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CURRENT PRACTICES IN THE USE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL TESTING BY POLICE AGENCIES

JOSEPH J. MURPHY

Joseph J. Murphy was Assistant Professor of Criminal Justice, West Virginia State College, Institute, West Virginia. For nine and a half years Professor Murphy served as a New York City Police Officer. He received his Master of Arts degree in Psychology from John Jay College of Criminal Justice, City University of New York.

The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (1968) in its report to the President concerning the role of the police pointed out that there existed a need to weed out those individuals in the law enforcement field who displayed signs which indicated that their personal prejudices would interfere with the proper administration of their duties. It was indicated that the mere testing of individuals on their ability to answer questions pertaining to grammar, mathematics, and local ordinances was not sufficient by itself to perform this important task. Some agencies in addition to administering examinations of the type noted above also use an oral interview to assess the character of applicants. The Commission criticized this procedure because it considered the oral interview too subjective a method of testing an individual's qualities. This type of test was considered insufficient to recognize unsuitable individuals because of the difficulty in developing valid and reliable oral tests. In addition, this type of examination was looked at as a means of utilizing political influence to sway the interviewer's judgment.

The Commission recommended that there should be some other method of screening applicants in addition to the methods currently in use. It was pointed out that the current procedures were insufficient by themselves to eliminate those candidates that have personality disorders or other similar defects. It was recommended that police agencies use trained personnel, psychologists and psychiatrists, to conduct interviews with police applicants. It was also recommended that each candidate be subjected to a battery of psychological examinations in order to determine whether a particular candidate was qualified for police work.

This concept is not new. For years police administrators have been aware of the need to eliminate those individuals who were emotionally unsuitable for police work. It was first proposed by

Terman (1917) to use mental and scientific testing techniques in the selection of policemen and firemen. Terman administered the Stanford Revision of the Binet-Simon Intelligence Test. Terman felt that the testing of general intelligence was the most important factor, aside from moral integrity, in determining the fitness of an applicant for police or fire work.

Kates (1950) conducted a study with twenty-five volunteer New York City patrolmen to ascertain the personality traits possessed by policemen. He was of the opinion that an individual with certain personality characteristics, just short of a thoroughgoing psychotic disorganization, might be attracted to and satisfied with an occupation because his personality traits were compatible with its demands. He tested this group to find out if this type of relationship existed in police work. He also postulated that there would be a relationship between personality and adjustment or maladjustment in the emotional sphere with interest and satisfaction in the occupation. Kates administered the Rorschach Test and the Strong Vocational Interest Blank. As a result of the Rorschach Test he found that the degree of maladjustment of policemen was slightly but insignificantly greater than that of biologists and slightly but insignificantly smaller than that of routine clerks. He concluded that policemen probably, as a whole, demonstrated as many signs of maladjustment as may be found in other groups. The policemen that were tested showed a high level of job satisfaction although there was no relationship between this and job interest. Kates correlated the results of the Rorschach and the Strong Vocational Interest Blank tests and concluded that there was a significant relationship between job satisfaction and maladjustment. Finally, Kates pointed out that policemen with high police interests tended to be markedly introversive, to have adequate ability to accept their own strivings and outlook as mature,

to be relatively unresponsive to stimuli from without, and to be lacking in the capacity to think along conventional lines.

The selection methods of the Los Angeles Police Department which included the use of psychological testing and a psychiatric interview were discussed in an article by Rankin (1957). Los Angeles began to use these tools in their selection process in June, 1953. They used the group Rorschach and the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI). Rankin indicated that the rationale offered for the incorporation of personality testing was the recognition that candidates would attempt to make the most favorable impression possible and that instruments were needed to determine the candidate's personality structure and emotional attitude. The results of the Rorschach and the MMPI examinations were used by Rankin along with his own impressions of the clinical interview of each candidate to evaluate each for acceptance or rejection. After the other delimiting factors had been used, that is, failing the written test, the physical examination, etc., the remaining 161 candidates were subjected to psychological evaluation. As a result of this evaluation twenty-five candidates were eliminated. He classified the candidates that were rejected as a result of this evaluation as either latently borderline psychotic, as inadequate personalities, schizoid personalities, and paranoid personalities.

Rankin concluded as a result of this study that there existed the possibility for meaningful research based on the use of the Rorschach and MMPI tests. He further concluded that the attitude towards authority and the need for security could be assessed. However, he indicated that he was not prepared to label these attitudes and needs as good or bad with regard to the performance of an individual in the role of a police officer. Rankin stated that those individuals whom he rejected as candidates for one or more of the personality disorders previously indicated would fall in the category of what he considered to be a bad police officer.

Rhead, Abrams, Trosman, and Margoles, (1968) reported on their examination of over 1,000 applicants for the position of police officer in the Chicago, Illinois Police Department. The applicants were given the MMPI and a variation of the Draw-A-Person Test. Those candidates who showed an extreme MMPI profile and a marked disturbance in the Draw-A-Person Test were also given the Rorschach Ink Blot Test, the Thematic Appercep-

tion Test (TAT), the Wechsler-Bellevue Test, and other tests deemed appropriate. From this group the psychologist selected those candidates that had questionable results and asked them to appear before an advisory board comprised of the psychologist and two psychiatrists. During the period that the researchers were employed by the Chicago Civil Service Commission the board rejected 30% of those candidates who appeared before it. In their studies the board found that at least 20% of those rejected showed evidence of grossly incapacitating illnesses.

It was the conclusion of the researchers that the success or failure of an individual in police work was not determined by the unconscious conflicts of the individual or by his ego defenses. Rather, that it depended on the degree to which the ego had remained undistorted in response to those conflicts. They recommended that projective testing and the psychiatric interview should be utilized by police agencies in the selection of future recruits.

It is obvious from a review of the literature that some work has been performed with regard to the use of psychological testing by law enforcement agencies. Unfortunately, the author was not able to find any recent survey of police agencies to determine how widespread was the use of such tests in the selection process of candidates to these departments.

Two previous surveys, one in 1957 and another in 1963, had been conducted to ascertain the extent to which psychological examinations were being used by police administrators. The first survey revealed that only fourteen agencies were using psychological examinations and the second survey indicated that twenty-two agencies were using such methods.

It was assumed by the author that there had been an increase in the use of psychological testing in the selection of police officers as a result of the emphasis placed on the need for such examinations. His opinion that there was a need to conduct a survey to determine the extent to which psychological examinations were being employed in the selection of law enforcement officers led to the present study.

METHODOLOGY

The initial reason for conducting this survey was to determine to what extent police agencies throughout the United States utilized psychological testing in the selection of police officers. A further purpose was to determine whether police adminis-

trators also used such tests in their evaluation of police officers before they were given their assignments or before they were promoted to higher positions.

The method used to obtain the information necessary for this study was through the use of a four page questionnaire which was sent with a cover letter explaining its purpose. This questionnaire was sent to 258 "local" police agencies throughout the United States. In addition, this questionnaire was also sent to forty-nine "state" police agencies. The only state to which this questionnaire was not sent was Hawaii which does not have a state police agency.

There were two criteria which were used to determine those "local" police departments that would receive a questionnaire. The first criterion was that the "local" police agency must serve a population of at least 50,000 people. The second qualification was that the "local" police agency selected must have more than 100 police officers in its department.

In order to determine those "local" police agencies that met these two qualifications the author used the following sources:

U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Metropolitan Area Statistics*. Reprinted from *Statistical Abstracts of the United States*. Washington, D.C.: 1970.

U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation. *Uniform Crime Reports for the United States*. Washington, D.C.: 1969.

It was also decided to send the "state" police agencies a copy of the questionnaire because they represent a unique type of police officer. Most "local" agencies permit their recruits to reside in the community where they live during their training period. With few restrictions they are permitted to function in the normal activities of society. However, this is not the case with most of the "state" police agencies. Many such agencies have rules which prevent them from hiring a candidate who is married. Most require that their candidates live in barracks during their training period with few days off to visit their friends and relatives. The training period is similar to that experienced by the individual entering the armed forces. Even after the men complete their training they are required to work long hours and must live in the barracks during their work week. In viewing the more normal life experienced by the "local" police officer one must wonder what are the incentives

that draw a man into the ranks of the "state" police agency. Naturally, as an offshoot of this, one must wonder what the selection methods are for hiring a candidate seeking employment as a "state" police officer. In an attempt to find an answer to this problem the author decided to include "state" agencies.

As mentioned previously, the instrument used in this survey was a four page questionnaire which was accompanied by a cover letter explaining its purpose. The questionnaire was comprised of sixteen questions which the author felt were pertinent to this investigation. The first two questions dealt with the number of police officers in the department and the total population that the department serviced. The next four questions concerned themselves with the general testing requirements of a candidate to the police agency. The remaining ten questions were items which sought information about the influence, if any, that psychological examinations had in the selection procedures of a police applicant, and in the evaluation of a police officer for assignment and promotion.

RESULTS

As a result of sending out this questionnaire the author received 203 responses out of a possible 307. There were thirty replies out of a possible forty-nine from the "state" police agencies and 173 replies from the "local" police agencies out of the 258 questionnaires.

In response to the question dealing with the use of psychological examinations only seventy-six, or 43.93% of the "local" police agencies indicated that they used such tests in examining police candidates. Out of the thirty "state" agencies replying to this questionnaire only four, or 13.33% of them utilized psychological testing in the selection of their candidates. As a result of this survey it was determined that out of 203 responses only eighty, or 39.41% of those replying used psychological testing to evaluate potential law enforcement officers.

Table 1 indicates the types of psychological examinations that are being utilized by various law enforcement agencies in the screening of applicants. A review of this table discloses that there were thirty-six different types of psychological examinations being used by the eighty agencies employing such testing methods in the screening of candidates seeking a law enforcement position.

It is noted that the MMPI is employed by thirty-nine of the eighty agencies using such testing

procedures. This represents 48.75% of the using agencies. The psychiatric interview was indicated as being the next most used method of examining a candidate for his suitability. This method was used by thirty-three of the agencies or 41.25% of the total using psychological methods in the selection process. The remaining examinations seemed to be limited in use with the exception of the Army General Classification Test (AGCT) and the Rorschach Ink Blot Test. Both of these showed some frequent use. One agency has prepared its own psychological examination and administers it to police candidates.

When questioned as to how they use the results of the psychological examinations thirty-five agencies stated that they automatically rejected any applicant who failed them. Thirty-three other agencies indicated that they take the results of these examinations into consideration when making a final evaluation of the candidate. Five agencies sent the applicant to a psychologist for a further interview if he scored low on the psychological tests. These agencies made their final decision after reviewing the report of the psychologist concerning the candidate. If the report was negative, they automatically rejected the applicant. Three agencies indicated that they were currently studying the results of the psychological testing methods they were employing. It was indicated that these results had no bearing in the final selection of candidates. One agency indicated that it was studying the results of these tests in an attempt to determine the racial attitudes of each candidate. Another agency notified each recruit about his results on the psychological examinations. The recruit was informed of his weaknesses and advised that an attempt should be made to improve in those areas. The potential of a candidate for police work was evaluated by one agency as a result of the psychological examinations taken by this candidate. One agency did not answer this question.

When questioned about the influence of these examinations on assignments and promotions five agencies indicated that they considered the results in both assignment and promotion. Seven other agencies indicated that they considered the results of psychological examinations before making assignments and three other agencies indicated that they consider these results when making promotions. One agency, the Kansas State Police, indicated that they had experimented with using the results of these examinations for promotions

TABLE 1
TYPES OF PSYCHOLOGICAL EXAMINATIONS IN
USE BY POLICE AGENCIES

| Type of Examination | Frequency of use |
|--|------------------|
| Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory..... | 39 |
| Psychiatric Interview..... | 33 |
| Army General Classification Test..... | 13 |
| Rorschach Test..... | 9 |
| Otis Quick Scoring Mental Ability Tests.... | 7 |
| Sentence Completion Test..... | 5 |
| Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale..... | 4 |
| California Psychological Inventory..... | 4 |
| Draw-A-Person Test..... | 4 |
| House-Tree-Person Test (Tree Test Only)... | 4 |
| Cattell Intelligence Test..... | 3 |
| Strong Vocational Interest Blank..... | 3 |
| Edwards Personal Preference Schedule..... | 3 |
| Allport-Vernon Scale of Values..... | 2 |
| Guilford-Zimmerman Interest Inventory.... | 2 |
| Kuder Preference Record-Personal..... | 2 |
| House-Tree-Person Test (House Test Only) . | 2 |
| House-Tree-Person Test (Person Test Only) . | 2 |
| Taylor-Johnson Profile Analysis..... | 2 |
| Bender-Gestalt Test..... | 2 |
| 16 Personality Factors Test..... | 2 |
| Thematic Apperception Test..... | 2 |
| Beta Test..... | 1 |
| Gordon Personal Profile..... | 1 |
| Adams-Tepley Personnel Audit..... | 1 |
| Cornell Word Form-2..... | 1 |
| Flanigan Aptitude Classification Test..... | 1 |
| Thorndike Aptitude Test..... | 1 |
| F Scale..... | 1 |
| Thurston Temperament Schedule..... | 1 |
| Nelson-Denny Reading Test..... | 1 |
| Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal.. | 1 |
| Quick Test..... | 1 |
| Culture Fair Intelligence Test..... | 1 |
| Bull Session Test..... | 1 |
| Self-Prepared Psychological Test..... | 1 |

but found the results of these tests to be inconclusive and had discontinued this practice.

The responding agencies that used psychological testing methods were asked to explain why their department gave such examinations. It was indicated by forty-two agencies that these tests helped to determine those individuals that were emotionally unstable. As a result, it was possible to weed out those candidates who would not in the department's opinion make good police officers. Eleven agencies indicated that these tests enabled

them to find out if an individual was suitable for police work. Five agencies stated that these tests were important because they were able to determine the motivation of an individual for taking the police examination. Five agencies stated that they were interested in upgrading the quality of their members and psychological examinations helped in this task. Two agencies stated that these examinations assisted them in making a determination as to those candidates who had the ability to empathize with the people they were servicing.

Those responding agencies that indicated that they did not currently employ psychological examinations were asked to indicate whether or not they contemplated using such methods in the future. Only twenty-three agencies out of the 123 who do not currently use these methods indicated that they intended to implement them in the selection of recruits. Twelve agencies stated that they might introduce such testing in the future but could not make a definite commitment. The remaining eighty-eight agencies had no intention of implementing the use of psychological testing in the selection procedures of their department.

In connection with the above findings there were five agencies, two "local" and three "state", which indicated that they had at one time used such tests but, upon review had discarded them. The following is an excerpt from the letter received from the Columbus, Ohio Police Department relative to this matter. The author believes that this sums up the feelings of the five agencies which have discontinued these selection tests.

... we scrubbed the tests for several reasons. Not only were they of questionable legality, but it was our experience that they failed to produce tangible results. This is, of course, in addition to the high costs of the program.

The following is a further quote from this same letter which indicates the attitude of the writer:

... it seems incomprehensible to us that an applicant's potential performance as a police officer can be predicted on his response to a handful of questions. During the time of these tests, there is no doubt that many potentially fine officers were disqualified because of the arbitrary nature of the exams.

It is apparent from this letter that the utilization of psychological testing in the selection of police officers is not considered a cure-all by all law enforcement administrators.

DISCUSSION

Towler (1964) recognized that the attitude of the police officer towards the people he services plays an important role in the welfare of the community in which he patrols. It is important that the man or woman chosen to serve in the role of a police officer be the best qualified.

In order to accomplish the task of hiring only the best qualified, each police agency must establish stringent criteria for a candidate to meet. It has come to be recognized by many experts that psychological examinations should be included as a part of each candidate's selection procedure. As has been indicated previously, the main purpose of this survey was to ascertain the extent to which psychological examinations were being used by police agencies to assist in the evaluation and selection of those individuals seeking employment as police officers. The second purpose of this investigation was to determine to what extent police administrators use the results of the psychological examinations in making assignments and also in considering their personnel for promotion.

As a result of this present survey it was determined that 39.41% of those that replied used psychological examinations in the selection of their personnel. This was a much larger percentage than Olgesby (1957) received in response to his questionnaire. He indicated that only fourteen out of the ninety replying agencies, or only 15.56%, used any type of psychological testing. As a result of their survey Narrol and Levitt (1963) concluded that only twenty-two of the replying agencies were using psychological methods in evaluating police applicants. This represented 38.60% of their return. As can be observed by comparing the figures of the Narrol and Levitt study against the return experienced in the present survey there has been only a small increase in the percentage of agencies using psychological examinations today as compared to 1963. It can be said, therefore, that the use of psychological testing methods in the selection of recruits has not increased significantly in the eight years since the last survey.

A review of the responses received disclose that there is a great reliance on the use of the MMPI in examining candidates. Out of the eighty agencies using psychological testing thirty-nine of them, or 48.75%, stated that they used this examination. There were nineteen agencies which indicated that this test was used in conjunction with one or more other examinations. Although there exists a heavy

reliance on this examination its validity in the police selection process has been questioned. Not enough literature has been published wherein follow-up studies have been made to ascertain whether the results achieved from using the MMPI in selection procedures have proven positive. It has been pointed out by Mills, et al. (1966) that the personality inventory examination has been standardized on different populations from that of the police recruit. The researchers were of the opinion that the extrapolation from the standardized group to the police group is questionable. In addition, they pointed out that the police candidate appeared more guarded than the average job applicant and that the responses of the police candidate are more difficult to interpret because they are not typical of the individual's usual functioning. Rankin (1957) has also pointed out this weakness and he has suggested that a study be conducted to create examinations that would have more validity for the testing of future police personnel.

Another weakness of the current methods of examining recruits is the fact that many of the tests used have been limited to an evaluation of intelligence. While this is an important facet to consider it should not be the main thrust of police psychological examinations. The only apparent reason for the use of this type of examination is the fact that there are no accepted examinations that will give a clear indication as to whether an individual is suited for police work.

There is an obvious weakness in the methods currently used because the psychological examinations in use have not been properly validated on police populations. As a result of this survey it was determined that there are a number of trained individuals, psychologists and psychiatrists, working in this area. There is a need to coordinate their efforts to develop a set of psychological examinations which can be utilized by all police agencies in the selection of their personnel. The President's Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice in its report (1968) recommended that the utilization of psychological testing should be considered as a most important tool in the selection of police personnel because it is through examinations such as these that the emotionally unstable individual can be discovered before he causes an incident such as those that have occurred in the last few years.

The author suggests that the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration is a logical source for

the funds which would be needed to validate a set of appropriate measures for this purpose. This would require the cooperation of departments throughout the country for the collection of validating data. It is only through such a coordinated effort that improvements can be made in this area. Once this research has been completed there should be a set of examinations which would give more accurate information about the potential of each candidate.

This report has dealt primarily with the use of psychological testing in the selection of police personnel. The author is of the opinion that there are two other areas that should also be studied with regard to the use of psychological testing.

It has been mentioned frequently that police officers have been a major cause of much of the racial unrest that has occurred in the United States in the last few years. Because of this fact, the author believes that there is a need to utilize the results of the psychological tests in order to determine where to assign an individual so that he will serve the interests of the department and the community to the best of his ability. Such a consideration would greatly reduce the tension between the police force and the people. The reason for this is because only those officers who have indicated through psychological tests that they are able to empathize with a particular community will be assigned to that community.

The author is aware that arguments can be made indicating that there would not be enough personnel to make assignments in this fashion. This might be true, but another value of psychological examinations is the fact that they might point out the reasons why an individual should not be assigned to a particular area. Once these weaknesses are noted the police administrator could develop programs which would induce the individual to change his attitude thereby permitting him to work in an otherwise unsuitable area. The author contends that this matter should be considered in any long range study involving testing for police agencies.

The author also believes that psychological testing should play a role in promotion procedures. Leadership is an essential quality which a superior officer must have. Stogdill (1948) has indicated that the qualities required by a leader are determined to a large extent by the demands of the situation in which he must function as a leader. The police department by its very nature tends to be a centralized form of government that is

authoritarian in its outlook. In this respect the leader must function within an authoritarian structure. Yet, the nature of the operation prevents the leader from giving direct and constant supervision to the men that work under him. The men must have some reason to perform their assigned tasks even though their performance is not being directly supervised. Leighton (1950) has indicated that a leader must excel in certain qualities in order to retain his authority even when not directly controlling the activities of his subordinates. He indicated that some of these qualities include self confidence, quick decision making ability, and skill in deciding the right solutions. Fiedler (1968) indicated that a group will perform in the proper manner when its goals have been clearly designated by the leader and he has been able to show them the most direct approach to achieving them. The leader must show his men that he is aware of their activity even when not directly supervising them by praising them for a good performance and criticizing them when it is in order. As Shartle (1956) has pointed out the activities of the leader can influence the manner in which his subordinates perform their assigned tasks.

It is clear that there is a need for good leaders in order to obtain the best performance possible from each police officer. The author is of the opinion that the results of psychological examinations dealing with leadership capabilities should be utilized when making promotions. Any study dealing with the use of psychological methods in police agencies should include this area in its survey.

SUMMARY

The present study was conducted to estimate the extent to which psychological testing was being employed by police agencies in the selection of their personnel. Only eighty of the 203 replying agencies indicated that they used psychological examinations in the selection of their personnel. A review of the testing methods used indicated that there was a significant increase in the number of agencies using methods that tested the personality of the individual. However, there were a number

of agencies that still used tests of intelligence rather than personality.

The author recommends that funds be obtained from the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration for the purpose of conducting a study of every police department in the United States to find out the extent to which psychological examinations are being used by these agencies. It is suggested that the collected data would be useful in establishing relevant criteria for testing police candidates. He also recommends that psychological examinations should be used as a criteria for assigning personnel and promoting personnel.

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