

Increasing public safety through Emotional Intelligence

Prevention of crime and protection of civilians is a collaborative effort involving many people across many disciplines. Those working in law enforcement and public safety need physical and mental sharpness, as well as emotional intelligence (EI), to perform their work with their team members and in their community. Leveraging EI skills help law enforcement and public safety sector employees effectively manage their own emotions, relate to others, and address conflict with colleagues and community members in a productive, safe, and professional manner. Those with greater EI also benefit from improved wellness due to enhanced stress management skills and resilience.



In one study Ali (2021), examining the relationship between EI and job performance in police organizations, researchers found a significant correlation between EI levels and police job performance¹. In this case, job performance was measured through annual rating scales, where feedback was provided by the employee's immediate supervisor, a review of the immediate supervisor's evaluation completed by another supervisor working in the same department, and the final appraisal, which was approved by the director of the department. After their analysis of these results and after controlling for general mental abilities and personality traits, EI was found to explain additional incremental variance in predicting police job performance.

Through this study, researchers concluded that the link between EI and job performance shows that individuals with high levels of EI can be more successful than those with lower EI at completing cognitive tasks and interacting with others at work. Additionally, officers with high levels of EI (the ability to manage their own and others' emotions) can help build constructive communication practices with other people and agencies in their communities. This ability to meet their job demands, in turn, helps predict other aspects of police officer performance.



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Law enforcement benefits from enhanced emotional intelligence

Police officers are first on the scene of some of the most dangerous and demanding situations imaginable, providing immediate care and support. Police officers face a great deal of trauma on a day-to-day basis. Although these duties are essential to society, they can be strenuous and emotionally draining. Officers may feel hopeless and anxious due to constant exposure to devastation and life-threatening situations.

In a study by Kumarasamy (2016), examining the relationship between emotional intelligence and work-life balance among police officers, researchers concluded that higher levels of EI contributed to better work-life balance and more positive health outcomes². Police officers need emotional intelligence to achieve a work-life balance, and organizational support could strengthen this relationship. As an example, progressive police departments actively implement innovative strategies such as providing peer counselors, encouraging officers and couples to enter confidential counseling, and adding critical incident training to help minimize the risk of work stress among police officers. Several of these strategies offer police officers outlets for addressing emotional or work stressors by using their EI.



Results from another study by Ojedokun (2010) examined the effort-reward imbalance and attitude towards unethical work behavior among police personnel³. This study indicated that EI may play an important role in determining the occurrence of unethical work behavior. Individuals who perceive a greater imbalance between effort and reward (that is, considerable effort at work is not met with a commensurate reward) are more likely to engage in unethical workplace behaviors (such as absence from duty, breach of confidence, corrupt practice, discreditable conduct, disobedience to orders, insubordinate or oppressive conduct, malingering, neglect of duty, improper conduct or unlawful or unnecessary exercise of authority). However, EI moderates this relationship. People with high levels of EI don't exhibit these unethical behavioral tendencies and can cope with the perceived imbalance in other, non-disruptive ways. These results suggest that the inclusion of EI-related training modules in the training and development of police personnel may assist in creating more ethical workplaces.

The link between emotional intelligence and leadership in law enforcement

Romosiou, Brouzos, and Vassilopoulos (2018) conducted a study using the Emotional Quotient Inventory 2.0® (EQ-i 2.0®) to investigate the effect of EI training on law enforcement officers⁴. The experimental group completed an intensive, integrative psychoeducational training program on EI, including Empathy, Resilience, and Stress Management. Results indicated an improvement in Total EI and the five composite scores compared to the control group, and the positive changes remained significant three months after the intervention.

Turner (2005) looked at which EI competencies best differentiated 424 FBI National Academy graduates from 424 other law enforcement leaders with similar demographic backgrounds⁵. He found that the leaders who were selected for the FBI National Academy had higher EQ-i scores on the Social Responsibility, Problem Solving, Self-Actualization, and Interpersonal Relationships scales. Overall, these results debunk the myth that the characteristics that best define law enforcement leaders are their toughness and inflexibility.

Working in public safety is a challenging task. Employees like police officers and first responders are usually on the front line, dealing with violent situations, dangerous activities, and life-or-death scenarios. Most of their work involves dealing with strong emotions and stressful situations. The research cited in this paper shows a clear link between EI development and more effective and efficient public safety responses. Moreover, it illustrates the ability to create a more psychologically safe work environment for these personnel.

Learn more about how to bring emotional intelligence into your training or coaching programs. Get in touch with our Talent Development team today.



Keep the conversation going.
Get in touch for more information.

References

¹ Al Ali, O. E., Garner, I. & Magadley, W. (2011). An exploration of the relationship between emotional intelligence and job performance in police organizations. *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology*, 27(1), 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11896-011-9088-9>

² Kumarasamy, M. M., Pangil, F. & Isa, M. F. M. (2016). The effect of emotional intelligence on police officers' work-life balance. *International Journal of Police Science & Management*, 18(3), 184-194. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461355716647745>

³ Ojedokun, O. (2010). Effort-reward imbalance and attitude towards unethical work behavior among police personnel: Emotional intelligence as a moderator. *IFE Psychologia*, 18(1). <https://doi.org/10.4314/ifep.v18i1.51658>

⁴ Romosiou, V., Brouzos, A., & Vassilopoulos, S. P. (2018). An integrative group intervention for the enhancement of emotional intelligence, empathy, resilience, and stress management among police officers. *Police Practice and Research*, 1-19.

⁵ Turner, T. W. (2005). *Identifying emotional intelligence competencies differentiating FBI National Academy graduates from other law enforcement leaders* (Unpublished dissertation). Curry School of Education, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA.