

Ensuring the Psychological Well-being of Law Enforcement Officers

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Ensuring the Psychological Well-being of Law Enforcement Officers

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## Abstract

*Law enforcement has long been recognized as a stressful career that requires optimal mental health on the part of the sworn officers. For over forty years it has been recommended that candidates for positions in law enforcement be given a psychological screening by both the Presidents Commission on Law Enforcement and the National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice. Despite this there are many law enforcement agencies that still fail to do this. Stress of the job has negative physical, emotional, behavioral, and mental impacts on police officers. Therefore, the mental health of officers should be monitored throughout their careers. Four more commonly used tests are explored in this paper. Recommendations for implementing mandatory psychological screening pre and post-employment will be provided.*

Ensuring the Psychological Well-being of Law Enforcement Officers

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Under the Supervision of Dr. Sabina Burton

### **Statement of the Problem**

In the United States each individual state implements the minimum hiring standards for law enforcement officers in that state. As a result of this hiring standards vary wildly from state to state. An individual deemed unfit for employment in Wisconsin may be hired easily in Iowa.

Some states have implemented much higher standards than others, but none of them require pre or post-employment psychological screening. Most major police departments have implemented testing on their own, but many smaller rural departments have not. The costs of training and arming one psychologically unfit person are too high a potential price to pay. This fact was illustrated in Crandon, Wisconsin on October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2007 when an off duty deputy open fire, with his police issued rifle, on seven people killing six and wounding the seventh. The deputy, Tyler Peterson, had not been

psychologically screened prior to his employment as a law enforcement officer. Six dead and a law suit filed is much too high a price to pay.

In 1967 The Presidents Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of justice recommended pre-employment psychological screening for law enforcement recruits (Cochrane, Tett & Vandecreek, 2003). The job of police officer is stressful, and it requires an individual make split second decisions that can literally mean life or death for citizens. The state has an obligation to ensure the individuals they train, arm and give the authority to use force, including deadly, are and remain psychologically fit for duty.

### **Purpose of this Study**

The purpose of this paper is to research and illustrate the need for psychological screening of law enforcement officers, to research and analyze the existing tests available for psychological screening, and to debate the feasibility of mandating pre and post-employment testing. The potential benefits and disadvantages will be explored and analyzed as well.

### **Methods of Approach**

Secondary data will be gathered from credible scholarly journals, books, and websites. Additionally, government websites may be utilized for accurate reliable statistics if needed. Empirical peer reviewed studies will be favored in this research. Personal experience, knowledge, and perspective gained from six years of studying criminal justice in America and seven plus years in law enforcement will be drawn upon by the author as well.

### **Contribution to the Field**

This paper can be used by individual police departments as a means to justify their current hiring practices or bolster their case for the implementation of new hiring standards in line with the findings in this paper. It may also be used as a justification for federally mandated psychological testing of all American law enforcement officers some day in the future.

### **Results of the Study**

Law enforcement is a stressful career that demands officers are ready and able to make split second life and death decisions. The men and women in this profession must both be psychologically fit to accurately size up a situation and make those decisions, and to be able to handle the consequences of their decisions and actions. There are no dissenting opinions on the need for officers to be psychologically healthy in order to effectively and safely perform their duties. Despite this approximately ten percent of police departments do not conduct pre-employment psychological screening, and sans a critical incident, questionable behavior in the field and/or a promotional opportunity ongoing monitoring of mental health is unheard of. This needs to be changed for the well-being of all parties involved.

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## **Section 1**

### **Introduction**

#### **Statement of the Problem**

In the United States there are no federal mandates for hiring standards of police officers. Currently only eleven states mandate departments conduct psychological testing on perspective recruits (Janik, 1994). Though many departments voluntarily conduct psychological testing on all perspective candidates some do not. Additionally, very few conduct agencies ongoing psychological testing on their officers until an incident, poor decision, or bad act has already occurred. This practice opens the door for psychologically unfit individuals to become law enforcement officers, and allows officers who become unfit throughout the course of their career to continue without intervention until damage has already been done.

#### **Purpose of This Seminar Paper**

Pre-employment psychological screening is successful in filtering out psychologically unfit candidates for the job of law enforcement officer (Butcher, Atlis & Hahn 2004; Shusman & Inwald 1991; Chibnall & Detrick, 2004 & Bishop, Tong, Diong, Enkelmann & Why, 2001) Ongoing psychological testing will bring struggling officers to the attention of command staff. This will allow them to get counseling prior to bad acts or decisions caused by psychological instability including PTSD. The purpose of this paper is to research and illustrate the need for psychological screening of law enforcement officers, to research and analyze the existing tests available for psychological screening, and to debate the feasibility of mandating pre and post-employment testing. The potential benefits and disadvantages will be explored and analyzed as well.



### **Significance of the Problem**

Psychologically unfit officers are more likely to make poor decisions in the field, more likely to misuse and abuse authority, more likely to have problems at home, more likely to leave the profession, and at higher risk for suicide (Arter, 2007). They also cost the department and society money in turn over. It costs as much as \$100,000 to hire train and equip a new officer (Cochrane et al., 2003). Lost productivity, overtime, and sick outs are also costs that rise when employees are unhealthy or unhappy. Additionally, when an individual is not psychologically healthy they are more likely to abuse power, use excessive force, and/or make bad decisions which cause law suits costing departments and taxpayers substantial amounts of money (Arter, 2007 & Gershon, Barocas, Canton, Li & Vlahov, 2009).

### **Assumptions**

Screening out applicants who are psychologically unfit for the job of law enforcement, and continuing to monitor the mental health of practicing law enforcement officers will be beneficial to the officers. This could include lower divorce rates, officer suicide rates may be lower, lower incidents of domestic violence, physical health will improve, and interventions can happen before a mistake is made that could ruin their career.

Ensuring psychological fitness will benefit police agencies financially as their will be less turn over, fewer sick calls, fewer law suits, and less need for disciplinary actions saving money. It will also benefit agencies by improving their standing with the community they serve, and improving the moral of the officers.

Finally this will benefit the citizens served by law enforcement in several ways. First it will increase their trust in police, allowing them to feel safer in their communities. Second they will feel more confident they will be treated with respect when they are stopped by law enforcement. Third they will be less likely to be the victims of excessive force or abuse of power by police officers. Finally they will be assured no matter where they travel in this country they can expect the same from all law enforcement. Psychologically healthy officers are a benefit to the entire community.

## **Section 2**

### **Stress in Law Enforcement**

The job of a law enforcement officer is considered to be one of the most stressful in the United States (Arter, 2007; Kelley, 2005; Anshel, 2000, Dantzer, 1987). It is a stressful occupation for a myriad of reasons. Many of the stressors inherent in the profession are virtually unchangeable. For this reason it is imperative only the most psychologically fit among us are chosen for the profession, and that the mental health of the officers is both monitored and attended to throughout their careers.

Jobs that are physically and emotionally demanding are known to be stressful. (Gershon, Barocas, Canton, Li & Vlahov, 2009). The same applies to occupations that do not give individuals much or any control and flexibility (Gershon et al., 2009). A career in law enforcement has all of these major stress inducers.

Officers are called upon to physically take people into custody for a variety of reasons. This at times involves, running, tackling, grappling, punching, physically restraining, carrying, tazing, baton use, and deadly force options. This is in addition to carrying approximately twenty

pounds of equipment on their person. Some officers ride bicycles, horses, and motorcycles and conduct miles of foot patrol. The job of policing is a physical profession, and as a result most departments conduct a physical agility test prior to employment. Some departments also conduct ongoing physical tests to ensure the fitness of their officers.

Law enforcement officers are often the first on scene to car crashes, fires, and medical emergencies. They are called into people's homes to investigate domestic violence, child abuse, accidents, burglaries, sexual assaults and other crimes. While civilians run away officers run toward danger. Officers are paid to, are expected to, and, most often, are proud to put their lives on the line to protect others. The job of a law enforcement officer is emotionally demanding.

In the United States law enforcement agencies are para-military. They follow a strict chain of command and the more perilous the situation the more militant the command becomes. There are situations in law enforcement, much like the actual military, where an officer has no choice but to follow the orders of a superior officer. There are often times when individual officers have little or no control over duties. A career in law enforcement often lacks individual control.

Though each individual officer does have a large amount of autonomy and discretion in their day to day activities, they must operate within a ridged set of rules and laws. They generally get to choose whether or not to issue a traffic citation, however, the more serious the offense the less discretion they have. They also have less flexibility in their personal appearance while on or off duty than most other professions. Many departments do not allow visible tattoos, piercings, and have strict guidelines on hairstyles and color. Some departments even dictate their officers actions when they are off duty, banning outside employment, enforcing residency requirements,

and requiring they be armed at all times when in the jurisdiction they serve. The job of a law enforcement officer is not flexible.

Some of the more obvious stressors have to do with safety. Though law enforcement is not the most dangerous job in this country, it is one of the few that face the possibility of a violent death or injury at the hands of another human being during the course of their duties. For the vast majority of people when faced with a dangerous situation they get to choose between fight or flight, but for law enforcement flight is not an option (Arter, 2007). There are not many professions that require the use of a bullet resistant vests and firearms. Though line of duty deaths are relatively rare, in 2010 there were 161 on duty deaths 72 of which were traffic related, out of more than 900,000 officers (Floyd, 2011), the reality is at any moment an officer could be called to a potentially fatal situation and that can cause nearly constant stress. It's not always what officers do that causes the most stress, it's what they may have to do.

Other stressful aspects of the job of law enforcement officer include shiftwork and overtime (Gershon et al., 2009). Police work does not begin at 9am and end at 5pm. It is, by necessity, a job that requires shift work, working weekends, and working holidays. It is also a job that by its nature requires overtime. An officer cannot ignore a crime in progress or a call for service simply because their shift is nearly over. Additionally, subpoenas cannot be ignored because they fall on a day off or before or after the officer's shift. Law enforcement requires both shift work and overtime, and that is stressful.

Gershon et al. (2009) stated frequent interaction with the general public and poor working conditions also cause stress. Police officers must interact with the general public everyday they are on duty. Though the vast majority of these interactions are service related the general public

tends to view them negatively (Arter, 2007). In addition officers also interact with the criminals in society on a regular basis. Working conditions for officers, at times, are the worst imaginable. They go into people's homes and cars, abandoned buildings, homeless shelters, basements, attics, and are outside in the elements as often as they are inside.

Another particularly stressful aspect of police work is the varied and intermittent work load (Gershon et al. 2009). There are shifts where officers are literally running from call to call without as much as a bathroom break, and there are shifts that are so painfully slow the officers cannot find enough work to fill the hours. Though one can assume Saturday nights are generally busier than Sunday mornings they cannot plan on this being the case. A big accident, fire, or natural disaster can turn a slow day into a nightmare in a matter of seconds.

In addition to the outside stressors the para-military environment may cause stress. Also police supervisors are often not particularly supportive of the officers which causes them even more stress (Anshel, 2000). These are considered to be more harmful than the outside stressors according to officers, and coincidentally are some of the few that can be remedied (Brough, 2004; Pasillas, Follette & Perumean-Chaney, 2006).

Adding to the stress, police tend to isolate themselves from civilians, often abandoning old friendships for new ones with other officers (Harrison, 1998). By separating themselves they come to rely on other officers for support. This is problematic because the police subculture has little room for perceived weakness which often pushes individuals to cope with the stress in unhealthy ways such as alcohol abuse and/or avoidance and denial (Pasillas et al., 2006). Law enforcement officers are also unlikely to seek out professional help for mental health issues (Pasillas et al., 2006). Additionally, according to Gershon et al. (2009) the stress of police work

can be worse for officers who lack a strong social support network to rely on. It is clear police work is stressful, and that the amount of stress police officers are under can cause a myriad of problems.

### **Negative effects of stress in law enforcement**

A job in law enforcement is stressful by its very nature, and most of the stressors in law enforcement cannot be changed or removed. Untreated stress can and does cause a variety of problems for individual officers, law enforcement agencies, and the public they serve.

For the officers the stress coupled with poor coping skills, causes many physical and emotional problems. Law enforcement officers have higher rates of coronary disease, depression, anxiety, and alcoholism than the general population (Arter, 2007). These things can, and often do, lead to suicide or suicidal ideation, family problems, burnout, and mortality (Arter, 2007 & Gershon et al., 2009). Repeated exposure to traumatic events, such as child abuse, domestic violence and sexual assault can cause psychological problems (Pasillas, Pollette & Perumean-Chaney, 2006), and chronic untreated stress can also lead to excessive force, domestic violence and abuse of power (Gershon et al., 2009). Officers are trained to use and have constant access to lethal weapons. This makes the suicidal ideation and domestic violence particularly worrisome. Ensuring only psychologically stable people are accepted into law enforcement and monitoring the mental wellbeing of current officers is something that society owes to them.

For law enforcement agencies chronic untreated stress coupled with poor coping mechanisms leads to higher rates of absenteeism. Also, when officers become mentally unstable and use unjust force or abuse their power the agency loses credibility and the cooperation of the public they serve (Gershon et al., 2009). This is particularly problematic because without

cooperation from the public law enforcement cannot be effective. Additionally, an agency is liable for the actions of their officers (Janik, 1994). Stress also causes turnover, early retirement and loss of productivity (Gershon et al., 2009). Add to that the cost of training a new recruit are incredibly high, as much as \$100,000 per person, hiring people who are not mentally capable of handling the job, and losing good officers because of stress is very costly (Chocrane, Tett & Vandecreek, 2003). The literal bottom line is untreated stress costs law enforcement agencies millions of dollars and the loss of good officers. It is good fiscal policy to ensure only psychologically healthy people are hired by an agency, and to ensure the ongoing mental health of the officers.

The cost of over stressed and untreated police officers to society is high. The first way it costs society is with higher taxes due to officer absenteeism, turnover, and loss of productivity. It also may cost them their trust in law enforcement if they, or someone they know, is the victim of police abuse of power, excessive force or are just treated badly by an unhealthy officer. Finally, in the most extreme of situations, it can, and in the past has, cost individual members of society their lives. Chronic stress can cause slower mental capability which in turn can cause poor decision making (Anshel, 2000). The people grant law enforcement officers the power to use force. In fact with the exception of the military law enforcement has a monopoly on sanctioned use of force in this country (Cochrane, Tett & Vandecreek, 2003). Officers are trained and equipped to use force, up to deadly, on the citizens they serve. Optimal mental capability is necessary, and optimal mental health should be demanded. This is owed to society.

### **The use of psychological screening in law enforcement**

In the United States each individual state dictates the minimal hiring standards for their police departments. This includes how much education is required, how old applicants must be, what is or is not allowed as far as previous offenses and traffic violations, will prior drug use be tolerated, and physical fitness level required for entry. Then each individual police department can implement their own requirements as long as they have fulfilled the state minimum requirements. As one can imagine this creates a wide variety of requirements, not only state to state, but within each state as well.

The lack of uniform minimal standards throughout the country would not be problematic if all the states took their role of deciding minimal standards seriously. This has turned out not to be the case. Currently, there are several states that require only a high school diploma or GED for entry into the profession, and the vast majority of states do not require pre or post-employment psychological testing for their applicants or officers.

In 1967 The Presidents Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of justice recommended pre-employment psychological screening for law enforcement recruits (Cochrane, Tett & Vandecreek, 2003 & Buetler, Storm, Kirkish, Scogin & Gaines, 1985). Six years later in 1973 The National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals also advocated for pre-employment psychological screening (Cochrane et al., 2003). Nearly 40 years have passed since these recommendations came out, and only 11 states have pre-employment psychological screening as a minimal requirement for a job in law enforcement



(Janik, 1994). It would appear the individual states are going to need to be forced into requiring psychological screening or unfit individuals will continue to enter the profession.

### **Section 3**

#### **The Five Factor Model**

Folk concepts are generally held common sense beliefs about personality that people use in their everyday lives to explain and predict behavior (Tellegen, 1993). The California Personality Inventory (CPI) was created to measure folk concepts. The NEO-PI uses the five personality dimensions to classify an individual's personality: the five personality dimensions have roots in folk concepts (McCrae, Costa & Piedmont, 1993). As the CPI and NEO-PI are two of the four tests explored in this paper this section will explain the five factor model.

Five factors of personality first emerged in research by McDougall in 1932 (Barrick & Mount, 1991). The five categories of personality were classified as intellect, character, temperament, disposition, and temper by McDougall (as cited in Barrick & Mount, 1991). Fisk (1949), Tupes (1957), and Tupes and Christal (1961) all found support for a five factor model (Barrick & Mount, 1991). It was further corroborated by four additional studies conducted by Norman in 1963, Borgatta 1964, Smith 1967, and Hakel 1974 (Barrick & Mount 1991). Norman's five labels (extroversion, emotional stability, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and culture) are most commonly used today (Barrick & Mount 1991). Though the five factor model lost favor in the 1980's today it has widespread acceptance among researchers as a valuable framework or classification tool for personality (Carchione et al., 1998, Barrick & Mount, 1991).

Each of the five labels is multidimensional (Sackett & Wanek, 1996). Although there is general agreement about there being five strong factors that repeatedly emerge in research, and

which labels are the best descriptors of the factors, there is disagreement about what each label means (Barrick & Mount, 1991). For the purposes of this paper the descriptions created by Barrick & Mount (1991) will be used. They define each label as follows. Extroversion (surgency) which includes traits such as, assertiveness, an outgoing nature, friendliness, and activity. Emotional stability (emotionality) which contains self-sufficiency, calmness, and poise. Agreeableness (conformity) consists of tolerance, kindness, maturity, trustfulness, and a cooperative nature. Conscientiousness (dependability) includes responsibility, a conventional nature, organization, and work ethic. Culture (intellect) comprises independence, creativity, intelligence, curiosity, and artistic ability.

According to Barrick and Mount (1991) 117 studies had found correlations between the five factor model and job performance for a variety of careers including law enforcement. This consistent support for the five factor model makes the NEO-PI and CPI of particular interest for the purposes of this paper. From the model conscientiousness has been found to be the most significant predictor of future job performance in law enforcement officers (Barrick & Mount, 1991).

#### **Section 4**

##### **Available psychological tests used in law enforcement: their strengths and weaknesses**

There are several psychological tests that can be used for the screening of law enforcement candidates and current officers, all of which at least one department employs. In this paper four commonly utilized tests will be reviewed. The tests are: the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI), Inwald Personality Inventory (IPI), NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-PI-R), and the California Personality Inventory (CPI).

### **Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory**

The first psychological test to be reviewed is the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI). The MMPI is the most commonly used test for law enforcement in the United States (Beutler, Storm, Kirkish, Scogin & Gaines, 1985 & Shapiro, 1981 & Daniels & King, 2002). There are three versions of the MMPI: the MMPI, MMPI-R and MMPI-2 (Boes, Chandler & Timm, 1997). The original MMPI was completed in 1943 and was widely accepted and used throughout the United States to measure adult psychopathology (Butcher et al., 2004). Both the MMPI and the MMPI-R consisted of 566 true/false questions and take approximately an hour to complete (Boes, Chandler & Timm, 1997). Both of these tests were written at a sixth grade reading level (Boes et al., 1997). By the early 1980's the MMPI was outdated and no longer reflected the general population. Because of this, work on the MMPI-2 began (Butcher et al., 2004). The MMPI-2 was published in 1989 (Daniels & King, 2002) It consists of 567 true/false questions and is written at an 8th grade reading level (Boes et al., 1997). It still takes approximately one hour to complete.

The MMPI-2 has 10 standard scales, and six validity scales (Ben-Porath & Waller, 1992). Over the years additional scales have been developed, including norms for law enforcement (Boes et al., 1997). The MMPI-2 has the capacity to measure a myriad of concerns including; alcohol abuse, marital stress, inconsistency, depression, hysteria, psychopathic deviation, paranoia, anxiety, anger and antisocial tendencies along. (Butcher, Atlis & Hahn, 2004). The validity scales are used to indicate to the test interpreter when a test taker has been dishonest on the test (Butcher et al., 2004 & Daniels & King, 2002 & Boes et al., 1997). The MMPI-2 has

proven itself to be a useful tool in pre-employment screening for law enforcement. According to Weiss Johnson, Serafino & Serafino (2001) the MMPI-2 can identify individuals who are aggressive approximately 75 percent of the time.

Overly aggressive officers can cause many problems for their departments and so this is a useful trait to be able to identify. Blau, Super and Brady (1993) found the MMPI-2 to be successful 80 percent of the time in identifying problem officers, as identified by supervisor reviews. Bartol (1991) found the test was successful 70 percent of the time in predicting which individuals would be terminated. Several studies have found the MMPI and MMPI-2 both have the ability to detect adults with psychosis and have limited predicative abilities in terms of future behavior for law enforcement candidates. The true value of these tests is difficult to determine given numerous externalities. Most of the studies used very small samples. Also many of the studies conducted to determine the predicative value of the MMPI used the supervisor reviews of current police officers. Supervisor reviews are highly subjective and should be handled with caution. Additionally, candidates who have seriously elevated profiles on the MMPI will not be hired and therefore cannot be included in the sample.

As demonstrated in the above paragraphs the MMPI-2 has been successful in helping law enforcement agencies choose candidates who are emotionally equipped to be successful law enforcement officers. However, the MMPI and MMPI-2 have several weaknesses as a tool for this purpose. First the MMPI was developed to identify abnormal individuals from the normal population, not as a personality test; therefore it can be difficult to interpret scores from the MMPI in terms of personality (Bartol, 1991). Second police candidates have shown as a group they are defensive in their test taking resulting in elevated K scales(Boes et al., 1997). K scales are the score of one of the validity tests measuring defensiveness. Many have also

demonstrated they have the ability to sufficiently manipulate the test and portray themselves as better candidates than they actually are (Daniels & King, 2002). As the candidates are trying to obtain employment it is logical they would try to paint themselves in a more positive light.

Blau et al. (1993) found some individuals may be wrongly removed from hiring based on MMPI-2 scores which is especially worrisome for departments that have a hard time getting quality applicants. Additionally, the MMPI's normative data for law enforcement under-represents women and minorities potentially putting them at a disadvantage with the test (Arrigo & Claussen, 2003). Finally the MMPI does not measure conscientiousness which has consistently shown to be positively correlated with acceptable job performance (Arrigo & Claussen, 2003). The MMPI-2 is currently the most used psychological test for law enforcement candidates. The test has strong support and backing in both the psychological and criminal justice communities.

### **Inwald Personality Inventory**

The second psychological test this paper will discuss is the Inwald Personality Inventory (IPI). The IPI was published in the late 1980's specifically for law enforcement. It was developed by Robin Inwald in response to the perceived weaknesses in the MMPI (Inwald, 2008). It consists of 310 true/false questions and takes approximately 45 minutes to complete (Boes et al., 1997).

The IPI has 26 subscales relevant to a career in law enforcement. The scales are: Guardedness, Alcohol, Drugs, Driving Violations, Job Difficulties, Trouble With the Law, Absences Abuse, Substance Abuse, Antisocial Attitudes, Hyperactivity, Rigid Type, Type "A", Illness Concerns, Treatment Programs, Anxiety, Phobic Personality, Obsessive Personality,

Depression, Loner Type, Unusual Experience, Lack of Assertiveness, Interpersonal Difficulties, Undue Suspiciousness, Family Conflicts, Sexual Concerns, and Spouse/Significant Other Conflicts (Scogin, Schumacher, Gardner & Chaplin, 1995). The IPI has one validity scale to measure defensiveness in the test takers answers which presumably will indicate if the answers were given honestly (Boes et al., 1997).

A yearlong study conducted by Scogin et al. (1995) found the IPI to accurately predict future disciplinary action in law enforcement officers 73 percent of the time as compared to 64 percent of the time for the MMPI-2. A five-year follow-up study conducted by Inwald (1988) determined the IPI to be a more reliable predictor of success and/or failure in corrections officers, as defined by being fired or maintaining employment than the MMPI-2. The IPI has also demonstrated the ability to predict problem behaviors such as lateness, absences, and derelictions of duty (Shusman & Inwald, 1991). Though the IPI has been proven to be a valuable tool in the hiring process for potential law enforcement officers it also has weaknesses. Similar to the MMPI some individuals will be wrongly categorized causing the dismissal of good potential officers. Additionally, many of the studies conducted on the IPI were conducted by the creator Robin Inwald. Though the studies were peer reviewed and published it should be noted the author had a stake in the outcomes.

### **California Personality Inventory**

The third test to be reviewed is the California Personality Inventory (CPI). There are two versions of the CPI. Version one consists of 480 true/false questions and has 18 standard scales. Version 2 has 462 true/false questions and 20 standard scales. Both are written at a 7th grade reading level and take approximately one hour to complete (Boes et al., 1997). The CPI was

developed to evaluate individuals who are not psychiatrically disturbed, and norms for law enforcement candidates exist and can be obtained from the publisher (Boes et al., 1997). The CPI has three validity scales to measure if test takers are faking good, faking bad, or just answering the questions randomly (Boes et al., 1997).

The CPI measures “folk concepts” of personality (McCrae et al., 1993). Folk concepts are beliefs we share about personality as a culture or “folk wisdom” pertaining to personality (Tellegen, 1993). Folk concepts are responsible for the five personality factors; Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness (McCrae et al., 1993). A high measurement of conscientiousness is especially useful in hiring law enforcement officers as it has been found to be the best indicator of a good candidate (Arrigo & Claussen, 2003). People who score high in conscientiousness generally are hardworking, reliable, honorable, trustworthy, dependable, and organized (Sarchione, Cuttler, Muchinsky & Nelson-Gray, 1998). These are important traits for people to possess in any profession, but especially important for law enforcement officers. The CPI has the proven capacity to accurately measure individual’s level of conscientiousness, and therefore should be considered a useful tool in the hiring process for law enforcement officers (McCrae et al., 1993).

As do the two other tests, the CPI has limitations. Perhaps the most obvious is that it is intended for use in “normal” populations (Boes et al., 1997). If an individual with severe psychological problems made it through to the psychological screening the MMPI-2 or the IPI would flag those candidates and they would be released from the process. It is unclear as to whether or not the CPI would filter out an abnormal individual. A second weakness is misclassification. All psychological screening tools currently in use occasionally render false

negatives or positives. As with the other tests reviewed there is a risk of releasing good candidates and allowing an occasional bad one to be hired (Sarchione et al., 1998).

### **NEO-PI**

The NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-PI) was developed in the early 1990's by Costa and McCrae (Arrigo & Claussen, 2003). It has 240 questions, and is specifically designed to measure the "Big Five" personality concepts (extroversion, emotional stability or neuroticism, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness) (McCrae, Costa & Piedmont, 1993, Barrick & Mount, 1991 & Chibnall & Detrick, 2003). Each of the five traits has six subscales (Young & Schinka, 2001). To this date the NEO-PI is likely the most comprehensive of the existing tests that measure personality traits (Young & Schinka, 2001). Designed for people ages 16 years and older, the test is available in two versions; NEO-PI-R and NEO-PI-S (Arrigo & Claussen, 2003). The NEO-PI-R is designed to be completed by a trained observer, and the NEO-PI-S is a self-report test (Arrigo & Claussen, 2003). Though either test would be appropriate for use in law enforcement settings more departments would likely choose the self-report style, and this paper will focus more on that test.

The NEO-PI has shown potential in pre-employment processes. Black (2000) conducted a study on police officers in New Zealand and found the NEO-PI was a good predictor for the applicants' abilities in firearms, computer skills, academics, public speaking, and driving (As cited in Chibnall & Detrick, 2003 & Detrick, Chibnall & Luebbert, 2004). Bishop, Tong, Diong, Enkelmann & Why (2001) conducted a study with Singapore police officers utilizing the NEO-PI. Their analysis of 243 male police officers showed the officers who scored higher in conscientiousness generally coped with stress by planning and showed restraint in high pressure



situations. They also found officers who scored higher in neuroticism used denial and venting as their chosen coping mechanisms. This information would be valuable in hiring decisions.

The NEO-PI has been proven to be a useful tool in measuring personality traits, but it is not without weaknesses. First, it is not a test that will weed out individuals for psychopathology. Neither the self-report or observed version is designed to catch major psychological issues in the test takers (Ben-Porath & Waller, 1992). Second, personality traits do not dictate every action a law enforcement officer may take. This could be attributed to the power of peer pressure in the law enforcement profession (Guffey, Larson, Zimmerman & Shook, 2007).

Another potential weakness is the NEO-PI has not been used extensively in law enforcement pre-employment screening and as a result is underdeveloped for this use (Arrigo & Claissen, 2003). The NEO-PI does not contain a validity measure, rather it has 3 questions that ask if the test taker has been honest, complete, and correct (Caldwell-Andrews, Baer & Berry, 2000). Caldwell et al. (2000) determined one could successfully fake good or fake bad on the NEO-PI and concluded new validity measures should be added. The NEO-PI would be best coupled with the IPI or the MMPI-2 for the most comprehensive results and some departments may be unwilling to commit to two tests due to cost (Guffy et al., 2007).

## **Section 5**

### **Making Pre and Post Employment Psychological Screening Mandatory Throughout the United States**

Each state in the United States is granted the ability to govern themselves without undue interference from the federal government. This includes the ability to determine minimal standards, requirements, and training for law enforcement officers. Traditionally, states have

been reluctant to give up any of their autonomy to the federal government. Despite the reluctance there are many examples of the federal government imposing its will on the states when the cause is deemed important enough. For example in the 1970's maximum speed limit was implemented as a result of oil shortages. More recently, lowering of the prohibited blood alcohol content for operating a motor vehicle was implemented in every state through the urging of the federal government. If the reason for change is important enough the federal government has the ability to pressure the states to comply. Ensuring law enforcement officers are psychologically healthy should be a compelling argument to impose legal guidelines.

The first step in implementing mandatory pre and post psychological screening for law enforcement officers is for a high ranking official in the federal government, such as the Attorney General, to strongly advocate its implementation in hopes the states would follow suit. The second step is to offer federal grants to aid states in the enactment of this new policy. This would help alleviate the argument that the program is too expensive for local jurisdictions. The third step is to cut off all states that have not satisfactorily implemented mandatory psychological testing from any federal law enforcement grants. This gives each state the choice to implement the policy or simply give up grant dollars. This issue is important enough to justify these actions.

The individual states have the autonomy to choose what test or tests they would administer, though there would be federally mandated guidelines. The author recommends combining either the MMPI-2 or the IPI with the CPI or the NEO-PI. Any combination of the first two tests with the second two tests would be comprehensive and fair.

The potential benefits of both pre and post-employment psychological screening have been covered extensively in this paper. There have been some concerns or potential

disadvantages that have been proposed by colleagues in regards to this policy. The first is a concern over what would happen to a veteran officer who tests to be psychologically unfit for duty. The intention of post-employment monitoring is to discover potential problems before they happen. If an officer slips through the safety net and is found to be unfit for duty there are many options to handle this. One way is to reassign the officer in question to tasks that do not entail much interaction with the public. They could also go on temporary disability. If the situation occurs where the officer is found to be permanently unfit for duty he or she will be given the same benefits as an officer who is injured and deemed physically unfit for duty. In the long run keeping officers healthy will inevitably save money by limiting turn-over, and sick out calls, and staving off lawsuits.

A second concern discussed was the potential reluctance of police officers to accept this new policy. It can be difficult to implement changes in law enforcement. However, because the psychological monitoring is for the well-being of officers it has a better chance of being accepted. Departments all across the country have successfully implemented minimal physical agility requirements for their officers, and this has not only been accepted, but has been welcomed by street level officers. Psychological health is equally, if not more, important than physical health and would be accepted with time. Additionally psychological testing could raise moral and relieve stress by ensuring fellow officers are emotionally capable of handling themselves in dangerous situations (Janik, 1994).

## **Section 6**

### **Recommendations/Conclusion**

The importance of ensuring police officers are psychologically fit has been made repeatedly throughout this paper. An individual would find it difficult to find a serious person who would argue with this point. However, none of the tests proposed are infallible. Further research should be conducted to monitor the effectiveness of the available tests and to revise or enhance them where needed. The goal should be to ultimately develop a unique test for law enforcement personnel that accounts for the stressors and challenges unique to the criminal justice field.

For a timely remedy the author of this paper recommends to use two or more of the tests currently available along with a psychological evaluation by a professional both for pre and post-employment screening. It would be interesting to see how the attitudes might change as careers progress. A comprehensive policy should be created that covers pre and post psychological evaluations, and how to handle officers who test unfit for duty.

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