

# **Research Assessment 1**

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Citation:

## **Analysis:**

To become knowledgeable enough to discuss and understand professionals in my chosen field of Forensic Psychiatry, keeping up with current events and research done pertaining to my topic seemed like a valuable way to start the mass collection of information. With the death of a schizophrenic woman who passed away after being tasered by county deputies making headlines recently, I decided to evaluate a research article about a new training program for law enforcement that improves their interactions with mentally ill individuals.

While reading the article, I learnt that present police training on mental illnesses has been limited and has had very little impact on the behavior of officers toward those who are mentally ill. With police officers coming in contact with more and more individuals with mental illnesses and inadequate knowledge on mental disorders, it is not surprising that the use of physical interaction and weapons is rising. What is appalling is that many law enforcement agencies are not changing their training programs to prevent this obvious rise in violence and inability to de-escalate situations peacefully. So what programs are they using and what are those training courses teaching?

The most well studied program is the Crisis Intervention Training (CIT) which is focused on improving relationships between police officers and the community mental health. While the program is commendable in that it teaches causes, signs, and treatment of mental illness, it unfortunately does not train all members and instead only specific members. This method is used nationwide and a quick trip to the Frisco Police Department's website shows that they use it too. On the website itself, it states that Frisco's Crisis Intervention Team is composed of officers who volunteer to become certified, which means that it is not mandatory. One question that came to my mind immediately, is the question of how many police officers will actually volunteer for such a program? If there are 300 individuals in the department and 56 of them volunteer for this program, how much of a difference will they make? 244 officers are still on duty and uneducated on how to identify an individual with a mental illness and unaware of how to properly handle them.

Now on to the proposed solution from the research article. The authors created a 1 day training program to address and solve the issues of other training programs. During this training, pairs of law enforcement officers interact with extensively trained actors in one of six explicit scenarios. The scenarios were devised input from EPS officers to ensure that the interactions were realistic. This course was more focused on changing behaviors rather than educating officers about mental illness. The scenarios include a call about a depressed individual who might have overdosed and a psychotic

individual having hallucinations. The results of the program showed an overall improvement of police interactions with the mentally ill.

One important factor to note however, is that this 1 day training program has not been well studied and that the results above are only from one study. Another thing to note is that, the article did not provide any research to back the claim that the CIT and other mental illness training courses are ineffective.

After reading this article, I wondered if the death of Natasha McKenna could have been prevented if better training courses had been implemented. Perhaps with better training, McKenna might not have been tasered 4 times in the time span of 20 minutes. Although Fairfax County Commonwealth's attorney Ray Morrogh reports that the deputies acted appropriately and did not act with malicious intent, I can't help but believe that McKenna's cell extraction probably could have avoided fatality.