

1 AN EVALUATION OF THE IMPACT OF THE SECURITY INDUSTRY AUTHORITY ON THE OPERATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS OF CLOSE PROTECTION OPERATIVES

Abstract

This paper uses a questionnaire survey and purposive sample to evaluate the impact of the Security Industry Authority (SIA) on the Operational Effectiveness of Close Protection Operators (CPOs) in London, UK; particularly in raising standards and professionalising the security industry. The study shows that few licence holders have been checked by the SIA, and less than 50% of respondents thought that the operational effectiveness of CPOs had improved. It suggests that the SIA is not doing enough to investigate and prosecute illegal operators and that little has been done to improve the operational effectiveness of CPOs. It also identifies the link between effective enforcement and the raising of operational effectiveness in the industry. The study is the first to be carried out showing how successful the SIA has been; it identifies the need to conduct a more in depth research on the SIA licensing and enforcement activities.

Introduction

The aim of this study is to look into the effect that the establishment of the Security Industry Authority (SIA) and the Private Security Act (2001) had on the operational effectiveness of Close Protection Operators (CPOs). It will focus specifically on Protective Security to determine whether the SIA has improved Close Protection Training within the Private Security Industry in London, UK, and thus the operational effectiveness of Close Protection Operators. As many companies are looking for loopholes in the regulations to avoid SIA licensing, the paper also looks at any comparison between SIA licensed CPOs and those unlicensed operators directly employed by companies to provide CPO duties in-house. Although no research is available on this subject, information is, nevertheless, available on the SIA and the subject of licensing and its importance in raising standards in the security industry. Padgham (2006) states that "as a direct result of the Private Security Industry Act 2001 and the birth of the SIA, regulation for Close Protection (CP) will eventually clean up the sector". However, enforcement is an issue; the SIA, in its 2006 report, sends the wrong message by describing prosecuting as a last resort: "We know that prosecuting offenders can be expensive and it is not always the most effective way of gaining compliance". The same report also shows that large numbers of investigators are concentrating their efforts on monitoring manned guards and door supervisors who are easier to locate, leaving the unlicensed CPOs in relative safety of detection or prosecution. SIA website (SIA, 2007) confirms the above statement, as none of the 482 names of security operators who have had their licenses revoked or



suspended by the SIA are Close Protection license holders. The Private Security Industry Act (PSIA) was brought in to professionalise the UK security industry, to raise the standards of operators by ensuring all individuals are vetted, trained and licensed (SIA, 2001). Its aim is to cast away the image of the industry as one of low paid, poorly qualified and unmotivated work force with poor career development or future prospects.

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Study Method

Due to the limited information surrounding the operational effectiveness of CPOs and the lack of secondary data and statistics, it was decided to conduct a questionnaire survey of a purposive sample of security providers and licensed CPOs in London, UK. Adopting a quantitative approach enables large amount of data to be collected in the shortest possible time, cost effectively and with the minimal disturbance to an individual's work. It also allows the findings to be extrapolated and generalised.

Gaining information about the CP industry and identifying and targeting working CPOs are difficult due to the limited number of operators, restrictive practices and the veil of secrecy that envelopes the profession. To overcome these difficulties, the questionnaire was administered to a small sample of five suppliers and 100 individuals operating in the Close Protection Industry. Asking the suppliers to assist with the research, increased the ability of the researcher to locate and reach CPOs, and provided a form of snowballing sampling strategy. Fifty one responses were received, thus further limiting the reliability of the findings.

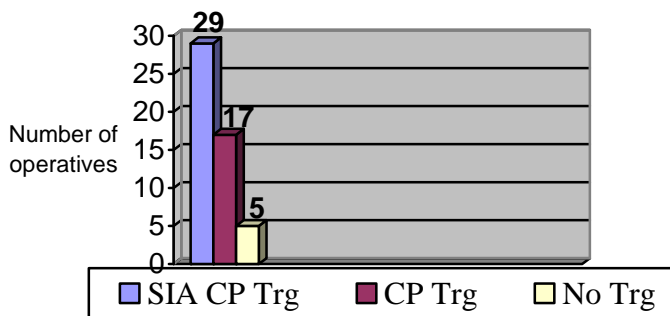
SIA: Perceptions of Close Protection Operators

Only five respondents (9.8%) had no relevant CP training. Twenty nine (57%) had completed a SIA approved course whilst the remaining seventeen (33%) had completed a CP course not recognised by the SIA (see Figure 1). Whilst the above data indicates that the majority (90%) of operators within the industry had completed some form of CP training, it also suggests that 44% of CPOs do not have the relevant training courses as required by the SIA. They are thus currently operating illegally and do not have the recognised standard of training to carry out CP operations in the UK.



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Fig 1. Training Undertaken



Possession of CP Licence

Twenty seven respondents (53%) had a SIA Licence to carry out CP duties in the UK; the remaining twenty four (47%) were operating illegally, without a SIA licence, although most had received some form of CP training. This suggests that large numbers of CPOs are working illegally, as they are not licensed by the SIA.

Improvement in Standards

Twenty seven respondents (53%) believed that under the SIA standards of CPO operational effectiveness had increased, whilst the remaining twenty four (47%) believed that it had done little to improve the standards of CPOs. This suggests that nearly half of the individuals questioned believed that the introduction of the SIA has done little to improve the operational effectiveness of individuals working within this area of the security industry and that the SIA has failed in its objective to raise the standards of the CP industry.

SIA Enforcement

Only three respondents (6%) had ever been approached by the SIA and checked whilst carrying out their duties. This indicates that 94% of CPOs have never been approached by the SIA whilst carrying out their duties as CPOs. This statistic seems to highlight the short fall in the ability of the SIA to effectively enforce its licensing of the UK Close Protection Industry. It also suggests that there is no real reason to undertake an expensive course and purchase a costly licence as the chance of being checked by a SIA inspector is extremely low. The findings seem to support the belief that the SIA is unable to enforce and maintain its own standards, and that this could be a contributing factor to the proliferation of unlicensed CPOs operating within the UK.



Knowledge of SIA Enforcement

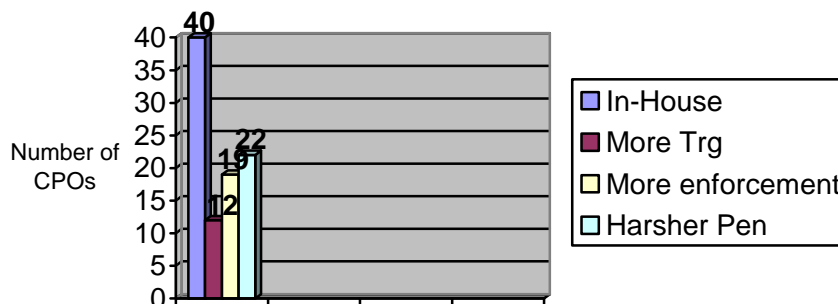
Seven respondents (14%) had known somebody that had been checked whilst working in the UK. The most surprising statistic is that only two respondents (4%) knew that their company had

been targeted and checked by the SIA to ensure that they were abiding by the licensing requirements. The remaining 96% stated that their company had never received a visit by the SIA. This is a major concern highlighting the inability of the SIA to effectively enforce its own standards within the industry.

Improving Operational Effectiveness

The views of the CPOs on how they thought operational effectiveness could be improved within the sector are shown in Figure 2. It is significant to note that some of the CPOs that were operating illegally thought that the licensing regulations should cover in-house CPOs, and that there should be more enforcement and harsher penalties for those caught operating illegally. It should also be noted that although twenty four individuals were operating illegally at the time of the survey, seventeen (71%) stated that they would be applying for a license.

Fig 2. How To Improve Operational Effectiveness



Conclusion and Suggestion for Further Research

The problem that the SIA faces is that a large proportion of CPOs are currently unlicensed and have not completed the minimum requirement set by the government (Act 2001) in terms of relevant training or attainment of standards necessary for operating in the specialist environment of the Private Security Industry. This disregard to Government regulations, the research shows, is due to the inability of the SIA to effectively monitor and investigate CPOs whilst carrying out their duties. In addition, because the SIA licence requirements only covers contract CPOs, individuals are currently carrying out CPO duties with no qualifications by being employed directly or 'In-House'.

The findings also show that a large proportion of the CPOs have completed some form of CP training. It can also be seen that just over half of these individuals have a SIA CP licence which allows them to legally work as CPOs in the UK. The findings further indicate that a number of licensed CPOs believe that since the formation of the SIA standards of CPOs have risen, whilst the same



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number of non-licensed CPOs believe that the SIA has done little to improve the standards of CPOs' operational effectiveness.

It is significant that a very small percentage of operational CPOs and companies have been checked by the SIA whilst carrying out their duties. It can, therefore, be concluded based on the findings that the SIA is not effectively inspecting or enforcing its own standards within the CP industry, and as such half of those individuals questioned operate illegally. These findings further indicate that because of the ineffective enforcement and prosecution SIA policy, there is little prospect that the proportion of licensed and unlicensed CPOs will change or that the SIA achieve its objectives of professionalising the industry. The reluctance of the SIA to prosecute those that work outside the law has, as this study suggests, led to a disregard of the standards set by the SIA. The prosecution of unlicensed individuals operating within the CPO industry and the raising of standards of operational effectiveness appear to be directly linked, and until the SIA starts to proactively target CPOs, the standards will not rise.

Caution must be exercised in attempting to generalise the findings of this exploratory, London based, study where the sample was small and the respondents were few. It is thus recommended that a further, more in depth research is carried out in other parts of the UK to gain a greater insight into operational effectiveness in the security industry and to draw regional comparisons.

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