

Suitability in law enforcement

Assessing multifaceted selection criteria

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Abstract

When selecting applicants for professions with job descriptions involving complex human interaction, identifying suitable candidates is essential. This strongly applies in police selection, because police officers must act appropriately at all times, deal with difficult and sometimes dangerous work situations, and come into contact with people who are in highly emotional states, such as anxiety, fear, excitement, and shock. However, suitability is a broad and vague concept that cannot be even defined without understanding the value of various personal skills and qualities for specific duties, ways that such skills are manifested during life as an officer (potentially both on- and off-duty), and appropriate ways to assess them.

The overall aim of this thesis was to explore the personal skills and qualities that are relevant to suitability for the police profession with a special focus on the concept of empathy, and to investigate how it can be conceptualized and measured in the context of selection. Two of the four studies focused on different perspectives regarding the personal skills and qualities of a good police officer, while the other two focused on theoretical aspects and practical measurement of empathy.

Mixed methods were used, in acknowledgement of the value of using different forms of data collection, material, and analytical methods to achieve valid information.

The results and findings support several of the personal skills and qualities that have been identified in previous research and also can be found as criteria in police selection. Empathy should be considered in the selection process, but it is also important to ensure that there is an alignment between the definition of the concept and practical outcomes in police work. The findings indicate that empathy could be conceptualized in a relevant way using a social cognitive neuroscience (SCN) approach. In particular, a modified, Swedish 4-factor version of the Empathy Assessment Index (based on recent theoretical advances in SCN) appears to have considerable potential for further development.

Future studies will focus on areas identified as requiring further research, such as the development of this instrument by adding complementary measures focusing on manifestations of empathy and other relevant qualities in actual work-related situations. Other aspects that require further attention include the definition, assessment, and impact of social desirability in selection contexts.

Keywords

selection criteria, measurement, empathy, self-report instrument, validity, interpersonal qualities

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