

# Causes of Law Enforcement Attrition Utah County

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# Purpose:

The purpose of this study was to understand what factors are causing higher attrition rates among law enforcement agencies in Utah County.



## Research Method:

- Our research project included getting responses from various police departments throughout Utah County
- The surveys were individually handed out and then passed on from one officer to the next.



## Research Method (Continued)

- A survey was conducted that current officers had a chance to answer questions about their current police departments regarding things with their hiring processes
- Some questions were about what they thought could help improve hiring.
- Lastly, questions showed the different demographics of people who were in the police force.



# Demographic Results

- The target demographic we were seeking were police officers within Utah County
- The surveys were approved to be given through each organization, but was not distributed by the police chiefs.
- At the end of the surveys, we asked officers to identify their age, gender, rank, and years of service.



## Demographic Results (Cont)

- Our results showed that a significant amount of our respondents were males,
- Most of the respondents were officers/deputies, with a captain and a few supervisors.
- There was almost an even split between those under the age of 40 and those over the age of 40.
- Information that was submitted for years of service was relevant to age, as the numbers were corresponding for their age and the amount of years they have served.



# Literature Review:

- The Law Enforcement Retention Study in 2016 focused on 26 North Carolina Police Departments of various sizes. The study issued a survey to officers working for agencies in North Carolina. The survey was comprised of 29 questions. The study identified three specific areas that impacted the officers and ultimately retention, they were: Pay/Benefits, Commitment, and Communication
- A study done by Raymond, Hickman, Miller, and Wong in 2005 discusses the changes that law enforcement agencies are facing, especially post 9/11. Agencies are faced with expanding responsibilities, retirement of the baby boomer generation, and the implementation of community policing. This study focused on the Long Beach Police Department (LBPD) to understand the issue of hiring and retention agencies are facing and what LBPD has done to combat this problem. The study further draws on the parallels between law enforcement and the military and how law enforcement can look to military tactics to hire and retain officers.



# Literature Review Continued:

- A study done by Wilson, Dalton, Scheer, and Gammich in 2010 focused specifically on recruitment and retention in law enforcement agencies. The study recognizes that attrition can be caused by several factors: budget crises, organizational characteristics that are unappealing to officers, baby-boom generation retirement, and younger generations more likely than older workers to change careers to find work they like best. The study offers four practices agencies can adopt to improve recruitment and retention: Job satisfaction interviews and surveys to help agencies understand how they can attract and keep officers; providing realistic job previews to candidates and requiring contracts with new employees; enhancing compensation and other benefits; last, encouraging greater employee engagement.
- Finally, a study by Wilson, Rostker, and Fan in 2010 focused on creating evidence-based lessons for personnel planning in large agencies. The study sought to survey every U.S. municipal police agency with at least 300 sworn officers on their current personnel profiles and the effectiveness of their recruitment and retention programs. While other studies created surveys designed to assess an individual officer, this survey focused on the agency as a whole, designing the survey for a member of management to fill out. The survey asked questions regarding the number of cadets who entered the academy, how many successfully completed the course, and how many successfully completed their probationary stage. The study found that attrition in a given year is most common among the most junior personnel, who may still be exploring career possibilities, and the most senior personnel, who are entering retirement.



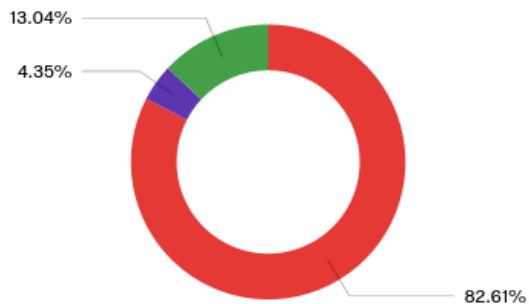


# Key Findings

There are three primary factors that law enforcement agencies in Utah County are contending with, and as a result are facing a high levels of attrition.

Each of these factors are related, and share a significant degree of overlap. Of those three primary factors, one in particular stood out...

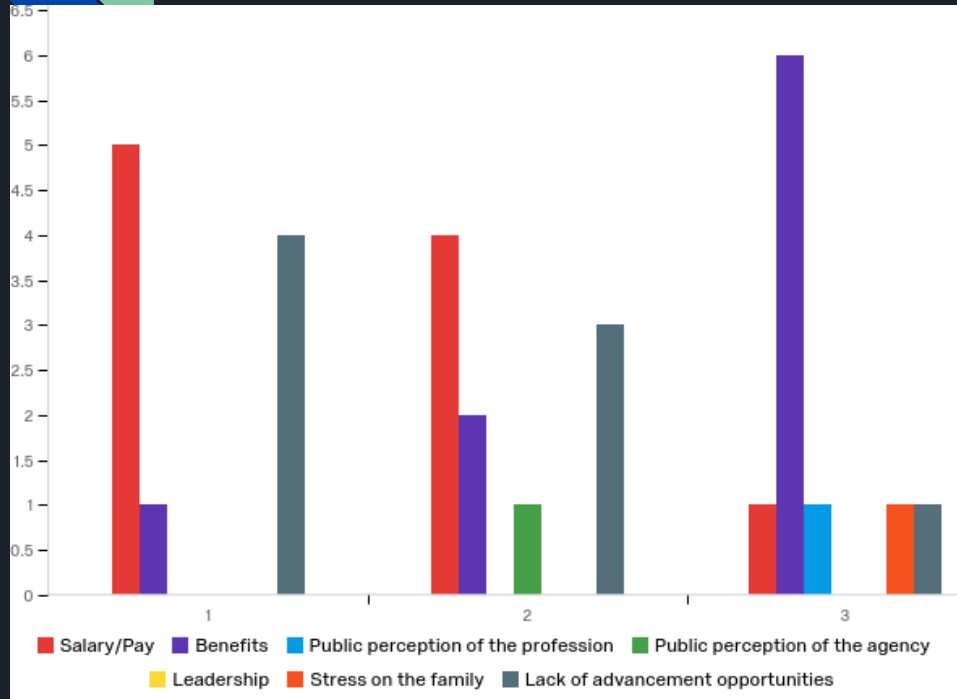
# Key Findings Continued...



Salary, advancement opportunities, and benefits were the primary reasons that law enforcement agencies in Utah County faced high levels of attrition in regard to retaining and attracting personnel.

- Increased pay
- Increased benefits
- Educational opportunities
- Advancement opportunities
- Other

# Key Findings Continued...



The officers were asked to rank from most important to least important what contributed the most to wanting to leave their agency.

As shown in the graph, the options that were ranked the most in the top 3 were salary/pay, benefits, and lack of advancement opportunities.



# Why This Matters

- Personnel costs are the single largest expenditure for law enforcement agencies.
- Most agencies are adding positions on paper, but many are unable to fill them.
- The cost of hiring new personnel is substantial. The cost of leaving these vacancies open will often end up costing an agency even more due to increased overtime requirements and the potential burnout of the remaining personnel.
- Training up new hires costs a significant amount of time and money as well. An agency that underpays its personnel will often end up fronting the cost of training new personnel in the profession at full price, then lose the benefit of that investment when the newly trained officer or deputy moves to a different agency.
- High turnover is generally poor for morale.



# Conclusion

While identifying the primary factors that contribute to a problem may be straightforward, the solutions aren't. The various law enforcement agencies in Utah County are already running tight on their budgets. Funding is finite, and the responsible allocation of those funds must be balanced with the needs and desires of the communities that they serve. Ignoring the needs of the personnel isn't a viable long term strategy, and could end up adversely affecting the communities that they are tasked with supporting.



## References:

*Law Enforcement Retention Study*. (2016, November 16). Retrieved from <https://www.ncdoj.gov/getdoc/1f68a32a-ebfc-4eca-b93d-958a6e726dcb/Law-Enforcement-Retention-Survey-Results.aspx>

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