



## *PSO Perspective*

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### Online company reviews affecting officer recruitment and retention

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Before submitting a job application many candidates read online company reviews. This enables them to evaluate the agency, its culture, occupational practices, perceptions of the workplace, and reasons why employees resign. In professions such as policing that struggle to overcome public opinion regarding reputation, an analysis of this information offers a unique perspective regarding why people may not pursue an application, and why officers resign.

#### STAFFING CHALLENGES

Police agencies across the globe face recruitment and retention challenges regarding dwindling applicant numbers, increasing resignations, as well as a crisis regarding reputation, and shifts in attitude towards pursuing a policing career. This is affected by many things such as changing workloads and performance expectations, budgets and budgetary constraints, fluctuating operational processes, the number of officers required to do the work, economic highs and lows, and the socio-political climate regarding the nature of police work and policing conditions affecting officers.

#### RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

While evolving recruitment strategies and large-scale advertising campaigns are often implemented to attract people into policing, agencies continue to struggle to overcome lack of interest in policing careers. Retention of officers is a complex matter, often being attributed to officer exclusion, lack of organizational support, lack of adjustment processes (as officers transition to different units of command and geographical areas), as well as the fact that police work is a highly stressful occupation resulting in officer stress, PTSD, health-related issues, and burnout. There is also the inability of some officers to balance work-life challenges,

children/family commitments, and other personal factors, as well as rising complaints about staff mistreatment/shortages, overworked employees, workplace litigation, discrimination, workplace bullying/harassment, lack of promotion, and negative media scrutiny.

#### ONLINE COMPANY REVIEW ANALYSIS

When seeking employment, it is a common practice that potential applicants will read online company reviews by current and former employees to increase knowledge about the workplace, and to find out information that is not necessarily shared by an organization or that was previously considered. While there is the potential that online company reviews may be perceived as being less credible (in terms of offering a balanced critique of employment) or that they may be perceived as a 'rant' by the reviewer in terms of venting frustration (or that the reviewer is using the platform to cause reputational damage to the respective police agency), an analysis of this information enables examination of data that is often overlooked.

#### WHAT IT TELLS US ABOUT POLICE OFFICER EMPLOYMENT

The reviews demonstrate the value of information contained within them regarding employment and how recruitment strategies can be improved, as well as the insight they offer into reasons why officers resign. For example, in relation to retention, the reviews used in research

by Miles-Johnson (2026) suggest that officers are frustrated by the lack of attention that police agencies give to employment issues and organizational practices. This includes lack of attention to pay and employee benefits, job security and promotion, organizational management, workplace culture, and work-life balance. In relation to recruitment, whilst the research is not testing recruitment per se, the findings demonstrate how recruitment strategies could be improved because of the likely influence of the concept of 'negativity bias', whereby negative reviews (especially those containing information that is personally relevant to the applicant) increase the persuasion of a message. For example, when the review is negative, it significantly influences the reader to not act - suggesting that they will not pursue an application regarding employment as a police officer. This is because they will view the information at hand as being credible in terms of protecting them from making the wrong decision.

#### THE CHALLENGE FOR POLICE AGENCIES

The challenge this raises for police agencies is to acknowledge and recognize the relevance and importance of the content within online company reviews. Research by Miles-Johnson (2026) indicates that police agencies must focus on the workplace experience of officers contained within the reviews, and how this affects retention. But this means systemic workplace cultural practices must change, particularly workplace practices that contribute to police officers experiencing inequitable employment, discriminatory organizational staffing practices, and exclusion. Miles-Johnson (2026) suggests that implementing workplace mechanisms that deal with such problems before or as they arise, and not after officers resign, could begin with police agencies

comparing the overall content of online company reviews with similar information captured in police employee surveys. This could include a comparative analysis of data evaluating officer engagement, satisfaction, and occupational experience, and aspects of policing known to affect retention (officer morale, commitment and motivation, perceptions of workplace culture and leadership, opportunities for career growth in policing, and officer remuneration and employee benefits). They could also be compared against information collected during formal or semi-formal exit interviews – this will determine experiences of the workplace, occupational practices, as well as reasons for leaving, and present an opportunity for police agencies to learn from departing employees regarding how strategies can be actioned to improve employee retention. Accepting the relevance and importance of content within online company reviews, therefore, is likely to increase the number of officers staying in policing (as issues are recognized and addressed) and increase the likelihood that potential applicants will finalize a submission and pursue a career in policing.

Professor Toby Miles-Johnson is a criminologist and policing scholar specializing in quantitative and qualitative methodologies. He researches with police agencies, national security agencies, international defense agencies, diverse groups of people, and primarily examines [police officer background characteristics and occupational attitudes](#).

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## About the Michigan State University Police Staffing Observatory

The [Police Staffing Observatory \(PSO\)](#) is a global collaborative of academics, scholars, practitioners, and students working with Michigan State University to promote evidence-based police workforce research, strategy, and operations. It aims to advance police workforce knowledge and its application through research and its dissemination, including practitioner partnerships.