Police Ethics

[Author Name(s), First M. Last, Omit Titles and Degrees]

[Institutional Affiliation(s)]

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Ethics are well-grounded standards of right and wrong; it guides humans regarding what to do and what not to do, generally, in terms of obligations, rights, and duties. Being ethical is not the same as following the law, for instance, the pre-Civil War slavery laws deviated from the ethical principles. Ethics is based on two things; first, it refers to the well-established rules of what is right or wrong. For instance, these are standards that impose obligations to refrain from immoral acts. Secondly, ethics also refer to the development of one’s own ethical standards, since laws can also deviate from general ethical principles (Shanks, Andre, Velasquez, & Meyer, 2010). Thus it is important to ensure that one’s own ethical standards are well-founded. Institutions also make continuous efforts to ensure that they live up to the ethical standards of society. Same goes with law enforcement organizations; at the heart of every such organization, there is an ethical foundation. In order to develop a better understanding of police ethics, it is imperative to look at the role of ethics in law enforcement agencies, the roles and values of police, police code of ethics, and the significance of ethics and integrity in the police department.

# Ethics in Law enforcement

"Ethics" is about doing the right thing no matter what it is and it is also grounded on those values that are of paramount importance to society (Shanks et al., 2010). Ethical principles are based on the idea that wrong is always wrong and right is always right. Officers often disrupt police ethics, undermine the public trust, and reduce their aptitude to work within the community by not doing what is right. It also reduces their ability to carry out their mission especially when the action is clearly wrong. Complying with extraordinary ethical standards is just as important for realizing the general goal of modern police work like any other technique, tactic or practice. In traditional police work, the significance of a high ethical standard is enthralled by aspiring officers from the very first days of the police academy. There are a number of ways to promote police ethics between their specific ranks and the first or mandatory thing is the oath taken by the officers.

People who serve their communities by working in law enforcement agencies have a high responsibility; they have to live up to the higher standards of professionalism. As a result, these agencies have developed a code of ethics for these offices. In 1957, the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) developed a code of ethics for its affiliates. These codes are used at the time when officers take the oath of office, once they graduate. Ethical guidelines are developed to ensure that officers working in law enforcement perform their duties efficiently. Moreover, the guidelines develop a notion that officers are government servants and they perform their duties impartially considering all the citizens respectful. The code of ethics ensures that officers apply laws without any discrimination. The law enforcement code of ethics also prevents officers from comprising their professional integrity by abstaining from conflict of interest and accepting gratitude. Moreover, many codes of ethics also require officers to maintain their personal life in a manner that serves an example of a role model to society.

# Police Officer’s Values

Police is the body of officers in charge of maintaining law and order, safeguarding public safety, and investing criminal activities. They represent the civil authority of government and they are involved in the activities of preventing, detecting and investigating crimes and criminal activities. The need for police departments increased as social control diminished in informal institutions and stemmed from an increase in population. The roles and responsibilities of the police department demand some values and ethical responsibilities. Values are fundamental beliefs that motivate or guide actions and attitudes. Value is a term given to actions, ideas, and behaviors that are imperative for us. Values have a strong influence on our decision making and also help us to determine where we should place our emphasis in our professional and personal lives. Values are a foundation of one's ability to judge between wrong and right. It also forms a basis for an individual’s understanding of ethics. Within society, we have societal and personal values. Personal values depend on cultural upbringing, personal experience, ethnic background, and religious beliefs. On the other hand, societal values are held strongly by groups and cultures and these are values from which we stem our hope and understanding of ethical behavior. Such ideals include kindness, sympathy, honesty, bravery, hard work, justice, and integrity. These universal values also guide individuals towards ethical decision making and ethical behavior and also involve the protection of individuals and victims. Values also inform individuals of what is expected of them and what actions they should take. Obedience to ethical standards is important to achieve the general goals of modern policing.

# Police Code of Ethics

The code of ethics is an inscribed document that outlines the principles of conduct to be employed as a foundation while making ethical decisions. Code of ethics establishes a formal standard and rules about what is right or wrong, these rules are utilized by the people to make the most suitable decisions considering the interest of their unit. The Police officers are under oath to protect and assist the community. For them to accomplish this objective, there should be an ethical code. This ethical code serves as an essential key to build trust and confidence among the societies and the police community. The appropriate code of conduct greatly helps to improve the relation and communication between the people and police. In addition to this, it also promotes the communal responsibility to focus on and fight crimes in society.

Following the code of ethics acts as the ultimate guide for the police officers. It allows the police officers to display qualities of outstanding character. Moreover, the qualities of an officer serve as a role model in society. However, it is necessary that during training on ethics, the police officers consciously perform all duties. According to the true essence of police work, the implementation of an ethical code of conduct is not merely up to the will of the police officer, rather it is the spirit. In this way, the code of ethics is defined. Police ethics, if observed critically at a basic level, are the steps towards risk management. The chances of damage to civilians, property, and honor of police decrease significantly if the police officers are well-trained to follow the code of ethics properly. The consequences of impulsive decision making are neglectful regulation and specific police offer, as well as the whole department is responsible for it. It is the basic requirement of police ethics that everyone takes responsibility and contributes towards the betterment of society.

It an arguable fact that law enforcement is the most vital department that needs to follow the code of ethics. When it comes to choosing police as a career, the urge to do the morally right thing is understood as basic. Due to this reason, it is normally expected from the police department that they will exhibit the best character. It actually puts a great pressure on the police department to serve as a role model for other fields. There may come such situations, where it seems difficult for the police officer to choose between different options to do the right things. For this purpose, numerous tests can be practiced. Among these tests, the best test practices include the gut test, the media test, and critical thinking.

# Significance of Police Ethics

It is a common understanding that Police officers need ethics and discipline for a very vital reason. Police officers hold the command and authority to take away people's privileges and modify people's lives completely by placing them in jail/prison. In many cases, unethical police officers may plant fake evidence in order to get a conviction, might do illegal searches that violate people's rights, and really have the chance to not do the right things (McCartney & Parent, 2018). Any job that has powers such as Police Officers requires the individuals to be ethical; that way we know we can trust them to do the right thing when no one is looking (McCartney & Parent, 2018).

The police officers are like any other professionals who need to incorporate ethical standards in their lives. The job of a police officer requires more personal and professional ethics than any other job. Along with personal ethics, police officers need a framework to guide them in the performance of their job.

# Ethical Issues in Law Enforcement

Several ethical issues arise, particularly in law enforcement. In Canada, widespread lawbreaking and systemic corruption by officers of law enforcement are relatively rare, but it may occur from time to time. This may include clear violation of provincial, municipal and federal statutes. For example, Vancouver police officer constable was arrested for illegal selling of drugs from his police van. The main ethical issues that law enforcement encounter are sometimes not easy to identify (McCartney & Parent, 2018). In law enforcement agencies, a high profile decision made by the police officer is sometimes analyzed in a month or even years. The five major ethical issues are the use of unnecessary force, upholding laws and rights, acting impartially, and officers off duty life. Police officers are usually tackled with ethical issues of preserving their social respect and obedience to the law. This frequently puts officers in clash with society. Added ethical matter which police officers encounter daily is the ability to sustain those oaths which are contradictory. For example, one of the main contradiction can be found in a national drug war and drug laws which force officers to act in the best interest of state instead of public. Another ethical issue which police officers face is the use of unnecessary force. Although police officers have the authority to practice force which is necessary, however, sometimes they use force that is unjustified.

# International Association of Chiefs of Police

At the 64th annual meeting of the IACP Conference, the code of ethics was established in the year 1957. Code of ethics is the standards set in an organization or department to be available for the individuals to follow (“Law Enforcement Code of Ethics,” n.d.). It is an asset of ethics that presents standards, policies, and missions of a particular department. A code of ethics established in the law enforcement organization states its mission and values that they practice in fulfilling their duties and responsibilities. International Association of Chiefs of Police is the largest department in the United States that establishes laws and policies for the Police department. The provision of Oath and maintaining standards of ethics in the police department is the duty of law enforcement. In the provision of these principles and policies, the police department maintains unsullied practical life and obey ethics of duty even when they are not in uniform (“Law Enforcement Code of Ethics,” n.d.).

These principles and ethics permit those to perform their duties and responsibilities in accordance with the code of ethics. Code of ethics is other than the responsibilities of an organization or department which are reinforced to practice commitment to allow officers to follow these other than their duties. Conduct and performance of the police department are strictly obeyed and practiced in the light of the code of ethics. Ethics is a wider statement of an organization or department that defines its values and morals. The police department is directly in contact with the people and criminals. They have to consider a particular code of ethics while performing their duties as it would be difficult for them to maintain peace in communities if ethics are not followed. The police department has established its code of ethics to maintain law and order, harmony and peace among communities. The performance of the police department is strictly bound to their code of ethics.

# Ethics and Integrity in Police

If someone is granted arresting powers by the city, county, state or even the government of your country they ought to have ethics because of they the power to take someone's freedom away from them. There was a time when parents used to teach their kids that they can trust the police and if they get lost or need help they can find a policeman and they can help them. It is not like that anymore; the view of how the police work now has caused us to be demonized in the public eye, partially because of true acts of a few bad officers and partially the media. Everyone assumed that 25% of all corps in the united states are corrupt and don’t care about ethical behavior (Westmarland, 2005). They throw their weight around with the badge they wear and the legal powers they have by treating people like the second class citizens whom they are charged to protect and serve (McCartney & Parent, 2018). However, the police officers also contain people who are willing to help others, always. They consider themselves as the protector of people and want to make others feel safe in their presence. They recognize, ethical treatment is what every human being deserves and that everyone simply wants to be treated like a human being.

Integrity in law enforcement ensures that all the officers preserve the values of service and strive to do their best in every situation. This simply explains the need for integrity in law enforcement. Integrity is all about how well the police officers make decisions, deal with the challenges and treat people they are meant to serve. If a police officer does not have the integrity to fess up for making a mistake they are a criminal yourself. Integrity is 100% needed in law enforcement, if people will not trust the police, they are more likely to commit crimes and less inclined to help law enforcement agencies. A lot of cases have been dropped in history or not proven guilty because police officers didn’t have the integrity they ought to have.

# Conclusion

To sum up, the police is a profession that involves coercive power and therefore, this power must be exercised with due responsibility. The law enforcement agencies preserve high responsibility towards the government, the general public, and society. They play a vital role in guaranteeing the safety of citizens alongside the protection of their rights. In order to fulfill their mission, they ought to follow an ethical code. The code of ethics will allow them to exhibit superior character qualities and will also promote that officer as a moral standard in the community.

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