



# **Police Training: What Works and What Don't We Know?**

**Scott Wolfe, Ph.D.**

Associate Professor, School of Criminal Justice, Michigan State University

May 27, 2021

Panel: "What Impact Does Training have on Police Institutions and Organizations?"

Committee on Law and Justice

Evidence to Advance Reform in the Global Security and Justice Sectors

The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine

## Today's Context

- George Floyd's murder sparks a new and stronger push for police reform
- Police training is common target of police reform efforts
- “What works” in police training?



# What Works in Police Training?

- Implicit Bias Training

- One study that speaks to whether implicit bias training works
  - Fair and Impartial Policing (FIP) evaluated in NYPD with 36,000 sworn officers.
  - Survey given on same day as the one-day training showed attitude change
    - Increased officers' knowledge of implicit bias and many thought they learned useful skills
  - Follow-up survey showed that of the officers that completed the training:
    - 42% had not used FIP training in their duties during the last month
    - 58% attempted to use them sometimes or frequently
  - However, with respect to actual behavior, the report concluded:
    - “Overall, we found insufficient evidence to conclude that racial and ethnic disparities in police enforcement actions were reduced as a result of the training.”

- Conclusion = ***Implicit bias training is likely insufficient to impact excessive force by the police or other racial and ethnic disparities***



The Impacts of Implicit Bias Awareness Training  
in the NYPD

July 2018

Robert E. Woodson  
Sarah E. Williams  
Robert E. J. Taylor  
Michaela L. Carter  
Dorothy E. Roberts  
Catherine E. Lewis



## What Works in Police Training? (continued)

- Crisis Intervention/Mental Health Training
  - Some evidence that such training is beneficial
  - But...
    - It must be longer than 1 or 2 days for repetition and skill acquisition to set in
    - It is too narrow
  - Conclusion = ***CIT training is likely a necessary, but not sufficient, component of police training***





# What Works in Police Training? (continued)



- Procedural Justice Training
  - Allow citizens a voice, be respectful, explain the reasons for decisions
  - **Several studies** show this type of training leads to attitude and behavior change
    - Greater Manchester Police study:
      - Officers more likely to support procedural justice
      - Officers more likely to use procedural justice during role-playing exercises
      - Citizen surveys– more satisfied with procedural justice trained officers
    - Queensland Recruit study:
      - Officers more likely to support procedural justice
      - More likely to use procedural justice with public as reported by training officers
    - Chicago Police Department studies (8,840 officers trained):
      - Officers that completed training were significantly more likely to support the use of procedural justice during interactions with the public
      - Reduction in use of force found in original article, but a reanalysis was recently issued that tempered those findings.
  - Conclusion = ***Procedural justice training offers a lot of promise but likely needs to be combined with other skill development***



## What Works in Police Training? (continued)

- De-escalation Training
  - Emerging evidence that it works
  - If effective, often it is narrowly focused
    - Also, the term tends to alienate officers which can doom the training from the start
    - And, 1 or 2 day trainings are not long enough
  - Conclusion = ***De-escalation training likely is a necessary, but not sufficient, aspect of police training aimed at impacting excessive force***



## Evaluation of Tact, Tactics, and Trust (T3)

- NIJ funded randomized-controlled trial (RCT) evaluation of T3
- T3 is developed by Polis Solutions
- The evaluation:
  - RCT – half of patrol officers assigned to the training and half kept business as usual
- The results:
  - Trained officers more likely to prioritize procedural justice
  - No overall change in use of force, but control and treatment groups both



## Moving Forward

- **Critical considerations in training for police-citizen interactions**
  - Be repetitious
  - Consider logistical challenges of training
  - Consider who provides the training - MUST consider the audience's perspective
- **Be evidence based**
  - **NEED:** Invest more heavily in funding police training evaluation research.
  - **NEED:** Prioritizing police training evaluation by researchers, police departments, and local governments.
  - **NEED:** If states are to require training, they should require independent evaluation.
  - **NEED:** ORGANIZATIONAL JUSTICE TRAINING FOR SUPERVISORS!



Thank you!

Scott Wolfe, PhD

Associate Professor

School of Criminal Justice

Michigan State University

[wolfesc1@msu.edu](mailto:wolfesc1@msu.edu)