

**The Bill Blackwood  
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**

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**Motivating the Members of Law Enforcement to  
Participate in a Voluntary Physical Fitness Program**

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**An Administrative Research Paper  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
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## **ABSTRACT**

Motivating police officers to become physically fit is relevant to contemporary law enforcement because many departments do not have mandatory physical fitness requirements. The nature of the job requires that police officers be physically fit. While there is not a mandate requiring a certain level of physical fitness, there is a need to determine ways to motivate officers to engage in physical fitness activities and maintain those activities. The purpose of this research is to highlight the most effective reinforcement strategies for motivating police officers to become physically fit and maintain that fitness. A review of the literature was conducted, and a survey was sent to 50 participants. The survey was developed based on the literature. The literature review included articles, publications, and internet publications. The researcher discovered that a high percentage of law enforcement officers report to be both extrinsically and intrinsically motivated to participate in a physical fitness program; most report that their job requires minimal time actually spent engaging in activities that require physical fitness.

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## INTRODUCTION

Hoffman and Collingwood (1995) stated: "Research has overwhelmingly shown that the life expectancy, after retirement, for a police officer is much shorter than that of the general population (p. 9). Reasons for this phenomenon are complex and varied, but the main theme running throughout the literature is that of "stress." One could list a host of specific causes of stress, but it is even more important to examine how an individual copes with stress in general. Knowing the research, police officers still do not put enough emphasis on the importance of physical wellness (Hoffman & Collingwood, 1995). When a law enforcement officer maintains the necessary level of fitness, they not only improve job performance, but it also helps to relieve stress (Hoffman & Collingwood, 1995). According to Hoffman and Collingwood (1995), "required levels of fitness are far from those of an Olympic athlete and can be obtained in as little as three hours of training per week" (p. 9). By combining healthy eating and a physical fitness program, law enforcement officers can have a life expectancy that is near their civilian counterparts.

The purpose of this research paper is to identify strategies that will effectively motivate members of law enforcement agencies to participate in physical activities. In 2007, all sworn members of a small north Texas law enforcement agency were administered a physical fitness assessment in order to give each officer a view of his or her level of fitness. Many officers, even after seeing results that showed their level of physical fitness to be poor, were unmoved and displayed a negative attitude towards improvement. Currently, that law enforcement agency has no mandatory standard or level of physical fitness for its officers. No officer or prospective officer is excluded from

employment based on their level of physical fitness. Therefore, it is apparent that without any required criteria for fitness, officers have been unmotivated in improving their physical fitness.

Webster's New World (2006) defines motivation as the act or process of motivating, the condition of being motivated, or a motivating force, stimulus, or influence. It is the reason or reasons for engaging in a particular behavior. This research will explore the concept of motivation and how it impacts law enforcement officers' level of physical fitness. The concepts of reward and reinforcement, as well as intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation, will be examined. Intrinsic motivation occurs when one engages in a behavior without obvious external rewards or reinforcement. There is currently no global theory to explain the origin or elements of this type of motivation. Extrinsic motivation exists when a behavior occurs due to some tangible reward or external pressure. This research will also look at theories of motivation as applied to physical wellness.

The method of inquiry for this research will include a review of multiple sources including books, journal articles, periodicals, and internet resources. Additionally, a motivation survey will be developed and administered to members of a small law enforcement agency and members of other police departments to determine motivation. It would be a faulty assumption that everyone would be motivated by just one approach, so it is necessary to find threads of commonality that can be applied in order to motivate the members of law enforcement. It is anticipated that results from this research will provide specific strategies to utilize with the officers in order to improve physical fitness. Also, it will show officers that a lack of appropriate levels of physical fitness and proper

diet combined with the demands of the job is a disastrous recipe that often leads to premature death or a life that can best be described as circumscribe due to health related conditions. The implications of this research may apply not only to the members of the small law enforcement agency, but any law enforcement officer. As a result, these officers may influence others to become more physically fit.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

There is an obvious and established need for those in law enforcement to engage in physical fitness activities. According to the US Department of Health and Human Services (1998), the benefits of exercise are well documented and understood, but the majority of the population does not practice this belief. For those police departments not mandating participation in a physical fitness program, there is a major issue in how to motivate voluntary participation.

Many theories of motivation abound in the literature, but a detailed discussion of these is beyond the scope of this paper, although a major study would be beneficial. The discussion here will focus mainly on two broad types of motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic reinforcement is internal to the person, i.e. satisfaction or feeling of accomplishment. Although extrinsic motivation is important, intrinsic reinforcement is the key to lasting effects (Peters & Waterman, 1982). According to Dishman, Ickes, and Morgan (1980), intrinsic motivation is the best determinant of adherence to a program of exercise. How one deals with their surroundings is driven innately by self-determination and competence. The need for competence, autonomy, and positive emotions are satisfied by intrinsic reinforcement (Dishman, Ickes, & Morgan, 1980). For example,

actually having a feeling of fun gives more sense of accomplishment and internal satisfaction than that of external rewards gained by winning or pleasing others.

Extrinsic motivation is external to the person, i.e. verbal praise or monetary reward. The American Cancer Society's "Active for Life" is a program that encourages their employees to be physically active. The program includes personal goal setting, self-monitoring, tangible incentives, and team competition. Incentives include a pedometer for all participants. Those who complete the program receive athletic socks, bicycle lights, team prizes, individual rewards, and prize drawings (spa and gift cards). Results showed an increase in physical activity (defined as exercising enough to break a sweat) at ten weeks with maintenance at six months. The three highest ranked motivating factors were: personal goal setting, signing up and making a commitment, and having a pedometer to track their steps. Tangible incentives were less effective, and these included team prizes (as cited in Green, Cheadle, Pellegrini, & Harris, 2007).

Stolovitch, Clack, and Condly (2002) studied motivational incentives (gifts, travel, and money) to increase performance in the workplace. They reviewed the literature, conducted a meta-analysis, and surveyed U.S. organizations that utilize incentive programs. They found that incentives positively and strongly influence workplace performance.

Orlick and Mosher (1978) hypothesized that children would perceive an external reward for performance as controlling, and it would decrease their internal motivation for engaging in an activity, in this case a balance board. They were right. Children who were given a choice with no expected external reward spent more time on the balance board. Lloyd and Fox (1992) studied adolescent girls in a fitness program. They found

that putting the focus on an individualistic orientation increased pleasure and motivation. The competitively focused environment for the other group resulted in less pleasure and motivation. Seifriz, Duda, and Chi (1992) found that increased pleasure and intrinsic motivation resulted when an individually orientated climate was provided for high school basketball players during practice. When a competitive performance oriented environment was provided, the players experienced less pleasure and intrinsic motivation.

A study by Weinberg and Jackson (1979) showed that the subject's perception of competence moderated changes in intrinsic motivation. Thus, they were motivated by improvements in competence, not external rewards or recognition. Hence, without self-efficacy (the belief that an individual can achieve something), extrinsic motivation may be necessary to increase participation in physical fitness activities. It was found that the individuals who hold unfavorable attitudes and also have neither the skills nor the opportunities to exercise may actually form intentions to participate.

This brief review of the literature shows that intrinsic motivation is more effective in the increase and maintenance of individual's participation in physical fitness activity. Intrinsic sources and corresponding theories can be further subcategorized as either body/physical, mind/mental (cognitive, affective, cognitive), or transpersonal/spiritual. This paper intends to ascertain those motivational incentives, both intrinsic and extrinsic, that will most effectively influence law enforcement officers to participate in a voluntary physical fitness program as well as maintain that participation throughout their lifetime.



## METHODOLOGY

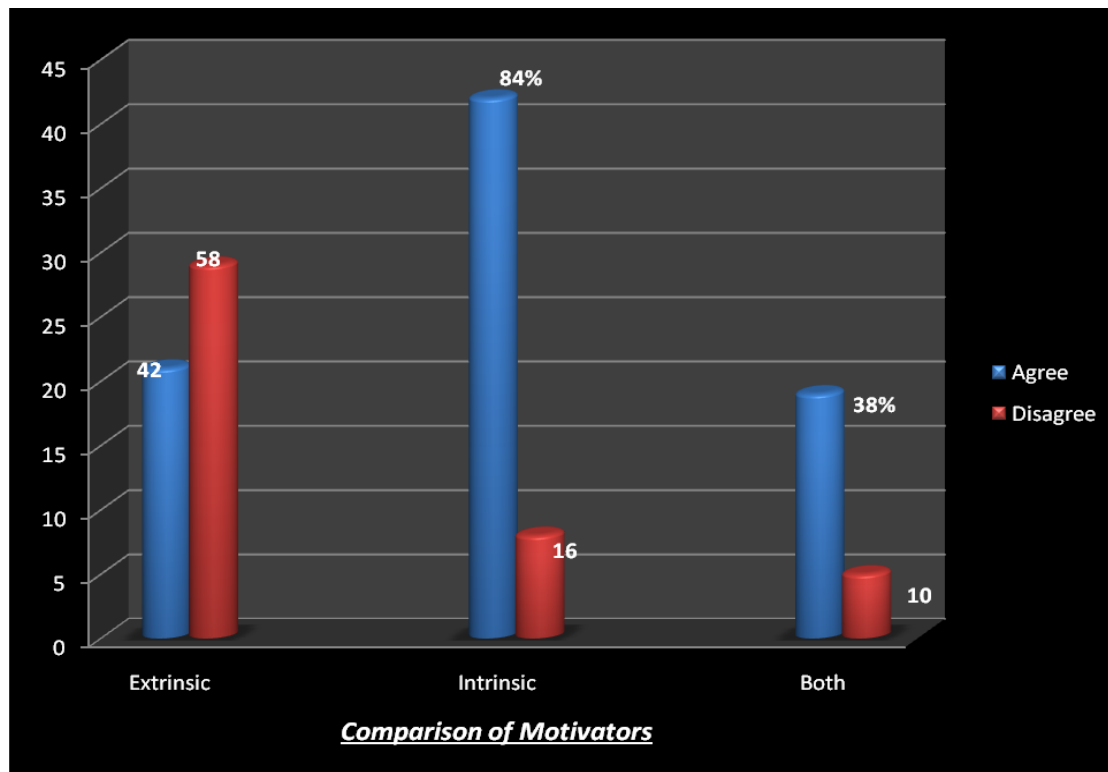
The research question to be examined considers whether or not police officers are motivated best by intrinsic versus extrinsic reinforcement. This researcher hypothesizes that police officers are motivated more by intrinsic reinforcement; however, extrinsic reinforcement may be needed (to a lesser extent) in the beginning phases. Goal setting and setting personal challenges will be most effective in maintaining a physical fitness regimen.

The method of inquiry will consist of a survey that has 18 items with a 4-point Likert scale. The survey will ask respondents to list age, gender, years of service, position, and whether their department has a mandatory program of fitness. The majority of questions will ask about motivating factors, including extrinsic and intrinsic factors. There will also be questions that ask respondents the number of hours per week they perform duties that require them to be physically fit and if they feel that being physically fit is important to their job.

This survey was distributed to 50 peace officers from the state of Texas. Twenty-three of the surveys were given to participants in Module II at the Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas (LEMIT). Additionally, 20 were given to all members of a small law enforcement agency, and seven were given to officers from surrounding law enforcement agencies. All of the questionnaires that were distributed were returned. The information obtained from the survey will be analyzed by statistical analysis to determine if there are specific motivators that can be identified, whether intrinsic or extrinsic, to develop a program that would elicit the most participation in some form of a voluntary physical fitness regimen.

## FINDINGS

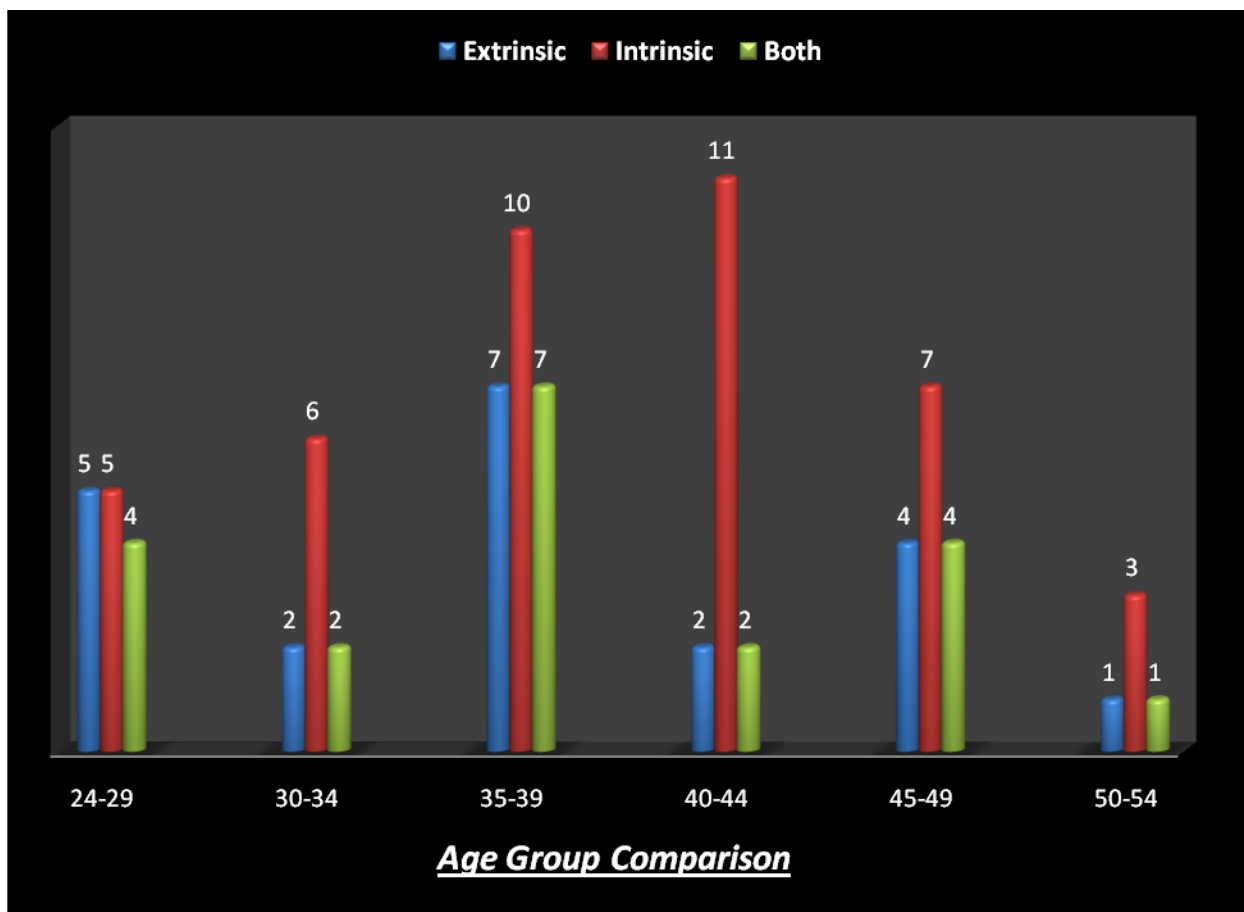
Of respondents surveyed, 42% agreed that they were extrinsically motivated to engage in physical fitness training, 84% agreed that they were intrinsically motivated, and 38% were motivated both extrinsically and intrinsically. Ten percent were not motivated extrinsically or intrinsically.



**Figure 1.** Percentages for whether participants believed they were motivated by intrinsic or extrinsic motivation

In looking at the age of officers as related to levels of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation for physical fitness training, 83% of those aged 24-29 were extrinsically motivated, and 83% were intrinsically motivated. Sixty-six percent were motivated both extrinsically and intrinsically. Of those in the 30-34 age group, 29% were extrinsically motivated, 83% were intrinsically motivated, and 29% were motivated by both. In the

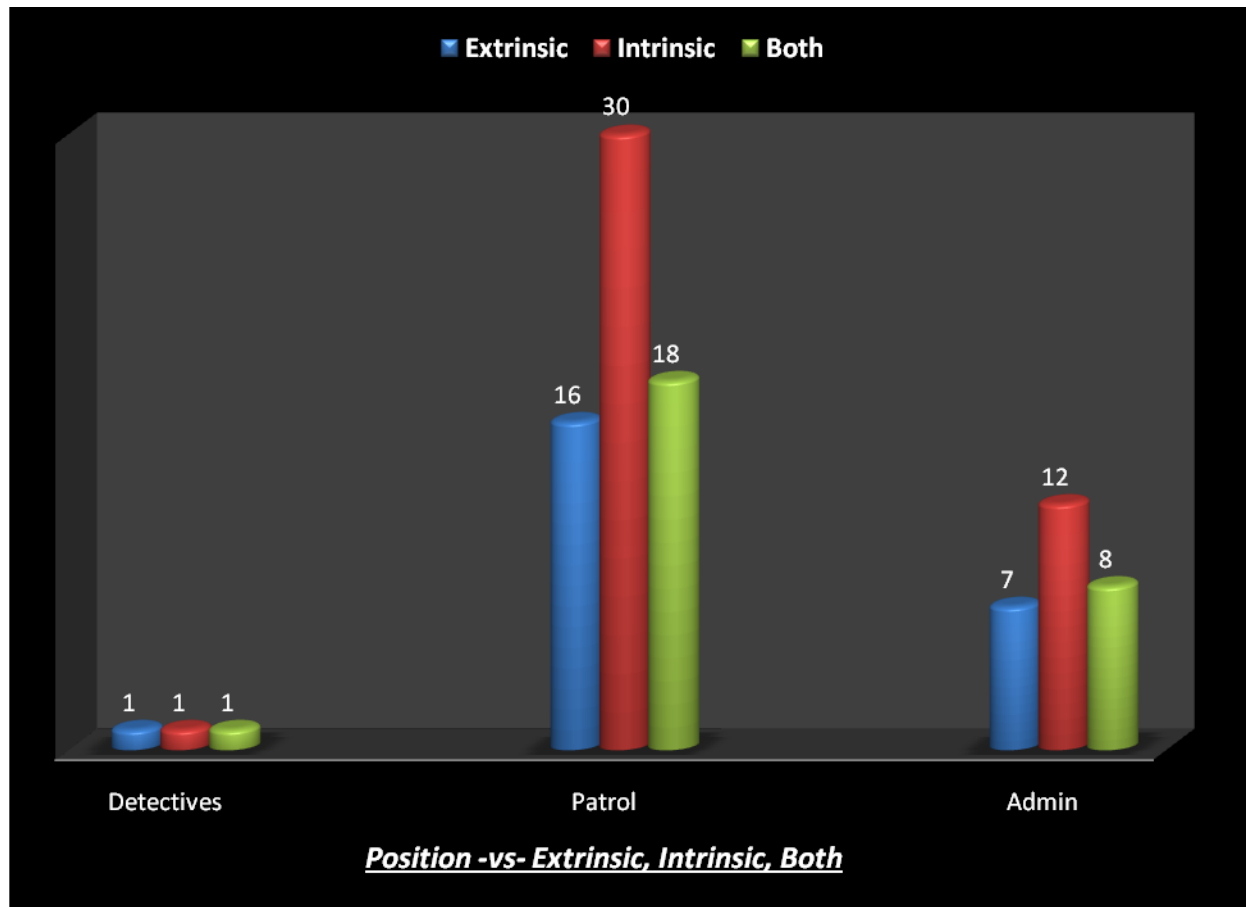
35-39 age group, 58% were motivated extrinsically, 83% were motivated intrinsically, and 17% were motivated by both. For the 40-44 age group, 18% were extrinsically motivated, 100% were intrinsically motivated, and 18% were motivated both extrinsically and intrinsically. In the 45-49 age group, 44% were extrinsically motivated, 77% were intrinsically motivated, and 22% were motivated by both. In the 50-54 age group, 20% were extrinsically motivated, 60% were intrinsically motivated, and 20% were motivated by both. Overall, 60%-100% were intrinsically motivated.



**Figure 2.** Comparison of age groups and whether participants were motivated by extrinsic or intrinsic motivation or both.

In regards to employment position, 86% of patrol officers were intrinsically motivated, and 46% were extrinsically motivated. Fifty-one percent of patrol officers

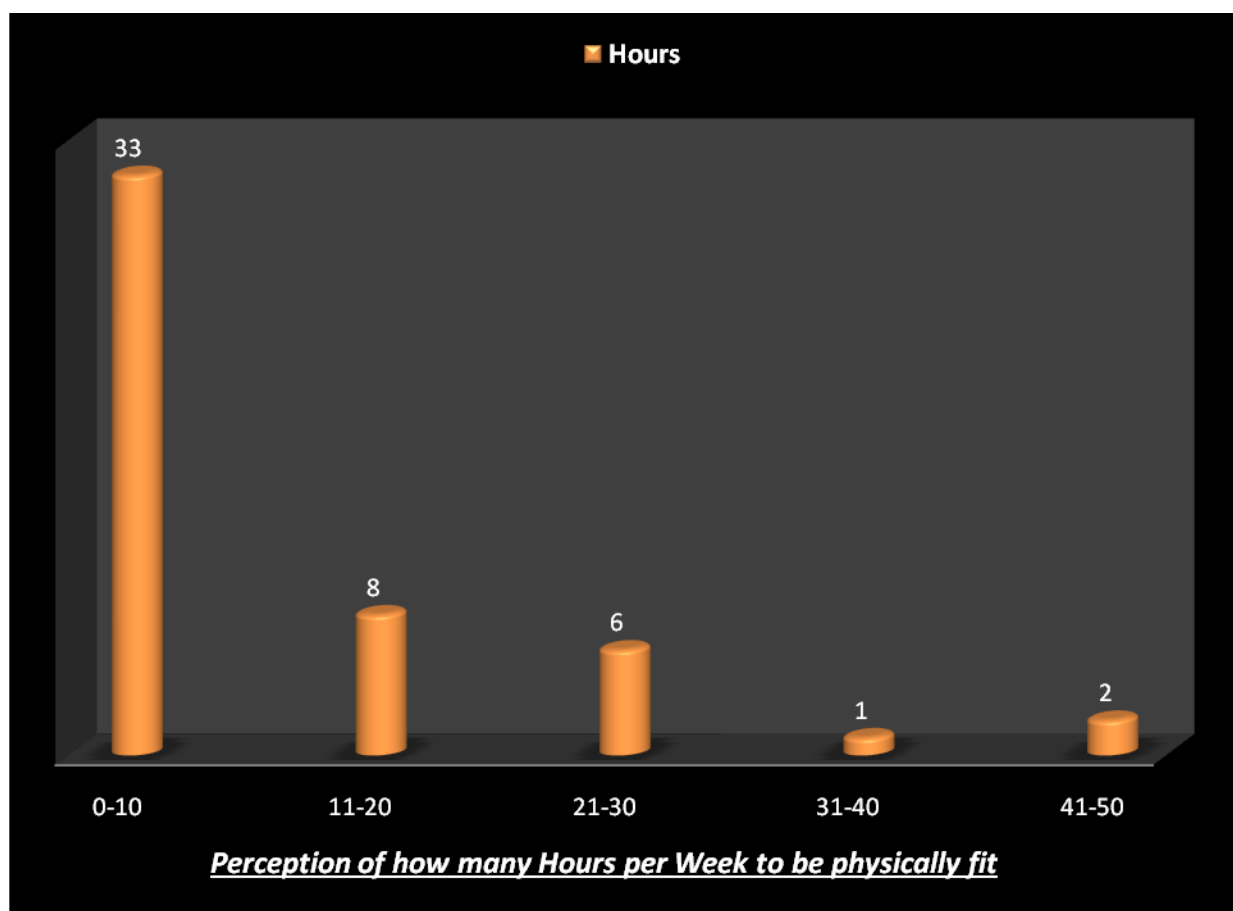
were motivated by both, and 11% were not motivated by either. Administrative officers were 86% intrinsically motivated and 50% extrinsically motivated. Fifty-seven percent of administrators were motivated by both, and 3% were not motivated by either. Only one detective was surveyed, so the data was not statistically significant.



**Figure 3.** Comparison of employment position and how intrinsically or extrinsically motivated they were.

When considering how many hours per week were needed to perform duties that required the officer to be physically fit, 66% of those surveyed indicated they spent ten or fewer hours in activities that require physical fitness. Sixteen percent indicated they spent 11 to 20 hours completing duties that require a level of fitness. Twelve percent spent 21 to 30 hours on performing duties that require fitness, and 2% spent 31

to 40 hours of duties that require a high level of fitness. Four percent felt they spent 41 to 50 hours per week needing to perform duties that require physical fitness.



**Figure 4.** Perception of how many hours per week each officer felt their job requires them to be physically fit

## DISCUSSION/CONCLUSIONS

The problem or issue examined by this researcher considered whether or not, and in what ways, law enforcement officers can be motivated to engage in a physical fitness program. The purpose of this research was to identify strategies that effectively motivate members of law enforcement to participate in physical activities, whether it is intrinsic, extrinsic, or a combination of both. This research focused on intrinsic and

extrinsic motivation as a means to increase participation in a physical fitness program. The researcher hypothesized that when the type of motivator is ascertained, then law enforcement officers will be motivated to participate in a physical fitness program. This researcher concluded that regardless of a law enforcement officer's level of motivation for engaging in a physical fitness program, whether motivated extrinsically, intrinsically, or both, when the perceived level of actual time spent in duties requiring physical fitness is low, the officer is less likely to engage in a program of physical fitness. What stands out from this research is that there appears to be a disconnect between what they report as motivators and what their perceptions of needed fitness is necessary to perform their job duties.

According to the results of this research, a police department can offer all the incentives they desire to no avail. Without changing officer perception of the amount of time spent in job duties that require physical fitness, officers are not likely to participate in a physical fitness program. This occurred regardless of age or rank. Age of officer did not determine motivation, whether it was extrinsic, intrinsic, or both, nor did being a patrol officer or administrative officer. Motivation alone played little role in law enforcement officer participation in a physical fitness program.

The findings of this research did not support the hypothesis as officer perception of actual application of physical fitness on the job is low. In conclusion, whether or not a law enforcement officer was motivated to participate in a physical fitness program, it had little effect if the officer perceived less application in actual duties as an officer. This conclusion opens the door for future research. Limitations might have hindered this study because the survey was given to a small number of law enforcement agencies.

Included in the study group were two captive audiences: the first of these being Module II of LEMIT participants, and the second being members of a small law enforcement agency. The participants of Module II were comprised of all supervisory personnel who spend the majority of their duty time inside an office, and their perception of the percentage of physical fitness may be lower. The members of the small law enforcement agency do not have a mandatory fitness program or pre-employment physical testing, and they are not currently rewarded or reprimanded for their status of physical fitness.

The study for the need for those in law enforcement to engage in physical fitness activities is relevant to contemporary law enforcement because it has been shown that law enforcement officers are less fit and die earlier than those in the general population. A study conducted by the Cooper Institute for Aerobics Research over the course of ten years looked at 1,700 different law enforcement officers from across the country, and it showed that law enforcement officers are less fit in most areas than that at least half of all U.S. citizens. This is despite the fact that the physical demands of their profession require that they be more fit than the average person (Collingwood, Hoffman, & Samman, 1998). As a group, law enforcement has a greater mortality rate than the general public due mostly to cardiovascular disease, colon cancer, and suicide (Collingwood et al., 1998). Members of law enforcement have a physically strenuous job, and it is critical that they are prepared to handle the hazards of the job because the physical fitness of a police officer is a crucial part of survival.

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## APPENDIX

### SURVEY OF MOTIVATING FACTORS IN ENGAGING IN PHYSICAL FITNESS ACTIVITIES

Age \_\_\_\_\_ Gender \_\_\_\_\_ Length of service \_\_\_\_\_ Position \_\_\_\_\_

Does your department have a mandatory fitness program? Yes or No (circle one)

Instructions: Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with each of the following by circling the appropriate number.

	strongly disagree	somewhat disagree	somewhat agree	strongly agree
I am motivated by an annual physical fitness test.	1	2	3	4
I am motivated to exercise by praise from peers.	1	2	3	4
I am motivated to exercise by praise from superiors.	1	2	3	4
I am motivated to exercise by comp time.	1	2	3	4
I am motivated to exercise by monetary rewards.	1	2	3	4
I am motivated to exercise by earning a fitness bar as reward.	1	2	3	4
I am motivated to exercise by competition to win an award.	1	2	3	4
I am motivated by tangibles such as special t-shirts, etc.	1	2	3	4
I am motivated to exercise by peer pressure.	1	2	3	4
I am motivated to exercise by working out with a friend.	1	2	3	4

I am motivated to exercise by being given time during the work day to do it.	1	2	3	4
I am motivated to exercise by seeing others exercise.	1	2	3	4
I am motivated to exercise to improve my physical appearance.	1	2	3	4
I am motivated to exercise to improve my health.	1	2	3	4
I am motivated to exercise if I have set personal goals.	1	2	3	4
I am motivated to exercise to improve my athletic ability.	1	2	3	4
I am motivated to exercise in order to meet the challenge.	1	2	3	4
Being physically fit is important to my job.	1	2	3	4

How many hours per week do you perform duties that require you to be physically fit?

\_\_\_\_\_