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Job Satisfaction Among Civilians in Policing

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There has been very little research on the role of civilians in police work, despite the fact that civilians represent a growing presence in police departments. The number of civilians employed by police departments varies greatly, as do the tasks they perform. This report from the National Police Research Platform examines workplace satisfaction among civilian respondents to surveys conducted in 19 cities. The agencies surveyed range greatly in size, from dozens to thousands of employees, and they serve a diverse collection of communities. On average, 18 percent of their employees are civilians, but that figure ranges from less than 10 percent to the high 40s. This analysis combines responses from just over 700 civilian employees, including those whose jobs range from parking enforcement and data entry to planning, budgeting and technical support. It describes how satisfied they are with their jobs, and then examines some of the factors that contribute to job satisfaction among civilians in police work.
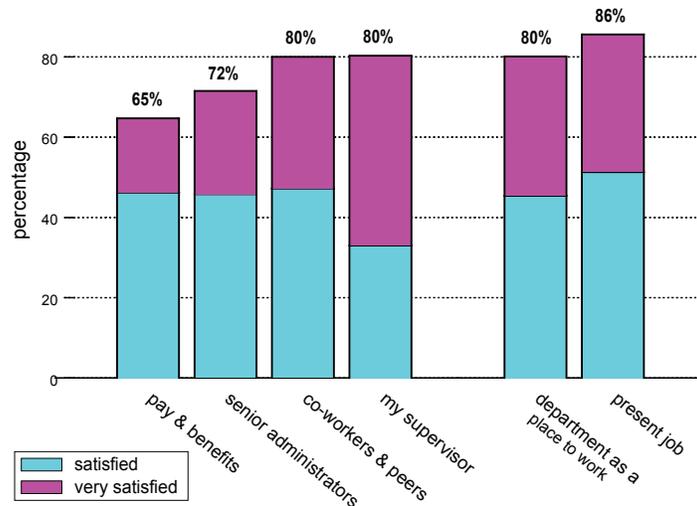
Job Satisfaction

In the survey, respondents were asked to indicate how satisfied they were with elements of their job. Figure 1 summarizes their responses, adding together those who indicated they were satisfied or very satisfied with each, as opposed to dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. Overall, they were least satisfied with their pay and benefits; only 18 percent indicated they were very satisfied with these. They were most highly satisfied with "my supervisor" (47 percent were in the very satisfied category), and overall 80 percent were satisfied with their supervisors and their co-workers. They were also widely satisfied (at 72 percent) with their department's senior managers.

Figure 1
Job Satisfaction

The right side of Figure 1 illustrates responses to two general satisfaction questions. They ask how satisfied respondents are with their present job and with their department "as a place to work." The overall level of satisfaction that these questions reveal is high, albeit with more being satisfied than very satisfied.

Responses to these two general questions were combined into an index in order to examine factors that could be related to satisfaction among civilians in the policing workplace. Based on this combined measure, the most satisfied civilian employees were (a) those assigned to planning, budgeting and program development work and, (b) staff members doing data entry. The small number of part-time and volunteer employees we surveyed (they worked in the smallest agencies) were more satisfied than their full-time counterparts, and when compared to African American and Latino employees, whites were less satisfied with their jobs.

However, the influence of these background factors pales when compared to the impact of the workplace cultures within which civilians in police work find themselves.

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Accomplishment and Teamwork

The first of these factors is the sense of teamwork and accomplishment that civilians experience in the workplace. As Table 1 indicates, many civilian employees feel that they make important contributions to their organization. Three-quarters of them report they "make a difference" and over 90 percent feel that they accomplish worthwhile things. Smaller percentages see their agencies as places that encourage dialogue and the sharing of ideas, on the other hand, and this factor, in particular, turns out to be strongly linked to job satisfaction.

Table 1
Teamwork and Accomplishment

	percent agree or strongly agree		percent agree or strongly agree
I accomplish worthwhile things every week with my job	91	I am encouraged to share my ideas about ways in which the department can improve	63
I feel like I can make a difference in this department	77	There is a lot of open and honest dialogue	50

Equality and Respect for Diversity

Another important feature of a police workplace is the extent to which its members respect diversity. To judge this, respondents were asked if "employees are treated the same" regardless of their race and their gender, and how often they hear jokes or negative comments made concerning other employees that are based on gender, race and sexual orientation. As Table 2 indicates, in their experience, overt negative remarks are quite infrequent. Only 7 percent recalled hearing gender-based comments often or "all the time," and big majorities indicate that this happened only rarely or never. Negative commentary concerning fellow employees' race or sexual orientation are even less common. Smaller but still large majorities also report that, in their agency, employees are treated equally regardless of their gender or race.

These percentages varied somewhat depending on who was asked. Male employees are more likely to report there is no differential treatment by gender, by a margin of 77 versus 67 percent. On the other hand, female employees report hearing fewer gender-based jokes or negative comments. Whites are more likely to endorse the view that there is no differential

treatment by race; 81 percent of whites, but only 64 percent of African American employees took that position, with Latinos lying in-between. Whites are also less likely to recall hearing race-based jokes or negative comments. In general, more educated employees are somewhat more likely to recall hearing intolerant remarks, and to doubt that these groups receive equal treatment.

Table 2
Equality and Respect for Diversity

How frequently hear* jokes or negative comments about:	percent rarely or never	percent often or all the time	Employees are treated the same regardless of their:	percent agree or strongly agree
female employees	72	7	Gender	70
minority employees	81	4	Race	75
sexual orientation of employees	80	5		

* excludes comments heard "sometimes"

Acceptance of Civilians

Our respondents were more likely to report differential treatment because of their status as civilians than they were to point to gender or racial disparities. Table 3 reports the percentages who agreed with a series of questions about the place of civilians in their organizations. Overall, they split about 60-40, with a large minority of civilian employees perceiving that they are not fully accepted, have limited opportunities for advancement, and that their expertise and personal experiences and opinions are often dismissed by sworn personnel. Only one in three feels that civilians are treated the same despite their status, and almost 60 percent report that, as civilians, they have to constantly prove themselves.

Table 3
Acceptance of Civilians

	percent agree or strongly agree		percent agree or strongly agree
The department culture is accepting of civilian professionals	65	My personal experiences and opinions are often dismissed by officers	40
There are opportunities for advancement by civilians	43	My expertise is often dismissed by officers	43
As a civilian I feel I have to constantly prove myself	58	Employees are treated the same regardless of their sworn-civilians status	32

In general, civilians serving in communications and dispatch, and those doing planning, budgeting and development tasks, found their agencies the most supportive of their work, while technical and systems support personnel saw their situation as least supportive. More educated employees were more critical of the support they received from their agencies.

Summary: Enhancing Job Satisfaction

As previously noted, civilian job satisfaction proves to be rooted in features of the places where they work rather than in the backgrounds that individual civilian employees bring to their job. To identify the importance of various background and workplace factors, we examined them using the two-question index of job satisfaction described in Figure 1. Not surprisingly, acceptance of civilians in the work place has the strongest effect. Satisfaction is much higher in places where civilians' views are taken seriously and they do not have to constantly prove themselves, and where civilian employees are treated equally and the department culture accepts them as professionals. Similarly, those working in agencies that are perceived to treat all employees equally are much more satisfied; this is equally true with regard to perceived equality by gender and race. In addition, respect for diversity in the organization is strongly linked to job satisfaction. These civilian employees are less satisfied with their jobs and the organization they serve when they face a culture that tolerates negative commentary on fellow employees' race, gender or sexual orientation. By and large, the survey revealed that they see their organizations in a positive light in this regard, but where they do not, job dissatisfaction is more extreme. Finally, analysis indicates that civilians working in smaller departments are generally more satisfied than are their counterparts in larger places.