

# PERF's National Survey on Recruiting and Hiring in Law Enforcement



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# Background



- News headlines in the 1990s and 2000s indicated that many LEAs were having problems with recruitment and hiring (the “cop crunch”)
- Some were contending that LEAs were seeing a decline in new recruits/hires because of private sector competition, negative media coverage of the police, and a strong economy in the 1990s.
- The low # of minority & women applicants has been a particular concern and an obstacle to developing agencies that are diverse and representative of the communities they serve.

# Background (Cont'd)



- Some have predicted that LEAs will continue to face tough times retaining officers due to inflexible schedules, low pay and long hours, and opportunities in federal law enforcement.
- In response to this reported “COP Crunch,” PERF (with NIJ funding) conducted the only national survey on this issue in 2002 to examine:
  - Nature and extent of the “cop crunch”
  - Identify agency & jurisdiction-level policies/practices that facilitate the recruiting and hiring of quality personnel (including women/minorities)
  - While the PERF data is old – it is worth exploring for no other national data of this type is available

# Methods: National Survey



- National survey and follow-up phone interviews
- Survey of ~ 1,000 local LEAs (sheriffs/PDs) in 2002
- Stratified/random sample of LEAs across the U.S.
  - Population was divided into strata based upon agency size, agency type, and geography
- Survey items covered recruitment/hiring issues
- The survey response rate (just under 50%) was lower than expected (PERF usually gets 70+%).
  - Non-response analysis suggested that the impact of low response on our substantive results was minimal, but this is a potential limitation of this study



# Findings: Recruitment efforts



- Scarcity of resources available for recruitment
- With the exception of the State PDs & larger LEAs (>500 officers), only a small % of LEAs have a permanent recruitment unit. The smaller LEAs more typically had either one full-time recruiter or some part-time recruiters.
- Most LEAs had fairly modest budgets for recruiting (little beyond recruiter personnel) - e.g., most LEAs don't provide awards for officers that refer successful applicants.
- Most common recruitment methods included newspaper ads, career fairs and Internet.

# Recruitment efforts



- Majority of LEAs do not engage in joint recruitment efforts with other LEAs
- Only about half of the LEAs use one of their own police programs (e.g., SROs) as a means to recruit young people, with the larger agencies reporting greater use of this approach than the smaller agencies. The police programs most commonly utilized for this purpose across all agencies were college internships, explorer programs, and school resource officers.
- The most commonly targeted group were those with previous police experience, followed by college grads, racial/ethnic minorities and women.

# Application procedures:



- Another factor related to problems potentially associated with hiring problems is the application procedures in place for hiring officers.
- The larger LEAs have a more lengthy process from the submission of an application to the acceptance of an offer of employment.
- The bulk of responding LEAs indicated that they accept applications continuously or only when a vacancy exists, as opposed to a particular schedule (e.g., once per year).
- Most LEAs did not require individuals to submit their applications at LEAs or other government facilities.
- Most LEAs did not supply applicants with study materials to help them prepare for tests and other selection procedures

# Requirements for recruits



- Most LEAs require applicants to be:
  - A U.S. citizen
  - Have a driver's license
  - Have a High School diploma
  - Meet minimum vision requirements
  - No criminal record
  - No dishonorable discharge from armed forces.
  
- Most LEAs did not require that applicants or sworn officers live in the agency service area



# Selection procedures



- The first procedures to take place in the selection process for the vast majority of LEAs was a civil service exam/written entrance exam.
- Although the precise order may differ, the data indicates that subsequent steps include
  - A criminal record check
  - Fitness test
  - Assessment center and practical tests.
  - Medical exam
  - Psychometric test
  - Interview with psychologist
  - Drug test

# Benefits and salary for recruits



- The vast majority of all agencies:
  - Paid their recruits a salary during training
  - Offered a uniform allowance or provided a uniform
  - Paid the tuition for recruit training at an external academy/school
  - Offered salary increases for college degrees and/or had take-home cars.
- Base starting salary was generally higher in the larger LEAs. However, agencies with 501 or more officers were an exception to this, with the second lowest base starting.
- Most LEAs indicated that they allowed officers to work overtime/work secondary employment

## Comparison of PERF survey results (2002) to the Strawbridge and Strawbridge (1989) results



- The PERF survey included key questions related to recruitment and selection developed by Strawbridge and Strawbridge (1990)
- PERF survey was sent, not only to a stratified random sample of 2,138 agencies, but also to the 72 agencies previously surveyed in 1990 by the Strawbridges.
- The survey of these 72 agencies produced a follow-up wave of longitudinal data for the large agencies previously studied.

## Comparison of PERF survey results (2002) to the Strawbridge and Strawbridge (1989) results



- During the intervening 13 years, the average number of officers per capita significantly increased, with more minorities and females are working in law enforcement in 2002 compared to 1989 (indicating that the trends discovered by Langworthy et al., 1994 have continued).
- We did not find sufficient evidence to either support or to reject the existence of the much discussed *Cop Crunch*.
- Mean number of applicants in 1989 was 3,113 compared to 1,949 applicants in 2002. Although there appears to be a substantial decrease, the change was not statistically significant.

# Strawbridge comparison results are also similar to other data



- Also, DOJ stats on hiring trends demonstrate that from 1996-2000, only 22% of agencies nationwide experienced a reduction in force, while the majority either remained stable or grew (BJS, 2000)
- Another study reveals that from 1996-1999 slightly more than 50% of agencies grew in size while the rest remained level (Koper, 2004)

- Small common sample (n=32) included in the PERF and Strawbridge's studies to test the cop crunch hypothesis.
- With a sample of only 32 LEAs containing both 1989 & 2002 data, even our large difference was not statistically significant.
- Therefore, our observed drop of 1,164 applicants between 1989 and 2002 could have been statistically significant if we observed the same pattern with a larger sample.



## Comparison of PERF survey results (2002) to the Strawbridge and Strawbridge (1989) results



- Despite non-significant findings, there were a # of LEAs in our comparative study that did have fewer applicants in 2002 compared to 1989, suggesting that some LEAs are having difficulty attracting applicants & are under a “crunch.”
- Also, a noticeable minority of agencies (> than 10%) have severe shortages, that is less than 90% of their sworn positions were filled on Jan. 2002.
- Some agencies are having significant difficulty in maintaining staffing levels, with somewhat greater problems appearing with the smallest and the very largest LEAs.



# Attracting and Hiring Applicants (1989 vs 2002)



- Positive shifts in targeted recruiting strategies for:
  - Minorities
  - Women
  - Military veterans
  - Four-year college grads
  - People with prior police service
- However, problems were still observed in hiring qualified female and minority applicants across all agency sizes, with relatively few individuals from these groups applying.
- While most of the LEAs were able to draw sufficient # of applicants, the LEAs with > 500 officers had significant problems drawing sufficient qualified applicants.



# Applicant screening (1989 vs 2002) has not changed much, except:



- Fewer LEAs have:
  - Residency requirements
  - Written test requirements
  - Intelligence test requirements
  - Requirements for a “clean criminal record” (except increases were observed with regard to drug testing)
- Screening and hiring process still takes on average six months from time of application to employment
- Police salaries have not kept pace with inflation from 1989 to 2002

# Follow-up Phone Interviews



- A subset of agencies participated in follow-up interviews on specific comprehensive and effective recruitment/hiring programs and specific innovative strategies.
- Survey data used to identify 60 LEAs that (1) are effective in recruiting/hiring generally, (2) are effective in recruiting and/or hiring women and/or ethnic minorities, and/or (3) report innovative strategies that promote hiring.
- Interviews done w/ relevant personnel in the 60 LEAs to characterize the programs/practices that are linked to hiring successes

# Promising practices in recruiting women and minorities - based on phone interviews



- Direct recruiting at events geared towards women and minorities (e.g., trade shows)
- Recruiting at women's fitness clubs/athletic events
- Use of local advisory committees and task forces to determine effective local ways to recruit women and minorities
- LEA has a commitment to increasing opportunities for female/minority officers, so female & minority recruits can see fellow females/minorities in higher positions

## Promising practices in recruiting women and minorities (Cont'd)



- Partnering with minority organizations (e.g, NAACP)
- Inviting different minority groups onto a task force, and then using a person of each group to recruit fellow minorities (e.g., a Hispanic member would go out into the Hispanic community to help find places to advertise and recruit; an Asian member would do the same for the Asian community, etc.)



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