

# Physical Fitness and Wellness at the Hallandale Beach Police Department

Sonia Quinones

## Abstract

*Due to the nature of core activities related to law enforcement, physical fitness is paramount. Police agencies require new recruits to pass a battery of fitness tests, but once officers are hired, physical fitness levels relevant to performance are no longer evaluated or tied to performance. Left to their own devices, officers' health and well-being decline for variable of reasons. Benefits and reasons why a physical fitness assessment program should be implemented are discussed. Explained are results of a survey of the Hallandale Beach Police Department's sworn law enforcement officers. The survey was implemented to assess officers' belief that a physical fitness program is relevant to performance. Recommendations for physical fitness program requirements are discussed.*

## Introduction

A Police Officer is a sworn officer: he/she acts in the capacity to uphold the law: the act of upholding the law is dynamic and at times, requires certain physical capacities. This is the sole concentration of this research paper.

“Exercise and recreation are as necessary as reading; I will say, rather, more necessary because health is worth more than learning”  
– Thomas Jefferson

When entering the law enforcement profession, law enforcement agencies have strong physical fitness programs that prepare officers to perform their jobs. However, few agencies offer programs to maintain a level of health commensurate with the physical requirements of the job for the length of their officers' careers. (Shell, 2005) Due to lack of physical fitness and wellness, the average life span of a male law enforcement officer after retirement is only between two to five years. This lack of fitness makes officers prone to on-duty injuries and illnesses, increases their exposure to liability, and engenders a loss of respect from the community based on their appearance (Quigley, 2008).

Physical fitness is defined as the ability to meet life's daily demands, without undue fatigue, while maintaining sufficient energy for leisure time pursuits and to overcome emergency situations that may arise personally and professionally (Smith & Tooker, n.d.)

Physical fitness has a direct impact on job performance. Based on job descriptions, a core list of physical tasks required to perform the duties of a law enforcement officer were identified. These tasks were identified as running, climbing, jumping, lifting/carrying, dragging, pushing, and use of force (Quigley, 2008).

Physical fitness can also protect officers from becoming victims: offenders hesitate to challenge officers who appear fit. This one example alone establishes fitness and wellness programs in law enforcement agencies as paramount. By implementing an exercise program, law enforcement agencies reduce their liability by ensuring officers are prepared to handle tasks while controlling the possible risks and their associated costs therefore reducing crime and contributing to safer communities (Quigley, 2008).

Two additional topics are intertwined with physical fitness. They are Health and Wellness. Health is defined as a state of complete physical, mental, and emotional well-being. Top physical condition contributes to a higher level of overall health, reduces stress, and enhances the personal perception of wellbeing. Wellness is defined as those purposeful actions taken to attain and maintain optimal health and fitness. The beginning point for establishing lifelong wellness habits starts with incorporating best practices in entry-level fitness programs. The physical training goal should match other mandated, physically demanding classes, such as arrest and control strategies and defensive tactics that directly align with the actual skill needs of patrol officers. (Shell, 2005)

Out-of-shape officers pose a danger to both themselves and others. Physical conditions such as hypertension, diabetes, and high cholesterol are accurate indicators an officer needs a fitness routine. The increasing influence good physical conditioning has on an officer's job performance, the department's liability, and the public's perception of the law enforcement agency has become more apparent. Agencies have to assure officers are physically ready to handle any task or physical challenge presented. It is not about being able to lift a house; the issue is being ready to do the job. The key is to analyze and correlate appropriate exercises. Officers who are physically fit are more confident about their ability to handle a job, make better decisions about which level of force is appropriate to a situation, and it helps them relax and suffer less stress (Moore, 2006).

## Literature Review

### *Leadership Perspective: Pros & Cons of Officer Physical Fitness*

There are some legal issues with requiring fitness standards, and oftentimes union opposition. Failure to provide physical fitness and wellness training can open an agency to unnecessary liability, especially in cases alleging excessive force. In the case of Parker v. District of Columbia, the arresting officer was accused of using excessive force to affect an arrest of a combative subject. The officer's lack of physical fitness and inability to use defensive tactics or less-

lethal options resulted in his discharging his firearm, rendering the suspect a paraplegic. The D.C. Metropolitan Police Department was found to be deliberately indifferent to the physical training needs of its officers, and the plaintiff was awarded a substantial sum of money (Quigley, 2008). Many police agencies have taken the step of offering bonuses to officers that meet a physical fitness standard. Installing weight/exercise rooms in the police agencies is also a good idea to encourage officers to exercise. If an officer needs to be fit to enter the police academy, then it should be a requirement of the job. There are various arguments against career physical fitness standards. For example, an officer can do their job just fine out of shape; some people are naturally overweight; and getting heavy is a fact of life as one ages. There are also various reasons preventing police officers from staying fit, for example, laziness and complacency; unions; and lack of free time. It is important to realize that for most officers, getting and staying reasonably fit is not a lot of work, nor is it expensive. It takes some discipline (Mroz 2008). This is important, as lawsuits have arisen in the past, as well as union involvement, against physical fitness programs (Shell, 2005).

Health Insurance Administration - Health Insurance costs are one of the highest budgetary items. Maintaining a healthy workforce contributes to lowering overall health insurance premiums which can be staggering. One thing is clear; disease is expensive and police officers have an above average risk for heart attacks, obesity, arthritis, ulcers, and cancer while also prone to bouts of depression and suicide. Further, nearly 30 percent of police officers overindulge in alcoholic beverages compared with 10 percent of the general population. These diseases carry hefty price tags: Heart disease - \$183B, Cancer - \$157B, Diabetes - \$100B, Arthritis - \$65B. It is estimated an in-service heart attack costs \$400,000 to \$750,000. Many of the maladies to which countless law enforcement personnel succumb refer to "modifiable risk factors," which means health conditions and related costs can be affected. More than 50% of the deaths in the U.S.A. are attributable to lifestyle choices. Poor lifestyle habits include cigarette smoking, obesity (more than 25% body fat for males and over 30% for females), poor nutrition, substance abuse, sedentary living or poor cardiovascular fitness, and stress (Smith & Tooker, n.d.).

Health insurance contracts may be negotiated with decreased premiums for agencies who demonstrate health and wellness goals. For example, agencies who demonstrate a physically fit, proactively healthy workforce can lower costs of health care insurance through documentation and negotiation. (Shell, 2005).

Career capacity- Most officers have a long-term professional development goal in mind when entering the police academy. On the job injuries have the capacity to stifle these dreams and thus impact motivation. A physically fit officer is less prone to injury and in a healthy state will recover from an injury faster. A permanent injury limits the officer's physical capacity forcing a temporary clerical assignment or possibly forcing an early retirement from the agency.

The final aspect viewed from the leadership perspective is management of personnel; physically fit, motivated employees have a lower rate of absenteeism than their unhealthy peers. While definitely a supervisory issue, absenteeism is

a costly expense due to issues of shift coverage and overtime. Additionally, physical fitness and wellness programs may increase loyalty, reduce turnover, and improve morale (Smith & Tooker, n.d.).

The goal of lifelong wellness and physical fitness is not to produce a “super” law enforcement officer who can push cars, jump over buildings, walls, or other obstacles, and run all day. A physical fitness program teaches officers techniques to relieve stress and provide nutrition and exercise guidance in order to maintain optimum health for the length of their careers and beyond.

### *Designing a Winning Program: Best Practices*

The benefits of a physical fitness program include improved capability to perform specific physical tasks, improved ability to mobilize the body efficiently, improved tolerance to fatigue, reduced risk during physical attacks, better psychological preparation, and reduced stress and associated health risks. Fitness components of a program include screening, assessment, goal setting, exercise prescription, education, and trained leadership (Cooper Institute, n.d.). Job task analysis data can be used to develop corresponding fitness assessments, testing protocols, and related standards (Shell, 2005). Agencies must fit the officer to the task when designing a fitness program (Moore, 2006). The law of exercise specificity refers to the similarity between a training activity and the actual task(s) one is training for. Officers who exercise regularly should be commended for their commitment and dedication to this effort. However, despite good intentions, many officers are performing various exercises and following physical fitness routines that will have little or no impact on their job related performance. Gender differences are at times taken into consideration when selecting exercises and designing police fitness routines. There are specific physiological and structural differences that need to be addressed through training to optimize performance. Each gender has certain advantages and disadvantages due to these differences. A well-designed police fitness training program can help overcome certain performance disadvantages unique to each of the sexes (DiNaso, 2006).

A physical fitness program was developed by various law enforcement organizations as a guide for a cost-effective, voluntary law enforcement fitness and wellness program that serves the interests of the agency, its individual officers, and the community it serves. This program has two elements. The first ensures the development and maintenance of physical performance capability, which is the ability to perform job tasks and personal leisure time pursuits. The second element addresses the officers’ health status. The benefits of this program are improved health indices and fitness levels, as well as a reduction in employment-related accidents, fatalities, injuries, and illness (Smith & Tooker, n.d.)

Implementing a physical fitness and wellness program requires a basic common understanding of the issues and the names of program components. The ability to perform the frequent and essential physical fitness tasks of a law enforcement officer at a minimum level of safety and effectiveness requires

knowledge, skill, and physical ability. The underlying constructs of physical job task performance are health and fitness. There are six components of physical fitness:

1. Cardiovascular endurance is the ability to take in and deliver oxygen to the working muscles to produce energy to sustain activity. Cardiovascular endurance is necessary in approximately 11% of foot pursuits and over 50% of use of force encounters.
2. Anaerobic power is the ability to make short, intense bursts of maximal effort, which underlies the ability to run short distances and up stairs.
3. Muscular strength refers to the muscles' ability to generate maximal force, which is necessary for performance in control and restraint situations.
4. Muscular endurance refers to the muscles' ability to sustain sub-maximal force, which is necessary for lifting, pushing, pulling, or carrying.
5. Flexibility is the ability to the available range of motion at a given joint or structure, which is challenged in common tasks such as bending over, as well as much less frequent ones, for instance a foot pursuit.
6. Body composition is the ratio of fat to lean tissue, which is associated with physical performance, as well as health (Smith & Tooker, n.d.).

The Cooper Institute has worked with fitness programs in law enforcement, public safety and military since 1976. Part of the Cooper Institute's mission is to help shape and influence fitness programs throughout the nation. According to the Cooper Institute, a recommended fitness test consists of:

1. 1.5 Mile Run
2. 300 Meter Run
3. Vertical Jump
4. 1RM Bench Press and/or 1 Minute Push Up
5. 1 Minute Sit Up

This fitness test has the validity to predict an officer's ability to perform essential and critical physically demanding tasks regardless of age, gender or handicap condition. This test has also been found scientifically valid and defensible in court, as they are job related (Cooper Institute, n.d.). Legislation requires

physical fitness tests, standards, and programs must be job related and scientifically valid. The requirements for job relatedness are: a fitness component (or fitness area) must be an underlying factor for performing essential and/or critical physical functions of the job. It must demonstrate construct validity; a fitness component (or fitness area) must predict who can and who cannot perform the essential and/or critical physical functions of the job. It must demonstrate criterion validity. The requirements for scientific validity are: fitness tests/standards/programs must have evidence they are accepted within the field of exercise science as being valid and as meeting the “standard of ordinary care” of The American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM); the fitness tests are accepted as valid measures of the fitness areas (construct validity); the fitness tests must be accurate and reliable measures of the fitness area tested; the fitness standards predict who can and who cannot perform the essential and/or critical physical functions of the job (criterion validity); and the fitness programs are defined and implemented according to ACSM guidelines for safe exercise training. Physical fitness is job related and scientifically valid. Results of several public safety studies consistently show 20-30 strenuous/critical tasks that are job related. These tasks are necessary to perform essential functions of the job. There is ample data to document that physical fitness components are the underlying and predictive factors for performing tasks such as: sustained pursuit, sprints, dodging, lifting and carrying, dragging and pulling, pushing, jumping and vaulting, crawling, and use of force (Cooper Institute, n.d.).

Legal requirements- Tests/standards/programs cannot discriminate against protected classes (females, minorities, handicapped or older adults) as defined by the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1991 (Same Job=Same Standard), the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA). However, if job relatedness is established and documented, then the fitness tests/standards/programs can discriminate against anybody. It is important to implement tests/standards/programs that do discriminate between those who can and cannot do the job regardless of age, gender, race, or handicap condition (Cooper Institute, n.d.).

If the goal of the agency is to be in compliance with the Civil Rights Act of 1991, absolute standards (single cutpoints for everyone) are recommended. However, the use of absolute standards will likely demonstrate adverse impact especially against females. Thus, it is important that the standards be validated and that the test cutpoints predict who can and cannot do the job. Even if adverse impact is shown, if the standards have evidence for their validity, they should be upheld if challenged in court. If the goal of the agency is to promote diversity, then the use of age-gender norms is probably the best approach. Although the use of such norms appears to violate the Civil Rights Act of 1991, these types of norms are much less likely to result in adverse impact against females. However, the agency needs to be aware that age-gender norms are not as predictive of the ability to do the job as absolute standards (Cooper Institute, n.d.).

The agency must determine if a physical fitness program will be voluntary or mandatory compliance or a combination of the two. For example, some agencies have mandatory compliance for academy exit and voluntary programs for incumbents, or mandatory testing but voluntary compliance. Some agencies will implement mandatory compliance to fitness standards throughout an officer's career because it is the right thing to do to ensure that officers are fit for duty. Agencies must give their officers a fair chance to prepare for the implementation of mandatory fitness standards/programs and should be phased in over time. "Grandfathering" of incumbents is not recommended because it undermines the basic premise that physical fitness is job related (Cooper Institute, n.d.).

No one can legitimately argue physical fitness is not job-related. The key issue and the one necessitating considerable planning, thought, research and effort is what level of physical fitness is required to do the job? In other words, which fitness cutpoints or standards will be chosen and implemented? These standards have legal, scientific, and practical issues (Cooper Institute, n.d.).

## Methods

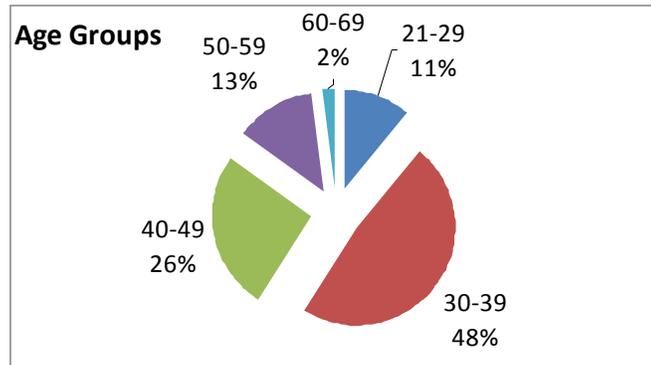
The purpose of this research is to examine the need for physical fitness standards and testing within the Hallandale Beach Police Department. The data was collected through a ten-question anonymous survey of the Hallandale Beach Police Department's 100 sworn law enforcement officers. Information gathered in the survey included gender, age, frequency of exercise, and whether it should be mandatory to participate in physical fitness testing. Additional information gathered in the survey included whether officers would participate in a physical fitness program if incentives were offered.

A possible strength of this study is increasing awareness of the benefits of physical fitness standards and testing. A possible weakness of the study would be officers not accurately completing surveys to avoid being singled out or the possibility of a mandated physical fitness program implemented. A copy of the survey instrument is included at the end of this report, as Appendix A.

## Results

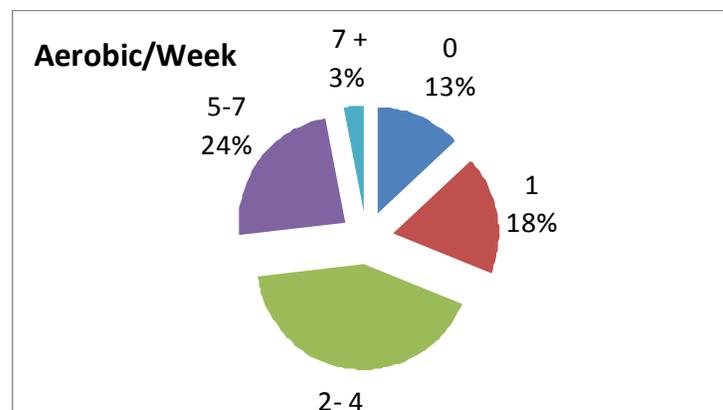
A total of 89 surveys were disseminated to the sworn employees who were available at the Hallandale Beach Police Department. Of the 89 surveys disseminated, 62 were returned giving a 70 percent response rate. The majority of the responses indicated support of a yearly physical fitness assessment program. Additionally, the majority would also participate in a physical fitness program if they received an incentive. 100 percent of the responses indicated physical fitness is important and related to the job duties of a law enforcement officer.

-Question One: How old are you? 11 percent of respondents are between the ages of 21-29; 48 percent are between the ages 30-39; 26 percent are between the ages of 40-49; 13 percent are between the ages of 50-59; and 2 percent are between the ages 60-69.



- Question Two: What is your gender? 92 percent of the respondents are male with 8 percent being female.

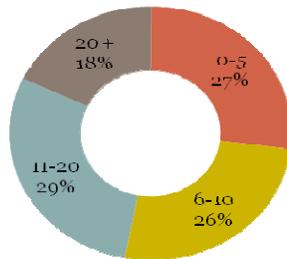
-Question Three: You exercise aerobically how many times a week? 13 percent of the respondents indicated 0 times; 18 percent indicated 1 time; 42 percent indicated 2-4 times; 24 percent indicated 5-7 times; and 3 percent indicated more than 7 times.



-Question Four: What do you think is the biggest obstacle to getting (or staying) in shape? The majority of the respondents indicated work schedule as being the biggest obstacle, followed by family obligations and low motivation. A few respondents gave multiple responses to this question.

-Question Five: How long have you been in law enforcement? 27 percent of the respondents indicated 0-5 years; 26 percent indicated 6-10 years; 29 percent indicated 11-20 years; and 18 percent indicated 20 or more years.

### **Career Length/Years**



-Question Six: Would you support a yearly physical fitness assessment program? 82 percent of the respondents indicated yes; and 18 percent indicated no.

-Question Seven: Would receiving a monetary or leave incentive for successfully passing a physical fitness assessment compel you to participate in a physical fitness program? 77 percent of the respondents indicated yes; and 23 percent indicated no.

-Question Eight: Should it be mandatory or voluntary to participate in a physical fitness assessment program? 50 percent of the respondents indicated mandatory; 45 percent indicated voluntary; and 5 percent indicated no program should be implemented.

-Question Nine: Do you believe physical fitness is important and related to your job duties? 100 percent of the respondents indicated yes.

-Question Ten: If the agency provided on-duty time to exercise, would you be more agreeable to participate in a physical fitness program? 90 percent of the respondents indicated yes; 2 percent indicated no; and 8 percent indicated not sure.

## Discussion

A good return rate was received allowing for a greater assessment of information from the respondents. The majority of the respondents exercise on a regular basis and would support a yearly physical fitness program. Interestingly enough, 100 percent of the respondents believe physical fitness is important and related to the job duties of a law enforcement officer. Only three of the respondents indicated a physical fitness program should not be implemented.

## Recommendation

By implementing a physical fitness program, the Hallandale Beach Police Department will promote responsibility among its officers to take control of their own health. This responsibility is positive, as law enforcement officers are held to a higher standard which allows them to provide an example to others. This provides opportunities that can affect the lives of the hundreds of people the law enforcement officers serve daily. In being a role model for others, the officers give even more back to the community they serve.

Captain Sonia Quinones has served the Hallandale Beach community since 1993. She is currently a Captain assigned to the Uniformed Patrol Division. Sonia has an Associate of Arts degree in Criminal Justice from Miami-Dade Community College, a Bachelor of Arts in Public Administration from Barry University and is pursuing her Master's Degree in Business Administration from Nova Southeastern University.

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## APPENDIX A

### FITNESS SURVEY

This short survey is to gain an understanding of where law enforcement professionals are with regards to exercising and the probability of instituting a physical fitness program within a law enforcement agency.

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1. How old are you?
  - A. 21-29
  - B. 30-39
  - C. 40-49
  - D. 50-59
  - E. 60-69
  
2. What is your gender?
  - A. male
  - B. female
  
3. You exercise aerobically (continuous, vigorous exercise producing sweat for a minimum of thirty minutes) at least \_\_\_\_\_ per week.
  - A. 0 times
  - B. 1 time
  - C. 2-4 times
  - D. 5-7 times
  - E. more than 7 times
  
4. What do you think your biggest obstacle is to getting (or staying) in shape?
  - A. work schedule
  - B. family obligations
  - C. low motivation
  - D. not knowing what physical activities to partake in or proper exercise routine
  - E. other
  
5. How long have you been in law enforcement?
  - A. 0-5 years
  - B. 6-10 years
  - C. 11-20 years
  - D. 20 + years
  
6. Would you support a yearly physical fitness assessment program?
  - A. yes
  - B. no

7. Would receiving a monetary or leave incentive for successfully passing a physical fitness assessment compel you to participate in a physical fitness program?
- A. yes
  - B. no
8. Should it be mandatory or voluntary to participate in a physical fitness assessment program?
- A. mandatory
  - B. voluntary
  - C. no program should be implemented
9. Do you believe physical fitness is important and related to your job duties?
- A. yes
  - B. no
  - C. not sure
10. If your agency provided on-duty time to exercise, would you be more agreeable to participate in a physical fitness program?
- A. yes
  - B. no
  - C. not sure

Thank you for taking this survey.