

**How to change the status quo to a new model**

**Brazilian Jiu Jitsu (BJJ) for Police**

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### **Abstract**

The American police officer is under constant scrutiny by mainstream media and the court of public opinion. The use of force by police officers is regularly publicized on the news where it is challenged based on the public perception and optics surrounding it. The unpopular truth of the matter is that police officer must use force to perform their duties. They are tasked with arresting individuals who refuse to comply peacefully. The question less asked is, are they learning the most effective methods to gain control over a violent individual. Police officers experience PTSD at a higher ratio than the general population. Those internally battling PTSD symptoms are more likely to portray aggression toward the public. If we want police officers that are in better physical and mental shape, who can successfully control an aggressive person, we must shift the status quo. Brazilian Jiu Jitsu (BJJ) offers a way to change the status quo of police culture. BJJ provides more effective methods of control, while simultaneously improving an officer's physical and mental health. If a police department implemented a partnership with a privately owned BJJ training facility, their officers would enjoy a higher quality of life. In turn, this would likely translate to better use of force reactions improving the public perception of the department.

## **How to change the status quo to a new mode: Brazilian Jiu Jitsu for Police**

Police Officers in America are under incomparable criticism, usually surrounding their use of force against citizens. This topic is highly publicized and can be found on news headline across the nation. Police culture is an entity of the government, which is inherently reactive in nature and slow with any progress. The way police officers have been training has been slightly modified, but conceptually stagnant over the decades. A police applicant is hired as a recruit, at which time they attend a police academy to gain the minimum level of proficiency to wear the uniform and enforce the law. Annually they return to the police academy for refresher training on various topics to include use of force. The question remains, is the use of force training police officers receive enough?

Police culture is very exclusive whereas they train their own. Police are slow to trust those who are not within their ranks and bear the same burden of public service. To improve police culture and the status quo of training, it is time for police departments to think outside the box. One avenue to explore is a public-private partnership with local Brazilian Jiu Jitsu (BJJ) training center. These training centers can offer specialized training to officers which exceeds that provided during their initial or re-training curriculum.

On top of the physical attributes officers gain through BJJ, they also gain a mental advantage. BJJ offers an increased situational awareness during stressful situations, allowing a student's cognitive ability to maintain performance, producing good decision making. Officers face a high level of PTSD from their ongoing exposure to critical incidents involving violence, death and a threat to themselves. BJJ helps officers safeguard themselves against PTSD by learning self-regulation techniques and continually working through stressful situations on the BJJ mats.

Police agencies across America are slowly accepting and joining into the trend of BJJ for their police officers. Mesa (AZ) Police Department has begun training all eight-hundred police officers in BJJ. They have also outfitted one of their police duty stations with a training facility and offer incentives for officer to complete additional training. Pittsfield (MA) Police Department secured a public-private partnership with a local BJJ training center where fifteen of their twenty-three officers completed extracurricular BJJ training. At the end of the training all officers reported a higher sense of confidence regarding violent encounters and an increased belief in their abilities. As a result of this partnership and BJJ training, the police department's insurance plan reduced their rate because the training increased the perceived level of safety while decreasing liabilities. Lynwood (WA) Police Department signed a public-private partnership with a local BJJ training center and the Chief required all sworn members to attend at least two classes per month. The Chief's vision was to stay proficient in physical skills and noted their police academy training is a perishable proficiency. Manteca (CA) Police Department has embraced a BJJ focused use of force program, which aims for consistent year-round training. Since deploying this program use of force complaints have decreased dramatically.

Police are facing attacks both externally and internally. They are being attacked for their use of force incidents, but not receiving adequate initial or annual training. They are also under attack internally battling mental health disorders which are direct derivatives of their career. BJJ provides a method to improve their physical and mental wellbeing, in effect improving the public's perception and regaining their trust.

## Literature Review

The New York City Police Department (NYPD) is the largest police department in the United States of America with approximately 38,000 sworn personnel within its ranks. NYPD's Annual Use of Force Report (2022) is an annual publication where the department reviews, analyzes, and discusses use of force data. This publication is not solely focused on use of force, but also focuses on calls for service, arrest data and the correlated use of force data. The use of force data is broken down by numerous identifiers such as subject age, race, gender, as well as the type of force applied to the subject. The NYPD categorizes their force by five levels based on severity, five being the highest as deadly force. The lowest form of report is no force, but the subject sustained an injury, this was reported to potentially be attributed to an unintentional handcuff injury or prisoner injury. Other forms of force are taser, OC spray, impact weapons, mesh blanket, firearm and physical force. NYPD reported the following statistics calls for service – 7,100,000, arrest – 189,774, use of force incidents – 8,270, physical force – 6,717. Physical force, which represented approximately eighty-one percent of applications of force includes actions such as hand strikes, foot strikes, takedowns and controlling the subject. Based on the statistics provided it appears the narrative of police recklessly arresting everyone and applying force in a reckless manner is false. Of the over seven million calls for service, NYPD officers made 189,774 arrests, which represent approximately a 2.7% call to arrest percentage. Of those arrests force was applied only 8,270 times, which represents approximately a 4.3% arrest to force percentage and a 0.1% call for service to arrest percentage. When compared to the active NYPD police force of approximately 38,000 sworn members, force was only applied by approximately twenty one percent of the sworn personnel. Furthermore, the force which was applied was overwhelmingly in the form of physical force, representing 81% of applications of

force. This illustrates that the large majority of police use of force incidents, which are required to overcome a violent encounter, are weaponless and rely on the officer's physical ability to control an unwilling subject.

Chicago Police Department (CPD) is the second largest police department in the United States of America with approximately 11,750 sworn personnel. CPD provided police services to 3,305,415 calls for service, made 41,449 arrests and reported 1,925 use of force incidents. During the 1,925 use of force incidents, 93% of them involved the application of physical force by the officer onto the subject to overcome violence. Within the physical force category, most physical force involved take downs, redirection, and control holds. The small minority of this category involved the striking of a subject by the police officer. Based on these statistics CPD answered 3,305,415 calls for service and made 41,449 arrests representing a 1% arrest to call rate. CPD reported 1,925 use of force incidents, representing a 4.6% arrest to force rate and .05 call for service to force rate. Furthermore, based on the reporting staffing to use of force incidents, only 16% of sworn personnel would have used force in the year 2022. Of the force used, the overwhelming majority involved the weaponless physical control of a violent subject by the police officer.

Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) is the third largest police department in the United States of America with approximately 9,215 sworn personnel. LAPD published its Annual Use of Force Report (2022) annually. This publication reviews, analyzes and explains various aspects of their department operations including calls for service, arrest and most in-depth their use of force. LAPD categorizes use of force into two categories, categorical and non-categorical. Non-categorical involves the deployment of less than lethal force, while categorical is deadly force, usually related to a firearm. LAPD reported a total of 2,283 use of force

incidents, whereas 53 involved use of deadly force and 2,230 were non-categorical. Of the 2,230 non-categorical use of force incidents, applications of force were reported to be the following: 67% of use of force incidents involved the usage of body weight on the subject, 91% involved the application of control holds / joint lock, 32% involved a takedown and 67% involved a form a physical force. Based on these statistics it appears that during the 1,159,568 calls force service, only 43,626 arrests were made, representing a 3.7% arrest rate. Furthermore, force was used in 2,283 incidents representation a 0.2% call for service to use of force rate and 5% arrest to use of force rate. Of the use of force incidents, non-lethal weaponless force was most of the incidents. Based on the reported use of force statistics compared to the personnel, it appears only approximately 25% of sworn personnel would have used force within the year.

*A Training Method to Improve Police Use of Force Decision Making: A Randomized Controlled Trial* was published by Anderson and Gustafberg in 2016. This research article examined the effect on police officers when subjected to a violent encounter. The study specifically analyzed the psychological and physiological associated with a police officers decision making process under stressful conditions. The study revealed that during a violent encounter a police officer may experience a fight or flight response, while potentially having limited motor skills along with cognitive functioning ability. On aspect of the response that could directly affect an officers perception is the severity of the threat. This perception could be affected by an imbalance of the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous system. This is referred to as a perceptual distortion and is a common response, especially when threatened with injury or death. Along with perceptual distortion officer could lose motor skills based on the rapid increase their heart rate. Cognitive ability could also be affected because the officer's body will respond with a large adrenal dump while simultaneously constricting vessels reducing

oxygen to the brain. This physiological response makes it difficult to think clearly under pressure. As a part of this research officers were split into two groups, control and training. Both groups were subject to use of force decision making training scenarios. During the scenarios their heart rates were measured, and their performance scored by unbiased instructors. Prior to the training however, the training group participated in self-regulation and resiliency training. This aimed to combat psychological and physiological effects of stressful situations to ensure sound decision making. The study found that the training group had lower heart rates during the training scenarios than the control group. The training group's heart rates also returned to a normal resting heart rate upon conclusion of the scenario much faster than the control group. Secondly, the training group obtained higher scores in the realm of decision making by instructors. As a result, this research concluded that self-regulation may combat numerous negative physiological and psychological responses by a police officer. A police officer who participates in training revolving around this topic will likely make better decisions under stressful conditions.

*Ensuring the Validity of Police Use of Force Training* was published in *Police Practice and Research* in 2017. This research targeted the training receive by police officers surrounding use of force, both as recruits and during their active-duty career. Researcher surveyed seventy police officers were all trained within the same police academy. Participants also receive annual training from the same academy during their active-duty career. There were numerous aspects evaluated from participants regarding their use of force training, one of which evaluated their perceived readiness to apply force based on their training. A response from participants commonly referred to the need for increased training on physical weaponless control of a violent subject. Participants reported their training to rely heavily on the deployment of a weapon

system such as OC spray, taser or firearm, whereas most incidents require physical control only. Participants also voiced concern that their training was static in nature, especially their annual refresher training. They claimed that continual and ongoing training throughout the year to maintain proficiency in weaponless physical control, would be far more beneficial than an annual refresher course simply reviewing a policy.

*Implicit Transfer of Life Skills Through Participation in Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu* (2016) was published in the Journal of Applied Sport Psychology by Chinkov and Holt. This research study viewed BJJ training by life skills learned. Sixteen participants were involved in the research. Participants were all BJJ students, who were surveyed regarding the non-physical influence of BJJ on their lives. Participants reported that BJJ had introduced them to individuals who may belonged to different socio-economic classes the participant would have otherwise not interacted with. It was acknowledged that based on this forced introduction and socialization, individuals who trained BJJ had an increase respect for others. They also claimed their empathy levels were heightened as a corresponding reaction to their appreciation of others from differing walks of life. Though the non-physical attributed gained through BJJ were the focus of the study, all participants reported that a healthier lifestyle and better physical conditioning was a contributing factor to increased mental health. The internal mental health aspects reported to have been bettered via BJJ were self-confidence, happiness and positive attitudes.

*Can Brazilian Jiu Jitsu be a Viable Treatment Option for Law Enforcement Officers with PTSD?* (2022) was written by Megan Rinderer, and evaluates the positive link between BJJ and combating BJJ. Rinderer noted that police officers are highly susceptible to PTSD. This is a result of a high frequency of exposure to critical incidents. This extreme exposure extended over years of service paired with little to no debriefing leads to a high level of officers with PTSD.

Rinderer acknowledged that police departments may express support for mental health services for their personnel, however police culture combats that with negative connotations. This creates an anti-mental health establishment making officers less likely to seek help when need. Rinderer cited how BJJ offers a form of physical exercise which increases an officer's ability to self-regulate. Furthermore, the mental resiliency required to participate in BJJ is transferable to police officer's lives. Rinderer concluded that police officers training in BJJ could offer mental health benefits while increasing resiliency and combating PTSD symptoms.

*Benefits of Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu in Managing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: A Longitudinal Study* (2022) by Weinberger and Burraston examined the effects of BJJ on first responders and military personnel. The research involved thirty two participants who were first responders and/or military. The military aimed to evaluate the impact of BJJ onto a subject prone to PTSD. Participants were selected based on a three prong evaluation. Participants had not trained BJJ before, were first responders and/or military and were experiencing symptoms of PTSD. Participants were surveyed regarding their PTSD symptoms prior to beginning their BJJ training as well as during the study. Participants reported that their PTSD symptoms decreased as their BJJ training continued. They validated this one change in their lifestyle was responsible for the difference in mental health. Participants reported less aggression bouts and attributed it to their BJJ training. The causation of this was believed to be the transfer of fundamental BJJ principles which teaches students to react to other's aggression with a calm demeanor. The research confirmed that BJJ combats PTSD symptoms, while also regulated a human's fight or flight internal mechanism for a controlled reaction.

*An Exploratory Study of the Perceptions of Effectiveness for Brazilian Jiu Jitsu Training for Law Enforcement* (2022) by Harmon analyzed the application of BJJ by police officers and

the potential associated benefits. The ten participants completed a questionnaire of twelve questions regarding BJJ and law enforcement. All participants were both police officers and current BJJ students. Participants all agreed the defensive tactics training provided to them in their recruit level training in the police academy was inferior to BJJ training. Participants reported the training originally provided is not an adequate level of proficiency to appropriately control and secure a violent individual. Most participants noted their annual use of force training is also inferior to their BJJ training. Not only did participants report the superior control methods of BJJ but they acknowledged the current anti-police climate. It is no secret that police officers are under extreme scrutiny by the public and media whenever force is used. Participants concurred that not only does BJJ offer an effective method of control, but it also creates a more professional appearance on video as it relies on holds and leverage instead of striking a subject causing injury. Harmon's research was primarily targeted on the physical benefits of BJJ by a police officer. BJJ was also praised for its positive contribution toward the fight against PTSD by first responders.

Marietta Police Department (MPD) in Marietta, GA, implemented a BJJ training program following a less than desirable viral video involving their police officer's inability to control a violent subject. Major King of MPD conducted a pilot program, and following its institutional published the Marietta Police Department BJJ Training Program – Data Summary. This report details the inception of the program, the methods implemented, and results drawn from it. The MPD BJJ training program began on April 2019. Police officers who enrolled in the program were documented as BJJ officers, while those who did not remained as the control group. All recruits in the police academy were mandated to participate in weekly BJJ classes. MPD partnered with a civilian owned BJJ academy in their area to facilitate the training. MPD

reported to have approximately 145 officers whereas 95 participated in the program. After one year of the training being in effect, an analysis was conducted of the two groups of officers, training and non-training. As a result, the control group of non-training officers used their tasers in 77% of use of force incidents. The BJJ officers used their tasers in 54%, but most of those incidents the taser was used to stop a foot pursuit. The department saw a 48% reduction in injuries to officers while effecting arrests. None of the injured officers were BJJ officers, only those who elected not to train got injured. The 2020 MPD Use of Force analysis reported thirty-three use of force incidents. Twenty incidents involved non-training officers and thirteen incidents involved BJJ officers. Non-training officers who used force against a suspect caused thirteen suspects to require hospitalization, where BJJ officers induced a hospitalization to only four suspects. Based on this data, BJJ officers are less likely to use force while calmly managing a violent encounter. Furthermore, when BJJ officers do use force, they are less likely to be injured and to cause injury. MPD reported that based on the reduction in officer injury they saved approximately \$66,752 in workers compensation costs.

### **Methodology**

This research utilized a qualitative analysis surrounding the benefits of BJJ. The benefits of BJJ which were outlined in secondary sources were further correlated to the law enforcement public sector. The benefits were applied in such a manner as to overcome current obstacles. These obstacles include a poor public perception of police use of force, inadequate police training, and unsatisfactory mental health conditions within police work.

### **Findings**

Based on the findings of this research, the benefits of BJJ are directly applicable to police officers. Police officers face ongoing stressors stemming from their profession. They are

constantly under a public attack by the media as their use of force incidents are made to go viral and portrayed as an assault on an innocent person. They are under threat of physical attack at work where they are expected to gain control of an unwilling and violent subject with little training. Their mental health is exposed to a roller coaster of adrenal for a career lifetime, experiencing more critical incidents than the public. These factors make police officers highly prone to PTSD. By the nature of classes and training methods, BJJ teaches its students methods of self-regulation. Police officers who train BJJ will have a superior mode of self-regulation both during a critical incident but also after. This level of self-regulation may provide a safeguard to police officers to withstand the gravity toward PTSD. This resistance will in turn prevent aggressive tendencies, improving the public image of the police department. BJJ offers resiliency in the way it teaches students to bounce back from hard training sessions and finding themselves in tactical disadvantages. BJJ benefits police officers by improving their mental health which are directly connected to their ability to make sound decisions under stress. BJJ students also embrace a heightened sense of respect for others and empathy. These two pillars are necessary to rebuild the trust in the police officers rooted in a community policing function.

The physical benefits of BJJ are undeniable, especially when used by a police officer. A police officer who is trained in standard tactics and receives an annual check-in-the-box refresher course on policy can not properly gain control of a truly violent subject. When a untrained police officer gets confronted with violence, they may resort to violent strikes or escalated directly to a weapon system. This encounter when captured on video will likely be made viral online and paint a poor picture of the police department. BJJ training focuses on the appropriate control hold and leverage points to gain control of an individual without using violent strikes. This method of control offers two main benefits. First, it provides a superior appearance on

video when viewed by the public. It appears the officer simply gains control by minor grabs and movements, instead of violently striking the individual. Secondly, it prevents unnecessary injury to both the subject and the police officer. Less injuries induced results in less liability for the police department in the form of workers compensation and civil suits.

Police officers are often taught outdated control tactics during their recruit training. Recruit training is effect by time constraints and policy driven requirements. After graduating the academy, the training provided is more of a refresher than continuing education. A few hours per year is simply not an adequate amount to maintain efficient skills related to control violent unwilling individuals. Police departments who partner with a local business offering BJJ training to their department can utilize this public-private partnership to increase their officer's proficiency in physical force. By utilizing a private partner, officers will have the opportunity to train effective methods of physical force in the form of BJJ. The amount of available training in one week will surpass what they would have otherwise received in an entire year.

Police departments focus heavily on training weapon systems such as firearm and taser, but the statistics show that physical force is most of the force used. Based on data provide by the three largest police departments in American, physical force accounts for over 75% of all use of force incidents. Those same departments cited their officers received semi-annual firearms training. To extrapolate that data, if firearms were used in five percent of use of force incidents, which it was far less. If, five percent of applications is awarded sixteen hours annually for training, then the seventy-five percent of physical force is deserving of two-hundred forty hours of annual training. It is virtually impossible for a police department to dedicate that many hours per officer. This would equate to between four to five hours per week of BJJ training. This

would only be available through the utilization of a public-private partnership through a local BJJ training center.

### **Conclusion**

Changing the status quo in any organization is a challenging feat. But changing a government agency rooted in tradition and an inherent sub-culture is even more difficult. BJJ offers an alternative method of continual training for police officers. BJJ improves police officer's ability to successfully control a violent subject, while mitigating unnecessary injuries. Police officers who train BJJ perform better under stress because they continually training. BJJ officers can cognitively navigate a stressful situation and maintain sound decision making. BJJ also increases police officer's mental health by combating PTSD and improving their overall wellness. Incorporating BJJ into police training and continual police culture is a shift in the status quo that offers numerous benefits. These benefits are not only ideal but are necessary to regain the public trust and re-establish the prominence and respect of police officers in America.

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