



### **Study: Misconduct by Experienced Officers**

In the past, police scholars have extensively studied the link between “rookie” cops and the commission of officer-involved crimes. Research suggests discrepancies between a rookie officer’s expectations of police work and the on-the-job reality they experience, as well as a new officer’s potential to attach to delinquent subcultures can sway newer officers to commit crimes; however, not much research has been done to analyze the commission of crimes by more experienced officers. In order to obtain a broader understanding of officer misconduct, a recent study, conducted by researchers at Bowling Green State University and published by *Police Chief Magazine*, explored the commission of crimes by seasoned officers who are approaching the end of their careers.

The researchers, who analyzed over 2,000 cases in which 1,746 sworn police officers had been arrested for one or more criminal offenses, focused on data pertaining to “late-stage” offenders. Items of note from their findings:

- Overall, cases of police crime peak at four years of service and decline thereafter. This decline, however, is interrupted by spikes of crime during years nine, 10, 14, and 18 of service.
- Crimes committed by officers with 18 or more years of service accounted for 17.4 percent of the total number of crimes for which years-of-service data was available.
- Late-stage offenders were more likely to be supervisors and/or administrators, and were more likely to commit crimes motivated by profit.
- Late-stage offenders were significantly less likely to be terminated, as opposed to suspended for their actions than their less experienced counterparts.
- Cases that involved commission of crimes by officers approaching retirement were significantly more likely to end in resignation as opposed to suspension or termination.
- Experienced officers who committed crimes were more likely to be convicted in criminal court. Researchers suggest “law-breaking officers may become vulnerable to more severe legal sanctions in cases where the organization fails to dispense punishment that is perceived to be adequate.”

In light of these findings, police departments should consider implementing programs to assist baby-boomer officers approaching the final stage of their careers. Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) may provide the most promising avenue toward addressing late-stage offenses before they occur. The pre-retirement phase of an officer’s career may evoke feeling of fear and insecurity; EAPs are specifically designed to provide personal and job-related counseling services to officers. Researchers note existing literature suggests the need for assistance in long-term build-up of police stressors, psychological issues related to the feeling of loss of identity, family adjustments, and the need for financial planning. The majority of larger police departments provide counseling to retired officers, but very few offer help to employees before they begin the transition from officer to retiree.

Proactive departments will train officials to recognize problem behaviors among seasoned employees and develop programs to anticipate the issues that commonly emerge late in an officer’s career. Coupled with the internal affairs section of a department, comprehensive personnel assessment systems already adopted by many police departments nationwide collect a wide range of data and have the

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ability to address a broad spectrum of problem behaviors, most commonly related to the use of force and citizen complaints.

For questions regarding late-stage officer misconduct, or for assistance developing your department's EAP, contact Michael Branham at (602) 368-6624 or [mbranham@berkleyrisk.com](mailto:mbranham@berkleyrisk.com).

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