

Police Education and its Influence on Traffic Enforcement Performance

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ABSTRACT

In demanding occupations, the preference for formal education is presumptive when improving competency and workmanship. This study assesses the correlation between college education and traffic enforcement performance within a local police department in Aberdeen, North Carolina. In this study, performance strictly refers to issued traffic citations and traffic enforcement. The research consisted of a secondary analysis (public records) using qualitative data. Data were collected to determine which officers issued the most traffic citations from the highway patrol unit from January to June 2021. Second, qualitative data were collected via an interview with one of the department officers to obtain demographic information (age, gender, race/ethnicity, highest level of education, and the number of years of employment) of each officer who had issued the most citations. This data was collected to determine if there was a plausible correlation between officer demographics used as confounding variables and the number of citations issued. Findings suggest that they all had a high school diploma among the identified officers who issued the most traffic citations each month. Study findings can inform policy, practice, and subsequent research.

Keywords: college, education, degree, citation, law enforcement, traffic enforcement

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Aberdeen Police Department (APD)

African American (African Am.)

Basic Law Enforcement Training (BLET)

Education (Edu.)

General Education Development (GED)

Lieutenant (Lt.)

Masters Police Officer (MPO)

Native American (Native Am.)

North Carolina (NC)

Officer (Ofc.)

Police Department (P.D.)

Sergeant (Sgt.)

Years (Yrs.)

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Chapter One

PURPOSE AND SIGNIFICANCE

The study aims to identify and assess the correlation between education levels and traffic enforcement performance within a local police department in Aberdeen, North Carolina (NC). In this study, performance refers to the overall productivity in the issuance of traffic-related citations within the spectrum of traffic enforcement. In Moore County, NC, there are 14 police departments, one of which the department included in the study is located. Many officers desire to work within these units though none of them are required to obtain a college degree. However, many departments in NC may require or prefer a college education such as an associate's or bachelor's degree upon consideration for candidacy. For example, it is preferable for local governments to hire a candidate with a college degree in a related field, such as a bachelor's degree in criminal justice. Employers want candidates who possess relevant qualifications and workforce preparedness needed for success often attained while attending college.

To become a police chief, many municipalities look for candidates with a college degree in the related field since the chief's job is related to an executive management position. According to Kranick (2020), several research studies have shown that officers with a college education have better job performance and more opportunities for advancement in the workplace than those who do not (Kranick, 2020). With this knowledge, the question arises whether police officers should be required to attain a college degree before joining law enforcement and the minimum college degree requirement. An education provides evidence that an individual has knowledge in a specific area and meets the requirements to understand the discipline. It also indicates that those with a degree will be able to carry out work duties. Despite the evidence,

many larger law enforcement agencies in NC have not mandated higher educational standards for all officers, although it is favored. Therefore, those who desire to have a career in law enforcement in NC are encouraged to have an associate's degree. According to Bartkowiak-Théron (2019), the context in which changes in police education happen is vital to analyzing the professionalization agenda and the impact tertiary education of police has on officers.

Competency in policing is complex; therefore, this study aims to assess the relationship between education and traffic enforcement performance in exploring efficacy as a police officer. Law enforcement policies and procedures are constantly in flux with new laws and regulations. Therefore, law enforcement agencies need educated people who possess the skills for success or possess competencies of the subject matter in an evolving society. For example, research has indicated that educated officers are more prone to act with discretion and integrity when encountering civilians, especially with the trend of body-worn cameras, than those who are not (Kranick, 2020). Officers who have attended college or decided to continue their education will make themselves a great asset to the field of law enforcement and the department. It is essential to note that education does not predict traffic enforcement performance. However, it can undoubtedly influence officers' attitudes and behavior while on the job. In addition, it is essential to mention that an individual who has attained a college education does not necessarily imply that they will uphold the ethical standards that police are expected to. Nor does not having a college education imply that an individual is incompetent to perform officer duties. The term education within the following study will be used interchangeably to refer to completing either a high school diploma, associate's, or bachelor's degree.

The importance of education and police performance has had a great debate. According to (2020), many believe that a college education can enhance decision-making, knowledge, skills, and understanding of the law combined with continued training. Others believe that education beyond high school is not necessary to carry out police-related duties because education does not predict better performance or competency (“The Importance of a College Degree for Police Officers”, 2020). Although both may be valid, police play a crucial role in society by promoting public safety and enforcing the law; therefore, officers must be well equipped with knowledge in all aspects of the role. Examining police education and the correlation of traffic enforcement among a small local police department in Aberdeen, North Carolina, will give insight into how specific responsibilities and duties are executed in correlation to the presence or absence of obtaining a college education. Questions such as whether officers with a college education issue more or fewer citations than those who do not will highlight how much obtaining a college education correlates with traffic enforcement and the implications. The research study will examine the extraneous variables of gender, race/ethnicity, age, and length of employment when assessing the disparities between officers with a college degree versus those who did not pursue a degree. The goal is to determine if there is an apparent correlation between education levels and the perception of a college education using officer demographics and traffic enforcement performance at Aberdeen Police Department (APD) in NC. These variables will help determine the objective of the study. Lastly, study findings can be used to inform policy, practice, and subsequent research.

Chapter Two

LITERATURE REVIEW

History of Police Education

August Vollmer was a pioneer in leading the development of “professional policing” in the 20th century as the first police chief of Berkley, California. Vollmer is known as the “father of modern policing” and is credited with the development of the field of criminal justice, beginning the advancement of police training, technology, and education. In 1916, Vollmer created an academic program at the University of California titled Criminology, which included courses on police practice, criminal law, and natural sciences courses such as biology, chemistry, and toxicology (Oliver, 2016). Vollmer also taught courses teaching Police Organization and Administration and Police Procedure; his knowledge and specialization reveal his efforts to professionalize policing using technology, training, and, most importantly, education. The idea that police should be educated and not just trained gained support over time during the middle 1900s. According to Marciniak and Elattrache (2020), in 1931, the National Law Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement, also known as the Wickersham Commission, highlighted the importance of higher requirements and a need for college-educated officers in law enforcement. In 1967, the President’s Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice stated that the goal of all police personnel should be to have a bachelor’s degree and have the characteristics that college education encourages (Marcniniak & Elattrache, 2020). According to Cordner (2019), in 1973, a National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals set a goal that all police should have a four-year college degree by 1982. Unfortunately, 35 years later, only 1% of police agencies require a four-year degree. Most agencies encourage a

college education and offer incentives such as higher pay. However, because so many departments do not require this, about 40% of current police have four-year degrees (Cordner, 2019). Since 1916, Criminology programs have progressed significantly as police education gradually became more academic-based into what is known as criminal justice education today. Approximately 1,800 colleges and universities offer criminal justice or related programs in the U.S., many of which are at two-year colleges and technical schools and about 800 programs at colleges and universities (Cordner, 2019). The criminal justice field is a highly favored area of study, preparing students to pursue many job opportunities such as law enforcement, social services, and public safety. According to CCK Online, 2017, as cited in Data USA, in 2015, more than 61,000 people in the U.S. earned a bachelor's degree in criminal justice (CCK Online, 2017). Criminal justice programs incorporate the study of courts, corrections, and policing and are not considered reading or writing-intensive, thus considered easy compared to other majors.

Standardizing Law Enforcement Entry

The ongoing debate about requiring a minimum of a college education for those wanting to join law enforcement has also grown internationally. Williams et al. (2019) analyzed the complexity of British policing, which aims to standardize entry with joining law enforcement to enhance professionalization and allow serving officers to gain accreditation for previous training and experience. This process involves developing a national police curriculum at higher education institutions for recruits. However, different interpretations of professionalism can affect police officers' interpretation of the term and how they engage with the new change (Williams et al., 2019). The study is based on qualitative interviews with officers who have

academic qualifications in policing, suggesting that the relationship between education and professionalization is complex. The researchers assert that officers need to be trusted and encouraged to use their education to encourage the cultivation of professional standards and behaviors. However, the authors argue that the professionalization agenda questions the development of a standardized curriculum because it can be viewed as control over officer behavior (Williams et al., 2019). Reaves (2015) asserts that only 1% of police departments require a four-year degree in the U.S.; 84% of police departments only require a minimum of a high school diploma. Only some have a two-year requirement despite clear calls for law enforcement personnel to have a college education (as cited in Marciniak & Elattrache, 2020). Factors contributing to the complexity of police education and training in the U.S. are directly related to size and government functions. The U.S. is home to millions of residents, many of whom are law enforcement personnel. As a result, government functions are administered on the national, state, and local levels, with the responsibility of policing assigned to local jurisdictions. There are thousands of municipalities in the 50 states of the U.S. with laws and regulations that set the education and training requirements. According to the NC Department of Justice (DOJ) (2019), in NC, the minimum educational requirements for every law enforcement officer employed by an agency shall possess a high school diploma or have passed the GED indicating high school equivalency (“Law Enforcement Certification: Applicants”, 2019). Like British policing, developing a national minimum standard curriculum higher than that of a high school diploma or GED equivalent and training at higher education institutions in the U.S. will significantly benefit officers in ensuring exposure to key concepts, skills, and tactics. Increasing

the national minimum standard for a college education in a related field will also create consistency among all agencies regardless of department size or location.

The findings from Williams et al. (2019) suggest a need for a broader definition of what contributes to “police knowledge”. Second, study participants stressed the benefits of attaining an education corresponding with critical thinking and applying knowledge and skills in professional practice. However, the participants communicated an inability to utilize knowledge gained from their degree in the department due to a lack of peer support and the perception of degree irrelevance from their higher-up staff (Williams et al., 2019). As mentioned previously, chiefs and supervisors who must report to the mayor and city officials set the tone of the work culture and ultimately determine whether their officers, with or without an education, feel valued. The importance of this study is understanding what individuals define as professionalism and how that relates to or conflicts with organizational professionalism and good policing (Williams et al., 2019).

The central idea of including formal education in demanding professions is related to increasing demands experienced by professionals and the preference of wanting to provide relevant qualifications to work. Education affects how effective police are and is crucial to the police profession in helping officers overcome biases or reservations when interacting with civilians, thus improving performance. International debates concerning the advantages of completing a college degree illustrate that additional concentration is warranted to assess the occupational environment in which these tools will be employed and explore skills implemented in these settings alike (Williams et al., 2019). The same can be said about police education in the U.S.; therefore, more research should be conducted further understand the three emerging themes

of the study. First, the perceptions of how the participants perceived knowledge gained from their degree and if it contributed to their idea of professionalization. Second is the perceived inability of participants to use their degree in the workplace. Lastly is the application of police education and how officers who have a college education feel that the department receives it (Williams et al., 2019).

Connecting Police Education to the Department

Marciniak and Elattrache (2020) examine the opinions of police chiefs on the benefits of a college education for police officers. It is vital to understand because police chiefs set the standard for the department's culture. Police chiefs oversee the hiring process of recruiting officer candidates. Their opinions on college-educated officers can affect whether their officers feel valued or not because of their education levels. The study findings reveal that the style of policing, such as community policing, is not related to the chief's opinions of the benefits of a college education. The findings correspond with a high school diploma's current minimum educational requirement (Marciniak & Elattrache, 2020). However, there remains a strong urge to push for higher educational requirements due to the experience gained through the learning process and not the educational attainment itself. As mentioned previously, many believe that having a college degree can improve the quality of police performance in areas such as communication, critical thinking, and writing skills.

On the other hand, many believe that law enforcement is more important than educational attainment, especially in policing styles like traditional or community policing. Determining if officers who have a college education perform better than those who do not can be complex because there are various ways to measure performance. Additionally, depending on the style of

policing a police department endorses, the police chief's views on the benefits of a college education to police performance may also vary. Further, Marciniak and Elattrache (2020) found a few studies centered around police performance and education. Gardiner (2015, as cited in Marciniak & Elattrache, 2020), in a study of police chiefs in California, found that many chiefs believed officers with a college education were better writers when writing reports. Second, half of the chiefs believed that college-educated officers were better at using technology. Third, half of the chiefs believed college-educated officers were more open to organizational change and new methods. Lastly, about half believed that college-educated officers are better at problem-solving (Marciniak & Elattrache, 2020).

There were a few limitations to Marciniak and Elattrache's study. The term "college-educated" has different interpretations, such as someone who attained a degree in liberal arts or received vocational training. The different interpretations may explain why there are different opinions on the association between officer education and police performance. Second, the authors did not include the number of years the chiefs had been employed and whether the number of years correlates with attained education. It is essential because there could be an association between the number of years a chief has been employed and the level of education on police performance. Third, the study findings do not account for large police departments or departments in other states. Finally, how the chiefs were asked about community policing left further room for different interpretations. For example, the chiefs were asked if the department *has* community policing and not *if* they endorse community policing. These results could have been different depending on if this question was phrased differently.

Overall, the study highlighted the importance of the police chief's opinions on the benefits of college-educated officers. Because chiefs set the department's standards, their views on the benefits of having a college degree are valuable. They can also contribute well-informed opinions due to their experience. As society and laws change, education in law enforcement should be necessary. Today, policing has taken a more modern approach, such as community and problem-oriented policing. Community policing involves the police and the community working together to develop relationships. By developing relationships with community members, police become more informed in solving public safety issues. Problem-oriented policing involves identifying a specific problem and developing strategies to tackle crime and disorder. Both approaches to policing involve communication and problem-solving skills, which are emphasized in college curricula. The extent to which police departments are utilizing different approaches to policing will greatly influence police chief's opinions on the benefits of having a college education.

Nevertheless, whether an officer has a college education determines if they will be adequate in performance is to be determined. The learning process of attaining a degree may make some officers better at performance than those who do not possess a degree or have some college education. However, the chief's opinion on education and performance will help inform the ongoing debate about the necessity of having a college education in law enforcement.

U.S. Police Education Today

According to Cordner (2019), as of 2020, the field of criminal justice education programs in the U.S. has continued to advance. There are criminal justice academic journals and societies such as the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences (ACJS) and the American Society of

Criminology (ASC) (Cordner, 2019). With the success of the implementation of police education in academia, there is still concern about how much obtaining a degree serves the police, such as if it is effective, fair, and meets the needs of an evolving society. Recent movements, events of police brutality, and excessive use of force have raised questions about the standards of police education and professionalization. According to Bartkowiak-Theron (2019), in the U.S., events involving police use of force and inquiry into policing initiated by the Obama administration opened debates about what and how much police should know and be trained on before entering the field (Bartkowiak-Theron, 2019). The stressful challenges officers experience in the role, including the knowledge and skills required to perform duties effectively, require a higher education level than the minimum of a high school diploma or GED equivalent. Other emerging issues include who should instruct police education, how education should be delivered to police officers, and the impact it may have on officers. These issues are crucial to developing an officer's career, experience, and problem-solving ability.

Policing has changed dramatically in the past few decades. Higher education and technology have significantly advanced how police perform today. For example, knowledge of computer skills is a minimum requirement to perform and communicate effectively. Understanding technology and its functions require educated officers. Therefore, police departments need educated people who are cognizant of promoting safety and security in a technology-driven society. With body-worn cameras and witnesses recording events unfolding of officers performing their duties, evidence-based research proves that officers who have attained a college degree act with more discretion, fairness, and restraint when interacting with civilians. The tools officers gain by attending college will also help build positive relationships with

community members. It is crucial because officers today need to know how to effectively communicate with the people they protect and serve, particularly with people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. Having a college education will give officers a broader perspective of the people they serve and make critical decisions expected of them. Additionally, education gives those in management positions the tools needed to lead the department in the right direction. As mentioned previously, police officers with a college education or continuing higher education make themselves valuable assets to the department and the field.

Issues surrounding police education bring concerns about achieving a comprehensive occupational plan that operationalizes professionalism. Negative and positive attitudes remain about higher education and its benefits. Researchers are now measuring the impact of having higher education and police performance and how to measure such impact. This study will contribute to criminal justice and the advancement of knowledge in police education.

Chapter Three

METHODS AND MEASURES

The research consisted of a secondary analysis (public records) using qualitative data collected from a small-sized police department in Aberdeen, North Carolina. Qualitative data was collected to determine which officer issued the most traffic citations from the highway patrol unit from January to June 2021. Second, qualitative data were collected via an interview with one of the department officers (Ofc. S) to obtain demographic information (age, gender, race/ethnicity, highest level of education, and length of employment) of each officer who had issued the most citations. This data was collected to determine if there was a plausible correlation between officer demographics used as confounding variables and the number of citations issued. Appendix B contains the additional questions that were asked as part of the development of the discussion portion of the research. These questions were used to discuss one of APD officers' (Ofc. S) stances on education and performance related to law enforcement and the department itself. Third, a list of all officers in the highway patrol unit was collected to compare the educational and performance levels of officers who were identified to have issued the most traffic citations from January to June of 2021 and those who were not.

Chapter Four

FINDINGS

From January to June of 2021, four different officers were identified out of 19 to have issued the highest traffic citations from the highway patrol unit each month. Pseudonyms were used in place of officer names for confidential purposes. One of the four officers identified, masters police officer (MPO) W, issued the highest citations for three different months of the six measured - January, March, and May, highlighted in blue below. Among the four officers identified, officer ages ranged from the highest at 44 years to the lowest at 24 years of age. Three of the four officers were male and one female. There were two White/Caucasian officers, one Native American and one African American. The highest level of education for all officers was a high school diploma. The highest length of officer employment was six years, with the lowest being one year and two months. Table 1 below displays the months, names of the officers, and their corresponding demographics.

Table 1*Officers with the Highest Traffic Citations Issued, 2021*

| Months | Officer Names | Age | Gender | Race/Ethnicity | Highest Level of Edu. | Length of Employment |
|-----------------|----------------------|------------------------|---------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| January | MPO W | <u>38</u> (35-44 yrs.) | Male | Native Am. | High School | <u>6 yrs.</u> (More than 5 yrs. Less than 10) |
| February | MPO V | <u>27</u> (25-34 yrs.) | Male | White/Caucasian | High School | <u>4 yrs.</u> (More than 3 yrs. Less than 5) |
| March | MPO W | <u>38</u> (35-44 yrs.) | Male | Native Am. | High School | <u>6 yrs.</u> (More than 5 yrs. Less than 10) |
| April | Officer T | <u>24</u> (25-34 yrs.) | Female | White/Caucasian | High School | <u>1 yr. and 2 mo.</u> (More than 1 yr. Less than 3) |
| May | MPO W | <u>38</u> (35-44 yrs.) | Male | Native Am. | High School | <u>6 yrs.</u> (More than 5 yrs. Less than 10) |
| June | Officer C | <u>44</u> (35-44 yrs.) | Male | African Am. | High School | <u>2 ½ yrs.</u> (More than 1 yr. Less than 3) |

Table 2 below shows the additional 15 officers (not including Ofc. C) in Aberdeen’s highway patrol unit, their names, and their highest level of education. As for the performance of the other 15 officers, according to APD, officers who have obtained a formal education such as a high school diploma, GED, or an associate degree are likely to be the most productive or efficient in issuing traffic citations. As table 2 shows, four officers have obtained as high as an associate’s degree, one of which is no longer employed with APD, listed as dismissed in the last row of the table. Two officers have Bachelors, one of which at the time of the study had only a

high school diploma (Officer C), and the other 13 officers have only a high school diploma or GED, and all with Basic Law Enforcement Training (BLET) certification.

Table 2

Highway Patrol Unit Officer Names and Edu. 2022

| Officer Names | Highest Level of Edu. |
|----------------------|------------------------------|
| Lt. T | Associates |
| Lt. B | Associates |
| Lt. S | High school |
| Lt. N | Associates |
| Sgt. A | High school |
| Sgt. D | High school |
| Sgt. R | High school |
| Sgt. S | High school |
| MPO W | High school |
| MPO C | High school |
| MPO A | Bachelors |
| Ofc. B | Bachelors |
| Ofc. M | High school |
| Ofc. L | High school |
| Ofc. M | High school |
| Ofc. C | Dismissed (Associates) |

Chapter Five

DISCUSSION

The current study was designed to analyze police education and its correlation to traffic enforcement performance by measuring which officers issued the highest number of traffic citations and their highest levels of education and other demographics for comparison within six months. There were a few common officer characteristics observed in the demographic categories. Table 1 of the study shows that the “highest level of education” category had the most common characteristic. Findings show that all officers who issued the most traffic citations in six months only had a high school diploma showing a common correlation. The following most common characteristic was the gender category. All officers except one were male. A potential explanation for this is that most officers employed at the department are male. At the time of the study, APD consisted of 5 female and 14 male officers; thus, the chances of officers who issued the most traffic citations being male are high compared to females. The number of male officers is currently down to 13.

Additionally, two of the four officers were White/Caucasian. Like the gender category, most officers employed at the department are White/Caucasian, which may explain why two out of the four officers who issued the most traffic citations made up half of the “Race/Ethnicity” category. Native Americans and African Americans were less likely to be included in the study. In terms of “Age”, two of the four officers identified were between 25-34 years of age. There is a possibility that many officers employed are in this age group; thus, there is a higher chance for an officer in this age group to have issued a high amount of traffic citations than not. Lastly,

“length of employment” had the least notable common characteristics, with the number of years employed ranging from one year and two months to six years.

It is also vital to discuss Basic Law Enforcement Training (BLET), as all officers in NC are required to be BLET certified regardless of educational achievement. According to Fisher (n.d.), BLET in NC is a required curriculum designed for entry-level individuals to become law enforcement officers. Every individual interested in a career in law enforcement must complete BLET and pass the BLET state exam. The curriculum consists of over 600 hours of instruction over 16 weeks, covering topics such as motor vehicle laws, search and seizure, and constitutional law. Subsequently, a written comprehensive exam and skills testing are to be completed. Once completing the course, students are eligible for certification and have one year from the examination date to be duly appointed as a sworn officer in the state (Fisher, n.d.). Education refers to completing a high school diploma/GED, associate's, and bachelor's degree for this study.

The primary goals of the study were to examine (a) how does police education correlate with traffic enforcement performance, (b) do officers with a college degree outperform those who do not have a college degree, and (c) do educational differences as well as age, gender, race/ethnicity, and length of employment influence police performance? Considering the study's findings, objective A had support in that there was a commonality in the officers identified to have only attained a high school education. However, there were no officers identified to have attained higher than a high school diploma to compare to determine if there was a pattern between officers who have issued the highest traffic citations with a college degree or not.

Possibly, officers who only have a high school diploma may see the law in black and white. In other words, there is a simple choice between right and wrong.

In contrast, officers with a college degree may see gray areas in the law, subject to conflicting interpretations. It may be due to conflicting law enforcement experience and knowledge gained through college, thus issuing fewer traffic citations than their counterparts. Objective B lacks support in that there were no officers identified with higher than high school education. Because of this, there was no way to determine if officers with a college degree outperform officers without. But officers with a high school diploma appear to outperform those without degrees. Lastly, objective C had support in that there were noticeable patterns in the other demographic categories such as age, gender, and race/ethnicity.

At the department in which the research took place, Ofc. S was interviewed to ascertain his stance on education and police-related duties related to law enforcement and the department itself. Appendix B contains the questions asked. At APD, opportunities for growth and advancement exist for officers with minimum education qualifications but are primarily based on experience and performance. However, to become chief of the department, there is a minimum requirement of a bachelor's degree in a related discipline to apply. If the potential chief does not have a bachelor's degree, they are given a certain amount of time to complete their degree before accepting the position. Though the department offers equal treatment to all employees regardless of education levels, there is no extra pay or incentives for officers with college degree. Further, Ofc. S did not notice any differences in traffic enforcement performance between those with a college degree and those without. Productivity and performance ultimately depend on the officer's work ethic.

Nevertheless, according to one of APD's lieutenants, most highway patrol unit officers firm on traffic enforcement have either a high school diploma or an associate's degree. However, Ofc. S believed that work performance could improve with additional training and education. In addition, he did not believe that the minimum educational requirement to join law enforcement in NC should be raised because it could exclude those who are great at their job but do not possess a college degree. Officer S. believed raising the minimum educational requirement would not guarantee improvement in law enforcement performance. Lastly, there were no reports of officers who experienced a lack of confidence due to their educational background.

Chapter Six

LIMITATIONS

There are a few notable limitations in the research. Data was collected from a small police department consisting of 29 officers, of which four officers were identified to have issued the most traffic citations in the given six-month period. Therefore, data is limited to a small sample of officers to compare demographics. Data would provide a more well-rounded view of how education influences performance if data were collected from a major agency or multiple agencies in different geographical locations. Under the assumption, some officers would issue traffic citations beyond a high school diploma or GED and various other demographics to compare. Second, because data was only collected for six months, data is limited to those who issued the most traffic citations in that period. Suppose data were collected for a more extended period, as mentioned previously. In that case, this might provide more information on the patterns of officers who issued the most traffic citations, given that more officers are likely to be included in the study. Third, the exact number of issued traffic citations was not included in the study; therefore, the significance of the citations is unknown. For example, MPO W may have written one or two more citations in January than MPO V in February. However, the number is unknown because the specific number of citations was not measured. Lastly, there is a lack of qualitative research on the experience, feelings, and thoughts of how education influences the officers' performance. Future research should explore this topic to provide more insight into the correlation between education levels and police-related performance.

Chapter Seven

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The study aimed to identify and assess the correlation between education and traffic enforcement performance within a local police department in Aberdeen, NC. Many departments in NC may require or prefer a college education such as an associate's or bachelor's degree upon consideration for candidacy. For example, it is preferable for local governments to hire a candidate with a college degree in a related field, such as a bachelor's degree in criminal justice. Law enforcement agencies in NC have not mandated higher educational standards for all officers despite evidence that officers with a college education have better job performance and make themselves valuable assets to the workplace. The primary goals of the study were to examine (a) how police education influences traffic enforcement performance, (b) do officers with a college degree outperform those who do not have a college degree, and (c) do educational differences as well as age, gender, race/ethnicity, and length of employment influence police performance? Findings suggest a few common characteristics among the identified officers who issued the most traffic citations each month. All officers who issued the most traffic citations each month in the given six only had a high school diploma. This finding could imply that officers with only a high school diploma outperform those with a college degree or those with only a high school diploma issue excessive traffic citations. Another significant finding was that master police officer (MPO) W issued the highest citations for three months of the six measured - January, March, and May. The following most common characteristic was the gender category in which all officers except one were male. Much of the department consists of male officers; thus, the probability that males issued more traffic citations than females was high. Like the gender

category, most officers employed at the department are White/Caucasian, which may explain why two out of the four officers who issued the most traffic citations made up half of the “Race/Ethnicity” category. Native Americans and African Americans were less likely to be included in the study. In terms of “Age”, two of the four officers identified were between 25-34 years of age. Lastly, “length of employment” had the least notable common characteristics, with the number of years employed ranging from one year and two months to six years.

There were a few notable limitations in the research. Data was collected from a small police department consisting of 29 officers, of which four officers were identified to have issued the most traffic citations in the given six-month period. Therefore, data was limited to a small sample of officers to compare demographics. Second, data were only collected for six months, limited to those who issued the most traffic citations. Third, the exact number of traffic citations issued was not included in the study; therefore, the significance of the issued citations is unknown. Lastly, there was a lack of qualitative research on the experience, feelings, and thoughts of how education influences officers’ performance other than the interviewee’s stance on education and performance related to law enforcement and the department itself.

In conclusion, the research objectives provided an accurate method of examining how education influences traffic enforcement performance. Education levels and performance correlate among officers with a high school diploma. However, due to study limitations, future research should examine the correlation between education and traffic enforcement performance from a more prominent police agency or multiple agencies in different geographic locations for a more well-rounded view of the correlation. As mentioned previously, in demanding occupations, the preference for formal education is presumptive when improving competency and

workmanship. Education affects how effective police are and is crucial to the police profession in helping officers overcome biases or reservations when interacting with civilians, thus improving performance.

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Appendix A

Demographic Questions Included in Chapter Four – Methods and Measures

1. What is the officer's age?
 - 20 – 24 years
 - 25 – 34 years
 - 35 – 44 years
 - 45 – 54 years
 - 55 – 64 years
 - 65 – 74 years

2. What is the officer's gender?
 - Male
 - Female
 - Prefer not to specify

3. What is the officer's race or ethnicity?
 - White/Caucasian
 - Hispanic/Latino
 - Black/African American
 - Asian/Pacific Islander
 - Native American/American Indian
 - Other (please specify)

4. What is the officer's highest level of education?
 - High school diploma or equivalent
 - Some College
 - Bachelor's degree (e.g., BA, BS)
 - Master's degree (e.g., MA, MS, MEd)
 - Doctorate (e.g., PhD, EdD)
 - Other (please specify)

5. How long has this police officer been employed within the police department?
 - Less than one year
 - More than one year but less than three
 - More than three years but less than five
 - More than five years but less than ten
 - Ten years or more

Appendix B

Questions Included in Chapter Five – Discussion

1. Do opportunities for growth and advancement exist for officers with minimum qualified levels of formal education (high school diploma or GED)?
2. Does the department offer equal treatment (the right to not be discriminated against) for officers with different levels of formal educational background?
3. Do formal educational levels affect officer salary?
4. Do officers with a formal educational background have increased productivity in job performance?
5. Can work performance improve with additional formal education and training?
6. Should the minimum educational requirement to join law enforcement in North Carolina be raised? Why or why not?
7. Would raising the minimum educational requirement result in an improvement in law enforcement performance? Why or why not?
8. Has any officer experienced a lack of confidence due to their educational background at work? Why or why not?