
UNIT 2 ROLE AND FUNCTIONS OF FORENSIC PSYCHOLOGIST¹

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2.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you will be able to,

- discuss the roles and functions of a forensic psychologist; and
- discuss the qualification and training of forensic psychologist.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The work of a forensic psychologist is varied and wide reaching. He/ she assists the police in investigation, provides advice on interviewing of suspects or witnesses, works as expert witness in court cases, works in the rehabilitation of offenders, conducts forensic psychology research or work in academia. This unit aims to present a balanced view of profession of the forensic psychologist and to introduce you to the variety of roles within which the forensic psychologist can, and does work. You will also be introduced to the specific functions that a forensic psychologist performs within these roles.

2.2 ROLES AND FUNCTIONS OF A FORENSIC PSYCHOLOGIST

Let us look at the roles of a forensic psychologists and then we will discuss about the functions.

In 1981 Professor Lionel Haward, one of the UK's founding fathers of criminal psychology, described the four roles that psychologists may perform when they become professionally involved in criminal proceedings.

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The four roles are:

Clinical: In this role the forensic psychologist will usually be involved in the assessment of an individual in order to provide a clinical judgement. The psychologist could use interviews, assessment tools or psychometric tests (i.e. special questionnaires) to aid in his or her assessment. These assessments can inform the police, the courts, or the prison and probation services about the psychological functioning of an individual and can therefore influence how the different sections of the criminal justice system process the individual in question. For example, a forensic psychologist may be asked to assess individuals in order to determine whether they are fit to stand trial or whether they have a mental illness which means that they would not understand the proceedings.

Experimental: This may involve the forensic psychologist performing research regarding the case. This can involve carrying out experimental tests in order to illustrate a point or provide further information to the courts (for example, how likely it is that someone can correctly identify an object in the hand of an individual from a distance of 100 metres at twilight). Alternatively it can involve psychologists providing the court with a summary of current research findings which may be relevant to the case in question.

Actuarial: In this context the word ‘actuarial’ relates to the use of statistics in order to inform a case. One example of how a forensic psychologist may act in an actuarial role is if they are required to present actuarial information relating to the probability of an event occurring to the court. For example, a court may wish to know how likely an offender is to reoffend before the sentence is decided. In such a case, a forensic psychologist could be called upon in order to inform the pre-sentence report to the court.

Advisory: In this role the forensic psychologist may provide advice to the police about how to proceed with an investigation. For example, an offender’s profile could inform the investigation, or advice could be provided about how best to interview a particular suspect. Alternatively a prosecution or defence lawyer may ask for advice on how best to cross examine a vulnerable witness or another expert witness. This role involves the use of the psychologist’s expertise in order to advice the police, courts or prison and probation services.

As you can see, psychology thus can be used in a variety of different scenarios within the criminal justice system and for a number of different reasons. The next few sub-sections will examine in more detail how psychologists can and do contribute their expertise to aid the work of the criminal justice system. This list of role, however, does not claim to be exhaustive, as there are many more ways in which psychologists play their part. We have therefore chosen the most well known roles in order to give an indication of what kinds of roles and functions forensic psychology involves.

Let us now discuss the functions of a forensic psychologist.

Criminal investigations: The role of a forensic psychologist in criminal investigations can take a variety of forms. Professor Laurence Alison of the

University of Liverpool has suggested a number of ways in which the expertise of a psychologist could aid the police and support the work that they do. According to him, “It is important to appreciate that the ways in which psychologists can contribute extends well beyond the process of profiling offenders. Indeed the apprehension of the offender would be assisted by enhancing police decision-making and leadership-skills, improving methods of interviewing witnesses and victims, developing accurate methods of recording, collating and analysing data on pre-convictions of offenders, developing suspect prioritisation system based on empirical research and enhancing intelligence-led policing and the use of informations.” (Alison 2005)

From the list of functions within the quote above, it may be seen that the role of the psychologist in assisting the police can be wide-ranging.

Crime analysis: Crime analysis (sometimes also called intelligence analysis) is one field of work which draws upon forensic psychological methods. Crime analysts are generally employed by the police (or policing agencies, for example in the UK, the National Crime and Operations Faculty and the National Crime Squad) in order to analyse crime data to aid the police carryout their roles. One of the most common roles of crime analysts is that of case linkage. This process involves the linkage of crime based on the similarities in the behaviours of the offenders as reported by the victim or as inferred from the crime scene. For example, let us examine a rape case committed by a stranger on a woman walking home alone after a night out with her friends. Crime analysts could use the details of this case – the fact that she had just left her office, that the rapist took some of her clothing away from the scene with him, the contents of the threats used towards the woman – in order to check against an already established database of similar crimes to see whether there are any similarities to past crimes. If matches are found – the same threats were used, similar items of clothing taken by a rapist, and it was in a close geographical location to another rape – then this information can be used by the police to investigate the potential that the same individual offender has committed both crimes. This allows the focusing of the resources of the investigation in order to avoid duplication of work.

Offenders profiling or criminal investigative analysis: Offender profiling has received a great deal of attention from the media in recent years. Media reporting of the utilisation of forensic psychologists in high profile cases has introduced the general public to the notion of offender profiling. While this has raised the profile of the field, it could be argued that the (largely) sensationalist portrayal of profiling resulted in a general confusion of what profiling actually is, how often it is done and who does it. This uncertainty amongst the general public is not altogether surprising however, as there is an absence of an agreed definition of the term ‘profiling’, even in academic circles.

What we can be clear about is that profiling uses information gleaned from the crime scene relating to the offender’s behaviour during the crime. This can be pooled with other information, such as victim statements (if available), in order to draw conclusions about the nature of the person who

committed the crime. Was the crime planned meticulously or was it impulsive? Does the offender live locally to the crime scene? What age range is the offender likely to fall into? What gender is the offender? This information can then be used to aid the police in investigations and in targeting resources.

But how exactly is a profiler able to look at the scene and use this to specify the characteristics of the offender? The answer to this question is not entirely clear mainly because different people involved in offender profiling can, and do, use a variety of techniques in order to reach their conclusions. Even those individuals who claim to be working from the same theoretical standpoint can still vary in how the theory is applied to any given case.

Interviewing, detecting deception and eye witness research: One of the most important tasks during investigation is collecting reliable evidence in order to put together a case of what happened during the event in question. One of the main sources of this evidence is the people who were eyewitnesses to the event. In order to gain this information, an interview needs to be conducted by the investigating police officers with the aim of gaining as much accurate information from the witness as possible. In addition, once the suspect has been identified, he/ she too is interviewed in order to gain his or her view of events and to possibly extract a confession to the crime. Hence the interview (whether with a witness or suspect) and the manner in which it is conducted can be crucial to a case.

It is not surprising, therefore, when you think of the processes (those relating to memory and the retrieval of memory) that are involved in the interview situation, the psychologists have been interested in this area for years. Given research findings such as those that state that the recall of events by witness can be manipulated by the interviewer (either intentionally or unintentionally – for example, by the type of questions asked), it is clear that those carrying out the interviews need to receive training in how to conduct the interviews appropriately.

Psychologists have been instrumental in developing guidance and advice on how best to interview witnesses and suspects and have also provided training to various police forces on these techniques. The police can also use psychologists in order to gain advice on how to interview particular types of witnesses or suspects. For example, psychologists have conducted research into interviews with vulnerable witnesses such as the young, the elderly and learning disabled witnesses. This research can be used to inform the police on how best to retrieve the information that they require from such witnesses without causing them too much stress while at the same time ensuring that the information received is as accurate as possible.

Research performed by forensic psychologists investigating the detection of deception also has useful applications for the police when interviewing witnesses and in particular suspects.

Function of forensic psychologist as a police psychologist: The information here, thus far, been concerned with the application of psychological knowledge to assist in police investigation. However, there is another field

within which the work of forensic psychologists, and the application of their knowledge, is useful to the police, that is police psychology. Like many organisations, the police force itself presents its own challenges – what type of person makes a good police officer? What is the best way to train police officers? How might the attendance at unpleasant scenes of crime, or repeated exposure to negative events, impact on an individual and how are those affected in this way best treated?

This area of work is not a new one – psychologists, both occupational and forensic, have been advising the police on such matters for the last twenty-five years or so. Psychologists have contributed their knowledge to the process of police officer recruitment through the introduction of psychometric tests which measure psychological characteristics that may be important in relation to such work. These could assess, for example, whether a person is an assertive individual, open to persuasion, and conscious of detail. Psychologists have also provided advice on the composition of interviews and assessment centres which will eliminate those who do not have the necessary qualities for the role as well as providing an indication of those who will prosper in such a role.

Another important area of police interest where psychologists have an ongoing input is the moderation of police stress. The stress faced by police officers is somewhat different from that in other types of employment. Whereas stress can be elevated in most jobs through organisational change, such as decreased workload or a pay rise, the police can be faced with unexpected, perhaps threatening, situations at any time during their daily work. These events, due to their unpredictable nature, cannot necessarily be mediated by organisational change. So the police also need stress management measures that can assist at an individual level, as and when they are needed. Psychologists have been instrumental in advising the police on what mechanisms would be beneficial (such as peer counselling and self-help programmes), but will also provide professional services to police officers who require more intensive stress management.

Expert witness: Court cases can involve complex issues including the presentation of information that is judged to be beyond the knowledge of the average layperson who may sit on a jury. In such situations, the court permits the calling of an expert witness who, by definition, has an expertise relating to the issue in question. Under the circumstances expert witnesses are permitted to provide their opinion (rather than the facts) on the issue being discussed.

The way the expert witnesses are called to the court could vary from one jurisdiction to another. For example, in some countries within Europe, an expert witness is called by the court itself in order to provide information as and when it is needed. However, in the UK and USA, the expert is instructed by either the defence or prosecution in order to provide extra strength to their version of events.

The use of the psychologist as an expert witness has, in the past, been constricted by the notion of the expert having to provide information that is beyond the knowledge of the average person. Historically then, the

admissibility of a psychologist's opinion was often limited to provide evidence relating to mental impairment or the psychological functioning of an individual. However, in recent years, the psychologists' expertise has been increasingly recognised and they are now being called upon as evidence in relation to a wide variety of issues. Some examples of these are the impact that the interviewing techniques have on a suspect or witness, the reliability of eyewitness testimony, the clinical assessment of suspect or witness, or the use of profiling techniques during an investigation.

Forensic psychologists and assessment and treatment of offenders:

Forensic psychologists, especially within Australia, Canada and the UK, are heavily involved in work concerning the assessment, rehabilitation and management of offenders, either in the community or when held in incarceration. This role can involve working with the offenders to reduce their likelihood for reoffending in the future or a more clinical role addressing the psychological needs of offenders. These psychological needs may (or may not) result from the effects of crime they committed (for example the development of post traumatic stress disorder or realisation of the impact of their offence on their victim) or the environment within which they are held (for example developing depression due to being away from the family or anxiety brought on by respective bullying from other prisoners). This work can be both varied and challenging in nature.

One of the first and ongoing concerns of a forensic psychologist working with offenders post-sentence is the assessment of the offenders. This encompasses an in-depth analysis of their risk of reoffending, their risk of harm (to others as well as themselves) and their needs (such as accommodation, finances and mental health, for example).

These assessments can be used in the management of the offenders' highlighted risks and needs, informing the planning of the activities that the offenders will undertake during their sentence. This could include the provision of basic skills courses, treatment programmes, one to one work on the particular issues, and so on.

In addition, if an offender is on a community sentence and has been assessed to be high risk to the public, then it may be the case that the offender becomes subject to the monitoring arrangements in order to reduce the risk that he/ she poses. The forensic psychologist can provide an input to each of these arrangements on an operational level but can also provide managerial and advisory support to those delivering such interventions.

In the recent years there has been a growth in the use of treatment programmes with the offenders. Forensic psychologists have been active in this development contributing to the design, delivery and management of programmes which attempt to address the offenders' thoughts, attitudes and behaviours that contribute to their offending behaviour, and prevent further offending.

Psychologists are also involved in the management of these programmes, ensuring that the right offenders are placed on such programmes and that the programmes are delivered in the manner in which the designer intended.

Research has shown that badly delivered programmes can be ineffective but at worst be damaging.

However, the role of the prison or probation psychologist is not limited to rehabilitation related work. Forensic psychologists within these settings can also be involved in undertaking research, overseeing training of prison or probation

Forensic psychologists and academia / research: With the growth of interest in forensic psychology in the recent years, there has been an increased demand for courses which teach the theory and practice of forensic psychology. With the inevitable growth in forensic psychology courses, there has been a corresponding increase in the number of forensic psychologists working within academia.

So what do those people actually do? Well, the obvious answer is that they teach students about forensic psychology: about the psychology of criminal behaviour, of the courtroom, psychology and investigation, the assessment and treatment of offenders and also about how to carry out criminal psychological research. This teaching can be at undergraduate or postgraduate level and can be delivered in a variety of different ways.

However, the role of academic forensic psychologist is not only limited to teaching. The other main role of academics is to carry out research within their field of interest. Most academics have their own research interests that develop over time and they are usually encouraged by their employers to expand their knowledge of these specialisms by researching them further. The ability to do this can often be dependent on a variety of outside forces, however, such as the availability of funding and access to privileged data or to imprisoned individuals. From a personal point of view, while at times this work can be frustrating, tedious and time consuming, it is also very interesting and hugely rewarding. Most forensic psychologists who work in universities also are required to be involved in professional practice such as giving advice in some of the many ways outlined in this Unit.

Check Your Progress I

- 1) List the roles played by a forensic psychologist.

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Box 2.1 Specific examples of the functions that forensic psychologists may be asked to perform (Bartol and Bartol, 2008).

Functions of a forensic psychologists with reference to police psychology, psychology of crime and delinquency, victimology and victim services, legal psychology, and correctional psychology are described as follows:

Let us elaborate these:

1) Police Psychology: Police psychology includes functions as follows:

- Assist police department in determining optimal shift schedules for their employers.
- Assist police in developing psychological profiles of serial offenders.
- Establish reliable and valid screening procedures for law enforcement officer positions at various police and sheriff departments.
- Train police officers on how to deal with mentally ill persons.
- Provide counselling services to officers after a shooting incident.

2) Psychology of Crime and Delinquency: This includes the following functions:

- Evaluate the effectiveness of preschool intervention strategies designed to prevent violent behaviour during adolescence.
- Conduct research on the development of psychopathy.
- Consult with legislators and governmental agencies as a research policy adviser on prevention of stalking.
- Consult with school personnel on identifying troubled youth who are potentially dangerous.
- Develop a psychological test for assessing risk among the mentally ill.

3) Victimology and Victim Services: Victimology and victim services include the following functions:

- Evaluate and treat persons who are the victims of crime or witness of crime.
- Conduct psychological assessments for personal injury matters having to do with such things as auto accidents, product liability, sexual harassment and discrimination, and medical negligence or workers' compensation.
- Educate and train victim service providers on psychological reactions to criminal victimisation, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).
- Assess, support, and counsel those who provide death notification services.
- Educate service providers on the impact of multiculturalism when victims seek mental health and support services.

4) Legal Psychology: Under legal psychology the functions mentioned below are included:

- Conduct child custody evaluations, visitation risk assessments, and child abuse evaluations.

- Assist attorneys in jury selection through community surveys and other research methods.
 - Perform evaluations of a defendant's competency to stand trial.
 - Consult with attorneys and the courts concerning custody decisions, conflict resolution, and the validity of assessment procedures used in the evaluation of various psychological conditions.
 - Conduct competency evaluations for the civil court.
- 5) Correctional Psychology:** Functions under correctional psychology include
- Establish reliable and valid screening procedures for correctional officer positions at correctional facilities.
 - Evaluate the effectiveness of a variety of existing programmes (a process called programme evaluation) for juvenile and adult offenders, such as victim-offender reconciliation programmes, sex offender treatment, or health education programmes.
 - Develop a stress management programme for correctional personnel.
 - Assess the development of a system for classifying prison inmates for placement within a correctional facility.

2.3 QUALIFICATIONS AND TRAINING

The typical day of forensic psychologist can vary. In general, it is oriented towards research activities. However, a forensic psychologist may do other things as well, such as helping with jury selection. In this case, a forensic psychologist could gather information on studies done on juries especially relevant to a pending case. They would then go to a courthouse or to an attorney's office to shift through papers or conduct interviews of possible jurors. The forensic psychologist might also help attorneys narrow down the juror pool by eliminating people whose views may affect the outcome of the trial in an undesirable way. This process can sometimes last several weeks or even longer.

There are both potentially rewarding and frustrating aspects to working in forensic psychology that need to be carefully considered before pursuing a career in this field. Listed below are some potential pros and cons. There are certain very special attractions in being in the field of forensic psychology and working as forensic psychologist. For instance, if a person enjoys working with others, then this will be good profession to take up. Forensic psychologists usually work with a team of other professionals in addition to working directly with clients or criminal offenders. A person who loves challenging assignments would find forensic psychologist's job quite attractive. A person who is interested in psychology and the law subjects would find forensic psychology a very interesting subject. Forensic psychology can be very rewarding when you make a difference to someone's life and thus the forensic psychologists can derive satisfaction for helping others. There are many different specialties within the field of forensic psychology that create a number of opportunities. When working in prisons

and with juvenile delinquents every day can be challenging and very different providing opportunities for applying varying skills and techniques. While there are great attractions in the field of forensic psychology, there are equally a few unattractive or disadvantageous aspects in the field of forensic psychology. It is a field that requires expertise and thus, continuous training and regular updation of knowledge is required. Attending seminars and conferences throughout one's professional life is important for keeping with the current trends and discoveries in the field. The people that forensic psychologists work with in prison settings are sometimes very violent and the chances of getting hurt or injured is quite high when working with such violent persons. Personal safety thus need to be taken care of. Forensic psychology can be very stressful job. Often, people and situations cannot be changed easily. Thus, forensic psychologists could be prone to stress, anxiety and even burnout.

The settings that a forensic psychologists is likely to work in are mainly police stations and courts. Though many forensic psychologists also work in laboratory setups and some may be in to teaching and training. They could also work as consultants.

The educational qualification required of a forensic psychologists includes at least a Masters degree, followed by Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D) or Doctor of Psychology (PsyD). One of the Institutions offering programmes in Forensic Psychology (Msc. in Forensic Psychology is National Forensic Science University, Sector 9, Gandhinagar-382007, Gujarat. You can refer to its website for more information <https://www.nfsu.ac.in/m-sc-forensic-psychology>.

Those with a desire to work in forensic psychology must be patient, adaptable, comfortable working with others, and enjoy doing research. Often, one must be a good speaker because many people who do work in this field work as expert witnesses at some point during their career. An expertise in abnormal, motivational, clinical, and social psychology is also key to being successful in this field.

Thus, besides educational qualification in psychology and forensic psychology, one needs to also update oneself with legal system in the Country. Further, a forensic psychologists will have to regular update his/ her knowledge and skills by attending training programmes and participating in conferences and seminars. A forensic psychology not only needs to have an expertise in his / her subject area but also needs to have skills pertaining to team work, communication skills, decision making and even report writing.

2.4 LET US SUM UP

You have learned in this unit about the roles and functions of the forensic psychologists. The clinical role focuses primarily upon a scientific determination of the mental state of the offender. In their experimental role, forensic psychologists apply established experimental data to the events of a case to produce an authoritative interpretation of what transpired. The actuary role involves the forensic psychologist providing information on the

probabilities of certain events occurring or in conjunction with one another. The advisory role involves the use of the forensic psychologist's expertise in order to advise the police, courts and prison and probation services.

As you have read in this Unit, the functions of the forensic psychologist with the criminal justice system take many routes depending on the specialisation of the particular forensic psychologist. From aiding the police in their investigations advising in the selection of police officers, providing expert evidence to the court, working with offenders, conducting assessments and interventions, carrying out research or imparting their knowledge to future, the functions of a forensic psychologists are varied and challenging.

2.5 REFERENCES

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2.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress I

- 1) List the roles played by a forensic psychologist.

The roles played by forensic psychologist are clinical, experimental, actuarial and advisory.

2.7 UNIT END QUESTIONS

- 1) Explain the roles played by a forensic psychologist.
- 2) Describe the functions of a forensic psychologist.
- 3) Explain qualification and training of a forensic psychologist.