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The National Crisis of Police Recruitment and Retention

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Walden University

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Walden University
2022

Abstract

The National Crisis of Police Recruitment and Retention

by

Brandon M. Lentz

M.Ed, Mercer University, 2018

BS, Mercer University, 2017

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Criminal Justice

Walden University

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Abstract

Throughout the history of policing in America, the industry has been hobbled by inadequate recruitment and retention of quality personnel. During the first half of the 21st Century, this inadequacy has reached the level of a crisis. The crisis encompassed the continual shrinking of the police force in the United States with 2020 numbers showing that the United States currently had roughly 800,000 certified police officers with 27,000 leaving the profession each year. The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of law enforcement officers on the factors affecting recruitment and retention among new police recruits. For this study, 15 certified police officers from multiple Georgia Police Departments who had been employed no less than 5 years were asked to complete a voluntary qualitative questionnaire. What are the perspectives of law enforcement officers on recruitment and retention and the impact a lack of retention and recruitment had on the agency and community. Findings included themes related to social perceptions, pay, benefits, lifelong desire to police, and micromanagement. The information gained from this study furthers positive social change through an understanding of the root causes of retention and recruitment problems throughout large agencies within the United States and can potentially contribute to solving the recruitment and retention problem.

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to all those who helped me reach this incredible academic milestone.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Throughout the history of policing in America, the industry has been plagued with inadequate recruitment and retention of quality personnel (Maciag, 2020). During the first half of the 21st century, this lack has reached the level of a crisis. As community and police relations continue to deteriorate on a national level and with calls to defund or eliminate the police force of many major cities around the United States, the industry's retention and recruitment problems continue to grow (Meade, 2018). Historically, police agencies around the country were able to identify the root cause of the recruitment and retention inadequacies. However, in some cases, if the causation was not identified, with time, the community and the police agencies were able to work out their differences (Maciag, 2020). However, with the rise of technological advances such as smartphones, social media, and the ability to quickly share information globally, all previous police-community reconciliation strategies have become obsolete (Maciag, 2020).

Most criminal justice scholars such as Maciag (2020), Meade (2018), and Roufa (2018) and those in practice agree that there is a gap in knowledge about what drives people away from or out of the industry. This same group has hypothesized that the root cause could be related to the industry's negative stigma. It is the purpose of this qualitative study to contribute knowledge and possibly gain a better understanding of the causal factors contributing to the retention and recruitment crisis of police in the United States (Meade,2018). The purpose of this study was to examine and identify common trends and similarities that contribute to a lack of retention and recruitment in the policing

industry, specifically Georgia Police Departments. Additionally, I made a comparison between positive and negative stigmas towards the police in the community to determine if the stigma affects police recruitment and retention. Lastly, I examined the role of the media and technological platforms such as cellphones and social media to determine its effect on police recruitment and retention in the United States.

While it is unreasonable to conclude that any contributions of knowledge coming from this study will solve the retention and recruitment issue in the United States, it is my hope that the information gained can further existing research. This chapter provides the purpose study and the background to the retention and recruitment problem. I then provide the research questions and the study's nature. Lastly, I address the study assumptions and potential limitations, and the implications of the study. The chapter concludes with the significance and summary of the study.

Background

The relationship between police recruitment and retention has been examined in the literature; this is not a new phenomenon (Maciag, 2020). According to Maciag (2020), police recruitment and retention have been a systemic problem for at least the past 10 years. This problem has been correlated with low pay, morale, benefits, and safety concerns (Maciag, 2020). The examination of the published literature revealed articles relating to police agency recruitment and retention practices. These articles, such as the ones authored by Maciag (2020), Meade (2018), and Roufa (2018), discussed a myriad of elements and issues related to police recruitment and retention. To conduct the literature review, keywords searched were *ABD, online doctoral program completion,*

doctoral capstone completion, online research training, and online learning in the dissertation prospectus guide (p. 224) databases, Education Source, ERIC, and SAGE Journals, as well as in a Thoreau multidatabase search.

- Maciag (2020) provided information on the current state of police agencies on a national level. This included the number of current sworn law enforcement officers in the United States and the average number of officers who leave the profession each year for various reasons. In addition, Maciag (2020) provided a brief overview of key problems in law enforcement, which stem from problems in recruitment and retention.
- Roufa (2018) presented the concept of bidding wars between agencies in the law enforcement industry. In addition, Roufa (2018) addressed how bidding wars can both positively and negatively affect the recruitment and retention process
- Meade (2020) explained how such concepts as bidding wars combined with elements such as low morale and public perception could negatively affect an agency's ability to recruit and retain quality officers.

Problem Statement

Throughout the first two decades of the 21st century, the police force within the United States has shrunk to an unprecedented low level (Maciag, 2020). As of 2020, the national police force within the United States currently stands at roughly 800,000 individuals, with an estimated 27,000 officers leaving the profession each year (National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund, 2020). This massive turnover rate, combined

with a lack of applicants, has led to the creation of many social problems that carry severe impacts on both the officer and the community (Maciag, 2020). Maciag (2020) stated that the problems include the inability to answer calls for service promptly and officers potentially answering high-risk calls such as active shootings alone. These issues present a direct safety threat to both the officer and the community (Maciag, 2020). In an attempt to correct the recruitment and retention issues, many agencies have drastically changed their recruitment and retention policies to fill their ranks (Maciag, 2020). Maciag (2020) stated that the changes in recruitment tactics have varied depending on the agency's size. For most smaller agencies, the changes have included but were not limited to small pay increases, improved benefits packages such as allowing officers to drive their patrol vehicles home (Maciag, 2020). Larger agencies have taken the same approach as the smaller departments; however, due to their size and ability to offer higher pay and better benefits, these agencies have engaged in bidding wars to attract and retain quality applicants (Roufa, 2018). The bidding wars between agencies consist of one agency offering a better deal to a prospective applicant than another agency (Roufa, 2018). In most cases, the bidding war tactic helps larger agencies that have a large tax base. This tactic, however, generally hurts smaller agencies that can not afford to offer similar incentives. In many cases, this results in smaller agencies losing applicants or current officers to larger, better-paying agencies, thus aggravating the initial problem (Roufa, 2018).

In addition to recruitment, retention is also one of the key contributors to the police shortage in the United States (Roufa, 2018). Deputy Chief Meade (2018) of the University of Central Florida Police Department stated that on a national level, bidding wars, lack of training, and low morale are a few of the key contributors to the high turnover rate in the policing industry (Meade, 2018). In addition, changing perceptions by the general population, lack of support from the community, and the mindset that policing is not for them all contribute to an agency's inability to retain quality officers (Meade, 2018). Meade (2018) stated that all of the problems mentioned above are universal across most police agencies within the United States, and although a substantial number of researchers and scholars in the industry and academia have attempted to solve these issues, each continues to contribute to the police recruiting and retention crisis in the United States (Meade, 2018).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of law enforcement officers on the relationships of recruitment and retention among Georgia police officers with 5 or more years of experience. The findings of this study may increase the understanding of recruitment and retention in law enforcement.

Research Questions

For the purpose of this study, identifying, discussing, and suggesting problems that result in department shortages across the country would be too broad. As a result, I concentrated this research paper on the following questions: RQ1: What are the perspectives of law enforcement officers on recruitment and retention?

RQ2: What impact does a lack of recruitment and inability to retain law enforcement officers have on the agency and community?

Theoretical Framework

This study's framework will be based on Maciag's (2020) grounded theory that universal recruitment and retention issues are the results of the extreme police officer shortage in the United States. Maciag's (2020) theoretical work has been utilized by many criminal justice scholars such as Roufa (2018) and Meade (2018), as well as those in practice to explain the reasons behind the common recruitment and retention issues that plague the law enforcement industry (Maciag 2020). In addition, Maciag's (2020) research has also been utilized to develop policies and practices designed to promote recruitment and retention among law enforcement agencies throughout the United States.

Nature of Study

This study was exploratory in nature and is designed to make contributions to the existing literature in the field of police recruitment and retention. I conducted the research utilizing the qualitative research method using existing scholarly data and information offered by leaders in the policing industry. Bhandari (2020) defined qualitative research as a data collection method that involves collecting and analyzing nonnumerical data

(e.g., text video, audio, interviews, or surveys) to understand concepts, opinions, or experiences. Additionally, Bhandari (2020) stated that qualitative research is also used to gather in-depth insights into a problem or generate new ideas for research. For this study, the qualitative approach yielded the most data, as it allowed for the use of existing research and the use of bonified naturalistic opinions from leaders in the industry. From this, I could gather information to understand the full scope of the problem and thus be able to offer usable recommendations and draw meaningful conclusions at the end of the study.

Definition of Terms

I used the following terms extensively throughout the study:

Candidate: A person likely or suited to undergo or be chosen for a specified activity or position (Merriam-Webster,2019).

Crisis: An unstable or crucial time or state of affairs in which a decisive change is impending (Merriam-Webster, 2019)

Graham v. Conner, 490 U.S. 386 (1989): The United States Supreme Court case that determined that an objective reasonableness standard should apply to a civilian's claim that law enforcement officials used excessive force in the course of making an arrest, investigating a stop, or other "seizure" of a person.

Manpower: "People available or required for work" (Merriam-Webster, 2019)

Morality: "The principles of right and wrong behavior and the goodness or badness of human character" (Merriam-Webster, 2019)

Recruitment: “The process of adding new individuals to a population or subpopulation by growth, reproduction, immigration, and stocking” (Merriam -Webster, 2019)

Retention:” Preservation of the aftereffects of experience and learning that make recall and recognition possible” (Merriam-Webster, 2019)

Assumptions

There were two assumptions in this study. Firstly, I assumed that based on current data, there is a real crisis regarding police recruitment in the United States. Secondly, I assumed the history of policing in America, public perception, and technological advancements all play a vital role in the police recruitment and retention crisis. Although not proven, all assumptions were necessary to the qualitative study and helped provide an understanding of the overall problem and its effects on the policing industry.

Scope and Delimitations

This qualitative study was conducted between July 2021–August 2021. Upon Institutional Review Board approval from the university, I commenced data collection. I conducted data collection via questionnaire from August 2021–September 2021, and the collected data was analyzed from late October 2021 until November 2021.

Delimitations are choices made by the researcher that describe the study's boundaries (Informedia Services, 2020). Due to this study's broad nature, delimitations of this study included limiting the data to only police agencies within the State of Georgia. Included police agencies were full-service police agencies serving various jurisdictions

within the State of Georgia. The delimitations were in place to minimize the limitations of the study.

Limitations

Gill (2020), stated that a study's limitations are those characteristics of design or methodology that impacted or influenced the interpretations of research findings.

Additionally, Bevins (2020) stated that limitations are the constraints on generalizability, applications to practice, and utility of findings that are the result of how researchers initially chose to design the study or method used to establish internal and external validity of the results of unanticipated challenges that emerge during the study.

According to Gill (2020), in qualitative research, the data collector's techniques and their unique observations can alter information in subtle ways. Radu et al. (2018) identified three of the top limitations to qualitative studies, which included (a) it is a time-consuming process, as the research may take several weeks or months as the process often involves personal interactions for data collection and discussions often deviate from the main issue being studied; (b) it is hard to verify results because qualitative research is open-ended and participants have more control over the content of the data collected; as a result, data is often not verified objectively against scenarios stated by the respondents; and (c) causality is not the focus of qualitative research as the purpose is aimed at gaining a deep understanding of a specific organization or event rather than the surface description of large sample populations. Additionally, Bhandari (2020) stated that qualitative research is also used to provide an explicit rendering of the structure, order, and broad patterns found among participants. Lastly, because all qualitative studies are

unique, they are difficult to replicate (Radu et al., 2018). The main limitation of this study was that the agency's command staff changes during this study; however, the study continued.

Significance

This research helps increase the understanding of factors contributing to recruitment and retention issues in the policing industry. It provides a foundation for future research and potentially contributes to the reformation of current recruitment and retention practices. This study is significant because an increase in understanding the problem allows current and future criminal justice scholars and policymakers insight into the development of incentives and policies that may curb the retention and recruitment problem in police agencies in the State of Georgia.

Summary

In this chapter, I introduced the study, the background of the problem, and the problem statement. I explained the purpose of the study, along with the research questions. Additionally, I introduced the study's theoretical framework, Maciag's (2020) theory, and explained the nature and the terms of the study, including assumptions, scope, and limitations. In Chapter 2, I outline the theoretical framework of the recruitment and retention problem and review the literature regarding police evolution and how different events in the industry's development have affected police recruitment and retention. Additionally, I explore aspects that examine how the policing industry reached the current retention and recruitment crisis.

Chapter 3 provides the study's methodology, an outlining of the rationale of implementing qualitative research methods, and a discussion of data sources and potential threats and limitations to the study. In Chapter 4, I report the study results, and in Chapter 5, I identify conclusions drawn from study outcomes and provide recommendations for policy and future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

In this study, I aimed to examine the universal factors contributing to the recruitment and retention crisis in American law enforcement and its impact on citizens. This literature review includes information on the crisis in American law enforcement due to the shortage of qualified police officers (Weichselbaum & Thomas, 2019). In the literature review, I found that published research by peer-reviewed journals, news outlets, and bonified literature sources all indicated the same set of issues: (a) there is a massive shortage of police officers in the United States, (2) this staffing deficit is undermining the effectiveness of many police agencies in the country, (3) current strategies to fix the universal recruitment and retention deficits are inadequate, and (4) the inability to maintain the police force is further deepening the divide between the police and the community (Weichselbaum & Thomas, 2019). Additionally, the literature review reveals that each of these issues directly contributes to the retention and recruiting crises, as each feeds off the other and are connected, creating the overall problem (Diamond, 2019).

The literature review shows the dynamics of the recruitment and retention crisis are difficult to analyze. The difficulty stems from the fact that each of the issues mentioned above can change rapidly. In some cases, the changes are positive, while in other cases, they are adverse; a single action by a police officer can either improve or diminish the public's perception of the entire industry. This directly correlates with the retention and recruitment crisis as a police agency has an easier time recruiting and retaining officers when the industry is popular; a negative public perception may

discourage potential applicants from pursuing the profession (Diamond, 2019). Lastly, to narrow the scope of the issues and the literature review, I chose only to examine how each of the issues affects an agency's ability to recruit and retain quality police officers. Additionally, during the literature review, I explored the impact police retention and recruitment crisis is having on the communities that these agencies serve.

Lastly, throughout this literature review, I detail these issues in the following order. The introduction to the literature review provides a brief overview of the information in Chapter 2. The Literature Search Strategy section presents the sources of the information. In the Theoretical Foundations section, I explain the academic basis of the literature found in this chapter and review the data on the birth, evolution, and current state of the problem. A summary recaps of the information in Chapter 2 and will provide a transition to Chapter 3.

Literature Search Strategy

During the search for literature on police recruitment and retention, several sources were utilized for this study. The sources included search engines such as Walden University Library's Thoreau search engine and Google Scholar. Using the Walden University Library allowed me to access such databases as Proquest, National Criminal Justice Reference Service, and various Sage journals. Using search terms such as *police recruitment and retention*, *officer shortage*, *police bidding wars*, *police*, and *public perception*, and *high turnover in policing*, I found over 22,000,000 links to various resources surrounding police recruitment and retention within the United States. Due to the overwhelming amount of information, I briefly reviewed a small sample of article

abstracts to see how closely they matched the specific search criteria. After reviewing 20–30 articles, I found 22 sources that dealt with police recruitment and retention in the United States.

Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical framework connects the researcher to existing knowledge provides a relevant theory to the research problem and methods (Williard, 2020). This study's framework was based on Maciag's (2020) theory of police recruitment and retention and the organizational theory of criminal justice. Maciag's (2020) theory states that nationally, police recruitment and retention are at the lowest point in United States history. This lack of proper retention and recruitment is a direct result of diminishing resources of recruitment, increasing causes for attrition, broadening of police responsibilities, lack of support by the community, and large scale distrust of police (Wilson et al., 2020)

In addition to Maciag's (2020) theory, I relied on the organizational theory of criminal justice. Wilson et al. (2020) stated that the organizational theory of criminal justice examines a criminal justice agency's overall operations; it is generally accepted by both scholars and those in practice as a bona fide approach to understanding the behavior in a criminal justice agency. Wilson et al. (2020) stated that the organizational theory of criminal justice helps the examination of how an organization develops, grows, and flourishes in the overall structure. I chose these theories as to the theoretical framework for this study for two primary reasons: Macig's (2020) theory combines the views of several scholarly resources on the crises of the retention and recruitment of police

officers, and because the organizational theory helps explain the inner workings of a police agency, its command structure, and the day-to-day operations, regarding the recruitment and retention crisis experienced by police agencies around the United States

Literature Review

The Rise of Police in America

As mentioned, attempting to understand the police recruiting and retention crisis's full scope in the United States can be challenging. As a result, it is imperative to provide a basic understanding of how the modern police force came into existence and what factors may have contributed over time to its current state. In 1838, the City of Boston formed the first police department in the United States, followed by New York City in 1845, Albany, New York, and Chicago, Illinois, in 1851 (Potter, 2020). The Cities of New Orleans and Cincinnati formed their departments in 1853, while Philadelphia and Baltimore formed their departments in 1857 (Potter, 2020). By the 1880s all major cities in the United States had a municipal police force in place. During this first 50-year timespan, policing in America shifted from wild west rangers, volunteers, and constables to a modern police force that shared four similar characteristics: (a) the police agencies were publicly supported in bureaucratic form; (b) police officers were full-time employees, not community volunteers or case-by-case fee retainers; (c) departments had permanent and fixed rules and procedures, and employment as a police officer was continuous; and (d) police departments were accountable to a central government authority (Potter, 2020).

The birth of the modern police force in America emerged not as a response to a crime but as a response to disorder (Potter, 2020). During this period of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, what constituted social and public disorder depended mostly on who was defining those terms. In the cities of 19th century America, they were represented by mercantile interest, which, through taxes and political influence, supported the development of bureaucratic policing institutions. These economic concerns had a more significant interest in social control than crime control. Furthermore, private and for-profit policing was too disorganized and too crime-specific to fulfill these needs. The emerging commercial elites needed a mechanism to ensure a stable and orderly workforce, a stable and orderly environment for conducting business, and the maintenance of what was referred to as the collective good.

Additionally, the mercantile interest of the period also wanted to divest themselves of the cost of protecting their enterprises by transferring the cost from the private sector to the state (Potter, 2020). As a result of this process and through social control, the policing industry garnered a strong positive reputation with communities around the United States. As a result of this, most agencies experienced not just a good reputation but a period when retention and recruitment of qualified officers were not a problem (Potter, 2020).

As the industrial revolution began to take hold within the United States, the period of trust and prosperity for many police agencies around the country began to falter. Maintaining a stable and disciplined workforce for a developing system of factory production and ensuring a safe and tranquil community for the conduct of commerce

required an organized system of social control. The developing profit-based production system antagonized social tensions in the community through low pay, rapidly increasing inequality, dangerous working conditions, and exploitation of workers through long hours (Potter, 2020). Over time, these harsh working conditions led to civil unrest, riots, and a deep distrust of the government who supported the organizations that made up industries. In an attempt to maintain social control, maintain obedience, and squash civil unrest and rioting, the government, who, in many ways, was supported by the leaders of industries, called upon the police force to solve the problem. Potter (2020) states that this series of events occurred in almost every industrialized city in America, and it projected the idea to the average citizen that the police were reactive, not proactive, and only stood as a form of protection for industry. As a result, a divide between the police and citizen began to emerge, which in many ways is still present in the 21 century (Potter, 2020).

As the early 20 century progressed, distrust of the police continued to evolve, and for the first time in the history of American policing, many agencies found themselves unable to find anyone who wanted to wear the badge (Potter, 2020). The first real crisis in recruitment led to the industry universally altering the definition of the police function. Up until this point in time, police had always been a reactive enterprise, occurring only in response to a specific criminal act (Potter, 2020). In an attempt to seal the divide created between the police and the community, police agencies began to emphasize the preventative crime control model. The idea of the preventive crime control model was that police could potentially stop a crime before it occurred through the presence of police and authorized use of force. Furthermore, the concept of police patrol as a

preventative measure routinized the insertion of police into the everyday events of people's lives. Potter (2020) states that while, in theory, this concept seemed favorable to many state and local governments, the idea over time backfired and further deepened the divide, further tarnishing citizens, police relations, and further contributing to the recruitment and retention crisis within the United States.

As mentioned, the police were initially put into the community by government organizations to enact social control and heal a deepening divide. However, as police agencies ultimately answered to their governing organization, many politicians began utilizing the police force to push agendas and for political gain (Potter, 2020). This event is where the backfire occurred and where the police as an industry began to share two primary and universal characteristics: they were notoriously corrupt and brutal (Potter, 2020). As most police forces within the United States began to fall more and more under the control of local politicians as opposed to a centralized government, many local politicians began appointing police executives as ward leaders of neighborhoods. The ward leader were often the neighborhood tavern owner, sometimes the neighborhood purveyor of gambling and prostitution, and usually the controlling influence over neighborhood youth gangs who were often used for voter intimidation and pushing political agendas (Potter, 2020).

In addition to the universal organized violence and political corruption, police officers in most major cities often took payoffs to allow illegal drinking, gambling, and prostitution. Other behavior norms included drinking while on patrol, protecting patrons' vice operations, and being quick to utilize preemptory force. Additionally, police

organized professional criminals, like thieves, pickpockets, trading immunity for bribes or information (Potter, 2020). To matters worse, in many cities, loyal political operatives became police officers and were provided with little to no training and had very few, if any, qualifications. This led to a developing mindset among most Americans that police were nothing more than delegated vigilantes, entrusted with the power to use overwhelming force against a citizen to promote government political agendas and social control (Potter, 2020). This mindset over time became generational and pushed many potential applicants away from the policing industry due to the level of distrust (Potter, 2020).

The Advent of Prohibition (1919-1933) only made the current situation worse. The outlawing of alcohol combined with the fact that the overwhelming majority of urban residents drank and wished to continue to drink not only created new opportunities for police corruption but substantially changed the focus of that corruption. During prohibition, lawlessness became more open, more organized, and more blatant (Potter, 2020). The lawless was often perpetrated by organized crime syndicates, which, in many cases, used local police forces as enforcers and watchmen. In many instances, this consisted of local police forces harming members of the community or vandalizing business per the request of organized crime organizations. Potter (2020) states that almost every police agency in America was viewed as corrupt by the end of prohibition due to its ties to prohibition and organized crime. As in previous cases, this, in many ways, further deepened the divide between the community and the police, thus also contributing to the recruitment and retention crisis.

Throughout the next several decades of the 20 Century, the police and the community's relationship was generally viewed as unfavorable. In the 1950s, it was becoming abundantly clear that most Americans did not trust the police, nor did they want to join the force or push their children towards a policing industry career (Potter, 2020). In an attempt to change this perception, many reforms such as police professionalism were instituted on a universal level; this concept consisted of transforming police agencies into a more of a paramilitary structure, establishing police commissioners, a clear chain of command, stringent selection standards, and placing police under the category of civil service. Additionally, police professionalism was widely touted to improve police effectiveness and reform policing as an institution. This was all done to project the idea that police would no longer owe their jobs or ranks to political objectives but to the people they serve.

As with many ideas that have been attempted to boost interest in the policing industry and improve police and community relations, the concept of police professionalism backfired (Potter, 2020). While many in the profession of policing viewed professionalism as a successful reform, in reality, it antagonized tensions between the police and the communities they served, creating rancor and dissension within the departments themselves. The crime control tactics recommended by the professionalism movement, such as aggressive stops and frisk procedures, created widespread community resentment, particularly among young minority males who were the most frequently targeted (Potter, 2020). Both the professionalism and military model of policing became synonymous with police repression and gave the general impression that police

departments were vast bureaucracies, inward-looking, isolated from the public, and defensive in the face of any criticisms. Additionally, Potter (2020) states that the professionalism model had done nothing to rectify racist or sexist hiring practices that had been in effect since police departments had been created in the 1830s and further contributed to the ongoing retention and recruitment crisis.

By the 1960s, a massive social and political change occurred in the United States, most notably, the civil rights movement (Potter, 2020). The civil rights movement was a massive call for social change within the United States. The movement covered a wide range of topics which included social change, racial injustice, police brutality, and the use of deadly force (Siff, 2020). Siff (2020), states that during the movement which occurred over several years, almost every event in some way centered around ending police brutality and use of force. Potter (2020) states that during events, tensions among attendees often ran high which in some cases led to looting, violence, or other illegal acts. In other cases, events related to the civil rights movement were held illegally which required the response of the police. Siff (2020) states that more often than not, the police were called to disband the events which in most cases ended with the police having to use force to gain compliance. This clashing of perspectives between members of the civil rights movement and the police further inflamed police, community relations which in many instances led to looting, massive riots, and other forms of civil unrest which led to further deterioration of police and community relations (Siff, 2020). Many scholars in the field of criminal justice have argued that these long-occurring acts created irreparable damage to the American police force regarding perception, which still lasts today (Potter,

2020). From the 1960s to the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, police reputation in America continued to fluctuate, contributing to positive or negative police recruitment levels throughout the United States. From the beginning, American policing has been intimately tied not to crime but the exigencies and demands of the American political economy. From the anti-immigrant bashing in early police forces to strike breaking and corruption and professionalism throughout the 20th Century, the police's role in the United States has been defined by economics and politics, not crime control (Potter, 2020).

The role of policing in the 21st Century has emphasized science and technology, particularly related to citizen surveillance. A new wave of militarization is being reflected in the spread of Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) units and other paramilitary squads. A new emphasis on community pacification through community policing has further deepened the divide between the community and the policing industry. As a result, many criminal justice scholars such as Potter (2020) have argued that the police have essentially alienated themselves from the community, which in many ways has turned people off from the profession. The evolution of policing and the mistakes made along the way have possibly contributed to the recruitment and retention crisis that American is currently facing today. With further research into building community relations and sealing the divide, the policing industry may not replay the failures of the past (Potter, 2020).

America's Growing Police Shortage

As with Potter (2020), Henney (2020) states that since the establishment of the policing industry in the 1830s and throughout its history, police officers' recruitment and retention have always been problems. The root causes that have affected the recruitment of qualified candidates have essentially stayed the same, with the only difference being attributed to the press's evolution and social media (Henney, 2020). Henry (2020) states that while problems relating to recruitment and retention in American law enforcement have always been present, there has never been a point in American history where the shortage of qualified police was more prevalent than it is today (Henney, 2020).

Throughout the history of the policing industry, many incidents have created a divide between the police and the citizens. Many criminal justice scholars, including Henney (2020) and Potter (2020), state that these incidents, while occurring over a long period, have not been forgotten, which has resulted in a generational distrust of the industry. As a result, many individuals have been taught from birth that the industry is corrupt, racist, and is no place for a person who possesses good values. This mindset of distrust, viewing the profession as undesirable, and a continuing deepening divide all contribute to the lack of qualified police officer candidates within the United States.

Henney (2020) states that during the first decade of the 21st Century, the policing industry experienced a time when the public trust was improving. Many agencies around the United States were experiencing a surge in applicants, and with low retirement or turnover rates. Henney (2020) states that by all accounts, it would appear that many individuals who once distrusted the police had put the past behind them and were joining

the police force in droves. As a result, many agencies found themselves fully staffed for the first time in decades; however, with the rise in popularity of the internet, the birth of smartphones, social media, and video sharing platforms such as YouTube, the age of prosperity was short-lived (Henney, 2020). The technological innovations which occurred during the first decade of the 21 Century brought people closer together than ever, and the way information was shared took on a new meaning. This age gave birth to the notion that everyone always had a camera/video recording device on their person, and videos and information could be shared globally with the click of a button. This ability to record and spread information rapidly puts many first responders' actions, including the police, under a microscope (Henney, 2020).

As more people began to indulge in this new technology, it is within reason to state that it was only a matter of time before someone began recording the citizen/police interactions (Henney, 2020). One such interaction occurred in Ferguson, Missouri, in the late summer of 2014, when an anonymous individual recorded the death of Michal Brown, an unarmed African American male who was shot to death by Ferguson Police Officer Darren Wilson. Henney (2020) states that while this was not the first negative encounter ever caught on film of police and citizen interaction, nor was it the first recording of an officer-involved shooting, it was one of the first recent recordings to go viral. Henney (2020) states that as this video recording spread among news media outlets, social media, and the internet, civil unrest ignited from person to person. Mass debates, civil unrest, and protest began to occur in several major cities throughout the United States. It was not uncommon to hear significant news outlets or influential political

figures speaking negatively about policies such as the use of force and other central concepts to police and community relations. Henney (2020) claims that this single event was not the sole factor but was one of the main agitating factors contributing to the mass national police shortage today.

This single event brought to light the use of force of many police departments, and when political, social media, and public perception opinions weighed in, accepted practices that have always been justified under the law were now viewed by many as police brutality (Henney, 2020). Henney (2020) states that long-standing United States Supreme Court Decisions such as *Graham v. Conner*, the "Good Faith" clause, and the entire concept of using deadly force as a form of self-defense came under public scrutiny. During this time, many agencies began to experience the wrath of mass video recording and the sharing of information and changing public perceptions towards police. This single incident destroyed friendships, families, and other vital relationships for many police officers around the country. Henney (2020) states that this came from people not wanting to associate with police officers due to the commonly shared perception that all police officers were brutal and racist. This mindset led to what Henney (2020) has termed as the "mass blue exodus," whereas many as 35% of the nation's police officers choose to leave the profession to maintain relationships and avoid public scrutiny. In an attempt to curve the mass exodus of police officers within the United States, many agencies attempted to become more subordinate to the political climate and changing views of the population within the United States. This included changing the use of force policy and

developing community-oriented policing units to improve police-community relations (Henney, 2020).

Henney (2020) states that while this initiative was proactive, it did not stop police officers' high turnover rate, nor did it correct the ongoing retention and recruitment issue. Since the Michael Brown incident in 2014, the number of full-time sworn police officers has dropped by 23,000 from roughly 823,000 – 800,000 in 2020. Furthermore, this drop in the police forces is one of the most significant since the early 1990s. Since the 2014 Ferguson incident, the average number of police officers per 1000 residents nationally has decreased from 2.42 in 2014 – 2.14 in 2020, or 11% in just seven years (Henney, 2020). Henney (2020) states in the current economy, the job market is experiencing historical growth, and many companies are continually looking for applicants with professional and personal skills commonly associated with police officers and other first responders. As a result, Henney (2020) predicts that due to the growing economy and the uptick in assaults on police officers, the current turnover rate in the policing industry will continue to grow at a rate of 1% each year throughout the next decade.

Henney (2020) states that the retention of qualified police officers is also a significant problem in addition to recruitment. It is relatively common knowledge and generally accepted that policing is a dangerous job; however, this is not what is driving people away from the profession. Henney (2020) states that no matter what police officers do in the post Ferguson world, no matter how much they train, police officers can still make mistakes. Even if minor, those mistakes can be quickly shared, often on a national or global level, and are sometimes taken out of context. Henney (2020) states

that when these adverse events involving police occur, the officer's home address, personal identifications, and even their children's school locations are widely shared on the internet as retribution. Lastly, Henney (2020) states that newer generations tend to stay on the job for a shorter time than previous generations. This is a problem because it takes a long time to become a good police officer, a good detective, and know the community members where trust can be established. Henney (2020) states that these concepts are vital to making a police officer's job easier, safer, and more effective; however, this is no longer occurring in America due to the recruitment and retention crisis.

Recruiting, Selecting, and Retaining Law Enforcement Officers

Deputy Chief of Police Dr. Brett Meade (2019) stated that balancing community perception while recruiting and retaining qualified police officers is the most challenging internal issue facing police agencies today. Meade (2019) advised that given the current environment and the factors mentioned by Henney (2020) that affect the policing profession, recruiting the next generation of police officers is more complicated than ever. Meade (2019) states that with the pressures, demands, and expectations of the community, finding individuals who want to step into this uncertain and dangerous career is becoming a very daunting task.

Meade (2019) states that in some cases, many agencies around the United States have created many of their own recruiting and retention problems. Cost is always a concern, as the national standard cost to recruit, hire, equip, and thoroughly train an officer from the time they submit their initial application to the time they can function

independently may exceed \$100,000 and 18 months. Meade (2019) states that many departments, especially the smaller departments around the country, could not afford the cost, much less offer pay raises to currently employed officers when the recession hit. As a result, many agencies engaged in "bidding wars" by offering higher pay and benefits than other agencies, thus lowering officers away from one agency to join another (Meade, 2019). Meade (2019) states that this type of behavior among agencies lasted for the entire length of the recession, and in some cases, it is still happening today.

Lively (2019) advised that the American economy is currently experiencing one of the most significant upticks in recent memory; the job market is exploding with new opportunities; however, it is also crippling the American police force. Lively (2019) states that officers are leaving in droves for better opportunities; during the recession, agencies had to resort to "bidding wars" amongst other agencies to keep their ranks filled; however, now officers are leaving the profession altogether and are heading towards higher-paying jobs which federal, state, and police forces can not compete with. Lively (2019) states that as of 2019, the effects are being felt from coast to coast; the Los Angeles Police Department is short over 100 officers who make up 1% of its total workforce. The Philadelphia Police Department has over 350 vacancies, and The City of Dallas Police Department has had to cancel its last two academies due to a lack of applicants (Lively, 2019).

Furthermore, Lively (2019) states that in 2014, police officers' ratio to population hit its lowest point since the early 1990s. Lively (2019) advised that essentially what every other criminologist has stated thus far, the officers are retiring faster than they can

be replaced. The younger generations of Americans do not want to subject themselves to the dangers, low pay, and scrutiny of being a police officer. Furthermore, just as all the previous criminalists have stated, the main reason other than the economy and danger that people do not want to become police officers is that it may destroy their personal life, divide friendships, and distance them from their families. Lively (2019) states that in a world that is driven by the media, social media, public perception, and political opinion, which all seem to hate the police and what they stand for, it is not "rocket science" to see why a sane minded person would want to pursue another career, which pays more, is safer, and is free of public scrutiny (Lively, 2019).

Where Are All the Police Going?

Webber, (2019) stated that not all, but a substantial portion of police officers across the United States are military veterans. The training these men and women received in the armed services combined with their training during their time as civil servants make them very employable in many other higher-paying professions. Webber (2019) advised that the skills that come with a person who is or has been a police officer are unique and usually consist of excellent communication skills, sales abilities, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. Additionally, former police officers can work with a wide variety of other people, have strong attention to detail, and possess strong leadership/managing abilities (Webber, 2019). Webber (2019) states that many or all of these skills are hard to find in one individual; thus, hiring a former police officer is an excellent move in most employers' eyes.

Webber (2019) states that aside from the skills mentioned above, there are many other careers, such as working as a private crime scene investigator, private investigator, fire inspector, or some other similar private-sector job that may pay five-ten times more than than that of a police officer. Webber (2019) states that in the minds of many police officers, especially those who like policing and take pride in the professions, they can make a lot more money in a safer environment, doing the same or similar work by moving to the private sector. Webber (2019) states that since the 2014 Ferguson incident, this trend has spread across the country. Due to the high state of the economy, many private sector industries are going out and seeking police officers. While this may sound great and diversify the workforce, it, much like many of the other mentioned aspects, is continuing the police shortage crisis within the United States (Webber, 2019).

Improving Police and Community Relations Through Diversity

Thus far the many reasons as to why police officers are leaving the professions in droves have been discussed. Many of the criminologists mentioned such as Lively (2019), Webber (2019), Henney (2018), and Meade (2019) have all agreed that pay, benefits, work environment, safety, relationships, and public perceptions are key contributors to the lack of retention and recruitment among police agencies within the United States. Spencer (2020) states that even with all of the negative aspects hindering recruitment and retention, further diversifying the police forces on a national level could help in healing the hate which many have towards the policing industry. Spencer (2020) states that in several studies conducted on diversity in law enforcement such as those by Maciag (2020) and Henney (2019), results have revealed that the police force in the

United States is roughly 75% white males between the ages of 21 and 60 (Spencer, 2020). Spencer (2020) states that while this may not have been in the past, it is a problem today because the makeup of many police agencies does not match the makeup of the community.

Spencer (2020) states that the lack of diversity in the community tends to cause unnecessary problems, which in turn results in an uptick in crime rates. The unnecessary problems usually result from a lack of understanding between the police officer and the citizen who, more times than not, come from different socioeconomic statuses, different neighborhoods, or different backgrounds. The lack of understanding of a particular culture seems to break the idea that if the police do not look like us then they do not understand us. Spencer (2020) states that police and community relations are key to a stable environment and promote prosperity between the two groups. If a police agency is willing to diversify its force and hires more officers who mirror those in the community then the mindset may transform from they do not look like us, so they do not understand us to they look like us, so they understand our problems. Spencer (2020), states that this is not a quick fix and points out that simply diversifying a police department will not fix retention and recruitment problems. What diversifying will do is build a better relationship between the community and the police department which in turn may improve the reputation of the department which may result in more officers wanting to continue employment with the agency and the agency being able to attract more candidates to the police force (Spencer, 2020).

Summary

Throughout the literature review, I have thoroughly demonstrated current research and literature on the United States' police shortage crisis. Throughout the literature review, the evolution of the policing industry and many of the pressing issues such as public perception, politics, social media, the media, pay, and safety have been discussed. Each of these concepts is fundamental to the problem. Each category is so broad that attempting to fix one of the issues could create other issues that would further diminish an already delicate problem. While much of the research sounds repetitive, it is not; most of the problems I mentioned are central to the entire police industry. They are the same wherever you go and do no change with the department size. The issues are present on the federal, state, and local levels and will continue to be present until a better solution is brought to light, which will fix the entire policing industry's retention and recruitment issue.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore and analyze the universal factors which negatively affect the recruitment and retention of qualified police officers in the United States. Maciag (2020) stated that the lack of skilled police officers in the United States has reached an all-time high, with many criminal justice scholars and those in practice calling the problem a crisis. Webber (2019) stated that this crisis did not start overnight but has been a part of the industry since its conception. As society has evolved, the reasons behind why so many are leaving or avoiding the profession have developed with it. Webber (2019) stated that in the 21 century, the universal reasons that have always affected positive police retention and recruitment are still present but changing faster than ever. Meciag (2020) and Roufa (2019) stated that these "universal reasons" are almost always based on either negative or positive public perceptions. It is the purpose of this study to identify and further analyze how public perception develops and is spread (i.e., social media, mass media) and how it directly affects the retention and recruitment of qualified police officers in the United States.

In Chapter 3, I begin with a brief overview of the chapter. In the Research and Rationale section, I explain how the study was designed, who participated, how it was conducted, and why the study and the information it yielded are important. In the Role of the Researcher section, I outline my role in the process. In the Methodology section, I explain what method of research was used in this study. In this qualitative research study, I used a questionnaire.

In the Participant section of Chapter 3, I outline who was involved in the study. For the purposes of this study, participants consisted of 15 certified police officers who had been employed for no less than 5 years in various police departments within the State of Georgia. In the instrumentation section, I explain the questionnaire that I used to collect the data for this study. In the Reliability and Validity section, I explain the reliability and validity of the study and how it can be used to further understand the police retention and recruitment problem in the United States. In the Issues of Trustworthiness section, I go into detail as to why the questionnaire and the information yielded from it are trustworthy. Lastly, the summary section recaps the information in Chapter 3 and provides a brief preview of Chapter 4.

Research Design and Rationale

For this study, I identified factors that have led to recruitment and retention problems in police agencies in the State of Georgia. Analyzing common recruitment and retention problems for all the departments across the United States would be unpractical and too broad. As a result, for this research paper, I concentrated on the following questions as they relate to police agencies in the State of Georgia.

RQ1: What are the perspectives of law enforcement officers on recruitment and retention?

RQ2: What impact does a lack of recruitment and inability to retain law enforcement officers have on the agency and community?

For this study, I used a qualitative design with phenomenological methods and secondary data to obtain real-world opinions from those in practice. Those in practice

consisted of certified full-time police officers of the multiple police agencies in Georgia who had been actively employed for 5 years or more. I chose this population to inform the most important aspects of the phenomenon being studied. Existing literature such as Maciag's (2020) theories reveal that police recruitment and retention have been studied before and have led to many opinions on the matter. As a result of such a large body of existing literature, I utilized the existing research to conduct research and draw conclusions. Additionally, I used the phenomenological research method as it focuses on the study of individuals' lived experiences in the world. This research approach was best as it yielded real-world opinions that could be used as contributions to real-world solutions (Gill, 2020).

Due to covid restrictions barring nonemployed persons from entering the premises of most Georgia police agencies, I sent a 10-question questionnaire to members chosen for the study via email. Due to varying work hours of police officers, with some working during the day, others in the evening, and some during the night, email was the primary communication method for this study. This was to ensure that participants could join in the research process during a time that did not conflict with professional or personal time. All questionnaire questions were open-ended, thus easily adjustable if the officer needed to rephrase the question to answer it. I chose to use an open-ended question style as it is the best way to gain individual perceptions, especially on topics such as social perceptions. The population of interest for this study consisted of currently certified officers with at least 5 years' experience working for various law enforcement agencies in

the State of Georgia. To collect the data for this study, I provided qualitative questionnaires to participants.

It is well known among criminal justice scholars and those in practice that police agencies' inability to recruit and retain qualified police officers is a significant problem (Maciag, 2020). Prior research on this problem's cause has consisted of qualitative and quantitative research methods, with each study identifying many of the same root causes (Maciag, 2020). In this study, I used questionnaires to collect data, as they allowed me to guide the discussion on the topic. Furthermore, this data collection method allowed me to gather meaningful data and explore the feelings and beliefs of participants.

For this study, I used only emailed questionnaires to collect data. The purpose of the questionnaire was to gain an understanding of what factors influenced a candidate to join one police department as opposed to another. Other questions were designed for those currently in practice and who may be thinking about retiring or moving to another police agency. The purpose of these questions was to determine what factors influence the decision-making- process. The officers were asked to complete the questionnaire during a time that did not conflict with their personal or professional lives. A deadline of 7 business days was set for the return of the documents from the time they were received.

Role of a Researcher

During this qualitative research study, I collected data by sending a questionnaire containing 10 open ended questions to all participants via email. My role as the researcher was to ensure that I remained free of any preconceived biases that would complicate or compromise the questionnaire. To prevent any form of bias from tainting

or thwarting the questionnaires or data collected from it, I utilized Ravitch and Carl (2020) suggestions of recording research identity memos. A research identity memo allows a researcher to record their thoughts and feelings about their study and reflect on them throughout the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2020). As part of this process, researchers are encouraged to share their ideas with stakeholders or other research team members for constructive criticism or to identify overlooked research biases. Additionally, because the researcher is ultimately responsible for the outcome of the study, interviews must be flexible but structured in a way that directs focus to the research questions (Ravitch & Carl, 2020).

Methodology

As mentioned for this study, I used a qualitative methodology to explore the perceptions, experiences, general mindset of the target population. While it is unreasonable to state that there are limited resources to gather information, utilizing purposive sampling to form focus groups, collecting questionnaire data will be the best approach for this study. As mentioned, the purpose of this study was to bring together existing research on the universal factors which negatively influence police recruitment and retention. By utilizing the above-mentioned data collection technique, only the best raw data will be collected. By the conclusion of the study, 15 officers were interviewed via a questionnaire from the multiple police agencies within the State of Georgia. Due to the large number of certified police officers currently employed within the State of Georgia, the purposive sampling technique provided the opportunity to select participants from various ethnic backgrounds and beliefs.

Participation Selection

The intended participants of this study were well informed about the specific goals of qualitative research. The purpose sample participants were selected from the online employee databases of police departments within the State of Georgia which contains contact information such as emails for all employees. Participants who fit the participant criteria were chosen based on their time in service, they were contacted via email. This method was the safest as it allows me to make initial contact with the officers or visa-versa, without fear from the participants that they may get in trouble by their agency for participating in the study in some way. Additionally, by contacting the officers via email, a communication schedule and paper trail was established. Prior to any research taking place, 15 were invited to join the research study.

The 15 officers were comprised of three officers from different divisions of multiple agencies: three from the command staff, three from the uniform patrol division, three from the criminal investigation division (CID), three from the crime scene investigation unit (CSI), three from the training unit, and three from the special operations unit. There was no requirement for time in service with the unit as long as the officer has been employed with the agency for five or more years. The number of participants, 15 were specially chosen to allow an even number of officers to participate from each division. As each division ranges from 10 to over 100 officers, having at least three allows for a few different perspectives during the research process.

Instrumentation

This study was conducted using qualitative questionnaires to explore the root causation of police retention and recruitment problems within various police agencies within the State of Georgia. The qualitative questionnaire was a new instrument that was created by the researcher, and which had not been utilized in a previous research project. Prior to utilizing the questionnaire, it was evaluated by two or three members of the one agencies' background and recruitment unit, the Chief of Police, or the designee to ensure that the questions are valid and reliable. Additionally, the questions were vetted by faculty members of Walden University to ensure that they align with qualitative research methods and are also valid and reliable. The questionnaire covered police recruitment, why officers choose to stay employed with the department, and how community relations affect the department's climate and the officer's everyday duties. All questions that were asked were opened ended to necessitate an explained answer regarding the Participant's feelings, experiences, and knowledge about the topic. All interviews were recorded when collecting data from participants, and all questions will be carefully mapped out to ensure only the most meaningful data was collected.

Instrument Reliability and Validity

Paradis et al. (2016) state that questions added to qualitative questionnaires to obtain qualitative data are typically opened ended with a free-txt format. Additionally, questionnaires are ideal for documenting perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, or knowledge within an exact, predetermined sample of individuals. Paradis et al. (2016) state that interviews or questionnaires are used to gather information from individuals 1-on-1,

using a series of predetermined questions of a set of interest areas. Information derived from questionnaires is often recorded or transcribed; they can be structured or unstructured, and they can either follow a tightly written script that mimics a survey or be inspired by a loose set of questions that invite interviewees to express themselves more freely.

Paradis et al. (2016) state that most researchers will utilize the survey, interview, questionnaire, or field research models when conducting a research topic within the criminal justice realm. In past studies such as Maciag (2020) on bidding wars and police recruitment and retention, surveys, questionnaires, and 1-to-1 interviews were utilized as the primary research models. In other similar studies on police recruitment and retention, such as those conducted by Lively (2019) and Meade (2020), interviews and questionnaires were also utilized as the primary research model for collecting data. The findings from the above mentioned are considered scholarly as they show up in various peer-reviewed journals. This research method or instrumentation is proven as worthy and best; it is the best and most reliable data collection method for this study.

Validity refers to how accurately a method measures what it is intended to measure. If research has high validity, it produces results that correspond to real properties, characteristics, and variations in the physical and social worlds (Middleton, 2020). Additionally, high reliability is one indicator that measurement is valid; if the method is not reliable, it is probably not valid. The only potential threat that I anticipate may arise in this study is that some participants may exaggerate their experiences.

Data Analysis Plan

An ethical data analysis plan can be useful in helping the researcher draw conclusions and establish validity (Ravitch & Carl, 2020). The data collection phase of the research study will be guided by the two following research questions:

RQ1: What are the perspectives of law enforcement officers on recruitment and retention?

RQ2: What impact does the lack of recruitment and inability to retain law enforcement officers have on the agency and community?

To answer these guiding research questions, to regularly communicate and debrief each Participant's responsibility to ensure clarity of the response. To ensure that any data received goes toward answering the research questions only certified officers who have been employed for five or more years will were included. Once the completed questionnaires were received from the participants, the data was informally analyzed to check for common themes. These themes could include social perception, lack of pay and benefits, or micromanagement which all may affect recruitment and retention within police agencies located within the State of Georgia.

Once this step was completed, the information from the questionnaire was transcribed it will be uploaded onto a data analysis software platform called Nvivo. Nvivo is a software program that is generally used on qualitative research for the analysis of unstructured text, audio, video, or imaging data which include but are not limited to interviews, surveys, and questionnaires (Ballard, 2020). Ballard (2020) states that this type of inductive coding and theming analysis will allow me to observe other common

themes such as participants' intended feelings, facts, and opinions who participated in the study. Once this step was completed, I plan to analyze how the retrieved data complements and aligns with the research questions and the qualitative study. Utilizing each of these steps, compiling and analyzing the information allowed me to answer the research questions to some degree.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Paradis, O'Brian, Nimmon, Bandiera, and Marthmianakis (2016) state that questions added to questionnaires to obtain qualitative data are typically opened ended with a free-txt format. Additionally, questionnaires are ideal for documenting perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, or knowledge within an exact, predetermined sample of individuals. Pardis et al. (2016) state that questionnaires are used to gather information from individuals 1-on-1, using a series of predetermined questions of a set of interest areas. Questionnaires are often recorded or transcribed; they can be structured or unstructured, and they can either follow a tightly written script that mimics a survey or be inspired by a loose set of questions that invite interviewees to express themselves more freely

Summary

In summary, Chapter 3 included the rationale for selecting a general qualitative methodology research design for this study. It explained the purpose and goals of this study extensively: to explore what vital universal factors adversely affect police agency recruitment and retention in the United States. This chapter also included research questions, sampling techniques, recruitment procedures, and a data collection plan. It

explained the choice of using open-ended questions when utilizing questionnaires, which was appropriate for obtaining real thoughts and feelings on the universal reasons affecting recruitment and retention. Chapter 4 will include the demographics of the participants, agencies, an account of the data analysis, and coding themes that emerged from the study.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore and analyze the universal factors that negatively affect the recruitment and retention of qualified police officers in the United States. In Chapter 4, I describe the research I conducted via qualitative questionnaires to fill gaps in the literature areas of police recruitment and retention. In Chapter 4, I provide a brief introduction followed by the Setting section in which I describe personal and organizational conditions that may have influenced participants in recounting their experiences at the time of the study that may have affected my interpretation of the results. The Demographics section presents participant demographics and characteristics relevant to the study. The Data Collection section recounts the number of participants from which the data was collected, the location, frequency, duration, and means of the data collection and a discussion of the data collection instrument, any variations from the plan presented in Chapter 3, and any unusual circumstances encountered during the data collection phase.

In the Data Analysis section I report the process used to move inductively from coded units to more significant representations, including categories and themes; describe themes that may have emerged and their importance; and discuss how any discrepant cases were factored into the analysis. In the Evidence of Trustworthiness section, I discuss the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the research. In the Results section, I address each research question and present data to support the findings of the study. The research questions for this study were:

RQ1: What are the perspectives of law enforcement officers on recruitment and retention?

RQ2: What impact does a lack of recruitment and inability to retain law enforcement officers have on the agency and community?

Setting

This study was conducted during the global COVID-19 pandemic and at a time when public perceptions toward law enforcement officers were at one of the lowest points in recent history (Felbab-Brown, 2020). To decrease the spread of the COVID-19 virus, many police agencies around the United States, including the agencies within Georgia, established policies to limit police officer/public contact (Felbab-Brown, 2020). This lack of police presence within the community has driven up the crime rate in many cities and towns within the United States, which in many cases has established a mindset that the police no longer care about the community. This issue, combined with agencies having to enforce stay-at-home orders, has also strained police-community relations. These exigent factors, which were brought on by sudden laws and ordinances enacted to protect public health, may have changed the situational climate of the police agencies in the State of Georgia and, as a result, may have affected the opinions of lived experiences of officers who chose to participate in this study.

Demographics

The 15 participants of this study were all certified police officers who had been employed for no less than 5 years. To ensure that the entire department was represented, three officers from each division were invited to participate in the study. Three officers came from the training, background, and recruitment unit; three officers came from the criminal investigation division; three officers came from the special operations division; three officers came from the patrol unit; and three officers came from the chief's staff.

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted via a qualitative questionnaire. Before beginning the data collection process, 15 participants from various agencies from around the state of Georgia were invited to participate in the research study. Within 2 days from the time the initial emails were sent, I received an email response from 15 of the interested participants. After confirming that the participants met the qualification criteria for the study, I sent emails with attached consent forms. Upon receiving the consent form, I sent another email that contained the 10 question questionnaire. The email also included return instructions, which stated that the questionnaire would need to be returned via email within 10 days. Two of the participants responded within 24 hours, eight responded within 48 hours, with the remaining five responding by the 4th day.

All the officers who participated in the study were certified officers employed in the State of Georgia. As a former police officer, I was familiar with the many different command staffs and many of the division heads of some of the departments who participated in this research study. Before beginning the research process, the chief of

police, along with the various division chiefs, of some of the included agencies were informally asked if they or members of their departments would like to participate in a dissertation research study if one were to take place. When Walden University granted permission to collect data, I was informed by the various police agency executive command staff that COVID-19 restrictions, officer schedules, and security concerns would prevent me from conducting interviews in person at the agency headquarters. I was further informed that officers would not be allowed to participate in phone interviews while on duty due to officer schedules and a lack of staffing. As a result, the data collection process was conducted via a qualitative questionnaire sent through email. This allowed the officer to complete the questionnaire from anywhere and at a time that was convenient for them.

I sent the questionnaire form (Appendix A) to the participants, which allowed all responses to be separated and collected. To ensure that the participants remained anonymous during the data collection and analysis process, all participants were assigned a respondent ID that consisted of a combination of letter and number values. By assigning the participants respondent IDs, no personal or professional information would be compromised when analyzing and sharing data from the qualitative questionnaire.

Once all data was collected and separated, the data analysis process was initiated. The only variation that took place in data collection from the original plan was in regard to the form that the questions were completed on. In the original plan, questions were to be sent to the participants via a word document, at which time the participants had to download, complete, reupload the document, and then email it back to me for analysis.

By using the questionnaire (Appendix A), participants were able to quickly access and complete it without taking any further action. Once the questionnaire was received, I uploaded the document to Google Docs where the results were separated into individual categories and themes, making the data analysis process smoother. No unusual circumstances were encountered in the data collection process.

Data Analysis

Once all data was collected, analysis of each participant's questionnaire was completed after identifying common themes or trends. Upon completing the initial review, all data was transferred from the Google Form to a Microsoft Excel sheet to separate and code the data further. When the research study began, the initial plan was to utilize Nvivo qualitative analysis software; however, due to the cost of the software and personal financial constraints brought on by the current COVID-19 pandemic, I decided that utilizing Microsoft Excel and manual transcription of the data would be the best and most economically feasible approach. Using a Google Form allowed the data to be electronically transcribed into an excel document as the questionnaires were being completed. The manual transcription allowed for common and emerging themes and trends to be identified. Table 1 shows the common trends and themes.

Table 1 is broken down into four categories: questionnaire questions, participants, general themes, and common trends among participants. The questionnaire questions category correlates with the questionnaire sent to the participants in which Q1 = question 1, Q2 = question 2, and so forth. The second category is the participants; as mentioned earlier, each participant was provided with a respondent ID to protect personal and

professional privacy. The general theme categories show what common themes were present in the research. The fourth category shows what percentage of participants thought the general theme directly affected recruitment and retention in the policing industry.

Table 1

Emerging Themes and Trends

Questionnaire questions	Participants respondents ID	General Themes	Opinions of participants on themes vs recruitment and retention.
Q1	CRJ- 1	Life-long desire to police	70%
Q2	CRJ- 2	Negative social perceptions	100 %
Q3	CRJ- 3	Pay and benefits	90%
Q4	CRJ- 4	Family and friends perceptions	30%
Q5	CRJ- 5	Rise of technology	100%
Q6	CRJ- 6	Micromanagement	80%
Q7	CRJ- 7		
Q8	CRJ- 8		
Q9	CRJ- 9		
Q10	CRJ- 10		
	CRJ- 11		
	CRJ- 12		
	CRJ- 13		
	CRJ- 14		
	CRJ- 15		

Further breaking down the percentages revealed that 10 or 70% of the participants had a lifelong desire to police and pay and benefits played a significant role in their decision to join the police force. All 15 or 100% of the participants responded that they believed that negative social perceptions towards police officers were driving officers out

and away from the industry. As a sub-theme of this question, all 15 or 100% of the officers agreed that it is highly likely that the idea of negative social perception towards police is driving officers out of the profession on the national level. Only 4 or 30% of the participants stated that their friend's or families' perceptions affected their decision to join or leave the policing profession. Of those 4, two said that without family or friend support, they could not carry out their duties successfully, while the other two stated that they could police but would need a support system to avoid burnout or mental health-related issues.

When examining the technology variable, 15 or 100% of the participants agreed that the rise in technology made people wary of joining the policing profession. All respondents also agreed that the bad actions of one officer caught on film could further fuel the negative stigma which the public holds towards police and that as technology becomes more and more advances, more instances, such as the one presented in the example, will take place which will further irritate an already severe problem. Lastly, 12 or 80% of the participants agreed that micro-management by police leadership was a major contributor to police officers choosing to leave the profession. The remaining three respondents agreed that since most police agencies operate under a para-military structure, micro-management did not bother them or affect their perceptions of the policing industry.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

As mentioned in Chapter 3, Paradis et al. (2016) state that questions added to questionnaires to obtain qualitative data are typically opened ended with a free-text format. Additionally, questionnaires are ideal for documenting perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, or knowledge within an exact, predetermined sample of individuals. Paradis et al. (2016) stated that questionnaires are used to gather information from individuals 1-on-1, using a series of predetermined questions of a set of interest areas. Questionnaires are often recorded or transcribed; they can be structured or unstructured, and they can either follow a tightly written script that mimics a survey or be inspired by a loose set of questions that invite interviewees to express themselves more freely.

To ensure validity and rigor, consistent methods of data gathering and analysis were maintained. Before engaging in the research study, all questions were reviewed by both executives in practice, as well as Institutional Review Board officials at Walden University. This was to ensure that the study's goals, rationale, research design, methods, writings, and theoretical framework were aligned. Furthermore, this research addressed the anticipated ethical problems such as protecting participants' personal and professional identities and developing a research problem. No major adjustments to implementation or credibility were adjusted from what was explained in chapter 3.

When conducting any research study, credibility, trustworthiness, reliability, and dependability are crucial to the validity and overall outcome of the research study. Credibility is an important characteristic in qualitative research as it allows the researcher to consider and take into account all the complexities in a study, including emerging

patterns that might not always be easy to explain (Bhandari, 2020). During the research process, I utilized and followed consistent mythology to identify common trends and emerging themes of the data that was collected. As the researcher, my goal was to draw meaningful conclusions while avoiding any instances of bias or misinterpretation. I ensured to draw meaningful inferences from the data provided by the participants using the established research designs and instruments. It was essential to link the research findings accurately and clearly with actual responses from participants. For this research, I utilized different data sources within the same method. For example, I used multiple police agencies thus all information came from multiple divisions within multiple police agencies who carry out different duties to support the common overall mission. The same interview questions and protocols were used for all participants in the study.

Just as credibility is an important characteristic in qualitative research, transferability is equally important. Transferability allows the researcher to apply or transfer a qualitative context to a broader context while maintaining the richness of its original context or context-relevant statements (Bhandari, 2020). To attain transferability, I ensured that a detailed description of the data and circumstances were provided so that readers could establish their own comparisons based on the information that I provided. This process would allow audiences such as fellow researchers, stakeholders, and participants to transfer aspects of the study design and findings to different contextual factors and patterns.

In addition to credibility and transferability, reliability and dependability are also important characteristics in qualitative research. Reliability refers to the stability of

responses to multiple coders of data sets (Bhandari, 2020). Dependability refers to the stability of data over some time or conditions. By incorporating credibility, transferability, reliability, and dependability into the research process, I ensured that well-structured methods of data collection and that the data collected were consistent with the study's overall argument. Confirmability in this study sought to achieve relative neutrality and reasonable freedom from existing prejudice and biases (Bhandari, 2020). To ensure confirmability, I maintained objectivity throughout the research process. The guiding research questions and the qualitative questionnaire were continually used throughout the process to ensure credibility, transferability, reliability, and dependability.

Results

This section outlines the ten-question qualitative questionnaire to give clarity and answers to the overarching questions of this study. Themes and patterns will be discussed in detail. There were 15 certified police officers who chose to participate in this voluntary qualitative research study. The officers involved represented the different divisions which included: the chief's staff, internal affairs/recruiting, uniform patrol, criminal investigation division, and special operations. Three officers from each division participated, which led to the total participant number of 15 certified police officers with five or more years of service within the policing industry.

The guiding research questions for this study comprised the following:

RQ1: What are the perspectives of law enforcement officers on recruitment and retention?

RQ2: What impact does a lack of recruitment and inability to retain law enforcement officers have on the agency and the community?

The first research question was designed to gain a real-world perspective from those in practice. As a researcher, I wanted to examine the perspectives of law enforcement officers on the relationships of recruitment and retention among new police recruits. Additionally, research aimed to investigate the officer's thoughts on recruitment and retention issues, how it affects their agency, their duties, and the community in which they serve. The officers who participated in the study all had five or more years of experience working within the policing industry, and all worked in areas of the department that directly impact recruitment and retention. As a result, it is reasonable to believe all of the involved officers would be a prime source of information on the possible causes of lack of recruitment and retention within their perspective agencies.

The second research question was designed to investigate the impact of a lack of retention and recruitment on the police agency as a whole and the community it served. It differs from the first research question in regards to perspective. While the first research question investigated how a lack of retention and recruitment affects the individual officer, the second examines the problem on a systemic level regarding the effects on the department and how it serves the community. The participants' insight was precious when answering this question because if the department does not have the manpower to serve

the community, then it is reasonable to believe that the community will develop a less than desirable stigma of the police department. Current research, research indicates a relationship between community police tension and both departmental recruitment and retention deficits (Maciag, 2020), (Roufa, 2019).

To answer the guiding research questions for this study, participants were asked to answer the following questions based on their experiences and observations while working as certified police officers. The questions which were asked are listed in Table 2 and Appendix A.

Table 2

Participant Questionnaire

Q1: Have you always wanted to be a police officer? If not, what recruitment tactics led you to join your perspective agency?

Q2: Did you choose your agency based on pay and benefits, or were there other factors involved? If you did choose your agency based solely on pay and benefits, briefly explain why these were the only factors that attracted you to the agency. If other factors were involved, please briefly explain what other factors led you to join your current agency

Q3: Have you observed a shift in social perceptions within your jurisdiction? If so has this impacted your duties in any way. If not, how do you think a change in social perception would affect your current duties.

Q4: If you believe there is a current shift in social perceptions towards the policing profession, how do you believe this is affecting the current recruitment and retention of

police officers. If you have not observed a shift, what would be your opinion in the hypothetical sense.

Q5: Does a positive or negative community relationship affect the recruitment and retention of police officers? What are your thoughts?

Q6: Does your family or friends' perception of the policing industry affect you in any way in regards to wanting to continue policing?

Q7: Do you feel that micro-management within a police agency affects police recruitment and retention? Please briefly explain your position (It does or does not)

Q8: Have you ever personally dealt with micromanagement during your policing career? How did it affect you?

Q9: Have you ever observed micromanagement contribute to an officer leaving the force?

Q10: If you could leave the law enforcement profession today, and it had no impact on you or your family, would you do it? If not, why? If yes, why

During the data analysis portion of the research, several common themes and trends were observed when looking at the data. The response for Question 1, which covered a lifelong desire to police was varied. Respondent CRJ-1, CRJ-2, CRJ-3, CRJ-11, CRJ-15, CRJ-6, CRJ-9, CRJ-10, CRJ-12, and CRJ-5 stated they wanted to be a police officer for as long as they could remember and nor pay, benefits or social perception had an impact on their decision to begin a career in policing. CRJ-4, CRJ-7, CRJ-8, CRJ-12, and CRJ-14 stated that they did not have a lifelong desire to police; however, pay and benefits were a major factor in attracting them to the policing profession. Social

perceptions were not mentioned by CRJ-4, CRJ-7, CRJ-8, CRJ-12, or CRJ-14 as a major recruitment factor at the time that they began their policing career.

Question 2 inquired if the participants choose their agency solely based on pay and benefits or if there were other factors involved. CRJ-1 states that they joined the agency at 21, so pay and benefits were a huge factor but not the only factor in the decision-making process. CRJ-1 stated that having friends currently working at the department and the agency's superb reputation within the community were also contributing factors. CRJ-2 and CRJ-3 both stated that they entered the policing profession as a second career and that pay and benefits were an important factor that attracted them to the profession. CRJ-11 stated that he was recently retired from the policing field and had a decent retirement; however, due to being bored in retirement, he chooses to return to policing as a hobby, which meant that pay and benefits were not a factor in the decision to join the police force.

CRJ-15, CRJ-6, and CRJ-9, CRJ-10 and CRJ-15, stated that pay and benefits were important factors when joining the police force; however, social perception also played a large role in the decision-making process. CRJ-4, CRJ-12, CRJ-7, CRJ-8, and CRJ-14, stated that while pay and benefits were important when joining the police agency, they were more concerned with the environment they would be working in. CRJ-4, CRJ-12, CRJ-7, CRJ-8, and CRJ-14 all responded that even if the pay and benefits were attractive, they would not have joined the agency if it was not supported by the community. Question 3 covered observations of social perceptions within the jurisdiction and the impact of the shifts on their duties. Question 4 covered how the shift and social

perceptions are affecting recruitment and retention. All of the respondents agreed that they had observed a shift in social perceptions within their jurisdiction; how the shift affected them varied depending on where they were assigned within the department. Officers from the uniform patrol division and special operations unit who deal with citizens daily stated that “everything seems to be dictated by the media and social media” and that in many cases, public perception is placed over officer safety. It was also stated by each of the officers that participated from the uniform patrol division that they felt that the community does still support them in some ways, just not as much publicly as in the past.

Information obtained from the officers in the background and recruiting unit was fairly consistent with that of the uniform patrol division. As these officers are directly responsible for hiring and training new officers, each stated that each has been assigned to the unit for around two years, and during that time, they have observed a gradual decrease in the number of applicants applying for the department. During the debriefing process, it was asked how this decline in application affected the officers of the background and recruiting unit directly. Each stated that if they cannot recruit officers, then they are putting the lives of every other officer on the force in danger. Furthermore, each stated that during discussions with potential applicants at job fairs or colleges, they found that many individuals simply do not like the idea of becoming a police officer due to what they (the interested party) feel is a universal negative stigma towards the policing profession.

The officers from the Chiefs Staff and the criminal investigation divisions seemed to have a slightly different opinion of shifting social perceptions within the jurisdiction of the police department but agreed that a shift was still present. The chief staff agreed that although they do not deal with the public daily in the same fashion as patrol officers, the lack of people applying at the department and decrease in the public showing up for community events such as coffee with the chief or national night out which are events designed to bring the community and the agency together showed a clear sign that there was a divide. Detectives from the criminal investigation division stated that they had observed a shift due to how the community communicated with them during major investigations. In response, one detective cited an example by stating that 10 or 20 years ago, everyone wanted to help the police when a major event would occur. Witnesses to a crime would turn up in droves, people were easier to talk to, and crimes were much easier to solve to information or tips from the public. All detectives seemed to claim that this is not the case anymore as potential witnesses seemed to make an honest effort to avoid talking to the police even if it means helping solve a major crime. The detectives agreed that this is proof to them that a shift in social perceptions towards police is present, which makes the job of solving a crime or even engaging with the community much harder than it was at one point.

Question 5 addressed how positive or negative community relations affect recruitment and retention. All the participants agreed that positive or negative community relations affect recruitment and retention. Furthermore, the responses from the participants seemed to support established research such as that by Maciag (2020).

Maciag (2020) suggests that if a police agency and the community do not have a good working relationship, both sides will suffer. The police department will have a more complicated time-solving crime due to a lack of support from the community. In other words, if people are afraid or do not like the police, crimes will go unreported; thus, crimes will be unchecked, which will drive up the crime rate and further divide the community. In addition, eyewitnesses are a critical factor in solving crimes, thus if members of the community do not talk to the police to help them solve crimes, the ability to solve crimes is greatly diminished. Maciag's (2020) theory further states that most police agencies recruit from the community which they serve. It is logical to believe that if the community does not like or trust the police, then members of the community will not want to be part of the police force. Most if not all of the responses made by the participants echoed this theory.

Question 6 covered what impact family or friends perceptions had on the participant continuing their career in law enforcement. All of the participants agreed that their family and friends' opinions of the policing profession had no impact on their desire to continue policing. Members of the background and recruiting unit also stated that they had not observed any impacts on recruitment and retention based solely on the opinions of the applicant or officer's family or friends. Questions 7, 8, and 9 dealt with the impact of micromanagement on the individual officer and the agency as a whole. Question 7 asked if micromanagement had any impact on police recruitment and retention. The consensus of the participants was that micromanagement did not have an impact on recruitment; however, it did have a significant impact on retention. CRJ-05 stated that in

addition to a negative stigma of the policing industry, most police officers at his agency are choosing to leave the profession due to inadequate and micromanaging supervision.

Question 8 asked if micromanagement affected how the officers carried out their duties. Unlike the previous responses, the answers to this question were split. 25% of the participants stated that being micromanaged had a direct negative impact on their job performance. This impact, over time, affected their perceptions of the job, which in some cases has led them to consider seeking employment elsewhere. 50% of the officers stated that while they did not like to be micromanaged, it did not have an adverse effect on how they carried out their duties. The remaining 25% stated that they had left a police agency in the past due to the level of micromanagement within their agency. Question 9 asked if the participant had ever observed an officer leave the policing industry due to micromanagement. All of the participants, or 100%, stated that they had observed at least one officer leave the agency throughout their career as a direct result of poor supervision or micromanagement.

The final question in the questionnaire asked if the officer could leave the law enforcement profession today and it had no impact on them or their families, would they go? The responses were almost unanimous and followed the same narrative. 13 of the 15 officers stated they would leave and cited lack of pay, benefits, personal safety, and social perceptions as the main reasons. CRJ-3 stated that law enforcement is not what it once was; the profession as a whole seems to back the public's negative perception of police and will turn on the officer, even if the officer was following all established protocols to save face. CRJ 4,5,6,10,11,12,15 stated that they have been in law

enforcement so long that they are too far in to start over but not close enough to retire to leave. This recipient states that due to the changing climate of the profession If there were no adverse effects to them, their families, or their financial security, they would leave the procession without question. The opposing responses from two officers state that they are both retired from another agency, and they rejoined law enforcement for the fun of the job. Furthermore, they stated that due to the love of the profession, they would not leave under any circumstances.

Summary

In summary, there were a total of 15 certified police officers who choose to participate in this voluntary research study. Each of the officers represented a different division from multiple police agencies from around the State of Georgia and provided an essential perspective on recruitment and retention. The participants of the study who all had five or more years working in the law enforcement profession were asked to complete a research questionnaire designed to collect their opinions on the possible causes of the lack of retention and recruitment at the agency. The question which the officers were asked to answer centered around some of the hypothesized causations of the recruitment and retention crisis within the United States. Topic included social perception, pay, and benefits, lifelong desire to police, and micromanagement. These categories have been cited in existing research, such as that conducted by Maciag (2020), as possible reasons for the recruitment and retention crisis among police agencies.

The responses submitted by the participants generally aligned with the existing research. Almost all participants stated that being a police officer is something that they

had wanted to do since their youth. A small portion indicated that they did not have a lifelong desire and that pay and benefits were the main contributors to them joining the force. All of the officers who participated in the study stated that social perceptions, rather positive or negative, directly impact police recruitment and retention. The consensus was that most of the applicants for a police department come from the community that the agency serves, thus, if the community has a good relationship with the agency, the climate of the department is better, and more people will be willing to join the department and stay at the agency for an extended period of time.

There was a consensus among the officers that a shift in social perceptions towards the policing industry as a whole. Most stated that they felt that most agency decisions in some way dictated by the media or social media, and as a result, no how closely the officer follows protocol, the public will be quick to judge via the media and social media. The officers agreed that this creates a perception within the industry that the agency will not back the officer, which in turn drives people out of and away from the police field. In addition, officers were asked about their feelings on micromanagement, which most researchers, including Roufa (2019) and Maciag (2020) have become prevalent in the profession over the past several decades. The participants agreed that micromanagement is not a factor in the lack of recruitment among police agencies; however, it is a significant factor in the retention of police officers. Lastly, the participants were asked if they could leave the profession with no repercussions, would they? All of the participants except for two stated that they would leave the profession altogether without hesitation.

The first research question which was presented in this study was the following: What are the perspectives of law enforcement officers on retention and recruitment? The collected primary data suggest that there is a clear recruitment and retention problem not just within the State of Georgia but at every agency within the United States. The participants of the study present several opinions as to why they believe agencies are experiencing such a hard time finding and retaining police officers. The opinions which were contributed support the existing secondary research, which leads me to believe that the originally stated causations such as negative social perceptions pay, benefits, and lack of interest in the job are vital reasons for the lack of manpower at the agency.

The second research question posed in this research study was the following: what impact do a lack of recruiting and the inability to retain law enforcement officers have on the agency and the community? The answer to this question was provided clearly by all of the participants in the study. The consensus was that a positive working relationship with the community is vital for both sides and every aspect of the police department's operations depends on a positive relationship. For example, the police agency likely recruits from the community in which it serves. If the population of the community does not have a good opinion of the agency, it is likely that members of the population are not going to apply to work there, or if they are currently employed, it is not likely they will remain employed due to the social perceptions. Additionally, a good working relationship is crucial in solving crime and in the crime suppression process. Participants have stated that without the public's help, solving a crime becomes much harder, and as the police

cannot be everywhere at once, the agency depends on the public to report crimes or suspicious activities for suppression activities to occur.

All of the participants agreed that if there is a negative stigma of police or the policing industry, solving crimes and crime control will not happen. This, in turn, directly affects the community; if the community feels that they are not being served by the police, then it is reasonable to believe that the negative stigma will continue. Maciag (2020) and Roufa (2019) agree that this cycle is present everywhere within the United States, and once established, it is tough to break. This consensus by the participants in the research study supports many if not all of the claims made by criminal justice researchers such as Magiag (2020) and Roufa (2019) and existing literature. The questions which were posed to the participants in this study were all created based on known problems within the criminal justice industry that directly affects the retention and recruitment of police officers. The questions which probed the officer's opinions of police recruitment and retention further supports the problem statement of this research study along with the claims of criminal justice researchers, existing literature, and those in practice.

Chapter 5 will include an introduction that will concisely reiterate the purpose and nature of the study, why it was conducted, and concisely summarize key findings. It will also include interpretations of the findings which will cover the confirmation or disconfirmation of the extension of knowledge. Furthermore, analysis and interpretation of the findings and how it relates to the theoretical framework will take place. Limitations and recommendations of the study, along with implications and final conclusions, will also be present.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

In this qualitative study, I explored the possible causes of the lack of recruitment and retention of police officers resulting in a critical shortage in the State of Georgia and across the United States. I also sought to understand what impact a lack of recruitment and retention of police officers has on the agency and the community they serve. The study was grounded in Maciag's (2020) theory that there is currently a massive police shortage in the United States, and the shortage has reached a crisis level. The problem presented in this research study that was supported by the research of Maciag (2020) and other criminal justice researchers is that the national police force has been shrinking at an unprecedented rate for the past decade, and it is continuing to shrink more and more each year. Maciag (2020) stated that this is a major problem because police agencies are losing officers faster than they can be replenished. This problem leads to the further reinforcement of the negative stigma of police held by many in the country, which in turn is furthering the retention and recruitment problems currently present in the law enforcement industry.

The purpose of the study was to examine the perspectives on recruitment and retention among Clayton County Police officers with 5 or more years of experience. The findings of the study increase the understanding of recruitment and retention in the law enforcement community. The study was exploratory in nature and was designed to contribute to the existing literature in the field of police recruitment and retention. The

research was conducted using a qualitative research method that employed existing scholarly data and information offered by leaders in the policing industry.

The study was important because it was designed to help solve a severe problem within the policing industry. It is common knowledge in the policing industry that not being able to recruit and retain police officers affects every aspect of the profession. Common problems that can be attributed to recruitment and retention issues include deteriorating relations between a police agency and the community, compromised officer and citizen safety, and weakened crime suppression, and the ability to solve crimes promptly. This claim is directly supported by criminal justice researchers such as Maciag (2020) and those in practice including the police officers who chose to participate in this voluntary research study. Furthermore, it is apparent that the issues of recruitment and retention of police officers not just in Georgia but on a national level are getting worse with each passing year. It is also apparent that this problem is fluid and evolves with the social perceptions of society. If this problem is not solved, the current situation will only worsen, which in turn will further irritate an already delicate problem. It was not the purpose of this research study to solve the problem but to contribute new knowledge that can be used to solve the retention and recruitment problems that the industry is currently facing.

The findings of the study were generally consistent with the established research. Current research such as that published by Maciag (2020) and Roufa (2019) stated that police officers are leaving the industry due to several reasons which include a negative stigma towards the profession held by the general public, lack of pay and benefits to

match the risk of the job, micromanagement, and lack of support by the agency. All the data collected in the study suggested that a negative stigma of police by the general public is a primary factor contributing to the problem. This negative stigma is fueled by the rise in technology over the past decade, which has allowed information to be shared more quickly than at any other time, is possibly the root cause of the negative stigma because one bad incident can be recorded and shared by almost anyone and from this people can form opinions that although are often negative, may be formed without knowing all the facts. It is generally agreed by criminal justice scholars and those in practice that this cycle of recording and sharing the actions of one bad officer has damaged the reputation of an entire industry. Furthermore, because the process keeps repeating itself, the problem is continually occurring before it can be fixed.

Further findings revealed that the negative stigma of policing is directly contributing to the recruitment and retention problem. This finding was supported by the fact that most of the participants stated that they would not work for an agency that has less than desirable relations with the community. Additionally, most of the participants stated that negative community–police agency relations were one of the top reasons officers left police agencies. These claims are supported by the existing research of Maciag (2020) and Roufa (2019). Further findings revealed that agencies that operate in a jurisdiction where a negative stigma is present struggle to recruit from the population. This, in turn, leaves the agency without officers who match the makeup of the community, which in turn hinders the relationship-building process. Additionally, without a proper police force, the crime rate rises, crime suppression goes down, and

investigations take longer (Maciag, 2020). This, in turn, furthers the divide between the agency and the community, which furthers a vicious systematic cycle that is present on a national level. As mentioned earlier, it was not the intent of this research study to solve this problem but to contribute knowledge which when combined with existing knowledge, can hopefully help to break the cycle and fix the recruitment and retention crisis that is currently hobbling police agencies in Georgia and throughout the United States. These findings are consistent with the existing data and literature such as the information published by Maciag (2020) and Roufa (2019).

Interpretations of Findings

In this section, I provide a comparison between the established data that was presented in the literature review of Chapter 2 and the final findings of the study from the primary sources. Such a comparison may confirm, disconfirm, or extend knowledge. This section encompasses and discusses the findings in the context of the study's theoretical framework, which was based on Maciag's (2020) ground theory of police recruitment and retention. The literature review in Chapter 2 explored the evolution of the policing industry and how recruitment and retention of police officers have been a problem from the beginning. Potter (2020) stated that the recruitment and retention issues on a systematic level are extremely complex and are rooted in the foundation of the policing industry. Further, Potter (2020) stated that to understand the scope of the current problem fully, it must be understood how it evolved with the industry.

The findings of this study were consistent with existing research found in Chapter 2. In the Chapter 2 literature review, multiple criminal justice researchers and those in practice stated that the problems with police retention and recruitment are a systemic problem that goes back to the beginning of the policing industry in the United States. Potter (2020), Maciag (2020), and Roufa (2019) stated that among the many problems that challenge the police industry and affect police recruitment and retention, public perception and a negative stigma of police officers is the top factor that drives people away from and out of the industry.

This research study had two guiding questions:

RQ1: What are the perspectives of law enforcement officers on recruitment and retention?

RQ2: What impact does a lack of retention and recruitment have on the agency and community?

In this research study, 15 police officers from various police agencies around the State of Georgia were asked to complete a 10-question questionnaire to collect their opinions on the factors that are affecting police recruitment and retention among law enforcement agencies. The responses of the officers were consistent with the established research such as that of Potter (2020), Roufa (2019), and Maciag (2020). The officers stated that among other problems facing individual agencies, the negative stigma of the policing industry and adverse police agency–community relations were top factors. Additionally, all of the participants in the study stated that they would not join an agency that did not have a good working relationship with the citizens of the agency’s jurisdiction.

When comparing the findings of the study with the existing research and literature, it is clear that the concepts support one another. The existing research and literature support the findings of the research study and the research study essentially mirrors what can be found in the published literature. The research findings and existing data support the notion that a large portion of the American population does not like nor do they trust the police. The distrust is possibly generational; in other words, it's a taught notion that is further fueled by the ability for information to spread rapidly. This generational distrust is rooted deep in the history of the policing industry, and from the existing research, literature, and data collected in this study, it could be argued that this is the factor that fuels the negative stigma which is turning people away from the industry and driving people out of it as well.

Limitations of the Study

The research study had several limitations that drastically changed how data was collected. From the beginning, it was decided that data would be collected from 15 officers with five or more years of experience who were currently employed with the various police agencies within the State of Georgia. The original data collection plan called for all 15 of the officers to be interviewed in person, which the interviews being recorded and transcribed/coded at a later date. The Covid-19 pandemic resulted in social distancing requirements and changes in security protocols at the vast majority of police agencies around the State of Georgia, face-to-face interviews were no longer feasible. Limitations included not being able to interview officers face to face due to social distancing and not being allowed within the agency due to the department restricting

access only to employees for health concerns. It was decided that a video interview would be best; however, after speaking to the command staff of various police agencies, I was informed that due to manpower shortages, officers would not be able to participate in the study while on duty.

To address restrictions, it was decided that the best approach to collecting data would be to invite the officers to complete a voluntary questionnaire utilizing the question initially intended for the interview. I found that because the officers could complete the survey on their own time, I have more than enough participants for the study and was able to collect the data without incident.

Recommendations

Maciag (2020) stated that the recruitment and retention issue currently plaguing the policing industry in the United States is an extraordinarily complex and delicate issue. Roufa (2019) and Potter (2020) agree with Maciag (2020) and point out that because the recruitment and retention issues are so deeply rooted in the fibers of the policing industry that establishing one single recommendation to fix the problem is highly improbable. Maciag (2020) claims that the recruitment and retention issues currently plague the industry are systematic, as the same issues seem to affect police agencies universally. This claim is further supported by those in practice who have stated that they have observed retention and recruitment problems not just at their current agency but other agencies they may have worked for. This claim is also supported by the current social perceptions of the country, as most news outlets on the national level are reporting shortages of police officers and its relation to a negative stigma routinely.

Based on the findings of the research study, it is reasonable to believe that most officers harbor the notion that no matter what recommendations are made, the negative stigma of the policing industry will continue to be present in society. However, based on the success of bridging the divide and improving social perceptions that many agencies had in the late 1990s. I think that agencies around the country to include those within the State of Georgia should reattempt instituting programs to bring the community and the police agency. These programs could be youth programs such as police explorers, national nights out, and coffee with a cop. All these programs are designed to improve perceptions and build a better more meaningful working relationship between the two sides. Suppose the agency(s) can institute these programs and work to bridge the gap. In that case, the retention and recruitment issues that many departments face may disappear with time and, as a result, fix many of the other common problems which are driving police officers out of and away from the industry.

Implications

These study findings revealed a clear link between negative social perceptions and recruitment and retention among police agencies within the United States. The study results also found that the adverse social perceptions effects on police recruitment and retention also resulted in a trickle-down effect of other problems that are also present in the policing industry. As mentioned, it was not the goal of this study to solve the overall problem but to contribute knowledge to existing data. It is within reason to believe that if a solution to the problem is eventually found utilizing this data and existing research, tremendous positive social change will occur. A potential positive social change could

include an improvement between the police and the community on a national scale. Based on established data, this change in perception could lead to more people wanting to be police officers, thus fixing the recruiting problems. Additionally, with the community's support, officers employed with the agency could feel more appreciated and supported by their agencies. As existing research has shown that this is a major factor driving officers out of the industry, this change could help with the retention rate, which would further help improve the department's social standing in the community. By fixing the recruitment and retention problem, there is a chance for a positive social change that could benefit both the community and policing agencies for generations to come.

Conclusion

From the beginning, it has been the purpose of this research study to identify factors that contributes to the retention and recruitment crisis that is plaguing the policing industry. The goal of the research was not to solve the problem but to potentially fill a gap in existing research. Through the research process, existing research revealed that the current retention and recruitment problem is nothing new and has evolved with the policing industry since its conception. Those who participated in this study supported the claims of the existing research by claiming that while many different factors negatively impact police recruitment and retention, a negative stigma and adverse police-community relations are the primary contributors to the current retention and recruitment crisis within the United States.

As mentioned, it was not the goal of this research study to solve the problem but to fill a gap in existing research. As the research study has now been completed, it may

be possible to add the finding of this study to the findings of criminal justice scholars such as Roufa (2019), Maciag (2020), and Potter (2020). With the combination of all of these findings along with findings from future criminal justice research on the topic, it may be possible to solve the recruitment and retention problem at some point in the future.

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Appendix A: Invitation Email

INTRODUCTION EMAIL TO PARTICIPANTS

Dear Officers,

My name is Brandon Lentz, and I am presently in the process of obtaining my Doctoral Degree from Walden University in Criminal Justice. My dissertation topic is titled: Police Recruitment and Retention: An American National Crisis.

I am inviting you to participate in this study due to your current employment in the field of law enforcement. The purpose of this qualitative study is to identify what key elements negatively affect police recruitment and retention. As a police officer, you will provide valuable insight into what you conclude pushes an individual out or away from the law enforcement field. Additionally, your insight will give valuable insight into possible factors as to why officers are either not joining or not remaining employed with the police force. To participate in this study, you must be currently employed in law enforcement and have no less than five years of experience.

Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and confidential, and no individual or organizational names will be published. Attached to this email, you will find a questionnaire and a consent form. The questionnaire is a standard 10 question document, which requests feedback on issues related to police recruitment and retention. If you choose to participate, please return the consent form and questionnaire, within 10 business days to the following email: *This study has been approved by Walden University's IRB 297524-2, Effective From:*

If you have any questions about this study, please contact, Brandon Lentz. You may also contact Dr. Tamara Mouras, Dissertation Chair, Walden University,

Thank you in Advance,

Brandon Lentz

Ph.D. Candidate

Appendix B: Consent Form

You are invited to take part in a research study about the perspectives of law enforcement officers on the relationships of recruitment and retention among law enforcement officers. The researcher is inviting certified police officers who are currently employed with a Georgia Law Enforcement Agency for five or more years to be in the study. This form is part of a process called “informed consent” to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study seeks 10-15 volunteers who are:

- Officers currently employed with a law enforcement agency
- Have been actively employed for no less than five years.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Brandon Lentz, who is a doctoral student at Walden University.

Study Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to examine the perspectives of law enforcement officers on the relationships of recruitment and retention among law enforcement officers. The findings of this study will attempt to increase the understanding of recruitment and retention within law enforcement.

Procedures:

This study will involve you completing the following steps:

- Complete a questionnaire that should take about 15 minutes
- Respond to a follow-up email if clarification is needed. It should take no more than 10 minutes to respond to the follow-up email.

Here are some sample questions:

1. Is becoming a police officer something that you have always wanted to do? If not, what led you to join the police force?
2. Tell me about how pay and benefits affect your ability to remain employed with the department?
3. Have you observed a shift in social perceptions within the community?

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Research should only be done with those who freely volunteer. So everyone involved will respect your decision to join or not. You will be treated the same rather or not you join the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time. The researcher seeks 10-15 volunteers for this study. The researcher will follow up with all volunteers to let them know whether they were selected for the study

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Being in this study could involve some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as the stress of revealing things that are personal. It is also possible that others from your department could deduce your participation in the study and disagree with your perceptions. You may also know me as a former co-worker and feel uncomfortable discussing these questions. To minimize these risks If a situation arises where I know a participant too well or to the point where I feel that I cannot be impartial to their data, I will ask them not to participate in the study due to a potential conflict of interest.

If you feel that there is a conflict of interest due to knowing the researcher in some capacity, and no longer wish to participate due to the conflict of interest you are free to leave at any time with no further communication being necessary

Assistance with a feeling associated with risk.

If you require further assistance or feel that you are experiencing a mental or medical emergency, please contact one or all of the following resources.

Emergency: 911

National Helpline – 1-800-662-HELP (4357) - SAMHSA

Georgia Crisis & Access Line (GCAL) 1-800-715-4225

This study offers no direct benefits to individual volunteers. This study aims to benefit society by aiding in furthering understanding of the universal elements contributing to recruitment and retention issues in the policing industry

Payment:

None

Privacy:

The researcher is required to protect your privacy. Your identity will be kept confidential, within the limits of the law. The researcher will not ask for your name at any time or link your responses to your contact info. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. If the researcher were to share this dataset with another researcher in the future, the researcher is required to remove all names and identifying details before sharing; this would not involve another round of obtaining informed consent. Data will be kept secure on a private hard drive to be secured in a private location only accessible by the researcher. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

Contacts and Questions:

You can ask questions of the researcher by sending an email. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant or any negative parts of the study, you can call Walden University's Research Participant Advocate. Walden University's approval number for this study is 10-18-21-1023904 and it expires on 10/17/2022.

You might wish to retain this consent form for your records. You may ask the researcher or Walden University for a copy at any time using the contact info above.

Obtaining Your Consent

If you understand the study and wish to volunteer, please return the consent form along with the questionnaire within 10 business days. If you need additional time, do not hesitate to contact me via email so that arrangements can be made.

Appendix C: Interview Questions

4. Is becoming a police officer something that you have always wanted to do? If not, what led you to join the police force?
5. Tell me about how pay and benefits affect your ability to remain employed with the department?
6. Have you observed a shift in social perceptions within the community?
7. Has this observation changed how you feel about the policing profession?
8. How do you feel about building relationships with the community?
9. Does your family or friends' opinion of policing affect you in any way?
10. What is your opinion of micro-management within a police agency?
11. Do you feel that you have ever been micro-managed?
12. If you were not micro-managed, do you feel that this type of leadership would improve your performance? If you did experience micro-management, how did it affect you as a law enforcement professional?
13. If you could leave the law enforcement profession today and it had no impact on you or your family, would you do it? If not, why? If yes, why

Appendix D: Debriefing
Walden University
Researcher: Brandon Lentz
Chair: Dr. T. Mouras

Thank you for your participation in our study! Your participation is greatly appreciated.

Purpose of the Study:

The purpose of this study is to examine the perspectives of law enforcement officers on the relationships of recruitment and retention among law enforcement officers. The findings of this study will attempt to increase the understanding of recruitment and retention within law enforcement.

I realize that some of the questions asked may have provoked strong emotional reactions. As researchers, we do not provide mental health services and we will not be following up with you after the study. However, we want to provide every participant in this study with a comprehensive and accurate list of available clinical resources, should you decide you need assistance at any time. Please see information about local resources at the end of this form.

Confidentiality:

You may decide that you do not want your data used in this research. If you would like your data removed from the study and permanently deleted please ***contact me via email: no later than 5 business days from the time you receive this debrief.***

Whether you agree or do not agree to have your data used for this study, you will still receive ***NO compensation*** for your participation.

Please do not disclose research procedures and/or hypotheses to anyone who might participate in this study in the future as this could affect the results of the study.

Final Report:

A summary of the study and its findings will be sent to you via email within 5 business days from the date this debrief was sent to you.

Useful Contact Information:

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, its purpose or procedures, or if you have a research-related problem, please feel free to contact the researcher(s) or the research study chair. The information can be found at the top of this form.

If you feel upset after having completed the study or find that some questions or aspects of the study triggered distress, talking with a qualified clinician may help. If you feel you would like assistance please contact one of the following agencies listed within the clinical resources.

Clinical Resources

If you require further assistance or feel that you are experiencing a mental or medical emergency, please contact one or all the following resources.

Emergency: 911

National Helpline – 1-800-662-HELP (4357) - SAMHSA

Georgia Crisis & Access Line (GCAL) 1-800-715-4225

*****Please keep a copy of this form for your future reference. Once again, thank you for your participation in this study!*****