



# National Fraternal Order of Police 2023 Critical Issues in Policing Survey



## Comprehensive Report of 2023 Survey Findings

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## About the Critical Issues in Policing Survey Series

Since 2021, the National Fraternal Order of Police (FOP) has partnered with Griffith University (Australia) to develop and conduct the Critical Issues in Policing Survey. The FOP has instituted a practice of measuring the experiences and perceptions of members of law enforcement. The survey is conducted on a biennial basis to provide insights into practitioner experiences of the police profession.

Leveraging academic experts in collaboration with the FOP has allowed an evidence-informed approach to both survey development and analysis to be undertaken. Attention has been given to the methodological rigor of the survey instrument, using validated scales and clearly defined theoretical constructs. Further, survey development involved extensive input from leaders and scholars working within the law enforcement profession. This includes members of the FOP Wellness Committee who are all current or retired law enforcement officers. Both academic and practitioner expertise was sought during survey development to ensure robustness of the survey design.

The 2023 survey was deployed to all FOP members between August and November 2023. The survey was also promoted amongst law enforcement agencies throughout the United States. The FOP plans to continue surveying members of law enforcement into the future. The evidence collected through the biennial survey will continue to focus on better understanding the experiences and needs of law enforcement across the country. It will be used to lobby on their behalf. The 2025 Critical Issues in Policing Survey will open to respondents in August 2025.

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### Acknowledgements:

We gratefully acknowledge the support provided by the FOP National Board to conduct the survey with their membership. We would like to thank the officers who participated in this survey; it is a privilege to be given the opportunity to amplify your voices. More broadly, our thanks to the brave men and women of law enforcement across the United States who step up every day to serve their communities.



# Comprehensive Report - 2023 Survey of US Law Enforcement

## KEY FINDINGS

### **Critical Issues**

- ⇒ The top three most critical issues facing the law enforcement profession as perceived by law enforcement officers are 1) insufficient staffing, 2) violence against police, and 3) removal of qualified immunity for police officers.

### **Motivation, Community Relations and Police Practice**

- ⇒ Over half of active officers were concerned about being fired 'just for doing their job.' More than six out of 10 officers held serious concerns about being criminally prosecuted and civilly sued.
- ⇒ Among stakeholders in the community, officers perceive that individuals and groups of citizens in the community are working most effectively with law enforcement to solve problems, while the mainstream media is working the least effectively.
- ⇒ Public discussions and debates, including negative commentary about law enforcement, have made the job more difficult and more dangerous than it has ever been.

### **Police Retention**

- ⇒ Over half of active officers indicated that they were considering leaving their agency or the law enforcement profession. Of those, 7 out of 10 officers were considering leaving the profession entirely.

### **Police Stressors**

- ⇒ Operational and organizational stressors were rated by officers as more impactful than the physical dangers caused by the job and exposure to traumatic calls.

### **Mental Health**

- ⇒ Around half (50.3%) of all active officers reported experiencing high levels of burnout; 40.2% of active and almost 28.7% of retired officers reported some level of psychological distress.
- ⇒ Police officers responding to this survey reported higher rates of PTSD, depression, and anxiety compared to the general population.

### **Wellness Services**

- ⇒ Almost all active officers across the country (93.3%) indicated that their agency provided either an employee assistance program (EAP) or some type of specialist mental health program (93.1%).
- ⇒ Around 4 out of 5 officers reported that their agencies had peer support programs and chaplaincy services.
- ⇒ When compared with findings of the 2021 national survey, officers report an 11% reduction in stigma attitudes around help-seeking; 80% of officers reported low perceptions of stigma in their workplace.

## Introduction

In August 2023, the National Fraternal Order of Police (FOP), the largest organization of law enforcement officers in the world, undertook a national survey of members of United States law enforcement. This report details findings of the *2023 FOP Critical Issues in Policing* survey. The survey is conducted and the report produced as a collaboration between the FOP and Dr Jacqueline Drew, Griffith Criminology Institute, Griffith University, Australia. This report is part of a series of reports that are produced biennially from the *Critical Issues in Policing Survey Series*.

The *2023 FOP Critical Issues in Policing Survey* had several aims: to understand what officers believe are the most serious issues facing policing currently; to capture the prevalence of burnout, psychological distress, and suicidality among officers; to measure and compare various sources of stress experienced by law enforcement personnel; to measure the effect of current social and cultural events on officer well-being and policing practice, and to examine the availability, use of, and perceived effectiveness of wellness services. Measuring over 30 separate variables, the survey presents a comprehensive picture of the perceptions and experiences of US law enforcement officers.

## National Survey

At the time of the *2023 FOP Critical Issues in Policing Survey*, the FOP had a national membership of approximately 365,000 active and retired police officers. The FOP has subordinate lodges in all 50 US states and the District of Columbia. Given the composition of the FOP, the survey also included those who have retired from the policing profession, a group that is significantly underrepresented in police research.

Over 5500 active (n=3843) and retired (n=1729) sworn officers participated in the survey. Responses were received from every region of the US (see Figure 1): 49 states, the District of Columbia, and the US territory of Guam. Survey responses were also provided by law enforcement officers who are not members of nor affiliated with the National FOP as the survey was also distributed and promoted to law enforcement nationwide.

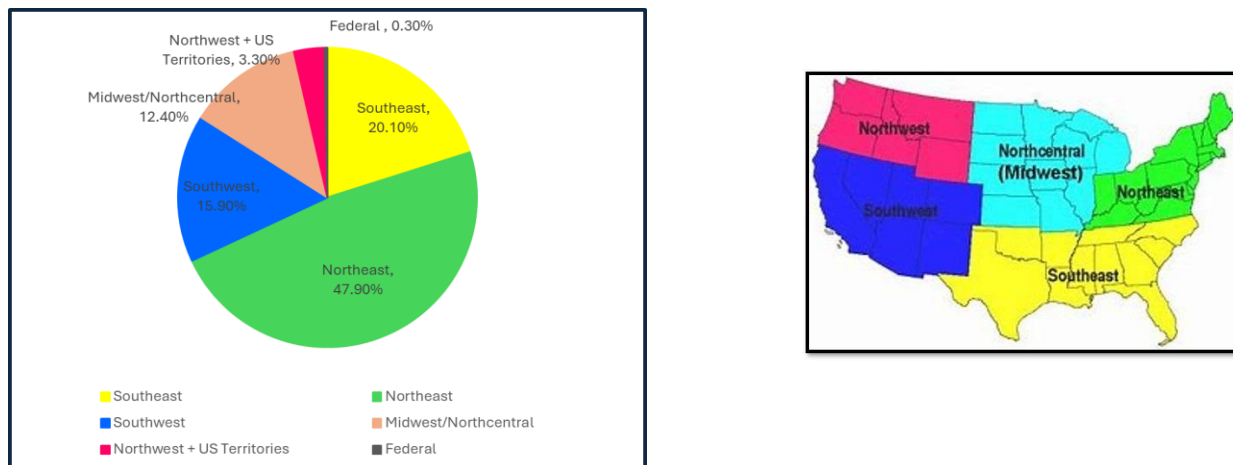


Figure 1. Respondents by Region (Active and Former Officers)

## Respondents

- Of the survey respondents, 69% indicated they were in active service, with the remaining 31% retired from the law enforcement profession.
- The gender composition of survey respondents who were in active service was broadly reflective of US police agencies; 86.4% males, 12.6% females. The sample included .2% gender non-binary, and .8% who declined to answer regarding gender.
- Most respondents identified as White (82.4%), with other respondents representing various ethnic groups (6.6% Hispanic/Latino, 6.2% African American/Black, 1.3% American Indian/Alaskan, 1.2% Asian/Asian American, .4% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and 2% Other).
- Of current active officers, the largest group of respondents had 21+ years of service (40.9%), followed by those with 16 to 20 years (19.8%) of service, and 5 to 10 years of service (13.8%).
- The largest group of respondents were serving as officers or deputies (39.1%), with the next largest category being first line supervisors, corporals, or sergeants (24.3%). Each level of services was represented.
- Most respondents indicated that their job assignment consisted mostly of general patrol or operational duties (42.7%), followed by detectives or plain clothes officers (21.8%). This survey largely captures the experiences of rank-and-file officers; those who are most likely to be engaged in working daily with members of the public and performing frontline police functions.
- Respondents included officers from law enforcement agencies with different personnel strengths; data was collected from agencies with fewer than 25 officers through to those with over 5000 officers. The largest group of respondents (17%) were members of larger agencies with between 2001 and 3000 personnel. The remaining responses were fairly evenly distributed across agencies of all sizes.

## The Critical Issues

A key aim of this survey of law enforcement was to provide a voice for frontline, law enforcement personnel who are most directly involved in delivering policing services to the public. It is vital to understand, from their perspective, what they view as critical issues facing the profession.

Currently, police agencies across the US are experiencing a recruitment and retention crisis. For this reason, it is vital to capture the perceptions and concerns of officers for the purpose of better understanding the reasons why too few officers are joining the police profession, and many are deciding to leave. Viewing experiences through the eyes of the frontline, as they enact their policing role, will enable a clearer understanding of these challenges hopefully leading to better positioning for confronting them.

The *2023 FOP Critical Issues in Policing Survey* asked officers to rate the seriousness of a list of issues that are likely to be of most concern to them. Critical issues were rated on 10-point scale, with 10 indicating that it was a more serious issue. The list of critical issues was generated through consultation with focus groups of active US law enforcement officers. Three groups of factors were examined: crime problems, community relations, and concerns related to the policing profession.

Across all factors, the top five most serious issues were (in order of importance): **insufficient staffing, violence against police, removal of qualified immunity, violent crime, and officer recruitment and retention.**

### Crime Problems

Crime-related problems rated by officers as most serious were:

1. Violent crime
2. Illegal narcotics
3. Policing emotionally disturbed/mentally ill citizens
4. Illegal firearms
5. Illegal immigration

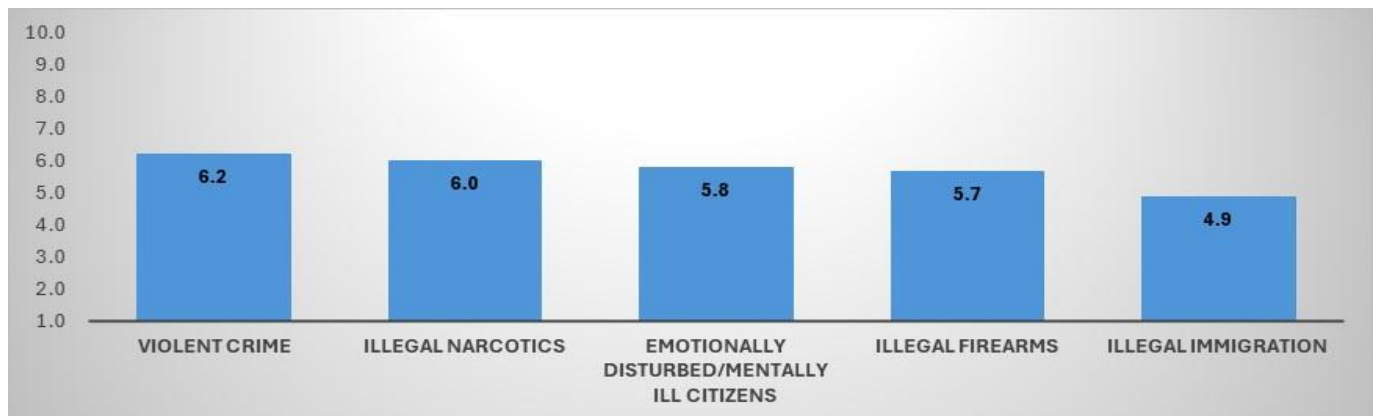


Figure 2. Critical Issues: Crime Problems (Active and Retired Officers)

## Community Relations

Community relations issues rated by officers as most serious were:

1. Violence against police
2. Negative news media about law enforcement and other anti-police rhetoric
3. Reduction of police department budgets
4. Racial tensions between police and their communities
5. Unethical conduct/corruption by officers
6. Excessive use of force by officers

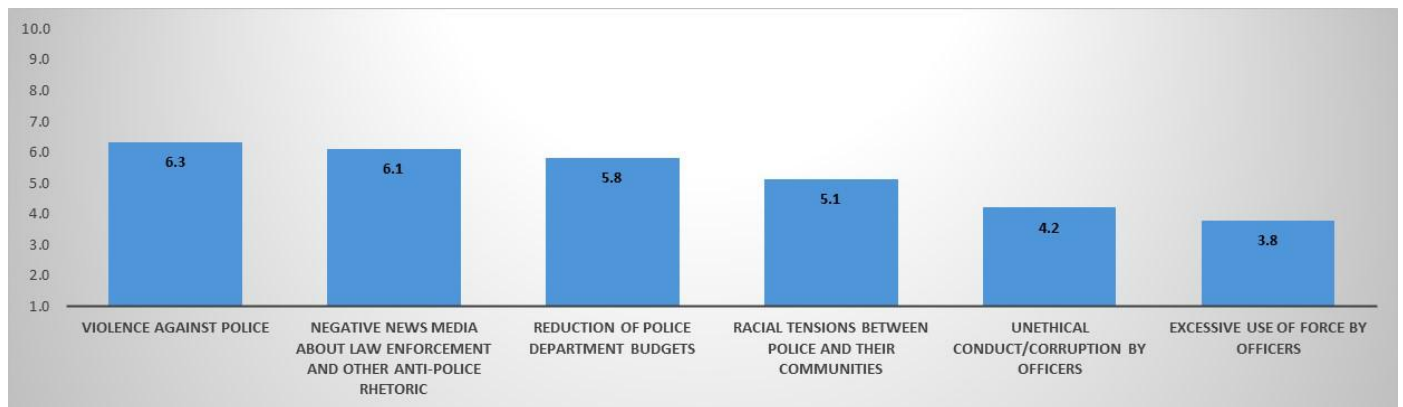


Figure 3. Critical Issues: Community Relations (Active and Retired Officers)

## The Policing Profession

Reflecting on concerns about the policing profession, the issues rated as most serious by officers were:

1. Insufficient staffing
2. Removal of qualified immunity for officers
3. Officer recruitment and retention
4. Levels of officer morale
5. Officer mental health
6. Rates of police suicide

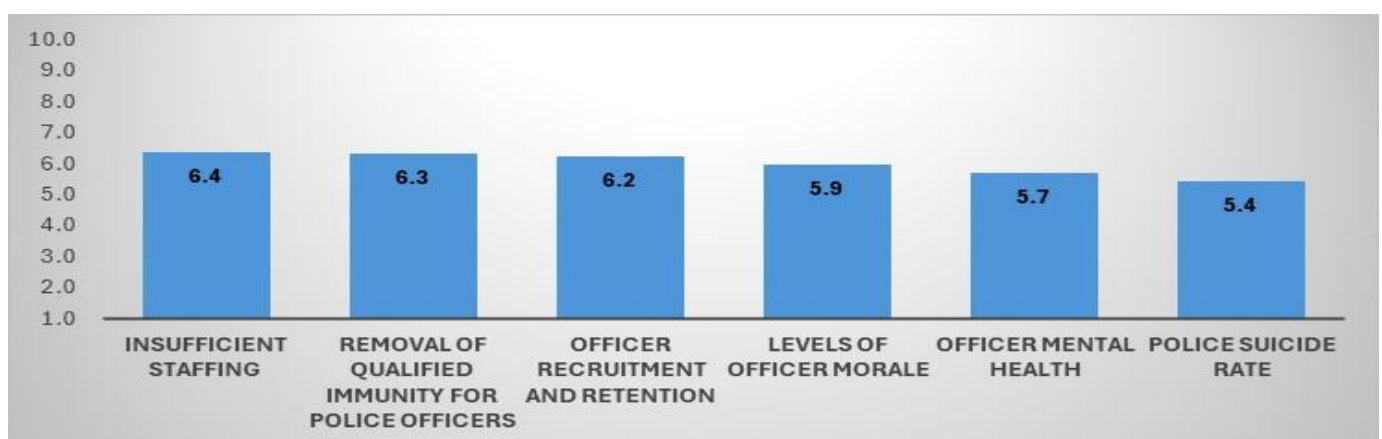


Figure 4. Critical Issues: Police Profession (Active and Retired Officers)

In 2021, removal of qualified immunity for officers was the top critical issue for the profession. Despite decreased conversations about qualified immunity in the intervening 2 years, it remains a persistent concern for officers. Considering that the top critical issue in 2023 was insufficient staffing, the challenges of ‘removal of qualified immunity’ and ‘fears over being fired for simply doing your job’ is important in the context of the recruitment and retention crisis. In stemming the tide of officers who are leaving or considering leaving the profession, these types of concerns must be addressed.

***In 2023, more than 6 out of 10 officers held serious concerns about being criminally prosecuted and civilly sued, and 1 in 2 officers were concerned that they will be fired for ‘simply doing their job’.***



Figure 5. Concerns Surrounding Qualified Immunity (Active Officers)



## The Law Enforcement Environment in 2023

Beginning in 2020, the law enforcement profession began to experience a sharp increase in attention focused on police practices, procedures, and culture, both from within the profession and from external sources. Many agencies entered a period of increased critique from community members and organizations about police practices and procedures. Calls to defund police occurred throughout the United States, and police agency budgets were being more closely examined. In the wake of high-profile deaths of citizens during encounters with police, the mainstream media increasingly focused on law enforcement practices and outcomes. Academia also began to take unprecedented interest in law enforcement policies and procedure, with a focus on police making better use of evidence-based methods and engaging in scientific evaluation of their practices. During this period of transition, officers were asked about their perceptions about the effectiveness of these stakeholder groups in working with law enforcement.

### Stakeholders working with Law Enforcement

Officers reported that the mainstream media and politicians were least effective in working with law enforcement to solve problems. It is promising that officers perceived that work with individual community members and community groups was most effective. Although media attention often highlights instances of prosecutors at odds with law enforcement, the results of this survey provided a more positive view. Officers perceived that prosecutors and solicitors were working relatively effectively with police compared to other stakeholders.

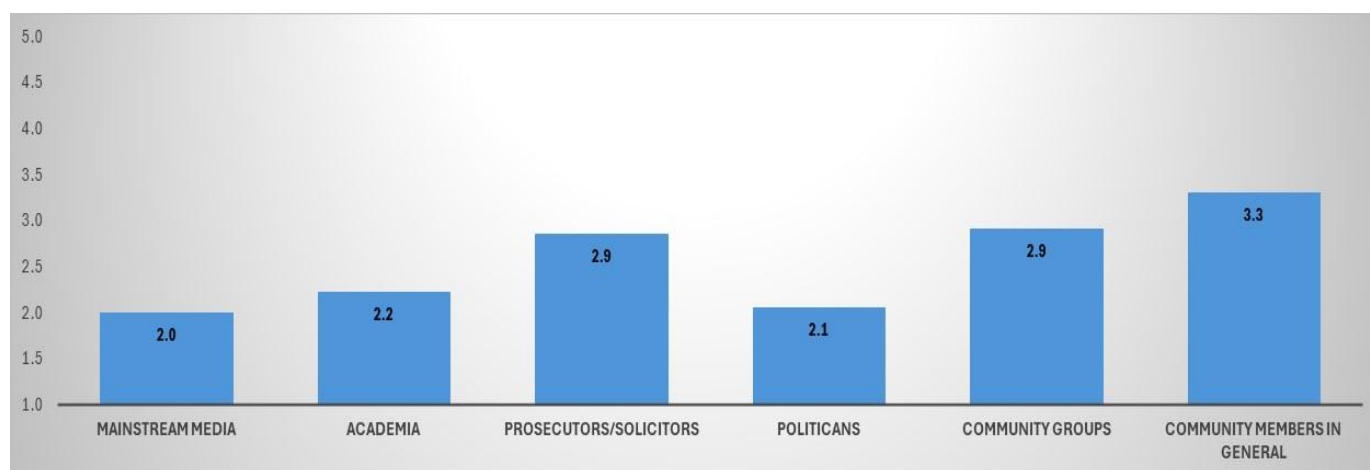


Figure 6: Effectiveness – Stakeholders working with Law Enforcement (Active Officers)

### Procedural Justice

Procedural justice refers to the fairness of the processes police use in their interactions with the public, and it is critical when considering how police can build trust and foster legitimacy within their communities. Officers were asked to consider their policing practices and their community interactions. Four statements were presented to officers. They were asked to indicate how important each one was when they were interacting with the public.

The four statements were:

- Listening carefully to what community members say, even if it is not directly relevant to what you need to do
- Explaining to community members the reasoning and/or legal basis behind decisions
- Treating community members respectfully at all times, even if you are personally frustrated with them
- Listening to all sides of a story before making a decision

When asked to consider their personal approach to police work, almost 9 out of 10 officers indicated that procedural justice was highly important to them.

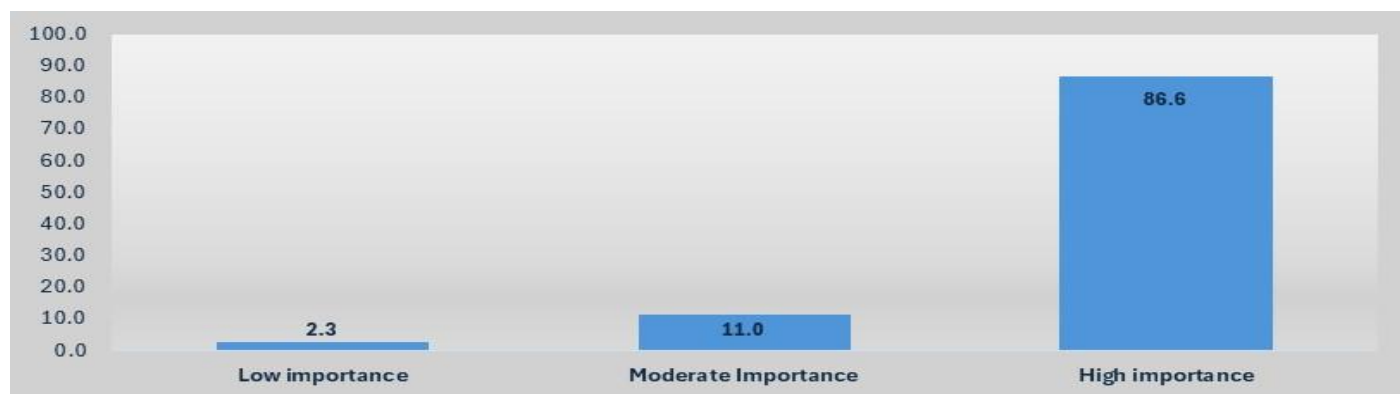


Figure 7: Procedural Justice (Active Officers)

## De-policing

Public discussions and debates can impact the job of law enforcement. De-policing is a term that refers to police disengaging from active police work, generally as a reaction to external scrutiny or negative publicity. Officers were asked to think about how such discussions and external attitudes about police might impact on their work and their motivation to do the job. Specifically, they were asked to rate their level of agreement with each of the following statements:

- Have caused me to be less proactive on the job than I have been in the past
- Have caused me to be more apprehensive about using force even though it may be necessary
- Have caused me to be less likely to want to work with community members to solve local problems

Most respondents indicated agreement with either moderate or high levels of de-policing attitudes. This indicates that negative community discussions are impacting policing behaviors.

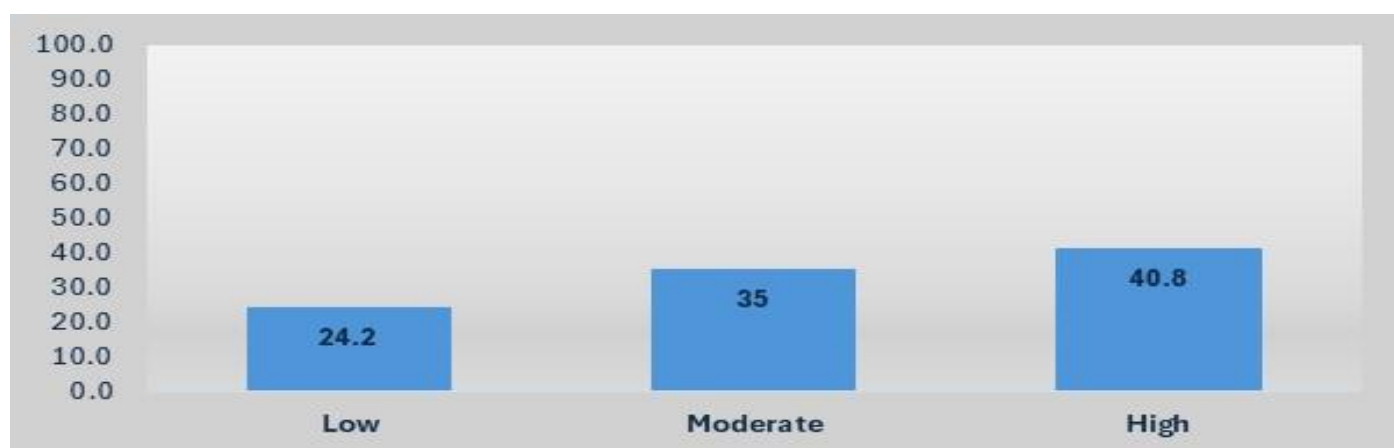


Figure 8: De-policing (Active Officers)

## Dangers of Policing

Respondents were asked to consider how public discussions and debates about law enforcement impact the perceived difficulty and dangers faced by officers in carrying out their duties. Specifically, officers were asked to rate their level of agreement with each of the following statements:

- Have made it more difficult to do my job
- Have made it more dangerous to be a law enforcement officer

Respondents overwhelmingly indicated that negative public discussions and debates about law enforcement have made the job of policing more dangerous and more difficult.



Figure 9: Dangers of Policing (Active Officers)

## Police Stress: Trauma, Operational and Organizational Factors

The *FOP Critical Issues in Policing Survey* series provides a snapshot of a comprehensive range of factors that are commonly associated with stress in policing. Through greater understanding of the sources of officer stress, specific stressors predictive of poor wellbeing outcomes for officers can be identified and appropriate prevention and response efforts can be prioritized.

Police stress was measured according to three groups: trauma or critical incident stress, other operational stress, and organizational stress.

Consistent with contemporary studies of police stress (e.g. Carleton et al, 2020; Drew & Williamson, 2024), trauma and critical incidents were found to be the least stressful of the three groups of stressors. The factors that cause the most stress are associated with organizational factors.

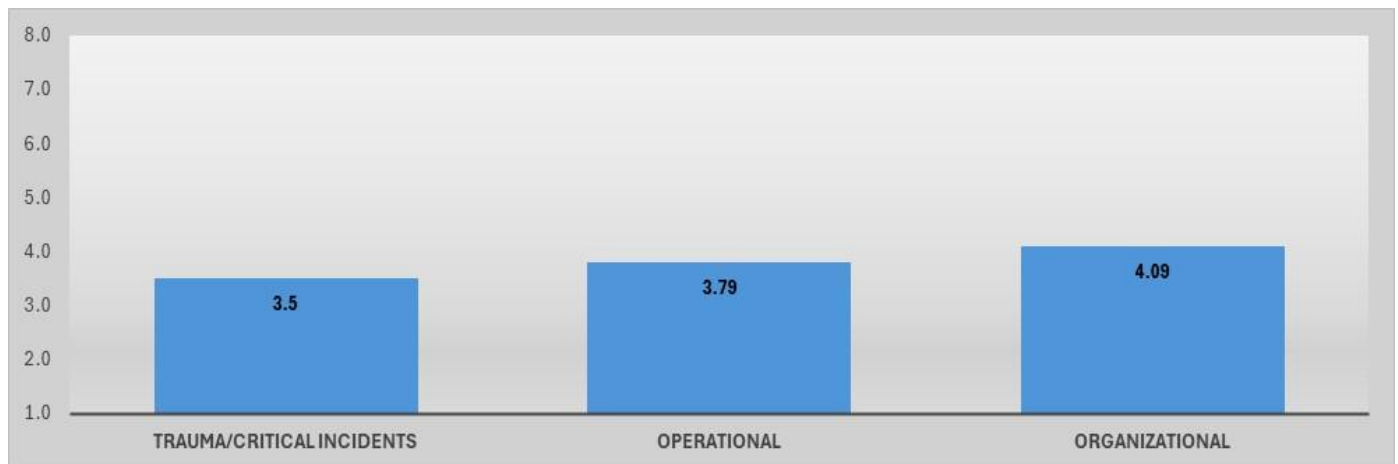


Figure 10. Comparison of Sources of Stress (Active Officers)

### Trauma and Critical Incident Stress

Of those officers who had experienced the critical incident or traumatic events listed, the top three most stressful events were:

1. Danger or harm to work colleagues
2. Danger or harm from traumatic calls
3. Physical danger of job to self (officers)

### Operational Stress

Operational stress refers to stressors that are experienced by police that are related to the context of their job, including fatigue, work-related activities on days off, managing work-life balance, and physical health impacts (McCreary et al., 2017). The top three operational stress factors reported by officers are:

1. Health related issues (fatigue, eating healthy, etc.)
2. Work demands (shift work, overtime, etc.)
3. Work-life balance

### Organizational Stress

Organizational stress refers to those stressors experienced by police that are associated with the organizational culture of policing and/or the police agency. The current research indicates the top three organizational stress factors reported by officers are:

1. Work-based pressures; including staff shortages, excessive administrative duties, and changes in policy and legislation
2. Poor leadership, including perceived favoritism
3. Insufficient resources and training

## Comparing Stressors

The data gathered in this survey highlights that organizational and operational stressors are significant for US law enforcement officers. Directly comparing stressors across the three groupings (fourteen distinct stressors were measured), the top five most highly rated stressors included two organizational stress factors and three operational stress factors. No specific stressor related to trauma appeared in the top five most highly rated stressors.

Overall, the top five stressors are:

1. Work-based pressures (Organizational)
2. Poor leadership (Organizational)
3. Health related issues (Operational)
4. Work demands (Operational)
5. Work-life balance (Operational)

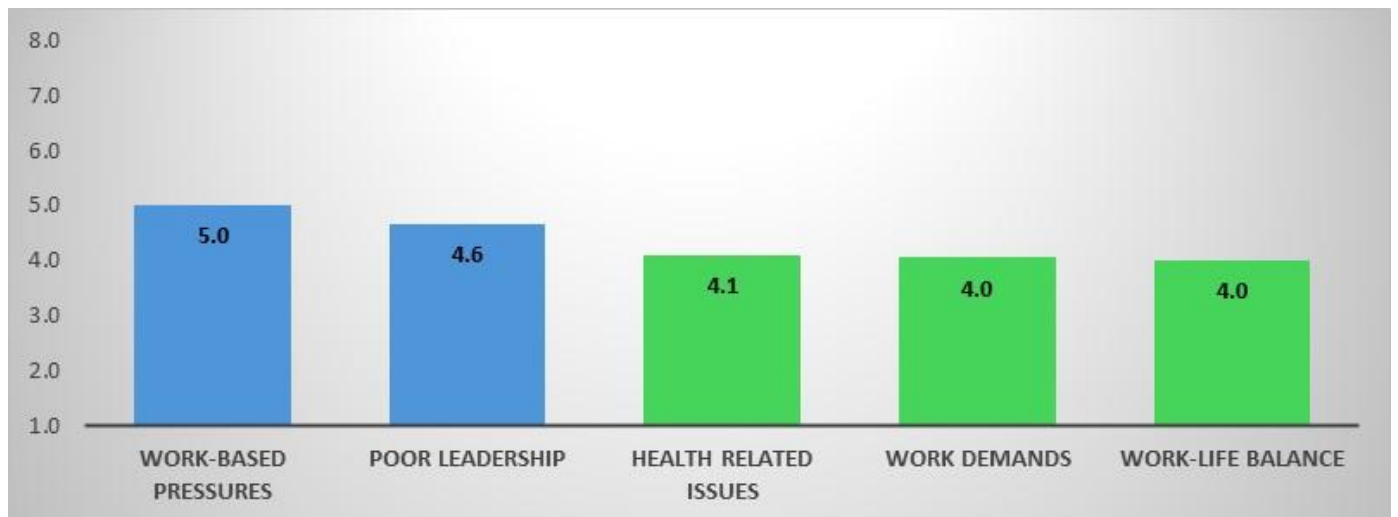


Figure 11. Comparison of specific stressors across stress categories.

**These findings indicate that respondents find operational and organizational stressors more stressful than the physical dangers caused by the job – whether that danger be to themselves or their colleagues. Operational and organizational stressors are rated as more stressful than exposure to traumatic calls.**

## Law Enforcement Mental Health

The *FOP Critical Issues in Policing Survey* series collects data from US law enforcement on burnout, psychological distress, mental health diagnoses, and suicidal behaviors. With the inclusion of retired officers, the findings of the survey provide critical information about the need for mental health support for active officers and ongoing support following the end of a policing career.

### Burnout (Exhaustion)

Among active officers, approximately half (50.3%) reported high levels of burnout. Around eight out of every 10 officers reported medium to high levels of burnout.

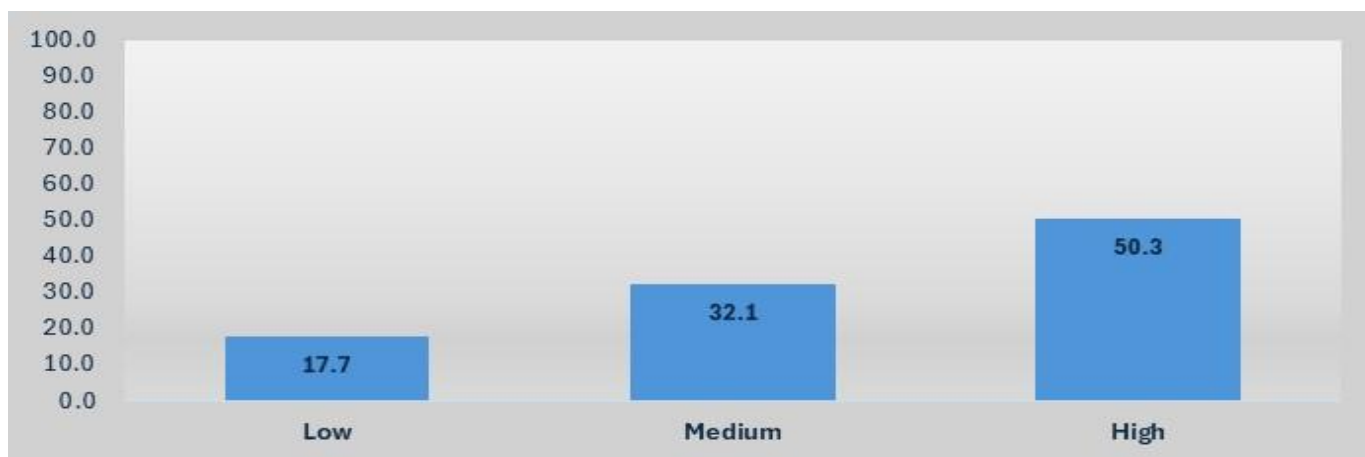


Figure 12. Burnout for Police (Active Officers)

### Psychological Distress

The data reveals that 40.2% of active and 28.7% of retired officers experienced some level of psychological distress. Of particular concern, 11.6% of active officers and 6.6% of retired officers reported symptoms that reflect severe distress.

The survey findings indicated that psychological distress remains relatively high even following retirement from the profession. As most retirees will no longer have access to agency support after leaving law enforcement, effort should be made to address this issue. Consideration should be given to how to better support retirees, as retired officers continue to be impacted by the experiences of their policing career even after they have left active service.



Figure 13. Psychological Distress Categories for Police (Active and Former Officers)

## Mental Health Diagnoses

Data was collected about the three types of mental health conditions that are most commonly reported by police populations. Active and retired officers were asked whether, during their employment as a police officer, they had received a formal diagnosis of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and/or anxiety.

Similar numbers of officers across the active and retired cohorts reported PTSD, depression, and anxiety. Anxiety was the most reported condition (active: 21.4%; retired: 18.0%), followed by depression (active: 16.5%; retired: 15.2%) and then PTSD (active: 14.5%; retired: 14.2%).

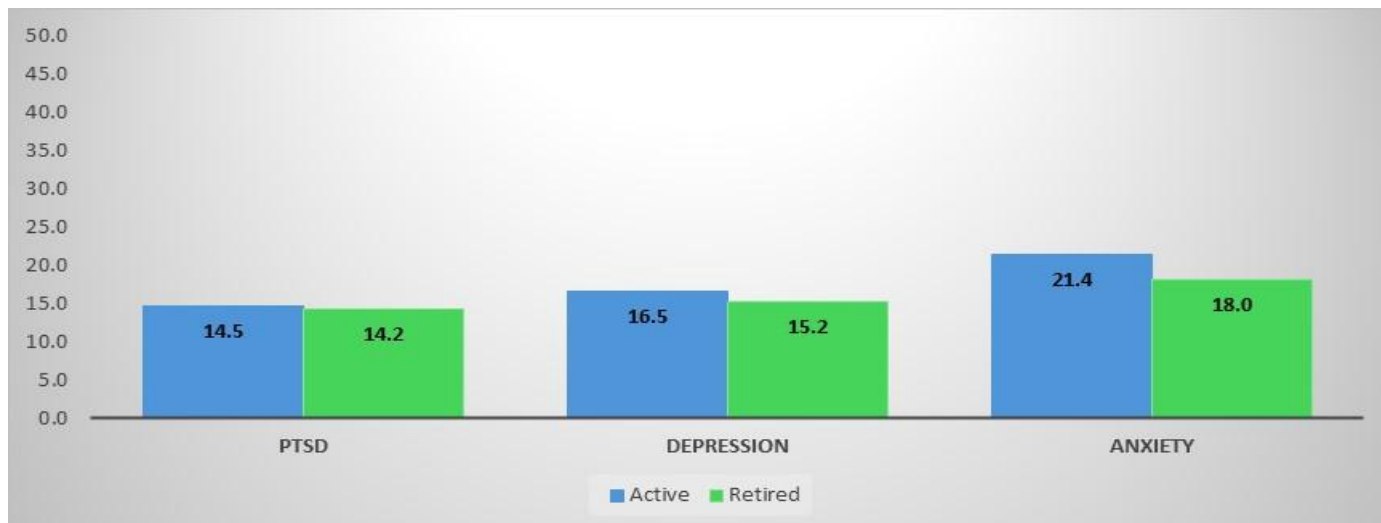


Figure 14. Mental Health Diagnoses for Police (Active and Retired Officers)

## Suicidal Behaviors

Officers were asked about a range of suicidal behaviors, including suicidal ideation, suicide attempts, and suicide plans. They reflected on the previous 12 months and across the span of their police career.

The data indicated that 5.1% of officers (both active and retired) reported suicidal ideation within the previous 12 months, and 15.4% reported suicidal ideation sometime during their policing career. Considering suicide planning, 1.8% of all officers had made a suicide plan, and 5.4% had done so at some time during their career. Among respondents, 0.4% of officers had made a suicide attempt within the previous 12 months, and 1.0% had made a suicide attempt sometime during their police career.

There were some changes between the 2021 and 2023 survey findings with regard to suicidal behaviors; however, these were small. Findings of the 2023 survey indicated a slight decrease in prevalence of both suicidal ideation and planning compared to the 2021 survey results. A slight increase in suicidal attempts was reported by the sample.

## Impacts of the Job on Personal Relationships

For the first time in the *Critical Issues in Policing Survey Series*, the *2023 FOP Critical Issues in Policing Survey* asked about the impact of police work on personal relationships and families. This is important, as it is increasingly recognized that those outside of policing are also affected by the stress and wellbeing impacts that law enforcement work has on their loved ones who serve. Families are a vital source of support, playing a critical role in supporting the physical and psychological health of officers. While there is much speculation about the longevity of personal and/or romantic relationships of those working in policing, 82.9% of officers reported being in a committed relationship, with 75.5% of officers indicating that they were married.

In the 2023 survey, officers were asked three questions about whether they perceived that their work had created problems in their personal relationships. We were interested in the impacts of the operational nature of police work, the stress experienced because of working in law enforcement, and whether loved ones understood the impact that police work can have on officers.

For all three questions, around one third of officers who were in active service, indicated that their job had either a 'high' or 'very high' negative impact on their relationships.

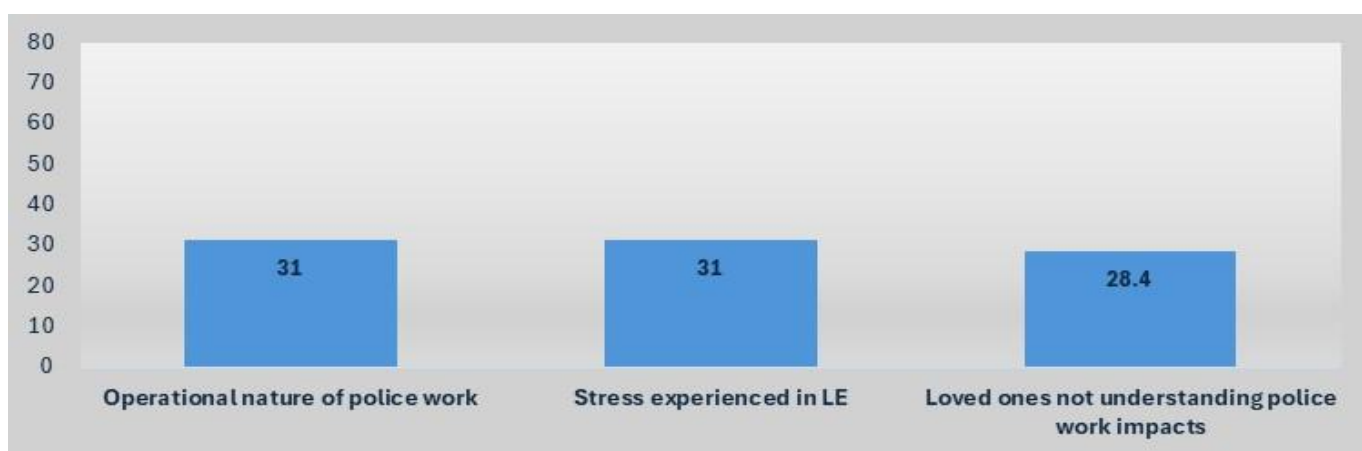


Figure 15. Police work and negative impacts on relationships (Active Officers)



## Life As a Retired Officer

To better understand the experiences and impact of the law enforcement career over a lifetime, the *Critical Issues in Policing Survey* series is also open to officers who have retired from active service. Approximately one third of the respondents to the 2023 survey indicated that they had retired from active service. Among them, over half (55.2%) had retired within the previous 10 years.

Many retirees continue to work after retiring from law enforcement. Among retirees surveyed, 30.1% reported working either full or part-time in a job related to law enforcement, 23.3% reported working either full or part-time in employment unrelated to law enforcement, and 46.5% reported not being currently being employed. With regard to the timing of and reasons for retiring, three quarters of retirees had left voluntarily once they reached the necessary number of years of service required to collect a pension or retirement payout.

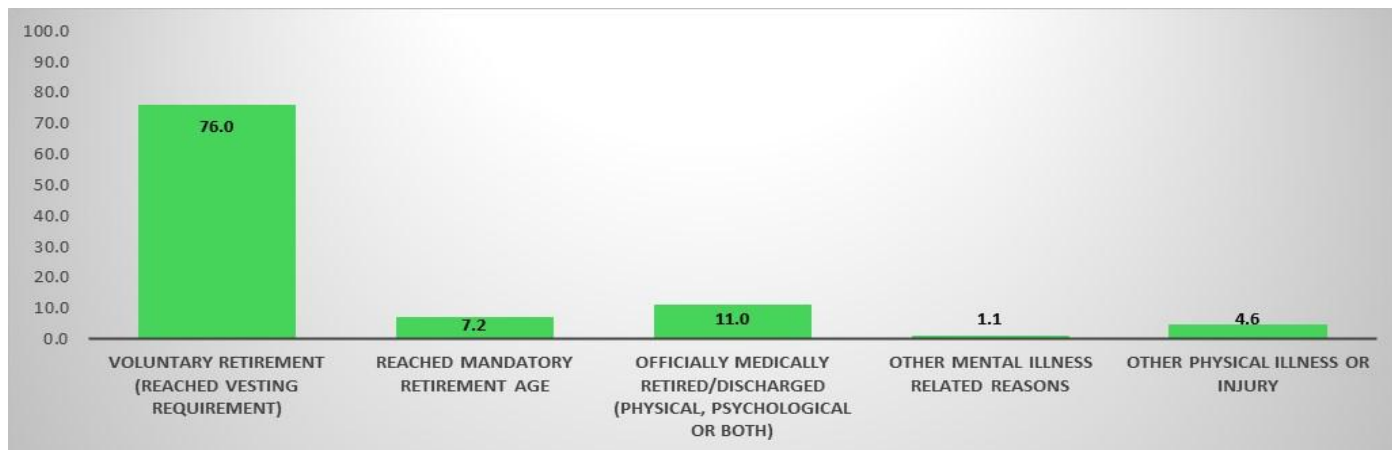


Figure 16. Reasons for Profession Exit

As officers transitioned to retirement, their experiences varied. While over half indicated that their transition was easy or very easy (53.1%), one out of four officers indicated that their transition was difficult or very difficult. Retiring officers' experience of support provided to them by their former employers and from the profession varied. The survey measured the perception of the support the retiree received, compared to what they expected to receive. Just over half of retired officers (53.6%) indicated that they received appropriate support, matching their needs and expectations. A significant number (41.0%) reported that they received less support than expected. This finding highlights that current levels of support for retired officers as they transition out of active service should be improved.



Figure 17. Perceptions of Support Received in Retirement

A particular area of interest, but to date one that has been relatively underexplored, is the potential and perceived impacts of the law enforcement career on the health of officers that extends into retirement after active service. Retirees were asked to rate the impact of their law enforcement service on their physical health in retirement. Nearly 7 out of 10 officers (69.9%) reported that their physical health continued to be impacted in retirement by their experiences on the job.

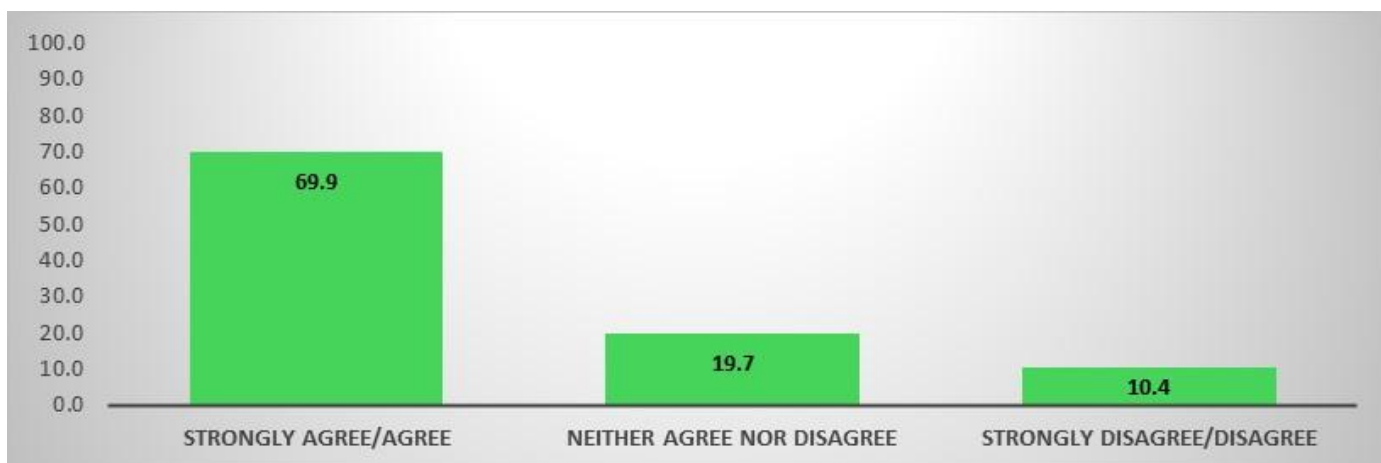


Figure 18. Perception of Career Impacts on Physical Health (Retired Officers)

Similarly, over 6 out of 10 retired officers (61.9%) reported that their psychological health continues to be impacted in retirement by their experiences in active service across their law enforcement careers.

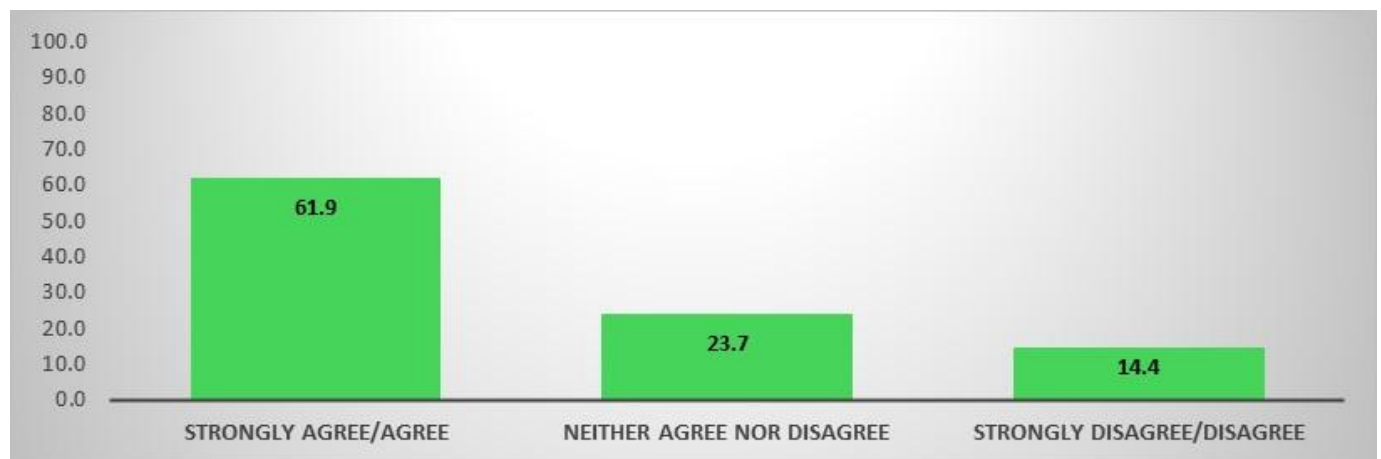


Figure 19. Perception of Career Impacts on Psychological Health (Retired Officers)

## Wellness Services for Law Enforcement

The FOP is dedicated to making a positive impact on officer wellbeing. As such, an important aim of the *FOP Critical Issues in Policing Survey Series* is to measure the availability, access to, and perceived effectiveness of wellness services for both active serving and retired members of law enforcement<sup>1</sup>. We are interested both in services offered by police agencies to their staff and wellness services that may be accessed by officers outside of their agencies.

### Services Provided by Police Agencies

Drawing on data collected as part of the *FOP Critical Issues in Policing Survey Series*, it has been found that police agencies which provide greater numbers of wellness services positively impact on the psychological distress reported by their officers. Similarly, data indicates lower levels of stigma around help-seeking in agencies that offer a larger number of wellness services to their employees.<sup>2</sup>

In the current survey, officers reported that the five most common agency-provided programs or supports available were:

- Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) or similar
- Specialist program (e.g. anger management program)
- Formal or informal debriefings with manager or work colleague
- Peer support program
- Chaplaincy



Figure 20. Top 5 Wellness Services Provided by Agencies - Availability (Active Officers)

While wellness services may be offered by agencies, officers may choose not to access them. This may be because officers do not perceive them as sufficient or suitable to meet their needs, or as is often the case, due to stigma associated with help-seeking. As such, it is important to understand which of the offered programs officers are most likely to use.

<sup>1</sup> Further detailed findings related to availability, access, and effectiveness of wellness services in law enforcement has been published separately. See Drew, J.M. & Martin, S. (2023). Mental health and wellness initiatives supporting United States law enforcement personnel: The current state-of-play. *Journal of Community Safety and Well-Being*, 8(Suppl\_1), S12-S22.

<sup>2</sup> Martin, S. & Drew, J.M. (2023). Critical issues in Policing Survey: Comprehensive Report of 2021 Survey Findings. A collaboration between National Fraternal Order of Police and Griffith Criminology Institute, Griffith University. <https://fop.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/2021-Survey-Report-202309.pdf>

The five most common agency-provided programs or supports accessed were:

- Formal or informal debriefings with manager or work colleague
- Mental Health First Aid (MHFA)
- Training/program for mental and physical self-care (incl. resiliency training)
- Suicide awareness and prevention education/program
- Support/therapy K9 program

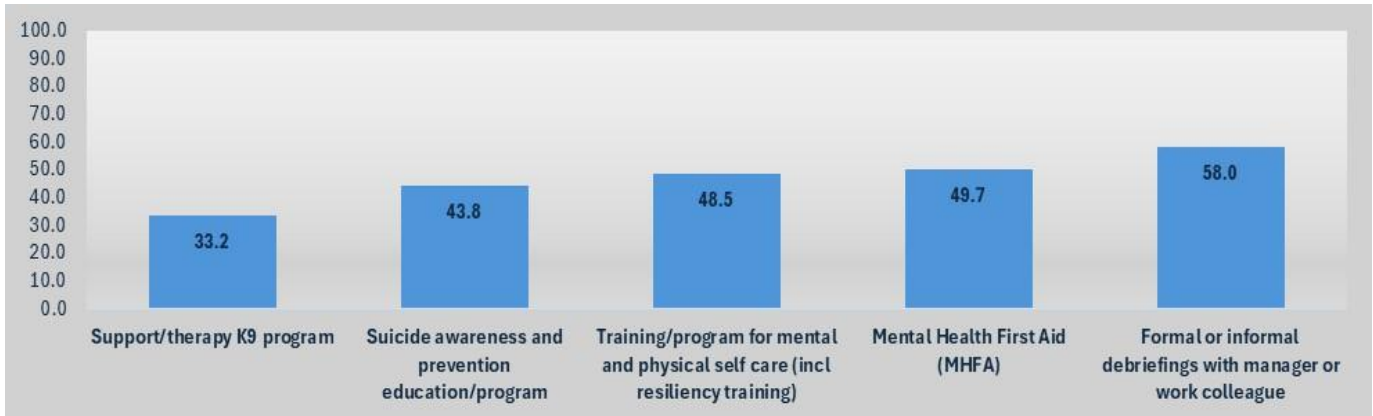


Figure 21. Top 5 Wellness Services Provided by Agencies - Accessed (Active Officers)

When examining wellness services offered by agencies, it is critical to understand which services are perceived by officers as being most effective. As such, we measure impacts based on the perception of officers who have *actually used* the service. This can guide us in resourcing and prioritizing services that officers find most helpful. Officers rated services on a scale of 1 to 5 with a higher score indicating greater perceived effectiveness.

The five most effective agency-provided programs or supports were:

- Peer support program
- Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) or similar
- Chaplaincy
- Formal or informal debriefings with manager or work colleague
- Support/therapy K9 program

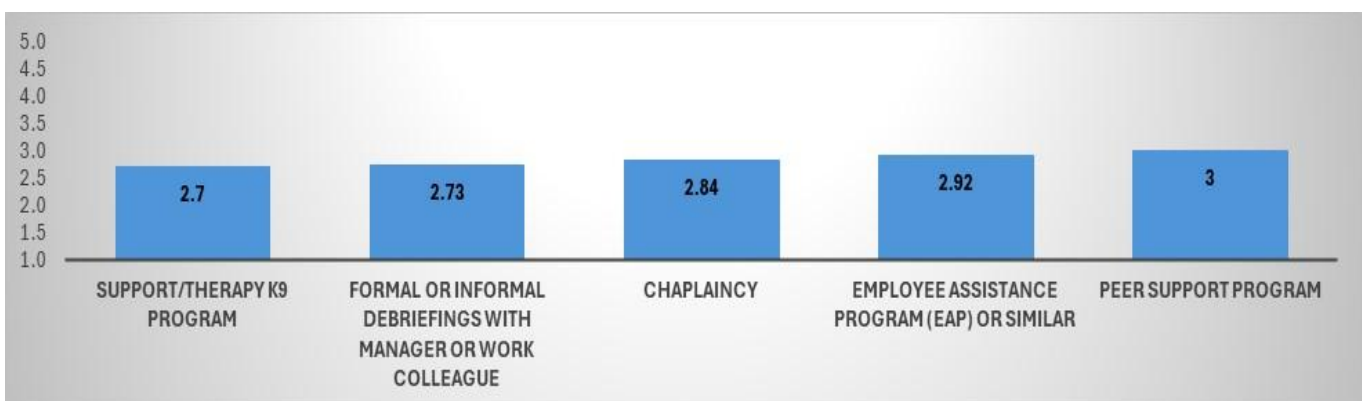


Figure 22. Top 5 Wellness Services Provided by Agencies - Effectiveness (Active Officers)

It is of interest that some of the services deemed most effective, peer support for example, were not among the most frequently accessed services. This finding is significant as agencies consider which programs represent the most responsible and effective use of often limited resources.

### Services External to Agencies

Officers were asked about their engagement with wellness services that are external to their police agency.

The three most accessed external services were:

1. General Practitioner
2. Internet
3. Psychologist/Psychiatrist

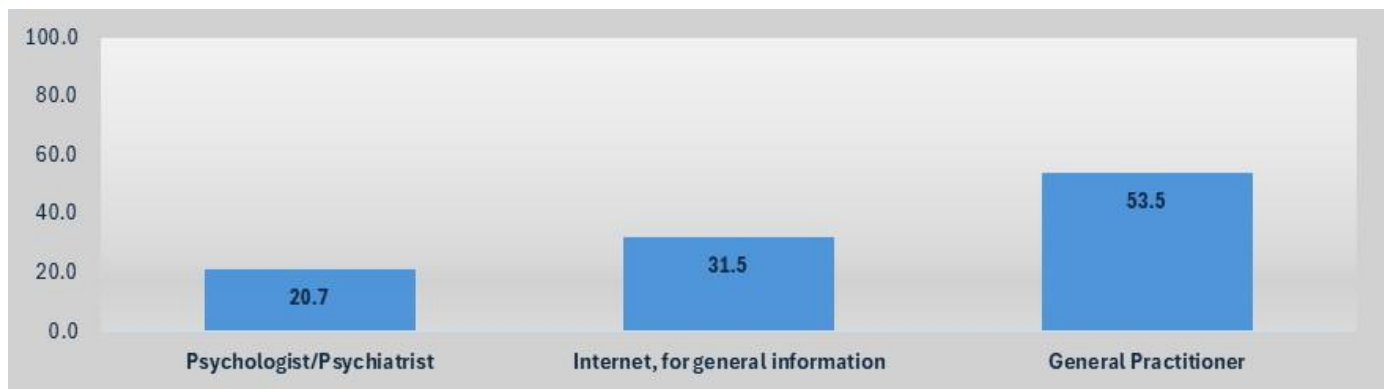


Figure 23. Top 3 External Wellness Services - Accessed (Active Officers)

Similar to what was asked about wellness services provided by agencies, officers were asked about the perceived effectiveness of services.

The three most effective external wellness services were:

- Psychologist/Psychiatrist
- Other professional provider - MH services
- Alternate medicine practitioner

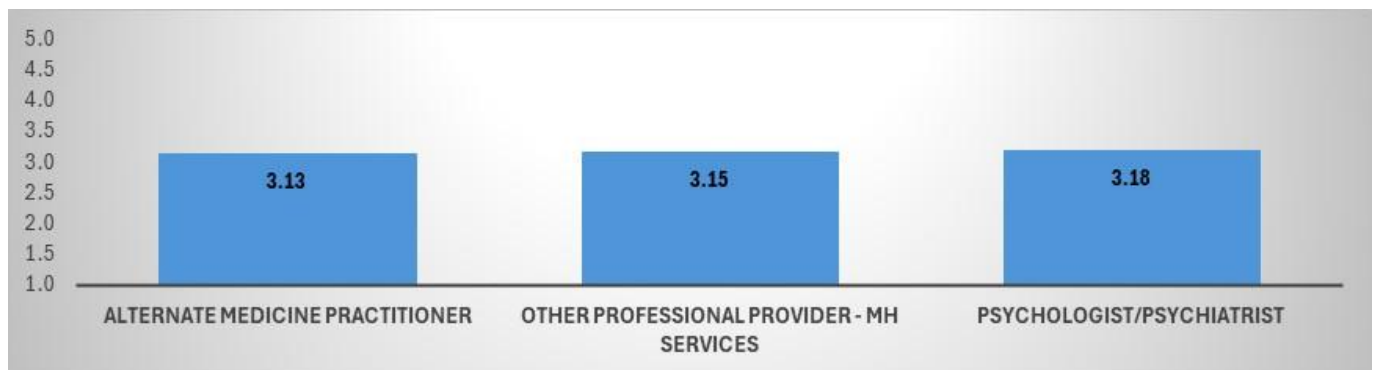


Figure 24. Top 3 External Wellness Services - Effectiveness (Active Officers)

## Stigma

In recent years, conversations surrounding mental health have increased among members of law enforcement. As such, one aim of the *FOP Critical Issues in Policing Survey Series* is to examine officer perceptions of stigma, specific to help-seeking, and to examine how they might shift over time<sup>3</sup>.

Officers were asked about their perceptions about mental health help-seeking; specifically, their degree of agreement with the following:

- People in the agency would think I pose a risk to others
- People in the agency would react negatively toward me
- People in the agency would think of me less favorably

It was encouraging that 80% of officers perceived only low levels of mental health help-seeking stigma with less than 10% of officers strongly endorsing stigma perceptions.

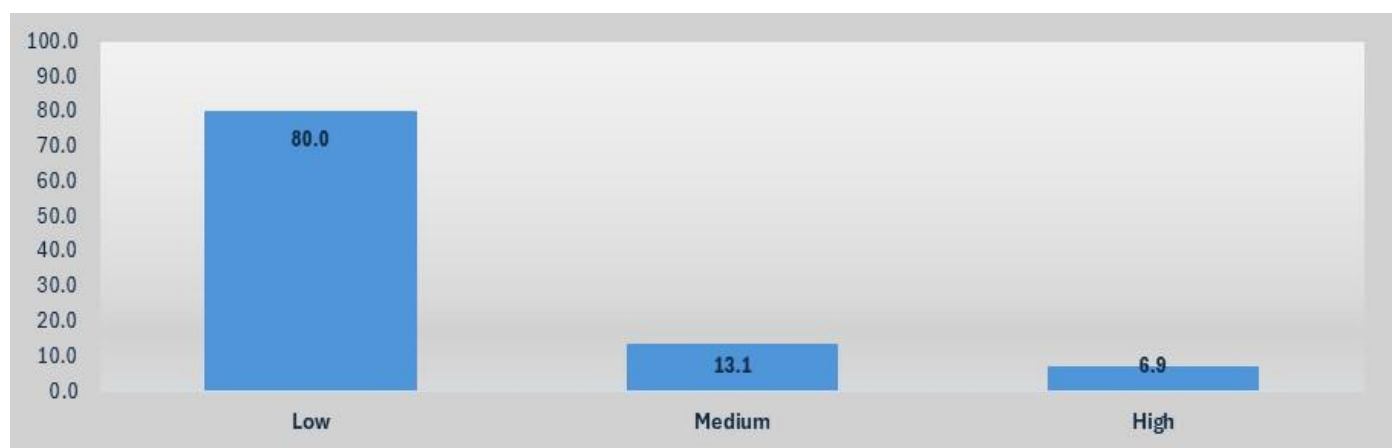


Figure 25. Help-Seeking Stigma (Active Officers)

These findings indicate a change from responses to the 2021 survey in which higher rates of stigma attitudes around help-seeking were found. The changes observed in the current survey represent an 11% reduction in stigma attitudes toward help-seeking.

In addition to the above questions, officers were also asked several additional questions more specific to the drivers of stigma in police workplaces. Among factors that are perceived to be persistent drivers of stigma are:

- "Suck it up police" culture
- Negative impact on promotions
- Firearm removal
- Concerns over confidentiality (agency provided psychological services)

<sup>3</sup> A publication produced from the first survey conducted by the NFOP in collaboration with NBC News focused on help-seeking stigma. See Drew, J.M. & Martin, S. (2021). A national study of police mental health in the United States: Stigma, mental health, and help-seeking behaviors. *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology*, 36, 295-306.

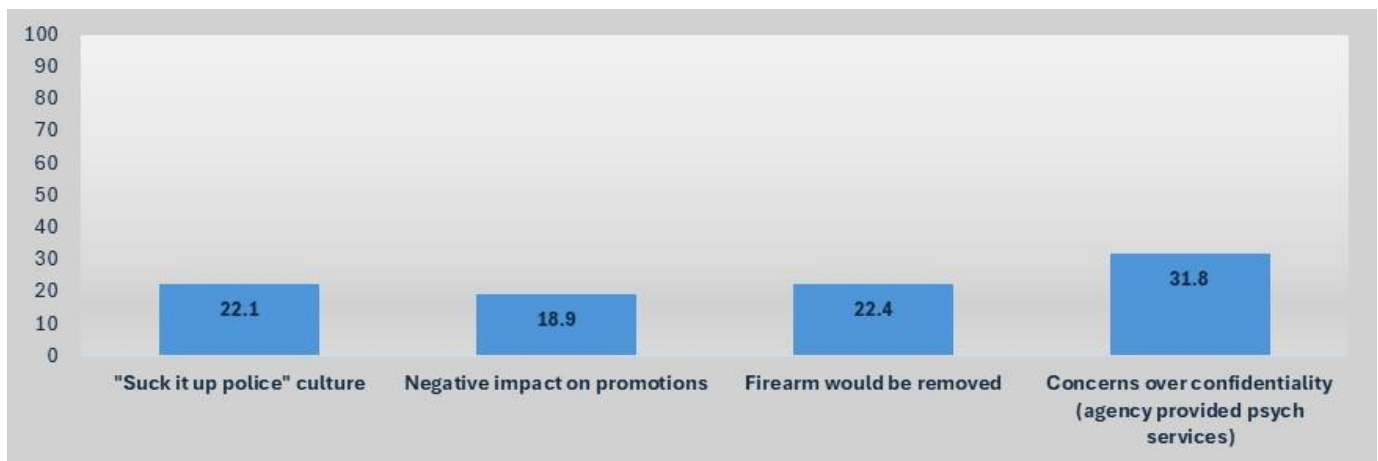


Figure 26. Help-Seeking Stigma – Police Specific Factors (Active Officers)

In the 2023 survey, officers were also asked about what contributes most to stigma reduction. The current study found that increased conversations about mental health in both the workplace and in the broader external community were important in reducing mental health stigma. Additionally, peer support teams and an increase in the number of wellness services provided by agencies both were nominated as important factors that result in normalization of the presence and utilization of wellness services within agencies. As wellness services within police agencies become more widely available and as the profession increasingly recognizes the importance of mental health, the critical need for officers to access support services will hopefully become an integral part of law enforcement culture.

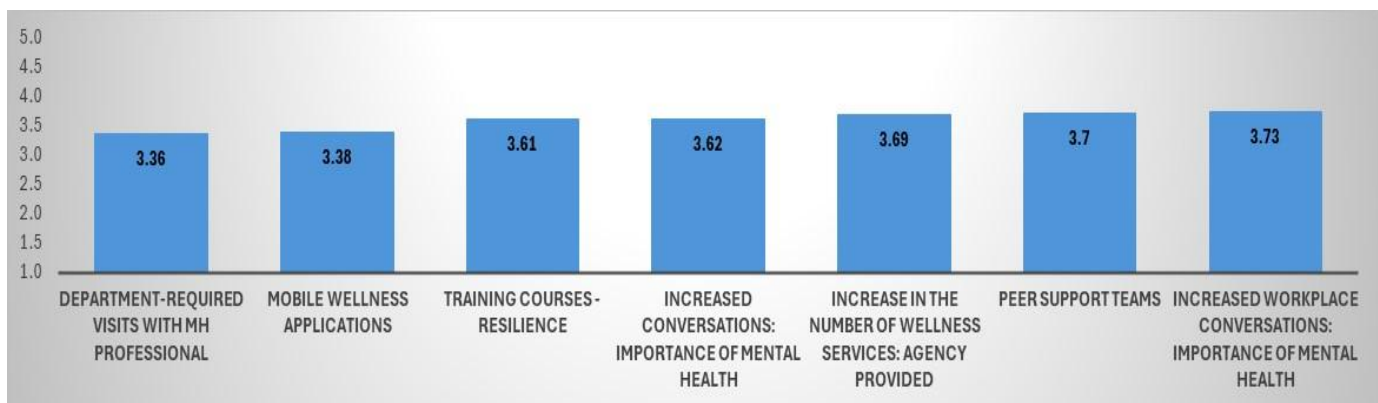


Figure 27. Help-Seeking Stigma – Reducing Stigma (Active Officers)



## Police Retention

A major aim of the *2023 Critical Issues in Policing Survey* was to collect the views of officers regarding the retention crisis that is currently being experienced by police agencies across the US. Since 2020, the law enforcement profession has experienced a changed landscape wherein there is a tangible shortage of applicants for law enforcement positions and large numbers of officers have left or are considering leaving the profession.<sup>4</sup>

Over half of all officers responding to the survey indicated that they had some intention of either moving from their current agency to another or to exit the profession entirely.

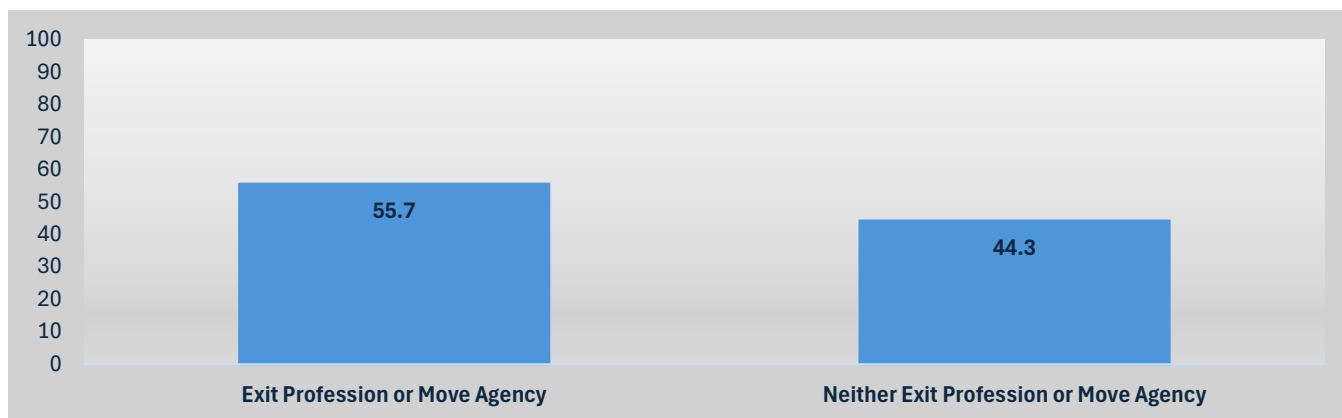


Figure 28. Intentions of Leaving (General)

Among those who had some intention of either leaving the either agency or profession, 7 out of 10 officers were considering leaving the profession entirely.

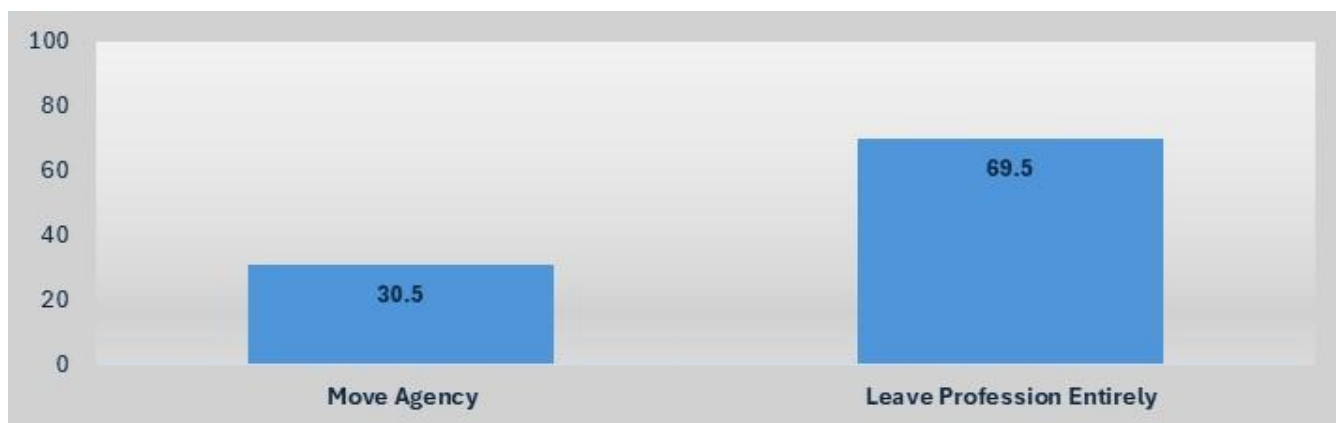


Figure 29. Intentions of Leaving (Focused)

Officers in both groups, those either considering moving between agencies or out of the law enforcement profession entirely, endorsed significantly higher levels of stress compared to those not planning to move from the profession or between agencies.

<sup>4</sup> Further detailed findings regarding police retention have been published separately. See Drew, J.M., Keech, J.J. & Martin, S. (2025). Will I Stay or Will I Go? Exploring Job Demand Stress, Organizational Justice, and Psychological Health in Decisions to Leave the Police Agency or Profession. *Am J Crim Just* 50, 848–871. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12103-025-09833-8>

Significant differences were found between the two groups, those considering moving agencies or leaving the profession entirely, with regard to the sources of stress that are driving their intentions. Specifically, officers who were intending to move between agencies reported significantly less trauma stress compared to officers considering leaving the profession. Officers intending to move between agencies, compared to those exiting the profession, reported significantly more organizational stress. This may indicate that officers experiencing significant organizational stress will seek to reduce their stress by moving to a new agency with the expectation that organizational experiences, such as poor or inconsistent leadership, may be different.

Among officers with the strongest intentions of leaving their law enforcement agency to move to another, four of the top five reasons cited were tied to organizational stressors. The top five factors included:

1. Lack of support from administration
2. Low agency morale
3. Intense scrutiny from administration and supervisors
4. Criminal justice system benefits the criminal
5. Seeking better workplace culture

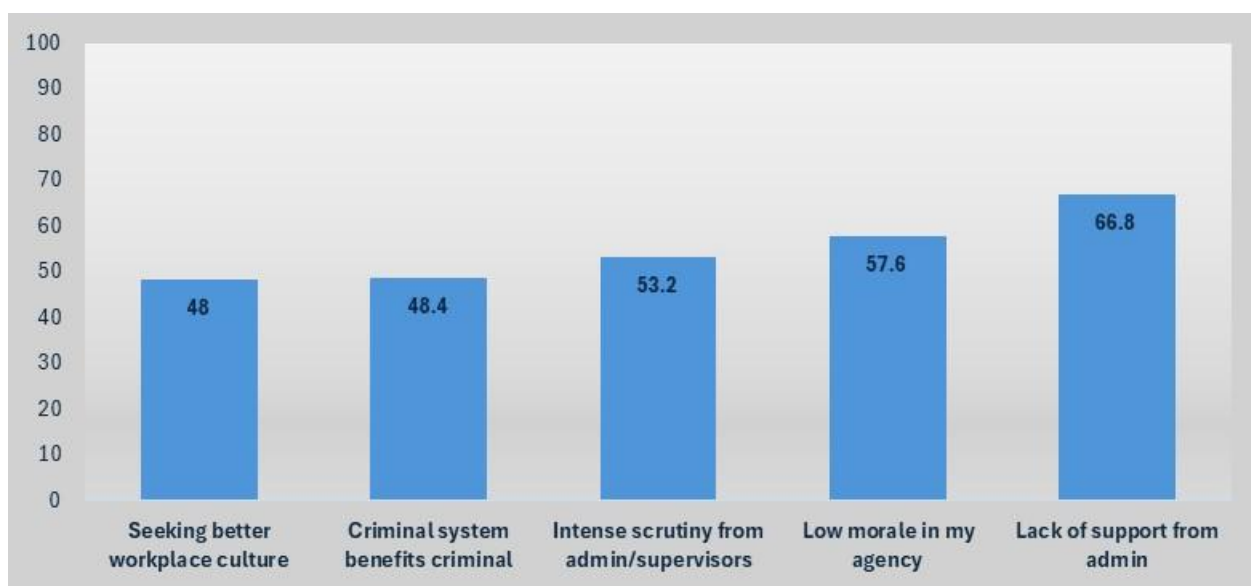


Figure 30. Reasons for leaving law enforcement agency to move to another

Among officers with the strongest intentions to leave the law enforcement profession entirely, the most prevalent reason was a perception that the current criminal justice system largely benefits the criminal. Among officers with the strongest intentions of leaving the profession entirely, the top five factors were:

1. Criminal justice systems benefits the criminal
2. Lack of support from administration
3. Low morale in my agency
4. Increase scrutiny from administration and supervisors
5. Intense scrutiny from outside of the profession

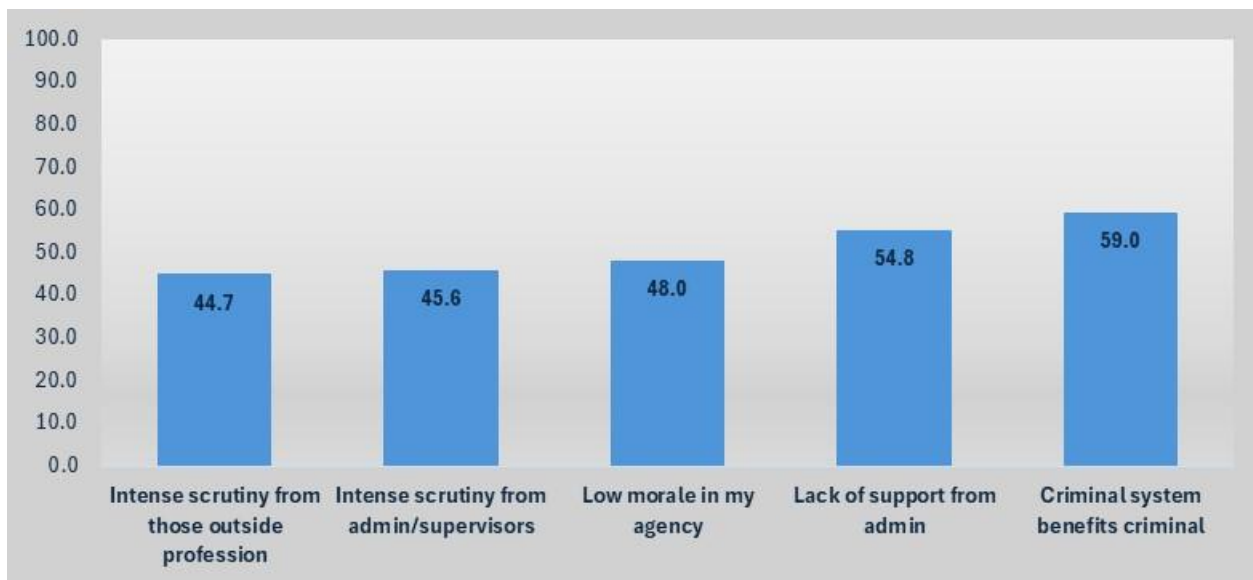


Figure 31. Reasons for leaving the law enforcement profession entirely

Both groups of officers, those who indicated an intention to leave their police agency or the profession entirely, reported significantly higher stress from all three sources previously examined in this report (trauma and critical incident stress, operational, and organizational) compared to those who were intending to not move agencies or leave the profession. While trauma and critical incidents have been historically considered to be the most stressful aspects of police work, the most stress-inducing demands that are tied to retention and psychological health are in fact from organizational and operational experiences.

It is of note that both groups of officers who indicated strong intentions to leave either their agency or the profession, reported that a significant contributor was the perception that the criminal justice system largely benefits the criminal. This finding highlights the impact of influences which may be affecting police recruitment and retention from outside of the policing profession. For example, nearly half (44.7%) of officers reporting an intention to leave the profession entirely cited intense scrutiny from outside of the profession.

In regard to psychological health, both burnout and psychological distress are important factors when considering the intention of officers to leave their agency and the profession. Officers who intended to leave either their police agency or the police profession, compared to officers intending to stay, reported poorer psychological health (burnout and psychological distress).

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## Other Relevant Information

### Publications

- Drew, J.M., Keech, J.J. & Martin, S. (2025). Will I Stay or Will I Go? Exploring Job Demand Stress, Organizational Justice, and Psychological Health in Decisions to Leave the Police Agency or Profession. *American Journal of Criminal Justice* 50, 848–871.
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- Drew, J.M. & Martin, S. (2021). A national study of police mental health in the United States: Stigma, mental health and help-seeking behaviors. *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology*, 36, 295-306.

### Presentations & Podcasts

- Martin, S & Drew, J.M. (2025). National Fraternal Order of Police Biennial Conference, Miami Beach, FL. Mental Health from Start to Finish: Staying Well for the Whole Police Career.
- Martin, S. & Drew, J.M. (2025). International Association of Chiefs of Police Officer Safety & Wellness Conference, Anaheim, CA. “Rub Some Dirt on It”: Changing Attitudes and Reducing Stigma Through Agency Wellness Programming.
- Drew, J.M., & Martin, S. (2025). International Association of Chiefs of Police Officer Safety & Wellness Conference, Anaheim, CA. The Power of Leadership: How Can Police Leaders Support the Police Wellbeing Agenda?
- Martin, S. (2025). Fraternal Order of Police Leadership Matters, Nashville, TN. Officer Wellness: What FOP Leaders Need to Know (updated).
- Martin, S. (2024). Concerns of Police Survivors Conference on Wellness & Trauma, Orlando, FL. What’s On Our Minds? Officers Across the Nation Weigh In.
- Martin, S., Drew, J.M., & Estill, S. (2024). International Association of Chiefs of Police Annual Conference, Boston, MA. 10-7 End of Watch: Impacts of the Job After the Shift Ends and Making Wellness a Family Matter.
- Martin, S. (2024). National Association of Women Law Enforcement Executives, Las Vegas, NV. Are We Getting Better? An Examination of the Changing Environment of Law Enforcement with a Focus on Officer Wellbeing.

- Martin, S. & Drew, J.M. (2024). Fraternal Order of Police Leadership Matters, Nashville, TN. Officer Wellness: What FOP Leaders Need to Know.
- Martin, S. & Drew, J.M. (2024). Fraternal Order of Police Wellness Summit, Nashville, TN. The Current State of Officer Wellness: Results of the 2023 Critical Issues in Policing Survey.
- Martin, S. (2023). Concerns of Police Survivors Conference on Wellness & Trauma, Orlando, FL. Where We Stand: The Current State of Law Enforcement Health.
- Martin, S. (2023) National Fraternal Order of Police Biennial Conference, Las Vegas, NV. Our Voices Have Been Heard: Findings of the 2021 FOP Critical Issues in Policing Survey.
- Drew, J.M. & Martin, S. (2023). International Association of Chiefs of Police Officer Safety and Wellness Conference, Anaheim, California. Emerging Trends Impacting Officer Wellness and Engagement with Services: Maximizing Positive Impact.
- Martin, S. (2023). Fraternal Order of Police Leadership Matters 2023, Nashville, TN. What FOP Leaders Need to Know About Officer Wellness.
- Martin, S. (2023). Fraternal Order of Police Wellness Summit 2023, Nashville, TN. The Current State of Officer Wellness: From the Voices of Our Members.
- Drew, J.M. & Martin, S. (2022). International Association of Chiefs of Police Annual Conference, Dallas, TX. A National Study of U.S. Law Enforcement Officers: Critical Issues, Psychological Health, and Well-being.
- Drew, J.M. & Martin, S. (2022). American Society of Evidence-Based Policing Conference, Washington, DC. A National Study of Critical Issues in Policing and Mental Health Outcomes Experienced by US Law Enforcement Officers.
- Martin, S. (2022). International Association of Chiefs of Police Officer Safety & Wellness Symposium, Atlanta, GA. The 2021 FOP Biennial Critical Issues in Policing Survey – Experiences of Officers Across the U.S.
- Martin, S. & Drew, J.M. (2022). Fraternal Order of Police Leadership Matters and Wellness Summit, Nashville, TN. Results of the 2021 FOP Biennial Critical Issues in Policing Survey: An update on the state of officer wellness.

