

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

**Police Ethics:
Are Gratuities Expected or Accepted?**

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ABSTRACT

This research gives two points of view to whether gratuity is expected or accepted among police officers. The purpose of this research is to understand the public's perception of ethical and moral issues in law enforcement. The research also examines the opinions of police officers and their thoughts on how ethical and moral they are.

The method of inquiry used by the researcher included a review of articles, Internet sites, periodicals, journals, a survey distributed to 50 survey participants. The researcher discovered that citizens believe police officers are ethical and moral, although they believe that gratuity corrupts police officers, and there are moral and ethical issues within the police department. Police officers believe that gratuity is not a problem, and, for the most part, police officers are moral and ethical.

The final opinions resulted in the police being respected by the public, and the police officers have become more of a positive resource for the public. The survey showed there were many areas where both citizens and police officers shared the same opinions and outlooks when it came to moral and ethical issues. For the most part citizens, despite the cries of injustice and unfair treatment, really do trust police officers as a whole.

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INTRODUCTION

The problem or issue to be examined considers whether or not police officers expect or accept gratuity from the public. Within the police organization, there is a code that police officers abide by. One practice is that police officers do not give another officer a ticket or citation. Another rule is that officers do not report one another for misconduct, no matter what the situation. This type of policing has been around for centuries, and it has developed more wrongs than rights. Recently, many details of police wrongdoings have come out into the public's view. The trial of OJ Simpson was a monumental example of how a glove was planted for the purpose of conviction, and the history of an officer that was found to be his undoing.

The relevance of police ethics to law enforcement is to see if police officers do the right things because of their position or if they do the wrong things because of their authority. Many people look at the police officers and say all they do is write tickets because of the quota they have, or maybe the perception of the police has been tainted because of all of the recent publicity. Whatever the case may be, it is a revelation that those who are placed in authority to protect the public do not make the right decisions. The ethics of a person has everything to do with if they can and will do the right thing at the right time. Ethics is not something that is learned overnight but is instilled from the time of birth until the age of culpability. It is difficult at times to make the right moral decision, but in the process of making that decision, one must weigh the odds of their actions.

The purpose of this research is to discover if police officers are morally and ethically performing their duties or if the public's perception is altered because of their

behavior. According to Merriam-Webster's Dictionary (2009), "ethics is the discipline dealing with what is good and bad and with moral duty and obligation" (p.1). Some might say there is no ethics in law enforcement because of the way officers can lie to get a confession and how they turn the truth around on a criminal to gain entry into a house. The public begins to wonder if there is any truth in the way they are approached. But the definition of ethics really explains it all by the pure statement of right human conduct. The public will question if the officer is fair to the victim if they are not trying to do their very best to apprehend a suspect involved in a rape. The jury is still out in determining if it would be wrong to not tell a lie to stop the abuse that might be taking place. It is a question one must ask themselves, but also know that if entry is not gained, the possibility is that a child could be sexually assaulted, physically assaulted, or murdered.

The research question to be examined focuses on whether or not police officers think of themselves as being moral and ethical people when expecting or accepting gratuities. There are still mixed emotions on how the public views the police expecting or accepting these gratuities as opposed to them having to pay for the same services. So many issues are involved in what and how police officers handle different situations, and it is not just morality and ethics that comes into consideration.

The intended method of inquiry includes a review of articles, journals, books, and a survey distributed to 50 survey participants, including police officers and citizens. These articles, journals, and books will give scholarly information that has either been researched or studied by a profession or scholarly individual. The survey will be either mailed or hand delivered to the participant and collected in a reasonable time limit.

The intended outcome or anticipated findings of the research will show the perception that police officers have of themselves and their co-workers and the perception the public has of police as it relates to ethical situations dealing with gratuity.

The field of law enforcement will benefit from the research or be influenced by the conclusion because it will show how the public's perception can easily be influenced by the actions of a police officer who receives gratuity from merchants who give food, coffee, and free carwashes for the service or mere presence of police officers. It will also bring to light the problems that are caused by police who accept or expect those gratuities when entering an establishment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, the framework of the survey will be observed. The theory in this survey is to observe how many people have witnessed or participated in police officers receiving gratuity for free or half price. The police administrative team needs to find out if this is a normal occurrence, and if so, it should be eliminated within the police agency. Getting a free cup of coffee may be a big deal. Evidently so, when it leads to more than just a free cup of coffee, and officers start to expect more from the people they have been sworn to protect.

It is believed that many officers go into an eatery and ask managers if they are friendly to police officers. Tarbell (2005) stated, "When there is an implied favor (a wink and nod) it's called mooching. When the officer is quite blatant about demanding free services, it called chiseling" (p. 4). It is such an embarrassment to see officers who can but will not pay for a meal that others pay regular price for. Gratuity is something given voluntarily or beyond obligation, usually for some service, the receipt of free meals,

services, or discounts. Some police officers believe that because they sit in an establishment, they are owed something or, in this case, gratuity. White (2002) wrote, "When law enforcement officers offer additional services to private businesses in exchange for a free cup of coffee, they detract from other citizens within their communities" (p. 2).

The problem with gratuity is that it sends a bad message to the public that police officers always get free things for nothing. Herbert (1996) explained, "Police officers regularly construct their work in terms of a morality that is so pronounced that it must arise unique aspects of their role in society" (p. 799). If this is the case, then there must be something wrong or unethical with receiving free food and other items that are given to police officers.

Police officers operate by a code of ethics, and if that code is to be used, it must be placed above the normal morality. The main duty of the police is to serve mankind and protect the life and property of the citizen. There are other professions that are just as important that do not receive favors for their mere presence, and police officers should be in that group also. According to the Police Officer's Code of Ethics (2006), "The commitment to a code of ethics is unconditional. You don't lower your ideas (or revise your mission statement) just because circumstances in the environment changed" (p. 1).

Police officers, because of their nature, are associated with the thin blue line this creates as well as the potential for gradual deterioration of socio-moral inhibitions and perceived sense of permissibility for deviant conduct. This is said to be the thin line that police officers work by. It is so easy to take a free meal or buy something at a

discounted price and think nothing of it. However, it sets a bad example for the person behind the officer purchasing the same items the officer has received for free or at a discounted rate. The perception left in the hearts of the public cannot be a good one.

All police officers are hired on the basis of their ethical views and values of their society. It is always important to remember that on a daily basis, officers come in contact with situations and individuals that test their values and morality. These individuals begin their careers able to not only successfully complete the multiple task demands required of a police officer but present personal backgrounds reflective of well developed value systems congruent with those of society. When police officers have the belief of unrealistic expectations of favors or special treatment, this is the framework of entitlement. Gilmartin (2006) stated, "Entitlement is the belief that an individual by virtue of his/her position as a law enforcement officer is owed certain privilege or latitudes in terms of their behavior," which can be seen in statements like "those rules really don't apply to us" (p. 3).

Sometimes there are situations that place the law enforcement officer in a position where the public's perception changes because of serious incidents that occur in society. On September 11, 2001, the world stood still as terrorists attacked the United States. In all of the confusion in the Twin Towers, police officers and firemen were running into a burning building trying to save people. Because of the heroic efforts, many police and firemen died. This made it difficult for police and firemen everywhere. Some businesses would not charge for a meal, clothing was being cleaned for free, and the public's respect level was at an all time high. Andrews (2001) argued, "Society dictates what defines acceptable behavior by the police" (p. 7). Since it was deemed

okay by the public to accept free meals because of the tragedy of 9/11, free services were not considered gratuity.

It is the responsibility of the police to set the example and not provide the excuse for unethical and immoral behavior. The duty police officers have to society should always be viewed as one of diligence and consistency. Once the ability to be effective has been lost, then the respect of the people who are served is lost. There is no worse feeling than to lose the relationship of someone that is close, and the public is the eyes and ears of society. Proctor explained (Statement, 1997), "The extent to which the community's respect and trust can be secured is diminished when a member of the department acts in an unprofessional, improper, dishonest, or unlawful manner" (p. 1).

METHODOLOGY

When presenting the questionnaire to the public, since individual human beings are the units of analysis, a specific neighborhood will be chosen within the precinct or area of a local law enforcement agency. The individuals can be male or female, married or single, homeowner or renting. The total amount of citizens surveyed is 25. The reason for choosing this class of individuals is because they are more likely to have come in contact with the officers that patrol, arrest, and make calls for service in their neighborhood. The individuals' chosen will have to be in the age range of 18 and 55. This will give more of a variety since, in most states, the legal age to drive is 18.

The underlying reason for undertaking a morality survey is to identify the morality of police officers, viewed by citizens and police officers themselves, that such information has value and should be retained as functional parts of modern life. A morality survey will also identify the true feelings of the public compared to the overall

feelings of the police officers. The survey will give a contrast between the two groups and allow the police to see how they are viewed in the public's eye and how officers view one another. A morality survey can define the character of a community or a particular area and can provide the basis for making sound judgments in community planning.

By using a survey questionnaire, data can be used to construct a preservation plan that helps the community identify the cultural, ethical, moral, and visual relationships that unify and define its component areas. It also establishes policies, procedures, and strategies for maintaining and enhancing the data. It can lead to an increased understanding and awareness of the human environment by officials and citizens within the community and an increased commitment to preserving it. An official preservation plan, prepared and adopted by the community and its planning agency, should provide a basis for integrating survey information with other planning data; it should be an important part of comprehensive community planning. It can establish priorities for dealing with moral issues within the framework of existing local planning programs and present specific recommendations for meeting these priorities.

The questionnaire allows specific questions to be asked that could be important to finding out information that is important to the survey. It does not allow the person taking the survey to be evasive in the way that they answer the questions, and it gives a clear cut understanding of what they are saying. The reason for both groups being surveyed is because it gives the chance to be objective and only look at the results to determine the outcome of the survey.

The type of sampling that will be used is purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is a type of non-probability sampling in which the researcher selects the units to be observed on the basis of individual judgment about which ones will be the most useful or representative. The reason for using the purposive sampling is because it allows the researcher to use a variety of people in different age ranges. It also gives a variety of viewpoints from different ethnic groups, age groups, and genders. Purposive sampling will also give a truer result because of the various audiences being surveyed. Using this sample method could shed more light on morality issues that could lead to a revelation of ideas to better deal with this problem.

This sampling is best suited for the project because it allows the researcher to be flexible with the questions that are asked from both sides of the survey. It also gives better reliability when it comes to truthfulness on the side of the public, and it allows objectivity when reading or evaluating the questions the police officers answer. The survey is not so much about what can be found wrong with the morality of police officers, but what can be made known of the morality issues that police officers might have and not even realize.

The research questions to be examined considers whether or not the public has a negative or positive view on the ethics of law enforcement and how law enforcement officers view themselves as being moral people. In order to provide the necessary information for this study, the identification of the type of study must be presented. Since the survey will be making an observation of a particular sample at one point and time, the cross-sectional study will be the best form of operation. This particular study

will be used because of the single time frame, and the study will not be measured over a long period of time.

The researcher hypothesizes that citizens view police officers as highly ethical and moral people in the scope of their duties and responsibilities. The method of inquiry will include a review of articles, internet sites, periodicals, journals, and a survey distributed to 50 survey participants. The instrument that will be used to measure the researcher's findings regarding the subject of police ethics will include a survey questionnaire. The size of the survey will consist of 11 questions, distributed to 50 survey participants from local law enforcement and local citizens. The number of people who responded to the survey instrument resulted in 100% participation. The information obtained from the survey will be analyzed by qualified personnel who are familiar and trained in collecting and observing will data.

The questionnaire will be passed out randomly, and participants will be given two days to complete the survey. After completion, the survey will be collected and observed for data purposes. Qualified personnel who are familiar and trained in collecting and observation will observe the data. After the data has been collected and observed, special reference will be given to the results or findings.

When presenting the questionnaire to the local law enforcement agency, the survey will be administered the same way as above. The age range will start at 21 since, in most states, this is the required age to become a police officer, and the ending age will be 60. The number of officers surveyed was a total of 25, with 15 males and 10 females. The age range for the citizens was the same; the citizen's survey returns totaled 25, with 18 females and 7 males. The process of passing out the survey,

collecting, and processing the survey will be handled in the same manner as in the citizen survey. After the data has been collected and observed, special reference will be given to the results or findings.

FINDINGS

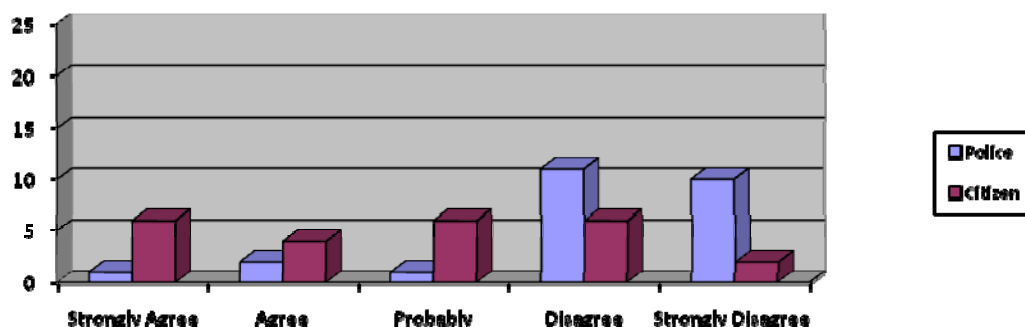


Figure 1. The number of police officers and citizens who think police are owed for their protection of citizens.

In response to the question about whether police officers are owed something for the protection of citizens and their property, two officers agreed while one strongly agreed. One officer stated they were probably owed something while 11 officers disagreed, and ten strongly disagreed. The citizen's response to the same question showed that six strongly agreed, and four agreed that police were owed something. While six said probably, and six disagreed, only two strongly disagreed that officers are owed for the protection of citizens and their property.

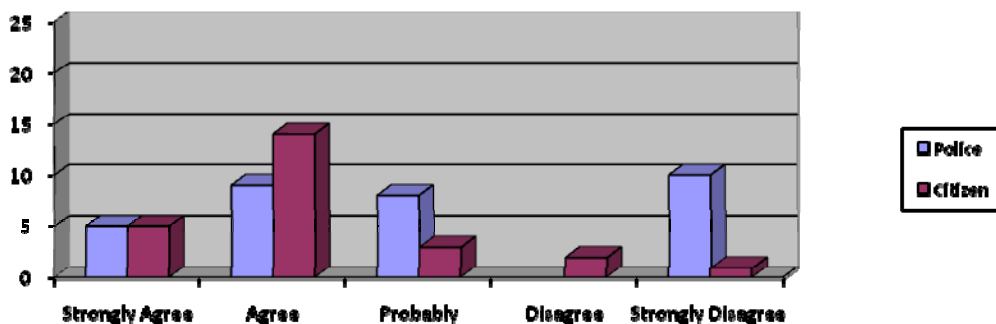


Figure 2. The number of police and citizens that think morality and ethics are an issue in law enforcement.

When police officers were asked if morality and ethics is an issue in law enforcement, five officers strongly agreed, while nine agreed. Eight officers said probably while zero disagreed and ten officers thought that morality and ethics was not an issue. The response of the citizens to the same question revealed that six citizens were in line with police officers by strongly agreeing, while 14 agreed that morality and ethics are an issue. Only three citizens thought probably, and three disagreed while one citizen strongly disagreed that morality and ethics are issues in law enforcement today.

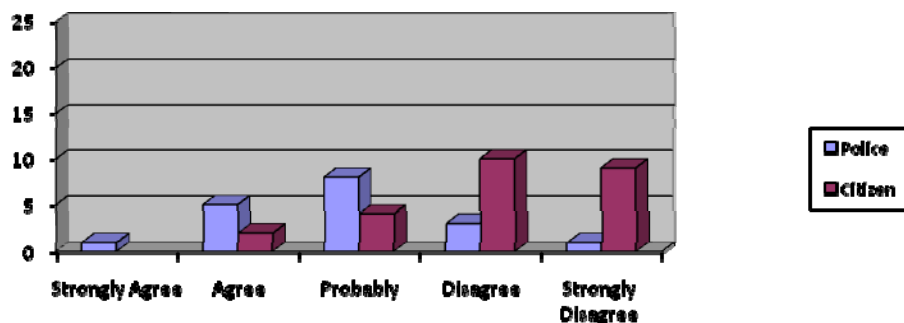


Figure 3. The number of police officers and citizens that think it is wrong for police officers to eat for free or half price while other patrons pay full price.

The police response to eating half price or for free when patrons have to pay was that five officers agreed, while one strongly agreed. Eight officers responded probably, while three disagreed, and one strongly disagreed that it was wrong for police officers to

eat for free or half price while other patrons pay full price. Citizen response to the same question was quite opposite from the police. Two agreed, while zero strongly agreed that officers should pay for their meals just like the other patrons. Four citizens said probably while 10 disagreed, and nine strongly disagreed that it is okay for officers to receive free or half priced meals while patrons pay full price.

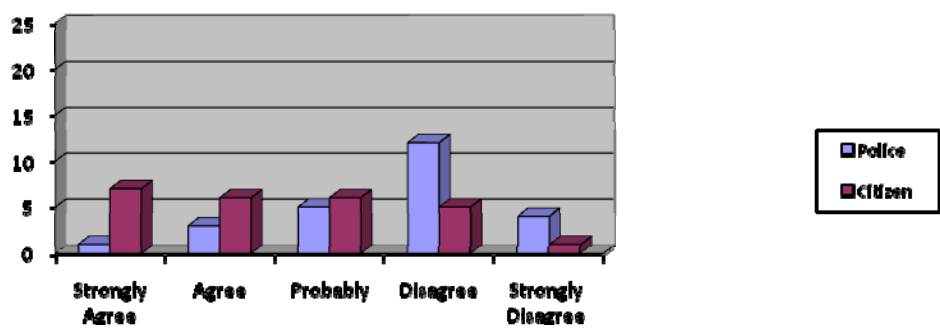


Figure 4. The number police officers and citizens that think police provide extra security or protection to an establishment because of the gratuitous act.

Three police officers agreed, and one strongly agreed, while five officers responded by saying they probably provided extra security. Twelve disagreed and four strongly disagreed that they provided extra security or protection to an establishment because of the gratuitous acts. In response to the same question, six citizens agreed and seven strongly agreed that officers provide extra security or protection, and six citizens said probable, while five disagreed, and one strongly disagreed that officers provide extra security or protection to an establishment because of the gratuitous acts.

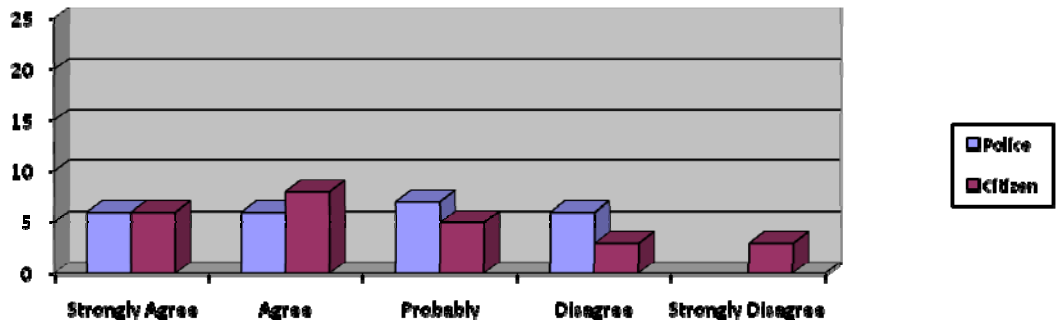


Figure 5. The number of police officers and citizens that think police officers frequent an establishment because they are police friendly.

The response of police that officers frequent establishments that are police friendly was that six officers agreed, and six strongly agreed, while seven said probably. Six disagreed, and zero strongly disagreed that police officers frequent an establishment because they are police friendly. When asked the same question, citizens replied with similar responses. Six strongly agreed, eight agreed, and five said probably to police frequenting places where they are police friendly. Three disagreed, and three strongly disagreed that officers do not frequent these establishments because they are friendly.

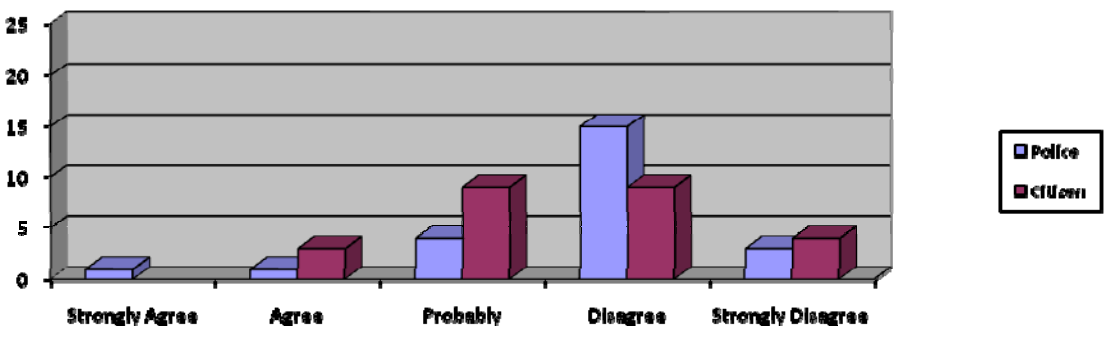


Figure 6. The number of officers and citizens that responded to there being a policy against police gratuity.

The police officers' response to whether there should be a policy against police gratuity is that one agreed, one strongly agreed, and four said probably to a policy being

needed. Fifteen disagreed, and three strongly disagreed that a policy is needed against police gratuity. In response to the same question, citizens replied that three agreed, zero strongly agreed, and nine said probably to a policy concerning gratuity. Nine citizens disagreed, and four strongly disagreed to having no policy about gratuity.

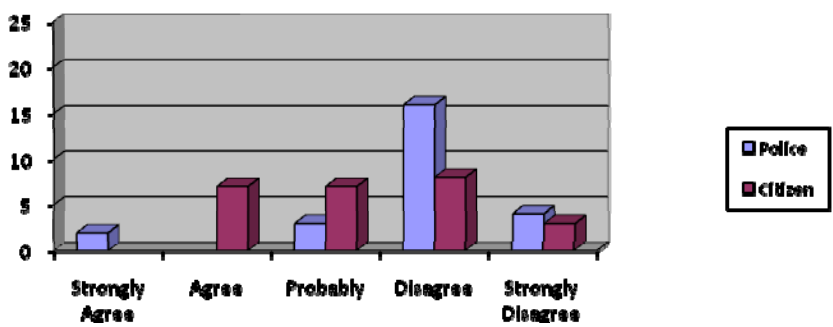


Figure 7. The number of officers and citizens that responded to whether accepting gratuities causes corruption within the police department.

Police officers were asked the question about whether accepting gratuities causes corruption within the police department, and 2 officers strongly agreed, and 3 said probably. Sixteen officers disagreed, and 4 strongly disagreed that gratuity caused corruption. Citizens, when asked the same question, responded with 7 agreeing and 7 probably agreeing that gratuities cause corruption. Eight citizens disagreed, and 3 strongly disagreed that accepting gratuities caused corruption within the police department.

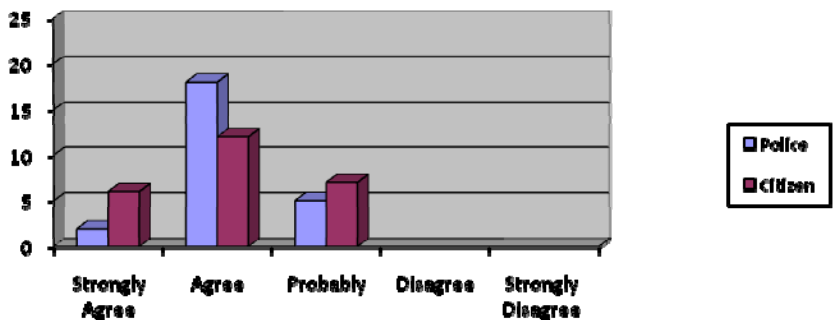


Figure 8. The number of police and citizens that responded to whether police officers make sound ethical decisions.

When police officers responded to the question about whether police officers make sound ethical decisions, 18 agree, two strongly agreed, while five thought that officers probably make sound ethical decisions. The citizens responded in a similar manner with 12 agreeing, six strongly agreeing, and seven responding probably to police officers making sound ethical decisions.

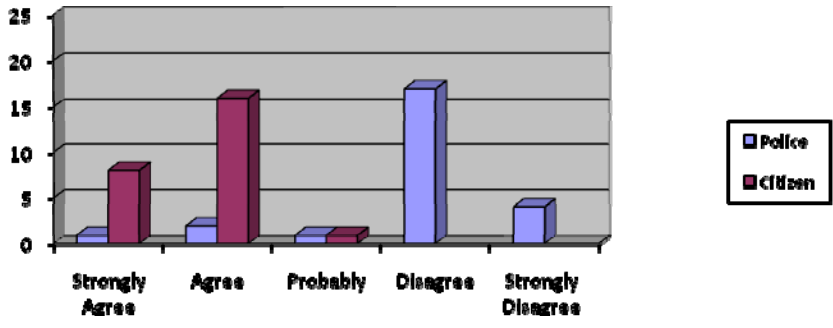


Figure 9. The number of police and citizens who responded to if police officers are unethical or immoral if they accept gratuities.

A surprising contrast came for the question about when police and citizens were asked to respond to whether police who accept gratuities are unethical or immoral. Police officers responded with 2 agreeing, 1 strongly agreeing, and 1 probably that it is unethical and immoral to accept gratuities. Seventeen officers disagreed, while 4

strongly disagreed that it was not immoral or unethical. On the other hand, citizens took the opposite opinion to the same question, with 16 agreeing, 8 strongly agreeing, and 1 probably that accepting gratuities are unethical or immoral.

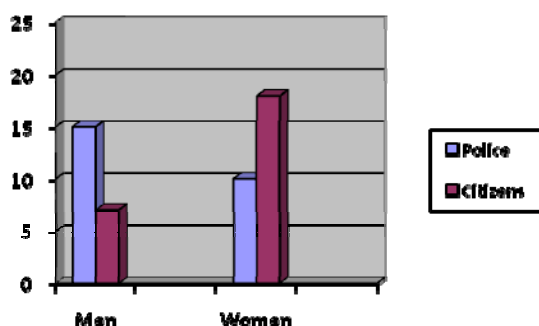


Figure 10. The number of responses of police officers and citizen that were either male or female.

The above chart shows that 15 male and 10 female officers participated in the survey, while seven male and 18 female citizens participated in the same survey.

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSIONS

The problem or issue examined by the researcher considered whether or not police officers expect or accept gratuity from the public. The purpose of this research was to discover if police officers are morally and ethically in performing their duties or if the public's perception altered because of their behavior. The research question to be examined focuses on whether or not police officers think of themselves as being moral and ethical people when expecting or accepting gratuities.

The researcher hypothesized that citizens view police officers as highly ethical and moral people in the scope of their duties and responsibilities. The researcher concluded from the finding that both citizens and police officers have basically the same opinions concerning the ethical and moral attitude of police officers. The only difference

is when the citizen looked at the overall ethics and morality of the police when it came to gratuities; they thought they were unethical and immoral.

The findings of the research did support the hypothesis. The reasons why the findings did support the hypothesis are probably due to the fact that police are respected because of the job they do on a day to day basis. Also, it is probably because there is not much mentioned about the gratuities that police officers receive. Lastly, if the business owner wants to give the officer a free cup of coffee, the citizens are not concerned about what is not coming out of their pockets.

Limitations that might have hindered this study resulted because there was not an opportunity to get the opinions of the younger population, and the recent acts of terrorism has caused the public to be more pro-police. Also, when giving the survey to younger officers, they do not have the experience to have a true opinion concerning gratuity and how it affects their profession. The study of gratuities expected or accepted is relevant to contemporary law enforcement because it gives them a true account of how the public views the seriousness of officers who take advantage of their position. It also gives the administrators a way how to approach those citizens who might have a problem with officers who accept gratuities on regular bases.

Citizens and police stand to benefit from the results of this research because it gives the police officers the chance to see how the citizens view their actions when gratuity is involved. On the other hand, the citizens get a chance to voice their opinion concerning the matter and give the police agency a true assessment of public opinion on the matter of gratuities and the ethics of law enforcement.

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APPENDIX

Police and Citizen Questionnaire (circle one answer)

1. Police officers are owed something for the protection of citizens and their property?

Strongly Agree Agree Probably Disagree Strongly Disagree

2. Morality and ethics are an issue in law enforcement today?

Strongly Agree Agree Probably Disagree Strongly Disagree

3. It is wrong for police officers to eat for free or half price while other patrons pay full price for their meals.

Strongly Agree Agree Probably Disagree Strongly Disagree

4. Do police officers provide extra security or protection to an establishment because of the gratuitous act?

Strongly Agree Agree Probably Disagree Strongly Disagree

5. Do police officers frequent an establishment because they are police friendly?

Strongly Agree Agree Probably Disagree Strongly Disagree

6. Should there be a police against police gratuity?

Strongly Agree Agree Probably Disagree Strongly Disagree

7. Does gratuity cause corruption within the department?

Strongly Agree Agree Probably Disagree Strongly Disagree

8. Do police officers make sound ethical decisions?

Strongly Agree Agree Probably Disagree Strongly Disagree

9. Police officers who accept gratuities are unethical or immoral?

Strongly Agree Agree Probably Disagree Strongly Disagree

10. Gender: Male or female

11. Age: _____