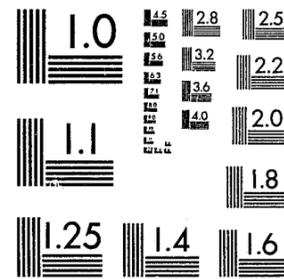


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**FBI** LAW ENFORCEMENT BULLETIN

JANUARY 1983



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**Patrol Problems  
in Northern Climes**

U.S. Department of Justice  
National Institute of Justice

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**Federal Bureau of Investigation  
United States Department of Justice  
Washington, D.C. 20535**

**William H. Webster, Director**

The Attorney General has determined that the publication of this periodical is necessary in the transaction of the public business required by law of the Department of Justice. Use of funds for printing this periodical has been approved by the Director of the Office of Management and Budget through February 21, 1983.



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Hostage Matters

"Hostage seizures have been one of the most sensational and politically charged criminal acts of the last decade."

## A Behavioral Approach to Hostage Situations

Hostage seizures have been one of the most sensational and politically charged criminal acts of the last decade. Publicity surrounding these events has helped to generate an interest in studying what occurs between criminals and victims in such an environment. An interesting phenomenon observed in some of these hostage incidents is an intimacy that develops between a hostage and hostagetaker. This phenomenon is commonly called the "Stockholm Syndrome."<sup>1</sup> The name comes from a bank robbery attempt in Stockholm, Sweden, on August 23, 1973. During the incident, a woman hostage had a conversation with the Prime Minister and stated her fear of the police. When assured by the Prime Minister of the desire for a safe resolution of the situation, she replied, "Of course they (the police) can't attack us. . . . He (the robber) is sitting here and protecting us from the police."<sup>2</sup> This and other similar statements were widely reported by the media and were viewed as expressions of sympathy by victims for the criminals.

Law enforcement officers who read accounts of the Stockholm incident noted still other cases in which certain hostages had expressed unusual sympathy for the criminal.

Although a great deal of discussion has been generated about the Stockholm Syndrome, much of this discussion has occurred in the absence of a body of known facts about the phenomenon. This article examines the Stockholm Syndrome and poses questions, the answers to which will clarify the importance of the syndrome in hostage situations. In addition, it suggests a behavioral analysis of the Stockholm Syndrome as an alternative to traditional ways of viewing the phenomenon, offer a variety of techniques of potential use to law enforcement officers, and conclude with recommendations for continued study of hostage situations.

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Assistant Chief Olin



Mr. Born

### The Importance of the Stockholm Syndrome

The Stockholm Syndrome is considered to be a positive and useful element in a hostage situation because it may reduce the chance for the unprecipitated killing of hostages.<sup>3</sup> Law enforcement officials have concluded that the longer the incident is prolonged, the greater the probability of a safe resolution, provided the hostage(s) and hostagetaker(s) have interacted favorably during the time period. Few explanations have been offered to account for this increase in safety except for rapport developing between participants.

### The Study of the Stockholm Syndrome

The study of the Stockholm Syndrome is complicated by a myriad of data problems about hostage incidents. There are no requirements to report hostage situations to any central repository. As a result, there are few detailed summaries of the wide variety of hostage incidents that have occurred, and most of the relevant information is available only to the law enforcement agencies which actually handled the call. Few incidents have been investigated by the same personnel. This leads to inconsistent or even biased interviewing and reporting. There are no experimental studies of the occurrence of the Stockholm Syndrome. All of these conditions contribute to serious data interpretation problems.

Investigations of the Stockholm Syndrome have relied almost exclusively on postincident interviews of hostages about their recollection of events which occurred. Thus far, it is not clear that this method of study (i.e., interviews) has furthered the understanding of the Stockholm Syndrome or how the results of this method of inquiry have assisted law enforcement officers in resolving hostage incidents.

### Theoretical Interpretations of the Stockholm Syndrome

Recent law enforcement literature suggests that the Stockholm Syndrome occurs when hostages and hostagetakers are isolated by authorities and there are:

- 1) Positive "feelings" from the hostages to their captor(s);
- 2) Negative "feelings" toward authorities by both hostages and captor(s); and
- 3) Positive "feelings" returned by the captors to the hostages.<sup>4</sup>

There is a widespread expectation that these three conditions may be enhanced in some circumstances by the actions of the authorities. Research has attempted to demonstrate that some of these conditions may be present in hostage situations. For example, a recent study by Mirabella and Trudeau indicated that fear and anger toward authorities were reported in 82 percent of the hostage incidents examined.<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, the reader is not told if this percentage is a normally occurring level of antipolice sentiment or if the authorities in these cases took specific steps to promote this hostage hostility.

The Stockholm Syndrome has sometimes been attributed to defense mechanisms, regression, weakness of the ego, and identification of the hostage with the aggressor.<sup>6</sup> In fact, most

## "... the Stockholm Syndrome is a more complex phenomenon than was initially believed."

law enforcement articles written about the Stockholm Syndrome rely on Freudian interpretations of "inner feelings" reported by the hostages and their captors. Few alternative interpretations have been offered. While the Freudian approach provides one explanation for a limited number of hostage incidents, it has not yet provided a framework to assist law enforcement personnel. To make such an approach useful, persons espousing *post hoc* analyses of the underlying personality dynamics of hostages and captors have to show how these analyses can be translated into guidelines for officers trying to resolve a hostage incident with lives at stake.

### An Alternative View of the Stockholm Syndrome

Applied behavior analysis provides another perspective for the examination of hostage incidents. The focus of this approach is not on underlying personality dynamics, or "... on what people report they do, but on how they actually behave and the conditions under which the [behavior] occurs."<sup>7</sup> The study of the Stockholm Syndrome, as an outcome of some hostage incidents, may also be facilitated by this approach. From this position, the Stockholm Syndrome is viewed as a particular way in which hostages and hostagetakers interact (e.g., they make positive statements concerning each other), and the interest shifts to the identification of conditions under which Stockholm Syndrome phenomenon is observed.

Behavioral definitions of criminal acts are not a recent development. Researchers Sutherland, Jeffrey, Burgess, and Aker<sup>8</sup> have all used a behavioral approach to describe the causes of criminal conduct. They agree with other behaviorists, such as Skinner,<sup>9</sup> that there is a direct relationship between the environment and behavior.

In an attempt to clarify the importance of the Stockholm Syndrome for hostage incidents, there are several important questions to be answered. How often does the syndrome occur? Does occurrence of the Stockholm Syndrome actually increase the safety of persons involved in hostage incidents? Assuming that it occurs in a significant portion of hostage incidents and that it increases participant safety, one might then ask under what circumstances does the Stockholm Syndrome occur? Can it be facilitated? How? Is the Stockholm Syndrome more likely to occur in some hostage situations, such as those involving family members, and less likely to occur in others, such as in incidents of political terrorism? While many other questions might be asked, this brief list provides a starting point for understanding whether/how the Stockholm Syndrome will be of use to law enforcement officers.

Although there is little evidence that bears directly on the preceding questions, a review of the original incident in Stockholm, Sweden, makes it clear that the Stockholm Syndrome is a more complex phenomenon than was initially believed. The complexity in this case arises from the fact that all of the hostages and hostagetakers were subjected to the same police pressures, and yet, not all exhibited the

Stockholm Syndrome. As defined earlier, the Stockholm Syndrome was observed only between one captor and some of the hostages. Thus, the phenomenon does not necessarily occur to all individuals exposed to virtually identical conditions. A brief summary of the Stockholm incident may highlight some of the problems in the case.

On August 23, 1973, Jan-Erik Olsson attempted to rob the Sveriges Kreditbank. The incident was prolonged after a rapid police response trapped the robber inside. The resulting incident lasted 131 hours. The other criminal participant in the situation, Clark Oloffsson, was delivered from prison to the bank as the result of a demand by Olsson to the police.

During the initial stages of the robbery, Olsson fired an automatic weapon inside and outside of the bank, wounding a police officer. He made demands and pointed his submachinegun at a woman hostage, threatening to kill her. When Oloffsson joined the group, the situation changed. Olsson no longer shouted, he allowed bindings on the hostages to be loosened, and the situation calmed. The hostages were moved into the bank vault. There was more shooting and another police officer was wounded. The police finally trapped the participants in the vault and shut the door. Police decided to drill into the vault, knocking out electricity and flooding the vault floor with water from the drill. There was more shooting. Human waste accumulated in wastebaskets. Authorities stopped delivery of food and water into the vault, forcing the hostages to strain the water on the floor through cloth to filter it before drinking. Local radio stations, which were being monitored by the hostages and hostagetakers, reported actions being considered by the police, including the use of nerve gas

## **"The law enforcement response should always be designed to increase the likelihood of caring behavior by the hostagetaker."**

and assault. Hostages were subsequently tied into nooses so that if they fell unconscious they would strangle.<sup>10</sup>

Not surprisingly, these conditions resulted in both the hostages and hostagetakers fearing the actions of the police. Further, some of the hostages had favorable interactions with Oloffsson who, in at least some instances, protected them from Olsson. Throughout the incident, the hostages feared Olsson. A positive rapport developed in this environment between the women hostages and Oloffsson.<sup>11</sup> Strentz and Ochberg<sup>12</sup> delineate this distinction. However, some of the literature and many speeches have widely misunderstood the circumstances and have suggested that the Stockholm Syndrome is a more generally occurring phenomenon than is probably the case.

These misunderstandings may be avoided by a simple restatement of the Stockholm Syndrome. The syndrome is the positive rapport which occurs between a hostage and hostagetaker when they both engage in interactions which are of mutual benefit and when the participants express greater fear of the police than of each other. This rephrasing may provide a better guide for actions taken by law enforcement personnel than the other explanations for the phenomenon. For example, a law enforcement supervisor faced with a hostage situation must make numerous decisions about which hostagetaker demands to honor during a negotiation. Should authorities negotiate for concessions in trade for additional weapons, ammunition, food, drink, alcohol, drugs, cigarettes, publicity demands, or a hostage exchange (substituting a law enforcement officer for a hostage)? In the past, a law enforcement supervisor would make these decisions based on past experience

and commonsense. Using the previous description of the syndrome, the supervisor should determine whether this decision would encourage interactions of mutual benefit to the participants? A supervisor would then examine the list of options and would probably negotiate for exchanges of food, drink, publicity demands, and cigarettes, while rejecting demands for weapons, ammunition, alcohol, drugs, or hostage exchanges. The first items could be expected to encourage rapport if delivered in a timely fashion; the last items probably would not. These individual interactions could possibly reduce the probability of injury to hostages.

Given the circumstances of the Stockholm Syndrome it seems likely that the occurrence of the Stockholm Syndrome depends upon specific participant interactions, and perhaps, the interactive styles of the individuals. Thus, some hostage situations are probably more amenable to the Stockholm Syndrome than others. For example, there might be a smaller likelihood of the phenomenon developing in kidnaping or politically motivated hostage seizures. Some terrorist incidents appear to have been deliberately structured by the terrorists to limit the possibility of any interpersonal relationships developing between hostages and their captors. Such actions have been used by the South Moluccan terrorists in the Netherlands and by the Japanese Red Army. Interpersonal relationships are inhibited by hostage segregation, blindfolds, language barriers, and other methods. Similarly, some hostages may avoid any potential for rapport with a hostagetaker by sleeping, performing repetitive actions, writing, etc.

In considering ways to promote the occurrence of the Stockholm Syndrome, it may be helpful to recognize

that a hostagetaker's responses toward hostages could be placed on a continuum which ranges from threatening behavior toward hostages on one end, through indifferent behaviors, to caring responses. The law enforcement response should always be designed to increase the likelihood of caring behavior by the hostagetaker. To accomplish this objective, negotiators should make judicious use of all available resources to reinforce the hostagetaker when he responds in a desirable way. Some resources may be provided (positive reinforcement) and others withdrawn (negative reinforcement) as a consequence of specific actions taken by the hostagetaker. Providing or withdrawing these resources must be coordinated between tactical and negotiations personnel.

### **A Behavioral Strategy for Law Enforcement Response**

The initial actions taken by officers upon arrival at a hostage scene set the stage for the incident. It is of critical importance for law enforcement personnel to demonstrate immediate absolute control of the outer perimeter to establish the maximum limits of the hostagetaker's conduct. A hostagetaker may initially attempt to escape. A confrontation such as this requires that the authorities be able to use force if the escape attempt does not cease. The certainty and immediacy of punishment will assist law enforcement personnel in controlling the hostagetaker in many of the same ways it assists the hostagetaker in controlling the hostage. The options remaining to the hostagetaker are very limited. He may attack, do nothing, or surrender. Thus, the hostagetaker operates under conditions that closely resemble those of the hostage(s). The initial police objec-

tive should be limited to forcing the hostagetaker to abandon his escape attempts.

After tactically securing a hostage scene, law enforcement officers should allow time for the situation to stabilize. The initial confrontation between the hostagetaker and the hostage is the most dangerous time period for all participants.<sup>13</sup> The hostagetaker will be operating under a variety of emotionally or politically charged reinforcers as a result of the failure to escape, the arrival of the police, the conditions of the hostage(s), etc. This may produce "frustrated expectation which refers specifically to a condition produced by the termination of accustomed reinforcement."<sup>14</sup> These conditions are favorable to the introduction of negotiators on the scene.

Negotiators must be aware of the need for a direct, immediate relationship between hostagetaker caring behavior and reward. A negotiator must begin by modifying verbal behavior. Several different techniques may be used to do this. For example, differential reinforcement should be given during conversations. Positive comments by the hostagetaker should be responded to with warmth, understanding, and encouragement, while negative statements should be ignored. It is very important that the negotiation process be reinforcing to the hostagetaker so that there is a reason to continue talking. The more skillfully and appropriately a negotiator uses these techniques and the available resources to shape verbal behavior, the more likely negotiations will proceed toward the desired outcome.

The negotiator may ask specific questions or manipulate existing conditions in an attempt to force caring behavior between the hostage(s) and hostagetaker. The negotiator should

always attempt to discuss the medical problems of the hostage(s).<sup>15</sup> This gives the hostagetaker the opportunity to ask about or view the physical condition of the hostage(s). Naturally occurring physiological conditions, such as hunger, sleep, thirst, etc. may also be used advantageously.

Tactical unit personnel should be used to provide control over other resources which may be used to shape behavior. Food, water, medication, electricity, natural gas for heat, light, selected noises, obvious police activity, media releases, the threat of assault, and other options may be used to help manipulate environmental conditions at the scene.

In addition to activities and resources under the direct control of law enforcement personnel, there may be other significant aspects of the situation which could be influenced indirectly. For example, if a food box is delivered containing a plate of cold cuts and garnishes instead of ready-made sandwiches, the result may be discussion, decisionmaking, compromise, etc., between hostage and captor. If these interactions provide the hostage with opportunities to behave in ways which are reinforcing to the captor (e.g., providing limited assistance), the potential for violence against the hostage may be lessened. Throughout the incident, hostages should be encouraged to behave in ways which would help them avoid violence. Some resources may be used to divert the hostagetaker's attention in the case of particularly threatening behavior toward the hostage. Spotlighting windows in darkness may illuminate the scene to the tactical disadvantage of the hostagetaker. Pounding on walls or drilling may give the impression of vulnerability or that an assault is imminent. These activities could then be

terminated as a consequence of specific hostagetaker concessions. One important consideration suggested by the review of the original Stockholm incident is that the increasing level of sophistication of police tactical assault, i.e., silent drilling for eavesdropping, invisible police deployment, etc., may lessen the fear necessary to stimulate favorable negotiations during the incident. The judicious use of negotiators and tactical personnel to develop a coordinated, timely response creates the optimum conditions for a favorable resolution of the incident.

### **Conclusion**

Although hostage incidents appear to have received increased attention in recent years, little is known about the dynamics of these situations, and there are only vague outlines to guide appropriate law enforcement response. The Stockholm Syndrome has been widely discussed as a significant outcome of many hostage incidents, yet almost nothing is known about how often it occurs, what causes it, or whether it actually enhances the safe resolution of hostage incidents, and if so, how to promote its occurrence. At least part of the problem appears to be related to how the Stockholm Syndrome has been investigated, and perhaps, the related theoretical interpretations of the phenomenon.

Behavioral theory offers many new ways for law enforcement personnel to approach hostage situations. This study may lead toward the future development of specific techniques which may help control hostage situations. However, it is necessary to conduct further research before generalizations may be considered. Archival data should be collected and examined to define further the phenomenon of hostage(s) and hostagetaker(s) devel-

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oping a favorable rapport and to validate statistically the assumption that the rapport is a useful condition in hostage situations. Past incidents should also be studied to determine what specific actions were taken by hostages and hostagetakers. In describing these events, writers should be careful to note that the Stockholm Syndrome is only a label for the rapport that may develop between the involved parties, and it is not an entity which produces the rapport. The phenomenon can be observed and studied in the same ways used to examine other behaviors.

Several administrative steps may be taken to facilitate the study of the Stockholm Syndrome and hostage situations. A central repository for hostage information, perhaps at the FBI Academy, should be established and all reports of hostage incidents should

be forwarded to that location. A more consistent reporting procedure must be established to guide data collection. This procedure should encourage:

- 1) A detailed, chronological police incident report;
- 2) Tape recording all negotiations while the incident is in progress; and
- 3) The completion of a detailed questionnaire by the participants.

This debriefing questionnaire should focus on the negotiator, tactical commander, witness(es), hostage(s), and hostagetaker(s). Using existing behavioral research methodologies and the detailed information which would be gathered by the system noted above, it may be possible to begin to evaluate hypotheses suggested by the incident reports.

Behavioral psychology provides a consistent, innovative rationale for viewing the dynamics of a hostage situ-

ation. This kind of analysis is a radical departure from the descriptive work done in the past. By identifying selected classes of behavior and using established techniques for bringing about behavior change, it may be possible to resolve successfully a higher proportion of hostage situations. By virtue of its empirical emphasis, behavioral psychology suggests strategies for appropriate law enforcement response and simultaneously suggests methods for evaluating the usefulness of many law enforcement techniques. It is the emphasis on observable events and the accompanying challenge to monitor and evaluate an assortment of techniques (which have been developed in other fields) that make behavioral psychology a potentially useful tool for the study of law enforcement in general and the study of hostage situations in particular. **FBI**

## **LEB Readership Survey**

The FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin conducted a mail survey to determine the overall opinion our readers have of the magazine and the estimated readership. Survey forms were sent to 20,000 LEB recipients who were asked to respond to questions regarding the size of their law enforcement agency, the number of people who read their copy of the magazine, and the usefulness of the magazine's contents to their role in police work. The number of survey cards returned totaled 11,486.

Of those who responded to the survey, 54.4 percent consider the Bulletin to be a "very useful" publication, 34.2 percent believe the Bulletin to be "useful," and only 4 percent see the publication as having "little use." Seven percent failed to respond to this question.

The survey also revealed that the Bulletin has an estimated monthly readership of over one-half million, based on survey respondents' projections. This is a considerable increase over the last survey conducted which showed a readership of approximately 300,000. The Bulletin staff appreciates the cooperation of our readers who responded to this survey.

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