

Occupational Identity of Police Recruits and the Role of the Industry Practicum

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Abstract

This paper reports on a study of police students' motivation to join the NSW Police Force (NSWPF), their identification with the policing profession, and their reasons for choosing their entry path to the NSWPF. It also examines the attitudes of students to policing and to their course in one of the courses at three different points in their degree. It was conducted in 2006 and 2007 among students enrolled in two policing degree courses run under collaborative arrangements between Charles Sturt University (CSU) and the New South Wales Police Force (NSWPF). First, the entrants to the Associate Degree in Policing Practice (ADPP) and the Bachelor of Justice Studies (Policing) (BJS(P)) were surveyed at the point of entry to their degree about their identification with their future occupation as officers in the NSWPF (anticipatory socialisation). Secondly, groups of BJS(P) students are compared before and after their field placement in a Local Area Command (LAC) (practicum) to see whether their identification with the policing profession in general, and their motivation and desire to join the NSWPF in particular, differed from those of new entrants. The examination of recruits' identity patterns was also important, as a strong occupational identity has been observed by academic staff to be related to successfully completing the course. The study has important implications for action to reduce the rate at which police leave the force and the findings have been used to enhance the value of the courses for recruits.

Introduction

Police recruits begin their education aspiring to be part of 'the policing family' and with high ideals. Maintaining these aspirations and developing a positive occupational identity throughout a university course is a challenge to educators, especially given recruits' expectations of an action-oriented occupation and the significant increase in the length and academic content of pre-service police education in NSW since the 1981 Lusher Report on the New South Wales Police Force (NSWPF) (Wood 1997).

This paper reports on a study of students' motivation to join the NSWPF, their identification with the policing profession, and whether university education and the experience of work placement in a police station (ie. where they are confronted with the realities of operational police work) strengthens or weakens their occupational identity. It also compares the results for four sub-groups, based on two entry paths and two stages of training.

Relevant Literature and Context of the Research

Occupational identity conveys an understanding of how people *compare* and *differentiate* themselves from other professional groups (Tajfel & Turner 2001). The initial years in any profession can be critical years. It is the time when recruits develop their occupational identity by sharing attitudes, values, knowledge, beliefs and skills with others in the 'defined' group, and relating these to their professional role. It is a time of developing 'working models', through self-analysis in group-based

circumstances, that can carry the recruit through his/her entire career (McGowen & Hart 1990). Thus, van Knippenberg & van Schie (2000: 138) postulate that ‘this conception of the self as a group member provides a basis for the perceptual, attitudinal and behavioural effects of group membership’.

Occupational identity develops over time as recruits interact with others in their ‘in-group’. Fielding (1988: 112) argues that it is a mixture of training and practical experience. Van Knippenberg’s (2000) review of empirical studies of the relationship between organisational identification, work motivation and task performance indicates that identification is positively related to both these factors, but only if the social identity is ‘salient’ in an organisation and high performance is perceived to be in the organisation’s interest.

Published research on the relationship between recruits’ expectations of policing, their identity as police, and their experiences of police education and training is limited in Australia. Chan’s mid 1990s study (Chan et al. 2003) of recruit education and socialisation in NSW indicated that police recruits begin their training with “high expectations and lofty ideals”. This was consistent with Fielding’s (1988) earlier study of British police forces. Chan et al. (2003:112) also found that after the first period of placement in police stations, recruits began to transfer “their allegiance to the field of operational policing, building social capital as police officers”. However, Chan’s study is primarily focused on the *transition* from the Police College to operational policing, and, also, there have been substantial changes in police education in NSW since then.

Harr (2005: 431) examined reasons why US recruits ‘drop out’ within the first 16 months of their policing careers and found that resignation was self-initiated, academy-initiated, or department-initiated. According to Haar (2005: 231) “[r]ecruits who self-initiated resignation experienced a conflict between the version embodied in their ideal and the reality of policing in practice”.

Currently, the NSWPF has a significant rate of resignation, including by early career officers. (1) This has negative implications for the organisation, especially through the loss of corporate experience and the financial cost (eg. it means that the cost of police education and training is only partially recovered). Thus, it is essential to identify factors that might limit this attrition. Occupational identity and the impact of police training on occupational identity are key factors that need to be explored. Research has shown that occupational identity, a strong desire to belong to “the police family” (Sato 2003) and job satisfaction are important factors in lessening the attrition rate in policing (Lynch & Tuckey 2004; Victoria Police 2002).

Methodology

A cross-section of policing students from the following four subgroups were surveyed: (1) new entrants into the Bachelor of Justice Studies (Policing) (BJS(P)); (2) new entrants into the Associate Degree in Policing Practice (ADPP); (3) second year BJS(P) students pre-practicum (ie. police station placement); and (4) BJS(P) post-practicum students. The students were surveyed about: (i) their identification with the policing profession (ii) their reason for choosing policing (which helps establish the sources of their identification), and (iii) their reason for choosing their

specific course (BJS(P) or ADPP) as an entry path. This paper reports on the findings on these three issues. In addition, comparisons are made, first, between the two groups of entrants and, secondly, between BJS(P) students at the three different stages of their degree to establish any differences in the occupational identities of groups at entry, just prior to the practicum, and after the practicum.

Policing identity is measured using a scale adapted from Brown et al. (1986). For purposes of analysis, the results from responses to seven questions were collapsed into a single identity score. Each question was answered on a 5 point Likert scale. Internal consistency reliability was checked to form a consolidated scale for occupational identity (Cronback Alpha = .79).

The courses

CSU and NSWPF collaborate in providing two entry pathways into NSWPF. The principal path is through the ADPP, which is taught at the NSW Police College campus at Goulburn, principally by CSU's School of Policing Studies. The second entry path is through the BJS(P), which is a 3 year degree, the first 2 years of which are taught on CSU's Bathurst campus by staff from the School of Social Sciences and Liberal Studies (SSLS), with the final year consisting of the major part of the ADPP, taught through the Police College (Jennett & Bull 2006). The ADPP is marketed to those who are sure they want a policing career, targeting people with life and work experience. The BJS(P) is marketed to school leavers, who are too young to enter the ADPP or who are unsure that policing really is the career for them.

Associate Degree in Policing Practice

The Associate Degree in Policing Practice is undertaken over five trimesters of study which include both on-campus study and study by distance education. Phase One of the ADPP is comprised of Session 1 (13 weeks in duration for on-campus students and 26 weeks if studied via distance education) and Session 2 (16 weeks in duration). Both of these sessions are undertaken at the NSW Police College, Goulburn, with the students studying full-time and living in residential accommodation, with the exception of those Session 1 students who choose to study by distance education. Students undertake a field placement of 80 hours in a police station between Sessions 1 and 2. Provided the students meet the professional and medical requirements of the NSWPF and the academic requirements of the ADPP for these first two sessions, they are offered employment as a Probationary Constable and are attested into the NSWPF.

Upon attestation, the new probationary constable is transferred to a police station anywhere in the State of New South Wales but in most cases the posting will be in the Sydney metropolitan area. From this point, the probationer is required to successfully complete another three sessions of study (Phase 2) involving assessment of both academic knowledge and operational competence by distance education. They then graduate with the Associate Degree in Policing Practice and are confirmed as a Constable of Police.

For this study, ADPP students were only surveyed at the point of commencing their studies. A study which is currently underway will be examining them in their pre and post practicum phases.

Bachelor of Justice Studies (Policing)

The three year BJS(P) degree contains three elements aimed at giving students a better understanding of the practical realities of policing. First, students in the second year of the BJS(P) attend four residential schools at the NSW Police College to cover practical and operational topics. Second, they study a subject on *Introduction to Police Investigation* taught by an experience police investigator. In addition, and of some importance, they do two practicums in their second year. The first is with a welfare or community organisation and is designed to expose the students to welfare work and organisations with which they are likely to have contact as police officers. These welfare practicums also expose students to the clientele of these organisations, which for many students is their first significant contact with people with socio-demographic characteristics quite different from their own. This practicum is supervised by SSLS staff from Bathurst.

The second practicum of 80 hours is completed in a police station under the guidance of a NSW Police Educational Development Officer (EDO). Students follow the same programmes as ADPP students. They are observers and work standard police shifts. This practicum exposes students to the kind of work which they will confront after graduation. In most cases the students return reinvigorated to complete their degrees. In a few cases, it demonstrates to students that policing is not the career for them. While students are supervised by EDOs and operational police officers from the NSW Police Force during their time in police stations, they are debriefed by SSLS staff at the end of the practicum. The purpose of this academic debriefing is to contextualise what they have learnt 'on the street' with reference to social science theories about social inequality, race, class and gender relations.

After completing the prescribed subjects over two years of study on the Bathurst campus and having Professional Suitability Approval (PSA), the students are given credit for the first full time session of study of the ADPP. They transfer to the Goulburn campus and do the second session of the ADPP as full time on-campus students. If they pass all subjects, they are attested as Probationary Constables. They then complete a further three sessions of distance education study while working as Probationary Constables, after which they graduate with both the BJS(P) and the ADPP and become confirmed as Constables of Police.

A key challenge in this type of degree is to maintain the motivation of students, who have a definite career and a specific employer in mind but who are being educated in a non-industry context. It is difficult to assess the motivation of students to become police. Some clearly state that this is their goal, their only employment goal and are devastated if their Professional Suitability Approval (PSA) is withdrawn or they cannot meet the fitness requirements. (2) Others are equivocal about their career choice from the outset and it is to be expected that some of these will transfer to another degree or leave university. Those who are impatient to get into policing transfer to the ADPP.

Research Findings

The remainder of the paper sets out the key findings in relation to the four groups in terms of demographic characteristics, occupational identification and students' perceptions of aspects of their courses. Table 1 summarises the responses for each group to the survey questions on demography and occupational identification.

New Entrants

Demographic characteristics:

The survey was given to 59 entrants to the BJS(P) and 61 entrants to the ADPP. As expected, the BJS(P) recruits were all younger (17-22 years old) whereas the ADPP recruits had a greater range of ages, with some in their forties. Both had a majority of males, but this was more notable for the ADPP (72.1% compared to 59.3%). ADPP entrants were more likely to come from Sydney (35.7% compared to 33%) or other coastal regions (39.3%, compared to 27.1%) and less likely to come from regional NSW (21.4% compared to 37.5%) These figures suggest that rural entrants tend to enter policing at a younger age and through the 3 year degree.

Another contrast between the two samples of entrants was that while three quarters (76.9%) of the BJS(P) entrants had come to the degree straight from school, almost all (96.7%) of ADPP entrants had not. A majority (65.8%) of ADPP entrants who had not come straight from school had worked in the intervening period, whereas BJS(P) entrants who had not come straight from school were less likely to have worked (43.9%) and more likely to have studied, undertaken training or travelled. Some ADPP entrants (3.8%) had been in other services (army, navy, air force).

Occupational identification:

The survey included a group of questions about identification with the policing profession. The first of these asked *whether they wanted to become a member of the NSW Police Force*. Unsurprisingly, 81.4% of BJS(P) entrants strongly agreed with this statement, 15.3% agreed but 3.4% were unsure. Of the ADPP entrants a slightly higher proportion (88.5%) agreed strongly with the statement and a lesser proportion merely agreed (9.8%) or was unsure (1.6%). This is to be expected because those entering the ADPP are only giving themselves the option to enter the NSWPF, whereas those entering the BJS(P) are entering a longer developmental trajectory and they have the option to transfer to the Bachelor of Social Science (Criminal Justice) should they decide that NSWPF is not for them. It should also be noted that some who decide the BJS(P) is not for them transfer to the ADPP.

We asked the entrants *whether they had always wanted to be a police officer?* Of BJS(P) entrants 61% answered 'yes' to this question as did 73.3% of ADPP entrants.

We then went on to explore *what had made them want to become a police officer?* Responses covered three categories of motives: (i) personal motives – career, variety, lifestyle; (ii) social motives – making a difference, in the community, helping others; (iii) experience – family/friends, TV role models, positive encounters with police.

TABLE 1 : Survey - Occupational Identity of Police Recruits				
	<i>ADPP New entrant 2007</i>	<i>BJS (Pol) New entrant 2007</i>	<i>BJS (Pol)-Yr 2 Pre-practicum 2007</i>	<i>BJS (Pol)-Yr 2 Post-practicum 2006 & 2007</i>
Number in Sample	61	59	30	48
<i>All values below are percentages of the total sample, unless otherwise stated</i>				
Demographic Data				
<i>Gender</i>				
Male	72.1	59.3	53.3	52.1
Female	27.9	40.7	46.7	47.9
<i>Age</i>				
17-22	41.0	100.0	96.6	93.8
23-32	41.0	0.0	3.4	4.1
33-47	18.0	0.0	0.0	2.1
<i>Home town</i>				
Bathurst Region	8.9	18.6	29.6	8.9
Sydney	35.7	33.9	25.9	35.7
Other Coastal NSW	39.3	27.1	33.3	39.3
Other Regional NSW	12.5	17.0	7.4	12.5
ACT/Other states	2.8	3.4	3.7	3.6
<i>Did you come direct from School to University?</i>				
Yes	3.3	76.3	50.0	52.1
No	96.7	23.7	50.0	47.9
<i>Not Direct from School- Other Activity</i> (These figures are responses only from those 'Not direct from School' and include multiple responses from some participants)				
Employment	65.8	42.8	57.1	47.1
Other study/training	21.5	28.6	33.3	38.3
Travelled	7.6	28.6	4.8	2.9
Army/Navy/Air Force	3.8	0.0	0.0	2.9
Other	1.3	0.0	4.8	8.8
<i>Do you have any relatives who are or who have been in the police?</i>				
Yes	31.1	32.2	20.0	16.7
No	68.9	67.8	80.0	83.3
Occupational Identity				
<i>Do you want to be a member of the NSW Police Force?</i>				
Strongly agree	88.5	81.4	93.3	81.2
Agree	9.8	15.2	6.7	14.6
Unsure	1.7	3.4	0.0	4.2
No	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
<i>Have you always wanted to be a police officer?</i>				
Yes	73.3	61.0	70.0	76.6
No	26.7	39.0	30.0	23.4
<i>What made you join the police?</i> (These include multiple responses from some participants)				
Personal motives	40.9	36.1	36.0	45.4
Social motives	22.7	21.3	10.0	5.2
Positive experience of police	15.9	12.8	22.0	16.9
Combination of above	20.5	29.8	32.0	32.5
<i>Do you feel that you have strong ties with the police ?</i>				
Yes	58.3	53.6	46.7	55.3
No	41.7	46.4	53.3	44.7
<i>Calculated Policy Identity Score</i> (These figures are based on a Likert Scale of 1 to 5)				
Score	4.74	4.78	4.61	4.56
Standard Deviation	0.31	0.29	0.48	0.64

Personal motives were the most important for all groups, although these were often combined with social motives (eg. “a rewarding career where I could make a difference and help others”). The ADPP entrants were slightly more likely than BJS(P) entrants to have personal motives (40.9%, compared to 36.1%) and positive experiences of policing (15.9% compared to 12.8%).

We also asked whether the entrants felt *strong ties with the profession* and more than half (BJS(P) 53.6% and ADPP 58.3%) agreed that they did. The mean of the aggregated police occupational identity scale for BJS(P) entrants was 4.78 (SD 0.29) and for the ADPP entrants it was 4.74 (SD 0.31). Our expectation that the ADPP entrants might have a stronger police occupational identity score proved not to be the case and there was no significant difference between the entrants to the two courses. This may be explained by the likelihood that ADPP recruits want to take the shorter course in order to start or return to paid employment as quickly as possible. As previously noted, most have already been in the workforce, so study would most likely result in a drop in income for them. This also means that they have made a conscious decision to change career. Our data does indicate that a high proportion have always wanted to be police officers and, having the chance to do so, a high proportion want to do it quickly. BJS(P) students put a higher priority on social goals, at least at the point of entrance. Our data also show that they want options for future careers and that the desire for options increases (i.e. the percentage doubles) with the experience of the practicum. There is also the practical issue, which we mention elsewhere, of being too young to be accepted directly into the ADPP.

Student perception of the course:

In answer to the question *why did you choose to enrol in BJS(P)/ADPP*, as expected, the highest proportion of ADPP entrants (49.3%) said that they saw their course as a shorter, quicker, easier option than the three year degree, though 5.4% said they were unaware of the degree option (i.e. BJS(P)). Others (17.8%) said that they wanted a more practical and challenging experience than the degree option. Among the BJS(P) entrants 19.5% took a long term view and said they saw the degree as providing better promotion prospects and improving job security as opposed to the ADPP. To these can be added 5.8% who wanted a degree to fall back on in case they later decided on a career change. Just over a quarter (27.5%) said that they wanted a good grounding and preparation for their career and more life experience before they became police officers.

Second year BJS(P) students

Demographic characteristics:

The second year BJS(P) students, who were surveyed pre and post their field placement, had a similar demographic profile to the BJS(P) 2007 entrants, though there were a few in older age groups. The pre-practicum sample was 30 (53.3% males and 46.7% females). The post-practicum sample was 48 (52.1% male and 47.9% female) and consisted of two cohorts, one from each of 2006 and 2007.

It has been our observation as teachers in these courses that students, who are academically struggling but highly motivated to become police officers, usually manage to complete their course through sheer determination. When teaching BJS(P) students, we noted that a strong motivation to be a police officer was very important to a student remaining in the course even when the student was under considerable personal strain. Our observations also suggested that having a member of their family in policing or other services appeared to add to their commitment.

For that reason we decided to include a question about *relatives in the police force*. Of the BJS(P) entrants, 32.2% had a relative in the police and 31.1% of ADPP entrants. These are higher proportions of the entrants than of the pre-practicum (20%) and post-practicum (16.7%) groups. Because this is not a longitudinal study we can only hypothesise about the possible reasons for this difference. It may simply reflect the backgrounds of different cohorts. One would expect that students with family and/or friends in policing would have realistic expectations of the profession for which they had signed up. Therefore we would not expect a high attrition rate among them, but these figures suggest that could be the case. However, such young people might also feel under some pressure to follow other family members into a profession for which they subsequently become aware that they are unsuited. This is the sort of issue which we are exploring with a longitudinal study of individual students.

Occupational identification:

When asked *whether they wanted to become a member of the NSW Police Force* 93.3% of the pre-practicum group strongly agreed and 6.7% agreed. No one felt unsure. However, in the case of the post-practicum group 81.3% strongly agreed, 14.6% agreed and 4.2% were unsure. These figures suggest that after a period of first hand experience of policing, some students become less sure that they want to become a member of the occupation. This suggests that the practicum experience is a useful reality check for some in that it gives students a period where they can consider their options before becoming fully committed to their chosen profession. This should reduce 'self-initiated resignations' of sworn officers for the NSWPF.

We asked the entrants *whether they had always wanted to be a police officer*. The percentage of BJS(P) students answering this question positively increased at every stage with 70% of the pre-practicum group and 76.6% of the post-practicum group answering this way. This suggests that long term commitment to the goal of becoming a police officer is crucial to students successfully completing the course, which lends weight to the observation by teaching staff that people who were highly motivated in the first place are the ones who successfully stay the distance.

We then went on to explore *what had made them want to become a police officer?* . Personal motives appear to have become more important over time (representing 45.4% of responses from post-practicum students, compared to 36.1% and 36.0% for students in the two earlier stages of the course), with the number mentioning social motives declining at each stage, from 21.3% among entrants to 10.0% for pre-practicum, and 5.2% for post-practicum. Interestingly, the number of students indicating a positive experience of policing increases significantly from entrant to pre-practicum (12.8% up to 22.0%), but then falls (to 16.9%) post-practicum. Possible reasons for this are suggested later in the paper.

With reference to *whether they felt that they had strong ties with the police*, 46.7% of the pre-practicum group and 55.3% of the post-practicum group answered positively. The mean police identity score was 4.61 (SD = 0.48) for the pre-practicum group and 4.56 (SD = 0.64) for the post-practicum group.

Student perception of the course:

In answer to the question *why did you choose to enrol in BJS(P)* the highest proportion of students in second year BJS(P) (22.7% pre and 28.6% post field placement) identified lack of maturity and a desire for more life experience before they became a police officer as the reason why they chose to enrol in the full university degree. Again, as with new entrants, a substantial proportion thought that their promotion prospects and job security would be improved by doing a degree, some identified the desire to gain background knowledge and prepare themselves well for their career, and others wanted to experience university life.

As mentioned previously, maintaining BJS(P) students' connection with 'the police family' to keep their motivation level up is a challenge in a 3 year degree. The three methods of achieving this are a practicum (field placement) in the middle of second year, four residential schools at the Police College throughout second year, and the introduction in 2006 of a subject in Police Investigations taught by a serving police inspector. Interestingly, as shown in Table 2, students surveyed pre-practicum rated the usefulness of practicums (60%), residentials (23.3%) and Police Investigations (50%) lower than students surveyed post-practicum (practicums 91.7%, residentials 72.9%, Police Investigations 70.8%). These ratings would tend to suggest that all three of these measures are achieving the goal of preparing students for operational policing, but that this is not appreciated by some students until they have actually experienced operational policing.

Table 2 : Perceived Value of the Practical Components of the Courses

<i>Question</i>	<i>Response</i>	<i>Pre practicum</i>		<i>Post practicum</i>	
		<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Practicums are helpful</i>	<i>Yes</i>	18	60.0	44	91.7
	<i>No</i>	12	40.0	4	8.3
<i>Residentials are helpful</i>	<i>Yes</i>	7	23.3	35	72.9
	<i>No</i>	23	76.7	13	27.1
<i>Police investigations subject is helpful</i>	<i>Yes</i>	15	50.0	34	70.8
	<i>No</i>	15	50.0	14	29.2

As we have noted, both BJS(P) and ADPP students enter their courses with a very high level of occupational identity, and there is no significant change to this level of occupational identity amongst the students either pre practicum or post practicum. However, the above results indicate that a significant change from pre to post practicum is that the appreciation of the three practical components of the course increases markedly, especially in relation to residential schools. Pre practicum, just over three-quarters of students felt that they were unhelpful, whereas post practicum,

nearly three-quarters felt that they were helpful. Given that the occupational identity score does not change between pre and post practicum, it may be that the practicum achieves two things. It both significantly increases students' motivation to complete the course and become a police officer, and it facilitates their appreciation of the links between theory and practice. The practicum may well be the first time they understand how social science theory can be applied to their work in a service organisation and their dealings with the public on a regular basis.

Another important outcome of the practicum is that students appear to gain a 'reality check' about policing and a policing career. As previously noted, one of the attractions of the BJS(P) for recruits to policing is that it offers the security of a degree which increases the graduates' career options over those provided by the ADPP which has as its purpose a specific industry qualification for a specific employer. The proportion of students noting this as their reason for their choice of course almost doubles from pre practicum (13.3%) to post practicum (25.7%). Given that there is no significant change in the occupational identity score, the practicum experiences may have caused them to think about long term career prospects, the possibilities of burn-out, or the value of variation in their working lives. The practicum experience has perhaps also caused them to think that a career change should be factored into life planning. This is an area which we will be exploring using qualitative methods in our subsequent study.

The above data suggests that the practicum is a critical part of the education and preparation of police officers. Giving them a 'practical taste' of policing increases the motivation of most students and gives them a better understanding of how their course can contribute to their chosen career, while also giving a substantial number a more realistic view of their long-term future career options. Together, these outcomes mean that the practicum can have a very powerful impact on enhancing both their identity and their capability as police officers, and in turn this can ultimately contribute to an improvement in police retention rates.

Reasons for wanting to become a police officer

We have earlier discussed the major reasons why students want to become police officers. Here we look at this issue a little more closely, although we do not compare the two courses or pre and post practicum responses, but rather consolidate the summary data about both courses.

Table 3 summarises the major results. The first point to make is that there is a variety of reasons, with no single factor being described as most important by more than a quarter of the students. Second, three items emerged as most important, as discussed below. Third, 'a secure job with good conditions' was not a critical factor for most students. (It is important to note that respondents could give more than one reason).

The most frequent reason given was that '*policing offers variety, opportunity and an active lifestyle*'. Overall, 23.2 cited it, with very similar results for males (23.7%) and females (22.5%). Although these results have not been linked directly with occupational identity, as educators we have noted consistent references to these characteristics of policing when students in class have discussed their reasons for wanting to become a police officer. As many researchers on police work (eg Reiner

1978) have found over many years of research, this is a strong characteristic of the occupational culture.

Table 3: Student responses to possible reasons for wanting to become a police officer

<i>Reason</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Policing offers variety, opportunity & an active lifestyle	62	23.2
Wanted to pursue a rewarding career where I could make a difference & help others	56	21.0
Wanted to be involved in improving the community	34	12.7
Secure job with good conditions	7	2.6

The second most important item was ‘*wanted to pursue a rewarding career where I could make a difference and help others*’. While a similar proportion (21.0%) gave this reason, there was a noticeable difference between males (18.9%) and females (24.5%). This supports our earlier comments on the importance of social motives for commencing students, and the difference between males and females perhaps reflects gender roles in social life generally. These gender differences will be further explored in our qualitative study. Recent research in the USA by Lord and Friday (2003: 73) has concluded that ‘male students responded with higher self-efficacy expectations for their ability to handle police functions than female students’. Therefore they argued that it would make sense to recruit males and females with similar (‘androgynous’) sex-role identification and that this could help prevent gender role conflict ‘that women particularly may experience when working in a non-traditional field such as law enforcement’ (Lord & Friday 2003: 77). Such an aim would appear to be likely to neutralise the special contributions which women can make to policing by drawing on strengths which characterise positive aspects of traditional female socialisation

The third most significant item, ‘*wanted to be involved in improving the community*’, although noted by a somewhat smaller proportion of respondents (12.7%), provides further support for the suggestion that social motives are significant factors in the decision making of prospective students and their occupational identity.

By contrast, very few people (2.6%) responded affirmatively to the item, policing is a “*secure job with good conditions*”. This provides further evidence for our earlier finding that the aggregated identity score is measuring such things as personal and social motives, not the instrumental characteristics of the job.

Impact of the practicum on BJS(P) students

We have earlier noted the broad positive impact of the practicum. Here we look into the reasons why this might be so and examine what occurred for students during this period to achieve these benefits. This section adds a qualitative dimension to the quantitative results which we have discussed so far, as it is based on the debriefing sessions which the students went through in class when they returned from their practicums. Students’ motivation to become police officers and identification with

the policing profession continued to be strong after the experience of a field placement in a LAC, an experience as a first hand observer of 'policing in action'. From the survey of new entrants we established that over eighty percent of new entrants want to become members of the NSWPF and that over half feel that they have strong ties with policing.

In the case of the BJS(P) the experience of the practicum in the middle of second year has been one way in which students' commitment to policing as a career is sustained. The structure of the course would appear to have been well designed judging by the results of our pre and post practicum surveys, in that the students' appreciation of the relevance of the practical components of the degree (practicum, residentials, Investigations subject) are substantially higher at the post practicum phase.(4)

However, this increased appreciation of the practical components of the course after the practicum did not appear to translate into increased commitment to a career in policing. In fact, 93.3% of the pre-practicum group strongly agreed and 6.7% agreed that they '*wanted to become a member of the NSWPF*' but among the post-practicum group 81.3% strongly agreed, 14.6% agreed but 4.2% were unsure. While these were not exactly the same cohorts, these findings do suggest that the 'reality check' provided by the experience of the practicum had led some students to reconsider their career options.

As course coordinators, we have observed the tendency of some students to transfer to the general criminal justice degree at this point in time. However, this does not always mean that they intend to abandon a policing career. Some decide to get a degree first and then to apply for entry into the Australian Federal Police (AFP). Also, some attrition from the BJS(P) occurs in second year both pre and post practicum as students either fail to get PSA or have it withdrawn due to traffic infringements, in the main. Some need to 'fill in' a year or two before they can re-apply to the NSWPF for PSA after they have demonstrated maturity and respect for traffic rules. Some still plan to join the NSWPF, but want to complete an extra year of study to develop greater maturity and enhance their career flexibility.

Academically, the practicum is located within the subject JST 225 *Police Practicum* which has three components: practicum, residentials, and introduction to the physical and health requirements necessary for entry into the NSWPF. The learning objectives of this subject are as follows:

- be able to locate contemporary police practice within contemporary theory on policing;
- be able to demonstrate your understanding of a range of police work tasks, as a result of observing them;
- be capable of demonstrating your understanding of some of the characteristics of police organisations at the grass roots level;
- be able to explore the role of police organisations in modern industrial societies;
- be aware of the relationships between police and other organisations in society, such as welfare organisations;
- have developed some skills in the use of COPS computer programme;
- be able to demonstrate your understanding of patrol issues and techniques;
- be able to demonstrate your awareness of and some competence in, officer safety techniques;
- be able to demonstrate that you have made significant steps towards meeting the New South Wales Police Force's physical fitness requirements; and
- be able to demonstrate your understanding of the principles of a fitness programme and be able to apply it to your personal lifestyle.

While on field placement students are attached to a Local Area Command. In their subsequent debriefing they compare and contrast the nature of the LACs to which they were attached. Most are surprised at how busy the police stations are. For example, one whose placement had been with a LAC in a large country town said 'there was more running than I expected. We didn't sit and wait for jobs'. Students observe how officers with whom they are placed interact with the public. One student commented on the judgemental attitude of an officer dealing with a victim in a domestic violence incident whose house was very untidy. He felt that the officer had 'got her completely offside; she won't show up at court'.

Some students noted that although they had learnt about the NSWPF provision of liaison officers in the field the LACs did not always have an appropriate liaison officer for the local population. One recounted an incident where the presence of an Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer (ACLO) was requested by both offender and victim but they were advised that none was available (even though this was a rural area with an Aboriginal community in the town). Another student who had been placed in a nearby rural town commented on how useful it was to have an ACLO as 'some of the people we were dealing with were not very receptive to police'.

A student recounted a very positive experience of police public relations when an officer made an origami swan for a woman who was an artist who had fallen foul of the law. Her gesture was much appreciated and when asked why she had done it she said 'just trying to prove that we're not all arseholes'.

Students came to appreciate the roles played by other organisations with which the police must interact, such as the Department of Community Services (DOCS). They came to understand that these organisations also operate under resourcing constraints and therefore police were not able to protect victims of child abuse and neglect in the way they had expected to be able to do. Anecdotally at least, this is one reason why some police become disillusioned with their ability to 'make a difference' and leave policing.

While on practicums students also saw the organisational structure and culture under which police work and the pressures which they generate. For example, under a new promotion system which had been recently introduced, competition had become fierce and somewhat personal. The reason for the latter was that the basis of an appeal against a promotion had to be the suitability of the person who had been promoted in contrast to that of the one doing the appealing. This demonstrated a side of the job to which most students had not previously given much thought.

Another aspect of organisational culture observed was the resistance to changes in key legislation under which officers worked (LEPRA). Officers saw some of the new provisions which had been introduced as 'a waste of time'. Despite the many changes which have been introduced into the policing profession over the last three decades (Leishman et al.2000; Weisburd & Braga 2006; Williamson 2008) policing is still a profession dominated by males and many authors have noted that sexism still characterises the occupational culture (Sutton 1992; Walklate 2000; Garcia 2008). Some of our female students reported excessive attention by male officers while the male students did not report the same experiences with female officers. One student

noted that 'they needed to know whether I was a lesbian or not. Once they had an answer they seemed content'. Pressure to declare one's sexual orientation can be daunting to someone who is on a steep occupational learning curve and would not be welcome by many at any stage in their career. Chan et al. (2003) addressed the issue of gender throughout their study from both a theoretical, habitus and field, and empirical base. This comment by a female student reflects many of Chan et al.'s findings and is characteristic of police culture as habitus.

As our study has shown, a high proportion of students are attracted to policing because it offers 'variety, opportunity and an active life style' (23.7% males; 22.5% females). Other studies have also commented on this, for example, Poole and Pogrebin (1986 as cited in Sutton 1992: 89) noted the importance of challenge and excitement for women in the early stages of their policing career and that this remains 'one of the salient considerations affecting women's decisions to remain police officers regardless of career stage'. One of the female BJS(P) students, who had been placed in a large urban LAC, encapsulated many students' feelings about policing as a result of the practicum when she said 'It was all new, really interesting. I can't wait to go back to start'.

Discussion

As well as providing some valuable data and insights this present study has raised a number of important issues for further exploration. It has established that recruits are highly motivated to become members of the NSWPF when they commence their courses. The expected differences in BJS(P) and ADPP recruits were only partially born out in that a number of BJS(P) students had chosen that degree because they felt too young to commit to a policing career, were too young to gain entry to the ADPP, or wanted to experience university life, and more came from rural areas. However, their determination to become members of the NSWPF was only slightly less likely to be strong than that of recruits entering via the ADPP. The latter were older and less concerned about keeping their career options open.

The second year students in the BJS(P) demonstrated that the relationship between the academic and practical subjects in their degree was not apparent to most of them before the experience of a practicum in an LAC. However, afterwards the practical subjects and residentials were much more highly valued. When they were being debriefed in JST 225 on their practicum students were able to identify issues of service delivery to a clientele which was diverse socio-economically, culturally and in terms of race, gender, age and disability. They demonstrated awareness of issues of victim support, both from the NSWPF and other human service agencies. They also demonstrated awareness of the police organisation and culture and the ways in which these can cause occupational stress and/or cynicism (Reiner 1992).

Conclusion

The paper demonstrates that the entry path does not appear to be an indicator of strength of policing occupational identity as both ADPP and BJS(P) entrants identified strongly with the policing occupation. It also shows that students in the BJS(P) consider their long term career options and likely progression in policing when they choose their entry path. The BJS(P) results suggest that those who were

highly committed to the occupation in the first place are likely to complete their studies. The study has provided important insights into the factors that underpin police identity which education and police administrators can draw on to help structure the experiences of police at all stages from training throughout their careers in order to increase retention rates. **{???too much to claim?}**

The findings of this research stimulated us to design a more comprehensive study involving both quantitative and qualitative research methods to investigate the complex relationships between police recruits' police role perception, police identity structure, perceived characteristics of a successful police officer and perceived determinants of retention in the police force from the police recruits' perspective. .

Endnotes

1. According to the NSW Police Association, 1421 officers have left policing over the last two years. While in the current economic climate it is easy to recruit, over the long term the attrition rate is 'two officers a day' (Kennedy 2009). This high attrition rate is very costly to NSWPF in financial terms and in terms of the human capital of experience in frontline policing and investigation.
2. The NSW Police Force conduct a Professional Suitability Assessment (PSA) on all applicants for a police career. BJS(P) students are assessed in their first year. The PSA covers integrity and health matters. The most common reasons for failing the PSA process are prior criminal offences, serious infringements, and health or injury problems. Some students have PSA approval delayed by 12 to 18 months as a result of minor traffic offences.
3. For all four groups only a small number identified the role of family and friends in policing as a relevant factor (4.3% entrants, 6.0% pre-practicum, 4.0% post-practicum, and 3.1% ADDP).
4. It must be remembered that the pre and post practicum groups were not exactly the same as the post practicum group contained at least 12 students from the 2006 cohort who completed their practicum in that year. The rest were from the 2007 cohort.

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