



## Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences Section - 2012

### I24 A Decision-Making Approach for Offering Risk Assessment Ratings in Forensic Psychological Evaluations of Police Officers

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After attending this presentation, attendees will be aware of the need to remain sensitive to negligent hire issues in selection of police officers.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by using the Peace Officer Standards of Training's psychological dimensions as an evidence-based anchoring base for forensic examiners to use while making the risk assessment rating.

Risk assessment in the context of a forensic evaluation of police officer refers to the identification and psychological weighing of potential factors that are expected to compromise judgment or increase concern about stress vulnerability that can fuel misconduct. In the aftermath of a high profile police misconduct incident, once details are disclosed it becomes clear that there were matters that should have previously raised red flags for the department. The financial costs to departments and municipalities for police officer improper action reinforces the need to reduce the lawsuit risks where negligent hire can erode public trust. Insurance rates are also expected to rise in the wake of such cases. Following a high profile police-involved incident, attorneys representing the alleged victim are quick to request copies of all forensic psychological evaluations of the involved officers. What are they looking for or a better question might be, what is their forensic evaluator looking for? In this case, any part of an officer's behavior (i.e., on or off duty), in the distant past or recent can function as a basis for the claim that a particular officer should not have been hired or allowed to remain on the job. For example, an off-duty officer shot and killed his romantic partner with his service revolver. He was convicted of involuntary manslaughter. His blood alcohol count was below the legal limit. There was a long history of domestic violence in this relationship. The victim's family's suit claimed negligent hire on two primary bases. First, the officer had one occasion around the age of 12 when he imbibed a six-pack of beer as recorded on a form used by the department psychologist during the pre-employment psychological interview. The accused officer was said to have an alcohol problem that the department should have used to rule him out as an officer. Second, the department's psychologist failed to write a report on the accused officer.

There are three learning objectives associated with this presentation. First, attendees will be made aware of the need to remain sensitive to negligent hire issues in selection of police officers. For example, what is not as well-known is that police officers must pass a psychological screening in advance to their being sent into the department's academy. The screenings function to eliminate those applicants assessed as poorly suited or in the case of a fitness for duty evaluation, fit or unfit to return to work. The psychological evaluation provides a barometer of the evaluatee based on the original referral questions.

The second learning objective of the presentation uses the Peace Officer Standards of Training's (POST) psychological dimensions as an evidence-based anchor for forensic examiners to use while making the risk assessment rating. A practice-relevant forensic case study is used to demonstrate how the POST psychological dimensions can be used in this risk assessment process. The goal is that attendees from this presentation will have a greater understanding of the forensic elements associated with use of the psychological dimensions. The community is expected to gain from the enhanced forensic competencies of examiners who use this recommended approach to risk assessment ratings of police officers.

**Forensic Psychology, Risk Assessment, POST**