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Recruiting, Hiring and Retaining Women In Law Enforcement

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ABSTRACT

Since the inception of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 equality has been demanded for minorities to include women. Most recently the conception of what women can do in a law enforcement agency has begun to break down. Until the early 1970's, women employed by law enforcement agencies were limited in their duties and worked mainly as meter maids and matrons. Our communities and what they expect of law enforcement is rapidly changing. This is evidenced by the vast amount of literature published on the subject of women in law enforcement, although the attitudes seem to remain the same as evidenced by surveys of men in law enforcement agencies. Women are equal but separate—supported by law but unable to obtain true and complete participation. Research reveals men and women are both equally capable of fulfilling the job duties that police work entails. Even looking past the behavior of males towards females in the police environment, there is still a bias when hiring, selecting, and recruiting women. Command Staff of law enforcement agencies need to take a hard look at the mounds of research to discover the benefits of women in policing. With the changing role of law enforcement in today's society, the presence of women in policing is desirable. From this research a staring synopsis can be deduced: fear thrives on ignorance, and so does prejudice, which in turn leads to discrimination.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	
Introduction.	1
Review of Literature	3
Methodology	7
Findings	10
Discussions/Conclusions	11
References	13-14

INTRODUCTION

Diversity was forced on American business in the 1960's with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Diversity no longer is an issue of black and white, or of meeting EEOC standards in hiring. The demographic changes taking place even now are such that Hispanics represent the fastest-growing ethnic group in the nation, and it is expected that they will outnumber blacks in the US within the span of the current generation. Added to this is the rapid growth of Asians of the Pacific Rim, and growth within other ethnic groups as well.

Cultural diversity is a fact of life in today's environment. While it has been difficult for many to adjust to an increasingly diverse cultural environment, it also has been rewarding. Business has come to realize that a more diverse work force helps it deal with an increasingly diverse customer base and to gain cultural perspectives not readily apparent to members of other cultures. Increased diversity helps businesses understand its customer base to the point that it can truly serve customers, thereby enhancing its own position with its customers. The same diversity issues that were only more regulations to incorporate in the past now have come to be valuable to corporate America.

Police departments are not businesses, of course, but all of the same principles apply. There has been and continues to be a movement away from the paramilitary view of law enforcement as agencies seek to become an integral part of the communities they serve, to focus as much on crime prevention as crime resolution. Of course the mission of any police department is to serve the members of the community, but that mission is undergoing change in today's environment.

Rather than focusing so much on those who have and would break the law, police departments seek to build relationships with the communities they serve. Toward this end, increased diversity assists in creating and maintaining positive relationships with the community.

A few pioneering women essentially forced their way into police departments in the past, enduring blatant sexual harassment and other items that prevented these women from enjoying positive working conditions. Research has demonstrated that women officers are preferable in a variety of situations, particularly in those involving domestic violence (Recruiting and Retaining Women, n.d.). As an example, a 2001 “study found that female officers demonstrated more concern, patience, and understanding than their male colleagues when responding to calls of domestic violence” (Recruiting and Retaining Women, n.d.). Further, “battered women who had contact with a female officer rated the police response as more helpful than those without such contact” (Recruiting and Retaining Women, n.d.). As domestic violence continues to constitute one of the leading categories of calls to police departments, this single aspect of the benefits of the presence of women officers alone is worth increased attention on the part of police departments’ recruiting efforts.

Recruiting and retaining women continues to be hugely problematic for local law enforcement agencies, however. The study discussed here sought to gain understanding of the perceptions of the value of women officers within a specific police department. The research question focuses on working conditions within the department and how they can be improved. The expected result is that conditions

will be found to be less than ideal, and that individuals participating in the survey will come to be more aware of their ability to improve conditions that currently exist.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The National Center for Women and Policing report that many barriers still exist for women in law enforcement (Recruiting and Retaining Women, n.d.). This view is shared by Women in Federal Law Enforcement (WIFLE), and “outgrowth of an interagency committee formed by the Department of the Treasury and the Department of Justice in 1982” (About WIFLE, n.d.). The effort to recruit and retain women is not a new one.

Raganella and White (2004) conducted a study in 2002 of 278 academy recruits in the New York City Police Department seeking to determine the motivations behind the recruits’ decisions to seek positions in law enforcement. Raganella and White (2004) state that “prior research suggested that there might be both gender and racial differences” in motivations for seeking work in law enforcement, but also note that much of that previous research “was dated and findings were mixed” (p. 501).

Raganella and White (2004) believed they would find differences according to race and gender, but they discovered only minor differences according to those stratifications. Instead, the researchers’ findings “indicated that motivations for becoming a police officer were similar regardless of race or gender” (p. 501). Motivations most frequently reported by the recruits “were altruistic and practical, specifically the opportunity to help others, job benefits, and security” (Raganella and White, 2004, p. 501).

In law enforcement, the word “minority” includes women of all races and ethnicities. The issue of recruiting women is not a problem limited to the United States, as evidenced by Britain’s Police Information Technology Organization (PITO). In 2001, Sue Hopgood, head of PITO’s training, development and equality, noted that British police had more men than women, and that PITO was providing child care support in an effort to facilitate recruiting of women. She commented that PITO’s “childcare support is really generous and we hope that promoting these benefits in or ob adverts will result in more diversity” (Police recruit on flexibility, 2001, p. 10).

Rienerth (2001) reviews several books addressing the issue, concluding that although “the number of female officers has increased, women have not reached gender equity” (p. 195). It is less difficult for a woman to be hired in today’s environment, but women often are “not accepted by their male counterparts. They are still victims of discrimination and harassment in obvious and subtle ways” (Rienerth, 2001, p. 195).

This statement is supported by stories such as that of Paulette Boothe, a black New York City police officer who recently filed an EEOC complaint against the New York Police Department (NYPD). Boothe appears not to have had much difficulty until taking action against a drunken, armed officer during the Republican National Convention. Since then, she has been denied mealtime repeatedly and disciplined for minor infractions, some of which did not occur. The union representative refused to help Boothe on the grounds that it could jeopardize his job (Weill-Greenberg, 2005).

In 2000, the New York State Police planned to team with the National Association of Women in Policing in an effort to increase the numbers of minority individuals the organization is able to recruit. In 2000, only 3 percent of the state police's 2,800 were women (Kocieniewski, 2000). When recruiting reports were issued for 2000, the latest training class actually represented "a decrease in the percentage of women" (Kocieniewski, 2000, p. B5).

These news stories published in general-interest publications highlight some of the difficulties that law enforcement agencies face in recruiting women, but they also inform the general public of the same problems. As agencies actively recruit women and market themselves directly to women, newspaper articles often negate the positive steps that law enforcement agencies try to take.

Tyre (2004) reports that women head only 200 of the 18,000 police departments in the country, and that women presently account for less than "15 percent of the 880,000 sworn law-enforcement officers in the country" (p. 48). In contrast, in 1971 women comprised less than 1.5 percent of the total of sworn officers "at the local, state, and federal levels" and "4 to 5 percent of the sworn officers in 1985" (Grant, Garrison and McCormick, 1990, p. 147). As numbers increased, relatively few women were assigned to patrol duties.

While numbers are not changing at greatly impressive rates, the concept of what constitutes a "good cop" is. Law enforcement in the past was viewed as a paramilitary organization; today, "police officers are expected to be more service providers than soldiers" (Tyre, 2004, p. 48). According to Tyre (2004), there is great

emphasis on developing the concept of community policing, crime prevention and developing “strong ties to neighborhood leaders” (p. 48).

Female recruits tend to be better educated than their male counterparts, a fact that is beginning to favor women. Tyre (2004) emphasizes that many police departments and other law enforcement agencies are requiring that new recruits have at least two years of college, thus favoring women over men.

Additionally, “Modern chiefs are expected to be proficient at marketing and public relations” (Tyre, 2004, p. 48). One of the features of recruiting women has been the realization that women are more likely to respond to challenges with reason and an effort to sort out the situations before them (Equality Denied, n.d.). While this has been valuable in community policing, it is now becoming more valuable in upper management positions as well.

Prior to 1998, the Albuquerque, New Mexico, “Police Department recruited and retained more women officers through a range of policies” (Polisar and Milgram, 1998, p. 42). One of the first to be instituted was a sexual harassment policy. Following that, Albuquerque used existing women officers to aid in recruiting others and began advertising “in venues frequented by fit women” (Polisar and Milgram, 1998, p. 42). Internally, it instituted training programs designed to assist supervisors in promoting integration of women within the department.

In North Carolina, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department instituted an internal mentoring program directed toward women. Maglione (2002) maintains that “the department has been successful in hiring, training, and promoting women since the inception of its mentoring program directed toward women” (p. 19).

Women appear to be less tolerant in matters such as sexual harassment and related working conditions. Penny Harrington, former police chief and founder of the National Center for Women and Policing commented that the increasing numbers of lawsuits filed by women officers is unusual. According to Mark (1991), "Studies have found that 80 percent of women officers say they've been subjected to some sort of sexual harassment during their careers, but only 5 percent have filed complaints" (p. 1). As indicated by the Boothe case (Weill-Greenberg, 2005), it appears that women now are less willing to simply be tolerant.

Some observers muse that this increase in lawsuits by active women officers ultimately could benefit agencies' ability to recruit women. Traditionally, the male-dominated police culture has been resistant to change and has not fully accepted women officers. These same attitudes "have discouraged many women from joining the force" (Mark, 1999, p. 1). Women's greater willingness to go forward with complaints that are not addressed or resolved internally has the potential to affect lasting and positive effects.

METHODOLOGY

This study sought to determine the perceptions of the members of a metropolitan police department regarding recruitment and retention of women on the police force. The department serves a city of 350,000 located in the Southeast United States, which has a large black population and a growing Hispanic population. The researcher identified a stratified random sample of police department members, ranging in responsibility from office workers to senior management.

The study is qualitative in nature as it seeks to gain insight into workers' perceptions. It would have been gratifying to add a quantitative component seeking to measure the direct effect of the department's recruiting and retention efforts, but the information required to reach valid conclusions either does not exist or is not available for examination. For these reasons, the study necessarily remained qualitative in its design and execution.

The study was conducted in two parts. The first surveyed a balanced number of employees from throughout the department; the second used the same survey questionnaire with a sample of an additional 25 police officers assigned to patrol duties. In part one of the study, data was collected through interviews of department members identified in a stratified random sample. Though the sample was random, it also was stratified to ensure the inclusion of several types of department members. Human Resources provided coded lists of employees – coded to mask individuals' names and protect identities – stratified by employment level within the department. This produced four categories of employees: patrol, administrative support, operational support, and upper management. Each category contained 15 department employees, roughly balanced by sex.

In part two of the study, the research focused on those only police officers assigned to patrol duties. This is the largest component of the department and the area of greatest focus regarding recruitment and retention. An additional 25 officers were selected for the study. These additional officers were all men; the department did not employ enough women officers assigned to patrol duty to include women in both parts of the study.

The interviews were based on a questionnaire yielding self-scoring responses. For questions one through nineteen of the twenty-question questionnaire, respondents were asked to provide their answers in the form of a one to five point Likert-typescale (disagree, somewhat disagree, no opinion, somewhat agree, agree), assigning numerical values to their answers themselves. This requirement was included in an effort to prevent introducing a bias on the part of the researcher. Respondents' answers can be viewed as carrying greater validity and reliability than if the researcher translated a verbal response into a Likert-type category. Requiring respondents to assign their answer to a category themselves relieves the researcher of the responsibility for ensuring the s/he translates into a numerical value what the respondent actually meant to relate in answer to each survey question.

Question twenty, the final question, was an open-ended and designed to gain respondents' thoughts on how the department might attract a greater number of women applicants or retain those women already with the department.

Analysis begins with a series of descriptive statistics operations on collected data within their categories. The results were then subjected to the t-test, "the most commonly used method to evaluate the differences in means between two groups. The groups can be independent ... or dependent" (Electronic Statistics Textbook, 2002).

Results of these tests were subjected to tests for significance after determining an acceptable p value. Generally, "p-level of .05 is customarily treated as a 'border-line acceptable' error level" (Electronic Statistics Textbook, 2002, p.22).

Comparing results of tests of data should be done in a manner that can be considered as being statistically significant. It should be useful in informing final conclusions arising from calculated results. Such a comparison should provide the researcher with information leading to suggestions for further research. Assessment also should be able to inform methods of enhancing the department's ability to recruit and retain women.

FINDINGS

In the first section, individuals from patrol, administrative support, operations support and upper management were surveyed. As was expected, those in administration, operational support and upper management did not identify any specific problems or complain about working conditions that exist in the department. The only exception to this came in the form of women working in administration who originally had intended to join the patrol aspect of department operation. Their reasons for being in administration varied extensively and included personal reasons as well as work-related reasons. Some (8 percent) were excluded from patrol duty because of physical restrictions; others (20 percent) were not selected for officer training but were unaware of the reasons for the decisions keeping them in administrative roles. Others (26 percent) chose administrative work in the belief that the regular hours and reduced danger were of greater benefit to their families.

Those in operational support (such as records queries, vehicle maintenance and other related areas) did not identify any difficulties with either recruiting or retaining women. Upper management reported much difficulty in both respects. In terms of retention, 63 percent of those in upper management indicated that the

working environment is not one conducive to retaining women the department already has been able to recruit.

Among those assigned to patrol duty, there was great indication that working conditions are far from the ideal imagined by those not directly providing patrol services. Most men (76 percent) report that they do not necessarily object to women being on the force, but that they feel safer when working in dangerous situations with men. A common response was that men are more reactionary and more likely to act first and act from instinct. This is a quality admired by men, whereas women report preferring more rational, thoughtful approaches to diffusing stressful situations.

As stated, all of the study respondents taking part in this portion of the study were men. Inclusion of this separate portion of the study serves to affirm the study's internal validity in that the responses gained in this section were comparable to those gained from men in Part I.

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSIONS

This research question focuses on working conditions within the department and how they can be improved. The expected result was that conditions would be found to be less than ideal, which proved to be the case. Another expectation was that individuals participating in the survey would come to be more aware of their ability to improve conditions that currently exist. One of the survey questions addressed whether the respondent could view internal conditions from the outside and wants to be a part of the organization. Many fewer men responded positively to this question supporting conditions, as they exist.

Nearly 50 percent of the department's male patrol officers are black or Hispanic, and the department went through similar recruiting and retention difficulties in the early days of affirmative action. It would seem that these officers would be more willing to accept women into the force, and indeed most of those men concluding the survey with a negative response to "would you want to be a part of this organization?" question (60 percent) were black or Hispanic.

The study confirms, for upper management, the difficulties that exist in the department and serves to identify several sources of those difficulties. It also may serve to increase awareness among male officers of the problems faced by female patrol officers that originate with male officers. Calling attention to a problem is the first step in resolving it, and the study appears to have caused at least some of the male officers to consider working conditions from women's perspective. News reports of increasing sexual harassment lawsuits do as well, but those are far removed from the department studied. The study itself appears to have served to increase awareness within the department and further research at a later time may confirm whether this is true.

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