

THE PROBLEMS OF POLICE CHIEFS: AN EXAMINATION OF THE ISSUES IN TENURE AND TURNOVER

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The alarmingly high rates of police chief turnover have created concern in the public and private sectors. The average police chief tenure is discussed in public administration circles as being dangerously short, but there is little evidence of exactly why this is so. The position, in major cities and small towns, has become a virtual "revolving door" that results in numerous expenses for local agencies. This article explores factors related to short tenures for police executives. This exploratory research is based on in-depth interviews with former and incumbent chiefs. The data reveal that health concerns, stress, politics, and personnel issues are related to short tenures.

The job of police chief in the United States represents perhaps one of the most visible and volatile positions in the public sector. Police organizations and their chief executives have an incredibly diverse and challenging set of duties. Police chiefs, largely without a contract (Greenburg, 1992), must successfully meet the demands of community members, politicians, organizational members, unions, police associations, special interest groups, and their own executive staff members. Given this enormous complexity, as well as the multiplicity of concerns and responsibilities of today's chief of police, the tremendous turnover in the position should not be a surprise.

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Short tenures are typical for the average police chief, and mobile chiefs have become the “rule rather than the exception” (Maehler & Wagoner, 1999, p. 56). Peak and Glensor (1996) found that the tenure of a metropolitan police chief fell from 5.5 years to between 3.5 and 4.5 years. In 1997, the public information office of the International Association of Chiefs of Police estimated that the average tenure for major city police chiefs in the United States was 2.5 years. That same year, the Police Executive Research Forum reported that the average tenure for police chiefs in jurisdictions of more than 500,000 was 4.93 years and that 73% of the chiefs had no employment contract or agreement.

Police administration is an art and a science that demands quality credentials, solid experience and qualifications, advanced education, and community, organizational, personal, and political skills. The modern police chief executive takes on a formidable task. He or she must be able to maintain order and law enforcement, preserve and model ethics and values, create a high-performance organization that can provide quality services, solve community problems, and provide leadership to the men and women who perform a difficult job. Although the police traditionally were seen as those who merely enforced the law and provided order and maintenance to society, there is no question that the problems now faced by departments are structural and deep (Sparrow, Moore, & Kennedy, 1990; Stamper, 1992).

The job of the modern police chief is stressful and exhausting. Wexler (1995) noted that police chiefs “pay an enormous price, both professionally and personally, for the kind of life they live”; that the “police chief’s job can often be a lonely one”; and that the “chief’s pressures not only alienate them . . . but can create personal problems as well” (p. 2). According to Wexler, after a brief honeymoon period, the pressures of the job are unrelenting and little is done at the executive level to help chiefs cope.

The complexity of the political arena represents an enormous challenge for police chiefs (Schultz, 1979; Tunnell & Gaines, 1992). Neilsen (1990) noted that some police chiefs encounter political trouble and even lose their jobs because they simply do not understand all of the complex forces that affect the job. The chief’s selection often is a political act, and virtually everything the chief undertakes can have political implications (Bouza, 1990). Hunt and Magenau (1993) provide an analysis of the power and political ramifications of the position and the types of issues that beleaguer chiefs:

Unions, other employee groups, state governmental officials and functionaries, plus the many, many other interested parties of all sorts with which a chief must deal, and it

is easy to see why police chiefs, especially in major cities, come to see themselves in a storm at sea aboard a leaking and rudderless ship with a mutinous crew. (p. 24)

The police chief position is often fraught with ambiguity and precipitous terminations. The performance of police agencies is highly scrutinized, but the police themselves often are unsure of their responsibilities (Pogrebin & Regoli, 1986). Mahtesian (1997) noted that police chiefs are being “sacked” even in the absence of impropriety or misconduct. In some cases, however, the problem of tenure for the chief is related to corruption in the department. According to Pogrebin and Atkins (1986),

Police administrators realistically admit that they are unable to eradicate all police corruption. Their real concern is maintaining a low degree of corruption in their departments. The predicament for police executives is awesome. They become almost powerless in controlling the deviance within their lines of command (p. 312).

Goldstein (1977) noted that few efforts to control corruption have succeeded without some guarantee of tenure for chief. Clearly, the beliefs and actions of police officers are shaped by the administrative style and integrity of the chief (Brown, 1981; Hunt & Magenau, 1993; Platt & Cooper, 1974; Vanagunas & Elliott, 1980).

Police chief turnover may represent a positive feature of the profession. Turnover among chiefs, on one hand, may create an opportunity for organizational growth and improvement. Indeed, a change in stagnant leadership may be both liberating and motivating. New leaders often can help the organization face times of change and leadership challenges (Bridges, 1991; Kouzes & Posner, 1995; Nadler, Shaw, & Walton, 1995). On the other hand, the amount and degree of turnover among police chiefs is worthy of concern and scrutiny. Leadership consistency is a crucial element for effective administrative directives, decision making, and implementation of policy (Finkelstein & Hambrick, 1990; Kingdon, 1995; Koven, Shelley, & Swanson, 1998; Peters, 1993; Svara, 1990).

Although the issue is multifaceted, high turnover rates can lead to organization disruption, physical and financial costs to the community, and a lack of attention to the policy-making group's political agenda during the absence of the departing police chief (Kingdon, 1995; Peters, 1993). Initiatives instituted by the former police chief might be dismantled or fragmented due to a change in leadership. Progressive initiatives, such as those involving ethics, problem solving, and community partnership, are greatly dependent on police chief leadership (Geller, 1985; Goldstein, 1977; Peak &

Glensor, 1996; Poole, Regoli, Culbertson, & Crank, 1986; Sparrow et al., 1990). In addition, the police organization's focus and direction is considerably weakened during interim police chief periods.

Specific information about the reasons for chief-of-police turnover is scarce. Hunt and Magenau (1993) simply stated, "Not much is known about police chiefs" (p. 3). Indeed, there is copious literature about what factors affect the careers of police officers, such as health, stress, and burnout but not a commensurate amount of sources regarding the length of tenure of police chiefs as a unique part of policing. This exploratory study offers a number of insights from the perspective of police chiefs and the issues they feel contribute to their decision to leave the job. This study, to a great extent, allows police chiefs to tell their stories about leaving the police chief position.

METHOD

This research is derived from a larger occupational life-history study that involved 10 case studies of incumbent or recently departed chiefs of police in a western state who had left their positions within the past 5 years. The life-history case study, as described by Denzin and Lincoln (1994), finds particular value in identifying problematic moments in the lives of individuals. This study focuses on job difficulties and reasons for termination as perceived by the former police chiefs. Qualitative data were collected using in-depth, semistandardized interviews with probes (Berg, 2001; Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Patton, 1990). The open-ended questions allowed the respondents to elaborate on their responses and reflect on the events as they experienced them (Hamel, 1993). Each respondent was asked the following questions: "What do you believe were the reasons or factors in leaving your last police-chief position?" "Were you in a position to decide how and when to leave this last position? Why or Why not?" and "Were there any unusual or unforeseen circumstances that caused you to leave your last position?" The collected narratives were compared with a minimum of two other sources, including written employment or separation agreements, city council proceedings, media accounts, and internal memoranda to corroborate their stories (Burgess, 1982; Fetterman, 1989).

All participants were from municipal jurisdictions that required the chief to report to managers responsible for supervising the police executives. Two chiefs were selected from each of five regional areas delineated by the state association of chiefs of police. The regional selections provided an

opportunity to represent executives from departments of various sizes and communities of various compositions. According to Kitzman and Stanard (1999), consistent commonalities and overlap in responsibilities exist among chiefs of different department sizes although specific tasks may differ. The police chiefs were from urban, resort, and rural agencies. Six departments had fewer than 25 officers, two had 25 to 74 officers, and two had 75 to 150 commissioned officers.

The age of the chiefs interviewed ranged from 43 to 49 years ($M = 47$). Notably, 8 of the 10 police chiefs in the study left their positions in their forties, at relatively young ages. All of the chiefs had a college education with at least an associate's degree. Only 1 of the 10 participants interviewed is still an active police chief. The average years of service was 5.1 years (range = 7 months to 12 years).

Interviews were conducted with the chiefs at former or new workplaces and each interview lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes. All exchanges were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The data portray the experiences of our respondents related to their job termination. The accounts of these police chiefs may not be reflective of all police executives, but their narratives add voice and depth to our understanding of the issues they faced (Ragin, 1994; Seidman, 1998). All the respondents were cooperative and appeared to be open and frank in relating their personal experiences.

MAJOR REASONS ASSOCIATED WITH TURNOVER

The chiefs interviewed for this study related several reasons for their job terminations. Table 1 shows the major themes along with relevant demographic data. Despite a certain amount of overlap, a number of specific concerns for premature departure emerged from the data. Their primary concerns included health, stress, personnel issues, and political dynamics.

HEALTH AND FAMILY

Personal health and overall family well-being was a prominent reason why many of these chiefs left their positions. Of the chiefs, 4 mentioned health concerns as a major factor in leaving the police chief position. One chief dramatically discussed his personal health concerns, even stating that if he died due to them "he wouldn't have to do this anymore [be a police chief]."

TABLE 1. Profiles of Occupational Life Histories

<i>Chief</i>	<i>Reason or Factors for Leaving</i>	<i>Agency Size/ City Size</i>	<i>Tenure</i>	<i>Age (years)</i>	<i>Education</i>
A	Health and family concerns Stress Personnel issues New position	19 ofs., 8 civ./ 11,500 pop.	2 years 2 months	43	A.A.
B	Political difficulties Personnel issues	40 ofs., 20 civ./ 14,000 pop.	1 year 10 months	46	2 B.A.s 2 M.A.s D.P.A.
C	Health and family concerns Political difficulties Personnel issues New position	50 ofs., 25 civ./ 17,000 pop.	5 year 6 months	44	B.A.
D	New position	16 ofs., 2 civ./ 2,500 pop.	3 years 5 months	38	B.A.
E	Health concerns Stress Political difficulties	14 ofs., 10 civ./ 6,000 pop.	8 years	56	M.C.J. A.A.
F	Stress Political difficulties Personnel issues	150 ofs., 5 civ./ 95,000 pop.	7 years 1 month	48	B.A.
G	Stress Political difficulties New position	18 ofs., 3 civ./ 5,000 pop.	7 months	48	M.A.
H	Health concerns Political difficulties	20 ofs., 7 civ./ 15,000 pop.	6 years 4 months	43	A.A. in law enforcement
I	Family concerns	16 ofs., 8 civ./ 6,000 pop.	2 years	56	A.A. in law enforcement
J	Stress Political difficulties	78 ofs., 50 civ./ 38,000 pop.	5 years	49	B.A. M.P.A.

Perhaps of greatest significance is the dynamic of health as a reason for leaving. Chiefs who stipulated that personal health concerns were a factor were clear about these issues being related to the job. They stated that their employment caused health problems serious enough as to induce them to leave their chosen professions. Several respondents also pointed out that their health was much improved and that they felt better since leaving the police chief position. Chief A told the story of his health concerns:

I developed heart arrhythmia—an extra beat. The doctor said it won't kill you, but it's not a normal thing. That's kind of a strange statement. The other problem when I had the chief's job; I didn't have time to exercise. The arrhythmia got a little worse. Last summer, I took a week off and went fishing for a week with a good friend of mine. The week I was gone the arrhythmia was gone. No phone, no pager, no work stuff. The day I came back to work, it started up again. I told the wife, the whole thing is job and stress related, no doubt about it.

Chief H also commented on the detrimental physical effects of being a police chief and his reasons for resigning:

Health played a part. Stress situations were detrimental to my health. Thirty to forty percent of my decision-making process [was due to health]. I made myself physically sick. I, and the doctors, didn't know what was wrong, I figured I'd die, but I figured, "If I die, I won't have to do this anymore."

Chief E explained the official or public reasons for his leaving:

The stated reasons were health and personal reasons. I just decided one day that I didn't look healthy. Don't I look healthy now? I'm sure I could still be there, [but it] affected my health. I decided I had enough. I woke up one day and said, "I don't even want to go into that damn place." My health was in jeopardy. My thyroid died, and I became diabetic, had high cholesterol. A good part of it was due to the stress of the job. Health was an issue. The job made physical issues that much worse. I feel much better now.

Another instance of health can be drawn from the story of the chief who was eventually fired for a drunk-driving arrest. Alcoholism or substance abuse can certainly be considered a health problem. Whether the stress of the job was a contributing factor to the arrest for drunk driving of Chief J is an open question, but it may be related. Chief J was asked what he believed were the reasons or factors in leaving his position. He told this story:

And it's not a simple answer. As you know, I'm in litigation over that issue right now. The DUI, it was off duty, a hundred miles away, on a weekend. Certainly not an acceptable behavior for a police chief. I came in Monday morning after that and offered to resign, and he [the city manager] wouldn't accept the resignation, wanted to look at it and think about it, and not act hastily. He gave it to the assistant city manager to do an internal investigation, which was pretty simple, you know. It was a DUI; I got arrested, and all he needed to do was get the reports to figure that out, and then he called me 3 or 4 days later and had me come in, and he said that he was going to keep me. I was too good to lose and had done too many good things, and he was going to suspend me significantly to send the right message, and we get back to work. He was going to have a

press conference that afternoon and wanted me there. I said, "Great," you know because I had offered to resign. I figured well, we could make this work. Whether we could have made it work or not, I don't have a clue. I met with him again and the city manager and the assistant city manager on Friday, and he told me he wanted my resignation or he was going to fire me.

Several chiefs discussed family-related problems. One chief took an unplanned, early retirement for family health reasons—to care for sick parents. This chief retired from his position for personal reasons. He explained,

One reason was that my father was in very poor health, and my mom was not much better. My wife's mom was not in the best of health. I just have one sister, and my sister shouldered the responsibility of taking care of my dad who had been paralyzed for 13 years. So at that time I think when I say that there were many reasons, and the timing was felt, the pieces just sort of fell together, that it could be an advantage to myself, to the city—rather than wait a couple of years. 'Cause I knew my parents wouldn't be around. In fact, my dad died right after I did retire, the following month, and my mom just died this year, and [my spouse's] mom is still not in good health, but we're here.

Chief C explained how the position had affected his family:

Another factor was [that] there are two positions in [the city] that were required to live in the city, and that was the city manager and the police chief. And from a personal standpoint, you know, I've got two children, and they attended the public school system, which we felt was pretty inadequate, and then there was discrimination issues which were kind of interesting. It was a reverse situation. . . . My daughter came home probably a couple of times a week, in tears, being called a white bitch, and so that was pretty tough. Gang members who lived three houses away decided to have a shoot-out in the middle of the street at about four o'clock in the morning. So my wife wouldn't let the kids ever play in the front street, front yard. And that's kind of disheartening to be the police chief and have your wife tell you that she doesn't feel safe living in the city, but that's the kind of community that we were dealing with. And we were making some strides and changes obviously, but their "druthers" would not be to live there. So there were some personal issues with that.

STRESS

Stress was a key dynamic for many of the police chiefs. This finding is consistent with recent literature regarding stress and policing (Ayres, 1990; Wexler, 1995). Perhaps the health factor discussed above can encompass the stress issue, but it seems reasonable, based on the interviews, that stress was a separate issue for this group of police chiefs in terms of what motivated them to leave their positions. Several chiefs directly mentioned stress

and pressure as being a significant factor in their decision-making process. One respondent described the stress dynamic when he spoke of the trauma to which he, the community, and the department had been exposed. The long hours, on-call status, lack of opportunity for healthful activity and exercise, and overall feeling of being tired were repeating themes throughout the research. Chief A explained his view of the position:

The other thing was that the job of chief is very stressful. I mean it's a very stressful job; if someone said that it's not, then they aren't doing much of a chief's job, but it's stressful. It took a lot of time away from my family, I mean, plus the fact that my predecessor had left me with some problems.

Chief H also expressed concerns related to on the job stress and physical ailments:

I always worried. Stress level was up. In fact, I went for a physical my last year as a police chief there, and my cholesterol was like at 265 or something like that. I came back to the Sheriff's Department. I worked here for about a year, and I was down to 231. I think there's some correlation there. I really do. I feel that you can live to be a police chief for a short time because as soon as you retire, you're going to die because your health is that poor. I think it has a real play on the physical and mental stability of the individual because of the pressures associated with the job. My home life was suffering. My health was suffering. It was just no good. In the end the public suffers.

PERSONNEL ISSUES

The dynamic of dealing with what the chiefs called "personnel issues" also was mentioned during the interviews. These issues seemed to contribute to the stress of the job. Many of the police chiefs mentioned what could be called human resource issues or labor/management matters that put great demands on their time and energy. The difficulties that they encountered ranged from unethical behavior to problems with disciplinary actions.

Several chiefs expressed their frustration with problem employees and corrupt behavior. In one agency, integrity issues involved gratuities and drinking on duty that resulted in conflict with the department and city, based on efforts to correct these human resource issues. Chief B was dealing with integrity and ethics issues mixed in with difficulty in seeing eye to eye with the city manager. Specifically, Chief B said that he felt he had come into an agency "that was in the 1950s." He explained,

When I got there, I walked back about 20 or 25 years in law enforcement, dealing with issues that I should have thought of but didn't. Those included drinking on duty in the police department—as authorized by the former chief—eating for free around town, [and] employees taking free days off from work.

Chief B also explained that the lack of discipline in the department along with dealing with internal issues and then not being able to make the necessary changes within the organization represented major problems. Chief B found himself involved in the termination and demotion of police officers:

So they [the officers] were feeling that I was out to get them and not on their side. I was not popular; the city manager and I were not getting along well, so it was a combination of getting frustrated with dealing with the employees, frustrated dealing with the city manager, and going, "Why in the heck am I doing this?"

Police chiefs spend an inordinate amount of time on human resource issues. These duties include such things as grievances, hearings, court appearances, lawsuits, and the review of personnel investigations to decide upon corrective action, discipline, and training needs. These tasks may be frustrating because many chiefs would rather be spending time and energy on the mission of the department, its goals, and the needs of the department and community. When asked what the reasons or factors were in leaving his police chief position, Chief C gave a complex and lengthy response:

Probably a combination of several things. I was tired. I'll be right up front with that. Probably tired most of dealing with personnel issues because that seemed to be a constant thing, and that was one of the reasons that I was brought to [the city]. There was some issues with a department that was lethargic, that was out-of-tune with the community, that was out of step, that there was a number of disciplinary issues that weren't being addressed or hadn't been addressed, and so I knew going into it that it was going to be a lot of personnel issues to deal with, probably a lot of turnover. And my assessment was correct.

He further explained,

In that 1st year, there was a need to turnover the entire management staff and some of the supervisor staff, and it was really the lack of abilities the people had, and it appeared to me no desire in terms of change or to redirect their energies or to reeducate on where the city wanted to go in terms of its police department and where they personally wanted to be. And so, in dealing with a lot of those after 6 years, I was tired.

Chief A stated that he was left to deal with the many personnel and community difficulties that had developed before his tenure: "I had those problems to deal with; I pretty much got those done, but some of those I just couldn't get rid of because he [the predecessor] created such deep wounds that just wouldn't go away." These types of job requirements and issues clearly affected him.

POLITICAL DIFFICULTIES

Another major concern related to police chief departures was that of a lack of support from city officials and, indeed, the supervisors of several chiefs. One chief related a situation in which the city manager failed to support his position in dealing with integrity and ethics issues in the department. This led to a real frustration that the job of police chief was not what he thought it would be and that the city official with whom he needed a relationship of trust was actually leaving him to deal with the issues alone. Validation and support from city officials is crucial for chiefs who must rebuild and heal departments.

Chief G was in an unusual chief's situation given the financial constraints, combined positions, layoffs, and overinvolvement of the city council. Chief G was asked if there was anything in his situation that "would have caused him to move on anyway." Evidently, there was because he elaborated,

The city is very torn. The council, the politics, the reality of politics, I think, makes that job stressful, and so I will tell you that I don't know how long it would have lasted past 7 months because it was a constant questioning of why are we spending money? Why are police cars out there? Why are police gone from the station? A lot of time spent having to justify what you were doing and a lot of time not so much telling them what you needed but finding a way that they would understand why you needed it. So you spent a lot of time translating, and this is very blue collar.

During the interview, Chief G had stated that he "may not have lasted much past 7 months anyway given the politics of the city." He explained,

Politics and pressure. I was putting in easily 65 to 70 hours a week. Pressure. Time. The time constraints. And I'll be quite frank, limited resources. The community did not have the resources to provide, or it was challenging for it to provide full services—full police service 24 hours a day. So I think to maintain, recruiting was difficult because of the nature of the department. The reputation was not good metro-wide. And

see, you had a hard time attracting and keeping well-educated, sophisticated police officers. So, I think the love-hate relationship is clearly a key for me, the love-hate relationship between the city government, the community, and their law enforcement agency is so different than the fire or anybody else.

Another chief cited frustration and a lack of support from supervisors as a paramount reason for his departure. Interference and micromanagement, coupled with a lack of understanding about the delivery of police services by the city administrator/mayor, illustrated that his relationship with his supervisor was not what it needed to be to sustain him in his chief's position. Chief E resigned from his position. Upon being asked about the reasons that caused him to leave his position, he stated,

The main factor, I think, was frustration with the town administration that had no concept and no desire to have a concept of what the police mission is or should be. Their people were underpaid, overworked, and that caused a great deal of difficulty within the department, I think, and the town administrator was very plain in telling me that as far as anybody was concerned, that was my fault, not his. I had a town administrator who wants to run the whole town—tried to tell me what we needed. More concerned with outside appearances than the true function. I didn't get fired.

Changes in city political structure and leadership also may shorten tenures. In one case, the chief lost his support and power base. An acting city manager, a candidate for the permanent city manager position, decided potentially to terminate the chief after interaction with the city council and after his support from the prior city manager, the one who hired him, had eroded. It was only an employment agreement that temporarily saved him from termination. Chief F resigned after a 7-year tenure. He explained in detail about how and why he left his position,

What happened in [the city] was the disruption of events that have occurred the last year put an incredible amount of pressure on the community and the department, on the administration of the department and on me personally in the department. And those things are pretty well-known. A major homicide investigation, significant rioting by students, a significant increase in heroin overdose deaths, some, a couple other not-so-high profile but very traumatic homicides in the community, and this is a community that averages one homicide a year, and normally those are the typical, you know, there's a relationship involved, and there's a crime of passion, and these are two high-profile "who-done-its" and one very brutal relationship . . . an overdose, and an in-custody death. Just a lot of really traumatic things, a no confidence vote [by the police union] and so there's a lot of feeling in the community that things were just out of sorts.

Politics also played a role in his departure:

The most significant event contributing is a changeover in the political structure of the city—the political leadership of the city. The mayor was in office for 8 years and was a strong supporter of mine, decided not to seek another term. She endured some health problems—cancer, breast cancer—so she decided [on] that change. And the firing of the city manager, who was the person that hired me and also one of my strong supporters. And with the mayor leaving and a new mayor coming in, we've had three acting city managers, the current acting city manager, who was vying for the position of city manager actually [saw that this] is the opportunity for the city manager to resolve the issue of the chief, and so, he made the decision to accelerate my, uh, the selection of my replacement.

Another account included ethical and integrity violations by supervisors and public officials. The account was replete with rationale, which said to the chief that he must resign and move on to something else. These surprising accounts, substantiated by several sources, so bothered the chief that he finally seemed to need just to get away from the burden of witnessing unethical behavior. He also needed to escape being verbally reprimanded for the misdeeds of others that his officers and he did not allow or support. So urgent was this need that he finally walked away from his police chief position without so much as a resignation letter. He articulated some of the facts as he saw them:

The mayor gets stopped for speeding [by one of the department's police officers] and gets ticketed. [The mayor] calls the chief into his office [and wants to know what is going to be done about it]. I get called at home. . . . We [the police] are on the way to the mayor's house—a domestic violence call—he [allegedly] hit his pregnant spouse. I told the sergeant to handle it by the book. The mayor [was given] a citation and put in a motel, the wife got a citation for 3rd degree assault and was left at home. [I] got tired of the crap. I finally said, "You can no longer participate in this kind of activity." No longer participate in the political arena. My expectations were that I wouldn't be asked to do the things I was asked to do.

Chief F and Chief H experienced direct political difficulties. Chief F said that the most significant event was "a changeover in the political structure of the city—the political leadership of the city." Chief H stated, "Leaving was my decision to no longer participate in the political arena." Chief A remarked that the politics of his city, especially emanating from the local policy makers, made the job less desirable and more difficult and stressful. Chief A said he "was tired" of the politics and "burned out" on them. Chief G

also commented on the strange and challenging politics that affected the job in undesirable ways. One also wonders about the depth of the political ramifications at work in the stories of Chief B and Chief E, both of whom articulated their difficulties in dealing with their city managers.

Politics, inside the organization and outside, are a part of the reality of being a police chief. Whether political difficulties involve micromanagement by city policy makers or actual integrity issues on the part of politicians, they will take a toll on the police chief who is engaged in the experience. Chief H explained that there were a number of reasons involved in his leaving the position: "my unpleasant feelings towards the politicians; lack of respect for the political entity as it's known today, be it at the municipal level, state level, or federal level." Chief H said,

Well, I think to expound on that a little is the issue that, to be very frank, I dislike and distrust politicians. I have yet to find one that I would share a bed with. I think they're all, in my own opinion, I think they're criminal in nature, and they expect to have, commit criminal activities frequently. They, and I say they, I say the majority because again I say, I have yet to find one who didn't expect to be treated differently than other people, who misuse funds, who make decisions based upon not what people want but their own personal agendas.

ACCEPTING ANOTHER POSITION

Several chiefs left their positions to take other jobs. For at least 1 and perhaps 2 of the chiefs, this was actually a positive reason for leaving. Chief D told his story of how he was tracked down by an executive search firm and encouraged to apply for a chief position in another city. The position offered more money, more prestige, and more responsibility. Chief D seemed destined to leave his job from the start. He explained that he was raised in the business by his first department to work toward being a police chief and considered his chief's job as a "stepping-stone."

Chief D had an advanced degree, had served as a supervisor in every division in a major agency, had worked directly for the police chief of that agency, and specifically had planned his search for a chief's job. His "pedigree" in policing was flawless. He accepted the position in a resort city and left for another position at the age of 38. When asked why he left this position, he said this:

Career advancement. When I took that first job, it was a stepping-stone. I realized I was using that as a first chief's job, and I had every intention of moving on to addi-

tional chief's jobs after that. The recruiter realized that; the town manager and even the council realized that. That I wouldn't, you know, I was going to be there for a while but, you know, not a career chief, by any means, there.

Chief D was asked how the next position came about, and he said, "I was recruited to another chief's job." Although this seemed to be a positive experience for Chief D, the city that offered him his first chief's job and gave him his start was now without a police chief after just 3 years, and they were required to initiate another complex and expensive recruitment process to select a new chief. Chief D related the stated official or public reasons for leaving his first chief's job:

They were all the same. It was in the newspaper articles that it was a great opportunity for me. The police department, both in terms of personnel and in budget, was three to four times larger than the department I was currently in. There were some severe internal problems that the city manager there felt, based upon my performance at [the former city], that I would be very well suited for. I was brought into [the former city] to make some significant changes due to internal problems and [the new city] had some similar problems. So, I was very honest with everybody. Just said it was you know, I loved what I was, I loved my first job; it was hard to leave, but it was, both for me personally and professionally, to move on to [the new city] as was, it was stated, I mean, [the new city's] a, it's an international resort. So it offered me, both career-wise and personally, a great chance for some new opportunities—some real challenges; it seemed like the next logical step in my career. In the 3½ years I had been in my first chief's job, I had really kind of built the whole department up, and it was running well, and there weren't a lot of challenges left to me there.

Chief A was disillusioned by the job and found a serendipitous opportunity to get into another city position. He moved on to another job, but it seemed more of a safe harbor or safety net than something that he sought to replace his police career from the start.

Chief G left his position soon after arriving to take a job in another city police agency. There were many additional factors or considerations in a complicated scenario. He described his situation:

Well, what we should add is that after a number of months that 1st year with the city I became acting city administrator. So I was in charge of the fire department, police department, and city government, and the first day on the job I had to lay off, close down Public Works, so I could start laying off personnel. So it was kind of a new challenge I had as the police chief. For me, it was a real tough decision, because the department came a long way. We made a lot of progress. When I came, we had two cars running. When I left, they had a full fleet. We had reserve ranks back up, and morale was up. Had some promotions. Helped some other, some employees find new careers outside

law enforcement. When I left, they came in and measured the plaque that I got from [my prior] city, and made sure the one they gave me was larger, and that's pretty impressive with 7 months of service. In the end, they talked about how I had brought integrity back to the department.

With these seemingly positive items as a context, Chief G answered more specifically about why he left this situation:

So, frankly, the reason to leave was that I was recruited by another department. I did not apply and would not have applied. I was approached by [his former] city. The city manager called me and said, "Would you be interested?" And my city government and my staff and city council, even the ones that liked me, said I'd be a fool if I didn't take it, because the salary was about \$20,000 above, so it was a substantial salary increase.

It seems plausible that Chief G's stay in his city would have been short lived, at best, just as he stated. A long tenure in the situation that he described is unlikely. Nonetheless, he was gone from his position in 7 months officially because of a another job offer but, realistically, also because of the factors that were just articulated: pressure, stress, time, and lack of resources.

Chief C pointed out that he was able to parlay his credentials, experience, and connections into a well-paying, rewarding nonpolice position in another city. This was helpful to him as well because this departure allowed him to escape his current situation, where he believed his family was in danger and caught in a marginal school situation. In addition, the departure seemed to be just in time as Chief C was tired of dealing with his agency and its attendant personnel issues. One major theme in the data was that police chiefs left their positions to simply move on—whether that was a positive, negative, or marginal experience.

INEVITABILITY OF DEPARTURE?

Chief A encapsulated his reasoning for leaving: "I guess the bottom line is the basic factor(s), stress, time away from my family; it was starting to affect my health. I saw that I really did not enjoy it like I thought I might, but it was a career goal of mine." Chief B explained,

Six months into the job I realized I was dealing with the same people, doing the same thing, except the faces were different, and I was bored. In my former agency, the police chief that I had worked for had given me most of the responsibilities of being a police chief. Looking back on it, I think I was also tired of the work, is probably the best

description. I had a hard time getting the energy level up and frustrated with some of the internal issues that I was having to deal with. It seemed I wasn't getting anywhere.

Part of the irony to this situation was that Chief B felt that he was "very well thought of in the community" and "got along well with the community." When asked for the official or public reasons for departing, Chief B said,

Frustration. Actually, I said it in my letter of resignation. It's short. It says, "As you know I have thought about this for some time. The challenges and opportunities have been overshadowed by the day-to-day frustrations of the job, and I look forward to moving on to new challenges."

Chief H originally thought that being a chief was fun. He was asked directly if he had the opportunity, would he be a chief again. He answered quickly and readily, "No." When asked if he had any more thoughts about that he replied,

No. No, actually I think I'm over that hump now where I'm in a position, I'm very comfortable with what I'm doing. I'm back where I started in '73. I like my job. I'm stress free. Again, I'm not in the political arena. I don't work 14-, 16-, 18-hour days. I'm not responsible for people who carry guns; I'm responsible for myself. I work for one person, not a board of people that do nothing but cause you confusion. No, and that's the reason why. I'm now 46 years old. And my life priorities have changed. My family is far more important to me now than any job I could have, and this one gives me an opportunity to spend time with my family and do the things I want to do.

Chief H also commented that the "lack of job security was a significant part." Chief F reflected on the uncertainty of the job and inevitable change:

You've heard me say that it's not a matter of if, it's a matter of when. And so we all know that, we all know we face this thing of being dumped, but even though you know it and understand it, going into it, you never know how it's going to happen, and you never like it, and it's never really fun when it happens, but it's part of the deal.

DISCUSSION

Police chief turnover is related to a variety of issues. Police executives in this study related several reasons for their departures, including health, frustration, weariness, political pressures, and new job opportunities. Clearly, the small sample limits the generalization of these results, but as an exploratory study, the findings offers explanations from the chiefs' perspective and a framework for further research. Also interesting is the absence of

other factors in police chief departures that one might expect to hear or discover. Felony criminal conduct, corruption, media pressure, and a single major community event were foreseen as potential factors in leaving but were not singularly present in this study. For example, with the exception of the DUI issue, no chief was terminated outright or terminated for corruption or other ethics and integrity issues.

Information on the departure of a police chief often is based on media accounts of scandal and corruption within a department. Indeed, in many cases, the real reasons for the departure of a police executive may be vague and unknown. Incompetence on the part of some chief may account for short tenures in certain agencies, but inadequacy alone fails to fully explain all of the dynamics and transactions leading to their departures. Interview respondents are likely to present themselves in the most positive light, and this may be the case with chiefs in this study; however, no evidence of incompetence was found in documented sources related to their termination.

In addition, the failure of major organization change, implemented by a police chief as an agent of change, was not present. That is, in the age of new police initiatives such as community policing, community partnership, customer service, total quality, and problem solving, it is reasonable to expect that some police chiefs may get caught in a web of failed organizational change and be released by their cities. The ridding of a radical police-chief "change agent" by an organization might be a factor that could be reasonably seen in modern policing.

The experiences of the police chiefs in this study have several implications for recruitment and selection. Health concerns and stress are major issues in policing (Ayres, 1990). Police chiefs have long supported physical fitness for police officers, and some participate in these programs. Yet, many cities do not require a complete physical of police chief candidates. A study of city and county police chiefs found that only 23.2% underwent a physical fitness exam as part of the selection process (Reaves & Goldberg, 1998). A related issue is emotional and psychological strength and stability. Police chiefs in this study mentioned stress, illness, and perhaps psychosomatic maladies as factors in their departures. Yet, a study of 518 police chiefs reported that only 33% had undergone psychological exams as part of the selection process (Reaves & Goldberg, 1998).

Although many people rightly believe that police chiefs should not be contractually or legally locked into their positions, several of the cases in this study indicate a need for some type of contractual relationship between

the chief and the city. An employment agreement can assist with difficult situations that might arise from organizational, supervisory, or community difficulties. Greenburg (1992) noted that contracts are not a panacea between the chief and his or her boss, but they do provide some security or foundation from which the chief can act and succeed when dealing with tough issues such as community dissatisfaction, personnel issues, or police-officer-involved shootings or deaths. Most important, contracts can provide a written set of performance indicators and expectations.

The reasons for leaving a police chief position are sometimes positive. Many chiefs who had engaging and successful careers leave one post to move on to more lucrative and challenging positions. The results of this study suggest that the complexities involved in police leadership demands a strong, healthy, highly skilled, and committed individual. Public administrators must focus on the recruitment and selection, with a clear articulation of the responsibilities of police chief. Those who seek to be police chiefs also need to explore carefully their motivations, capabilities, and expectations.

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