



120 The Four D's of Decision Making of Police Officer Applicants in Forensic Psychological Evaluations

Ronn Johnson, PhD*, University of San Diego, 3525 Del Mar Heights Road, #302, San Diego, CA 91230

After attending this presentation, attendees will understand a review of the ethical forensic context that is used as a framework for exploring the four D's of decision making.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by showing how the safety sensitive nature of police work requires that an applicant's behavioral patterns to be placed under a higher level of scrutiny.

Most accredited law enforcement agencies require a series of steps for all applicants that include a post-offer forensic pre-employment psychological evaluation. These evaluations frequently use guidelines from the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) and at the same time relevant psychological dimensions stated in the Peace Officer Training Standards (POST). Both reference sources provide forensic examiners with direction for using the "rule out" approach designed for identifying counterproductive behaviors related to an officer's decision making. Why? Because police officers have to make appropriate judgments under Action Forcing Moments (Johnson, 2010) where split-second decision making is required during extremely stressful situations. Forensic psychologists conducting these evaluations at a minimum will rely upon several informational sources that include background investigation, personal history questionnaires (PHQ) and objective personality tests (e.g., IPI, MMPI2-RF, PAI, 16PF). Because the quality of an officer's judgment is a critical selection factor, forensic psychological examiners must use samples of an applicant's past behavior and decision-making as a foundation for rendering an opinion. The forensic psychological interview itself may last less than an hour but usually involves about five hours of the forensic examiner's total time that is spent evaluating the applicant (e.g., reviewing files, crafting forensic interview framework, and writing the forensic report). There are many job-relevant areas where the forensic psychological interviewer can probe to secure a scientifically-informed basis for rendering an opinion about the quality of an applicant's decision making and judgment. These job-relevant areas are hereafter referred to as the four D's and include debt, driving, drugs, and drinking. This investigator hypothesizes that a rigorous review of the four D's will significantly enhance the opinions and recommendations offered by forensic examiners working in these law enforcement settings.

There are four primary learning objectives for this presentation. First, attendees are presented a review of the ethical forensic context is used as a framework for exploring the four D's. For example, guidelines from the American Board of Forensic Psychology stress that practitioners use assessment methods in the way that is appropriate based on research or evidence of their usefulness and proper application within a law enforcement personnel selection context.

Second, the safety sensitive nature of police work requires that an applicant's behavioral patterns to be placed under a higher level of scrutiny. The standards for armed police officers are different than civilian and military personnel. Primarily because police officers have discretion in executing an arrest, using deadly force, engaging in pursuit chases, and having to respond to a wide range of diverse citizen contacts under stress. A review of an applicant's history of judgment in the four D's facilitates a forensic examiner's understanding of a distinctive style expected as they would carry out the duties of an armed police officer.

Third, forensic practitioners document all data they considered and used while assessing the four Ds. This documentation includes background reports, letters and consultations, notes, assessment and test data, scoring reports, and interpretations in connection with the pre-employment evaluation. Finally, there are several practice benefits emerging from this presentation. These include sensitizing forensic examiners to ways of crafting probes in the domains of the four Ds based on an integrative discussion of the applicant findings. A forensic case study to demonstrate the practical application of conducting these types of evaluations will be presented. Evidence based practice prompts the recommendation of additional training for mental health professionals practicing in the area of forensic pre-employment psychological evaluations. At a minimum, this would include becoming familiar with POST, IACP, relevant state statutes, high profile cases, and the police psychology research literature.

Forensic Psychology, Pre-Employment Psychological, Decision-Making