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Perceived vs. Actual Reported Peace Officer Physical Job Demands: What Three Points in Time Tell Us

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ABSTRACT
A common perception among incumbents and some trainers is that muscular endurance and aerobic capacity are the most prevalent and important components of occupationally related stressors. This review is aimed to clarify the underlying of Peace Officer survey responses. The purpose of this study was to review job demand studies, and present the most recent data from a job task analysis for LEOS in California. For the LAO survey, three large scale studies were conducted by the California Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (CA POST) and the third was a local study by the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department (LASD).

METHODS
• For this inquiry, three large scale studies were reviewed. The first and third studies were conducted by the California Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (CA POST) and the third was a local study by the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department (LASD).

• Study #1 (CA POST-1) was conducted in 1983 and studied 1,625 LEOS on physical abilities required of the California patrol officer by frequency, importance/criticality to success, time spent performing.

• Study #2 (LASD) was conducted between 2008-2010 and surveyed 162 deputies assigned to patrol duties in Los Angeles County.

• Study #3 (CA POST-2018) was conducted in 2018 survey (question responders = 2,874-3,937) and on physical abilities required of the California patrol officer by frequency, importance/criticality to success, time spent performing.

• Subject matter experts assigned to each study at the respective point in time each study was conducted rated physical tasks identified in surveys and assigned each tasks to an underlying physiological construct. Following this, underlying physiological constructs from each study was compared.

RESULTS
• Essential job tasks for law enforcement officers (LEOs) include numerous physical motions such as pushing, pulling, dragging, running, and other physically demanding body movements.1,2 These actions are often completed while the LEOS is under load carrying conditions (bullet-resistant vest, gun belt, and other equipment). However, the actions could also be completed while not under the same load (the LEO not wearing the above listed protective equipment).

• To ensure candidates and employees can successfully complete required job tasks, a job task analysis is an industry-accepted first step.

• A job task analysis (a survey of tasks performed by employees) at the state or local level is part of a multi-step process that forms the basis for selection standards, training, rehabilitation, and “return to play/duty” standards.

• In the case of Law Enforcement Agencies, these types of analysis are often conducted at the state level (as is conducted by a Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (CPOST Commission)).

• The physical job task analysis process requires respondents (usually subject matter experts (SME) and incumbent patrol officers) to rate the criticality, frequency, and time spent performing specific tasks. The responses are then grouped into underlying physiological constructs such as aerobic/anabolic capacity, muscular strength and endurance, power, agility, stability, balance, etc.

• The purpose of this study was to review job demand studies, and present the most recent data from a job task analysis for LEOS in California.

INTRODUCTION
• The data of 1,625 officers showed that the underlying fitness components of agility, anaerobic capacity, anaerobic power, and strength were more predominant in daily officer tasks than muscular endurance and aerobic capacity. The result of Work Sample Test “Battery” (WSTB) was developed and validated. With the exception of a 50-yard run, the other 9 WSTB tests (39-yard obstacle course, chain link fence climb, solid wall climb, dummy drag) assessed components of agility, anaerobic capacity, anaerobic power, anaerobic endurance, and flexibility.

• In a 2008-2010 survey of Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Deputies1 assigned to patrol duties, components of fitness reported as important by Deputies =162) were: 15% strength, 15% muscular endurance, 10% power, 10% anaerobic capacity, and 15% flexibility.1 The report noted that the underlying fitness associated with the LEOS role were: strength, power, anaerobic capacity, anaerobic endurance, and flexibility.1

CONCLUSIONS
• When the results of all three large scale studies2-3 are examined for trends, the reported importance by those assigned to patrol duties appear to focus on the constructs of anaerobic qualities, strength, and power. Agility also consistently ranked highly.

• The prevalence of stability in Study #3 (POST-2-2018)2 can be attributed to more precise definitions of constructs for this specific study. The Study #3 stability trend can also be observed. Study #2 (LASD) under the equivalent category.

• Taken together and longitudinally, these job task analyses indicate that numerous respondents (SME and California patrol officers) over the nearly 35 years continually rate the underlying physiological constructs required in patrol work as stability/equilibrium, anaerobic, agility, strength, and power as more prevalent (importance/critical, frequent, and time spent performing) and than muscular endurance and aerobic tasks.

• The five event CA POST Work Sample Test Battery3 (a state required physical ability test to graduate all peace officer academies) is also reflective of these observed trends.

• As a result, law enforcement professional training programs should as closely as possible reflect the reported physical ability demands of the patrol function to ensure successful completion of required job tasks.

Figure 1. LAOS patrol physical abilities distribution based on SME input.

Figure 2. A CA POST-2 relative contribution of patrol physical abilities distribution based on statewide SME input.