

(Week 2 Interactive Media for FPSY 6521 Police Psychology)

FPSY 6521 Police Psychology
Developmental Lifespan Stages of Police Officers

Police Officer Developmental Stages:

Researchers, such as Freud, Erikson, Kohlberg, Levinson, and Piaget have studied developmental stages over the course of an individual's lifespan. Similarly, research has attested that psychological, environmental, and biological factors also influence one's career development. Stages of an individual's development as a police professional are important for the forensic psychology professional to understand in order to better assist police professionals in their adjustment, influences, coping skills, and personal and professional choices. Van Manen (1973), Fagan & Ayers(1982), and Cooper (1982) researched police officer behaviors and attitudes as a function of a series of developmental stages. Burke & Mikkelsen (2006) studied police officers in Norway and also noted that understanding career stages is essential in responding to a constable's needs. The following stages are derived from the existing research and identify relevant issues affecting police professionals.

Burke, R., & Mikkelsen, A. (2006). Police Officers over career stages: Satisfaction and well being. *Europe's Journal of Psychology*. Retrieved from:
http://www.ejop.org/archives/2006/02/police_officers.html.

Cooper, W. H.(1982). Police officers over career stages. *Canadian Police College Journal*, 6, 93–112.

Fagan, M., & Ayers, K. (1982). The life of a police officer: A developmental perspective. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 9(3), 273–285.

Van Manen, J. (1973). Working the street: A developmental view of police Behavior. In H. Jacobs (Ed.) *The annals of criminal justice* 681-73. Beverly Hills, California: Sage Publishing Co. Retrieved from:
<http://dspace.mit.edu/handle/1721.1/1873>.

Levinson's Developmental Stages:

Adult development theory emphasizes that adults are challenged by different tasks which enable them to progress through a series of orderly life stages. Daniel Levinson (1985), suggested that these life stages are processes that affect an individual's relationships between him/herself and the world. He identified stages of adulthood from early transition to late adulthood and referred to these stages as "eras" which are also linked to specific ages. He also discussed the importance of transitions where events impact an individual and lead to change and progression to the next stage. This progression is dependent on a combination of an individual's internal processes and external events. The following are descriptions of the predominating issues that each stage encompasses.

Levinson, D (1985). *The Season's of a Man's Life*. Knoph: New York NY.

Levinson, D. (1986). The Conception of adult development. *The American Psychologist*, 42 (6), 3-13.

Police Officer Developmental Stages

Age 18–22:

Positives: Officers enter a new world of expectations; mentors train and guide officers in behavior and interactions (how to act); officers look forward to a new role and new sense of identity.

Negatives: While entering the police world, one may be guided by a mentor who is disgruntled; expectations and identity may be affected in a negative way.

Police Officer Developmental Stages

Age 22—28:

Positives: While on probation, one may experience crises and resolves them in positive ways through training, guidance, and positive values; officers are introduced to the realities of police work; officers are further socialized into the police department; family provides support.

Negatives: May face and resolve crises in a negative way based on poor guidance, lack of support, or poor values; as more crises arise, s/he may become anxious and hostile, which affects the way s/he interacts with the public and other officers; officers may also withdraw from family. Subsequently, “us” vs. “them” feelings and mentality develop.

Police Officer Developmental Stages

Age 28—33:

Positives: Officer has more responsibilities; has learned to handle crisis situations, and has become more independent; may receive promotions; officer may get satisfaction and enjoyment from the job. S/he does well within the community.

Negatives: Officer may experience stress from negative influences and choices such as getting passed over for promotions or other job opportunities, and being disciplined by administration. S/he may become bitter and question career choice.

Police Officer Developmental Stages

Age 33—38:

Positives: “Professional Rebirth.” Officer rediscovers initial enthusiasm for job; gets more involved in activities with fellow officers; feels content with profession.

Negatives: May feel stuck in job because of a lack of promotions; possible increase in negative behaviors, i.e., drinking, gambling, etc.

Police Officer Developmental Stages

Age 40—45:

Positives: Officer resolves questions about life’s meaning; looks forward to retirement; content with job and family.

Negatives: Officer questions his/her career choice; may have a negative attitude toward police work; may be bitter and vulnerable to corruption and other negative behaviors; negative attitude may also affect marital and family relationships.

Police Officer Developmental Stages

Age 45—50:

Positives: Based on good choices and strong career direction, an officer will continue to make positive strides in preparing for, and in, retirement.

Negatives: Based on poor choices and lack of strong career direction, an officer will have poor preparation for retirement, and a lack of direction afterwards.

Levinson's Developmental Stages

Age 17—22:

Leave adolescence; individual makes preliminary choices for adult life.

Levinson's Developmental Stages

Age 22—28:

Individual makes initial choices in love, occupation, friendship, values, and lifestyle.

Levinson's Developmental Stages

Age 28—33:

Changes occur in an individual's life structure; either a moderate change, or, more often, a severe and stressful crisis.

Levinson's Developmental Stages

Age 33—40:

Individual establishes a niche in society; progress on a timetable in both family and career accomplishments; are now expected to think and behave like a parent so they are faced with more demanding tasks and roles.

Levinson's Developmental Stages

Age 40—45:

Usually a time of crisis in the meaning and value of an individual's life, and s/he reassesses his/her life; an individual may seek to express certain parts of him/herself which have been neglected, i.e., certain talents and aspirations; individuals become more aware of their mortality and become involved in trying to leave a legacy.

Levinson's Developmental Stages

Age 45—50:

Individuals enter into middle adulthood and new choices must be made.

Some sources also state that there is a late adulthood stage during which time an individual spends time reflecting on past achievements and regrets, and making peace with one's self and others.