

# COP DOC CORNER

*Helping agencies be proactive about mental health and normalizing the use of mental health professionals.*

*by Shawna M. Baron, Psy.D., Licensed Psychologist*

## **April 2024 Topic: Pre-Employment Psychological Evaluations**

### **What are pre-employment psychological evaluations (PPE's)?**

PPE's are psychological evaluations used to determine if candidates are psychologically suitable for a position in law enforcement. Candidates should be free from any psychological impairment that could adversely impact their ability to perform their job duties in a safe and effective way in their work as an armed, often minimally supervised law enforcement agent.

While they are referred to as pre-employments, they are technically done in the **post conditional offer phase** because they assess for the presence of a mental and/or emotional impairment (this would go against the ADA if done in the pre-offer phase). Some employers choose to use a form of personality measure in the pre-offer phase, but those assessments are only limited to normal psychological functioning (like a basic "personality test" on the internet).

### **Why utilize PPE's?**

Ultimately, PPE's are one of many tools agencies can use to select the best workforce for their unique needs. DOJ data indicates 90% of law enforcement agencies in the United States utilize some type of PPE. Given the highly stressful and dangerous nature of the job, reducing negligent hiring is of utmost importance. From a broader perspective, PPE's help contribute to public trust and transparency. Perhaps most importantly- in my view- providing PPE's helps agencies establish a relationship with a mental health professional(s) and helps to normalize the use of them within the department.

## **What kind of positions can PPE's be completed for?**

Just about any public safety position in the public or private sector, including:

Police officers and deputies (including academy recruits)  
Specialized assignments/promotion (ex: sex crimes, homicide)  
Armed security (court, bailiff, financial couriers, etc.)  
Evidence technicians  
Correctional and detention officers  
Police Chaplains

## **What does a PPE involve?**

At least two psychological assessments, a life history questionnaire, and a thorough clinical interview with the candidate. I assess for mental or emotional impairment as well as counterproductive behaviors. Overall, the process takes 3-4 hours, so I am able to get a pretty good impression of the candidate.

## **What can a PPE conclude about a candidate?**

My PPE reports include a clear “yes” or “no” recommendation as to qualification for psychological suitability for the job applied for.

If the candidate is considered unqualified, further information is provided as to the reason why (e.g., deficiencies in required competencies, elevated risk of counterproductive behaviors, mental or emotional impairment, etc.)

I also include areas of risk - historical or current- to assist the agency in hiring decisions. These are related to the POST personality competency domains (cognitive, emotional, interpersonal, judgment, conscientiousness, etc.)

## **What are the most common reasons for an “unqualified” rating?**

I have been doing this work for 10+ years now and can anecdotally say the most common reasons include stress management/PTSD related concerns, excessive risk for counterproductive behaviors, and substance use concerns. In the very young (~ age 21), it's usually an issue of emotional immaturity.

## What information does my agency need to provide for a PPE?

Ideally, the following information would be provided prior to evaluation:

- Copy of offer letter (if the agency provides them)
- Copy of job description for the position applied for
- Results of background investigation and/or any agency concerns

## Looking for more information?

Email me at [Shawna@BaronPsych.com](mailto:Shawna@BaronPsych.com) to learn more about pre-employment evaluations or any other services I provide (like critical incident debriefings, fitness-for-duty evaluations, mental health check-ins, etc). If you are unsure about starting PPE's, I'm happy to send an example PPE report.



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## *On a lighter note...*

One thing I have learned working with law enforcement is how hard duty belts are on furniture! After a lot of furniture shopping, I found the perfect blend of comfortable, sturdy, and no arms- perfect for those wide duty belts. Mental health check-ins are a breeze with a cup of coffee and these new chairs.

