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National De-Escalation Training Center: Tools for law enforcement to reduce unnecessary use of force



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Fort Hays State University – 2022 SACAD

ABSTRACT

Reducing uses of force is one of the most significant challenges to policymakers and practitioners. Of the various methods being proposed, de-escalation training represents the option most likely to do so. This article reviews the literature concerning uses of force and describes the National De-Escalation Training Center (NDTC), a decentralized research and training organization recently funded by the Department of Justice, Office of Community-Oriented Policing Services. With the popular support for de-escalation growing in the public consensus, the NDTC answers the call for that training to be evidence-based, with the national infrastructure to distribute and evaluate it.

LITERATURE

Following deaths of George Floyd, Breanna Taylor, and others, politicians and the public demanded police reform. De-escalation training for law enforcement is one exam of reform.

De-escalation techniques are effective in medical and mental health contexts, but few studies examined effectiveness in criminal justice arena (Engel et al., 2020a).

Studies of programs focused on criminal justice:

- Integrating Communications, Assessment, and Tactics (ICAT) (Engel et al., 2020b).
- Tact, Tactics, and Trust (Wolfe et al., 2020).

Researchers found a statistically significant change in officers' perceptions in how they should act towards and react to citizens.

Some studies examined the impact of de-escalation on use-of-force patterns, with all showing statistically significant declines in uses of force (Engel et al., 2020b; 2022).

Engel and colleagues (2020b) used a randomized control trial to determine whether uses of force changed after the Louisville Metropolitan Police Department adopted de-escalation training.

- Results indicated changing crime and enforcement patterns, reinforcing results of de-escalation as an effective tool for law enforcement.

Evidenced-based policing is receiving increased support from the federal government (Sherman, 2018; 2020). With more than 18,000 agencies across the U.S. (USAFacts.org, 2020), EBP regarding officer use of force will not be easy to accomplish.



NDTC has established several regional hubs (currently 5 in place and 2 in negotiations) across the U.S. to deliver training and facilitate research to determine the effectiveness of de-escalation training for reducing unnecessary instances of force by law enforcement.

Training is certified by International Association of Directors of Law Enforcement Standards and Training (IADLEST) and approved by the Department of Justice, Office of Community-Oriented Policing Services.

NDTC Principles & Practices is available as an 8-hour interactive online program, 16-hour face-to-face program, and a 40-hour face-to-face train-the-trainer program.

Benefits of the NDTC model are two-fold:

- Increases the internal and external validity of any study conducted by facilitating simultaneous, or near simultaneous replication in a variety of locations and across different types of law enforcement agencies.
- Allow for studying the impact of this training within and across agencies of varying sizes, policies, organizational structures, and locations, which will help account for setting- and subject-dependent effects (Shadish et al., 2002).

METHOD

Members of several Kansas Police Departments were given access to the NDTC Principles & Practices Online De-Escalation Training (n = 28).

- Trainees completed the training between 2/1 – 2/15, 2022

Each trainee completed the following assessments:

Pre-Training Survey

- Demographics
- Perceptions of Community
 - Necessity of Procedural Justice
 - Risk Posed by Community
 - Perceptions of Individuals with Mental Illnesses
- Past Training Experience

Pre-Training Knowledge Assessment (Pre-Test)

Post-Training Knowledge Assessment (Post-Test)

FINDINGS

Pre-Training Survey

- Stronger beliefs in procedural justice associated with lower levels of perceived risk from community members
- Trainees perceived a broadly positive relationship with their communities
 - Related to low crime rate and/or close ties to community
- De-escalation training was seen to help improve officers' communication skills and reduce conflict during encounters
 - De-escalation training must also include elements of crisis intervention to aid officers in helping those with mental illnesses or other issues

Pre-Post Test

- NDTC Principles & Practices training associated with a 15% improvement in trainees' knowledge of de-escalation techniques
 - Pre-Post difference was statistically significant at the 0.00001 level

DISCUSSION

While data is preliminary, it does show that

1) Officers support the idea of de-escalation to avoid conflict

2) Officers understand that community support is vital

and that de-escalating conflicts can reinforce community support

3) The NDTC Principles & Practices Training can significantly improve officers' ability to de-escalate situations

De-escalation training is a way to provide officers with additional tools to resolve situations without resorting to force or coercion.

The NDTC Principles & Practices program is effective in teaching officers how to de-escalate situations

As more agencies participate in the Online, Face-to-Face, and Train-the-Trainer programs, we will continue to evaluate effectiveness of the training

Department of Criminal Justice

Central Region of National De-escalation Training Center