

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

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**A Study of the Recruitment of Women
by Texas Law Enforcement Agencies**

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**An Administrative Research Paper
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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the strategies used to recruit women by Texas law enforcement agencies. The purpose of this study was to determine how Texas agencies compare with organizations across the country in both the percentage of female officers and the methods used to recruit them. The information needed to answer those questions was gathered by the use of a survey and interviews with representatives of various agencies. The results showed that although Texas had a lower percentage of female officers than both the national average and the out of state agencies, they were attempting to recruit women as aggressively as departments nationwide. This shows that the type of women being recruited is more important than the quantity. This study can benefit agencies by showing them where their resources should be committed in order to obtain the best results.

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INTRODUCTION

Are women being adequately recruited by law enforcement agencies in Texas? This paper will try to answer this very important, yet often overlooked, question. According to Lonsway (2003) the number of women in policing has declined overall since 2000. Despite the advantages of a diverse workforce, and the fact that women officers have proven themselves to be as capable as their male counterparts, this pool of potential applicants might not be targeted as aggressively as they should be.

This paper will examine reasons for the decline in Texas of recruiting qualified female candidates. Recruiting activity, location, incentives and female officer involvement in the recruiting process may be some of the factors that have caused a decline. In addition, it will attempt to identify strategies that are being used by agencies that are seeking qualified female applicants.

The primary method of inquiry will be a survey sent out to a wide range of law enforcement agencies. Further research of existing literature and articles on this subject will be conducted. In addition to these methods, personal interviews will be conducted with representatives of some agencies. The agencies to be contacted will be determined by their responses to the survey. Agencies outside of Texas that have initiated innovative programs will also be contacted, in order that a comparison can be made between their current recruitment practices and those being used in this state.

This research is expected to show that agencies that actively recruit women are the exception, and will have shown a steady increase in the number of women officers. It is also anticipated that the majority of agencies will not be

actively recruiting women. It is not believed strategies that would significantly increase the number of female recruits are being effectively utilized.

A workforce that represents the community it serves benefits everyone. An agency's failure to attempt to recruit, then retain, qualified applicants from any potential source is detrimental to both the agency and the community.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

According to Prussel (2001) women have several qualities that are beneficial to today's law enforcement agency, one of which is a communication style that is different than their male counterparts. Many of these qualities are not only useful in today's problem-oriented policing strategies, but are essential.

The issue of recruiting women in law enforcement is relatively new. As recently as 1972 it was almost unknown to even consider hiring women for sworn positions, so strategies to recruit them were not an issue. More (1972) wrote guidelines outlining the type of man that should be recruited. He suggested ways this man might be recruited. He gave recommendations on how this man could be retained. At no point does he suggest recruiting qualified women to improve the pool of potential candidates. This is probably not a reflection of More's personal opinions, but of the attitude towards women in law enforcement at that time.

By 1989 the prevailing attitude was already changing. Breedveld (1989) authored an independent study on how the California Highway Patrol could effectively recruit women by the turn of the century. He recognized that in order to effectively recruit female officers new strategies were needed. Interestingly, he

also identified the need to reevaluate the grooming and uniform standards in place at that time to help female officers maintain their femininity.

By the late 1990s agencies began to realize the value of actively recruiting women officers. Polisar and Milgram (1998) recognized that having female recruiting officers did not by itself increase the number of female applicants. They recognized the value of departments sponsoring a Women & Policing Career Fair and insuring the local media, which provided free advertising, covered the event. They also identified the importance of having female officers represented in recruiting material. Finally, they recommended creating a targeted recruitment list.

Campbell, Christman and Feigelson (2000) suggested identifying the job characteristics women find desirable. They highlighted the importance of what the potential recruits thought the job would be, as opposed to what it actually is. These “perceptions . . . are just as important as actual job characteristics, since it is the perceptions of the job that will affect the decision-making process” (p.20). The data obtained in their surveys suggested contact by an officer from the organization doing the recruiting phase was the most important factor in whether a potential candidate would decide to pursue a career with that agency or not. This contact could be from someone they knew within the organization, or by an officer they had not previously known.

Prussel (2001) cited research that showed several advantages women bring to policing. These included their communication skills, which are a better fit for today’s problem-oriented style of policing than the majority of their male counterparts. Another benefit to most women’s communication style is the ability

to deescalate situations before physical force is necessary. This is perhaps why women are the subject of fewer excessive use of force complaints. Female officers are more likely to empathize with the victims of crimes. This characteristic is useful, “. . . especially in domestic violence situations . . .” (Prussel, p.2).

In a New York State Police survey several potential categories of women who might be interested in policing as a career were identified. “The results indicated that women who possess hunting and fishing licenses, engage in home repairs and do-it-yourself projects, or participate in sports and exercise programs are more likely to consider a career in law enforcement” (Prussel, 2001 p2).

In addition to the advantages noted by Prussel the National Center for Women & Policing (NCWP) identified a couple of additional benefits women bring to their agencies. First is the added awareness of potentially inappropriate behavior. Increasing the ratio of male-to-female officers can by itself change the environment of an organization. This reduces the potential for sexual harassment complaints, which in turn can reduce the agencies liability. Another positive aspect of adding more women is the potential to increase the pool of qualified male applicants. This can occur when the image of the typical police officer (big, burly male) is proven to be outdated. A woman’s ability to do the job opens the door to men who previously would not have been considered capable of performing the job (NCWP, 2000).

In the same self-assessment guide the NCWP point out the importance of mentors for female recruits. The mentors are vital in helping the recruits make the transition from civilian life to the more structured and semi-military

environment of most law enforcement agencies. Women need to see women performing the job, so role models are also important. They are far more likely to believe they can actually do the job when they see someone they can relate to doing the job.

When the Fairfax County, Virginia, Police Department instituted a mentoring program they were able to retain all of the female applicants in the first class conducted after the start of the program. The class before the program began lost all of the female cadets before graduation (Krandall, 1998). This is a graphic illustration of the importance of this type of program.

The NCWP raises two more important points. First, they suggest looking within the organization for qualified female applicants. On average, they say that approximately 65% of an agency's civilian workforce is female. These women are already aware of the nature of the organization, and have some awareness of the actual job functions they would be performing. Second, they suggest getting the participation of community members when looking for potential female applicants. This seems to make particular sense, since who knows the members of the community better than their friends and neighbors?

After comparing the information obtained from the available literature there is no doubt that the importance of this issue is widely recognized. There is consensus on the idea that new methods need to be used to improve not only the number, but the quality, of women applicants. Almost all of the information recognizes the necessity of changing the perception of what being a police officer actually entails. The need to target women who have the best chance of adapting to the law enforcement environment is also a recurring theme.

The suggestions on how to accomplish these tasks are similar, if not identical, in most cases. The reason for this could be that quite a lot of the available material refers to some degree on the comprehensive self-assessment guide prepared by the NCWP with a grant from the Bureau of Justice Assistance. If the ideas and strategies recommended were not successful to some degree, however, it is unlikely they would be mentioned again and again by the geographically diverse agencies represented in the literature.

METHODOLOGY

Are female candidates being adequately recruited by Texas law enforcement agencies? This paper proposes that methods and strategies being used successfully in other parts of the country are not being utilized in Texas. As a result, the number of qualified women recruited by Texas agencies will be less than comparable agencies outside the state.

To compile the information necessary to answer this question several methods were used. Initially a review of existing literature was conducted. This literature consisted mainly of articles from law enforcement related publications. In addition to these, a self-assessment survey and an independent study were also consulted.

A survey was sent out to a number of Texas law enforcement agencies. State, county, and municipal agencies were represented. The agencies were diverse in both geographic location and the number of officers. In order to compare the numbers and practices in Texas the survey was also sent to several agencies outside the state. The out of state agencies that were contacted were chosen based on information obtained while reviewing the existing literature.

Because those agencies were primarily on the west coast, a large east coast agency was also contacted to add geographic diversity to the survey.

Of the surveys sent out 88% were completed and returned. The information obtained in these surveys will be analyzed to determine what, if any, practices designed to increase the number of female applicants are currently in use. Once that is established the percentage of female officers in the agencies using the recruiting techniques will be compared with the percentage in agencies not currently using these approaches.

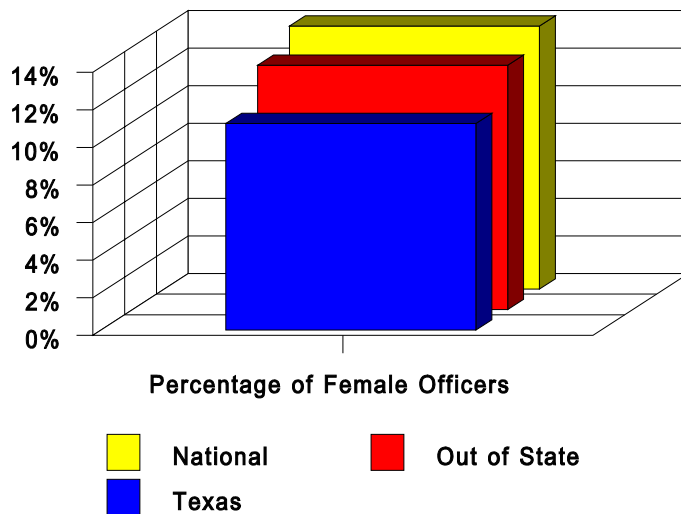
FINDINGS

The research was intended to determine whether law enforcement agencies in the state of Texas are recruiting women as adequately as agencies in other parts of the country. In order to ascertain this a comparison of the percentage of agencies using selected recruiting techniques was conducted to determine whether Texas agencies are aggressively attempting to increase the number of women in their organizations.

A review of the existing literature was conducted to identify agencies that are actively recruiting women. Once these agencies were identified a list of recruiting techniques they use was compiled. These techniques were then listed in a survey which was sent to the targeted agencies.

The survey responses indicated that the out of state agencies had a higher percentage of female officers than their Texas counterparts. The percentage for these out of state agencies was close to the 14% national average reported by the National Center for Women in Policing. The average for Texas agencies, however, was several percentage points below that average (Table I).

Table I



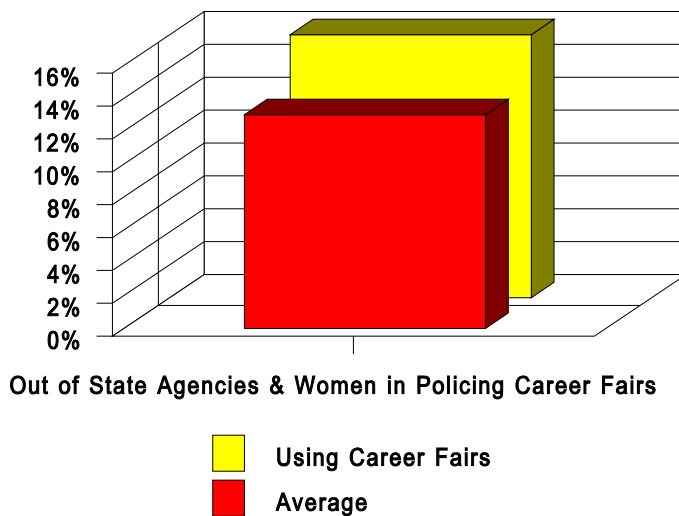
In order to establish whether or not the lower than average number of women employed by Texas law enforcement agencies was a result of their recruiting methods a comparison of those methods and the methods of outside agencies had to be conducted. It was decided to use a difference of 3% or more between the two groups to determine whether or not each factor might play a role in the number of females in an agency. Additionally, the percentage of women officers in agencies using each method was compared with the overall percentage to see if that particular method resulted in a higher than average number of women officers for agencies utilizing it.

The first area addressed was whether or not the responding agency had a unit dedicated to recruiting. The purpose of this question was to establish whether agencies with such a unit had an advantage over agencies which did not when it came to the number of women in the agency. Using the 3% difference guideline discussed earlier this factor did not seem to be a contributing aspect. Texas agencies utilizing recruiting units had a slightly lower than average number

of women when compared with the overall percentage of females in Texas agencies.

Next, agencies were asked whether or not they sponsored Women in Policing Career Fairs. The review of agencies that had success in increasing the number of women in their ranks pointed to this as being one of the most important issues in attracting female applicants. The surveys confirmed this, showing a slightly larger percentage of women in out of state agencies which used this approach (Table II).

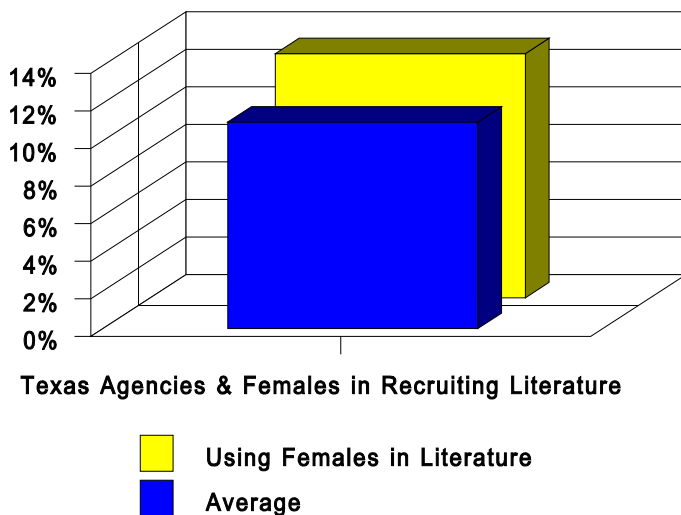
Table II



Those agencies which conduct career fairs were asked if they advertised the events in unusual or unconventional locations. This was one of only three areas in which Texas agencies use of a tactic was higher than that of the out of state agencies. It did not, however, result in a higher number of women officers for the Texas agencies, nor did it make a substantial difference overall.

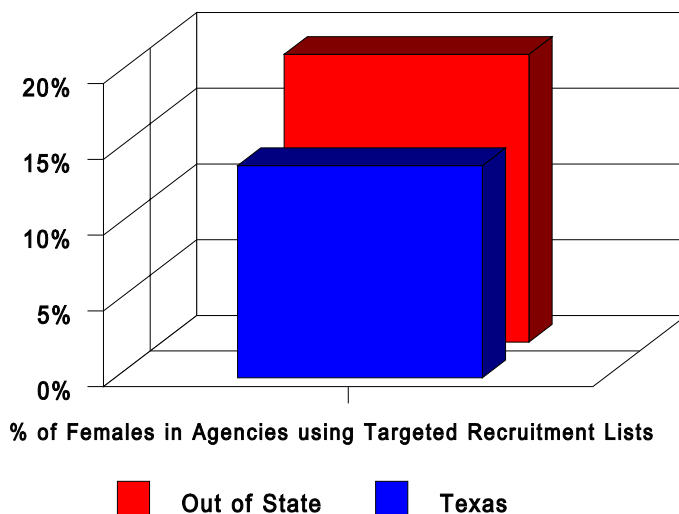
The next question on the survey dealt with recruiting literature. The agencies that use these items were asked if female officers were featured in the ads. While this aspect did not have any influence on the out of state organizations, it did have a positive impact for the Texas agencies utilizing it (Table III).

Table III



The second area in which the Texas agencies had a slight advantage over the out of state respondents was the use of Targeted Recruitment Lists. This method proved to have the greatest positive impact of all the methods covered in the survey. It produced significant results for the agencies employing it (Table IV). While this technique showed the best results, by far, it was the one least utilized by both responding groups. This was the only method used in Texas that brought agencies up to the 14% national average.

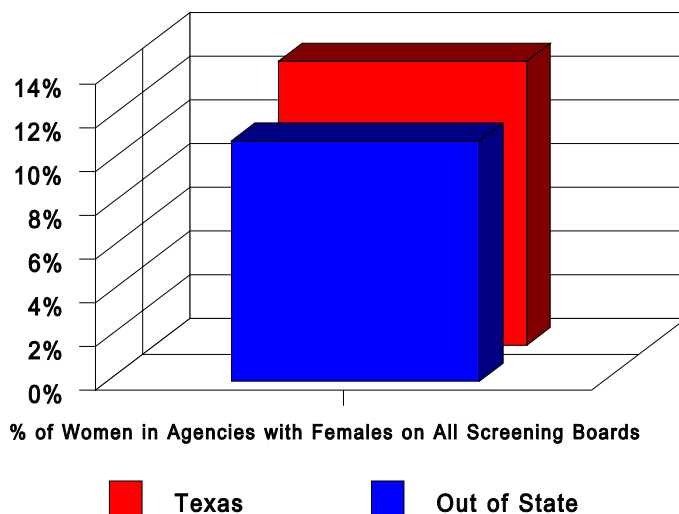
Table IV



Agencies were asked whether or not they had a program in place to help female applicants prepare for the physical agility test. It has traditionally been assumed that this test is one of the major stumbling blocks for women attempting to join a law enforcement agency. Thus, it would seem that agencies that have implemented this program should show a significantly higher percentage of women in their ranks. While less than half of the responding Texas agencies had such a program, it did not have any effect on the number of women employed by those agencies. Likewise, there were not a higher number of female employees in the out of state agencies using this program.

The final category is the third, and last, utilized more widely by the Texas organizations than the agencies from other states. Agencies which use screening boards as part of their hiring process were asked whether or not female officers were used on all applicant screening boards. This was the only category where Texas showed a higher percentage of females than the out of state agencies (Table V).

Table V



While many agencies used a combination of the various techniques, only one agency used all of the methods covered by the survey. Despite what would seem to be a very aggressive attempt to identify and hire potential female applicants this agency was still below the national average. This would seem to indicate that the problem is not merely a matter of the number of women being recruited, but whether or not the right women are actually being sought by these organizations.

CONCLUSIONS

The number of women serving in Texas law enforcement agencies is below the national average. This paper compared recruiting practices used by agencies outside of Texas that successfully recruit women with the strategies used by a variety of Texas departments. Are the Texas agencies adequately attempting to recruit potential female applicants?

The research was expected to show that most agencies are not actively recruiting women. Agencies that are using strategies covered in the survey were

expected to show a higher percentage of female officers than agencies that are not. The last expected outcome of the research was that Texas agencies would have a percentage of women in law enforcement positions similar to agencies in other parts of the country.

The first thing that was evident from the survey information was the fact that the average number of female officers in Texas agencies is lower than both the national average and the average of the out of state agencies that responded. Could this disparity be linked to a lack of aggressive recruiting? Are Texas departments using methods that have proven successful elsewhere?

The results show that roughly half of the Texas agencies use at least some of the techniques covered by the survey. The most common technique used by these agencies was the Dedicated Recruiting Unit. While more than half of the agencies surveyed utilized this system it did not have an impact on the number of women in their agencies.

The method that had the greatest positive impact on the number of female officers was the use of a Targeted Recruitment List. This was also one of the practices used by the smallest percentage of agencies. Many agencies, including the ones outside of Texas, had never even heard of the concept.

The biggest surprise was the impact on agencies using a program to help female applicants prepare for the physical agility test. This program was expected to show the most positive results out of all the programs discussed. A female applicants perceived inability to pass the physical agility test has always been viewed as one of the reasons for the low number of women in law

enforcement. But there was no increase in the percentage of female personnel in either group of agencies.

What is apparent from studying the results of these surveys is most agencies realize the need to increase the number of women in their ranks. Almost all of them use some combination of these tactics to try to accomplish this goal. With the exception of the Targeted Recruitment List, however, there does not seem to be any approach that has a substantial impact. The fact that this was the only universally effective method reinforces the assumption that the problem is not in the recruitment of women. Rather, the problem appears to lie in the recruitment of the right women for this career field.

There were several agencies that had a much higher percentage of women officers, and one that did not have a single female. But there was no connection between the recruiting techniques and the number of females. Agencies using the same approaches were represented on both ends of the scale.

The findings of this research do not support the hypothesis of this paper. The majority of the agencies surveyed were making some attempt to actively recruit women. Agencies that did use a variety of these techniques did not show the higher percentage of female officers that was expected. And while it was supposed that Texas agencies would have a comparable percentage of women officers to agencies from other parts of the country, they were found to be well below the national average.

The results of this study might have been hindered by the relatively low number of agencies outside of Texas that were contacted. In addition, these

agencies were contacted because they had been mentioned in previous literature as having aggressive attitudes toward recruiting females. A wider range of agencies may have brought the out of state averages closer to those of the Texas agencies involved. This would not have improved the Texas numbers, but it might have showed that the problems here in Texas are more prevalent nationwide.

With the current need for diversity in the ranks of law enforcement agencies this study is not only relevant to the career field, it is timely. It was obvious that even the smallest agencies are trying in some way to increase the number of women in their organizations. The fact that the majority of current techniques are not producing any noticeable results is very important. Agencies can devote time and resources presently being used to implement programs that are not proven to have positive results towards techniques that can help them attain their goals. The most important of these would be the creation and utilization of a targeted recruitment list.

Communities are better served when their law enforcement agencies are representative of the people they serve. Identifying approaches that are proven to increase the number of women in an agency is obviously beneficial for women in the community. But the same techniques that increase the number of women in an agency can be adapted to increase the number of any minority that is underrepresented in a particular agency, thus benefiting the community as a whole.

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