

DO POLICE OFFICERS NEED A COLLEGE EDUCATION?

Do Police Officers Need a College Education?

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Abstract

Education and the impact that it has on police work has been debated for a long time. There have been studies that have included Minnesota police departments, California police departments, police professionals, police science students, and a number of different university students (including other countries). Some of the questions that are asked during these studies are: what impact does police officer education level have on police misconduct, and what should take priority in the management of student police officers: their education needs or deployment as an operational resource. The results have showed that education may be crucial in career success as far as moving up the career ladder, but as far as education making for a better police officer, the answer still remains due to lack of research.

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I believe that no; police officers should not need to have a college education. I think that police officer's already have a very constructive and sufficient training program already implemented. I do believe however that a higher education can be crucial in earning more money and career advancement.

According to police scholars and practitioners, the impact of higher education on police officer performance has long been debated (Manis, Archbold, & Hassell, 2008). The National Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement, Presidents Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice, and the National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals believed that by increasing formal education standards and improving the quality of training, policing would become more professionalized in the United States (Manis, Archbold, & Hassell, 2008). According to (Manis, Archbold, & Hassell, 2008), existing studies on police education level and citizen complaints have concluded that police officers with a college education are less likely to have complaints filed against them compared

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to police officers with a high school education (Cohen & Chaiken, 1972; Kappeler et al., 1992; Lersch & Kunzman, 2001; Sanderson, 1977; Wilson, 1999). Some studies have revealed that higher education also has an impact on the number of sustained complaints. (Manis, Archbold, & Hassell, Exploring the impact of police officer education level on allegations of police misconduct, 2008). (Sanderson, 1977), discovered that police officers with four-year degrees have an average sustained complaint rate approximately one-third of the rates of officers with two-year degrees or no college degree. Deputies who hold only a high school diploma accumulate a much higher number of sustained complaints than do two-year graduates (Lersch & Kunzman, 2001, pg. 166-167). Some findings indicate that officers without four-year degrees are more likely to generate a greater number of formal complaints (Manis, Archbold, & Hassell, Exploring the impact of police officer education level on allegations of police misconduct, 2008).

Academics and Practitioners as well as organizations and national commissions have repeatedly argued that the movement from traditional policing to community-orientated problem solving requires skill sets such as critical and analytical reasoning, enhanced understanding of socioeconomic causes of crime, and advanced interpersonal and intercultural communication, that are best developed in higher education programs (Hilal & Erickson, 2010). Even though this has been argued, it has not been placed into effect. As recently as 2003, only 9 percent of police departments nationally required a 2-year college degree and only 1 percent required a 4-year degree (Hickman & Reaves, 2006).

Minnesota has had a 2-year degree requirement for more than 30 years. Minnesota has conducted two statewide studies of the education levels of its police officers, the most recent in 2008 (Hilal & Erickson, 2010). Using census data from 2000 as a comparison, Minnesota

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officers appeared more educated than the general population in the state (Hilal & Erickson, 2010). Since Minnesota is the only state that requires some sort of college, they cannot compare how Minnesota relates to other states as far as education is concerned. If they could conduct a further investigation in other states to compare it with the most recent Minnesota study, then they could find out whether the Minnesota experience of increasing levels of formal education of police officers is a direct result of the post secondary degree requirement or merely a reflection of a possible increase of education level of police officers nationally (Hilal & Erickson, 2010). They are hoping that perhaps the Minnesota model can help lead to incremental increases in overall law enforcement officer education levels. (Hilal & Erickson, 2010).

Police groups do appear to be more motivated by job security, social and self actualization than by autonomy needs, and to prefer more formal power and authority relationships than autonomous ones (Zedeck, Middlestadt, & Hayes, 1981). (Sterling, 1972), investigated role concepts and percepts of a sample of police officers at three different time periods, beginning with the onset of training and ending 18 months later. He found many significant differences between the recruits scores and both general population and college student norms, but few differences among recruits and experienced police officers, due to lack of sufficient research and the complexity of casual factors.

In the study of police science students and current officers at the University of California, Berkeley, the police science students were enrolled in their second year of a two-year program in Justice Administration. Thus the students had demonstrated an interest in a police career by selecting police science as their specialization (Zedeck, Middlestadt, & Hayes, 1981). The questionnaire for this study consisted of a one-page personal information sheet followed by a

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measure of general work values, in addition to the demographic variables of age, sex, ethnic status, education and marital status (Zedeck, Middlestadt, & Hayes, 1981). The questionnaires were administered to the police science students by their instructors during class time, while two of the police departments distributed the questionnaires themselves (Zedeck, Middlestadt, & Hayes, 1981). The results showed that the police officers place less value on pride in work activity preference, and upward striving. By contrast, the police science students place more value on job involvement, pride in work, activity preference, and upward striving (Zedeck, Middlestadt, & Hayes, 1981). These results showed that students have more motivation for career success, but nowhere in this study did it show whether education plays a significant role in the police profession.

In other countries, there is also a large debate on police training and education. Involvement of universities remains a relatively recent and underdeveloped phenomenon in England and Wales, more opportunities and significant developments have begun to emerge (Wood & Tong, 2009). This is especially true since the Police Reform Act 2002, drawing up recommendations in *Training Matters*, which formally acknowledged deficiencies in police training and initiated the development of a new Initial Police Learning and Development Program (IPLDP) (Wood & Tong, 2009). IPLDP, has been adopted by all 43 Home Office police services in England and Wales by April 2006, and does not imply university involvement in any way. IPLDP just gave the police services in England and Wales greater scope in choosing how to deliver training to new recruits, including the possibility of working with local universities in the provision of initial police training (Wood & Tong, 2009). The Student Officer Program (SOP) is a program that was developed in England over a three-and-a-half-year period (Wood & Tong, 2009). The SOP was developed as one of five pilot schemes sanctioned by the Home Office that became an

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“early adopter” in initiating the establishment of IPLDP nationally (Inspectorate, 2005). It combined professional, academic, and competency-based learning, attracting an academic award in addition to the achievement of fully qualified police officer status (Wood & Tong, 2009). The SOP began in September 2004 and by the end of 2007 a total of 19 intakes of students, each with approximately 30-40 student officers, had joined the program (Wood & Tong, 2009).

Sir Ronnie Flanagan expresses two arguments that favor university involvement in police training (Wood & Tong, 2009). First, it suggested that the qualities needed of today’s police officers require a kind of learning that is more commonly associated with a university education as opposed to a traditional police training school: a more confident police service-one which emphasizes individual professionalism and which is founded upon strong standards and team values which means we need to move away from training towards education (Flanagan, 2008).

Despite moves towards greater university involvement there are still doubters within the police. The first form of resistance relates to the distinction between education and training. From an educational perspective, it is argued that training falls below what universities should be engaged in and that the learning involved in police training is far too practical to count as academic (Peters, 1966). The second form of resistance concerns the question of who owns the right to discipline student officers (Wood & Tong, 2009). More specifically, there is a concern that university departments lack the required means of providing a sufficiently disciplined setting, given the hierarchical culture of police work and the laissez-faire attitude of liberal educational (Wood & Tong, 2009). The third form of resistance relates to the question over what should take priority in the management of student police officers: their educational needs or their deployment as an operational resource (Wood & Tong, 2009).

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So given the research that has been conducted throughout the years, there is no real sure evidence that police officers should have to have a college education, there is however research that tends to show more motivation among college students to strive for individual success. So until they conduct more extensive research we may never really know if education has an impact at all on police work. Maybe the United States and other countries can work together to come up with a research plan to see just how much education if any plays a role in police work, until then I believe that police training and on-the-job training are sufficient enough in the police work force, but an 2-year degree can be crucial in career advancement.

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