

# Case Racism and misuse of power

PO21 Learning Resources



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# Credits

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# Case – Racism and misuse of power

This case was developed within the PO21 project<sup>1</sup>, based on the critical incidents approach and the experience of the Prison Officers involved in the project. It can be dynamised using several strategies<sup>2</sup>, according to the training and trainers' objectives.

## Case Script:

# Summary

### Main situation

For the past two months, PO John has been experiencing tension between PO Marcus and some inmates, especially with Roma ethnic group, the group's leader, Paco. There have been racist comments by the PO to the inmate, and the supervisor is "closing his eyes".

### Why is it complicated/difficult/challenging:

- Racism
- Misuse of power
- Misplaced correctional orientation
- Guilt feelings

<sup>1</sup>For more information: <http://www.prison-officers21.org/>

<sup>2</sup>Detailed information on cases dynamisation and development can be found in the Guide for developing cases, produced under the PO21 project

## Main Characters

### Character 1: John

**Name** - John

**Professional description** – PO, 8 months of experience

**Personal/psychological description** – 21 years, single, no brother, no sister, up average intelligence, he's new, so he has no friends (he stays alone in jail). Afraid to report. Fearful. Unable to ask questions to a colleague. He works in Marcus's team.

**Main function/hierarchy** – PO

### Character 2: Dolph

**Name** - Dolph

**Professional description** – Supervisor

**Personal/psychological description** – Directive style, not much reflection. He is divorced with one kid. Staff members look at him as a brute but trust him in crises. He gives clear orders and knows how to handle a crisis. He can keep a clear mind, even in difficult situations. Military education, special forces.

**Main function/hierarchy** – Supervisor

## Secondary characters or witnesses

### Character 3: Marcus

**Name** - Marcus

**Professional description** – PO

**Personal/psychological description** – 12 years experience, 40 years, MMA champion, aggressive, racist, report of this behaviour situation, gambler debt, divorced (beat his wife), psycho-rigid.

**Main function/hierarchy** – Team leader

### Character 4: Paco

**Name** - Paco

**Professional description** – Inmate troublemaker

**Personal/psychological description** – Inmate multiple sentences (17 years of condemnation), 48 years, Low intellectual, aggressive, thief, policeman aggression, gang-related, married, 8 kids.

**Main function/hierarchy** – NA

# Description of the situation

## Time

Leisure time, afternoon (insults). 2 days later, a fight during cell inspection (Paco goes to showers)

## Duration

Few minutes (insults)  
Few seconds (fight)

## Location

Inmate cell

## Description of the situation

For the past two months, PO **John** has been experiencing tension between Agent **Marcus** and some inmates, especially with Roma ethnic group and its group leader, **Paco**.

It started with insults and racist remarks. After the abuses, **John** went to find **Marcus** and explained that acting this way was unprofessional.

Marcus tells **John** that the supervisor approves of this behaviour, and he says, "that's the way you should do it too."

When he hears this, **John** decides to discuss it with the supervisor.

**Dolph** ignored the officer's comments and told him not to open a can of worms.

**Dolph** said they were only inmates and had enough rights in prison (TV, etc.), so "Do your job and stop complaining" were **Dolph's** last words to **John**.

**John** was very confused by his supervisor's answer.

He asked himself, "what can I do?". He knows that this is an illegal practice and against human rights.

He is mentally in the wrong place. Two days later, **John** sees **Marcus** beating up **Paco**.

**Paco** has epilepsy and has a seizure.

**Paco** had to go to the hospital for several days, and **John** was the only one who knew what had happened.

Following the first answer from his supervisor, **John** is afraid and does not know what to do.

Should he report what he saw or keep it to himself? Who should he tell? For the moment, he decides not to tell anyone and hopes everything will soon be forgotten.

## Reaction of each character

### **Dolph**

Ignore the reports; he thinks that's a good thing to keep control of the inmates, especially Roma inmates.

### **Marcus**

He puts pressure on John, he tells John that the supervisor approves of this behaviour, and he says, "that's the way to do a good job."

### **Paco**

He threatens Marcus that it will report these insults. There will be consequences.

## Result of each action

| Open to debate

# How to apply this case?

This case can be used in several ways, there is no prescriptive, specific strategy, and the trainer shall choose the specific themes to highlight by applying the case. However, making the best of this resource in terms of promoting debate and stimulating reflection among trainees, common strategies can be:

### **Brainstorming:**

Create a question about the case and promote group discussion. Remember that in brainstorming is particularly important to register all contributions and to make a summary of all contributions. It is suited to initiate a new theme.

### **Role-play:**

In the training room, arrange the scenario according to the case description. The trainees should perform the characters as close to the description possible to create a real-life situation. After the presentation, group discussion can be promoted. It is suited to deepen a situation or theme.

### **Problem-Solving:**

Present the case without providing information on how it was handled and ask the trainees, individually or in groups, to describe how the situation should be handled. Then, dynamise a debate around each new ending for the situation. It is suited to applying theory to practice.

### **Dilemma:**

Create a dilemma by designing a new development of the situation. Organise a debate around which was the best solution and why. It is suited to explore complex situations.

### **Pros and Cons:**

A debate can be used in any strategy. If used as the main strategy, one idea may be to organise the group in two sectors: one, arguing in favour of the resolution and the other, arguing against it. This can be improved by providing other learning resources that support the arguments of each sector. It is suited to deepen a situation or theme.

To learn more about the creation and application of Critical Incidents, you can consult the Critical Incidents Technique Application Guide.