



127 Ethical and Professional Issues in Crafting Outside Evaluation Reports (OE Reports) for Police Officer Applicants

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

The goals of this presentation are to provide: (1) the forensic-related guidelines associated with conducting OE evaluations; (2) a recommended format for Outside Evaluation (OE) reports. For example, it may be appropriate to use the typical report format but the referral questions in these evaluations may require a format more consistent with the needs of the hiring authority; and, (3) suggestions for preparing for appellant hearings that may be held in connection with the OE report.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by improving upon the screening and selection process of peace officers who must interact with citizens in a wide range of stressful situations by assuring professional responsible to conducting evaluations are properly informed about relevant ethical matters. A forensic case study of an OE report is used to demonstrate how ethical issues can arise.

Forensic psychologists must adhere to ethical and professional standards as they deliver services. According to the APA Committee on Professional Practice and Standards (2003), ethics "is defined as the rules or standards governing the conduct of members of a profession" (p. 595)." The main resources for standards of conduct for psychologists are the APA's (2002) Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct (referred to hereinafter as the Ethics Code). The American Board of Forensic Psychology has outlined recommended specific guidelines aimed at forensic psychologists. There are at least three areas of those guidelines that may be useful to forensic psychologists conducting evaluations in law enforcement settings. The areas include documentation and compilation of data considered, disclosing sources of information, bases of opinions, as well as comprehensive and accurate presentation of opinions in reports and testimony. Forensic psychologists are sometimes called upon to craft outside evaluation reports (OE reports) on appellants who have been disqualified or rejected on psychological grounds. It is also possible that an agency, county, or department may contract with a forensic psychologist to perform an independent evaluation of an appellant or incumbent officer. Some departments or hiring authorities have developed standards (e.g., minimum number of police evaluations, licensure, and experience in law enforcement) as pre-requisites for conducting Outside Evaluations; however, there is an absence of standards for conducting such evaluations as well as ethical guidance for qualified forensic examiners performing them.

A less experienced forensic examiner may be tempted to use methods or techniques they commonly rely upon in their customary work but be less aware of the ethical issues in this type of work. As a result, the examiner may unwittingly stumble into ethical dilemmas but still be held accountable for their actions or lack thereof. Second, a recommended format for OE reports is provided. For example, it may be appropriate to use the typical report format but the referral questions in these evaluations may require a format more consistent with the needs of the hiring authority. Third, suggestions are made for preparing for appellant hearings that may be held in connection with the OE report. For example, the entire evaluation has legal implications and the forensic examiner could be subpoenaed to provide testimony regarding the OE report. Examiners with limited experience in these areas may be caught unprepared for the often rigorous cross examination regarding a department's psychological screening standards, professional literature as well as other resources frequently used in police and public safety psychology.

The goal is that this presentation will impact the forensic examiners by sensitizing them to ethical, legal (e.g., negligent hire), and professional issues related to OE reports. The benefits to the community include improving upon the screening and selection process of peace officers who must interact with citizens in a wide range of stressful situations by assuring professional responsible to conducting evaluations are properly informed about relevant ethical matters. A forensic case study of an OE report is used to demonstrate how ethical issues can arise. The presenter recommends that examiners become familiar with problems identified by empirical studies of forensic reports.

Forensic Psychology, Ethical-Legal Issues, OE Reports