



122 Use of Law Enforcement Oath of Honor in Forensic Psychological Evaluations of Police Officers

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After attending this presentation, attendees will be able to articulate the relationship between key elements of the law enforcement oath and relevant job functions of a police officer.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by improved precision in forensic evaluations. It is believed that public trust is enhanced by awareness that officers are being evaluated on their ability to fulfill standards consistent with what most would view as critical for these safety sensitive positions.

Forensic examiners responsible for psychologically evaluating police applicants or incumbent officers must draw upon several job-relevant sources. The International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) provides guidelines for conducting pre-employment psychological evaluations and fitness-for-duty evaluations. Another IACP source not often thought of within the context of the evaluation but is nonetheless instructive in the evaluation process is the law enforcement oath of honor. Experienced and qualified examiners using this oath as an assessment prism will be immediately struck by several ethical behavior elements. First, there is the self-imposed promise to “never betray my badge, my integrity, my character, or public trust.” Second, the oath fuels a commitment to “...always have the courage to hold myself and others accountable for our actions...” Third, there is the self-assurance that, “I will always uphold the constitution, my community, and the agency I serve.” These three areas collectively and separately offer a firm foundation for evaluating behavior, dispositions, knowledge, and skills that anyone functioning as a police officer should be able to demonstrate through the way they have functioned in the past. Why? A police officer’s duty carries critical responsibilities. All police officers must follow core values of the profession that are reflected in the aforementioned oath. A history of slippage in behaviors related to the oath would justifiably call into question a recruit or officer’s fitness to appropriately carry out the duties of an armed police officer.

There are three primary learning objectives expected from this presentation. First, attendees will be able to articulate some the relationship between key elements of the law enforcement oath and relevant job functions of a police officer. For example, background reports, personal history questionnaires, personnel records, oral panel statements, and psychological test results can serve as important sources of information used to frame the semi-structured interviews of an evaluatee. Second, the same oath may be used in connection with other data to craft a psychological interview format. Third, the guidelines set forth by the IACP and Police Officer Standards of Training (POST) require forensic psychologists to 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 these forensic evaluation approaches.

It is hypothesized that using the Oath of Honor as one assessment prism is a powerful mechanism for understanding an evaluatee’s capacity for consistently adhering to high ethical standards while functioning as a police officer. A case study will be used to demonstrate how the law enforcement oath can be integrated within the forensic evaluation process. This includes the opinions and recommendations contained in the final forensic report. The benefit to the field of practice may be observed through improve precision in forensic evaluations. In terms of community impact, the author believes that public trust is enhanced by awareness that officers are being evaluated on their ability to fulfill standards consistent with what most would view as critical for these safety sensitive positions.

Forensic Psychology, Law Enforcement Oath of Honor, Ethical Issues