UNDERSTANDING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF DE-ESCALATION TECHNIQUES: A MIXED METHODS APPROACH

by

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DEDICATION

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ABSTRACT

NOAH C. SCHAFFER. Understanding the Effectiveness of Police De-escalation Techniques. (Under the direction of DR. JANNE E. GAUB)

Violence de-escalation has received significant attention in recent years; however, little research has been conducted to assess the effectiveness of the topic's associated techniques. The current study surveyed over 56 officers in the Concord (NC) Police Department regarding their perceptions of de-escalation techniques, including their importance, frequency of use, and effectiveness as they relate to resolving potentially violent encounters. Eleven follow-up interviews were conducted to further explore the perceptions of officers outside of the limited responses found within the survey. Aside from examining perceptions overall, we sought to assess differences in officer responses across various demographic variables. Overall, findings suggest that officers' views do not shift based on prior training history. However, the age of an officer was correlated with differences in how officers view the effectiveness and frequency of use of de-escalation techniques. Officers believe de-escalation is inherently valuable, although the makeup and characteristics of a suspect can directly influence effectiveness. The article concludes with a discussion of policy related to the more prominent topic of police de-escalation.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables

List of Figures

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Contention over police use of force has been a point of emphasis for researchers and social rights activists for decades (Friedrich, 1980; Klahm & Tyiller, 2010; Riksheim & Chermak, 1993; Sherman, 1980; Terrill & Reisig, 2003). The death of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, in Minneapolis (MN), was widely considered to be a shocking display of excessive force by police, furthering the calls for reform that began during the Civil Rights Movement. Across the United States, an estimated 15-26 million people participated in protests after a video of the George Floyd incident surfaced online (Buchanan et al., 2020). Advocates were quick to point out the actions of officers involved in the encounter, noting the excessive use of force on an offender who was unarmed and already detained. Furthermore, as noted by both popular media networks and the general public, far too many of the victims present in these types of incidents appeared to be Black men, specifically those who did not possess a weapon. Citizen trust in the police had become temporarily fractured, with George Floyd's death serving as the most recent flashpoint in a long line of questionable police-citizen encounters that received widespread national attention, beginning with the death of Michael Brown in Ferguson (MO) in 2014. Thus, the pressure caused by public outrage has now fallen on the shoulders of law enforcement agencies to look for effective solutions to this polarizing social issue.

In the realm of policing, violence de-escalation has no proven optimal method of implementation when dealing with potentially violent citizens. Ideally, an officer will utilize a combination of verbal commands, de-escalation techniques, and tactical repositioning to limit the physical force required during an encounter. The International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) defines police use of force as the "amount of effort required by police to compel compliance by an unwilling subject" (2001, p. 1). This definition, while simplistic, was left

intentionally ambiguous, to allow individual officers to exercise discretion within each public encounter. Training in the proper defense tactics and knowing when to use force can be considered some of the most important aspects of policing. However, the techniques attributable to being able to avoid using force altogether have been understudied in existing research. To create future policing strategies that limit unnecessary use of force incidents it is important to know what de-escalation techniques are effective from an individual officer's perspective. First-hand experience, along with the training pedigree of law enforcement officers should provide valuable feedback on any potential future policy changes.

The current study replicates and extends a portion of a study on violence de-escalation conducted by White and colleagues (2021), which surveyed 101 officers in the Tempe (AZ) Police Department to assess their views on de-escalation. In particular, the current study utilizes a mixed-methods approach, wherein officers' perceptions of violence de-escalation were captured through both a survey and interviews to gain insight into officers' perceptions of the importance, frequency of use, and effectiveness of de-escalation tactics. Interviews served as an additional form of data collection, which allowed officers to fully describe their views on the topic outside of the limited responses provided within the survey. The survey and all follow-up interviews were administered to officers in the Concord (NC) Police Department. A total of 56 officers completed the survey (representing 28% of the total sworn force), and 11 elected to complete a follow-up interview. Descriptive and bivariate analyses were used to investigate the perceptions of officers across individual officer demographics (age, gender, education, etc.). Interview transcripts were coded and thematically analyzed to examine expected and emergent themes. Finally, policy implications of the study's findings are discussed, as are limitations of the current study on de-escalation training.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Role of Coercive Force within Modern Policing

Before discussing both the implementation and effectiveness of de-escalation training, it is important to provide background on the use of force within policing. An officer's value has been stated to be tied directly to his/her ability to control/dictate any and all public encounters, with criminal apprehension serving as a symbol of a job well done (Van Maanen, 1978). This notion can paint a dangerous image of what an officer should be while out on patrol, potentially leading to an increase in unnecessary use of force incidents in an effort to preserve some form of higher stature within society. Fyfe (1981) states that while an officer's power to use force may rely on three distinct responsibilities; protecting life, preserving order, and fighting crime, legislation and policy ultimately decide right from wrong. Bittner (1970) highlights how the ability to use force is a core aspect of policing, stating that "the police are nothing else than a mechanism for the distribution of situationally justified force in society" (p. 39). Bittner (1970) also emphasizes that this 'force' is meant to be "coercive" and that officers are still limited by the letter of the law when it comes to applying that force. He argues:

> In fact, the only instructions any policeman ever receives in this respect consist of sermonizing that he should be humane and circumspect, and that he must not desist from what he has undertaken merely because its accomplishment may call for coercive means. (Bittner, 1970, p. 38)

The position of a law enforcement officer inherently grants one a heightened level of authority when compared to the general public. Furthermore, an officer's individual discretion also provides the opportunity to directly influence the outcome of any public encounter, for better or worse. However, given a particularly stressful interaction with a violent offender, an officer may be inclined to use force to induce compliance or eliminate any potential deadly threat. The use of

coercive force, warranted or otherwise, should ideally be used as the last resort to establish control over an individual.

The *Police-Public Contact Survey* (PPCS), administered by the Bureau of Justice Statistics as a supplement to the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), provides information on the characteristics of interactions between citizens and officers (both police- and resident-initiated; Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2009). Every three years, data from the PPCS is released to the public and by comparing data from 2015, 2018, and 2020, we can assess variations in police contacts over a 6-year span. The PPCS indicates that 53.8 million police contacts were made in 2020 (20.6% of the U.S. population), a drop of 2.9% from just two years prior (Tapp & Davis, 2022). However, when looking at 2015 statistics, percentages are comparable to 2020 at around 21% (Davis et al., 2018). Of the over 160 million interactions in all three years combined, the threat of force or use of nonfatal force was only present in 2% of interactions (totaling around 3.2 million instances across 2015, 2018, and 2020). Interestingly, this proportion is much higher for minority groups like Black (4%) and Hispanic (3%) respondents compared to white respondents (1%; Harrell & Davis, 2020; Tapp & Davis, 2022). The year 2020 is significant as it represents the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak. Stay-at-home orders had a significant impact on criminal activity, with recent studies highlighting the dramatic increase in domestic violence incidents during the pandemic (Anurudran et al., 2020; Kourti et al., 2023; Piquero et al., 2021; Regalado et al., 2022). The decrease in the total number of contacts between 2018 and 2020 can be explained by the strict regulations placed upon citizens to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Popular businesses—specifically those capable of holding large volumes of people (bars, restaurants, arenas, etc.)—were no longer accessible to the general public, creating fewer events in which a police presence may be required. The frequency of officer-initiated contacts dropped significantly during the

implementation of stay-at-home orders, with traffic stops being one of the most heavily impacted (Mohler et al., 2020; Nielson et al., 2022). Traffic stops can pose some of the most serious threats to officer safety while on the job, as they can rapidly become extremely dangerous, making this decrease noteworthy when referring to possible changes in criminal activity during the pandemic.

2.2 The Influence of Officer Characteristics on Use of Force

Researchers have spent several decades studying the factors that influence an officer's decision to use force within public interactions. Officer mindset was believed to be one of these possible predictors. Muir (1977) was the first to propose the idea that the makeup of an officer (morals, experiences, emotional characteristics) matters within the policing role. Paoline et al. (2021) sought to empirically test the impact mindset had on behavior by utilizing Likert scale style questions to classify officer views on topics such as workplace danger, positional role, management personnel, force training, and their agency's use of force reporting system. Collectively, these five categories were used to measure how an officer's use of force mindset may impact street-level coercive behavior. The findings suggest that while the use of force mindset varied across individual officers, there was no ability to accurately predict which officers may be more likely to use force within street-level encounters (Paoline et al., 2021).

Officer education has also been found to impact an officer's decision to use force during an encounter (Chapman, 2012; McElvain & Kposowa, 2008; Paoline & Terrill, 2007; Rydberg & Terrill, 2010;). Officers who receive bachelor's degrees were significantly less likely to use force throughout the completion of their daily job duties (Paoline & Terrill, 2007). However, the same could not be said for officers who only possessed a high school level education. Furthermore, the act of simply attending college courses, but not completing a degree, would have no effect on force being used within police-citizen encounters (Paoline & Terrill, 2007). Regarding, deadly force,

McElvain and Kposowa (2008) found that male officers were 2.9 times as likely to discharge their firearm compared to female officers. Although, much like previous literature has found, officers with at least a college education "were over 30% less likely to shoot compared to their non-college-educated counterparts" (McElvain & Kposowa, 2008, p. 515).

Outside of the education of the individual officer, some may consider law enforcement experience as the 'be-all end-all' when it comes to knowing when to use force. Coursework and simulated training exercises may only take an officer so far, especially when presented with unique scenarios while on the job. Paoline and Terrill (2007) found that officers with higher levels of job experience were less likely to rely on verbal or physical force throughout everyday encounters. Therefore, one could assume that simple exposure to a variety of police-citizen encounters throughout one's career can allow officers to resort to less aggressive forms of situational control more regularly. However, education was found to have little to no impact on the significance of this decrease (Paoline & Terrill, 2007). Highlighting that while possessing both a higher education and more job experience can reduce use of force incidents independently, the effect will not be amplified if officers possess both qualities simultaneously.

2.3 Situational and Environmental Factors That Influence Use of Force

The impact of situational factors of a police-citizen contact has garnered some of the biggest support in recent history. Prior literature has shown that officers are more likely to use force when evidence that a suspect has violated the law is present within a given encounter (McCluskey et al., 2005; McCluskey & Terrill, 2005; Paoline & Terrill, 2007). Provided the suspect was armed or in possession of a weapon, a similar increase in likelihood could be observed (McCluskey et al., 2005; Paoline & Terrill, 2007). Overall, suspect resistance to officer coercion has influenced the use of "relative" force (Hine et al., 2018). "Relative force" is the force required

to coerce a suspect dependent on the level of resistance that the suspect employs (Hine et al., 2018). If force should exceed the level of resistance displayed by a suspect, then this force can now be classified as 'excessive.' Hine et al. (2018) found that officers were less likely to use higher levels of relative force on suspects that were physically aggressive or in possession of a weapon. However, this does not mean suspect resistance results in less use-of-force incidents; in fact, resisting officer detainment has been correlated with greater levels of force in general (McCluskey & Terrill, 2005).

Research regarding the environmental impacts on force is rather limited, despite being a topic of intrigue. Terrill and Reisig (2003) sought to analyze force within a neighborhood context. The researchers found that "officers were far more likely to use high levels of force on suspects encountered within disadvantaged neighborhoods" (Terrill & Reisig, 2003, p. 307). These same neighborhoods were typically found to have higher rates of criminal activity, specifically homicide (Terrill & Reisig, 2003). Given the negative stigma surrounding these communities, it is possible officers may be predisposed to fear or anticipate danger while out on patrol, potentially leading officers to prioritize individual/partner safety above all else (including refraining from using high levels of force on suspects).

2.4 The Influence of Suspect Characteristics on Use of Force

Suspect characteristics have been shown to have some empirical impact on force within literature. The most significant of which revolves around the assumption that those who possess low socio-economic status are more likely to experience use of force by police. Studies like those by McCluskey and Terrill (2005) and Paoline and Terrill (2007) exemplify these assumptions by finding that lower socioeconomic status populations are more susceptible to use-of-force incidents. Research generally supports the notion that offenders under the influence of either drugs or alcohol

are significantly more likely to have force used against them (Engel et al., 2000; Garner et al, 2002; Kaminski et al., 2004; Terrill & Mastrofski, 2002). Males and individuals suffering from mental illnesses/disabilities have also been found to be at greater risk of experiencing use of force (Johnson, 2011; Morgan et al., 2020; Terrill & Mastrofski, 2002). Variation based on race has been debated, however, some studies find that blacks possess a higher likelihood of having force used against them, particularly lethal force, as opposed to their white counterparts (Edwards et al., 2019; Jacobs & O'Brien, 1988). Bolger (2015) conducted a meta-analysis examining the predictors of police use of force decisions and found that minorities were 1.06 times more likely to experience uses of force by police relative to their white counterparts.

2.5 The Effect of Fear and Stress on Officer Decision-Making

It is no secret that an officer's job requires both pinpoint accuracy and sound decision-making when faced with extreme adversity. Forms of acute stress can begin to emerge if presented with a life-or-death situation, especially in officers who deal with dangerous and life-threatening encounters fairly regularly (Lawrence, 1984). Instances of situational stress can occur with the pressure to perform one's job duties while being recorded by members of the general public. Combining these various stressors can create fear within the minds of officers attempting to carry out the law, potentially leading to unnecessary use of force due to a compromised thought process (Amir et al., 2003; Eysenck et al., 2007). Verhage et al. (2018) found that an officer's decision-making processes become impacted when presented with stressful and fear-inducing situations. Evidence also suggests that fear and perceived danger alone may contribute to an increase in use of force mistakes by officers (Sherman, 2018).

2.6 Defining De-escalation

Although a clear definition of de-escalation is difficult to ascertain, some consider the definition provided by the *National Consensus Policy on Use of Force* as solidified (Engel et al., 2020). The term is defined as follows:

> Taking action or communicating verbally or non-verbally during a potential force encounter in an attempt to stabilize the situation and reduce the immediacy of the threat so that more time, options, and resources can be called upon to resolve the situation without the use of force or with a reduction in the force necessary (IACP, 2017, p. 6)

The document goes on to emphasize that de-escalation in a vacuum is inherently positive, as the ability to avoid violence by calming an aggravated citizen/suspect can limit any direct threat to officer or public safety. However, this is not to say that the use of de-escalation techniques in all police-citizen encounters will guarantee a positive outcome. Additional definitions, specifically policies analyzed by Todak and March (2020), paint an inconsistent narrative on what de-escalation truly entails, even if law enforcement agencies insist on its inclusion within modern policing.

The difference between verbal, tactical, and physical de-escalation is also important to emphasize, as the methods of obtaining control over a suspect can vary significantly. Communication (both verbal and nonverbal) can be considered an officer's first line of defense within a public encounter, wherein officers may attempt to speak or position themselves toward citizens in a calm or composed manner. From a practitioner's standpoint, verbal communication can be used to take patients out of an agitated state, resulting in them becoming "active partners in de-escalation" (Richmond et al., 2012, p. 18). Furthermore, appropriate rapport-building within public encounters can allow officers to avoid the use of physical forms of de-escalation (Todak & White, 2019). Tactical methods of de-escalation may be as simple as body positioning or having the ability to reposition to maintain officer safety. The use of aggressive body language may only

serve to make suspects wary of what may happen, leading to suboptimal outcomes. The threat of deadly force (not use) can also be considered a form of tactical de-escalation, as suspects may be inclined to stop offending/resisting under the threat of a firearm. Ideally, physical de-escalation (use of force) would be the last resort to gain direct control over a suspect/citizen. Although, the discretion of the individual officer will impact which form of de-escalation is utilized in any given scenario.

The tone and demeanor of both officers and citizens can play a major role in understanding the context of an encounter, especially when that police-citizen contact is recorded (Gaub et al., 2021). While the use of body-worn cameras within a law enforcement context is relatively new, public support for their mass implementation is extremely high (White et al., 2017). A recent meta-analysis found that most citizens support agencies attempting to implement BWCs, although with the caveat that they are to be used to make officers more accountable (Lum et al., 2019). The ability to record both video and audio within an encounter can serve as a figurative safety net for all involved, simultaneously upholding the professionalism of officers and reducing the chance of an unlawful act from occurring (White et al., 2017). However, in the event in which poor demeanor is displayed by a civilian (verbal disrespect or hostility towards officers), feelings of suspicion, perceived danger, and even fear can begin to arise, resulting in officers taking more punitive actions (Nix et al., 2019).

2.7 De-escalation Training

Training programs geared toward teaching useful de-escalation techniques have existed for many years, with Crisis (Hostage) Negotiation and the Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) being some of the most prevalent (Herndon, 2009; Ritter et al., 2010; Rogan et al., 1997). Vecchi et al. (2005) classify the components of successful crisis negotiation as “(1) the ability to establish

communication and build rapport, (2) buy time, (3) de-escalate high emotional states, and (4) gather intelligence to produce the best intervention strategy" (p. 538). Since 1973, the Federal Bureau of Investigation National Academy has provided agents with a two-week National Crisis Negotiation Course (NCNC) covering "the basic principles of negotiation, crisis and suicide prevention, abnormal psychology, third-party intermediaries, and equipment and technical consideration." (Van Hasselt et al., 2006, p. 61). Van Hasselt et al. (2006) conducted an evaluation of the NCNC with role-play testing procedures to help simulate realistic "critical incidents," finding that participants displayed significantly higher active listening skills after the completion of the course. Active listening skills are considered a major proponent of rapport-building within communication (Vecchi et al., 2005).

CIT, a 40-hour training program crafted to help officers aid those who suffer from mental health vulnerabilities, has also shown some promise in promoting the use of de-escalation tactics/techniques over physical force (Compton et al., 2011). Evidence also suggests that CIT training can increase an officer's de-escalation abilities and tactics (Demir et al., 2009; Helfgott et al., 2021). Additional training programs like Verbal Judo have been shown to increase the likelihood of officers attempting de-escalation when presented with a use of force scenario (Giacomantonio et al., 2020). Although, this form of training did not result in any type of reduction in formal complaints ushered against officers in the months following training completion (Giacomantonio et al., 2020).

The lack of evaluations of recently developed curriculums like Active Bystandership for Law Enforcement (ABLE), a program meant to serve as a direct response to the George Floyd incident, has created a knowledge gap surrounding de-escalation training effectiveness. A recent multidisciplinary review of de-escalation training evaluations found that out of the 64 total studies

reviewed, only three were considered to possess high enough quality research designs to provide valuable conclusions (Engel et al., 2020). Furthermore, the vast majority of the analyzed studies resided within medical disciplines (nursing, psychiatry, and psychology), while also containing zero direct evaluations of training programs within the field of criminal justice (Engel et al., 2020). Another study worth noting is Todak and James (2018), which assessed how frequently officers use de-escalation tactics/techniques and how the use of such tactics influenced citizen demeanor. The study found that officers who spoke to citizens in a calm manner and made sure to treat them as equals resulted in citizens displaying a calm demeanor overall (Todak & James, 2018).

White et al. (2021) serves as the baseline upon which much of the current study is based, in both overall goal and research design. Officer perceptions, specifically regarding the topic of de-escalation, remain underreported within the criminal justice community. White et al. (2021) sought to correct this gap in knowledge by partnering with the Tempe (AZ) Police Department (TPD) on a research grant provided by the Bureau of Justice Assistance. The TPD was instructed to create a personalized de-escalation training program based on similar CIT and hostage negotiation training curriculums (White et al., 2021). After the finalization of the program, half of the TPD patrol force was provided the training through a randomized control trial (White et al., 2021). To test for the effectiveness of the curriculum, officers were provided pre-post examination surveys to gage their views on "(1) the importance of de-escalation tactics; (2) the frequency of use of de-escalation tactics; and (3) perceptions of de-escalation training" (White et al., 2021, p. 732). Results showed that tactics such as maintaining officer safety, communication, listening, and knowing when to use force were classified to be the most important, with tactics like compromise and non-threatening body language being valued the least (White et al., 2021). Listening, communication, and remaining calm were some of the most frequently employed tactics while

knowing when to use force or call a supervisor were some of the least used (White et al., 2021). There was little discernable difference in the perceptions of officers across demographics. However, a common viewpoint amongst officers was the general lack of confidence or skepticism surrounding the implementation of de-escalation training, specifically regarding the viability of the training within day-to-day police-citizen encounters (White et al., 2021).

2.8 Department Organizational Culture

The impact of policing culture on officer practices has been a topic of interest to researchers for many years (Paoline, 2003). Department corruption and the seemingly always-present "blue wall of silence" can create concerns about whether officers legitimately act in accordance with the law. Officers have a tendency and history of protecting their own, even when faced with evidence of wrongdoing (Kleinig, 2001). In recent years, a shift in accountability has been observed in how departments handle situations of misconduct. The creation of the smartphone has made the act of recording an officer-citizen contact as easy as pressing a button. It can be difficult to deny video evidence, especially once it appears on national news and in social media. Furthermore, by implementing BWCs, departments have been able to keep a better eye on instances of officer misconduct while simultaneously improving police-community relationships (Maskaly et al., 2017). While initially skeptical/negative towards BWCs, officers have even been found to be supportive once they start using them (Gaub et al., 2016; Jennings et al., 2014; White, 2014). However, one could argue that the use of BWCs inherently creates a notion for officers to always follow department policy, creating instances in which officers become fearful of using force at the risk of losing employment. Department policy favors the use of de-escalation, so in effect, one should have more officers attempting to de-escalate, even at the risk of officer safety. McElvain and Kposowa (2004) found that younger officers with less experience were significantly more

prone to be investigated for use of force allegations compared to older more experienced officers, leading to the belief that younger officers are not receiving the proper training to know when to use force in an encounter.

A relationship exists between the 'standard' officer and his/her supervisors, one filled with feelings of uncertainty and ambiguity (Brown, 1981). Departments are both political and business oriented. Officers are finding out more than ever that the survival of the department far outweighs the survival of one's career. If one's decisions in the field attempt to tarnish the reputation of an individual department, one's career may be severely at risk. Paoline (2003) points out that it is in the nature of an officer to be skeptical of new recruits and that only through commitment to the 'brotherhood' will they be accepted. Officer perceptions of de-escalation should function no differently in this regard. Caution would advise officers to remain supportive of de-escalation in an effort to promote department policy.

2.9 Current Study

Outside of White et al. (2021), little research has analyzed officer perceptions of de-escalation training. Evaluations of individual programs can provide valuable feedback on the relevancy of specific trainings. However, data relating to the 'real world' importance and effectiveness of de-escalation training may provide greater insight into what truly de-escalates high-intensity police-citizen encounters. It may be equally important to know if those individual perceptions vary depending on the demographic characteristics of the officer (age, gender, race, education, rank, etc.). Variations in officer perceptions can be used to help aid law enforcement agencies in improving their training programs. Therefore, promoting the increased use of de-escalation tactics/techniques within everyday police work, especially amongst officers who view those tactics in a less favorable light.

The current study aims to understand individual officers' perceptions of the effectiveness of de-escalation techniques. A mixed-methods approach is used to fully assess officer viewpoints regarding the topic of de-escalation and associated techniques. The electronic survey provides a benchmark assessment of officers' perceptions of de-escalation techniques using 4- and 5-point Likert scales. At the end of the survey, officers were provided the option to opt in to a one-on-one semi-structured interview to further discuss violence de-escalation in the field. Semi-structured interviews allowed officers to discuss the topic outside of the limited responses found within a survey and any additional techniques that were not explicitly included in the survey.

This study will address the following research questions:

1. How do officers view the effectiveness of de-escalation training and associated tactics/techniques?
2. What factors impact officers' perceptions of the importance, frequency of use, and effectiveness of de-escalation techniques?

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

3.1 Research Setting

Concord, North Carolina is approximately 63 square miles in size, located within Cabarrus County, northeast of Charlotte. The U.S. Census Bureau (2021) estimates the total population of Concord to be slightly over 107,000 as of 2021, with a race distribution of 62% White, 22% Black or African American, 14% Hispanic or Latino, and 6% Asian. Median household income as of 2021 was estimated to be slightly higher than $78,000, with around 8.3% of Concord's population living in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). The Concord Police Department (CPD) employs approximately 200 sworn officers and over 20 civilians assigned to one of three bureaus under the Office of the Chief (Patrol, Operations and Administration). Patrol is divided into four primary districts (Adam, Baker, Charlie, and David), with an additional mounted patrol division, foot/bicycle patrol division (created in 2016), canine unit and airport unit to assist when needed. Operations consist of the Criminal Investigations and Special Operations Divisions (Public Safety Unit, Street Crimes Unit and Vice & Narcotics). Officers from any of the three bureaus were eligible to participate in the current study.

3.2 Data

The data for this study comes from two sources: An electronic survey and in-depth interviews. The study was approved by the UNC Charlotte Institutional Review Board. The electronic survey was administered via Qualtrics to CPD officers to assess their perceptions of the importance, frequency of use, and effectiveness of de-escalation techniques. The survey used in this study is partially derived from the survey developed and administered by White et al. (2021), wherein officers were provided 106 questions capturing their views on de-escalation training, and the viability of tactics associated with de-escalation (how often they are used and the importance

of each). The majority of the questions found within the White et al. (2021) survey used a 4- and 5-point Likert scale to determine the viewpoints of officers. The current survey employs a similar strategy, assessing officer perceptions through questions designed in a 4- and 5-point Likert format. To limit the time officers would need to complete an online survey, even while on duty, the length of the White et al. (2021) survey was significantly reduced in the current study. In total, there were a maximum of 38 survey questions (24 of which used a matrix format). At the end of the survey, officers had an opportunity to opt into a one-on-one interview to further discuss their perceptions of de-escalation techniques. Officers who elected to opt-in were asked to provide a preferred email address or phone number by which to contact them to schedule the interview.

Survey distribution was handled by the CPD Chief, who agreed to send an email (drafted by the Principal Investigator) to all sworn full-time and part-time CPD personnel outlining the purpose of the study, the approximate time needed to complete the survey, and an anonymous link to the survey. This email also included a QR code flyer to increase the visibility of the survey, and copies of the flyer were posted throughout the department buildings. During May and June 2023, survey responses were collected and stored via Qualtrics. Out of the approximately 200 sworn officers employed at the CPD, 56 officers participated in the survey (28% response rate). However, 4 of the responses were left mostly incomplete, resulting in 52 total responses usable for future analyses (26%). Eleven participants elected to complete a follow-up interview (19.6% opt-in rate).

The semi-structured interviews were conducted both by phone and Zoom. Officers were provided the option of turning off their body cameras during the interview. All interviews were recorded (audio, video, or both) for the purposes of transcription. On average, interviews lasted approximately 18 minutes. All interviews were conducted with male participants, two of whom were minorities. The interview protocol (see Table 1) served as a guide and included 10 primary

questions on the topic of de-escalation, with additional probing questions when further explanation of a topic was needed.

Table 1. Interview Protocol

1. Provide some background about yourself, including your tenure at your current agency and any other information you feel is relevant.
2. What comes to mind when you hear the term *de-escalation* or the phrase *de-escalation techniques*?
3. What would you consider is the overall purpose of utilizing de-escalation techniques?
4. What kind of emphasis is placed on using de-escalation techniques within your agency?
5. What are your perceptions of the benefits of using de-escalation techniques? What are your perceptions of the challenges?
6. How do you view the effectiveness of de-escalation techniques?
    a. PROBE: How has the knowledge of de-escalation training techniques led to different kinds of interactions with civilians? In what ways?
    b. PROBE: How would you compare these techniques to the others you learn as a part of your training? [Academy, AOT, etc.]
7. How might the current climate of policing affect the use of de-escalation techniques within your agency?
    a. PROBE: Consider from both public and police perspective
8. What de-escalation techniques are the most helpful throughout your day-to-day interactions?
    a. PROBE: How do you apply those techniques in different types of interactions?
        i. An interaction you perceive to be "low threat" versus an interaction you perceive to be "high threat."
            1. How do you make that categorization?
    b. What elements of high-intensity/stressful situations make de-escalation more challenging?
9. If you have served time on a specialty unit at your agency, what changes have you noticed regarding how de-escalation is handled within that unit?
10. Do you have anything else you wish to share?

3.3 Variables

For the quantitative portion of the study, the variables selected for analysis were grouped into four categories: (1) officer demographics; (2) perceptions of de-escalation techniques; (3)

level of use of de-escalation techniques; (4) effectiveness of de-escalation techniques. For demographics, respondents' gender, race/ethnicity, age, education, training history (ABLE, FIP, CIT, DEI, de-escalation, hostage negotiation, etc.), law enforcement experience, and rank were collected and analyzed as independent/explanatory variables. Officers' perceptions regarding the importance, frequency of use, and effectiveness of de-escalation techniques were the dependent or response variables for this study. Eight of the 18 total tactics used as a part of White et al. (2021) were included in the current survey (see Table 3). The eight tactics selected were chosen based on their importance relative to this study's research questions. Additional supplementary questions were added to help understand which techniques officers view as the most useful/effective when encountering potentially aggressive subjects.

For measures of importance, frequency of use, and effectiveness, participants were asked to rank each of the eight de-escalation techniques using a Likert scale. For example, effectiveness was ranked on a scale of 0 (ineffective) to 3 (very effective). Importance followed a similar ranking scale ranging from 0 (not important at all) to 3 (very important). Frequency of use was measured using a 5-point Likert scale, where participants were asked how often they use each de-escalation technique (never=0, less than once per week=2, once per week=3, once per shift=4, and multiple times per shift=5). The scales used for frequency of use and importance mirror the scales utilized by White et al. (2021).

3.4 Analytical Plan

The current study did not employ any form of pre-post assessment on officer perceptions, like those seen in White et al. (2021); here only a single wave of the survey was collected. Unfortunately, due to the low total number of usable survey responses (n = 52), analysis is quite limited. Univariate descriptive statistics were collected for all 38 total variables (see Table 2 and

Table 3). In an effort to simplify the number of models needed, additive scales were created using the 24 variables related to measuring officer perceptions of the eight de-escalation techniques. For example, when looking at our measure of importance, the numeric scales used to assess officer perceptions of the eight de-escalation techniques were combined to create an additive scale totaling a maximum score of 24. A participant's additive score is representative of their views of the eight de-escalation techniques. A higher additive score correlates to a participant who views the techniques as more important, used, and effective when compared to someone with a lower additive score. Surveys lacking a complete set of responses for any of the eight techniques were removed from the analysis[1]. Since age was the only other numeric variable present within the dataset, bivariate linear regression was used to analyze the relationship between age and officer perceptions of de-escalation techniques. For the remainder of the binary categorical variables related to training and demographics, Welch two-sample t-tests were used to examine the differences in officer perceptions across gender, race, and previously-completed training (de-escalation, ABLE, HN, and CIT).

For the qualitative portion of the study, interviews were digitally transcribed using Otter.ai. After the removal of any identifiable information pertaining to the participants, the transcripts were imported into the program NVivo for the purposes of thematic analysis. The transcripts were coded for expected and emergent themes based on the questions asked as a part of the semi-structured interview. Transcripts were manually coded twice to ensure that all initial codes were representative of the sample. To maintain the anonymity of the participants, officer names were replaced with numerical codes (e.g., Officer #201) when reporting direct quotes.

[1] Five surveys were excluded from each additive scale measuring officer perceptions of effectiveness and importance. Ten surveys were excluded from the additive scale measuring the frequency of use of de-escalation techniques.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics, participant demographics and training history

Category	Group	Total Sample (n = 52)	Interviews (n = 11)
		N (%)	
Gender	Male	46 (88.46)	10 (90.91)
	Female	5 (9.62)	0 (0)
Race	White	44 (84.62)	8 (72.73)
	Minority	8 (15.38)	2 (18.18)
Rank	Command staff	7 (13.46)	2 (18.18)
	K9	1 (1.92)	1 (9.09)
	Mid-level supervisor	4 (7.69)	1 (9.09)
	MPO	9 (17.31)	1 (9.09)
	Police officer	18 (34.61)	4 (36.36)
	Police sergeant	13 (25.00)	1 (9.09)
Tenure	Less than a year	2 (3.85)	2 (18.18)
	1 – 2 years	6 (11.54)	2 (18.18)
	3 – 5 years	9 (17.31)	2 (18.18)
	6 – 10 years	8 (15.38)	1 (9.09)
	Over 10 years	27 (51.92)	3 (27.27)
Education	High school diploma / GED	3 (5.77)	0 (0)
	Some college	11 (21.15)	2 (18.18)
	Two-year degree	10 (19.23)	2 (18.18)
	Four-year degree	18 (34.62)	2 (18.18)
	Advanced degree	10 (19.23)	4 (36.36)
Previous Departments	0	25 (48.08)	9 (81.82)
	1	19 (36.54)	0 (0)
	2 or more	8 (15.38)	1 (9.09)
Current De-escalation Training	Tactical	4 (7.69)	0 (0)
	Verbal	1 (1.92)	3 (27.27)
	Both	47 (90.38)	7 (63.64)
Previous De-escalation Training	Yes = 1	30 (58.82)	6 (54.55)
FIP	Yes = 1	48 (92.31)	9 (81.82)
CIT	Yes = 1	43 (82.69)	6 (54.55)
HN	Yes = 1	8 (15.38)	1 (9.09)
ABLE	Yes = 1	46 (88.46)	8 (72.73)
DEI	Yes = 1	50 (96.15)	9 (81.82)

Note: Gender groups do not total to sample size due to incomplete survey responses. One interview participant did not complete the survey

Table 3. Descriptive statistics, outcome variables

Category	Technique	Total Sample (n = 52)				
		Group				
Importance		Not important at all	Somewhat unimportant	Somewhat important	Very important	
	Patience	0	1	6	45	
	Communication	0	0	3	48	
	Knowing when to use force	0	0	2	47	
	Knowing when not use force	0	0	3	49	
	Maintaining officer safety	0	0	1	49	
	Listening	0	0	8	44	
	Non-threatening body language	0	1	20	31	
	Staying calm	0	0	4	48	
Frequency of Use		Never	Less than once per week	Once per week	Once per shift	Multiple times per shift
	Patience	2	6	0	4	40
	Communication	2	2	0	0	48
	Knowing when to use force	2	16	7	11	13
	Knowing when not use force	2	13	3	12	20
	Maintaining officer safety	2	3	3	1	39
	Listening	2	1	1	0	44
	Non-threatening body language	3	5	1	6	36
	Staying calm	2	2	3	2	43
Effectiveness		Ineffective	Somewhat ineffective	Somewhat effective	Very ineffective	
	Patience	0	1	22	26	
	Communication	0	0	13	36	
	Knowing when to use force	0	0	10	38	
	Knowing when not use force	0	0	10	38	
	Maintaining officer safety	0	1	9	38	
	Listening	0	2	13	34	
	Non-threatening body language	1	2	23	23	
	Staying calm	0	1	8	40	

Note: Groups do not total to sample size due to incomplete survey responses.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS OF QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

Unfortunately, the CPD did not provide a demographic breakdown of the entire department, preventing our ability to compare the sample of officers who completed the survey to the larger department population (N = 200). However, it is important to note that the vast majority of our sample came from officers who were (1) tenured at the CPD for over 10 years, (2) white males, (3) 41 years old on average, (4) possessed at least a four-year college degree, and (5) held some form of management position within the department.

4.1 Importance of De-escalation Techniques

For ordinal categorical variables such as tenure, education, and type of de-escalation training taken, the sample sizes were too small to run any form of complex analysis due to the lack of variation in participant responses. Table 4 displays the mean score for each de-escalation technique across tenure, ranked from the most important technique to the least. Visually, there are

Table 4. Ranked Importance of De-escalation Techniques, by tenure

Techniques by rank (ordered by highest to lowest mean score)	Overall n = 52	1 year or less n = 2		1 – 2 years n = 6		3 – 5 years n = 9		6 – 10 years n = 8		Over 10 years n = 27	
	Mean	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank
Maintaining officer safety	2.98	3.00	1	2.80	3	3.00	1	3.00	1	3.00	1
Knowing when to use force	2.96	3.00	1	3.00	1	3.00	1	2.86	3	2.96	2
Communication	2.94	3.00	1	2.83	2	2.75	4	3.00	1	3.00	1
Knowing when not to use force	2.94	3.00	1	3.00	1	3.00	1	2.75	4	2.96	2
Staying calm	2.92	3.00	1	2.83	2	2.78	3	2.88	2	3.00	1
Patience	2.85	3.00	1	2.50	5	2.89	2	2.88	2	2.89	4
Listening	2.85	3.00	1	2.67	4	2.67	5	2.88	2	2.93	3
Non-threatening body language	2.58	2.50	2	2.33	6	2.44	6	2.50	5	2.70	5

Note: Some ranks appear more than once to indicate a tie.

no significant differences in how officers ranked the importance of the eight techniques based on the tenure of the officer; similar results were observed when looking at education (not shown).

Table 5 provides the mean score for the importance of each de-escalation technique across both gender and race (white and nonwhite). Overall, officers ranked *maintaining officer safety* as the most important de-escalation technique (M = 2.98). Techniques related to *use of force* (M = 2.96 and M = 2.94), *communication* (M = 2.94), *staying calm* (M = 2.92), *patience* (M = 2.85), and *listening* (M = 2.85) were all ranked fairly high when compared to the maximum possible mean score of 3.00. *Non-threatening body language* was the only technique that received a less-favorable rating (M = 2.58) when compared to those previously mentioned. In terms of how male and female officers perceive the importance of the eight de-escalation techniques, only two differences reach statistical significance: Female officers rank both *patience* (M = 3.00) and *listening* (M = 3.00) higher than men (M = 2.83 and M = 2.83). White and minority officers rank the importance of de-escalation techniques about the same, with only one difference that is statistically significant: Minority officers rank *patience* (M = 3.00) higher than white officers (M = 2.82). Results parallel much of what was found within White et al. (2021). However, due to the incredibly small subsamples of both females and minorities that engaged with the survey, these findings should be taken with great caution.

Figure 1 displays the relationship between age and the perceptions of how officers rank the importance of de-escalation techniques (additive scale). The relationship was not statistically significant, meaning there was no discernable difference in how officers rank the importance of de-escalation techniques as officer age (and likely experience) increases.

Welch two-sample t-tests were used to analyze the mean differences across officer perceptions of the importance of de-escalation techniques when they have completed various

training programs (ABLE, CIT, and hostage negotiation). Officers who had completed ABLE and had taken previous de-escalation training in the past ranked the importance of *staying calm* (*M* = 2.91 and *M* = 2.86) lower than officers who did not complete such training programs (*M* = 3.00 and *M* = 3.00). These mean differences were both statistically significant (ABLE: *T* = 2.070, *p*-value = 0.044; Previous De-escalation Training: *T* = 2.112, *p*-value = 0.043), however, they were not in the expected direction. Officers who had completed hostage negotiation training ranked the importance of *patience* (*M* = 3.00) higher than those who had not completed hostage negotiation training (*M* = 2.81). This mean difference was statistically significant and in the expected direction (*T* = -2.705, *p*-value = 0.009). Overall, officer demographics and training history have little to no impact on the way in which they perceive the importance of de-escalation techniques.

Figure 1. Relationship between age and the additive measure for importance

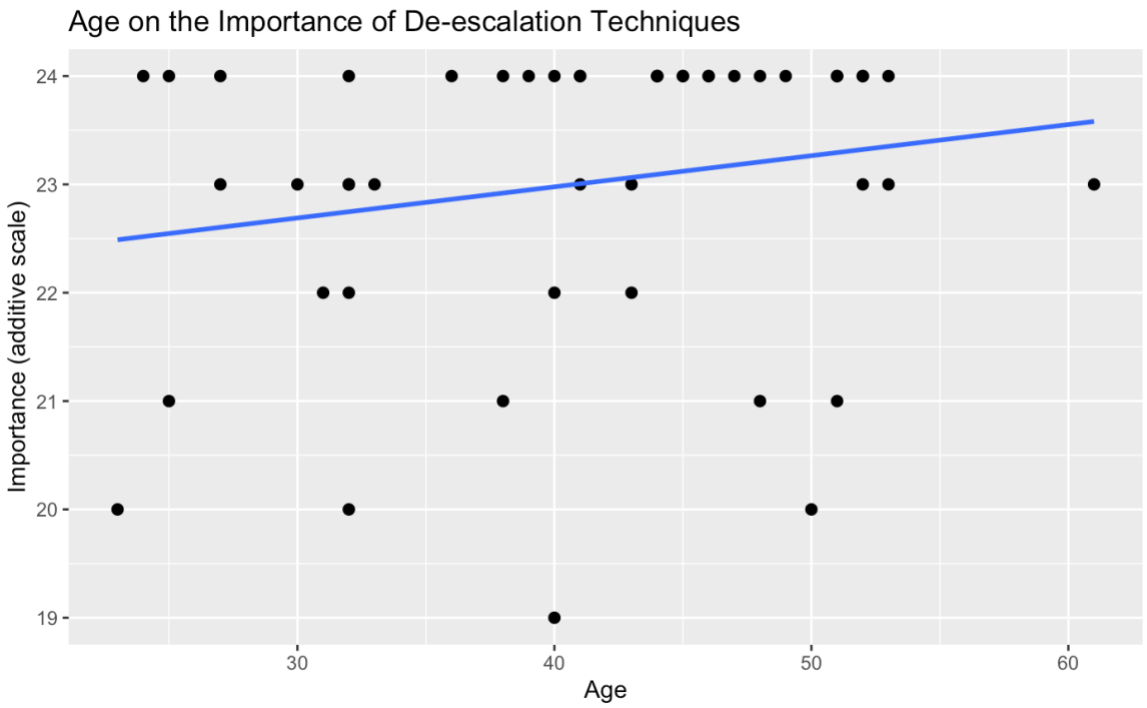


Table 5. Ranked Importance of De-escalation Techniques, by gender and race

Technique by rank (ordered by highest to lowest mean score)	Overall n = 52	Male n = 46		Female n = 5		*T*	Sign.		White n = 44		Minority n = 8		*T*	Sign.	
	Mean	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank				Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank			
Maintaining officer safety	2.98	2.98	1	3.00	1	1.000	0.323		3.00	1	2.88	2	1.000	0.351	
Knowing when to use force	2.96	2.95	2	3.00	1	1.432	0.160		2.95	2	3.00	1	-1.432	0.160	
Communication	2.94	2.93	3	3.00	1	1.773	0.083		2.95	2	2.88	2	0.608	0.560	
Knowing when not to use force	2.94	2.93	3	3.00	1	1.772	0.083		2.93	3	3.00	1	-1.774	0.083	
Staying calm	2.92	2.93	3	2.80	2	-0.663	0.542		2.93	3	2.88	2	0.434	0.675	
Patience	2.85	2.83	4	3.00	1	2.697	0.009	**	2.82	5	3.00	1	-2.705	0.009	**
Listening	2.85	2.83	4	3.00	1	3.078	0.004	**	2.84	4	2.88	2	-0.249	0.808	
Non-threatening body language	2.58	2.56	5	2.60	3	0.135	0.898		2.61	6	2.38	3	1.192	0.261	

**p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001*

4.2 Frequency of Use of De-escalation Techniques

Similar to how officers ranked the importance of de-escalation techniques across varying levels of tenure and educational experience, there was little visual difference in how these same officers ranked the usage of the same techniques. Table 6 displays the mean scores and ranked order of the most-used techniques according to the officers surveyed. Overall, officers viewed *communication* as the most-utilized de-escalation technique (M = 3.73). Techniques such as *listening* (M = 3.72), *staying calm* (M = 3.57), *maintaining officer safety* (M = 3.50), and *patience* (M = 3.42) were also ranked highly. *Non-threatening body language* (M = 3.31), *knowing when to use* (M = 2.70) and *not to use force* (M = 2.34) were all ranked lower by officers. Male and female officers were almost identical in both mean scores and rankings of the usage of de-escalation techniques; no difference was large enough to be statistically significant. White and minority officers shared similar perceptions, though one difference was statistically significant: Minority officers ranked the frequency of use of *communication* (M = 4.00) higher than white officers (M = 3.68). Results parallel much of what was presented within White et al. (2021). Again, these results should be taken with caution.

Figure 2 shows the relationship between age and how officers perceive the frequency of use of de-escalation techniques (additive scale). This relationship was statistically significant (T = -2.035, p-value = 0.048), with an estimate of -0.252, making the relationship negative, which means that for each year an officer ages, the additive scale for frequency of use decreases by 0.252 points. One could argue that this relationship is in the expected direction as older officers typically work fewer night shifts and more desk jobs compared to their younger counterparts, resulting in fewer opportunities to have to use de-escalation while on the job. Additionally, older officers may

not see the value in using de-escalation tactics, as historically, the police have been known to subvert movements of reform (Chan, 1996; Prenzler, 1997)

Welch two-sample t-tests were used to analyze the mean differences across officer perceptions of the usage of de-escalation techniques when they have completed various training programs (ABLE, CIT, and hostage negotiation). With officers who had completed ABLE training, techniques such as *communication* and *staying calm* were found to be statistically significant ($T = 2.047$, p-value = 0.046, $T = 2.975$, p-value = 0.004), although the differences were in the opposite expected direction. Meaning officers who took ABLE ranked *communication* ($M = 3.69$) and *staying calm* ($M = 3.52$) lower compared to officers who have not completed ABLE ($M = 4.00$ and $M = 4.00$). Officers who had completed hostage negotiation training ranked the frequency of use of *communication* ($M = 4.00$) higher compared to officers who did not complete hostage negotiation training ($M = 3.68$). This mean difference was statistically significant and in the expected direction ($T = -2.050$, p-value = 0.046). Overall, officer demographics and training history have little to no impact on the way in which they perceive the usage of de-escalation techniques.

Figure 2. Relationship between age and the additive measure for frequency of use

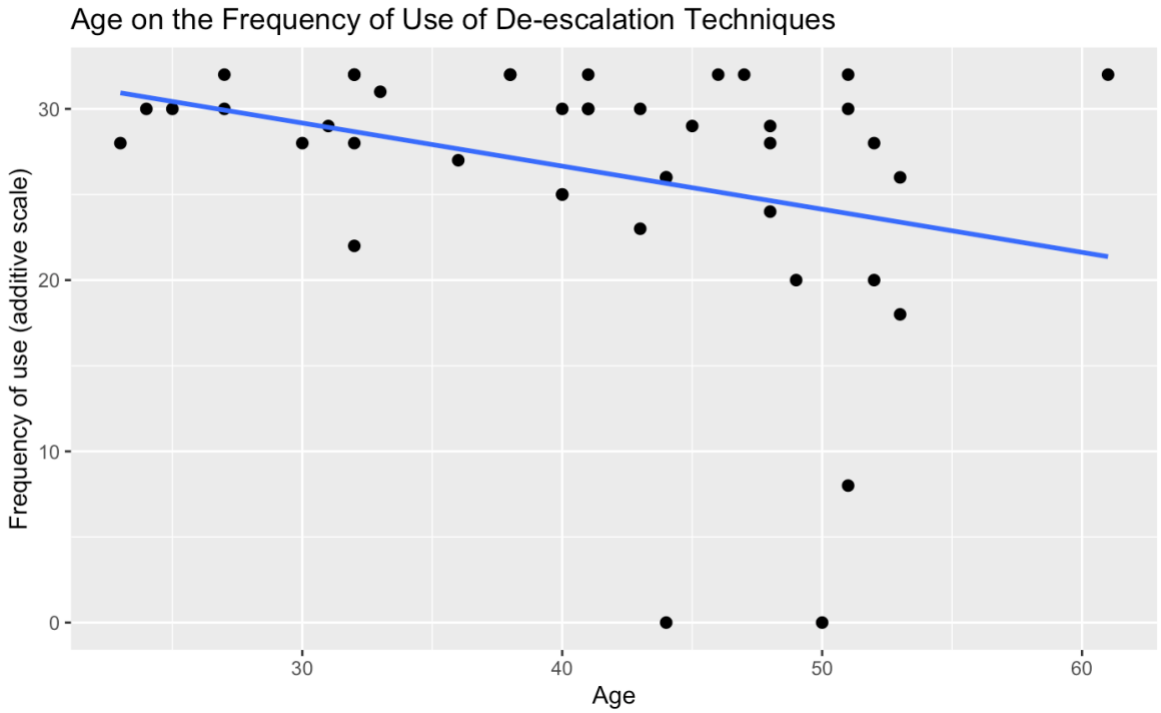


Table 6. Ranked Usage of De-escalation Techniques, by gender and race

Technique by rank (ordered by highest to lowest mean score)	Overall n = 52	Male n = 46		Female n = 5		*T*	Sign.	White n = 44		Minority n = 8		*T*	Sign.	
	Mean	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank			Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank			
Communication	3.73	3.78	1	3.20	1	-0.719	0.509	3.68	1	4.00	1	-2.050	0.046	*
Listening	3.72	3.78	1	3.20	1	-0.723	0.507	3.67	2	4.00	1	-2.010	0.051	
Staying calm	3.57	3.60	2	3.20	1	-0.503	0.639	3.56	3	3.62	2	-0.183	0.857	
Maintaining officer safety	3.50	3.53	3	3.00	2	-0.528	0.632	3.47	4	3.62	2	-0.359	0.726	
Patience	3.42	3.50	4	2.60	3	-1.015	0.363	3.38	5	3.62	2	-0.570	0.579	
Non-threatening body language	3.31	3.33	5	3.00	2	-0.418	0.694	3.30	6	3.37	3	-0.171	0.867	
Knowing when not to use force	2.70	2.86	6	1.60	4	-1.371	0.229	2.64	7	3.00	4	-0.702	0.498	
Knowing when to use force	2.34	2.46	7	1.60	4	-2.003	0.102	2.26	8	2.75	5	-0.969	0.355	

**p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001*

4.3 Effectiveness of De-escalation Techniques

The previously observed pattern regarding the lack of visual differences in officer rankings of importance and usage across tenure and education remains consistent when looking at officer perceptions of the effectiveness of de-escalation techniques. The absence of a larger sample does not allow for an effective test of these relationships. Table 7 displays the mean scores and rankings of the most effective de-escalation techniques according to officer perceptions. Overall, officers viewed *staying calm* and both techniques related to *use of force* as the most effective (tied M = 2.79). *Maintaining officer safety* (M = 2.77), *communication* (M = 2.73), and *listening* (M = 2.65) also received high overall rankings. Techniques such as *patience* (M = 2.51) and *non-threatening body language* (M = 2.38) were noted as being the least effective of the eight included in the survey. None of the mean differences existing between males and females or whites and minorities exhibited any form of statistical significance.

Figure 3 depicts the relationship between age and officer perceptions of the effectiveness of de-escalation techniques (additive scale). The relationship was statistically significant (T = 2.30, p-value = 0.026), with an estimate of 0.089, which means that for each year an officer ages, the additive scale for effectiveness increases by an average of 0.089 points. In other words, officers become more favorable to the effectiveness of de-escalation techniques as they age.

Welch two-sample t-tests were used to analyze the mean differences across officer perceptions of the effectiveness of de-escalation techniques when they have completed various training programs (ABLE, CIT, and hostage negotiation). For officers who had completed some form of previous de-escalation training, *non-threatening body language* was ranked lower (M = 2.21) compared to those who had not taken any previous de-escalation training (M = 2.61). The mean difference was statistically significant (T = 2.289, p-value = 0.026), however, not in the

expected direction. It is important to mention that only 14 of the total 83 analyses run were statistically significant, with the vast majority of those results having a $p<0.05$. Overall, officer demographics and training history have little to no impact on the way in which they perceive the effectiveness of de-escalation techniques.

Figure 3. Relationship between age and the additive measure for effectiveness

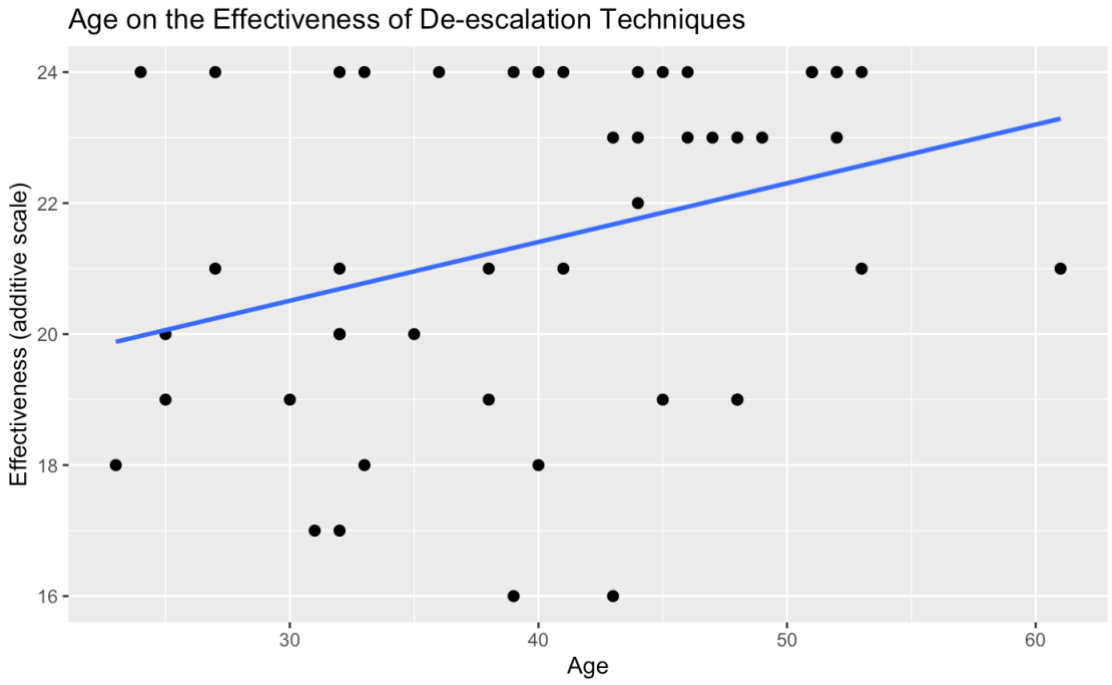


Table 7. Ranked Effectiveness of De-escalation Techniques, by gender and race

Technique by rank (ordered by highest to lowest mean score)	Overall n = 52	Male n = 46		Female n = 5		*T*	Sign.	White n = 44		Minority n = 8		*T*	Sign.
	Mean	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank			Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank		
Staying calm	2.79	2.81	1	2.50	2	-1.073	0.354	2.80	2	2.75	1	0.307	0.765
Knowing when to use force	2.79	2.81	1	2.50	2	-1.064	0.359	2.80	2	2.75	1	0.284	0.782
Knowing when not to use force	2.79	2.81	1	2.50	2	-1.064	0.359	2.82	1	2.62	2	1.037	0.327
Maintaining officer safety	2.77	2.79	2	2.50	2	-0.977	0.393	2.77	3	2.75	1	0.138	0.892
Communication	2.73	2.72	3	2.75	1	0.087	0.934	2.73	4	2.75	1	-0.102	0.920
Listening	2.65	2.65	4	2.50	2	-0.528	0.628	2.63	5	2.75	1	-0.619	0.547
Patience	2.51	2.52	5	2.50	2	-0.075	0.943	2.56	6	2.25	4	1.682	0.120
Non-threatening body language	2.38	2.40	6	2.25	3	-0.587	0.587	2.39	7	2.37	3	0.071	0.944

**p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001*

CHAPTER 5: RESULTS OF QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

5.1 Initial Codes

Table 8 provides a breakdown of the initial codes manually created within the NVivo program. The table is ordered by the total number of references of each major coding category, arranged from highest to lowest. De-escalation techniques were by far the most referenced coding category, totaling 97 references (23.77%) and appearing in all 11 interviews. The specific de-escalation techniques referenced can be viewed in Table 9. References to de-escalation techniques were typically made in response to describing what de-escalation entails. *Communication* was mentioned the most (23.96%) and appeared in 10 of the 11 interviews. Other techniques such as *listening* (14.58%), *patience* (14.58%), *staying calm* (10.42%), and those relating to the *use of force* (7.29% and 6.25%) were all referenced at a high rate, with a good portion of the 11 officers mentioning them within interviews. *Empathy* was referenced a total of 8 times, however, only 3 officers brought the technique up during their interview. Notably, the ranking of de-escalation techniques observed within interviews parallels much of what was observed with how officers ranked the most frequently used de-escalation techniques in survey responses.

Other coding categories worth mentioning consist of ABLE training (8.33%), challenges associated with de-escalation (8.09%), hesitant officers (7.35%), describing de-escalation (6.13%), current policing climate (4.66%), officer opinions on use of force (3.68%), opportunities for de-escalation (3.68%), effectiveness of de-escalation (3.68%), specialty units (3.43%), emphasis to use de-escalation (3.43%), and additional officers (2.94%). Understandably, the most prevalent coding categories heavily align with the questions asked during the interview process. While officer demographics did receive 31 total references (7.60%), most of those codes consisted of

only officer work experience. Graph 4 provides a visual representation of the frequency distribution of de-escalation techniques referenced during interviews.

Table 8. Initial Codes Frequency Table

Initial Codes	Interviews Mentioning Individual Code n = 11	Total References n = 408
	N (%)	N (%)
De-escalation techniques	11 (100)	97 (23.77)
ABLE training	10 (90.91)	34 (8.33)
Challenges associated with de-escalation	11 (100)	33 (8.09)
Officer demographics	11 (100)	31 (7.60)
Hesitant officers	11 (100)	30 (7.35)
Describing de-escalation	11 (100)	25 (6.13)
Current policing climate	8 (72.73)	19 (4.66)
Officer opinions on use of force	7 (63.64)	15 (3.68)
Opportunities for de-escalation	8 (72.73)	15 (3.68)
Effectiveness of de-escalation	7 (63.64)	15 (3.68)
Specialty units	3 (27.27)	14 (3.43)
Emphasis to use de-escalation	7 (63.64)	14 (3.43)
Additional officers	8 (72.73)	12 (2.94)
Lack of proper training	2 (18.18)	12 (2.94)
Officer opinions on department	5 (45.45)	8 (1.96)
High-intensity situations	4 (36.36)	8 (1.96)
Officer opinions on policy	4 (36.36)	6 (1.47)
Lack of experience	4 (36.36)	5 (1.23)
Lack of diversity within policing	1 (9.09)	5 (1.23)
CIT training	3 (27.27)	4 (1.0)
BLET	3 (27.27)	3 (<1.0)
Risks of the job	1 (9.09)	3 (<1.0)

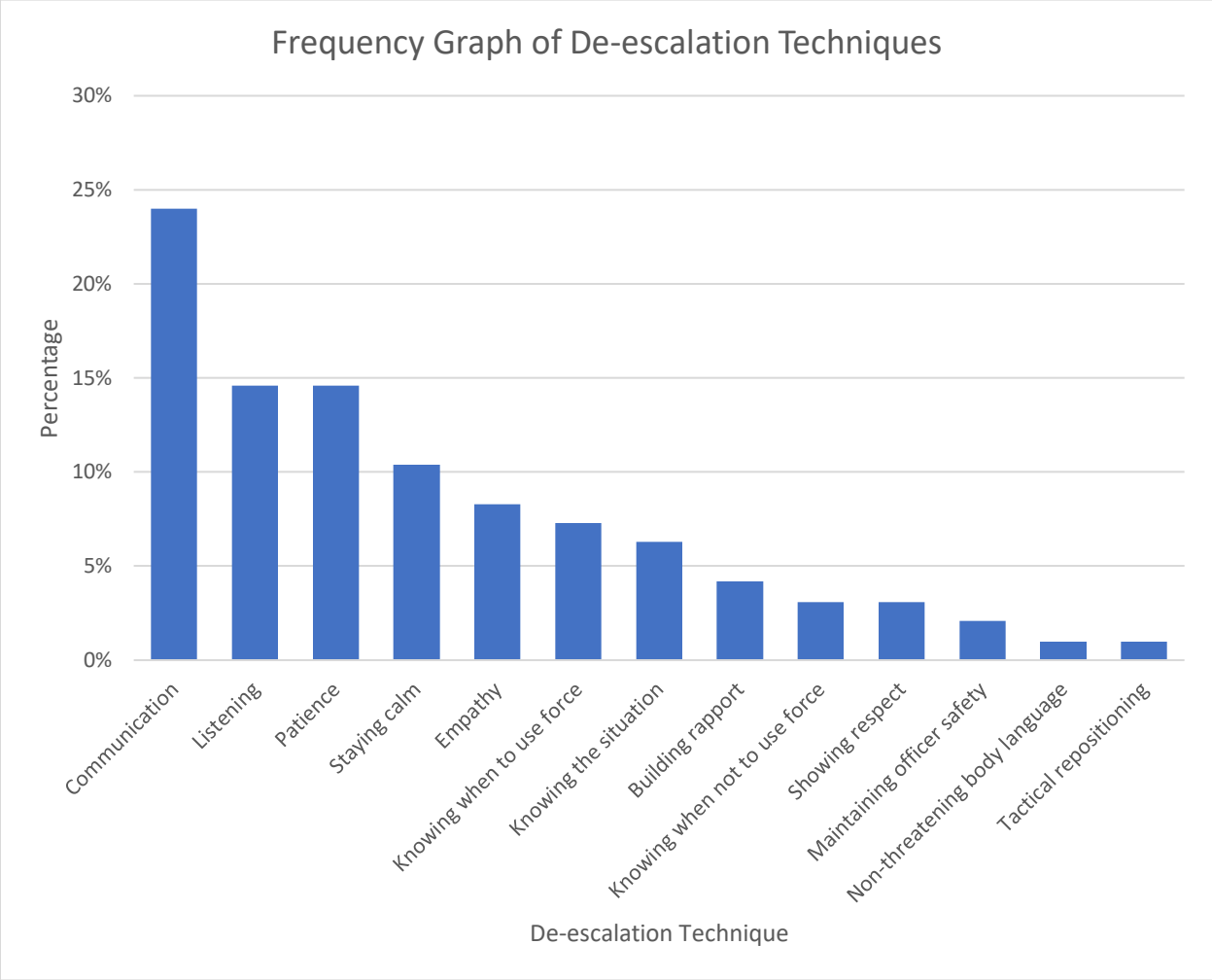
Note: Table is ordered by total references

Table 9. De-escalation Techniques Frequency Table

Primary Technique	Interviews Mentioning Technique n = 11	Total References n = 96	Reference Sample
	N (%)	N (%)	
Communication	10 (90.91)	23 (23.96)	*"Honestly, just having a conversation. Nine times out of 10. If you're yelling at somebody, it's not going to de-escalate the situation. So, I try to talk to them."* - Officer #208
Listening	7 (63.64)	14 (14.58)	*"So, if you're attentive and you're listening, and you can pick up on the little things they talk about, then you can expand the conversation with open-ended questions."* - Officer #203
Patience	7 (63.64)	14 (14.58)	*"Patience is definitely one as well, I mean, people will go from one side of the conversation to another with no logical way in between how they got from A to B, just kind of be patient and try to fill in the gaps." - Officer #205*
Staying calm	7 (63.64)	10 (10.42)	*"Being able to stay calm. And that is 1,000%, the building block of de-escalation. That's the Keystone. You've got to be able to stay calm no matter what you're met with."* - Officer #207
Empathy	3 (27.27)	8 (8.33)	*"And empathy goes a long way. Getting empathetic to everybody's situation and putting yourself in their shoes and trying not to let whatever kind of day you've had affect your judgment in that particular situation."* - Officer #202
Knowing when to use force	7 (63.64)	7 (7.29)	*"If somebody's pointing a gun at us, or somebody's got a knife, we're not going to be extra nice to them, just to get them to do it. And we're not going to not use force for the sake of de-escalation."* - Officer #201
Knowing the situation	4 (36.36)	6 (6.25)	*"My technique is really about realizing that this person is in crisis, we're not talking about a situation to cause the man with a gun to start shooting up a particular geographic location and things of this nature, but disputes, arguments, fights, you have to stop the physical violence from happening."* - Officer #206
Building rapport	2 (18.18)	4 (4.17)	*"Building a relationship and rapport. That way they can see you as a human and not just a badge, as far as verbal de-escalation goes."* - Officer #208
Knowing when not to use force	3 (27.27)	3 (3.13)	*"And we know when it's not necessary. We don't ever overstep that threshold of "probably could have talked to them a little bit longer and calmed them down."* - Officer #208
Showing respect	3 (27.27)	3 (3.13)	*"Something that I train, and it's a de-escalation technique, is you never just disrespect somebody on their own front porch."* - Officer #207
Maintaining officer safety	1 (9.09)	2 (2.08)	*"Definitely officer safety, because that's the most paramount."* - Officer #201
Non-threatening body language	1 (9.09)	1 (1.04)	*"Body language is number two, if they see you as a threat, because of the way you're standing, their visual cues, will tell them something different than what you're saying."* - Officer #203
Tactical repositioning	1 (9.09)	1 (1.04)	*"Create distance to avoid being assaulted."* - Officer #210

Note: Table is ordered by total references

Figure 4. Graph of total references of de-escalation techniques, by percentage



5.2 Interview Participants on the Effectiveness of De-escalation

While survey responses provide an in-depth look into how an officer may rank an individual de-escalation technique, the interviews serve as an opportunity to discuss the topic of de-escalation more generally. More specifically, how effective de-escalation is through day-to-day interactions regardless of the technique employed by officers. Table 10 summarizes the themes discovered across all interviews (n = 11), while also sorting those themes according to the two posed research questions.

5.2.1 General Effectiveness

Participants routinely emphasized that the effectiveness of de-escalation can be directly tied to the situation presented. Most participants agreed that 70-80% of all public encounters can be solved through de-escalation. However, if subjects become set on being non-compliant with officer commands, the ability to make de-escalation effective becomes null and void:

> You obviously have people that aren't going to listen to you no matter what, but when you spot somebody that's in a high-stress, emotional, situation, establishing a common ground baseline typically calms them down to where we can get the full story and figure out exactly what's going on. (Officer #208)

Subjects that are intoxicated, under the influence of drugs, or suffering from a mental illness can pose the biggest challenges when attempting to use de-escalation techniques. Participants point to lapses in "judgment" and the "capacity to listen" as some of the major side effects of impairment, thus resulting in situations in which force is used. The following quotes serve as examples:

> Alcohol is one that we deal with on a regular basis. Their cognitive ability is already impaired. So, they're already not thinking clearly based on whatever happened and a lot of times when you're under the influence, and you're at a level of anger, or just being upset, it takes much longer to calm them down and try and reason with them. A lot of the time, with them already being impaired, the de-escalation stuff that typically would work, either takes longer, or just doesn't work for them, and you kind of have to find common ground. And a lot of the time, that's what we try to do. (Officer #211)

Table 10. Themes and Research Questions

Research question	Themes that address question
RQ1. How do officers view the effectiveness of de-escalation training and associated tactics/techniques?	Theme 1: De-escalation works in most situations provided subjects avoid being non-compliant. Theme 2: Communication, active listening, patience, and remaining calm are all among the most common/referenced de-escalation methods. Theme 3: Officers view use of force as a last resort. Theme 4: Additional officers can both hinder and help de-escalation efforts. Theme 5: Officers view ABLE and CIT training in a favorable light.
	Overlapping Theme: Effectiveness can be tied directly to the individual characteristics of the suspect and the officers on the scene.
RQ2. What factors impact officers' perceptions of the importance, frequency of use and effectiveness of de-escalation techniques?	Theme 7: The experience, training, and hesitancy of the individual officer play a role in how de-escalation techniques are used. Theme 8: The current negative climate surrounding use of force incidents can contribute to hesitancy and frequency of use. Theme 9: Emphasis from upper management and through department policy/training can influence frequency of use and importance of associated techniques. Theme 10: Gender and age appear to play a role in an officer's opportunity to effectively de-escalate a situation.

> If you're dealing with somebody who's going through some sort of mental crisis, sometimes there's just nothing you can say to somebody to get through to them to calm down. I've had quite a few where de-escalation techniques work great, even in mental crisis, because they want to be heard. Whether it's something that makes no sense whatsoever, but just listening to them can them calm down. I've had other situations where it's just you basically talking to a brick wall, and nothing you say gets through. (Officer #205)

Additional challenges outside of typical mental impairment are usually related to the specific situation officers become involved in, such as scenarios where those involved are already violent or there is a domestic dispute/altercation. For example, these officers mention:

> Other barriers are just kind of violent, volatile situations. Like you come in, and it's already violent, there's not much you can do. Sometimes you just have to go in immediately and use force, and sometimes you can calm it down afterward once you get them restrained. But just depending on the person, at that point, if they're already at a nine, it's hard to bring them back down. (Officer #205)

> Anytime there's a child involved with parents; de-escalation is very tough to get through. For example, when you're talking about verbal situations between husband and wife, over a child, and either the mom or the dad is not getting their way or isn't going to get their way due to this situation. If we are not there quick enough, or soon enough, and multiple jabs or blows are taken at one another. Sometimes it's very difficult to de-escalate that situation due to the fact that their spouse, ex-spouse, or the person who's making them upset, won't stop. And they know they're pushing the limits. (Officer #203)

Participants who serve in specialty units detail how de-escalation can vary depending on the situation for which they are called. For example, participants who serve time on SWAT typically respond to high-intensity encounters with potentially dangerous offenders, which typically does not allow much room for de-escalation. Their job in that situation is to control the people inside and neutralize the threat to ensure public safety. A canine handler may look at de-escalation a little differently, where the dog itself is viewed as a de-escalation technique/method, as described by this canine handler:

> Just seeing the canine unit car come up, they know there's a dog back there. You think about all the other force offerings that we have, right? You think about the pepper spray, the taser, everything like that. Those all are not fun, but just the thought of getting bitten by a dog is something that really gets people to be like

> "Okay, what do they want from me, so we can't have this happen…" A lot of times it's not even used just in violent situations or hot situations. Sometimes it's somebody who's going through something emotionally. I'm fortunate enough with the dog that I have, he can get out, he can meet and see people. Sometimes it's just "Hey, I want to see the dog." Especially with juveniles that are going through a tough day or a tough time. They just want to see the dog and I allow them to see and pet the dog and that helps calm them down. (Officer #211)

5.2.2 Use of Force

While de-escalation attempts may not work in 20% of public encounters (according to participants), these officers still view instances where use of force occurs as suboptimal and dangerous. Recalling how officers ranked the importance of all eight de-escalation techniques, *maintaining officer safety* received the highest rank across all 52 survey responses. Use-of-force situations can prove to be deadly for both the officers and subjects involved, so from a safety standpoint it is reasonable that these officers view using force as a last resort. Officer #203 states:

> Basically, we walk into every situation trying not to get into the use of force. Cops don't like getting punched in the face. We don't like getting into fights. That's more of a way for us to get injured, more of a way for somebody else to get injured, and more of a way to put ourselves in a bad situation for something to go wrong. So, the more we can alleviate the pressure and get [the encounter] back to a calm state, the better off we are anyway. So, most cops don't like to get physical with anybody they're dealing with just because of the fact of their own safety. It only takes one good shot to put an officer on the defense rather than on the offense. (Officer #203)

Furthermore, participants weighed in on the costs and benefits of getting into a use of force encounter. Despite some officers experiencing a momentary rush of excitement during a fight with an impaired subject, the time commitment of filling out paperwork related to use of force incidents is rarely worth it. Department policy dictates that all officers must detail exactly how, when, and why force was used during an encounter, and most participants stated they seek to avoid this outcome whenever possible. Officers describe use of force scenarios as follows:

> When we deal with a lot of the clientele that we have, they're usually at their worst. We recognize that and, again, if we end up having to use force on somebody, it takes a lot more time. Most of our officers don't want to be stuck in here typing up reports as to what happened. They would rather be out doing their thing and

> traveling around and doing what police officers do. But typing up reports is not something that they want to do. (Officer #209)

> Line officers don't want to go and fight the dude who's drunk at Twin Peaks on Friday night. That's not fun for anybody. Lasts 30 seconds, and then you got four hours of paperwork to follow up with. So, everybody wants to de-escalate. It's just a matter of if you can. (Officer #201)

5.2.3 Additional Officers

One may assume that the more officers you have in a given situation would (1) reduce the potential risk involved and (2) increase the success of de-escalation. While this may be true in some encounters, there are certain drawbacks to having too many officers present at a particular scene. Provided officers are dealing with a subject suffering from a mental illness, it may be ill advised to have an abundance of officers present. Certain subjects may internalize that they are viewed as a threat by law enforcement and begin to engage in activity counterproductive to de-escalation efforts. Participants detail:

> Sometimes too many people respond, and people take that almost as a show of force. Like you're dealing one on one with somebody, but you got four officers showing up. Sometimes they automatically go into defense mode because they think they've done something wrong, just because so many officers are there, and they kind of shut down. Any talks with them can kind of go south quick. (Officer #205)

> It just kind of depends on what kind of call you're on. There are some calls where a bunch of officers is counterproductive to de-escalation. So, it would just depend on what kind of call it is. If somebody's threatening to kill themselves, you don't want 20 Cops showing up. (Officer #210)

However, most participants agree that having additional officers present can be advantageous in a larger variety of situations. Many participants view their colleagues as a support system, people they can go to in their time of need, whether that be during a physical altercation or a simple verbal conversation with a subject. Having additional officers can also act as a deterrent to subjects possibly looking to enact acts of violence. These officers describe:

> Teamwork is very important. Being a newer officer, there are some scenarios that I run into that, you know, not that I don't know how to handle them. But sometimes I'll maybe get slightly stumped and having another officer there to kind of lead me in the right direction to then help me conclude whatever we're on is always a really great thing. (Officer #204)

> Having multiple officers there makes the opportunity to handle the situation, if it did come to hands-on, much easier. At the same time, by having multiple people there, they're going to realize, "You know what, I'm not going to win that fight, so I'm not going to try them." (Officer #209)

> If it's me and one other guy, at best I can hope is to tie with him. If it's two officers and one other guy, I have the upper hand at that point, three, four, and so on and so forth. The more backup you add, the more advantageous it is. (Officer #207)

5.2.4 ABLE and CIT

Besides standard de-escalation training, programs such as ABLE and CIT add an additional layer of preparation for officers looking to limit use of force encounters. CIT, or crisis intervention training, deals exclusively with attempting to de-escalate subjects who suffer from mental illnesses. Past research has shown support for CIT as it has been found to reduce officer and subject injuries/casualties (Oliva et al., 2010; Thomas & Hendricks, 1991; Vickers, 2000). ABLE is a relatively new training program created as a direct result of George Floyd's death. The program was devised to encourage officers to 'speak up' and intervene during scenarios in which unethical or excessive behavior was being committed. While some officers may have initially felt that this program was a way to punish the many for the sins of the few, the participants interviewed compared the program more so to "buddy checking." Participants believed that both ABLE and CIT were beneficial:

> As far as mental illness, they provide us with crisis intervention training, we're all mandated to go through it, we learn about different kinds of mental illnesses and how to approach people with mental illnesses. I think that helps us a lot, because we're able to understand what we need to do in order to calm them down. Had we not had that training, I believe it'd be much more difficult to calm them down. But with that training, it's definitely been a lot easier. (Officer #211)

> [ABLE] is beneficial when it's used correctly, and when it's used at the right time. I think that no matter who you are, when you constantly have to give commands, or you're constantly trying to evaluate a situation to make the correct judgment, and you're getting the runaround, everybody's going to get frustrated, doesn't matter who you are. However, having the right person step in, and enable and correct you, will be beneficial. (Officer #203)

The chemistry between groups of officers was also mentioned regarding the effectiveness of ABLE. Officers who spend a greater deal of time with one another may be able to better anticipate when to step in. Officer #205 details how this works:

> If you work with people close enough, you start to learn everybody's a little button, so when somebody starts to kind of push on that button that ABLE training kind of really makes you think about not only watching the situation unfolding with whatever individual you're dealing with, but also kind of keeping an eye on your fellow officers. So, you learn to pick up on those buttons. And when you see [the button] getting pressed you can find ways to distract that officer. (Officer #205)

5.3 Factors That Influence De-escalation

Although some statistical tests conducted with survey respondents yielded significant results, the factors analyzed were only characteristics of the officers surveyed (demographics, experience, and training history). No measures of outside factors were collected. The open-ended interview format allows participants to explore both the internal and external factors that can influence de-escalation efforts. In particular, interview participants note that the effectiveness of de-escalation can be directly tied to the background of an officer. Recall that Muir (1977) argues the makeup of an officer was believed to dictate what kind of officer one could become. Officers possessing negative traits, such as a lack of communication skills, were viewed as less competitive by participants holding positions in the hiring department. These officers were believed to create greater difficulty in de-escalation scenarios due to their lack of awareness and mindfulness. Officer #209, who held management-level positions within the CPD, describes:

> When I was hiring people, the sergeant that worked with me in recruiting, we had this sort of mentality of, “We're not going to hire someone that's an asshole, and if you are, go work for someone else, because we don't want you.” Those guys make

> everybody's lives harder, because of the way they go into situations, and they try to escalate a situation so they can get in fights. We don't want them around, because, again, it puts all of you at risk, especially in this day and age… Sometimes you got officers that aren't used, or they don't know how to talk with people. And that's probably one of the most important parts of the job is you've got to be able to actually communicate with the public in which we serve. You got to go from the top echelon of society down to the lowest. And you got to be able to effectively communicate with all because that's what we deal with on a regular basis. (Officer #209)

5.3.1 Gender, Experience and Age

A repetitive theme amongst participants was the influence officer gender could have in a given situation. Some participants believed that female officers displayed a calmer and more approachable demeanor compared to male officers, allowing them to better de-escalate situations requiring the presence of a more 'maternal' figure. However, Rabe-Hemp (2008) opposes this notion by finding that female officers are not more likely to use supportive behaviors compared to male officers. Participants also noted the chivalrous nature of non-compliant male subjects, where they would be less likely to engage in acts of violence with female officers. For example:

> There are other situations where a female officer might be great with de-escalation, because of the fact that she's being viewed as a sister, a mother, a loved one to that person, or just as a friend. They come off a little bit calmer, laid back, a little bit easier going. (Officer #203)

> Female officers have done this more so than male officers, sometimes you'll run into this with angry drunks, they want to fight a man, but they don't want to fight a woman. And just her presence alone will de-escalate the situation. (Officer #209)

The visual age of an officer was also described as having a similar calming effect on subjects. An officer who appears to look older may project a larger degree of confidence and control over a given scenario compared to his/her younger, less experienced counterparts. Furthermore, participants possessing a greater amount of life experience were considered better equipped to handle de-escalation, even if these same participants were relatively new officers. Participants stated:

> I would say the last 10 years or so, since my hair is growing in all white now that has more of a calming effect on things. You can relate to people a lot. It's kind of like dealing with my adult children in a particular circumstance. So, you're the calming factor. It's not uncommon for me to go into a scene where a younger officer is trying to adjudicate a circumstance and that individual he's dealing with turns to me and says, "Can I talk to you?" (Officer #206)

> I was a post-George Floyd police officer, however, due to the fact of my age, I think that it lends me an advantage and I was also a guidance counselor. So you know, put me in a situation in middle school where you're trying to talk down two kids from getting in a fight, you're only going to ask two or three times before you give up and move on. So I think that my training and my life experience as well as my education lends me different than some of the 22 to 26-year-old officers that are coming out now. (Officer #203)

5.3.2 Current Policing Climate

An element of an officer's job resides in internalizing his/her own mortality. As one participant puts it, "sometimes you get dead doing this kind of work" (Officer #206). While an officer's life may not be at stake in every public encounter, a situation can quickly turn dire if one is caught off-guard. Officer #203 states:

> I do come from the post-George Floyd climate and understand why you can't have somebody with a license to hurt people out there. But that's not the main goal of most cops. And I think the one thing that's missed for most cops is you have to make a split-second decision based on what your brain is telling you. I have pulled my gun maybe 12 times in two and a half years. To me, that's not a lot when I see officers pulling their guns every day in other places. However, I will say that I've had one situation where somebody got out of a car fast and they had a black phone in their hand as they were turning around. That's all I could see. So of course, I pulled my gun and I'm putting my gun at their face when I realized that it's a cell phone. Now that I'm a police officer I understand more of why, but I do think that agencies are no longer protecting their officers. They want officers and they want to say they'll protect you. But they'll hang you out to dry, so it's not on them, it's on you. (Officer #203)

Many officers may share this sentiment but not have the courage to admit it publicly due to potential negative backlash from the department itself or the general public. One could assume that this line of thinking has led to the precipitous decline in officer retention and applications

observed over recent years (Bailey, 2020; DeStefano, 2020; Mourtgos et al., 2022; Rantz, 2020; PERF, 2019; Wilson, 2012; Wilson et al., 2010). Officer #203 continues:

> If I make a major mistake, my department is not going to back me, they want nothing to do with me, they're going to push ties as fast as they can. But that's almost every department today. That's part of the reason why we're losing police officers, and a lot of the reason why people don't want to become cops anymore. (Officer #203)

The current political climate surrounding policing has contributed to an increase in public interest in topics such as use of force and de-escalation. While it may appear as though these officers feel betrayed in some respects by their departments, one must be held accountable for their actions. However, it would be unfair to simply ignore the danger associated with serving in the line of duty. It may be hard for those who are not officers to understand the level of fear that can arise while on the job.

A common belief held by the majority of participants is this idea that younger officers are now becoming more hesitant to use force in situations that may require such action. Similar impacts can be observed with articles related to the "Ferguson effect" and the influence of BWCs on use of force encounters (Ariel et al., 2018; Deuchar et al., 2020; James et al., 2015). These officers point out:

> The issue with de-escalation that you're seeing on the road now is that cops coming out that are a little bit more timid, I guess you could say, or they go through training for de-escalation thinking that they're going to sit there and they're going to ask somebody 17 times the same question over and over and over again. For example, "Hey it's [redacted], get on the ground, get on the ground, get on the ground," and they just keep asking repetitively. Or "drop the gun, drop the gun, drop it." You got to move on from that. Because if you're not dropping the gun, at what point are you going to react? (Officer #203)

> I have a very good former colleague of mine who was beaten within an inch of his life. This was a very experienced guy and a white male; however, he adopted seven children of different races. And when I asked him, "Hey, man, why didn't you defend yourself?" And he says, "I wanted to, but the dynamic of having my face plastered over the news might have had an adverse effect on some of my children and their perception of me as a man and a father, so I didn't do that." (Officer #206)

Unfortunately, a side effect of this mentality is that both public and officer safety can be at risk, as officers may become overly hesitant to act. Officer #210 goes on to state:

> There are some instances where you don't have a choice but to use force. And using force never looks good. You want your officers to use force when it's necessary. But you want it to be reasonable. And you don't want them second-guessing themselves or putting themselves in danger, because they are worried about what's going to happen in the news media. (Officer #210)

Even with this potential flaw in the training and preparation of young up-and-coming officers, de-escalation is still emphasized above all else. A unique shift has taken place in the ability for an officer to perform his/her job duties in a manner that aligns with department policy. Officers can no longer be as quick to use force as in decades past. Officer #209 notes:

> With everything caught on body camera, I mean, sometimes they'll just cover all their bases, even if they grab somebody, where it doesn't really look like they used force. Their supervisors will make them do at least one report, just to follow what the policy says. That's one of the reasons they spend a lot more time trying to talk people into doing something than we did years ago. Now it seems like sometimes you're begging them to do something just because they know they don't want to deal with what comes with using force for that situation. (Officer #209)

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Very few studies have sought to assess the true effectiveness of de-escalation; even fewer have done so using a mixed-methods approach. The current study, while wide in scope, can be classified as small in scale. The goal of this study was to (1) assess officer perceptions of de-escalation techniques and (2) see if those perceptions change across various individual factors (demographics, training, etc.) in the Concord (NC) Police Department.

Several major findings emerged from both sets of analyses regarding the effectiveness of de-escalation. First, survey participants viewed techniques such as staying calm and those related to the use of force as the most effective when attempting to de-escalate. Non-threatening body language was ranked last in both importance and effectiveness. Secondly, interview participants believed de-escalation was effective in the vast majority of cases, with the characteristics of the subject involved (impairment and possessing an overall aggressive nature) serving as the biggest hindrance to a calm resolution. Furthermore, having too many officers appear at a scene was also mentioned as a limiting factor in de-escalation efforts, especially in situations involving an emotionally unstable subject. Communication was far and away the most referenced technique. However, participants who have served time in management positions consider officers who lack communication skills as detrimental to de-escalation efforts, reiterating the need for de-escalation training geared towards improving one's ability to communicate effectively. Supplementary training such as ABLE and CIT were widely considered to be beneficial when attempting to de-escalate those with mental illnesses or when officer-citizen encounters became unstable. Officer chemistry appears to be a major proponent in the success of any attempted ABLE intervention. It may be reasonable to assume that officers who lack the appropriate amount of chemistry would be

more hesitant to intervene when necessary. Although, officers agreed that using force should be a last resort option even when dealing with subjects exhibiting various levels of non-compliance.

Based on surveyed participants, race, gender, and training history appear to have little to no impact on how officers perceive the importance, usage, and effectiveness of de-escalation techniques. In general, participants viewed techniques related to their own safety and those related to use of force as the most important. Techniques centered around communication, staying calm, and patience also received high mean scores. The same set of techniques (communication, staying calm, listening, and patience) were noted as the most frequently used by officers. These findings mirror the results of White et al. (2021). Surveyed participants view de-escalation as an essential aspect of their jobs, with some techniques being considered more useful than others when dealing with non-compliant subjects. The age of an officer was found to impact the additive scales of how officers view both frequency of use and effectiveness of de-escalation techniques. As officers age, their rankings of the effectiveness of de-escalation techniques increase while the frequency with which they use de-escalation techniques decreases. Rankings of importance did not change with officer age. Future research should further examine this relationship. Officers who participated in interviews emphasized the need for younger officers to become more assertive in their ability to de-escalate situations involving non-compliant subjects. Unfortunately, officers may remain hesitant due to the overwhelming media backlash one can receive as a result of using force, justified or not. Officers reiterated that social media could paint a false narrative of any encounter, but that body cameras have been a helpful tool for justifying one's actions. Furthermore, participants believed that department policy heavily emphasized the use of de-escalation techniques to avoid use of force incidents as often as possible. A couple of officers brought attention to the impact gender and age can have on specific scenarios. Both female and older

officers were thought to possess an intrinsic ability to bring a calming presence to a scene compared to their younger male counterparts.

6.1 Policy Implications

These findings should be used as a reference when constructing future training centered around de-escalation. Training techniques related to the use of force should be seen as necessary to better maintain officer safety. Producing officers equipped with the knowledge of when force is needed to resolve conflict should be a department's top priority. Increased communication skills, along with active listening training, should create more opportunities for effective de-escalation. Emphasizing elements of SWAT training, that teach officers to remain calm in high-intensity situations, should improve officer decision-making and the effectiveness of de-escalation. Officers should be familiar with the advantages and disadvantages of having additional officers present at a scene and be able to dictate whether backup is necessary or beneficial to de-escalation efforts.

Furthermore, departments should consider lengthening training programs, such as BLET, to incorporate any necessary changes to the training curriculum. The lack of a nationwide requirement on the length of BLET programs can contribute to officers leaving the academy 'undertrained' for the job ahead. In a national examination of BLET across the United States, Sloan and Paoline (2021) point to the lack of time dedicated to community-oriented policing (COP) and use of force training. One could argue that COP training serves as the backbone for de-escalation-related training programs. If the younger officers of a department begin to hesitate to use force when necessary, the training those officers receive should undoubtedly be called into question.

According to the interviewed participants, the visual maturity of an officer plays a role in the effectiveness and opportunity of de-escalation. Increasing the baseline educational requirements to become an officer by requiring a college degree will produce candidates that (1)

possess greater life experience and (2) are more mature compared to high-school graduates. The delayed onset of potential candidates applying to become officers should increase opportunities for de-escalation by creating officers better equipped to handle complex situations.

6.2 Limitations

As with any study, limitations are inevitable. Due to the limited scale of the current study, the PI was unable to offer any form of incentive to officers who completed both the survey and/or follow-up interview. Additionally, while the PI drafted all recruitment communication, it was sent out to officers by the chief. While the chief may have improved the initial response rate of the survey, both of these facts impact who will elect to complete the survey and volunteer for an interview. The willingness of participants to engage in the study is affected by their views about the chief specifically and the department more generally. This recruitment method was preferred by the department, but it impacts the sample characteristics and can therefore skew or otherwise shape the results. Future research should administer surveys online or in-person without the use of a third-party distributor to limit any form of bias or predisposition from the participants.

Additionally, the small sample size poses a problem for statistical power. As such, it would be disingenuous to make any bold claims regarding the true effectiveness of de-escalation training. That said, the CPD is a medium-sized police department, and this study obtained a respectable response rate for online surveys administered among police personnel (Nix et al., 2020). Future research could overcome at least some statistical power concerns by using in-person surveys (or a combination of in-person and online) as well as including multiple police departments. Similarly, the diversity of respondents can only be described as poor in relation to both sex and race. Also, the demographic breakdown of the CPD remains unknown, limiting the ability to fully compare the sample ($n = 52$) to the population ($N = 200$). Future research should look to include a greater

percentage of female and minority participants to effectively gauge any potential differences in officer perceptions of de-escalation.

While qualitative methods are not intended to be generalizable, the sample of interview participants were rather homogeneous—particularly in terms of sex and race—which could impact the findings. Unfortunately, none of the participants interviewed for the current study were female, so their input remains unknown. Many interviewees had higher educational backgrounds and/or possessed management-level positions within the CPD. Typically, the answers these participants provided were more formal than officers with a lower rank and educational background. Officers in management positions admitted their lack of patrol experience in recent years and that their answers originated from their prior experience or department body camera footage. With the topic of de-escalation being as controversial as it is, officers may be disinclined to comment on their true feelings about a particular subject matter. Future research should look to interview a wider variety of officers (by position, race, and gender) to increase the reliability of the results.

In sum, officers view de-escalation and associated techniques as an effective solution to police-citizen conflict. Ideally, use of force should be limited to circumstances involving completely non-compliant subjects or to maintain officer safety. Departments attempting to improve de-escalation-related training programs should look to incorporate ways of improving both the communication and decision makings skills (as they relate to use of force) of its officers. Future research should further explore the relationships between officer demographics and officer perceptions of de-escalation techniques. In particular, the role gender, experience, and racial diversity play in achieving a non-violent resolution with a variety of subjects. Understanding the differences in the use of de-escalation techniques across officers of various backgrounds may have important implications for future policy changes related to de-escalation training.

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