

# Confronting the Challenge: Recruitment and Retention Issues in State Law Enforcement Agencies

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## ***Abstract***

*State law enforcement agencies face unique challenges in recruiting and retaining sworn officers. Competition among all law enforcement agencies has greatly hampered the state's ability to keep valuable employees, especially in light of the significantly higher wages offered by their local and federal counterparts. By employing recruiting tactics that emphasize job aspects career seekers are looking for, engaging in new media, and creating a work environment that emphasizes appreciation and accountability for employees, agencies can begin to confront the challenge.*

## **Introduction**

Recruitment and retention of qualified personnel is not a problem unique to law enforcement, but it is one that can have far-reaching implications on how police agencies are able to render services and carry out their core missions. Countless studies have been conducted and papers have been written on best practices for finding, hiring and keeping the best and brightest individuals for all types of organizations. Even while the job market constricts, competition is fierce in all sectors for well-qualified employees. This is perhaps best evidenced by media accounts during the "Great Recession" of 2007-2009, bemoaning the large pool of job applicants but ever-shrinking pool of qualified candidates.

Within the law enforcement community, however, issues pertaining to recruitment and retention pose special challenges that are peculiar to the industry. First and foremost, perhaps, is the fact that the hazards associated with the job itself prevent some from ever considering police work as a career. Law enforcement careers are widely considered to be inherently dangerous, and thus a limited number of people would consider applying for such jobs to begin with. As a result, law enforcement agencies find themselves in competition with private industries that often offer less danger and better pay.

All law enforcement agencies subject candidates to some form of background screening, which may include any combination of criminal history checks, credit checks, polygraph exams, psychological screening and physical testing. This screening, however necessary, further reduces the available pool of qualified candidates. What remains is a small group of people who are both interested in law enforcement careers and are qualified for the job, making competition among agencies fierce, to say the least.

Once a candidate is hired and properly trained, the challenge shifts from recruiting to retention. A now presumably well-trained and experienced officer is a

valuable commodity in the competitive law enforcement job market, making them prone to explore better options and opportunities.

When officers leave their agencies, it may be for any number of a host of reasons. Whether they leave for a better salary, a better work environment or a more satisfying job, it is presumed to be in the agency's best interest to create an environment that encourages members to remain with their department. And therein lies the rub: figuring out how better to retain and recruit law enforcement officers for the long term.

The problem is made that much more difficult for state law enforcement agencies, who not only have to compete with each other, but with county and municipal departments. It is here where former U.S. Speaker of the House Tip O'Neil's quip, "All politics is local," is truly seen in action. Whereas local law enforcement relies on local governments with local sympathies for resources and salaries that keep them competitive, state agencies - with no real local community of their own - must rely on a diffused group of legislators from all around the state. The challenge is not insurmountable, but it may very well require creative and out-of-the-box thinking to resolve.

What is it that motivates an employee to stay or to go? Why do they take a job with a particular agency to begin with? What can agencies do to foster an environment that encourages retention? Finally, can hiring and recruiting practices be tuned to target individuals who will be better inclined to remain with one agency through their entire law enforcement career? These are the questions this study asks and seeks to answer.

## **Literature Review**

### **Challenges of Retention**

Losing quality employees is generally harmful to an agency, and top performers may leave for a number of reasons including poor job satisfaction, lack of motivation and low pay. Conversely, otherwise high quality employees who remain with an organization despite those issues may cause other problems, such as poor interaction with other members, failure to comply with policies and practices, and demands for higher wages. Ideally, organizations would do their best to retain those employees who produce positive results for the agency and whose positive influence is greater than those of a new employee would likely be. (Sigler, 1999)

Often, high-quality employees leave organizations for better opportunities elsewhere, leaving behind poorer workers and those who are otherwise unable to advance. This problem is prevalent when compensation and reward for high performers is not offered, which results in everyone within an agency receiving the same compensation and perks regardless of productivity or effective performance level. Such issues often result from an inability to objectively distinguish high-quality workers from low-quality workers due to inadequate appraisal systems, in which employers and employees fail to clearly identify what is considered a desirable work product and how to deliver it. Ultimately, even talented employees can be expected to act within their

own self-interest, which can further obfuscate and complicate the question of their value to the organization. (Sigler, 1999)

If agencies fail or are unable to tackle the problem of retaining employees, an imbalance between the number of veteran employees and younger, less experienced members will occur, significantly reducing the average years of experience for a given workforce. This can lead to loss of productivity and an overall lower quality of work within and organization. (Orrick, 2008)

The reasons most often cited for leaving a department are: salary; poor supervision and leadership; poor job fit; failure to meet higher-ordered needs; dysfunctional organizational cultures; generational differences; lack of career growth; inadequate feedback from supervision; inadequate recognition; inadequate training; and state and availability of issued equipment. (Orrick, 2008)

Besides organizational issues which can contribute to the problem of retaining employees, research suggests that stress and psychological burnout can have a significant impact on police officer turnover. Police work is understood to be a stressful occupation. The job can be at times boring. Officers often report frustrations with perceived lack of respect from the public. Interactions with members of the public are sometimes confrontational. These factors, as well as shift work and the frustrations with bureaucracy can all impact an officer's level of stress and job satisfaction. (Burke, 1994)

On-the-job stressors, including a lack of clear understanding of the officer's role and perceived conflicts between law enforcement related functions can lead to poor work performance. These stressors can lead to burnout, loss of individuality, and feelings of low personal accomplishment. Some sources of these stressors have been identified as poor supervision, organizational constraints and unmet expectations. Specific work-related stressful events and health concerns also contribute to poor work attitudes and on-the-job stress, which can increase employee turnover. (Burke, 1994)

## **Challenges of Recruitment**

Attempting to recruit employees is a complicated process that involves more than merely getting scores of people to turn in applications. Rather, it should be a comprehensive process that involves finding the right people for the right department. The process should involve determinations of staffing needs that account for future attrition, and each agency should emphasize its strengths and appeal to candidates that fit best within the department's core values and mission. Recruitment is not a one-size-fits-all approach. (Orrick, 2008)

Changes in the way in which police work is conducted has led to an increase in the amount of time it takes to train new officers. This in turn increases the time it can take a new officer to make it through the hiring process and actually be placed on the road in a patrol capacity. (Koper, 2001 pg 44)

Anecdotal accounts over the past several years have indicated that the available pool of candidates who are qualified for law enforcement is shrinking. Some factors that have been identified as contributing to this phenomena are past and current economic conditions, an increase in vacant position due to baby boomer retirements; and the increased authorized strength and additional strain placed on training academies due to the infusion of federally-funded law enforcement positions. (Koper, 2001 pg 45)

Law enforcement agencies are finding themselves in a position they are unaccustomed to: competing for human resources. Current general practices, in which agencies may advertise a position that lists salary and benefits and then sit back and watch the applications roll in are simply not effective in the current market. Even in times and locations of high unemployment, police departments are finding difficulty filling vacancies. (Gordon, 2004)

A reduced pool of qualified candidates has forced agencies to compete both with each other and with private industry. As agencies place a greater emphasis on their recruiting efforts though, the quality of candidates they are able to attract continues to decrease. By some accounts, less than one officer is hired for every 10 applications received. In addition to economic factors, the long screening process employed by most departments may play a role in discouraging otherwise qualified candidates. (Gordon, 2004)

## **Generational Differences**

Generational differences highlight the need to rethink strategies as they pertain to recruitment and retention. Generation X, which is now firmly established in the workplace, has a different perspective and attitude regarding work than did their predecessors from the Baby Boomer generation. This generation places value on free time, flexible work schedules, independence, potential for growth and advancement, and work that is both challenging and interesting. Many members of Generation X do not feel a strong sense of loyalty to their employer and have no compunction about changing jobs frequently for better pay and better opportunities, much more so than previous generations. (Gordon, 2004)

Members of the current candidate pool in general do not place an emphasis or importance so much on their work product as they do upon themselves. Hard work is still valued, but as a means to an end as opposed to the end itself. Circumstances within an agency can encourage or suppress an individual's willingness to work. Cultural values in existence at the time an employee enters the workforce play an important role in shaping the employee's work ethic. (Jurkiewicz, 2000)

Younger generations – specifically Generation Xer's – tend to value teamwork, a sense of belonging, the potential to learn new things, security, flexibility, feedback and short-term rewards. They are often distrustful of hierarchical structures and relationships and typically believe respect for authority must be earned rather than given simply by virtue of title or position. What they look for in a job is trust that they will get the job done and the freedom and autonomy to complete the task. This generation looks for variety, stimulation and change in their work environment, and a link can be found between what the organizational culture offers and the type of work product it receives in return. (Jurkiewicz, 2000)

Little difference has been observed to date with regards to Generation X and their successors in Generation Y. Both groups display technical competency and are comfortable with change and diversity. They are accustomed to multi-tasking and are skilled at problem solving. Generation X and Y members are likely to have an appreciation for developing new skills and training. They are likely to take an active role in their own career development rather than relying on their employers, and are more

prone to look for work elsewhere if their expectations and desires are not met. (Westerman & Yamamura, 2007)

Work environment fit is a major factor in predicating employee outcomes among Generation X and Generation Y workers. Whether or not the individual's goals fit with the goals of their employing organization can provide a strong indication of their potential job satisfaction and desire to remain with an employer. Conversely, if the expectations they have for their work environment are not met, they are much more likely to seek employment elsewhere. (Westerman & Yamamura, 2007)

## **Improving Retention**

Retaining quality employees can be accomplished in part by taking steps to increase job satisfaction. This can be done by allowing employees the autonomy they desire to get their jobs done. Job satisfaction can also be improved by allowing members to participate in the decision making process when their expertise may align and by giving them meaningful work assignments. Pleasant working conditions are likely to encourage employees to remain with their current employer rather than seek other opportunities. (Sigler, 1999)

Retention efforts should be directed at maximizing those factors which attract candidates to the agency and minimizing those that repel quality employees from it. While departments rightly seek to identify reasons why officers leave, they can improve their ability to retain officers by polling those who stay to learn what keeps them there. At the same time, departments can identify common traits of those quality employees who remain to determine the type of individual who will be more likely to remain with the organization in the future. (Orrick, 2008)

Compensation is critical to any employee retention strategy. Employing agencies should be aware of how their compensation package compares to competing interests and market themselves accordingly. A positive work environment and high job satisfaction can minimize some of the impacts of lower financial compensation, but salary packages can be used as leverage if environmental factors are lacking. (Gering & Conner, 2002)

Agencies can help improve the work environment and earn the loyalty of workers by helping their employees feel valued. This can be accomplished through marketing communications, which share the agency's goals, vision and direction, as well as keeping them informed of what they can do to stay or get things back on track. (Gering & Conner, 2002)

Organizational wellness programs can improve job satisfaction among employees, potentially reducing the rate of turnover. Departments with robust wellness programs are often perceived as having greater concern for their employees, thus making them more attractive places to work. Wellness programs can encourage a positive attitude, reduce stress and help employees feel better physically, which can influence attitudes toward work and life and increase productivity. Employees who participate in wellness programs tend to have a lower rate of absenteeism and higher levels of job satisfaction. (Parks & Steelman, 2008)

## **Improving Recruitment**

Several techniques can be employed to enhance a department's recruiting efforts. A strong internet presence is an important step toward presenting a positive image to potential job candidates and allows the department to control the message, presenting the most positive aspects of the job. Websites should be informative, dynamic and interactive, as serious candidates will very likely research the agency through its own website. (Orrick, 2008)

Other means of recruitment include using those currently in the hiring process to recruit their friends and acquaintances. It is likely that excellent job candidates may be associated with other similarly qualified individuals, making them great potential recruiters. Religious organizations often have job outreach ministries, and networking with these organizations can lead to recruiting some outstanding candidates. Additionally, developmental programs such as internships and explorer posts can foster early interest in an organization, creating a future recruiting pool. (Orrick, 2008)

New and innovative techniques are needed to attract newer generations of employees. By taking into consideration what younger employees value, departments can make adjustments to make themselves more attractive to these generations. At the same time, the pool of candidates can be expanded by looking outside of the traditionally targeted age groups. If possible, signing bonuses can be explored as a potential recruitment tool. (Gordon, 2004)

## **Methods**

The purpose of this research was to identify whether or not a correlation exists between state law enforcement officers and several factors that have been shown to contribute to high turnover rates, as well as those factors that have been demonstrated to contribute to high rates of employee retention.

Data was gathered through surveys given to members of the Florida Highway Patrol (FHP), Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), Florida Department of Agriculture (AgLaw) and Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) Capitol Police in order to represent a cross section of duties and departments. Data was also gathered from current academy recruits from the FHP Academy, FWC Academy and the Pat Thomas Law Enforcement Academy. Survey questions were designed to determine the level of job satisfaction among state law enforcement personnel and whether or not they have considered leaving their agency in the present or recent past and why. Questions also asked participants to identify long-term career goals and whether they saw value in remaining with a single employer.

Information about participants' current health and exercise habits was sought in order to discover if a correlation existed between job satisfaction and personal health. Additionally, data regarding level of education and years of service was requested to identify whether or not other correlating factors existed.

The survey was anonymous in order to encourage truthful answers and a greater response. A weakness in the data collected is that it fails to capture information from those who have already left their agencies. In addition, lack of candor remains a concern despite assurances of confidentiality and anonymity.

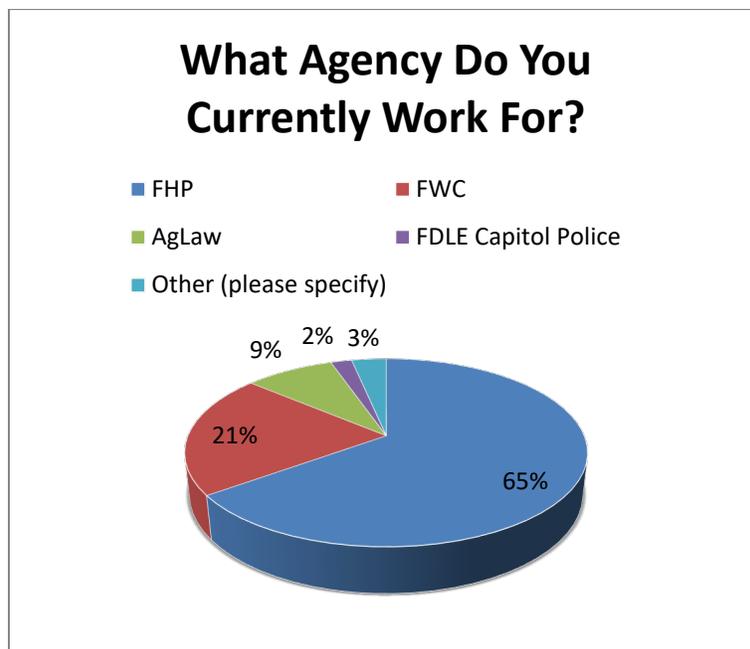
## Results

The survey was sent to 2991 state law enforcement officers and academy recruits. I received 1407 responses, for a response rate of 47%. Of those 1407 responses, some respondents chose to skip some of the questions in the survey.

The first three questions on the survey were biographical in nature. Respondents were first asked to identify what agency they worked for: The Florida Highway Patrol (FHP), The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), the Florida Office of Agriculture Law Enforcement (AgLaw), the Florida Department of Law Enforcement Capitol Police (FDLE Capitol Police), or Other.

Nine hundred and twelve respondents (65%) reported they work for the FHP, while 298 (21.2%) reported working for FWC. AgLaw was represented by 119 (8.5%) of the respondents and 28 (2%) of the respondents said they worked for FDLE Capitol Police. Forty-six (3.3%) of those taking the survey said they worked for other agencies. Four people skipped the question.

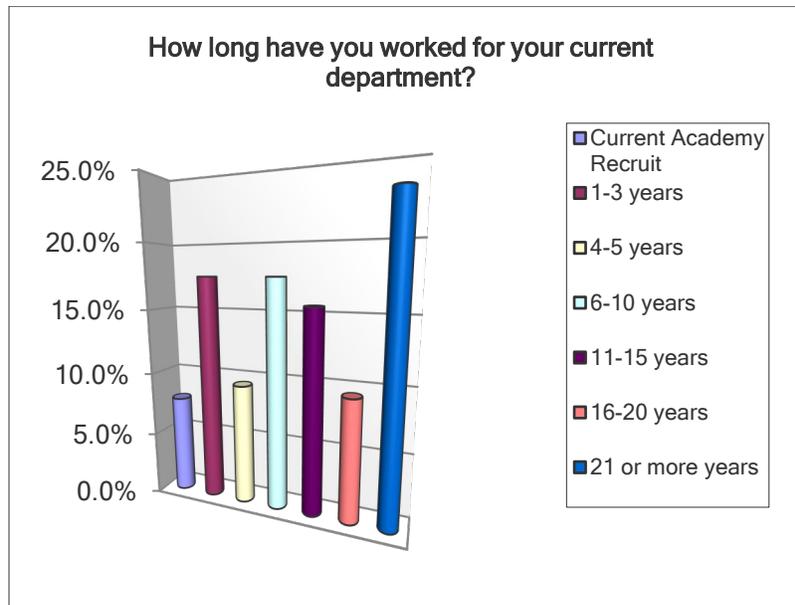
TABLE 1: Employing Agencies of Respondents:



The second question asked participants to indicate their years of service. One hundred and nine respondents (7.8%) were current academy recruits, and 246 (17.5%) reported having between 1 and 3 years of experience. One hundred thirty-two (9.4%) participants had 4-5 years of service; 245 (17.5%) had 6-10 years; 218 (15.5%) had 11-

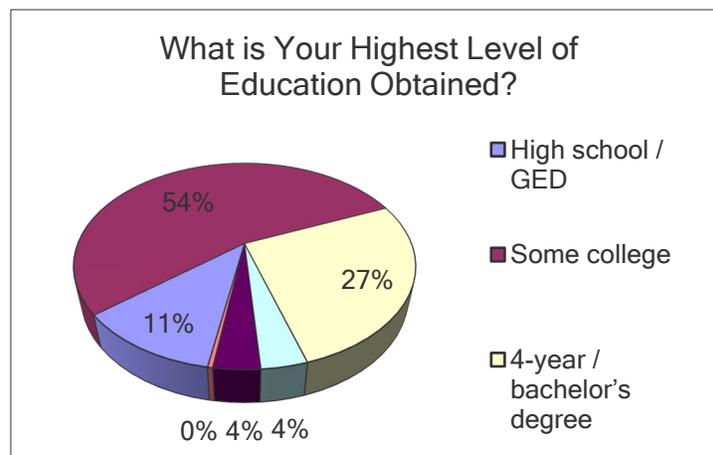
15 years; 132 (9.4%) had 16-20 years; and 322 (22.9%) respondents had 21 or more years of experience. Three survey participants chose to skip this question.

TABLE 2: Years of Service:



The third question looked at educational background and asked survey participants to report the highest level of education they've received. Three participants chose to skip this question. Of the 1,404 respondents, 160 (11.4%) had only a high school diploma or GED; 765 (54.5%) had some college; 373 (26.6%) held a bachelor's degree; 51 (3.6%) had performed some graduate work; 50 (3.6%) held a master's degree; and 5 respondents (0.4%) had obtained a doctorate, PhD or law degree.

TABLE 3: Education Level

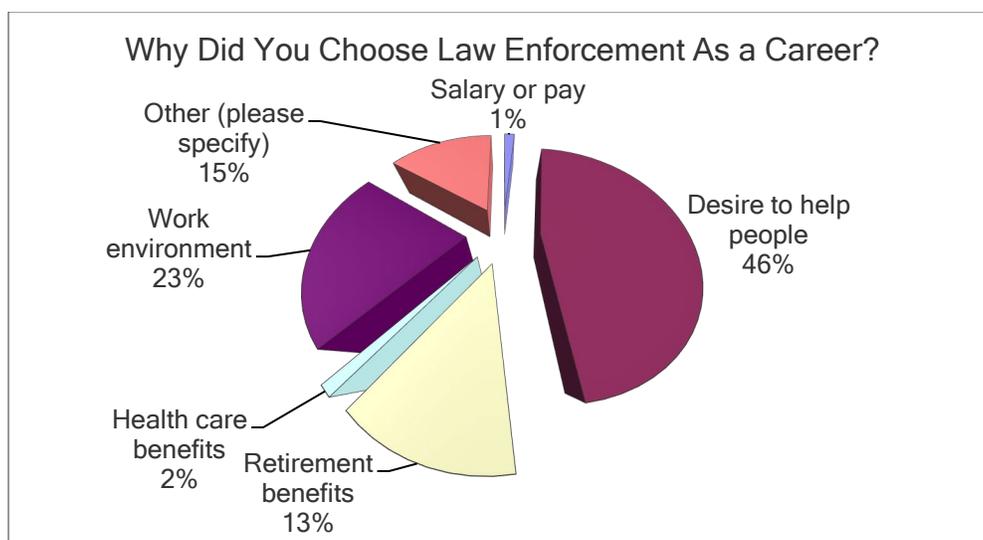


Question 4 asked respondents to identify why they chose to enter into a law enforcement career. Salary or pay was cited by 20 (1.5%) of the participants. Six

hundred and eighteen (46.6%) respondents said they chose law enforcement out of a desire to help people. Retirement benefits were cited by 169 (12.7%) participants, and 16 (1.9%) said they chose law enforcement for the health care benefits. Three hundred (22.6%) participants indicated they wanted to work in law enforcement for the work environment, and 204 (15.4%) chose “other” reasons.

Of those who said they entered law enforcement for other reasons, comments ranged from a desire to make a difference to wanting to follow the footsteps of family members. Some cited “all of the above” – indicating they chose law enforcement for all of the reasons given in the survey question – and some said they wanted excitement and something new every day. Others claimed it was a lifelong dream, and a few claimed they viewed it as respectable profession. Eighty respondents skipped this question.

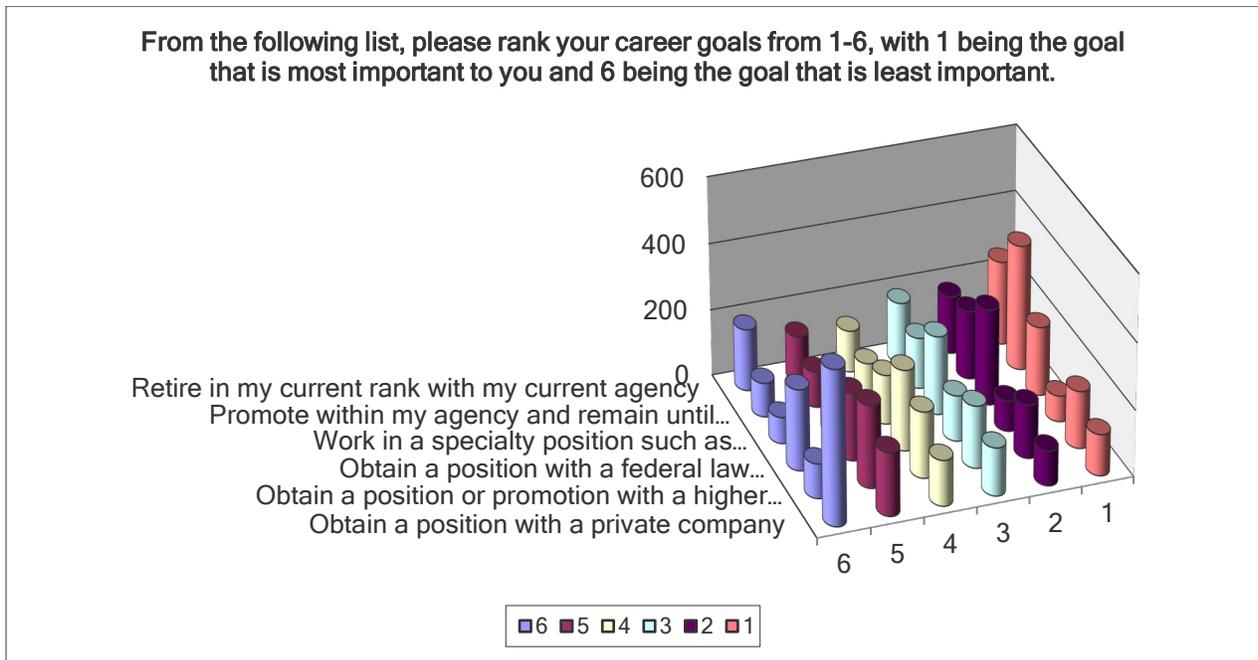
TABLE 4: Reasons for Entering Law Enforcement



Question 5 asked participants to rank their career goals in order of importance from a list of 6 possible options. Of the 1,329 total respondents who answered this question, 252 indicated that retiring with their current agency in their current rank was their most important goal; it was the least important goal for 186 participants. Three hundred seventy-six participants identified promoting within their agency was most important, while 102 said it was the least important. Working in a specialty law enforcement position was identified as most important by 207 respondents and least important by 79 of them.

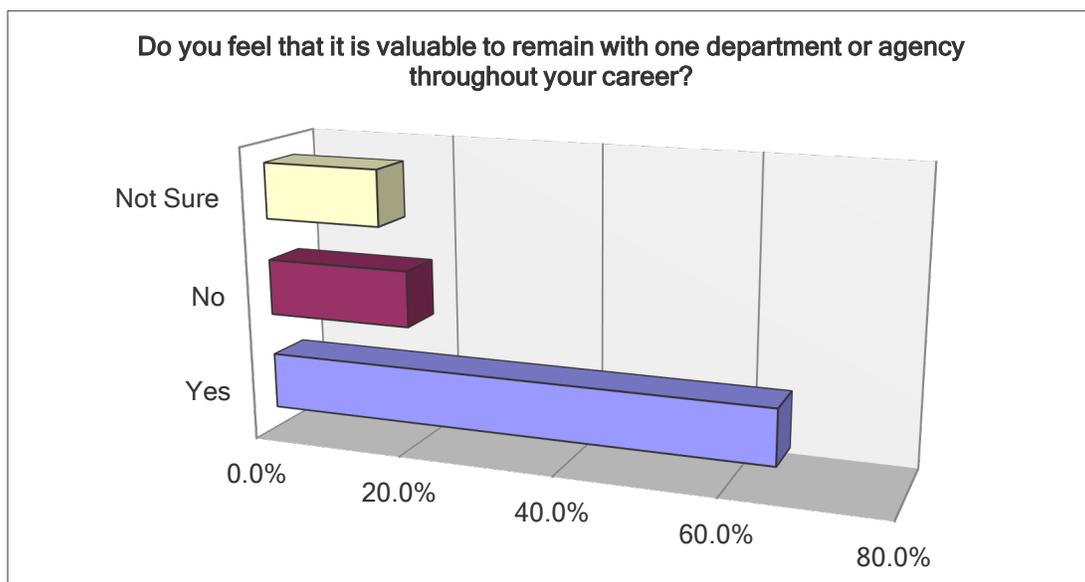
Seventy-eight respondents indicated they hoped to obtain a position with a federal law enforcement agency, while 243 said this was their least important goal. One hundred seventy-two participants felt it was most important to obtain a position or promotion with a higher paying law enforcement agency; this was the least important goal for 104 participants. One hundred twenty-four respondents felt obtaining a position with a private company was most important to their career goals, but 463 said this was least important to them. Seventy eight participants skipped this question.

TABLE 5: Career Goals among State Law Enforcement Officers



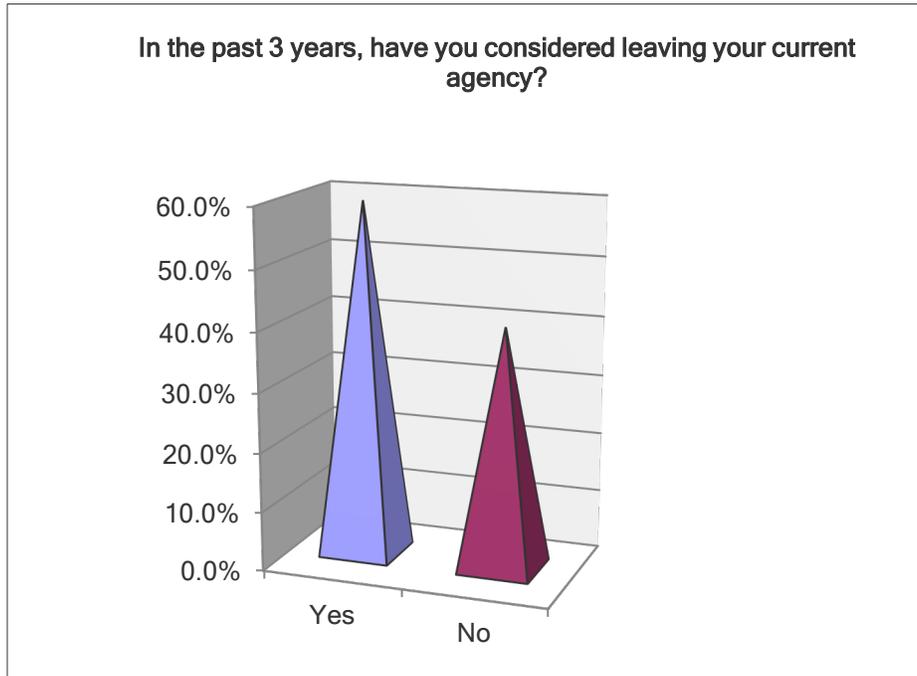
Question 6 asked whether or not respondents felt it was valuable to remain with one agency or department throughout their career. Of the 1,332 participants who answered this question, 872 (65.5%) believed it was valuable to remain with one agency. Two hundred fifty-four (19 %) did not feel it was valuable to stay with one agency, and 206 (15.5%) reported that they weren't sure.

TABLE 6: Value of Loyalty to Department among State Law Enforcement Officers



Question 7 asked whether or not participants had considered leaving their agencies within the past 3 years. Of the 1,331 respondents who answered this question, 792 (59.5%) reported that they had in fact thought about leaving. Five hundred thirty-nine (40.5%) said they had not considered resigning in the past 3 years.

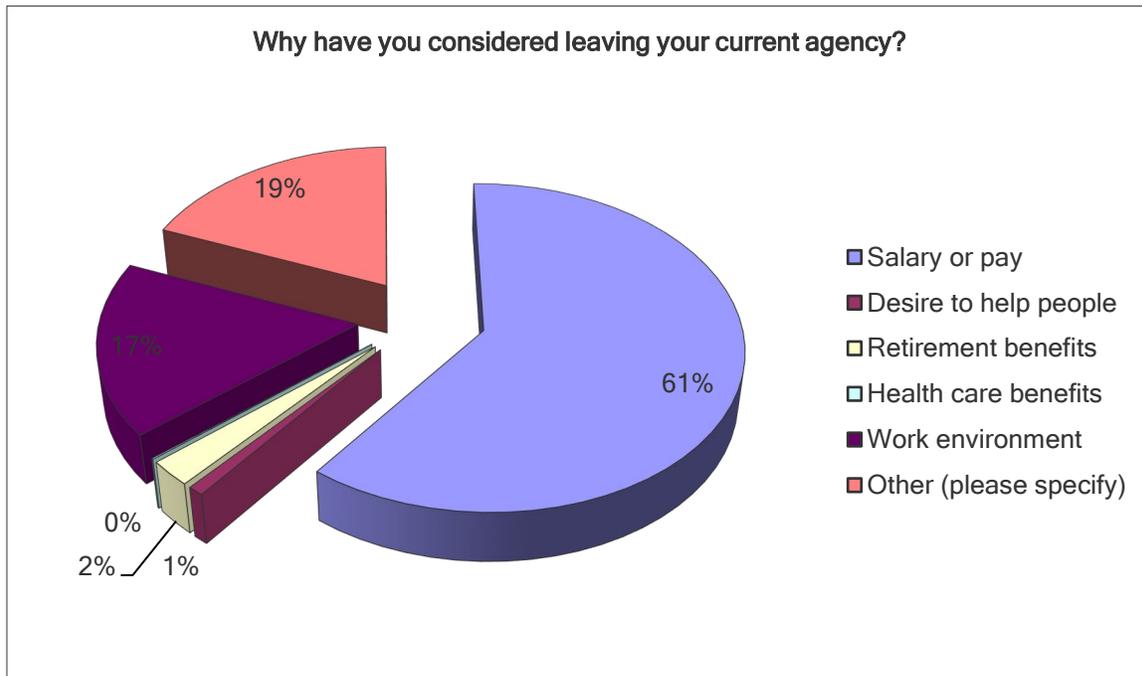
TABLE 7: Officers Who Considered Resigning in the Past Three Years



Participants who indicated in question 7 that they had considered leaving their agency were asked to identify their reasons for wanting to resign. Out of 790 respondents, 479 (60.6%) cited salary or pay as the motivating factor in considering leaving. A desire to help other people was indicated by 7 (0.9%) of the participants. Retirement benefits were the reason 20 (2.5%) had considered leaving. Health care benefits was indicated by 1 (0.1%) respondent, and work environment was listed by 137 (17.3%) of the participants.

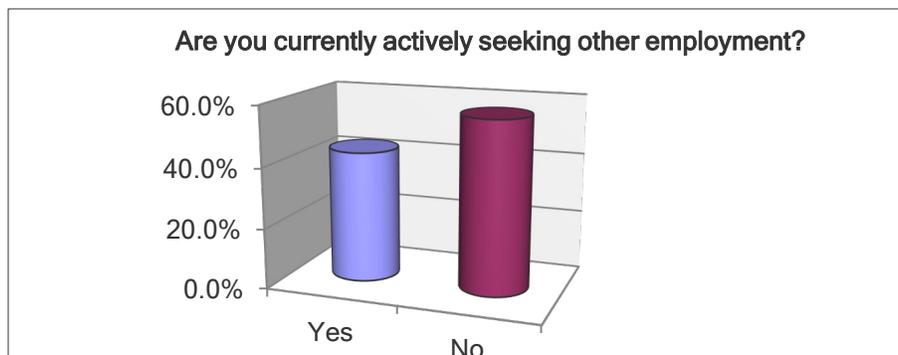
One hundred forty-six respondents cited "other" as their reasons for thinking about leaving their agency. Of those who chose "other," specific comments denoted work environment issues, poor supervision, pay disparity as compared to other law enforcement agencies, and "all of the above."

TABLE 8: Why State Law Enforcement Officers Have Considered Leaving



Those respondents who indicated they had considered leaving their agency were then asked if they were currently actively seeking other employment. Seven hundred eighty-four participants chose to answer the question. Of those, 339 (43.2%) said “yes,” and 445 (56.8%) said “no.”

TABLE 9: State Law Enforcement Officers Actively Seeking Other Employment

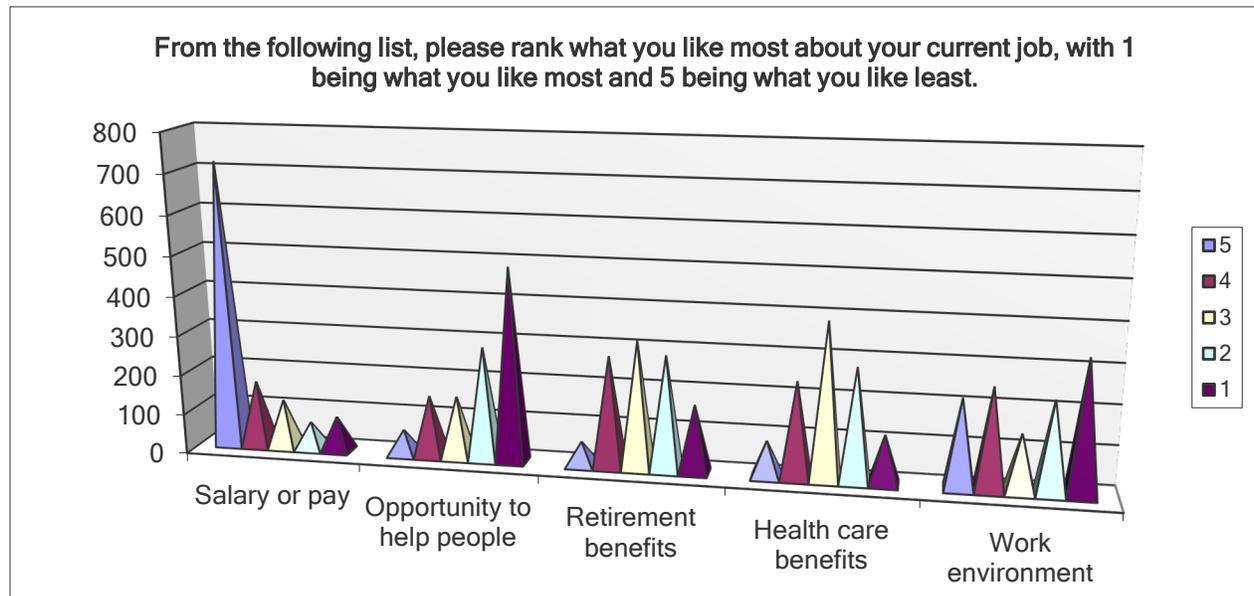


Question 10 asked participants to rank five components to indicate what they liked best and least about their job. One thousand, two hundred and eighty-five survey unique participants answered this question. Not all participants ranked every choice, which resulted in a smaller number of recorded rankings for each job aspect. Of those who responded, 88 indicated they liked their salary the best; 489 said they appreciated the opportunity to help other people the most; 171 identified retirement benefits as the

aspect they liked most; health care benefits were favored by 123; and the work environment was cited as what 335 participants liked most about their jobs.

Salary and benefits was the aspect that 721 respondents said they liked least about their jobs. Sixty-four participants indicated the opportunity to help others was what they liked least; 61 cited retirement benefits; another 61 respondents listed health benefits; and 224 reported that the work environment was what they liked least about their jobs.

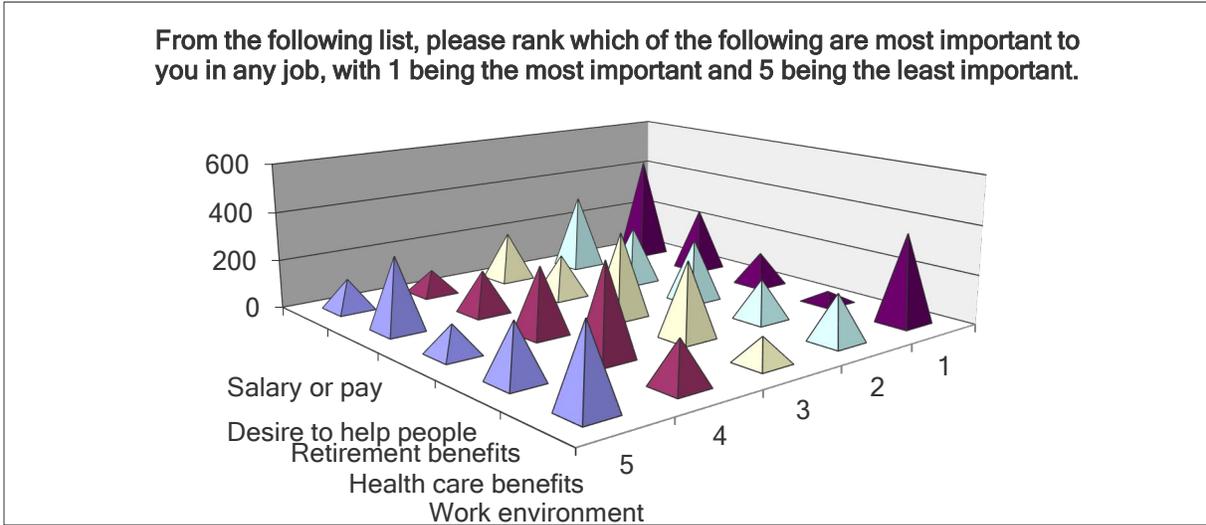
TABLE 10: Most and Least Liked Aspects of State Law Enforcement Officer's Jobs



Building on Question 10, question 11 asked participants to indicate what was most important to them about any job by ranking five components. The question was skipped by 125 participants. Of the 1,282 unique individuals who responded, salary or pay was identified as most important in any job by 439; the desire to help others was indicated by 262; retirement benefits were the most important aspect of any job for 136; health care benefits were most important to 45; and work environment was most important to 364. As was the case with Question 10, not every respondent ranked each aspect, resulting in lower response numbers for each individual choice.

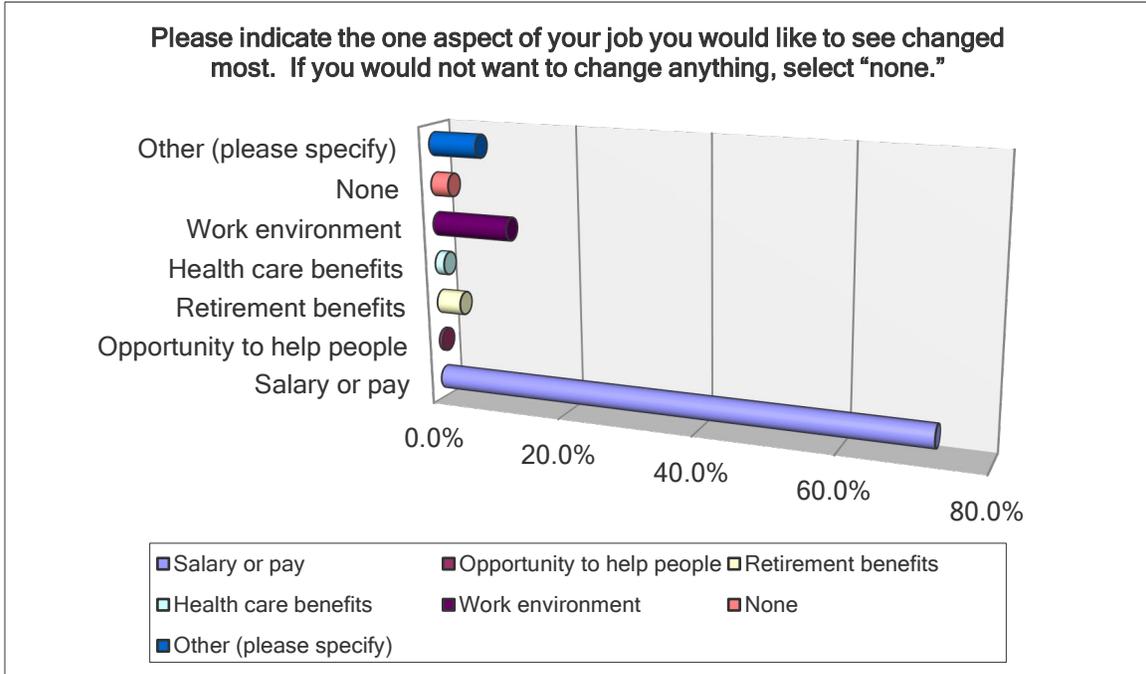
Least important to 136 respondents was salary or pay. Two hundred ninety-nine participants said the desire to help other people was least important, while retirement benefits were the least important to 119. Health care benefits were listed as least important to 225 participants, and the work environment was least important to 323 respondents.

TABLE 11: Most Important Aspects of Any Job for State Law Enforcement Officers



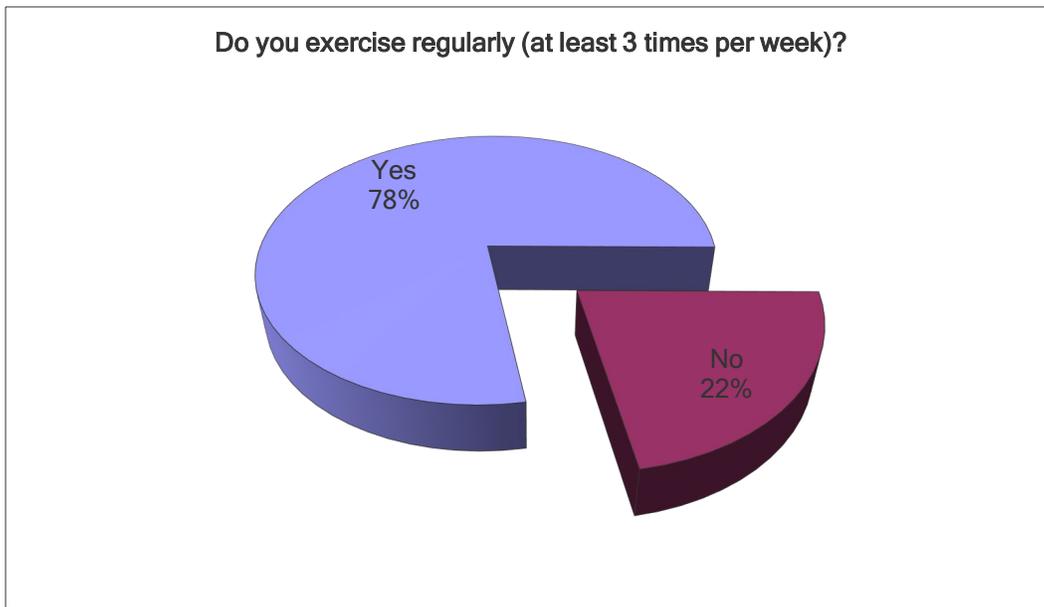
Question 12 asked participants to indicate the one aspect of their job they would most like to see changed. One hundred twenty respondents chose to skip this question, though not all respondents selected every ranking. Out of the 1,287 who answered, 936 (72.7%) said they would like to see the salary or pay changed. Seven respondents (0.5%) identified the opportunity to help other people as the aspect they most wanted changed, while 48 (3.7%) wanted to see the retirement benefits changed. Eighteen (1.4%) wanted to change health benefits, and 149 (11.6%) wanted the work environment to change. Thirty-five respondents (2.7%) did not want to see any change. Ninety-four (7.3%) of the participants cited “other” aspects they would like changed. Those who chose “other” aspects they would most like changed identified supervision, more opportunities to work in specialized position, rotating shifts, and “all of the above.”

TABLE 12: Job Aspects State Law Enforcement Officers Would Like Changed



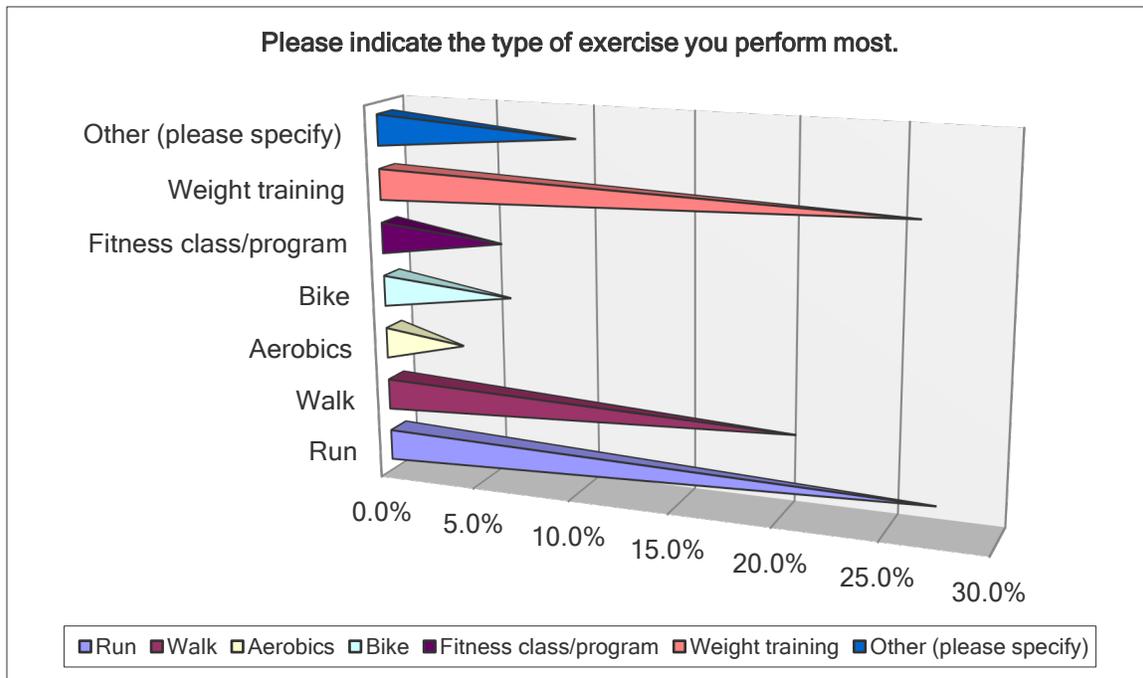
Question 13 focused on wellness and asked whether respondents exercised regularly. One thousand two hundred eighty-five participants answered the question. One thousand and one (77.9%) claimed they exercised regularly, while 284 (22.1%) said they did not.

TABLE 13: Exercise among State Law Enforcement Officers



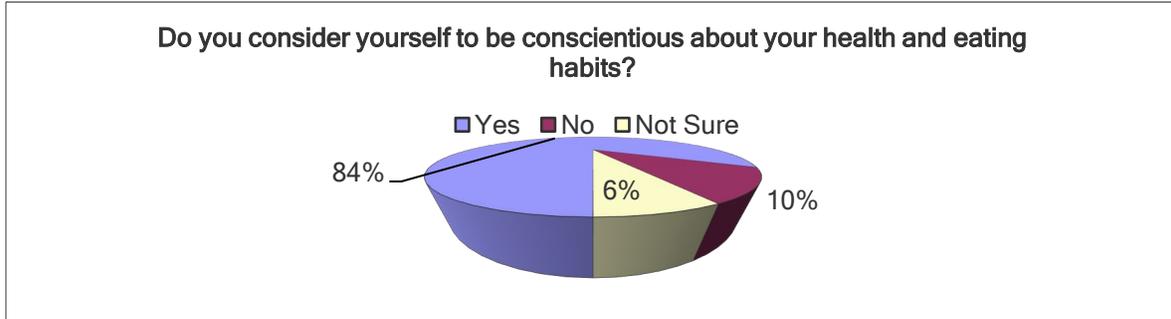
Building on Question 13, the 14<sup>th</sup> question asked those who reported exercising regularly to identify what type of exercise they performed most often. Of the 1003 participants who responded, 273 (27.2%) said they ran; 207 (20.6%) said they walked; 38 (3.8%) reported they performed aerobic exercises; 64 (6.4%) biked; 60 (6%) took fitness classes; 262 (26.1%) participated in weight training; and 99 (9.9%) cited “other” exercises. Those that chose other cited activities such as martial arts, swimming and sports as the exercises they performed most.

TABLE 14: Types of Exercise among State Law Enforcement Officers



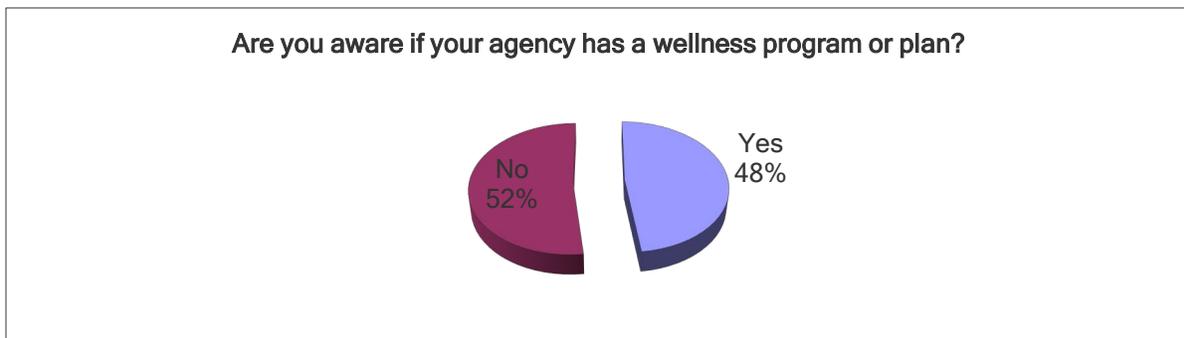
Question 15 asked whether or not state law enforcement officers considered themselves to be conscientious about their health and eating habits. Out of 1,281 respondents who answered this question, 1073 (83.8%) claimed they were conscientious about their health, and 130 (10.1%) reported they were not. Seventy-eight participants (6.1%) said they were not sure if they were conscientious about their health and eating habits.

TABLE 15: Health and Eating Habits among State Law Enforcement Officers



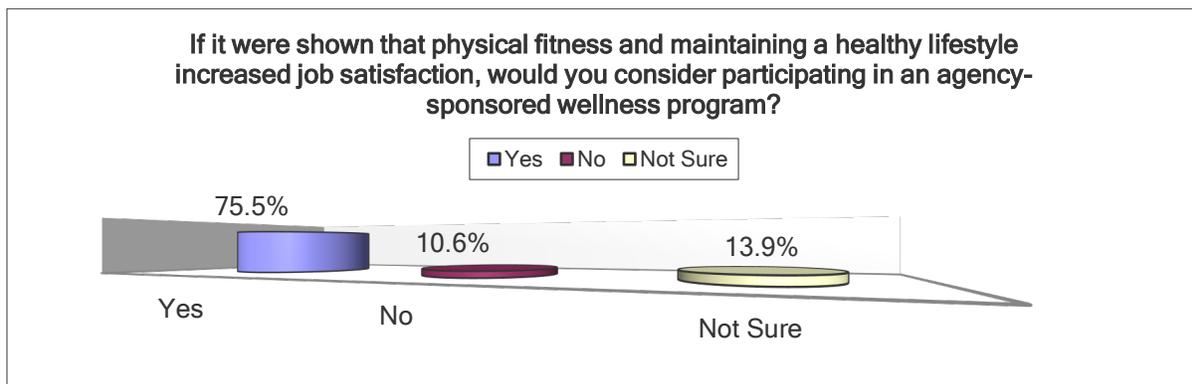
Question 16 sought to gauge whether or not state law enforcement officers were aware of any wellness programs their agency may have. One thousand two hundred eighty participants answered the question; 616 (48%) reported they were aware of a wellness program, while 664 (51.9%) said they were not.

TABLE 16: Officers' Awareness of Wellness Programs



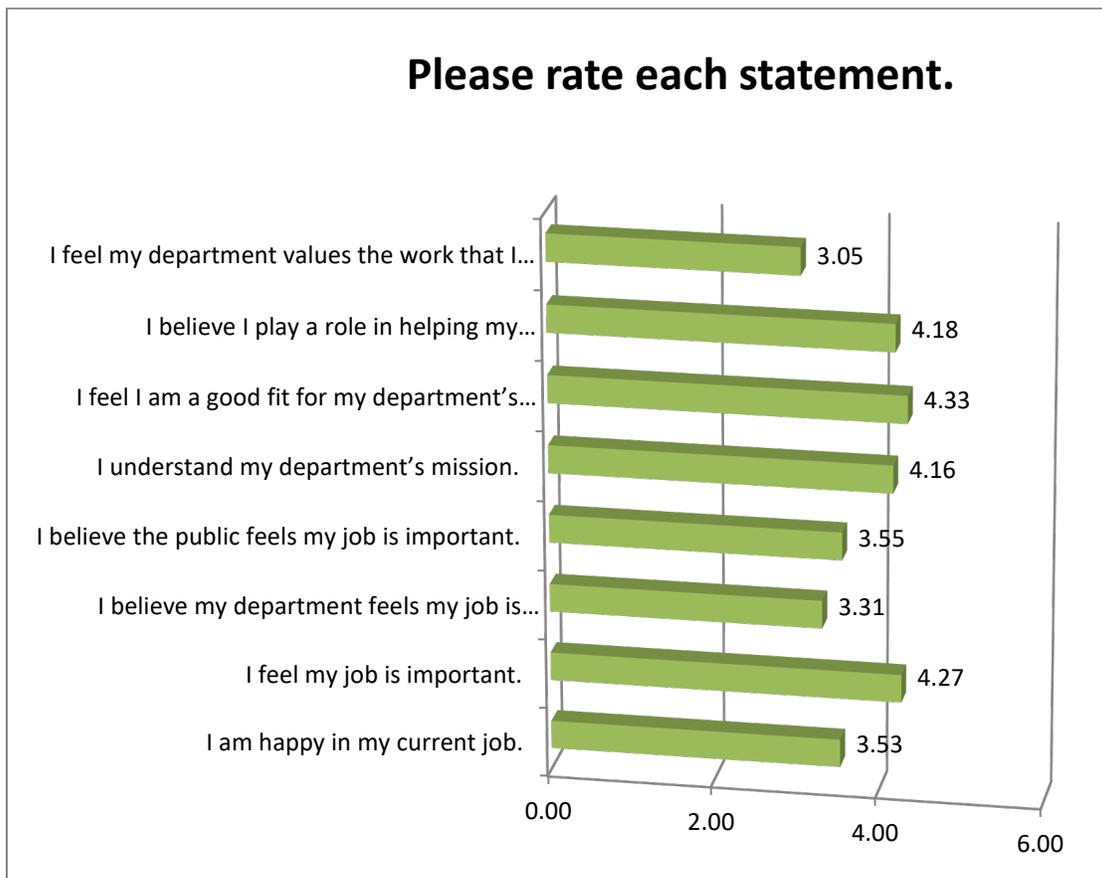
Question 17 looked at officers' interest in participating in a wellness program if it were shown to be able to improve their attitude about their job. Out of the 1280 who answered the question, 966 (75.5%) said they would participate; 136 (10.6%) said they would not; and 178 (13.9%) were unsure.

TABLE 17: Officer's Interest in Wellness Programs



Question 18 focused on job satisfaction among state law enforcement officers. It asked respondents to rate a series of statements about their job as “strongly agree,” “agree,” “neutral,” “disagree,” or “strongly disagree.” Each statement was given a corresponding numerical score of 1-5. “Strongly agree” was scored as a 5 and “strongly disagree” was scored as 1. “Neutral” statements were scored as 3’s. One hundred thirty-six respondents skipped the question, while 1271 answered it. The statement “I feel my job is important” received the highest rating at 4.27. The statement “I feel my department values the work that I do” received the lowest score at 3.05.

TABLE 18: Job Satisfaction among State Law Enforcement Officers



Question 19 was an open-ended question which afforded respondents an opportunity to add input if they felt there were questions that should have been asked that weren't or that felt they had more information to share. Three hundred sixty-four participants choose to leave comments. Comments left by these individuals reflected frustrations with existing salary structures, management practices, promotional policies and the lack of opportunity to transfer into specialty jobs or take on new duties without having to move or promote.

## Discussion

The results of the survey paint an interesting, if not sometimes conflicted, picture in light of the review of existing literature. As expected, the survey indicates police officers enter into law enforcement careers most often for reasons other than money. Rounding to the next decimal, a desire to help other people and work environment accounted for 70% of the respondents' reasons for pursuing a law informant career, as opposed to only 1.55% who cited pay.

Though 65.5% of respondents said they felt it was valuable to remain with one agency throughout their career, 59.5% nonetheless considered leaving their current agency. Among those who admitted they have considered leaving, however, the data shows nearly the opposite from the reasons people said they entered law enforcement careers. Salary and work environment were cited as the reason for looking elsewhere by 80% of those participants, and they were identified as the two areas that participants felt were most important in any job. Salary and work environment also were the two areas respondents identified as aspects they liked least about their jobs, as well as the two aspects they would most like changed.

The desire to help others remained the aspect survey participants liked most about their jobs and was third overall in ranking the most important aspect of any job. This data suggests that while state law enforcement officers may have altruistic reasons for joining an agency (and altruistic reasons for *wanting* to remain), most officers who consider leaving want practical, tangible reasons for staying, chief among them being salary and a desirable work environment.

The comments left by respondents suggest that a distinction can be made between the type of work performed and the managerial and peer climate in which it is performed. That is to say that while respondents mentioned work environment as being an aspect of their job they disliked and one they'd like to see changed, they seemed to indicate they enjoyed the work they did – indeed, they felt the job they did was important – but they felt they lacked support and direction from their supervisors and managers.

Nearly 78% of the respondents claimed they exercised regularly (at least 3 times a week) and 83% claimed to be conscientious about their health and eating habits. This is surprising in light of the expressed dissatisfaction of so many respondents and the literature suggesting a correlation between job satisfaction and regular exercise; however intensity, length of exercise and overall health of the respondents was not gauged.

Telling is the data collected about how state law enforcement officers feel about their jobs. Eighty-five percent indicated they strongly agreed or agreed that they felt their job was important, 87% felt they were a good fit for their department and 82% believed they played a role in helping their department. However, 59% disagreed, strongly disagreed or were neutral as to whether they felt their department valued the work they did.

## Recommendations

The survey results indicate that state law enforcement officers want to make a difference and help others, but that they want to feel appreciated while doing it. This confirms what the available literature suggests. However, the survey data suggests that salary and pay play a much larger role in whether officers feel appreciated. When pay is significantly lower compared to other professionals doing the same or similar jobs with the same or similar responsibilities, employees express feelings that their agency does not appreciate their work as much as another agency might.

Unfortunately, salary and pay is an area that individual state law enforcement agencies have little control over. That doesn't mean, though, that nothing can be done. As the survey data and the literature indicate, officer's want to be made to feel that their department values them and their work. With significant salary increases unlikely, supervisors and managers should look for other ways to stress to their members how valuable they are.

A majority of those polled said that they would participate in an agency-sponsored wellness program. The literature shows that robust wellness programs help members feel that their employers truly care about them. Coupled with the fact that regular exercise and good health has been correlated with higher job satisfaction, a true wellness program that includes encouragement from management, perhaps with incentives for reaching or maintaining certain health goals, could boost employee morale and lead to greater job satisfaction and less turn over. This takes more than just having a written policy that promotes wellness, but active involvement and buy-in from the entire department that incorporates wellness into the day-to-day job.

Managers should work to create a culture that is balanced between accountability and caring. Members should be held accountable for their actions, but they should also be rewarded for their hard work and made to feel as though they are more than a number – as though they're a valuable member of a team. Agencies can partner with private corporations or organizations to help provide meaningful rewards to well-performing members.

Agency missions should be emphasized at all times, and members should be reminded how they play a vital role in that mission. The mission should be clear from the recruitment phase, so that new recruits can get on board early and know exactly what their role will be.

Retention starts with recruitment, and from the earliest phases of the hiring process, potential new hires should be given a clear and realistic picture of the job they are about to enter into. Recruiters should be positive but honest. Potential recruits should be educated on what the department does and how and why it does it so both employer and employee can be certain they are the right fit for each other.

State law enforcement entities have the traits many job seekers are looking for: variety, structure, independence, challenge and opportunities to grow, learn, develop and promote. Agencies should look for new ways to reach these job seekers and emphasize these traits, making use of new media technologies, social networking and staying up-to-date on web technologies and trends. A strong internet presence with plenty of useful information and an appealing professional design is a must-have.

Recruitment and retention are not two separate issues, but rather two sides of the same coin. By tuning recruiting techniques to help hire the right people for the right job, agencies can put themselves in a better position to keep well-qualified employees. At the same time, by taking steps to enhance employee retention by incorporating more robust wellness programs, meaningful employee appreciation programs and encouraging agency buy-in, state law enforcement agencies can build a strong recruiting force and foster an environment in which people will want to work, even at salaries lower than their local and federal counterparts.

Captain Timothy Roufa began his law enforcement career with the Florida Highway Patrol on September 10, 2001. In 2004, he was promoted to Corporal as a Traffic Homicide Investigator. In 2007, he promoted to Sergeant and served as the agency's recruitment coordinator, transferring back to patrol operations as a district supervisor in 2008. He promoted to Lieutenant and served as a training officer and recruit class coordinator at the FHP Training Academy from 2010-2013. In 2013, he received a promotion to the rank of Captain and currently serves as the Florida Highway Patrol's Assistant Chief Training Officer. Tim has a bachelor's degree in political science from The Florida State University.

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## Appendix A

### Survey Questions

#### Introduction:

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this survey by the Senior Leadership Program at the Florida Criminal Justice Executive Institute. The purpose of this survey is to identify challenges faced by state law enforcement agencies in hiring and retaining valuable officers.

This survey shouldn't take more the 15-20 minutes of your time, and the information you provide will be vital in helping to identify what, if anything, can be done to improve recruitment and retention. Please answer the questions candidly and honestly. Your responses to these questions will be anonymous.

#### Demographic Info

What Agency do you currently work for?

FHP

FWC

AgLaw

FDLE Capitol Police

Other (Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you worked for your current department?

Current Academy Recruit

1-3 years

4-5 years

6-10 years

11-15 years

16-20 years

21 or more year

What is your highest level of education attained?

High school / GED

Some college

4-year / bachelor's degree

Some graduate work

Master's degree

Doctorate, PhD or Juris Doctorate

#### Work Issues Information

Why did you choose law enforcement as a career?

Salary or pay

Desire to help people

Retirement benefits  
Health care benefits  
Work environment  
Other (Please Specify): \_\_\_\_\_

From the following list, please rank your career goals from 1-6, with 1 being the goal that is most important to you and 6 being the goal that is least important:

Retire in my current rank with my current agency  
Promote within my agency and remain until retirement  
Work in a specialty position such as interdiction, K-9, investigations, training, etc.  
Obtain a position with a federal law enforcement agency  
Obtain a position or promotion with a higher paying law enforcement agency  
Obtain a position with a private company

Do you feel that it's valuable to remain with one department or agency throughout your career?

Yes  
No  
Not sure

In the past 3 years, have you considered leaving your current agency?

Yes

Why have you considered leaving your agency?

Salary or pay  
Desire to help people  
Retirement benefits  
Health care benefits  
Work environment  
Other (Please Specify): \_\_\_\_\_

No

Are you currently actively seeking other employment?

Yes  
No

From the following list, please rank what you like most about your current job, with 1 being what you like most and 5 being what you like least.

Salary or pay  
Opportunity to help people  
Retirement benefits  
Health care benefits  
Work environment

From the following list, please rank which of the following are most important to you in any job, with 1 being the most important and 5 being the least important.

- Salary or pay
- Desire to help people
- Retirement benefits
- Health care benefits
- Work environment

Please indicate the one aspect of your job you would like to see changed most. If you would not want to change anything, select "none."

- None
- Salary or pay
- Opportunity to help people
- Retirement benefits
- Health care benefits
- Work environment
- Other (Please Specify): \_\_\_\_\_

### Health Information

Do you exercise regularly (at least 3 times per week)?

Yes

Please indicate the type of exercise you perform most

- Run
- Walk
- Aerobics
- Bike
- Fitness class/program
- Weight training
- Other (Please Specify): \_\_\_\_\_

No

Do you consider yourself to be conscientious about your health and eating habits?

Yes

No

Not Sure

Are you aware if your agency has a wellness program or plan?

Yes

No

If it were shown that physical fitness and maintaining a healthy lifestyle increased job satisfaction, would you consider participating in an agency-sponsored wellness program?

Yes

No

Not Sure

### **Climate Info**

Please rate each statement:

I am happy in my current job.

Strongly agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

I feel my job is important.

Strongly agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

I believe my department feels my job is important.

Strongly agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

I believe the public feels my job is important.

Strongly agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

I understand my department's mission.

Strongly agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

I feel I am a good fit for my department's mission.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

I believe I play a role in helping my department advance its mission.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

I feel my department values the work that I do.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

If you have anything else to add or feel any important questions were left out of this survey, please let me know in the comment box below: