



# Law Enforcement and the Use of the Fitness-for-Duty Evaluation

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## Introduction

- Law enforcement officers work very stressful jobs and encounter negative incidents routinely in their daily tasks.
- It is important to care for the mental health of law enforcement officers and provide them the care they need.
- One way to assist officers after a critical incident is the fitness-for-duty evaluation (FFDE), which is typically performed by a forensic psychologist.

## Defining the FFDE

- “Formal specialized examination of an incumbent employee that results from
- (1) objective evidence that the employee may be unable to safely or effectively perform a defined job and
- (2) a reasonable basis for believing that the cause may be attributable to a psychological condition or impairment.
- The central purpose of an FFDE is to determine whether the employee is able to safely and effectively perform his or her essential job functions” (Price, 2017)

## Uses of the FFDE

- Pre-employment assessment
- After critical incidents
- When an officers shows a significant decrease in work performance
- When officer attitude has substantially changed

## Critical Incidents

- Critical incidents may be experienced by law enforcement officers.
- Critical incidents are extreme and potentially traumatic experiences – typically on-the-job situations – that have a significant impact on the officer.
- Critical incidents may “overwhelm the usually effective coping skills of an individual officer” (Price, 2017)
- Examples of critical incidents are officer involved shootings, line of duty deaths, harm to family/friends/children

## Discussion

- FFDE must be supported by evidence leading up the assessment.
- Higher standards are applied to law enforcement officers during the evaluation because officers carry out their duties equipped with a firearm
- Agencies must uphold standards of officers to protect the community
- FFDE can assist in decreasing early retirement of experienced employees
- FFDE results can assist in determining if an officer must be removed or demoted from their current work assignment
- FFDE may be used on officers struggling with personal issues as well – such as stress at home

## Conclusion

- The fitness-for-duty evaluation is an important tool for law enforcement administration to use within their agencies.
- Officers undergo many forms of stress while conducting their daily duties, some reaching levels to be considered a critical incident.
- Proper care for law enforcement officers will reduce early retirement of valuable, experienced employees and allow the agency to operate more efficiently.
- Law enforcement agencies must work to normalize mental health care so it may become a part of every officer’s law enforcement career.

## References

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