POLICE RETENTION

AND CAREER PERCEPTIONS:

FINDINGS FROM AN EIGHT-CITY SURVEY

BY

Charlie Scheer, Ph.D.
The University of Southern Mississippi

Michael Rossler, Ph.D.
Illinois State University

Deputy Chief Jerry Peters
Thornton Police Department

Lieutenant Walt Melnyk
Bryan Police Department

Deputy Chief Joseph Hayer
Frederick Police Department

MAY 2022

PREFACE

In the summer of 2019, following the completion of a study of police recruitment, we began to have discussions about the different forces that appeared to push police officers away from the profession and/or their agencies, and the mechanisms which could pull officers towards staying in the career. It seemed that these pushing and pulling forces exerted a strong combination of influences on officers who would reconsider their careers, and that closely examining officer retention and turnover could be beneficial to not only police leaders but researchers as well. Few empirical studies of retention existed which used line-level data as the main source of explanation for why officers might leave and stay.

The original idea to conduct a study of police retention emanated from the belief that there were different "types" of leavers and stayers, and that to explore the landscape of personnel retention in policing would require collecting data from a wide variety of police agencies from a national sample, something that had been rarely done. Our main research agenda was to explore in detail what psychologists called the "career ladder" in the context of police careers by asking police personnel questions about the forces that may be pushing them away, or pulling them towards, a career in police work. To begin, we sought to conduct comprehensive surveys of police personnel at multiple levels of the career ladder. We envisioned using a purposive sample of eight police agencies, and launched the study in the spring of 2020. Of course, the Covid-19 pandemic had other plans! We spent the majority of 2020 like many others did, either hunkered down with our families or creating ways to conduct work from a distance, and yet we devised a way to begin the study in three locations as an online Qualtrics survey. Once our respective universities allowed for in-person research to resume, we shifted to conducting the survey at the remaining five locations, distributed at briefings and in meetings with supervisory and specialized personnel.

The results presented here indicate that police personnel management remains an immense challenge for police leaders and command staff, and should be taken seriously by civic leaders and communities. Contrary to the narrative that officers were leaving the profession in massive numbers, our research indicated strong feelings of organizational commitment on the part of the vast majority of officers, and specific reasons for those leaving the profession or who were transferring elsewhere. The study indicated many surprising results about these populations of "leavers", including feelings toward immediate supervisors, benefits packages, salaries, and feelings of community responsibility. The results included in this technical report will be further examined in future articles as the effort to disentangle the forces of retention continues.

Our hope is that our report and its findings can initiate a dialogue between police practitioners, researchers, and community stakeholders about how best to retain committed and passionate police officers during a time of change. We trust that our project fills a need to more deeply examine the reasons why officers are pushed to leave the profession, or pulled towards their agencies and communities, and how best to address these competing forces.

DR. CHARLIE SCHEER, *The University of Southern Mississippi*
DR. MICHAEL ROSSLER, *Illinois State University*

RESEARCH SUMMARY

This research project uses a survey questionnaire distributed to sworn law enforcement personnel to gauge reaction to statements regarding their perception of their career trajectories, the police profession, mental and physical challenges of the career, contemporary demands of police professionals, and perspectives on career longevity. Questions on contemporary issues such as the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic and the in-custody death of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota, were also utilized to gauge points of concern for officers that expressed reservations with continuing their careers. Survey results indicate that while officer organizational commitment is high, specific issues related to job satisfaction and stress pose a challenge to the police manager to address turnover intention. Among the macro-level findings is an acknowledgment that police retention is separate from recruitment in terms of policies that may be crafted to address the phenomenon, as well as the urgency by which police command personnel and city governments need to take agency workforce health as a potential driver of community stability. The survey was conducted in eight jurisdictions across the United States: Topeka (KS) Police Department, Vernon Hills (IL) Police Department, Smyrna (GA) Police Department, Biloxi (MS) Police Department, Frederick (MD) Police Department, Thornton (CO) Police Department, Bryan (TX) Police Department, and Portland (OR) Police Bureau. The survey was administered from April to August 2021. Personnel responses measured morale as a multi-contoured concept which included expectations about physical and mental stress, career development, and public interaction. The data collected is expected to provide the benchmark for discussion of officer intention to separate from their careers or their agencies, as well as act as a pulling mechanism that solidifies organizational and career commitment.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: Study Objective and Method

Study Background

While police personnel recruitment has been rightfully considered a critical concern of law enforcement administrative management for decades, the more elusive issue of retention has largely escaped empirical analysis. Accounts of trends towards either leaving the profession or transferring to another agency have largely been anecdotal in nature, yet have become engrained in police culture that informal observations and forecasts have driven agencies' policy changes (Orrick, 2002). This reliance on anecdote escalated in the late 2010's as accounts of police officers leaving in large numbers were prevalent in media, often originating from singular interviews or viewpoints, and accompanied by descriptive headlines (Li & Mahajan, 2021; Van Buskirk, 2022). This research project attempts to clarify those trends – and the myriad water cooler conversations about retention - using a national sample.

The primary research questions asked by this research project are, what are possible reasons for voluntary and involuntary turnover in police agencies? What was the current climate of officer lateral movement or transfer to other agencies? At which points in officer careers do the forces of retention begin to appear? Also, what strategies employed by police agencies have the most benefit in addressing forces of employee retention? These and other subquestions informed the creation of a 180-item questionnaire with Likert measures that probed six specific areas of police career impressions: thoughts about the agency in which they work, thoughts about their career, thoughts about physical aspects of their job, thoughts about compensation and benefits, thoughts about departmental and personal values, personality characteristics, and thoughts about contemporary challenges. Each of these areas was deemed a potential impactor of officer disposition to leave, and by breaking down the concept of "morale" into smaller factors, the study intended to explore the synergistic effects of these factors in impacting the desire to leave or stay.

A broader objective of this research project was to assist both police leaders and criminal justice researchers by providing comprehensive data to craft evidence-based strategies assisting with retention and turnover. In many industries, employee retention and turnover remains a challenge for which very little evidence-based practice or policy exists. The few opportunities managers have to proactively address potential turnover issues are often based upon information gathered from sources such as post-employment or exit interviewing, which can be notoriously unreliable barometers of employee morale or intent (Allen et al., 2010). This project sought to provide an impression of the landscape of retention for police personnel, an area for which a large gap has existed between evidence and practice.

Other than the overall necessity of collecting accurate and timely data on personnel turnover and behavior, the primary objective of organizations seeking to strategize responses to personnel retention is to examine the efficacy of employee engagement strategies. As psychological research has examined, the strength of organizations' attempts to engage their employees in ways that provide for organizational commitment constitutes the foundation for efforts to target unwanted personnel retention and turnover, including the degree of perceived support from supervisors and management (Broom, 2010; Eisenberger et al., 2002). These also formed the foundation of items on the survey utilized in the current project.

Data Collection Procedure

Through the use of a Likert-based questionnaire distributed to sworn police personnel, this study intended to measure attitudes toward a variety of career, departmental climate, and personal values characteristics. The study approach was to attend briefings of patrol officers at eight participating police departments and visit as many command staff and specialized personnel as possible in order to distribute the 180-item survey. Briefings that we attended could target as many currently scheduled officers as possible during the visit. In the case of three of the eight agencies, the questionnaire was distributed electronically through the use of a Qualtrics-constructed survey provided by a website link and could be accessed either on a smartphone or desktop computer. Data obtained by both survey methodologies were merged into a single data file prior to analysis.

The survey instrument was either a printed hard-copy document provided to officers in briefings, or a Qualtrics survey provided via email from research staff and accompanied by an instructional memo for participant assistance. Officers self-administered the survey and were instructed to circle (or electronically check) the response that most closely represented their feelings toward the prompted statement. Likert-type scales ranging from one to four measured perceptions of participants to the statements. Across all eight agencies located in all four census regions of the United States, the number of responses was 668. The response rate varied by method of survey administration: across the three agencies where surveying was conducted electronically due to the Covid-19 pandemic, response rate was about 60 percent of available sworn personnel staff. For agencies where in-person surveying was conducted at briefings and meetings, the response rate was about 80 percent.

Sample and Recruitment

Agencies with varied geography and jurisdictional character were contacted by researchers, resulting in eight city police departments across the United States. Although the sample is a convenience sample of agencies which permitted participation based upon prior request, care was given to capturing a diverse representation of officer years of experience, shift assignment, organizational familiarity, and career trajectories as much as possible. In utilizing a sample that included more than simply current patrol officers, the project included individuals with different career experiences and impressions. Participants were recruited in two primary means according to survey method: online participants were recruited by an email and link that was sent by research staff (via command staff) to all persons within the agency's email roster, and in-person recruitment was accomplished with presentation of the survey and participation consent at briefings.

TABLE 1.1
AGENCY REPRESENTATION

Agency	Respondents	Sample Percent
Topeka Police Department	91	13.6
Smyrna Police Department	25	3.7
Vernon Hills Police Department	23	3.4
Biloxi Police Department	75	11.2
Frederick Police Department	75	11.2
Thornton Police Department	126	18.9
Bryan Police Department	83	12.4
Portland Police Bureau	165	24.7
TOTAL	663	100

TABLE 1.2
ETHNIC DEMOGRAPHICS OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS

Reported Ethnicity	Respondents	Sample Percent
African-American	37	5.5
First Nations / American Indian / Alaskan native	4	0.6
Asian	18	2.7
Hispanic / Latino	41	6.1
Native Hawaiian / Pacific Islander	3	0.4
White	531	79.5
Self-reported more than one race	10	1.5
No report	24	3.6
TOTAL	668	100

TABLE 1.3
GENDER DEMOGRAPHICS OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS

Reported Gender	Respondents	Sample Percent
Male	551	82.5
Female	93	13.9
No report	24	3.6
TOTAL	668	100

TABLE 1.4
HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION

Level Reported	Respondents	Sample Percent
High school / GED	37	5.5
Some college	141	21.1
Associate degree	115	17.2
Bachelor's degree	291	43.6
More than a Bachelor's degree	70	10.5
No report	14	2.1
TOTAL	668	100

TABLE 1.5
NUMBER OF PREVIOUS AGENCIES EMPLOYED, NOT COUNTING CORRECTIONS

Reported Number of Agencies	Respondents	Sample Percent
0 (Been employed only at current agency)	452	67.7
1	139	20.8
2	45	6.7
3 or more	19	2.7
No report	13	1.9
TOTAL	668	100

TABLE 1.6
PRIMARY CURRENT RANK / POSITION

Reported Rank	Respondents	Sample Percent
Patrol / Entry level	344	51.5
Investigations / CID / Detective	110	16.5
Mid-manager / Patrol Supervisor	134	20.1
Command staff	32	4.8
Other rank	34	5.1
No report	14	2.1
TOTAL	668	100

CHAPTER TWO: SURVEY RESULTS

The following chapter presents both frequency of report and percentage of responses for questions from each of the six subsections in the retention survey, and a discussion follows tables where compelling information was provided by survey responses. The sections grouped multiple dimensions of each thematic heading, for instance the section on "physical aspects of work" focused mainly upon potential factors that would either act as pushing or pulling mechanisms on officer career intention.

Questions about the agencies in which the officers worked

The survey questionnaire asked a number of questions about the climate and nature of the organization in which the officers worked. The intent of this section was to see if, by and large, the internal organizational environment had predictive power in forming officer morale and career expectations. Questions about career goal setting, supervisory capacity, and training as an avenue to professional development were included.

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL

Table 2.1 - "I find real enjoyment in my job."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	154	376	95	22	**647**
percent	23.8	58.1	14.7	3.4	**100**

Table 2.2 - "I like my job better than the average officer does."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	137	378	118	14	**647**
percent	21.2	58.4	18.2	2.2	**100**

Table 2.3 - "I find it hard to get motivated to go to work."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	40	144	357	105	**646**
percent	6.2	22.3	55.3	16.3	**100**

These initial questions get at first impressions of the "likability" of police employment, and demonstrate that the sample responded favorably to the concept that the career could inherently motivate individuals through rewarding and exciting work, and that the respondents actually enjoyed their jobs.

Table 2.4 - "When an officer does a particularly good job, command staff / management will publicly recognize their performance."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	59	318	192	78	**647**
percent	9.1	49.1	29.7	12.1	**100**

Table 2.5 - "My immediate supervisors treat everyone the same when making decisions."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	111	357	133	43	**644**
percent	17.2	55.4	20.7	6.7	**100**

Table 2.6 - " In the past year, I have been in a situation where a direct supervisor was condescending to me."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	58	99	226	262	**645**
percent	9.0	15.3	35.0	40.6	**100**

Table 2.7. "I feel that command staff/ management recognize line level officers when they do good work."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	65	308	192	82	**647**
percent	10.0	47.6	29.7	12.7	**100**

Table 2.8 - "My immediate supervisors take the time to explain their decisions that affect me."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	128	376	114	28	**646**
percent	19.9	58.2	17.6	4.3	**100**

Table 2.9 - "There is an open dialogue with my immediate supervisors."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	224	363	48	11	**646**
percent	34.7	56.2	7.4	1.7	**100**

Table 2.10 - "I have at least one trusted agency mentor I can speak with for career advice."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	273	301	55	19	**648**
percent	42.1	46.5	8.5	2.9	**100**

The supervisory climate of a police agency has been seen as critical to department morale, efficiency, and dissemination of agency values in prior research projects on the police workforce. The findings form this study reiterated that the perceived satisfaction of employees to supervisory climate went beyond the traditional interactions to embrace mentoring and goal-setting. On the whole, officers appear somewhat cognizant of the usefulness of supervisory and command staff in recognition and career advancement.

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL

Table 2.11 - "This department encourages employees to develop new skills."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	117	340	146	45	**648**
percent	18.1	52.5	22.5	6.9	**100**

Table 2.12 - "This organization cares about all of its employees."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	56	274	199	118	**647**
percent	8.7	42.3	30.8	18.2	**100**

Table 2.13 - "I feel like I do not play a significant role in this department."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	49	158	337	103	**647**
percent	7.6	24.4	52.1	15.9	**100**

Table 2.14. "I feel positive about the values of this department."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	112	355	128	53	**648**
percent	17.3	54.8	19.8	8.2	**100**

The perception that the agency "cares" – a cornerstone of employee engagement – is articulated through unseen values-laden efforts such as salary, benefits, assignment, and supervisory interaction, among other factors. But when asked specifically if the agency they work for shows caring, respondents offered that values matter.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE POLICE CAREER

Table 2.15 - "My academy training prepared me for my duties in this career."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	87	360	149	52	**648**
percent	13.4	55.6	23.0	8.0	**100**

Table 2.16 - "My agency's field training program prepared me for my career."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	142	428	60	17	**647**
percent	21.9	66.2	9.3	2.6	**100**

Table 2.17 - "My agency is tolerant of honest mistakes while learning."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	122	401	88	35	**646**
percent	18.9	62.1	13.6	5.4	**100**

The importance of training - and what constitutes good training – is the focus of the set of questions above, with the reported belief that training matters to create an environment of employee engagement and professional development.

Table 2.18 - "I am planning to leave my job for one outside of policing in the near future."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	51	105	296	194	**647**
percent	7.9	16.3	45.8	30.0	**100**

Table 2.19 - "I intend to seek employment in a different agency in the near future."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	17	53	282	294	**647**
percent	2.6	8.2	43.7	45.5	**100**

Table 2.20 - "I often think of quitting this job and finding another career outside of law enforcement."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	115	180	196	156	**647**
percent	17.8	27.8	30.3	24.1	**100**

Table 2.21 - "I often think of applying for a job in another agency."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	45	82	251	268	**646**
percent	7.0	12.7	38.9	41.5	**100**

Table 2.22 - "I am actively seeking work outside of the policing profession."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	41	75	265	265	**646**
percent	6.3	11.6	41.0	41.0	**100**

Table 2.23 - "I am actively seeking work in another law enforcement agency."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	9	29	264	344	**646**
percent	1.4	4.5	40.9	53.3	**100**

The above results focused on three stages of the desire to separate – the initial consideration, the plan to leave, and the act of seeking employment. Considering that some respondents were possibly retiring (a data point that will be explored in future empirical study), the responses indicate a workforce balanced between considering the possibility of leaving, and actively pursuing non-police employment.

Table 2.24 - "I feel that promotional opportunities in my department are fair among individuals with the same rank."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	42	328	184	93	**647**
percent	6.5	50.7	28.4	14.4	**100**

Table 2.25 - "The process for career advancement in my workplace is fair."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	38	370	171	66	**645**
percent	5.9	57.4	26.5	10.2	**100**

Table 2.26 - "The process for determining specialized assignments in my workplace is fair."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	36	307	206	94	**643**
percent	5.6	47.7	32.0	14.6	**100**

The perceived fairness of the promotions process has been deemed critical to the satisfaction of employees in an organization in other fields, and these questions focused on the state of satisfaction with the promotional process within the respondents' departments.

Table 2.27 - "I feel like I work too many hours most of the time."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	38	137	363	101	**639**
percent	5.9	21.4	56.8	15.8	**100**

Table 2.28 - "The shift schedule I work is detrimental to my personal relationships."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	55	119	322	143	**639**
percent	8.6	18.6	50.4	22.4	**100**

Table 2.29 - "The shift schedule I work is detrimental to my physical health."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	52	132	318	137	**639**
percent	8.1	20.7	49.8	21.4	**100**

QUESTIONS ABOUT INTERACTIONS WITH THE PUBLIC

In the years following the Ferguson, Missouri civil disturbances with the death of Michael Brown, police have been especially aware of a modicum of public anger fueled by social media scrutiny about the use of force. The questions in the section on public interaction focused on police awareness of public interaction that may have an impact on their morale, and whether or not they feel such behavior impacts their well-being.

Table 2.30 - "It is not often clear what a member of the public wants from me."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	119	231	241	44	**635**
percent	18.7	36.4	38.0	6.9	**100**

Table 2.31 - "Individual members of the public are difficult to please."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	136	312	173	14	**635**
percent	21.4	49.1	27.2	2.2	**100**

Table 2.32 - "Members of the public are often hostile towards me."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	74	174	348	38	**634**
percent	11.7	27.4	54.9	6.0	**100**

Table 2.33 - "In the past year, I have been verbally attacked by a member of the public while doing my job."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	286	227	87	34	**634**
percent	45.1	35.8	13.7	5.4	**100**

Table 2.34 - "In the past year, I have been physically attacked by a member of the public while on duty."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	135	130	248	121	**634**
percent	21.3	20.5	39.1	19.1	**100**

Table 2.35 - "Officers should take the time listen to citizens complain about their problems."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	183	408	40	4	**635**
percent	28.8	64.3	6.3	0.6	**100**

The potential for interpersonal violence, verbal and physical abuse, and the effect of this potential upon job related stress, is emphasized in the survey questions on public interaction. Also highlighted is the degree to which officers feel that, despite these concerns, their role is to address each concern with a degree of fairness and equity.

QUESTIONS ABOUT COMPENSATION AND BENEFITS

Is police work "worth it"? The underlying question (and subsequent anecdotal impression) that officers are "leaving in droves" because of the perceived lack of "worth" – either compensatory worth, or in other intangible benefits such as making a difference, was a concern of this research project. In this section, questions were asked if in fact the officers felt as if they were fairly compensated, and if the balance of compensation was allowing them to live the life they had envisioned.

Table 2.36 - "I am satisfied with my current salary."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	71	397	135	32	**635**
percent	11.2	62.5	21.3	5.0	**100**

Table 2.37 - "I think that my pay would be substantially higher in a different department."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	41	99	408	86	**634**
percent	6.5	15.6	64.4	13.6	**100**

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL

Table 2.38 - "I am satisfied with my workplace benefits."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	102	434	79	20	**635**
percent	16.1	68.3	12.4	3.1	**100**

Table 2.39 - "Police work gives me a good opportunity to raise a family."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	50	316	205	57	**628**
percent	8.0	50.3	32.6	9.1	**100**

Table 2.40 - "Police work gives me the type of lifestyle that I want to live."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	53	392	170	18	**633**
percent	8.4	61.9	26.9	2.8	**100**

Table 2.41 - "Policing provides me the ability to achieve a good work-life balance."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	26	334	233	40	**633**
percent	4.1	52.8	36.8	6.3	**100**

QUESTIONS ABOUT PERSONAL AND DEPARTMENTAL VALUES

The degree to which officers' expectations of the career merged with their pre-existing values is a critical piece of their overall career satisfaction. The survey specifically asked if officers felt their career expectations were being met, and if their support system reinforced this belief.

Table 2.42 - "I feel part of a community in my immediate workplace."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	94	394	115	29	**632**
percent	14.9	62.3	18.2	4.6	**100**

Table 2.43 - "I have had numerous experiences in my job which have resulted in personal growth."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	147	416	61	8	**632**
percent	23.3	65.8	9.7	1.3	**100**

Table 2.44 - "I am valued at work for who I am."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	100	410	95	27	**632**
percent	15.8	64.9	15.0	4.3	**100**

Table 2.45 - "I see a connection between my work and the larger social good of my community."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	119	405	91	18	**633**
percent	18.8	64.0	14.4	2.8	**100**

Table 2.46 - "I feel positive about the values of my immediate work unit/shift."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	119	459	47	8	**633**
percent	18.8	72.5	7.4	1.3	**100**

Table 2.47 - "I had a good idea of what police work would be like before I became an officer."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	71	287	176	99	**633**
percent	11.2	45.4	27.8	15.6	**100**

Table 2.48 - "The work I do as an officer is much different than I expected."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	88	213	288	44	**633**
percent	13.9	33.6	45.5	7.0	**100**

Table 2.49 - "If I had known what this job was like, I would have chosen a different career."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	65	81	326	161	**633**
percent	10.3	12.8	51.5	25.4	**100**

Table 2.50 - "I feel well supported by my family."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	351	265	16	1	**633**
percent	55.5	41.9	2.5	0.2	**100**

Table 2.51 - "I feel well supported by my friends."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	291	314	24	4	**633**
percent	46.0	49.6	3.8	0.6	**100**

Some of the responses in this section reiterate our previous research conducted in the area of recruitment, that a more well-rounded introduction to the real expectations of law enforcement, as well as an understanding of the career imparted to a candidate's family and friends, is an approach that generates a more values-laden effort to recruit the best candidates for the agency.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE OFFICER'S PERSONALITY

Table 2.52 - "I am often under time pressure."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	100	271	247	12	**630**
percent	15.9	43.0	39.2	1.9	**100**

Table 2.53 - "I miss my mid-shift meal (lunch) more than once per week."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	117	214	254	42	**627**
percent	18.7	34.1	40.6	6.7	**100**

Table 2.54 - "I feel that all I do is run from call to call, or task to task, with no time in between."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	85	199	310	33	**627**
percent	13.6	31.7	49.4	5.3	**100**

Table 2.55 - "I have the freedom to plan my own work."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	42	307	235	46	**630**
percent	6.7	48.7	37.3	7.3	**100**

Table 2.56 - "Officers in my department get to try out their own ideas."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	22	323	237	47	**629**
percent	3.5	51.4	37.7	7.5	**100**

It appears important to officers that they have the opportunity to plan their own ideas and direct the course of their own career, with minimal practical distraction (such as the call-taking nature of patrol work, or the impending tasks of other specialized units) as an expected feature of the career.

QUESTIONS ABOUT CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES

The following section asked specific questions about the two most pressing issues to public safety careers, especially police careers, during the time in which the survey was distributed: the Covid-19 pandemic and its potential effect on employee safety, and the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota and its associated impact on the police-public relationship. The responses to these questions demonstrate the exceptional attention given to these two events by police officers during this time, and the degree to which these issues impacted morale and career trajectories.

Table 2.57 - "The COVID-19 pandemic has caused me to reconsider my law enforcement career."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	35	59	293	246	**633**
percent	5.5	9.3	46.3	38.9	**100**

Table 2.58 - "The reaction of many members of the public to the George Floyd incident in Minneapolis has caused me to reconsider my law enforcement career."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	151	172	192	118	**632**
percent	23.9	27.2	30.3	18.6	**100**

Table 2.59 - "The agency I work for has faced significant public criticism since the George Floyd incident."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	177	106	238	111	632
percent	28.0	16.8	37.7	17.6	100

Table 2.60 - "The agency I work for has managed the COVID-19 pandemic adequately."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	74	406	102	50	632
percent	11.7	64.2	16.1	7.9	100

Table 2.61 - "The current "anti-police" sentiment among the public does not represent the majority of citizens' beliefs."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	131	379	97	26	633
percent	20.7	59.9	15.3	4.1	100

Table 2.62 - "I have felt that my health was in danger because of working during the COVID-19 pandemic."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	44	147	272	170	633
percent	7.0	23.2	43.0	26.9	100

These data generate an incredible amount of discussion. One the one hand, officers report that they feel negative media attention may be obscuring the true feelings of the public about police, even going so far as to suggest a "narrative", but yet officers acknowledge the very real pressures put upon them by the George Floyd murder and its renewed scrutiny on police behavior. Further statistical analysis of these data will disclose the relationships between these responses and disposition to stay in the career.

Table 2.63 - "The George Floyd incident has resulted in officers that I personally know to leave law enforcement."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	176	198	196	61	631
percent	27.9	31.4	31.4	9.7	100

Table 2.64 - "I have noticed a negative change in the relationship between community members and police officers where I work since the George Floyd incident."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	175	223	197	36	631
percent	27.7	35.3	31.2	5.7	100

Table 2.65 - "Despite what you see in the media, most of the public supports the police these days."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	114	380	114	24	632
percent	18.0	60.1	18.0	3.8	100

Table 2.66 - "In police work, a person stands a good chance of being sued."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	235	328	64	6	633
percent	37.1	51.8	10.1	0.9	100

Table 2.67 - "I personally fear negative media attention because of my job."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	158	259	192	23	632
percent	25.0	41.0	30.4	3.6	100

Table 2.68 - "I am bothered by the way law enforcement as a profession is being portrayed in the news media."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	392	204	30	6	632
percent	62.0	32.3	4.7	0.9	100

Table 2.69 - "In today's environment, it is in my best interest to avoid proactive searches of persons."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	165	158	216	93	632
percent	26.1	25.0	34.2	14.7	100

Table 2.70 - " In today's environment, I am hesitant to perform an arrest."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	47	126	287	170	630
percent	7.5	20.0	45.6	27.0	100

Table 2.71 - "I have seen fellow officers in my agency engage in less proactive work for fear of lawsuits."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	265	238	99	30	632
percent	41.9	37.7	15.7	4.7	100

Table 2.72 - "I have seen fellow officers in my agency engage in less proactive work over fear of local protests."

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
frequency	242	195	152	43	632
percent	38.3	30.9	24.1	6.8	100

CHAPTER THREE: Themes

The study disclosed a new landscape of officer attitudes toward career growth and disposition to stay in the career during a time of accentuated pressure on the police profession itself. The overarching narrative of police officers" abandoning" the profession, anecdotally "leaving in droves" amid widespread dissatisfaction with the profession's stresses and what they perceive is an ungrateful public, is not supported. What is supported is the awareness of officers about the climate in which they are in, as well as practical knowledge of what steps must be taken if they are to continue their careers and further a positive police-community relationship. It is important to acknowledge the main themes emerging from the data with regard to retention and what hope these findings play for strengthening officers' commitment to their work.

- **Police appear cautiously optimistic in the face of contemporary challenges. Acknowledging that the police career is under pressure, while simultaneously showing displeasure with media portrayals of the police – public partnership, officers do feel continued engagement and building of community relationships is still a cornerstone of their careers.**

- **Police appear somewhat satisfied with salaries and benefits, and look for additional ways to pursue a different kind of career satisfaction. The ability to help others – long considered the primary attractant with policing and other human services professions – continues to be one of the strongest predictors of career satisfaction.**

- **Officers recognize the stresses of the career, and are aware of the dangers of not keeping a positive balance. Questions about physical challenges and support mechanisms demonstrate a keen awareness about stress and coping, and their admission that others that they have seen who may have left the profession under these stressors is sobering.**

- **A sense of community on the job, with support from supervisors, emerges (once again) as a critical "pulling" mechanism. Officers acknowledged that the strength of supervisor support and acknowledgment of a "job well done" goes a long way in creating a positive work climate that engenders a sense of community and continuity.**

- **The ability to plan one's work – possibly emerging from the perception of police work as largely self-directed – is a potential pulling mechanism that should be further explored. Questions about the proactive nature of police work, and the potential erosion of that ability in the face of recent fears of lawsuits and staffing shortages, showed a profession in flux, and the relationship of these changes to retention challenges should be further explored.**

CHAPTER FOUR:
OBSERVATIONS FROM THE FIELD

JERRY PETERS, Deputy Chief of Police, Thornton Police Department

Recruiting and retaining qualified, enthusiastic,and diverse employees has to be at the forefront of every police executive's mind today. Now, more than ever, we have to understand and identify what keeps our people here and why are they leaving. Our participation in this study allowed Thornton Police Department to dive deeper into this complicated topic and make changes to retain good cops. What attracts and keeps people wanting to be cops is more than pay, the idea of public service, and a good pension: it's a combination of many factors that a police executive has to know. The Thornton Police Department, like many other agencies, are losing great employees to larger agencies that are offering bonuses to leave and the promise of accelerating their training program. The Thornton Police Department is looking towards other self fulfilling methods to retain people and recruit qualified individuals to serve their community.

WALT MELNYK, Lieutenant, Bryan Police Department

The Bryan Police Department is a mid-sized agency located in central Texas, with an authorized strength of 156 sworn officers. Like most police organizations, we place a heavy emphasis on recruiting and retaining men and women of integrity, intellect, and professionalism. As a result, our hiring process is rigorous, and expectations for performance are high. Overall, morale is positive among the officers in the department. Although we generally lose between five and seven officers a year, it is usually due either to retirement, job opportunities outside law enforcement, or significant life changes. While there are many law enforcement agencies with a higher pay scale, we believe we are successful in retaining our officers because of the family-like atmosphere and high level of training provided to our officers. Because the issue is so important, future studies in retention and officer turnover would be helpful for tailoring our leadership training, creating a culture of trust within both the community and the agency.

JOSEPH HAYER, Deputy Chief of Police, Frederick Police Department

From the Frederick, MD Police Department's perspective, the agency, like others, finds it more difficult to get applicants to the final selection process to become a certified police officer. The State of MD hiring standards are standardized for each agency across the state, and the agency location within the Baltimore-Washington, D.C. Metro region makes it difficult to recruit given some of the highest paying jobs, especially in Law Enforcement, and one of the most expensive regions to live in the U.S. Despite the challenges, the agency, with a sworn staff of 149, has successfully recruited nearly 1,000 applicants, on an annual basis, for the past five years, with over 40% from diverse backgrounds. Much success has been derived from having a transparent process, an "all hands on deck approach" to the recruiting mindset, making personal contact with every single applicant, and auditing the process yearly through the CALEA accreditation process and committing to making constant improvements. Once applicants complete the entry level and field training processes, the agency has successfully retained nearly 100% of sworn staff through aggressive work completed to stay competitive with salary and benefits compared to peers in the region.

CONCLUSIONS

This study was conducted with the intention of providing both researchers and practitioners with a more precise view of the current retention landscape in police work, relying upon empirical data to determine the breadth of officer intent to either separate or stay with their agencies and the profession. Future empirical study using these data may look at relationships between the "pushing" and "pulling" mechanisms and intention to leave or stay, creating predictors of intent. Some of the subquestions for the study involving job stress and its potential relationship with media scrutiny, the effect of litigaphobia or fear of lawsuits, peer and supervisory support, and the impact of salary and benefits can also be explored. Most intriguing is the response of officers to the dual stressors of the Covid-19 pandemic and the murder of George Floyd upon intention to leave or stay, phenomena that are persistent with the associated impact on policy reflected in vaccination mandates and changes in use of force policy to reflect public disagreement.

REFERENCES

Allen, D.G., P.C. Bryant, & J.M. Vardaman (2010). Retaining talent: Replacing misconceptions with evidence-based strategies. Academy of Management Perspectives, 48-64.

Allisey, A.F., A.J. Noblet, A.D. Lamontagne, & J. Houdmont (2014). Testing a model of officer intentions to quit: The mediating effects of job stress and job satisfaction. Criminal Justice & Behavior, 41 (6), 751-771.

Broom, C. (2010). Entice, engage, endure: Adapting evidence-based retention strategies to a new generation of nurses. Journal of Healthcare Leadership, 2, 49-60.

CEB Inc. (2015). The career path is dead! Long live careers. CHRO Quarterly Magazine, Q3.

CEB Inc. (2015). The new path forward: Creating compelling careers for employees and organizations. Stamford, CT: CEB Corporate Leadership Council.

Copple, J. (2017). Law enforcement recruitment in the 21st century: Forum proceedings. Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS).

Eisenberger, R., F. Stinglhamber, C. Vandenberghe, I.L. Sucharski, & L. Rhoades (2002). Perceived supervisor support: Contributions to perceived organizational support and employee retention. Journal of Applied Psychology, 87 (3), 565-573.

Haarr, R. (2005). Factors affecting the decision of police recruits to "drop out" of police work. Police Quarterly, 8 (4), 431-453.

Li, W. & I. Mahajan (2021, September 1). Police say demoralized officers are quitting in droves. Labor data says no. The Marshall Project. Retrieved May 26, 2022 from https://www.themarshallproject.org/2021/09/01/police-say-demoralized-officers-are-quitting-in-droves-labor-data-says-no

Morison, K.P. (2017). Hiring for the 21st century law enforcement officer: Challenges, opportunities, and strategies for success. Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS).

Orrick, W.D. (2002, October). Calculating the cost of police turnover. Police Chief, 100-103.

Orrick, W.D. (2008). Recruitment, retention, and turnover of police personnel: Reliable, practical, and effective solutions. Springfield, IL, Charles C. Thomas Publishers.

Taylor, B., B. Kubu, L. Fridell, C. Rees, T. Jornan, & J. Cheney (2006). Cop crunch: Identifying strategies for dealing with the recruiting and hiring crisis in law enforcement. Washington, DC: Police Executive Research Forum.

US Government Accountability Office (GAO) (2018, June). US Customs and Border Protection: Progress and challenges in recruiting, hiring, and retaining law enforcement personnel. Washington, DC.: Government Accountability Office, Document no. GAO-18-487.

Van Buskirk, C. (2022, June 12). 'No one wants to be a cop these days'; Across Massachusetts, police chiefs say hiring and retaining officers is a challenge. Mass Live. Retrieved June 18, 2022 from https://www.masslive.com/news/2022/06/no-one-wants-to-be-a-cop-these-days-across-massachusetts-police-chiefs-say-hiring-and-retaining-officers-is-a-challenge.html

Wilson, J., E. Dalton, C. Scheer, & C. Grammich (2010). Police recruitment and retention for the new millennium: The state of knowledge. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation.

POLICE RETENTION AND CAREER PERCEPTIONS: FINDINGS FROM AN EIGHT-CITY SURVEY

BILOXI, MS | BRYAN, TX | FREDERICK, MD | PORTLAND, OR | SMYRNA, GA | THORNTON, CO | TOPEKA, KS | VERNON HILLS, IL