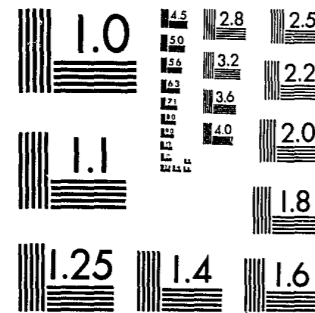


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11/18/82

JUDY  
MAYNARD

**FBI** LAW ENFORCEMENT BULLETIN

Children Vanish Evenly

AUGUST 1982

birds 50,000

News

missing after tornado

Finding Missing Children

MISSING

84995-  
84999

U.S. Department of Justice  
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# FBI LAW ENFORCEMENT BULLETIN

AUGUST 1982, VOLUME 51, NUMBER 8

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The NCIC's Missing Person File can be an invaluable tool to investigators in solving missing person cases. See Story p. 20.

Federal Bureau of Investigation  
United States Department of Justice  
Washington, D.C. 20535

William H. Webster, Director

The Attorney General has determined that the publication of this periodical is necessary in the transaction of the public business required by law of the Department of Justice. Use of funds for printing this periodical has been approved by the Director of the Office of Management and Budget through February 21, 1983.

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## Director's Message

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AUG 30 1982

### ACQUISITIONS

At the beginning of this year, Attorney General William French Smith assigned concurrent jurisdiction to investigate drug offenses to the FBI in cooperation with the Drug Enforcement Administration. This is part of an "overall effort to achieve more effective drug enforcement through coordinated efforts involving the Drug Enforcement Administration, the FBI, the United States Attorneys and other agencies in this and other Departments," according to the Attorney General.

The Attorney General praised the work of the Drug Enforcement Agency, saying that everyone at DEA "can be justly proud of their accomplishments." However, because of the magnitude of the drug problem today "for the first time since its establishment over 50 years ago, the full resources of the FBI will be added to our fight against the most serious crime problem facing our nation. . . ."

This move is part of the Justice Department's overall strategy to bring about more effective drug law enforcement through more coordinated efforts on the part of the DEA, the FBI, U.S. Attorneys, other agencies in the Justice Department, and other departments of the Federal Government. The DEA, according to the Attorney General, "will continue its fine work" and will be helped by this new cooperative effort.

The FBI's investigative effort in this area will be concentrated on major narcotics trafficking organizations, both those tied to traditional organized crime and not, and on high-level smugglers, distributors, manufacturers, financiers, and corrupt public officials who aid narcotics dealing. All the FBI's new authority will be exercised in close coordination with DEA.

*William H. Webster*

William H. Webster  
Director  
August 1, 1982

# Using Psychological Consultants in Screening Police Applicants

BY

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Since the Kerner's Commission recommendation in 1967 that all police officers be psychologically evaluated, psychological screening of applicants has become a routine component of the hiring process in many police agencies. Although the psychological evaluation process is widely used, it has not always been well understood or used to maximum effectiveness. Therefore, it is necessary to clarify some of the basic issues involved in effectively incorporating the "psychological" into the law enforcement administrative process.

## Stress, "Liability-Prone," and Negligent Admission/Retention

Research shows that excessive stress can lead to aggressive and unconventional behavior, as well as mental and physical dysfunctions on the job.<sup>1</sup> Police work is a well-known, high-stress occupation. Stress can be a significant factor in causing serious and expensive problems, but the stress tolerance level of officers or applicants can be a significant factor in preventing problems. People have different ways of coping with stress. Some individuals are emotionally "liability-prone." These individuals have an increased propensity to develop serious behavioral, psychological, and physical problems. They may become a serious threat to themselves, fellow officers, the welfare of the community, and the agency budget.



Dr. Saxe



Dr. Fabricatore

Apart from the obvious moral obligation law enforcement agencies have to ensure that their officers do not abuse their powers, inappropriate police behavior is expensive. The cost of investigating and processing personnel complaints is high. Disciplinary actions often include suspension, which reduces manpower. In addition, lawsuits and civil claims are costly in both dollars and manpower and are devastating to agency morale. The courts have identified "negligent admission" and "negligent retention" of officers as agency liabilities. Most agencies can trace a major portion of their unfavorable incidents to a relatively small number of officers. It is in the area of identifying applicants whose behavior will be costly to the agency that psychological screening efforts can be most effective.

## Strategies—"Select In" or "Screen Out"

Too often, police administrators are led to believe in a "select in" strategy, which suggests that psychological evaluations can aid in selecting the best candidate for police work. This is not quite true. Psychological input can be helpful in deciding which individuals within an agency or department are suitable for specific assignments, such as Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT), hostage negotiation, or bomb squads, but the most effective use of psychological evaluation is to "screen out" or identify those applicants who may not be emotionally suitable or may be a high risk for law enforcement. In our experience, the percentage of applicants psychologically unsuitable typically ranges between 5 percent and 20 percent of the applicant pool.

The former strategy—"select in"—implies a precision and level of accuracy that psychologists do not possess and psychological procedures do not produce. In addition, this strategy ignores the possibility that future events, such as personal problems, could severely impact applicants initially judged to be acceptable and cause them to become high-risk employees at a later time.

Unsuitable applicants do not always appear to be inappropriate. Applicant pools approximate the normal curve—some individuals will appear to be excellent candidates, some will be obviously unacceptable, and the great majority will be somewhere in the middle. Applicants in this middle range who, in the judgment of a psychologist, demonstrate risk of engaging in liability-resulting behavior should be screened out. This decision is not always clear, but in admitting individuals to law enforcement, judgmental decisions should be made with caution.

Other mechanisms should exist in the screening process to minimize possible decision errors. Included should be an appeal or review process conducted at a higher administrative level.

## How to Select and Best Use a Psychological Consultant

It would be ideal for law enforcement agencies to have a full-time mental health professional as part of the staff. In this case, the professional should be involved in an orientation period long enough to provide familiarity with police management, police officers' tasks, and criteria for successful job performance. Since the majority of police agencies do not have or cannot afford full-time mental health professionals, outside consultants are used for a variety of psychological services, including the psychological

**"It is the psychologist familiar with law enforcement who renders a clinical judgment that brings expertise and credibility to the screening process."**

screening of applicants. Outside consultants may be psychologists, psychiatrists, management consultants, and on occasion, physicians. Most often, a licensed professional or certified consultant is required.

An important consideration in choosing a professional for a department is the person's ability to relate to the police organization and to become knowledgeable in police consultation. Police agencies are approached by professionals from all areas and backgrounds who wish to become associated with an agency or propose a project on a fee-for-service or contract basis. In rural areas and small towns, police organizations sometimes develop working arrangements with university professors. In some cases, research academicians look upon police officers as subjects for data-gathering and fail to understand totally the needs of police officers and administrators.

Academic persons working in applied areas or professionals who have done research in areas of police psychology are sometimes better prepared to begin consultation in law enforcement. It is, however, important that such professionals also possess training in the area of identifying clinical or personality issues that could impair police officers' performance. Consultants who are not familiar with the job should approach the consultation task initially as a student, and police agencies should insist on exposing them to relevant areas of police work.

The director or chief of police will often be the primary contact for the consultant. The psychological screening information is usually transmitted directly to him or to another previously designated representative. In most cases, the decision to hire is made by the chief of police after background results, medical results, psychological results, and in some cases, polygraph results are available. Some agencies prefer either a "yes or no" response as to whether an applicant is suitable for police work. This response may be verbal, followed by a written report. Some police administrators prefer to meet with the consultant to discuss each applicant. However, in most cases, a detailed written report including the background as reviewed by the consultant, the results of any psychological tests administered, interview data, and a summary and recommendation is submitted to the department.

The consultant should function as part of a team that includes all those involved in processing applicants. It is strongly desirable for the consultant to meet with all persons in the system, including the training officers who will eventually complete the screening process by either recommending recruits for permanent status, probation, or termination. The consultant should know the training officer's perspective and be aware of any past psychological problems of the recruits. The training officer should know on what basis the psychologist will recommend marginal applicants be accepted with the hope they will develop as suitable officers during probation.

Consultants should be willing to explain and defend screening decisions should it become necessary.

When an applicant appeals a disqualification, the consultant should be available to appear before a civil service board or in court, if necessary.

In many cases, a psychologist or other professional will be hired solely to provide preemployment psychological screening. After the agency develops confidence in him, the consultant may be called upon to perform psychological "fitness for duty" evaluations on officers who have demonstrated patterns of excessive-force complaints or highly unusual or "liability-prone" behavior. Also, officers applying for special assignments, such as bomb squad technicians or hostage negotiators, may be evaluated to ensure that persons chosen are the best suited for the job. In these cases, the officer's personnel file and work history provide valuable information regarding past performance. Information on the number and nature of complaints against the officer, sick time taken, and performance under stress provides valuable input for the psychological consultant.

In all cases, it is important to remember that the decision as to who will be selected for employment and which officers will receive specialized assignments remains in the hands of the administration. The psychologist or consultant only provides specialized in-

formation and judgments that will be taken into consideration along with other important factors. In some instances, police administrators may choose officers who have not been recommended by the psychologist. Often, in these instances, the psychological consultant can identify areas of needed development and can suggest to the administration ways of supporting individual development.

#### Screening Components

Police administrators and managers are often concerned with the validity of psychological tests. Psychological instruments and procedures were developed through scientific and statistical investigation, but the relevance of any single statistical score to a well-integrated psychological judgment is often overemphasized. Good decisions require information. The three best sources of information in evaluating law enforcement applicants are:

- 1) Psychological tests;
- 2) Background information; and
- 3) An indepth or "clinical" interview by a psychologist knowledgeable in law enforcement.

All information developed in the preemployment stages could reasonably be used by a clinical psychologist. Typically, most psychologists choose the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI), the Sixteen Personality Factor Questionnaire (16PF), or the California Psychological Inventory (CPI). Extensive information exists on these instruments and their use in law enforcement screening;<sup>2</sup> however, psychologists may vary in the psychological tests they use depending on their training and experience.

Some psychological tests, such as the MMPI and the 16PF, can be computer scored, but a psychologist must

review and interpret the results on an individual basis. Because most computer interpretations of the MMPI are based on the assumption that the test applicant is a mental patient or an outpatient in psychotherapy, negative or pathological information is likely to be emphasized. The MMPI can be extremely useful in screening, but it must be interpreted by a professional who is knowledgeable in both the test's subtleties and law enforcement.

#### The Psychologist as an Expert Judge

In the psychological screening approach, the psychologist plays a critical role in integrating psychological test results, background information, and interview data in order to arrive at a judgment of unsuitability. This is a "clinical" or expert judgment, not a statistical or scientific outcome. Studies have been done relating various kinds of biographical or psychological test score information to criterion variables, such as disciplinary actions, number of arrests made, commendations, sick time taken, on-the-job automobile accidents, etc. These studies are helpful in suggesting which tests and criteria may be of potential benefit, but to rely totally on test scores and correlations would be inappropriate. It is the psychologist familiar with law enforcement who renders a clinical judgment that brings expertise and credibility to the screening process.

The psychological consultant, properly trained and working as support for management, can maximize the success and professionalism of the screening and selection process.

Psychologists cannot predict the future. However, assuming they know the intricacies of a police officer's job, they can develop relevant information regarding an individual's emotional functioning in a law enforcement position and render a judgment about an individual's suitability. Psychological screening minimizes the admission of inappropriate applicants and is consistent with the safeguards and precautions that the law and commonsense dictate. **FBI**

#### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> W.D. Haynes, *Stress Related Disorders in Policemen* (San Francisco: R & E Research Associates, Inc., 1978); R.H. Rahe and E.K.E. Gunderson, *Life Stress and Illness* (Springfield, Ill.: Charles C. Thomas, 1974); M. Reiser, "Stress, Distress and Adaptation in Police Work," *The Police Chief*, January 1976.

<sup>2</sup> J. Gottesman, *The Utility of the MMPI in Assessing the Personality Patterns of Urban Police Applicants* (Hoboken: Stevens Institute of Technology, 1975); S.J. Saxe and M. Reiser, "A Comparison of Three Police Applicant Groups Using the MMPI," *Journal of Police Science and Administration*, vol. 4, No. 4, 1976; J. Fabricatore, F. Azan, and H. Snibbe, "Predicting Performance of Police Officers Using the 16 Personality Factor Questionnaire," *American Journal of Community Psychiatry*, vol. 6, No. 1, 1978; R.H. Blum, *Police Selection* (Springfield, Ill.: Charles C. Thomas, 1964).

**END**