



U.S. Customs and Border Protection
Office of Internal Affairs
Integrity Programs Division-Behavioral Research Branch



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Test vs. No-Test:
Pre-Employment Polygraph Exams and Subsequent Record with Internal Affairs

As part of the ongoing discussion regarding the need to screen 100% of the applicants for law enforcement positions, the Assistant Commissioner of Internal Affairs asked the Behavioral Research Branch (BRB) of the Integrity Programs Division (IPD) to qualify the extent of reported negative conduct of those CBP law enforcement officers (LEOs) who took the pre-employment polygraph examination. Practically speaking, it is expected that individuals who pass a pre-employment polygraph examination will be less likely to of record with Internal Affairs for negative conduct in the future. In order to provide context to the question posed, the BRB designed and conducted a comparative study of negative conduct between LEOs who took the polygraph and those who hadn't.

Method

A total of 1,293 applicants for the Border Patrol Agent (BPA) and Customs and Border Protection Officer (CBPO) positions took and passed pre-employment polygraph exams with No Significant Responses (NSR) between FY 2008 and FY 2010. Two hundred and three of these applicants (15%) went on to enter on duty as BPAs (194) or CBPOs (9) and attend the Training Academy (referred to as Test). A random sample of 203 CBP LEOs who did not take the pre-employment polygraph, stratified by occupation, was drawn from the Training Academy rosters for the same time period (referred to as No-Test).

The LEOs in the Test and No-Test groups were compared on the presence of negative conduct any time between their EOD date and FY 2010. Negative conduct was operationally defined using four measures:

- Misconduct* reported to the Joint Intake Center (JIC) and recorded in the IPD Misconduct Database
- Status as a Subject of an allegation or investigation in JICMS
- Formal Discipline recorded in Personnel Actions in the USDA database
- Informal Discipline recorded in Labor and Employee Relations (LER)

*Misconduct is defined as an incident in which a CBP employee is arrested, indicted, cited, or detained for a violation of law.

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Findings

- Twenty LEOs in the Test group and 41 in the No-Test group were determined to be of record with Internal Affairs for at least one instance of negative conduct.
- The negative conduct in question involved drug and alcohol misconduct; misplaced, stolen, and/or damaged government-issued property (excluding GOV); terminations based on misconduct; and traffic violations and accidents involving GOVs.
- A chi-square statistic was calculated to determine if there was a significant relationship between whether the applicant took the polygraph exam and subsequent negative conduct. The size of the chi-square statistic revealed a statistically significant relationship between the two variables. In other words, the difference in the proportion of negative conduct in each group cannot be explained by chance.
- Further analysis revealed that those who did not take the pre-employment polygraph were more than twice as likely to be of record for negative misconduct than those who did take the pre-employment polygraph.