

Policing and Marriage:
Recruitment and Retention Amid
Negative Media Coverage

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Problem

- **Staffing Challenges**

- Police Executive Research Forum (PERF)
 - Staffing has dropped nearly 5% between 2020 to 2023
 - Regardless that hiring increased by 5.5% in 2022
- Resignations and retirements outpace new hires during that same period.

- **Problem Acknowledgment**

- U.S. House of Representatives – “Filling Public Safety Vacancies Act”
- \$162 million committed to those vacancies

Reasons to Leave/Avoid the Profession

- **Range**
 - Retirement, negative career perception, different employment opportunities, and loss of life.
 - Contracting infectious diseases to relationships to colleagues and management.
 - Familial Stress
 - Working additional jobs – support family
 - Reputational stress or self-legitimacy
 - What is the current studies specific focus?

Negative Media Coverage

- **Last Few Decades**

- The media has depicted law enforcement in a negative light
- Can be argued as having a generalizable effect.

- **Negative Exposure**

- Tragic Events: Michael Brown, Trayvon Martin, Botham Jean, and George Floyd.
- Promoted anti-police efforts.
 - “Defund the Police Movement.”
- However, they still only represent a small percentage of police interactions
 - Not generalizable.

Stressors

- **Studies Found:**

- Occupational stress is negatively correlated with job satisfaction
- In addition to the officer's perception, if married, their spouse's opinion towards the profession may play a critical role in retention.
- Officer's spouse may experience a significant amount of secondary stress due to the dangerous nature of their significant others occupation.

- **Recruitment and Retention**

- May be dependent on how each individual perceives their profession and the impact it has on their lives and others

Coping

- **Range – Previous Studies**

- Prayer
- Exercise
- Substance abuse
- Violence
- Depression - Suicide
- Avoiding Administrative Support – Career jeopardy and various stigmas
- Leaving the profession (Current Focus)

Mitigation

- **Familial Support:**
 - Positive Effect on ones overall health
 - Positive Effect on psychological state
- **Marriage:**
 - Marriage is negatively effected with job stress
 - Marriage is positively associated with job satisfaction (Current Focus)

Theoretical Foundation

- **Incentive Theory**
 - Derived from his work with operant conditioning, B.F. Skinner is credited for coining incentive theory.
 - People are motivated by external stimuli rather than internal stimuli.
 - Explanation of behavior
 - Insight on how individuals make decisions based on incentives and extrinsic motivation.

Theoretical Foundation

- **Incentive Theory**

- May help explain why recruitment efforts are hindered during the eras of extensive negative media coverage on policing and why current officers resign to pursue other endeavors.
- In addition, incentive theory may also explain why marriage, as a support structure, may encourage officers to remain in the profession and thus provide guidance to those who may desire to pursue a career in law enforcement. (Current Focus)

Theoretical Foundation

- **Suggested by Incentive Theory:**
 - During times of harsh media coverage on policing, those who may be considering a career in law enforcement may consider this negative display of policing as an incentive to decide against the profession.
 - Those already serving may view the negative media coverage and the community's reaction to it as an incentive to resign, because the positive incentive now lies outside the profession.
 - The beforementioned would align with the concept of motivation because their external goals may not seem achievable any longer in the profession.

Theoretical Foundation

- **Incentive Theory**

- However, incentive theory may also explain how marriage may be a mitigating factor that shifts the negative perceptions of the police profession into a positive light regardless of negative media coverage.
- Individuals considering law enforcement and those already serving, may rely heavily on their spouse's opinion when determining how to proceed with important life decisions.
- Therefore, incentive theory may suggest that fulfilling a dream to become a police officer or continuing to serve and protect may be looked at as a positive incentive regardless of the negative media coverage because of the positive support they receive from their marriage.

Conclusion

- **Staffing Challenges**
 - Individuals are leaving the profession faster than the hiring process
- **Stressors**
 - Negative Media Coverage
- **Coping**
 - Leaving/Avoiding the Profession
- **Mitigation**
 - Familial Support – Marriage
- **Lack of Research**
 - How police marriages may mitigate the negative effects of negative media coverage to promote recruitment and retention utilizing incentive theory.

Recommendation

- **Promote Recruitment and Retention**
 - Incentive Theory
 - Qualitative studies
 - Phenomenological or Narrative Methodologies
 - To preserve and ensure that the personal nature of these life events are recorded and presented accurately.
 - Determine how the couple was successful – necessary ingredients