

LAW ENFORCEMENT MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE of TEXAS

PHYSICAL FITNESS PROGRAMS FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT PERSONNEL
IMPLEMENTATION INTO A DEPARTMENT

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BY JONEVA M.
ROGERSON

WACO INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT
POLICE DEPARTMENT
WACO, TEXAS
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ABSTRACT

From the beginning of an officer's career the officer must be in good shape. While in training for the academy the officer goes through extensive training both mentally and physically. The officer gets into the department then the officer's physical state in most cases is gone. The number of physical calls an officer gets in one month might be five (5). Then the day comes when the officer has to ensue a foot pursuit on a fleeing felon. The officer overworks the heart and collapses. This officer had no physical fitness program.

The way law enforcement agencies can stop the risk of heart attack, stroke and obesity is by implementation of a wellness and fitness program. To determine if a discrepancy exists in keeping our police officers physically fit thirty (30) Texas police departments were surveyed. All but three (3) departments did not have a fitness and wellness program for the officers. On the other hand, fifteen departments have fitness facilities available to the officers and twelve departments had nothing at all. Though most if not all of these departments expect applicants to perform and pass an entry-level fitness test.

The majority of the literature utilized in this research continues to indicate the strong need for officer's to be on some sort of physical fitness and wellness plan or program. This is beneficial to the department as well as the officer for health as well as safety purposes.

It is concluded that a police department without a fitness program holds itself liable for the physical condition of its officers. This could be detrimental to the department and its officers.

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INTRODUCTION

In the United States, it is believed that the one person in the professional world that should be physically fit is the police officer. This issue deserves close examination. The joke for years was that all Police officers did was hang out in donut shops for hours. This myth has come to halt. Today more and more officers have come to realize that if they are physically fit they not only feel better but can perform their job better and have a better outlook on life in general (Strandberg, 2000).

In theory it can be said that every police agency should establish physical fitness standards that will insure every officer's physical fitness and satisfactory job performance throughout their entire career. Although many agencies have minimum physical standards at the entry level, few, if any, have adequate physical conditioning and weight control programs beyond the recruit level. (Strandberg, 2000).

If a police officer is physically unfit they face not only putting their life in danger as well as the life of others. For many days an officer can go through the shift with just the minimal calls. But there will come that one day when he/she will have to do any of the following a foot pursuit, breaking up a fight or a struggle to regain his/her weapon and run the risk of getting brutally injured or even killed. With a Physical Fitness program in place the officers will realize that this is not for punishment but for the betterment of the officers, their safety and one day their life(Strandberg,2000).

In this study Legal Considerations are researched in Parker v. District of Columbia, an officer shot an unarmed offender whom he (the officer) could not subdue. The court found in favor of the plaintiff after considering two issues: failure to train the officer in arrest procedure and deficient physical fitness programs. The court concluded that the officer's condition posed a foreseeable risk of harm to others due to his inadequate physical condition. Records indicated the officer had no training in these areas for years.(Strandberg, 2000).

In 1971, George R. Stevens conducted a research project comparing the results of recruit school physical fitness program of the Los Angeles Police Department and the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department.

Stevens found that the level of recruit physical fitness failed to progress, and even began to deteriorate, during interruptions of formal physical training lasting up to only one (1) to three (3) weeks(Stevens, 1971).

According to the American Heart Association, a person in poor condition who attempts sudden strenuous physical activity runs a relatively high risk of injury, strain, or heart attack. But the person who exercises regularly runs a lower risk of heart-- attacks .than those who failed to keep in shape and exercise(American Heart Association, 1968).

The anticipated outcome of this study will assist in the development and understand the importance of being physically sound in every way, thus gaining confidence in themselves. Being fit is more than just exercising, it includes check-ups and checking body fat, heart rates and blood pressure.

It is hypothesized that a physical fitness program will benefit officers

performance on the job. The research question that will guide this study is:

"What benefits can be concluded by the development and implementation of a physical fitness program for a Law Enforcement Agency?"

The method of inquiry for this research includes journals, articles, and books pertaining to physical fitness issues and police. Additionally, a survey will be conducted by interviewing police officers who belong to police agencies with physical fitness programs in place to explore the issue of physical fitness and police.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In the law enforcement field the broad spectrum of cardio vascular pathologies such as stroke, hypertension, and heart attack have been studied and implicated along with cigarette smoking, family history, obesity, diabetes, stress and physical inactivity as increasing one's risk of Coronary Heart Disease (Heart facts, 1981). The potential beneficial action of regular exercise is so dependent upon a multiplicity of factors, that physical inactivity alone is difficult to isolate and assess.

In a study conducted by Morris, Adam, Chave, and Sirey, (1973), they investigated the incidence of Coronary Heart Disease among London postal workers. Groups of postal workers were classified according to activity level. The more active the postman, walking routes, were found to have a total incidence of Cardio Heart Disease lower than the more sedentary grades of postal clerks and telephone operators. If this study is applied to Law Enforcement personnel a strong similarity could be found. The officer that

performs some type of cardio vascular training two to three times a week is less likely to fall prey to a heart attack or stroke. This officer will perform the job better and have more confidence in themselves when in a physical confrontation with a perpetrator.

The mechanism by which physical activity exerts its proposed protective effect is not known. Regular exercise has been shown to be a strong factor in altering the classical modifiable cardiovascular risk factors. It has also been shown to lower serum triglyceride levels. As a result, exercisers tend to assume a more prudent health-conscious life style, which may actually be part of the total contribution to establishing the mechanisms of increased cardiovascular health.

The Physiological Effects of Exercise Conditioning will be discussed next. Physiological changes occurring with chronic physical exercise are the results of progressive overload on the musculoskeletal and cardiopulmonary systems. These physical changes resulting from the body's adaptive responses involve a variety of changes in the skeletal muscle fibers, endocrine, nervous, respiratory and circulatory systems. The review will be limited in this study to changes reflected in the cardiovascular-respiratory system, musculoskeletal system and the neurohormonal system. According to Astrand (1968), aerobic capacity for women past the age of 18 years may be 70 to 75% that of men. Pollock (1978) found that women can have maximal oxygen uptake values 10 to 20% lower than men of the same age, while McArdie, Katch, and Katch (1981) report that sex differences account for female maximal oxygen values 10% below those recorded for men. In both sexes, there are gradual declines in maximal oxygen

intake with increased age.

The increase in physical activity can be attributed to an increase in knowledge concerning the benefits of physical fitness with regard to cardiovascular disease. The benefits of an aerobic endurance training program (e.g. running, cycling, swimming) on cardiovascular fitness have been well researched (Cooper, 1970; deVries, 1974); but, as concluded by Horne (1975), most of this research has taken place at the university level with university aged subjects, and more research in this field needs to be done using middle aged, sedentary individuals. A study by Cooper, Pollock, Martin, White, Linnerund and Jackson (1976), was done to try to quantify the status of cardiorespiratory fitness and risk factor variables, and to document their possible relationship.

Approximately 3,000 men averaging 44.6 years of age were examined for blood and lipid profile, pulmonary function, percent body fat and maximal performance stress testing. Five aged- adjusted cardiorespiratory fitness categories were determined from treadmill times. Results indicated a direct inverse relationship between levels of cardiorespiratory fitness and variables related to higher coronary heart disease risk. The difference- in coronary- heart disease risk was minimal for adjacent levels of fitness groups, but became more pronounced among the groups with greater differences in levels of fitness. These data strongly support the belief that protection from coronary heart disease appears to be associated with a higher level of fitness.

Total body fat measuring is important. Total body fat is generally reduced with endurance training programs, while lean body weight may remain constant

or increase slightly (A.C.S.M., 1980). The American College of Sports Medicine Position Statement on Recommended Quantity and Quality of exercise for Developing and Maintaining Fitness in Healthy Adults (1978), recommends that programs conducted at least three days a week for twenty (20) minutes, and expending 300 calories per session will show reductions in total body weight and percent body fat. Training two (2) days per week did improve cardiovascular functions, but had no effect on body composition.

Flexibility is a major component in muscular fitness as it contributes to better performances and less injury. This is where the law enforcement field needs to be alert and aware of the possibilities of chronic back pain ailments. Lack of flexibility, poor posture, and abdominal muscle weakness particularly in middle-aged and older adults, will often lead to chronic back pain ailment (Sharkey, 1979; Pollock, Wilmore, and Fox, 1978). A significant portion of lower back problems were due to lack of flexibility in the hamstring muscles, hip flexors, and lower back muscles. Regularly performed static stretching exercises will improve flexibility. A recommended warm-up and muscle conditioning period of static stretching to increase and maintain flexibility, and since the flexibility of a particular joint is specific to that joint, all major joints should be individually warmed up. While there are two general types of stretching, static and ballistic, the static is preferred. Static stretching causes less chance of damage to joint tissue as well as being found to help prevent and relieve muscle soreness. Endurance activity such as jogging, swimming or cross-country skiing all depends on full range of motion in major joints. Reduced flexibility of the

extensor muscles of the hip, knee, and ankle can lead to fatigue, back pain and joint instability, as well as hinder efficient execution of job performance on the officer's part.

Physical fitness and the benefits of the of an implemented fair fitness program. The goals of a fair fitness program include the following: (a) improve and maintain general fitness levels of officers, (b) decrease health care costs, (c) decrease absenteeism, (d) increase productivity and (e) increase officer morale.

METHODOLOGY

Many police officers consider themselves invincible because they are the police and they are confident that their training with firearms will resolve the majority of the situations. Relying on firearms as a means to protect officers and apprehend offenders frequently falls short. So why do Law Enforcement agencies need some type of physical fitness program? It is hypothesized that implementation of such a fitness program will reduce physical injury, lower stress level, create a better work environment and lower days taken for illness.

In order to research other departments that have a fitness program a survey was taken in Module I and II of Leadership Command College of Texas. The departments range from large departments to small departments, county sheriffs departments, and college police departments to independent school district police departments. Six questions were asked. Three of these questions pertain to department policy and procedure on fitness programs and the other three were about incentives offered for fitness programs and medical

examination requirements.

FINDINGS

For the most part the survey showed what was expected. Very few if any departments actually have a physical fitness program in effect for the officers, however, most departments have exercise facilities for the officers to utilize. By implementing a physical fitness program all officers will be healthier, look better and project a more positive image to the Law Enforcement Organization. A clean clear physically fit police officer is the image that should be projected in law enforcement organizations.

A sedentary officer probably prefers to remain sedentary. The officers need motivation to become fit and healthy, this can be done through perks or punishments. If the officer gets fit through force or voluntarily the officers is the ultimate winner, simply because they are healthier, present a better image and will feel better about themselves. When this happens the officer becomes more productive. As general population becomes more fit and health-conscious recruits enter the ranks, the law enforcement attitude to health and fitness will continue to change. The most difficult issue is standards for all officers. Most departments do not have standards for the veteran officers, and as a long-term result of this policy, have a decidedly unhealthy workforce. The department may be held liable for the unfit officer who fails in their ability to perform basic police duties as it is for an officer neglecting their duty. The courts are just beginning to recognize that police officers are athletes and must be able to perform certain

tasks to be effective. In 1988, in U.S. v. City of Wichita Falls, et al., the court held that the city could conduct physical assessment test for persons seeking employment with the police department; additionally, the training academy could require physical agility testing after recruits had entered the academy. (The Police Chief, 1992). In another court case (Kevin Scott v. The state of Vermont) In 1999, Scott was relieved of duty for not meeting the physical standards after three (3) attempts. The Vermont State Police Department made every attempt to help Scott get his 1 % mile run in the allotted amount of time, Scott was even offered to be able to ride a bike in the place of running. This case was dismissed and Scott was relieved of duty.

If weight control and periodic physical examinations are going to be effective, the correction of negative conditions should be required within a realistic time limit and should be supervised by a specialist. Adequate, convenient gymnasium facilities should also be provided. This should pose no problem for large agencies; smaller agencies might utilize local schools or the local YMCA or other facilities within the city. Some gyms offer a discount for police and fire departments to utilize their facility.

If job relatedness is established and documented, then the fitness tests, standards and programs can discriminate against anybody. It is important to implement tests /standards/programs that do discriminate between those who can, and cannot do the job regardless of age, gender, race or handicap condition.

Legal counsel at the FBI Academy in Quantico, Virginia, suggest the

following recommendations for a fitness program:

As a first step, begin a mandatory wellness program, which would include the provision of information on a healthier lifestyle such as nutrition, smoking cessation and the benefits of exercise. A physical examination could also be included. Be aware of and avoid any negative impact that might occur, particularly on a protected group, until the program is deemed job related. Before implementing any mandatory standard, consult with fitness experts and legal counsel to determine the legality of the program to be implemented.

Other legal concerns might be safety. The agency must document in writing the policies and procedures that meet the "standard of ordinary care" as demonstrated by the American College of Sports Medicine. If an agency does not address the fitness requirements and needs of officers is susceptible to litigation for the following: Negligent hiring of applicants who are fit to do the job. Negligent training of recruits and incumbents so that they are physically capable of doing the job. Negligent supervision of incumbents to ensure that they can meet the physical demands of the job. Negligent retention of officers who cannot meet the physical demands of the job. There has been one court case (Parker vs Washington, DC Police Department 1988) in which the agency was found negligent for not requiring a physical fitness program for officers.

There are many benefits of implementing a physical fitness program. Establishing an officer's weakness and strengths, or body strength. This can then be compared with other officers and if improvement is needed to do the job then the officer is aware of the type of fitness program they need to go on to develop

their skills and strengthen their body. Thus making and all around better officer.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

So, we ask why implement a physical fitness and wellness into a Law Enforcement Agency? By implementing a physical fitness program all officers would be healthier, look better and project a more positive image to the Law Enforcement Organization. A clean clear physically fit police officer is the image that should be projected in law enforcement. A cop on the street should be physically fit. That's why most police academies stress the physical part of law enforcement, the reason physical standards exists. A cop on the beat is the symbol of the entire police force, and a trim, fit cop is much better able to handle all the demands and pressures of the job. Police officers have to be alert and ready for action at any time, even though that action might be days, weeks or even months apart. On top of that, it takes physical fitness and real skill to subdue a criminal, or chase down a fleeing felon.

Law enforcement officers take an oath to protect and serve the citizens of their communities, yet due to unfit physical conditions, the officer is sometimes put in jeopardy along with members of the community.

It was hypothesized that a physical fitness program will benefit officers' performance on the job. The available literature strengthens the belief that there is a need for an officer to be in the best physical shape they can be in. Given the opportunity, motivation and a gymnasium most officers would bring their physical appearance and condition up to a standard that was reasonable for all officers. It

is understood that the standard are slightly less for older officers, however that should not stop any officer from wanting to be and feel the best they can. Ideally all sworn personnel should be required to meet the physical standards set by their department, this is to include the Chief, and you must lead by example. Healthy chief healthy department. Ideally a fitness coordinator will have been trained, certified as a Physical Fitness Specialist to implement as fitness program based on the standard of ordinary care.

A given agency has the latitude to implement physical fitness testing, standards and programs. No one can legitimately argue that physical fitness is not job related. The key factor and the one necessitating considerable planning, thought, research and effort is what level of physical fitness is going to be required of the officer to do the job? In plain english, which fitness standards will be chosen and implemented. The standard your agency selects for applicants, recruits and other enforcement personnel must have the legal, scientific and practical issues. Healthy life styles are not hereditary they are a result of education and commitment. It all starts at the top if the chief of police cares about the health issues and the physical status of his officers, the feeling is communicated throughout the department.

The final results of this study indicate that the lack of physical activity in a police officers life could very well be detrimental to their health. The outcome of the research should provide law enforcement officials a multitude of information supporting the fact that every department should implement a physical fitness program for all officers. This is for the safety and protection of, not only the

citizens but the officer as well. Healthy officers equal officers who feel good, look good and stay alive longer.

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POLICE PHYSICAL FITNESS QUESTIONARE

1. *ROGERGON WISD POLICE DEPARTMENT*

LCCI ARP ORAL PRESENTATION

JUNE 26, 2000 TEXAS A&M

Please answer the following questions to the best of your knowledge. These survey questions will be used in a research paper to possibly implement a physical fitness program in accordance with Texas Standards On Law Enforcement. After extensive research is completed. Your cooperation is greatly appreciated.

1. Name of your agency
2. Does your agency have a mandatory physical fitness program currently in operation?
Y N
3. Are all sworn personnel, regardless of rank, assignment or age required to participate?
Y N
4. Are there incentives utilized to increase the participation in the physical fitness program.
Y N
5. Does your department provide a facility for physical conditioning and training?
Y N
6. Are officers required to get yearly Physical examinations? Y N

Thank you for your participation.

Name

Agency Address

Agency E-Mail Address

Agency Phone Number