

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EDUCATION AND JOB SATISFACTION AMONG
POLICE OFFICERS

by

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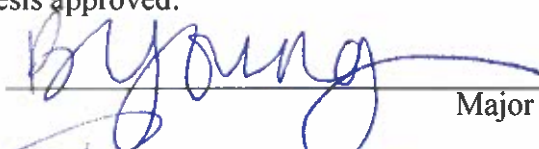
APPROVAL

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Andrew W. Bray

Thesis approved:



Major Professor



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While I am the author of this study, I am not alone in celebrating its completion. My primary source of motivation is my family. Chelsi and Randi, the both of you are my measure of success in life and I thank God every day for you both. You keep grounded and encouraged in all things I do.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.....	ii
List of Figures.....	v
List of Tables.....	vi
Abstract.....	vii
Introduction.....	1
Literture Review.....	3
i. Educational Standards for Police Officers.....	3
ii. The Benefits of Police Officer Education.....	6
iii. Education and Job Satisfaction.....	7
Current Focus.....	10
i. Data and Methods.....	10
ii. Dependent Variable.....	12
iii. Independent Variable.....	13
iv. Confounders.....	13
v. Analytical Strategy.....	14
Findings.....	15
i. Descriptives.....	15
ii. Bivariate.....	16
iii. Multivariate.....	16
iv. Educational Attainment and Current Job Satisfaction.....	17
v. Educational Attainment and Change in Job Satisfaction.....	18
Conclusion and Discussion.....	18
i. Policy Implications and Directions for Future Research.....	20
ii. Limitations.....	22
iii. Future Research.....	23
References.....	24
Appendices.....	31
i. Table 1: Descriptive Information.....	31
ii. Table 2: Bivariate Correlations.....	33
iii. Table 3: Poisson Regression.....	34
iv. Table 4: OLS Regression.....	35
v. Figure 1: Frequency of Current Job Satisfaction.....	36
vi. Figure 2: Frequency of Change in Job Satisfaction.....	37

vii. Survey 38

LIST OF FIGURES

1. Frequency of Current Job Satisfaction.....	32
2. Frequency of Change in Job Satisfaction.....	33

LIST OF TABLES

1. Table 1: Descriptive Information.....	28
2. Table 2: Bivariate Correlations.....	29
3. Table 3: Poisson Regression.....	30
4. Table 4: OLS Regression.....	31

ABSTRACT

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Education requirements for police officers have increased since the 1920s and will likely continue to increase amidst calls for criminal justice reform. The effects of higher education are well documented, and findings suggest it reduces use of force, involvement in traffic related accidents, use of sick time, and even racial prejudice. This study aimed to add to the body of research in a different regard, by examining the effect education has on officers' job satisfaction. Education showed to be significant at the bivariate level with both current job satisfaction and the change in job satisfaction. At the bivariate level, education was statistically significant with respect to current job satisfaction and change in job satisfaction. At the multivariate level, education no longer exerted a significant effect on job satisfaction. Rank and experience were found to be statistically significant. Recommendations for policy implications and directions for future research are also discussed.

INTRODUCTION

While there are currently around 660,000 sworn law enforcement officers in the United States (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023), many agencies report staff shortages. Indeed, approximately 66% of police agencies have reported an increase in resignations and 69% reported a decrease in applicants (PERF, 2023). Some studies have speculated that this increase in resignations is the result of lower job satisfaction among law enforcement (Hilal & Litsey, 2020). There has been a drop in job satisfaction for this group in recent years—much of which has stemmed from waning police-community relations and worsened public opinion of law enforcement (Yang, 2023). Given the costly nature of resignations and police turnover (Wareham et. al., 2015; Halil & Litsey, 2020), there have been efforts to try to understand what might improve job satisfaction and reduce resignations.

Scholarship has identified several factors that might be related to affect job satisfaction. These include leadership styles (Hadnot-Harris, 2021; Yang, 2023; Stormer, 2021), occupational or work-related stressors (Stormer, 2021), a lack of workplace autonomy (Johnson, 2012), and stressed family relations (Johnson, 2012). As highlighted by Johnson (2012), police job satisfaction is multidimensional and “clearly there are other correlates of police officer job satisfaction that are yet undiscovered” (p. 170).

Another factor that might be related to job satisfaction is education. On one hand, higher levels of education might reduce job satisfaction if education does not produce upward career mobility (Chavez et. al., 2000; Lersch & Kunzman, 2001; Paoline et. al., 2015). On the other hand, higher levels of education could increase job satisfaction. It is possible that education adds value to one’s career and does produce upward mobility. To-date, however, very little research has explored this relationship, and those that have produced mixed results (Boss, 2019; Dantzker,

1992; Paoline et al., 2015; Paoline & Gaul, 2020). There is, therefore, a need for additional research on this topic. Such research is particularly important given that educational standards for law enforcement are becoming increasingly commonplace, and a record number of law enforcement officers hold college degrees (Polk & Armstrong, 2001; Paoline et. al., 2015; Gardiner, 2017). As a result, how education level affects job satisfaction among law enforcement has the potential to affect a large portion within this profession.

To this end, the current study seeks to better understand the relationship between education and job satisfaction among police officers. More specifically, using surveys collected from law enforcement agencies in a large metroplex in Texas, this study examines whether education level is related to current levels of job satisfaction, and whether education level is associated with an increase or decrease in job satisfaction over time. In doing so, such findings can help provide a clearer idea of the effects of rising educational requirements among law enforcement, and future directions for this requirement.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Educational Standards for Police Officers

Discussions about law enforcement reform have been occurring for decades. In the early 1920s, August Vollmer argued for college education for law enforcement (Marciniak & Elattrache, 2020). This was echoed by George Wickersham in 1931 with his contributions to the National Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement (Marciniak & Elattrache, 2020). Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, major universities developed programs that emphasized police education. These programs laid the foundation for criminal justice programs which continued to be developed into the 1960s. Interestingly, it was not until the 1950s and early 1960s that the requirement of a high school diploma or GED was established (Roberg & Bonn, 2004).

In 1967, the Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice was established and was tasked with improving policing strategies and reducing crime (Carter & Sapp, 1990). As part of this, the Commission released a report outlining strategies to improve policing. One of those strategies was that law enforcement agencies require their officers to obtain a bachelor's degree (Carter & Sapp, 1990). This recommendation was made under the idea that more educated police officers would have greater decision-making skills and thus be better equipped to handle the increasing complexity of the job (Carter & Sapp, 1990). This, in turn, would allow officers to better serve their community and be "more responsive, more comprehensive, and more insightful police service" (Carter & Sapp, 1990, p. 60). Others were concerned that only requiring a high school diploma for law enforcement would "invite mediocrity" (National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals, 1973).

Another goal of the Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice was to have college educated officers in leadership positions. In pursuit of this goal, the Commission created the Law Enforcement Education Program (LEEP; Carter & Sapp, 1990). LEEP was

designed to encourage criminal justice personnel to attend college. At the same time, research for police education grew and organizations centered around police education like the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences were created. Police agencies also began supporting educational related policies, such as educational incentive pay, for the growing number of criminal justice degree programs being started by colleges and universities (Carter & Sapp, 1990).

Standards for police education were better quantified by the 1973 National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals. This commission was formed by the Administrator of the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA) to build upon the guidelines set forth by the 1967 Commission (Roberg & Scott, 2004). Part of the 1973 Commission's recommendations was an increase in educational standards for police applicants. The goal was that by 1975, police applicants would be required to have 60 credit hours, then 90 credit hours by 1978, and ultimately, by 1982, all police applicants would have a bachelor's degree. The LEEP program was eventually phased out, but strong academic programs focused on criminal justice research continued to attract quality scholars who had PhDs in criminal justice and other social science for their faculty. This, along with student body make-up and course curriculum, resulted in criminal justice programs quickly gaining academic respectability and a rapid maturing of the criminal justice field (Roberg & Scott, 2004).

Though calls for reform have been ongoing since the mid-1900s, recent high-profile incidents involving police officers and members of the community have led to louder, more persistent calls for police reform. The deaths of citizens by police officers during use of force incidents have members of the public calling for more training (Sloan & Paoline, 2021), more scrutiny (Burleigh, 2021), and more transparency (Ali & Pirog, 2019; Sloan & Paoline, 2021). Calls for higher educational standards for officers have also been renewed (Gardiner, 2021; Bouffard & Armstrong, 2020). Such calls are popular. In a recent survey conducted in California,

Gardiner (2021) found that 81% of the public believe police officers should have more than a high school diploma in order to be hired as an officer. More specifically, 46% believed a 2-year degree was sufficient and 35% believed a 4-year degree should be the minimum standard (Gardiner, 2021). Another article, from *The Conversation*, lists five reasons police should pursue college degrees (Bouffard & Armstrong, 2020). These reasons were that college-educated police officers were less likely to use force, were more problem-oriented, are able to better relate to the community, help identify best practices, and, finally, college education builds better leaders (Bouffard & Armstrong, 2020).

And several states have recently introduced or passed legislation outlining educational standards for law enforcement. For example, the Peace Officer Employment and Age Conditions of Employment Act (PEACE) was introduced in California in 2021. PEACE recommended police officers have a bachelor's degree in a discipline of choice at the time of their initial employment as well as the completion of a "modern policing degree program," which can be earned before or within 24 months completing the police academy (Peace Officers Education and Age Conditions for Employment Act, 2021). This bill was, in part, introduced in response to the call for police reform and aimed to reduce the number of deadly use-of-force encounters. However, these educational standards also served another purpose. These standards would ensure that officers are slightly older—closer to the age when the parts of the brain that control decision making, and rationalization are fully developed (mid-twenties)—by the time they became sworn law enforcement (Peace Officers Education and Age Conditions for Employment Act, 2021).

A similar bill was introduced in Oregon in 2023 that would require police applicants to have a bachelor's degree to be hired at an agency with more than 50 officers and two years post-secondary education to be hired at an agency with 50 or fewer officers (82nd Legislative

Assembly, 2023). While the bill in Oregon has not been voted on as of the current study, it is another example of a state legislature calling for action to increase educational standards for police officer applicants.

At the federal level, perhaps the most notable work in this area was the 2015 President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing (President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing, 2015; Lum et. al., 2016). President Obama charged the Task Force with identifying best policing practices and offering recommendations to reduce crime and strengthen community policing and trust among law enforcement officers and the communities they serve. In the final report, the task force identified six pillars to accomplish their goal. One of these pillars centered on police training and education. The Task Force recommended the Department of Justice partner with universities to develop a national postgraduate institute of policing for senior police executives. The Task Force also encourages federal, state, and local agencies to incentivize higher education. In the action item for this recommendation, the Task Force suggests reinstating funding programs similar to LEEP. Interestingly, this recommendation also suggested that law enforcement agencies offer jobs to those without a college education to promote diversity, but in combination with a provision of means to obtain higher education during one's career so the benefits of a diverse staff to be realized (President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing, 2015).

The Benefits of Police Officer Education

The renewed interest in higher educational standards among police officers is not without merit. During college, the average student will mature, and become more knowledgeable and future oriented (Mayhew et. al., 2016). Taking college courses can also improve critical thinking skills, moral reasoning, and intellectual and social confidence (Mayhew et. al., 2016; Bostrom, 2003; Paterson, 2011), all of which are key to policing. While meeting degree requirements, college classes also expose officers to a wide variety of topics and viewpoints, which could be

beneficial in dealing with diverse bodies of citizens (Mayhew et al., 2016; Bostrom, 2003).

Exposure to diverse experiences in college have been shown to foster development of cognitive growth and more complex modes of thought (Pascarella et. al., 2014).

Higher education among law enforcement can also reduce use of force incidents. Police officers with some college education are also significantly less likely to use verbal force (commands and threats) while officers with a bachelor's degree are significantly less likely to use physical force (any form of physical restraint or application; Paoline & Terrill, 2007; Marciniak & Elattrache, 2020). Research also shows that education level is inversely related to frequency and level of force used by patrol officers (Chapman, 2012; Marciniak & Elattrache, 2020). Higher levels of education are also negatively correlated with racial prejudice (Chapman, 2012). That is, more educated officers showed less racial prejudice (Chapman, 2012), which is the issue at the center of many police reform debates.

Another notable benefit of education in law enforcement is that college educated officers are less likely to generate complaints or have disciplinary actions against them (Marciniak & Elattrache, 2020; Gardiner, 2019; Roberg & Bonn, 2004; Lersch & Kunzman, 2001). College educated officers are also more likely to be open to changes in policing and innovative methods of policing (Gardiner, 2019; Roberg & Bonn, 2004; Carter & Sapp, 1988), take fewer sick days and have fewer job-related injuries (Gardiner, 2017; Bostrom, 2003), and have fewer traffic-related accidents (Bostrom, 2003). In short, higher education among police officers might benefit both the department and the community.

Education and Job Satisfaction

Education might also be related to job satisfaction, though research on this is largely inconclusive as to how. On one hand, some preliminary evidence suggests that some college-educated officers report lower job satisfaction and hold less favorable views about upper

management (Paoline et. al., 2015). This was true among lower ranking officers as they are intellectual equals with their superiors but remain at the bottom of the police hierarchy (Paoline et. al., 2015). One explanation for the negative effect of education on job satisfaction is unrealized promotion expectations (Lersch & Kunzman, 2001; Chavez et. al., 2000). Police officers who obtain higher education might expect their degree to aid in promotions and if that does not happen, this might lead to frustration (Lersch & Kunzman, 2001). Indeed, college educated officers tend to have greater promotion aspirations than their less educated peers (Paoline et. al., 2015).

Other studies find the opposite: that education can increase job satisfaction, but mainly for less experienced law enforcement officers. Dantzker (1992), for example, found that the higher a police officer's education level is, the more satisfied they are, but this was only true for patrol officers with less than 5 years of experience. For officers who have more than five years' experience, education reduced job satisfaction. Perhaps less experienced officers still maintain high levels of satisfaction even after obtaining a college degree because they are optimistic their degree could yield promotions (Roberg & Bonn, 2004; Polk & Armstrong, 2001).

Furthermore, some studies have found no effect of education of job satisfaction. White and colleagues (2022), for example, found that education had no significant relationship to job satisfaction. White and colleagues (2022) surveyed officers at seven different agencies with a primary finding that supports the findings of previous research (Gau & Paoline, 2019), that police officers are generally satisfied with their job, including mid-level police managers (Erckiti, 2008).

In short, we know very little about the relationship between job satisfaction and education level among police officers. The research that does exist is also largely inconclusive. Yet, this is an important question. Educational standards have remained a priority in many police

departments (Carter & Sapp, 1990; President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing, 2015), and the percentage of college-educated law enforcement officers continues to grow. In 1960, only about 3% of law enforcement had a bachelor's degree, today that figure is over 30% (Polk & Armstrong, 2001; Paoline et. al., 2015; Gardiner, 2017); and more closely mirrors the rates of bachelor's degrees among 25- to 29-year-olds nationally (37%; Marciniak & Elattrache, 2020).

Second, turnover rates among law enforcement are quite high. Nationally, the law enforcement turnover rate is about 11% (Hilal & Litsey, 2020), however, more recent data from the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) indicates that between 2020 and 2022, 66% of their member agencies reported an increase in resignations and 69% reported a decrease in applicants. Such turnover rates raise serious concerns considering police jobs are expected to increase 7% by 2026 (Hilal & Litsey, 2020). Higher turnover rates are extremely costly to police agencies because of the amount of time and resources used during the recruitment process (Wareham et. al., 2015). To replace an employee, it can cost up to five times the salary of that individual and these costs are higher for police than other organizations (Hilal & Litsey, 2020). How education affects job satisfaction, therefore, can have important implications for the future of the field.

If education increases job satisfaction, there should be serious considerations about raising, or even maintaining, current education standards for hiring new police officers. This could reduce police turnover and the associated expenditures, but also improve community safety. Conversely, if education reduces job satisfaction, additional efforts are needed to maintain the benefits associated with higher education, while also promoting job satisfaction.

CURRENT FOCUS

The purpose of this research was to determine the relationship between an officer's level of education and job satisfaction. More specifically, this study seeks to answer two research

questions. First, does a higher level of education affect current job satisfaction among police officers? And second, does a higher level of education affect job satisfaction over the course of one's career?

Data and Methods

This data for this study come from a Qualtrics survey administered to all law enforcement officers from the following 26 agencies in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex:

Addison PD	Farmers Branch PD	Keller PD
Allen PD	Flower Mound PD	Lewisville PD
Arlington PD	Frisco PD	Mansfield PD
Bedford PD	Garland PD	McKinney PD
Carrollton PD	Grand Prairie PD	Mesquite PD
Coppell PD	Grapevine PD	North Richland Hills PD
Denton PD	Haltom City PD	Plano PD
Desoto PD	Hurst PD	Southlake PD
Euless PD	Irving PD	

The agencies listed above were selected because they are considered to be midsize agencies, which is an agency of between 50 to 999 officers (IACP, 2014). This type of agency was specifically targeted for this research because they are uniquely situated within the law enforcement community. There are nearly 700 midsize police agencies in the United States serving over 75 million people (IACP, 2014). This represents nearly a quarter of the United States population and is twice the population served by larger agencies. Midsize agencies are also severely lacking representation in previous research because the Midsize Agency Program (MAP) was not formed until 2010. The agencies listed above employ around 4,700 full-time sworn police officers.

After all mid-size municipal agencies in DFW were identified, a Qualtrics survey was then made available to all law enforcement officers within each of those agencies. The President

of the Texas Police Chiefs Association (TPCA), who was also a Chief of Police in one of the agencies surveyed, distributed the survey to the Chiefs of Police of each of the above-listed agencies. The Chief of each of those agencies then disseminated the survey to their officers by electronic mail. Participation was completely voluntary. The survey was available for 30 days to allow enough time for respondents to participate. A reminder was sent out 10 days before the online survey was set to expire.

The survey was comprised of 18 questions, of which 16 were close ended questions and 2 were open ended questions. First, the respondents were asked how long they have been a peace officer. The second question was an open-ended question that asked respondents to report their rank or position. The respondents were then asked if they aspired to be promoted (Yes/No), if they have ever had any formal disciplinary action against them (Yes/No), their highest level of education (categorical variable), and their reason for seeking higher education (categorical variable). The next two questions asked about job satisfaction. The respondents were asked to rate their level of job satisfaction when they first began their career in law enforcement and to rate their current level of job satisfaction.

The next question asked respondents whether they planned on retiring from law enforcement (Yes/No). If respondents selected “No” on this question, they were asked why they planned on leaving law enforcement. If respondents selected “Yes” on this question, they were asked whether they would leave law enforcement if they could. If the respondents selected “Yes” to the follow-up question, they were asked what their reason for leaving law enforcement was, followed by what was keeping them in law enforcement. If the respondents selected “No” to the follow-up question, they were directed to the demographic questions. All respondents were then asked a series of demographic questions. These questions captured the respondents age, race, sex, agency, and veteran status.

Once the survey was closed, 9 responses were deleted for having no data recorded, 15 responses were deleted for being incomplete, and 2 responses were deleted because they were answered by civilian positions. Nine additional cases were dropped because they were missing on key confounders. This resulted in an analytical sample of 403. This is approximately a 9% response rate.

Dependent variables

The primary goal of this study was to assess the effect of education level on job satisfaction. The main dependent variable was *current job satisfaction*, which was derived from a survey question that asked respondents to rate their job satisfaction at the time of the survey on a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 being labeled as “Hate it!” and 10 being labeled as “Love it!” 5 was labeled “Neither like nor dislike it” to allow for a neutral option.

The second goal of this study was to understand whether education level is associated with a change in job satisfaction from the time law enforcement began their career to now. *Change in job satisfaction* is a change score that was calculated by subtracting the values produced by a retrospective question that asked respondents to rate their job satisfaction when they first began their career from the value of the current job satisfaction variable. Both questions had the same response options. The change scores ranged from -8 to 5. Negative scores indicated the respondent had a decrease in job satisfaction and a positive score indicated the respondent had an increase in job satisfaction.

Independent variable

Education was the key independent variable. This was measured by a survey question that asked respondents to indicate their highest level of education. Respondents who had a high school diploma or GED were coded as 1, some college was coded as 2, an associate’s degree (or 60 total credit hours) was coded as 3, a bachelor's degree was coded as 4, a master’s degree was

coded as 5, a PhD was coded as 6, and a J.D./M.D./Ed.D. was coded as 7. Just under half of the respondents had a bachelor's degree (49 percent).

Confounders

This study also included a host of confounding variables. *Rank* is a categorical variable where 0 indicates the respondent was an officer, 1 indicates the respondent was a Corporal or Detective, 2 indicates the respondent was a Sergeant, 3 indicates the respondent was a Lieutenant, and 4 indicates the respondent was Command Staff (Captain, Deputy/Assistant Chief, and Chiefs of Police). *Age* is also a categorical variable where 1 indicates the respondents were 21 to 29 years old, 2 indicates respondents were 30 to 39 years old, 3 indicates respondents were 40 to 49 years old, 4 indicates respondents were 50 to 59 years old, 5 indicates respondents were 60 years or older. The age scale begins at 21 years of age because it is the minimum age required to be certified as a Peace Officer by the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement. The average value for responses was 2.73—which is the equivalent of between 30 to 39 and 40-49 years old. *Race* is a dichotomous indicator of whether the respondent was white (coded as 1) or non-white (coded as 0). An overwhelming majority of the respondents identified as “White or Caucasian” (87.4%).

Sex is another dichotomous indicator of whether the respondent was Male (coded as 1) or not (coded as 0). This variable was derived from a survey question that also gave respondents the options to select “prefer not to say.” Three respondents selected this option and were thus coded as missing on this variable. Of the completed responses, 82.3% identified as “Male” and 17% identified as “Female.” *Veteran* is a dichotomous variable of whether respondents served in the United States Military (Yes = 1; No = 0). One response did not answer the survey question from which this variable was created and was coded as missing. Approximately 29% of the respondents in this sample are veterans.

Years of experience is a categorical variable that captures how long the respondents have been a police officer. This variable is coded so that 1 indicates respondents have less than 5 years of experience, 2 indicates respondents have 5 to 10 years of experience, 3 indicates respondents have 10 to 15 years of experience, 4 indicates respondents have 15 to 20 years of experience, 5 indicates respondents have 20 to 25 years of experience, 6 indicates respondents have 25 to 30 years of experience, and 7 indicates respondents have more than 30 years of experience.

Finally, *formal discipline* is a binary measure that captures whether the respondent had ever received any formal discipline in the course of their job (Yes = 1; No = 0). Formal discipline is discipline that has been documented. Just over 56.1% of respondents had never received any formal discipline while 43.9% had received some form of formal discipline.

Analytical strategy

The analysis for this project proceeds in several stages. First, descriptive information for the full sample is provided. Second, the bivariate correlations between the independent and dependent variables, as well as all the confounders, are assessed. Next, Poisson regression models examine the effect of education on current job satisfaction. This method is appropriate given that the dependent variable is an under dispersed continuous variable. Finally, ordinary least squares (OLS) regression is employed to examine the effect of education on change in job satisfaction. This method is appropriate because after log transformation change in job satisfaction approximates a normal distribution. All other conditions of OLS were satisfied.

FINDINGS

Descriptive Statistics

The first goal of this study is to examine the descriptive information of the sample, the results of which are displayed in Table 1. As displayed in Table 1, respondents' experience levels ranged from 1 (less than 5 years) to 7 (30 or more years) with a mean score of 3.54, or

between 10 and 20 years. Respondents' rank ranged from 0 (Officer) to 4 (Captain and up), with a mean score of 0.97. More specifically, nearly 73% of this sample included Officers, Detectives, and Corporals. Approximately 44 percent of respondents had some form of disciplinary action against them, and the average age of respondents was 2.74. Recall that age ranged from 1 (21-29 years of age) to 5 (over 60 years of age), so the average respondent in this same is the equivalent of 30-49 years old. Most of the respondents identified as white (87.8%) and male (82.9%), while a smaller portion were military veterans (29%).

With respect to the outcomes of interest, the average respondent reported a current job satisfaction of 6.91 with values on this variable ranging from 1 to 9 and had a reported change in job satisfaction of -1.54 with values on this variable ranging from scores ranged from -8 to 5. To better aid in understanding of the nature of these variables, Figures 1 and 2 visually display the distribution of these variables. Recall that positive values on the latter variable indicate an increase in job satisfaction, while negative values indicate a decrease. As a result, the average on this variable indicates respondents experienced an average decrease of 1.54 from their job satisfaction at the beginning of their career. The highest level of education ranged from 1 (high school diploma/GED) to 7 (J.D./M.D./Ed.D), with a mean score of 3.54. This indicates, on average, respondents had an associate's degree (13.6) or Bachelor's degree (48.9%).

Bivariate Analysis

The second goal of this study was to examine the bivariate correlations between the independent variable, dependent variables, and key confounders. Table 2 shows the bivariate correlations between all variables. Several variables were significantly correlated with the outcomes of interest. With respect to current job satisfaction, the variables that were statistically significant at the bivariate level were education ($p < 0.05$), experience ($p < 0.01$), age ($p < 0.05$), and race ($p < 0.05$). More specifically, these results indicate that officers with higher levels of

education and officers who identify as male were *more* satisfied at the time of the survey.

Conversely, officers with more experience, older officers, and white officers were *less* satisfied at the time of the survey.

With respect to the change in job satisfaction the variables that were statistically significant at the bivariate level were education ($p < 0.05$), experience ($p < 0.01$), age ($p < 0.05$), and race ($p < 0.01$). More specifically, respondents with higher levels of education and those who identify as male reported an improvement in job satisfaction over time. Conversely, officers with more experience, older officers, and white officers were less satisfied over time. That is, they were less satisfied at the time of the survey than they were at the beginning of their career.

In short, education is significantly correlated with current job satisfaction and the change in job satisfaction at the bivariate level. Additional analyses are needed to determine if these findings hold up in a multivariate context.

Multivariate Results

Accordingly, the next goal of the study was to determine how educational attainment was associated with both current job satisfaction and change in job satisfaction using multivariate regression techniques. More specifically, two sets of models were estimated for each outcome. The first model regressed the outcome on educational attainment with no controls. This was done to determine the baseline relationship between the independent and dependent variable. The second model regressed the outcome on educational attainment with the full set of controls. Recall that Poisson regression was used for the models predicting current job satisfaction and ordinary least squares regression was used for the models predicting change in job satisfaction.

Educational Attainment and Current Job Satisfaction

The first set of models assessed the effects of educational attainment on current job satisfaction—the result of which are presented in Table 3. This table has two models. Model 1

displays the Poisson regression results estimating the effect of educational attainment on current job satisfaction with no controls. As you can see, this model shows no statistical significance between education and current job satisfaction ($p > .05$). Model 2 displays the Poisson results estimating the effect of education on current job satisfaction net of controls. In this model, education remained non-significant ($p > .05$), but other variables were significantly associated with current job satisfaction: experience and rank. That is, as experience increases, current job satisfaction decreases, but as rank increases, current job satisfaction increases. It should be noted, however, that these effect sizes are quite small. For every unit increase in experience, job satisfaction only decreased by 0.05, and for every unit increase in rank, job satisfaction increased by 0.04. Recall, experience is measured in increments of 5 years up to “30 years or more,” so for every 5 years of experience, current job satisfaction scores decreased by 0.05. For every promotion to the next higher rank, current job satisfaction scores increased by 0.04. No other variables in this model were statistically associated with current job satisfaction.

Educational Attainment and Change in Job Satisfaction

The final goal of this study was to assess the effect of educational attainment on changes in job satisfaction. Change in job satisfaction was calculated by subtracting respondents’ job satisfaction at the beginning of their career from the current job satisfaction. Analyses revealed that this variable was non-normally distributed. To adjust for this, the dependent variable was log transformed. Prior to doing so, a constant 9 was added¹. After log transformation, this variable approximates a normal distribution. All analyses employed robust standard errors to address concerns of heteroskedasticity.

¹ A constant of 9 was chosen to ensure all values on this variable were greater than 1, which is necessary in order to log transform a variable.

Model 1 in Table 4 displays the effect of educational attainment on the change in job satisfaction with no controls. This model shows statistical significance ($p < 0.05$) between education and the change in job satisfaction. The effect size is rather small in this model because, as the data show, for every unit increase in education, the change in job satisfaction increases by 0.017.

Model 2 in Table 4 displays the effect of educational attainment on the change in job satisfaction with all controls included. In this model, education was no longer statistically associated with change in job satisfaction. It was, however, significantly associated with experience and rank ($p < 0.05$). The effect sizes in this model remain small. According to the data, for every unit increase in experience (5 years of experience), the change in job satisfaction decreases by 0.019. Conversely, for every unit increase in rank (next higher rank), the change in job satisfaction increases by 0.018.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Since the 1920s, education standards for law enforcement have been scrutinized and have been the focus of research and policy (LEEP; National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals, 1973; Carter & Sapp, 1990). Generally, research has found that more education among law enforcement results in fewer use-of-force incidents (Paoline & Terrill, 2007; Chapman, 2012; Marciniak & Elattrache, 2020), less racial prejudice (Chapman, 2012), fewer complaints and disciplinary actions (Marciniak & Elattrache, 2020; Gardiner, 2019; Roberg & Bonn, 2004; Lersch & Kunzman, 2001), fewer sick days used (Bostrom, 2003; Gardiner, 2017), and fewer traffic-related accidents (Bostrom, 2003). Few studies, however, have examined the effect of education on job satisfaction. Those that did had inconclusive, or even conflicting, results (Dantzker, 1992; Paoline et. al., 2015; Chavez et. al., 2000; Lersch & Kunzman, 2001). As a result, additional research that examines the effect of education on job

satisfaction is needed. The goal of this thesis is to help fill that gap. Based on the findings presented here, two conclusions are warranted.

First, officers with higher levels of education are no more or less satisfied than their less educated peers. Though there was a positive relationship at the bivariate level between education and current job satisfaction as well as education and the change in job satisfaction over time, this did not hold up at the multivariate level in either case. These models did not show a relationship between education and job satisfaction, current or change, but this finding is encouraging because education did not show a negative relationship. Education standards will likely continue to be a focus of criminal justice reform and, if education standards continue to be raised, this will at least not negatively affect police officers' job satisfaction levels according to the data from this study.

These findings are consistent with prior work in this area (White et. al., 2022; Barnett, 2020; Gau & Paoline, 2019; Erckiti, 2008). Officers who participated in this study indicated that they are generally satisfied with their job given the mean of the current job satisfaction rating was 6.91. Perhaps education has become such a common achievement among those entering the workforce that it does not influence one's job satisfaction. In fact, nearly two-thirds (62.8%) of the officers who took this survey had either a bachelor's degree or a master's degree. This suggests there is more research needed that can parse out *when* and for whom education is important. Perhaps it is experience level like Dantzker (1992) noted. It may be that education simply does not result in the desired promotions and earning expectations. Because educational standards are becoming the norm, too many officers have attained higher education and there might not simply be enough financial resources or ranking positions to accommodate that.

Second, rank (or career advancement) seems to be the single best influence on job satisfaction. Though the effect sizes were small, rank remained consistently significant at the

bivariate and multivariate levels on both current job satisfaction and the change in job satisfaction. Rank might increase job satisfaction because higher ranking officers tend to make more money, and research finds that money is associated with job satisfaction (Mishra & Mishra, 2022). This finding is important because college educated officers tend to have greater promotional aspirations than their less educated peers (Paoline et. al., 2015) and unrealized promotions can lead to lower job satisfaction (Lersch & Kunzman, 2001; Chavez et. al., 2000). Rank might also be related because higher ranking officers might be able to effect change in the manner they see fit, making the job resemble what they want.

Another variable that was consistently associated with job satisfaction was experience—or the number of years respondents had served in law enforcement. Indeed, the longer respondents had been in law enforcement, the less job satisfaction they currently had and the greater decline in satisfaction they experienced overtime. This could very well be caused by phenomenon known as secondary traumatic stress (or compassion fatigue; witnessing or helping in the aftermath of traumatic events), moral injury (failing to prevent or witnessing events that go against deeply held moral beliefs), and constant societal pressures (Daniel & Treece, 2022; Papazoglou, 2020). As an officer goes through his or her career, they are repeatedly exposed to traumatic events (Daniel & Treece, 2022; Papazoglou, 2020), which could cause them to become less satisfied with their job.

Policy Implications

The findings presented here present several opportunities for policy change. First, even though education is not associated with job satisfaction, it does have many other tangible benefits (e.g., reduction in use of force, fewer traffic related incidents). As a result, agencies could consider implementing tuition reimbursement programs or increasing their usage of them to encourage officers to seek higher education. Of the agencies included in this study, twenty

offered tuition reimbursement. These benefits range from \$2,650 per year (City of North Richland Hills, 2024), on the low end, to \$5,250, on the high end (City of Denton, 2024). All of the agencies offering tuition reimbursement require an officer to be out of training before being able to take advantage of these benefits. Of the six agencies included in this study that do not have tuition reimbursement, three have an education incentive pay, which is a monthly or yearly stipend for completing a degree (Trigg, 2020). For example, an officer with a bachelor's degree can earn an additional \$100 per month, or \$1200 per year, while an officer with a master's degree can earn an additional \$150 per month, or \$1,800 per year (Trigg, 2020). These figures, while a good start, provide an opportunity for expansion of these benefits.

Tuition reimbursement and educational incentive pays are some of the most common incentives offered for educational benefits (Trigg, 2020). Additional incentives may include allowing officers time to complete some coursework on duty or flexible scheduling allowing an officer to attend classes on campus. Providing, or increasing, funding for higher education among officers, or simply allowing time on duty to complete coursework/classes, would allow more officers to obtain higher education, thereby benefiting the law enforcement community.

Second, these findings suggest the need to develop opportunities for career advancement. Because rank was significantly associated with job satisfaction, it might be important for agencies to prioritize leadership training. While not everyone who wants to be promoted will, due to the limited number of leadership roles compared to the total number of officers, this could, at a minimum, give way to a better prepared cadre of police supervisors and managers. Doing so could provide important information that can be used to reduce police turnover and ultimately improve community safety.

Finally, because police officers are likely to experience feelings of moral injury and compassion fatigue throughout their career due to chronic exposure to traumatic incidents

(Papazoglou, 2020), law enforcement administrators should help minimize their effects by implementing preventative care. As Papazoglou and colleagues (2020) state, “[s]upporting the mental health needs of law enforcement officers is critical to increasing the safety of both officers and the public they serve,” (p. 139). This could not only provide increased safety, but also increased job satisfaction over time if officers feel supported and their mental health is prioritized.

Directions for Future Research

These findings also suggest important directions for future research. First, because the effects of education on job satisfaction here were null, there are opportunities for future research to understand *why* this might be true. This might involve examining how education level interacts with rank or experience, or even demographics like race, age, or sex to influence job satisfaction. Additional research might also consider conducting interviews or focus groups with law enforcement to better understand how they feel about their job, their education, and the relation between those two factors. Second, there is a need to understand why rank might increase job satisfaction and experience decreases it. Existing research has speculated on why rank and experience might be associated, but this has yet to be empirically examined.

Another direction for future research is understanding how geographic location could affect job satisfaction. It is possible that the policies in certain areas affect job satisfaction differently. Additionally, future research should aim to identify what other confounders affect job satisfaction in law enforcement. As determined by this study, job satisfaction is multidimensional and there are certainly other confounders that could help scholars and practitioners understand what increases job satisfaction. The confounders used in this study, in addition to the independent variables, only explained six percent of the variance in job

satisfaction. Additional research should identify new variables to help identify what most affects job satisfaction.

Given the study of secondary traumatic stress and moral injury in law enforcement are in their infancy (Papazoglou, 2020), additional research should focus on this to determine if there is an effect on job satisfaction. Papazoglou and colleagues (2020) reported that a substantial number of officers have reported feelings of moral injury and compassion fatigue after chronic exposure to traumatic events on the job. Future scholars should work to determine if a relationship exists between these unseen injuries and job satisfaction, especially among more experienced officers.

Limitations

The conclusions presented here should be viewed in the context of the study's limitations. First, the study's geographic concentration cannot be ignored. The United States is widely heterogeneous. Cultures and ideas differ between regions, and this is likely the case with police agencies across the country. What influences and affects officers in the southern United States may not have the same effect on officers in the northern United States and, similarly, officers in the western United States may have different opinions than those in the eastern United States. That said, the findings in this study may be specific to officers in certain geographic locations and should be replicated in other locations.

Second, the survey asked officers to retrospectively rate their satisfaction at the beginning of their career. It is possible, particularly among career law enforcement, that they do not accurately remember how they felt about their job when they first started. Officers' original level of job satisfaction could be colored by the experiences they have had over their career and thus their reports on this could be skewed.

Furthermore, these data were collected only at one point in time. Therefore, current level of job satisfaction could reflect respondent's daily job satisfaction level, not their average current job satisfaction level. Some respondents could also be facing current disciplinary action which could negatively skew their estimation of their current job satisfaction. To account for that, the survey did ask the respondents if they had faced disciplinary action, and that measure was included as a confounder in the models presented here.

Finally, it should be noted that officers may be less than forthcoming when asked about former disciplinary action. Police officers tend to be relatively cynical (Kanvinde, 2022). Because of this, some may have felt their information was not safe and would potentially be relayed to their agency if shared, despite the survey promising confidentiality. To potentially account for this and build trust, the author reiterated their own law enforcement background. This potentially reduced any concerns about inaccurate disciplinary action information.

In sum, the goal of this study was to add to the body of research that exists with respect to education level and job satisfaction in law enforcement. This study found no relationship between education and current job satisfaction and, similarly, between education and change in job satisfaction. Rank and experience were also found to have a significant influence on job satisfaction. Ultimately, it was determined that job satisfaction is multidimensional. Educational requirements for law enforcement are likely to increase over time as the United States population becomes increasingly more educated which, as shown by this study, will not have a negative effect, but education is clearly not the end-all contributor to job satisfaction.

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APPENDICES

TABLE 1. Descriptive Information (N = 403)

Variable	%	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	S.D.
Current job satisfaction		1	9	6.91	1.956
Change in job satisfaction		-8	5	-1.54	2.077
-8	1.7				
-7	1.2				
-6	1.7				
-5	4.5				
-4	4.5				
-3	12.4				
-2	21.1				
-1	15.1				
0	31.8				
1	1.5				
2	2.7				
3	0.5				
4	1				
5	0.2				
Education level		1	7	3.54	1.086
1	3				
2	19.9				
3	13.6				
4	48.9				
5	13.9				
6	0.2				
7	0.5				
Years in law enforcement		1	7	3.66	1.855
1	14.1				
2	20.6				
3	12.9				
4	17.9				
5	14.6				
6	12.2				
7	7.7				
Law enforcement rank		0	4	0.97	1.27
0	51.9				
1	20.8				
2	13.6				
3	5.5				
4	8.2				
Disciplinary action (0/1)		0	1	0.44	0.497
Age		1	5	2.74	1.062
1	12.7				
2	30.8				
3	30.5				

	4	22.1				
	5	4				
White race (0/1)			0	1	0.88	0.327
Male (0/1)			0	1	0.83	0.377
Veteran (0/1)			0	1	0.71	0.454

Table 2. Bivariate Correlations (N=403)

	Current job satisfaction	Change in job satisfaction	Education level	Years in law enforcement	Law enforcement rank	Disciplinary action	Age	White race (0/1)	Male (0/1)	Veteran (0/1)
Current job satisfaction	1.000	0.870**	0.098*	-0.173**	0.082	-0.017	-0.110*	-0.114*	-0.084	0.081
Change in job satisfaction	0.870**	1.000	0.106*	-0.180**	0.040	-0.062	-0.124*	-0.141**	-0.084	-0.009
Education level	0.098*	0.106*	1.000	-0.049	0.157**	0.035	-0.025	-0.012	-0.158**	0.119*
Years in law enforcement	-0.173**	-0.180**	-0.049	1.000	0.440**	0.183**	0.830**	0.091	0.225**	0.014
Law enforcement rank	0.082	0.040	0.157**	0.440**	1.000	0.169**	0.363**	0.046	0.073	0.072
Disciplinary action	-0.017	-0.062	0.035	0.183**	0.169**	1.000	0.108*	-0.025	0.121*	0.045
Age	-0.110*	-0.124*	-0.025	0.830**	0.363**	0.108*	1.000	-0.013	0.186**	-0.085
White race (0/1)	-0.114*	-0.141**	-0.012	0.091	0.046	-0.025	-0.013	1.000	-0.008	0.097
Male (0/1)	-0.084	-0.084	-0.158**	0.225**	0.073	0.121*	0.186**	-0.008	1.000	-0.189**
Veteran (0/1)	0.081	-0.009	0.119*	0.014	0.072	0.045	-0.085	0.097	-0.189**	1.000

*p<0.05, **p<0.01

Table 3. Poisson Regression models estimating the effect of education on current job satisfaction (N = 403)

	Model 1			Model 2		
	B	S.E.	Exp(B)	B	S.E.	Exp(B)
Education level	0.026	0.018	1.026	0.011	0.018	1.011
Years in law enforcement	-	-	-	-0.050*	0.020	0.951
Law enforcement rank	-	-	-	0.040*	0.017	1.042
Disciplinary action	-	-	-	-0.002	0.040	0.998
Age	-	-	-	0.027	0.033	1.027
White race (0/1)	-	-	-	-0.082	0.057	0.921
Male (0/1)	-	-	-	-0.015	0.052	0.985
Veteran (0/1)	-	-	-	0.053	0.044	1.054

*p < .05

Table 4. OLS Regression models estimating the effect of education on change in job satisfaction (N = 403)

	Model 1		Model 2	
	B	S.E.	B	S.E.
Education level	0.017*	0.008	0.011	0.008
Years in law enforcement	-	-	-0.019*	0.009
Law enforcement rank	-	-	0.018*	0.008
Disciplinary action	-	-	-0.021	0.017
Age	-	-	0.007	0.015
White race (0/1)	-	-	-0.048	0.026
Male (0/1)	-	-	-0.022	0.024
Veteran (0/1)	-	-	0.000	0.019

*p < .05

Figure 1. Frequency distribution for current job satisfaction (N = 403)

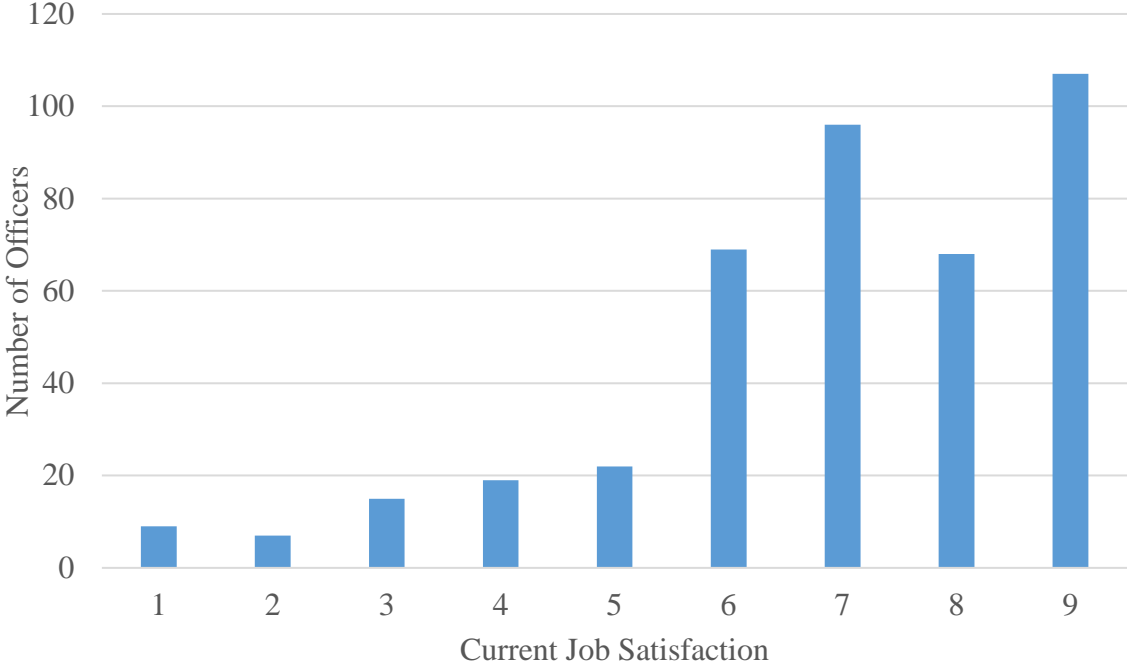
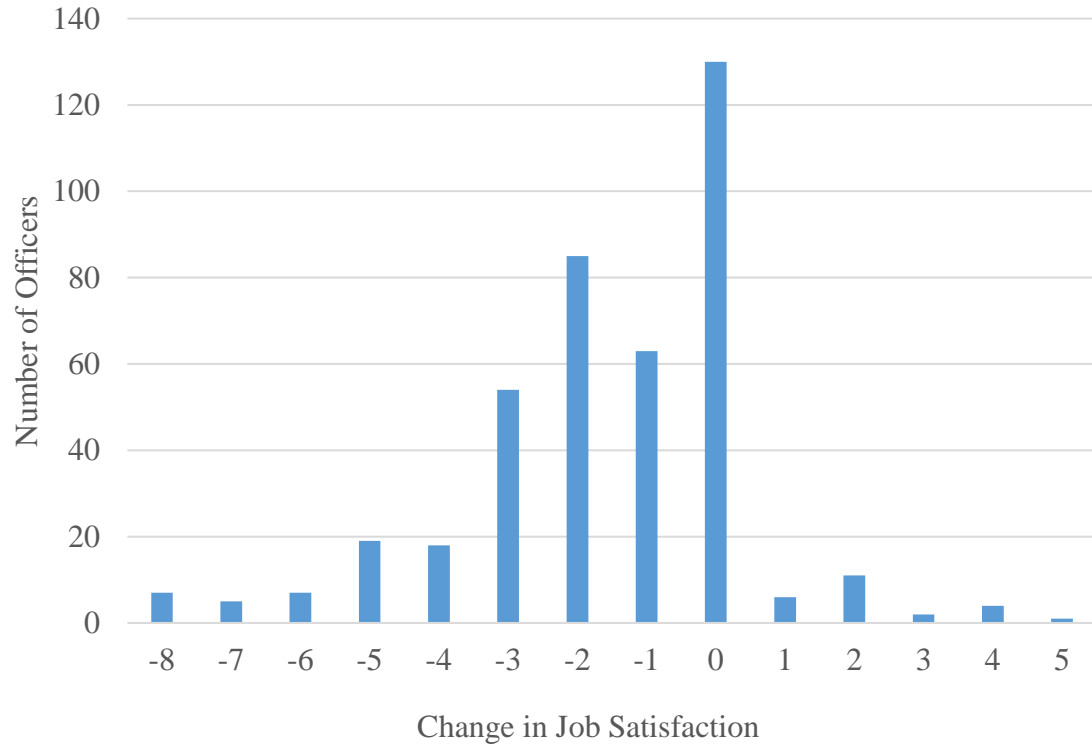


Figure 2. Frequency distribution for change in job satisfaction (N = 403)



Police Education and Job Satisfaction Survey

1. How long have you been a peace officer?
 - a. Less than 5 years
 - b. 5-10 years
 - c. 10-15 years
 - d. 15-20 years
 - e. 20-25 years
 - f. 25-30 years
 - g. More than 30 years
2. What is your current rank/position?
_____ (fill in blank)
3. Do you want to promote/change positions within your agency (i.e. Motors, CID, SRO, etc.)?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
4. Have you ever had any formal disciplinary action taken against you?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
5. What is your highest level of education? (if answer is high school, skip to Q8, else: continue)
 - a. High School/GED
 - b. Some College
 - c. Associate's Degree (or at least 60 credit hours)
 - d. Bachelor's Degree
 - e. Master's Degree
 - f. PhD
 - g. J.D./M.D./EdD
6. What was/is your reason for seeking higher education?
 - a. Family expectation
 - b. Wasn't sure what else to do
 - c. Personal goal
 - d. Promotion
 - e. Career Change
 - f. _____ (Fill in blank)
7. When did you complete your highest level of education?
 - a. Before law enforcement career
 - b. During law enforcement career
8. Rate your job satisfaction when you first began law enforcement.
1-----5-----10 (scale)

9. Rate your job satisfaction now.

1-----5-----10 (scale)

10. Do you plan on retiring from law enforcement? (Meaning reaching retirement eligibility)

(If yes, skip to Q12, if no, continue)

- a. Yes
- b. No

11. What is the reason for leaving law enforcement?

(Select all that apply)

- a. Societal pressure
- b. Political Climate
- c. Burnt out/ Don't enjoy it anymore
- d. Not what I expected
- e. I'm qualified for a job I wasn't before
- f. _____ (fill in blank)

12. If you could leave law enforcement, would you? (If yes, continue, if no, skip to Q14)

- a. Yes
- b. No

13. What is keeping you in law enforcement?

- a. Too close to retirement
- b. I'm not qualified for anything else
- c. Nothing else pays as well for my qualifications
- d. I don't have enough education
- e. _____ (fill in blank)

14. What is your age range?

- a. 21-29
- b. 30-39
- c. 40-49
- d. 50-59
- e. 60+

15. What race do you identify with?

- a. White or Caucasian
- b. Black or African American
- c. Asian or Asian American
- d. American Indian or Alaska Native
- e. Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
- f. Another race: _____
- g. Prefer not to say

16. What is your biological gender?

- a. Male
- b. Female
- c. Prefer not to say

17. What agency do you work for? (CONFIDENTIAL)

_____ (fill in blank)

18. Are you a veteran of the United States Military?

- a. Yes
- b. No