

## CHAPTER 2

### Police Psychology

#### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Outline the major steps in developing a valid police selection procedure.
- Describe the various instruments that are used to select police officers.
- Define what is meant by the term *police discretion*.
- List some key decisions in policing that require the use of discretion.
- Outline some of the major sources and consequences of stress in policing.
- Describe various strategies for dealing with police stress.

#### OUTLINE

##### Police Selection

- Police selection is the process by which police agencies screen out applicants with undesirable qualities or select in those with desirable qualities. Typical qualities assessed include physical fitness, cognitive abilities, personality, and job related abilities.
- Police selection techniques have been employed since the early 1900s. In 1917 the Stanford-Binet intelligence test was used and applicants who scored under 80 were screened out. In the 1940s, personality tests were beginning to be used to predict police officer performance and by the 1950s psychological and psychiatric screening procedures were standard in many agencies. Currently, higher educational requirements and formal cognitive and personality tests are part of the standardized process.
- Currently, police forces across Canada use formal procedures for selecting officers. Every force conducts background checks and requires medical exams and most forces require cognitive and personality tests. In general, the same selection procedures are used by police agencies across Canada, although slight differences do exist (e.g., whether or not a polygraph is required). See Box 2.1 for a description of the member selection process in the RCMP.

##### Developing Police Selection Instruments

- There are two general stages in the police selection process: (1) conducting a job analysis and (2) construction and validating selection instruments.
  - Job analysis is usually conducted by an organizational psychologist, and involves a procedure that defines the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) that make a good police officer. However, research suggests that there may not be a single set of KSAs that are desirable. For example, desirable KSAs may vary across positions in a police force (Ainsworth, 1993). In spite of these issues, research indicates agreement on some KSAs. These include honesty, reliability, sensitivity,

communication skills, motivation, problem-solving skills, and being a team player (Sanders, 2003).

- Construction and validation involves developing an instrument to measure the presence of relevant KSAs in applicants (construction) and ensuring the instrument developed is related to future police officer performance (validation). Validation measures commonly focus on predictive validity, which concerns the extent to which the selection instrument accurately predicts job performance. Difficulty in validation arises when deciding what performance measure to use. Measures often used include punctuality, complaints, or commendations. However, there is currently no research that identifies which measures are the best indicators of job performance.

### **The Validity of Police Selection Instruments**

- The selection interview is one of the most commonly used police selection instruments. Generally, these interviews are semi-structured in an attempt to ensure objectivity in the selection process (Gowan & Gatewood, 1995). The goal of the interview is to determine if the applicant has the desired KSAs, as identified in a job analysis. Research concerning the predictive validity of selection interviews is mixed.
- Psychological tests are also often used for police selection purposes, and include cognitive ability tests and personality tests.
  - Cognitive ability tests are designed to measure constructs such as memory, logic, observation, and comprehension. These types of tests are used frequently in Canada, such as the RCMP's Police Aptitude Test. Research indicates these tests are better at predicting police training performance rather than performance while on the job (Hirsh, Northrop, & Schmidt, 1986). Personality factors may also play a role in on the job performance, which may be why it is difficult to predict future performance by only taking into account one's cognitive abilities.
  - Personality tests measure aspects of personality. Although not originally designed for police selection purposes, the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) is the most common personality test used in the selection process (Cochrane, Tett, & Vandecreek, 2003). This test identifies psychopathologies, such as schizophrenia and depression. The MMPI is moderately able to predict police officer performance (Sanders, 2003), and has been found to predict problematic police behaviours through assessment of the MMPI-2 Lie Scale (Weiss et al., 2013). The Inwald Personality Inventory (IPI) was developed for law enforcement to identify applicants best suited for police work. It measures personality attributes and behaviour patterns such as stress reactions and interpersonal difficulties. Research indicates that the IPI has slightly better predictive accuracy than the MMPI (Aamodt, 2004).
- Assessment centres are facilities where the behaviour of police applicants can be observed in different ways by multiple observers. The primary selection instrument used in these centres is the situational test, which attempts to test for the presence of appropriate KSAs, as identified in the job analysis. Situational tests involve simulating real world tasks often faced by police officers, and are followed by a performance evaluation given by trained observers. Research suggests these tests moderately predict both training and on the job performance (Aamodt, 2004; Pynes &

Bernardin, 1992). These centres are now an integral part of police assessment and training in Canada (see Box 2.2).

### **Police Discretion**

- Police discretion refers to a need for police officers to distinguish between situations in which adherence to the law is required and situations in which a certain degree of flexibility is warranted.
- Police discretion is needed for several reasons (Sheehan & Cordner, 1989). For example, if all laws were unconditionally enforced, the various branches of the criminal justice system would be overwhelmed.
- Although there are advantages to police discretion, there also are disadvantages. On occasion, discretion may be used inappropriately, such as in cases of racial profiling (see an example of inappropriate discretion in Box 2.3).
- There are a number of situations where police discretion is undoubtedly required, including when police officers have to deal with: youth, mentally disordered offenders, domestic dispute situations, and use of force situations (youth and domestic violence situations will be addressed in subsequent chapters).
  - Police officers frequently encounter offenders with mental illnesses. Formal policies present a range of response options for police officers in such encounters. For example, they can resolve the situation informally, escort the offender to a psychiatric facility, or make an arrest (Teplin, 2000). New training is now being provided to police officers to better prepare them to deal effectively with mentally ill individuals (Bailey, 2013; see Box 2.4 researcher profile on Dr. Cotton).
  - Although use-of-force situations are relatively rare, police officers must exercise a great deal of discretion upon encountering such a situation (see In the Media box on the death of Sammy Yatim). The Criminal Code of Canada states that the police may use force under reasonable grounds as deemed necessary.
- Many agencies have established policies for restricting the use of force and others have developed models to aid police officer decision-making in use of force situations. For example, the RCMP has adopted a dynamic Incident Management/Intervention Model (see Box 2.5), which provides guidelines concerning the force that is necessary to control the situation, based on the suspect's behaviour and other circumstances.

### **Police Stress**

- Policing is an occupation that involves high levels of stress for both officers and their families. Recent data suggests that the balance between work and home life tends to be one of the biggest challenges for Canadian police officers (Duxbury & Higgins, 2012; see Box 2.6).
- There are different categories of police stressors including: intra-organizational, inter-organizational, occupational, criminal justice, and public stressors (see Table 2.2). Research suggests that some of the most highly ranked stressors are organizational stressors, such as the feeling that departmental rules are applied selectively (Taylor & Bennell, 2006; see Box 2.3).
- Being exposed to stress results in physical, psychological, personal, and job-related consequences. For example, with regards to physical consequences, police officers are

at an increased risk to develop digestive disorders, cancer, and cardiovascular disease (Franke, Collins, & Hinz, 1998; Kroes, Margolis & Hurrell, 1974; Violanti, Vena, & Marshall, 1986). Psychological and personal consequences include depression, anxiety, marital difficulties, and suicide (Brown & Campbell, 1994). Finally, job-related consequences include poor morale, absenteeism, and early retirement (Brown & Campbell, 1994).

- Police agencies have recognized the need to prevent and manage negative stress reactions among officers. Some stress management programs attempt to enhance mental preparedness and thus, proactively address potential difficulties that may arise in police work. Though research on such approaches is new, the limited evaluative work that has been done has shown resiliency training. Training in resiliency has been shown to have a positive influence on both the health of police officers as well for performance on the job (Anderson et al., 2015). Another commonly used method is psychological debriefing, which involves group or individual meetings aimed at mitigating emotional distress and preventing long-term psychopathology. The effectiveness of this stress reduction method remains unclear (Mitte, Steil, & Nachtigall, 2005).

## SUGGESTED LECTURE ACTIVITIES

### Police Selection

- Show students a police recruitment video off the internet (e.g., Vancouver Police Department's *The Promise*). Ask students to generate a list of the policing jobs they observe in the video (e.g., patrol, administrator, detective, etc.) and the sorts of KSAs associated with those jobs. Have the students discuss the implications of their observations for a job analysis (e.g., the fact that different policing jobs are characterized by different KSAs).
- Have students discuss what performance measure (e.g. commendations, citizen complaints, punctuality, etc.) should be used in validating selection instruments and why. Have them make a list of possible advantages and disadvantages of using each performance measure.
- Divide the class into groups assigned to the different cognitive and personality tests (i.e., MMPI-2, IPI, RPAT) discussed in the text. Give them time to locate any recent or additional information on those tests and present the utility of each test to the class as a whole.
- Present the class with an article or new research concerning other psychological measures that may be useful in police selection (e.g., Detrick & Chibnall's 2013 paper on use of the Revised NEO). Have them discuss how this or other measures may be useful, and how the traits assessed by such measures are relevant to policing.

### Police Discretion

- Have students debate the necessity of police discretion, including the fact that the criminal justice system has limited resources to accommodate the many potential offenders that may exist if the law is fully enforced.
- Provide students with the following scenario: A well-dressed middle aged woman is walking down the street intoxicated. As a police officer, what action do you take?

What factors went into your decision? Do you think they are similar to factors police officers consider when exercising their discretion? Ask if their decisions would have been different if they witnessed an older man who was shabbily dressed walking down the street?

- Recent research in police psychology has focused on use of force models in policing. Present examples of fatal or non-fatal use of force (i.e., Robert Dziekański taser incident in the Vancouver airport; In the Media box – Sammy Yatim case) and have the class discuss what factors they believe increase/decrease the incidence of UOF incidents.
- Divide the class into groups and have each group locate an article concerning police use of force (alternately, you could locate several articles and assign them to groups; such as Kesic, Thomas, & Ogloff's 2013 paper cited below). Have the groups review the articles and identify what factors were associated with UOF incidents, and discuss how police training procedures could address these problems.
- Have the students look up the RCMP's Incident Management/Intervention Model presented in Box 2.5 and discuss what situations they feel should or should not result in the use of force and whether they agree with this model. Is the model clear? Do officers understand when it is appropriate to use force or are "heat of the moment" decisions more likely to take over?

### **Police Stress**

- Divide the class into the four different sources of police stressors in Table 2.2: inter-organizational stressors, inter-organizational stress, occupational stressors, criminal justice system stressors, and public stressors. Have them discuss why these are problematic to police officers and design an experiment to test the relative impact of these stressors (which is worst and how would they test) or to examine how they would measure and assess the impact of each category of stressor.
- Have students discuss why organizational stressors may be rated as highly stressful.
- Have students generate departmental policies that would reduce the stress experienced by police officers or promote adaptive coping behaviours.

## **PEER SCHOLAR EXERCISES**

The discussion and research questions at the end of the chapter (located below) can be used as peerScholar assignments ([www.pearsoned.ca/peerscholar](http://www.pearsoned.ca/peerscholar)). Students are expected to write a 500 word response to the question (using *at least one empirical* reference incorporated into their response) and submit it online through peerScholar where an anonymous and randomly-assigned group of their peers will review and evaluate it. Peers will be required to read and provide constructive comments (and a grade out of 100 points, see Instructions and Tips) for three randomly assigned papers from questions different from the one they themselves completed. Peer grades will be averaged and make up a portion of the individual student's grade (e.g., 5%). All students also will be given a grade out of 100 points for their feedback on other papers according to the Instructions and Tips specified by the instructor (see below) and this could count for another portion of the overall student grade (e.g., 5%). Students will then receive feedback from their

classmates on their paper and have a chance to revise their paper prior to submitting to the professor for a paper grade out of 100 points (worth say 5%) that is then combined with the other grades for a total of 15% or some value as determined by each individual instructor. This entire process will be anonymous. For more information about peerScholar, contact your Pearson sales representative.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1) You are a member of a community group that has been put together to provide your local police agency with recommendations regarding police selection criteria. What do you, as a community citizen, feel are the most important characteristics of a good police officer? Do you think these characteristics should be considered when police forces select police officers? Why or why not?
- 2) Imagine you are a police officer who encounters a well-dressed woman walking down the street who is obviously intoxicated. What would you do? Would you arrest her and take her to jail, or would you drive her home? What factors would you consider when making your decision? Would your decision have been different if you had encountered an older man who was dressed in dirty and ripped clothes? Why or why not?

#### RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

- 1) A concern in the field of police selection is that applicants may “fake good” during the selection process. That is, they may try to appear better than they are when being assessed. Based on the research, should we be concerned that applicants may be able to fake good when applying for the police?
- 2) Critical incident stress debriefings (CISDs) are commonly used to manage the stress police officers frequently experience after being exposed to a serious event (e.g., an officer involved shooting). Does it appear from the research that CISDs are an effective way to manage police stress?

#### INSTRUCTIONS AND TIPS (to be provided to students as grading criteria)

All students must leave *at least 5 comments* per paper they read. Comments must be constructive (i.e., other things the student could consider, ways concepts could be clarified) rather than destructive (i.e., this is a stupid argument, the writing sucks). Remember that ALL students are also being evaluated on the QUALITY of feedback that they provide to their peers – so make it count!

Consider the following questions when providing a grade for your peers, and assign a grade of 20 points to each evaluation criteria, to provide a total overall paper grade out of 100 points.

- a) Was the paper written clearly?
- b) Did the author make clear arguments that are backed up with facts?

- c) Did the author use additional resources (minimum one) to support their arguments and was this done effectively?
- d) Did the author answer the discussion/research question appropriately?
- e) Overall impression (sentence structure, fluidity, grammar, spelling).

## SUGGESTED READINGS

- Blau, T. H. (1994). *Psychological services for law enforcement*. New York, NY: John Wiley and Sons.
- Brewer, N., & Wilson, C. (Eds.) (2013). *Psychology and policing*. East Sussex, UK: Psychology Press.
- Brown, J. M., & Campbell, E. A. (1994). *Stress and policing: Sources and strategies*. New York, NY: John Wiley and Sons.
- Cotton, D., & Coleman, T. G. (2010). Canadian police agencies and their interactions with persons with a mental illness: A systems approach. *Police Practice and Research, 11*, 301-314.
- Detrick, P., & Chibnall, J. T. (2013). Revised NEO personality inventory normative data for police officer selection. *Psychological Services, 10*, 372-377.
- Kesic, D., Thomas, S. D. M., & Ogloff, J. R. P. (2013). Estimated rates of mental disorders in, and situational characteristics of, incidents of nonfatal use of force by police. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology, 48*, 225-232.
- Kurke, M. I., & Scrivner, E. M. (Eds.) (2013). *Police psychology into the 21<sup>st</sup> century*. East Sussex, UK: Psychology Press.
- Miller, L. (2006). *Practical police psychology: Stress management and crisis intervention for law enforcement*. Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas Publisher.
- Walma, M. W., & West, L. (2002). *Police powers and procedures*. Toronto, ON: Emond Montgomery Publications Limited.
- Weiss, P. A., Vivian, J. E., Weiss, W. U., Davis, R. D., & Rostow, C. D. (2013). The MMPI-2 L scale, reporting uncommon virtue, and predicting police performance. *Psychological Services, 10*, 123-130.

## **SUGGESTED ONLINE VIDEO RESOURCES**

1) *Police and Mental Health* (CBC RAW Video; January 16, 2013). Clinical and correctional psychologist Dorothy Cotton talks about how police interact with people with mental illnesses (7:33)

LINK: <http://www.cbc.ca>

2) *The Fifth Estate: You Should Have Stayed at Home* (CBC News, April 2011). Report on the G20 Summit and police abuse (45:05).

LINK: available on YouTube

3) *Death Causes Canada to Review Use of Tasers* (Reynolds, 2007). Description and video of taser incident and police response (1:52)

LINK: available on YouTube

4) *Canadian Justice Credibility Gap: Police Brutality* (Howard, 2012). Police Brutality is an important issue in Canadian Society, even if major media continues to ignore it (14:02).

LINK: available on YouTube

NOTE: Independent film presents one side of police brutality and discretion, have the class discuss what options could police have chosen in these circumstances and integrate class material and use of appropriate v. inappropriate force.

5) *Canadian Forces – Military Police* (Canadian Forces). Information and overview of military policing within the CF, including what they do, specific tasks, and qualifications/skills required (2:14).

LINK: available on YouTube

6) *Canadian Police Recruiting* (RCMP). Demonstrates an advertisement for police recruitment used within the RCMP to promote and recognize diversity (0:46).

LINK: available on YouTube

NOTE: Instructors can search online for police recruitment videos from their local province or city as well.

## **SUMMARY OF COURT CASES**

There are no case summaries for this chapter.