

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

**The Recruitment and Selection of
Ethical Police Candidates**

**An Administrative Research Paper
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ABSTRACT

The recruitment and selection of ethical police candidates is relevant to contemporary law enforcement because it is growing increasingly difficult for society to maintain their trust in public servants. Police officers are regularly portrayed negatively in media headlines as a result of making poor ethical related decisions and personal actions. One of the most notable recent national headline grabbers was the “Rampart” Scandal in Los Angeles, California where several officers of an anti-drug unit were indicted on corruption charges including torture, murder, drug dealing, and framing innocent people. Eight San Antonio, Texas police officers were arrested in 2001 for plotting to protect cocaine deliveries after a federal drug sting. A Dallas, Texas police officer was arrested after collecting “protection money” from a store in a Vietnamese community. The officer attempted to increase the amount of money required from \$400.00 to \$500.00 per week which resulted in the owner of the store calling police.

These are just a few of today’s headlines; police officers are in the news on a regular basis for being terminated, disciplined, or resigning as a result of unethical choices such as theft or lying. The purpose of this research is to determine if police departments and other law enforcement agencies can successfully recruit quality applicants and hire candidates with strong ethical backgrounds by implementing recruiting practices that specifically address acceptable ethical behavior. In order to fully evaluate this topic, there were various methods of inquiry reviewed and utilized. Primary research included the review of published books as well as magazine articles, journal articles, and previously submitted administrative research papers from the Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas (LEMIT).

The research revealed that law enforcement agencies are facing a serious dilemma in being able to hire qualified applicants and that ethically related behavior is essential for all police officers. It was also determined that there is a need for the specific recruitment of ethical candidates in order to simplify and speed up the selection process. This will also improve the overall quality of police officers, thus sustaining a professional image for all of law enforcement. Recruiting and hiring police officers with strong ethical backgrounds helps build and maintain the necessary trust between law enforcement and the public.

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INTRODUCTION

The recruitment and selection of ethical police candidates is a dilemma being faced by law enforcement across the nation. It is growing increasingly difficult for agencies and departments to expect and require a high moral standard of police applicants in today's society. Police candidates must also be expected to uphold ethically acceptable principals throughout their careers. Along with the shrinking applicant pool, the quality of candidates applying for jobs in law enforcement has decreased steadily in recent years (Ayers, 2005).

Law enforcement officers have always been held to a high ethical standard and code of conduct. In order for officers to maintain the standards expected of them, it is essential that they learned and lived ethically as young adults. Unethical police officers are often found in today's headlines and are portrayed poorly by the media. In Los Angeles, California several of the area officers operated a violent home invasion/robbery ring. In Dallas, Texas, numerous drug convictions and court cases were overturned when it was determined that officers were arresting and charging individuals for possession of cocaine when, in reality, it was ground up sheetrock. The officers testified that the substance tested positive for cocaine and were later found to have perjured themselves, which resulted in a federal civil rights investigation. This has a profoundly negative effect on the law enforcement field as a whole.

The purpose of this research is to determine whether agencies are able to develop alternative techniques and methods to recruit quality applicants with high ethical standards. Departments must also decide if they can maintain their entry standards in today's changing society or if they will be forced to lower their standards

in order to recruit an acceptable number of police candidates. Many agencies have begun lowering their standards in order to draw a larger pool of applicants. This can have a negative effect on law enforcement as a result of agencies lowering expectations, thus settling for officers with less than acceptable ethical standards.

The question to be examined is whether or not police departments and law enforcement agencies can recruit and hire candidates with strong ethical backgrounds in today's society. This examination will also address whether quality applicants can be recruited in numbers large enough to keep agencies from having to lower their entry standards and maintain a viable applicant pool. In order to fully evaluate this topic, there will be various methods of inquiry reviewed and utilized. Primary research will include the review of published books as well as magazine articles, journal articles, and previously submitted administrative research papers from the Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas (LEMIT). All of these methods will be utilized to obtain information relevant to how law enforcement agencies and departments are impacted by what are considered acceptable ethical standards.

It is anticipated that this research will determine that the majority of law enforcement agencies have been adversely affected by what acceptable ethical standards are as evidenced by shrinking pools of qualified applicants. The anticipated results of this research will show that most agencies are not willing to lower their standards despite the dwindling pool of qualified applicants. High ethical standards must be required of all candidates in order to preserve the professionalism in law enforcement demanded by society. Recruiting qualified applicants is a concern to all those involved in law enforcement, as well as the community it serves. Society will

benefit from maintaining and expecting a high level of ethical standards from police candidates. It has been stated that past behavior is an excellent predictor of future behavior, thus it can be expected that if an applicant brings a high level of ethical standards to their law enforcement career when they begin, then they will maintain those same standards throughout it. This will result in a more positive and professional image of police officers everywhere, which, in turn, assists in building trust with the public. Wallace (2007) stated, "When citizens view the actions of their police agencies as being fair and ethical, their trust and respect for the organization in individual members of that organization will increase" (p. 3). The importance of law enforcement officers and personnel possessing the highest ethical standards will allow the profession to be portrayed in a more positive manner. This also helps to build an increasingly positive relationship between law enforcement and the communities it serves.

METHODOLOGY

The research question to be examined considers whether or not law enforcement agencies and departments can recruit and select candidates with strong ethical backgrounds in today's society. Law enforcement must prepare for the future by focusing on recruitment efforts emphasizing the importance of appropriate ethical behavior. Candidates who have strong ethical backgrounds and unsullied pasts must be actively pursued.

The researcher hypothesizes that unethical police officers have caused a significant strain on the relationship between the public and law enforcement. The public trust has been undermined by unethical police officers and must be rebuilt.

This can be done by ensuring that strong ethical applicants are recruited and hired, thus maintaining future ethical behavior and sustaining a strong, positive relationship with the community.

The method of inquiry will include the review of published books as well as magazine articles, journal articles, and previously submitted administrative research papers from the Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas (LEMIT). All of these methods will be utilized to obtain information relevant to how law enforcement agencies and departments can recruit and select ethical candidates.

The instrument that will be used to measure the researcher's findings regarding the subject of the recruitment and selection of ethical police candidates will be to clearly define ethics and compare various meanings of the term. It will also explore the relationship between ethics and law enforcement, the challenges facing recruiting, and the implications of hiring substandard applicants. The review of literature will provide the necessary research to draw conclusions and present findings.

The research will focus on the major themes of the definitions of Ethics. A review of twenty two books and articles on the topic was conducted. Only articles were selected that met the following criteria for the definition of ethics: ethical behavior and its impact on hiring police applicants.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

According to Grant (2002), "The topic of ethics and ethical behavior has existed for centuries. Many people believe that Socrates was the first philosopher to delve into the issue of ethics, specifically the ethical treatment of problems in government" (p.11). There are several different literal definitions and interpretations of the term

ethics. Ethics, according to Merriam-Webster Dictionary, is the discipline dealing with what is good and bad and with moral duty and obligation. Encarta World Dictionary defines ethics as a system of moral principles governing the appropriate conduct for an individual or group. Michael Josephson (1993), of the Josephson Institute, defined ethics as a code of values which guides choices and actions and determines the course of lives. While there are various literal meanings of ethics it is commonly referred to as doing the right thing. Josephson's definition of ethics is the version this researcher will utilize as the basis for this paper.

Law enforcement has always been held to a high standard of ethical behavior by the public, thus causing law enforcement, in turn, to hold themselves to a higher standard. Law enforcement has taken the proactive step of implementing specific policies and procedures concerning ethical behavior. The International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) adopted a Law Enforcement Code of Ethics in 1957 and revised it in 1991, but it was not until 1998 that the IACP introduced an Ethics Toolkit, which contained a model policy that focused on ethics (Wallace, 2007). This policy, developed by the IACP, is now accepted throughout the law enforcement community as the standard guideline for ethical behavior.

According to O'Malley (1997), in any situation, a person's individual values and environmental background serves as their foundation for their ethics behavior. Thus, definitions of ethics may be as varied as the characters of people themselves. Yet, despite this diversity, or possibly because of it, a heightened awareness has arisen for promoting ethical uniformity in the public sector. In today's society, individuals can rarely solve ethical problems simply by resolving to do what is right.

The Josephson Institute alleged that American culture has a long history and far-reaching belief that society is built upon a solid foundation of ten consensus ethical values which form the basis of an ethical society. These ten values are honesty, integrity, respect, caring, fairness, promise-keeping, pursuit of excellence, civic duty (responsible citizenship), accountability, and loyalty (fidelity). The Josephson Institute believed that these ten core ethical values form the philosophical basis for ethical judgment and define the moral duties and virtues implicit in ethical behavior (Josephson, 1993).

According to Delattre (2006), ethics is about right and wrong. The professionalism, competence, decency, and manners possessed by the police in the communities they serve has a direct impact on the amount of public trust received by law enforcement. The manner in which police conduct themselves on and off duty, what they tolerate among themselves, and their moral expectations of one another determines whether the police deserves to be trusted and, in most cases, whether they are, in fact, trusted by the public.

Delattre (2006) also suggested that when a person voluntarily accepts a position of public trust, he takes on new responsibilities and obligations. He is free to not accept the job if he does not wish to live up to those new responsibilities and obligations. This is not only a fair expectation but granting authority without expecting public servants to live up to those standards would be unfair to everyone they are expected to serve. Delattre (2006) believed, "we have a right to insist that the obligations of public servants are very sacred and high" (p. 78).

According to Delattre (2006), many police departments are encountering greater difficulty in attracting qualified applicants and filling recruit classes with competent candidates. Too many recruits do not complete the academy or training once they realize what the character expectations are of them by society and their department. Police candidates with a history of good judgment, character, and responsible behavior in the workplace generally show great promise and should be actively recruited.

Recruiting quality applicants is not an easy task. The applicant pool, overall, has been shrinking in recent years, resulting in the number of quality applicants dwindling as well. Law enforcement agencies have found that their need for police officers has grown while the number of quality applicants is steadily declining (Ayers, 2005). Unfortunately, some agencies and departments are finding it increasingly difficult to find qualified applicants, let alone the ideal one (Sharp, 1994).

According to a National Institute of Justice (NIJ, 2004) report after several years of growth in police employment, law enforcement agencies are having a hard time finding qualified applicants. The supply of good police recruits was down throughout the nation during the summer of 2000. The majority of agencies reported that a shortage of qualified applicants caused difficulty in filling vacancies. Negative publicity toward law enforcement may have discouraged some people from wanting to join the profession.

National statistics tracked by the Department of Justice are grim: in the past three years, New York City has seen the number of its applicants plummet from 32,000 to 15,000. The state of Minnesota expects to retire half of its police forces

statewide in the next five years. These are just two examples of the challenges facing law enforcement across the country (Kelly & Rivera, 2000).

The report also went on to state that in the current environment, some departments may feel pressure to lower standards or expedite the applicant screening process. Although higher recruiting standards may contribute to applicant shortages, departments must consider the demands of contemporary policing in determining recruiting and selection, including background, requirements. Rushing the screening process to fill openings can also have adverse effects. Some departments have realized the importance of the process after suffering scandals arising from corrupt or abusive officers who were inadequately screened (NIJ, 2004). Much of this could have been avoided if proper selection had been done since past behavior is generally a good indicator of future behavior. According to Blanchard and Peale (1988), ethics and values are primarily caught versus being taught.

According to Sharp (1994), some agencies have suggested that hiring standards be lowered to compensate for a lack of qualified applicants. Other agencies were emphatic about maintaining standards and were adamant against standards being lowered to fill vacancies. Changes in hiring standards will not change the need for recruiting and selecting qualified officers. The ideal candidate, while difficult to find, is out there and must be found in order to maintain standards expected by the public.

Tate (2000) suggested that a commonly heard statement from law enforcement managers is that applicants are different now and not the same as they used to be. This has a significant effect on recruiting. While this is probably true, it is not the only issue to consider in recruiting qualified applicants. Several factors have been

considered for causing the decline in quality candidates applying and being hired in law enforcement. Lowering hiring standards to fill vacancies and meet staffing needs is a disturbing trend that has far-reaching negative implications for the future of any agency and should be discouraged. Lowering standards may fill the positions, but it will only create problems later. Law enforcement must make the most of the available applicant pool without sacrificing quality or accepting substandard candidates. Law enforcement must recognize that the future lies with the youth of today's society and evolve recruiting strategies accordingly to select and hire the most ethically qualified applicants.

Palmiotto (2001) combined both ethical behavior and recruiting police candidates in his writings. He discussed the importance of selection procedures and practices. He believed that employment procedures should thoroughly examine the suitability of applicants to serve as police officers. The ultimate goal should be to hire and employ persons who would serve as police officers without engaging in any misconduct for the entire length of their career. This goal can only be achieved by selecting persons who are ethical, moral, and intelligent and who do not bring problematic issues to law enforcement. A qualified ethical candidate displays traits, qualities, and actions that clearly set them apart from others. They adhere to specific principles including law abiding, respect, restraint, example, ownership/responsibility, integrity/honesty, attitude, judgment, and pride.

It is possible that unethical police officers strain the relationship between the law enforcement community and the public. This in turn can create a negative image for the profession as a whole. There may always be unethical police officers in today's

law enforcement, but this research will assist in determining if the numbers of unethical police officers can be greatly diminished. The question to be considered is whether ethical behavior can be addressed in the recruiting and selection process to minimize the number of ethical related issues in the future.

The IACP believed ethics to play such an important role in law enforcement that they created and adopted a formal code of ethics which is recognized throughout law enforcement as the standard for acceptable ethical behavior. The Texas Commission on Law Enforcement Officer Standards and Education (TCLEOSE) includes a copy of the code of ethics with every Peace Officer Certification they issue so that every peace officer in the state of Texas has one. TCLEOSE prohibits individuals from receiving a peace officer license in Texas if they have ever been convicted of a Class A misdemeanor or higher, convicted of a Class B misdemeanor within the last ten years, or have ever been convicted of a family violence offense.

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSIONS

The research revealed that ethics is an integral part of the law enforcement profession and must be adhered to by all police officers in order to maintain not only a professional image, but also a strong relationship built on trust with the public. While ethics has many varied literal definitions it is commonly referred to as the difference between right and wrong. The interpretations also vary depending on an individual past. It is undeniable that ethics should play a significant role in law enforcement and be ever present in the profession. Police officers are expected to have and maintain a high standard of ethical behavior. When unethical behavior is displayed by police officers and publicized in the media it has long lasting negative implications on the law

enforcement profession as a whole. It also has long lasting effects on the relationship between the law enforcement community and society in general. The research has revealed the importance of ethics in law enforcement. It has also indicated a need for strong ethically consistent police officers and the importance of recruiting ethical candidates. This will help to ensure that the future ethical behavior of police officers will be acceptable and in turn create a positive image for all of law enforcement.

Police agencies throughout the nation must focus their recruiting efforts on attracting police candidates with strong ethical backgrounds. Applicants who have displayed past behavior based on appropriate and acceptable ethical standards must be sought after in order to maintain the professionalism in law enforcement that society deserves. Law enforcement is plagued by the abundance of negative headlines concerning police officers making unethical choices and inappropriate actions. This issue can be resolved through the recruiting and screening process. The public deserves a law enforcement community free of unethical behavior so their trust in public servants is not strained and they can be proud of their police officers. The ten core ethical values listed in the review of literature must be an integral part of each and every police officer's daily habits. These values need to be ingrained and reinforced in order for police officers to constantly make the right and proper decisions. These decisions, made on a daily basis, will in turn reflect positively on the law enforcement community and help in building and maintaining strong relationships with the public.

The problem or issue examined by the researcher considered whether or not law enforcement can successfully recruit and select candidates with strong ethical

backgrounds to be employed in the capacity of a police officer. The purpose of this research was to determine if law enforcement can recruit specifically for ethical behavior. Hiring candidates with high ethical standards, in turn, will help to build and maintain a public trust, thus improving relationships between society and law enforcement.

The research question that was examined focused on the negative implications of unethical police officers in law enforcement. It also determined the need for law enforcement to improve its recruiting and hiring process by focusing on past ethical behavior in applicants. The researcher hypothesized that unethical police officers have caused a significant strain on the relationship between the public and law enforcement. The public trust can be undermined by unethical police officers and must be avoided. This can be done by ensuring that ethical applicants are recruited and hired thus maintaining future ethical behavior.

The researcher concluded from the findings that ethical behavior and the hiring of persons possessing acceptable ethical traits is an important part of law enforcement and essential to a positive image of police officers. It was also determined that while law enforcement has faced recruiting challenges, it cannot afford to lower hiring standards in order to fill vacancies. Standards must be upheld, and candidates must be held to the highest ethical standards in order to maintain a professional portrayal of the law enforcement image.

The findings of the research did support the hypothesis and indicated a strong need to combine ethics and recruiting. It also revealed a specific need for how to implement and successfully combine the two areas. The reasons why the findings did

support the hypothesis are due to several published authors such as Ayers (2005), Delattre (2006), Josephson (1993), Sharp (1994), and Wallace (2007) stressing the importance of ethics in law enforcement. It has also been documented in published literature that recruiting acceptably qualified applicants has become increasingly difficult. When the two, ethics and recruiting, are combined and emphasis is placed on their importance, law enforcement can only benefit positively from the expectation of hiring candidates with high ethical standards. Based on the research, a recommendation for implementing and combining these two areas would be to focus recruiting efforts on the ten core ethical values as determined by Josephson.

Limitations that might have hindered this study resulted because statistics, whether nationally or locally, are not kept and reported to any one specific entity or department regarding rejection of police candidates for what would be considered ethical related behavior. Specific information is also not available concerning police officers who are terminated for ethical related behavior. A large scale study, including surveys, should be completed to compile the information and document how widespread this problem is and the magnitude of its effects.

The study of the recruitment and selection of ethical police candidates is relevant to contemporary law enforcement because being able to specifically recruit and hire candidates with strong ethical backgrounds will improve the image of law enforcement and allow agencies to focus on other needs, rather than problematic police officers. This will also help to ease the background investigation process, which will save agencies time and money. Law enforcement and society, in general, stands to benefit from the results of this research. The relationship between police and the

public is regularly challenged and changes on a daily basis. It is strained by a lack of trust, which can be built and maintained through the constant actions of strong ethical police officers. Ethically strong police candidates must be actively recruited and highly sought after for living their life in accordance with the highest acceptable level of ethical behavior.

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