

LAW ENFORCEMENT TATTOO POLICIES

RESEARCH IN THE UNITED STATES

Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) U.S. Department of Justice published, "Hiring for the 21st Century Law Enforcement Officer: Challenges, Opportunities, and Strategies for Success" in 2017 which reviewed COPS recommendations and best practices for recruiting and hiring based, in part, on the information gleaned from a forum comprised of professionals from across the United States. **Below are some of the relevant findings:**

- **Police Departments Need to Ease Tattoo Restrictions in Order to Attract More Applicants** - 29% of Americans have at least one tattoo per a 2016 Harris Poll and 69% of those have two or more. While only 13% of Baby Boomers, 10% of those age 70 or more, 36% of those age 46 to 50 have a tattoo, 47% of Millennials reportedly have a tattoo and 37% have more than one. This means that nearly half of police recruits have a tattoo.
- **Best Agency Responses to Shifts in Tattoos:**
 - **Content** – Ensure that tattoos are not obscene or offensive.
 - **Size** – Determine what size that is visible is acceptable.
 - **Location** – Determine whether any should be visible and on what parts of the body.
- **Examples of Agency Responses to Shifts in Tattoos:**
 - **Milwaukee Police Department** – Milwaukee uses a Performance Appearance Committee which reviews any tattoos which are questionably in conflict with their policy.
 - **Los Angeles Police Department** – Applicants are examined during the medical exam of the hiring process and any questionable tattoos are referred to the gang and narcotics units to check for any white supremacy, gang, or other offensive references.
 - **Lenexa Police Department** – Lenexa now allows tattoos on the arms so long as they are covered.
- **A Critical Agency Response to Shifts in Tattoos** - Determine whether new hires will be treated differently from more seasoned officers. If there is a difference it can lead to human resources and legal liability.
- **Freedom of Expression** – An increasing number of job seekers think of tattoos as a form of expression.
- **Valuable Community Feedback on Tattoos** – Newport News sought community input via social media and neighborhood watch and other community groups. They learned that their community overwhelmingly were not concerned with tattoos, but rather merely that officers had professional behavior. They changed their policy accordingly. The below quote is from the report.

"We went out and asked our community. We put it out on social media, and the response was overwhelmingly positive that, yes, as long as the police officers are treating us right, we don't care what their tattoos look like. We also took the question to neighborhood watches and the same thing occurred. Residents didn't care which officer responded, or what their tattoo looked like, as long as they were treated professionally."

– Michael Grinstead, Assistant Chief of Police, Newport News (Virginia)

Morison, Kevin P. 2017. *Hiring for the 21st Century Law Enforcement Officer: Challenges, Opportunities, and Strategies for Success*. Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services.

Please see COPS Report, attached, pages 51-61.

RESEARCH IN ENGLAND AND WALES

Police Federation of England and Wales conducted a survey from August 4 to 29, 2016 for which all law enforcement officers from all 43 police forces in England and Wales were invited to participate and 4,456 officers responded. **The survey revealed some insightful information:**

93% of those with visible tattoos reported that they had never had an issue with a member of the community, a supervisor, coworkers, or anyone in the Professional Standards Department.

- 48% of officers had a tattoo and 17% had a visible tattoo.
- 83% reported not being concerned that their tattoos would affect future employment prospects.
- Younger officers with a college education were twice as likely to have a tattoo as older officers with a college education.
- 93% had no regrets about their tattoos.
- 72% had never had an issue getting a law enforcement job due to their tattoo.
- 68% are not required to cover their tattoos at work.
- 96% reported that their tattoo had never caused an issue in their department.
- 93% of those with visible tattoos reported that they had never had an issue with a member of the community, a supervisor, coworkers, or anyone in the Professional Standards Department.

55% of officers without a tattoo were comfortable or very comfortable working with visibly tattooed coworkers. Officers between 18 and 34 years of age were twice as comfortable as those 45 or older.

Van Mechelen, D. 2016. *Final Report on Police Officers' Tattoos Survey 2016 25 October 2016*. Police Federation of England and Wales.

Please see Police Federation of England and Wales Report, attached.