

Although age ranges for Policemen and Deputy Sheriff show top levels of 40 and 45 respectively, the median upper age for appointment in both groups is roughly 35. As the tables illustrate, age limits for fireman jobs tend to be even lower with the median upper age falling at 31 for the cities. Since few counties mentioned firemen jobs, the response is inconclusive. A number of cities reported that they considered the job of fireman to be more strenuous than that of policeman.

There were no comments on the reasons for the various lower age limits, other than a few statements that peace officers must be 21 in order to be deputized.

The variation in entry age limits for peace, fire, and safety jobs—ranging from age 29 to age 45—raises the question as to the real meaning of such limitations in connection with job performance. If physical fitness is taken as the standard, the physical capacities of the individual can be better determined by performance tests and physical examinations. Although comparatively few city or county agencies were willing to hire law enforcement officers at age 40, some apparently did not consider this age level as a handicap.

Among the reasons given for entry age limitations, the physical requirements of the jobs were most frequently mentioned. However, there is no evidence available to indicate that every individual deteriorates physically at the same rate, or that a man aged 34 is necessarily a better physical specimen than a man aged 35.

Requirements of retirement plans, also mentioned frequently in the responses, appear to have a strong effect on establishment of upper age limits in law enforcement positions. The 1937 County Retirement Act is specific in prohibiting admission of new members into the "safety" retirement plan after their thirty-fifth birthday.

The variation in entry age limits for law enforcement and safety jobs suggests that (1) physical requirements of the jobs have not been clearly established; (2) retirement provisions have the effect of establishing the length of a "work-life span"; (3) age has been accepted by some public agencies as an easy elimination device to limit the number of job applicants, even though recruitment difficulties would suggest the need for broadening the recruitment base.

B. Reasons Given for Age Restrictions

The principal reasons given for establishing age limits on employment were (1) physical or performance requirements of the jobs, and (2) pension and retirement plans. Some agencies mentioned also the costs of insurance or workmen's compensation, the difficulties of maintaining age balance in a small agency, and the length of training for law enforcement positions. Some doubts were expressed about the physical and mental capacities of older persons.

Of the nine cities and eight counties that said they had "no age restrictions," several qualified the statement by references to retirement plans or the "requirements of the job." One of the eight counties stated that for law enforcement jobs, applicants under age 45 were preferred.