

**The Bill Blackwood
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Retaining Correction Officers in the Jail Setting

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ABSTRACT

In today's society, a large number of people are incarcerated in county jails. This situation means there is an increasing demand to hire more officers to care for these inmates. However, there is often the problem of a high turnover rate regarding county jail personnel. This researcher used surveys, periodicals, journals and publications to find information regarding what officers want out of their professions and if having in-house training has any effect regarding the turnover rate of jailers. This researcher used a survey to find out what employees wanted in their profession. It was found that over half of employees surveyed requested better pay in shift differential or in better salaries. This researcher also found that of the employees surveyed, the employees who worked for an agency with in-house certification classes had more employees with seniority than with the agency that did not have this available. In conclusion, this researcher found that when comparing the agency with in-house certification to the agency without in-house certification, the agency with in-house certification did show an increase in the amount of time employees worked for the agency. The agency without in-house certification had a larger amount of employees who had only worked for the agency for a short time. More research would need to be done (considering the agency examined as a whole) to be conclusive in the findings.

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INTRODUCTION

In today's society there is a large population that is incarcerated by our judicial system. This of course means we need more and more correction officers to care for these individuals. Finding and keeping these professionals are very difficult. County jails are known to have a revolving door when it comes to keeping enough officers to stay in compliance with jail standards. Jail standards say we will have one officer for every forty-eight inmates (Texas Commission of Jail Standards, 1999).

The purpose of this research is to give agencies enough information they need to help them make informed decisions on finding ways to help retain correction officer and police officers in the county jails. The question considers what incentives a county can use to retain the correction officer and police officer in the jail setting and would having in-house certifications for corrections and peace officer be in the best interest for the agency. When in-house training is discussed, it refers to correction officer and peace officer certification school not continuing education hours.

This researcher will explore different county jails by contacting and surveying the officers and departments and inquiring information on whether they have in-house certifications and what incentives do they have to help retain the officers. This researcher will also use publication, journals and periodicals.

This researcher will show the need for better pay for correction officers. It will look at other agencies procedures of keeping officers in the facility. The research found would provide agencies with information and incentive that will help retain officers. It is anticipated that this research will show that the agencies that have their own certification courses, which train and certify people to become correction officers and

police officers within the agency, will have less of a turn over than agencies that do not have the courses in-house. Other incentives will be pay differentials for officers that speak Spanish and work night shifts. This researcher will show also by giving officers more opportunities to use their peace officer certification in the jail and also training them to be able to perform those duties while off duty will also keep some officers from leaving the jail.

This research will give law enforcement agencies avenues to help retain officers whether they are peace officers or correction officers by having procedures in place to get them certified and giving the new correction officer the opportunity to be able to increase their knowledge and move up within the agency either in an administrative position or move on to the patrol side of the agency. By giving the employees opportunities that would not be available if they were to go and get the certifications on their own. This researcher will find what benefits and incentives other agencies have to offer.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This researcher found that the information that was available was primarily focusing on traditional law enforcement officers in a patrol setting and not on correction officers in the jail setting. There was a good number of prison related issues, which in many aspects are the same problems that were seen in the correctional setting. According to a report written for the Vermont Department of Corrections May 2005 the officer turnover rate increased from 15.6 per cent in 2003 to 35 percent in 2004. Charles Sebesta (2002), wrote among deputies and jailers of Sheriff's Office's in Texas of rural county jails they had a 33 percent turnover rate on officers leaving for better

paying jobs. The Bureau of Justice Statistics, Prison and Jail Inmates in Midyear (2006) reports an increase in the jail population of 2.5 percent. With increases in inmate populations the need for more and more officers are needed. A report put out on June 1, 2007 by the Texas Commission of Jail Standards, reported a total of 268 jai in Texas, of which, 49 were filled above 90 percent, 5 were filled to capacity and 7 were overcrowded. The total inmate population for County jails in Texas in June was 27,241. In July's report 46 were filled above 90 percent capacity, 7 were filled to capacity and 11 jails were overcrowded. The total inmate population for County jails in Texas in July was 27,966. This is an increase of 725 inmates in county jails in Texas in one month while jails are struggling to keep good officers staffed to care for this increase of inmates.

An article on the Politics Unspun noted that the officers in the UK had a sick leave rate of 14.7 percent, which was the highest in their public sector. The recruitment and retention of officers in the prison system are affected with a 10 percent or more vacancy rate in 17 prisons and 5 percent or more with 45 prisons in 2003. In this article it was argued that the lack of officer training and experience was also a safety issue. A study performed by the Victoria Police Department, in Victoria Texas in 2004, found hiring and training new personnel was a costly process for both commissioned and non-commissioned officers. After all the time and money is spent and the officer did not complete the certification programs or decides to leave the department within a short time the money spent hiring and training them is long gone and unrecoverable. Roy Boyd (2004), believes it is due to the stressful environment, dealing with a large number of offenders some of whom have committed assaultive offences and would not have a

problem with hurting another person or even on officers. The officers are locked in a jail or prison for as much as 12 hours a day and are having to be mentally and physically alert at all times knowing that if they put their guard down for just a short period that someone including themselves could be hurt or killed.

Other reasons given by officers were pay and schedule problems. A survey done by the Department office of Testing and Research (Correction News), Officers were given exit interviews, the survey completed shown 68.5 percent were dissatisfied with their pay. This researcher looked for information of whether having in-house training had an impact on employee retention. No information or research was found for this specific issue.

METHODOLOGY

The research question to be examined considers whether or not having an in-house certification within the agency will help retain correction and peace officers in the agency. Does pay have bearing on how long the officers stay at any agency? What types of benefits are available to agencies to increase the longevity of the officers? Does an agency that has in-house training to certify them as correction officers and peace officers have a lower turnover rate than an agency that does not offer or provide these types of schools?

This researcher believes that in order to retain correction and peace officers, the agency must provide a variety of benefits that will keep an employee fulfilled in the job or position in which he or she is employed. This researcher believes that there are two important factors that work hand in hand in keeping officers with an agency. One is pay, having an equal pay scale to their counter parts in patrol. The other is training,

giving the officer the opportunity to fulfill their goals, some to become peace officers and being able to use their license while being assigned in the jail and the other is correction officers, keeping them well trained in the field of corrections. This researcher anticipates that the pay scale will be the most important to employees.

The method of inquiry will include: Internet sites, periodicals, journals and surveys distributed to employees of different agencies and administrators as well as personal interviews and telephone surveys. Surveys will be sent to agencies that have in-house training and agencies that do not have in-house training. The surveys will be sent to agencies around the State of Texas. Human resource department will be contacted to get the turnover rate from each county.

The instrument that will be used to measure the researcher's findings regarding the subject of retaining officers in a correctional setting will include telephone surveys and questionnaires. The findings will be calculated to show what the employees want in an agency. Surveys will also be sent to two agencies. Each county will be sent 30 surveys with the instruction to give 15 to day shift and 15 to night shift. Each county work schedule is 12-hour shifts. One county will have in-house training for peace officers and correction officers. This county will be referred to as County A. This is training to get the peace officers and correction officers' certification not continuing educational hours. The other county will not have this training in-house. This county will be referred to as County B. The survey will consist of 13 questions.

The information obtained from the survey will be analyzed by the length of service in the agency that has in-house certification programs with one that does not

have this available to the officers. The surveys will also be separated into the officer's perspective of what they are looking for in a career.

FINDINGS

Officer retention in the correctional facility is a difficult problem to solve and may never be resolved. Working in a facility that could get an employee taken as a hostage, stabbed or even killed on a daily basis is not very appealing to the average person looking for work or a new profession. Most people are looking for a profession that they can enjoy and not worry about getting hurt. Law enforcement is a profession that they can enjoy but there is the potential of getting hurt. Law enforcement is a profession with different hazards and issues. It takes a special kind of person to be in law enforcement. Agencies have the responsibility to maintain an appropriate officer to inmate ratio and without qualified applicants that are willing to maintain a position within the jail settings, there will always be a struggle to keep within Texas Jail Standards requirements. During the search for information, it was noted that much of the research found was related to the prison systems and peace officers in the performance of patrol duties. A study performed by Victoria Police Department (2004) found that the hiring and training process was very expensive and if the applicant did not complete the requirements or decided to leave after a short time. That money was long gone and unrecoverable.

Two agencies were picked to send survey instruments to. Both agencies were from the same geographical area and were similar in size. County A was sent 30 surveys with instructions to give 15 to a day shift and 15 to a night shift. County B was also sent 30 surveys and was given the same instructions. Both agencies had 12-hour shifts. County A had in-house training while County B did not have in-house training.

County A did not charge their employees to take either the corrections or peace officers class. Nor did they make them sign any agreements to work for the agency for any length of time.

County A had 16 respond that wanted more competitive pay or payment for shift differentials out of 26 responses. County B had 15 out of 24 respond for competitive pay or pay for shift differentials. County A had 5 respond to better training or tuition reimbursement. County B had 6 respond to better training or tuition reimbursement.

The years of service was broken down as follows:

	County A	County B
1month to 1 year	3	8
2 years to 5 years	7	7
6 years to 10 years	7	6
11 years to 15 years	3	0
16 years to 20 years	3	1
21 years to 25 years	2	1

One person from each county did not respond to this question.

Comparing the two counties one with in-house and one without in-house certification, the county that had the ability to give the in-house certification classes had more officers with more than 11 years of service totaling 8 out of the 26 officers. The county that did not have in-house certification classes had only 2 officers out of the 24 that had more than 11 years of service. The average length of service for both agencies was 2-5 years with the agency. The agency with no in-house certification

classes had 8 officers with less than 1 year of service. The agency with in-house certification classes had only 3 with less than 1 year of service.

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSIONS

Retaining qualified officers is one of the biggest problems facing agencies in today's workforce. Agencies have the responsibility to maintain a certain number of officers to inmate ratio. The problem agencies are having is maintaining the acceptable number of officers to maintain the operations of the facility.

The purpose of this study is to find out whether or not anything can be done by the agencies to maintain an acceptable number of correction officers. What incentives could an agency implement that would give an agency more appeal? If in-house certification classes were not available within the agency, would educational reimbursement help agencies maintain a full staff? Will better benefits entice an employee to stay with the agency?

This research question that was examined focused on whether or not having an in-house certification for peace officers and correction officers have a large effect on the turnover rate of the correction officers. The other research question will examine if better pay will give the officer the incentive to remain within the agency.

The researcher hypothesized that agencies that have better access to training such as in-house peace officer and correction officer certification that allow officers to follow their goals would decrease the turnover rate of the correction officers. This researcher believes that having better pay will be the number one reason given by the correction officers to maintain their employment at the agency they work for at the time of the survey.

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