

# Environmental Influences on Sheriff Perceptions and Strategies

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**Abstract:** Scholars generally agree that law enforcement organizations are influenced by the environment. While most research on criminal justice organizations has focused on municipal law enforcement agencies, sheriff agencies are distinct from municipal police agencies for a variety of reasons. As such, sheriff agencies may be uniquely impacted by environmental pressures. In the current study, electronic surveys were sent to sheriffs in 9 states to assess their concern about juvenile trafficking, their perception of environmental groups' concern, and the agency's response to juvenile trafficking. Results suggested a complex relationship between environmental groups, respondent perceptions, and agency response. Most notably, sheriffs seemed to view themselves as most in sync with local groups, especially the community. Additionally, rural agencies did seem to be influenced differently by environmental groups than urban and suburban agencies. Future research should study rural agencies and also seek to more deeply understand the complex relationships between the environment and sheriffs.

**Keywords:** Institutional theory, sheriff, trafficking.

Police agencies play an important role in communities around the world, making understanding them critical. Many researchers have examined the impact of the environment on the behaviors and attitudes of police agencies (Brudney & Hebert 1987; Burruss & Giblin 2014; Burruss, Giblin, & Schafer 2010; Crank 1990; Crank & Langworthy 1992; Farris & Holman 2017; Giblin 2006; Lanier, Farrell, and Bezuidenhout 2014; Matusiak, King, & Maguire 2016; Morabito 2008; Willis & Mastrofski 2011; Zhao, Lovrich, & Robinson 2001). Understanding the influence of the environment on police agencies is important to understanding the behaviors and attitudes of police actors. Attitudes can influence which issues are identified by police agencies as problems (Lanier *et al.* 2014), subsequently impacting the innovation and adoption of police practices to address those issues. As such, the influence of the environment on police attitudes must be understood in order to better implement policies and practices to address both existing and emerging issues. The bulk of the research on local law enforcement agencies, including organizational research, has focused on municipal police agencies (Tomberlin 2018). However, as the nature and activities of sheriff agencies differ from those of municipal agencies, it is quite possible that the organizational environment exerts a different influence on sheriff agencies. The current study aims to examine the influence of the environment on sheriff agencies, using the issue of juvenile trafficking as an example.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In most states, sheriffs act as the chief county law enforcement officer as per state constitution, giving

them a unique hybrid local/state status (Tomberlin 2018). Indeed, Farris and Holman (2017) argued that as elected officials with a great deal of bureaucratic and policy influence, sheriffs fill unique positions in the law enforcement community. Sheriffs must enforce federal and state laws while still maintaining legitimacy with their local constituents (Farris & Holman 2017). Farris and Holman conclude that 'the county sheriff is a fruitful arena for investigating important questions of representation, local policy implementation, and electoral responsiveness' (2017:152). While sheriff agencies play a critical role in law enforcement, most empirical research on local law enforcement either focuses on municipal police agencies (Tomberlin 2018) or combines municipal and sheriff agencies into one group (see Burruss *et al.* 2010). Overlooking sheriff agencies or applying municipal research to them represents a serious deficiency in the literature.

In the same vein, a number of scholars have identified the elected status of sheriffs as an important differentiator between them and municipal police chiefs, who are typically appointed (Brudney & Hebert 1987; Farris & Holman 2017; King 2014; Matusiak *et al.* 2016; Thompson, Price, Khubchandani, & Dowling 2011; Tomberlin 2018). Being elected may cause sheriffs to be more responsive to the local community (Brudney & Hebert 1987; Farris & Holman 2017; King, 2014; Matusiak *et al.*, 2016) and as a result the agency may behave differently from municipal agencies. Sheriffs are also responsible for a wider range of duties than are police chiefs (Tomberlin 2018), are more likely to serve rural, conservative areas (Thomson *et al.* 2011), have more autonomy than chiefs (Farris & Holman, 2017), and typically provide a different style of policing than municipal agencies (King, 2014).

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In fact, those studies that have empirically compared sheriff agencies and municipal agencies concluded that these groups think and behave differently. For example, Thompson *et al.* (2011) compared sheriff and chief views of firearm control policies. They found that sheriffs' views differed markedly from those of chiefs, with chiefs being overwhelmingly in favor of the policies and sheriffs being overwhelmingly against them. In addition, Crank (1990) studied factors influencing police style in urban and rural departments. He concluded that organizational and environmental variables 'varied, at times dramatically, between urban and rural communities' in their influence on policing style (1990:185). Variable relationships differed both in magnitude and in direction between urban and rural agencies. Therefore, Crank argued that research on urban departments would be misleading if applied to rural departments. As sheriff agencies are more likely to be rural than municipal agencies, this again suggests sheriff and municipal agencies would respond to organizational and environmental influences differently. Through the lens of institutional theory, the current study will examine how environmental pressures relate to sheriff views of and responses to the trafficking of juveniles.

### Theoretical Framework

Institutional theory (IT) is a framework within the open systems perspective which emerged after World War II (Scott & Davis, 2007). Open systems frameworks not only acknowledge the environment's impact on organizations, but considers the environment an essential factor in understanding the behavior of organizations. A number of researchers have examined the impact of the environment on police organization using these theories (Brudney & Hebert 1987; Burruss & Giblin 2014; Burruss *et al.* 2010; Crank 1990; Crank & Langworthy 1992; Farris & Holman 2017; Giblin 2006; Matusiak *et al.* 2016; Morabito 2008; Willis & Mastrofski 2011; Zhao *et al.* 2001).

IT centers on issues of legitimacy and acceptance (Hessels & Terjensen 2010; Oliver 1997) and has been used to explain police organizational structures, practices, and behavior (Brudney & Hebert 1987; Matusiak *et al.* 2016). According to IT, rather than being a rational response to external conditions or events, the behavior of organizations reflects environmental expectations about what behavior is appropriate (Burruss *et al.* 2010; Matusiak *et al.* 2016), regardless of whether the 'appropriate' behavior is

efficient or effective. This is because organizations have the need to appear legitimate to important actors in the environment (Roberts & Roberts 2009) and, as a result, will conform to the expectations of these actors, or 'sovereigns.' Sovereigns may include elected officials, the community, special interest groups, accreditation bodies, and the media (Matusiak *et al.* 2016). Different sovereigns may exert different amounts of influence on agencies (Brudney & Hebert 1987). Moreover, different types of agencies may have variable responses to the same sovereign (Brudney & Hebert 1987), further underscoring the need to study sheriff agencies separate from municipal law enforcement.

Support from sovereigns is critical for the survival of the organization (Rourke 1976), thus, organizations will adopt structures and innovations that are widely supported (Burruss & Giblin 2014; Giblin 2006). For example, using case studies of neighborhoods in New York, Vitale (2005) argued that changes in police practice were driven by a desire to regain lost legitimacy with the community. Furthermore, Katz (2001) found that environmental pressures about gang activity led to police creating a gang unit, arguing this was largely for the purpose of maintaining legitimacy with the community. Similarly, in studying why police agencies were disbanded, King (2014) found behaving in a manner contrary to the expectations of sovereigns was a major reason that some police agencies in the sample were eventually dissolved. In the current example, if sovereigns are concerned about JT, sheriff agencies will feel pressure to take action against the issue in order to maintain legitimacy.

Maintaining legitimacy, however, is problematic in that it may involve satisfying multiple, competing sovereigns; in addition, agencies also wish to maintain control over their operations. One way to satisfy multiple sovereigns while maintaining organizational autonomy is to 'loosen dependencies' or 'decouple' the elements of the organization (Matusiak *et al.* 2016; Pfeffer & Salancik 1978). Decoupling involves the creation of subunits to deal with homogeneous subsets of the population. For example, a sheriff agency might create a trafficking unit or designate a particular officer to interact with community members (sovereigns) who are concerned about trafficking; these sovereigns could communicate with that unit/officer, leaving the rest of the sheriff agency free to deal with the more central tasks of the organization. Thus, the agency appears to be responsive without having to change the technical core of the organization (Matusiak *et al.* 2016). Such

'ceremonial' or 'symbolic' adoptions in law enforcement agencies have been observed by a number of scholars (Burruss & Giblin 2014; Gill, Weisburd, Telep, Vittner, & Bennett 2014; Hancock 2016; Maguire 1997; Matusiak *et al.* 2016; Schulhofer, Tyler, & Huq 2011; Vasquez 2012; Zhao *et al.* 2001).

While all members of an organization interpret the environment and thus can determine the pressures placed on an organization (Brudney & Hebert 1987), the literature has identified the heads of law enforcement agencies as important points through which the environment impacts the organization (Burruss & Giblin 2010; Brudney & Hebert 1987; Matusiak *et al.* 2016). In IT, this individual is referred to as a 'boundary spanner,' spanning the line between the organization and the environment (Hessels & Terjesen 2010). The qualities of the boundary spanner make them an excellent subject through which to study the influence of the environment on organizations. These individuals are not only responsible for processing environmental information but also ultimately for the creation and implementation of agency structures, policies, and strategies (Brudney & Hebert 1987). This is certainly true of sheriffs, who are fairly autonomous (Farris & Holman 2017) and have great power in how to adapt the sheriff agency.

## Environment

While Wilson (1968), in his seminal work on the topic, posited that local politics influences the behavior of local police agencies, the empirical research on the impact of politics on law enforcement policy has been mixed. This disparity may be due in part to different samples—state versus municipal versus sheriff, different size agencies, different geographic locations, etc.<sup>1</sup> Another reason for the varying impact of politics is its complex nature. The large number of competing political groups, such as citizens, local elected officials, and special interest groups, could potentially represent different environmental influences. It has been noted that differing environmental variables should impact various agencies in different ways (Brudney & Hebert 1987; Crank 1990). Prior research would also suggest that local sovereigns would be more influential than would national sovereigns. Matusiak *et al.* (2016), for example, found a number of local groups to influence police chief priorities while federal and state law

enforcement and national media to be largely unimportant.

As stated earlier, sheriffs are unique in their position as elected law enforcement officials which may in turn make them more responsive to the citizenry than to the government. In fact, Lanier *et al.* (2014) posited that political and community pressures may influence on which laws sheriffs focus. They studied sheriffs in Florida with regard to their views of human trafficking and their views of environmental concerns about human trafficking. Lanier *et al.* found that sheriffs believed human trafficking to be of equal or greater concern to outside groups than to the sheriff agency itself. As stated above, agency concern and perceived political concern were significantly different; this was also true for agency concern and public health concern. However, the perceived concern of the community and of the media were not statistically significantly different from sheriffs' perceptions of the agencies' concern. (Lanier *et al.* 2014). This suggests that sheriffs viewed themselves as having similar concerns as their community, supporting the idea that they are more influenced by the citizenry (or perceive themselves to be) and that local sovereigns may have greater impact than national.

## Juvenile Trafficking

Firearm, drug, and human trafficking are the three largest illegal markets on the planet (International Association of Chiefs of Police n.d.). Although estimates of the number of juveniles trafficked vary widely, there are consistent findings that thousands of young people are trafficked annually in the United States (Fong & Cardoso 2010; Kotrla 2010; Spriggs 2011). In addition, there is a growing recognition that, unlike adults, juveniles engaged in sex work are victims of trafficking simply because they are legally unable to give consent (Kotrla 2010). Sheriffs who view juvenile sex workers as trafficking victims rather than delinquents engaged in sex work are clearly more likely to categorize cases of juvenile sex workers as *de facto* trafficking, subsequently causing them to see trafficking as a more severe problem in need of response.

There are a number of organizational ways sheriff agencies can respond to a perceived problem with JT (whether that perception is their own or that of sovereigns) in order to maintain legitimacy and acceptance with sovereigns. For example, one of the strongest impediments to the trafficking response is the misidentification of victims (Smith, Vardaman, & Snow

<sup>1</sup>See Brudney and Hebert 1987; Burruss and Giblin 2014; Morabito 2008; Lanier, Farrell, and Bezuidenhout 2014.

2009) and it has been noted that lack of training is a major barrier to identification of victims (Finklea, Fernandes-Alcantara, & Siskin 2015). As such, possible responses could be the utilization of a formal screening policy to help identify juvenile victims of trafficking as well as implementing deputy training in this area. Another response, as indicated above, is to create a special unit or designating an officer just for investigation of JT.

The current study will look at whether sheriff perceptions of sovereign's concern are related to their perceptions of agency concern. It is hypothesized that state governments will be the least related while local groups will be most strongly related. In addition, this study will look at a potential relationship between perceived concern of sovereigns and agency response, specifically with regard to training, special units, and screening policies. Due to decoupling, this relationship will be stronger for units/officers if the community and local government are more concerned.

## METHOD

### Procedure

Comparable to Swaner, Labriola, Rempel, Walker, and Spadafore (2016), states were chosen using the 2015 (most recent available) Uniform Crime Report (UCR) and the National Human Trafficking Hotline (NHTH) reports. These sources represent two different measures of trafficking, as the UCR is official reports and the NHTH is not. The UCR is compiled by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and contains crimes reported to police. While the UCR includes trafficking, not all states report trafficking to the UCR. Conversely, the NHTH includes information from all states; however, while most of the contacts (2/3) are to report trafficking, some of them are for things like information, technical assistance, or referrals. Even though not all of these calls represent unique cases, they do represent a greater awareness of trafficking and perhaps a greater problem. The contacts included in the NHTH trafficking reports are verified as having valid indicators of trafficking (NHTH 2017).

For the sample, eight states were selected based upon the information from these two sources. Because actual trafficking cases would represent a reality that might influence sheriff and sovereigns' attitudes and, subsequently, sheriff responses to trafficking, the four states with the most and the four states with the fewest reports (but at least 2) were selected. Florida was

among the highest, but due to recent work by Lanier *et al.* (2014), it was excluded so as to get a more unique sample. Alaska and Hawaii were among the lowest reporting but were excluded, as Alaska does not have sheriffs and Hawaii only has one. Finally, due to activism occurring in Kentucky with regard to human trafficking, it was also included. The states included were: Arkansas, California, Kentucky, Minnesota, Nevada, Ohio, Oklahoma, Texas, and Wisconsin.

Email addresses were collected for sheriffs in these states; unfortunately, the researcher could not obtain addresses for many of them; ultimately, emails for 710 (84%) of the sheriffs were obtained and found to be deliverable. A cover letter was sent in the summer of 2018 to confirm the email addresses and invite subjects to participate in a 10-15 minute survey. About a week after the initial email, the actual survey link was emailed; a week later a reminder was emailed to the sample. The survey instructions indicated that the sheriff should be the individual to take the survey, or somebody designated by the sheriff. It was assumed that the sheriff would send the survey to an employee who had the appropriate knowledge, as noted by prior research (Brudney & Hebert 1987).

The survey was open for 15 days; of the 710 survey links distributed, 81 surveys were completed (11.4%). While this is a low response rate, email surveys typically have lower response rates than mail surveys (Kaplowitz, Hadlock, & Levine 2004). In addition, Farris and Holman (2017:148) note that sheriffs can be categorized as 'political elites' and that low response rates are typical of this group. Maestas, Neeley, and Richardson (2003) also identify low response rates as a dilemma for studying political elites. Finally, in comparing mail and internet surveys of state legislators (also political elites), Fisher and Herrick (2013) found that while mail surveys did produce a higher response rate than internet surveys, they did not necessarily create a more representative sample (women were more likely to respond to internet surveys), and that the substance of the responses between the two groups had minimal differences. There also was no apparent relationship between trafficking reports and response rate.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>ANOVA was used to determine if state (excluding Oklahoma, which had only one case) influenced sheriff JT perception. The results of this test indicated no significant differences, despite the different number of trafficking reports.

## Variables

### **Perception of Trafficking Problem**

The survey included two statements saying JT is a serious problem in their jurisdiction and JT had become worse in their jurisdiction in the past 10 years; there was also a statement saying juvenile sex workers should be treated as victims. Respondents were asked to rate the statements using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Respondents were also asked to rate their agency's concern about JT from 1 (low) to 5 (high). Furthermore, respondents were asked to select of which services their jurisdiction needed more to specifically address juvenile victims of trafficking. These services were tailored counseling, educational, housing, relocation, reintegration, and medical. There was also options for current services being adequate or unneeded. If respondents believe current services are not adequate, it would suggest the perception of a more severe problem.

To test whether these questions represented the same underlying dimensions, principle component analysis (PCA)<sup>3</sup> was performed. Reported eigenvalues indicated two factors to be extracted, with 'sex workers as victims' being its own factor. The other four variables had significant<sup>4</sup> loadings on the other factor. In addition, Cronbach's alpha for the other four items was 0.761; analysis also indicated that removing the 'services' variable would improve the Cronbach's alpha to 0.803, indicating a measure with strong internal consistency. Given the conceptual difference, the lower factor loading, and the Cronbach's alpha, the victim and services questions were removed. The final composite perception was created using the median of the 3 Likert scale questions about JT severity and concern.

### **Perceptions of Environmental Concern**

Respondents were asked about their perception of various groups' concerns about JT. For example, they ranked the statement 'juvenile trafficking in my jurisdiction is a community concern.' Respondents ranked the perceived level of concern from 1 (low) to 5 (high). Similar to the sheriff study in Florida by Lanier et

al. (2014), these groups were the community, local lawmakers, local advocacy groups, local social service agencies, state legislators/government, public health, and the media.

### **Agency Responses to JT**

Respondents were asked whether their agency had a formal screening policy in place to identify juvenile victims of sex trafficking and one to identify juvenile victims of labor trafficking. They were also asked if they had a JT subunit (unit, officer, or officers designated for trafficking). Finally, they were asked what proportion of their officers had received training in JT.

### **Personal and Agency Characteristics**

Respondents were asked their position within the agency, their age, gender, and race. They were also asked how many years of experience they had in law enforcement and the highest level of education they had completed. Because smaller agencies would have fewer officers to create a subunit, respondents were asked the number of full-time employees in the agency. As urban areas are more at risk for trafficking, urbanicity was included (urban, rural, suburban) and also local JT reports in the past 10 years.

### **Analyses**

The data were analyzed at the bivariate level using chi-square tests, correlations, ANOVA, and t-tests. Analyses indicated that composite perception of the severity of trafficking had a skewness of 0.501 and a kurtosis of 0.298; based on even the most conservative standards (see Curran, West, & Finch 1996; Kline 2005), these values indicate no serious violations of normalcy. Examination of the histogram confirmed that composite perception was approximately normally distributed. Moreover, as the sheriffs in the sample represent fairly autonomous agencies operating in different counties and states, it can be assumed that the observations are independent of one another. Tolerance and VIF values indicated no issues with multicollinearity among the environmental concern variables.<sup>5</sup>

To test the relationships between perceived agency concern and perceived sovereign concern, ANOVA was used. Due to the debate (see Agresti & Finlay 1997) surrounding whether Likert scale variables

<sup>3</sup>Nunnally (1978) suggests a sample size of 10 cases per component is sufficient for a PCA-for this factor, with five components, the sample size should be sufficient. In addition, the correlation matrix showed a number of correlations above  $r=0.3$ . Finally, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure (0.698) was above 0.6 and the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant ( $p=0.001$ ). As such, by Pallant's (2007) criteria, PCA was supported.

<sup>4</sup>Based on Thurstone (1947) criteria of loadings larger than absolute value 0.3.

<sup>5</sup>Based upon standards from Pallant (2007) and tolerance ranging from 0.222 to 0.446 and VIF ranging from 2.243 and 4.661.

**Table 1: Descriptives of Sample**

	n	%		n	%
Position			Gender		
Sheriff	46	56.8	Male	71	87.7
Chief Deputy	9	11.1	Reported JT/10 years		
Other	24	29.6	None	66	81.5
Race/Ethnicity			1-3	4	4.9
African American	4	4.9	4-9	7	8.7
Caucasian	69	85.2	10 or more	4	4.9
Other	3	3.7	FT employees		
Age			1-25	18	22.2
25-35	1	1.2	26-50	27	33.3
36-45	16	19.8	51-100	14	17.3
Over 45	60	74.1	Over 100	22	27.2
Education			% officers trained		
High school	2	2.5	None	6	7.4
Some college/vocational	20	24.7	Under 10	24	29.6
Associate's	22	27.2	10-25	12	14.8
Bachelor's	29	35.8	26-50	8	9.9
Master's	5	6.2	51-75	5	6.2
Years experience			76-100	17	21
6-10	1	1.2	Unit/Officers		
11-20	13	16	None	56	69.1
More than 20 years	64	79	A unit	8	9.9
Urbanicity			Officer(s)	17	20.9
Rural	65	80.2	Sex screening policy	30	37
Suburban/urban	16	19.7	Labor screening policy	21	25.9

\*The ns for the respondent characteristics do not add up to 81 as some respondents chose not to answer those questions. In addition, 9 respondents said they "don't know" the percent of officers that were trained. However, the column percentages still reflect the full sample of 81.

**Table 2: Juvenile Trafficking Perceptions**

Juvenile trafficking in my jurisdiction is...	1. Low		2		3. Neutral		4		5. High		x̄
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	
perceived as a problem by my agency.	26	32.5	8	10	20	25	21	26.3	5	6.25	2.64
a community concern.	20	25	10	12.5	16	20	29	36.3	5	6.25	2.86
a concern of local lawmakers.	13	16.3	8	10	21	26.3	31	38.8	7	8.75	3.14
a concern of state government.	2	2.5	9	11.3	18	22.5	38	47.5	12	15	3.59
a concern of local advocacy groups.	6	7.5	12	15	14	17.5	35	43.8	13	16.3	3.46
a concern of local social service agencies.	6	7.5	11	13.8	18	22.5	34	42.5	11	13.8	3.41
a public health concern.	7	8.75	8	10	21	26.3	34	42.5	10	12.5	3.4
a media concern.	6	7.5	6	7.5	29	36.3	32	40	7	8.75	3.35
	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>		<b>Disagree</b>		<b>Neutral</b>		<b>Agree</b>		<b>Strongly Agree</b>		x̄
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	
JT is a serious problem in my jurisdiction	9	11.1	34	42	19	23.5	15	18.5	3	3.7	2.61
JT has become worse in my jurisdiction in the past 10 years	6	7.4	30	37	25	30.9	17	21	2	2.5	2.74
	n	Min	Max	x̄	SD	Skew.	Kur.				
Composite Perception	80	1	5	2.54	0.89	.5	.3				

should be treated as categorical or continuous, correlation analyses were also conducted. Finally, a series of ANOVAs, t tests and logistic regression were used to examine the impact of the environment on agency response to trafficking.

## RESULTS

### Descriptive Analyses

Table 1 shows the characteristics of the sample. Most respondents were the actual sheriff. It can also be noted that, demographically, the sample was fairly homogenous, with most respondents being male, Caucasian, over 45, and with more than 20 years of experience in law enforcement. These demographics are consistent with previous research on sheriffs (Farris & Holman 2017). In terms of education, however, the respondents were more diverse.

The sample statistics indicated that about 65% of agencies had 50 or fewer full-time sworn employees. While Burch (2016) has indicated that about 74% of sheriff agencies were this size in 2013, she also found that the percent of sheriff agencies of 24 or fewer had dropped 10% between 2007 and 2013. Moreover, the percent of agencies of 25 or more had grown in the same period (especially those with over 500 full-time sworn). These trends suggest that the current sample may be fairly close to the current sheriff population.

Most agencies did not have reported cases of JT, which is not surprising given that the vast majority of agencies were rural, where trafficking is less likely. About 7% of agencies had no trained officers while another 54% had half or fewer trained, indicating most officers were not trained in juvenile trafficking. In addition, while screening procedures for sex trafficking were more common than those for labor, the vast majority of agencies did not have screening policies at all, and most did not have a subunit.

Table 2 shows the breakdown of respondents' rankings of institutional concern regarding juvenile trafficking, concern to their own agency, perceptions of the severity of trafficking, and composite perception. Similar to the findings of Lanier *et al.* (2014) in Florida, respondents ranked their own agencies as having the lowest levels of concern over the issue. Their ranking of agency concern most closely matched that of community concern. In addition, they ranked state legislators and government as having the highest concern about juvenile trafficking. This is also similar to Lanier *et al.*, who found that sheriffs in Florida ranked

human trafficking highest as a 'political' concern. In terms of perceptions of severity, sheriffs tended toward neutrality as reflected in composite perception, which averaged 2.54 out of 5.

### Multivariate Analyses

When testing whether urbanicity influenced perception, results of the ANOVA indicated that, while there was no difference between urban and suburban sheriffs, rural sheriffs (80% of the sample) differed significantly [ $F(2, 77) = 6.259, p = 0.003$ ] from both of the other groups. Post hoc analysis<sup>6</sup> indicated rural sheriffs ( $M = 2.38, SD = 0.85$ ) had a significantly lower mean scores for composite perception than either urban ( $M = 3.33, SD = 1.03$ ) or suburban sheriffs ( $M = 3.10, SD = 0.57$ ). Not only is this consistent with JT being more common in urban areas, but it underscores the need for more study of rural agencies.

Because of these results and the theory that rural agencies would respond to the environment differently, rural sheriffs were analyzed separately from the urban and suburban with regard to environmental influence. Because there were not enough urban and suburban sheriffs to analyze separately, a second analysis was conducted on the entire sample to see how inclusion of the non-rural sheriffs impacted the results. Table 3 shows the results of the ANOVA and correlation analyses on rural sheriffs' and all sheriffs' composite perceptions and their perception of environmental concern.

As shown, ANOVAs indicated that composite perception was related to the perceived concern of all the environmental groups except for state lawmakers and the media; this was true for both the rural sheriffs and the full sample of rural, urban, and suburban sheriffs. The relationship was also a direct one for all the environmental groups, as one increased, so did the other. For the full sample, the p-value for the analysis with state lawmakers approaches significance at the  $p < 0.05$  level, suggesting that the composite perception of urban/suburban sheriffs is more closely related to state lawmakers than that of the rural sheriffs. This relationship is further supported by looking at the correlation analyses, shown in the final two columns of Table 3. All the environmental groups were significantly correlated with composite perception with both groups ( $p < 0.05$ ). The correlation coefficient for state

<sup>6</sup>Levene's test indicated homogeneity of variances, so Tukey HSD was used.

**Table 3: Results of ANOVA and Correlation Analyses of Composite Perception and Environmental Concern**

Rural Sheriffs	ANOVA Statistic	p value	Pearson Coef.	p value
Community Concern	F(4,59)=19.27	.001	.707	.001
Local Lawmaker Concern	BF(4,19)=4.86*	.007	.52	.001
State Lawmaker Concern	BF(4,26.4)=1.48*	.236	.267	.033
Local Advocacy Groups Concern	BF(4,27.6)=4.58*	.006	.471	.001
Local Social Services Concern	F(3,65)=5.67**	.002	.472	.001
Public Health Concern	F(3,68)=2.98**	.038	.424	.001
Media Concern	F(3,70)=2.44**	.072	.32	.01
All Sheriffs				
Community Concern	F(4,75)=16.615	.001	.66	.001
Local Lawmaker Concern	F(4,75)=7.211	.001	.505	.001
State Lawmaker Concern	F(4,75)=2.228	.074	.31	.005
Local Advocacy Groups Concern	BF(4,37.3)=6.97*	.001	.496	.001
Local Social Services Concern	F(3,65)=5.67**	.002	.501	.001
Public Health Concern	F(3,68)=2.29**	.038	.384	.001
Media Concern	F(4,75)=2.003	.103	.283	.011

\*Homogeneity of variance was violated, so the Brown-Forsythe test was used.

\*\*As it had 0 variance, ANOVA was conducted without the "moderately low" group.

lawmakers was larger for all sheriffs than it was for rural sheriffs. In addition, the correlation coefficient for community, public health, and media concern is noticeably lower for the full sample than for the rural sheriffs, suggesting a weaker relationship when the urban/suburban sheriffs are included. These results suggest that the environment influences rural sheriffs in a unique way.

In examining the bivariate relationships between trafficking concern and response to trafficking (subunits, sex and labor screening policies, officer training), results indicated very few statistically significant relationships. Table 4 shows the *significant* results of these analyses. No significant relationships were found between perceived environmental concern and the proportion of officers that had been trained.

In terms of screening policy, perceived concern of local lawmakers was significantly related to whether agencies had a sex screening policy. Agencies with sex screening policies had respondents who viewed local lawmakers as being more concerned with juvenile trafficking. It should also be noted that, where local lawmakers were concerned, the mean of concern was below neutral for those agencies without policies and above neutral for those with policies, suggesting a more substantive difference.

The middle section of Table 4 shows the significant ANOVA results for the relationship between perceived environmental concern and subunits (no unit, a unit, or an officer/officers designated for trafficking cases). For both community concern and media concern, higher perceived environmental concern was related to a greater likelihood of having an officer or officers designated to investigate trafficking than for having no special units. For public health concern, the significant difference was between no special unit and having a unit for trafficking. As with sex screening policy, the community and public health concern group means were on the opposite sides of neutral concern.

Two more sets of analyses were conducted to account for some control variables and the sample size. First, it is natural that agencies that have experienced trafficking cases in the recent past would be more likely to have a formal response to trafficking. Due to the sample size, this was analyzed by splitting the agencies into those that had reported juvenile trafficking cases in the past 10 years (15 agencies) and those that had not (66 agencies). For those with no cases, results of ANOVA and t-tests indicated no significant relationships between perceived environmental concern and response.

The analyses on the 15 agencies with cases were only conducted with screening policies, as t tests would



**Table 4: Results of t Tests and ANOVAs on Environment and Response**

	Mean of concern	t Statistic	p value	SE	95% CI of difference	
Local Lawmaker Concern						
Sex screening policy	3.52	-2.024 (77)	.046	.275	-1.106	-.009
No policy	2.96					
	Mean	ANOVA statistic	p value			
Community Concern*		BF(2, 23.5)=3.902	.034			
No unit/officer for trafficking	2.64					
Officer/officers for trafficking	3.53					
Public Health Concern*		BF(2, 19)=4.028	.035			
Unit for trafficking	2.71					
No unit/officer for trafficking	3.94					
Media Concern*		BF(2, 14.6)=4.273	.035			
No unit/officer for trafficking	3.25					
Officer/officers for trafficking	3.88					
Agencies with JT cases	Mean of concern	t Statistic	p value	SE	95% CI of difference	
Local Lawmakers						
Sex screening policy	3.71	-2.216 (12)	.047	.387	-1.7	-.014
No policy	2.86					
Local Advocacy Groups						
Sex screening policy	4.29	-2.191 (12)	.049	-.57	-1.14	.324
No policy	3.71					
Local Advocacy Groups						
Labor screening policy	4.33	-2.223 (12)	.046	.262	-1.155	.669
No policy	3.75					

\*Homogeneity of variance was violated, so the Brown-Forsythe test was used.

be robust enough to handle the smaller sample size and ANOVA would not. The results of these tests can be seen in the bottom of Table 4. As indicated, a higher perceived concern of local lawmakers and local advocacy groups was significantly related to having a sex screening policy. The same relationship existed with local advocacy groups and labor screening policies.

Finally, the number of employees would naturally be related to the agencies' ability to create subunits. Agencies with only a handful of officers would not have the resources to designate one or more of them just for trafficking cases or to create a trafficking unit. As such, a logistic regression analysis was conducted that regressed subunits (presence or not) on perceived environmental concern and the number of employees.

The model containing all predictors was statistically significant (see Table 5), indicating the model was able to differentiate between agencies that had special units (25) and those that did not (56), correctly predicting 81.3% of cases and explaining between 25 and 35.5% of variation in subunits. However, only 1 of the

predictors, number of employees, was statistically significant: not surprisingly, agencies with more than 100 employees were over 7 times more likely to have special units than the smallest agencies.

## DISCUSSION

While the sample size used to analyze agencies with reported cases and used to analyze the impact of the number employees indicate caution when interpreting the results, there are some broad observations that can be made. First, sheriff perceptions were indeed related to the perceived concern of sovereigns. In addition, as hypothesized, sheriff perceptions were most related to local groups and least related to state groups. As stated in the literature review, sheriffs may have a greater connection to the community than municipal or state police. As stated in the literature review, compared to municipal police, sheriffs may have a greater connection to the community. Indeed, sheriffs ranked community concern about trafficking as closest to that of their own agencies and state lawmaker concern farthest; in addition, the perceived concern of

**Table 5: Results of Logistic Regression Analysis Predicting Special Units**

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	p value	Odds Ratio	95% C.I. for Odds Ratio	
A community concern.	.525	.374	1.973	1	.160	1.691	.813	3.519
A concern of local lawmakers.	-.045	.640	.005	1	.944	.956	.272	3.353
A concern of state legislators/government.	-.697	.612	.299	1	.254	.498	.150	1.652
A concern of local advocacy groups.	.368	.565	.424	1	.515	1.445	.477	4.373
A concern of local social service agencies.	-.284	.595	.227	1	.633	.753	.234	2.417
A public health concern.	.179	.471	.145	1	.703	1.197	.475	3.013
A media concern.	.323	.422	.588	1	.443	1.382	.605	3.157
1-25 employees (reference)			10.910	3	.012			
26-50 employees	-.074	.869	.007	1	.932	.929	.169	5.098
51-100 employees	-.376	1.046	.129	1	.720	.687	.088	5.336
Over 100 employees	1.982	.882	5.047	1	.025	7.256	1.288	40.890
Constant	-2.452	1.530	2.566	1	.109	.086		

community and local groups had the highest correlation with sheriffs' perception of JT severity and state lawmakers the lowest. The findings of the current study suggest that, at the very least, sheriffs view themselves as being most closely related to the local community in terms of the concern over crime issues.

One reason sheriffs were hypothesized to have a greater connection to local groups is their tendency to be rural and to thus have a greater likelihood of being smaller and more cohesive communities. As shown, the rural sheriffs' perceptions were strongly correlated with community concern. The full sample had a lower correlation with community and local groups' concern, suggesting urban and suburban sheriffs are not as in sync (or at least do not view themselves as such) with local groups. This suggests urbanicity may play a stronger role in police-community relations than elected status. Indeed, urban areas tend to be more racially and culturally diverse than rural areas, making cohesion and a singular community view of the issues problematic for urban areas. As such, attempts to improve and maintain police-community relations should be tailored to the area.

Another difference in the two groups that is worth mentioning is that the correlation with public health dropped when the urban and suburban sheriffs were included. In fact, experts in the field of public health note that public health in rural areas receives less funding but has more of a focus on basic needs (i.e. food, shelter, etc.) than in urban areas.<sup>7</sup> As such,

'public health' may mean something different to rural sheriffs than it does to urban or suburban sheriffs. For example, JT can create housing issues as rural areas are less likely to have facilities that specialize in serving JT victims, leaving homeless shelters and foster homes to deal with this group. Exacerbating the problem, homeless shelters and foster homes may not have the resources to keep traffickers away from the juveniles (Finklea *et al.* 2015). Thus, rural sheriffs that are more concerned with trafficking may find public health resources being overwhelmed by JT victims while urban areas may have better access to services and thus JT is not the threat to the availability of services that it is in areas with fewer services.

Finally, the perceived concern of sovereigns was unrelated to the proportion of officers that had received training. It may be that officer training is not seen as necessary to more effectively respond to JT. In fact, 8 of the 9 sample states already require training in human trafficking.<sup>8</sup> If some amount of JT training is mandated, sheriffs may not see a need to add to that. What becomes interesting is many officers were apparently not trained, perhaps due to the relatively recent establishment of training laws and the resources necessary for training.

It was also suggested that community and local lawmaker concern would lead to more subunits as the result of decoupling. While local lawmaker concern was not related to more subunits, community and media

<sup>7</sup>Dr. M. Terry, Director of Public and Community Health Program, Murray State University, personal communication, October 28, 2018

<sup>8</sup>AR, CA, KY, MN, OH, OK, and TX all mandate criminal justice training in both human and specifically child trafficking, NV mandates the training in just human trafficking; WI mandates neither (Williams, 2017).

concern were related to more trafficking officers. It could be argued that the media needs to be placated and is the means by which the community is informed and placated-establishing an officer for trafficking allows this person to talk to the media and is a visible response, symbolic or not, to media and community concern. Notably, the inclusion of the number of employees into the analysis removed the influence of community, media, and public health on special units. Again, the number of employees influences an agency's ability to decouple; however, it is also possible that urbanicity plays a role here as well (indeed, community, media, and public health were the environmental groups with the largest drop in their coefficients when non-rural sheriffs were included). For example, larger agencies might be more insulated from environmental influence and may have more difficulty responding to a more diverse social and political climate with more heterogeneous demands.

Not surprisingly, agencies with actual trafficking cases had higher levels of concern over JT and seemed more responsive to the local government and advocacy groups. Trafficking cases in the jurisdiction obviously must be addressed, and may become more urgent if coupled with sovereigns' concern. Local advocacy groups and lawmakers may use such cases to champion transformation in JT response and create pressure for law enforcement to change. As suggested by Thompson *et al.* (2011), vocal groups have a higher likelihood of getting sheriff response, and advocacy groups, by their nature, are vocal. Indeed, it is not uncommon for new laws to be named after the victim of a specific case. Akin to decoupling, police may symbolically "do something" about JT to satisfy pressures from advocacy groups and lawmakers. These relationships would suggest training for law enforcement managers on how to interact and collaborate with lawmakers and advocacy groups, as well as training for lawmakers and advocacy groups on the realities and restrictions of law enforcement so that responses to public issues are effective and not short-term, "knee jerk" reactions.

The results suggests a number of routes for future research. First, a further study of the perceptions of police upper and middle management and line officers seems warranted to ensure proper policy creation and implementation. While sheriffs and chiefs may create policy, line officers are the ones that actually implement these policies; if line staff disagree with the policies they may not implement them as necessary, an idea

proposed by Lipsky (1980). It is also important to examine how sheriffs may, in turn, influence sovereigns. Indeed, Thompson *et al.* (2011) suggested that law enforcement professionals can have a powerful influence on the types of policies implemented. Moreover, results indicated that sheriffs viewed themselves as being more in line with local community concerns; future research could also examine whether this was indeed a reality.

Results also further highlight the need for more research on rural departments. Rural departments not only were impacted by sovereigns uniquely, but there were also interesting relationships with public health. Good public relations and service provision in rural areas might require very different techniques and strategies than in urban areas. Future research should focus on rural departments, how they relate to their environment, and how they can interact with public health agencies to better address social issues that lead to and exacerbate crime. Clearly, the interplay between perceptions, urbanicity, the need for legitimacy, and police practice is complicated and the mixed results indicate a need for more in-depth research.

## CONCLUSION

The importance of the environmental factors on law enforcement agencies is undeniable. Failing to adapt to these factors can result in the failure or demise of the organization, yet knowledge of the interplay between the environment and police agencies is still limited. A deeper understanding of these issues can serve to strengthen policy, make resource allocation more efficient, and, maybe most importantly, help law enforcement, lawmakers, advocacy groups, social services, and the public work together in a more cohesive manner to improve communities everywhere.

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