

Investigative Decision Making and Its Association With Critical Thinking Skills, Thinking Styles, and Law Enforcement Experience

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Decision making is an important aspect of the investigative work performed by law enforcement officers. The processes involved, though, can be influenced by biases in thinking and reasoning, which have been described as issues that could contribute to missed leads on the offender responsible for committing a crime when investigative efforts become focused on the wrong individuals. This study is interested in whether individuals with certain thinking skills and characteristics are particularly well-equipped to avoid this issue. More specifically, the study was designed to analyze whether there is an association between a person's critical thinking, thinking styles, their level of experience in law enforcement, and the decision-making approach they take when presented with a mock investigative task. Three aspects of their decision-making approach were examined to gain insight into their ability to avoid confirmation bias. These included their perceptions of a main suspect in a criminal case, their perceptions of the evidence collected during the investigation, and their prioritization of additional evidence and lines of inquiry to pursue in the case. The results of the study suggested that critical thinking may be associated with a reduced susceptibility to confirmation bias in investigative decision making. This finding offers a helpful lead towards identifying characteristics that may be beneficial for investigators, and also offers evidence for the importance and utility of incorporating critical thinking in law enforcement training.