

Trends in Background Issues of Applicants for Access to Classified Information

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Before an employee of the Department of Defense is allowed access to classified information, a background investigation is conducted by the Defense Investigative Service (DIS). The purpose of the investigation is to determine whether issues related to loyalty, reliability, and trustworthiness are present in the person's background. Two major background areas of concern are general suitability issues and loyalty issues. Suitability issues are alcohol use, drug use, criminal conduct, financial responsibility, emotional/mental issues, sexual misconduct and falsification. Loyalty issues are allegiance to the United States, foreign connection, and foreign preferences. A third area, security incidents, is concerned with responsibility for handling classified information.

The DIS conducts investigations on three populations of DOD employees: military, both active and reserve; Federal civilians; and defense contractors. Between 1987 and 1996, DIS performed quality assurance by reviewing a sample of issue cases. A Quality Assurance Review (QAR) form was completed on each reviewed case. It contained personal identifying data, an indication of the issues present in the case, and an indication of whether the issues were investigated in accordance with DIS regulations. A copy of the review was sent to the Defense Personnel Security Research Center (PERSEREC). PERSEREC has established an Issue Case database (ICDB) which linked the cases in the QARs with their adjudications which are contained in the Defense Central Index of Investigations (DCII).

The ICDB now has more than 23,000 cases and is the only repository of issue information contained in DIS investigations. The cases in ICDB are derived from convenience sampling, which represents 5% to 8% of DIS issue investigations. It is weighted heavily towards contractor issue cases so that comparisons across the military civilian and contractor communities must allow for adjustments of their different representations in the ICDB. The strength of the ICDB lies in the size of the database and time span over which reviews were conducted.

A thorough examination of the ICDB was reported in a technical report by Wiskoff and Fitz (1991). They reported that the most frequent issues were alcohol, drugs, financial, emotional/mental and criminal, that more than half the cases had multiple issues in a case, that males and females differed in frequency, types of issues and in rates of negative adjudication, and that there was a relationship between the age of an individual and the types of issues that were investigated. For instance drug use and criminal issues was most prevalent for younger age groups, while financial issues became the most frequent issue after age 25. Also, emotional/mental issues showed a general increasing trend, with age, while alcohol issues increased up to age 25 and then remained stable afterward. This is an excellent report and is recommended to anyone interested in the suitability issues in DoD populations.

The current report is more modest in scope than Wiskoff and Fitz. The purpose is to examine the longitudinal issue trends in the 8 years of cases in the ICDB. For the sake of

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simplicity, the analysis is limited to just military issue cases and to those which received a full background investigation. This population tends to represent military personnel who are being assigned for the first time to duties which require access to classified information. They are the most typical case seen by DIS investigators.

The ICDB contained 6047 cases of military personnel with complete background investigations. The cases were partitioned into four groupings, based on the year when the investigation was started. The groupings were 1987-88, 1989-90, 1991-92, and 1993-95. The groupings were two years in length except for 93-95, which was three years long. The longer grouping was necessary to make up for the decline in the number of cases reviewed after 1993, which corresponded to the decline in the number of investigations conducted after 1993. Table 1 shows the number of cases and the number of negative adjudications for each year group.

Table 1. Number of Cases and Number and Percent of Negative Adjudications for Years 1987-1995.

| Year | Number of Cases | Number and Percent of Cases with Negative Adjudications |
|---------|-----------------|---|
| 1987-88 | 1647 | 129 (10%) |
| 1989-90 | 2034 | 202 (11%) |
| 1991-92 | 1377 | 123 (9%) |
| 1993-95 | 989 | 73 (8%) |
| Total | 6047 | 527 (100%) |

Negative adjudications are cases where clearance was denied, revoked, or terminated because of information contained in the case. There were 527 negative adjudications in the 5367 cases in the sample which had recorded adjudications. The years 1987-88 and 1989-90 had the largest number of unrecorded adjudications, and it is unclear whether the higher percent of negative adjudications in these years is a function of more serious issues at the time or faulty data.

Relationship of Negative Adjudications to Number of Issues in a Case. A predominant feature of the cases in the ICDB are the number of multiple issues in a case. In the military sample discussed here, 53% of the cases had multiple issues.. Table 2 shows the number of cases with single and multiple issues along with the corresponding percent of negative adjudications. As the table indicates, the number of issues in a case has a strong relationship to negative adjudications.

Table 2. Percent of Negative Adjudications by Number of Issues in a Case.

| Number of Issues in Case | Number | Percent Negative Adjudications |
|--------------------------|--------|--------------------------------|
| 1 | 2865 | 6.1 (176) |
| 2 | 1733 | 9.1 (157) |
| 3 | 916 | 10.4 (95) |
| 4 | 370 | 17.3 (64) |
| 5 | 105 | 19.0 (20) |
| 6+ | 39 | 32.4 (12) |

Issue Trends Across 8 Years. The primary purpose of the current study was to examine the stability of issue characteristics in cases across the 8 years of the database. This was accomplished by ranking the case issues by frequency across the entire sample and then ranking their position within each year group. The results of this ranking are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Rank of Case Issues in the Entire Sample and Within Each Year Grouping.

| All Cases (N = 6047) | 87-88 <u>n = 1647</u> | 89-90 <u>n = 2034</u> | 91-92 <u>n = 1377</u> | 93-95 <u>n = 989</u> |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1 Financial (21%) | 1 (21%) | 1 (23%) | 1 (25%) | 1 (15%) |
| 2 Drugs (8%) | 2 (12%) | 2 (8%) | 4 (5%) | 5 (5%) |
| 3 Criminal (7%) | 3 (7%) | 3 (7%) | 3 (6%) | 3 (7%) |
| 4 Emotional (6%) | 4 (5%) | 4 (5%) | 2 (8%) | 2 (8%) |
| 5 Criminal-Falsification (4%) | 7 (3%) | 5 (4%) | 5 (4%) | 4 (6%) |
| 7.5 Alcohol-Criminal (3%) | 6 (4%) | 9 (3%) | 8 (3%) | 6 (4%) |
| 7.5 Financial-Criminal (3%) 9 (3%) | 9 (3%) | 6 (4%) | 7 (3%) | 10.5 (2%) |
| 7.5 Drug-Criminal (3%) | 5 (4%) | 8 (3%) | 10.5 (2%) | 8 (3%) |
| 9 Alcohol (3%) | 8 (3%) | 7 (4%) | 6 (3%) | 14 (2%) |
| 10 Drug-Financial (2%) | 13 (2%) | 10 (3%) | 10.5 (2%) | 13 (2%) |

Table 3 indicates that Financial issue cases are by far the most prevalent cases in the military sample and have remained relatively stable across six of the past eight years. In 1993-95 there was a large drop in the percent of financial issue cases. Criminal cases at the third ranking have also remained relatively stable at 6-7%. On the other hand Drugs and Emotional/Mental issue cases have changed rankings in the past eight years. Drugs have dropped from the second ranking at 8-12% to the fourth ranking at 5%. Meanwhile, Emotional/Mental issue cases have increased from 5% to 8%, changing its ranking from

fourth to second.

A similar ranking procedure was applied to the adverse cases, with case issues ranked by their frequency across the entire sample and their ranking within each year group. Results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Rank of Adverse Case Issues in the Entire Sample and Within Each Year Grouping.

| All Cases (N = 527) | 87-88 n = 129 | 89-90 n = 202 | 91-92 n = 123 | 93-95 n = 73 |
|-------------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| 1 Financial (19%) | 1 (17%) | 1 (20%) | 1 (20%) | 1 (21%) |
| 2 Financial-Criminal (5%) | 6.5 (4%) | 2 (7%) | 3 (4%) | - (1%) |
| 3 Drugs (5%) | 2 (8%) | 3 (5%) | 21.5 (2%) | 11.5 (3%) |
| 4 Criminal-Falsification (4%) | 6.5 (4%) | 5 (4%) | 7 (3%) | 2 (5%) |
| 5 Criminal (4%) | 3 (5%) | 7 (3%) | 7 (3%) | 11.5 (3%) |
| 6 Emotional (3%) | 6.5 (4%) | 11.5 (2%) | 2 (5%) | 11.5 (3%) |
| 7 Alcohol-Criminal (3%) | 6.5 (4%) | 7 (3%) | 13.5 (2%) | 11.5 (3%) |
| 8 Alc-Drugs-Crim-Fals (3%) | 11 (3%) | 9.5 (3%) | 7 (3%) | - (11%) |
| 9.5 Finl-Crim-Fals (3%) | 11 (3%) | 15 (2%) | 13.5 (2%) | 4.5 (4%) |
| 9.5 Drug-Financial (3%) | 18 (2%) | 7 (3%) | 21.5 (2%) | 4.5 (4%) |

Table 4 shows that single-issue Financial cases are the most frequent adverse cases. Beyond that a longitudinal pattern is difficult to discern partly because the sample sizes for the yearly groupings are small, and there are many shared rankings. It should be noted that Drug issue cases have become less likely to be negatively adjudicated during the past 8 years. It is unclear whether this is a result of less serious drug use in the military population or just the small samples in this dataset.

Conclusions. It is always risky to draw generalizations from a limited dataset, but it appears that the background characteristics for military personnel assigned to high security positions may be changing. There may be less drug and alcohol use in their background, although there may be more emotional and mental problems. If this is the case, it will be difficult to find a cause for the change. During the period under discussion, DoD instituted uniform and consistent pre-screening for applicants for high security positions. Thus, we may be selecting-out background areas which were more prevalent in an earlier time. At the same time, DIS has been significantly downsized, and they may not delve as thoroughly into a candidate's background as before. Finally, while there may be some changes in some of the issue areas, there is still a solid pattern of financial and criminal issues which are cause for concern.

References

Wiskoff, M.F., and Fitz, C.C. (1991). The Defense Investigative Service Issue Case Data Base: Analysis of Issue Types and Clearance Adjudication. (Technical Report PERS-TR-91-006), Monterey, CA, Defense Personnel Security Research Center.

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