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Police chiefs and sheriffs rank their criminal justice needs

by Barbara Manili and Edward Connors

Law enforcement workloads have increased significantly compared to 3 years ago, according to a National Institute of Justice survey. More than 80 percent of law enforcement agencies nationwide said officers are handling more calls for service now. Increased drug arrests contribute to heavier workloads for more than 70 percent of police and sheriffs' agencies. Nearly two-thirds feel the impact of increasing arrests for domestic assaults. Drug enforcement and computer crime rank high on the list of law enforcement training needs.

This *Research in Action* summarizes the responses of police chiefs and sheriffs to the second National Assessment Program (NAP) survey. The first was conducted in 1983.[1] This paper discusses concerns common to law enforcement agencies nationwide as well as needs and problems that vary according to population and region. It also highlights the projects police and sheriffs have developed to meet management and training needs.

To help plan its research and development, the National Institute of Justice regularly identifies the important needs and problems of local and State criminal justice practitioners. To accomplish this, the National Institute contracted with the Institute for Law and Justice, Inc., to

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The 1986 National Assessment Survey was conducted by the Institute for Law and Justice, Alexandria, Virginia, of which Edward Connors is president and Barbara Manili a senior associate.

conduct the 1986 National Assessment survey of approximately 2,500 practitioners selected from a sample of 375 counties across the country. Included were all 175 counties with populations of at least 250,000 and a sample of 200 counties with populations less than 250,000.

In each sampled county, the police chief of the largest city, sheriff, jail administrator, prosecutor, chief judge, trial court administrator (where applicable), and probation and parole agency heads received survey forms. The questionnaires were tailored to specific responsibilities.

Police chiefs and sheriffs completed questionnaires that focused on:

Criminal justice system problems.
What does the department see as the most serious local criminal justice system problems?

Workload. If the department's workload has increased over the past 3 years, what factors account for the increase? How is the department coping with it?

Operations and procedures. What are the department's priorities for improving field operations, investigations, and management information systems? What projects have been successful?

Staffing. What problems do departments have recruiting and retaining staff? What are the major training and technical assistance needs?

Police chiefs completed 281 surveys for a return rate of 76 percent (well above the 64 percent return rate for all groups), and sheriffs completed 207 surveys for a return rate of 68 percent. The sheriffs included in this sample all have criminal law enforcement responsibilities.

Exhibit 1 shows the breakdown of police and sheriffs' departments in the survey sample according to size of population served.

Department budgets. Thirty percent of the police respondents (19 percent of sheriffs) have had budget increases of less than 10 percent, or budget reductions from 1983 to 1986. Funding for the majority of police (59 percent) and sheriffs (54 percent) increased between 10 and 30 percent over the past 3 years. Twenty-seven percent of sheriffs had budget increases of more than 30 percent, compared to only 12 percent of police.

Criminal justice system problems

Police chiefs and sheriffs were asked to rank order a list of seven criminal justice system problems identified in the previous NAP survey. In 1983, 39 percent of police (35 percent of sheriffs) ranked staff shortages as the most serious problem. This situation has not improved in the past 3 years. In 1986, staff shortages are again cited as the number one problem by 39 percent of police and 38 percent of sheriffs. Because most of the sheriff respondents have jail management responsibilities, it

Police chiefs and sheriffs rank their criminal justice needs

Police chiefs and sheriffs responding by population of jurisdiction
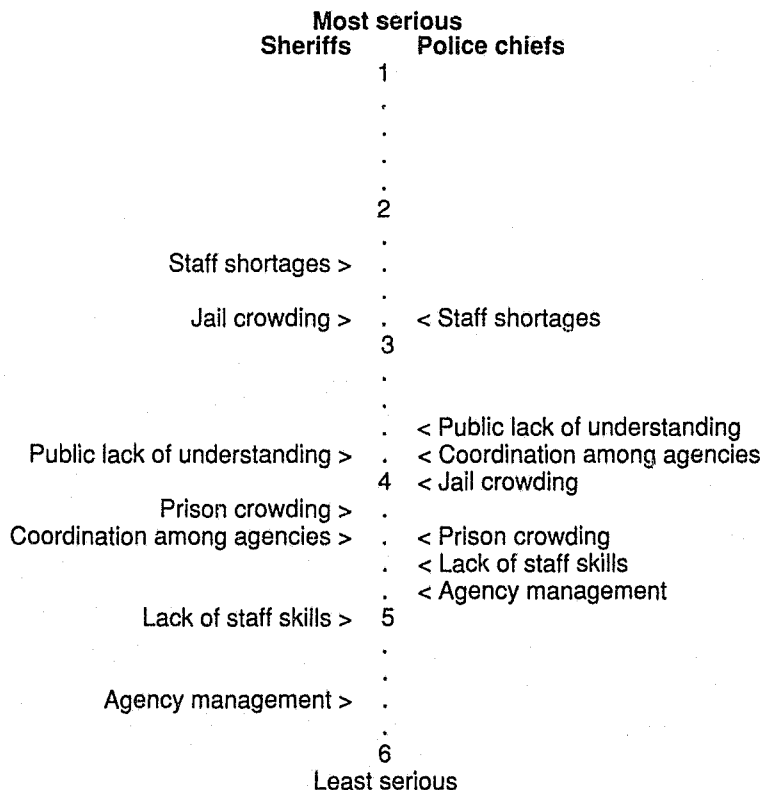
Population
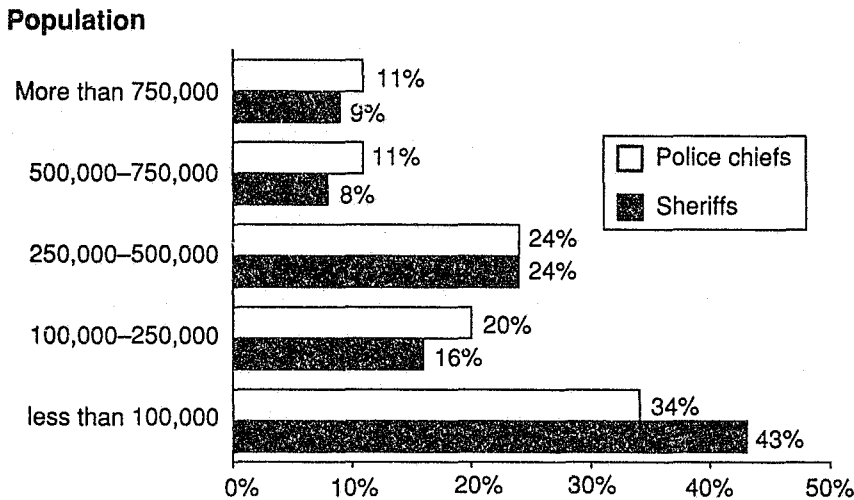
is not surprising that they rate jail crowding nearly as high as staff shortages: 35 percent of sheriffs consider jail crowding the most serious criminal justice problem. Police are more diverse in their responses. With the exception of staff shortages, no problem is rated as most serious by more than 14 percent of police. Exhibit 2 shows the average rankings by police and sheriffs for the problems listed in the questionnaire.

Most of the survey questions included a list of needs or problems. Respondents rated these items on a scale of 1 to 4 according to degree of importance for their agencies.

In the discussion that follows, ratings of 3 and 4 indicated a need or a problem. The term "major" (e.g., major need, major problem) refers only to the highest rating of 4.

Workload

To obtain background on workload, the questionnaire asked for data on crimes, calls for service, and traffic accidents. The medians on these workload measures are shown in Exhibit 3. Police and sheriffs were asked to rate the degree to which eight factors have contributed to increased workloads over the past 3 years.

The survey results show several trends, including the following:

● Departments are handling more calls for service now than in recent years. Increased calls for service are considered a significant workload contributor by 88 percent of police and 81 percent of sheriffs.

● More cases are requiring investigations by detectives. Approximately 70 percent of sheriffs and 66 percent of police consider this an important contributor to workload increases.

● Sixty-six percent of police and sheriffs believe the release of more offenders from crowded State prisons creates significant workload problems for their agencies.

Exhibit 2
Average rankings of criminal justice system problems

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● Officers are making substantially more arrests for drug offenses and driving while intoxicated. At least 66 percent of the respondents cite drug and DWI arrests as important contributors to increased workloads.

● Domestic violence arrests have increased over the past 3 years in more than half the agencies sampled.

Arrests for drugs and driving while intoxicated

There is little question that the recent public outcry to get tough on drugs—particularly street-level drug activity—has taken its toll on law enforcement workloads. More than 70 percent of both police and sheriffs say their workloads are heavier because they are now making more arrests for drug offenses than they did 3 years ago. For police, drug arrests are significant workload contributors in more than 80 percent of departments in jurisdictions serving at least 250,000 residents, compared to 60 percent of departments with less than 100,000 residents.

The impact of drug arrests on law enforcement workloads is greatest in States on or near the country's southern border. For example, increased drug arrests are a significant workload contributor for more than 90 percent of sheriffs in the Southwest (Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and Arizona), compared to 36 percent of sheriffs in the Plains-Mountain region.[2]

Increases in arrests for driving while intoxicated (DWI) reflect law enforcement's responsiveness to another widely publicized citizen concern. Approximately 66 percent of sheriffs and 60 percent of police consider increased DWI arrests a significant workload contributor.

Domestic violence arrests

In many law enforcement agencies in the 1980's, nonarrest strategies for dealing with domestic assaults are giving way to policies that encourage or require arrests. Many States have passed legislation expanding officers' authority to arrest domestic assault suspects based on probable cause without having to obtain a warrant or witnessing the crime.[3]

The trend toward arrests for domestic assaults is reflected in the NAP survey results. Increased domestic violence arrests are now a significant workload contributor for 64 percent of police and 55 percent of sheriffs. Less than 7 percent of either group indicate that these arrests have had no influence at all on workload.

Workload trends

To gain more information on workload trends, the NAP questionnaire asked police and sheriffs to identify training and technical assistance needs from a list of nine topics. Two topics related to drug enforcement received the highest ratings, followed closely by computer crime investigation.

Drug enforcement. The survey results showed that 94 percent of police and 91 percent of sheriffs wanted training in programs to reduce drug problems in their communities. In fact, 65 percent of police (58 percent of sheriffs) ranked assistance in this area as a major need. A related topic, processing asset forfeitures from drug cases, also received high scores. It was of interest to more than 77 percent of police and 80 percent of sheriffs. For police, asset forfeitures was

of greatest interest in the Far West,[4] where training or technical assistance was needed by 97 percent of the departments, and the Southwest, needed by 91 percent.

Computer crime training. The need for training and assistance in computer crime investigations is somewhat greater for police (75 percent) than sheriffs (63 percent). Approximately 84 percent of police in cities with more than 500,000 residents want training and assistance in this area, compared to about 70 percent of departments in cities of less than 250,000 population.

Management-union relations. The only other topic considered important by more than half the police respondents (52 percent) is management-union relations. Interest in this subject varies by region. For example, union issues are important for 70 percent of police departments in the heavily industrialized Great Lakes region,[5] but only 34 percent in the Southeast[6] and 38 percent in the Southwest.

AIDS. Half the sheriffs (45 percent of police) cite a need for training or technical assistance in handling arrestees with AIDS. This is a somewhat lower degree of interest than expected given the number of crimes committed by intravenous drug users, who are also considered at high risk for AIDS; however, some departments may have already received training.

Exhibit 3

Workload data for 1985—median numbers

Category	Police chiefs	Sheriffs
Part I reported crimes	4,935	1,956
Calls for service handled by patrol	46,218	18,151
Calls for service handled by telephone	2,500	500
Traffic accident reports	2,595	728

Other trends. Approximately 55 percent of sheriffs (48 percent of police) cite a need for victim assistance training. Technical assistance or training in career criminal programs is of interest to approximately 42 percent of both police and sheriffs. However, less than 11 percent of either group consider victim assistance or career criminal training a major need.

Finally, 34 percent of police (26 percent of sheriffs) report a need for assistance in communicating with persons who do not speak English.

Victim assistance programs

In the past 15 years, crime victims have made organized efforts to improve the way their cases are handled by the criminal justice system. The 1986 NAP survey shows that many police and sheriffs' departments have responded by administering victim assistance programs, cooperating with programs sponsored by others, and training officers to consider victims' needs. The survey also gathered information about victim services administered by prosecutors and independent organizations. A separate *Research in Action* discusses victim assistance in greater detail.

Ninety-five police departments and fifty-eight sheriffs' departments have victim assistance programs within their departments. Most of these programs operate with small staffs. The largest police program has nine staff members (the median number of staff is two), while the largest sheriff's program has four (with a median of one).

The services most commonly provided by both police and sheriffs are distributing printed materials (provided by approximately 80 percent), referring victims to other services (80 percent), notifying victims of the status of their cases (60 percent), and providing notice of court dates (50 percent of police and 40 percent of sheriffs' programs). Although 46 percent of law enforcement

agencies with victim programs train officers in victim assistance, only about 23 percent extend this training to call takers and dispatchers.

Exhibit 4 shows the victims (by crime type) most commonly served by law enforcement victim assistance programs.

As noted earlier, increases in domestic violence cases have significantly affected officer workloads in more than 70 percent of the departments surveyed. In addition, other NAP survey results point to critical increases in the number of cases involving child victims that have been prosecuted in the past 3 years. By using professional counselors to work with victims of violence, departments can improve the quality of services to these victims and free officers' time to focus on investigative and enforcement duties.

Workload management

The final workload question asked respondents to identify projects they believe have helped them successfully manage workloads in their departments. Some frequently mentioned techniques for managing increased calls for service are call prioritization systems, differential police response projects, and

telephone report units. Directed patrol, community-oriented policing, and improved crime analysis capabilities are also among the projects cited as most helpful. In addition, a significant number of departments mention using more civilians, for example, as field report technicians. To help manage investigators' workloads, the respondents frequently mention Managing Criminal Investigations (MCI) programs and other case-screening systems.

Responses are diverse regarding drug problems and increasing workloads created by drug arrests. No one program or management technique is predominant. Enforcement efforts such as buy-bust operations, stings, use of informants, and asset forfeiture programs are mentioned. A number of departments emphasize the importance of providing elementary and junior high school programs to help reduce the demand for drugs among young people.

Several departments mentioned the use of task forces to manage drug investigations. These joint efforts may be of special interest for followup studies because of their potential for making effective use of limited resources. One department mentions "a task force unit created to deal with career criminals and

Exhibit 4

Victims served by police chiefs' and sheriffs' programs

	Percentage of programs with service	
Crime victims served	Police chiefs (n=95)	Sheriffs (n=58)
Homicide survivors (e.g., friends, family)	39%	49%
Rape/other sex crimes	76	80
Spouse abuse/domestic assault	73	69
Assault	65	54
Child abuse/child sexual abuse	63	63
Robbery	38	31
Burglary	34	36

drug offenders," while another cites "combining county and city personnel for narcotics enforcement." Several other departments note success through participation in regional narcotics enforcement units.

Operations and procedures

Field operations. Law enforcement respondents were asked to rate the extent to which their departments need-to implement or improve various aspects of field operations. Although police and sheriffs' priorities vary somewhat, they agree that the two most important needs are for more patrol officer investigations and more directed patrol activities.

Having patrol officers conduct more preliminary investigations of serious crimes is seen as a need by 61 percent of police and 54 percent of sheriffs. The extent to which this is needed varies by size of jurisdiction served. For example, in jurisdictions of more than 750,000 residents, most police departments rely on specialized investigative units. In these jurisdictions, only 30 percent of police cite a need for more preliminary investigations by patrol. In contrast, 65 percent of departments in jurisdictions with fewer than 500,000 residents indicate a need for a more "generalist" approach in having patrol officers conduct more investigations.

Nearly 60 percent of police (56 percent of sheriffs) believe they need to implement or improve directed patrol operations. More than half of police (52 percent) and 43 percent of sheriffs cite a need to improve or implement telephone report units or other programs to divert calls for service from the field.

Approximately 40 percent of police (32 percent of sheriffs) are interested in improving officer work schedules. Police are more interested than sheriffs in redesigning patrol beats or districts. This is a need for 42 percent of police but only 26 percent of sheriffs. Approximately 26 percent of police say they are interested in foot patrol programs;

however, only 6 percent consider this a major need.

Finally, police show a somewhat greater interest than sheriffs in community programs to reduce fear of crime. More than 55 percent of police compared to 39 percent of sheriffs report a need for programs to address this problem.

Investigations. Police and sheriffs were given a list of nine options for improving investigations and were asked to rate the extent to which each option is needed. The results are shown in Exhibit 5.

Clearly, the most significant needs are related to drug investigations. Approximately 57 percent of police (50 percent of sheriffs) cite needs for buy-money for drug cases and informants, and 53 percent of police (47 percent of sheriffs) report a need to improve the way informants are managed. In addition, about 35 percent of police (33 percent of sheriffs) indicate a need for more support from the crime laboratory. Most of the examples for this need relate to increases in drug cases.
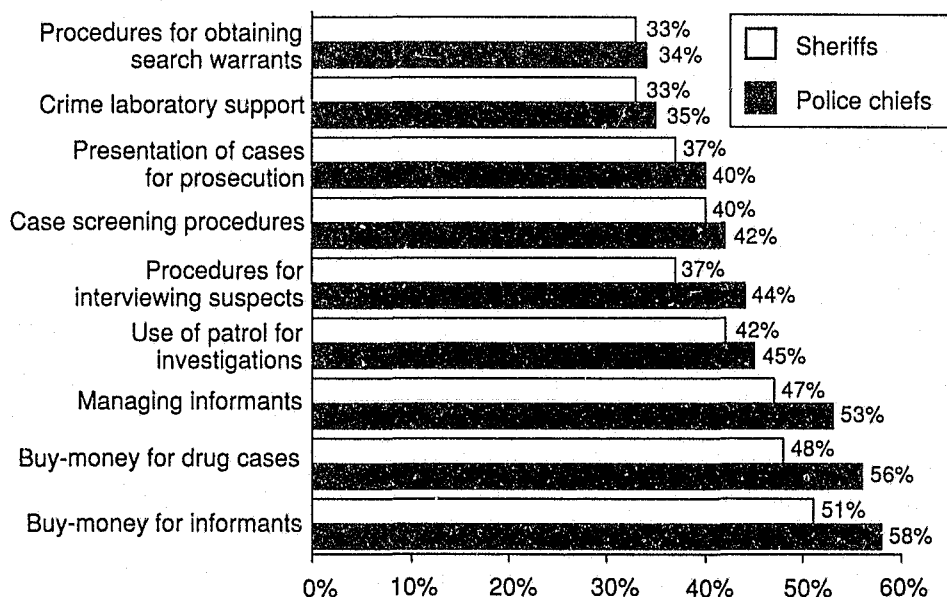
Management information systems. Police and sheriffs were asked to rate their needs for various types of management information (regardless of whether the department's management information system is computerized). Some of the most important needs relate to measuring employee performance and productivity.

Nearly 76 percent of police (66 percent of sheriffs) indicate they need information on patrol officer and detective performance and productivity. This is considered a major need by approximately one-third of police and one-fourth of sheriffs.

Information about case outcomes is also important for nearly two-thirds of both groups. Approximately 66 percent of police (63 percent of sheriffs) state they need information about the final disposition of court cases. This is a major need for 31 percent of police and 29 percent of sheriffs. Similarly, 58 percent of police and 54 percent of sheriffs want more information on the reasons that cases are rejected by the prosecutor's office.

Exhibit 5
Criminal investigations needs

	Sheriffs	Police chiefs
Procedures for obtaining search warrants	33%	34%
Crime laboratory support	33%	35%
Presentation of cases for prosecution	37%	40%
Case screening procedures	40%	42%
Procedures for interviewing suspects	37%	44%
Use of patrol for investigations	42%	45%
Managing informants	47%	53%
Buy-money for drug cases	48%	56%
Buy-money for informants	51%	58%

Survey respondents were asked to list ways they have improved their field operations, investigations, and management information systems. Many field operations projects (differential police response, directed patrol, and others) were highlighted in this paper in the section on workloads. Several departments also cited successes in assigning misdemeanor and other investigations to patrol officers. Some departments recommended training that includes temporary assignments to investigative units.

In addition, trends seem to be emerging in the use of special teams and neighborhood based approaches to crime and problem solving. For example, respondents mentioned the following projects:

● Street-crimes task forces;
● Field task forces;
● Burglary attack teams;
● Action plan programs;
● "Teams attacking crime through the involvement of neighborhoods;"
● Community patrol program; and
● Neighborhood team policing.

The questionnaire did not reveal a great deal of specific information on how departments are addressing investigators' needs for buy-money and ways to manage informants. However, a number of agencies report improvements in investigations as a result of such efforts as:

● Computerized case tracking;
● Fingerprinting;
● Records management systems;
● Computerized files of sexual assault suspects; and
● In-service training in interviewing techniques.

Efforts to improve management information include the growing use of computers to address virtually every aspect of police operations. The degree of sophistication mentioned by the respondents ranges from the use of portable terminals

in officers' cars to the simple statement: "We bought a computer."

Other departments emphasize the employee performance evaluation techniques they have found successful. These include:

● The development of monthly workload standards for investigators and patrol officers;
● A "police officer evaluation that includes peer and subordinate evaluations;"
● A "90 day status conference by a supervisor with each patrol and investigative officer, in addition to the annual conference;" and
● An evaluation system that includes a "burglary followup review procedure, analysis of robberies, and a warrant reduction review."

Staffing

Staff shortages. One objective of the NAP survey was to determine the extent and types of staff shortages that law enforcement agencies are experiencing. Responses on staff shortages are shown in Exhibit 6.

Nearly three-fourths of the survey respondents (75 percent of sheriffs and 72 percent of police) cite a need for more patrol officers. In fact, this is considered a major need by approximately 40

Exhibit 6

Staff shortages reported in survey

| Staff type | Percentage of agencies reporting shortages | |
	Police chiefs	Sheriffs
Patrol officers	72%	75%
Clerical	47	48
Data processing	43	43
Detectives	40	55
Crime lab	27	37
Sworn supervisors	24	22

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percent of both groups. Approximately 55 percent of sheriffs, compared to 40 percent of police, report a significant need for detectives.

The need for crime lab personnel varies considerably by size of jurisdiction. Forty-one percent of police serving more than 750,000 residents report a need for crime lab personnel, but only about 15 percent of departments serving fewer than 250,000 residents.

Staff recruitment. Sixty-seven percent of police respondents indicate they have recruitment problems because of a shortage of qualified minority applicants, and 37 percent consider this a major problem. Nearly half (49 percent) of sheriffs also cite a lack of qualified minority applicants as a problem.

More than half (53 percent) of sheriffs consider low salaries a recruitment problem, compared to 40 percent of police. However, for police this problem varies dramatically by region: 61 percent in the Southeast consider low salaries a significant recruitment problem, compared to only about 18 percent in the Mid Atlantic[7] and Far West regions.

Approximately 30 percent of police (26 percent of sheriffs) note problems because they do not have enough control over the personnel selection process. No other potential problem listed in the questionnaire (shortage of applicants, poor image of police work, and failure to pass physical examinations) is a problem for more than 25 percent of police or sheriffs.

The questionnaire did not ask specifically whether drug use among applicants creates a recruitment problem. However, more than a dozen departments cite this and related obstacles (for example, failure to meet standards after background checks, psychological screening, or interviews). One department with recruitment problems made this observation: "Background exams, psychologi-

cals and polygraphs weed out a lot. Is everyone a former drug abuser?"

Staff retention. Lack of promotional opportunities is the most significant obstacle to retaining staff, cited as a problem by 57 percent of police and 55 percent of sheriffs.

Low salary increases is the second most serious retention problem for sheriffs (52 percent) and police (40 percent). Police responses vary widely by region and by size of jurisdiction. More than 67 percent of police in the Southeast cite low salary increases as a retention problem, compared to only 28 percent of police in the Middle Atlantic region.

Staff "burnout" presents a similar problem for both police (37 percent) and sheriffs (31 percent). The problem of other agencies "raiding" the staff is more significant for sheriffs (38 percent) than police (23 percent). Less than 15 percent of the respondents have significant problems with the other factors listed in the questionnaire (poor image of police work, early retirements, and drug or alcohol abuse).

It is interesting in light of the ongoing public debate about employee drug testing that less than 4 percent of law enforcement agencies consider alcohol and drug problems significant obstacles to retaining staff. In fact, only one of the nearly 500 responding agencies considers alcohol or drugs a major problem.

Several departments commented on the mounting future problem of retirements of experienced personnel. One major police department expressed concern that within the next 3 to 5 years, nearly 50 percent of the mid- and upper level managers may retire.

Staff training needs. In general, most survey respondents seem to believe training in basic law enforcement functions is adequate. The following trends emerged from the survey results:

● Only about one-third of police and sheriffs see a need to improve recruit training, training in arrest procedures, or training in search and seizure.
● Drug enforcement is the only topic cited by more than half of the respondents (approximately 58 percent).
● Most departments want to focus their training efforts on management issues.

Approximately two-thirds of police and sheriffs report significant needs to improve training in midlevel supervision (a need for 71 percent of police and 66 percent of sheriffs) and civil liability prevention (cited by 71 percent of sheriffs and 67 percent of police). In addition, training in stress management is considered a significant need by 64 percent of sheriffs and 60 percent of police.

To aid practitioners in future training efforts, the National Institute of Justice is considering several electronic techniques, including teleconferencing, electronic bulletin boards, videotapes, television and radio presentations, audio cassettes, and electronic mail. The NAP questionnaire asked police and sheriffs which techniques they find most useful. The overwhelming majority of respondents (70 percent) favor videotapes.

Responses to staffing problems. Departments that are solving the problem of recruiting qualified minority applicants emphasize the following efforts:
● Recruiting visits to primarily black colleges.
● Advertising outside their immediate geographical areas.
● Making presentations at churches in minority communities.
● Media campaigns.
● General community outreach efforts that "place sharp officers before the public."

The lack of promotional opportunities is a long-recognized problem in law

enforcement agencies. To retain officers' interest and commitment, many departments are turning to rewards and incentives other than promotions in rank. Among the successful efforts mentioned by the survey respondents are:
● Changing officers' working hours (for example, scheduling fixed shifts or adopting 4/10 shift plans).
● Providing salary incentives for college degrees.
● Improving the retirement system.
● Providing stress management, employee assistance, and physical fitness programs.
● Making frequent reassignments.
● Creating career development programs.
● Developing specialist job classifications with pay increases.
● Providing opportunities to participate in management decisions.

One police respondent summarized the apparent feelings of many others on the subject of staff retention and employee morale: "Pay well, treat employees with dignity, and back them up on unfounded or distorted complaints against them."

Future issues

The National Assessment Program survey also included open-ended questions asking police and sheriffs to state the two most pressing managerial or operational problems in their agencies today, and the two problems they anticipate will be most serious 3 years from now. Personnel issues dominated both sets of responses.

First, agencies are concerned about the lack of funds for personnel at a time when calls for service are increasing. Many departments in rapidly growing urban and suburban areas believe this problem will only grow worse in 3 years.

There are widespread concerns about lack of funds and time for in-service

training, particularly for first-line and midlevel supervisors. Motivating officers, measuring productivity, compensating for a lack of promotional opportunities, and handling labor management conflicts are also among the most frequently mentioned issues.

One chief seems to have expressed the frustration of many with this statement: "There are no rewards to managing one's resources to the optimum in the police profession other than survival." However, in spite of the survey's focus on problems, the questionnaire also produced a great deal of information on solutions. Law enforcement administrators do express considerable frustration, but also a great deal of pride in the creative responses to complex problems their personnel have developed.

Notes

1. The 1983 National Assessment Program survey was conducted for the National Institute of Justice by Abt Associates, Inc., Boston, Massachusetts.

2. Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Utah, and Wyoming. Nearly 82 percent of sheriffs in the Plains-Mountain region cite increased DWI arrests as an important workload contributor, compared to only 50 percent of sheriffs in the Southwest.

3. Gail A. Goolkasian, "Confronting Domestic Violence: The Role of Criminal Court Judges," National Institute of Justice Research in Brief, November 1986.

4. Alaska, California, Hawaii, Nevada, Oregon, and Washington.

5. Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, and Wisconsin.

6. Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia.

7. District of Columbia, Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania.

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