

Education for the Police Force

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The topic at hand is whether or not police officers should have a college education. Is the amount that one officer is educated have an effect on how they do their job? During research for this paper I looked into whether there were significant differences between officers that were educated and officers that had only a high school education. I found conflicting information in some of these studies but most pointed to one direction. Educating police officers can have a beneficial impact on the way they interact with the community and the attitudes they have for the job. After reviewing these studies I have come to the conclusion that a formal education should not be required for officers to enter the police force. However, the amount of education that entry level officers receive should be given after they enter the police force.

It is my personal belief that education is important in every aspect of a career. When I began researching this paper I had the concrete belief that police officers, just like everyone else, should obtain a college degree. However the findings in this research could not support my ideas and I was forced to look at this topic in a new light. I started from the beginning and started by looking into how the process began. It all arose in 1931 with the National Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement. Later reinforced by the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice in 1967, and again in 1973 by the National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals. The push to improve higher education for officers stemmed from the belief that increasing formal education standards and quality of training that policing would become more professionalized. Most studies that look into police education vs. the number of complaints against officers has shown that officers with a college education are more likely to have less complaints than compared to officers with a high school education. The complaints researched in one study were compared by citizen complaints, administered complaints, and sustained complaints. It was found that police officers with higher

degrees received less complaints than those with little to no higher education. Although when looking closely at officers with higher education the findings showed that they received *more* complaints from their supervisors and were just as likely to violate departmental policies.

(Manis, 2008)

A college education can make officers more receptive to serving the community, more ethical and moral, and more tolerant. This should suggest that college educated officers would be expected to be less supportive of abusing police authority. The second study I looked into went into the abuse of police authority. Cody Telep's study referenced a journal by R. E. Worden where he notes that police rarely abuse authority. In fact he relates it to deaths from commercial airline flights. They are rare but it doesn't mean that it wouldn't be a bad idea to find ways to make the abuse of authority become even rarer. When police officers abuse authority it can cost communities millions of dollars in legal fees each year. So Telep's study focused heavily on the relationship between higher education and abuse of authority attitudes. One study put different officers together from different educational backgrounds and then put them together with officers with similar educational backgrounds. The study concluded that when officers have a four year degree and are grouped together with one another, the effect of that education on the officers becomes slightly stronger, but nothing that could be significantly noted. So it does show that higher education has a positive impact but it really doesn't have a significant amount. (Telep, 2011)

Officers still need an education that will prepare them for the communities they will be protecting. One journal I researched references the police force of the UK and the negative parts that police officers and their culture are exposed to. Such items included cynicism, isolation, suspicion, sexism, and racism. The journal so goes into the IPLDP (Initial Police Learning and

Development Program). Their new recruits join by taking the Police Structured Entrance Assessment for Recruiting Constable Holistically (SEARCH). When they pass the test they are then entered into service and are put into the two year program (IPLPD). Recruits must meet the standards of this program which involves race and diversity training, the primary purpose of the program. It discussed the differences between organizational culture and occupational culture. Organizational culture starts from the top of the administration and works its way down, while occupational culture is maintained by front-line officers. These front-line officers do most of their work out of the sight of management and the public. This study references another study by J. Foster that deals mostly with the significance of police culture. Foster argues that the “broad assumption of police ‘culture’ is a misnomer and misleading. The culture of the police cannot be viewed as one-dimensional and static; it exists as a range of sub-cultures that is manifested in different forms in different locations.” I understand this to mean that you cannot use one training piece for every area since each area is so diverse. (Macvean & Cox, 2012)

Instead of pushing a formal education on every one of our officers I think we need to focus on individualized education for entry level officers. Degrees should be left for those officers that are wanting to move up into a higher rank as they would need to learn important skills on how to manage a workforce. Those positions should be ones that require degrees since it is more likely the ones that receive degrees are more likely to apply for those positions. However, entry level police officers should only need to know basic general education topics. Examples of courses that should be provided include but are not limited to sensitivity training, conflict management, and diverse courses that will dive into cultures, ethnicity, the humanities, and social/economic classes. These should be incorporated before, after, and at an ongoing basis after they have been accepted into service.

I think we should take into consideration what the UK has done with the use of the IPLDP. The model was that training had to be delivered locally, there needed to be an element of community engagement, and the curriculum was to be competence based with work-based assessments. With this model each police force was to organize and deliver the training on a need specific to their community. Since this can be a daunting task it was suggested that the police forces join in partnerships with local further education or higher education institutions. This would help integrate what the institutions teach. Using the training based on the institutions it would help expose the new recruits to reflect and use critical thinking. The IPLDP used two different models and categorized them into two separate groups. One was pre-join and the other post-join program. With the pre-join program heavily attracting those wanting to pursue a career in policing. If we could model our police academy education around the way the IPLDP works in the UK we too could help lower the issues of discrimination within the police force. (Macvean & Cox, 2012) (Blackmore & Simpson, 2010)

There was not a significant amount of findings that indicated that our police officers should obtain an education prior to their recruitment. One exception would be for officers that want to move up to a higher rank. These officers should go to college and obtain a degree focused on managing in order to help prepare to lead a police force and be able to manage effectively. Entry-level police officers should be provided with the training and courses they need to remain sensitive to the community they will be working to protect. The training and courses should not end after completion but should be presented to them on an on-going basis during their careers.

Bibliography

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