Personal background and reasons for choosing a career in policing
An empirical study of police students in Taiwan

Ming-Yueh Tarng[a], Charng-Hon Hsieh[a], Tzu-Jeng Deng[a,b,*]

[a]*National Chiao-Tung University, Taiwan*
[b]*Central Police University, Taiwan*

Abstract

Policing has long been thought of as a job with high danger and pressure. Why and what type of people join the police force is becoming one of the more important issues in criminal justice research. This article examines career choice behavior of police students in Taiwan to help police departments develop recruitment strategies. Findings were obtained using survey research questionnaire with nineteen suggested reasons given to the freshmen of the Central Police University in Taiwan. The study found that most of the students are males from a lower- or middle-level socioeconomic family status. The major reasons that the students gave for selecting a policing career were for "good salary and fringe benefits" and "influence from parents." Some statistical differences exist between the reasons given by the male and female students, but less difference exists when the three levels of socioeconomic backgrounds are considered. In addition to the analysis of the responses to the questionnaire, a brief discussion of the above findings and the implications for police recruitment is presented. © 2001 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

Introduction

Police officers are the gatekeepers of the criminal justice system; enforcing the law and arresting offenders. Officers, in addition, are expected to prevent crime, protect life and property, maintain peace and public order, and provide a wide range of services to citizens twenty-four hours a day (Ehrlich et al., 1996, p. 59). Since policing plays such an important role in the criminal justice system of a country, it has long been thought of as a career of high danger and pressure. Police officers often are required to under-

take heavier work loads and suffer more occupational stress than people doing other work. Since policing is not an easy job, the questions of why and what kinds of people join the police force is becoming one of the important issues of police career choice behavior research. It is also important to study this issue to understand the perceived attractiveness of the job. The results may be helpful when police departments are recruiting new officers.

The method, which may reveal the attraction of police work and the answer to the question of why people join the force, is to analyze the reasons that people give when making the career selection. While this type of approach could easily display the truth behind police career decision, it does not offer enough support for the recruitment programs of the police departments. If police departments wish to make recruitment more effective, it is necessary to

* Corresponding author. 4F No. 33, Lane 412, Lung Jiang Road, Taipei, Taiwan. Tel.: +886-2-25077381; fax: +886-3-3281114.

E-mail addresses: tjdeng@sun4.cpu.edu.tw, u8431814@cc.nctu.edu.tw (T.-J. Deng).

clarify the effect of personal background on the choice; in other words, what kind of people seek careers in policing? A study of the reasons given for the choice could help police departments understand the motives of people joining the police force, and the survey of their social backgrounds may help police departments locate the people who are most willing to join the force. Surveying the reasons and backgrounds of people joining the force will not only provide good suggestions to police departments for recruitment, but it may also serve as a good references for other public services such as fire fighting or public safety control.

Therefore, the intent of this article is to investigate the personal backgrounds of people who make policing their career of choice and the reasons given for choosing this career. This article examines the relationship between the reasons and the backgrounds in order to discover what kinds of people and with what motives do these people join the force. Such an examination will not only have important implications on police career choice behavior research, but will also provide meaningful suggestions to police recruitment.

Literature review

The reasons given by police officers for joining the police force are diverse. A common statement of this issue is the desire to enforce the law and to help people (Cumming et al., 1965), or to do something worthwhile (Hageman, 1979, p. 207). Another observation is that policing is commonly viewed as an occupation that can provide the practitioner with ''adventure,'' which allows him/her to have a wider experience of life. These special factors seem to add to the attractiveness of the job and, in doing so, has led people to choose policing as their occupation (Milton, 1974). Beyond these considerations, the financial consideration of a high beginning salary and good job security was also expressed as an important factor for people in financial need (Meagher & Yentes, 1986, p. 321).

Due to the increasing number of policewomen, many studies have focused on the role of the female in policing. Originally, the integration of women into policing and the criminal justice system was not easy because of the perceived physical and gender dilemma (Schulz, 1993). Women initially entered policing only as specialists, doing work that was an extension of their domestic role (Ehrlich et al., 1996, p. 72). Although the integration of women into policing and the criminal justice system was not easy, the social activism of the civil rights and women's movements, as well as other social change

efforts, stimulated a variety of changes in the legal and criminal justice systems. These changes converged with changing economic conditions, which ultimately increased the demand for women workers in the justice occupations (Ehrlich et al., 1996, p. 7). As modern law enforcement became more community and human service-oriented, the deeply entrenched belief that superior physical strength is necessary for police work was discredited in numerous studies. This orientation is highly congruent with the policing style of female law enforcement officers, which stresses conflict resolution (Hatteberg, 1992). Thus, an increasing number of women have entered the police profession and have challenged the traditional male dominance of the occupation over the past two decades (Flavin & Bennett, 1997). Since policewomen are playing an increasingly important role, some researchers have chosen to focus on the motivations and reasons policewomen choose to join policing. Masters and Rasmussen (1983) noted that the prime interest stated by women on entering policing was to become good police officers in order to help people. They did not join to conform to many of the stereotypical views of females in policing. Powers (1983) indicated that women enter policing in search of a greater variety in their work assignments and for salary considerations. Women tend to join policing not for the perceived power or prestige associated with the occupation, but for social service, life experience, and financial needs.

As Johns and Barclay (1979) and Charles (1982, p. 195) observed, however, the fact that women serve in law enforcement does not prevent them from having difficulty in entering the profession. Thus, the frequent skepticism within police ranks regarding the ability of women to perform line police functions continues. Some studies have focused on the differentiation of attitudes or reasons for career choice between male and female officers. Interestingly, the reasons expressed by male and female officers for career selection do not differ markedly (Horne, 1975). Both male and female officers presented the desire to be part of a service occupation as a major reason for entering law enforcement and both expressed job security and salary as important factors in career selection (Ermer, 1978, p. 245). Therefore, according to the findings of the above studies, researchers can conclude that neither males nor females stress the importance of desire to be part of an authoritarian profession as a driving factor when selecting policing as a career. Previous studies by Lester (1983) used male and female police officers as the investigation respondents and found that the most important career selection reasons were: helping the public, job security, companionship with co-workers,

enforcing the law, and fighting crime. It is important to note that there were significant differences between male and female officers' reasons. Female officers expressed service as their major reason for choosing a police career and, power and status, unlike males, were less important reasons.

A study on the perceptions of male and female police officers entering law enforcement careers also pointed out some interesting results. First, the findings showed that both men and women expressed similar reasons for selecting a career in law enforcement with the desire to help other people and the desire for job security as the main reasons. Second, both male and female officers perceived women entering policing in the same light, but differences exist as to the reasons male officers enter policing as an occupation (Meagher & Yentes, 1986, p. 326).

Researchers can obtain from previous research some important conclusions. First, the major reasons given for career selection by police officers are still controversial. Some of the important reasons, however, are to serve people, job security, to fight crime, or to enforce the law. Second, there exists a differentiation between male and female officers' career selection reasons and perceptions.

While the findings mentioned above have established some answers, there are still a lot of questions. Most of the previous studies used sworn police officers as survey samples. It is necessary to ask if the reasons indicated in these studies were truly the original career selection reasons or the police officers' present perceptions after serving as police for an extended time. Also, by discussing only the differences of reasons and perceptions between male and female officers, the study neglects the importance of the individual background of each police officer. It is important not to overlook this since the personal background factor is an important variable, which might influence a career selection decision. As a result of these two problems, this study attempts to survey the career choice reasons of police students who have just been accepted by the police school, without any previous police work experience or academic training. It seems more reasonable to discuss only the students' reasons for wanting to enter the police school by asking the following questions:

1. What are the real reasons for career selection expressed by police students?
2. What is the background of the students hoping to join the police force of the Republic of China?
3. Do the expressed reasons for selecting policing as a career systematically vary according to the gender distinction or the family socioeconomic background of police students?

Based on the answers to these questions, this article will focus on the examination of the career selection reasons for police students of different backgrounds.

Methodology

To find the answers to the three research questions and to match the research intention, this study used a survey research format. First, the survey sample consisted of a population of respondents who were freshmen of the Central Police University in Taiwan. These freshmen had just graduated from high school and passed the entrance examination of the university on July 10, 1998, and did not have any previous academic training or police work experience. After entering the police university, they will follow a four-year police-related curriculum. When they graduate from the university, the students will be sworn in as police officers and be distributed to the local police system throughout the country to begin their police career. The police system of the Republic of China on Taiwan is divided into two divisions, the central and the local police authorities. The central police authority is called the National Police Administration and is in charge of all the police administrative affairs of the country with power to command or to supervise the local police authorities. The local police authorities include twenty-three municipal or county police departments that enforce the law under the Police Act. According to the law and the Police Act, the police authorities should execute such services as patrolling, traffic control, crime prevention, and investigation with the purpose of maintaining public order, protecting social security, preventing miscellaneous dangers, and promoting the welfare of the people. The students who graduate from the Central Police University will then become the basic law enforcers of the local police system to enforce law and to execute police service.

Second, a questionnaire was developed by using a five-point Likert scale that responded to nineteen possible reasons for the selection of policing as a career. The five levels of agreement were: strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, and strongly disagree. The nineteen statements were further divided into four major parts. These major divisions were "the influence of others" (1–5), "financial needs" (6–9), "job factors" (10–15), and "individual causes" (16–19). For each section of the survey instrument, the freshmen were asked to respond to the following statements.

I participated in the policing examination to join the force due to . . .

1. influence of parents
2. influence of other relatives

3. influence of classmates or close friends
4. influence of teachers
5. influence of siblings
6. need for a steady salary
7. early retirement and good pension
8. good salary and fringe benefits of the job
9. the security of the job
10. the excitement and adventurous character of police work
11. the chance to fight crime
12. working on your own with autonomy
13. the prestige and status of the occupation
14. enforcement of the law
15. the authority and power associated with the job
16. no other choice
17. the opportunity to help people
18. just try until seeing promotions
19. to avoid military service (male) or the desire to be a part of a male-dominated occupation (female).

The following statements were general inquiries into the personal characteristics and family backgrounds of the respondents. As the personal background is one of the important variables in this study, the whole individual and family socioeconomic background of the respondents had to be identified.

The socioeconomic background survey of the respondents was composed of three important parts: education level of family, average family income per month, and occupation of the respondents' parents. The education condition was divided into seven levels: illiteracy, elementary school, secondary school, senior high school, junior college, university, and graduate school. The average income per month (in US$) was broken down into five separate parts: under $625, $625–$1560, $1560–$2500, $2500–$3125, and above $3125. Occupations were divided into forty-two types according to the traditional ones in Taiwan, from the basic level to the top rank. When the respondent replied to the inquiries of family background, the respondent received a total score from 5 to 103 according to the total of the respondent's real answers. If the respondent got a score from 5 to 37, then the socioeconomic status is defined as the lower status; 38 to 70, middle socioeconomic status; and 71 to 103 as higher socioeconomic status. By defining the socioeconomic status as three categories, the study was able to examine the differentiation of career selection reasons with reference to the different classifications of family socioeconomic background.

In addition to the information about the family socioeconomic background, further individual background was listed for gender, age, marriage, and job experience. The individual background of the respon-

Table 1
Characteristics of the respondents

	N	%				
Sex						
Male	190	86.4				
Female	30	13.6				
Total	220	100.0				

Variable	Male		Female		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Marriage						
Yes	1	0.5	0	0	1	0.5
No	190	86.0	30	13.6	220	99.5
Total	191	86.5	30	13.6	221	100.0
Ages						
18–20	176	80.3	29	13.2	205	93.6
21–25	12	5.4	0	0.0	12	5.4
26–28	1	0.5	1	0.5	2	1.0
Total	189	86.3	30	13.7	219	100.0
Job experience						
No	108	49.1	16	7.3	124	56.4
Tried but not found	20	9.1	3	1.4	23	10.5
Yes	62	28.2	11	5.0	73	33.2
Total	190	86.4	30	13.6	220	100.0

Table 2
Family socioeconomic background of the respondents

Variable	Male		Female		Total		
	N	%	N	%	N	%	Cumm pct (%)
Education level of father							
1. Illiteracy							
2. Elementary school	49	22.3	4	1.8	53	24.1	24.1
3. Secondary school	30	13.6	5	2.3	35	15.9	40.0
4. Senior high school	56	2.3	11	5.0	67	30.5	70.5
5. Academy	28	12.7	5	2.3	33	15.0	85.5
6. University	24	10.9	4	1.8	28	12.7	98.2
7. Graduate school	3	1.4	1	0.4	4	1.8	100.0
Total	190	86.4	30	13.6	220	100.0	100.0
Education level of mother							
1. Illiteracy	9	4.1	2	0.9	11	5.0	5.0
2. Elementary school	67	30.6	7	3.2	74	33.8	38.8
3. Secondary school	29	13.2	5	2.3	34	15.5	54.3
4. Senior high school	61	27.9	13	5.9	74	33.8	88.1
5. Academy	13	5.9	2	0.9	15	6.9	95.0
6. University	10	4.6	1	0.5	11	5.0	100.0
7. Graduate school							
Total	189	86.3	30	13.7	219	100.0	100.0
Family income per month (US$)							
1. Under $625	11	5.0			11	5.0	5.0
2. $625–$1560	55	25.0	13	5.9	68	30.9	35.9
3. $1560–$2500	74	33.6	9	4.1	83	37.7	73.6
4. $2500–$3125	36	16.4	6	2.7	42	19.1	92.7
5. Above $3125	14	6.4	2	0.9	16	7.3	100.0
Total	190	86.4	30	13.6	220	100.0	100.0
Occupation of father							
1. Unemployed	5		2		7	3.2	3.2
2. Short-term worker	2		1		3	1.4	4.6
3. Hired laborer or servant	1				1	0.5	5.1
4. Manual worker, worker	14		1		15	6.8	11.9
5. Tenant-farmer or street vendor	8				8	3.7	15.6
6. Waiter							
7. Cleaner							
8. Mechanic or foreman	16		7		23	10.5	26.1
9. Sales clerk or salesman	2				2	0.9	27.0
10. Barber	1				1	0.5	27.5
11. Driver, tailor, or cook	16		3		19	8.7	36.2
12. Farmer or fisherman	23		3		26	11.9	48.1
13. Typist, plasterer, or carpenter	10		1		11	5.0	53.1
14. Postman or sergeant							
15. Teacher of elementary school	2				2	0.9	54.0
16. Technician or nurse	4				4	1.8	55.8
17. Cashier							
18. Owner of a little store	19				19	8.7	64.5
19. Wholesaler	4		1		5	2.3	66.8
20. Costume designer	2				2	0.9	67.7
21. Staff member	14		2		16	7.3	75.0
22. Secretary							
23. Little city or town magistrate	1				1	0.5	75.5
24. Lieutenant	10				10	4.6	80.1
25. High school teacher or principal	3				3	1.4	81.5
26. Certified accountant, engineer	1		1		2	0.9	682.4

Table 2 (*continued*)

Variable	Male		Female		Total		Cumm pct (%)
	N	%	N	%	N	%	
27. Lawyer, judge, public prosecutor							
28. Section chief	8				8	3.7	86.1
29. Capitol councilor							
30. Assistant manager or manager	8		2		10	4.6	90.7
31. Writer, painter, musician							
32. Actor or singer							
33. Major or high-ranking police officer	12		4		16	7.3	98.0
34. Owner of middle-sized enterprise							
35. Journalist	1				1	0.5	98.5
36. Doctor, scientist, grand justice	1				1	0.5	99.0
37. High-ranking public servant	2		1		3	1.4	100.0
38. Professor or dean							
39. Legislator or congressman							
40. National assemblyman							
41. General manager or board chief							
42. General, minister, or president							
Total	189		30		219	100.0	100.0
Occupation of mother							
1. Unemployed or housewife	86		17		103	47.0	47.0
2. Short-term worker	4				4	1.8	48.8
3. Hired laborer or servant	3				3	1.4	50.2
4. Manual worker, worker	19		1		20	9.1	59.3
5. Tenant-farmer or street vendor	9				9	4.1	63.4
6. Waitress	1				1	0.5	63.9
7. Cleaner							
8. Mechanic or foreman	7		2		9	4.1	68.0
9. Sales clerk or salesman	7				7	3.2	71.2
10. Barber	5		1		6	2.7	73.9
11. Driver, tailor, or cook	3		1		4	1.8	75.7
12. Farmer or fisherman	13		1		14	6.4	82.1
13. Typist, plasterer, or carpenter			4		4	1.8	83.9
14. Postman or sergeant							
15. Teacher of elementary school	2		1		3	1.4	85.3
16. Technician or nurse							
17. Cashier	4				4	1.8	87.1
18. Owner of a little store	5				5	2.3	89.4
19. Wholesaler							
20. Costume designer							
21. Staff member	8				8	3.7	93.1
22. Secretary							
23. Little city or town magistrate	2		1		3	1.4	94.5
24. Lieutenant							
25. High school teacher or principal	3				3	1.4	95.9
26. Certified accountant, engineer	1		4		5	2.3	98.2
27. Lawyer, judge, public prosecutor							
28. Section chief	1				1	0.5	98.7
29. Capitol councilor	1				1	0.5	99.2
30. Assistant manager or manager							
31. Writer, painter, musician							
32. Actress or singer							
33. Major or high-ranking police officer							
34. Owner of middle-sized enterprise							
35. Journalist							
36. Doctor, scientist, grand justice							
37. High-ranking public servant	2				2	0.9	100.0

Table 2 (*continued*)

Variable	Male		Female		Total		Cumm pct (%)
	N	%	N	%	N	%	
38. Professor or dean							
39. Legislator or congressman							
40. National assemblyman							
41. General manager or board chief							
42. General, minister, or president							
Total	189		30		219	100.0	100.0

dents was not scored; it was used to help reveal personal characteristics and used in the analysis of questions about gender as the basis for career selection.

Results

Background of the respondents

Before examining the inquiries pertaining to the reasons of career selection in policing, it is necessary to study the characteristics and family socioeconomic backgrounds of the freshmen responding to the questionnaire. The background factor of the study was divided into two sections, individual and family socioeconomic status.

As revealed in Table 1, there were 190 male and thirty female individual respondents in the study. A large proportion of the respondents were between eighteen and twenty years of age and unmarried. The job experience statistics also demonstrate that most of the respondents did not have any job experience before entering the police school, which means that, for most of the freshmen, policing would be their first job.

The family socioeconomic background category revealed some interesting information. (Table 2) First, for the education level of the respondents' parents, which was divided into seven types, the study found most of the respondents' parents were below the senior high school level (70.5 percent of the fathers' and 88.1 percent of the mothers' were at that education level). Second, the results indicated that the average family income (in US$) of the respondents

were: 92.7 percent earns less than $3,125; 30.9 percent earns $625–$1,560, and 37.7 percent earns $1,560–$2,500 per month. Third, in the category of occupation of respondents' parents, the study divided occupations into forty-two types from the lowest level of unemployment or retirement to the top level of the position of a general. Table 2 shows that 75 percent of the occupations of the respondents' fathers were below the position of a small city or town magistrate and 81.5 percent of the occupations of the respondents' mother were at the level below a farmer or fisherman.

Thus, by combining and scoring the values of education level, average family income, and occupation of the respondents' parents, the study derived a representative score of socioeconomic status from 5 to 103. The study then separated the socioeconomic background of the students into three divisions using the scores to identify three levels: the lower level (5–37), the middle level (38–70), and the higher level (71–103). Using this arrangement, this study found 69.3 percent of the respondents belonged to the lower level, 27.5 percent to the middle level, and 3.2 percent to the higher level. (Table 3) This means that 96.8 percent of the students belong to a family background of lower- or middle-level socioeconomic status.

Personal reasons for choosing a career in policing

There are two important issues to analyze here. The first analysis centers on the personal reasons of the freshmen for the selection of policing as an occupation. The second analysis focuses on the issue of whether the reasons systematically vary

Table 3
Family socioeconomic status of the respondents

	Male		Female		Total		Cum pct (%)
	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Lower	132	60.6	19	8.7	151	69.3	69.3
Middle	51	23.4	9	4.1	60	27.5	96.8
Higher	5	2.3	2	0.9	7	3.2	100.0
Total	188	86.2	30	13.8	218	100.0	100.0

Table 4
Score and rank of each career selection reason

	Mean	Mode	Median	Rank
1. Influence of parents	1.073	1.0	1.0	2
2. Influence of other relatives	0.227	1.0	1.0	10
3. Influence of classmates or friends	− 0.306	0.0	− 1.0	17
4. Influence of teachers	− 0.214	0.0	0.0	15
5. Influence of siblings	0.132	0.0	1.0	13
6. Need for a steady salary	0.659	1.0	1.0	6
7. Early retirement and good pension	0.35	1.0	1.0	9
8. Good salary and fringe benefits	1.086	1.0	1.0	1
9. Job security	0.914	1.0	1.0	3
10. Excitement and adventure	0.491	1.0	1.0	7
11. To fight crime	0.709	1.0	1.0	5
12. Work autonomy	− 0.218	0.0	− 1.0	16
13. Prestige and status	0.023	0.0	1.0	14
14. Enforce the law	0.42	1.0	1.0	8
15. Authority and power	0.168	0.0	1.0	12
16. No other choice	− 1.041	− 1.0	− 1.0	19
17. To help people	0.759	1.0	1.0	4
18. Just try until seeing promotions	− 0.5	− 1.0	− 1.0	18
19. Avoid military service or enter male-dominated occupation	0.191	0.5	1.0	11

according to the personal background, especially gender and family socioeconomic status, of the responding students. In order to examine this aspect of the analysis, the responses of the participants were weighted accordingly:

- Strongly Agree (+2)
- Agree (+1)
- Disagree (−1)
- Strongly Disagree (−2)

After weighting all responses, the study ranked the reasons and compared them by gender and family background. The reasons of the respondents in Table 4 were scored, weighted, averaged, and ranked. This table demonstrates that the three top reasons for

Table 5
Differentiation of career selection reasons between male and female respondents

	Male			Female		
	Weigh	Mean	Rank	Weigh	Mean	Rank
1. Influence of parents	205	1.079	2	31	1.033	1
2. Influence of other relatives	57	0.3	11	− 7	− 0.23	15
3. Influence of classmates	− 45	− 0.238	16	− 22	− 0.733	18
4. Influence of teacher	− 27	− 0.142	15	− 20	− 0.667	17
5. Influence of siblings	27	0.142	13	200	0.067	9
6. Need for a steady salary	145	0.763	4	0	0.007	11
7. Good pension	82	0.432	9	− 5	− 0.167	13
8. Good salary and fringe benefits	215	1.132	1	24	0.8	2
9. Job security	180	0.947	3	21	0.7	5
10. Excitement and adventure	91	0.479	7	17	0.567	6
11. To fight crime	133	0.7	6	23	0.767	3
12. Work autonomy	− 90	− 0.474	17	4	0.13	8
13. Prestige and status	10	0.053	14	− 5	0.172	14
14. Enforce the law	82	0.434	8	10	0.333	7
15. Authority and power	36	0.189	12	1	0.033	10
16. No other choice	− 192	− 1.011	19	− 37	− 1.233	19
17. To help people	145	0.763	4	22	0.733	4
18. Just try until seeing promotions	− 105	− 0.559	18	− 4	− 0.133	12
19. Avoid military service or enter male-dominated occupation	58	0.305	10	− 16	− 0.533	16

selecting policing as a career were "good salary and fringe benefits of the job" (mean = 1.086), "influence of parents" (mean = 1.073), and "job security" (mean = 0.914). The three least important reasons were "no other choice" (mean = − 1.041), "just try until seeing promotions" (mean = − 0.5), and "influence of classmates or close friends" (mean = − 0.306).

When considering the impact of gender in different career selection reasons, the study also found some differences. (Table 5) The three top reasons for male students were "good salary and fringe benefits of the job" (mean = 1.132), "influence of parents" (mean = 1.079), and "the security of the job" (mean = 0.947). The three top reasons of female students were "influence of parents" (mean = 1.033), "good salary and fringe benefits of the job" (mean = 0.8), and "the chance to fight crime" (mean = 0.767).

The three least important reasons of the male students were "no other choice" (mean = − 1.011), "just try until seeing promotions" (mean = − 0.559), and "working on your own with autonomy" (mean = − 0.474). The three least important reasons for female students were "no other choice" (mean = − 1.233), "influence of classmates or close friends" (mean = − 0.733), and "influence of teachers" (mean = − 0.667).

It is also apparent that statistically, significant differentiation exists between male and female stu-

dents' career selection reasons, by using the Student's t test method to examine the results. The items were "influence of other relatives" (P = .044 < .05, mean of male = 0.3, mean of female = − 0.23), "influence of classmates" (P = .03 < .05, mean of male = − 0.238, mean of female = − 0.733), "influence of teachers" (P = .011 < .05, mean of male = − 0.142, mean of female = − 0.667), "need for a steady salary" (P = .011 < .05, mean of male = 0.763, mean of female = 0.007), "early retirement and good pension" (P = .007 < .01, mean of male = 0.432, mean of female = − 0.167), and "good salary and fringe benefits of the job" (P = .003 < .05, mean of the male = 1.33, mean of the female = 0.8).

In addition to the gender distinction, the study examined differentiation between career selection reasons and the three divisions of socioeconomic background (Table 6).

First, there was very little differences for the three top reasons when comparing the respondent's reasons against socioeconomic background. For the lower socioeconomic background students, the three top reasons are "good salary and fringe benefits of the job" (mean = 1.17), "influence of the parents" (mean = 1.139), and "the security of the job" (mean = 1.02). For the middle socioeconomic background students, the three top reasons were "influence of parents" (mean = 0.95), "good salary and fringe benefits of the job" (mean = 0.933), and "the security of the job" (mean = 0.767). But for the

Table 6
Differentiation of career selection reasons among three socioeconomic status

	Lower			Middle			Higher		
	Weigh	Mean	Rank	Weigh	Mean	Rank	Weigh	Mean	Rank
1. Influence of parents	172	1.139	2	57	0.95	1	8	1.143	1
2. Relatives' influence	28	0.19	13	16	0.27	10	4	0.571	3
3. Friends' influence	− 36	− 0.238	17	− 24	− 0.41	17	− 6	− 0.857	15
4. Teachers' influence	− 31	− 0.205	16	− 17	− 0.283	16	2	0.286	5
5. Siblings' influence	36	0.238	11	− 3	− 0.05	12	− 3	− 0.429	14
6. Need steady salary	120	0.795	5	24	0.4	6	− 2	− 0.286	2
7. Good pension	60	0.397	9	18	0.3	9	− 1	− 0.143	8
8. Good salary	176	1.17	1	56	0.933	2	8	1.143	1
9. Job security	154	1.02	3	46	0.767	3	2	0.286	5
10. Adventure	89	0.589	7	21	0.35	7	− 1	− 0.143	8
11. To fight crime	114	0.755	6	44	0.733	4	− 1	− 0.143	8
12. Work autonomy	− 23	− 0.152	15	− 16	− 0.267	15	− 7	− 1.0	16
13. Prestige, status	28	0.187	13	− 14	− 0.241	14	− 7	− 1.0	16
14. Enforce the law	73	0.487	8	21	0.35	7	− 1	− 0.143	8
15. Authority and power	31	0.205	12	6	0.1	11	2	0.286	5
16. No other choice	− 160	− 1.06	19	− 61	− 1.017	19	− 9	− 1.286	9
17. To help people	129	0.854	4	37	0.617	5	3	0.429	4
18. Just try	− 61	− 0.409	18	− 41	− 0.683	18	− 8	− 1.143	18
19. Avoid military service or enter male-dominated occupation	50	0.331	10	− 7	− 0.117	13	− 2	− 0.286	12

higher socioeconomic background students, the three top reasons are ''influence of parents'' (mean = 1.143), ''good salary and fringe benefits of the job'' (mean = 1.143), and ''influence of other relatives'' (mean = 0.571).

Second, the three least important reasons when comparing different socioeconomic background were described as follows: for the lower socioeconomic background students, the three least important reasons are ''no other choice'' (mean = −1.06), ''just try until seeing promotions'' (mean = −0.409), and ''influence of classmates or close friends'' (mean = −0.238); for the middle socioeconomic background students, the three least important reasons were ''no other choice'' (mean = −1.017), ''just try until seeing promotions'' (mean = −0.683), and ''influence of classmates or close friends'' (mean = −0.41); and for the higher socioeconomic background students, the three least important reasons are ''no other choice'' (mean = −1.286), ''just try until seeing promotions'' (mean = −1.143), and ''working on your own with autonomy''(mean = −1.0).

Finally, when examining the statistical differentiation of the reasons given by the students of the three different socioeconomic backgrounds by using an ANOVA test, this study found only one item with statistically significant differentiation. The following reason was found to differ significantly: ''the prestige and status of the occupation'' ($p < .01$, mean of the lower socioeconomic background students = 0.187, mean of the middle socioeconomic background students = −0.241, mean of the higher socioeconomic background students = −1.0).

Discussion and implications

There are three central results from these findings: the characteristics of the respondents, the major reasons for career selection in policing, and the differentiation of personal backgrounds with respect to career selection reasons.

The questionnaire revealed that most of the respondents are male, unmarried, with the average age of 20.1 years, and with only some of the students possessing job experience before entering the police school. These characteristics are different from several previous studies. For example, Meagher and Yentes (1986, p. 320) used sworn police officers with an average of 34 and 9.3 years of police work experience as their survey samples. Consequently, these distinguishing features reveal much about the special nature of the survey samples. In addition to the findings on the respondents' characteristics, the results of the family socioeconomic background survey showed the respondents' families mostly belonged to the

lower or middle status. This result also reveals the true gap of social relative wealth between the respondents' family and that of Taiwan or other countries. When compared with other major countries, Taiwan possesses middle level of gross national product (in US$) of $13,130 which is lower than America's $30,276; England's $22,135; Japan's $33,370; Singapore's $25,754; and Hong Kong's $26,613. It is, however, higher than the Korea's $9623 and China's $724. The average income (in US$) of the Taiwanese was about $910 per month or $10,918 per year for one person in 1998. According to the survey presented in this article, more than 65 percent of the respondents' family incomes were higher than the average income of the country. It seems that the income of the respondents' families is not the lowest in this country or the worst in the world. This result is similar to the findings of Ozcan and Cagier (1994). They found that the future police elite in Turkey will come mostly from the middle- and lower-class families. This result also explains the conclusion of Arthur Niederhoffer who argues that most law officers are from the working class (Hageman, 1979, p. 206). Thus, lower- and middle-level families play an important role in police recruitment in Taiwan and in some other countries around the world.

The results also reveal two important implications for police recruitment. First, police departments need to pay more attention to the requirement of people of lower- or middle-level socioeconomic background when setting recruitment promotion strategies. Second, police departments need to examine the attractiveness of their organizations to see whether it is attractive enough for people of lower- or middle-level socioeconomic background. This should aid the efforts in attracting more outstanding people to join the force.

The results of the survey also showed that the top reason for choosing a career in policing is the reason of ''good salary and fringe benefits.'' This reason confirms earlier research by Lester (1983, p. 174) that found the financial factor to be an important reason for police officers choosing policing as their career. This also illustrates the tendency for recruits to join law enforcement agencies for materialistic or extrinsic concerns. This finding is different from earlier research done by Cumming et al. (1965, p. 276), Milton (1974), Ermer (1978, p. 245), Charles (1982, p. 205), and Meagher and Yentes (1986, p. 327). These authors concluded that the reasons police officers choose a career in policing is because they seek to help people or wish to join an adventurous force. In the present study, these two reasons of trying to help people and the excitement or adventure of the job rank 4th and 17th. It appears that serving others and experiencing the adventure of police work are not

the most important factors of career selection for the group in this study. Next to the reason of "good salary and fringe benefits" in importance, the reason of "influence of parents" was ranked as the second most important reason. This reason is seldom listed as a survey item by each of the earlier research, but is an important factor to consider. In Taiwan, the influence of the parents on people who choose a career in policing is great. Generally speaking, the expectation of the parents in Taiwan can be divided into three categories: financial concern, job security, and social reputation. Nevertheless, the question as to which expectation is most important still needs further investigation. When comparing previous research, the results reveal some very important cultural differences between Taiwan and other countries. First, the role of parents plays an important part when choosing a career in policing in Taiwan. Second, Chinese culture often emphasizes the importance of children obeying their parents even at the time of career choice. Thus, the respondents in Taiwan can be expected to respect the opinion of their parents since most of the respondents were only about twenty-years-old and without job experience when they had to make this decision. Accordingly, the opinion of their parents became more important. Finally, the survey results imply that police departments should be concerned with the financial incentive and parents' influence on the students when recruiting.

Examining the differentiation for personal background and career selection reasons yielded some important results. First, when examining the differentiation of career selection reasons between male and female police students, the results showed that there exist many statistically significant reasons. These reasons are "need for a steady salary," "early retirement and good pension," "good salary and fringe benefits," "influence of other relatives," "influence of classmates or close friends," and "influence of teachers." Male police freshmen chose "good salary and fringe benefits of the job" as their top reason, but female students chose "influence of parents" to be the most important reason when choosing a career in policing. This outcome is different from earlier research by Milton (1974), Ermer (1978, p. 245), Charles (1982, p. 205), and Meagher and Yentes (1986, p. 327), where men and women expressed the same reasons for joining the police force. Three grounds — the difference of survey samples, statistical methods, and career selection reasons — can interpret these results. The study that used sworn police officers as its survey samples listed only about fifteen items of reasons to survey and used frequency distribution to examine the response. The present study asked freshmen of the police university with neither academic training nor police work

experience to be the respondents, applied Student's *t* and ANOVA test to check each reason, and listed about percent items of reasons for the students to respond to. The difference of survey samples, statistical methods, and the real reasons may have contributed to the different outcomes. These results also imply that police departments in Taiwan need to adopt different strategies to recruit male and female students. In other words, police departments in Taiwan should place more emphasis on financial incentives for the male students and on the parents' opinions for the female students when recruiting or promoting careers in policing.

Furthermore, when examining the differences of career selection reasons by three categories of family socioeconomic status, this study found that only one item of the reasons revealed a statistically significant outcome. Except for the middle socioeconomic background students choosing the reason of "influence of parents" to be the top reason, the lower- and higher-level socioeconomic status background students both chose the reason of "good salary and fringe benefits to the job" to be the most important reason for choosing a career in policing. This result implies that police departments should emphasize the attractiveness of the good salary accompanying the job for those who belong to the lower- and higher-level socioeconomic status background, and the satisfaction of the parents' expectations for students of middle socioeconomic background when setting recruitment strategies or promotion.

Conclusion

This article has examined personal reasons that motivate people to enter policing, and the differing reasons as related to individual and family socioeconomic backgrounds through empirical survey of police school freshmen in Taiwan, ROC. After a survey and study interpretation, the results indicate that the salary or benefits and parents' influence are both important reasons for students when deciding to join the police force. There were some differences between male and female students in the reasons for joining the force. Unlike the gender distinction, however, the differences of the socioeconomic background did not cause major impact on the reasons. Such a finding counters the financial consideration; the parents' influence and the gender distinction are important factors when police students decide to join the force. Instead, it showed that these factors are important variables and implications for police recruitment. In other words, the police authorities should offer good salary and fringe benefits for police work, enhance the attractiveness of the promotion to the parents in order

to encourage their children to join the force, and to adopt different recruitment strategies for males and females to help attract people to join the force.

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