Homeland Security

FEDERAL LAW ENFORCEMENT TRAINING CENTERS

Training Research

Baseline Testing Results:

Scenario Based Testing for Police-on-Police Confrontations

BACKGROUND:

The Lessons Learned/Lessons Anticipated (LL/LA) working group at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Centers (FLETC) has been leading an effort to reduce Police-on-Police incidents also known as Blue-on-Blue. The LL/LA defines a Police-on-Police shooting as: "the intentional shooting of a law enforcement officer by another law enforcement officer due to mistaken identity." This group has been working to conduct research to better understand this problem as well as develop recommendations for methods to improve training in this area. Several research activities have occurred to date including reviewing existing research, surveying other training organizations and conducting testing related to police identification systems (banners, high visibility credential cases, etc.).

This brief covers baseline testing results upon which future comparisons will be made. Modifications to the content are currently being made in this area and once implemented, a new group of students will be tested with the same protocol to determine the effectiveness of the modified training.

> **Police-on-Police Shooting:**
>
> *The intentional shooting of a law enforcement officer by another law enforcement officer due to mistaken identity.*

The Study:

Specifically, the philosophy of our training is to influence the behavior of the confronted officer (plainclothes, undercover, off-duty). If we can train students to reduce their risk of being mistaken for a potential suspect, then we have been successful.

In order to record reactions that could be classified as realistic and legitimate, testing of this concept was embedded into a component of tactics training in the Criminal Investigator Training Program (CITP). In this component, all students were dressed in plain clothes while performing a variety of arrest techniques. In this context, their behavior would be likely to look suspicious to the public and/or
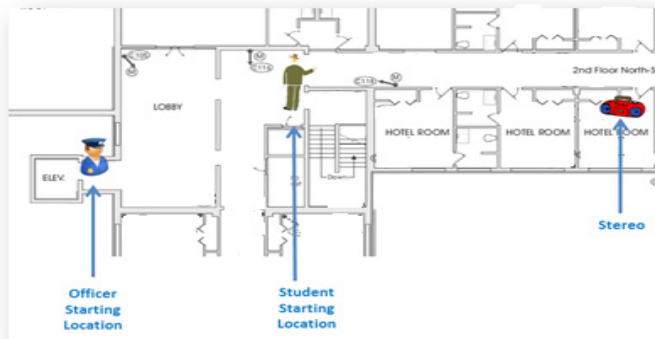

Figure 1

Uniformed Officers (UOs) in the area. The training venue in which this Police-on-Police scenario was set up was located in a mock hotel and contained audio and video recording equipment (*see illustration above*).

A total of 85 students (73 Male, 12 Female) participated in this research scenario over the course of 4 nights. Students were an average of 30.44 years old (SD 5.78), had an average of 2.36 years of law enforcement experience (SD: 4.43), 5.56 years of military experience (SD: 4.21) and 0.34 years of private security experience (SD: 1.00).

Students were read a briefing (*see upper right*), taken into the end of a hallway (*Figure 1*) and shown the direction of the "suspect's" room. In the hallway a boom box was playing music to help direct student's attention down the hallway. Based on the briefing, it was anticipated that most students would have their firearm drawn and use the right hand wall of the hallway as cover (*Figure 1*).

A UO was placed in a nearby room *(see photo on page 1)* and out of sight prior to the start of the scenario. Once an instructor had completed the briefing, he left the area via the stairwell. The instructor's departure served as a signal that the scenario had begun, both for the student and the hidden UO. The UO then waited 10 seconds, quietly moved into a position behind the student and issued the command "Police Don't Move." After the initial command, the UO issued commands in an unscripted manner based on prior

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experience to separate the students from their firearm. The UO was also given direction to never fire their firearm. The UO was instructed to call "Out of Role" (i.e., end the scenario) once students were either separated from their firearm or if students remained non-compliant to commands.

At this conclusion of this scenario, students were asked to complete a number of demographic questions and debriefed on this research project.

Key Findings:

Student Movements
► 43% of participants (34 students) pointed their firearm at the UO when initially confronted.
► 7.1% of participants did not have their firearm out at the start of the scenario.
► 17.6% of participants were not using the right wall for cover.
► Of the students who began the scenario with their firearm drawn, no students fired at the UO.
► After initially turning around and identifying the UO as a police officer, most participants quickly turned their firearm away from the direction of the UO.
► Of the students who began the scenario with their firearm out, 10.1% of participants continued to keep their firearm aimed at the UO for some period of time.
► The UO issued the command to "drop the gun" on the ground to every student with a visible firearm. Of these, 12.7% of participants failed to comply.

Students Initial Response When Confronted
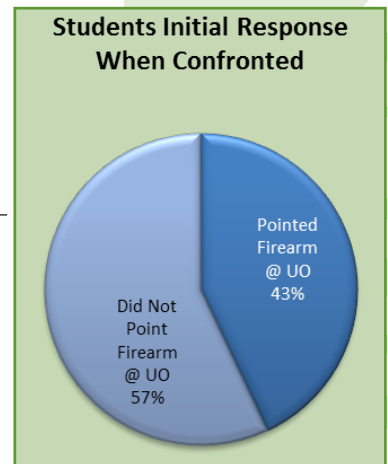
Compliance with Command to Place Firearm on Ground
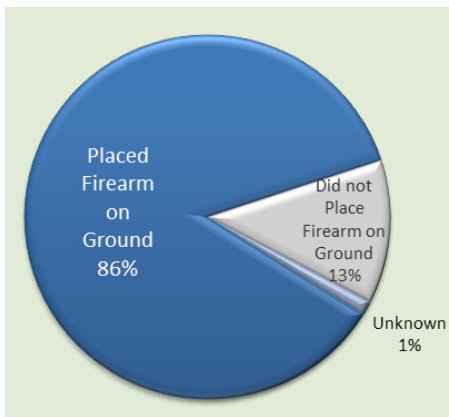
Credential Use During Scenario
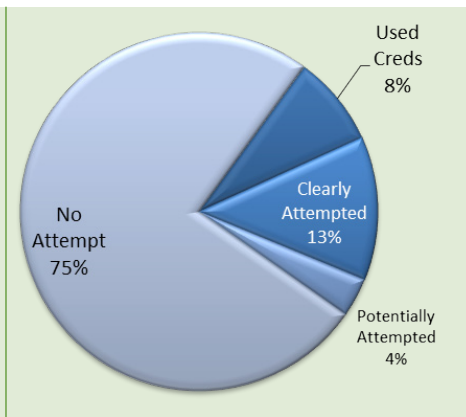
Use of Credentials:
► Only 8.2% of participants took out their credentials.
► Of those who did not take out their credentials, only 14.1% of participants (11 students) clearly made an attempt to show their credentials and only 3.9% of participants (3 students) potentially made an attempt to (reached for a pocket, but did not state that they were showing their credentials).

Verbal Responses:
► Videos of the scenarios were reviewed and student's initial verbal responses were summarized
► Some responses more clearly and succinctly identified the participants than others ("Police, Police" vs. "Friendly, Friendly").
► "I'm" was the most common first utterance and "Police" was the second most common

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first utterance. A minority of students (10.6%) failed to say anything during this scenario (and generally just complied with the UO's requests).

► 27.1% of participants failed to verbally identify themselves prior to complying with the UO's command to drop their firearm.

Impact of Demographics:
► One of the highest risk activities for plainclothes officer in a Police-on-Police encounter is for the plainclothes officer to point their firearm in the direction of the UO.
► The most meaningful demographic difference that can be noted is that participants who did not point their firearm at the UO tended to have LE experience (32.7% vs. 17.6%) as well as an average of more years of LE experience (2.82 vs. 1.84 years). With the current sample tested, these experience trends were not statistically significant.

Conclusions:

The primary goal of collecting this baseline information on student responses in Police-on-Police confrontations was to gain a better sense of where our training could be enhanced. There were a number of areas in which we believe student risks could be reduced during these encounters. These areas include:

► Increased use of identifying credentials: We recommend that a greater emphasis on the use of credentials be implemented in police training.
► Increased use of Identification: Increased focus on the importance of identification would be expected to increase the use of visual identification in the scenario tested.
► Increased clarity of verbal responses: Increased emphasis on the importance of immediate verbal identification could mitigate the altercation. Teaching a consistent verbal response would be expected to increase the comprehension for the UO.
► Decreased rate of reflexive spin: Forty three percent of participants made a reflexive spin and pointed their firearm at the UO. There was a trend for participants with previous LE experience to be less likely to point their firearm at the UO. This suggests that providing some experience in this type of scenario could potentially decrease, but not eliminate this response.
► Increased Compliance: Some of the students tested were very non-compliant. Hopefully these indicators of non-compliance can be reduced through incorporating the teaching point that when challenged by a UO, a plainclothes officer should comply with a UO's commands.

Limitations:

This testing involved only a single scenario, and a limited number of students. Testing with other Police-on-Police scenarios could result in different results. For instance, students may respond differently to an officer approaching from their front or side. The level of engagement may also influence students' responses. For example, if students are actively responding to a threat such as an active shooter (vs. our imaginary threat), they may be less likely to comply.

References:

New York State Task Force on Police on Police Shootings *"Reducing Inherent Danger: Report of the Task Force on Police on Police Shootings."* 2010.