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An Analysis of Non-Monetary Solutions to Officer Retention
Problems in Small Police Agencies

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Abstract

An Analysis of Non-Monetary Solutions to Officer Retention Problems in Small Police Agencies

Small police departments have a stake in developing strategies to reduce officer turnover rates. There are viable non-monetary strategies available to address turnover issues in small police agencies. The strategies small police departments can implement to aid in reducing officer turnover are examined and the questions: Are there non-monetary strategies that may reduce officer turnover rates in small police departments and Are small police departments reducing their turnover rates by using these non-monetary strategies will be answered. This study identifies what non-monetary retention strategies small agencies are using, if any, and if the strategies are decreasing the agency's turnover rate.

In order to determine if agencies are using strategies, a sample of small police departments across the U.S. was surveyed and the results analyzed. Data indicated agencies are using non-monetary strategies to reduce turnover and the strategies are reducing turnover rates.

It is concluded that available literature and survey results indicate non-monetary solutions to officer retention problems in small agencies exist and are being used successfully throughout the country to help small agencies retain quality officers.

Introduction

Thousands of dollars are spent each year by law enforcement agencies to recruit, train, and educate police officers. About 20 years ago, the Memphis police department estimated the cost of recruiting, selection, and training an officer at \$18,000 (Sparger, 1983). The cost is higher for today's recruits and budgets are developed around having the staff to provide adequate police services to the public. Despite an enormous amount of funding, police agencies continue to experience retention problems. This is not a new issue. It has been with the profession for a number of years. In a 1994 study, data indicated the Tallahassee Florida Police Department experienced a male turnover rate of 45% and a female turnover rate of 67% during the period 1981-86 (Doerner, 1995). Retention problems have no boundaries. They appear in both large and small agencies but smaller agencies are hit even harder. People constitute the most important asset to any size police agency. Small police departments have a stake in developing strategies to reduce officer turnover rates. There are viable non-monetary strategies available to address turnover issues in small police agencies.

This project will have two distinct goals. First, it will examine the strategies small police departments can implement to aid in reducing officer turnover and will answer the question: Are there non-monetary strategies that may reduce officer turnover rates in small police departments? The second goal will be to determine the strategies effect on turnover rates, if any. In particular, the second goal will answer the following question:

Are small police departments reducing their turnover rates by using these non-monetary strategies?

This project will review various retention strategies. A survey instrument will be sent to several small law enforcement agencies throughout the U.S. This instrument will identify what non-monetary retention strategies small agencies are using, if any, and if the strategies are decreasing the agency's turnover rate. The data will be analyzed to determine the effect of the strategies on turnover rates.

The first hypothesis is that there are non-monetary strategies available for small police departments to reduce their turnover rates. It will be revealed that there are retention strategies available and they are varied in scope. The selection of a particular strategy by a small police department will depend on fiscal restraints, agency goals, and policies. Therefore, there will be no reason for a small police agency to doubt there are effective non-monetary strategies available.

It is the second hypothesis that utilization of a particular non-monetary strategy or strategies will reduce the turnover rate of a small police department. The survey of small police departments will reveal turnover rates were reduced as a direct result of using such strategies. Other surveys concerning the effectiveness of the strategies have previously been conducted and will be compared to this survey instrument's results.

The law enforcement community will benefit from the research. It will send a message to small police agencies that turnover rates can be managed by utilizing an effective non-monetary strategy or strategies. Reducing the turnover rates will result in

a more cohesive and professional police organization. Manpower costs will be more stabilized.

This project will begin with an overview of the literature on officer retention and turnover. It will also include an analysis of a survey instrument's results from other small police agencies across the U.S. The project will conclude with recommendations and suggestions for the use of selected non-monetary strategies.

Review of Literature

Literature related to the issue of non-monetary strategies for improving the retention of officers in small police departments was found to be somewhat limited in scope. There seems to be many opinions as to what is causing the turnover in police departments in general but few sources direct their efforts towards perhaps the agencies hardest hit by turnover – the small police departments. In the area of literature on the subject of strategies in small police departments, some authors do indicate some non-monetary attempts at curbing the turnover issue.

Wales (1989), Chief of Police for a small city in Illinois, addressed the issue but offered no analysis of whether the efforts were successful in reducing officer turnover. The efforts were a result of his inability to match the higher salaries of larger departments and high turnover in his department. His literature indicates an attempt to curb the turnover by making his officers more specialized and by offering more training.

Several literature sources offered an insight into decreasing the turnover rates of minority officers. The Australian National Police Ethnic Advisory Bureau (2000) issued a report on research they conducted into developing a national strategy for retaining officers. Although it is oriented towards a much larger national force, the report does touch on strategies that could be applicable to a smaller agency. Interpersonal communications and employee mentoring are two mentioned strategies adaptable to a smaller agency. The literature contained no indications of whether the strategies reduced the turnover of the national force. The Bureau of Justice Assistance (2001) also alludes to retaining through mentoring

Wood (2001), in his article on turnover in small Alaskan police agencies, offers some research data into strategies to retain officers. The Alaskan police environment is unique in that the State offers a VPSO program that attempts to keep officers in the area in which they grew up. This offered an insight into strategies of hiring locally, and bringing the officer closer to the community and to the local police culture. According to the article, these strategies were effective in retaining officers in Alaska's smaller, rural police agencies although no quantitative data was presented.

Some of the research on this topic emphasized strategies involving management techniques. Charrier (2000) referred to Generation X officers who come into police work expecting tangible benefits and pointed out that management may want to use the strategies of soliciting input in decision making processes, improving the chain of command communication, delegating tasks, and mentoring to help retain these officers. Job sharing, flexible work hours, and specialized assignments are mentioned as

additional strategies. Again, there was no specific reference to a differentiation between small or large police departments but one could apply these strategies to a small department.

Hoffman (1993) referred to the problem small agencies have with turnover amongst the officers. He presented several examples of small agencies that have had success with such strategies as improved hiring practices and improved employee satisfaction. One of the departments used a team management model allowing every officer an opportunity to have input into decision making. This resembles some of the strategies offered in other readings. Other similar strategies included specialization assignments and training, and flexible scheduling. Although no data is available to substantiate the successfulness of the strategies is offered, all the departments had low turnover rates.

Sparger and Giacomassi (1983) cite possible strategies administrators might use to alleviate the turnover problem in police work. No distinction is made between large and small agencies but the strategies are adaptable to both. Development of evaluation instruments that provide a feedback option, rewards for work well done, career development programs, and specialized assignments and training are offered as viable strategies to prevent turnover. No data was available to substantiate the strategies effectiveness.

Methodology

This research paper examines two research questions. The first question is whether there are non-monetary strategies that may reduce officer turnover rates in small police departments. The second question is if small police departments are reducing their turnover rates by using these non-monetary strategies.

There are two hypotheses that have been constructed. The first hypothesis is that there are several non-monetary strategies available that can reduce officer turnover in small police agencies. The second hypothesis is that the non-monetary strategies reduce turnover rates in small police agencies.

The method of inquiry was a survey sent by email to several small police departments across the United States. The survey was sent with a cover letter explaining the research project in detail (Appendix 4). The recipients were to respond anonymously to the survey based on available data using the email service.

The measurement instrument was a one page questionnaire consisting of nine questions related to department sworn officer staffing levels (Appendix 5). Additional questions were asked about how many officers had left in the last 12 months, what their reason for leaving was, what action(s) the department took to alleviate the problem, and how successful were the efforts. The department's urban/rural setting and area population levels were also collected.

The instrument was sent by email through the National Center for Rural Law Enforcement's (NCRLE) and the Criminal Justice Institute that provides internet service,

email, and web hosting to 125 rural law enforcement agencies throughout the United States. Twenty-seven surveys were returned by email giving the instrument a 22% return rate. The data retrieved from the instrument will be analyzed using statistical graphs to show the correlations between turnovers and attempts to alleviate turnovers, if any.

Findings

The research into this subject contained a wide venue of the many areas associated with the subject of police officer retention, the underlying reasons for officer turnover, and strategies, both monetary and non-monetary, being used to prevent turnover. The research arrived at one conclusion: Police department turnover and retention is a problem unique to most agencies. Small agencies are affected even more because they don't have the monetary resources available to effectively compete with larger, more prosperous communities.

Much has been written about why officers change their place of employment. Little has been written about what strategies are available to retain the officers and how effective the strategies are. But, with what information there is on this topic, it can be determined that there are strategies being used and some are effective in reducing the turnover rates in small departments.

It was found that, when money is available, small departments tend to offer monetary incentives to assist with retention issues. These incentives may be in the form of educational reimbursements, graduated STEP increases in base pay, shift

differential pay, and uniform allowances. This however was not the focus of this research. Because most small departments do not have these resources, alternative non-monetary strategies were examined.

The results of the author's survey yielded interesting findings. Departments with 1-5 officers accounted for 33% of the sampling and those with 6-10 officers accounted for an additional 33% of the sampling (Appendix 1). Although the survey was sent to small departments with 30 or less officers, 66% of the respondents were from agencies with 10 or fewer officers. This established a representative population of a truly small police agency upon which to analyze the additional data.

All but six of the responding agencies had some turnover during the past year. Of those agencies with turnovers, most had somewhere between one and three officers leave (Appendix 2). This indicates that, since most of the agencies responding had 10 or fewer officers, each agency lost a significant portion of their manpower sometime during the preceding year.

It was found that several strategies were used by those departments with turnover problems in an effort to decrease turnover. Some form of monetary strategy was used 33% and another 33% involved a non-monetary strategy (Appendix 3). Some of the agencies indicated they used other strategies but failed to indicate whether the effort was monetary or non-monetary in nature. This skewed that portion of the data.

Of the departments that responded to the question of whether the strategies reduced turnover, 10 out of 16 indicated the strategy(s) had decreased turnover rates in their department. Some respondents chose not to answer the question on their

returned survey. It could not be determined if this choice was an oversight or intentional in nature. This finding indicates strategies had a positive effect on turnover rates.

The survey yielded other data of interest but not necessarily pertinent to the question of non-monetary strategies and their effectiveness in reducing turnover. More males left the small agencies than females did by a 29 to 2 difference. Nineteen of the agencies considered themselves to be rural and eight were deemed urban. Almost 2/3 of the agencies served populations under 5,000 while 1/3 third served populations between 5,000 and 15,000.

The research yielded no other survey instruments used to examine strategies to reduce officer turnover. There was, however, some research in which surveys were used to determine the causative factors of why officers were leaving departments. One could possibly use this data to develop alternative strategies based on alleviating the factors.

The author has personal experience examining turnover trends in a small police department and developing effective non-monetary strategies to stop the turnover. The efforts have proved effective in reducing the turnover from other than involuntary terminations to two individuals over the past three years. This personal finding occurred in a small agency of 7 officers serving a population of fewer than 5,000 in a rural area of Texas.

The strategies used included work schedules that offer officers every other weekend off, take home vehicles, specialized assignments and training, investigation of cases, and assignments of specific areas of the city to each officer. The officers responded to the strategies by committing to the department and the community. The strategies are being supplemented with monetary strategies when revenues are available but emphasis will continue to be placed on non-monetary strategies.

Discussion/Conclusion

The problem being examined in this research is that officers are leaving small police agencies and the agencies are not able to compete, from a monetary perspective, with larger departments. They are hit harder by turnover because most small agencies are trying to provide services with a limited number of personnel. This study examined related references and used a survey instrument to examine several small agencies attempts at reaching non-monetary solutions to the retention problem.

The research examined two questions: Are there non-monetary strategies that may reduce officer turnover rates? and, Are small police departments reducing their turnover rates by using these strategies? The first hypothesis is that there are non-strategies available for small police departments to reduce their turnover rates. These strategies are available and varied in scope. The second hypothesis is that utilization of a particular non-monetary strategy or strategies will reduce the turnover rate of a small police department.

It can be concluded from the findings that there are many non-monetary strategies available and that many departments are currently using the strategies effectively to reduce the turnover in their departments. It can also be concluded that research validates only the fact that strategies are available and not that they are effective. The survey results and author's successful experiences approve the effectiveness of the strategies.

The above conclusions support both hypotheses. The findings of the research prove the hypotheses correct in that strategies have been proved to be in existence and have been proved to be successful in reducing the turnover rates in small departments. Although both hypotheses are supported by research, some limitations hindered the study. Due to the low response rate on the surveys, one might wonder if all the agencies received the initial email consisting of an introductory letter and the survey itself. In the age of technology, it is even possible some of the returned surveys were lost when sent to the author

Another factor that may have affected the validity of the survey is the inability to determine who actually completed the survey and what the motive may have been in answering the questions in the manner they were answered. The survey was originally directed at administrators but, due to the anonymity requested in the instrument, it would have been impossible to determine who the individual was.

This study is important to law enforcement in that it presents alternatives to monetary responses to turnover in small police agencies. The data has provided a

means whereby small agencies can provide the increased service levels demanded by today's society and retain the personnel necessary to perform the tasks. With the economy as it is today and revenues dwindling, more pressure has been applied to provide more services with less money. This is an impossible task without a full cadre of personnel.

The police department and the community will benefit from the results of this study. The police department will be able to provide services and function without continuity being affected. The public will be affected by the results in that services will be maintained with no loss due to low levels of manpower.

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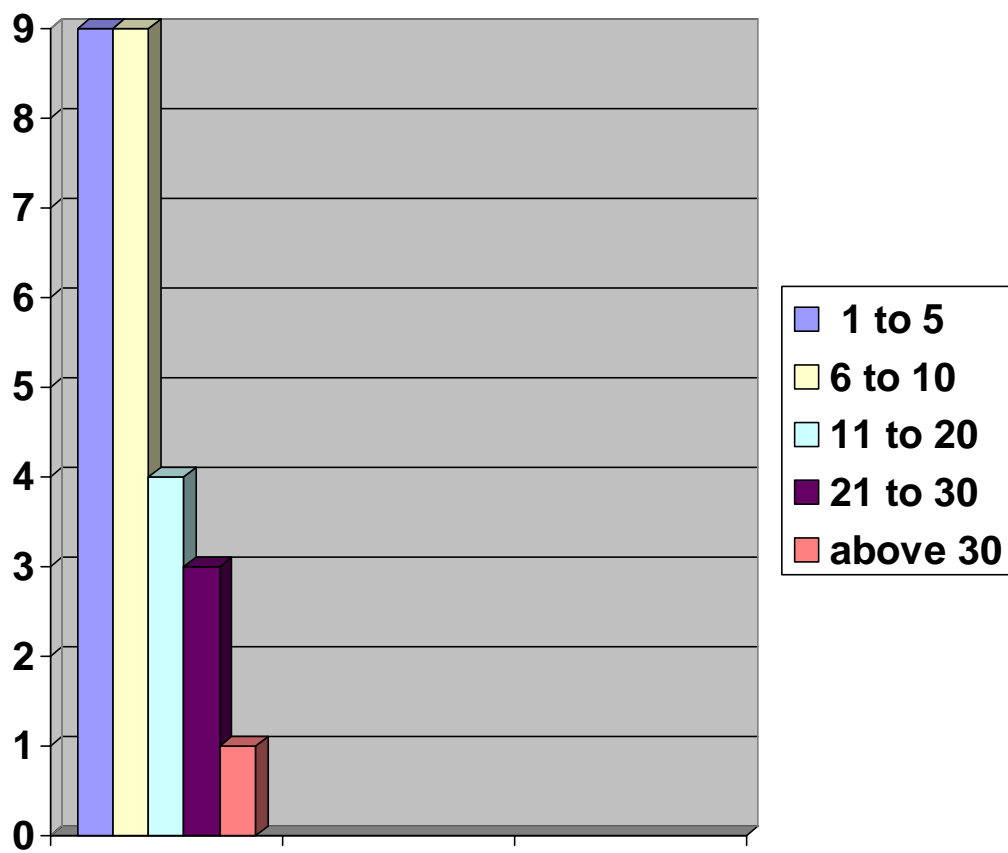
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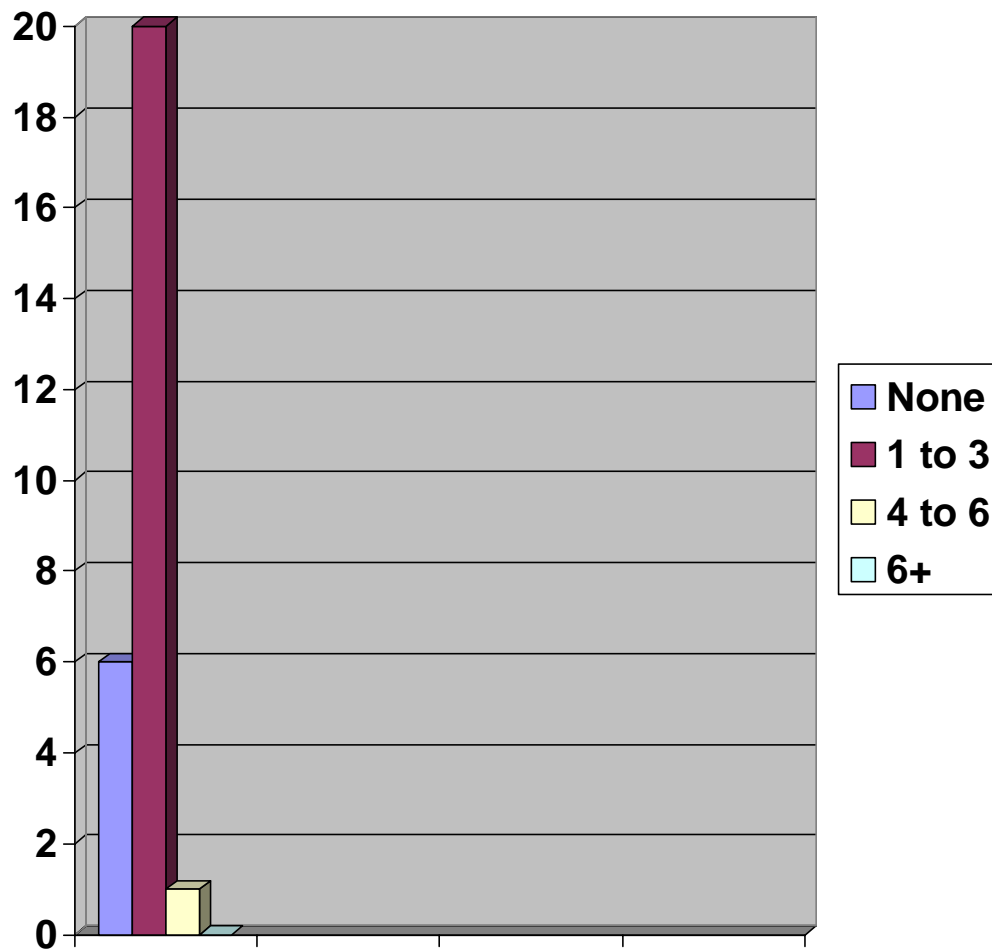
Appendix 1

Number of sworn officers in surveyed agencies



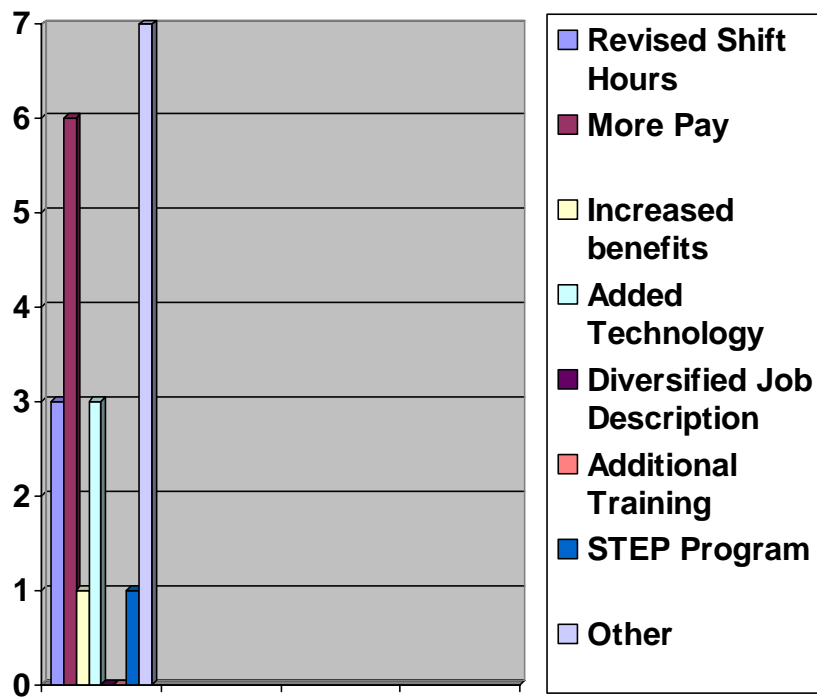
Appendix 2

Surveyed Agency Officer Turnover in 2002



Appendix 3

Surveyed Agencies Strategies of Reducing Turnover



Appendix 4

Survey Letter and Survey

Dear Colleague:

I am currently in the LEMIT Command Leadership College in Texas getting ready to start module 2. As part of my research on small agency turnover, I have prepared a short questionnaire and would appreciate your completing it. You may email the completed questionnaire to me at loumoon@digitalpassage.com.

I sincerely appreciate your assistance. This will aid me immensely in completing my paper.

Sincerely,

Frank Mooney
Chief of Police
Jacksboro PD

Appendix 5
Survey on Turnover in Small Police Departments

Please complete the following questions to the best of your ability based on latest data.
Thank you for your assistance.

1. Number of sworn officers: 1-5 __, 6-10 __, 11-20 __, 21-30 __, 30+ __

2. Number of Officers left during last 12 months: _____

3. Reason for leaving: (Number each)

Another job __, More Pay __, Terminated __, No advancement __,
Benefits __, No equipment __, Hours worked __, other _____

4. Action taken by department to correct problem:

Revised shift hours __	Increased Pay __
Implemented STEP program __	Increased Benefits __
Added Technology __	Diversified job description __
Additional training __	Other _____

5. Have the above measures decreased the turnover rate?

Yes _____ No _____

6. Number of turnovers by sex: Male __ Female __

7. Has your department taken any innovative steps at reducing turnover? _____
If yes, please list the steps taken

8. Is your department in a rural or urban setting? Rural __ Urban __

9. What is your city/county population?

Under 5,000 __ 5,000-15,000 __ 15,000-30,000 __ 30,000-60,000 __
60,000+ __

Please do not put your department name on this survey