

# Ready for Duty: A Study on the Preparedness of Licensed Criminology Graduates for Law Enforcement Careers

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## Abstract

This research investigates the preparedness of Criminology graduates from Urdaneta City University, specifically those who have become licensed criminologists, in their pursuit of careers within law enforcement agencies. The study involves six selected participants, comprising two each from the Philippine National Police (PNP), the Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP), and the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP). Employing a qualitative research design with thematic analysis, the study explores the multifaceted preparations made by these graduates as they apply for positions in law enforcement. The findings reveal that applicants proactively prepared themselves in three key dimensions. Physically, participants engaged in exercises to enhance their fitness levels. Financial preparation involved securing part-time employment to build savings, while mental readiness centered on maintaining a focused mindset aligned with their aspirations to become uniformed personnel. The study draws several conclusions from its findings. It emphasizes the importance of comprehensive preparation encompassing physical, mental, and financial aspects for individuals aspiring to join law enforcement agencies. Despite encountering challenges across various dimensions, applicants demonstrated resilience and determination, ultimately overcoming obstacles on their journey to becoming uniformed personnel. Importantly, the research underscores the proactive nature of these applicants, who commenced their preparations before formally applying to their desired law enforcement agencies.

**Keywords:** Career Preparedness, Criminology Graduates, Law Enforcement Careers

## 1. Introduction

In the realm of criminology, the transition from academic training to practical application within law enforcement agencies is a crucial juncture that demands meticulous examination. This study seeks to delve into the preparation of Criminology graduates from Urdaneta City University who have successfully earned their credentials as registered criminologists, particularly focusing on their experiences and challenges during the application process to law enforcement agencies. By scrutinizing the multifaceted dimensions of their readiness, this research aims to shed light on the unique journey undertaken by these graduates as they navigate the intricacies of pursuing careers in law enforcement. The significance of this study extends beyond the confines of Urdaneta City University, aspiring to provide valuable insights to a broader audience of registered criminologists seeking entry into diverse

law enforcement agencies. Understanding the significant problems encountered by these graduates and uncovering the life lessons gleaned from their application experiences can serve as an informative resource. This study aspires to be an eye-opener, offering practical guidance and strategic considerations not only to Urdaneta City University's Criminology graduates who have successfully passed the Criminology Licensure Examination (CLE) but to all registered criminologists embarking on the challenging path of applying to various law enforcement entities.

In essence, the research contributes to the broader discourse on the preparedness and challenges faced by criminology professionals in their pursuit of careers within law enforcement, fostering a deeper understanding of the intricate dynamics involved in this significant transition from academic accomplishment to real-world application.

### **Literature Review**

Recent graduates frequently choose a career as their next step in life after receiving their degree, and since this is their first experience in the working world, it is not surprising that they may face difficulties (Heang et al., 2019). Getting a career is expected as the next chapter of life among fresh graduates after earning their degree, and it is not a surprise that they will encounter challenges and problems since it is their first exposure to a working environment (Refugia, 2021).

Students' status influences the experiences of students beyond college and limits their awareness of and access to graduate employment. Lack of college education in the family affects the graduates' career decision-making, familiarity with corporate culture and expectations, preparedness for the corporate sector, and restricted access to people who can quickly ease their entry into the industry. These translate into transition outcomes such as starting at entry-level positions not requiring a college degree, delayed access to graduate-level classes, having to engage intentionally in additional efforts to reach graduate-level parts, and the potential to be discriminated against during the recruitment process, albeit unintentionally (Hirudayaraj et al., 2018).

Lack of employment opportunities makes work mismatch a frequent occurrence. According to Greaves (2020), the main justifications for accepting a job offer are that it fits into their career plan, they need the money to survive and pay off debts, there is room for advancement, they will gain and broaden their experience, there is support for their mental health and well-being, and they are well paid. Marr (2016) also highlighted seven factors, including seniority, stability, competition, networking and references, financial stability, and competition, as reasons why employees should remain at their current jobs.

In the study of Mohan and Ravindran (2018), explaining preparedness constituted by six domains emerged: academic and technical competence, communication and interpersonal skills, protective mechanisms and adaptive skills, professional attitude and ethical judgment, and financial solvency skills, and social and community orientation. The factors influencing preparedness were identified under the three themes of training-related factors, gender and experience of graduates, and opportunity of internship along with the nature of post-training work experience.

On the other hand, there are factors to take into account if an employee decides to keep their job, including having enough food on the table, having a backup plan in case they have to quit, having enough savings, receiving benefits, having a chance to get promoted, learning from their work, having a sense of purpose, having a healthy self-esteem, having a network of contacts, having references, and having the assurance of getting their next job (Claire, 2018). Further, Sunshine (2021) also strongly emphasizes the company's culture, team atmosphere, meaning and purpose, appreciation and

recognition, respect among co-workers, mentorship to support them, trust with their leaders, emotional investment, and fair treatment.

Every job requires a specific set of skills and competencies. Employers search for graduates with particular skills when hiring for entry-level positions. Students must understand that they can only succeed in getting off to a great start with prior experience and job preparedness. Each job necessitates acquiring relevant subject knowledge and various managerial and behavioral skills that directly advance the profession (Kapse et al., 2018).

Today's workforce needs qualified, professional workers with the character and mindset to face the demands and challenges of an economy and society that are changing quickly. Therefore, employability skills are crucial and needed. Higher education institutions (HEIs) are under pressure to ensure that their graduates can tackle this challenge. In order to inform and keep their students current with industry trends, HEIs have been seriously establishing solid relationships with their respective industries. On the other hand, pupils must have been instructed in and given the essential information and behavioral skills required for success, continuing development, and increased employee productivity. Higher education institutions' main goal is to prepare students for the workforce by giving them the knowledge and abilities they will need to find employment once they graduate. Its objectives were to determine the gender profiles of the respondents, evaluate the students' industry readiness in terms of general skills, functional area skills, and concentration area skills, and determine whether there was a statistically significant difference in the students' industry readiness when grouped by gender (Gevana et al., 2018). Every educational establishment must ensure its alumni are employable and prepared for life after graduation. A degree's electives should be compared to what employers are seeking. No research exists on the connection between graduates' first jobs and the technical and soft abilities required in total employment. The higher educational institution's output must fit the current requirements for professionals needed in the labor force. As a result, a student's learning experiences during his college years should incorporate both the technical and soft skills he or she has acquired (Diokno & Peparah, 2021). Any professional must acquire the abilities needed to overcome the current obstacles, whether they relate to the quest for a stable job or creating employment through entrepreneurial behavior (Albina et al., 2020).

Preparation of the students to join the workforce is the ultimate task of Higher education institutions in equipping them with the necessary skills and competencies for job placement after graduation. This study aims to assess the student's preparedness to enter the industry. Specifically, it aimed to identify the profile of the respondents in terms of gender; assess the readiness of the students to enter the industry in terms of generic skills, functional area skills, and concentration area skills; test the significant difference in the preparedness of the students when grouped according to gender (Verdadero et al., 2019).

The Philippine National Police (PNP), Bureau of Fire Protection (BFP), Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP), and other law enforcement agencies have had difficulty hiring new people to join the service in the past few years because of the increasing career opportunities in other fields and sectors. However, while it is a challenge for the PNP to recruit more people for the police force, several young Filipinos still dream of serving the country by joining the PNP. Working for the PNP not only gives you the honor to serve the country but also offers many rewarding benefits. (ProudBrown, 2017).

## Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the Theory of Employability proposed by Yorke and Knight (2004), which posits that employability is the culmination of an individual's learning, accomplishments, and awareness of personal skills essential for success in their chosen career. The relevance of this theory to the current study lies in its role as a yardstick for assessing the skills and knowledge sought by employers and managers. It serves as a valuable framework for evaluating the performance of leaders, both as individual contributors and team members, providing a structured tool to analyze their effectiveness in the workplace. In essence, this theory offers a lens through which to gauge the professional competencies crucial for success and advancement in a chosen career path.

Moreover, the study incorporates the Career Development Theory proposed by Parson, F. (2000), which underscores the exploration of pathways to enhance professional growth, advance career trajectories, and ultimately foster overall job satisfaction. This theory aligns seamlessly with the study's focus, as it implies that graduates engage in a thoughtful self-assessment of their strengths and weaknesses before charting a course toward their desired career. By emphasizing the importance of aligning personal attributes, such as knowledge, skill sets, values, and personality, with career aspirations, the theory underscores the significance of individualized growth efforts to attain job satisfaction.

Additionally, the research integrates the Social Cognitive Theory articulated by Bandura, A. (2000), providing insights into how individuals can strategically formulate career development plans for success. By cultivating a positive perception of their abilities and surrounding themselves with a supportive network of mentors, individuals can enhance their capacity to achieve career goals. This theory is intricately linked to the study's context, highlighting the imperative for graduates to concentrate on their inherent strengths and cultivate a positive professional environment. The theory suggests that individuals who excel in their roles do so by leveraging their strengths and fostering a constructive network, thus contributing to their success in their chosen career paths.

## Research Objectives

This study investigates how Criminology graduates from Urdaneta City University, holding licenses as criminologists, prepare for and apply to law enforcement agencies. It focuses on describing the preparation methods, outlining the encountered problems during the application, and uncovering the life lessons gained throughout the application journey to law enforcement agencies.

## 2. Methodology

This study employed a Qualitative Research approach with a Phenomenological design. Following Christensen et al.'s (2010) insights, as cited by Pathak (2017), the primary objective of the phenomenological study was to illuminate the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experiences of individuals or groups related to a specific phenomenon. To achieve a nuanced understanding, the researcher utilized unstructured interviews, providing a more detailed account of the occurrences and allowing for qualitative interpretation of the information gathered from respondents.

This study delves into the narratives of success in the journeys of UCU-CCJE graduates who, having become registered criminologists, have reached the pinnacle of their careers. The participants in this research comprise six criminology graduates who have transitioned into esteemed roles within the uniformed services.

As for the data gathering procedures, the researchers outlined the study's objectives and methodology, initiating the process by distributing request letters to UCU-CCJE graduates who are now registered criminologists and serve in the uniformed sector. These letters invited the participants for interviews to glean vital insights into their experiences in applying to law enforcement agencies. To ensure ethical conduct, a copy of the interview guide was provided, assuring participants that their rights would be respected throughout the interview process. Interviews took place at the respondents' residences at their convenience.

Moreover, participants were informed through a letter about the confidentiality of their shared information, and consent was sought for the use of an audio recorder necessary for transcription purposes. The interviews were conducted in a non-coercive manner, occurring three times to assess response consistency. The interview guide was meticulously designed to address the research problems, and the researchers reviewed recorded audio to enhance the analysis process. The amassed data facilitated the researchers in providing conclusive insights into the participants' preparedness in applying to law enforcement agencies and their individual experiences with the application process.

The researchers employed coding as a method for analyzing data, drawing on Madelyan's approach (2017) to label and organize qualitative data, thereby revealing distinct themes and their interconnections. The coding process encompassed three levels. Firstly, at Level One, each sentence pertaining to the topic was scrutinized, involving a comprehensive review of recorded interviews. The researcher assigned meaning to individual pieces of data, labeling them as codes—representing the smallest units of meaningful information.

Moving to Level Two, the researchers elevated the analysis by classifying codes into more comprehensive concepts termed categories, summarizing the coded information. Finally, at Level Three, the researcher further distilled the analysis by classifying categories into overarching themes, encapsulating the most significant ideas within the data. Following the coding process, the researcher systematically organized these themes to provide a coherent response to the research questions.

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### Preparation in Applying to Law Enforcement Agencies

**Mindset Development.** Mindset development plays a crucial role in the comprehensive preparation of individuals applying to law enforcement agencies. A positive and focused mindset is a crucial asset in navigating the rigorous demands and challenges associated with pursuing a career in law enforcement. Participant 1 emphasized, "Certainly, your focus should be on harboring no negative thoughts, only positive ones. If negativity occupies your mind, then submitting an application may not be advisable."

Participant 3 shared, "In my experience, it's crucial not to let rejection in your initial application dampen your morale. Instead, view it as a stepping stone, a way to build self-confidence. Applying to any law enforcement agency is challenging as the selection process is meticulous. There's a calendar of activities, and eventually, I got hired. It's important not to succumb to low morale. Persevere in your applications. If you don't get hired initially, persist through attrition. Trust in God's will; if it's meant for you, you will attain it."

This suggests that the application process is likely to present various challenges that may impact your morale. Despite these obstacles, maintaining a positive mindset is crucial. Consider these difficulties as opportunities for personal and professional growth, using them as motivation to steadfastly pursue and attain your goal in the law enforcement field. According to Desk (2022), rejection is a chance to



rediscover, reconsider, and explore new routes with better self-awareness. Rejection will always happen. It affects everybody. They keep you grounded, and you naturally develop patience. We maintain our focus because we are constantly reminded that we need to exert more effort. Therefore, keep on and don't stop, look back, or let it break your heart.

**Holistic Physical Readiness.** With regards to their preparation in terms of Physical Aspects, Participant 1, 2, 3 and 4 have the same responses. According to Participant 1, once you submit your application, you're aware that there's an agility test, necessitating physical readiness. Your preparation determines the outcome. Participant 2 added, "Even before applying or being on the go, I make it a habit to wake up early for a jog. Recognizing the demanding nature of the job I aspire to, I maintain a consistent morning jog routine to keep myself physically fit, understanding that agility is crucial in the application process." Furthermore, Participant 3 shared, "In response to that question, I incorporated jogging into my routine because the job I'm applying for demands mental and physical fitness. As others say, it's mind over body. Weight reduction is essential, especially considering the stringent medical requirements of the tri-bureaus." Participant 4 further explained, "Specifically focusing on the physical aspect, one major concern is our BMI or Body Mass Index. To prepare for the application, we must address this issue by reducing weight. Being physically fit is paramount, particularly if excess fat affects our BMI."

This implies that before you apply to the different law enforcement agencies, you should prepare yourself to be physically fit to pass the different stages of application up until the training. Based from Paladin Security (2019), the majority of law enforcement agencies, if not all of them, demand that applicants pass a physical fitness test as part of the application procedure.

**Strategic Financial Planning.** Strategic financial planning serves as a critical foundation for those aspiring to enter a law enforcement career, offering a proactive approach to address the unique challenges inherent in the profession. Beyond the immediate concerns of budgeting for training and certification, it encompasses a comprehensive strategy that addresses long-term financial stability. Participant 3 highlighted his financial challenges, noting, "I took on a part-time job due to our financial instability." In contrast, Participant 4 shared his financial strategy, stating, "On the financial front, I utilized savings accumulated from my job as an instructor at Urdaneta City University to facilitate my application with the tri-bureau." Furthermore, Participant 5 described his approach, saying, "Similar to my old practice, I engage in part-time construction work to supplement my income."

This underscores the importance of financial readiness prior to applying to law enforcement agencies. Taking proactive measures, such as engaging in part-time employment to accumulate funds for the application process, is essential for self-support. Zambas (2021) emphasizes the advantages of part-time jobs, elucidating that they not only provide additional income but also alleviate concerns about affording fundamental necessities, eliminating the need to rely on parental support.

### **Challenges during Law Enforcement Application**

**Experiencing Low Morale.** Regarding the challenges faced during the application process concerning mental aspects, both Participant 1 and Participant 4 shared similar experiences. Participant 1 expressed that there are moments in the mental aspect when morale dips, particularly when facing confusion about the phase they are in. Drawing an analogy to neuro, if there's uncertainty about an answer, it can

contribute to a decrease in morale. Additionally, Participant 4 noted that when applying to the BFP, the thought of a limited quota can immediately impact morale due to the perceived constraints.

This suggests that experiencing low morale is a common challenge in law enforcement application, particularly in the mental aspect. According to Voltage Control (2022), individuals with low morale may exhibit disengagement, lack of motivation, and apathy towards their jobs and employers. However, when applying to law enforcement agencies, it is crucial to remain focused on your goal despite encountering obstacles during the application process.

In the context of law enforcement, where mental fortitude is crucial, combating low morale becomes imperative. The demanding nature of the profession requires applicants to navigate various phases and assessments with resilience and determination. It is essential for them to recognize the transient nature of low morale during the application process and develop coping strategies to maintain focus on their ultimate goal of joining a law enforcement agency. Moreover, addressing mental well-being early in the application phase is crucial to fostering a resilient mindset, enhancing the likelihood of success, and ensuring that applicants enter the law enforcement profession with the necessary mental preparedness.

**Physical Fitness Concerns.** In terms of physical aspects, Participants 1, 2, and 4 share a similar perspective. Participant 1 emphasized the necessity of compliance, noting, "I must be really fit for the application; if they observe anything, you just have to comply." Likewise, Participant 2 stressed the importance of physical fitness, explaining, "Being physically fit is crucial. If there's a health issue or physical defect, you need to address it promptly. I complied with fixing my crooked teeth, and others, with conditions like varicose veins or hernias, had to ensure their physical fitness as well."

Similarly, Participant 4 highlighted additional challenges related to the Body Mass Index (BMI). Expressing the intricacies of maintaining physical readiness, they noted, "BMI poses several challenges; it's a metric we need to consider, prompting us to lose weight if necessary. This becomes a crucial aspect of our preparation during the application process, particularly in addressing physical concerns. The emphasis is not just on being within a healthy weight range but also ensuring that even if we are heavier, our overall physical fitness is maintained. It underscores the multifaceted nature of physical preparedness in the law enforcement application, where considerations extend beyond mere weight management to encompass a holistic commitment to physical well-being."

This implies that during the application, health and being physically fit is very important. Before you apply to the different law enforcement agencies, you should make sure that you are physically fit and can surpass all the stages of application until the training. In line with this, the Secretary of the Army, Mark T. Esper, stated that "if you're not physically fit for combat, then we're not only doing you an injustice, but we're also doing an injustice to your colleagues and peers as well" (Certify Fit, 2018).

**Low Budget for Application Process.** When considering the financial challenges faced during the application process, Participants 2 and 6 echoed similar concerns. Participant 2 emphasized the monetary demands, stating, "In the financial aspect, you must have money. Processing the paperwork is not only arduous but also quite expensive; the costs add up significantly." Likewise, Participant 6 underscored the expense associated with the application, pointing out, "The application is costly due to extensive paperwork, transportation, and food expenses. This becomes particularly challenging when finances are tight, necessitating the need for a part-time job."

This highlights the substantial financial burden applicants bear, not only in meeting documentation requirements but also in covering transportation and allowances for reporting. As outlined by Seek (2022), embarking on a new job opportunity often entails unexpected expenses, emphasizing the importance of meticulous planning and budgeting. Prospective applicants should recognize the financial commitment required during the application phase, emphasizing the need for comprehensive financial preparedness to navigate the costs associated with a career change successfully.

#### **4. Conclusion and Recommendation**

##### **Conclusion**

Prospective applicants undergo a comprehensive preparation process encompassing physical, financial, and mental aspects. Physically, they engage in exercises to ensure they are in optimal shape for the rigorous demands of law enforcement. Financially, many take on part-time jobs to secure funds, considering the range of expenses involved, from processing requirements to reporting allowances and transportation. Mentally, applicants maintain a steadfast focus on their aspirations, keeping their dreams and goals of becoming uniformed personnel at the forefront of their minds.

However, this preparation journey is not without challenges. Many applicants experience a dip in morale during the application process, often compounded by financial constraints. Despite facing various obstacles in different facets, applicants overcome these hurdles with unwavering determination to join the ranks of uniformed personnel. In essence, the key takeaway is that prospective applicants should proactively address their physical, mental, and financial readiness before initiating the application process for a law enforcement agency. The preparation undertaken is a testament to their commitment, ensuring a holistic approach to success in securing a position within their desired law enforcement agency.

##### **Recommendation**

Based on the research conclusion, here are some practical and doable recommendations. Schools may establish pre-application workshops or seminars that guide their graduates on effective physical, financial, and mental preparation strategies. These sessions can provide practical tips, resources, and expert advice to enhance readiness. Further, schools in coordination with the Guidance Office may offer mental resilience workshops or training programs to equip applicants with coping mechanisms and stress management techniques. These programs can focus on building emotional intelligence and maintaining a positive mindset during challenging phases. Lastly, schools may also introduce mentorship programs where experienced law enforcement professionals guide and support prospective applicants. Mentors can offer valuable insights, share personal experiences, and provide encouragement throughout the application process.

#### **5. Authors' Biography**

Mr. Bauzon, a Registered Criminologist and college instructor, specializes in Criminal Detection and Investigation courses. In addition to his teaching role, he is an active researcher. Dr. Moyao, also a Registered Criminologist, holds multiple credentials, including being a Licensed Professional Teacher, researcher, book author, national licensure exam reviewer, and a Certified Security Intelligence and Surveillance Practitioner. Beyond his commitment to teaching, Dr. Moyao is fervently engaged in



research activities, resulting in the presentation and publication of numerous studies in both international and local conferences as well as reputable journals.

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