



While civilianization may result in limiting budget increases, the overall cost of policing may not be reduced.

BACKGROUND

According to Statistics Canada, after many decades of stability, the proportion of civilian personnel working in Canadian police services increased from 26 percent of all employees in 2001 to 29 percent in 2014, or 2.4 sworn police officers for every civilian worker, down from 2.9 in 2001. While in the past many civilian employees held clerical positions, they now also carry out duties previously performed only by sworn officers including administration and management, specialized functions such as crime analysis, sophisticated investigations (e.g., forensic accountants), and public relations. This study of civilianization of police in Canada focuses on the costs and benefits, along with organizational challenges, for police services.

METHOD

A survey was sent to a purposive sample of small, medium, and large-sized police services throughout the country and follow-up interviews were conducted with police executives from responding organizations to further explore issues of interest uncovered in the literature.

FINDINGS

The survey results and interviews reveal that many respondents believe that civilianization has reduced policing costs as the salaries and benefits paid to civilians are typically less than those paid to sworn officers. These respondents contend that training costs in particular can be reduced significantly over the long term by hiring civilians who already possess specialized knowledge rather than by providing additional training for sworn officers to carry out specialized roles such as crime analysis. This is thought to be the case because a sworn officer's tenure in a specialized role such as crime analyst may be relatively short and their replacement by other sworn

personnel would require repeated training to develop the appropriate skill set. This contrasts with civilians, who may occupy these positions either for their entire careers or on an “as needed” basis.

Findings on the issue of turnover, however, are mixed. While some police executives report that civilian job continuity is the norm, the turnover of employees with highly specialized or expert skills is sometimes reported to be high. Other reported benefits of hiring civilians are difficult to quantify. These include building relationships with ethno-cultural or professional communities not represented in the sworn officer contingent, offering a different perspective on problem-solving than that provided by sworn officers, and enabling sworn officers to return to traditional policing roles for which they are specifically qualified.

Although introducing civilian personnel into police services is being promoted as an effective cost-savings measure, it is neither well-supported by evidence nor without challenges. Perhaps the most significant of challenges are the difficulties civilians experience adapting to a police services' organizational culture. Interviews with police executives reveal that their civilian employees do not always feel accepted, especially when they work alongside sworn police officers or in roles that had previously been carried out by sworn officers. Many police officers, for example, do not believe that civilian personnel share their values or entirely understand front-line policing. These findings are consistent with the review of the literature on civilianization which shows that the morale of civilian employees is lower than that of sworn officers. Lower morale among civilian personnel might also be a consequence of fewer opportunities for movement in police organizations.

There is some opposition to increasing the occupational roles and the proportion of civilian personnel working in police services, particularly in certain areas. Police associations generally oppose hiring civilians for positions that had previously been filled by sworn officers on the basis that this restricts opportunities for sworn officers' career growth. Police executives are sometimes reluctant to extend the roles assigned to civilian employees as this reduces the flexibility of the organization in exercising their duty of accommodation. This could include placing officers into meaningful jobs when they are unable to work "on the streets" because they are disabled, injured, or under investigation. Many respondents also referred to the challenges of supervising civilians when their duties fall under different collective agreements than those governing sworn officers.

Some challenges of civilianization were unforeseen. For example, once a civilian employee gains a foothold in a job role previously carried out by sworn officers, their professional associations may file grievances if similar vacant positions are not filled by civilians. Moreover, though not opposing civilianization, many police governance boards prefer to hire sworn officers on the premise that their visible uniformed presence is thought to increase public support.

Pressures from provincial and municipal governments to reduce policing costs are likely to continue given the rapid increases that have characterized the past decade, the revenue constraints most police services are now confronting, and the demand to get the best value for tax dollars. In addition, an increasing number of legislative requirements have swollen the administrative workload of police organizations. It is likely that the pressure to hire more civilians will be greatest in larger police services, given the variety of demands placed on them by the complex environments in which they serve. The largest police services in this study had the highest proportion of civilian personnel.

Altogether, the results of this project suggest that decisions about increasing the proportion of civilian personnel working within a police service should be based not only on careful identification of the overall direct short-term financial implications for the

organization, but also on indirect costs and benefits over the long-term. A key finding of both the literature review and empirical research is that the overall costs of policing may not be declining as the number of sworn officers does not appear to decline commensurate with increased numbers of civilian employees. Indeed, the overall number of police (both sworn and civilian) continues to rise and costs to increase. There seems to be reluctance, for a variety of reasons, on the part of police executives, police boards and other governance bodies to reduce the number of uniformed sworn police officers, the most publicly visible component of police personnel.

In sum, the growth in numbers of both sworn officer positions and civilians and the continuing rise in policing costs is a significant phenomenon that merits thorough research and analysis.

SOURCE

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