Psychological Evaluation of Police and Public Safety Officials for Employment

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Inservice Objectives
At the end of this program, participants will be able to
1. Select tests to evaluate employment candidates for police and other public safety positions
2. Distinguish pre-conditional offer evaluations from those done after the offer, and know the limitations of each
3. Prepare reports that are informative without compromising applicants’ privacy
4. Use validity scales appropriately for this population
5. Avoid legal and ethical pitfalls specific to employment evaluations

Invitation and Disclaimer
1. Audience participation and varying opinions are invited and encouraged!
2. The presentation does not constitute legal advice
3. The presenters are not speaking wearing their State Board of Psychology “hats” but rather their private clinician “hats”

Ethical Considerations—APA Code of Ethics
1. 2.01 Boundaries of Competence
   (a) Psychologists provide services, teach, and conduct research with populations and in areas only within the boundaries of their competence, based on their education, training, supervised experience, consultation, study, or professional experience.
   (closest applicable) (f) When assuming forensic roles, psychologists are or become reasonably familiar with the judicial or administrative rules governing their roles.

Introduction to the participants and the topic
1. Presenters’ experience
2. Audience members’ experience
3. Types of evaluations covered
4. Pre-conditional vs. conditional offer

Introduction to the topic, cont.
2. PA Act 235: Lethal Weapons Training Act (1975)
3. PA State Police—inhouse psychologist
Commonwealth of PA Act 120
psychological exam requirements:

(7) Be personally examined by a Pennsylvania licensed psychologist and found to be psychologically capable to exercise appropriate judgment or restraint in performing the duties of a police officer. The examination shall include the following elements:

(i) Interview and history. The psychologist shall personally interview the applicant. The interview shall include a summary of the applicant’s personal, educational, employment and criminal history.

(ii) Required psychological test. Applicants shall be administered a current standard form of the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI).

(iii) Other testing methods. If the licensed psychologist is unable to certify the applicant’s psychological capability to exercise appropriate judgment and restraint to perform the duties of a police officer including the handling of a lethal weapon, the psychologist shall employ whatever other appropriate techniques to form a professional opinion of the applicant’s ability. The use of these additional techniques requires a full and complete written explanation to the Commission on a form submitted by the psychologist to the Commission indicating what additional testing has been performed and the results of the tests.

(9) Certify whether they have taken a physical examination or psychological evaluation conducted in conjunction with an application for police employment within the previous year and the outcome of the examination or evaluation.

“Philosophical” Concerns

- Individual rights vs. public safety
- Who should be rejected?
- Consequences of rejecting highly dangerous people
- Empirical justification for your choice

Components of the Evaluation

- Setting the Stage
  1. Explain the process
  2. Implications re: self-pay
  3. Forms (Cathy’s sample consent form for this evaluation)

Components of the Evaluation

- Clinical Interview
  1. How broad vs. narrow a psychosocial review?
  2. Applicant’s goals for entering this line of work
  3. What is permitted
  4. What is useful

Specific Questions for this Interview

- Alcohol
- Recreational drugs
- Mental health treatment
- Medical conditions and treatment

Specific Questions for this Interview, cont.

- Arrests
- Bankruptcies
- Credit problems
- School suspensions
- License suspensions
Specific Questions for this Interview, cont.

- History
  1. What is relevant
  2. What is legally allowed
  3. Personal
  4. Family
  5. Employment
  6. Legal
  7. Finances
  8. Military

Criminal Justice History

Interest in area

Public Service (boy/girl scouts, fire companies)

Firearms
  a. Experience
  b. License to carry
  c. When and why do you carry

Components of the Evaluation

- Testing
  1. MMPI-2
  2. PAI
  3. 16PF Protective Services Report
  4. Inwald tests
  5. Other tests used

Ethical Considerations—APA Code of Ethics

- 9.01 Bases for Assessments
  (a) Psychologists base the opinions contained in their recommendations, reports, and diagnostic or evaluative statements, including forensic testimony, on information and techniques sufficient to substantiate their findings.
  (b) Except as noted in 9.01c, psychologists provide opinions of the psychological characteristics of individuals only after they have conducted an examination of the individuals adequate to support their statements or conclusions.

- 9.02 Use of Assessments
  (a) Psychologists administer, adapt, score, interpret, or use assessment techniques, interviews, tests, or instruments in a manner and for purposes that are appropriate in light of the research on or evidence of the usefulness and proper application of the techniques.
  (b) Psychologists use assessment instruments whose validity and reliability have been established for use with members of the population tested. When such validity or reliability has not been established, psychologists describe the strengths and limitations of test results and interpretation.
  (c) Psychologists use assessment methods that are appropriate to an individual’s language preference and competence, unless the use of an alternative language is relevant to the assessment issues.

- 9.08 Obsolete Tests and Outdated Test Results
  (a) Psychologists do not base their assessment or intervention decisions or recommendations on data or test results that are outdated for the current purpose.
  (b) Psychologists do not base such decisions or recommendations on tests and measures that are obsolete and not useful for the current purpose.
MMPI-2

- Gendered vs. non-gendered norms
- Law enforcement norms
- Offering retest, especially with high L
- MMPI-2 vs. MMPI-RF
- How/if to address validity scales with the applicant

Components of the Evaluation

- The report
  1. What to include/not include
  2. State forms for Act 120 and Act 235—see samples

Mr. Smith’s MMPI-2 profile

Mr. John Smith is a 40-year-old married Caucasian male. He is the youngest of three children raised in an intact household, and described adequate continuing relationships with both parents and his oldest brother, but a strained relationship with his younger brother, whom he feels takes financial advantage of his parents. Mr. Smith was employed in a managerial sales position at a retail grocery store for whom he has full custody. He lives with these two daughters, ages 12 and 11, his second wife, and their 2.5-year-old son, and described good relationships with all these family members. The applicant completed both a high school education and an Associate’s degree in Criminal Justice. Mr. Smith served in Military Police of the U.S. Army/Reserves from 1996 to 2011. He had two tours of active combat duty, in 2003 and 2004. He also worked at the county 911 Center for 7 years, over time attaining a middle management position. More recently, Mr. Smith worked part-time for 4 years at a local gun store, quitting that job in early 2018 in protest over the company’s publicly announced policy on gun reform laws. He is now a stay-at-home father for his children, especially his toddler son.

Mr. Smith reported a past history of combat-based PTSD. He has been treated with Cymbalta 60 mg qd for the past 13 years, with reported continuing positive benefit; a psychiatric provider initially prescribed this medication but his primary care physician now continues it. The significant previously completed a brief course of individual psychotherapy for PTSD, which he described as helpful. Symptom review indicates that Mr. Smith now experiences only two low-level residual symptoms of PTSD, occasional intrusive thoughts that he denied are distressing and mild hypervigilance that he denied interferes with his daily functioning. The applicant reported one past criminal conviction, a charge of harassment of his ex-wife, which he reported he pled guilty to, despite disputing that it occurred, in order to finalize that divorce and have her more serious (also denied) allegations dismissed.

Mr. Smith’s MMPI-2 profile

Mr. Smith’s MMPI-2 profile

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Special Issues in Public Safety Psychological Evaluations

- Feedback to Applicants
  a) How to inform re: “fail” status?
- Possible Legal Issues
- Possible Ethical Issues
- Telehealth Assessment Option

Ethical Considerations—APA Code of Ethics

- 9.10 Explaining Assessment Results
  Regardless of whether the scoring and interpretation are done by psychologists, by employees or assistants, or by automated or other outside services, psychologists take reasonable steps to ensure that explanations of results are given to the individual or designated representative unless the nature of the relationship precludes provision of an explanation of results (such as in some organizational consulting, preemployment or security screenings, and forensic evaluations), and this fact has been clearly explained to the person being assessed in advance.

APA Guidelines for the Practice of Telepsychology

- When a psychological test or other assessment procedure is conducted via telepsychology, psychologists are encouraged to ensure that the integrity of the psychometric properties of the test or assessment procedure . . . and the conditions of administration indicated in the test manual are preserved when adapted for use with such technologies . . .
- . . . Psychologists may consider the use of a trained assistant (e.g., proctor) to be on premise at the remote location in an effort to help verify the identity of the client/patient, provide needed on-site support to administer certain tests or subtests, and protect the security of the psychological testing . . . process.
- . . . They also strive to account for and be prepared to explain the potential difference between the results obtained when a particular psychological test is conducted via telepsychology and when it is administered in-person.

APA Guidelines for the Practice of Telepsychology, cont.

- In addition, when documenting findings from evaluation and assessment procedures, psychologists are encouraged to specify that a particular test or assessment procedure has been administered via telepsychology, and describe any accommodations or modifications that have been made. . .

E.g: “Note: This evaluation was completed via secure (HITEC and HIPAA-compliant) audio-video-conferencing technology. The applicant’s identity was confirmed via visually viewing his driver’s license. The MMPI-2 was computer-administered with an on-site proctor and real-time audio access to the evaluating psychologist.”

Questions and Comments

References

References (2)


References (3)