



Recruiting, Integrating and Retaining Women Police Officers

STRATEGIES THAT WORK

By Chief Joseph Polisar, Garden Grove, California, and Donna Milgram, Institute for Women in Trades, Technology & Science

As the 20th century comes to a close, policing remains a predominantly male profession. In fact, in the United States, women make up only 9.5 percent of police departments. But the world of policing is much different now than it was when the IACP was founded over a century ago, and it requires a different workforce. Police departments can only benefit when they reflect the communities they serve and create supportive work environments for all of their officers. Therefore, chiefs must actively recruit, retain, integrate and promote female police officers. However, more work needs to be done to provide them and their departments with the tools they need to accomplish this important goal.

In 1995, during my tenure as chief of the Albuquerque, New Mexico, Police Department (APD), the department was selected to participate in a national demonstration project designed to create new

technologies and strategies for helping employers to recruit and integrate women into male-dominated occupations. The "New Workplace for Women Project," funded by the U.S. Department of Labor, was directed by Donna Milgram, executive director of the Institute for Women in Trades, Technology & Science (IWITTS), a national nonprofit organization based in Washington, D.C. The APD was one of eight employers and one of two police departments—the Tucson Police Department was the other—chosen to participate. I have since left the APD, but the project is continuing under the leadership of Chief Gerald Galvin.

The goal of the New Workplace project was to involve both female and male officers in an attempt to dissolve the barriers that confront women in policing. In less than two years, the APD showed marked success in both recruiting female officers and creating a supportive work environment for them. The proportion of female

recruits in the academy increased from 10 to 25 percent, and these women were retained at rates comparable to those for men. The department also adopted a zero-tolerance policy with respect to sexual harassment.

"The work environment for women officers has dramatically improved at APD in the past three years," says Lieutenant Vicky Peltzer, APD's project leader.

Assessing the Work Environment

As a police chief, I have always tried to stay connected to the officers on the street, but it's difficult to know what the work environment is really like for female officers. Thus, the first step in the project was to formally assess the work environment. To this end, IWITTS carried out a Workplace Environmental Assessment, collecting information through anonymous surveys of female and male officers, interviews with key stakeholders (such as

the director of recruitment and selection), reviews of policies and procedures (specifically, those related to sexual harassment) and examinations of statistical information, such as recruitment and selection numbers.

Information was gathered on areas in which female officers have traditionally faced barriers, such as recruitment and selection, the academy, sexual harassment, acceptance by peers and supervisors, pregnancy, childcare, equipment and uniforms, and promotions. The assessment did not require individual women to risk their jobs by coming forward, but it did provide the information necessary for IWITTS to prepare a report that identified the department's problems and outlined a plan of action.

Upon receipt of IWITTS' report, the department formed a team of key stakeholders to implement its proposed plan. Both male and female officers in leadership positions were to be involved, and the recruitment and retention of female officers were given top priority by all the leaders in the department.

The APD and IWITTS are presently working to refine and formalize the Workplace Environmental Assessment in hopes that the process can be copied by other departments. It has already been established that the Albuquerque and the Durham, North Carolina, police departments will be the test sites for the assessment procedure under a grant from the National Institute of Justice.

Recruitment

Many police chiefs report that they would like to have more women recruits in the academy, and they are disappointed that so few apply. Although there are those who suggest that women just are not interested in becoming police officers—that women make up only 9.5 percent of police because only a small number want to pursue policing careers—this explanation does not address the much higher percentages of female sworn officers in some police departments. The Miami Beach, Florida, Police Department, for example, is 28 percent female, while the proportion of sworn female officers is 26 percent in Madison, Wisconsin, 22 percent in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and 19 percent in Birmingham, Alabama.¹

The APD found that actively recruiting women greatly increased the pool of female applicants and, ultimately, the number of female recruits in the academy. Similarly, by implementing the IWITTS strategies, the Tucson Police Department was able to recruit many more women: its female recruits jumped from 10 to 29 percent, and minority recruits rose to 47 percent.

Before the New Workplace for Women

Project, both Albuquerque and Tucson used traditional recruiting methods such as advertising in newspapers, making presentations at career fairs and schools, and sending mailings to community-based organizations. Although the APD's recruitment staff was racially diverse and included several women, this alone did not draw large numbers of female applicants.

What worked for these departments was hosting a Women & Policing Career Fair; obtaining accompanying media coverage; developing flyers, posters and brochures featuring female officers; and creating a targeted recruitment list.

Employer-sponsored career fairs for women have proven successful in recruiting women in a variety of traditionally male occupations. The presentation usually consists of a panel of female role models who describe their jobs and talk about working in a male-dominated occupation. They include information about the job, the academy, the application process, the physical conditioning designed for women and organizations for women in policing. This orientation enables the police department to communicate the message that women are welcome in policing and that the department actively seeks them out. At the same time, it can provide women who are interested in becoming officers with a realistic picture of the job. Usually no more than two or three hours long, these career orientations were held during hours that made it possible for women with either day or night jobs to attend.

Both departments were very successful in obtaining free publicity for their career fairs in the major newspapers and on television and radio. The APD received television coverage of the career fair itself, resulting in 500 phone calls over the following week. Media coverage that features female officers is the most effective strategy for recruiting female applicants. The APD issued press releases, convinced reporters to do ride-alongs with female officers and produced public service announcements that were aired by radio stations.

The departments also designed flyers and posters advertising the career fair and posted them in places that physically fit women were likely to frequent, such as gyms, martial arts schools and outdoor sporting stores. Notices were also placed at supermarkets, laundromats and shopping malls, and the career fair was advertised on the convention center's marquee. Finally, the APD designed a new, racially diverse standard-use brochure featuring an equal number of male and female officers.

Selection

Historically, women have been screened out disproportionately in the physical

agility phase of the police selection process and in the tests that allow for the most individual discretion, such as the interview by board and the ranking of the pool of qualified applicants. Police departments need to determine whether or not any stage of their selection process screens out women in larger numbers than men and, if so, ascertain the reason for this.

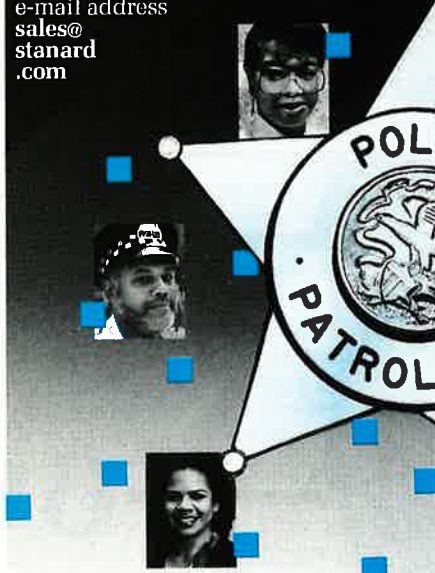
Tests that include scaling a six-foot wall, dragging a 150-pound dummy, measuring grip strength, running 200 yards or benchpressing one's own weight are likely to have an adverse impact on female applicants if the women have not been prepared.² Physical tests that have been validated for job task simulations or are health-based, such as the Cooper Standards, probably will not have an adverse impact on female recruits.³ If departments find that women are being screened out during the physical agility exam, they have three choices: change the test; move those portions of the test from the beginning of the academy to the end and make them a requirement for graduation; or prepare women for the test by providing them with a gender-specific physical conditioning regime that focuses on increasing upper body strength and respiratory capacity. Studies by the military have shown that, with training, most women's strength can be greatly increased, permitting them to perform the heaviest tasks required.

Departments can lower the numbers of women who are eliminated based on their board interviews by including female officers on the board and giving the evaluators not only more training but a predetermined set of questions and acceptable answers.⁴ The APD found that replacing the board interview with a critical incident interactive video that rates the participant's responses eliminated the gender bias in this phase of the testing. Similarly, ranking the qualified applicant pool should be based on written selection criteria, and women should be represented in this process.

Prevention of Sexual Harassment

Few of the recent national studies on sexual harassment have examined sexual harassment in police agencies, but those that have been done indicate that it is pervasive and widespread. A national study by the Police Foundation in 1985 found that 67 percent of female officers were victims of sexual harassment.⁵ A regional study conducted in the West in 1988 surveyed 500 female officers and found that "significant numbers of women in law enforcement experience sex-based problems."⁶ More recently, in a 1995 survey of female officers in a medium-sized depart-

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ment, 68 percent responded "yes" to the question, "Have you ever been sexually harassed while on the job by a member of your agency?"

According to two recent Supreme Court decisions, police chiefs can be held liable for sexual harassment in their departments even if they were not aware that it existed.⁸ Perhaps the best tool for chiefs trying to discover whether or not their departments have a sexual harassment problem is the anonymous climate survey, distributed to a sample of female and male officers. The voluntary survey developed by IWITTS and administered by the APD had a 66 percent response rate and provided information that probably could not have been obtained through other means. Additionally, IWITTS conducted interviews with key stakeholders such as the legal counsel and the internal affairs investigator, and reviewed both the language and the implementation of the department's sexual harassment policies and procedures.

The APD instituted a zero-tolerance sexual harassment policy by sending a strong, top-down message throughout the department, changing policies and procedures, and providing police-specific training on preventing sexual harassment.

All three shifts were briefed on the importance of tolerance and acceptance of all officers. In addition, all supervisors were briefed on the department's zero-tolerance policy on sexual and racial harassment, and were informed that there would be surprise inspections at substations to check for pin-ups and cartoons. An example was made of one lieutenant who had displayed a racially offensive cartoon on ebonics in his substation.

The promotional exam was also revised to include questions on the department's sexual harassment policies and procedures. The investigation of sexual harassment complaints was moved to an external city agency with expert Equal Employment Opportunity investigators on staff. This would serve to speed up the investigation, ensure impartiality and increase confidence in the process. Officers who made a complaint did not have to go through the chain of command.

Finally, IWITTS developed for sworn supervisors an eight-hour police-specific training session on preventing sexual harassment. The all-day training received top evaluations from participants, who found the case-study format and the analysis of police legal cases especially helpful. (See box at right.)

Typically, training on the topic of sexual harassment is delivered in a dry lecture format that prompts many participants to "tune out." This training was different in a number of ways: there was no lecturing;

all of the work was done in groups; examples of typical situations that occur in a chain-of-command environment were used; there was a focus on the gray areas of the law rather than only on black-and-white situations; the training was cus-

How would you handle it?

You are a male sergeant in charge of canines. You are expecting to receive the first female officer on your specialized unit shortly. Your squad members know that a female officer will be joining them and are collectively grumbling to each other about the lowering of standards, which has resulted in letting in too many women who can't cut it physically. When you have overheard these conversations, or when they have been addressed to you directly, you have refuted them by pointing to the women in the department who are in outstanding physical shape. This strategy has not been effective, as the squad members continue to complain that women officers can't do the job.

You are a male sergeant. Two single men on your squad are constantly talking about their sexual conquests, but only when the two female officers on the squad are not present. When the two female officers on the squad are nearby, they stop their conquest conversation and start laughing and whispering. They displayed a *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit calendar but took it down at your request. They have replaced it with photographs of Moslem women covered in head-to-toe black veils. There is tension between these single officers and the two women officers. The women officers have not told the male officers to stop their behavior, but their body language and demeanor indicate that the behavior is unwelcome.

You are a male sergeant and you observe another sergeant continually questioning the abilities of his squad's only female officer and verbally abusing her. He has a reputation as an extremely tough supervisor but he is treating the female officer much worse than any of the men. He continually points out the female officer's mistakes in front of others, cuts her off when she talks, mimics her and generally sends her the unspoken message that she is stupid. Over a period of months, you have watched the female officer's resentment grow and her self-confidence diminish.

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tomized to reflect the APD's sexual harassment policies and procedures; and pre- and post-tests were administered. Twenty supervisors—most of them male—attended the voluntary first training session; the second session was mandatory for the remaining supervisors. While both groups gave the training high marks, those who attended voluntarily were clearly more receptive, as shown below.

Do you feel better equipped to prevent/stop sexual harassment?

	Yes	No	Unsure
Voluntary training:	94%	0%	6%
Mandatory training:	75%	20%	5%

Would you recommend this workshop to other supervisors?

	Yes	No	Unsure
Voluntary training:	94%	0%	6%
Mandatory training:	79%	16%	5%

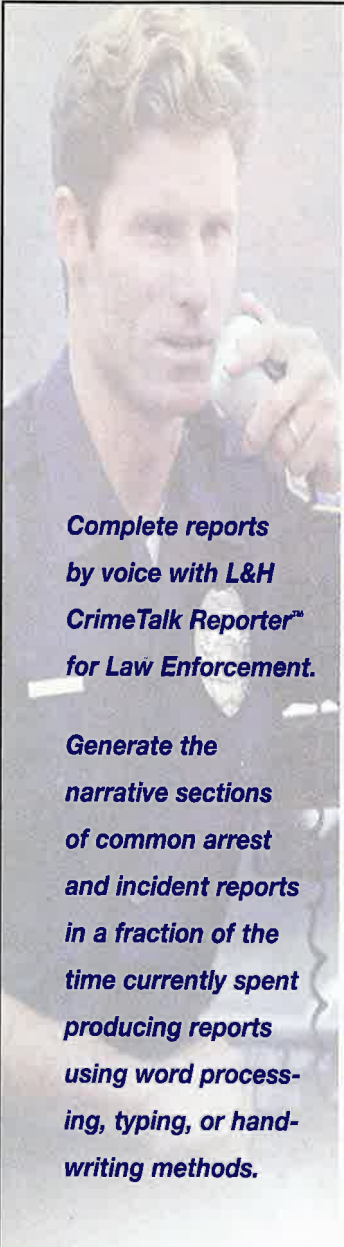
Of course, this must be weighed against the need to ensure that all supervisors receive the training quickly.

Several officers volunteered to be trainers for future workshops, and plans are underway at APD for IWITTS to conduct a train-the-trainer session. Training to prevent sexual harassment in police departments is most effective when delivered by sworn officers in the department, as they will have the most buy-in from their peers. In both training sessions, a small percentage of the participants (10 to 25 percent) scored very low on the pre-test and much higher on the post-test. While it is hard to say whether the training prevented any lawsuits, it clearly had a positive effect on the participants.

Integration and Retention

Many of the problems faced by women in policing exist because law enforcement agencies do not take women into account in the workplace. Supervisors may be unfamiliar with how to apply the light-duty policy to pregnancy; uniforms and equipment are not ordered in smaller dedicated women's sizes; there is little or no help for officers who need assistance with childcare; and physical education instructors may not properly pace female recruits, which can result in permanent knee injuries and the women being eliminated from the academy.

In fact, many of the problems identified by the IWITTS assessment within the APD had to do with integration rather than sexual harassment. The APD had lost a lawsuit because a supervisor did not apply the light-duty policy to pregnancy appropriately. Thirty-three percent of the department's female officers reported that their uniforms and equipment did not fit satisfactorily, compared to only 11 percent of men. Eighty-one percent of the women had reported their equipment problems to their supervisors and had been told that



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uniforms and equipment were not available in small sizes. Women recruits were dropping out of the academy in large numbers because of knee injuries. Seventeen percent of the women and 27 percent of the men reported that childcare during work hours was a problem.

The APD addressed these issues through training and changes in standard operating procedures. The department's request for bids for uniforms and equipment required vendors to provide smaller dedicated women's sizing. Physical education instructors adjusted the training regime to prevent women recruits from suffering leg injuries in disproportionate numbers. Because childcare was an issue for both male and female officers, the department decided to study the officers' needs in that area more extensively. IWITTS developed a well-received half-day training session for supervisors, "Creating a Supportive Work Environment," to address issues of integration.

Promotion

The percentage of women in policing who are ranked officers and in command positions is smaller than the total percentage of female police officers (9.5 percent), and at present there are only 123 women serving as police chiefs.⁹ It has been just over 20 years since women entered policing in large numbers, so there must be women present in the pool of qualified officers. The question is: why aren't they moving up in the ranks?

A definitive answer will require more research, but there are some steps that chiefs can take now. Are female officers receiving opportunities for assignments and training that will lay the groundwork for their eventual promotion? Do they have mentors to help guide them in their careers? In general, women and minorities have greater difficulty finding mentors, and departments might want to consider formal mentoring programs for all officers.

Chiefs should also consider whether female officers are applying for promotions in numbers proportionate to their representation in the department. If not, perhaps they need encouragement from their supervisors. It is also possible that the promotional process disproportionately screens out female officers. Research shows that the more subjective the promotional process is, the less likely women are to pass it.¹⁰ Some safeguards against bias include weighting the process towards "hands on" tasks (as assessment centers do); conducting structured interviews; selecting board members who represent different races and both sexes; and training the board members on interviewing techniques.

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The APD had certain strengths going into the project. It already had many women in key leadership positions, and it used an assessment center for its promotional process. One of its three deputy chiefs was a woman, and the directors of its training academy and its Recruitment and Selection Division were women. At the time of the IWITTS assessment, the proportion of women in ranked positions was actually slightly higher than their 11-percent representation in the department. Women in management serve as role models to female officers, sending the message that there is a career path up the chain of command for all officers.

Conclusion

Recruiting, integrating and promoting women in policing are achievable goals when police departments use women-specific strategies, enforce sexual harassment and pregnancy policies, and provide training for their supervisors and line officers. As more and more police departments move toward community policing, the need to recruit and retain female officers is becoming critical. ❖

¹ Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, September 1995).

² R. Arvey, T. Landon, S. Nutting, S. Maxwell, "Development of Physical Ability Tests for Police Officers: A Construct Validation Approach," *Journal of Applied Psychology* (December 1992) 77(6): 96-109; and M.L. Birzer, D.E. Craig, "Gender Differences in Police Physical Ability Test," *American Journal of Police* (1996) 15(2): 93-108.

³ L.K. Gaines, S. Falkenberg, J.A. Gambino, "Police Physical Agility Testing: An Historical and Legal Analysis," *American Journal of Police* (1993) 12(4): 47-66.

⁴ Z. Adler, "Hill Street Clues: The U.S. Police Record on Promoting Women," *Personnel Management* (August 1990) 22(8): 28-33.

⁵ S. Martin, *On the Move: The Status of Women in Policing* (Washington, DC: The Police Foundation, 1990).

⁶ W.M. Timmins, B.E. Hainsworth, "Attracting and Retaining Females in Law Enforcement: Sex-based Problems of Women Cops in 1998," *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, Vol. 33, 1989, pp. 197-205.

⁷ D. Nichols, "The Brotherhood: Sexual Harassment in Police Agencies," *Women Police*, Summer 1995, pp. 10-12.

⁸ *Burlington Industries, Inc. v. Ellerth*, No. 97-569 (1998); and *Faragher v. City of Boca Raton*, No. 97-282 (1998). An employer can be held liable for its supervisors' sexual harassment under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, even if it did not know of the misconduct; in some cases, the employer can defend itself by showing it took steps to prevent or correct harassment.

⁹ Martin.

¹⁰ Adler; see also S. Grennan and R. Munoz, "Women as Police Supervisors in the Twenty-first Century: A Decade of Promotional Practices by Gender in Three Major Police Agencies," from *Visions of Change: Crime and Justice in the Twenty-first Century*, edited by R. Muraskin and A. R. Roberts, (Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1996) pp. 340-354.



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