



Meeting Their Needs: Evaluating Agency-Specific Workplace Factors to Enhance Officer Retention Strategies

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ABSTRACT

Research Summary. Sworn officers remain the most critical and costly asset of any police agency. Due to complexities surrounding factors such as job motivation, organizational commitment, and agency structure, law enforcement organizations that want to understand officer retention require unique strategies. This study's purpose is to develop a comprehensive evaluation report of retention factors, utilizing a case study of a mid-size municipal police department. Participants were identified as sworn officers within the agency up to the rank of sergeant (N =367). Using the Likert scale and open-ended survey responses, we evaluated perceptions of workplace factors (External Job Opportunities, Compensation, Personal Characteristics, Organizational Issues, and Employee Needs) against officer retention decisions. Ordinary least squares regression found officers who indicated higher agreement with *Employee Needs* ($\beta = 0.262$, s.e. = 0.69, $p < 0.001$) were significantly more likely to report intention to remain with the agency. Open-ended responses provided practical direction for the implementation of findings into agency practices.

Policy Implications. Policy implications include integrating these findings into organizational procedures and supporting action research components. The research design strengthened the agency's capacity to evaluate officers' needs, while findings targeted areas for strategy development. These components combine to create an agency-specific mechanism that complements police retention assessments. This framework reinforces the importance of officers' voices in staffing evaluations; officers provide a needed viewpoint to ensure that lived experiences align with agency objectives.

Keywords: officer retention, turnover intention, staffing, action research



Introduction

For law enforcement agencies, determining where to focus staffing efforts without analysis to inform direction can be like receiving a service call with no geographical location. Without precise direction an agency can waste precious time navigating areas that may not be relevant. Given an ever-expanding list of motivation and commitment factors, individuals tasked with developing appropriate action plans can quickly become overwhelmed or misguided by best practices and recommendations if they do not have critical assessment of the agency.

Professional organizations have labeled personnel staffing challenges as a “crisis,” leading to heightened attention for police recruitment and retention across the United States (Police Executive Research Forum [PERF], 2019; 2021; International Association of Chiefs of Police [IACP], 2020). This has launched multiple efforts to clarify noted complexities of commitment and motivation using a modern lens (Morrow, et al., 2021; Copeland, et al., 2022; Wojslawowicz, et al., 2023). However, while the “crisis” label has bolstered empirical research, lingering impacts have led others to question whether the reported phenomenon is appropriately named (Wilson & Grammich, 2024). A staffing crisis suggests a period of increased challenges with the hope of returning to the status quo; whereas a pragmatic approach would view these conditions as a new normal (De Smet, et al., 2024; Wilson et al., 2024). As a result, a shift in how staffing should be evaluated prompts police to prioritize individualized methods of assessment against a more generalized backdrop of police staffing nation-wide.

Pressures surrounding modern staffing challenges stem from increased retirements, reduced applicants, and heightened voluntary turnover (PERF, 2019; 2021; IACP, 2020). The Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 sought to increase sworn officers by awarding grant funds (U.S. Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs, 2000). Thirty years later, officers hired during this boom are eligible for retirement. Advances in policing professionalism, changes in public perception, and the availability of alternative careers have challenged traditional hiring practices; what worked in the past may no longer be effective (Wojslawowicz, 2021; Wojslawowicz, et al., 2024). This paper will specifically examine heightened voluntary turnover through an action-research lens. Agencies must deconstruct and evaluate this perfect storm of widespread impacts to determine appropriate mitigation responses.

Financial costs are perhaps the most universal method for agencies to demonstrate the negative effects of police turnover. The cost of officer attrition can ultimately impact public safety through increased response times and affect budgets through greater costs for onboarding processes, new equipment, and training (Mourtgos, et al., 2022; Hilal & Litsey, 2020). Replacing an officer, even one with less than three years of experience, can cost a department from one to five times the officer’s salary (Orrick, 2002; 2008). In 2009, Copeland (as cited in Wilson, 2010) estimated the average cost to select, hire, and train a new officer was \$58,000. Rough inflation estimates for 2025 now place this figure at approximately \$87,000. Given the accompanying loss of knowledge and skills, all agencies should strengthen staffing strategies regardless of perceived need.



Considering the varying nuances in agency structures, each organization seeking to obtain an accurate understanding of officer retention should adopt strategies calibrated to itself. Noting the gap in available models for staffing development planning, this study supports the construction of a comprehensive evaluation of retention factors within a single mid-size municipal police department. Further, this study adopts an action research approach, ensuring agency involvement throughout the research design process to prioritize implementation.

Literature Review

Staffing assessments must navigate both recruitment and retention. In many aspects, these fields should not be separated, as challenges felt by officer retention are exacerbated by declining application pools (Skaggs & Montgomery, 2022). Yet, one can argue a focus on retention, rather than recruitment, provides a more efficient pathway for agencies to direct efforts (Wilson, et al., 2023). When trying to understand an organization's retention character, Tyson & Charman (2023) call for a people-centered approach that pays attention to the organization and focuses on the officers. As a result, law enforcement benefits from a highly focused problem-solving strategy tailored to each agency (Wojslawowicz, et al., 2024).

As previously noted, literature about officer staffing proliferated during the COVID-19 pandemic, arguably due to attention from professional law enforcement organizations (PERF, 2021; 2023; IACP, 2020). However, concerns over police staffing are not new. For example, the Bureau of Justice Statistics reported that between 1997 and 2016, local officer rates per 1,000 residents increased nationwide by only 11%, despite a 21% increase in population (Hyland & Davis, 2019). Modern literature examining police turnover intentions is relatively scarce. Works that fit these parameters have found that law enforcement career motivations and turnover results are multifaceted (Matz et al., 2014; Nyunt, 2022; Wojslawowicz, 2021).

"Turnover intention" is the deliberate willingness to leave an organization, often measured across specific intervals (Matz et al., 2014). Contributors to turnover intention are well-established and persistent, including concerns of legitimacy, generational shifts, and management challenges (Todak, 2017; Wilson & Miles-Johnson, 2024). Turnover intention is not the same as turnover rate, which has been examined in studies such as Wareham, et al. (2015), the use of Bureau of Justice Statistics Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics (LEMAS) and Census of State and Local Law Enforcement Agencies (CSLLEA) surveys. Wareham, et al. (2015) provided a nation-wide view of turnover rates, defined as the number of full-time sworn personnel who separated from responding agencies and sub-categorized. However, more recent publications of the CSLLEA survey have not included employee separation figures. Thus, turnover intention has largely remained examined at the organizational level within the United States.

The work by Wareham, et al. (2015) demonstrated turnover rates are contextual, varying by geographic location and police organization. A recent study examining officer resignations and



retirements in the post-George Floyd timeframe found most participating agencies experienced an increase in turnover; however, a select few did not (Adams et al., 2023). Those outliers were described as, “smaller suburban agencies, or in one case, a sheriff’s department” (Adams, et al., 2023, p.23). This suggests that turnover effects are felt differently even following a widespread event.

Just as retention rates are contextual, turnover intentions are individualized. In a meta-analysis of turnover intent, factors such as job satisfaction, other career opportunities, and psychological distress were individual predictors (Matz, et al., 2014). When asked, officers reported that job demand stressors, psychological distress, commitments (organizational and occupational), and burnout all played a role in turnover intentions (Drew, et al., 2024; Charman & Bennett, 2022). The unique nature of turnover intentions underscores the need for personalized retention strategies that consider the individual experiences and challenges officers face. Puhakka, et al., (2021) argued turnover intentions can also be examined from an assessment of what is external to the self through workplace environmental factors. Therefore, turnover intentions can be viewed as both unique to each person and a shared experience. This combination of individual and organizational is also characteristic of police career motivations (Foley, et al., 2008; White, et al., 2010). Therefore, organizations should base retention efforts both on known factors identified in industry literature and characteristics that are unique to the agency.

Workplace Factors and Action Research

As stated, turnover intention can be examined from both individual (basic psychological need) and organizational approaches (Puhakka et al., 2021). When researchers examine workplace factors resulting from the organization’s environment, they seek to isolate components the agency might address through department practices (Wilson et al., 2010). Lynch & Tuckey’s (2004) model of workplace factors that may affect officer turnover intention includes (1) the impact of other opportunities; (2) actual and potential compensation; (3) personal characteristics and demographic factors; (4) organizational health, policy, and culture; and (5) employee needs. Subsequently, the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) and RAND’s Center on Quality Policing provided a report on Lynch & Tuckey’s model, emphasizing practical considerations for law enforcement (Wilson et al., 2010). Workplace factors have been categorized as subsets of the Lynch & Tuckey (2004) model, such as management/leadership styles, work-life balance, recruitment practices and training, and officer expectations (Davies et al., 2024).

Notably, the Lynch & Tuckey model and discussion of workplace factors find many parallels with general concepts presented in organizational justice literature. The framework of organizational justice is centered on an employee’s perception of fair treatment by leadership (Wolfe & Piquero, 2011). Variations of organizational justice, or how fair treatment can be perceived by an employee, include the examination of fair distribution of resources (distributive justice), involvement in decision-making processes (procedural justice), and interpersonal treatment (interactional justice, also called informational and interpersonal justice) (see Wolfe & Lawson, 2020). Wolfe &



Lawson's (2020) meta-analysis emphasizes organizational justice as a significant predictor of work outcomes and notes connections between fair treatment and increased commitment among justice system employees. Significantly, how fairness is perceived and leadership's role in forming these perceptions influences officer motivation, trust, and commitment to the agency (Bradford et al., 2014; Donner et al., 2017; Wolfe & Nix, 2017).

Within the purview of turnover intentions, analysis of organizational justice factors have found a reduction in adverse effects for criminal justice employees (Byrne, 2005; Lambert & Hogan, 2009; Lambert et al., 2010). Further, Lynch & Tuckey's (2004) work on voluntary turnover include model factors such as employee needs (i.e., fair treatment, agency support) and organizational health/culture (i.e., leadership behavior), that fall within the purview of organizational justice as well as the paradigm of workplace factor influence. Nevertheless, a significant component in using workplace factors to evaluate retention is the organization's ability to adjust factors and make changes based on findings.

At its center, the action research framework intends to produce change and improvement within the context in which it is performed (Susaman & Evered, 2023). Action research is a method of study that engages active partnerships between practitioner and researcher, where focus is given to a specific problem to understand and help implement solutions (National Institute of Justice, 2024). More specifically, practical action research models concern themselves equally with both process and result, finding strength in the capacity to identify issues or problems within professional contexts (Leith & Day, 2000; National Institute of Justice, 2024). Applied to law enforcement agencies, action research invests time and effort into building capacity for problem-solving through constant input and evaluation. Recommendations that reflect action research in police staffing include constructing human resource strategies to fit a specific agency and investing in continuous feedback systems, such as surveying personnel to ensure their needs are met and procedures are communicated accurately (Sun et al., 2022). This study's research design seeks not only to demonstrate an archetype for building a sustainable research approach within an organization, but it also tries to inspire continuous improvement and incorporate relevant factors (Wilson & Miles-Johnson, 2024).

Identifying relevant factors for staffing assessments is a cost-effective way for agencies to quickly identify their strengths and needs (Quick & Wolff, 2024; O'Guinn et al., 2024; Wojslawowicz et al., 2024). Quick & Wolff (2024) utilize a cross-sectional method to assess the relationships between workplace factor components and turnover intention at the New York Police Department. Regression models found job satisfaction, financial factors, and job fulfillment to predict lower levels of turnover intention (i.e., increased commitment to the agency), whereas individuals who reported intention to separate were more likely to report issues with work-life balance and environmental factors (Quick & Wolff, 2024). Importantly, these findings translated into relatively inexpensive environmental solutions that the agency could directly control to address turnover concerns—such as maintaining a clean workplace and good condition of equipment.



O’Guinn et al. (2024) also demonstrate the benefit of department-specific retention evaluations. Their study examined agency hiring and employment data for voluntary separations—with specific attention to an officer’s tenure with the agency. Findings were agency specific. For example, the short average tenure of those with prior military experience provided insight for department strategies for that group (O’Guinn et al., 2024). Relevant to the current study’s design, researchers argued for “more research...to determine why officers decided to stay or leave their agency” (O’Guinn et al., 2024, p. 8). Therefore, this study seeks to evaluate the impact of workplace factors on retention decisions through an active research lens, supporting the development of a comprehensive retention assessment with the organization’s participation.

Methodology

The study adopted a participatory action research design, a subgroup of action research that emphasizes the collaborative effort of problem solving, improvement of practices, and refining actions based on impacts discovered (Leith & Day, 2000; Leykum, et al., 2009). The primary goal was supporting the development of a comprehensive retention report to contextualize system processes and integrate acquired knowledge into agency-specific responses for future evaluation. The study was led by the primary research question (RQ1): What is the relationship between workplace factor variables and officer retention decisions within the participating agency (Wilson et al., 2010)? This exploration of workplace factors on employee retention decisions centered on a framework of variables provided by Wilson et al. (2010) and adapted into survey items with organizational input; a critical element of the study was future strategy development and adaptation from outputs. A secondary research question (RQ2) was: Why do officers plan to stay or leave the agency (Snipe, 2021; O’Guinn et al., 2024)? This question was intended to provide additional insight into directing agency implementation.

Setting and Participants

The study occurred within a mid-size southeastern municipal U.S. law enforcement agency. The study’s population consisted of sworn officers employed by the agency—all holding the rank of sergeant or below (N=367). The agency population included those identified as being on active military leave or Family and Medical Leave (FMLA). Participants were asked to attend one of three master roll call sessions, during which they were provided with an overview of the study, given the opportunity to ask questions, and provided with informed consent. Participants were advised that involvement in the study was completely voluntary and confidential; no identifying information would be shared outside of the primary investigator. The survey instrument was accessed via an anonymous QR code through Qualtrics™. Of the 367 officers, 219 attended one of three roll call sessions, and of those, 207 participated in the survey. Upon review of submitted responses, seven were incomplete and thus removed from the data set. A 91.3% participation rate was recorded for those who attended roll call sessions. Using Cochran’s formula, a sample size of 188 (C.I. 95%, 5%



M.E.) was calculated for responses to reflect the target population. Therefore, it was affirmed that the sample collected (n = 200) represented the intended population. Demographic information is provided in Table 1.

TABLE 1. Sample Population Demographics

DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLE	FREQUENCY RESPONSE	
	<i>n</i>	%
Age		
21-25	33	16.5
26-30	56	28.0
31-35	39	19.5
36-40	32	16.0
41-45	21	10.5
46-50	10	5.0
51-55	7	3.5
56-60	1	0.5
61+	1	0.5
Gender		
Male	164	82.0
Female	34	17.0
Other	1	0.5
Prefer Not to Answer	1	0.5
Race		
White/Caucasian	166	83.0
Black/African American	21	10.5
Hispanic/Latinx	8	4.0
American Indian/Native American	0	0.0
Pacific Islander/Hawaiian	0	0.0
Asian	0	0.0
Other	5	2.5
Education		
High School/GED	13	6.5
Associates	11	5.5
Bachelor's	134	67
Master's	40	20.0
Doctorate/Juris Doctorate	2	1.0
Assignment		
Community Oriented Policing	9	4.5
Investigations/Forensic Services	36	18.0
Patrol/Team Investigations	132	66
Professional Standards	2	1.0
Special Operations	21	10.5



DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLE	FREQUENCY RESPONSE	
	<i>n</i>	%
Years of Service		
< 4	80	40.0
5-9	67	33.5
10-14	24	12.0
15-19	18	9.0
20-24	9	4.5

Note. N = 200.

Instrument Development

Instrument development underwent a multi-step validity process, including a pilot study involving officers of a similar rank from a nearby agency. Feedback on the instrument was gathered from the pilot study, followed by Cronbach's alpha for internal consistency of combined rating scales. Each construct reached acceptable to high levels of internal consistency, provided in Table 2. As previously noted, factor scales were designed based on literature review and input from the agency.

TABLE 2. Construct Reliability Analysis

CONSTRUCT	ITEM SCALE	CRONBACH'S ALPHA	COMBINED SCORE
		<i>a</i>	<i>a</i>
Workplace Factors			0.882
Compensation	8	0.719	
Employee Needs	7	0.852	
Job Opportunities*	2	-	
Personal Characteristics	5	0.710	
Organizational Issues	10	0.884	

* Job Opportunities responses were divided into two categories: consideration of leaving law enforcement and consideration of a different police agency.

Retention was defined by the agency as an intention to remain with the organization (i.e., turnover intention) and measured on a five-point scale (Snipe, 2021; Matz et al., 2014). Participants were asked to indicate their intention to remain with the agency within the following categories: 1= As long as I am able, 2= Until I reach retirement, 3= Undecided, 4= Until I find a more desirable job opportunity, 5= I plan to leave the agency as soon as possible. Workplace factors were Compensation, Employee Needs, Personal Characteristics, Job Opportunities, and Organizational Issues (see Figure 1) (Lynch & Tuckey, 2004; Wilson et al., 2010). Participants were also presented with an open-ended prompt after the survey that asked them to indicate whether they intended

to remain or separate from the agency (yes/no) and provide vital insight to direct agency focus (Snipe, 2021; Singer & Couper, 2017). Responses underwent thematic analysis coding of reoccurring themes. Codes and coding were peer-reviewed for validity purposes. A member of the agency reviewed by for appropriateness.

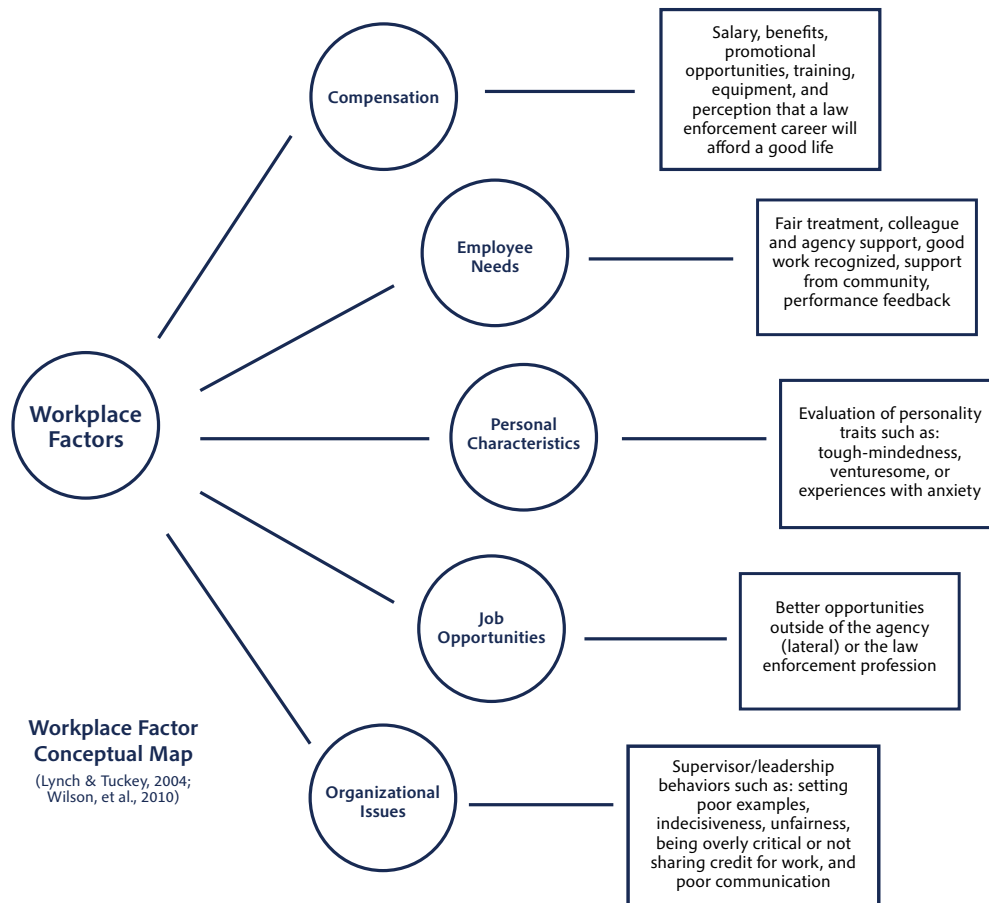


FIGURE 1. Workplace Factor Conceptual Map

Results

The analytical plan sought to examine the primary research question (RQ1): What is the relationship between workplace factor variables and officer retention decisions within the participating agency? SPSS™ v29 was utilized for statistical analysis, and NVIVO™ v11 for coding of open responses. Descriptive statistics of *Workplace* and *Retention* variable responses were provided to the agency for individual factor review, including a cross-tabulation of *Retention* response groupings by control variables (i.e., Age, Assignment, Division Assignment, Education, Gender, Race, Years of Service). Cross tabulations were utilized to review group differences and identify potential target areas for the agency.



Bivariate correlation analysis produced moderate to low significant relationships, as viewed in the correlation matrix in Table 3. While negative correlations were viewed between *Job Opportunities (External)* ($r = -0.398, p < 0.01$) and *Job Opportunities (Other Agency)* ($r = -0.385, p < 0.01$) on retention responses, positive correlations were recorded between *Compensation*, *Organizational Issues* and *Employee Needs* (Respectively: $r = 0.435, r = 0.390, r = 0.447, p < 0.01$). Meaning, when participants reported a higher agreement to *Job Opportunities*, lower intentions to remain with the agency were noted. Whereas higher agreement to *Compensation*, *Organizational Issues*, and *Employee Needs* factors saw a higher reported intention to remain with the agency. Of additional interest was the strong positive correlation between *Organizational Issues* and *Employee Needs* ($r = 0.813, p < 0.01$). This indicates a relationship where the two factors change together at a constant rate, implying higher agreements to one variable also saw a higher responses to the other—but does not imply cause and effect. Retention responses were also examined against control variables (i.e. *Age*, *Gender*, *Race*, *Education*, *Assignment*, and *Years of Service*) with no notable correlations noted, suggesting these factors had no significant impact to retention decisions.

TABLE 3. Correlations of Workplace Factors and Retention Variables

VARIABLE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Retention	—						
2. Job Opportunities (External)	-.385**	—					
3. Job Opportunities (Other Agency)	-.398**	.300**	—				
4. Compensation	.435**	-.237**	-.373**	—			
5. Personal Characteristics	-.141*	-.046	.032	-.088	—		
6. Organizational Issues	.390**	-.348**	-.277**	.574*	.081	—	
7. Employee Needs	.447**	-.364**	-.344**	.591**	.066	.813**	—

Note. ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$.

Next, to evaluate whether agency retention decisions may be impacted by workplace factors, ordinary least squares regression (OLS) was performed with required assumptions met. Workplace factors were measured against the binary planning to stay/leave survey prompt. The coefficients represented comparisons between intention to remain with the agency (coded 0) and intentions to separate (coded as 1). Binary logistic regression was also performed, and similar direction and significance logit specifications were found in the main OLS specification (see Angrist & Pischke, 2009; Cunningham, 2021 – output provided in Appendix B). The model accounted for



a moderate proportion (28.6%) of variance in decisions $R^2 = 0.286$, $F(5,193) = 15.43$, $p < 0.001$. *Employee Needs* ($\beta = 0.262$, $s.e. = 0.69$, $p < 0.001$) and *Job Opportunities (Other Agencies)* ($\beta = -0.066$, $s.e. = 0.023$, $p = 0.005$) were significant contributors to the model. Notably, *Employee Needs* maintained the largest influence. For every unit of increase in *Employee Needs*, intention to remain with the agency increased by 26.2%, holding other variables constant. In other words, officers who indicated higher agreement with *Employee Needs* were significantly more likely to report intention to remain with the agency.

TABLE 4. OLS Regression Table – Planning to Stay/Leave

EFFECTS	ESTIMATES	SE	β	95% CI		t	p
				LL	UL		
(Constant)	.923	.205	.149	.519	1.327	4.509	<.001
Compensation	.104	.056	-.091	-.006	.215	1.865	.064
Personal Characteristics	-.081	.055	-.122	-.189	.028	-1.462	.145
Organizational Issues	-.078	.069	.417	-.213	.058	-1.127	.261
Employee Needs	.262	.069	-.189	.126	.398	3.793	<.001
Job Opportunities (Other Agencies)	-.066	.023	.149	-.112	-.020	-2.840	.005

Note. N=199. Adjusted R Square = .267, CI = Confidence Interval, LL= Lower Level, UL= Upper Limit. Variable *Job Opportunities (External)* was not included in the model due to multicollinearity presumptions between the constant.

Open-ended responses following the binary planning to stay/leave prompt were used to provide context for reported factors. Participants indicating their intention to remain with the agency referenced pay and benefits (*Compensation*), the opportunity to advance their career (*Career Development*), and *Job Satisfaction* most frequently (see Figure 2). Respondents expressing their intention to separate identified the same top factors as those who intended to stay, albeit with negative sentiments. A review of codes and full quotes (redacted of identifying comments) was provided to the agency for examples of direct focus areas to support action planning. Due to the amount of detail provided, many of the responses were categorized under multiple codes.

Discussion

The officers’ perspective on workplace factors influencing their retention decisions is a crucial element in the formulation of a police agency’s staffing plan. While agencies should employ



additional analytical strategies, such as examining hiring factors or staffing allocation (O’Guinn, et al., 2024; Wilson & Grammich, 2024), capturing the officer’s voice is a potent method for gauging how current policies and procedures impact the staff (Sun, et al., 2022).

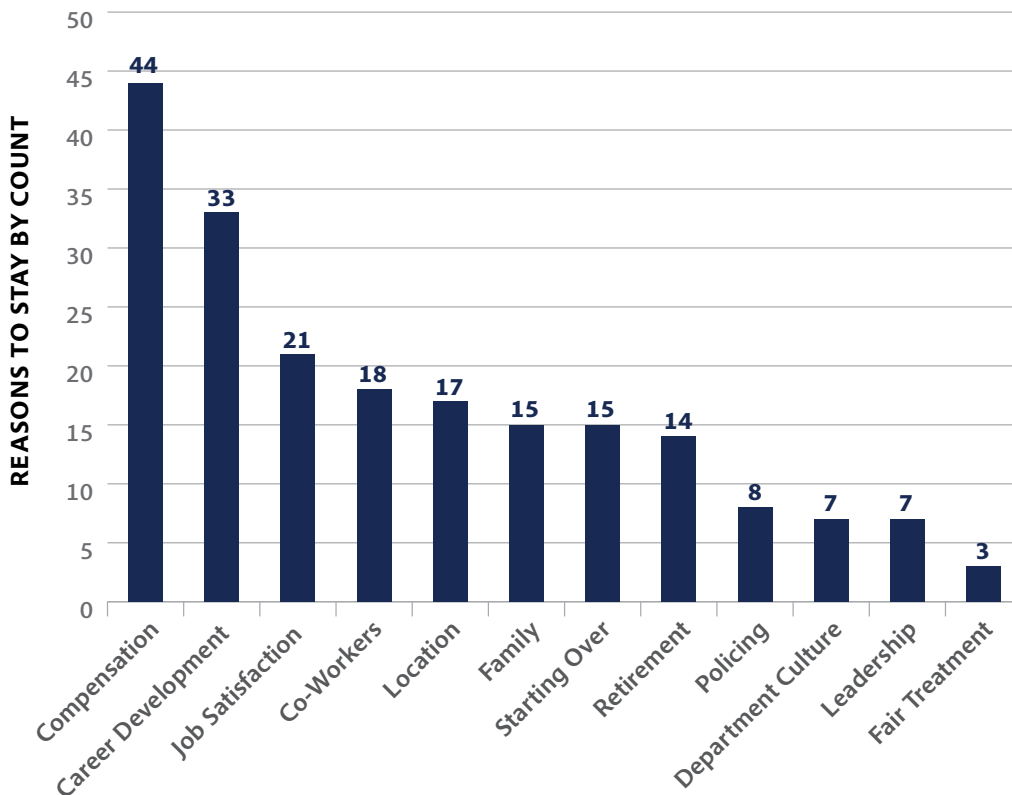


FIGURE 2. Reasons to Stay - Responses by Count

This study sought to identify how workplace factors impacted a specific police organization, allowing it to isolate focal points for strategy development. As *Employee Needs* was a significant factor in influencing retention decisions, that component was individually reviewed for procedure recommendations. Specifically, the study found evidence for strengthening organizational components, such as ensuring employees are recognized and appreciated for good work; providing feedback on work performance; garnering support for officers from the agency, community, and colleagues; treating employees fairly; and fostering strong working relationships among coworkers. The study’s design and findings suggest the value for organizations in conducting regular employee surveys to better understand current needs, give staff members a voice, and help mitigate turnover intentions (Wilson et al., 2010; Tyson & Charman, 2023).

These findings are consistent with prior work that recommends creating environments where employees feel valued and that advocate improvements to culture and workplace (organizational justice) factors (Drew et al., 2024; Hernandez-Orella, 2024; Wolfe & Lawson, 2020). Changes take shape at a relational level. Direct supervisors and leadership play a significant role



as the conduits between functionality of the agency and officer motivation and trust (Bradford et al., 2014; Donner et al., 2017; Wolfe & Nix, 2017). These efforts go beyond identifying a need to providing a visible response and establishing internal support systems for the officers (Wilson et al., 2010).

However, the statistical significance of one factor should not lead to neglect of others. Our findings indicate which factors were most influential for the participating agency at the time of analysis. Literature demonstrates that career motivations and turnover intentions are complex (Matz et al., 2014; Nyunt, 2022; Wojslawowicz, 2021). For example, this study found that *Compensation*, *Organizational Issues*, and *Employee Needs* positively correlate with retention responses. Nevertheless, in open-ended responses, participants mentioned *Compensation* most frequently as a reason to remain or separate.

Further, the top responses (*Compensation* and *Career Development*) were the same for both stay and leave categories. This provides an interesting paradigm to consider for changed motivations and unmet expectations (White et al., 2010; Davies et al., 2024). Prior research has identified both financial compensation and barriers to career development as associated with officer retention (Davies et al., 2024; Tyson & Charman, 2023). However, having identical factors on opposing sides of an employee's employment decision has yet to be examined within law enforcement. This dichotomy has received some attention in the business sector (see Flowers & Hughes, 1973). Ultimately, the examination of open-ended responses was not intended to provide over-generalized concepts for organizations to assimilate into their retention practices but rather to identify critical components for review in light of a comprehensive assessment. In other words, such responses gave the agency critical insight into how measured variables translated to current procedures and produced more accurate and valuable data (Singer & Couper, 2017), addressing an essential role in agency implementation and a known limitation to strictly quantitative assessments.

Limitations

Limitations for this study include using cross-sectional data; such findings only reflect officer perceptions at the time of collection. However, this research strategy, combined with additional factor review, helped develop a robust staffing report tailored to the agency itself. Second, this study focused specifically on sworn officers up to the rank of sergeant. Many essential nonsworn agency staff and leadership were absent from this population. Including all groups would have increased understanding of the organization's retention responses and allowed comparisons among groups.

Further, since this study was intended to advance understanding of one agency's staffing components, findings are only generalizable within the studied population. The inherent complexities surrounding police labor issues make it difficult to encapsulate retention decisions. However, the action research framework empowers agencies to take ownership of research (from design to implementation) and incorporate the officer's voice, ultimately leading to understanding of their ecosystem's retention.



Policy Implications

Action research intends to produce change and improvement within its deployed context (Susaman & Evered, 2023). Thus, we would like to highlight policy and procedure implications stemming from this research through the recommendation of similar techniques for future researcher-practitioner collaborations. First, we developed the research design and survey instrument with input from the participating agency. This included a collaborative effort on research question development, literature review, identifying and defining workplace factors of interest, data collection, and codebook review. Factors were selected from literature with the organization's input. Specifically, factors were prioritized based upon direct relevance to a standing practice or procedure, which in turn provided direction in the interpretation and implementation of potential findings.

As part of the distribution plan, findings were presented to department command staff to solicit initial feedback and next steps. As a result, a diverse group of officers (e.g., SMART team) was selected to review the findings and suggest areas for action. Not only did this strategy help create an avenue for rapid officer feedback, but it also improved leadership's ability to demonstrate responsiveness (organizational justice) in both short-term and long-term needs that may impact retention decisions (Wolfe & Lawson, 2020). SMART team input was received for areas such as promotional procedure (increasing transparency of the promotional process), internal communication practices (information sharing between leadership and supervisors), leadership development (opportunities for training), and needs identification (formalized processes for officer input to be received). This process identified components of the *Employee Needs* factor to incorporate into written procedure. Ultimately, study findings and SMART team feedback were incorporated with additional internal evaluations to develop a retention strategic plan.

From a broader perspective, the partnering agency's input and feedback, incorporated from the study's onset, have created a baseline for future measurement. It is recommended the organization distribute a secondary survey to observe perceived improvements and monitor new factors of interest outside the study's original framework. While the officer perspective is just one of many factors to be considered in evaluating a police agency's staffing needs (Wilson & Grammich, 2024), the organization's participation throughout the research effort helped solidify its commitment to evidence-based evaluation of policy and practice, underscoring its crucial role in staffing research.

Summary

This study aimed to analyze officer turnover intentions and perceptions of workplace factors to help build one agency's comprehensive organization retention strategy. Given the approximate 26% increase observed in intention to remain with the agency for officers who reported their needs being met by the agency, meaningful integration of those needs served as the agency's foundation



in retention planning development. Combined with additional areas of analysis, this study's officer perspective provides a necessary element in staffing assessments for police agencies to evaluate how policy and procedure affect staff (Sun et al., 2022). This study incorporated agency input from the beginning—from research question and instrument development to implementation of findings. It was explicitly tailored to the agency's interest and, as a result, produced insights that were directly relevant to the organization's needs.

Police agencies preparing to undergo similar efforts must ensure that the officers' voice is captured in the staffing assessment process; the lived experience behind the data is critical to achieving relevant and sustainable staffing goals. Ultimately, the importance of an organization effectively supporting its employees is just one finding that demonstrates how police departments can gain specific insight into addressing officer retention's complex challenges.



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Appendix

TABLE 5. Binary Logistic Regression – Planning to Stay/Leave

FACTORS	B	SE	WALD	SIG.	EXP(B)
Constant	– 3.619	1.419	6.503	.011	.027
Compensation	.666	.372	3.208	.073	1.947
Personal Characteristics	–.327	.370	.782	.377	.721
Organizational Issues	–.478	.456	1.099	.295	.620
Employee Needs	1.547	.485	10.192	.001	4.697
Job Opportunity (Other Agency)	–.424	.156	7.410	.006	.655

Note. Variable *Job Opportunities (External)* was not included in the model due to multicollinearity presumptions between the constant. *Employee Needs* 'Exp (B)' indicated for every one unit increase in agreement, the odds of a person indicating that they planned to remain with the agency changed by a factor of 4.70.