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Police Integrity

The Unwillingness to Report Misconduct

Research Problem & Rationale for Study

One of the important aspects of police integrity is peer reporting of unethical police behaviours. Literature in this research demonstrates that there is more than one factor to peer reporting of unethical police behaviours. Exploring the dilemma behind peer reporting is valuable for police organizations aiming to reduce unethical behaviours within their organizations.

Methods

Throughout this research, secondary data was reviewed and scholarly articles were used to explore the subject. No primary data was used during this project as time constraints did not allow collection.

Results/Findings

The perceived seriousness of acts, individual reporting intentions and police culture are the leading factors as to why police officers would want or not want to report a co-worker's misconduct. Once an individual is hired he or she is quickly part of the police subculture, which influences individuals to not report the misconduct of a peer. Even though the police subculture encourages loyalty, misconducts that are considered very serious by most police officers are more likely going to be reported.

Conclusions / Recommendations

Research demonstrates that police officers may be reluctant to report a peer's misconduct. Police organizations should consider rewarding police officers who report another officer's unethical activities, because rewarding an ethical behavior is the most influential method to increase ethical decision making.

Structured Abstract

Introduction: This project explores the unwillingness to report a peer's misconduct. Throughout this study three factors playing a role in the ineffectiveness of peer reporting have been outlined. Although police organizations aim to increase peer reporting of unethical behaviours, studies have shown that police officers who report their peers can damage the overall team structure of the police agency. (McCartney & Parent, 2015)

Methods: The method used to complete this project was a critical appraisal. A thorough literature review of the current research was conducted, and the most relevant information was chosen for review. The majority of the articles for this research were found on the Justice Institute of British Columbia library databases and the following keywords were used to find relevant information: Police Integrity, Peer Reporting of Police Misconduct, Corruption, Police Culture, Police Ethics, Blue Code of Silence, Police deviance. This search returned almost five thousand results. To limit the results, the search criteria was narrowed to only include full text, peer reviewed articles from the year 2000 onwards. The search terms generated hits in specific databases such as Criminal Justice Abstracts, PsycINFO. In total nine articles were analyzed for their relevance and validity in terms of this research topic.

Results/Findings: Three main themes emerged from this research. The themes identified are three different factors that play a role in the unwillingness to report a peer's misconduct. The themes are, the perceived seriousness of acts, individual reporting intentions, and police culture. These themes were explored and compared to the existing literature.

Discussion: The acts that were perceived as more serious were those with acquisitive attributions. The theft of money or items of any value is an act that most police officers would report. As for individual peer reporting intentions the academic literature stated that when police officers have higher levels of cynicism it will decrease their peer reporting intentions. The existing studies that were reviewed stated that low level of cynicism increases the likelihood of peer reporting within police departments. The police culture is one who encourages values such as loyalty among police officers but also creates a "us versus them" attitude (McCartney and Parent, 2015). Therefore, reporting a peer is seen as "snitching" and is discouraged by police culture.

Practical Applications: It is evident that some factors prevent police officers from reporting unethical behaviours committed by co-workers. Police officers should have more ethical trainings addressing the negative aspects of police culture (McCartney, 2012). The police organizations should consider rewarding police officers who report another officer's unethical activities, because rewarding an ethical behavior is the most influential method to increase ethical decision making.

References:

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- McCartney, S. & Parent, R. (2015). Discretion, Supervision, and Leadership. *Ethics in law enforcement*. Victoria, BC: BC campus. Retrieved from <http://opentextbc.ca/ethicsinlawenforcement/>