Fitness Characteristics for Deputy Sheriff Recruits who Graduate or Separate from Academy: A Pilot Study

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**ABSTRACT**

INTRODUCTION: Law enforcement can be a physically demanding profession. On-duty officers may be required to carry, push, pull, lift, jump, climb, crawl, swim, use force, and sustain suspect pursuit during their shift.  

Law enforcement and deputy sheriff recruits complete academy training to prepare for their job demands. The academy period is used to physically prepare recruits to tolerate the rigors of the job, as well as teach correct procedural and legal requirements.  

If a recruit that does not complete academy training the are defined as separating from academy.  

Stressors that can occur during academy training include academic, scenario-based training failure, or personal reasons. Recruits that do not graduate can create a great financial burden to the law enforcement agency (LEA) and state. The physical fitness of a recruit prior to academy could have some influence whether they are able to complete academy training. The ability to tolerate physical demands of academy training, however, may not be a reliable indicator of one’s ability to successfully complete academy training, as physical fitness demands of academy training are significantly lower than the demands of a law enforcement job. (Montgomery et al., 2015). The purpose of this study was to determine the differences in fitness characteristics between deputy sheriff recruits who either graduated or separated from academy training.  

METHODS:  

• Retrospective analysis was conducted on two classes from one LEA. This encompassed a total of 163 recruits; 131 recruits graduated (GRAD); 118 males and 13 females), and 32 recruits separated (SEP; 28 males and 4 females) at various time points during academy training.  

• Physical fitness testing occurred three days prior to the start of academy. The tests included: maximal number of push-ups and sit-ups completed in 60 seconds (≤) to measure muscular endurance; a 75-yard pursuit run (75PR), which was a simulated foot pursuit involving sprinting and direction changes about a grid marker (≤) to measure lower-body power, respectively; and number of shuttles in the multistage fitness test (MSFT) to assess maximal aerobic fitness.  

• A multivariate ANOVA, with sex as a covariate, was used to compare the GRAD and SEP groups. Pearson’s correlations were calculated on the pooled recruit data (n = 163) to determine if significant relationships existed between the fitness tests and academy separation. Significance was set at p ≤ 0.05 for all analyses.  

RESULTS:  

• The recruits from this LEA academy class who separated tended to be older, slower in the 75PR, and completed less shuttles in the MSFT. Previous research shows recruits who tend to perform poorer in the MSFT, which provides some support to the results of this study.  

• The 75PR incorporates maximal sprinting and change-of-direction ability, which has a foundation of lower-body strength, power, and dynamic stability. This is notable, as these physical characteristics can be related to job-specific law enforcement tasks (e.g., suspect pursuit and apprehension).  

• Taken together, maximal sprinting, change-of-direction ability, and aerobic fitness could have some impact on a recruit’s ability to graduate from this LEA.  

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS:  

• LEA recruits should attempt to improve their maximal running speed, change-of-direction ability, and aerobic fitness prior to academy as this could impact their ability to successfully graduate.  

• Older recruits in particular should ensure they develop their physical fitness prior to academy to enhance their ability to complete training and graduate.  

• Future research should investigate a greater sample of LEA academy classes to confirm the results from this pilot analysis.  

**CONCLUSION**

The recruits from this LEA academy class who separated tended to be older, slower in the 75PR, and completed less shuttles in the MSFT. Previous research shows recruits who tend to perform poorer in the MSFT, which provides some support to the results of this study. The 75PR incorporates maximal sprinting and change-of-direction ability, which has a foundation of lower-body strength, power, and dynamic stability. This is notable, as these physical characteristics can be related to job-specific law enforcement tasks (e.g., suspect pursuit and apprehension).  

Taken together, maximal sprinting, change-of-direction ability, and aerobic fitness could have some impact on a recruit’s ability to graduate from this LEA.