

The Existence of Fitness Testing in Florida Sheriff's Offices: Deputies' Perspective on Physical Abilities Testing

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Abstract

We as a society are constantly being reminded of the importance of health and fitness. Being physically fit offers many benefits, even more so for law enforcement officers who are generally in poorer health and less fit than the general public. Law enforcement officers usually receive fitness training while in the police academy. They may have to complete a fitness test upon being hired but once hired they are usually on their own to maintain fitness. Law enforcement agencies should be proactive and may avoid liability suits by mandating physical abilities testing (PAT) for hiring and for job retention. A two stage process was used to survey all 67 Florida sheriffs' offices for the existence of a PAT in their departments and to obtain deputies' perspectives on whether or not the PAT was a motivational factor in keeping fit.

Introduction

Physical fitness in today's age is not a new concept. A great deal of attention is focused on fitness and exercising regularly which bring rewards of weight loss, reducing heart disease, combating diabetes, reducing stress, longer life expectancy, and many others. With all the benefits there is still a lack of participation in physical fitness. Police officers are no exception. Research found shows that police officers' are generally in poorer health and less physically fit than members of the general public (Bissett, Bissett, and Snell, 2012). Furthermore, law enforcement officers are at a higher risk of heart attack which doubles with each 10 years of law enforcement service (Quigley, 2008). With these statistical findings, why is it that fewer officers are keeping fit? Police officers are an influential population where just their appearance and condition often dictates how a situation may unfold. Officers' fitness also impacts more than just their health. Carole Moore from her article, *Fit for Duty How to train for the real deal (2006)*, comments that it has become more apparent that good physical conditioning has an increasing influence on officer's job performance, the department's liability, and the public's perception (Moore, 2006).

Police officer fitness begins as a recruit in the police academy. Many law enforcement agencies require candidates to pass some form of physical agility test as a condition of employment. Many agencies, though, do not require a physical fitness standard for incumbents. With this lack of physical fitness requirement, law enforcement agencies need to step in and encourage physical fitness with their current members. This can be done by voluntary fitness programs and/or mandated physical agility tests. Physical agility testing is a method to help keep law enforcement officers at a readiness level or at a minimum fitness level to fulfill their job functions.

This paper will look at the background of physical fitness, the use of physical abilities testing in law enforcement and how it impacts law enforcement agencies today. The research conducted for this project will look for the existence and trend of fitness testing, or physical abilities testing, in Florida's Sheriff's agencies. In 2003 the Florida Department of Law Enforcement conducted a survey showing that only 27 out of 67 sheriff's offices had a fitness test in place (Allen, (n.d.)). This project will determine if that ratio has changed over the past 10 years. Sheriff Deputies were also surveyed on their perspective of physical abilities testing, what motivates them to keep fit, and any reasons for not staying in shape.

Literature Review

Health and Wellness Issues

Looking first at the general population can give an idea of the general health of citizens. Mattke, Schnyer, and Van Busum's paper, *A Review of the US Workplace Wellness Market (2012)*, advise that "rising rates of obesity and physical inactivity are leading to more diabetes and cardiovascular disease" (pg. 5). This chronic disease is shifting to younger workers adding to the cost of medical care and loss of productivity. More employers are looking at workplace wellness programs and how to motivate employees to participate. The primary causes for chronic diseases are inactivity, poor nutrition, tobacco use, and alcohol consumption (Mattke et al., 2012). Another article listed seven major risk factors for cardiovascular disease: genetics, sedentary lifestyle, obesity, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, smoking, and diabetes (Vonk, 2007). Adrienne Quigley's article, *Fit for Duty? The Need for Physical Fitness Programs for Law Enforcement Officers (2008)*, explains that only 22% of U.S. adults get light to moderate exercise five or more times per week and 10% exercise vigorously at least three times per week.

Research collected demonstrates that when compared to the general public, police officers are generally in poorer health and less physically fit (Ebling, 2002; Maher, 1984; Richmond, Wodak, Kehoe, & Heather, 1998; Quigley, 2008). A study conducted by the Cooper Institute showed results that officers average fitness levels are below normal and that they are less fit than at least half of all U.S. citizens (Quigley, 2008). Similar results were obtained in the United Kingdom of a study done on British police officer conditions. The study found $\frac{3}{4}$ of police officers were overweight or obese compared with $\frac{2}{3}$ of men in the general population (Johnson, 2012). In their article, *Physical ability, fitness and police work*, Bonneau and Brown (1995) comment on the results of a study conducted by Collingwood who compared the fitness levels of police officers to those of prison inmates. "Simply stated, the average police officer does not have the fitness capacity to face the average criminal" (Bonneau and Brown, 1995, p. 158). A thesis written by Michael Lane, *Health Problems within Law Enforcement: How Strength Training Can Be the Solution* (n.d.) reiterates that police officers have a higher risk of colon cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, arthritis, ulcers, obesity, and are more vulnerable to unhealthy lifestyles. The most disturbing is that "the average lifespan of a law enforcement officer is two to five years after retirement" (Lane, (n.d.), pg. 1).

There are a host of factors contributing to why law enforcement officers have a poor fitness level. Fitness can deteriorate due to aging, poor diet and exercise, and inactivity. A common theme in the research is that police work is mostly sedentary (Bissett et al., 2012; Bonneau & Brown, 1995; Boni, 2004; Mattke et al., 2012; Vonk, 2007). Officers are getting very little, if any, physical activity at work. One study shows that “80 – 90% of the officers’ time is devoted to tasks involving limited physical activity” (Bissett, Bissett, & Snell, 2012). This can be due to advances in technology, modern equipment, better communication skills, and closer ties to the community through community policing efforts. If officers want to keep fit they will have to do so on their own time or at work if given the opportunity but many don’t have the time or opportunity. Daniel Breci’s research paper, *Physical Fitness Requirements in Law Enforcement Agencies* (2005) gives four major reasons that people choose not to exercise: (1) Lack of time, (2) Lack of knowledge, (3) Lack of facilities/opportunities, and (4) Fatigue (Breci, 2005).

Another common theme found in the literature was stress. Job-related stress exists in all occupations but “law enforcement officers suffer more job-related stress than people in other occupations” (Quigley, 2008). According to a paper written by W.C. Brown, *Managerial Perspectives in the Development of a Physical Fitness Program* the most stressful job occupation is Air Traffic Controllers followed by Police Officers (Brown W. , (n.d.)). Sources of stress in police work are numerous and immediate. Some research has identified as many as 53 stressors associated with police work (Shell, 2005).

Benefits

One question to be asked is why is fitness important for law enforcement? Thomas Suminski’s paper, *Physical Fitness and Law Enforcement (n.d.)*, explains two reasons why fitness is important for law enforcement: Duty aspect and Longevity aspect. Officers should be fit enough to do the duties the job demands. Though research has shown that most of police work is sedentary, there are those times when physical activity is needed which are often critical times. Examples include fleeing suspects, subjects resisting arrest, and breaking up subjects in physical altercations, all having the potential for serious injury or death. Officer longevity is also important. Research has shown that mortality rates are higher for law enforcement officers. The average American male lives to be 72 years old, while the average law enforcement officer lives to be 59.5 (Suminski, (n.d.)). Longevity is affected by police officers’ inactivity, poor diet, and stressors, all of which contribute to such problems as heart disease and diabetes. Research has shown that physical fitness is a primary method of stress reduction (Brown W. , (n.d.)).

Besides obvious physical and health benefits, some literature has shown that physically fit officers receive higher ratings on performance evaluations, use less sick time, and are injured less (Quigley, 2008). Boni’s article, *Exercise and physical fitness: The impact on work outcomes, cognition, and psychological well-being for police* (2004), best summarizes the importance of fit officers. “Fit police officers are not only healthier, they also perform better on the job, are more committed, take fewer sick days, and are more satisfied and less stressed” (Boni, 2004). Excessive force may be reduced as a

physically fit officer may be able to meet a challenge without resorting to a higher level of force (Allen, (n.d.)).

The literature has shared the importance of keeping officers fit but police officers themselves do not necessarily share the same perspective. Bisset et al. listed results of a survey conducted of Texas law enforcement officers which revealed that physical ability was ranked last among a group of nine competencies (2012).

Types of Testing

Law enforcement agencies have options in reference to fitness testing programs. They can either sit back and put the responsibility on the officer or take a proactive approach and implement fitness programs or testing. An agency will need to determine if the testing will be voluntary or mandatory. The literature found has favored fitness programs/testing be mandatory. Voluntary testing does not typically address the issue of low fitness levels in an agency (Cooper Institute, (n.d.)). This is due to those who usually volunteer are the ones already fit. The literature has shown the need for agency intervention for improving officer fitness. Agencies need to not only set fitness standards for employment but continue these standards throughout an officer's career. The best time to start is the onset of an officer's career as a Finnish study revealed; police officers who started early were more likely to continue with physical fitness throughout their lives (Lane, (n.d.)). Agencies should set policy for the use of physical fitness testing for job retention. Consequences should be attached to the policy for not passing. "If there is no punishment, the policy could be deemed useless" (Brown C. , 2005). Reinforcements in the form of incentives should also be considered by the agency. Common incentives include, additional leave time, on duty workout time, pay bonuses, fitness memberships and special recognition (Lee & Mallory, 2004). "There is not much better incentive than allowing the officer time to exercise while being paid" (Williams, 2002).

In determining what types of testing to implement, agencies should choose from two schools of thought - Physiological or health related testing and occupational fitness testing. The following have been found to be important factors in successful job performance: cardiovascular endurance, anaerobic power, muscular strength, muscular endurance, flexibility, and body composition (Quigley, 2008). Bonneau and Brown (1995) contend that several medical tests are needed to truly determine body strength, endurance and flexibility which is time consuming and expensive. In their opinion, Bonneau and Brown state that the best approach to police fitness testing is that of job related fitness testing (1995). Those critical tasks associated with law enforcement have been identified as running, climbing, jumping, lifting/carrying, dragging, pushing, and use of force (Quigley, 2008). According to the Cooper Institute, *Law enforcement commonly asked questions*, "the purpose of fitness testing is to identify who can and cannot perform essential physical job tasks" ((n.d.), pg. 10).

Hoover's article, *Trends in police physical ability selection testing* (1992) describes three forms of physical abilities testing commonly used in law enforcement: Job simulation exercises, physical agility and/or stamina tests, and norm referenced physical fitness or wellness tests (1992).

Job task simulation exercises replicates as closely as possible those behaviors found in the field. Time, safety, and equipment are items to consider if using this form of testing. This form of exercise is not easy to develop. An advantage of this form is it is easily recognizable as being job related. Disadvantages include:

- Difficult to measure ability to perform all physical job tasks
- Accounts for only 20-25% of the critical physical functions of law enforcement
- Dependent on prior learning, therefore less predictive of overall fitness
- Does not provide overall measure of one's physical capabilities
- Officers tend not to train; does not encourage fitness
- No bearing on health risks
- More officers are injured with this testing
- Difficult to determine a passing score (FitForce, 2007).

Physical fitness or agility testing has advantages over simulation exercises as they are more economical to administer, safer, and more convenient (Hoover, 1992). They consist of a set of exercises designed to measure general physical condition. A disadvantage of physical fitness tests is that they are more difficult to understand as being job related. A physical fitness test has to be validated through a construct/criterion validation process as being predictive of job performance of physical tasks. This process takes more effort, resources and is costly (FitForce, 2007). FitForce (2007) lists the advantages for physical fitness tests:

- Discriminates well who can and cannot perform essential functions of the job
- Encourages fitness
- Direct bearing on lowering health risks and injuries
- Easier to administer
- Account up to 80% of the underlying physical abilities to perform most critical physical tasks
- Weak areas are easily identifiable

FitForce prefers physical fitness testing as there are more advantages. Both types of tests are defensible in court "if validated as being job related and consistent with business necessity" (2007). Hoover's article claims that when challenged in court physical agility tests have fared the worse (1992). This is due to adverse impact on women as they tend to not perform as well as men on the physical agility tests (Hoover, 1992).

The last form of testing is physical fitness norms or what others call the Cooper test. The Cooper Institute recommended fitness test battery consists of the vertical jump, bench press, 1 minute sit up, 300 meter run, 1 minute push-up and 1.5 mile run (Cooper Institute, (n.d.)). The Cooper tests, according to FitForce (2007), are only profiles of individuals who have taken the tests. They are not job related standards and do not predict the ability of officers to perform job tasks. The Cooper Institute does not perform law enforcement fitness testing validation studies at this time. They only report findings from other studies (Cooper Institute, (n.d.)). The Cooper norms are based on age and gender and the tests have been used in law enforcement as it is reasonable to

expect officers to be as fit as their age and gender group (FitForce, 2007). The norms are scientifically valid in terms of describing the fitness levels of various age-gender groups. Cooper norms should not be used for hiring, for Academy standards, or incumbent retention (FitForce, 2007).

Setting standards or cut off points to fitness tests are difficult for an agency to do. There are three approaches that exist for setting standards. The first approach is a construct/criterion validation study. This study is performed for a specific agency and cut points will determine the job standard for that agency. Though this is the most defensible it is also the most expensive option for an agency. A second less costly and slightly less defensible approach is the transferability study. This study documents that an agency has a strong similarity to another federal, state or local agency where standards have been validated. The agency would compare, by job analysis, job descriptions and if similarity exists adopt the host agency's standards. The third approach, and least defensible, is applying another "similar" agency's absolute standard. This is done by applying the standards of another department where there is no commonality study and no validation study. The only defense with this approach is to provide documentation with data that the demands of the job are the same as the agency whose standards were adopted (Cooper Institute, (n.d.)).

Liability

Agencies could be found negligent for not having fitness standards and programs in place that ensure the physical readiness of officers. An example is in *Parker v. Washington D.C.* (1988) where the city was found negligent for not having an annual assessment and ongoing fitness program for officers (Allen, (n.d.)). The following are areas an agency can be found negligent:

- Negligent hiring: failure to hire applicants who are fit to do the job
- Negligent training: failure to train recruits and incumbents to physically to the job
- Negligent supervision: failure to supervise incumbents to ensure they meet job demands
- Negligent retention: failure to reassign officers who cannot meet physical demands of the job. (Cooper Institute, (n.d.)).

Another area of concern which can lead to legal problems is what standards or cut off scores should be applied. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1991 both require that a test an agency uses must be job related. The Civil Rights Act of 1991 (same job = same standard) states that it is unlawful for an agency to adjust scores or use different cut off scores on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 requires that an agency not use a test that demonstrates adverse impact against a protected class (female, racial, minority). Therefore to be compliant it is recommended that absolute standards (single cut points for everyone) be used (Cooper Institute, (n.d.)). However, the use of these single cut off scores will likely demonstrate adverse impact against females. Though if the standards are validated and the test cut points predict who can and cannot do the

job then they should be upheld if challenged in court. An agency can use age-gender norms as standards even though they are not as predictive of the ability to do the job as absolute standards (Cooper Institute, (n.d.)). The use of these norms appears to violate the Civil Rights Act of 1991, though they are less likely to result in adverse impact against females. Lastly, Brook's article *Law enforcement physical fitness standards and Title VII* (2001) explains that an agency may decide to avoid the problems of adverse impact by simply setting physical standards so low that few will fail. This will not accomplish anything for an agency trying to improve the fitness level of officers.

Past research has shown the importance and benefits of physically fit officers and the need for an agency to maintain physical standards. The following research will help identify the use of physical abilities testing in law enforcement and whether or not officers' fitness is influenced by a mandated standard.

Methods

This research project focused on the 67 sheriffs' offices in Florida and included a two part survey process. First, a questionnaire was sent, via email, to all the 67 sheriffs' offices requesting one designated person to complete and return it within 10 business days.

The data from this questionnaire identified those agencies who utilized a physical abilities test for hiring and retention of sworn law enforcement officers and those agencies that did not. Data collected also included the frequency of the test, type of test, and any incentives for successful completion. A shortcoming was experienced in the execution of the first questionnaire as less than half of the agencies responded to the email. One hundred percent cooperation was needed in this step in order to proceed with the secondary survey; therefore the remaining sheriffs' offices were contacted via telephone in order to obtain the required information.

Those agencies that had a mandated physical abilities test for incumbent retention were the targeted agencies for the second part of this research. An internet survey was utilized for data collection from those agencies identified from the informational questionnaire. Only those agencies identified as mandating a physical abilities test for retention of sworn law enforcement officers were included in the sample to be surveyed. An email request and link to the survey was sent to those identified agencies requesting their participation in the survey. Furthermore, it was requested that only sworn law enforcement officers complete the survey; Corrections deputies were not included. Another shortcoming was experienced when sending out the survey links to those agencies that mandated a physical abilities test for retention. It was learned that one agency was unable to respond to the survey as that agency did not have internet access for its deputies. Therefore the number of possible respondents for this survey was reduced by the number of sworn law enforcement officers for that agency. The data from this secondary survey provided information on deputies' perspective of physical fitness and the use of the physical abilities test and whether or not it was a motivator for participation in physical fitness. The survey instrument was sent to the targeted sample with an explanation that the survey responses were anonymous. No agency

identification was requested. All responses were analyzed and any mention of individual agencies was removed.

The strength of these surveys is that the informational questionnaire will separate those agencies who utilize the physical abilities test for job retention from those that do not. Therefore, deputies in those agencies that have a mandated physical abilities test were the selected sample. A weakness in the secondary survey is that the sample is only sworn law enforcement deputies and results could be skewed by the possibility of any Corrections personnel taking the survey.

Results

The first part of this survey process was an agency informational questionnaire emailed to all 67 Florida sheriffs' offices (See Appendix A). Between email responses and phone contact, a 100% response rate was achieved. Results were tallied by hand. It was found that out of the 67 county sheriffs' offices, 32 (48%) of them utilized a physical abilities test (PAT) for the hiring process. Out of these 32 agencies, only 13 (19%) utilized the PAT for job retention. The remaining 35 agencies did not use the PAT at all.

The agencies were asked in the questionnaire what their PAT consisted of (type of test/course). The choices were: same as FDLE; similar to FDLE; Cooper test; or other. The FDLE style of course was the most frequently used among those 32 agencies using the PAT for the hiring process and Cooper Test was the least used, see Figure 1.

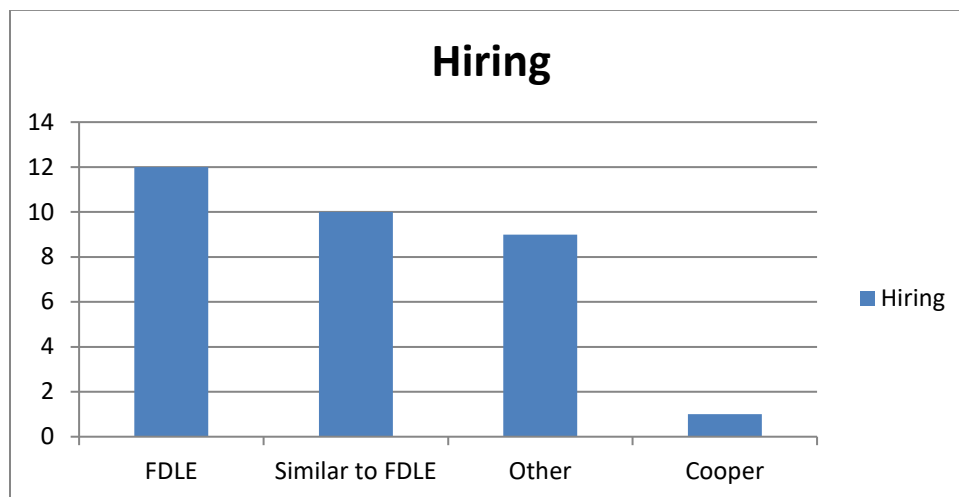


Figure 1

Similar tests to the FDLE course were used most frequently for those 13 counties using the PAT for job retention, see Figure 2.

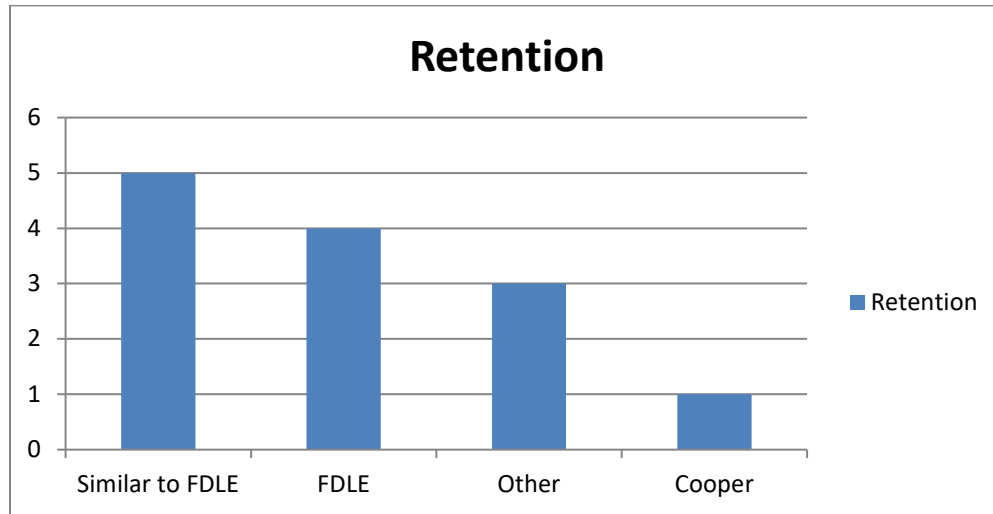


Figure 2

The following results only pertain to those 13 sheriffs' offices that mandate the physical abilities test for job retention. A list of those agencies and the number of sworn law enforcement deputies in each agency can be seen in Figure 3.

County	# of Sworn LEO
Charlotte	282
Citrus	225
Clay	260
Duval	1921
Hillsborough	1198
Okaloosa	343
Orange	1442
Pasco	400
Pinellas	783
Santa Rosa	199
Sarasota	405
Volusia	470
Walton	170
TOTAL	8098

Figure 3

The majority of these agencies use annual testing. Two counties used bi-annual testing, one tested every 2 years, and one used quarterly testing.

Only 1 of 13 agencies requires a doctor's physical before taking the physical abilities test. A question inquired on the existence of incentives given for taking the PAT. Five out of the 13 agencies give incentives for successful completion or completion in a certain time range. Incentives ranged from T-shirts, money, and time off.

The second stage of this research project was a web-based survey sent to the targeted sample – law enforcement officers from those 13 sheriffs' offices identified from stage one's agency questionnaire (See Figure 3). Hillsborough County was eliminated from the sample group; therefore the total sample group was 6900 possible respondents. Web Survey Creator was utilized to conduct the survey and the web-based program analyzed the results per question. (See Appendix B for survey questions).

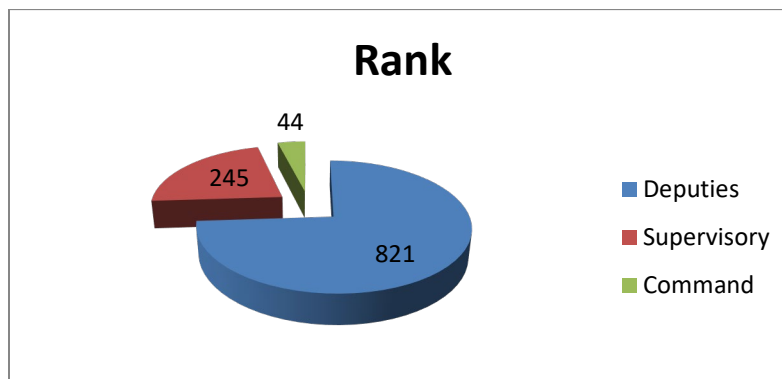
There were 1115 responses received back from the survey out of the 6900 possible, which yielded a 16.16% overall response rate. There were four sections to the survey with a piping question in section two.

Section 1 questions: Demographics

1. Rank level

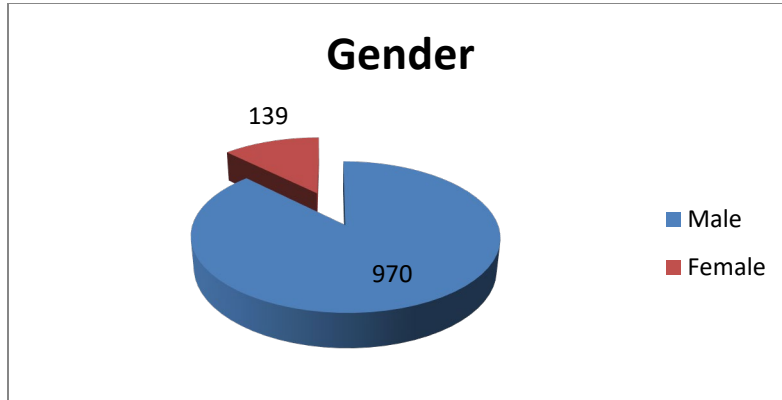
1110 responses were received with 5 unanswered; a 16.09% response rate.

There were 821 deputies, 245 supervisors (Corporal, Sergeant, Lieutenant), and 44 Command (Captain and higher).



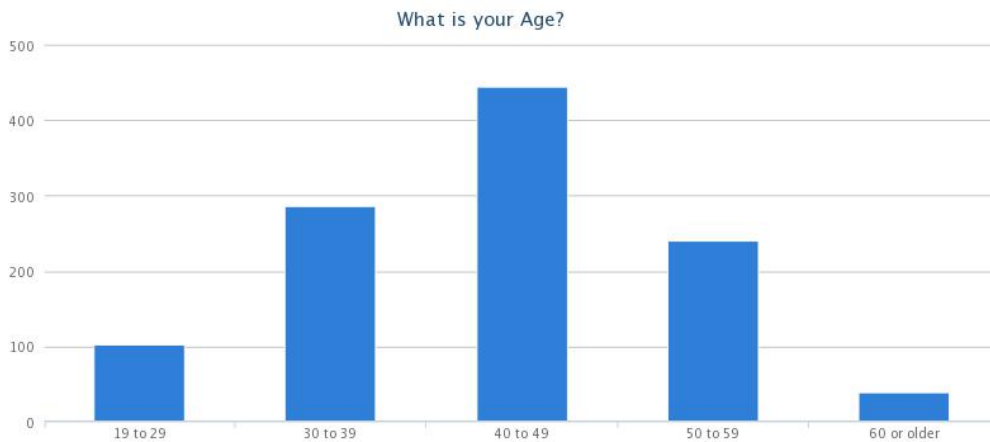
2. Gender

The majority of those completing the survey were male, 970 males and 139 females. Total of 1109 responses, 6 unanswered.



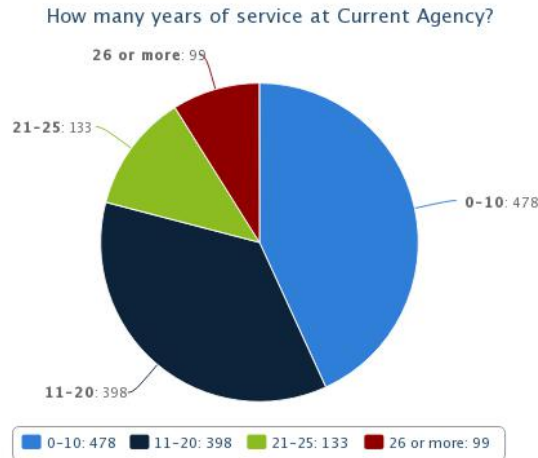
3. Age

The majority of the responses were of the age group of 40- 49. 1109 responses with 6 unanswered.



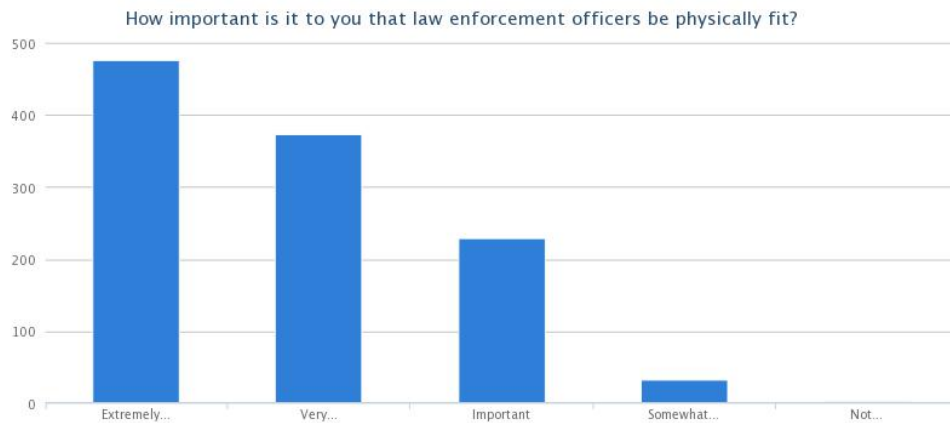
4. Years of Service

The most responses were from the 0 -10 years of service bracket. There were 1108 responses received with 7 unanswered.



Section 2 questions: Fitness

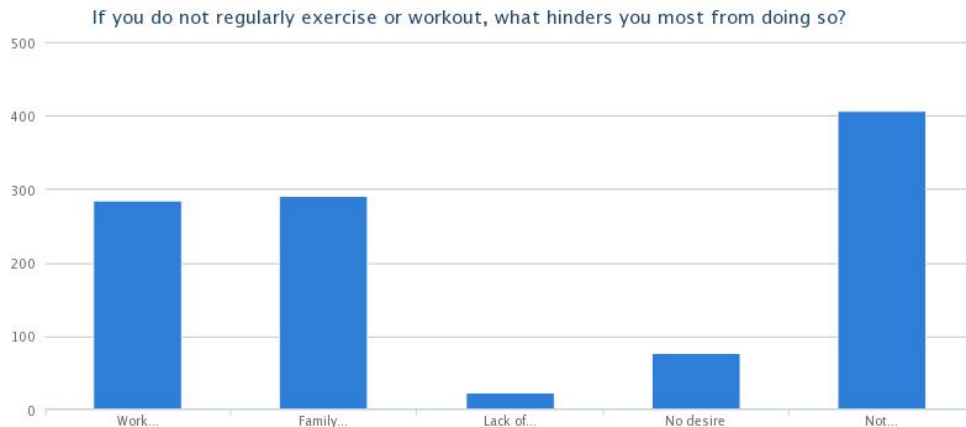
1. The majority of the responses answered extremely important as to the importance of law enforcement officers being physically fit. 1109 responses with 6 answered.



2. On average, most respondents answered that they work out 3-4 times per week (38.4%). 34.8% worked out 1-2 times per week and 14.2% worked out 5 or more times per week. 87.4% of the respondents advised they work out at least once per week. Only 12.6% responded that they don't work out at all. There were 1110 responses with 5 unanswered.

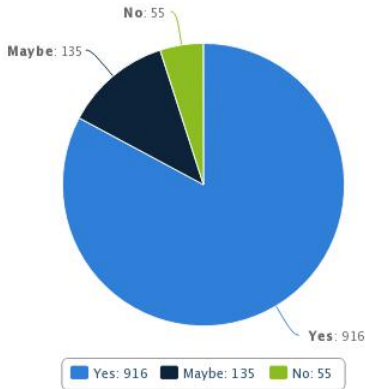


3. Hindrances to exercising revealed that most respondents (400) answered not applicable to this question. But for the others it was family obligations then work schedule that kept them from exercising. There were 1079 responses with 36 unanswered.

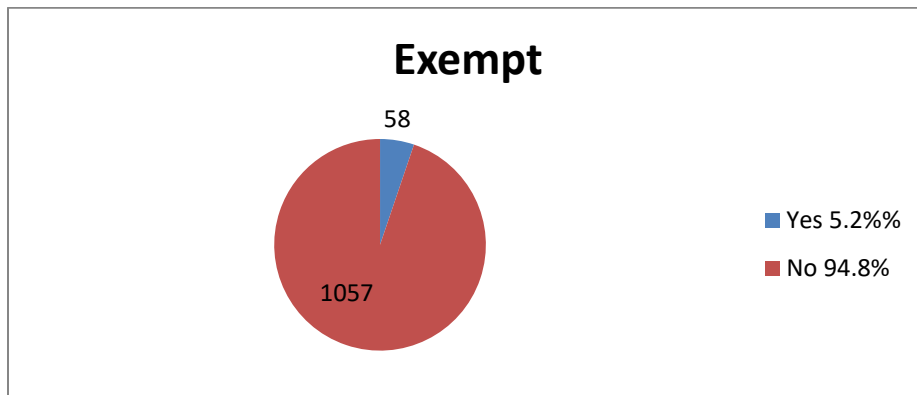


4. A total of 916 (82.8%) of the 1106 respondents advised that they would increase their fitness level if given on duty time to exercise. Nine did not answer the question.

If given on duty time to exercise would you participate in increasing your current fitness level?



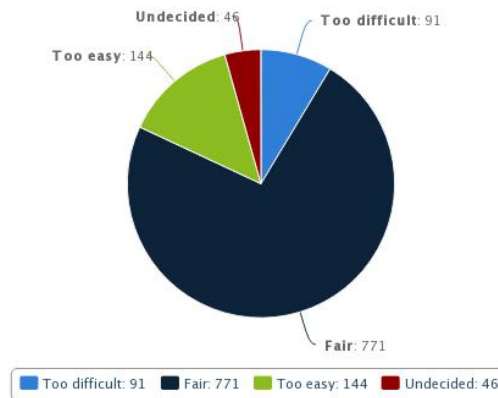
5. A total of 58 of the 1115 respondents answered that they were exempt from their agency's PAT. Those 58 respondents were directed to the last section of questions.



Section 3 questions: Mandated PAT – possible 1057 responses as 58 are exempt and did not answer questions

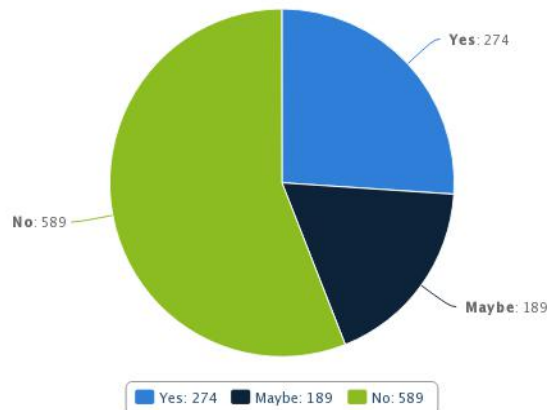
1. In reference to an agency's PAT level of difficulty, the majority of respondents 771 (73.3%) answered that the test was fair. A total of 144 respondents (13.7%) thought their test was too easy while 91 (8.7%) thought their test was too difficult. Forty six respondents (4.4%) were undecided. There were 1052 responses with 5 unanswered.

Do you feel your agency's mandated physical abilities test is _____: (fill in blank)



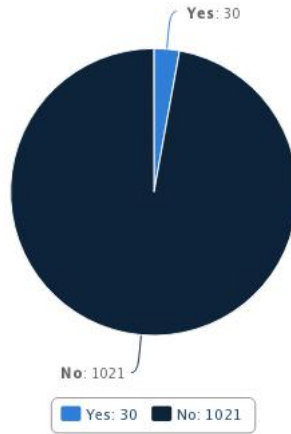
2. A total of 589 (56%) of the 1052 respondents stated that their agency's PAT did not motivate them to regularly exercise. Two hundred seventy four (26%) of respondents stated that their PAT did motivate them to exercise. One hundred eighty nine (18%) advised maybe it did. Five did not answer.

f difficulty for your agency's mandated physical abilities test for job retention motivate you to regularly ex



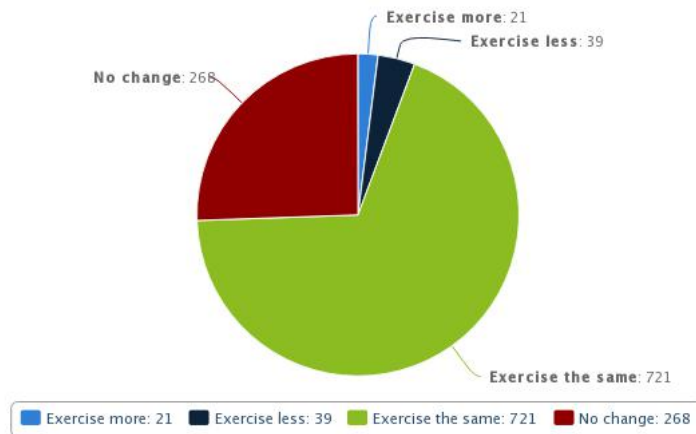
- A total of 30 (2.9%) of the 1051 respondents advised that there had been a time they did not pass their agency's PAT. Six did not answer the question.

Have you ever not passed your agency's physical abilities test?



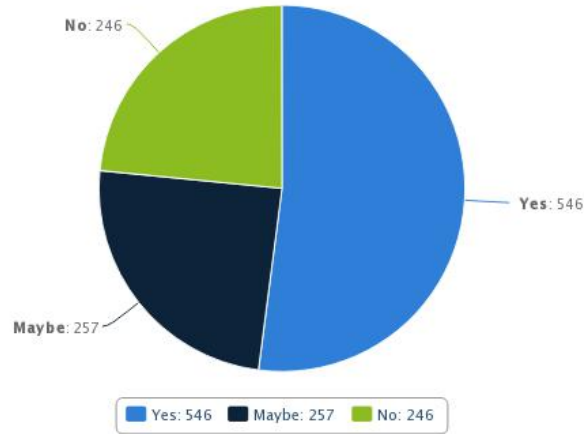
- A total of 721 respondents (68.7%) advised that they would exercise the same if their agency did not have a physical abilities test. Two hundred sixty eight respondents (25.5%) advised there would be no change in their exercise, while 39 (3.7%) would exercise less and 21 (2%) would exercise more. There were 1049 responses with 8 not answering.

If your agency did not have a mandated physical abilities test would you _____: (fill in blank)



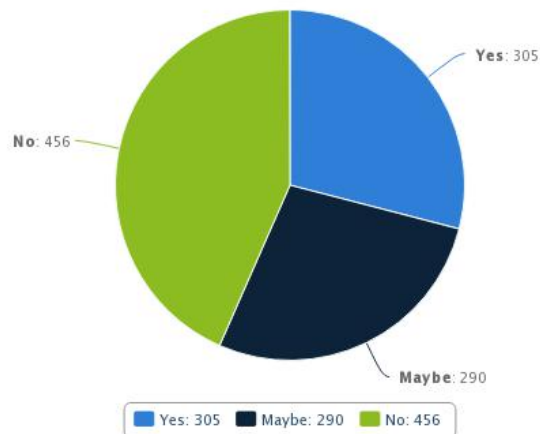
5. A total of 546 out of the 1049 respondents (52%) stated that they would increase their fitness level if their agency gave monetary or time off incentives for better passing scores on the PAT. Two hundred fifty seven respondents (24.5%) advised that maybe they would increase their fitness level while 246 (23.5%) advised they would not. Eight did not answer the question.

Would you increase your fitness level if your agency gave monetary or time off incentives for better passing scores when taking the m:



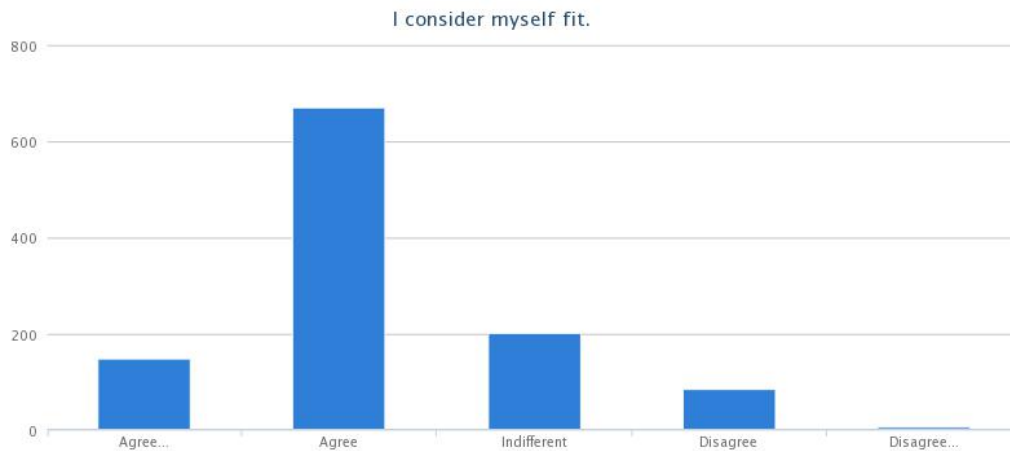
6. On whether or not a respondent would support a doctor's physical prior to taking their agency's PAT, the majority of respondents chose No – 456 out of 1051 respondents (43.4%). A total of 305 respondents chose Yes (29%), and 290 or (27.6%) chose maybe they would.

Would you support the requirement of a doctor's physical prior to taking the physical abilities test?

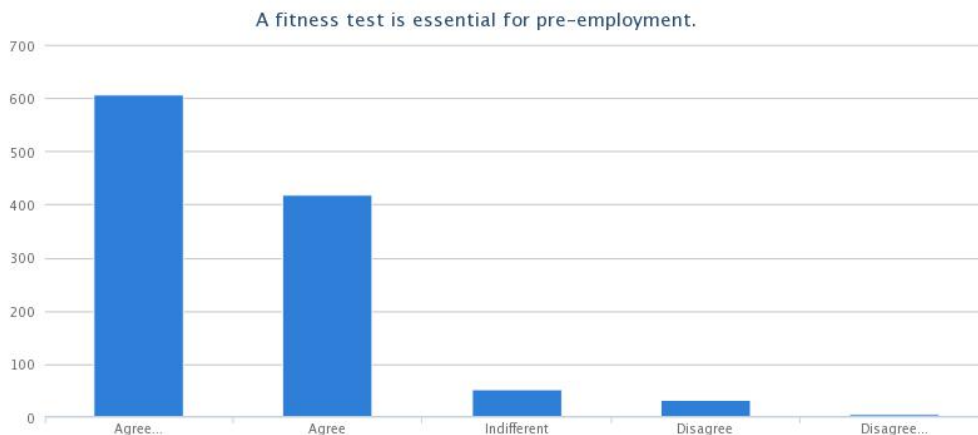


Section 4 questions: Conclusion – open to all respondents

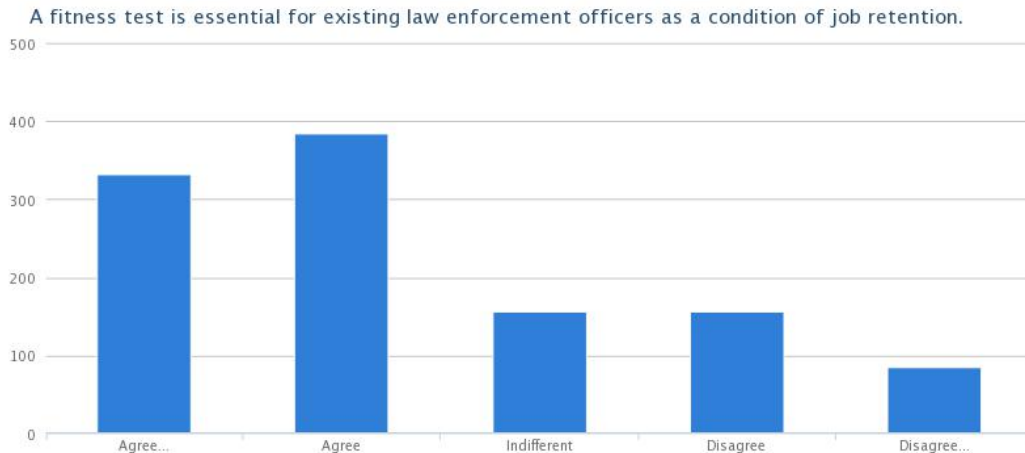
1. A total of 669 respondents (60.3%) agreed that they considered themselves fit. One hundred forty nine (13.4%) strongly agreed that they considered themselves fit while 200 (18%) were indifferent, 85 (7.7%) disagreed, and 7 (.6%) strongly disagreed. A total of 1110 responses were received with 5 unanswered.



2. When the respondents were asked how they agreed to the statement, A fitness test is essential for pre-employment, the majority, 605 respondents (54.5%), strongly agreed. Four hundred eighteen (37.7%) agreed while 51 (4.6%) were indifferent, 31 (2.8%) disagreed, and 5 (.4%) strongly disagreed. Total of 1110 responses with 5 unanswered.



3. The responses to a fitness test being essential for existing law enforcement officers as a condition of job retention revealed: The majority, 384 respondents (34.6%) agreed, with a slightly lesser amount of 331 (29.8%) strongly agreeing. 156 (14%) were indifferent, 155 (14%) disagreed, and 84 (7.6%) strongly disagreed. Total of 1110 responses with 5 unanswered.



Discussion

This research found that 32 out of the 67 sheriffs' offices utilized the PAT for the hiring process. Out of these 32 agencies only 13 mandated the PAT for retention of its incumbents. Previous research showed that 27 of the 67 Florida sheriffs' offices utilized physical abilities testing. This is an increase of five agencies over the past 10 years, though previous research did not state how many agencies mandated the PAT for job retention. I would have anticipated a higher ratio since the last survey, given the attention toward fitness in recent years. Of the 13 agencies, the majority used annual testing while utilizing a testing course similar to that of FDLE's course. All but one county did not require a doctor's physical prior to taking the test and only five out of the 13 offered some type of incentive for successful completion of the PAT.

Surveys were sent out to 6900 deputies within the 13 identified sheriffs' offices that mandated the PAT for job retention. A total of 1115 deputies responded to the survey. Results indicated that 87.4% of the respondents worked out at least once per week while 12.6% did not work out at all. This project revealed that a higher percentage of deputies are exercising per week when compared to adults in the general public. Fifty two percent of deputies in this research are exercising 3-5 times or more per week as compared to the 32% of adults in the general public as suggested in past literature. Of those deputies who responded that they do not work out regularly, gave family obligations then work schedule as reasons they do not exercise. Previous research gave lack of time, knowledge, facilities and fatigue as the major reasons people do not

exercise. I would interpret from the deputy responses that time was the major factor in not exercising. This can also be seen in the question of whether or not deputies would exercise if given on duty time. An overwhelming 82.8% responded “yes” they would. An implication to this consideration is that if on-duty time was given to deputies to exercise then an agency would have more deputies increasing their fitness level.

The majority of deputies (771) thought their agency PAT was fair, with 144 stating it was too easy. The majority (589) advised their PAT did not motivate them to regularly exercise. Another 989 respondents stated that they would exercise the same or there would be no change in their exercise if their agency did not mandate a physical abilities test. Only 21 stated they would exercise more while 39 responded they would exercise less. Fifty two percent of the respondents stated they would increase their fitness level if their agency gave incentives. More deputies agreed than strongly agreed when considering whether they were fit or not. The majority of deputies “strongly agreed” to a fitness test being essential for pre-employment. They did not feel as strongly in regards to job retention. Deputy perspective appears to be consistent with current practice and what the past literature has said, that physical abilities testing for law enforcement officers is more important on the onset of an officer’s career than during the rest of his/her career.

The research obtained appears to show that, for these respondents, the PAT does not motivate them to exercise. It also does not influence their exercising habits. The results showed that in the absence of the PAT at their agency most of the respondents would not change their exercise habits. The results also show for these respondents that there appears to be a higher percentage of officers regularly exercising than what previous research has provided. A limitation in the secondary survey is that it only yielded a 16.16% response rate. This is not a significant response rate of the sample and results are not representative of all deputies in Florida. There is also no comparison group to the deputies surveyed from the 13 sheriffs’ offices. These deputies were all deputies who were from agencies that mandated the PAT. A similar sample group of deputies who work for agencies that do not mandate the PAT for job retention should be surveyed to get their exercise habits and their perspective on what motivates them to exercise. Therefore both samples could be compared for similarities or differences in what influences exercise. This is one area for future research.

An implication of the results of this research project is that deputies are being motivated by some other means. One reason may be that deputies are being better educated on health issues related to their profession. Another reason could be from voluntary fitness programs. Another limitation to this project is that it did not explore the existence of voluntary programs in all the sheriffs’ offices due to limiting the scope of this project and management of time constraints. Future research is needed in exploring those agencies that have voluntary fitness programs and its influence.

This survey project provided two main results: one, it provided a common motivator to increase deputy fitness which is for an agency to provide on-duty time for exercise. Two, it showed that the physical abilities tests used by the 13 sheriffs’ offices do not influence or motivate the majority of the deputies to exercise or increase their fitness level. This second point generates the question of why then do agencies continue to use the PAT in their agencies? If the existing physical abilities tests that are being used by the 13 sheriffs’ offices for job retention are not challenging deputies and

are not influencing deputies to go out and exercise then, in my opinion, they exist for two reasons: one, the agency is taking a proactive stance toward fitness and/or two, protection from liability issues. Having a fitness test standard will help protect in negligence cases, but that same fitness test could bring its own liability issues; but as long as the test is validated as being job related and consistent with business necessity it will be defensible.

Recommendations

The data obtained shows that deputies' fitness levels or exercise habits are not influenced by the agency's mandated physical abilities test. This should not discourage an agency from either maintaining its mandated PAT or an agency wishing to initiate a physical abilities test. I would recommend that an agency create its own or adopt an existing agency's PAT as long as either test has been validated as being job related and consistent with business necessity. An agency that already mandates a PAT and wants to stimulate fitness may want to consider offering incentives for successful completion within certain time ranges, and/or make the PAT more challenging by reducing the cut off time or by mandating the test more frequently during the year.

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Appendix A

Agency Questionnaire

The following questions pertain to all certified Law Enforcement deputies only; please do not include Corrections deputies.

1. County of your agency
2. Number of sworn Law Enforcement deputies, disregarding Corrections deputies?
3. Does your agency utilize a physical abilities/fitness test as part of the hiring process for sworn Law Enforcement deputies? Choose one:
A. Mandatory B. Voluntary C. No test used
4. Does your agency utilize a physical abilities/fitness test for L.E. incumbents as a condition of continued employment? Choose One:
A. Mandatory B. Voluntary C. No test used

** If answered "C" (No test used) for both questions #3 and #4, please skip to the end and forward this to the email provided.

5. If your agency mandates that L.E. incumbents take and pass a physical abilities/fitness test, are there any exceptions? Choose One:
A. Yes B. No

If yes, please list exception (example: certain age, certain # of years of service, certain rank, grandfathered in for certain reason, etc.)

Answer:

6. If your agency mandates a physical abilities/fitness test for both pre-employment and retention of L.E. deputies, is the same test used for both? Choose One:
A. Yes B. No C. Not Applicable
7. What does your agency's physical abilities test consist of? (Type of test/course).
Choose One:
A. Same test/course designed by FDLE
B. A similar version of the FDLE course
C. Cooper test/program
D. Other (Describe)
8. If the physical abilities/fitness test is used for continued employment (retention) of L.E. deputies, what is the frequency? Choose One:
A. Annually B. Bi-Annually C. Other (describe)

9. If your agency has a mandatory physical abilities test for L.E. incumbents, are the incumbents required to have a medical exam (Physical) prior to taking the test?
Choose One:
A. Yes B. No C. Not Applicable
10. If your agency has a voluntary physical abilities/fitness test for L.E. incumbents, does your agency give an incentive for passing results? Choose One:
A. Yes (describe incentive) B. No C. Not Applicable
11. If your agency has a mandatory physical abilities/fitness test for L.E. incumbents, does your agency give an incentive for passing results? Choose One:
A. Yes (describe incentive) B. No C. Not Applicable

Thank you for your help with this questionnaire. Please complete by May 10th, 2013 and forward when completed to: John.Hamp@ccso.org

Appendix B

Survey Instrument

1. What is your rank level?
 - a. Deputy
 - b. Supervisory (Corporal, Sergeant, Lieutenant)
 - c. Command (Captain and higher)
2. Your gender?
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
3. Your age?
 - a. 19 – 29
 - b. 30 – 39
 - c. 40 – 49
 - d. 50 – 59
 - e. 60+
4. Years of service at current agency?
 - a. 0 – 10
 - b. 11 – 20
 - c. 21 – 25
 - d. 25+

5. How important is it to you that law enforcement officers be physically fit?
 - a. Extremely important
 - b. Very important
 - c. Moderately important
 - d. Slightly important
 - e. Not at all

6. On average, how frequently do you exercise or workout?
 - a. 1 – 2 times per week
 - b. 3 – 4 times per week
 - c. Greater than 4 times per week
 - d. Do not exercise or workout

7. If you do not regularly exercise or workout, what hinders you most from doing so?
 - a. Work schedule
 - b. Family obligations
 - c. Lack of facilities/equipment or knowledge
 - d. No desire
 - e. Not applicable

8. Are you exempt from taking the physical abilities test due to your rank, years of service, position, or other reason?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - If yes, will set up survey program to pipe to question # 15

9. Do you feel your agency's mandated physical abilities test is _____:
 - a. Too difficult
 - b. Fair
 - c. Too Easy
 - d. Undecided

10. Does the level of difficulty for your agency's mandated physical abilities test for job retention motivate you to regularly exercise or workout?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Not Sure

11. Have you ever not passed your agency's physical abilities test?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

12. If your agency did not have a mandated physical abilities test would you _____:
- a. Exercise more
 - b. Exercise less
 - c. Exercise the same
 - d. No change
13. Would you increase your fitness level if your agency gave monetary or time off incentives for better passing scores?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Unsure
14. Would you support the requirement of a doctor's physical prior to taking the physical abilities test?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Unsure
15. Do you consider yourself fit?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Undecided
16. If given on duty time to exercise would you participate in increasing your current fitness level?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Unsure
17. A fitness test is essential for pre-employment?
- a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Undecided
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly disagree
18. A fitness test is essential for incumbents as a condition of job retention?
- a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Undecided
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly disagree

Thank you for taking the time to take this survey.