

**“When the badge and gun just aren’t enough”  
-Officer Retention Rate Problems**

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Kristen Leigh Moore

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This dissertation, "When the badge and gun just aren't enough: Officer Retention Rate Problems," by Kristen L Moore, is approved by:

**Dissertation  
Committee  
Chair**

Rudy Prine ✓  
Dr. Rudy Prine  
Professor of Criminal Justice

**Committee  
Member**

Wilson Huang  
Dr. Wilson Huang  
Professor of Criminal Justice

F. E. Knowles, Jr.  
Dr. Fred Knowles  
Professor of Criminal Justice

**Associate Provost  
for Graduate  
Studies and  
Research**

Becky K. daCruz  
Becky K. da Cruz, Ph. D., J.D.  
Professor of Criminal Justice

**Defense Date**

April 10, 2020

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## **ABSTRACT**

Officer retention is a major problem across the United States of America. The deficit creates problems within the agency itself, and for the citizens those officers serve and protect. I created a literature review from previous scholars on reasoning's for officer retention with the focus being on income, suicide, and burnout. I also created a questionnaire that ran from September 2019 to March 2020 with respondents being sworn officers within my own department. The data was gathered anonymously and put into a bar graph for comparison. After consideration from previous scholars and the data gathered from the questionnaire the number one reason for officer retention problems is money. Officers feel the work they provide, and the dangerous path officers must walk do not equal to the pay they are currently receiving. My thesis represents a detailed snapshot into the problems of officer retention.

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## *CHAPTER 1*

Some form or version of a police department has been around since the beginning of time and long before the United States was ever a thought. The form of policing we as a society, see today, stems from a vision from a man by the name of Sir Robert Peel. In the early nineteenth century, London was policed by four hundred and fifty constables and four thousand five hundred watchmen all at odds over their own individual powers. The opposition the police force encountered from the citizens did not create an idea of unity and peace. When Sir Robert Peel became Home Secretary of London, he was determined to correct the issues between the police department and London's citizens.

To do this, the Metropolitan Police Act of 1829 was created. The act established the Metropolitan Police of London (with the exception of the city), replacing the previously disorganized system of parish constables and watchmen. "The Act was the enabling legislation for what is often considered to be the first modern police force, the "bobbies" or "peelers" (after Peel), which served as the model for modern urban police departments throughout England" (Critchley, 1978, p. 44). Now that the act was created, what remained was to lay out guidelines for officers. Sir Robert Peel created nine principles of law enforcement in which, officers mirror to this day.

The first of the nine principles are the "basic mission for which police exist is to prevent crime and disorder as an alternative to the repression of crime and disorder by military force and severity of legal punishment" (Sir Robert Peel). Today's officer's take an oath at graduation raising their right hand, swearing to serve and protect the citizens in which they police. The language may not be as eloquent as that used by Peel stated, but the underlying meanings are the same. The second principle by Peel states, the ability of the police to perform their duties

depends upon public approval of police existence, actions, behavior and the ability of the police to secure and maintain public respect. Police departments triumph or fail based off of public support and without the citizens backing up their officers, the cohesiveness between citizens and police does not exist creating more of a problem than the crime itself.

The third principle by Peel states, the police must secure the willing cooperation of the public in voluntary observance of the law to be able to secure and maintain public respect. Relating this to today's time, officers must remember they are a citizen first and an officer second. Their goal is to create trust and not place themselves of higher importance over the citizens just because they wear a badge and gun. The fourth principle states, the degree of cooperation of the public that can be secured diminishes, proportionately, to the necessity for the use of physical force and compulsion in achieving police objectives. This principle is the driving force of contention with officers today. Are officers going beyond necessary and reasonable force to effect arrest or the duties within their job?

The fifth principle by Peel is, the police seek and preserve public favor, not by catering to public opinion, but by constantly demonstrating absolutely impartial service to the law, in complete independence of policy, and without regard to the justice or injustice of the substance of individual laws. This law should be the backbone of policing today. The law is applied equally to all people, without regard for class, race or other distinguishing features. The sixth principle by Peel, mirrors the Eighth Amendment by stating, the police should use physical force only to the extent necessary to secure observance of the law or to restore order only when the exercise of persuasion, advice and warning is found to be insufficient to achieve police objectives; and police should use only the minimum degree of physical force which is necessary on any particular occasion for achieving a legitimate police objective.

The seventh principle by Peel that is still utilized today states, the police at all times should maintain a relationship with the public that gives reality to the historic tradition that the police are the public and the public are the police. The citizens and police officers must work as a team in order to be successful in combating crime. The eighth principle states the police should always direct their actions toward their functions and never appear to usurp the powers of the judiciary by avenging individual's or the state, or authoritatively judging guilt or punishing the guilty. Lastly, the test of police efficiency is the absence of crime and disorder, not the visible evidence of police action in dealing with them. This is why the modern policing is to be proactive instead of reactive. So how to Sir Robert Peel's nine principles affect officers today? You have an individual wearing a uniform, a badge, gun, and other tools on their belt. They conduct themselves with a presence of authority, demand respect, and issue commands that should be honored.

These people can strip the rights of citizen's away in a matter of seconds, not to mention, end their life with one single bullet. They also run into scenes of an active shooter, pull bodies out of wrecked cars, and deliver life-saving measures to people in need. These men and women wear the uniform demanding respect during a time where it is a game to "kill a cop." The respect factor between police officer and citizen has diminished with actions of both the citizens and the cops; you cannot demand respect without showing it in return. Sir Robert Peel created this foundation for officers to stand on, to hold their head up high operating under the foundation of doing the right thing. Some could argue Officers used to have that command of presence, to have respect and support, but now society has turned against them for reasons of their own, or because a few bad cops ruined the foundation that was set before them. Despite the uproar or backlash

from citizens, the media, and other general cooperation's officers still go out day in and day out serving the citizens within their jurisdiction.

The world is vastly different today than when Sir Robert Peel created his department. Men and women would line up out the doors waiting for a chance to be a police officer, when now, applicants are hard to find; Why? Money! The driving force of commerce, individual demands when looking for a job, and retention statistics for current employees. Money is the reason society either thrives or pitfalls. It is also a big component when it comes to law enforcement. Police officers put their lives on the line everyday they dress in that uniform. They become a target for hate, anger, judgement, and hostility for wearing a badge and defending the law. These men and women walk out their front door leaving their families behind and face some of the most heinous individuals this world has ever seen, with the possibility of not returning home.

These men and women do this job day in and day out for ranges of \$20,000 to \$50,000 depending on the area in which they are located. Why does someone who works in accounting make more than a teacher or a cop? Why does society feel the need to pay officers such a low salary amount when the work that is required of them is essentially incapable of placing a price tag on? However, money is not the only reason law enforcement agencies across the United States are having problems employing officers and keeping them. The retention problems span from benefits, to uniforms, to take home car privileges. This paper is going to explore the retention deficits found in law enforcement agencies across the United States, and investigate the reasons as to why. The study will conduct a survey of sworn police officers employed in a local police agency within Georgia. Their responses can shed some light on issues surrounding the causes of retention deficits.

## *CHAPTER 2*

Sir Robert Peel's principles of policing although created almost two hundred years ago, still apply to officers today. They are men and women who, outside the uniform are soccer mom and dads, members of their church, PTA boards, and homeroom assistances. The uniform is their career, how they make ends' meet, not what defines them. The problem occurs when officers think they are above the law and when society thinks officers are above the law. The hatred surrounding police departments, I feel, stems from the heels of Rodney King, and Ferguson.

Could the contention between officers and the public be a reason individual's are leaving the force? Possibly! Why should someone put their life on the line for complete strangers when they get zero respect in return? Is burnout in policing a real thing, is money the driving force of people leaving, or is policing just not what it used to be so the glam about it is gone? All of these hypotheticals could easily be a reality within departments. It appears that across the board, the United States is at a low for hiring candidates to fill officer positions. Then, when the positions are filled, the departments are struggling to keep the officers. What is the link between occupancy and retention?

Retention problems is not just about filling positions or keeping officers. Departments must figure out why individuals are not filling out applications, and why individuals are leaving either for other departments, or quitting law enforcement all together or much worse, ending their lives because of the position they held. According to Luke Barr, a writer for ABC news, in 2019 law enforcement suicides were up by twenty four percent (Barr, 2019). As of August 1, 2019, one hundred and fourteen officers had taken their own life in one way or another. Is the job of a police officer causing so much turmoil and stress, individuals feel their only way out is by suicide? Society has this image that officers are supposed to be strong and fearless and people

that fight the worst kind of criminals and throw them behind bars. They are cape wearing superheroes that are not allowed to show emotion or worry or any ounce of humanization.

The problem with this stigma, is that for the two-year-old who was killed in a wreck, or the fifteen-year-old who was raped repeatedly, or the mother and children who were brutally murdered by their father are calls officers must respond too. These images are engrained within officer's minds with the thought they cannot show emotion towards them. They have to carry that dead body, or that crime scene around with them and just bury it further and further to make room for the next fatal scene they are dispatched too. Officers are superheroes, but more than that, they are men and women who bleed red just like everyone else. Carrying around the guilt of losing a victim, or the inability to place a murderer behind bars, eats away at officers over time. When they feel lower than low, they may feel that the only way out is to end it.

Retention is more than just employing officers. It is finding out answers to questions beginning with why; starting with why officers are choosing permanent solutions to temporary problems? Donald W. De Lucca, the President of the International Association of Chiefs of Police, highlighted in 2017, "the myriad challenges police officers face in rising to higher standards of performance, crime prevention, and community engagement and how those demands can affect the emotional, physical, and mental well-being of sworn personnel in the United States." Officers do more than just combat crime to throw bad people in jail. The stigma these men and women must be stone cold and incapable of "feeling" is absurd and leading towards more and more suicides from our first responders. Although suicide is a major concern for first responders, the topic itself is outside the scope of this project.

Officers are not just jumping straight to suicide from the things they experience on a daily basis within the job. Officers are leaving the field of law enforcement all together because

of burn out from the job. A study conducted in February of 2019, focused on job-related burnout being a significant concern for researchers, law enforcement administrators, and government authorities because of its broader effects on officer health, job performance, and service provided to the public. The study surveyed over thirteen thousand officers from eighty-nine agencies across the United States, then compared the results to Leiter and Maslach's six areas of work life (2004). "The analysis indicated approximately nineteen percent of the total sample experienced severe levels of emotional exhaustion and thirteen percent had extreme values of depersonalization" (McCarty, Soloman, & Garlan, 2019, P. 672). The study concluded specific measures of workload and values were the strongest reasons for burnout.

The study utilized thirteen thousand one hundred and forty-six sworn personnel with thirteen percent being female and nineteen percent being from a minority. It also included seventy municipal police departments and nineteen full-service sheriff departments. The two dependent variables focused on were emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. The independent variables were a variety of Leiter and Maslach's (2004) six areas of work life (workload, control, rewards, community, feelings of fairness, and broader sense of values). Burnout is more than just being tired of staring at a computer all day, or depicting the same data set over and over. It can be the challenges between work life and home life, the demands of the job, or the losing of oneself within the job. "The difficulties officers face trying to develop, and identity separate from the job, balancing healthy social interaction, dealing with internal departmental hassles, interpersonal issues with coworkers and supervisors, and frustrations with the legal system, lead them to feeling lost in the world around them, becoming one with the misery of the job" (Fishkin, 2015, P 147). This depiction Fishkin mentions is something officers face daily. There is a saying, once you become a cop you are never off duty.

Officers are constantly surveying crowds, looking at individual's hands, watching interactions made within public eye. Not to mention, the departments that allow take home cars puts a target on officer's homes with the patrol car sitting in the driveway. Trying to separate the cop life with the normal civilian life is something many officers struggle with. It is mentally exhausting to be on guard every second of your life because you were trained to be that way. The struggle of self-identity is not something only officers face. Military personnel struggle with this constantly going from fighting and defending to coming home trying to live a somewhat normal life. Going from "badass superhero" to soccer mom creates an internal struggle that physically and mentally exhaust the physical being.

The study concluded, "the challenge to law enforcement personnel to meet higher standards of transparency, accountability, and effectiveness in the status quo amidst great scrutiny of these efforts requires a foundation of emotional, physical, and mental wellness (McCarty et al., 2019, P. 272). Burnout, in essence, is the absence of emotional, physical, and mental wellness. Being on guard "twenty-four-seven" is mind numbing and for our first responders it is something that is internally battled with every day. Now burnout with the job along with suicide is just a small fraction that leads to the retention deficits law enforcement agencies across the country are facing.

During the career of a police officer, men and women are exposed to events that go far beyond the experiences of the ordinary citizen, and these events become either the triumph or demise of officers. This paper explores much more than reasons officers quit or why departments are lacking in the fulfillment of positions. The struggle with law enforcement is more than just a position. It is an internal battle individuals face every day with themselves, the department, and society as a whole. The retention deficit is more than just money and uniforms, and ultimately it

will not get fixed until society can formulate a way to fix the broken foundation officers walk upon day in and day out.

The idea of policing has changed drastically over the past few decades. They are perceived as symbols of authority, unjust authority. The issues of skin color plague the justice system, not just on the streets where cops perform patrols, but in the court rooms as well. When Andy Griffin would appear on televisions, the citizens within the town he patrolled looked up to him and his word was law. Today, officers take the badge and use it as a sign of force not always in a good way. They make arrests based on color and not crime, but also let rich kids go in order to take kickbacks over the poor ones. The police brutality has gotten to the point it is at today, due to everything being viewed through rose colored glasses. Policing is not a white and black matter, it is full of gray and every color in between. Every arrest is different even if the individuals are committing the same crime.

On August 9, 2014, Officer Darren Wilson of the Ferguson Police Department shot and killed Michael Brown, an unarmed 18-year-old black male. Wilson stated Brown entered his patrol car striking him in the face reaching for his gun. Wilson in turn fired off a round hitting Brown in the back. Brown then proceeded to run when Wilson chased discharging two more rounds fatally hitting Brown. The evidence supported a struggle between Brown and Wilson corroborating Wilson's interpretation of the events that August day. "Federal authorities reviewed physical, ballistic, forensic, and crime scene evidence; medical reports and autopsy reports all concluding Officer Wilson did not constitute prosecutable violations under the applicable federal criminal civil rights statute" (Gonzalez, 2015, P. 4).

July 5, 2016, thirty-seven-year-old Alton Sterling was shot and killed at close range by two white officers of the Baton Rouge Police Department. Officers were responding to a 911 call

that a male dressed in a red shirt was threatening people with a gun to buy cd's he was trying to sell. Sterling had a criminal record that included several violent offenses such as resisting arrest and was known to carry a handgun on him. Officer's Howie Lake II and Blane Salamoni have both previously been under investigation with the Baton Rouge Department for their use of excessive force in previous cases. Was Alton Sterling's shooting justified or another breach of officer empowerment?

On July 7, 2016, an Army reserve Afghan War veteran by the name of Micah Xavier utilized a sniper like attack killing five Dallas Police Officers as they guarded a Black Lives Movement protest. Xavier was angry about the deaths of the unarmed black males by police officers and set out trying to shoot and kill officers specifically white ones. For the first time, U.S. Law Enforcement used a robot equipped with a bomb to capture and kill the suspect.

“At our best, we practice empathy, imagining ourselves in the lives and circumstances of others” (Bloom, 2016). The United States of America's 43<sup>rd</sup> President made that statement in front of thousands at the memorial service for the fallen Dallas Police Officers. It is a statement that rings true in times like today. Times where children are terrified to play on playgrounds, students are scared their last days may be in a classroom setting, and many wonder if a police officer pulls you over, will that end in bloodshed? The recent movements of black lives matter vs. blue lives matter goes to show Bush's statement is at a cultural divide.

Stories like the ones above seem inevitable lately. It seems like every day the news is reporting an officer down, or a suspect is captured and “murdered” by police officers. The media reports what sells, even if that is not always the truth. Now, I am not saying police officers do not ever cross the line or pull the trigger prematurely, but the media has not done law enforcement a justice with what they print. When is the line crossed from protection to violence? What

contributes to actual police use of deadly force? Are human factors such as gender and/or race a number one component in the decision making process of shoot/do not shoot? With this thought process, why would anyone want to be a police officer in today's times? Retention problems are not just because of financial constraints or personal uniform qualms; they come from the way officers are perceived from the public and that perception effects the way officers serve society.

An article by Maceo Brayboy focused on the dissatisfaction for the job law enforcement officers had and the solutions that could reduce attrition, recruitment, and retainment. Utilizing a qualitative Delphi study, the researchers selected over two hundred officers whom were asked to share their perspectives on strategies to increase police morale. Their responses were captured through an anonymous survey tool and formulated in a way to gain the general consensus of officers. Overall the general consensus was job dissatisfaction led to lower morale which caused internal struggles as well as the efficiency of the job performance to not be top notch (Brayboy, 2019). This consensus of these officers is not surprising since morale for officers is down across the United States. For issues we have already discussed such as the hatred these individuals face every day for doing their job, job security, and finances.

When this study asked officers what could change to make things better their responses were higher salaries, potential for lateral appointments, and promotional opportunities. Historically, a job as a police officer has been classified as a blue-collar occupation with relatively low salaries. However, over the last half century, officer salaries in the USA have increased due in large part to the proliferation of labor unions which successfully argue that police are underpaid and that the increasing complexity of police work should result in greater compensation (Johnson, 2012). In a matter of seconds officers have the ability to strip someone of their rights and even their life.

The amount of responsibility officers have and need completely outweigh the amount of salary they work for. If officers were to receive higher pay, or at least a pay they feel their duties justify, the job may attract more qualified applicants, as well as retaining the individuals they do have. If people are happy within their career fields, they are more likely to continue performing at their best, so if officers were to receive a higher compensation, the use of force complaints may be on a decline, as well as police brutality.

If retention is the big issue with law enforcement, and the data shows money and room for advancement as potential reasons for this, why is it so hard to correct the issue? The problem does not seem to be with how to fix the reasons officers keep quitting, instead how to fix how broken our society is when it comes to job salaries.

Police officers have to face and deal with some of the most traumatic and gut-wrenching things. For example, my second day on Field Training, I was standing roughly fifteen yards from someone who ended their own life with a single gunshot to the head. I have done CPR on a two-year-old little girl who did not survive, and have seen drivers impaled by their own vehicle due to an accident. Police officers do not even have to be patrol officers to see horrific things. Special Victim Detectives have to comb through hours of child pornography and watch children being physically and sexually assaulted. Homicide detectives have to recreate a death scene after watching an autopsy of a sixteen-year-old who was in the wrong place at the wrong time. From pulling deceased bodies out of vehicles to firing the shot that ends someone's life, the stress the job delivers is overwhelming.

Police officers who are exposed to the daily demands of the job are more susceptible to stress and burnout resulting into apathy and lack of concern for clients and other physiological disorders and addictions. A study conducted by Hawkins in 2001 utilized four hundred and fifty

two sworn police officers within four different departments. The study revealed “female officers experienced lower depersonalization scores, married officers had higher emotional exhaustion compared to non-married officers, and White officers had higher emotional exhaustion and depersonalization scores” (Hawkins, 2001, P. 351). Stress remains a major concern for agencies and their retention rates by causing multiple health factors, lack of productivity, and even the lack of officers appearing for their shift.

A study known as the, “Work and Family Services for Law Enforcement Personnel in the United States, 1995” was conducted utilizing several demographic variables such as age, sex, gender, along with education levels and other factors. This information was downloaded and put together to formulate different hypotheses stating there is no relationship between demographic variables and total job stress; and there is no relationship between work environment and total job stress (Tsai, Nolasco, Vaughn, 2017). The authors placed overall stress, job stress and burnout as the independent variables where respondents were asked to rate different questions on a Likert scale from 1 to 5. An index of .825 which indicated a high level of congruence was used to provide confidence in the officer’s total stress levels.

The demographic model of age, sex, and gender along with work environment were utilized as the dependent variables. “Structural equation modeling (‘SEM’) has been applied to measure simultaneously the latent concepts and the structural relationships among exogenous and endogenous variables derived from the research hypotheses (Tsai, et al., 2017, P.7)”. Table one was used to show the mean total job stress amongst police officers. The standard deviation was .981 with the total job coming in at 2.92. The majority of respondents were white male officers with a mean age falling in the middle 30’s. The majority of respondents had education lower than obtaining a bachelor’s degree with a majority of the respondents holding the rank of

officer with only 41% holding a supervisory rank. All three work environment variables were within the approximate middle level of responses. Officers felt a little or some level of impact upon their families with neither agreeing nor disagreeing that their work environment was supportive with counseling also feeling unable to discuss personal matters with co-workers; this information is depicted in the charts below.

Interpreting the results, the authors concluded job title had an enormous effect on stress within police officers. The officers who hold a supervisory rank expressed higher levels of stress over officers who did not. This finding his not surprising since supervisors must ensure their shift is safe and abiding by legal authority as well as policy. The saying, when someone screws up, you must look at their supervision is very true. This amount of responsibility brings upon an enormous amount of stress. This study shows also that rank directly impacts total stress, negative working environment, and family discussion with co-workers. Both negative working environment and counseling support directly impact police job stress. Although sex does not directly impact total job stress, female officers report higher levels of family discussion with co-workers (Hassell, K., Archbold, C., & Stichman, A. 2011).

Variables	Measure	Mean	SD	Frequency (%)
<i>Dependent variable</i>				
Total job stress	Ordinal (1–5)	2.92	.981	
<i>Independent variables</i>				
<i>Demographic model</i>				
Sex	Male			515 (86.7)
	Female			79 (13.3)
Age	Continuous (22–62)	36.09	8.113	
Race	White			478 (80.5)
	Minority			116 (19.5)
Education	Bachelor & Higher			188 (31.6)
	Less than Bachelor			406 (68.4)
Rank	Supervisor			248 (41.8)
	Officer			346 (58.2)
Tenure	Continuous (0–30)	12.20	7.403	
<i>Work environment</i>				
Negative working	Ordinal (1–5)	2.74	.910	
Counseling support	Ordinal (1–5)	3.23	.886	
Family discussion with co-workers	Ordinal (1–5)	3.43	1.108	

Note: N = 594.

**Figure 1: Descriptive Statistics. Hassell, et al., (2011).**

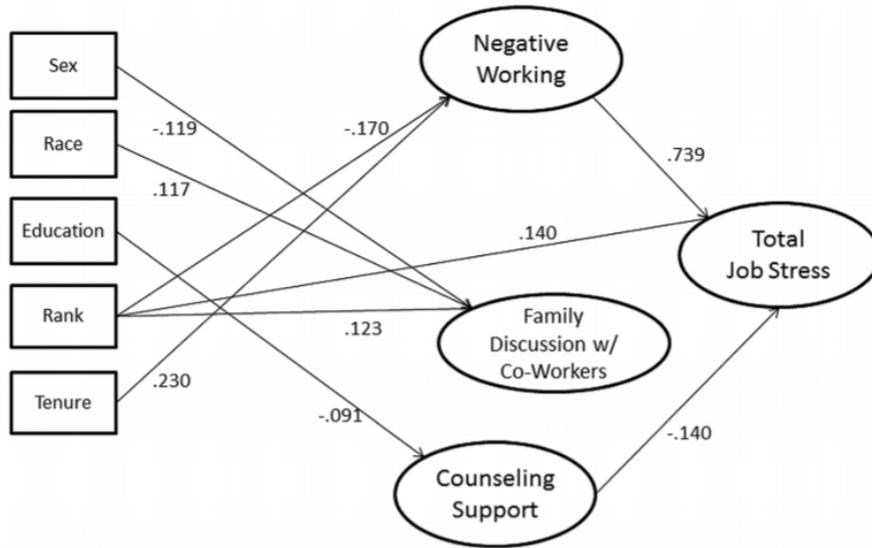


Figure 2: Empirical Model of Job Stress Total (N=594). Hassell, et al., (2011).

### CHAPTER 3

Combing through the literature up to this point, I was curious how my own department handled the retention issues and the different reasons officers were leaving. The Gwinnett County Police Department is authorized 1,152 employees with 878 of those positions allocated to sworn and the rest to civilian employees. Currently, GCPD has around 765 sworn police officers of all race and genders providing a deficit of 113 open positions for a county that services more than 958,000 citizens. In 2018, Gwinnett County Police Officers responded to 697,019 calls for service. 2019 is projected to have officers responding to over 17,000 more calls. The ratio of population to officer places a major strain with increasing fatigue, responsibility, and lack of morale for the job. The following chart provides a break down between 2018 and 2019 calls for service and the work officers have and will likely put in.

## 2019 Performance Summary



	2018	YTD June 30, 2019	2019 Projected
Police Calls Dispatched	697,019	357,280	714,560
Fire Calls Dispatched	98,052	48,068	96,135
Lilburn Police Calls Dispatched	35,990	17,124	34,248
Total Calls Dispatched		422,472	844,944
Criminal Cases Assigned	3,783	2,079	4,158
Criminal Arrests	12,719	6,480	12,960
Citations Issued	79,128	41,993	83,986

**Figure 3:** Gwinnett County Police Department (2019). Chief of Staff Departmental Statistics. Gwinnett County Board of Commissioners PowerPoint.

The challenges GCPD faces are the same ones the rest of the United States Law Enforcement agencies face: competitive wages for police officers, overall perception of law enforcement, and staffing level being close to critical. A comparison was made between the Gwinnett County Police Department and other county departments across the state of Georgia for starting salaries. The fact that GCPD is fourth from the bottom is a major reason the department is suffering from retention issues. The data is clear in black and white that Gwinnett is nowhere close to paying what other counties are. It is not even like we are comparing Gwinnett to different States, these are neighboring counties. Why should officers stay at Gwinnett and make less than 40K starting out, when they could go to Atlanta and make roughly 10K more? Money talks and if the county commissioners want to stop the bleeding that is officers quitting and leaving, then talks of raises should be a real thing.

## Labor Market



### Comparison by Departments

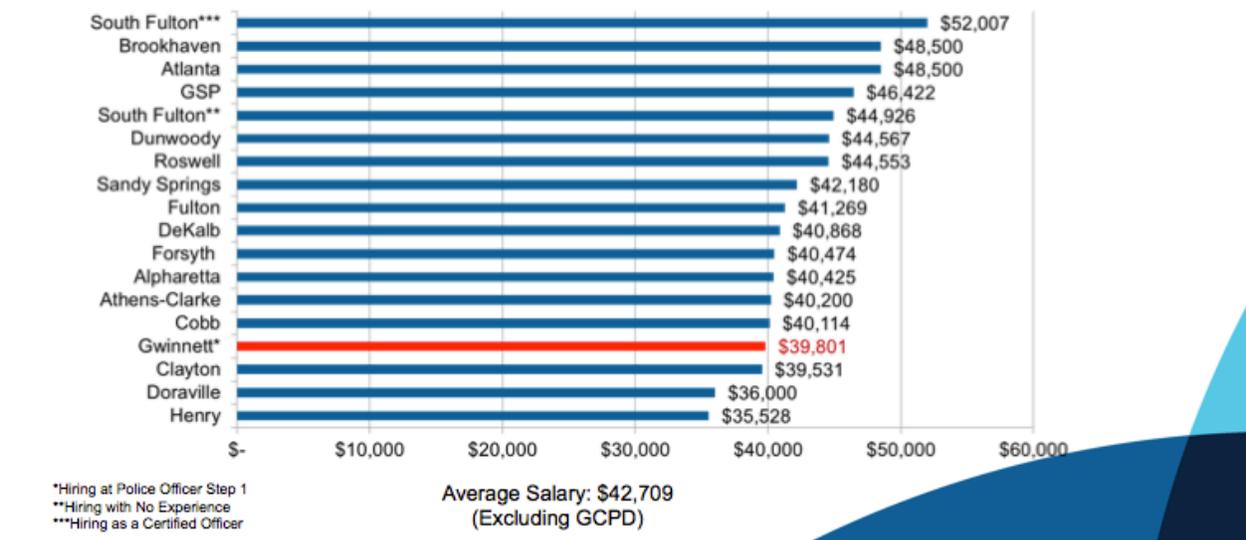


Figure 4: Gwinnett County Police Department (2019). Chief of Staff Departmental Statistics. Gwinnett County Board of Commissioners PowerPoint.

A second data set was made comparing Gwinnett to the city agencies within Gwinnett for salary ranges. This next data set is intriguing, because let's say hypothetically, the commissioners thought other counties make more because they have more money to spend and Gwinnett just does not, which is absolutely not true. This next set shows how Gwinnett Officers are second to last inside their own county for salary ranges.

## Labor Market

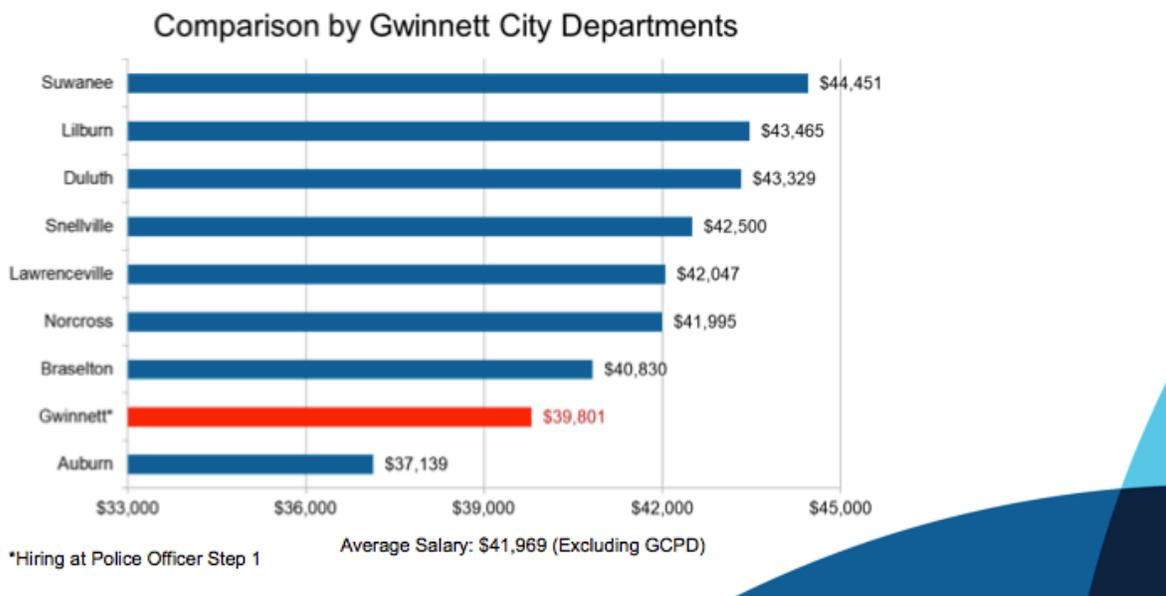


Figure 5: Gwinnett County Police Department (2019). Chief of Staff Departmental Statistics. Gwinnett County Board of Commissioners PowerPoint.

So again I ask, why should officers stay at Gwinnett when they can get hired on with a city agency still working inside Gwinnett county for more money? Personal relations, or personal perceptions are problems that cannot necessarily be fixed rather easily to combat retention, but money can. The proof is in the dataset and everyone can see it clearly, understanding money is absolutely a driving force for retention of officers.

For Gwinnett alone, in 2016 they hired eighty-four sworn officers, but lost ninety-six, in 2017 they hired one-hundred sworn, but lost seventy-three, hired one-hundred and twenty-four in

2018, but lost eighty-two, and lastly in 2019 so far they have hired one-hundred and thirty, but lost one-hundred and four. Not to mention the amount of money it cost to replace just one sworn officer; a little over fifty-two thousand dollars. Employees want to wonder why they are not getting raises, it is due to the amount of money Gwinnett loses every single day on officers quitting and having to replace them.

## Expense of Replacement



- Minimum cost to replace each sworn officer lost through voluntary attrition is approximately \$52,401 per officer (cost of 1500 hours of training)
- Minimum cost to replace officers who voluntarily left:
  - 2013 – 46 officers, \$2,410,446
  - 2014 – 50 officers, \$2,620,050
  - 2015 – 64 officers, \$3,353,664
  - 2016 – 74 officers, \$3,877,674
  - 2017 – 48 officers, \$2,515,248
  - 2018 – 67 officers, \$3,825,273
  - 2019 - 43 officers, \$2,462,847 (YTD June 30, 2019)
- Total: 392 officers, \$20,541,192

Figure 6: Gwinnett County Police Department (2019). Chief of Staff Departmental Statistics. Gwinnett County Board of Commissioners PowerPoint.

An article by Amie Schuck and Rabe-Hemp (2018) compiled data sets on the average cost it took to replace officers. Although the data on the actual costs of replacing officers are limited, experts suggest that the expenditures are significantly higher for law enforcement compared to other types of agencies (Koper, Majuire, & Moore, 2002). At the low end, Harris and Baldwin (1999) estimated that in 1999, it cost about \$14,300 to replace a single officer (adjusting for inflation, that figure would be about \$20,690 in 2016). At the high end, Frost (2006) estimated that in 2003, it cost about \$100,000 to train an officer in Los Angeles and about

\$250,000 to hire and train a law enforcement official for the US Government (\$130,999 and \$327,497, respectively, in 2016 adjusted for inflation). A more typical estimate calculated that the average cost of selecting, hiring, and training a new officer was about \$59,000 (\$66,288 in 2016 adjusted for inflation)( Wilson, Dalton, Scheer, & Grammich, 2010).

Almost sixty thousand dollars to replace one single sworn officer; that amount is more than officers even make in many places across the US. The money is clearly there to train the officers or replace the ones that leave, but yet the salary placed upon officers cannot change. It does not seem to make a lot of sense understanding the problem, having data sets and research conducted proving the problem, but no plans to correct the problem. Retention deficits do not just affect the county commissioners or police department as a whole. The ‘real’ people suffering are the citizens who have to wait longer for emergency calls to be answered, deal with frustrated officers due to staffing issues, and receive sometimes-mediocre care because officers have nothing to strive towards. Retention is more than just putting names down on paper to fill open slots; it is about getting and keeping the right people. Being a police officer takes a special kind of person, and once departments obtain these people, keeping them should be their number one priority. If money is the number one reason officers are leaving, then pay them more. Forgo upgrading road signs or opening brand new malls, focus on paying your first responders that are the lifeline of the county.

I would like to make mention that within Gwinnett County there are five city agencies: Duluth, Norcross, Lawrenceville, Snellville, Suwanee that house their own police departments. The data collected for this paper, is for the Gwinnett County Police Department that only handles calls for service for the unincorporated parts of the county. There is also a Gwinnett County Sheriff’s Department that handles the civil disputes as well as serving warrants and maintaining

the jail that is a separate entity from the police department. These agencies I am sure face a deficit just like GCPD, but again, the data presented is strictly for GCPD since that is the department I am currently employed with.

## CHAPTER 4

The literature and data provided try to explain the reason for attrition and common factors that influence officers leaving. Combing through the data presented by the PowerPoint the Gwinnett County Board of Commissioners received, I was curious if the men and women I work beside every single day felt the same as the officers leaving. Why do some officers stay while others leave? I conducted a field study within my precinct that I work. It represents roughly fifteen percent of the department with a range of seasoned veterans and officers right out of the academy providing a good mix of personal feelings towards the job and agency.

The following anonymous survey was created asking officers their opinions on several questions and the responses returned were all pretty much conclusive with the data presented.

November 19, 2019

“Officer’s Perceptions on Job Turnover”

Law enforcement agencies across the United States are reeling with retention deficits and hiring freezes due to the lack of interest with being a police officer. Our very own department is struggling to put staffing numbers together for all the precincts as well as pushing people through the academy. Individuals are either quitting during the academy, while on field training, and/or several years down the road. You are being asked to participate in a survey research project entitled “Officer’s Perceptions on Job Turnover,” which is being conducted by Kristen Moore, a graduate student at Valdosta State University. This survey is confidential and your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to take the survey, to stop responding at any time, or to skip any questions that you do not want to answer. You must be at least 18 years of age to participate in this study. Your completion of the survey serves as your voluntary agreement to participate in this research project and your certification that you are 18 or older. If you have any questions regarding the survey, you may contact the researcher, Kristen Moore at [krimoore@valdosta.edu](mailto:krimoore@valdosta.edu) or (404)932-6828.

Thank you for your participation,

MPO K.L. Moore #1880  
Graduate Student @ Valdosta State University

1. In your opinion, what is the number one reason officers are leaving the Gwinnett County Police Department?

2. In your opinion, what factors influence Gwinnett County Officers to quit, and work for another agency?
3. Do you believe the deficit of officers is causing the department to keep people that should not be officers just to have bodies on the road?
4. In your opinion, what are some reasons officers are quitting law enforcement all together?
5. What changes do you believe need to be made to help with retaining officers for Gwinnett?

#### APPENDIX C

The survey was distributed to seventy-eight officers with sixty-four returning completions over a span from September 1, 2019 to December 1, 2019. For question one, fifty-nine officers said money was the number one reason officers are leaving Gwinnett. Forty-seven officers said benefits such as uniforms and patrol equipment were the reasons officers left for other agencies. All sixty-four officers answered yes to question number three, that the agency is putting out people who should not be cops just to have bodies on the road leading to misuse of force and an erosion of respect and goodwill from the public. Question four had a mix of answers from family issues, to financial struggles; to it just was not the job they expected. And lastly, question five had thirty-seven officers answer with pay increases, twenty-one officers said change our uniforms and increase pay, and the remaining six stated a combination of other factors.

Some of the officers provided explanations for their answers that I wish to share with you today. One officer who has been with the force for fifteen years stated to question number one, “GCPD is a great department to work for, but the lack of promotions, raises, and updated uniforms not from the Jurassic period have officers jumping ship. The answer is very simple you see; want officers to stay, give them what they want or else they will go looking for it elsewhere.” To question number four, one officer wrote, “America hates cops right now. No

matter what we do we are the bad guys. We can save a life, but then turn around and arrest the abuser and we are wrong. The lack of gratitude and hatred I see every day on the streets makes me regret putting this badge on every day.” This response made me question was it dislike towards the public because of the lack of appreciation or thanks we receive, or was it more deeply rooted with how the agency treats its officers? The survey returned multiple responses similar to these two officers. Why risk your life for strangers, when those exact people are your judge and jury when push comes to shove? The chart below shows the opinions of the officers with money continually being the number one reasons officer either quit or leave for other departments.

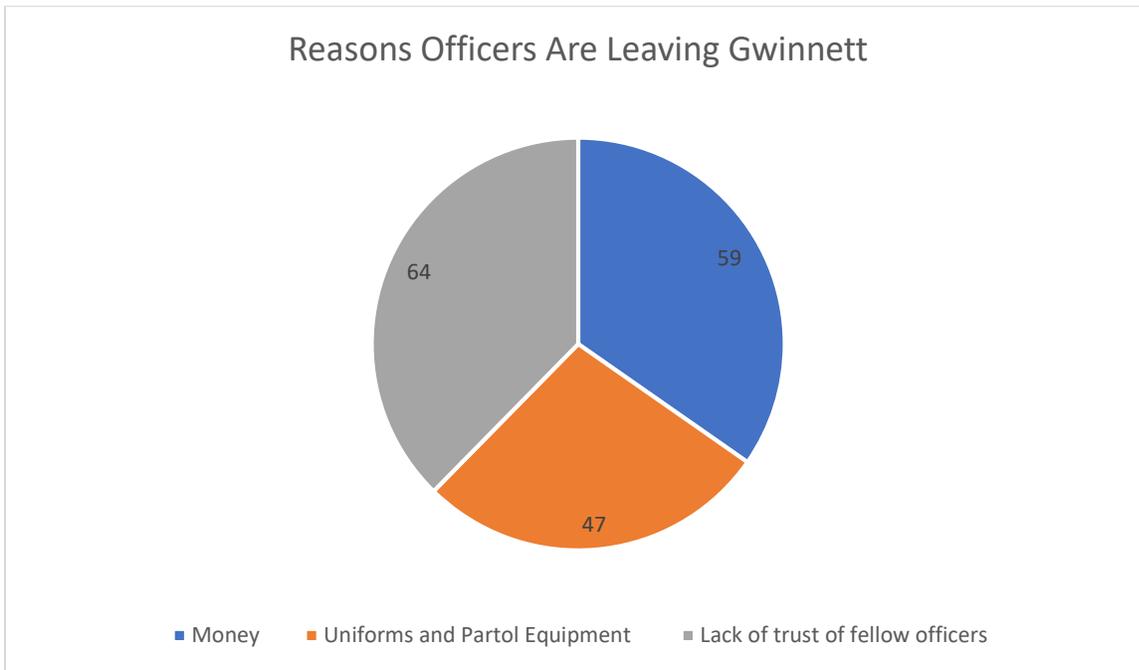


Figure 7: Responses to Survey Distributed

The eighty-two percent return rate this survey provided is something that is typically not very common. This survey was handed out to the men and women I serve alongside day in and day out. The trust we have in one another extends well outside the job, and the understanding we

help each other is definitely not questioned. The high response rate would not be likely if I had distributed this survey to another agency I was not affiliated with.

It is amazing to me because the data that is published, put into powerpoints, and answered on surveys, lays out the corrections that need to be made in order to stop attrition. Officers are quitting day in and day out all across the United States because of money and benefits. It is written in black and white what needs to be changed, but yet, nothing is done about that. I wanted to clarify exactly what I meant by benefits specifically pointing to uniforms equipment. Gwinnett County has not changed their uniforms since 1970. The belt we all carry on our hips puts close to an extra thirty pounds on officers.

Other agencies have gone to a more tactical uniform with a cargo style pant, polo shirt, and vest carrier giving officers the ability to remove some of the weight from off their hips. Police Officers constantly have back issues from all the time sitting inside the patrol car and carrying all of the weight from the duty belt. Officers are leaving the 1970's Polyester Uniforms with hip carrying duty belts, for departments that allow their officers to work more comfortably.

## *CHAPTER 5*

The statistics this paper has provided represents the Gwinnett County Police Department, but statistics such as this are projected across the United States. Officers are quitting faster than can be replenished for brighter opportunities, fear of the unknown, or and/or family relocation. We will never know every reason departments are struggling with retaining officers, but the top reasons are not that far stretched to be corrected.

Police officers struggle with many things from the job, whether it be what they face on a daily basis, the anger and hatred, or the internal struggles at home with finances, family, and stress triggers. Officers walk a razor-fine line every day for such little gratification. Whether it be money, suicide, better opportunities, or fear of being a human target, individuals who could change the face of policing are walking away from their careers with no one to fill their shoes.

I discussed several different factors that could help explain retention problems with police agencies, but the ultimate factor that seemed to be at the forefront was pay. Better pay creates a more supportive department accommodating to physical and personal needs such as counseling or medical care. It also boosts employee morale and lifts the spirits of those on the front lines. Money is the driving force of every citizens reasoning behind searching for a better opportunity. If you could do the same exact job for more money somewhere else, would you not go? This is what police agencies are seeing every day, even here in Gwinnett. After two years of service on the road, city agencies such as Duluth and Suwannee offer 10-12,000 more for the same exact duties. They are able to do so because they are smaller departments and their resources stretch further than a larger department such as Gwinnett.

However, the facts, opinions of officers, and data all point to a very strong starting point in keeping officers, and that is pay. The majority of officers are not leaving law enforcement all

together, more so, are leaving their individual apartments to go elsewhere. In a matter of personal opinion, being able to wear my police badge is priceless, but at the end of the day, the bills still come and the lack of money makes myself and other officers question how priceless that small piece metal really is.

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APPENDIX A:

IRB Approval



**Institutional Review Board (IRB)  
For the Protection of Human Research Participants**

**PROTOCOL EXEMPTION REPORT**

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**Protocol Number:** 03951-2020

**Responsible Researcher:** Kristen Moore

**Supervising Faculty:** Dr. Rudy Prine

**Project Title:** *Officer's Perceptions of Job Turnover.*

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**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD DETERMINATION:**

This research protocol is **Exempt** from Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight under Exemption **Category 2**. Your research study may begin immediately. If the nature of the research project changes such that exemption criteria may no longer apply, please consult with the IRB Administrator ([irb@valdosta.edu](mailto:irb@valdosta.edu)) before continuing your research.

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**ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:**

- *Upon completion of this research study all data (email correspondence, survey data, participant lists, etc.) must be securely maintained (locked file cabinet, password protected computer, etc.) and accessible only by the researcher for a minimum of 3 years.*
- *VSU email address must be included in the Research Statement. All research related correspondence must include your student VSU email address.*
- *The Research Statement must be added to the paper survey – either stapled to the survey, or included at the top of the printed survey.*

*If this box is checked, please submit any documents you revise to the IRB Administrator at [irb@valdosta.edu](mailto:irb@valdosta.edu) to ensure an updated record of your exemption.*

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**Elizabeth Ann Olphie**

**04.07.2020**

*Thank you for submitting an IRB application.*

Elizabeth Ann Olphie, IRB Administrator

*Please direct questions to [irb@valdosta.edu](mailto:irb@valdosta.edu) or 229-253-2947.*

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Revised: 06.02.16

Figure 8: IRB Approval

APPENDIX B:  
Survey Instrument



GWINNETT COUNTY  
POLICE DEPARTMENT

770 Hi-Hope Road | Lawrenceville, GA 30043  
P.O. Box 602 | Lawrenceville, GA 30046-0602  
770.513.5000  
www.gwinnettcounty.com | www.gwinnettpolice.com

You are being asked to participate in a survey research project entitled “Officer’s Perceptions of Job Turnover” which is being conducted by Kristen Moore, a graduate student at Valdosta State University. The purpose of the study is to better understand the turnover rate within police agencies from already sworn officers. You will receive no direct benefits from participating in this research study. However, your responses may help us learn more about why police departments across the US are struggling with retention rates. There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life. Participation should take approximately 20 minutes to complete. This survey is anonymous. No one, including the researcher, will be able to associate your responses with your identity. Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to take the survey, to stop responding at any time, or to skip any questions that you do not want to answer. Participants must be at least 18 years of age to participate in this study. Your completion of the survey serves as your voluntary agreement to participate in this research project and your certification that you are 18 or older. You may print a copy of this statement for your records.

Questions regarding the purpose or procedures of the research should be directed to name of responsible researcher at e-mail address [krimoore@valdosta.edu](mailto:krimoore@valdosta.edu). This study has been exempted from Institutional Review Board (IRB) review in accordance with Federal regulations. The IRB, a university committee established by Federal law, is responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of research participants. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the IRB Administrator at 229-253-2947 or [irb@valdosta.edu](mailto:irb@valdosta.edu).

Figure 9: Survey Instrument

APPENDIX C:

Officers' Perceptions on Job Turnover Survey

November 19, 2019

“Officer’s Perceptions on Job Turnover”

Law enforcement agencies across the United States are reeling with retention deficits and hiring freezes due to the lack of interest with being a police officer. Our very own department is struggling to put staffing numbers together for all the precincts as well as pushing people through the academy. Individuals are either quitting during the academy, while on field training, and/or several years down the road. You are being asked to participate in a survey research project entitled “Officer’s Perceptions on Job Turnover,” which is being conducted by Kristen Moore, a graduate student at Valdosta State University. This survey is confidential and your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to take the survey, to stop responding at any time, or to skip any questions that you do not want to answer. You must be at least 18 years of age to participate in this study. Your completion of the survey serves as your voluntary agreement to participate in this research project and your certification that you are 18 or older. If you have any questions regarding the survey, you may contact the researcher, Kristen Moore at [krimoore@valdosta.edu](mailto:krimoore@valdosta.edu) or (404)932-6828.

Thank you for your participation,

MPO K.L. Moore #1880  
Graduate Student @ Valdosta State University

1. In your opinion, what is the number one reason officers are leaving the Gwinnett County Police Department?
2. In your opinion, what factors influence Gwinnett County Officers to quit, and work for another agency?
3. Do you believe the deficit of officers is causing the department to keep people that should not be officers just to have bodies on the road?
4. In your opinion, what are some reasons officers are quitting law enforcement all together?
5. What changes do you believe need to be made to help with retaining officers for Gwinnett?