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Law Enforcement Organizational (LEO) Survey

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One phase of the National Police Research Platform involved online surveys of sworn and civilian law enforcement employees that covered wide-ranging topics, including views of the community, levels of stress and burnout, and feelings about supervision and management. A total of three surveys were conducted in a sample of municipal police departments and sheriff's offices that deliver policing services.

Participating agencies were recruited from a random sample of police and sheriff's offices. The sample was drawn from the 2007 Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics (LEMAS) database. In particular, this database enabled us to identify and sample sheriff's agencies providing policing services. Agencies with 100-3,000 sworn police personnel were eligible for participation. Consideration was also given to the geographic location of the agencies, with the intention of including organizations located in the northeastern, midwestern, southern, and western parts of the U.S.

In addition to the randomly selected agencies, a number of additional agencies were included for study. Several of them were small, but others were larger than 3,000 sworn and were among the biggest police departments in the nation. Ultimately, these procedures resulted in 100 agencies agreeing to participate in the three online surveys.

This report focuses on the results of the third survey (hereafter referred to as LEO C), which was composed of questions and items that had already been field tested in one of the previous two surveys. A total of 89 agencies participated in LEO C, which was in the field from October 2014, to February 2015. The average agency-level response rate was approximately 35 percent.

Surveys were conducted online using Qualtrics® software. All sworn and civilian employees were invited by e-mail to participate. Occasional reminder messages were sent to employees by their agency heads during the field period for the survey, which was about 30 days per organization. While civilian law enforcement employees participated in this survey, the findings presented below are based solely on sworn officers' responses.

The Sample

In total, 13,146 sworn officers representing 89 law enforcement agencies responded to LEO C. Approximately 13 percent of the survey participants were female, and roughly 48 percent had attained a college degree or higher. The majority of respondents, totaling 63 percent, were White, with approximately 7 percent African American, 8 percent Hispanic, and 1 percent Asian. The remaining

respondents self-identified in an “other” racial/ethnic category (e.g., Native American, biracial), refused to answer the question, or left the question blank. The average age of the respondents was approximately 43. The agencies comprised 70 municipal police departments and 19 full-service county sheriff’s offices.

Selected Findings

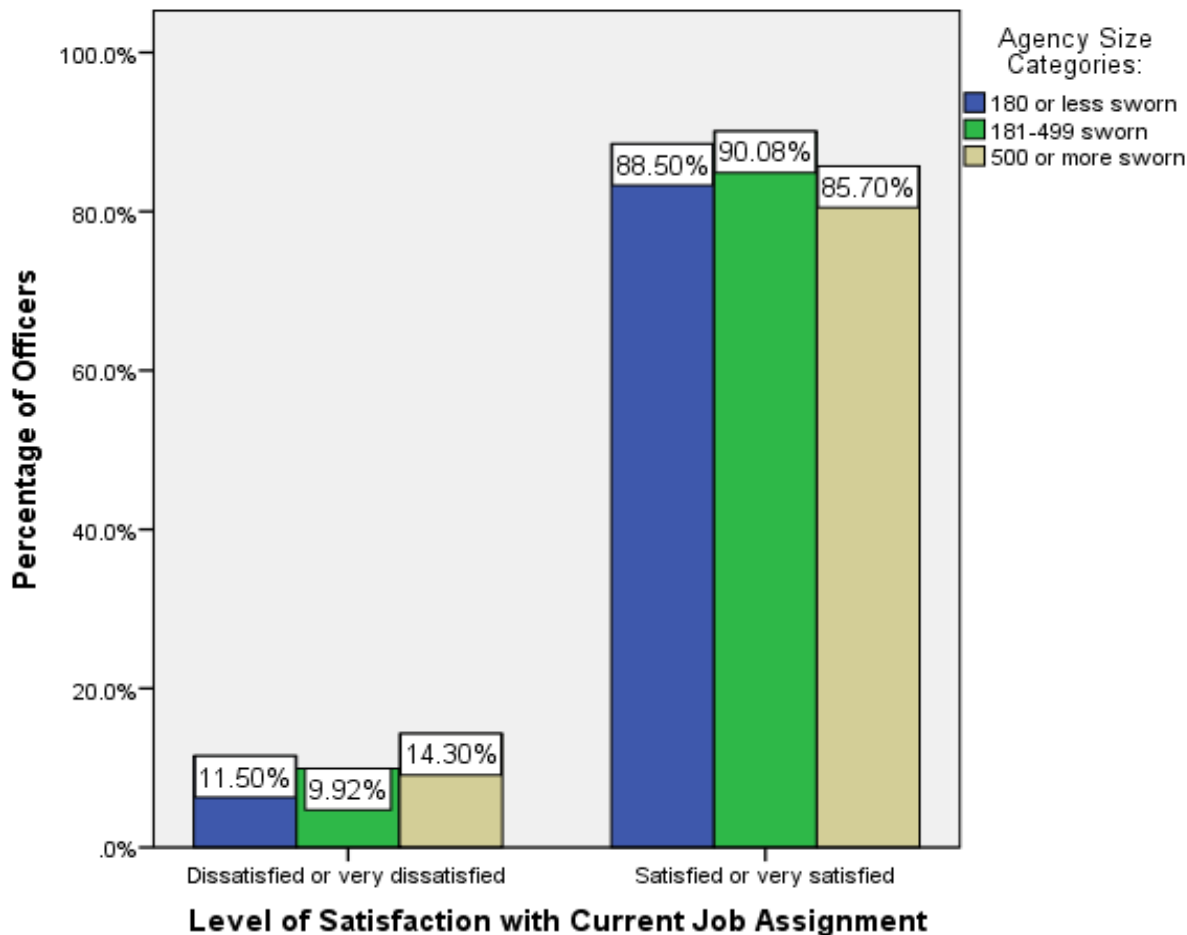
For the purposes of this report, sworn officers are categorized in two ways - first, by the size of the agency in which they worked and second, by the type of agency in which they worked. More specifically, officer responses to various survey questions are compared across three size categories (i.e., agencies with 180 officer or fewer, agencies with 181 to 499 officers, and agencies with 500 or more officers) and also across two agency types (i.e., municipal police departments and sheriff’s offices). The size categories represent natural breaks in the data and by no means equate to any standard definition of small, medium, and large agencies. Two distinguishing features of the National Police Research Platform are its inclusion of respondents from non-metropolitan agencies as well as its focus on employees of sheriff’s departments that perform policing duties, both of which represent under-studied populations of law enforcement employees.

Findings by Agency Size

Given the wide array of agencies in the sample, we expected some variances in responses based on the size of the agency in which officers worked. The findings below thus represent a comparison of 1,742 survey respondents who were officers working in agencies with 180 or fewer sworn employees, 3,465 survey respondents who were officers working in agencies with between 181 and 499 sworn employees, and 7,939 survey respondents who were officers in agencies with 500 or more sworn employees.

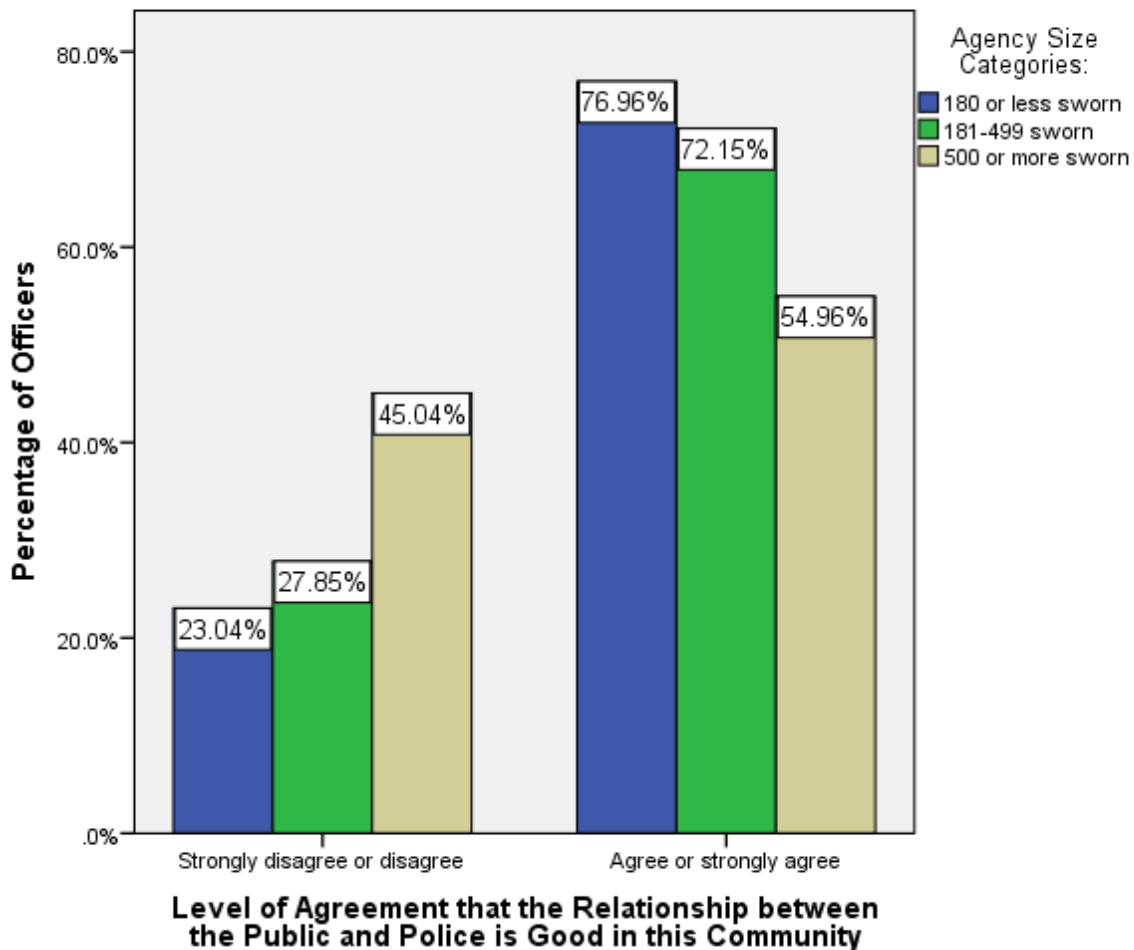
Satisfaction with job assignment. An area of consensus among officers working in agencies of all sizes was their overall high levels of satisfaction with their jobs. For example, one item asked respondents about their level of satisfaction with their current job assignment. Figure A illustrates that those surveyed expressed a high level of satisfaction with their current assignment: almost 89 percent of officers working in agencies with 180 or fewer sworn, 90 percent of officers working in agencies with 181-499 sworn, and 86 percent of officers working in agencies with 500 or more sworn were either satisfied or very satisfied with their current job assignment.

Figure A: Sworn Officer Satisfaction with Current Job Assignment by Agency Size



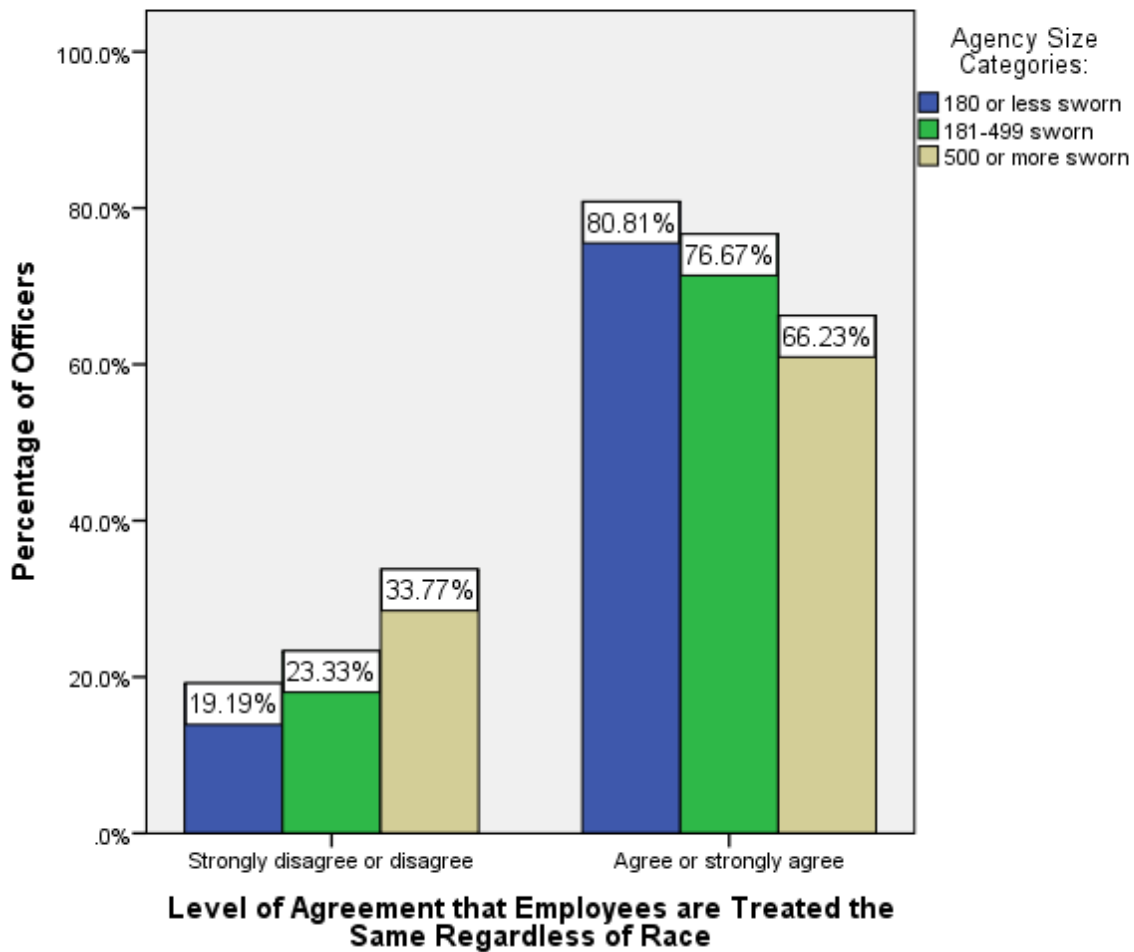
Views of community relations. In developing the surveys, we were very interested in learning how officers viewed the quality of police-community relations. To that end, one survey question asked officers to report their level of agreement with the statement, “the relationship between the police and public is good in this community.” As Figure B indicates, answers varied significantly depending on the size of the agency in which officers worked, with roughly 55 percent of officers in agencies with 500 or more sworn employees agreeing or strongly agreeing with that statement. Views were more positive among officers in smaller agencies, with almost 77 percent of officers in agencies with 180 or fewer sworn and 72 percent of officers in agencies with 181-499 sworn agreeing or strongly agreeing that the relationship between the police and the public was good.

Figure B: Sworn Officer Views of Community Relations by Agency Size



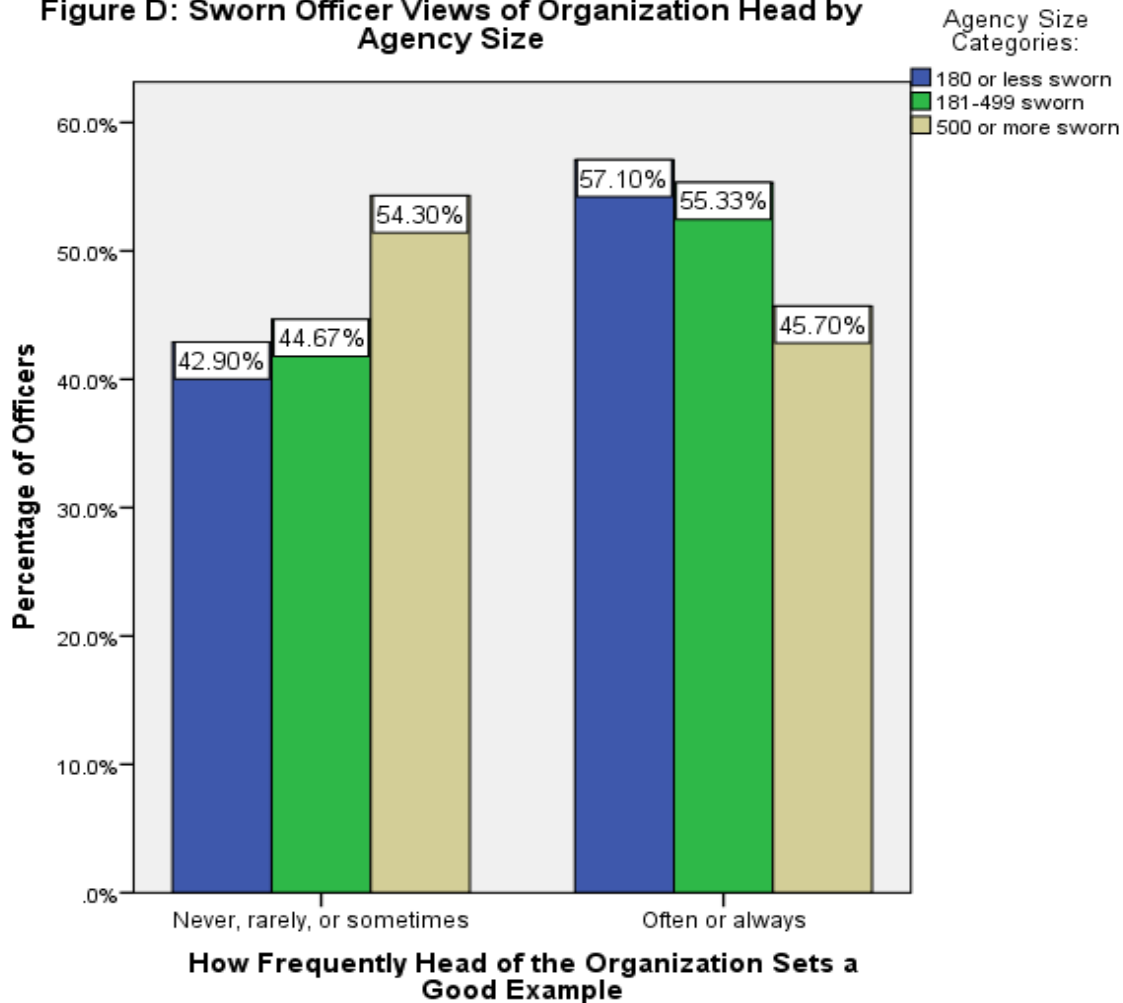
Views of treatment of minority employees. Officers were also asked in the survey about how employees were treated in the organization depending on different minority statuses. For example, one item asked respondents to give their level of agreement with the statement, “employees are treated the same regardless of race.” As Figure C illustrates, answers varied depending on the size of the organization in which officers worked, with almost 34 percent of officers working in agencies with 500 or more sworn officers strongly disagreeing or disagreeing that officers are treated the same regardless of race. This percentage compares to 23 percent of officers in agencies with 181-499 sworn and 19 percent of officers in agencies with 180 or fewer sworn strongly disagreeing or disagreeing with that statement. In other words, as the size of the agency increased so, too, did officers’ perceptions that employees of different races are treated differently. Conversely, in smaller agencies, officers were more inclined to believe that employees are treated equally regardless of race.

Figure C: Sworn Officer Views of Employee Treatment by Agency Size



Views of organization head. The survey also included various items relating to the head of the organization (i.e., the chief, sheriff, superintendent, commissioner, etc.). For instance, sworn officers were asked how often the head of the organization sets a good example for everyone in the agency. As Figure D indicates, answers varied based on the size of agency, with approximately 57 percent of officers in agencies with 180 or fewer officers and 55 percent of officers in agencies with 181-499 officers responding that the head of the organization sets a good example often or always. Less than a majority of officers, approximately 46 percent, in agencies with 500 or more officers reported that the head of the organization sets a good example often or always.

Figure D: Sworn Officer Views of Organization Head by Agency Size

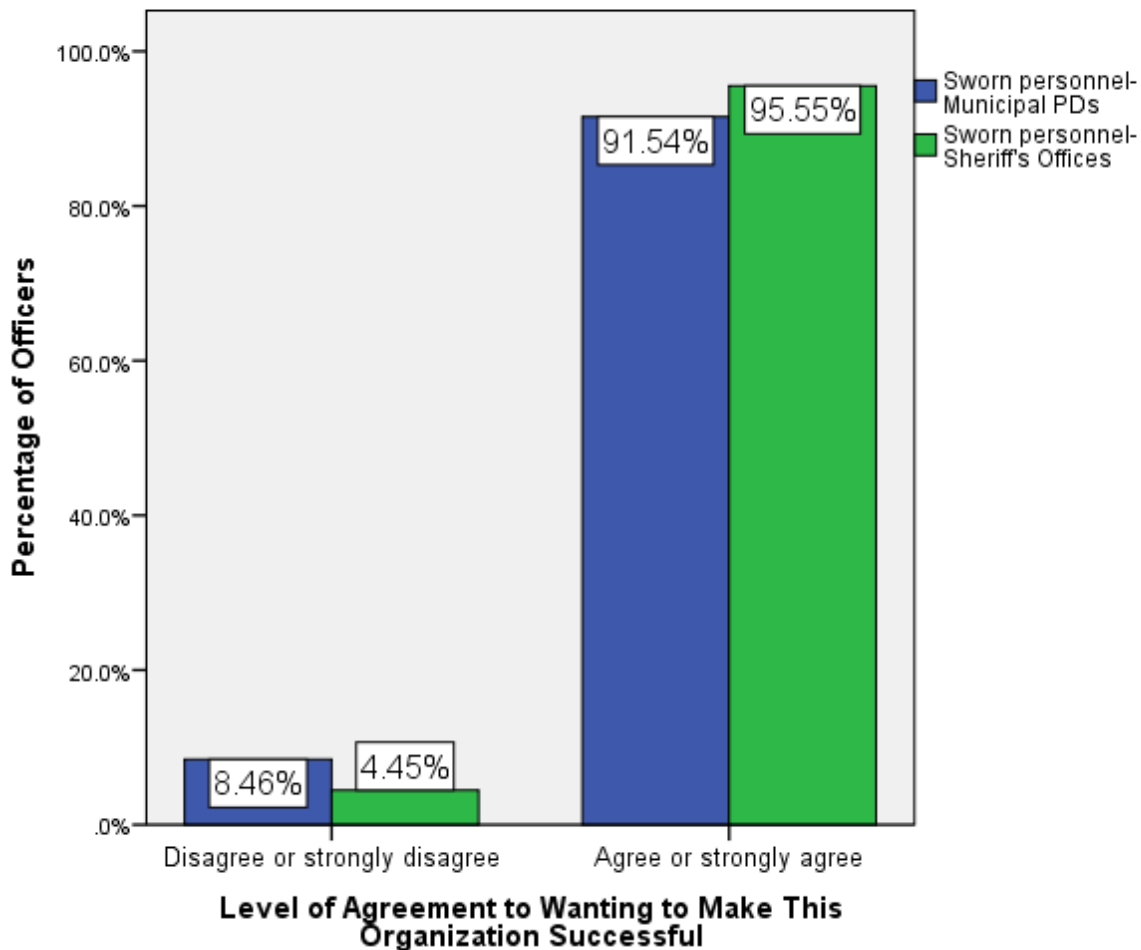


Findings by Agency Type

Given the lack of existing research on sheriff's offices, we were curious about differences that existed in perceptions or feelings among officers working in those agencies, compared to those working in municipal police departments. The findings below thus represent a comparison of the 2,495 survey respondents who were sworn officers working in sheriff's offices to the 10,651 survey respondents who were sworn officers working in municipal police departments.

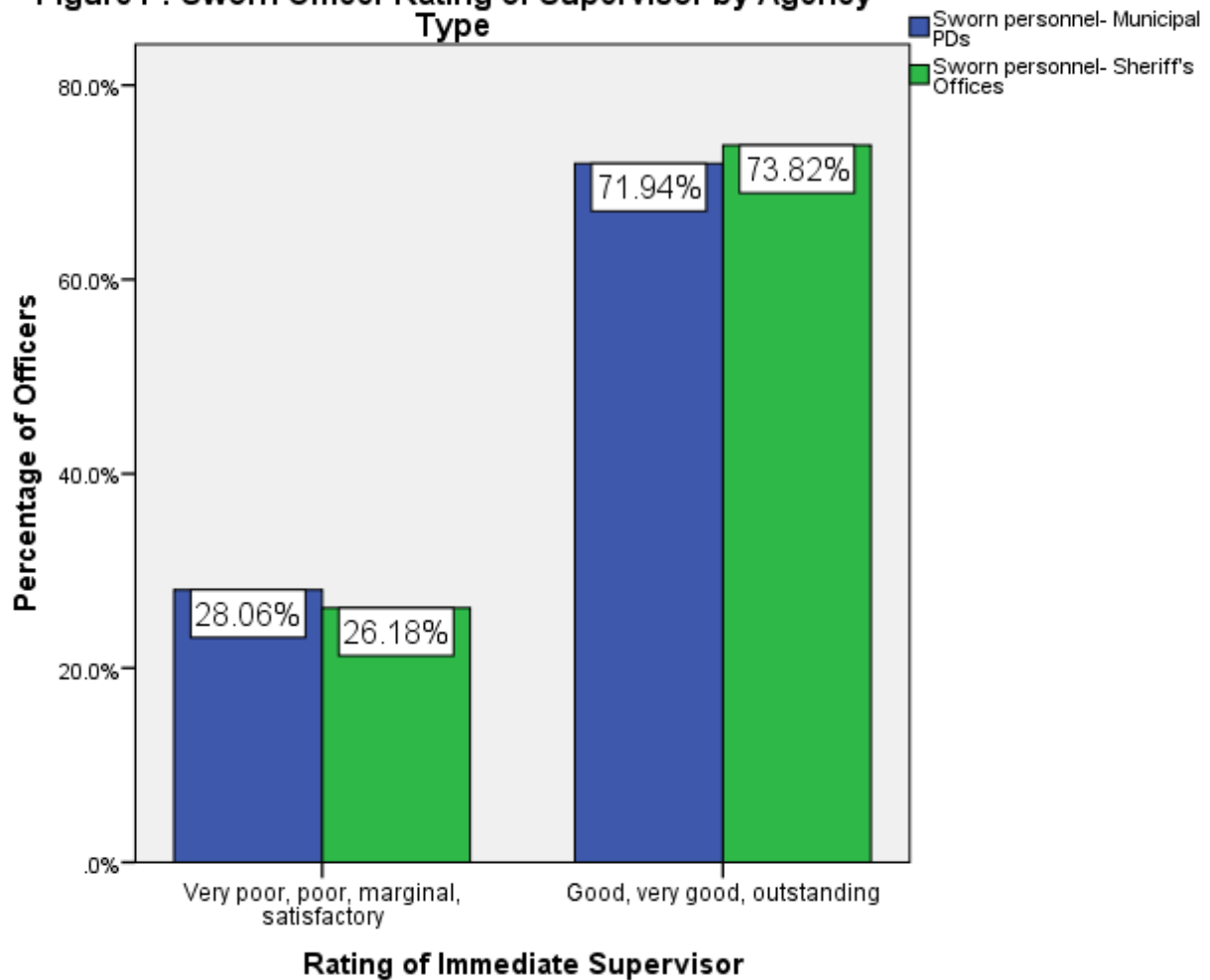
Organizational commitment. Respondents to the survey were presented several items that captured their levels of organizational commitment, an important concept that can affect employee retention, morale, and ways in which officers treat fellow employees and citizens of the community. For instance, one item in the survey asked respondents their level of agreement with the statement, "I am strongly committed to making this organization successful." As Figure E illustrates, sworn officers working in both municipal departments and sheriff's offices expressed strong agreement with that statement: almost 92 percent of sworn officers working in municipal police departments and 96 percent working in sheriff's offices agreed or strongly agreed that they were strongly committed to making the organization successful.

Figure E: Sworn Officer Organizational Commitment by Agency Type



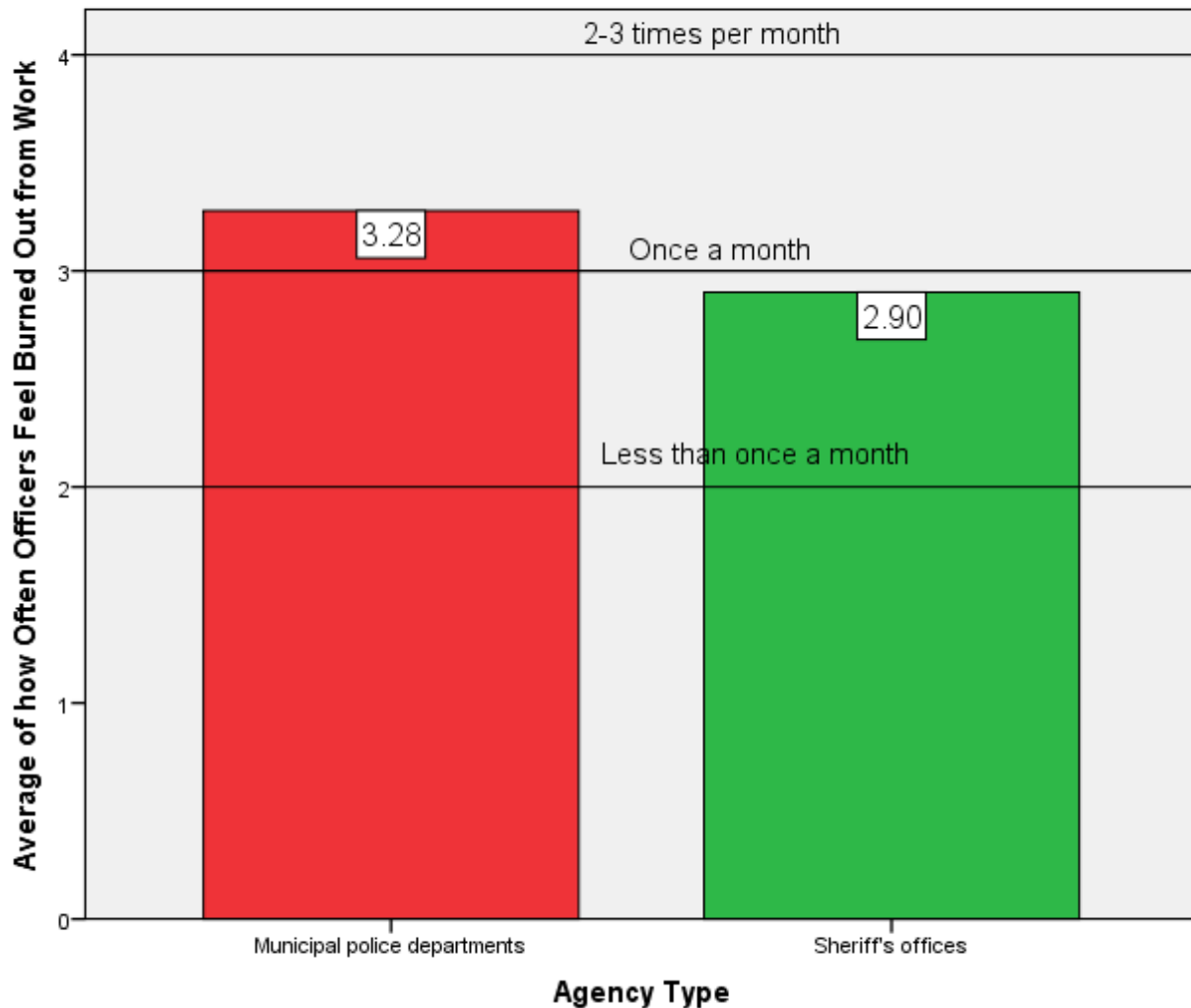
Ratings of supervisor. Respondents to the survey were also asked several questions about their immediate supervisor in the organization. As a point of clarity, “immediate supervisor” was defined as the person to whom the survey respondent reported directly in his or her current position. Respondents who had multiple supervisors were directed to think of the person to whom they reported most often. One question in particular asked the respondent to give an overall rating for his or her direct supervisor. Regardless of agency type, officers expressed positive ratings for their direct supervisor. As Figure F shows, almost 72 percent of sworn officers working in municipal police departments and 74 percent working in sheriff’s offices rated their direct supervisor as good, excellent, or outstanding. This left approximately 28 percent of sworn personnel in municipal departments and 26 percent of sworn personnel in sheriff’s offices that rated their direct supervisor very poor, poor, marginal, or satisfactory.

Figure F: Sworn Officer Rating of Supervisor by Agency Type



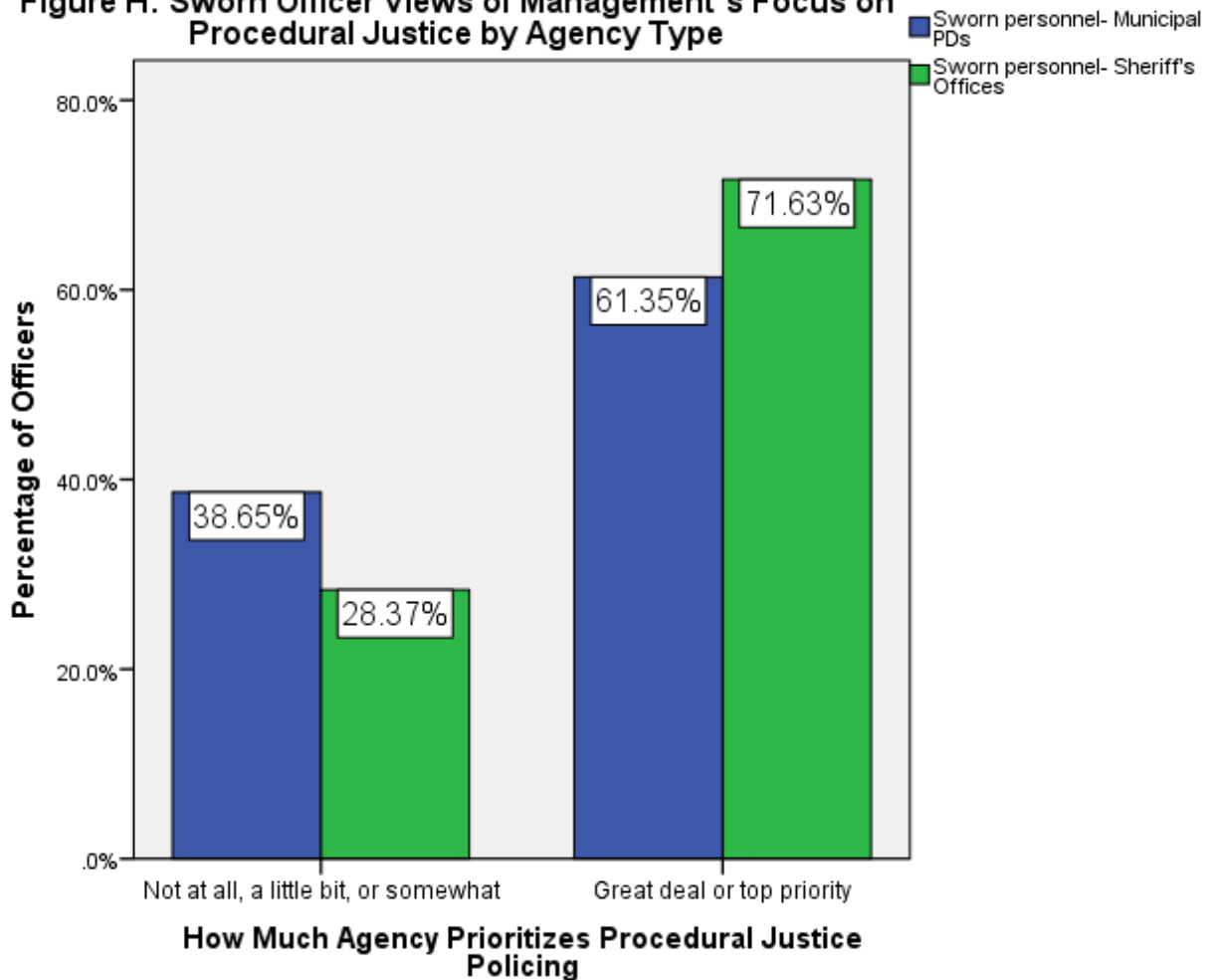
Burnout. While officers' levels of organizational commitment and feelings about supervision were largely positive and consistent between municipal departments and sheriff's offices, levels of burnout appear to differ depending on agency type. Burnout, commonly defined as a prolonged response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors on the job, can adversely affect health, motivation, and job performance, while also undermining the organization by accelerating staff turnover. To tap into this condition, an item on LEO C asked respondents how often they felt burned out from work. As Figure G shows, officers from municipal police departments expressed higher average levels of burnout than their counterparts working in sheriff's offices. The average score on the burnout question for municipal officers, which was 3.28, translates into having feelings of being burned out from the job between once a month and 2 to 3 times per month. The average score on the burnout questions for sworn officers in sheriff's offices, which was 2.90, translates into having feelings being burned out from the job less often than once a month to once a month. In essence, officers working in municipal agencies report more frequent manifestations of burnout than officers working in sheriff's offices.

Figure G: Sworn Officer Average Frequency of Burnout by Agency Type



Prioritizing procedural justice. Officers working in municipal departments also differed significantly from their counterparts working in sheriff's offices about how much they believed procedural justice policing was prioritized in their respective agencies. Procedural justice policing was defined in the survey as encouraging officers to show respect and concern for citizens and demonstrate fairness in the way they handle problems. After being given that definition, respondents were then asked how the extent to which the current top leadership tried to get employees to adopt this approach. As Figure H shows, almost 72 percent of officers working in sheriff's offices felt that their agencies were prioritizing procedural justice a great deal or that it was a top priority. A significantly smaller percentage, but still a majority at approximately 61 percent, of officers in municipal agencies felt that their agencies were prioritizing procedural justice a great deal or that it was a top priority.

Figure H: Sworn Officer Views of Management's Focus on Procedural Justice by Agency Type



Interpretation

This report has outlined selected findings from a survey of 13,146 sworn officers representing 70 municipal police departments and 19 sheriff's offices of varying sizes in the United States. Regardless of agency size, officers expressed a great deal of satisfaction with their work, with close to 90 percent satisfied or very satisfied with their current job assignment. Regardless of agency type, officers were very committed to the organizations in which they work, with over 90 percent agreeing or strongly agreeing that they were strongly committed to making the organization successful. Furthermore, regardless of agency type, officers also expressed high levels of satisfaction with their immediate supervisor, with almost three-fourths of respondents rating their direct supervisor as good, excellent, or outstanding. Agencies of all sizes and types should be commended for creating and maintaining environments where positive feelings exist, as officers who are satisfied with their work, committed to their agencies, and happy with their supervisors have higher morale, better health, better job performance, and are more likely to remain on their jobs for a long period of time.

Less uniformity existed on other measures. For example, agency size seemed to influence perceptions of community relations, treatment of minority employees, and example-setting by the head of the

organization. More specifically, as the size of the agency increased, officers were less likely to believe that the relationship between the public and the police was good in the community, less likely to believe that employees are treated equally regardless of race, and less likely to feel that the head of the organization sets a good example. This pattern of findings fits intuition, especially in terms of views of community relations and the head of the organization. Larger agencies are more likely to be situated in areas experiencing more violent crime and poverty, which are factors that may exacerbate tensions and strain relations between the police and community members. Furthermore, officers in larger agencies may have decreased personal contact with the head of the organization, and their perceptions of that individual may be informed more through second-hand knowledge or even media accounts, which may tend to be more negative. Officers in smaller agencies, in contrast, may have increased first-hand knowledge – or even a strong personal relationship – with the head of the organization, which may improve their perceptions of that person. Finally, the finding that perceptions of differential treatment of employees by race was more pronounced in larger agencies is important, as feelings of unfairness among employees can create factions in the workplace that can ultimately undermine organizational efficiency and effectiveness.

One additional point, however, should be considered about this finding. Even though sworn officers in the largest size category of agencies were more inclined to see treatment as being different, almost 66 percent, a strong majority, still agreed or strongly agreed that employees are treated equally regardless of race. Additional research should be done on the reasons for those feelings and in what contexts or situations they are perceived to manifest most often.

The type of agency in which officers worked seemed to influence feelings of burnout and perceptions of the importance of procedural justice in the organization. More specifically, sworn officers in municipal departments felt burned out more often and were less likely to believe that procedural justice policing was prioritized in the organization than did sworn officers working in sheriff's departments. Heightened levels of burnout among sworn officers in municipal agencies may reflect the higher crime rates that characterize cities with municipal departments and the greater scrutiny that officers may face in those organizations. Or, perhaps other organizational factors, such as those that guide promotion or training, may be somewhat different in municipal agencies and thus heighten levels of burnout. It is also interesting that procedural justice policing is prioritized less in municipal agencies than in sheriff's offices, according to officers completing this survey. Views on procedural justice, as well as its perceived importance by top management, are important given the current acute focus on community relations and the desire to serve and protect all members of the community. It also must be noted that this particular question only taps into how much procedural justice is prioritized, which may not capture entirely how much, or in what forms, procedural justice is used by officers when interacting with citizens. Regardless, future research should examine further the specific procedural justice training or initiatives being used in sheriff's offices and how those could be adopted in municipal agencies, or at least to ascertain why officers in sheriff's offices believe that procedural justice is such a priority in their organizations.

In closing, it is hoped that this report has provided a broad look at the feelings, perceptions, and beliefs of 13,146 police officers representing 89 agencies and how they differ, or remain similar, across agency

size categories or agency types. Ultimately, it is hoped that the results of the survey can assist agencies of all sizes and types in understanding their officers and developing initiatives or approaches to help them communicate better with citizens, become better officers, and improve the overall functioning of the law enforcement organizations in which they work.