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Research Article

Awareness and Readiness of Fire Officers on The Possession of Firearms: Basis for Policy Development

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ABSTRACT

Republic Act No. 11589, known as the Bureau of Fire Protection Modernization Act of 2021, aims to enhance the Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP) in the Philippines by improving firefighters' capabilities in fire prevention, suppression, investigation, and emergency medical services. The law also authorizes the issuance of firearms to certain firefighters to ensure their safety and that of their colleagues while performing their duties. This study used a descriptive-correlational research design and quantitative methods to assess BFP fire officers' awareness and readiness regarding firearm possession, bearing, and carrying. Data were collected from 120 respondents at the Caloocan City Fire Station between November 15 and 28, 2023. The findings indicate that fire officers generally understand firearm laws and procedures well, including licensing requirements such as age limits and background checks, though they encounter challenges with paperwork and license renewals. They are also familiar with the rules for carrying firearms, including permit requirements and concealment during duty. The results highlight the need for enhanced training and clearer regulations to ensure safe firearm use and minimize incidents, in line with broader research on firearm policies and education. The study concludes that, despite a solid understanding of firearm regulations, there is a need for improved licensing processes and training. Recommendations include developing comprehensive and practical training programs, conducting regular refresher courses, creating accessible reference materials, and improving licensing procedures through flexible scheduling and simplified paperwork, as well as addressing training challenges through better recruitment, funding, and facilities.

Keywords: *Readiness, Awareness, Fire Officers, Possession of Firearm, Policy Development, Bureau of Fire Protection*

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Introduction

Chapter 4, Section 54 of the Department of the Interior and Local Government Act of 1990 (R.A. 6975) established the Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP) with duties related to fire prevention, suppression, investigation, and enforcement of related laws. This role was further enhanced by Republic Act No. 9514 (Fire Code of the Philippines) and Republic Act No. 11589 (BFP Modernization Act), which updated the BFP's capabilities by equipping fire officers with handguns, body armor, and body cameras to improve their safety and effectiveness. The need for such measures was highlighted by issues reported by Zam (2021) and Flores (2021), including delays and risks faced by firefighters from unruly individuals and threats during fire incidents. Republic Act No. 10591 (Comprehensive Firearms and Ammunition Regulation Act) outlines stringent requirements for firearm ownership, including age, citizenship, clearances, and psychological evaluations.

The findings of this study aim to assess the awareness and readiness of BFP personnel in Caloocan City regarding firearm possession, with the goal of informing policy development to enhance their effectiveness and safety. This research will provide crucial insights into the challenges faced by firefighters and will contribute to formulating policies for better firearm management within the BFP.

Internationally, some U.S. states permit firefighters to carry firearms for safety, though this practice is debated due to potential confusion between first responders and law enforcement (Chase, n.d.). Nationally, the BFP's mandate, outlined in Republic Act No. 6975 and enhanced by Republic Act No. 9263, does not initially cover firearm issuance but was later addressed in Republic Act No. 11589. Locally, BFP-Caloocan City, part of the CAMANAVA district, has faced significant challenges, including assaults on firefighters. The high incidence of fire-related events in the National Capital Region underscores the importance of addressing these safety concerns and improving firefighter protection.

This study is anchored in Harald Cramér's Risk Theory and Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory. Cramér's Risk Theory examines

how individuals make choices amid uncertainty, predicting that armed fire officers' decisions during chaotic scenarios will be influenced by their understanding of potential outcomes while Bandura's Social Learning Theory posits that individuals learn behaviors through observation and imitation. In this context, fire officers can enhance their readiness and knowledge about firearm use through observing experienced peers and participating in training programs.

Statement of the Problem

The study aims to thoroughly assess the awareness and readiness of Bureau of Fire Protection personnel in Caloocan City concerning firearm possession. It seeks to identify their levels of awareness, readiness, and potential challenges related to firearms. The findings will be used to enhance policy development for issuing firearms within the Bureau of Fire Protection.

This study seeks answers to the following research questions:

1. What is the level of awareness and readiness of the fire officer for the possession of firearms in terms of:
 - 1.1 Application for licenses
 - 1.2 Submission of the validated reports
 - 1.3 Manner of firearm possession
2. Is there a significant relationship between the awareness and readiness of fire officers for the possession of firearms?
3. What is the level of awareness and readiness of fire officers for the bearing and carrying of firearms outside of residence in terms of:
 - 3.1 Fire Safety Inspection
 - 3.2 Fire Suppression and Prevention
 - 3.3 Fire and Arson Investigation
 - 3.4 Emergency Response
4. Is there a significant relationship between the awareness and readiness of fire officers to carry firearms outside of their residence?
5. What are the challenges encountered in the possession, bearing, and carrying of firearms among fire officers?
6. Based on the study, what policy may be proposed specifically for BFP personnel?

Methods

Study Design

The study employed a descriptive-correlational research design to examine the relationship between fire officers' awareness and readiness regarding firearm possession and use. This design allowed for both the description of current conditions and the identification of relationships between variables.

The research utilized a quantitative descriptive method to gather and analyze data from fire officers in the Bureau of Fire Protection, Caloocan City. A self-constructed survey questionnaire was used to collect numerical data, which was then analyzed to assess various aspects such as:

- Awareness and readiness related to firearm possession, bearing, and carrying.
- Processes for applying for licenses and handling firearms during various fire-related duties.

The study aimed to provide empirical insights that could inform policy development on firearms within the Bureau of Fire Protection. The quantitative approach enabled a systematic examination of the variables, offering a solid foundation for improving policies related to firearm management for fire officers.

Population and Locale of the Study

The study utilized purposive sampling to select participants with relevant experience, focusing on 168 fire officers who completed the Fire Basic Recruit Course (FBRC) at the Caloocan City Fire Station. This non-probability sampling technique, also known as judgmental sampling, ensured the inclusion of individuals with substantial knowledge and experience. The sample size was determined using the Raosoft online calculator, resulting in a final sample of 120 participants from the total population of 200 fire officers.

The research was conducted at the Caloocan City Fire Station, part of the Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP), which is responsible for fire prevention, suppression, and safety in the Philippines. The station's history includes various relocations and expansions, with the current facility operating 15 fire substations across two districts. The researcher's

familiarity with the institution, gained through four years of affiliation, facilitated efficient data collection and a deep understanding of the study's context.

Data Gathering Tools

The researcher developed a self-constructed survey questionnaire to gather data from fire officers. The questionnaire, distributed personally, used a 4-point Likert scale and was divided into four parts:

1. Part I: Assessing fire officers' awareness and readiness regarding firearms possession.
2. Part II: Evaluating their awareness of carrying firearms outside their residence.
3. Part III: Identifying challenges in firearm possession and use.
4. Part IV: Collecting recommendations for policy improvements on firearm issuance.

The instrument's validity was confirmed by research experts and a BFP-Caloocan City officer, ensuring the clarity, relevance, and objectivity of the questions. The Content Validity Index (CVI) was perfect ($S-CVI/Ave = 1$), and reliability was high, with Cronbach's alpha ranging from .816 to .971, indicating good internal consistency.

Statistical Data Analysis Procedure

The study employed a systematic approach to analyze and evaluate survey data regarding fire officers' awareness and readiness about firearm possession and use. A 4-point Likert scale was used to gauge responses, ranging from 1 (Not Aware/Not Serious) to 4 (Fully Aware/Very Serious). The data were processed using the average weighted mean, calculated with the formula $X = \frac{\sum fx}{N}$, where f represents the frequency of responses, x is the unit weight, and N is the total number of respondents. This method allowed for quantifying overall levels of awareness, readiness, and perceived challenges. Additionally, Kendall's Tau B coefficients were employed to assess the correlation between awareness and readiness, measuring the strength and direction of their relationship. This combination of descriptive statistics and correlational analysis provided comprehensive

insights into the fire officers' preparedness and the challenges associated with firearms.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher adhered to ethical standards by prioritizing participants' rights and welfare throughout the study. An ethics letter, endorsed by the adviser and dean, along with an informed consent document, was prepared. During data collection, the researcher personally explained the study's purpose, stressed confidentiality, and emphasized the voluntary nature of consent. Participants were informed that those who chose not to sign the consent form would not be included in the study. After data collection, the researcher committed to maintaining confidentiality and respecting participants' responses, ensuring secure disposal of the questionnaires. The study was communicated as beneficial to respondents, the Bureau of Fire Protection, and the community.

Result and Discussion

1. Level of awareness and readiness of the fire officer on the possession of firearms in terms of:

Application for Licenses

The findings reveal that fire officers generally exhibit a high level of awareness regarding the legal and procedural requirements for obtaining firearm licenses in the Philippines. They are well-informed about key aspects such as the need for a License to Own and Possess Firearms (LTOPF), age requirements, and background check criteria. However, the slightly lower score related to understanding necessary documentary requirements suggests some confusion or complexity in this area. This indicates a need for enhanced clarity in training programs about the documentation process. These insights align with broader research emphasizing the importance of effective firearm policies and training programs (Kleygrewe et al., 2022; Mellijor, 2022). Further qualitative research could provide additional perspectives on improving training and education for fire officers.

Submission of the Validated Reports

Fire officers generally have a high level of awareness about the requirements for

submitting validated reports related to firearm possession. They are fully informed about the necessity of neuro-psychiatric evaluations, the Gun Safety and Responsible Gun Ownership Seminar, and drug testing for firearm applicants. This demonstrates their understanding of the critical aspects of mental health, safety, and substance abuse prevention in firearm ownership. However, there is slightly less awareness regarding the requirements for background investigations, license renewals, and ballistic testing, indicating areas where additional training or clarification may be needed. These findings are consistent with broader research emphasizing the importance of strict firearm regulations and comprehensive training programs for enhancing officer awareness and public safety. Studies by Joseph et al. (2020) and Patel et al. (2022) highlight the link between stringent licensing procedures and reduced firearm-related injuries, advocating for targeted public health interventions to address firearm safety.

Manner of Firearm Possession

The study shows that fire officers have a strong understanding of regulations related to carrying firearms outside of their residences. They are fully aware of the prohibition against carrying privately owned firearms without a Permit to Carry Firearms Outside Residence (PTCFOR), the rules allowing law enforcement officers to carry firearms during official duties with proper permits, and the protocols for securely handling firearms in agency uniforms. Additionally, they understand the restrictions on carrying firearms in specific locations such as places of worship and public establishments. These results reflect the effectiveness of comprehensive firearm regulations and training in promoting responsible firearm ownership. Research by Zeoli et al. (2019) supports the value of strict firearm laws in reducing violence, showing that targeting individuals with a history of violent behavior can help prevent firearm-related incidents.

2. Is there a significant relationship between the awareness and readiness of fire officers for the possession of firearms?

The study highlights a notable and statistically significant relationship between fire officers' awareness and their readiness regarding firearm possession. The data reveals that officers who are more informed about the requirements for submitting validated reports are significantly better prepared, with a Kendall's Tau B coefficient of 0.657 and a p-value of less than 0.001. This suggests a strong correlation between increased awareness and enhanced readiness in this area. Similarly, there is a positive and significant relationship between awareness and the proper handling of firearm possession, with a Kendall's Tau B coefficient of 0.471 and a p-value of less than 0.001. This indicates that officers who are more knowledgeable about firearm possession protocols are more likely to follow the correct procedures. These findings underscore the importance of improving awareness among fire officers, as it positively impacts their preparedness to comply with firearm regulations, thereby contributing to better enforcement and public safety. To further explore these relationships, studies such as those by Galea and Abdalla (2022) on firearm laws, and research by Lee et al. (2019) and Muñoz et al. (2020) on officer training programs, could provide valuable insights into how awareness and training influence compliance and safety outcomes.

3. Level of awareness and readiness of the fire officer on the bearing and carrying of firearms outside of residence in terms of:

Fire Safety Inspection

The levels of awareness and readiness among fire officers concerning the handling of firearms during fire safety inspections disclosed that fire officers have a baseline understanding (median score of 3.00) that they are allowed to carry privately owned firearms during inspections, provided they have a Permit to Carry Firearms Outside Residence (PTCFOR). They also understand that firearms should generally be concealed during inspections, due to the absence of a holster in their standard uniform, but can be displayed if necessary. Additionally, fire officers show a slightly higher awareness (median score of 3.50) regarding the prohibition against openly displaying

firearms during inspections, highlighting their understanding of the need for discretion in firearm use while performing their duties.

Fire Suppression and Prevention

Fire officers' awareness and readiness concerning the carrying of firearms during fire suppression and operations are well-demonstrated. Officers are aware that they can carry privately owned firearms while on duty for fire suppression and prevention, provided they have a Permit to Carry Firearms Outside Residence (PTCFOR), as indicated by a score of 3.00. This is consistent with legal requirements for firearm permits. Additionally, officers scored 4.00 on both securely and concealing firearms during fire responses and the prohibition of displaying firearms during fire safety seminars, reflecting strong adherence to safety protocols and professionalism. The moderate awareness (score of 3.00) about carrying concealed firearms while in civilian clothes during duties indicates a reasonable understanding of the relevant procedures. Overall, with a score of 3.50, the data suggests that fire officers are generally well-informed about firearm carrying protocols outside of their residences, indicating a regulated and safety-conscious approach in their operations.

Fire and Arson Investigation

In terms of fire and arson investigation the fire officers' awareness and readiness regarding the carrying of firearms are well-documented. The data reveals that officers understand the requirement to have a Permit to Carry Firearms Outside Residence (PTCFOR) to carry privately owned firearms while on duty, as indicated by a score of 3.00. This reflects their comprehension of the legal necessity for permits. A score of 3.00 is also noted for their awareness that firearms must be concealed during official duties, except when a valid reason exists for their use, and that they can carry concealed firearms while in civilian clothes during investigations. In contrast, the prohibition against openly displaying firearms during investigations is well-understood, scoring 4.00, which demonstrates strong adherence to professional standards. Overall, with a score of 3.00, the data suggests that fire and arson

investigation team personnel have a baseline level of understanding of firearm regulations, which promotes safety and professionalism in their investigative work.

Emergency Response

Concerning emergency response, the study reveals that fire officers and EMS personnel are knowledgeable about the need to secure and conceal their privately owned firearms while providing medical assistance, as indicated by a median score of 3.00. They also understand the requirement to store these firearms inside the ambulance or service motorcycle compartment when responding to emergencies, and they recognize that firearms must be kept concealed unless immediately needed. The overall median score of 3.00 suggests a consistent awareness of these protocols, highlighting the importance of safety and prioritizing medical assistance during emergencies. The analysis indicates that fire officers and EMS personnel generally understand the protocols for carrying firearms during emergency responses. This awareness is vital for ensuring safety and effective emergency medical services. Research emphasizes the importance of clear policies and comprehensive training for handling personal firearms within the context of emergency services, reflecting the need for integrated roles and preparedness in diverse situations (Sharma & Bodempudi, 2022; Lentz et al., 2022).

4. Is there a significant relationship between the awareness and readiness of fire officers on the bearing and carrying of firearms outside of residence?

The study identifies significant relationships between fire officers' awareness and readiness regarding firearm carrying across various domains, such as fire safety inspection, fire suppression and prevention, fire arson investigation, and emergency response. Kendall's Tau B correlation coefficients range from 0.543 to 0.735, all statistically significant at the 0.01 level. The strongest correlation is between fire suppression and prevention and fire arson investigation (0.735), highlighting a strong connection between awareness and readiness in these areas. Additionally, there is a notable

correlation between fire arson investigation and emergency response (0.630), indicating that preparedness for arson investigations is closely related to readiness for emergency responses. These findings emphasize the interconnected nature of fire officers' responsibilities and the importance of comprehensive training and policies to improve their readiness and awareness across different operational contexts. Research supports these results, noting that situational awareness and preparedness are essential for effective responses in high-risk situations (Penney et al., 2022). Moreover, firearms policies within fire services stress the need for clear protocols and extensive training to balance legal rights with safety concerns, ensuring officers can handle emergencies effectively while maintaining their primary duties.

5. Challenges encountered in the possession, bearing and carrying of firearms among fire officers

Licensing Process

The challenges faced by fire officers in the firearm licensing process, with each issue rated at a median score of 3.00, indicating serious concerns. Major difficulties include the complexity of scheduling online appointments due to high demand and the risk of missing appointments because of urgent work tasks. The process of completing documentary requirements is also challenging, as it often involves acquiring documents from multiple offices, which can be time-consuming. Additionally, technical problems such as website crashes and slow processing further hinder the online application process. Renewing firearm licenses is also identified as a particularly lengthy and burdensome task. These issues are consistent with broader problems documented in the literature. Studies have indicated that online scheduling for firearm licenses often suffers from high demand, and conflicting work schedules can lead to missed appointments, a challenge observed across various fields (Hunstman et al., 2021). The complexity and time-consuming nature of the documentation process are also well-recognized, as noted by the American Bar Association, which emphasizes the difficulties in gathering necessary documents from

multiple agencies. Overall, these challenges highlight the need for systemic improvements in the firearm licensing process. Suggested improvements include implementing more flexible scheduling options, streamlining the documentation process, enhancing technical support, and making renewal procedures more efficient to boost overall compliance and efficiency.

Training

In the context of training-related challenges faced by fire officers regarding the possession, bearing, and carrying of firearms, several key issues are evident. A "Very Serious" shortage of certified instructors from the Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP) hampers the completion of Gun Safety and Responsible Gun Ownership training. This problem is exacerbated by the prioritization of training based on rank rather than the specific needs of units, which is categorized as "Serious." Financial constraints limit the number of available training slots, further restricting skill development. Additionally, the lack of dedicated training facilities, due to the BFP's focus on fire-related training, prevents officers from retaining their skills because of insufficient practice opportunities. These challenges align with broader research findings. Olma et al. (2024) highlighted that a shortage of qualified instructors can negatively impact the quality and frequency of firearm training. Buck et al. (2023) emphasized the need for training programs tailored to specific job requirements rather than rank-based prioritization. Financial limitations affecting training opportunities were documented by Flatt (2020), who underscored the importance of strategic resource allocation. The absence of dedicated training facilities is also a recognized issue in various contexts, further complicating effective firearm training. Overall, these challenges underscore the need for improvements in training infrastructure to ensure that fire officers receive effective training in firearm use.

Possession of firearm

The challenges faced by fire officers regarding firearm possession highlight several critical issues. A major concern is the "very serious" confusion over where to securely place

firearms, which is exacerbated by the lack of a prescribed agency uniform with a holster. This deficiency can compromise safety and accessibility. The demands of fire operations, including suppression, rescue, and medical assistance, often divert attention from firearm security, posing a "serious" risk. Additionally, the lack of experience with firearms among fire officers increases the potential for misuse or mishandling, which is also marked as "serious." Challenges related to concealing firearms in non-standard uniforms or civilian clothes, and securing them inside vehicles during emergencies, further complicate safe firearm possession. These challenges align with broader research findings. Cavataro (2024) highlights the impact of not having standardized equipment like holsters, which can lead to confusion and safety issues. Luciano et al. (2021) address the difficulties emergency responders face in managing firearms amidst dynamic operational demands, reflecting the concerns noted. Lentz et al. (2022) emphasize the importance of ongoing training to ensure proficiency and operational safety for both law enforcement and fire personnel. Overall, these findings underscore the need for improved training and policy measures to address firearm possession challenges and enhance safety protocols.

6. Policy may be proposed specifically for BFP personnel?

1. Application Process

The Committee on Firearm Registration and Renewal (CFRR) will develop an online application for Security and Protection Unit (SPU) members to request, upload, and track necessary documents for a License to Own and Possess a Firearm (LTOPF) and Permit to Carry Firearms Outside of Residence for Law Enforcement Agencies (PTCFOR-LEA). Once documents are submitted, CFRR will confirm their completion through the online system and transmit them electronically to the Philippine National Police Firearms and Explosives Office (PNP-FEO) for verification. After verification, PNP-FEO will notify CFRR of the verified status, prompting CFRR to publish a memorandum to district and city offices informing them of scheduled appearances for SPU members.

2. The renewal of firearm license and permits including ballistic testing and re-stenciling can be a time-consuming process

Mobile Caravan

The Regional Firearm Registry and Enforcement Team (RFRET), in collaboration with PNP-FEO, will conduct a mobile caravan service at least once a year for all district offices. This service aims to facilitate the renewal of licenses required for the possession, bearing, and carrying of firearms. The Committee on Firearm Registration and Renewal will notify each district regarding the scheduled time and dates for renewal.

Scheduled Appearance

SPU members intending to renew their License to Own and Possess Firearm (LTOPF) can submit the necessary renewal documents through the online application platform developed by the Committee on Firearm Registration and Renewal (CFRR). The renewal process will follow the same procedures as the initial application process.

3. Validated Reports

The Regional Firearm Registry and Enforcement Team is mandated to maintain comprehensive records by acquiring copies of all reports and certifications related to the results of neuro-psychological evaluations, drug tests, and the gun safety and responsible gun ownership seminar through the Committee on Neuro-Psychiatric and Medical Evaluation (CNPME). This meticulous record-keeping ensures thorough documentation of the individual's mental health assessments, substance test outcomes, and participation in seminars promoting responsible gun ownership.

4. The training will be prioritized according to rank rather than the specific unit in need of the training

All fire officers will undergo a firearm safety seminar during their Recruit Orientation Program (ROP), Fire Basic Recruit Course (FBRC), and all mandatory courses.

There will be an annual and updated refresher training course and seminars for fire

officers pertaining to the possession of firearms at every station.

5. Possession, Bearing and Carrying of firearms

The guidelines for carrying firearms include the prohibition of carrying them outside one's residence or workplace without a permit, the requirement of a Permit to Carry Firearms Outside Residence (PTCFOR) issued by the Chief of the PNP, and conditions for members of law enforcement agencies to carry licensed firearms while on official duties, including possession of a License to Own and Possess Firearms (LTOPF), a valid PTCFOR, and a valid Letter Order/Mission Order. Applicants for a Permit to Carry Firearms Outside Residence for Law Enforcement Agencies (PTCFOR-LEA) must submit required documents endorsed by the Police Regional Director or equivalent, and the PTCFOR-LEA is valid for one year. Additionally, the guidelines include restrictions on carrying firearms in certain establishments, requirements for firearm storage while in civilian attire, prohibitions against flagrant display of firearms, and the necessity of firearm concealment unless actively used for a legitimate purpose. Violation of these provisions may result in the immediate revocation of firearm licenses and registrations.

6. Fire Officers may face confusion regarding where to securely place their firearms because their prescribed agency uniform does not include a holster

The Security and Protection Unit, serving as an elite armed unit within the Bureau of Fire Protection, has a distinct uniform from other fire officers, which includes a holster for their safety and the safety of their issued firearm.

Conclusion

The study concludes that fire officers possess a solid understanding of firearm laws and procedures, including licensing and carrying rules, but improvements are needed in areas such as license renewals and testing. Strong positive correlations were found between knowledge of firearm regulations and readi-

ness to manage related tasks safely. Fire officers effectively apply firearm protocols in various scenarios, including fire safety inspections, fire suppression, fire investigations, and emergency responses. Significant connections were observed between different areas of firearm use, particularly between fire suppression and arson investigations, as well as between investigations and emergency response. The study underscores the need for enhanced licensing processes, including flexible scheduling and simplified paperwork, and highlights the importance of addressing training challenges, such as instructor shortages and inadequate facilities.

Recommendations

1. Develop and implement comprehensive training programs for fire officers focusing on firearm laws, licensing procedures, and renewal processes. Emphasize practical training sessions to improve understanding and compliance with paperwork requirements and testing protocols.
2. Conduct regular refresher training sessions to reinforce understanding of firearm rules and procedures, emphasizing the importance of adherence to regulations for license renewals and testing. Use case studies and practical scenarios to provide hands-on experience and enhance readiness.
3. Create easily accessible reference materials or job aids outlining specific protocols for firearm handling in different operational contexts, including fire safety inspections, suppression and operation, arson investigation, and EMS responses. Ensure these resources are readily available to all fire officers for quick reference.
4. Develop integrated training programs that highlight the interconnectedness of various operational domains, such as fire suppression and prevention, fire arson investigation, and emergency response. Foster collaboration between different units to promote a holistic approach to readiness and preparedness.
5. Implement improvements in license procedures, such as introducing flexible scheduling options, simplifying paperwork

- requirements, and streamlining renewal processes, to reduce administrative burdens on fire officers. Enhance communication channels to provide clear guidance and support throughout the licensing process.
6. Address training difficulties by addressing instructor shortages through recruitment and training initiatives, revising training protocols to prioritize skill development over rank-based training, allocating adequate funding for training programs, and investing in dedicated training facilities for firearm instruction.

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