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## **The Need for Police Reform**

**by Desiree Bevineau**

On May 25, 2020, police arrested an African American male named George Floyd. The police officer tossed Floyd on the street near a police vehicle; the officer then began pressing his knee on Floyd's neck. Floyd repeatedly stated to the officer that he could not breathe; however, the officer continued to press his knee on Floyd's neck until he breathed his last breath. Once again, another innocent civilian fell victim to police brutality. A transformation in law enforcement is needed, for George Floyd is amongst the several hundred who have lost their lives due to police brutality. The issue arising in law enforcement can be traced to police training. The murder of George Floyd raises the question of whether police are receiving any training at the police academy or enough training? Tyree Davis is another African American individual who was murdered by a police officer for stealing from a dollar store and refusing to drop the knife. Davis had suffered from two mental disorders: schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. The police were notified of Davis's mental state; however, after police reached Davis, he was tasered and shot multiple times. This poses a question that has been rising to the surface, "Are police officers in need of more intense and adequate training?" Judging by the murder of George Floyd and hundreds of other innocent civilians, police officers need more adequate training.

Police officers need to be sufficiently trained to better handle dilemmas and circumstances that occur on the job like handling a mentally ill civilian. There is immense importance in dissecting police training administered in law enforcement, for many individuals have been negatively impacted due to the actions of police officers. Without proper training, police officers will display unorthodox behavior which affects the very livelihood of every citizen. Ineffective methods of police training will expose the areas in which police training needs to be changed. Inadequate police training has cost the lives of hundreds and requires a thorough examination. In order to comprehend police brutality and police training, the past will be unveiled and assessed. The comparison concerning police training will be drawn between the 19th century and the 21st century. The errors of law enforcement throughout the centuries will be brought to the limelight and evaluated.

Research will be conducted and unravel the strains of thread that are included within the police academy. The different types of training that police officers undergo, including deadly weapon training, will be reviewed and explained. The causes of insufficient police training and how the public is negatively affected by police misconduct will be revealed. The murder of George Floyd and Tyree Davis appalled not only the African American community but, the whole world. These horrific events provide the message that states America has not changed over the decades for history continues to repeat itself. Police officers also are not being penalized accordingly for their heinous deeds and behavior. Insufficient training of officers leads to issues like unethical behavior, the mistreatment of the minorities and the mentally unstable, and self-endangerment; however, this can be reversed by implicating

solutions like police training in ethics, police training in mental health, and penalizing police officers who have behaved irrationally.

## **History of the Police Force**

### ***Background***

Throughout history, there are several errors that damage the effectiveness of American police departments. Since America's police department was founded in 1838, it lacked any sort of police training, which presented a problem. George Brereton is a journalist of Criminal Law and Criminology; he wrote a book in 1935 which illustrates the faults in police training in America. Brereton asks, "How much confidence should we have in the officer of a small town who had received not one word of instruction or training during the six months following his appointment?" (Brereton 249). Brereton reveals that one issue is that some police departments, specifically located in small towns, do not provide their officers with any instruction or training. As reported by Brereton, "in a personal survey of 225 towns of less than 10,000 there is absolutely nothing done which by any stretch of the imagination could be considered police training. . . . One hundred and eighty-five cities "sent the man out on duty with no instruction" while "forty cities placed the beginner with an older man from periods of a night to one week" (250). In other words, some officers in local police departments did not receive any police training at all. Another fault of the police departments that Brereton assessed was insufficient finances.

Police departments, specifically smaller departments, did not receive enough funding to have adequate police training available to their officers. According to Brereton, “The cost of carrying out such training, particularly in the smaller police departments under present conditions, is quite often prohibitive” (251). Smaller police departments lacked the proper funds to adequately train their officers; the equipment used for police training was exorbitant. The lack of police training became the foundation of a major problem in law enforcement: financial insufficiency. Insufficient finances have “hindered the development of police training” (Brereton 251). This posed a problem that led to catastrophic results in the future. Money makes the world go around; without money, the police department would not be able to thrive properly. This caused police officers to not be trained properly because the police department could not afford the equipment necessary to train them.

### ***A Late Start***

Although the first police department in America was established in 1838, police training did not begin until the early 20th century. Brereton explains, “in 1911 Detroit established a training school for recruits and a few years afterward New York provided a three month's course of instruction for its new members” (249). In particular, the police departments of Detroit and New York had gone at least 73 years without police training. New York is the headquarters of American police departments; if New York is behind, the other police departments are also behind with the exception of the Washington D. C. police department.

In the Report on Use of Force, the Metropolitan Police Department in the District of Columbia describes in detail all the components of training their officers complete. Unlike New York and other police departments in America, the Metropolitan Police Department in Washington D.C. sufficiently trains its officers for the challenges faced on the job. As stated in the "Report on Use of Force," "MPD officers receive explicit training in appropriate use of force techniques, firearms training, de-escalation, and related topics. All officers receive this training through numerous use-of-force modules during basic recruit training" (10). Outside of Washington D.C.'s police district, police departments are behind on the advancement of training. This, in turn, delays the time for improvement in the training of police officers. The police department had already gone at least 73 years without any training and cannot afford any more setbacks.

In addition, annually the police department is supposed to undergo changes to keep up with the latest information and technology. However, this is not the case for the police department that has fallen behind; police officers lack adequate stipulations required for the force. According to Brereton, "the tremendous growth of our cities . . . and the increasing complexity of our laws find the 'old type' police officer sadly lacking in the qualifications necessary for the solving of his problems" (249). As technology advances, the evolution of police training is needed. The modern update in police equipment is essential to ensure the safety of communities and civilians. A police officer cannot use equipment of the 1800s to locate a fugitive in the 1900s; the apparatus will crash or malfunction because it is outdated. Criminals are gaining more knowledge by the day and are finding new ways to commit crimes

and hide. Due to the changing of the times, advancement of technology and the changing of the way crime is being committed, police training of the 1900s will not be appropriate to solve crimes; these complications in the police department concerning inadequate training will continue to be an issue in the 21st century.

## **Problems of the American Police Force**

### ***Continued Lack of Training***

In 1935 Brereton mentions that the complications in police departments consisted of poor-quality training and insufficient finances which impacted the performance of police officers. Yet in the 21st century, police departments have made few improvements. Michael White and Gipsy Escobar are journalists of the *International Review of Law Computers and Technology*; they describe the irrelevance of police training compared to police work. Police officers are not receiving appropriate training for their line of work. According to White and Escobar, “police officers argue that ‘training given in police academies is . . . irrelevant to ‘real’ police work” (124). There is a deficiency of police training in the police force; its purpose is to give the individual an outlook on what is to be expected on the job. If a police officer states that the training received is not equivalent to real challenges on the job, then officers are not receiving realistic adequate training. A police officer cannot receive the same level of training as an individual who works in police administration. Police administration is an office-level job whereas a police officer is an active “hands-on” profession. If a police officer is trained to work in an office, they will not be beneficial to the community in maintaining order or protecting

civilians from criminals and opposers of the law. This would explain why there have been hundreds of victims who suffered at the hands of police officers.

### ***Lack of Education***

In police departments around America, only a high school diploma is required. High school education is not enough to teach an individual how to be a police officer. The majority of the information given, like how to hold a handgun and when to use a handgun, stems from colleges and universities. The skills required to be a police officer are not taught or learned while in high school. Robert Ramsey conducted a study in 2015, which concerns academic performance in police training. This study illustrates the effectiveness of education concerning the police department. Ramsey states, “the only education requirement is a high school diploma or completion of a General Education Development (GED) Examination. This educational standard is consistent nationally” (5). In other words, a high school graduate could apply for the position as a police officer and be accepted. The problem with this is that high school education does not fully prepare an individual to be a police officer.

Education provides information on the rules and regulations of a job as well as how to complete the job. According to White and Escobar, “those who study criminal justice at college will bring with them a more in-depth knowledge of the system, its various components, how it functions, as well as the prevailing theories on the causes of crime” (122). A college education would provide the individual with additional knowledge on how to be a police officer who cares for the betterment of civilians.

A lack of education will leave the officer ill-prepared to combat dangerous situations; this is also dangerous for the community. Ramsey states, “low educational requirements among police officers are potentially dangerous and unfair to the community they serve. Officers often who have no higher education are tasked to guide people through complex and potentially life-threatening situations” (15). In other words, an uneducated officer will not know how to effectively use police equipment like weapons or determine in what circumstances to use the weapons. This will place individuals of the community at risk of being victims of stray bullets and police brutality like George Floyd. Officers need to be educated and trained that violence is not, in most cases, an acceptable form to de-escalate dangerous situations.

## **Problems of the Police Force Around the World**

### ***England***

Many individuals perceive that America is the only nation that struggles with its police department. However, this statement is not true. In fact, other nations also have complications with their police department like England. England’s police department went over a century with outdated standards for training. White and Escobar explain, “in England, the London Metropolitan Police Force was established in 1829, but it was not until 1960 that the Royal Commission Act raised recruitment and training standards” (120). In addition, the English police department went 131 years without updating and changing training standards and recruitment. This relates to the military; if the military went 131 years without changing weaponry and training equipment, millions of soldiers would be unprepared and die in the line of duty. For

any police department to go over a century without updating technology, qualifications and standards will endanger the officer and civilians' lives. Without the proper equipment and training, law enforcement cannot ensure the safety of the community. These complications in the police department concerning inadequate training will continue to be an issue in the 21st century.

### ***Latin America: Colombia***

Besides America and Britain, Colombia is another nation that included police training decades after establishing their police department. The Colombian police department was created in the 1800s; police training was included in the 1900s which follows a similar trend prevalent in America and Europe. White and Escobar found, "similar processes were experienced in Latin American countries where professional policing was instituted in the late nineteenth century with the help of the US and European governments" (120). Colombia fell into the same category as Europe and America; the reason being is Colombia's police department was designed by these developed nations. This becomes a problem because the police departments in Colombia will have the same faults as America's and Europe's police departments. According to White and Escobar, ". . . in Colombia the National Police was founded in 1890 with the aid of the French government, but the first Columbian police academy did not open its doors until 1950" (120). In other words, the Colombian police department did not have police training for 60 years.

## **Types of Police Training Required**

### ***Emotional Skills***

Experience is important but, education makes the difference between a prepared and unprepared police officer. Daniel Blumberg, Michael Schlosser, Konstantinos Papazoglou, Sarah Creighton, and Chief Kaye conducted a study in 2019 which assessed types of training that enhances an officer's ability to perform on the job, like emotional skills. A police officer's job preys on an individual's emotions, for it requires thin-slicing and accurate snap-judgement. Police officers' acute emotions significantly impact their job performance. Blumberg et al. explain, "emotional skills can improve the extent to which police officers successfully manage the emotional challenges of the job" (5). In other words, emotional skills help prevent the police officer from suffering a mental breakdown on the job resulting in a panic. A police officer cannot afford to panic while on duty because it could very well endanger their life or a civilian's life. Blumberg et al. continue, "...when they were anxious, the officers had a stronger expectation of threat, which caused them to shoot earlier and make more mistakes" (5). In dangerous situations, the body becomes anxious and has a mental collapse. During a mental collapse, decisions are made rashly without thought which explains why some police officers fire their weapons after hearing footsteps or the crackling of leaves when stepped on. Malcolm Gladwell, the author of *Blink* a national bestseller, mentions that an emotional skill, like accurate mind-reading, is likely to fail when an individual is under stress. Gladwell illustrates how two police officers killed an individual named Amadou Diallo because they had mistaken a rectangular object that Diallo removed from his pocket as a gun; the rectangular object was a

wallet instead of a gun (192- 193). Every ounce of training that the two officers received was forgotten because they were mentally distorted by paranoia and fear. Diallo's death proves that the two officers did not receive enough training to make wise decisions under stress in situations of uncertainty. Without emotional skills, an officer is likely to accidentally shoot civilians which results in a fatality.

### ***Deadly Weapon Training***

The most important component of the police academy is deadly weapon training. This teaches the officer how to use a handgun and the appropriate grounds to use a handgun on the job. Gregory Morrison and Timothy Garner conducted research that focuses on the effectiveness of deadly force training. Deadly force training is essential for the protection of police officers and civilians. Morrison and Garner explain, "deadly force and related officer-safety training is time-consuming, expensive and of vital importance for officer and public safety" (342). Deadly force training lowers the probability of human endangerment of citizens and the officer. Furthermore, if police officers were not trained on the usage of deadly weapons, innocent individuals would be at risk of being fatally injured by stray bullets. All individuals of law enforcement are trained to use deadly force, specifically the handgun. As the Go Law Enforcement website explains, "incorporated in the police academy training is the law enforcement firearms training. Students will receive training in a variety of weapons including handguns, shotguns, and possibly rifles" (Go Law Enforcement). An individual cannot become a police officer without deadly force training. The handgun is the main weapon an officer carries

for defensive purposes. According to Morrison and Garner, "...the handgun remains the primary firearm that sworn line personnel use in the event of quickly emerging and dangerous encounters. . ." (343). Since the handgun is a key accessory that is a part of a police officer's uniform, it is important for police officers to receive effective adequate training on using a handgun and under what circumstances to use a handgun. In dangerous situations, it is crucial that an officer does not make a mistake that will endanger bystanders, the police officer, or other officers.

### **Counterargument: Are Education Requirements Too Much?**

#### ***Arguments Against the Requirement of Advanced Education***

There are some individuals who argue that the requirements of higher education for the police department are unnecessary and work against the police department. Education is beneficial, but some individuals question if education is more important than experience in law enforcement. A college education does not provide the knowledge and skills needed to be a police officer. According to White and Escobar, "a college education does not provide the skills needed to perform the job because those skills come exclusively from experience on the job" (122). Experience demonstrates how the job is supposed to be done and prepares the individual for unexpected situations that cannot be taught in the educational system. For example, an individual can only learn how to drive a car with practice and experience. An individual cannot learn how to drive a car by reading an instruction manual. Being placed in the driver's seat is essential in learning how to drive.

Another argument is that some individuals, like minorities, may not have had access to higher education due to their geographical location. According to White and Escobar, “the requirement has a disproportionate negative impact on minorities because of unequal opportunities for secondary education” (122). Some minorities are from rural areas and do not have access to advanced education, so a higher educational requirement would prevent their application from being accepted. This will limit the number of minorities in the police force.

### **Victims of Poor Police Training**

#### ***Mentally Unstable***

Inadequate police training affects citizens and communities, especially the mentally unstable. Rachel Shonebarger describes Autism Spectrum Disorder (ADA) in her studies divulge how poor police training affects individuals who are mentally unstable. In accordance with Shonebarger, “Autism Spectrum Disorder. . . consists of a wide-ranging group of developmental disorders. . . ASD is a cognitive impairment. . .” (354-355). There is immense importance in ASD victims in learning how to cope with their mental instability to function in everyday life. Police officers need to understand this, for there are many symptoms of ASD including sensory dysfunction. As reported by Shonebarger, “sensory dysfunction. . . results in a sensitivity to touch, causing many individuals with ASD to dislike being touched” (356). Individuals suffering from ASD are likely to have a psychological episode if they are touched. A lack of training would ill prepare the officer in handling ASD victims, resulting in the mistreatment and infringement of their human rights. This poses an issue concerning law enforcement for the detaining of

individuals who require touch. According to Shonebarger, “for example, on the one hand, officers can interpret the lack of eye contact or the lack of an answer as a sign of guilt, resulting in the officer raising their voice, shining a light in the subject’s face, or touching the subject” (358). An ASD victim would require to be handled with care and understanding, considering that normal police procedures like police commands of yelling or touching will cause them to have a psychological episode. ASD individuals fall prey to police brutality due to this misunderstanding.

### **Minorities**

Inadequate police training greatly affects the ethnic community for there have been hundreds of cases where ethnic individuals have died due to police brutality. Hans Oh, Jordan DeVyllder, and Geoffrey Hunt are associated with the University of Southern California, School of Social Work, Graduate School of Social Service, and Centre for Alcohol and Drug Research. The authors conducted a study that portrays the effect police brutality has on the mental health of ethnic minorities. Ethnic minorities are the first that are targeted by law enforcement, especially males. Oh et al. discovered, “. . . recent publicized cases generally corroborated the view that racial/ethnic minority men are the primary targets of negative police experiences” (1588). Ethnic minorities like African American and Latino men are targets concerning police brutality, which has not changed from the mid-20th century.

A racial minority that has been targeted over the centuries and mistreated by police officers is bound to be psychologically disrupted. Oh et al. “. . . found strong evidence that

experiencing at least one incident of police mistreatment or abuse was associated with major psychiatric disorders over the past year and suicidal behaviors at some point in life among African Americans” (1589). There is evidence that portrays that minorities who undergo mistreatment by law enforcement display symptoms of mental disorders. Police brutality results in catastrophe and trauma. According to Oh et al., “. . . police mistreatment or abuse can result in stress and trauma, injuring the mind via the stress-response system, which then becomes manifested in various psychiatric disorders and suicidal behaviors” (1589). Traumatic events like police brutality distort the mental state, specifically the nervous system. For example, the “fifth girl” and only survivor of the Birmingham church bombing, Sarah Collins Rudolph, describes suffering from anxiety, fear, and other mental distortions after the bombing. The bombing of the Birmingham church and police brutality are parallel because both are traumatic events that result in a psychological disruption that affects minority individuals. Police brutality due to insufficient police training mentally disturbs the ethnic community because they are targeted for the color of their skin.

## **Solutions**

### ***Mental Health Training***

Individuals suffering from mental illness are amongst the many who are mistreated by police officers. Arabella Scantlebury, Caroline Fairhurst, Alison Booth, Catriona McDaid, Nicola Moran, Adwoa Parker, Rebecca Payne, William J. Scott, David Torgerson, Martin Webber, and Catherine Hewitt have conducted research in 2017 which measured the effectiveness of mental

health training in police departments. Even though the global percentage of mentally unstable individuals is relatively small, they still contain a mass range of the global population. According to Scantlebury et al., “mental illness constitutes an estimated 7.4% of the world’s measurable burden of disease. . .” (2). The mentally ill consist of 7.4% of diseases which means there is a possibility a police officer will encounter at least one mentally unstable individual in their lifetime.

Police officers need to always be prepared to handle individuals who suffer from mental illness. According to Scantlebury et al., “police officers are often the first to respond to incidents involving individuals with mental health problems in crisis” (2). Considering police officers are the first to respond to cases concerning individuals of mental illness, they need to be well trained to handle the situation; this is to ensure law enforcement does not mistreat the mentally ill.

Despite the global issues concerning police departments being insufficiently trained, there is still hope. There are solutions to solve the problems that exist in the police department. One solution is to increase training on dealing with the mentally ill; mental health training will improve how officers handle the mentally ill. According to Scantlebury et al., “mental health training may improve how police officers respond to and record situations involving individuals with mental health problems” (3). This would prevent the mistreatment of the mentally unstable which results from a lack of knowledge and understanding of how to deal with the individual. By police departments incorporating mental health training, they would be helping

their officers notice and understand the symptoms of mental illness to handle the situation appropriately.

### ***Ethical Training***

Incidents like the murder of George Floyd occurred because of the lack of ethical training in law enforcement. Heather Wyatt and George Franks are assistant professors in the School of Public Affairs and Austin State University; they explain the importance of ethical training in the police department. Ethical training is important to gain the trust of civilians and ensure safety in the community. Wyatt and Franks explain, “ethics training is essential for law enforcement personnel. . . when officers behave unethically, it is a violation of the public trust and damages the image of law enforcement everywhere” (40). The lack of ethical training causes police officers to behave irrationally, resulting in the expression of brutal treatment towards citizens.

Wyatt and Franks conclude, “the literature indicates that there is significant variation in the length of pre-service academy training, ranging from twelve to twenty-six weeks. However, little time is devoted to ethics training—typically two to four hours” (41). The issue concerning the lack of ethical training in police departments is prevalent because minimum time is spent on ethics training. Police officers receiving two to four hours of ethical training is not enough. If ethics training lasted longer than four hours, the mistreatment of civilians by the police would decrease.

***De-escalation Training***

Unfortunate events, like the murder of George Floyd and Tyree Davis, present an issue of using violence to de-escalate a situation. Violence is not the answer and escalates an already unstable situation. David Clarey is a journalist for APM reports and explains that police officers in some states are being trained to de-escalate situations verbally instead of physically through de-escalation training. Communication is a rational way to de-escalate a situation without involving violence. Clarey explains, “. . . de-escalation training . . . teach[es] officers how to slow down and defuse potentially dangerous encounters through communication” (Clarey). In some cases, by simply communicating with the suspect, an officer could de-escalate the situation as opposed to igniting the flames. This shares a comparison with heated confrontations that occur in high school. Some of the fights in high school do not occur due to the student’s willingness to communicate verbally, instead of using physical force.

There are some states in America that have already involved de-escalation training in their police departments. An investigation report by APM reports discovered, “. . . only 16 states mandated de-escalation training. Since then, five more states — Minnesota, New Jersey, Colorado, Oregon, and South Carolina — have required that officers begin receiving the training” (Clarey). This means 21 states in America currently require police officers to go through de-escalation training. De-escalation training will lessen the likelihood of officers using their handguns to solve problems on the job. As reported by Clarey, “many law enforcement experts say that when police officers receive training in how to de-escalate confrontations, they’re far less likely to end up using their guns” (Clarey). Furthermore, officers who choose to

use their handgun as a last resort are using intelligence, instead of emotions to resolve conflict; this displays maturity which is required in law enforcement. Immature acts like using a handgun as a first resort could very well end an individual's life.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the police force in America is in desperate need of reform concerning police training. The actions of the police department such as holding a knee on a civilian's neck to prevent escape are unorthodox and against legal protocol. The enhancement of training will prevent officers from behaving inappropriately, for illegal behavior costs lives and threatens the very existence of the police department. At this rate, if the police department does not reconstruct their department starting with police training, there may no longer be a police department around. There are already articles and politicians mentioning that the police force should be defunded. Without sufficient finances, a corporation or business is unable to continue thriving and will soon disappear. As heavily flawed as the police department is, it is still essential to have a sort of law enforcement governing American society. Without enforcers of the law, the nation will erupt into lawlessness and there will be no one to maintain safety in the communities. Police officers need to be sufficiently trained in ethics, deadly weapons, and mental illness to protect the civil rights of every individual.

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