

LAW ENFORCEMENT RETENTION STUDY

NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

CRIMINAL JUSTICE TRAINING AND
STANDARDS DIVISION
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THE PURPOSE:

In the System Plan Eighth Edition the Commission established the goal to continue examination of professional development, retention, and recruitment of law enforcement and criminal justice officers, with the goal of improving the profession. Therefore, the study was conducted to help provide agencies with information to assist in recruiting and retaining high quality officers.

THE PROCESS:

The study population was 26 North Carolina Police Departments of various sizes: very small (1-25), small (26-100), medium (101-500) and large (501+). The 26 police departments consisted of a combined total of 8,135 sworn officers. In the table below are the police departments that completed the Law Enforcement Retention survey.

POLICE DEPARTMENT BY SIZE			
Very Small (1-25)	Small (26-100)	Medium (101-500)	Large (501+)
Angier PD Blowing Rock PD Candor PD Franklin PD Hamlet PD Spencer PD	Apex PD Boone PD Elizabeth City PD Fuquay-Varina PD Holly Springs PD Mooresville PD Statesville PD	Asheville PD Cary PD Concord PD Fayetteville PD Greenville PD High Point PD Rocky Mount PD	Charlotte-Mecklenburg PD Durham PD Greensboro PD NC State Highway Patrol Raleigh PD Winston-Salem PD

NOTE: Only sworn officers participated

The Law Enforcement Retention survey was comprised of 29 questions. The survey was created using Survey Monkey® electronic survey. The link to the survey was sent to Chiefs of the selected police departments enclosed with a letter from Director, Steven Combs. The letter informed the Chiefs of the study’s purpose and to encourage officers to participate. The survey link was accessible to officers August 23-September 23, 2016. At the close of the survey 1,023 officers responded, providing a 13% response rate.

DEMOGRAPHICS:

The demographic information describes the characteristics of the surveyed law enforcement officers. The demographics used in the Law Enforcement Retention Survey were: Gender, Race, Marital Status, Agency Size, Rank, Age and Number of Years’ Experience. However, age and years of experience were not reported in the table below because they were open ended statements, allowing officers to provide exact age and number of years of experience.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SURVEYED LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS:

The majority of the officers were male (88.11%) and (11.89%) were female. The majority of the officers were white (84.4%) and married (75.4%). Over half of the officers were appointed by medium sized agency (101-500) and assigned as sworn line officers (63%). The average age of officers was thirty-nine (39) and the average number of years of experience was (14) fourteen.

DEMOGRAPHICS TABLE:

Category	# of Response	Percentage
Gender		
Male	882	88.11%
Female	119	11.89%
Race		
White	841	84.4%
Black	89	8.9%
Hispanic	29	2.9%
Other	37	3.7%
Marital Status		
Married	749	75.4%
Single	150	15.1%
Separated	23	2.3%
Divorce	72	7.2%
Agency Size (# of Sworn officers)		
Very Small	32	3.1%
Small	115	11.2%
Medium	639	62.5%
Large	237	23.2%
Rank		
Line Officer (non-supervisory)	627	62.5%
Line Supervisors (Cpl., Sgt.)	239	23.8%
Unit Commander	82	8.2%
Division Commander	32	3.2%
Executive Managers (Deputy Chief or Chief)	23	2.3%

KEY FINDINGS

The findings identified three specific areas that impacted the officers and ultimately retention, they were: Pay/Benefits, Commitment and Communication. Each of the aforementioned areas was analyzed using the data below.

Question # 1 asked to rank in order “Why you became a police officer?” the following were the results:

Option Rank	Number of Responses	Percentage
1 st Desire to serve	537	55.43%
2 nd Excitement	316	33.98%
3 rd Adventure	340	34.76%
4 th Family/Friends Influence	235	24.35%
5 th Pay	271	27.97%
6 th Shift work (non-traditional)	455	45.45%

Question #8 asked “Which items could your agency take to help retain police officers?” the following was the results:

Options	Number of Responses	Percentage
1 st Increased Pay	927	91.24%
2 nd Increase Benefits	549	54.04%
3 rd Educational Opportunities	449	44.19%
4 th Permanent Shifts	411	40.45%
5 th Take Home Car	292	28.74%
6 th Better Equipment	247	24.31%

Question #3 asked “Are you considering leaving your agency?”

Answer Choice	Number of Responses	Percentage
Yes	302	29.64%
No	717	70.36%

Question #4 asked “If you considered leaving your agency was it to go to a different law enforcement agency or a different job industry?”

Answer Choice	Number of Responses	Percentage
Different Agency	273	37.35%
Different Job Industry	458	62.65%

NOTE: 292 skipped the question.

According to the above tables over half of the respondents became a police officer because they had a desire to serve, with pay ranked fifth of six. When asked “Which items could your agency take to help retain police officers?” The number one response was increased pay, which can be concluded that over time the desire to serve and or desire for the profession diminished. Furthermore, over 62% of the officers said they would leave their agency for a different job industry. The second choice to help retain officers was increased benefits. Over 72% of the

officers were married; it can be concluded that family dynamics had an impact on the need for increased benefits.

Question #9 asked “Please rate the overall job satisfaction (morale) within your police department.”

Answer Choice	Number of Responses	Percentage
High	431	42.55%
Low	582	57.45%

Questions numbers 10 and 11 were open ended allowing officers to write their specific thoughts, therefore no quantitative data to report only qualitative.

Question #10 “What is the top contributing factor to high morale in your agency?”

- Great leadership (Command and Line)
- Camaraderie

Question #11 “What is the top contributing factor to low morale in your agency?”

- Poor leadership/Management
- Rotating shifts
- Low pay

Over half of the officers said the overall job satisfaction (morale) within their police department is low. Contributing factors to the low morale were poor leadership and management, rotating shifts and low pay. Officers who experience high morale within their agency identified great leadership and camaraderie as contributing factors.

Question #12 “Please rate your perception of the relationship of your agency with the community.”

Answer Choice	Number of Responses	Percentage
Excellent	364	35.83%
Good	572	56.30%
Needs Improvement	70	6.89
Poor	10	.98%

Question #13 “What steps or programs do you believe your agency could implement to improve community relations?”

Answer Choice	Number of Responses	Percentage
Increased opportunity for police-citizen interaction	446	59.31%
Workshops with the media	327	43.48%
Citizens police academy	180	23.94%
Police explore programs	171	22.74%
Citizen review board	51	6.78%

NOTE: 271 skipped the question

Over ninety-two percent (92%) of the officers believe they have a good or excellent relationship with their community. However, they believe there is a need for more interaction. Fifty-nine percent (59%) of the officers believe there is a need for increased opportunity for police-citizen interaction. Forty-three percent (43%) believe workshops with the media are important to improve community relations.

Question #17 “I’m asked for my input on decisions that affect me at work.”

Answer Choice	Number of Responses	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	153	15.04%
Disagree	351	34.51%
Agree	432	42.48%
Strongly Agree	81	7.96%

Question #20 “The agency fosters a culture which supports employees.”

Answer Choice	Number of Responses	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	106	10.5%
Disagree	285	28.1%
Agree	549	54.1%
Strongly Agree	74	7.3%

Question #21 “There are open and healthy avenues of communication within my agency.”

Answer Choice	Number of Responses	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	109	10.73%
Disagree	337	33.17%
Agree	507	49.90%
Strongly Agree	63	6.20%

There is concern regarding internal communication. Fifty percent (50%) of officers do not believe they have input on decisions that affect their work. Thirty-nine percent (39%) of officers do not believe their agencies foster a culture which supports employees. Forty-four percent (44%) of the officers do not believe there are open and healthy avenues of communication within their agency.

CONCLUSION:

We can conclude based on the data provided:

1. Officers entered the law enforcement profession with the desire to serve. However, the desire to serve has become obsolete over time, therefore presenting an issue for the profession to retain officers.
2. Officers stated increased pay and benefits influence their decision to remain in the profession and with their agency.
3. Reasons that contribute to officers wanting to leave for another agency or a different profession:
 - a. Low Pay,
 - b. Benefits,
 - c. Lack Relationship with co-workers,
 - d. Lack Enjoyment of the Job and
 - e. Rotating Shifts