degree to which it is adhered to. If the actual organizational structure is a replica of the formal structure, then the formal structure is the significant structural component. On the other hand, the degree of variation from the formal structure is the actual significant structure for organizational operation. Accurate measurement of participant perceptions should therefore yield a reliable and valid representation of the actual organizational structure.¹

Data and Methodology

A review of the literature uncovered no instruments which had been previously used to measure assault related criteria, although sociometric devices have been developed to measure internal organizational conflict and disharmony.² Moreover, time did not permit construction of an original questionnaire which would adequately fulfill the needs of this particular study. All things considered, a previously constructed, standardized questionnaire was selected to measure those organizational dimensions hypothesized as relevant to the study.

Variables

After careful consideration, Hemphill's Group Dimensions Description Questionnaire, a 150-item self-administered organizational evaluation statement, was selected as the most appropriate instrument to assess those informal organizational characteristics which may be relevant to the assault problem.³ Hemphill's Index of Group Dimensions is designed to measure 13 more or less independent attributes of a group. The answers to the questions are provided

on a five point scale: definitely true, mostly true, equally true or false, mostly false, and definitely false. The 13 dimensions are:⁴

- 1) Autonomy. The degree to which a group functions independently of other groups and occupies an independent position in society.
- 2) Control. The degree to which a group regulates the behavior of individuals while they are functioning as group members.
- 3) Flexibility. The degree to which a group's activities are marked by informal procedures rather than by adherence to established procedures.
- 4) Hedonic Tone. The degree to which group membership is accompanied by a general feeling of pleasantness or agreeableness.
- 5) Homogeneity. The degree to which members of a group are similar with respect to socially relevant characteristics.
- 6) Intimacy. The degree to which members of a group are mutually acquainted with one another and are familiar with the most personal details of one another's lives.
- 7) Participation. The degree to which members of a group apply time and effort to group activities.
- 8) Permeability. The degree to which a group permits ready access to its membership.
- 9) Polarization. The degree to which a group is oriented and works toward a single goal which is clear and specific to all members.
- 10) Potency. The degree to which a group has primary significance to its members.
- 11) Stability. The degree to which a group persists over a period of time with essentially the same characteristics.
- 12) Stratification. The degree to which a group orders its members into status hierarchies.
- 13) Viscidty. The degree to which members of the group function as a unit.

In his perception of the police agency, a member should believe that the force is important, that it is of benefit to the community, and that he is making a contribution to the agency. If these beliefs are to be realized, the policeman must perceive the department to have favorable characteristics on the group dimensions. In other words, directions must be ascribed to each

of the dimensions for it to have meaning. A favorable perception of the group dimension is indicated by:

1) Positive perception for autonomy, flexibility, hedonic tone, intimacy, participation, permeability, potency, stability, and viscosity.

2) Negative perceptions for control, homogeneity, polarization, and stratification.

Analysis Techniques

Three police agencies -- Lake Charles, Louisiana; Abilene, Texas; and Galveston, Texas -- were selected for the purpose of administering the questionnaire. These agencies, all from cities in the 50,000 - 100,000 population range, were among the 13 municipal police agencies which had previously participated in the Police Assaults Study, furnishing extensive background information on police employees (e.g., rank, age, length of service, level of education). These data were useful in the subsequent analysis of responses to the questionnaire. In addition, the selected police agencies represented varying rates of assaults on police for the year 1973, providing the opportunity to compare perceived organizational characteristics with differing assault levels.

Each agency was provided questionnaires, an instruction sheet explaining procedures for completing the questionnaire, and letters addressed to each participant explaining the nature and purpose of the study. The questionnaires were given coded identification numbers corresponding to each member of the department. Respondents were asked to: (1) complete the form and return it to the agency coordinator; (2) indicate rank and age on the questionnaire; and (3) indicate the length of time required to complete the form. The inclusion of rank and age was requested to assist the project staff in cross-checking the forms against personal data already on hand. The time information was later used to compile the amount of in-kind services contributed to the Police Assaults Study by participating agencies.

The Hemphill questionnaire was used to test both inter-agency and intra-agency characteristics. Several hypotheses were considered:

1) Similar agencies from different geographical locations demonstrate dissimilar organizational perceptions.

2) Individual police officers who have been assaulted demonstrate different organizational perceptions from those who have not been assaulted.

3) Individual police officers occupying different positions of rank within an agency demonstrate dissimilar perceptions of the agency.

4) Organizational perceptions of the younger officers on the force differ from those of the older personnel.

5) Organizational perceptions of the relatively new officers on the force differ from those of the more experienced personnel.

These areas of inquiry were selected to ascertain whether specific perceptual patterns might be related to assaults on police. The inter-agency comparison was selected to test whether an agency's assault rate could be associated with patterns of perception. In other words, a less favorable perception of the agency may be reflected in a higher assault rate. Assaulted and non-assaulted officers are compared to ascertain whether the assaulted officers perceive the agency less favorably than do the non-assaulted officers. The three remaining comparisons were selected on the basis of data which indicate that patrolmen, relatively inexperienced policemen, and the younger police are more prone to be assaulted.⁵ The speculation is that these three classes of police officers may have a less favorable perception of the agency, and that this perception may be manifested in a higher number of assaults.

The hypotheses were tested through the medium of descriptive statistics. The principal manner of evaluation was comparison of means and evaluation of frequency distribution.

Findings

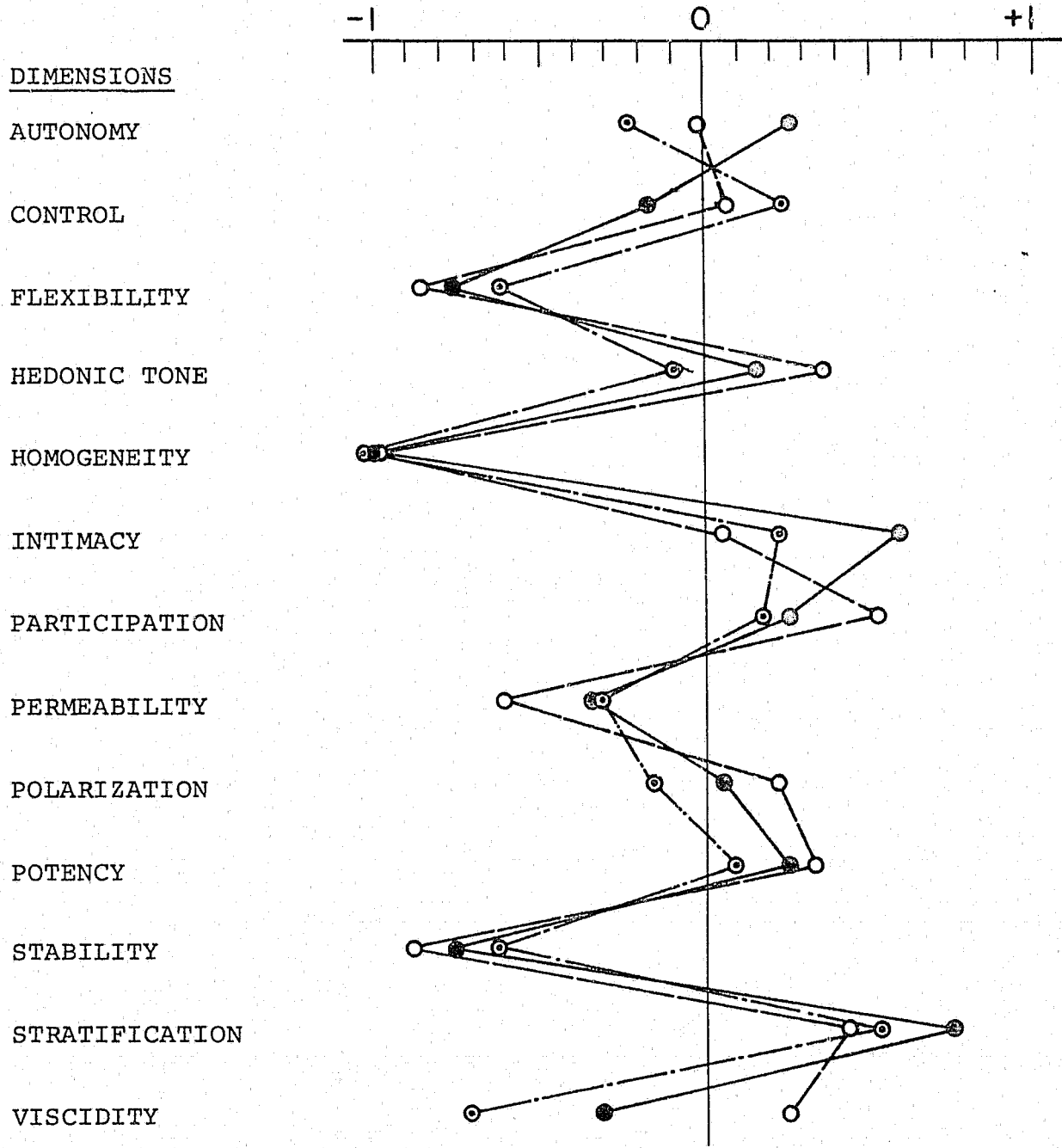
Agency Comparison

The first hypothesis was tested using an inter-agency comparison. The presumption here is that people from different communities who have no apparent reason for demonstrating similarity, maintain dissimilar perceptions of the organization in which they function. Figure 1 shows the dimension profiles of these agencies.

For the most part, the profiles of the agencies show a considerable degree of similarity, contrary to the initial presumption, since the three agencies demonstrated considerable dissimilarity with regard to outward characteristics. For example, the median ages vary from 26.5 for Lake Charles, through 31 for Galveston, to 36 for Abilene. Similarly, the median years of service range from 3 for Lake Charles through 5 for Galveston, to 8 for Abilene. One would expect the age and time in service factors to have a considerable effect on perception. Yet, these three agencies appear, on the surface at least, to have minimized effects of these factors. Personnel in all three agencies appear to follow a roughly similar pattern of perception. Maximum intra-dimension variations (maximum differences between means) range from .05 for the homogeneity dimension to .96 for the viscosity dimension. Ten of the 13 dimensions have a maximum variation less than .50. The remarkable feature of these inter-agency profiles is the near agreement

FIGURE 1

DEPARTMENT PROFILES OF LAKE CHARLES, LOUISIANA,
 ABILENE, TEXAS, AND GALVESTON, TEXAS (MEAN VALUES)



- Lake Charles (46 Cases)
- Abilene (76 Cases)
- Galveston (72 Cases)

on the homogeneity dimension, considering the diversity of the agencies. Even though the agencies are outwardly dissimilar, the perception difference of organizational homogeneity, in this case heterogeneity, appears minimal.

An item-by-item comparison of the three agency profiles opens up another interesting avenue for exploration. On initial appraisal, it appears that no single agency exhibits a markedly different organizational perception. However, a closer scrutiny indicates that the members of the Galveston agency may hold a less favorable perception of their organization than do the members of the other two agencies. This agency demonstrates the least favorable perception on six dimensions (autonomy, control, hedonic tone, participation, potency, and viscidty). While Galveston demonstrates the most favorable perception on three dimensions (flexibility, permeability, and stability), the differences are slight and do not appear to materially alter the overall impression. The other two agencies, Abilene and Lake Charles, appear relatively similar and generally more favorably disposed in their organizational perceptions.

Assaulted Versus Non-Assaulted

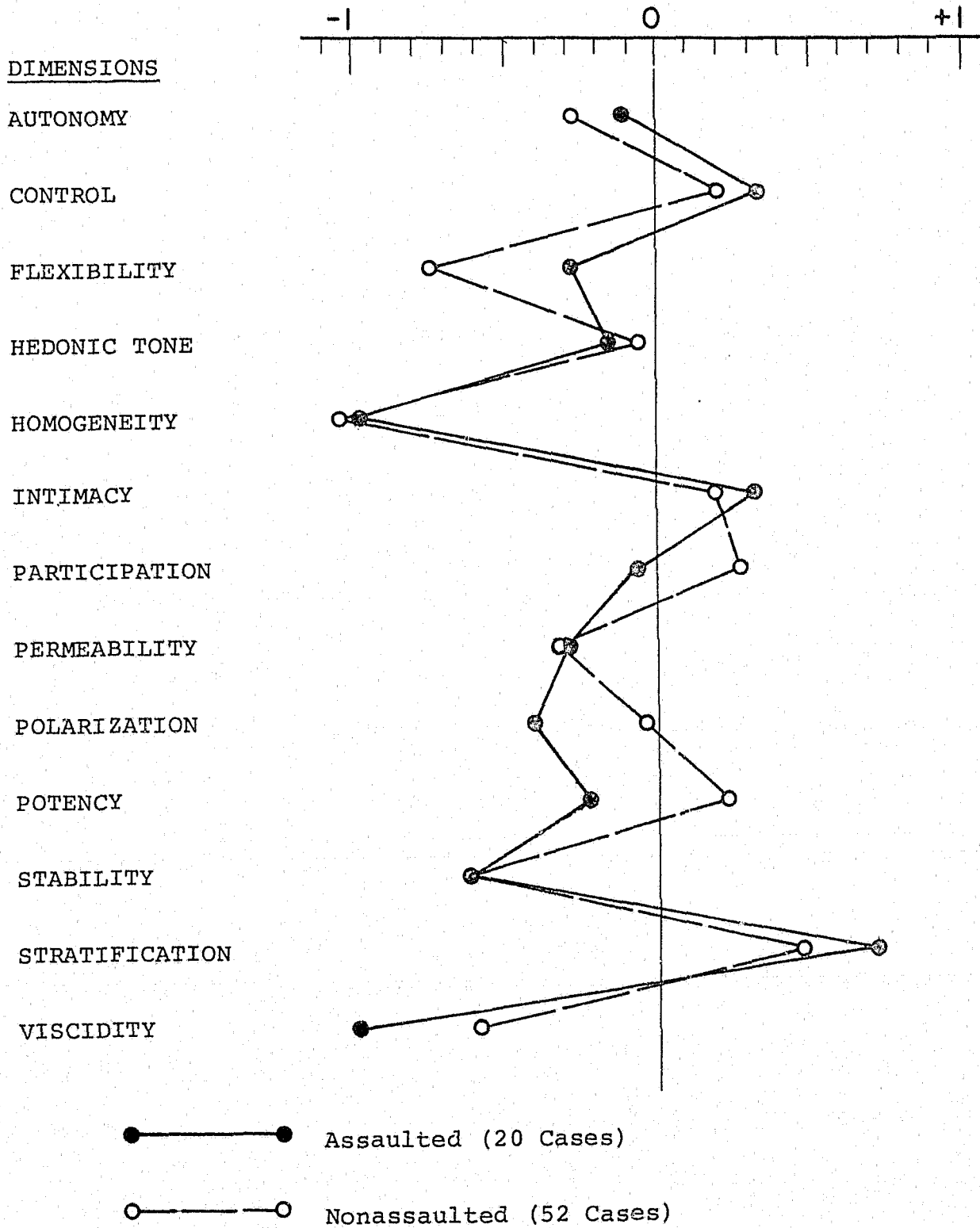
The remaining evaluations are directed toward perceptions within the agencies rather than perceptions between agencies. The first of these is the comparison of organizational perceptions of assaulted and non-assaulted officers. The hypothesis is that assaulted officers have different perceptions of their organization than do non-assaulted officers. This difference in perception may be a key to understanding variance in the frequency of police assaults. This evaluation will consider only the Galveston and Lake Charles agencies. The number of assaults in Abilene was not sufficient to allow meaningful comparisons.

An appraisal of Figure 2 shows some differences in the perception profiles of the assaulted and non-assaulted officers in Galveston. There are several obvious variations in perception in the dimensions of flexibility, participation, polarization, potency, and viscidty, indicating that in Galveston, at least, assaulted officers have different perceptions than do non-assaulted officers. On the other hand, several dimensions (hedonic tone, homogeneity, intimacy, permeability, stability) show close agreement between assaulted and non-assaulted officers.

Of equal interest, however, is the understanding that in three dimensions (participation, potency, and viscidty) of the five with large variations, the assaulted officers demonstrate a less favorable perception of the organization than do the non-assaulted officers. Additionally, three of the dimensions with lesser variations also reflect the same direction of perception. It appears that in each of these instances the assaulted officer is expressing the opinion that he is not totally a part of the organization.

FIGURE 2

PROFILES OF ASSAULTED AND NONASSAULTED
POLICEMEN (MEAN VALUES)
GALVESTON, TEXAS



The Lake Charles profiles (Figure 3) show, basically, few major differences between assaulted officers and non-assaulted officers in their organizational perceptions. However, the figure shows, as did that for Galveston, that the assaulted officer apparently views the organization differently than his non-assaulted counterpart. Six dimensions (autonomy, intimacy, participation, potency, stratification, and viscosity) demonstrate rather obvious differences in perception. Of special interest, however, is the direction of the differences in the Lake Charles agency. In all cases in which the difference between means was greater than 0.1 the assaulted officer held a less favorable perception of the organization than did the non-assaulted officer.

It is interesting to note that the two agencies -- Galveston and Lake Charles -- demonstrate several similarities. For example, in both agencies the assaulted officers had noticeably less favorable perceptions of the participation, potency, stratification, and viscosity dimensions than did the non-assaulted officers. These inter-agency similarities raise the possibility that assaulted officers may maintain similar perceptions in certain areas of their organizations regardless of organizational similarities or dissimilarities. On the other hand, the two agencies show noticeable differences between assaulted and non-assaulted officers in their perceptions of autonomy, flexibility, intimacy, and polarization which reduce the cross-agency correlation possibility. Nevertheless, the data indicate a promising area for future investigation.

Perceptions According to Rank

The third area of interest is the comparison of police officers according to their position (rank) within the agency. The principle concern here is inquiry into whether the individual's position on the force dictates his perception of the organization, and whether this perception is reflected in proneness to be assaulted. Each police agency was divided into three sections: (1) the senior supervisors (chief, captains, lieutenants, etc.); (2) the sergeants; and (3) the patrolmen. Generally speaking, one should expect patrolmen to display less favorable perceptions of the department in all dimensions except outside influence (autonomy). On the other hand, the senior supervisors, based on their years of service and progressively responsible roles within the organization, should demonstrate the opposite perceptions. Sergeants, the first supervisory range of police officers, can be expected to demonstrate values which approximate middle range perceptions.

The Abilene police force (Figure 4) presents the most nearly ideal conceptual picture. Except for the dimensions of control and stability, the perceptions of the three rank categories are all oriented in a series of continua based on rank from patrolmen through sergeant to senior supervisors. In ten of the 13 dimensions the patrolmen display the expected perceptions of the organization (most favorable for autonomy; least favorable for the

FIGURE 3

PROFILES OF ASSAULTED AND NONASSAULTED
POLICEMEN (MEAN VALUES)

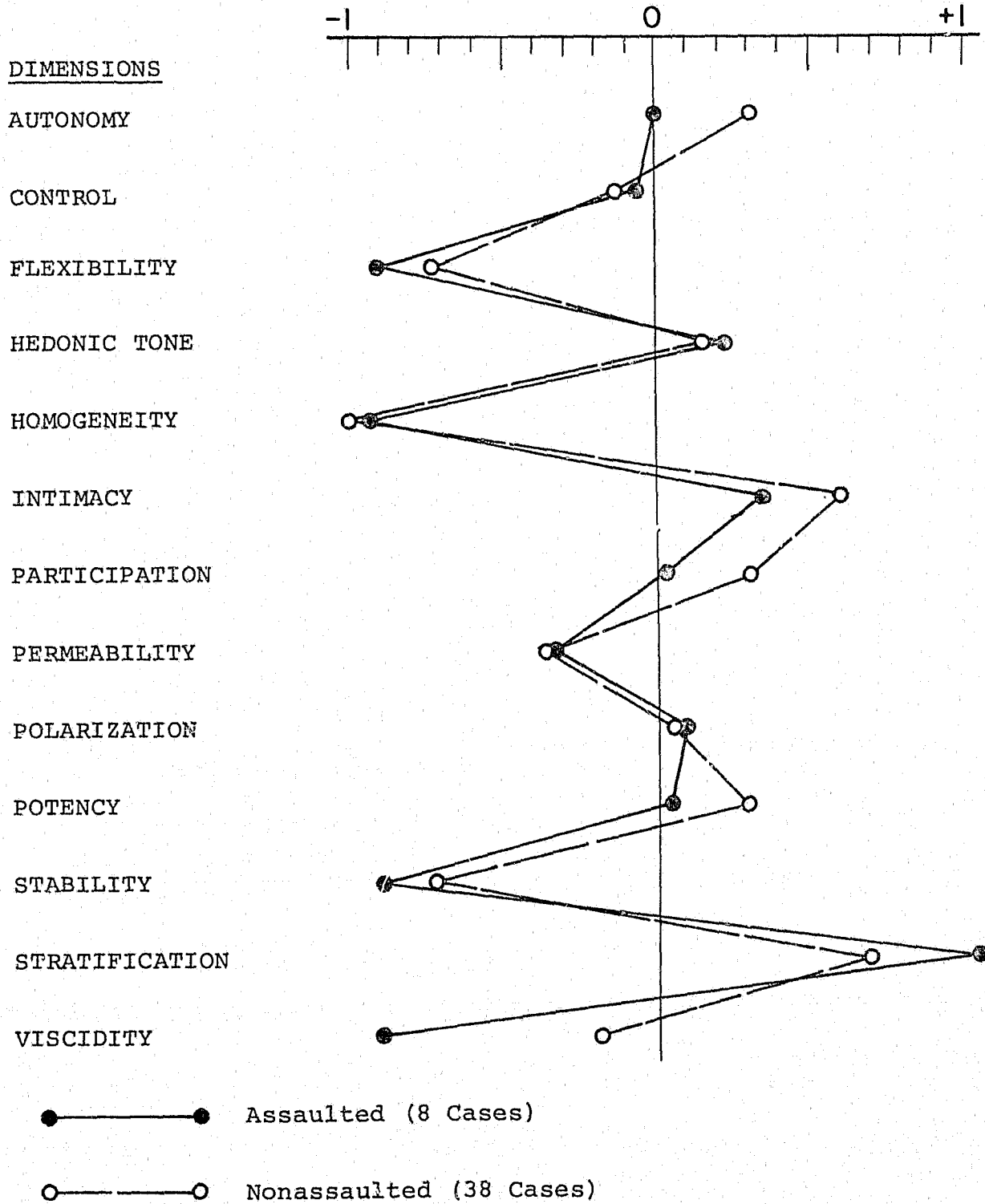
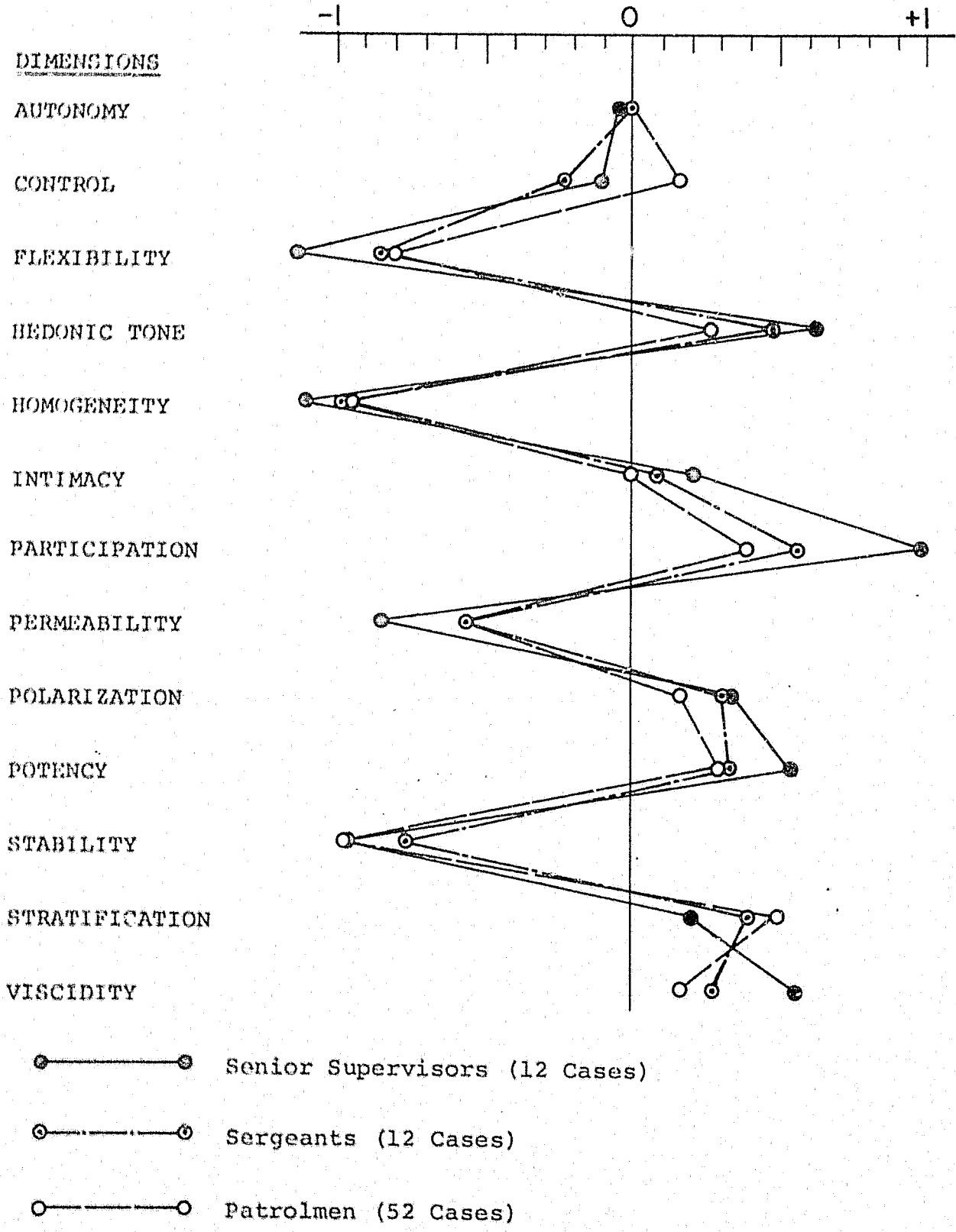


FIGURE 4

PROFILES OF SENIOR SUPERVISORS, SERGEANTS, PATROLMEN (MEAN VALUES)
ABILENE, TEXAS



remainder). In the dimensions of autonomy, flexibility, permeability, and polarization, the senior supervisors present the least favorable perception. Even though the department seems to perceive as projected, five of the 13 dimensions (control, flexibility, hedonic tone, participation, and viscosity) show relatively large differences in perception, indicating some possible areas of dissatisfaction. Generally speaking, however, a comparison of perceptions by rank of the Abilene police force reveals no unusual differences which might be related to assault. This is to be expected since the Abilene agency reported insufficient assaults to analyze.

The Galveston police agency (Figure 5) presents an entirely different picture. In this agency the senior supervisors present a series of extremely varied perceptions. However, one must view these responses cautiously inasmuch as only four people in this category, all lieutenants, completed the questionnaire. Nevertheless, there are extreme differences in the dimensions of the three groupings in the agency. In addition, the senior supervisors have least favorable perceptions of hedonic tone, stability, stratification, and viscosity, and demonstrate very negative perceptions of flexibility. The patrolmen demonstrated the most favorable perceptions of flexibility, permeability, and polarization. The sergeants seem most favorably inclined toward autonomy, control, hedonic tone, stability, and viscosity -- perceptions which would intuitively fall to patrolmen (autonomy) and senior supervisors (the remaining four dimensions). Yet, the agency exhibits no definite pattern which can be attributed to position within the agency or to proneness to be assaulted.

The Lake Charles agency (Figure 6) presents yet a third picture of organizational perception. While this agency demonstrates no overwhelming perception differences, it does show considerable incongruity from what may be classed as "normal" profile differences. In only three dimensions (hedonic tone, intimacy, and potency) do the three officer groups display an expected perception order (i.e., the perceptions range from patrolmen with least favorable perceptions through sergeants to senior supervisors with most favorable perceptions). In four of the dimensions (participation, stability, stratification, and viscosity) the major differences between means are those separating the senior supervisors and the sergeants, and in two of them (participation and stability) the perception range is reversed from that anticipated. In five instances (autonomy, control, homogeneity, permeability, and polarization) the senior supervisors are actually the mid-range perceptors rather than extreme perceptors. Sergeants, who were projected to express mid-range perceptions throughout the profiles, do so in only three dimensions (hedonic tone, intimacy, and potency), and in hedonic tone their perceptions are very similar to the patrolmen's. Contrary to expectations, patrolmen hold the most favorable perceptions of flexibility, permeability, and polarization. Here, as with the other agencies, there is no specific indication that the perceptions calculated in this manner can be related to assaults on police.

FIGURE 5

PROFILES OF SENIOR SUPERVISORS, SERGEANTS, PATROLMEN (MEAN VALUES)
GALVESTON, TEXAS

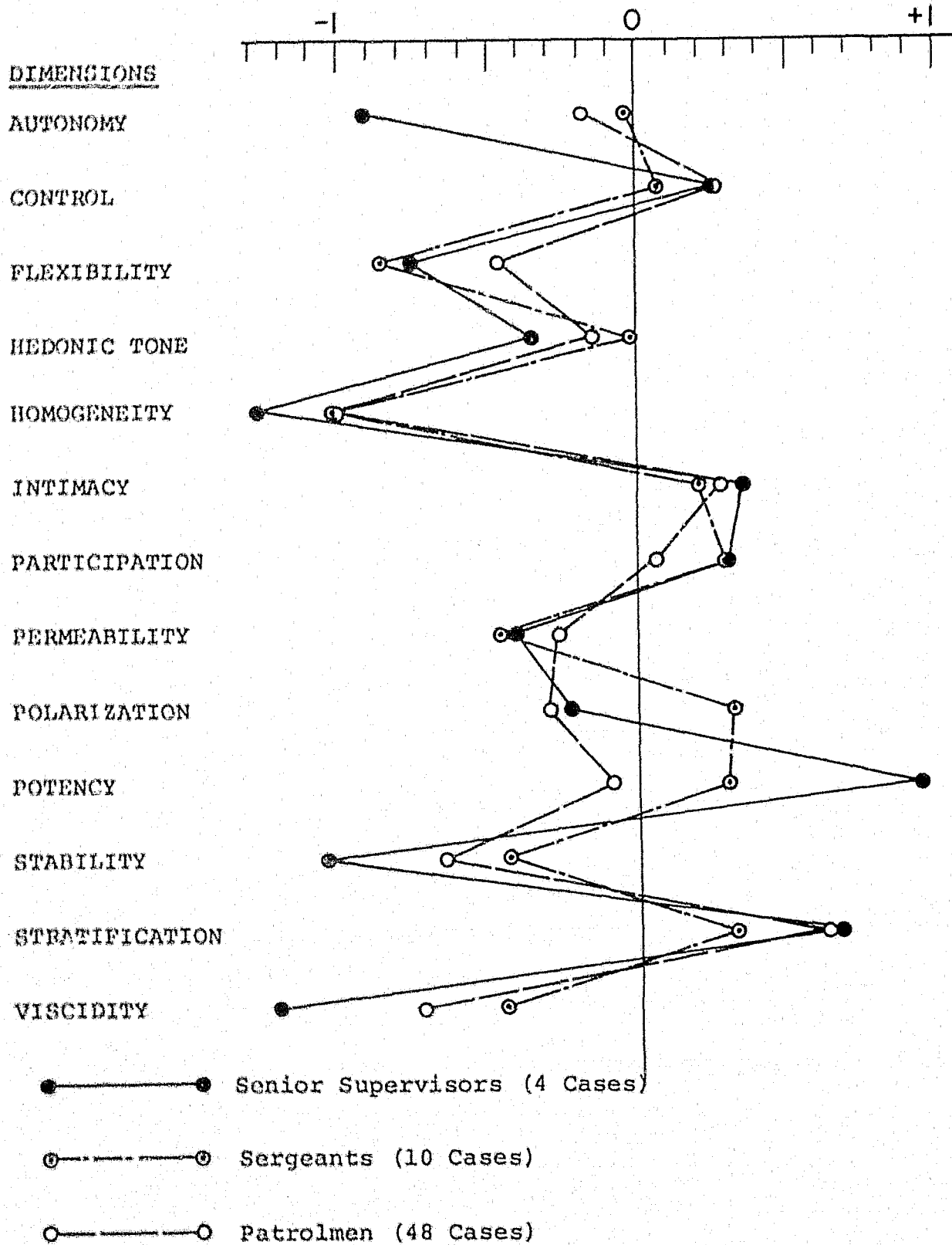
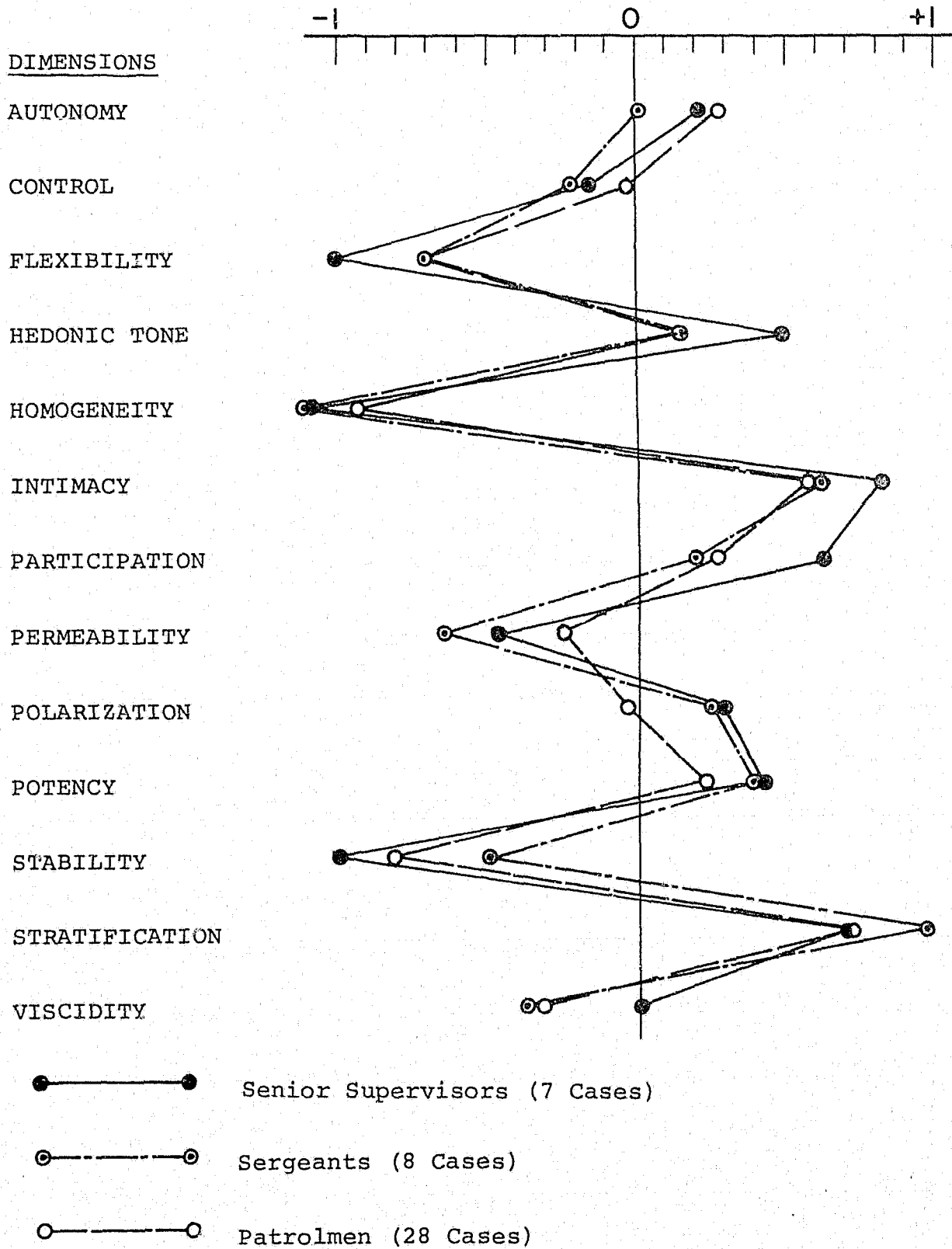


FIGURE 6

PROFILES OF SENIOR SUPERVISORS, SERGEANTS, PATROLMEN (MEAN VALUES)
LAKE CHARLES, LOUISIANA



This section of the analysis seems to have uncovered three completely different police agencies. From the standpoint of discovering differences in perception, it may be more effective than the inter-agency comparison. The perceptions of one agency (Abilene) conform very closely with expectations, intimating a hierarchical organization. The Galveston data illustrate two items of concern. One is the possibility that the senior supervisors are more disgruntled or disaffected than are their subordinates. The second is the needed awareness that a very small number of respondents (four senior supervisors) do not provide adequate data for reasoned analysis. The Lake Charles agency does not present a concrete, definable picture when police are compared according to rank. It is doubtful that the data are erroneous, but the perceptions of the agency, when arrayed according to rank, are very incongruous. Of greater importance through the three agencies, however, is the recognition that this particular intra-agency division (according to rank) does not lead to explanations of assaults on policemen.

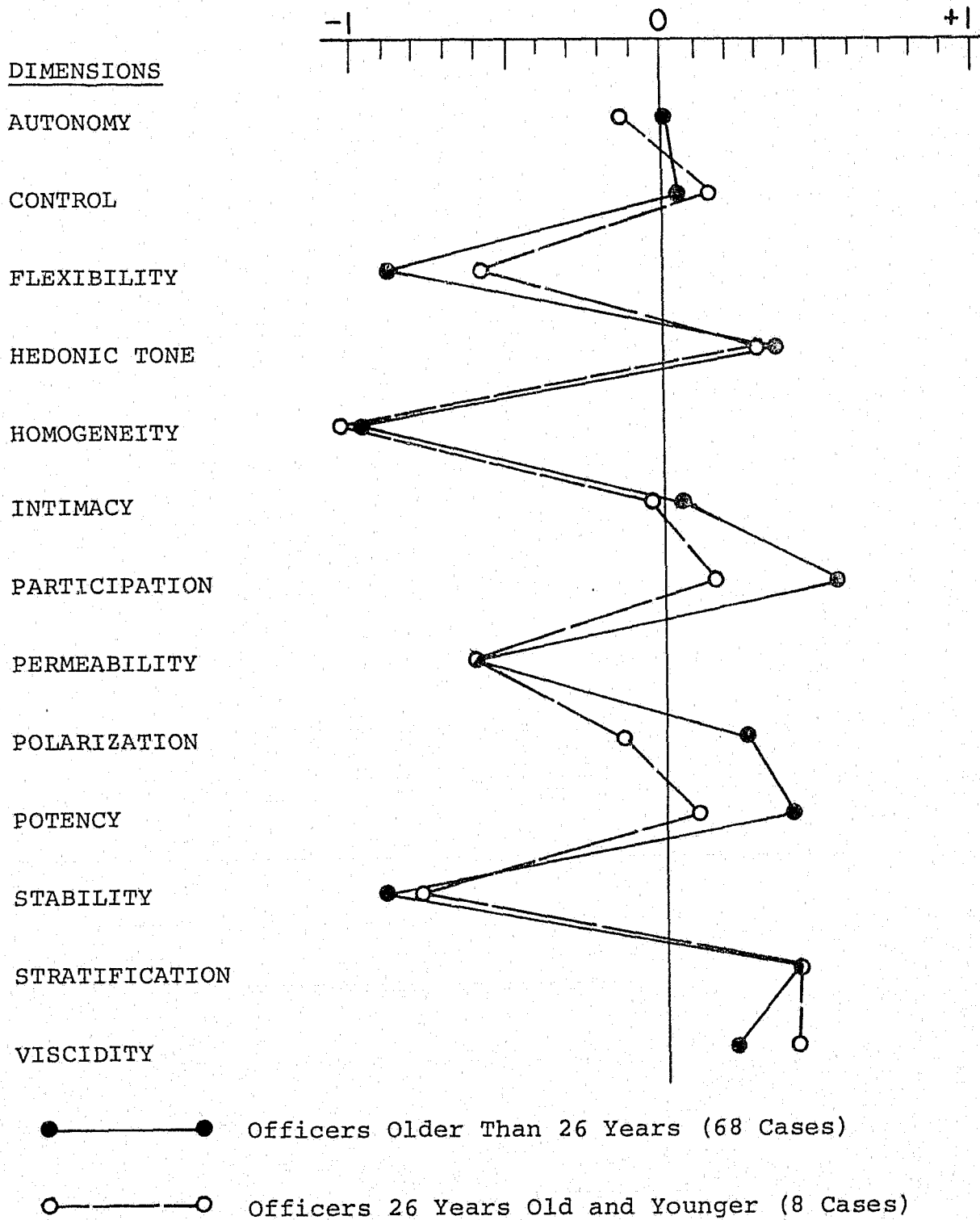
Perception According to Age

The fourth area of interest is analysis of perceptions according to the age of the respondents. The purpose in this section is to explore the premise that younger officers have a less favorable perception of the agency than do older officers. It is possible that their perceptions of the agency may assist in explaining their proneness to be assaulted. Accordingly, to test this possibility, each agency was divided into two groups according to age. One group includes personnel 26 years old and younger; the other group includes all personnel older than 26. The younger officers should be expected to have more favorable perceptions of autonomy (by virtue of not having experienced undue external influence), and to have less favorable perceptions of the other dimensions; the older officers should demonstrate the opposite perceptions.

The first agency to be considered, Abilene (Figure 7), does not conform with the anticipated configuration. Four of the dimensions (hedonic tone, homogeneity, permeability, and stratification) display little or no differences between perceptions; only two dimensions (participation and polarization) show any large difference. A comparison of the nine dimensions which have valuable perception differences shows only four (control, intimacy, participation, and potency) which conform with expectations. The older officers perceive these dimensions more favorably than do the younger officers. The other five dimensions exhibit perceptions which are opposite to expectations. The older officers have a more favorable perception of autonomy, while the younger officers show more favorable perceptions of flexibility, polarization, stability, and viscosity. In evaluating the Abilene agency, one must consider that it is an older agency; only eight (10.5 percent) of the officers who completed the questionnaire fall in the 26 or under age bracket. Thus, a breakdown by age does not explain too much about the Abilene

FIGURE 7

PROFILES OF POLICEMEN ACCORDING TO AGE (MEAN VALUES)
 ABILENE, TEXAS



Police Department and how it sees assaults on police officers.

The Galveston agency (Figure 8) also presents an unusual picture. In this instance, three dimensions (control, hedonic tone, and stratification) show negligible differences in perception; only two dimensions (autonomy and viscosity) show any appreciable difference. The ten dimensions with demonstrated differences in perceptions illustrate a near reversal of the anticipated trend. The younger personnel held favorable perceptions of autonomy (expected), flexibility, intimacy, permeability, polarization, stability, and viscosity; the older officers held favorable perceptions of homogeneity, participation, and potency. The impression one gets from these data is that the older police are more disgruntled, more dissatisfied, than their younger counterparts; a worrisome situation, if true.

The Lake Charles data (Figure 9) present an even distribution of perceptions. In this agency, three dimensions (stratification, potency, and participation) show only minor differences in perception. Of the remaining ten dimensions, two (permeability and hedonic tone) can be considered to have large perception differences. However, the distribution of perceptions is of more interest in the Lake Charles data. The younger officers perceive five dimensions (hedonic tone, intimacy, permeability, polarization, and viscosity) more favorably than do the older officers, an unexpected development. The older officers have a more favorable impression of autonomy (unexpected), control, flexibility, homogeneity, and stability. All things considered, an evaluation of perceptions based on age of personnel explains very little about how the personnel of the Lake Charles Police Department view assaults on police officers.

The analysis by age groups of the three agencies is not very revealing. All three agencies show relatively minor differences in perception, and none of them shows a really distinct pattern in the predicted direction. Galveston actually shows a relatively strong tendency in the reverse direction. Of the ten largest differences in the three agencies, six of them display perceptions opposite to those anticipated. No agency demonstrates any perception or series of perceptions which can lead to explaining assaults on police. It appears that a division into age brackets may actually hide any possible explanation of the assault phenomenon.

Perceptions Based on Experience

The final area of inquiry is based on experience, or years of service, within the agency. The intent here is to investigate whether the individual's time with the agency influences his perception of the agency, and whether that perception can help explain assaults on police. To evaluate these perceptions the agencies were divided into two groups: (1) those police officers

FIGURE 8

PROFILES OF POLICEMEN ACCORDING TO AGE (MEAN VALUES)
GALVESTON, TEXAS

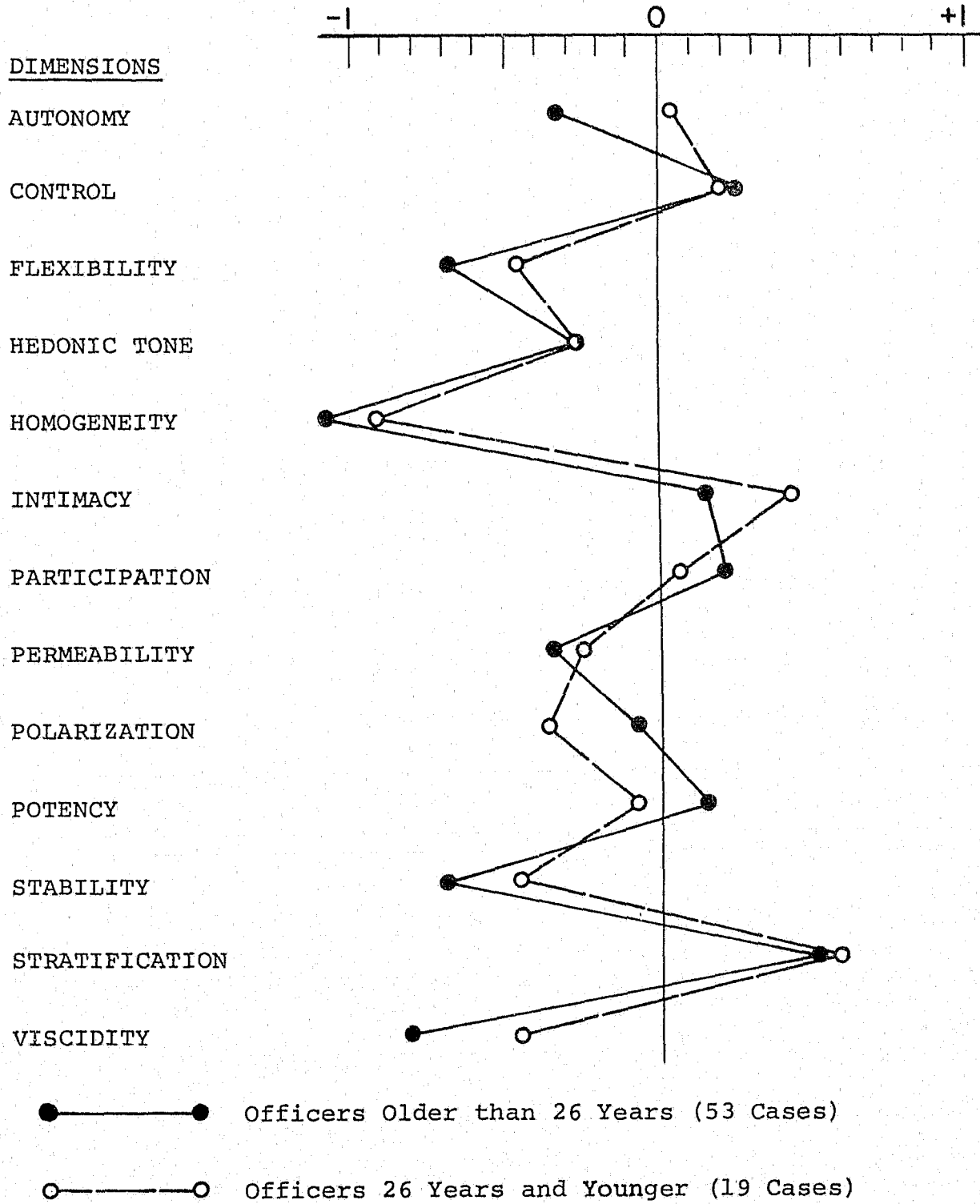
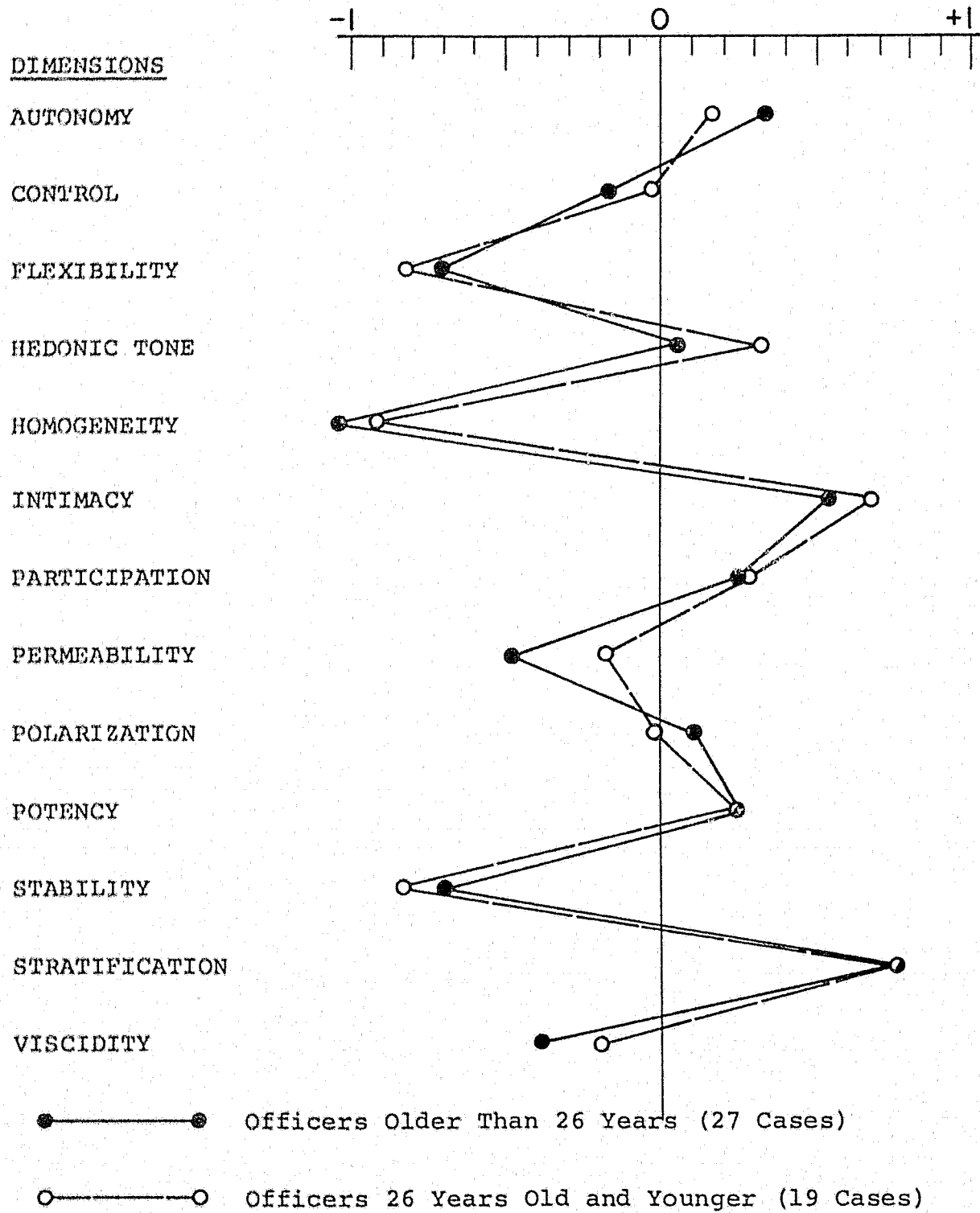


FIGURE 9

PROFILES OF POLICEMEN ACCORDING TO AGE (MEAN VALUES)
LAKE CHARLES, LOUISIANA



with more than five years experience; and (2) those with five years experience or less. One would anticipate that the less experienced officers would have a less favorable perception of all of the dimensions except autonomy (because of their lack of exposure to external influence) than do those with more experience. Their negative perception can be explained by their possibly not feeling totally accepted into the "in" group.

The Abilene force (Figure 10) appears to be almost homogeneous in the comparison of perceptions. Nine of the 13 dimensions display a negligible difference in perception. Only four dimensions (hedonic tone, participation, polarization, and potency) show much perception difference, and only the participation dimension has a very large difference. Of the four dimensions, hedonic tone, participation, and potency are perceived more favorably by the more experienced officers, as expected. In only one instance -- polarization -- do the less experienced officers have the more favorable perception. Thus, this agency tends to conform with the expected picture. The more significant factor, however, is the tendency toward homogeneous perceptions. The perception differences are neither sufficient nor numerous enough to lead to any conclusion.

The Galveston Police Department (Figure 11) presents a more useable picture from a standpoint of perception heterogeneity. Only three of the dimensions (control, hedonic tone, and permeability) have low perception differences. In this agency, six of the ten useable dimensions are more favorably perceived by the less experienced personnel. One of these, autonomy, is as anticipated, but the remaining dimensions (flexibility, intimacy, polarization, stability, and viscosity) are perceived counter to expectation. In only four dimensions (homogeneity, participation, potency and stratification) do the experienced personnel show the more favorable perceptions. The grouping according to experience leads to the implication that, in Galveston, the more experienced personnel maintain less favorable perceptions of the agency.

An analysis of the Lake Charles force (Figure 12) shows that a majority of the 13 dimensions have relatively insignificant perception differences. In this instance, seven dimensions show very small differences. Of the remaining dimensions, the experienced personnel display a more favorable perception of control, homogeneity, and stability, while the inexperienced personnel perceive permeability, polarization and stratification more favorably. Thus, the Lake Charles agency tends to conform with the anticipated configuration, yet it displays a strong homogeneity of perception.

The grouping of personnel in the agencies according to experience does not appear to provide much explanation of assaults on police. Two agencies demonstrate considerable homogeneity of perception, yet this homogeneity is not a result of similar experience. A comparison of the two agencies confirms this. Of those personnel completing and returning the questionnaire, 26 percent of the respondents from Abilene have fewer than six years service (56

FIGURE 10

PROFILES OF EXPERIENCED AND
INEXPERIENCED PERSONNEL (MEAN VALUES)
ABILENE, TEXAS

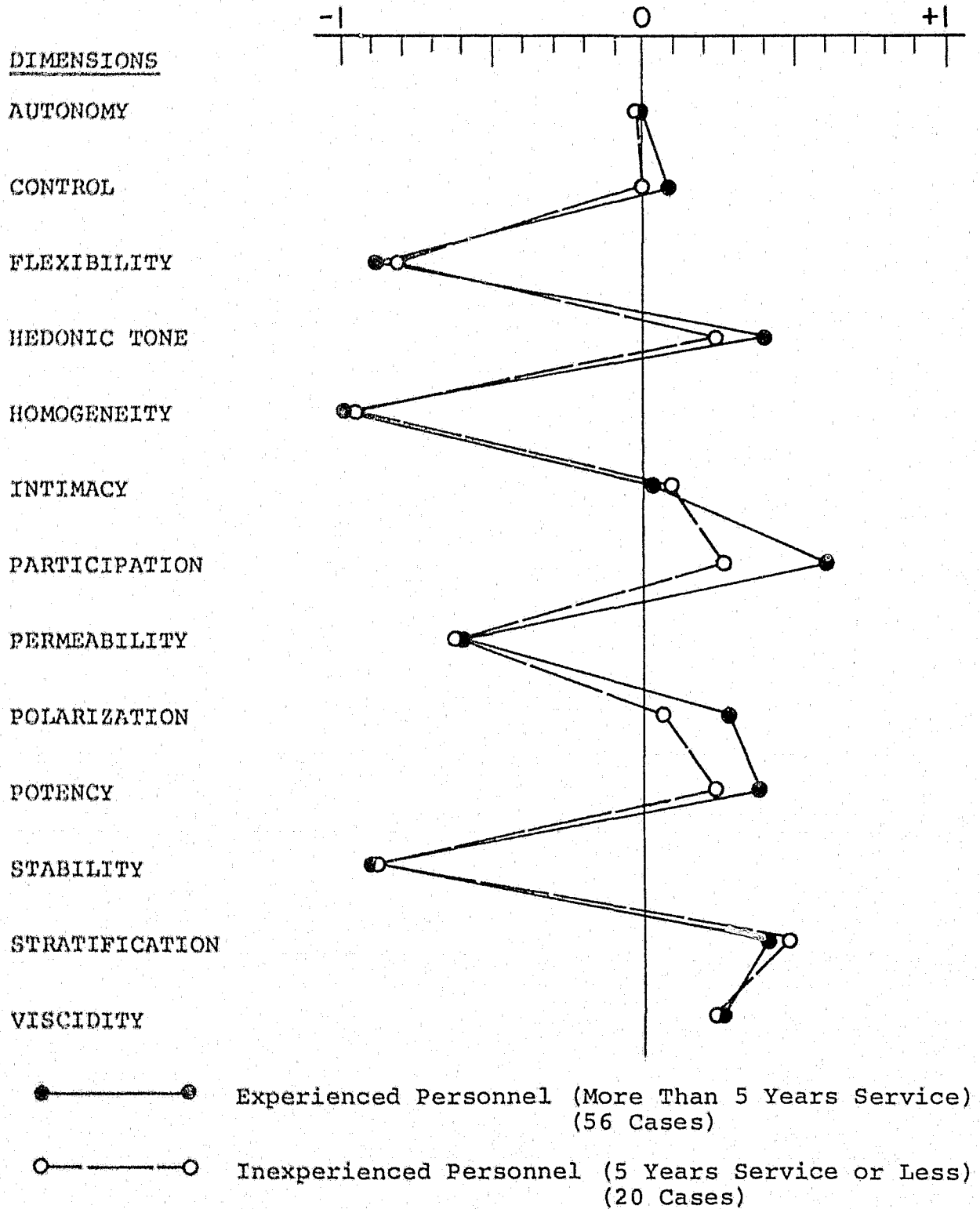


FIGURE 11

PROFILES OF EXPERIENCED AND
INEXPERIENCED PERSONNEL (MEAN VALUES)
GALVESTON, TEXAS

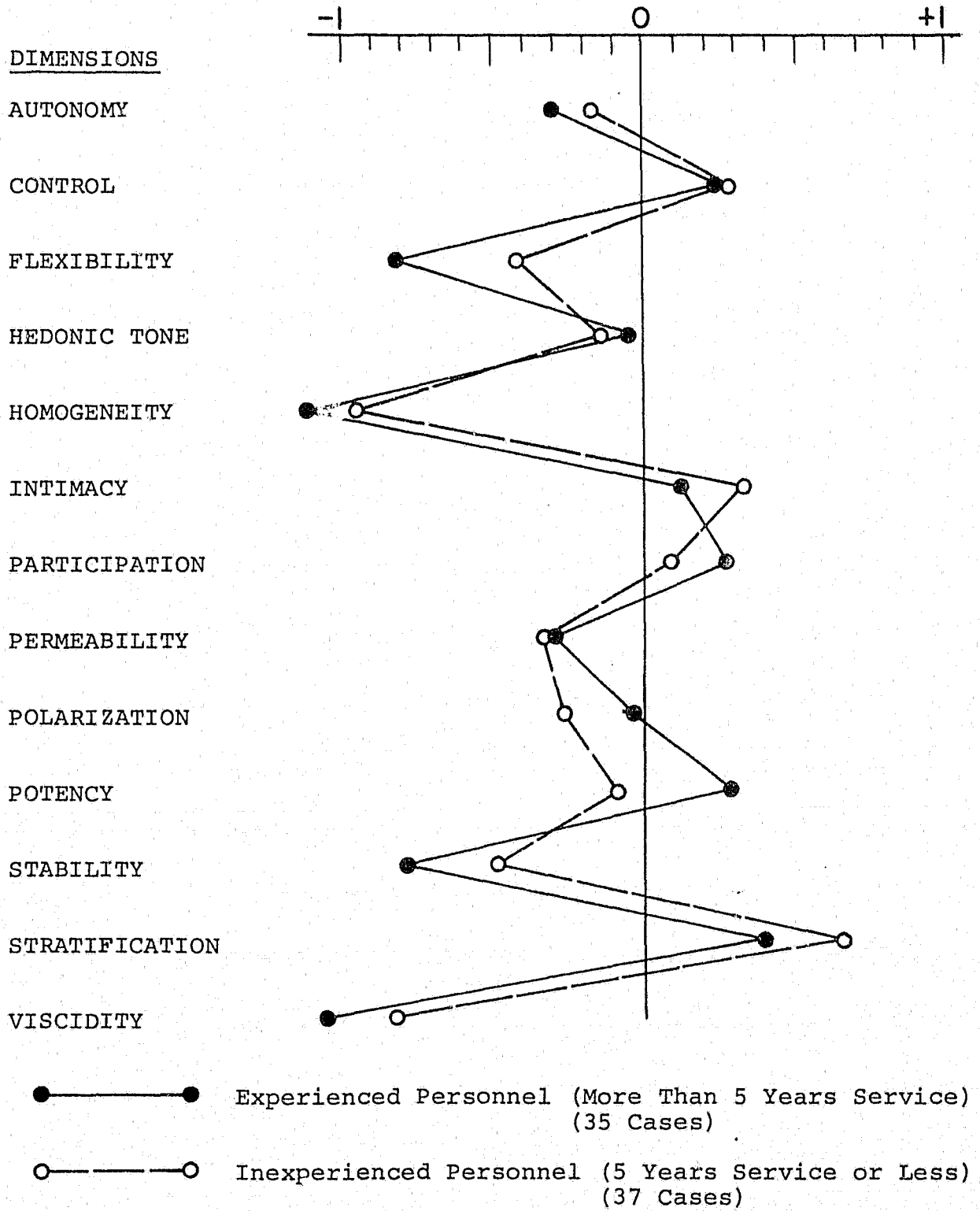
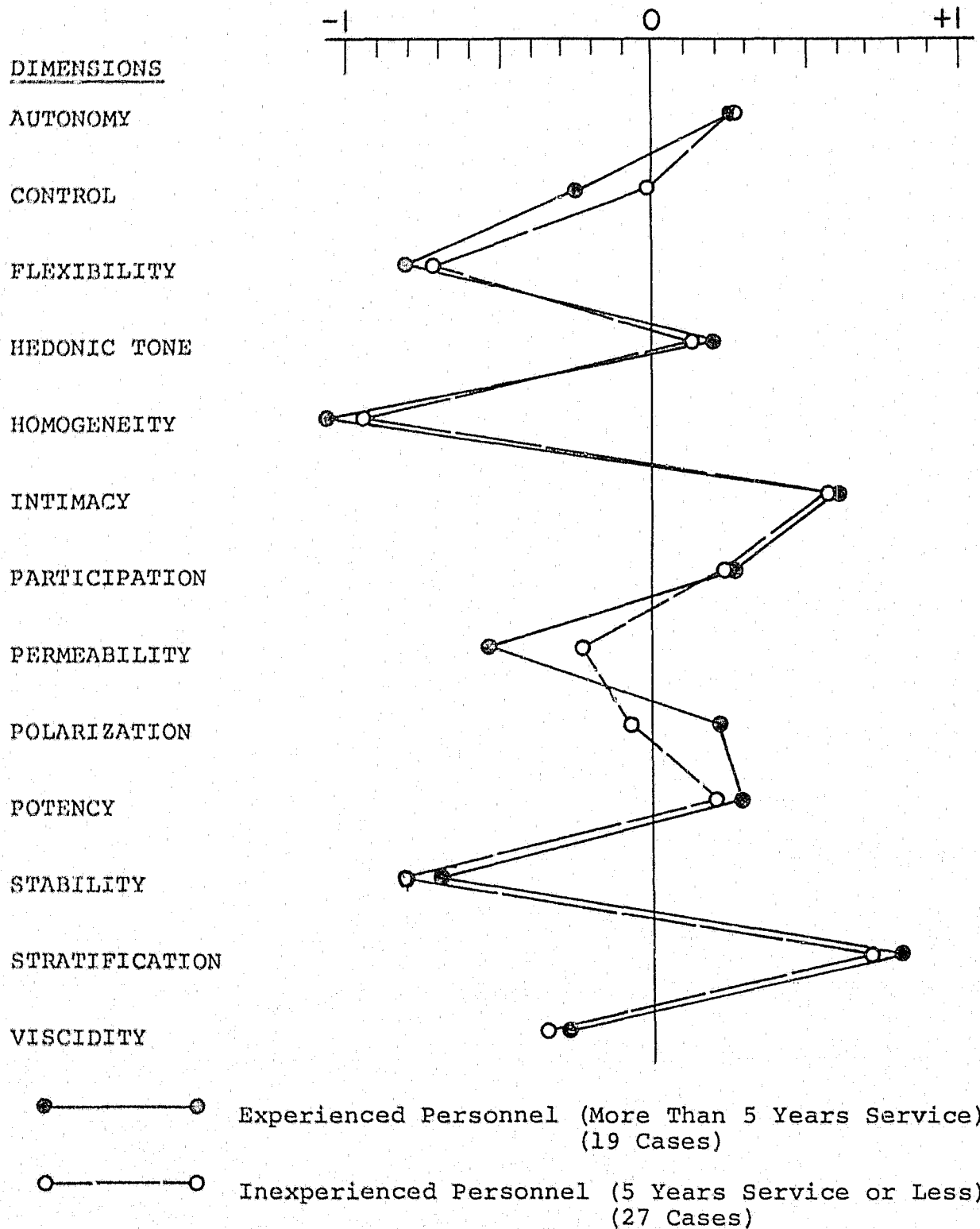


FIGURE 12

PROFILES OF EXPERIENCED AND
INEXPERIENCED PERSONNEL (MEAN VALUES)
LAKE CHARLES, LOUISIANA



experienced, 20 inexperienced) while 59 percent of the respondents from Lake Charles have fewer than six years service (19 experienced, 27 inexperienced). On the other hand, Galveston, which shows a strong reversal of the anticipated trend in perception, has 51 percent of its respondents with fewer than six years service (35 experienced, 37 inexperienced).

Summary and Conclusion

This research has concentrated on personal characteristics and organizational perceptions of individual police officers in three southwestern police jurisdictions. The study was designed primarily to explore the possibility of an association between the officer's perceptions of his organization and his potential to be assaulted.

Two basic avenues of exploration were utilized in the evaluation effort: (1) a comparison among the agencies; and (2) comparisons within the agencies. The agencies were compared with one another to determine whether a possible explanatory relationship exists between the agency assault rates and the overall perceptions of the officers within each agency. The evaluations conducted within the agencies represented an attempt to test the premise that differences of perception can be found between assaulted and non-assaulted officers, between younger and older officers, between less experienced and more experienced officers, as well as among the officers arrayed according to their positions (or rank) in the hierarchy of the agency.

The comparison of the three agencies proved enlightening. Even though the agencies appeared to be considerably different (geographically as well as environmentally), they displayed some remarkable similarities. Yet, in spite of the similarities, a relationship between the perceptions of the personnel and the agency assault rate could be discerned. For example, personnel in the agency which reported the highest assault rate also demonstrated, overall, the least favorable perception of the agency.

Evaluation of perceptions within the three organizations revealed a potential tool for further exploration of the assault phenomenon. Definite differences in perception were found in all of the areas tested, whether one compared assaulted personnel with their non-assaulted counterparts or compared perceptions of the personnel arrayed according to the several stratified samplings taken of the agencies. In addition, these differences were commensurate with research expectations; that is, the assaulted, the younger, the less experienced, and the lower ranked officers generally held less favorable perceptions of the organization. However, of the four sets of comparisons attempted, only that examining the perceptions of assaulted officers and non-assaulted officers appears to have any explanatory value in the study of assaults on police. The comparisons based on stratification fail to show

relationships between assaults on police and organizational perceptions, possibly because the assaultive factor tends to be obscured in the examples. On the other hand, when assaulted officers and non-assaulted officers are compared, the findings indicate that those who had been assaulted held a generally less favorable perception of the organization.

The results of this study indicate that an evaluation of the perceptions police officers hold of the police organization can perhaps assist in explaining an officer's potential to be assaulted. It is possible that the policeman's perception of his organization is a reflection of his attitude toward the organization, and perhaps those with a potential to be assaulted may also hold an unfavorable perception of the agency. It appears that the police officer's perception of the organization may be a potentially valuable area for further exploration. But the findings at this point in the analysis should not lead to the assumption that an evaluation of perceptions can be used as a predictive device, nor should one consider the data applicable to any other agencies. The data evaluated herein pertain solely to the police organizations participating in the study. Further exploration and study should be undertaken to determine whether an evaluation of organizational perceptions can be beneficial in the study of assaults on police.

FOOTNOTES

¹Richard H. Hall, "The Concept of Bureaucracy: An Empirical Assessment," The American Journal of Sociology, 69, 1963, p. 35. For a discussion of the formal versus the informal structure of the organization as operationalized, see William F. Whyte, "The Social Structure of the Restaurant," The American Journal of Sociology, 54, 1949, p. 308.

²See John P. Robinson, Robert Athanasion and Kenda B. Head, Measures of Occupational Attitudes and Occupational Characteristics, Ann Arbor: Institute for Social Research, 1969; John P. Robinson and Phillip R. Shaver, Measures of Social Psychological Attitudes, Ann Arbor: Institute for Social Research, 1969; Delbert C. Miller, Handbook of Research Design and Social Measurement, New York: David McKay, 1964.

³John K. Hemphill, Group Dimensions: A Manual for Their Measurement, Columbus: Bureau of Government Research, Ohio State University, 1956; see also, John K. Hemphill and Charles M. Westie, "The Measurement of Group Dimensions," Journal of Psychology, 29, 1950, pp. 325-42. For a discussion of Hemphill's Group Dimensions Description Questionnaire see Samuel G. Chapman, et. al., Operations Research Manual, Norman, Oklahoma: The University of Oklahoma, 1974, pp. 11-15 and Appendices IX, X, XI.

⁴Thomas W. Madron, Small Group Methods and the Study of Politics, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969, pp. 75-81.

⁵See Charles D. Hale and Wesley R. Wilson, "Personal Characteristics of Assaulted and Non-Assaulted Officers," in Samuel G. Chapman, et. al., Perspectives on Police Assaults in the South Central United States, Norman, Oklahoma: The University of Oklahoma, 1974.

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