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Predictors of Officer Self-Confidence in Police Interactions with Disabled Individuals in Florida

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PREDICTORS OF OFFICER SELF-CONFIDENCE IN POLICE INTERACTIONS WITH DISABLED INDIVIDUALS IN FLORIDA

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Olga Vega

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To: Dean John F. Stack, Jr.
Steven J. Green School of International and Public Affairs

This dissertation, written by Olga Vega, and entitled Predictors of Officer Self-Confidence in Police Interactions with Disabled Individuals in Florida, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

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DEDICATION

To my children, Parker and Zuri:

Always remember to be yourselves and to follow your dreams, no matter how crazy and unattainable they might seem to others. They are yours to own and yours to chase.

For whenever you are told that you could never break the glass ceiling, please remember there isn't one.

I will spend my life trying to inspire you as much as you have inspired me during these few years of your lives. I am forever grateful, and I am forever in love with you.

This one is for you.

Always and forever.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Professor Robert Peacock, Major Professor

There has been limited research conducted on disability-related training for law enforcement officers. Past researchers have either prioritized training specific to mental illness or evaluated curriculum content rather than training effectiveness. The present research focuses on predictors of officers' self-reported confidence in their ability to handle interactions with disabled individuals. The study took place in Florida and included 204 police officers. The study's findings showed that, despite a common belief of minimum disability training provided to police officers (Reaves, 2016), more than 35% (n = 71) of the officers surveyed reported receiving some disability training during the police academy and after graduation. Even so, more than 56% (n = 83) indicated that their training focused only on mental illness and believed that more disability related training would be beneficial to their careers. An analysis of the predictors of police confidence supported a role for training and experience in strengthening self-confidence in interacting with the disabled. The study found that disability awareness training is associated with greater officer confidence in their interactions with the disabled. Finally, the full regression model found that officers with police academy disability awareness

training and on-duty experiences with disabled persons were more confident in their ability to handle the study's hypothesized scenarios than those without such experiences. This finding suggests that experiential learning could be a valuable addition to formal education for law enforcement officers. Policy implications for law enforcement training are discussed.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER PAGE

I. INTRODUCTION 1
Background of the Study 1
Disabled Population in Florida 4
Statement and Significance of the Problem 5
Purpose and Significance of the Study 10
Summary 12

II. LITERATURE 14
Disabled Population and Definition of Disability 14
Diversity and Attitudes Toward Disabled Population 17
Victimization Rates of Disabled Persons 21
Routine Activity Theory 24
Existing Police Learning Materials 26
Evaluative Studies on Law Enforcement Training 35
Organizational Learning Theory 41
Experiential Learning 48
Experiential Learning and Self-Confidence 58
Significance of the Study and Hypotheses 63
Summary 64

III. METHODOLOGY 65
Research Design 65
Research Questions and Hypotheses 65
Independent Variables 66
Dependent Variable: Officers' Confidence 67
Other Variables 68
Survey Method 68
Ethical Concerns 69
Procedure 70
Summary 73

IV. RESULTS 74
Description of Sample 75
Research Question 1: Police Training 78
Research Question 2: Mental Illness and Disability Versus Other Disabilities 82
Research Question 3: The Impact of Training on Officer Confidence 84
Summary 89

V. DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION 90
Interpretation of Findings 90
Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research 98
Implications for Law Enforcement Training Change 101

Conclusion 104

APPENDIX 128

VITA 140

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE PAGE

1. Demographics of Law Enforcement Officers 76

2. Other Characteristics 78

3. Police Academy and Outside Academy Training 79

4. Officer Encounters with Disability per Illness 83

5. Officer Encounters with Disability per Category 84

6. The Influence of Training on Confidence in Scenario 1 (Movie Theater) 85

7. The Influence of Training on Confidence in Scenario 2 (Crisis Intervention) 85

8. The Influence of Training and Experience on Confidence in Scenario 1 (Movie Theater) 87

9. The Influence of Training and Experience on Confidence in Scenario 2 (Crisis Intervention) 87

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE PAGE

1. The United States Disabled Population in 2014 15

2. Espoused Theory: Formal Procedures to Solve a Problem.....46

3. Theory-in-Use: How Problems Are Usually Solved.....46

4. Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle 51

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ACS	American Community Survey
ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act
AS	Asperger syndrome
BRFSS	Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Systems
BJS	Bureau of Justice Statistics
CLETA	Census of Law Enforcement Training Academies
CDC	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
CIT	Crime Intervention Team
DS	Down syndrome
EL	Experiential learning theory
NCVS	National Crime Victimization Survey
OVC	Office for Victims of Crime
OL	Organizational learning theory
SRO	School resource officer
SSDI	Social Security Disability Insurance
SGA	Substantial gainful activity
SIPP	Survey of Income and Program Participation

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The literature on disability-related training for law enforcement officers has been limited. Despite the growing population of disabled persons in the United States (CDC, 2018), and especially in the state of Florida, past scholars have focused mainly on mental illnesses and disabilities (Borum, 2000; Dupont & Cochran, 2000; Godschalx, 1984) and neglected to evaluate the effectiveness of existing training curriculum and its impact on officers' confidence in such interactions. Cases in which interactions between law enforcement officers and the disabled have result in injuries have also increased (Perry & Carter-Long, 2016). Such occurrences could be seen as a consequences of officers' limited disability awareness training. This study aims to examine how officers' training and their personal and on-duty experiences contribute to their self-confidence in interactions with the disabled.

Background of the Study

Robert Ethan Saylor, a 26-year-old with Down syndrome, died in 2013 after three sheriff's deputies forced him from a movie theater after he had slipped back in for a second showing without paying for another ticket. During the struggle, Saylor suffered a fractured larynx and died due to asphyxia, a condition where the body is deprived of oxygen (Vargas, 2019). In 2019, Saylor's family won a longstanding wrongful death civil lawsuit for $1.9 million. Although the settlement resulted in monetary compensation, Saylor's death led to public outrage and calls for appropriate and better training of law enforcement members on how to effectively interact with people with disabilities to avoid similar incidents in the future.

Down syndrome causes developmental delays, including hearing and motor skills as well as speech and language deficits, particularly in relation to poor speech intelligibility (Roberts et al., 2007). Many with Down syndrome are often perceived as difficult to understand and can struggle to formulate and elaborate on conversational topics (Martin et al., 2009). About two thirds of children and adolescents with Down syndrome suffer from hearing loss that can affect either one or both ears and range in severity (Roizen, 2007). As a result, when individuals with Down syndrome interact with a law enforcement officer, the symptoms and characteristics of their disability contribute to unusual and often negative encounters (Perry & Carter-Long, 2016).

Ethan Saylor's lawyer, stated, "Ethan was developmentally disabled, not a criminal" (Perry & Carter-Long, 2016, p. 13). Law enforcement officers might unintentionally misperceive their interactions with individuals with Down syndrome, who could appear inattentive or purposely defiant. Therefore, without much knowledge of Down syndrome, individuals' perceptions could lead to unfair and unfavorable attitudes and treatment. Down syndrome is just one of the many medical conditions that can prevent a person from fully comprehending the purpose of officer commands. Police familiar with Down syndrome may be less likely to view the lack of a response by Mr. Saylor as a failure to comply with their commands and as a justification for physical restraint. Undoubtedly, providing law enforcement with such knowledge could be crucial to improving their interactions with a wide-range of disabled individuals.

Another incident involved Linden Cameron, a 13-year-old boy with Asperger syndrome from Salt Lake City, Utah. Linden's mother, Golda Barton, called 9-1-1 asking for a crisis intervention team, as her son had a major mental breakdown and she feared he

could potentially become violent. When law enforcement arrived, Linden, triggered by their presence, began screaming and ran away. Within minutes, the pursuing officer fired nearly a dozen shots, hitting Linden in the ankles, shoulder, intestines, and bladder and leaving him seriously injured. Officers' body camera footage revealed that Linden had no weapon.

Linden Cameron had been diagnosed with a higher-functioning form of autism, indicated by impairments in communication and social interactions (Koyama et al., 2007). Despite having better language skills than many people with autism, those with high-functioning autism often report depressive symptoms and panic behavior in high stress situations (Whitehouse et al., 2009). Lack of understanding of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and the range of symptoms with which it is associated can also increase officers' misunderstanding of the behavior of individuals with ASD and reduce the use of available techniques to assist them (Chown, 2010). Therefore, ASD may contribute to officer misinterpretations in interactions, especially in situations where individuals might be unable to handle contact with strangers and execute a fight-or-flight response, attempting to find safety (Chown, 2010).

The aforementioned cases are only two of many interactions between officers and disabled individuals that have led to serious injury and loss of life (Perry & Carter-Long, 2016). Increased disability awareness should be a priority for those who interact with these individuals. This is especially true in fields such as law enforcement, medicine, and education, where practitioners cannot predict with whom their next encounter will be. The current study was designed to shed light on disability awareness training for law

enforcement members and how various, personal and on-duty, experiences can contribute to officers' self-confidence when interacting with disabled individuals.

Disabled Population in Florida

According to the U.S. Department of Commerce's Economics and Statistics Administration, approximately 19% of the U.S. population had a diagnosis of disabled in 2012 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). However, this number increased to 26% (61 million individuals) in 2018, making this group an even larger share of the public potentially interacting with the police (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2018). The CDC's (2018) National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities compared Florida with the U.S. statistics on percentages of adults living with various types of disabilities. According to the CDC's report and data from the 2018 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, Floridians suffer from the six main types of disabilities at higher rates than the U.S. general population; these are: (a) mobility disabilities (serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs: 14% to 13%, respectively); (b) cognition (serious difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions: 12.6% to 11.4%, respectively); (c) independent living (difficulty doing errands alone, such as visiting doctor's office or shopping: 7.1% to 7.0%, respectively); (d) hearing (deafness or serious difficulty hearing; 6.2% to 5.6%, respectively); (e) vision (blind or serious difficulty seeing, even when wearing glasses: 5.8% to 4.7%, respectively); and (f) self-care (difficulty dressing or bathing: 4.3% to 3.8%, respectively).

Due to the high levels of disability in Florida, this study was a means to examine whether law enforcement officers in the state receive training on disability awareness and sensitivity that would allow them to best serve disabled persons. It is, however, important

to note that the higher rates in Florida could be due, in part, to the large senior citizen population, given the higher disability rate among the elderly. According to the CDC (2018), 45% of Florida's elderly population (ages 65 and above) were diagnosed as disabled compared to 35.2% of the U.S. population ages 65 and up.

The term "disability" has different uses in different fields. Therefore, this study will define the term as:

> A physical, sensory, mental, or intellectual limitation that may restrict one's participation in society by creating struggles with daily activities (such as walking, seeing, hearing, talking, etc.) and may or may not require an individual to necessitate treatment or therapy (such as the use of medical equipment or prescribed medication).

Statement and Significance of the Problem

Interactions Between Law Enforcement Officers and Disabled Population

Considering the frequency of various types of disabilities within the U.S. population, it is imperative to understand the role that disability plays in interactions with the criminal justice system. Many researchers have explored the subject of victimization and various factors that might contribute to an individual's risk of being victimized (Mind, 2007; Sin et al., 2009; Sobsey, 2014). For example, German criminologist von Hentig (1948/1967) recognized disability as one of the primary factors steering criminal offenders to select potential victims, making the disabled more suitable targets than persons without any disability. In 2012, Hughes et al. found that adults with disabilities were at a higher risk of becoming victims of crime and 1.5 times more likely to experience criminal violence than adults without disabilities.

Cohen and Felson (1979) developed a routine activity theory focused on three components that, when brought together, increase the chances of a crime occurring. Those components include a motivated offender (an individual whose desire is to commit a crime), a suitable target (e.g., a disabled individual), and a lack of guardianship (e.g., police officers). The present study was a way to shed light on whether police training on interacting with the disabled and officers' personal and on-duty experiences with the disabled impact the officers' role as guardians whose job is to protect the citizens, including disabled individuals.

Law Enforcement Training

McAfee and Musso (1995), pioneered the study of law enforcement training on disability and whether law enforcement academies were preparing cadets to work with people with disabilities. Their analysis showed that most basic training focused on the role of individuals with mental illness in crime interventions, with only two states providing training on interactions with the physically impaired: Delaware and Kentucky. According to McAfee and Musso (1995), training is essential to provide better services to people with disabilities and help officers be prepared for various scenarios when interacting with disabled individuals. Since the 1995 study, the disabled population in the U.S. has increased, reinforcing the need for more research on officer interactions with this population.

More recently, Reaves (2016) found that between 2011 and 2013, 664 police academies provided basic training to all entry-level officers in the United States, with the average basic recruit training program comprising around 840 hours. However, there was no additional training on interactions with disabled individuals beyond the 10-hour

training on mental illness. Reaves indicated that the Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) guidelines on interactions with physically disabled individuals had not been implemented within most law enforcement academies in the United States. These guides offer practical directions on how to interact with disabled persons in an effective yet sensitive manner and how to recognize the particular needs common to people with disabilities.

Despite most academies offering some training on persons with mental health illnesses, other disabilities are not included, leading to questions of whether officers are ready to interact with individuals having other special needs. Police officers are usually the first point of contact for disabled people who are victimized, arrested, or witnesses to a crime. In some situations, beyond an individual's attitude toward disabled people, knowledge of a person's disability and awareness of how to handle and proceed with such interactions could impact criminal investigations and, if not handled properly, lead to potential litigation (Callahan, 1997; McAfee & Musso, 1995).

The aforementioned studies show that the disabled frequently come in contact with members of law enforcement after being victims of various crimes. Thus, the frequency of interactions between disabled individuals and police officers increases with each disability-related crime, including hate and bias crimes. This rate of occurrence suggests that law enforcement members should receive appropriate training to handle such interactions with suitable knowledge and attitudes. Without proper training, officers might feel uncertain or self-conscious handling situations involving disabled individuals, resulting in a lack of necessary accommodations for disabled persons, such as providing sign language interpreters, distraction-free environments, or mobility accommodations (OVC, 2010). Moreover, miscommunication between police and the disabled can create

situations in which officers victimize individuals with mental or physical disabilities, perceiving their unexpected behavior as a threat.

Diversity and Discrimination

Because of their health status, individuals with disabilities are often the subject of discrimination, prejudice, and negative attitudes, limiting their ability to successfully or equally navigate daily life (Kennedy & Olney, 2001). Moreover, disabled individuals are often considered minorities, different from the larger groups of which they are a part (see American Heritage Dictionary, 1996). Disabled individuals are protected against disability-based discrimination through the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which requires proper accommodations in various situations, such as interactions with medical, education, or law enforcement professionals (Colker & Tucker, 1998).

Studies on disability-based discrimination have created a greater focus on attitudes toward the disabled population, which are often more negative than attitudes toward people who do not have disabilities (Bruyère, 2000). Negative attitudes toward disabled persons that result in negative interactions are based on stereotypes, fears, and misperceptions from a lack of accurate information or experience with disabled individuals (Chima, 1998; Minton, 1999). Perhaps such attitudes also come from a society more focused on the disability than the abilities of the disabled. Attitudes have also been linked to behavior (Matthews & White, 1990). Attitudes can be changed through education (e.g., disability awareness training), experience (e.g., personal interaction with disabled persons), and simulation (e.g., presentations or videos), leading to an improved perception of disabled individuals by nondisabled individuals (Matthews & White, 1990; Miller & Cordova, 2002; Perry & Apostal, 1986).

Negative attitudes can also create negative emotions, which can affect performance. Positive emotions can improve one's performance, whereas negative emotions can weaken it (Compte & Postlewaite, 2004). Compte and Postlewaite (2004) found that fears caused by the possibility of failure have negative consequences, such as loss of concentration, and might negatively affect performance. Therefore, considering the aforementioned findings, reforms addressing all three factors (lack of training or education, lack of experience, and negative attitude) could improve the interactions between law enforcement officers and disabled persons.

Theoretical Framework

Argyris and Schön (1997) developed the organizational learning theory focused on expanding an organization's existing knowledge by creating, maintaining, and transferring new information. Many researchers agree that organizations need to stay current, updating their policies and formal procedures to successfully navigate globalization and constantly changing technology (Schwandt & Marquardt, 1999; Stafsudd, 2017). By acquiring and applying new knowledge, organizations can improve their performance, which, in the case of law enforcement, is essential (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990). Organizational learning a social process in which the members or employees interact to create knowledge and meaning in regard to action and outcomes relationship (Brown & Duguid, 1991; Nutley & Davies, 2001).

Fields change with time, and law enforcement is no exception. If law enforcement officers operated in an unchanging and stable environment, not creating, and transferring new knowledge would be an appropriate way of functioning. However, due to increasing

changes in population, laws, and policies, different fields today require new methods of operating to deliver services efficiently and successfully.

Unlike organizational learning theory, experiential learning calls for the use of experiences as means of learning and improving performance (Lewis & Williams, 1994). Although acquiring formal education is essential in many fields, informal learning and experiences could be valid substitutions in some (Armstrong & Fukami, 2009). One of the leading theorists behind experiential learning, Kolb developed an experimental learning cycle that consists of four parts: experiencing/noticing, interpreting/reflecting, generalizing/judging, and applying/testing (Lewis & Williams, 1994). This process allows learners to recall their experiences, reflect upon them, develop generalizations, and test them to create another set of concrete experiences. Although both learning methods can be used separately, engaging them simultaneously could lead to more significant and positive changes in law enforcement officers and community relations. Combined use would also allow participants—in this case, law enforcement officers—to learn from past experiences (or the experiences of others), gain formal education, unlearn undesired behaviors, and learn new behaviors that can produce more preferable outcomes. One preferred result would be having supportive and positive attitudes about disabled persons while avoiding negative generalizations or stereotypes that could prevent officers from providing the disabled with appropriate services and attention.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

Not many scholars have examined police officers' experiences working with the disabled population, their training, and how well these experiences prepared them for encounters with disabled individuals. McAfee and Musso (1995) surveyed police pre-

service training; however, they did not study the officers' individual experiences. Although police research has focused heavily on relations with people with mental illnesses and intellectual disabilities (McAfee & Musso, 1995), other disabilities, such as physical and sensory problems, have been largely neglected in the literature.

Over 25 years have passed since McAfee and Musso (1995) examined the state of law enforcement training in disabilities. During this time, the population of disabled Americans has grown (Altman & Bernstein, 2008), yet there have been no follow-up studies to determine whether law enforcement training practices have adapted based on societal changes. As of 2016, no police academies required their recruits to receive training on interactions with disabled individuals (Reaves, 2016). Despite many changes to U.S. laws giving disabled individuals more opportunities for equal representation in society, they are still subject to negative attitudes, disability-based discrimination, and prejudice that might cause their exclusion from what most people believe is equal access to society (Minton, 1999).

The purpose of the present study was to (a) determine whether law enforcement officers receive training in working with disabled persons; (b) measure law enforcement officers' self-reported confidence in their interactions with disabled individuals in any capacity, including interactions with victims, witnesses, suspects, or the general population; and (c) determine what role training (including police academy and outside the academy training) as well as personal and on-duty experience play in preparing law enforcement officers to interact with the disabled population.

Law enforcement agents should be equipped with proper knowledge of potential characteristics and symptoms of different disabilities to appropriately respond to calls for

service. Additionally, officers may need to adjust their regular proceedings and interactions to ensure that individuals with disabilities receive the needed services. It is important that disabled individuals (victims, witnesses, suspects, and other parties involved in law enforcement encounters) can express their needs, share their stories in their own way, and participate in any proceedings the same as those without disabilities.

Findings from this study could benefit law enforcement, people with disabilities, and the criminal justice system. This research is important in reducing misunderstandings and improving outcomes between disabled citizens and law enforcement. Moreover, results from this study will provide a better understanding of officers' personal and on-duty experiences with disabled individuals, which could be a valuable tool in assessing their readiness to handle such cases. Finally, this research indicates the type of training and knowledge law enforcement should receive to ensure that encounters with disabled individuals (such as Robert Saylor and Linden Cameron) do not result in negative outcomes. Although this study occurred with law enforcement agencies in Florida, the findings could benefit agencies across the United States.

Summary

Despite the growing population of disabled persons in the United States, law enforcement training has been brought to question on multiple occasions. Since disability has been recognized as one of the main factors leading to victimization (von Hentig, 1948/1967) and disabled persons have been victimized at much higher rate than their non-disabled peers (Hughes et al., 2012), it is essential to equip law enforcement officers with proper training on interactions with this population. Today, such training is often limited to mental health and does not include other types of disabilities (Reaves, 2016).

The following chapters will focus on the existing training and two theories, organizational learning theory and experiential learning theory, that support learning through formal education and through experiences. Despite the focus on law enforcement officers' training, personal and on-duty experiences will be explored concerning their interactions with the disabled.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE

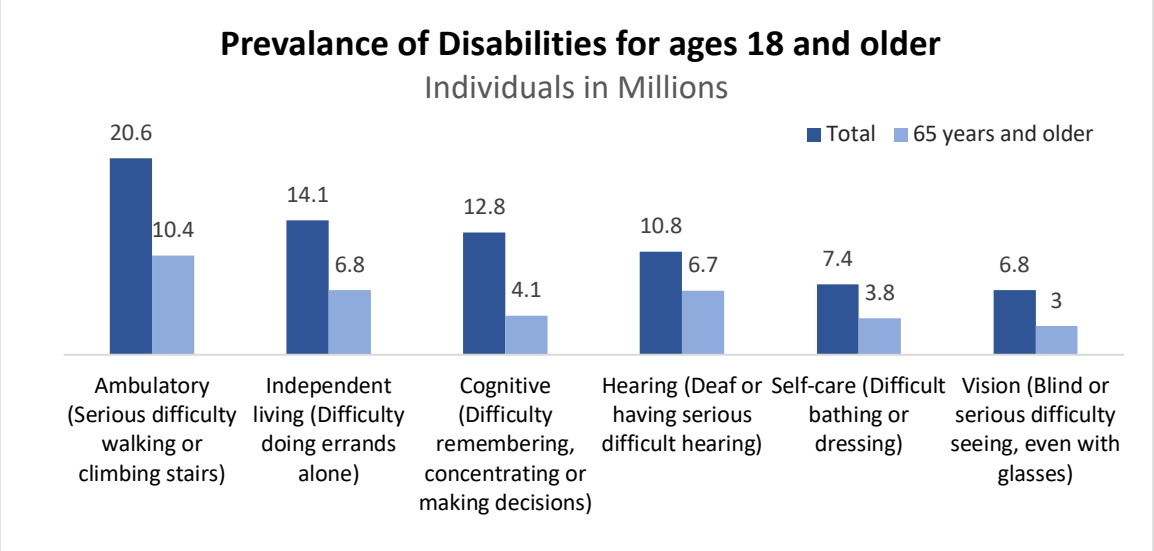
Disabled Population and Definition of Disability

A review of disability-related literature reveals that the definition of "disability" varies across contexts. For example, medical professionals define disability as "an extension of a physiological condition requiring treatment or therapy" (Brault, 2012, p. 1). Social models present disability as a disadvantage and consequence of two factors: the individual's mental or physical traits and the social setting (Samaha, 2007). Further, federal programs, such as Social Security Disability Insurance, view disability as a limitation or impairment of an individual's engagement in any substantial gainful activity (Social Security Administration, 2018). The Social Security Administration (2018) defines disability as a mental or physical impairment that can lead to death or injuries lasting for at least 12 months. From an international standpoint, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability defines disability as a physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairment that could restrict the individual's participation in society when faced with a barrier (Reinhardt et al., 2014).

Nearly one in five Americans live with a disability. Specifically, the U.S. Census Bureau (2012) found that 56.7 million Americans have a disability, and nearly half of these are severe. Per the definition established by the U.S. Census Bureau, an individual is viewed as disabled when having a physical limitation that restricts functioning, such as hearing, seeing, talking, walking, climbing stairs, or struggling with daily activities. Moreover, an individual who depends on an assistive device or needs direct assistance from another person to perform everyday tasks and cannot perform at least one activity independently is defined as a person with a severe disability.

Figure 1

The United States Disabled Population in 2014



Source. U.S. Census Bureau, Social Security Administration Supplement to the 2014 Panel of the Survey of Income and Program Participation, September–November 2014.

Although the existing definitions do not directly relate to law enforcement or disabled individuals who come in contact with officers, it is essential to recognize the conditions constituting a disability. For example, Lafortune and Balestat (2007) defined severe disability as a condition resulting in one or more restrictions in fundamental activities of daily living, such as eating, getting in and out of bed, bathing, or dressing, necessitating long-term care. Similarly, McNeil (1997) identified severely disabled individuals as those who are unable to perform at least one basic activity; need personal assistance; suffer from developmental disabilities; are long-term users of walkers, wheelchairs, or other mobility devices; are unable to perform any housework; or are between the ages of 16 and 67 and cannot work due to their medical condition. In a study of crimes against persons with disabilities, Harrell (2012) defined disability according to six limitations: vision (blindness or serious difficulty seeing), hearing (deafness or serious

difficulty hearing), cognitive (restrictions due to physical, mental, or emotional condition), ambulatory (difficulty climbing stairs or walking), self-care (difficulty with everyday tasks such as dressing or bathing), and independent living (restrictions on doing errands alone, such as shopping or visiting doctors).

As per the aforementioned definitions, physical disability can refer to various conditions and diseases that come with mobility, gait, and balance issues, including multiple sclerosis, Meniere's disease, brain tumor, Parkinson's disease, cerebral palsy, Guillain-Barre syndrome, and Arnold-Chiari malformation. Because some of these conditions can result from muscular neurological issues, they might cause difficulty or the inability to walk, unsteadiness, and trouble with a balance that could be short or long term (Giladi et al., 2013). Hence, individuals with such conditions might need to use wheelchairs, canes, service animals, or other mobility devices to assist them with basic daily activities.

The 1994–1995 Survey of Income and Program Participation showed that out of the 26 million severely disabled Americans, 1.8 million use a wheelchair and 5.2 million use a cane, walker, or crutches; thus, only 26% of the U.S. population with a physical disability uses such devices (Francis & Silvers, 2015). Therefore, law enforcement officers might face additional challenges when interacting with disabled individuals, as some of the conditions might not be seen or recognized right away or sometimes even at all. Additionally, considering that most severely disabled individuals do not use mobility devices, officers might be unable to discern an individual's disability.

Disability is not always apparent from the outside; about 10% of people in the United States suffer from invisible diseases (Disabled World, 2018). Such conditions

(often referred to as “hidden disabilities”) include various concealed conditions not necessarily obvious to others and usually neurological in nature, such as fibromyalgia, lupus, asthma, autism, and cystic fibrosis (Lorden, 2000). Individuals with invisible disabilities face difficulties performing daily tasks. Although many do not use specific visible medical devices, such as hearing aids, they rely on multiple prescribed medications as well as certain devices, such as oxygen tanks or feeding tubes, to help with day-to-day activities (Brotherson et al., 1995; Heimlich, 1982). Detecting disability might be thus troublesome and defining disability in general terms might be even more problematic. Thus, for this study, the definition of disability is a:

> Physical, sensory, mental, or intellectual limitation that may restrict one’s participation in society by creating struggles with daily activities (such as walking, seeing, hearing, talking, and so on) and may or may not require an individual to necessitate treatment or therapy (such as the use of medical equipment or prescribed medication).

The purpose of this extensive definition is to include all disabilities, visible and nonvisible, as well as all conditions affecting any of the following well-being areas: ambulatory, independent living, cognitive, hearing, self-care, and vision.

Diversity and Attitudes Toward Disabled Population

The ADA protects against disability-based discrimination and provides appropriate accommodations for those who might need them (Colker & Tucker, 1998). Despite the act, discrimination based on disability is still present and problematic, restricting disabled persons’ access to equality and denying them the advantages of society (Kennedy & Olney, 2001). Disability discrimination is not a new phenomenon;

it has been evident throughout history, from eugenics theories and policies in ancient Greece through the Middle Ages and into the present (Rubin & Roessler, 2001). The United States is not the only country where disability discrimination has risen to prominence, with the United Kingdom and Germany also having disability-based discrimination cases (Doyle, 1995).

People can face discrimination and marginalization based on different factors, from sexual orientation and race to sex and disability (Shapiro, 1994). Some researchers refer to disabled persons as a minority; minority status could also explain the marginalization and discrimination of disabled individuals (Cloerks, 1981). According to the American Heritage Dictionary (1996), a minority is a "racial, religious, political, national, or other group regarded as different from the larger group of which it is a part" (p. 1151). Many researchers have also explored the extent to which disabled individuals experience prejudice and discrimination, stating that those who "agree with stereotypes and develop an emotional reaction are showing prejudice and those who act on this prejudice are demonstrating discrimination" (Corrigan et al., 2001, p. 220).

Beyond discrimination and prejudice, scholars have explored the subject of attitudes toward disabled individuals (Bruyère, 2000; Chima, 1998; Minton, 1999). Many findings showed that the attitudes toward disabled individuals were often less positive than those without disabilities (Bruyère, 2000). Noe (2002) defined attitudes as "a combination of beliefs and feelings that predispose a person to behave a certain way" (p. 108). Therefore, attitude can motivate an individual's behavior and the situation's outcome. Some researchers believe that those negative attitudes can result from fear, misperceptions, stereotypes, and myths (Chima, 1998; Department of Labor, 1994, 1995,

2006; Mello, 1992; Minton, 1999; Peck & Kirkbride, 2001; Stapleton & Burkhauser, 2003). Additionally, existential anxiety and concerns are often a reaction to disability, as to some, people with disabilities might represent pain and possible death, especially when the disability is severe (Hahn, 1988). Not all individuals have had personal experiences with the disabled population.

Also influencing people's attitudes toward disabled individuals are common myths, including that disabled individuals might be inept, threatening, or reckless (Tschopp & Holt, 2003). Misperceptions might also play a role in attitude, as Chan and colleagues (2004) found that positive attitudes toward people with disabilities and knowledge of the ADA are associated. Thus, without current information or knowledge of state or federal laws, many might be unaware of the relevant rules, leading to a negative attitude or even potential litigation (Callahan, 1997). The American Heritage Dictionary (1996) defined stereotype as an "oversimplified and conventional opinion" (p. 1762). Those who have a negative attitude toward the disabled often find interacting or responding to people with disabilities bothersome or tedious (Berry & Jones, 1991).

Researchers and educators have made many attempts to change negative attitudes toward the disabled (Brostrand, 2006). Bailey et al. (2001) stated that role-taking or active simulation can increase sensitivity to disability issues. Simulation can involve training sessions in which participants pretend to either have a disability or encounter a disabled individual. With the help of education and hands-on experiences, such as interactions with disabled individuals, researchers have found improved perceptions of people with disabilities (Hamburger, 1994; Hunt & Hunt, 2004; Matthews & White, 1990; Meyer et al., 2001; Perry & Apostal, 1986).

Training programs often incorporate personal contact or videos to educate staff about disabilities. Organizations that implement disability awareness programs or training have improved employee attitudes in the workplace (Matthews & White, 1990; Miller & Cordova, 2002; Unger, 2002; Younes, 2001). However, most of these studies have shown the need for active participation. Information alone does not have a long-lasting impact and is not as effective as information followed by experience in improving negative attitudes toward people with disabilities (Horne, 1988; Tait & Purdie, 2000).

Perry and Apostal (1986) used five components in a seminar to improve people's attitudes toward disabled individuals: presentation delivered by employers, group discussion, video, simulation experiment, and personal interaction with disabled individuals. A 6-month follow-up showed that attendees' attitudes improved between the first and second meetings. Popovich et al. (2003) found that prior contact with disabled individuals contributes to a more positive attitude, suggesting that previous personal or work experience could play a significant role in improving attitude.

Policing research has shown that training and education (controlling for experience or simulation) improves law enforcement officers' knowledge of disabilities and their ability to apply that information (Janus et al., 1980). Nevertheless, this knowledge does not always improve attitudes, which are more resistant to change (Godschalx, 1984; Janus et al., 1980). Godschalx (1984) found that despite acquiring new knowledge and finding the mental health training valuable, most officers' attitudes toward disabled individuals remained the same. Godschalx's study, however, was limited to law enforcement officers who dealt with emotionally disturbed persons only.

Therefore, it is not known whether their attitudes toward individuals with other disabilities had improved.

Similarly, Janus et al. (1980) found that knowledge about disabled individuals can improve through instruction, and some attitudes can change for the better. Although the study included psychiatric disorders, excluding other disabilities and medical conditions, the findings showed that some officers became more sensitive to individuals with mental health issues. Also, because of this new knowledge, the officers could recognize the symptoms of these disabilities (Janus et al., 1980). Similarly, Compton et al.'s (2006) study on crisis intervention team (CIT) training showed that educational programs and trainings provided to law enforcement personnel might improve attitudes toward persons with schizophrenia and reduce negative stigma.

Victimization Rates of Disabled Persons

To address police interactions with the disabled population, it is imperative to understand the role that disability plays in interactions with the criminal justice system. Various scholars have explored the subject of victimization and the factors that might contribute to the risk of being victimized (Mind, 2007; Sin et al., 2009; Sobsey, 2014). Mental health is not the only factor determining an individual's risk of violence (Mind, 2007). Physical disability and demographic variables also increase that risk (Sin et al., 2009; Sobsey, 2014).

Sobsey (2014) found that in Canada and other counties, adults with significant disabilities experience much higher rates of violence than those without disabilities. The reasons for such trends include (a) the presence of any disability increases the risk of being victimized; (b) violence is a major cause of increased disability, allowing the

perpetrator to offend even more violently and seriously if the victim becomes more disabled than before the victimization; and (c) other unrelated circumstances and events increase the chances for both disability and violence. Because disabled individuals are more likely to be crime victims than individuals without disabilities, the present study focused on police officers' experiences with the disabled population.

Sherry (2016) found differences in the types of hate crimes reported against individuals with disabilities versus other groups: Rape was 30% higher and burglary was 11% higher for those with disabilities compared to nondisabled individuals. Research on disability hate crimes is not as frequent as research on other types of hate crimes. However, it is noteworthy that researchers of domestic violence against women with disabilities found that proportionally many more disabled women are abused than nondisabled women (Plummer & Findley, 2011).

In a study of crimes against people with disabilities between 2009 and 2011, Harrell (2012) used the National Crime Victimization Study (NCVS) to interview people ages 12 and older from a nationwide representative sample of households. Households stay in the sample for 3 years and are interviewed every 6 months; therefore, each domicile participated in seven interviews. The average number of people interviewed per year was about 140,000. Because the NCVS does not include detailed questions about potential disability, Harrell added responses from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey to calculate victimization rates against individuals with disabilities. Those interviewed were all living among the general populace in household settings, the population most likely to interact with police regularly. However, not counting disabled people living in institutions and facilities underestimated violent acts against people with

disabilities. Such exclusion leads to lower estimates of disability-related crimes, which might discourage researchers from exploring this issue in depth, minimizing the problem.

Harrell (2012) used Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) 2011 age-adjusted and unadjusted violent victimization rates by disability status in addition to other demographics. Generally, people with disabilities are from an older subset of the population than people without disabilities, which results in crime rate variations by age. The findings from 2012 showed that the violent victimization rate for people ages 12 to 15 was higher for those with disabilities than those without (76 per 1,000 compared to 30 per 1,000); the violent victimization rate for individuals ages 16 to 19 in 2011 was at least three times higher for those with disabilities (123 per 1,000 compared to 37 per 1,000); the rate for disabled people ages 20 to 24 was almost as high as for the previous age group (110 per 1,000 compared to 32 per 1,000); and the rate for individuals with disabilities, despite their age, was twice as high as for people without disabilities (48 per 1,000 compared to 19 per 1,000). Serious violence (including rape, robbery, sexual assault, and aggravated assault) accounted for about 43% of nonfatal violent crimes against disabled people compared to 31% for individuals without disabilities. Also, individuals with a single disability had a lower violent victimization rate than those with more than one disability (38 per 1,000 compared to 61 per 1,000).

The BJS data indicated that disabled individuals are much more likely to be victimized than their nondisabled counterparts and, thus much more likely to interact with members of law enforcement and the criminal justice system. The BJS study, however, did not identify the exact types of disabilities and their severity in each victimization rate. The BJS provided a general definition of disability but did not mention

which disabilities were related to what crimes. Such information could allow researchers to gain a better understanding of which disabled victims (per their disability) could be potentially at a higher risk of a specific victimization.

Due to the existing stigma that follows many disabled individuals, a disabled crime victim is less likely to report a crime than a nondisabled crime victim (Sobsey & Doe, 1991). Some of the reasons include disbelief by law enforcement officers, loss of independence, or fear of perpetrator retaliation (Sobsey & Doe, 1991). Communication or language challenges are among the primary concerns for disabled victims, as is fear of the officers' perceptions regarding the victim's disability (Sobsey, 1994).

Routine Activity Theory

According to Cohen and Felson (1979), routine activities are "recurrent and prevalent activities which provide for basic population and individual needs, whatever their biological or cultural origins" (p. 593). For example, routine activities might include day-to-day activities such as going to and from school or work, extracurricular activities, participating in religious services, grocery shopping, and going out. Because routine activities follow a rhythm associated with similar, and sometimes identical, patterns, offenders develop a framework to commit a crime (Cohen & Felson, 1979). There are three essential components to describe the necessary conditions for criminal activity: motivated offenders, suitable targets, and a lack of capable guardianship (Hollis et al., 2013).

The term "motivated offender" refers to individuals who have the tendency and the ability to commit a crime (Cohen & Felson, 1979). The reasons for doing so could include an intense desire for something specific, such as material goods, money, or even

power. A suitable target has specific characteristics desired by the offender, and the target's surroundings allow for easier victimization (Cohen & Felson, 1979). Therefore, a suitable target could be a disabled individual whose movements are restricted, making it more challenging to protect against victimization. Persons with disabilities can appear to be more attractive or suitable targets due to the likelihood that their restricted communication and language skills could inhibit them from reporting their victimization to law enforcement.

According to Cohen and Felson (1979), lack of capable guardianship refers to the absence of guardians against a violation. For example, capable guardianship could include security guards, police officers, parents, or even activated alarm systems. Wood et al. (2015) suggested that police officers often have an extended guardianship role with a focus on the promotion of public health; during law enforcement members' frequent contact with citizens, they often employ traditional police tactics (e.g., issuing citations, making arrests, negotiating order, etc.) that could need adjustments when interacting with disabled individuals.

Research suggests that officers should acquire knowledge of health risk behaviors and environments, as they could encounter individuals daily with various disabilities (Bittner, 1967b; Wood et al., 2015). Further, Wood et al. (2015) strongly suggested that to better assist individuals with disabilities, police officers should be familiar with the various health problems associated with such disabilities. Because adults with significant disabilities undergo victimization at much higher rates than people without disabilities, a disability might make a person a more suitable target (Sobsey, 2014). Therefore, a key

step for improving officer interactions with the disabled is developing police knowledge of disabilities and how they can impact behaviors and reactions to officer commands.

Existing Police Learning Materials

When responding to calls, law enforcement and first responders are often the gateways to appropriate and much-needed help and services. According to Modell and Mak (2008), police are also more likely to come into contact with disabled individuals and should be able to recognize and provide appropriate support. How officers first respond to disabled victims might have a long-lasting impact on these individuals and their perceptions of the criminal justice system.

Scior (2011) found that education and disability training can significantly increase officers' disability-related knowledge, which could, in turn, improve services provided to this population. Because most people have minimal understanding of various disabilities, instruction on the topic could lower anxiety and discomfort when interacting with a disabled person. Improving officers' knowledge could reduce such feelings and allow for better communication and treatment, resulting in more positive interactions. Law enforcement officers have a duty to serve and protect all, including those most vulnerable in society (such as persons with health conditions and disabilities, despite their severity and seriousness); such services should not be of any less quality than those provided to individuals without disabilities.

Despite recent developments in training, accessibility, and awareness of the need for such guidance, U.S. law enforcement officers often still lack the resources and training to best serve the disabled population, especially regarding interactions and communication (Ochoa et al., 2009; Oschwald et al., 2011; Parsons & Sherwood, 2016).

Oschwald et al. (2011) found that out of 133 American law enforcement departments surveyed, most did not have active protocols to assist disabled crime victims. This finding suggests that members of the disabled population may not always easily exercise their constitutional rights and engage in legal proceedings. As a result, these individuals could lack full access to the various services provided to crime victims, such as financial compensation, healing, restoration, and justice. A lack of potential adjustments could also lead to the underreporting of crimes or, if reported, constrain the effectiveness of the investigation, and prevent crime victims from full recovery (Nosek et al., 2002).

The main objective of training on how to handle encounters with disabled individuals is to sensitize and educate officers about the many disabilities they will encounter during their careers. Although there are many guides, handbooks, and resources on responding to individuals with mental illness (Bittner, 1967a; Borum, 2000; Dupont & Cochran, 2000), few indicate how to respond to people with other disabilities. The primary source of such training comes from the U.S. Department of Justice's OVC. Even though such training materials are revised and updated every few years, they are limited to well-known disabilities (e.g., Alzheimer's, blindness, deafness or hard of hearing).

Office for Victims of Crime Guidelines

The handbook *First Response to Victims of Crime*, prepared by the OVC in 2010, offers detailed guidance on how to approach and interact sensitively and effectively with people with disabilities. The handbook also explores how to recognize the unique needs of victims who are vision-impaired or blind, deaf, or hard of hearing or have a disability affecting physical mobility. To better respond to crime victims who might feel helpless

due to their victimization, the OVC identified three significant needs that all people have in common, but which may be more prominent for disabled individuals. These include a need for safety, a need to express emotions after suffering from any kind of trauma, and a need to know the next steps, as victims are often concerned with their role in legal proceedings. Although the OVC handbook focuses on police interactions with victims, the same rules and guidelines could apply to suspects, witnesses, and other members of society who have a disability. As such, it is essential not to limit such guidelines to victims only.

As reflected in the BJS (2011) statistics, the OVC (2010) emphasized that individuals with disabilities are more vulnerable to crime than the nondisabled. Moreover, disabled victims might not be able to reliably contact law enforcement due to an inability to pick up the phone, speak, or transport themselves. As such, the handbook suggests that disabled individuals could require additional accommodations when interacting with law enforcement compared to their nondisabled counterparts. The OVC's (2010) *First Response to Victims of Crimes* handbook featured guidelines regarding police interactions with victims from five categories of disability: vision, hearing, mobility, Alzheimer's, and mental illness.

Individuals with Blindness or Vision Impairment. For example, when working with blind victims, officers should introduce themselves; provide pertinent information, including their badge number; and describe the interview setting. Further, officers should not speak too loudly, as people with vision impairment usually do not have hearing problems (OVC, 2010). OVC suggests that officers dealing with individuals having blindness or vision impairments should follow additional guidelines to provide the best

service. Officers should take their time and describe the seating arrangements to help the blind person navigate the room and feel safe. When surrounded by other people, including fellow officers, the disabled interviewee should be aware of the identity of the person to whom the officer is speaking. Additionally, because the blind person might not be aware of the surroundings, it is crucial to announce when the officer steps away and returns. Taking notes and pausing conversations require explanation to people with vision impairment to know they are not ignored. Officers should project concern, compassion, and attentiveness through word choice and tone of voice, as individuals who are blind or visually impaired cannot see body language and facial expression. Thus, officers must use words to clearly express what is usually visible through unspoken cues (OVC, 2010).

Individuals Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing. Another widely known disability is deafness, which means that individuals cannot hear or fully understand oral communication. Additionally, some nondeaf people might have mild to severe hearing loss. Despite their inability to hear, individuals with this disability are fully capable of cooperating with law enforcement agents. The OVC (2010) provided tips and guidelines on how to effectively communicate with someone whose ability to hear is limited or absent. For example, contrary to blindness, officers must signal their presence with a wave or gentle touch on the shoulder if the person has not noticed them. Body language plays a tremendous role when communicating with someone who is deaf. Individuals prefer varying means of communication depending on their abilities, including writing, lip-reading, or a sign language interpreter, if available. As many people read lips, it is important to face the person with the eyes and mouth visible and speak clearly and slightly slower so that the person can effectively understand. When handling interactions

with deaf individuals in the context of law enforcement, it is crucial never to use a child or minor to assist with communication unless it is an emergency. Depending on the severity of their hearing loss, the absence of a hearing aid is not a sign that the person can fully hear and understand. Deaf individuals are visually oriented; therefore, facial expressions, body language, and lip movements merit consideration during any interaction. Body language is essential, as using gestures, props, and mime strengthens communications with deaf individuals. In interactions with deaf or hard-of-hearing individuals, what cannot be said must be shown, and what cannot be heard must be seen (OVC, 2010).

Individuals with a Disability Affecting Physical Mobility. People who have a disability affecting their physical mobility are usually highly independent and capable of cooperation. OVC (2010) guidelines provide tips on facilitating the encounter with someone who might not have the same physical mobility as many others. Some of the guidance includes asking to assist the individuals rather than assuming they need officer aid. Most disabled individuals understand their capabilities, limitations, and restrictions; thus, it is unfair to assume a person cannot perform a task. Instead, officers should ask how they do it rather than if they can do it.

It is also vital for officers to position themselves in front of the other person, preferably at eye level, but not to kneel. Because many individuals with mobility-related disabilities use wheelchairs or other devices, officers should offer assistance if there are issues navigating tight spaces, open and close doors, move obstacles, and allow extra time to move around. If transportation is needed, rather than assuming the individual

needs help, the officer should confirm the need for any accommodations before making them (OVC, 2010).

Individuals Who Have Alzheimer's Disease. Alzheimer's disease is one of the most well-known brain disorders in the United States. It causes dementia, an irreversible and progressive condition leading to the loss of cognitive and mental abilities. In many cases, the disease also causes changes in behavior and personality due to its neuropsychiatric symptoms (Lyketsos et al., 2011). The OVC (2010) handbook stressed the importance of recognizing the symptoms of Alzheimer's, which include a disoriented sense of place and time, becoming lost or wandering, mood swings, blank facial expressions, poor judgments, and the use of nonsensical words when speaking. With such symptoms in mind, officers should approach the victims from the front and try to establish eye contact, and then follow the regular steps, such as introduction and the reason behind the encounter. It is important to remember that due to impaired short-term memory, those who have Alzheimer's might ask the same questions and become impatient. Asking multiple questions at a time is strongly discouraged and using yes-or-no questions is often more effective. Because some individuals wear Alzheimer's-identifying bracelets, pins, necklaces, or keychains, officers should check for identification. Like anyone else, those who have Alzheimer's disease deserve to be treated with dignity, as their mental abilities do not translate into a lack of feelings. Because some individuals get lost or wander with very little sense of time and space, an officer should procure medical assistance if needed, especially if there is a suspicion of dehydration or hypothermia. Despite individuals having disrupted cognitive or mental abilities, officers should not challenge their reasoning or logic. It is also crucial never to

leave individuals with Alzheimer's alone as they can wander away, get lost, and put themselves in a dangerous situation (OVC, 2010).

Individuals Who Have a Mental Illness. With an increase in recognition of mental health illness, OVC (2010) prepared an extensive list of steps for interacting with a mentally ill person. The handbook presented a list of symptoms, including hyperactivity, paranoia, delusions, hallucinations (including but not limited to feeling, hearing, seeing, and smelling imaginary things), depression, unintelligible conversation, loss of memory, panic, fright, confusion, anxiety, and many others. It is important to note that individuals with mental illness might experience any critical situation more profoundly than those without such conditions.

The OVC's guidelines recommend approaching individuals with mental illness in a nonthreatening and reassuring manner, as the person might be overwhelmed with hallucinations or paranoia and feel threated by a law enforcement agent. As in any situation, it is important that officers introduce themselves and provide their department's information. If a person appears agitated, is uncommunicative, or displays unnatural or inappropriate responses to the event, it might be a sign of a psychiatric crisis, thus warranting outreach to the local mental health crisis center. Police officers should ask and make a list of any medication the person takes and provide access to water, food, and toilet facilities, as some of the prescribed medications might have side effects that include nausea, diarrhea, or thirst. If possible, only one officer should communicate with the person and keep the interview brief and simple. It is essential to display a calm and friendly attitude. Unless individuals are experiencing hallucinations or other severe symptoms, officers should not underestimate their ability to provide accurate information.

Officers should always treat individuals with mental health illness with respect and dignity and never use inappropriate language, such as “psycho,” “crazy,” “retarded,” or “nuts” when describing the individuals and their needs (OVC, 2010).

The handbook also encourages officers to treat victims’ assistive devices as their personal space and provide aid if they need help moving around. Such devices might include wheelchairs, crutches, oxygen tanks, and any other medical equipment and service animals that should not be separated from their owners. Overall, the OVC (2010) suggests that officers should not underestimate disabled persons’ abilities to explain the crime adequately or effectively, even if they cannot demonstrate it. Thus, it is critical to focus on ability rather than disability.

Some officers might not be familiar with individuals with disabilities and could feel uncertain or self-conscious about interacting with the disabled (OVC, 2010). Some disabilities might not be immediately visible, requiring officers to pay close attention to various signs of possible disability. Some of the general tips for responding to victims with disabilities include avoiding defining or identifying victims by their disability and using “people-first” language. People-first language refers to the structural sentence form that focuses on the individual rather than the disability and effectively eliminates assumptions, generalizations, and stereotypes related to a person’s disability (Gernsbacher, 2017). For example, it would be more respectful and accurate to say, “an individual with an intellectual, cognitive, or developmental disability” than a “mentally defective person.” Thus, officers should recognize the person first and the disability second.

Before conducting an interview, officers should speak with victims with disabilities to ascertain the best way to communicate and interact (OVC, 2010) effectively. Moreover, officers should not inquire about victims' disabilities or make the disability the focal point of the interaction. Officers should interact directly with victims rather than presuming that disabled individuals are not capable of making independent decisions. Additionally, law enforcement agents should monitor their behavior and intonation to avoid treating disabled individuals like children or inferiors, as disability-related assumptions and generalizations are not part of the interactions with people with disabilities. Such instances could discourage participation in the legal proceeding or result in a negative community rapport.

Law enforcement officers should be well versed in local and state laws pertaining to crimes against individuals with disabilities. Disability-based discrimination is prohibited under both Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Both acts require first responders to provide disabled crime victims with the same opportunities and benefits from participation in activities and services as nondisabled citizens (U.S. Department of Justice, 2010). Under both, law enforcement agents must provide disabled persons with effective communications as well as make proper accommodations and modifications to practices, policies, and procedures to ensure equal access to services (OVC, 2010).

According to Oschwald et al. (2011), people with disabilities other than mental or intellectual report more problems than their nondisabled peers when interacting with law enforcement personnel due to an inability to respond or react appropriately to the officers due to their disabilities. Additionally, because of the stigma often attached to disabled

individuals, some of their behaviors or responses could seem uncooperative or even suspicious, as law enforcement agents might fail to consider the disability (U.S. Department of Justice, 2010). Such behaviors could include lack of eye contact between a disabled person and a law enforcement officer, nervousness, unusual sweating, and others.

Despite providing highly accurate and useful information, the OVC handbook is limited to only a few well-known disabilities. It does not address other medical conditions, such as cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, ASD, epilepsy, multiple sclerosis, and many other officers encounter while on duty. To provide all individuals with disabilities with access to equal services and assistance, law enforcement officers must draw on a broader variety of training and experiences.

Evaluative Studies on Law Enforcement Training

As many communities have faced victimization by the police due to individuals suffering from symptoms of various mental disorders, many law enforcement departments have been criticized or sued for not providing appropriate training to their officers that would allow them to respond adequately (Hill & Logan, 2001). Similarly, lawsuits against police agencies result from families of victims of physically disabled individuals who may have experienced excessive force. For example, the family of Robert Saylor, whose fracture to cartilage in his throat contributed to his death, sued the sheriff's office and were supported by a petition signed by more than 340,000 people (Kreuz, 2013).

Individuals with disabilities might not be able to effectively communicate with others, and as a result, their unwillingness to cooperate could appear intentional.

Moreover, this lack of ability to communicate might mislead responding officers and contribute to the use of excessive force in response to a lack of cooperation. Bennett (2017) found that excessive force by law enforcement was an increasing and serious problem against individuals with mental illnesses. The most vulnerable members in American society too often find the police officer is not a guardian but another potential victimizer. Disabled individuals often require accommodations to ensure a peaceful encounter with law enforcement (Finn & Sullivan, 1987, 1989). Situations in which the use of excessive force takes place might be a result of police officers being inadequately trained to interact with the disabled, despite their formal training (Hanewicz et al., 1982).

Studies evaluating police training on interactions with disabled individuals are sparse. McAfee and Musso (1995) addressed in depth the subject of law enforcement officers' training in interactions with individuals with disabilities; however, the researchers did not examine police officers' experiences with this population. McAfee and Musso stated that police officers were usually the first point of contact for disabled people who are victimized, witnesses to a crime, or arrested. Although knowledge of a person's disability might not be necessary for casual contact (e.g., a disabled individual stopping an officer to ask for directions), many interactions can significantly impact criminal investigations. Because obtaining the maximum accurate information from a witness or victim is a complicated task rife with obstacles (e.g., imperfect eyewitness memory processes), interviewers must acknowledge and work with such difficulties to obtain the best-quality information (Milne & Bull, 2006). People with mental disorders, significant impairment of social functioning and intelligence, or physical disability are vulnerable witnesses; therefore, it is essential to provide more than the "standard

interview," which might not result in the desired outcome (Clarke & Milne, 2001; Milne & Bull, 2006). Special accommodations, such as using appropriate questions, are frequent recommendations when working with disabled individuals.

McAfee and Musso (1995) examined the extent to which U.S. states established policies regarding disability awareness in police training and the general nature of its content. To acquire information on states' provisions for training police officers, the researchers contacted police academies using information from the government section of telephone books. McAfee and Musso called individuals from 42 states to explain the study's purpose and ask for participation; the researchers requested written materials if the callees agreed to participate. During the first stage, the type of training and details were provided by officers in each state. In the second stage, the written materials used in the police academy were provided to the researchers for analysis. The overall response rate for the study was 98%.

The results showed that eight states did not require their officers to complete training on how to interact with disabled people; 36 states required new officers to complete some formal training and did not require disability awareness training participation following their graduation from the academy; and four states were deemed to have unclear policies (McAfee & Musso, 1995). Document analysis showed that if training was required, it focused on crisis intervention, mental illness, or the emotionally disturbed. McAfee and Musso (1995) found training specific to interactions with "deaf or hard of hearing" individuals in 12 states, "blind or visually impaired" individuals in one state, and physically impaired in two states. Most states provided formal training only on interactions with mentally ill individuals and generic crisis intervention skills (Goldstein,

1990; Murphy, 1986). Additionally, the average time spent on disability training (often limited to mental illness) was equivalent to 10 hours per officer (Reaves, 2016), insufficient time to provide information on most disabilities and the related scenarios officers will encounter at some point in their careers (McAfee & Musso, 1995).

Although 10 hours might seem like a reasonable amount of training, when comparing it to other subject areas, disability training is on the lower end. For example, on average, most officers receive 11 hours on professionalism, 15 hours on communications, 21 hours on the use of force, 25 hours on report writing, 42 hours on investigations, and 49 hours on health and fitness (Reaves, 2016). Although all subject areas covered during law enforcement training are essential, curricula should include more training on interacting with and assisting individuals with disabilities, including those other than mental illnesses. Also, although McAfee and Musso (1995) were among the first to research disability awareness training within law enforcement agencies, their study is now 26 years old, and no follow-up studies have occurred. Additionally, the constantly changing definitions of disability and the discovery of more medical conditions further reduce the validity of McAfee and Musso's findings.

Reaves (2016) compiled a master list of state and local law enforcement training academies in the United States using various sources, such as state law enforcement training organizations, professional associations, and existing law enforcement data. Data on the number of recruits trained in law enforcement academies were available from the 2006 Census of Law Enforcement Training Academies (CLETA), with adjustments made to account for the overall lower number of recruits in 2013 compared to 2006. The response rate was over 90% for all items included in the 2013 CLETA and 83% for

recruits' demographics. Between 2011 and 2013, 664 academies provided basic training to all entry-level officers in the United States; the average basic recruit training program was about 840 hours, or 21 weeks, excluding field training. Academies operated by agencies with special jurisdiction (e.g., transportation systems, parks, or natural resources) included on average 1,075 hours, the longest training programs in the country, followed by county police academies with 1,029 hours of training, municipal police academies with 936 hours of basic recruit training, state police academies with 878 hours, and State Peace Officer Standards and Training agencies with 650 hours (Reaves, 2016).

Regarding content, nearly 95% of recruits received training on terrorism-related issues and firearms skills (Reaves, 2016). The average number of instruction hours required per recruit was 71 hours on firearms skills, 60 hours on defensive tactics, 53 hours on criminal and constitutional law, and 52 hours on patrol procedures. The analysis of these academies showed that law enforcement members were very well prepared to handle almost any situation involving violence, as the training is strict, detailed, and essential. Additionally, almost all academies required recruits to complete an average of 40 hours or more of training on community policing. Moreover, Reaves (2016) found that academies provide training on social issues such as domestic violence (13 hours), mental illness (10 hours), victim response (5 hours), and hate and bias crimes (3 hours). However, there was no training on interactions with disabled individuals beyond the 10-hour training on mental illness. Moreover, the content of academy or on-the-job training is unknown; thus, it is unclear what type of training police officers might receive on individuals with disabilities after joining a police department.

Such relatively small amounts of disability training hours could affect officers' confidence in their interactions with the disabled. In their research, Henshaw and Thomas (2012) found that police officers who believed they needed more disability-related training also reported lower confidence in their encounters with disabled individuals than officers who believed their specialized training was sufficient. This might be particularly true when it comes to the disabled with complex and diverse needs and histories (Holland & Persson, 2011). Moreover, those who had some intellectual disability knowledge stated that it came from their interactions with this population while on-duty rather than other sources (Henshaw & Thomas, 2012). However, because this study was based in Australia, officers' training and experiences might differ from those in the United States. Henshaw and Thomas (2012) argue that because dealing with persons with intellectual disabilities is part of community policing, specialized training is needed for law enforcement officers.

Hails and Borum (2003) examined disability awareness training accessibility in all law enforcement agencies in the United States with more than 300 sworn officers (135 agencies). Out of 135 agencies, 70 departments (52%) offered their recruits 9 hours of disability awareness training, 42 agencies (31%) offered 5 hours of training, and 23 agencies (17%) did not provide any training. Additionally, 33% of the study's agencies did not provide any disability awareness training post academy. When training was available, materials were internally created and did not include actual experiences with disabled individuals (Hails & Borum, 2003).

These studies suggest that one in three law enforcement agencies in the United States could not provide their officers with more training, even as the disabled population

continues to grow. Borum (2000) argued that current disability awareness training is "probably not harmful and may be helpful…[but] there is a good reason to believe that they are not sufficient to fundamentally change the nature of police encounter with mentally ill people in crisis" (p. 33). Thus, it is necessary to improve and expand existing disability training to include other disabilities. Similar to previous studies, Hails and Borum (2003) did not explore the content of disability awareness training, which is crucial to gain a better understanding of what to change and implement.

Organizational Learning Theory

It would be unreasonable to expect law enforcement agencies to fully train their officers in all aspects of their job. However, police organizations are increasingly viewed as learning establishments. Globalization and technology have caused immense changes to the U.S. economy, education, and people. The 21st century challenges organizations to create new ways to adapt, survive, and succeed in a world with more external elements (e.g., education/information and training accessibility, technology, civil movements, etc.) that affect their structure, products, and activities. With significant changes happening worldwide, organizations are no longer in the business of product and profit only but require the continual learning pivotal for the success of any institution (Argyris & Schön, 1978).

Organization learning theory is not a new phenomenon. It is a concept that falls into various learning theories and is easily overlooked unless related to businesses and organizations. Developed in 1978 by Argyris and Schön, organizational learning focuses on a process of knowledge development, knowledge retention, and knowledge transfer

within an organization. Organizational learning is a consequence of experience and change in an organization's performance or behavior (Argyris & Schön, 1978).

Argyris and Schön (1978) explored two sets of behaviors that affect learning within an organization: (a) the organization's formal policies, rules, and procedures and (b) how things are actually done to solve a problem within the organization. However, on many occasions, those two sets of behavior might not blend. A person can follow formal policies, rules, and procedures yet be unable to appropriately solve a problem, which leads to implementing a creative and learning environment to facilitate the process.

Organizational learning theory focuses on developing a learning culture with knowledge-sharing from which everyone can benefit. It also encourages the organization's employees to pursue ongoing education, taking time to learn rather than completing entrance training without broadening their knowledge afterward (Argyris & Schön, 1978). Organizational learning allows people and teams to challenge the status quo. Ideally, learning within organizations should be delivered quickly, effectively, and cheaply to ensure the workplace is adapting appropriately to societal changes (Schwandt & Marquardt, 1999). What appears to work successfully today might contribute to a failure tomorrow.

Due to globalization and technological advances, all organizations need to transform into learning institutions. Marquardt (1996) discussed organizations' need for learning by examining trends in the global marketplace, noting that the organizations refusing to implement new learning strategies are less successful and sometimes become extinct. Although local law enforcement agencies will likely not close their doors, they could struggle to manage within the organization without implementing a new approach;

this would require a significant shift from the traditional culture of law enforcement organization (Breci, 1997). Albert Einstein once said, “No problem can be solved from the same consciousness that created it; we must learn to see the world anew” (as cited in Schwandt & Marquardt, 1999, p. 16).

Organizational learning relates to performance and performance enhancements as the products of adaptive learning that can accumulate through experiences and education (Argote & Miron-Spektor, 2011; Cyert & March, 1963; Huber, 1991). Experience and adaptive learning can be orchestrated or happen naturally over time. Although all organizations grow in knowledge and experience, not all learn equally; the degree of learning depends on the presentation and selection of knowledge and the availability of resources (Argote, 2012). Adaptive learning theorists developed three types of organizational learning that allow for a better understanding of the relationship between learning and performance: single loop, double loop, and triple loop (Berta et al., 2015; Nutley & Davies, 2001).

Single-loop organizational learning focuses on response to performance failure and improvement of the already-existing processes to avoid similar outcomes. Most of the original processes and the organization’s goals remain as the environment stays largely unchanged (Argyris, 2013). Double-loop learning focuses on understanding and explaining the performance failure by questioning the initial assumptions and goals. For most organizations, especially those that keep changing, double-loop learning is not only beneficial but often essential, as it encourages organizations to perform better (Argyris, 1974a). The third and highest concept is triple-loop organizational learning, a type of

reflective learning that improves an organization's learning processes and engages its workers in higher-order learning (Nutley & Davies, 2001).

According to Argyris and Schön (1978), organizational learning theory is based on two modes of operations: espoused theory and theory-in-use. These modes, however, are often in conflict. Espoused theory suggests that an organization should follow the existing rules and procedures when facing a problem. In contrast, theory-in-use encourages more of an undefined environment for successful problem resolution, suggesting that no problem is the same and some issues might require additional and careful observation and steps before resolution (Argyris & Schön, 1978).

Espoused Theory

Espoused theory refers to the policies, rules, and procedures already in place. Every past, present, or future organization has formalized instruction on how employees should conduct themselves and approach potential problems to carry out their jobs successfully (Stafsudd, 2017). For example, if presented with a problem, an individual should take a prescribed action that leads to a solution.

Although presented with an assumed action, most people rely on interaction and their surroundings rather than following the strict rules of the espoused theory. The espoused theory might work well for prevalent problems with anticipated potential complications. However, for most issues arising on the job—especially in law enforcement, where unknown obstacles might emerge at any time—following existing and straightforward rules might not always be enough. Therefore, Argyris and Schön (1978) developed another organizational learning sub theory called theory-in-use. Theory-in-use fulfills the needs of many organizations, including law enforcement

agencies, because it allows for adjustments to existing policies and procedures to appropriately respond to unexpected situations that officers may encounter while on duty.

Theory-in-Use

Despite having formal rules to follow when approaching a problem, most individuals prefer a socially interactive approach that is looser and flowing (Argyris & Schön, 1978). Argyris and Schön (1978) found the two theories, espoused theory and theory-in-use, potentially contradictory and problematic in situations where the organization strictly enforces rules, per espoused theory. Compared to the espoused theory, theory-in-use is more difficult to observe due to its indirection (Stafsudd, 2017).

To create a learning environment, individuals might perform better in an unstructured and undefined environment where rules and formal procedures change regularly based on societal adjustments and needs (Argyris & Schön, 1978). Levitt and March (1988) expanded theory-in-use by emphasizing that although history and past lessons are essential, events change and require new solutions. Additionally, Levitt and March argued that formal procedures should be target oriented. Therefore, organizational learning theory is spread through education, imitation, and socialization and can often change based on the interpretation of history. As theory-in-use allows organizations and individuals to anticipate the unexpected, it also provides for better and more effective long-term solutions. Theory-in-use considers the need for more information, data, experiments, consultation, and other aspects unexpected within the espoused theory (Argyris & Schön, 1978).

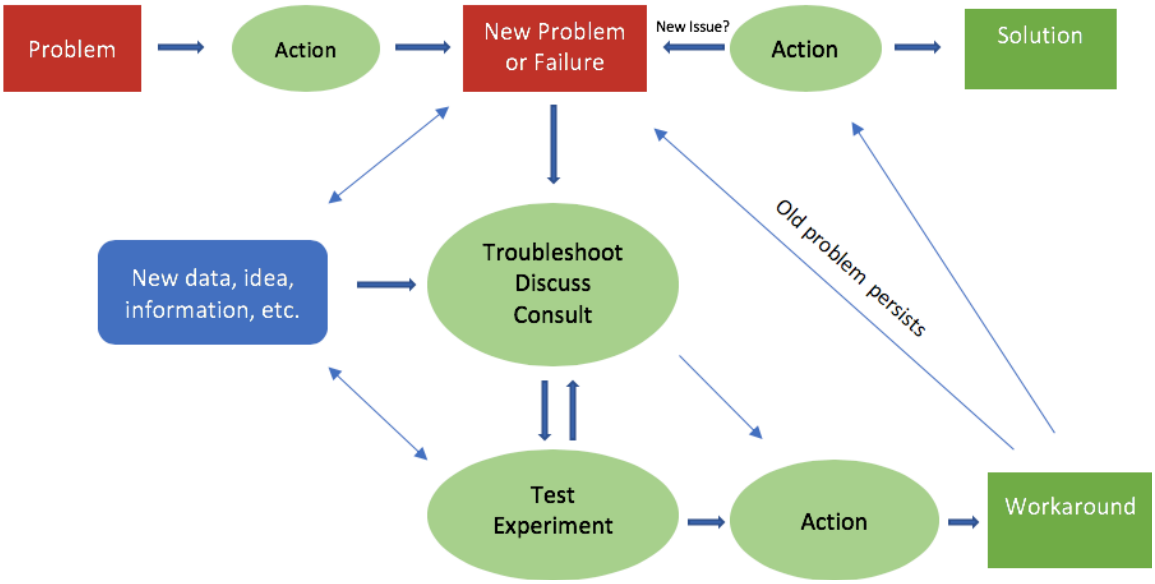
Figure 2

Espoused Theory: Formal Procedures to Solve a Problem

Note. Adapted from *Behind the Front Page: Organizational Self-Renewal in Metropolitan Newspapers*, by C. Argyris, 1974a. Copyright 1974 by Jossey-Bass.

Figure 3

Theory-in-Use: How Problems Are Usually Solved



Note. Adapted from *Behind the Front Page: Organizational Self-Renewal in Metropolitan Newspapers*, by C. Argyris, 1974a. Copyright 1974 by Jossey-Bass.

Figures 2 and 3 indicate the differences between espoused theory and theory-in-use. Espoused theory depends upon the existing policies and procedures to lead to a solution; theory-in-use shows additional steps that an individual or an organization might take when the existing policies do not produce the desired outcome. Theory-in-use allows

for personal experience, troubleshooting, possible experiments, consultation, new information, and knowledge to provide a better chance for problem resolution.

Espoused theory might work in most interactions with nondisabled individuals as it is in line with the steps to cooperate with disabled citizens (victim, suspect, witness, etc.) as learned in the police academy. Theory-in-use, however, could be a much better approach when interacting with members of the disabled population, many of whom need special accommodations. Theory-in-use would allow law enforcement officers to draw on their knowledge and experience to take additional steps to provide the appropriate services. This is especially true when interacting with disabled individuals whose medical conditions are rare or not often encountered. Additional accommodations could be necessary, requiring more innovative ways to provide these individuals with the best service and assistance.

Despite being a long-implemented phenomenon, organizational learning theory is infrequently used. This is, in part, because organizations and businesses do not offer ongoing training to provide their employees with access to nontraditional solutions. As globalization, technology, and laws continuously change, the need for new knowledge and solutions also changes. Although disability awareness training has been available for decades, most law enforcement departments do not incorporate it in their academy training (Reaves, 2016). Moreover, departments provide little to no post academy instruction on how to interact with members of the disabled population, requiring officers who have been on the job for years, or even decades, to refer to the training they received before starting their careers.

Lack of training can lead to worsening police–community relations, posing a threat to disabled individuals, as many officers do not know how to handle such interactions properly (Sikes & Cleveland, 1968). Additionally, poor training might lead to potential litigation and public outrage, as in the case of Robert Saylor. Therefore, it is essential to recognize the lack of training as a problem that still lacks a solution. There is limited research on organizational learning in the context of policing. Although organizational learning theory is not the perfect solution to the problems law enforcement departments face, it provides more and new knowledge and experiences, increasing officers' ability to solve a problem with minimum damage.

Experiential Learning

In addition to formal knowledge, learning theory also includes personal experiences as a learning tool. Learning itself has been a part of life from the beginning of time. Some of the earliest systematic inquiry into the nature of knowledge was by the Greek philosopher Plato, who pursued the ultimate foundations of knowledge. However, not all philosophers agreed with Plato. Socrates, for example, was skeptical about the possibility of acquiring specific knowledge and perceived the acceptance of ignorance as an essentially human condition. However, as times have changed, scholars agree that knowledge could and should be improved (Armstrong & Fukami, 2009). Also, although formal knowledge is often necessary, experience and informal learning can be worthwhile substitutes.

People learn from their experiences in many ways. From social interactions to risky adventures to attended events, various experiences shape a person. A child, for example, learns how to behave appropriately and express various emotions by observing

and imitating others, not through formal learning. Similarly, Bill Gates and Steve Jobs, among many others, have achieved proficiency and mastery in their fields without the need for formal knowledge or training but rather observation, imitation, and experience (Armstrong & Fukami, 2009).

Drawing upon the work of Dewey, Lewin, and Piaget, Kolb (2015) helped develop the modern theory of experiential learning. Experiential learning refers to a training experience where the learner is an active participant, leading to the development of new skills, ways of thinking, and attitudes (Lewis & Williams, 1994). Experiential learning involves engaging students in relevant, active, and challenging learning. With technological advances and ongoing societal change and development, the need for flexibility and the capacity to implement new experiences increase. According to Kolb and Lewis (1986), experiences strengthen knowledge through practice and vice versa. Lewis and Williams (1994) agreed that experiential approaches improve communication skills, workplace literacy, and the ability to work in groups.

Keeton and Tate (1978) defined experiential learning as:

> Learning in which the learner is directly in touch with the realities being studied. It is contrasted with the learner who only reads about, hears about, talks about, or writes about these realities but never comes into contact with them as part of the learning process. (p. 13)

Pfeiffer and Jones (1980) defined experiential learning as an event that "occurs when a person engages in some activity, abstracts some useful insight from the analysis, and puts the result to work through a change in behavior" (p. 4). Such representations of experiential learning emphasize direct experience as the primary source of knowledge.

Today, many organizations offer experiential programs, such as internships or field placements and projects, that add to individuals' academic knowledge by allowing for in-context action and hands-on experience. Field-based experiences, including internships and practicums, have long been components of higher education to prepare learners to successfully navigate their careers in various fields, such as social work, medicine, or clinical psychology (Lewis & Williams, 1994).

Kolb (2015) created a four-part process linking theory to actual practice: concrete experiences, reflective observations, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (see Figure 4). Concrete experiences are the experiences that learners already have and can recall through role-play or case studies. Reflective observations require a person to reflect on the recalled experiences from different perspectives to gain a better understanding. This step can involve writing a reflective paper or journal or sharing thoughts and perspectives in a group discussion. Next, the learners engage in abstract conceptualization, which entails developing or creating generalizations that integrate observations into theories using films or lectures. Finally, the learners participate in active experimentation, using the previously created generalizations to test what they have learned; this leads to another set of concrete experiences as the learners create and face new occurrences. Role-plays and mock proposals are some of the problem-solving exercises used in this stage (Lewis & Williams, 1994).

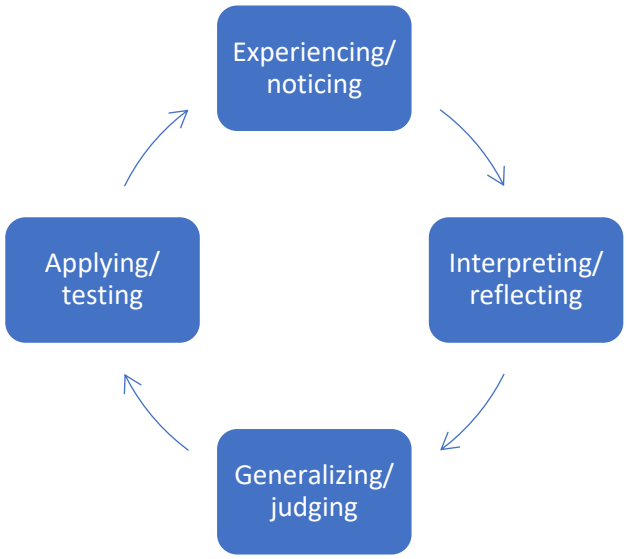
When a concrete experience is strengthened by reflective observation and meaning, the experiences become more profound and abundant, creating a learning spiral (Dewey, 1938). Harrelson and Leaver-Dunn (2002) developed a five-part process of experiential learning: experiencing, publishing, processing, generalizing, and applying.

Although similar to Kolb's (2015) four-part process, Harrelson and Leaver-Dunn conceived reflective observation in two parts: publishing and processing. Whether based on four or five fundamentals, experiential learning theorists strive to add experiences as a valid source of knowledge.

Experiences are dynamic and not fixed. New cognitive structures can influence one's perspective of each experience, as revisiting them allows for different interpretations that might significantly differ from the previous ones (Baddeley et al., 2009). Developing new perspectives happens when, while revisiting the old experiences, an individual has already created a new one. Thus, it would be incorrect to say that once people understand the meaning of their experiences, they remain unchanged. Perspectives on experiences are like human beings: They keep changing and evolving with time (Beard & Wilson, 2018).

Figure 4

Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle



Note. Adapted from *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*, by D. A. Kolb, 2015. Copyright 2015 by Prentice-Hall.

Other researchers agree with the importance of experiences. According to Mezirow (1990), with critical reflection, people become more aware of the psychological and cultural assumptions and generalizations that influence their actions. Freire (1970) also argued that experiential encounters allow people to raise their critical consciousness of the realities of their culture. Whereas some researchers believe that experiential learning influences personal development (e.g., Mezirow, 1990), others attest that it is also directed toward social change (e.g., McGill & Weil, 1990), as often seen in the modern world. Today, both private and public sectors incorporate more innovative experiential techniques to successfully and adequately meet the needs of various diverse groups (Lewis & Williams, 1994).

Beard and Wilson (2018) listed the benefits of experiential learning, including the quality of experiences that engage learners and make each experience memorable, which has the potential for self-transformation. Moreover, through experiential learning, learners take responsibility for controlling their knowledge. They experience not only the social and cultural dynamics of being a human but also the cognitive, conative, sensorial, and emotional aspects.

Emotional capability has received more attention in recent studies. Goleman (1996) argued that an emotional dynamic will always be part of any experience and that emotional intelligence is at the core of all success. Thus, the more senses engaged during each experience, the stronger the connection between the inner and outer worlds. Learning, in any capacity, also leads to fundamental transformation and change of an individual's being. As people learn through thinking, sensing, observing, interacting,

belonging, doing, and acting, they are continually evolving. Experiences serve as a film, where the clips of life experiences are together, shaping its unique script.

When considering disabled individuals, human rights might not come to mind immediately. However, diversity and cultural aspects of any training should not be limited to race or gender but rather extended to all subjects that could be considered diverse. Such training is often included in the traditional avenues taken by law enforcement agencies and police administration (Ederheimer, 2001). It is, however, often provided in the form of in-class learning with the use of textbooks rather than innovative experiential learning that could influence officers' behavior more than the traditional diversity awareness training (Ederheimer, 2001). Training in which the participants become active learners allows them to confront their personal feelings and forces them to foster creative thinking while on the job (Ederheimer, 2001; Lewis & Williams, 1994). Such skills can result in an improved quality of services provided to the community.

Moreover, although not directly related to law enforcement training, educators who participated in experiential learning reported feeling more prepared to work with students with learning disabilities (Jobling & Moni, 2004**)**. The teachers felt better about their perceptions, self-confidence, attitudes, skills, and knowledge on including special needs students in their classrooms (Jobling & Moni, 2004). On a similar note, because adults already have a broad set of experiences, drawing upon those experiences can only enrich their future learning (Lewis & Williams, 1994). Simulations, case studies, games, and role-plays may be valuable part of law enforcement training to enhance already-existing experiences.

It is crucial, however, to stress that experience itself does not provide for or lead to better decisions or judgment. In some cases, experiences alone can create bias and contradict formal learning and education (Kolb, 2015). If one perceives experiential learning as a natural process of learning from life experiences and not formal science, experience alone might seem unreliable, dangerous, and misleading. Further, some experiences might trigger memories, and not always positive ones. Each experience is unique; some occur in the inner private world, whereas others are from the outer public world (Beard & Wilson, 2018). However, some experiences, especially the negative ones, should be corrected by formal education (Kolb, 2015). When combined with proper knowledge, experiences can strengthen one's ability to approach life and work differently, often in a more sophisticated way and of better quality.

There have been a few attempts to understand the importance of applying the lessons learned from the organizational learning and experiential learning theories to law enforcement. Police departments have evolved for centuries, from allowing women on the force to expanding officers' tasks to implementing new technological advances. Although the 1994 Crime Control Act significantly contributed to technological advances in law enforcement and evaluations and research of community policing efforts, few scholars examined the role of organizational changes in implementing this new approach to policing (Alarid, 1999). A learning perspective may help police departments transform from a traditional organization to a department that can fully embrace its work through policies, procedures, structure, and mission (Dolan, 1994; Green, 1993; Malone, 1994). Traditional policing, defined as a police department's focus on procedural rigor and

organizational specialization, can benefit from incorporating learning theories (Fuld, 1909; Wilson, 1950).

To fully support these changes within a department, law enforcement personnel must participate in a learning process that is integral and fundamental to the entire organization (Geller, 1997). Creating a learning organization, particularly in criminal justice, requires exploring the theoretical groundwork of human relations theory and its connection to organizational learning (Alarid, 1999). Malone (1994) found that the transition to a learning institution is not always easy, as most police chiefs opposed the unavoidable organizational change. Similarly, Dolan (1994) observed that problems with staff recruitment, training, and professional jealousy also contribute to a lack of organizational change.

Argyris (1974b) created two theoretical assumptions of organization theory. The first is that each organization has its own life and that large organizations shall support and encourage individual change, apathy, compliance, and dependence. Second, Argyris argued that individual abilities and traits must evolve, as each person has changing needs that require an appropriate organizational response. Many researchers have linked both assumptions to the individual and unique needs and problems that law enforcement officers face, such as constantly changing laws and shifts within an organization and the outside community (Alarid, 1999). However, in most modern police departments, community police officer assessment is on traditional measures, such as clearance and arrest rates, rather than on overall performance and appropriate feedback to help officers improve (Alarid, 1999; Argyris, 1974b). Argyris (1974b) believed that feedback would

allow employees to detect and correct errors through the learning process, resulting in fewer mistakes.

Moreover, it is crucial to present the disparities between organizational learning theory's espoused theory and theory-in-use from a law enforcement perspective. For example, each officer must complete the police academy, which would fall under the espoused theory. However, the field training that officers experience after graduating from the academy is an example of theory-in-use. Superiors often tell officers to forget what they learned in the academy and act accordingly, as they might encounter scenarios not presented in a classroom setting (Alarid, 1999).

Organizational learning theory does not require all departments to change their philosophies. Instead, it suggests that police departments could be more productive and have more satisfied employees if they move from a traditional structure to an organization focused on implementing the needed changes. There is no single way or method of organizational change. However, administrators must allow law enforcement agencies to be learning organizations (Alarid, 1999). Implementing changes can allow law enforcement officers to respond efficiently, quickly, and effectively amid the rising challenges of changing times and evolving rules.

Members of organizations learn through experience, and experience can improve organizational performance (Huber, 1991). Thus, experiential learning is the key to organizational learning theory as it allows for learning through knowledge exchange and evaluation (Bedford & Mazerolle, 2014). Educators have used experiential learning for decades in various subjects, mainly social sciences but also professional fields (DeMartini, 1983; McCarthy & McCarthy, 2006). Criminal justice students participate in

various experience-based events, such as field trips, internships, and research projects. Such involvement replaces traditional and instructor-centered approaches and allows for a hands-on, student-centered experience (Cromwell & Birzer, 2012). These experiences improve career preparedness and provide students with practical skills not obtainable in a classroom.

Too much theoretical emphasis can reduce students' abilities to relate to everyday situations in which discretion plays a significant role (Braswell & Miller, 1986). Although experiential learning does not provide one with a correct solution to a problem, it presents multiple workable or correct options allowing for the application of theoretical principles in more ways than one (Braswell & Miller, 1986). Since the role of today's policing no longer operating under classical policing but rather community policing, the expectation of the public is that law enforcement will be more involved in society, serving everyone, especially those more vulnerable (Henshaw & Thomas, 2012). As experiential learning teaches skills rather than theory, it allows officers to work around the problem and come up with innovative solutions that could not be reached with theoretical learning only (Braswell & Miller, 1986).

Real-world and hands-on experiences can also strengthen interpersonal skills as individuals interact with clients, professionals, suspects, victims, and witnesses (Stichman & Farkas, 2005). Moreover, experiential learning through various programs, including internships, often improves learners' attitudes and perspectives of the criminal justice system (Fichter, 1987). It is important to mention that theoretical learning should not be fully replaced by experiential learning but rather enhanced by it (Fichter, 1987). Experiential learning, when added to traditional instruction, can be a useful tool in

applying criminal justice theory and allowing for positive changes in solving problems in the field (Miller & Braswell, 1986).

Law enforcement agencies have adopted experiential learning by providing ride-alongs, tours, and other service-learning experiences (Payne et al., 2003). However, the hands-on experiences promoted by these agencies pertain to academic opportunities and not officer development.

Experiential Learning and Self-Confidence

Learning organizations must constantly evaluate their performance, which includes service providers (such as the police) and their interactions with the diverse communities in which they operate. In this case, the diverse community might include the disabled. Experience, education, and training have received prior study as predictors of self-confidence. For example, Travers et al. (2013) examined health care workers and their confidence in working with individuals with dementia. The results of the regression analysis showed that three variables contributed to higher self-confidence in caring for these individuals: (a) current area of work, (b) occupation, and (c) more time working with people with dementia each week. Together, these variables accounted for 26% of the variance in the workers' self-confidence. Thus, greater confidence was evident among participants who spent more time working with individuals with dementia and those who had more work experience. Additionally, greater self-confidence resulted in more positive attitudes toward these individuals (Travers et al., 2013).

Indirect experience also contributes to an individual's attitude, with familiarity producing a clearer and more confident approach. Using problem-solving in a laboratory setting, Fazio and Zanna (1978) found that participants with direct experience were more

confident in their performance than those with indirect experience. The results supported the researchers' hypothesis that having better and more access to information allows individuals to solve problems more confidently.

Criminal justice research also supports the importance of knowledge regarding disabilities on disabilities, as many police officers lack the related knowledge (Modell & Mak, 2008). Chown (2010) surveyed 120 police officers in a qualitative study on autism awareness and law enforcement. The survey questions examined officers' definitions of autism and Asperger syndrome, the skills and knowledge that could equip officers to deal with disabled people, and receipt of disability awareness training. Despite understanding what autism and Asperger syndrome were, officers proposed more training to recognize key signs of disabilities, which they felt equal in priority to the existing training focused on understanding race and gender issues.

Perhaps with more direct experience with disabled persons, first responders could improve their attitudes toward this population and increase their confidence in interacting and de-escalating situations involving the disabled. Therefore, rather than solely relying on self-assessment on readiness to interact appropriately with disabled individuals, departments could provide an actual, direct experience to law enforcement officers through the police academy and in-service training (Chown, 2010).

As outside reformers and police agencies seek new means of policing vulnerable populations, many have increased the use of Crisis Intervention Teams (CITs). Greater CIT training corresponds with increased officer confidence in interacting with the disabled. Compton et al. (2006) examined whether CIT training was effective in changing officers' knowledge, attitudes, and stigma related to individuals with schizophrenia. The

researchers administered a survey about officers' comfort level with interactions with schizophrenic individuals before and after a CIT training program consisting of 40 hours of mental health training, with only one hour dedicated to schizophrenia. In addition to sociodemographic questions, officers reported their exposure to and familiarity with mental illnesses before and after training. Other topics explored included officers' attitudes on the aggressiveness of individuals with schizophrenia and those without mental health illnesses. Compton et al. found that by the end of the 40-hour CIT training, participating officers' attitudes toward people with schizophrenia had significantly improved ($p = .01$). The knowledge of the illness itself increased, and the social indifference toward schizophrenic people decreased after training completion ($p < .001$).

Although the findings did indicate that CIT training positively influenced law enforcement officers' attitudes and knowledge, the focus was limited to schizophrenia. Other disabilities (e.g., physical, sensory, or cognitive) were not included. Therefore, it is unclear whether these findings are applicable to interactions with individuals afflicted by other types of disabilities. Further, it is essential to mention that members of the Memphis Police Department developed the CIT training in 1988 (Steadman et al., 2000) which shows that such training has been in existence for decades. The purpose of the original training was to provide law enforcement agents with skills and knowledge to improve their responses to mentally ill individuals (Borum et al., 1998). In a study by Dupont and Cochran (2000), similar to Compton et al. (2006), self-selected officers participated in a 40-hour CIT training. Family advocates, local mental health professionals, and mental health consumer groups provided the training, awarding officers a certification of

completion to recognize them as first-line responders in crisis calls (Dupont & Cochran, 2000).

CIT programs can effectively reduce unnecessary use of force and arrest rates for mentally ill individuals (Steadman et al., 2000). This is an especially noteworthy finding, as there have been increases in emergency health care referrals and calls. A trained, suitable response to people with mental health issues has reduced incarceration incidence and cost, with individuals transported to mental health facilities rather than correctional institutions (Dupont & Cochran, 2000). Nevertheless, CIT trainings focus on mental illness, overlooking other types of disabilities. Dupont and Cochran (2000) and Steadman et al. (2000) found that when law enforcement agencies include disability awareness training, the content is usually limited. Although a 40-hour mental illness training might seem sufficient, the question remains whether officers receive information about specific disabilities, including a discussion of less-common disabilities. Disability awareness curricula for law enforcement should be more inclusive to provide the knowledge and skills needed to interact with individuals with various disabilities effectively.

An increasing number of researchers and practitioners have recommended and implemented experiential learning and reflective approaches for use within law enforcement (Copley, 2011). The role of reflection in police education has not received as much attention as in other fields. However, police training should move away from military-type and instructor-centered training toward lifelong learning (McCoy, 2006; Vodde, 2012). Such a change is essential for developing the problem-solving, communication, and critical thinking skills that play a significant role in policing (McCoy, 2006; Vodde, 2012). A few scholars have examined the impact of simulation

exercises and their contribution to decision-making and problem-resolution by providing additional experiences (Helsen & Starkes, 1999). Moreover, it has been found that simulation exercises can also improve officers' interactions with mentally ill individuals (Oudejans, 2008).

The existing literature on experiential learning shows that characteristics acquired through experience such as problem-solving, trust, respect, cooperation, and teamwork may be more important to team success than formal education (Godsey, 2005). Experiential learning also provides people with an opportunity to reexamine their interactions with others which may lead to increased self-confidence and improvements in personal and group dynamics (Ulin, 2004). Confidence building regarding measuring group performance is often used as a learning tool and has two major components: self-efficacy (one's confidence in themselves) and collective interdependence efficacy (confidence in group members). Confidence development has been found to be beneficial for individuals to work independently as well as to operate in groups (Ulin, 2004).

Self-confidence as a result of experiences has previously been examined in other fields. In a study related to nursing and self-confidence, Riess (2018) found that a simulation environment allows students to learn from their mistakes and make correct choices preparing them to assume a professional role. Compared to traditional learning, general experimentation plays an essential role in changing confidence levels as it creates new beliefs regarding disability (Riess, 2018). Such methods of learning facilitate empathy, self-confidence, and satisfaction. This might be particularly true when dealing with more diverse population that students might have limited experience with.

Significance of the Study and Hypotheses

The main purpose of this study was to fill the gap in the literature related to U.S. law enforcement training on interactions with the disabled population and law enforcement officers' self-confidence in handling such interactions. Increasing numbers among the disabled population necessitate more disability-related research and practical solutions. However, the sparse research conducted on this topic has shown that despite variations within the American populace, there have been few changes regarding disability awareness training or police academy training, in general (including post academy instruction). Given the existing literature and the theoretical framework, this research had four hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Few officers in the surveyed police departments have received police academy or outside the academy training on interactions with the disabled population.

Hypothesis 2: Police disability awareness training (regardless of when it was received) is often limited to mental illness and disabilities, but officers regularly encounter individuals with a broad range of disabilities.

Hypothesis 3: Receiving disability awareness training while in the academy, and receiving training outside the academy, will each be associated with a greater officer confidence in handling interactions with this population in the two presented scenarios.

Hypothesis 4: Personal and on-duty experiences with the disabled are associated with greater officer confidence in handling interactions with this population in the two presented scenarios when controlling for training.

Summary

The findings of Dupont and Cochran (2000) and Steadman et al. (2000) revealed a lack of disability awareness training in most American law enforcement agencies. Despite the apparent need for such instruction, most departments provide minimal hours of training on how to interact with the disabled population (Reaves, 2016). Not much has changed despite calls for more and better training, suggesting a problem that, after more than two decades, remains in need of improvement and solution. In the next chapter, a survey instrument and analytical plan will be introduced to shed further light on this deficit.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The present study was an examination of the extent to which law enforcement officers receive training on interactions with disabled individuals and whether officers' personal and on-duty experiences make them feel more confident in handling such encounters. Thus, the purpose of this research was to examine the relationship between police training, personal experiences, experiences on duty and the officers' confidence in handling interactions with disabled individuals based on two hypothesized scenarios.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

This study addressed four Research Questions:

1. As part of police academy or outside the academy training programs, what percentage of Florida law enforcement officers receive formal training on interactions with disabled individuals?

   Hypothesis 1: Few officers in the surveyed police departments have received police academy or outside the academy training on interactions with the disabled population.

2. Have the officers whose disability awareness training was limited to mental illness and disabilities also encountered individuals with other disabilities (e.g., physical, developmental) as part of their work duties?

   Hypothesis 2: Police disability awareness training (regardless of when it was received) is often limited to mental illness and disabilities, but officers regularly encounter individuals with a broad range of disabilities.

3. Is receiving disability awareness training (regardless of when it was received) associated with increased officer confidence in handling interactions with this population as measured via the hypothetical case scenarios?

   Hypothesis 3: Receiving disability awareness training while in the academy, and receiving training outside the academy, will each be associated with a greater officer confidence in handling interactions with this population in the two presented scenarios.

4. Are personal and on-duty experiences with the disabled associated with greater officer confidence in handling interactions with this population in the hypothetical case scenarios when controlling for training?

   Hypothesis 4: Personal and on-duty experiences with the disabled are associated with greater officer confidence in handling interactions with this population in the two presented scenarios when controlling for training.

Independent Variables

Police Training

The police training variable indicates whether law enforcement officers in Florida receive disability-related training (generally referred to as disability awareness training) and, if so, was it limited to "mental illness and disability only." The binomial training variable included yes/no responses to whether officers received (a) disability-related training in the police academy and (b) outside the academy disability-related training. The question regarding mental illness and disability was also binomial.

Personal Experience

The personal experience variable, which is binomial, enabled examination of whether having personal experience with people with disabilities could be significant in the field of law enforcement. Officers answered whether they had any personal experience with people with disabilities and, if so, whether they believed it had increased their confidence in general interactions with this population. Such personal interactions could include those with family members, friends, and colleagues, etc.

On-Duty Experience

In addition to personal experiences, this research was an examination of on-duty experience. Officers answered whether they had on-duty experience with the disabled population (also a binomial variable); if so, with the use of question logic, they reviewed examples of various disabilities they might have encountered while on duty and checked boxes for those they have met while on the job (see Appendix A).

Dependent Variable: Officers' Confidence

Officers reported their confidence level in relation to handling interactions described in separate case scenarios. The first of the two confidence measures was recorded as part of the following scenario:

> You received a call from a dispatcher stating that there is a 22-year-old man who refuses to leave the movie theater, and the manager asks for help in solving the situation. Once you arrive at the theater, you are either informed by others or notice yourself that the man has Down syndrome. There is no caretaker in sight. Despite asking the man multiple times to leave the movie theater or pay again to see another movie, he still refuses to leave or pay for another ticket.

The second of the two scenarios was:

> You received a call from a dispatcher stating that the mother of a 13-old-boy called for help in handling her son's "mental breakdown" and is asking for a crisis intervention team to help her manage the situation and ger her son treatment. You are the first officer arriving. The boy, who has Asperger syndrome, gets mad, starts yelling, and runs away.

Confidence was measured with Likert-like scales, from 1 = *not confident at all* to 5 = *extremely confident*.

Other Variables

Other variables included gender, ethnicity, age, highest educational level, years spent in law enforcement, position within the agency, and shifts worked.

Survey Method

Participants

This study's choice of police departments was based on a convenience sample of police departments in Florida. Another graduate student working on a law enforcement project (Wolfs et al., in press) created and shared a master list of all police departments in the United States. Because the list was from 2018, this researcher updated the information in 2020 with the most current police chief names and email addresses.

An email sent to 221 police departments in Florida was the means of soliciting the participation of their sworn officers. The email was sent to the police administrations (e.g., assistants to the chiefs, office managers) to help ensure it would be sent to those meeting the study's criteria (i.e., be being a sworn and active officer). The email contained a cover letter explaining the purpose of the study as well as the Institutional

Review Board approval letter, a letter to the Chief requesting permission to collect data, the survey link to distribute with the cover letter to members of the department, instructions on how to access and complete the survey, and contact information for the researcher. Follow-up emails went out 14 days after the initial email asking the police departments to consider participation in the study.

Data collection ended when the desired sample size was reached and included participants from 17 police departments in Florida out of the 221 departments contacted with 204 officers completing the survey. The respondents represented 27% of the sworn officer workforce of the 17 participating departments ($N = 761$). This met the data collection plan to collect at least 108 completed questionnaires to test this study's hypotheses. Specifically, Green (1991) recommended that to compare beta weights in multiple regression tests across four predictors a sample size for a test with a common statistical power of .8 should be greater than 108.

To best represent the study's target population, participation was limited to only sworn law enforcement officers who had graduated from the academy. To ensure anonymity, no participant names were collected. All data is reported in aggregate and all agencies are referred to as "law enforcement police departments in Florida." For the purpose of identifying the number of police departments, participants were asked to report the name of their department only. Participating departments varied in size from fewer than 10 sworn officers to more than 100.

Ethical Concerns

Ensuring that participants did not encounter any ethical issues was a priority in this study. Participation in the online survey had minimal risk with no potential adverse

impact on officers' well-being (including physical, psychological, and emotional). All participants were over 18 years of age and were eligible to participate in this study based on their current employment with a participating law enforcement agency. All participants were sworn officers at the time of the survey, which was another criterion for this research. Because the study does not divulge participant or agency names or identifying characteristics, no written consent by participants was required. Participants received a cover letter explaining the study and instructions on accessing the survey anonymously. Participants were able to skip any questions they were not comfortable answering and could withdraw from the study at any time without consequence.

Procedure

An online survey was used because of its availability, accessibility, and cost savings as opposed to a traditional mail survey. The online collection also likely facilitated faster data collection. Participants received the link to the survey page in Qualtrics via a designated department point of contact. After consenting to participate in the first online page, officers completed the 47-question survey (see Appendix A). Participation was entirely voluntary and anonymous, and there was no compensation or incentive for participating. The survey instructions informed respondents they could skip any questions they did not feel comfortable answering by either leaving them blank or indicating N/A. Upon completing the survey, participants clicked "submit;" if an individual exited without submitting, the survey remained as "in progress" for seven days before being automatically disregarded and deleted. As a result, all submitted surveys were complete. The survey link remained open until achieving the desired sample size of 108 or more, which occurred after 32 days.

Survey Instrument

The survey (see Appendix A) contained four sections: police training, encounters with disabled individuals, scenario questions, and officer demographics.

Section I: Police Training. Participants responded to questions about the training they received in and outside of the police academy, including the number of hours of training and their satisfaction with the training. Example questions were:

- As part of your police academy training, did you receive formal training on interactions with disabled individuals (interactions of any capacity with victims, witnesses, suspects, and general population)? Such interactions can include but are not limited to traffic stops, calls for service, making arrests, issuing citations, and negotiating order.
- Outside of the police academy, have you received any formal training on interactions with disabled individuals?
- If yes to Question 1and/or Question 2, was your training limited to mental illness and disability only?

Section II: Encounters with Disabled Individuals. Participants reported their on-the-job and personal experiences with disabled individuals, the various disabilities of the individuals they encountered while on duty and outside of work, their knowledge of the ADA, and the U.S. Department of Justice's OVC first response guidelines. Some of the questions were:

- As a law enforcement officer, have you ever encountered individuals with disabilities as part of your daily job functions?

- Have you ever heard of the U.S. Department of Justice's Office for Victims of Crime first response guidelines?
- On a 5-point scale, how familiar are you with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)?

Section III: Scenario Questions. Through two scenarios, officers had to put themselves in two situations based on the cases of Robert Ethan Saylor and Linden Cameron described at the beginning of this paper. Survey questions required officers to document their comfort and confidence levels in regard to the following vignettes.

1. ***Movie Theater Scenario.*** You received a call from a dispatcher stating that there is a 22-year-old man who refuses to leave the movie theater, and the manager asks for help in solving the situation. Once you arrive at the theater, you are either informed by others or notice yourself that the man has Down syndrome. There is no caretaker in sight. Despite asking the man multiple times to leave the movie theater or pay again to see another movie, he still refuses to leave or pay for another ticket.
2. ***Crisis Intervention Scenario.*** You received a call from a dispatcher stating that the mother of a 13-old-boy called for help in handling her son's "mental breakdown" and is asking for a crisis intervention team to help her manage the situation and ger her son treatment. You are the first officer arriving. The boy, who has Asperger syndrome, gets mad, starts yelling, and runs away.

Example questions for both scenarios included the following and were measured using a Likert-like scale from 1 to 5, with 1 = not prepared at all; not confident at all; and 5 = extremely prepared; extremely confident.

- How do you feel that your training prepared you to handle this particular disability in this particular situation?
- How confident are you in handling the above-mentioned situation?

Section IV: Officer Demographics. This section required officers to respond to general questions about their gender, age, ethnicity, and educational background. They also answered questions about their experience in law enforcement, in addition to the type of agency they worked for and their current department and position.

Summary

This study examined the responses of 204 police officers from 17 police departments in Florida regarding their police academy and outside the academy training, their experiences (personal and on-duty) with disabled individuals and their relationship to officers' confidence in interactions with this population.

Participants in this study received a Qualtrics survey with 47 questions via a designated department representative. Participation was anonymous and voluntary with no compensation for participating. All participants were sworn officers at the time of participation. Once the data were collected, analyses were run to examine the relationship between the predictor and outcome variables. The results of these analyses are discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

The collected data for this study underwent analysis using SPSS Version 26. All findings were considered significant when $p < .05$. The statistical tests differed across the four Research Questions, described as follows:

For Research Question 1, a frequency distribution (tabulated summary) of responses to the police training questions addressed whether law enforcement officers received any disability awareness training. For this Research Question, the survey's Test Item 1 (police academy training) and Test Item 2 (outside academy training) were analyzed.

For Research Question 2, a frequency analysis was used to determine whether officers whose disability awareness training was limited to mental illness and disability encountered individuals with other types of disabilities while on duty. Answering this Research Question entailed analyzing Test Item 4 (training limited to mental illness and disability only) and Test Item 25 (list of disabilities officers encountered on duty).

Answering Research Question 3 required conducting a linear regression analyzing officers' reported confidence in the two case scenarios based on their training, both in police academy and outside the academy. A linear regression is an appropriate model to compare the influence of different independent variables on the same dependent variable. Moreover, choosing regression was consistent and comparable with prior studies that examined multiple independent predictors on self-confidence and other training outcome variables (e.g., Olaussen et al., 2019). For this analysis, Test Item 1 (police academy/no police academy training) and Test Item 2 (outside academy/no outside academy training)

were regressed on officer self-confidence (Test Item 30 in Scenario 1 and Test Item 33 in Scenario 2).

A linear regression analysis was also appropriate to answer Research Question 4, testing whether on-duty experience and personal experience in combination with training influenced officers' confidenceinas measured via the two scenarios. In this full regression model, four predictors (on-duty experience,personal experience, police academy training, and outside the academy training) were regressed on the dependent variable (officer's reported self-confidence). A linear regression was an appropriate test to identify the relative strength of each predictor variable on the dependent variable in each scenario. Test Items 1 (police academy training), 2 (outside academy training), 11 (on-duty experience) and 27 (personal experience) were regressed on officer self-confidence (Test Item 30 in the first scenario and Test Item 33 in the second scenario).

Description of Sample

Regarding gender, 84% (n = 162) of the 193 respondents who answered this item identified themselves as male, 14% (n = 27) as female, and 2% (n = 4) as "other"; 11 did not answer the question. The respondents were between 18 and 64 years old, with an average of 42 years based on the 188 responses to that question (see Table 1).

A total of 192 respondents answered the question about their ethnicity. Out of these, nearly 42% (n = 80) were Caucasian, 36% (n = 70) were Hispanic/Latino, 15% (n = 28) were African American/Black, 4% (n = 8) were of mixed race, 1% (n = 2) were Asian/Pacific Islander, and 2% (n = 4) identified themselves as "other," with one noting Hispanic/Asian.

Table 1

Demographics of Law Enforcement Officers

Variable	*n*	%
Gender		
Female	27	13.99
Male	162	83.94
Other	4	2.07
Ethnicity		
Caucasian	80	41.67
African American/Black	28	14.58
Hispanic/Latino	70	36.46
Mixed race	8	4.17
Asian/Pacific Islander	2	1.04
Other	4	2.08
Highest educational level		
High school diploma	14	7.25
Some college credits	56	29.02
Associate's degree	39	20.21
Bachelor's degree	50	25.91
Some graduate school	8	4.15
Master's degree	23	11.92
Juris Doctor	2	1.04
Other	1	0.50

Note. $N = 204$. Participants were, on average, 41.5 years old ($n = 188$; $SD = 10.39$).

A question about respondents' highest level of education had answers from 193 respondents. Responses indicated that 7% (n = 14) had a high school diploma, 29% (n = 56) had some college credits, 20% (n = 39) had an associate's degree, 26% (n = 50) had a bachelor's degree, 4% (n = 8) had some graduate school credits, 12% (n = 23) had a master's degree, while two officers had a juris doctor and another identified their highest level of education as "other."

Participants' years of experience as law enforcement officers ranged from 0 to 41, with an average of 15 years (M = 15.41, SD = 9.86). More than 91% (n = 186) of respondents reported graduating from the police academy between 1980 and 2020; the other 9% (n = 18) did not answer this question. The most common year of academy graduation was 2004. A total of 194 participants reported the type of law enforcement agency for which they worked at the time of participating in this study. Responses showed that 3% (n = 6) worked for a state agency, 2% (n = 4) for a county agency, 91% (n = 177) for a local police department, and 3% (n = 5) for a university/state police department, with 1% (n = 2) identifying their departments as "other." More than half (53%; n = 109) of the officers worked in patrol units. Other divisions in which participants worked included investigations, K9, narcotics, operations, special operations, community response squad, compliance and standards, command, community involvement/school resource officer, administration, and training. At the time of the study, participants held various positions. These included assistant chiefs, chiefs, crime scene investigators, detectives, K9 officers, lieutenants, majors, police training officers, patrol officers, reserve officers, sergeants, school resource officers, supervisors, and watch commanders.

Out of all participants, 191 answered the question about their typical shift (see Table 2). As a portion of those that responded, 60% (n = 115) reported working days, 17% (n = 32) evenings, and 21% (n = 40) midnights. Four participants (2%) answered "other" and specified 12 p.m. to 8 p.m., afternoon, all, and varies, respectively. Out of 193 respondents, almost 12% (n = 23) worked for departments employing fewer than 20 sworn officers, 13% (n = 25) worked for departments with 20 to 50 officers, 34% (n = 66) were at agencies with 50 to 100 officers, 40% (n = 77) worked for departments with 100 to 200 officers, and 1% (n = 2) worked for departments with more than 200 officers.

Table 2

Other Characteristics

Variable	*n*	%
Type of agency		
State	6	3.09
County	4	2.06
Local	177	91.24
University/college	5	2.58
Other	2	1.03
Shift worked		
Days	115	60.21
Evenings	32	16.75
Midnights	40	20.95
Other	4	2.09

Note. N = 194 for 'Type of agency' variable; N = 191 for 'Shift worked' variable.

Research Question 1: Police Training

Research Question 1 was a means to examine the percentage of law enforcement officers who received formal disability awareness training as part of their police academy and outside the academy training. In the survey, these test items were separate (Q1:

police academy training; Q2: outside the academy training). Frequency distribution (tabulated summary) was used to analyze the data.

Out of 204 survey participants, 72% (n = 146) had received police academy training on interactions with disabled persons, whereas 28% (n = 58) had not. By coincidence, 72% (n = 146) of the respondents also reported receiving disability-related training outside the academy and 28% (n = 58) reported they had not received such training (see Table 3). Nearly every officer had received one training or the other type of as only 10% (n = 6) of officers answered "no" to both questions, indicating stating they had not received any disability awareness training. Out of the officers (n = 6) who answered "no" to both questions on disability awareness training, five (83%) reported that they believed that such training would be helpful in interviewing victims, suspects, witnesses, or communicating and interacting with disabled persons in general.

Table 3

Police Academy and Outside Academy Training

Variable	*n*	%
Training received		
Police Academy	146	71.57
Outside Academy	146	71.57
None	6	2.94

Note. N = 204.

Additionally, 75% (n = 152) of 202 participants had never heard of the U.S. Department of Justice's OVC first response guidelines. Out of those familiar with the guidelines (n = 50), a small portion (n = 10) had received training on its content. Out of 203 participants, less than half (48%; n = 97) had heard of the term "invisible disability." Of those familiar with this term, 90% (n = 87) said they had encountered a person with

an invisible disability while on duty. Officers who had encountered an invisible disability while on the job noted in which role they had faced these individuals. Officers were able to choose multiple answers (total of 234 answers provided by 87 respondents) and the results indicated that over 87% (n = 76) reported encountering victims of crime, 78% (n = 68) noted crime suspects, 76% (n = 66) noted crime witnesses, and 28% (n = 24) reporting 'other'.

Following the questions on academy and outside the academy training were two questions about officers' opinions on how well they believed their training prepared them for interactions with individuals with disabilities and how confident they would have been in these encounters had they been involved. A 5-point Likert-like scale was used for both questions. The first question had the scale of: 1 = *not prepared at all*; 2 = *slightly prepared*; 3 = *moderately prepared*; 4 = *very well prepared*; and 5 = *extremely prepared*. Out of the 198 officers who received training (either in the police academy and/or outside the academy), 130 (65%) responded to the question on training preparedness. The results showed that out of those 130, one officer (1%) believed their training did not prepare them at all, 33% (n = 43) believed their training prepared them slightly, 45% (n = 59) answered that their training prepared them moderately well, 17% (n = 22) said their training prepared them very well, and just 4% (n = 5) believed their training prepared them extremely well. The mean training preparedness on the Likert-like scale was 2.90 (SD = .83) whereas the mean confidence level was 3.11 (SD = .82).

The self-confidence question used a scale in which 1 = *not confident at all*, 2 = *slightly confident*, 3 = *moderately confident*, 4 = *very confident*, and 5 = *extremely confident*. The results for confidence level in interactions with disabled persons showed

that out of 131 officers who responded to this question, 2% (n = 2) of officers did not feel confident at all, 19% (n = 25) felt slightly confident, 51% (n = 67) felt moderately confident, 24% (n = 31) felt very confident, and 5% (n = 6) felt extremely confident in their interactions with the disabled population. The mean confidence level was 3.11 (SD = .82).

When asked about how familiar officers were with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) based on a Likert-like scale from 1 to 5, out of 202 respondents: almost 7% (n = 14) were not familiar at all; 23% (n = 46) were slightly familiar; nearly 40% (n = 80) were moderately familiar; 22% (n = 44) were very familiar; and 9% (n = 18) were extremely familiar. The mean ADA familiarity was 3.03 (SD = 1.04).

Moreover, when asked to choose all interactions in which the ADA compliance plays a role, officers could choose multiple answers (total of 454 responses provided by 202 respondents) in specifying when the ADA played a role in their interactions with the disabled. The majority of officers indicated that ADA compliance plays a role in interactions with victims (67%, n = 136), witnesses (63%, n = 127), and suspects (64%, n = 130). Others reported it was not applicable (30%, n = 61). Additionally, out of 201 respondents, 76% (n = 153) stated that in the past they had to make accommodations (for example, providing a sign language interpreter, adjusting light or noise levels, providing space for medical equipment, etc.) for a disabled person on the job.

Participants reported how many hours of disability-related training they had received in the police academy and as part of their job. Out of 203 officers who responded, 73% (n = 149) said they did not remember the number of hours, and 27% (n = 54) provided an estimate. The estimates varied from two to 120 hours (M = 19.91, SD

= 26.91, *Mdn* = 7), with most (*n* = 36) reporting fewer than 20 hours of disability training during the police academy. Furthermore, out of 203 officers who responded, 60% (*n* = 121) did not remember the number of outside the academy hours of training, while 40% (*n* = 82) provided an estimate. The estimates ranged from one to 200 hours (*M* = 33.45, *SD* = 36.98, *Mdn* = 24), with most (*n* = 60) officers reporting less than 50 hours of outside the academy training.

Research Question 2: Mental Illness and Disability Versus Other Disabilities

Officers who answered "yes" to either the academy training or post academy training under Research Question 1 were asked whether their training was limited to mental illness and disability. Out of those who responded (*n* = 144), 57% (*n* = 83) agreed that their training was limited to mental illness and disability, compared to the 42% (*n* = 61) that disagreed. A subsequent question pertained to what types of disabilities officers had encountered while on duty. The list included 10 disabilities (autism, Down syndrome, epilepsy, Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, deafness, blindness, and mental illness, including depression), with an "other" category for officers to add additional disabilities. In the "other" category, officers noted encountering the following disabilities on the job: traumatic brain injury, posttraumatic stress disorder, lupus, selective mutism, and conditions described as "wheelchair-bound." The purpose of this research question and the related survey questions was to determine whether officers who received training on only mental illness had encountered individuals with other types of disabilities (such as developmental, physical, or cognitive) while on duty.

Table 4 presents the frequency of officers encountering people with various disabilities, and Table 5 shows officers' encounters with disabled individuals according to their disability category (both mental and others).

Table 4

Officer Encounters with Disability per Illness

Variable	*n*	%
Autism	182	89.22
Down syndrome	119	58.33
Epilepsy	94	46.08
Parkinson's	70	34.31
Alzheimer's	156	76.47
Cerebral palsy	48	23.53
Multiple sclerosis	45	22.06
Deafness	161	78.92
Blindness	108	52.94
Mental illness	186	91.18

Note. $N = 204$.

The 198 officers who had received disability training of some kind were asked if their training was limited to mental illness and disability; of these 145 responded to the question. Of the 145, the majority 57% ($n = 83$) reported their training was limited to mental illness and disability. Of 203 officers, 197 (97%) reported encountering disabled persons of some kind as part of their duties. Ten disabilities were listed within the question: Mental Illness and nine 'other disabilities'.

Table 5

Officer Encounters with Disability per Category

Type of disability	*n*	%
Mental illness only	6	2.9
Any disability (including mental illness)	197	96.6

Note. $N = 203$.

Research Question 3: The Impact of Training on Officer Confidence

Answering Research Question 3 entailed examining whether disability awareness training (police academy and/or outside the academy) impacted officers' confidence in interactions with the disabled as measured via the case scenarios. In response to the two disability-interaction scenarios ("movie theater scenario" and "crisis intervention scenario"), officers provided their confidence on a scale of 1 (*not confident at all*) to 5 (*extremely confident*). A linear regression analysis was run on officers' confidence responses regarding the two scenarios to examine whether police academy and outside the academy training impacted their reported confidence levels in handling the scenarios.

The first linear regression model examined officers' reported confidence in handling the movie theater scenario based upon the received training (police academy training, and training outside the academy). In the movie theater scenario, both police academy training ($\beta = .18$, $p < .01$) and outside the academy training ($\beta = .14$, $p < .05$), were significant predictors of officer self- confidence (see Table 6).

Table 6

The Influence of Training on Confidence in Scenario 1 (Movie Theater)

	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized β
	B	Std. error	
(Constant)	3.16	.15	
Police academy training	0.36	.14	.18**
Outside academy training	0.28	.14	.14*

Note. *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$; $R^2 = .058$; $n = 195$.

As can be seen in Table 7, police academy training (β = .15, $p < .05$) was the only significant predictor of officer confidence in the crisis intervention scenario.

Table 7

The Influence of Training on Confidence in Scenario 2 (Crisis Intervention)

	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized β
	b	Std. error	
(Constant)	3.12	.15	
Police academy training	0.31	.14	.15*
Outside academy training	0.12	.15	.06

Note. *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$; $R^2 = .029$; $n = 195$.

Research Question 4: Experience Impact on Officer Confidence

The last research question focused on the role of on-duty and personal experiences, when controlling for training, predicting officers' reported confidence levels in the two scenarios presented. Respondents ($n = 203$) reported whether they had on-duty experience working with the disabled, with 96% ($n = 194$) confirming that they had. Nearly every officer participating in this study ($n = 197$) had encountered individuals with mental illness or some other type of disabilities while on duty. Moreover, out of 202

participants, 65% (n = 131) reported they had some type of personal experiences with the disabled.

The relationship between officers' reported confidence levels in handling the scenarios presented was examined using a linear regression that added the test item on-duty experience and personal experience to the previous model testing the role of training (both police academy and outside academy). Specifically, officers' reported confidence in handling the two scenarios presented was measured using a Likert-like scale from 1 to 5.

To test the fourth research question, multiple regression was conducted on the influence of the four predictor variables (on-duty experience, personal experience, academy and outside academy training) on officers' reported confidence in handling the two scenarios. Two linear regressions calculated officers' reported confidence based on their on-duty and personal experiences, and training with disabled persons.

In the first scenario (see Table 8), police academy training (β. = .17, $p < .05$) and on-duty experience (β = .18, $p < .05$) had a statistically significant effect on officers' reported self-confidence. Outside the academy training and personal experience were not statistically significant predictors of officers' self-confidence.

Table 8

The Influence of Training and Experience on Confidence in Scenario 1 (Movie Theater)

	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized β
	b	Std. error	
(Constant)	2.35	.30	
Police academy training	0.34	.14	.17*
Outside academy training	0.21	.14	.11
Personal experience	0.18	.13	.09
On-duty experience	0.79	.30	.18**

Note. *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$; $R^2 = .11$, $n = 198$.

Responses to the crisis intervention scenario (see Table 9) also showed that police academy training (β = .14, $p < .05$) and on-duty experience (β = .18, $p < .01$) were statistically significant predictors of officers' reported self-confidence in the full model. As in the previous scenario, personal experience and outside the academy training did not significantly impact officer self-confidence.

Table 9

The Influence of Training and Experience on Confidence in Scenario 2 (Crisis Intervention)

	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized β
	b	Std. error	
(Constant)	2.35	.32	
Police academy training	0.29	.14	.14*
Outside academy training	0.08	.15	.04
Personal experience	0.07	.14	.04
On-duty experience	0.80	.32	.18*

Note. *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$; $R^2 = .068$, $n = 198$.

Interestingly, despite the impact of police academy training on reported confidence levels in handling Scenario 2, 192 out of 198 participants (nearly 97%) of

officers believed that more training (specific to working with autistic individuals) would be beneficial. Similarly, 187 out of 197 participants (nearly 95%) in Scenario 1agreed that more training in interactions with individuals with Down syndrome would be beneficial.

Additionally, respondents with personal experience reported whether they believed this experience made them more confident in their general (including on-duty) interactions with persons with disabilities. Of the 131 officers with personal experience, 98% (n = 128) believed it improved their interactions with disabled persons.

Participants were also asked in what capacity they typically interact with disabled individuals (having an option to choose multiple answers resulting in 571 answers from 204 participants) leading to the following results: 71% (n = 145) interacted with disabled crime victims; 53% (n = 108) interacted with disabled crime witnesses; and 47% (n = 95) interacted with disabled criminal suspects. Further, 41% (n = 84) of officers encountered the disabled during traffic infractions; 45% (n = 91) while doing community outreach; and 23% (n = 48) were reported as 'other.' Additionally, when asked whether specific training was required before an officer is allowed to interview a disabled victim, witness, or suspect 73% (n = 149) out 203 officers responded there was not.

In terms of learning about a disabled person involved in an investigation, 119 out of 201 officers (59%) gained that information from a dispatcher while another 44 officers (22%) obtained this information from the first responding officer. Other sources of this information included five officers (2%) learning from a fellow investigator; five learning from other witnesses (2%), as well as nine learning from victims (4%), and six stated

they learned from others (3%). Only 13 officers (6%) reported that they typically do not have this information.

Summary

This study's analysis showed that although many officers reported receiving either police academy and outside the academy training (often both), they also reported that their training was limited to mental illness and disability (n = 83; 57%). Noteworthy is that most officers (n = 197; 97%) reported having interacted with individuals suffering from mental illnesses as well as individuals suffering from other, non-mental illnesses related, conditions on-duty, despite not always having received training on how to handle such situations. The results of a regression analysis showed that police academy training ($\beta = .18$, $p < .01$) and training outside the academy ($\beta = .14$, $p < .05$), significantly contributed to officers' reported self-confidence when presented with the movie theater scenario, while only police academy training ($\beta = .15$, $p < .05$) was significant in the crisis intervention scenario. Moreover, when analyzed together with personal and on-duty experiences, it was found that police academy training ($\beta = .17$, $p < .05$) and on-duty experience ($\beta = .18$, $p < .05$) had a statistically significant effect on officers' reported confidence in the first scenario as well as the second scenario (police academy training ($\beta = .14$, $p < .05$); on-duty experience ($\beta = .18$, $p < .01$). Given these results, interpretation of these findings and recommendations for future research are discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

A minimal amount of literature has focused on disability awareness training among law enforcement departments in the United States. Those few studies followed a similar process of examining official training curriculum rather than focusing on how training changes officers' attitudes towards the disabled and confidence levels in interactions with the disabled persons (McAfee & Musso, 1995; Reaves, 2016). Moreover, most literature is specific to mental illness and excludes other afflictions, such as physical, developmental, and cognitive disabilities.

The present study was an examination of training and experience predictors of self-confidence in police interactions with disabled individuals. The results shed light on disability awareness training across a broad range of police departments in Florida. The study's findings provide a basis for answering the four Research Questions, as follows:

Interpretation of Findings

Participating law enforcement officers were from 17 Florida police departments and had different experiences with disability awareness training and interactions with disabled persons. Some generalized findings emerged to suggest common and expected trends and themes. The discussion of these discoveries is organized by the four Research Questions.

Law Enforcement Training

Research Question 1: As part of police academy or outside academy training programs, what percentage of Florida law enforcement officers receive formal disability awareness training?

Hypothesis 1: Few officers in the surveyed police departments have received police academy or outside the academy training on interactions with the disabled population.

Out of 204 study participants, 146 officers (72%) reported receiving police academy disability awareness training. Similarly, 146 participants received outsice the academy training after graduating from the academy. Indeed only 6 officers had not received any training. These findings contradict Hypothesis 1, which predicted that few officers would have received such training. The hypothesis emerged from literature suggesting that most American law enforcement departments do not provide their officers with disability awareness training (Ochoa et al., 2009; Oschwald et al., 2011). Therefore, the present study shows that despite the common belief that officers do not receive any training on interactions with disabled individuals, of the sworn officers across Florida, who participated in this survey, reported receiving such training. However, it is noteworthy that this is a limited sample of police departments in Florida, but certainly disability awareness training is more common than found in past assessments from more than a decade ago. Of note, 83% (n = 5) of those who did not receive any training noted that such training could help their careers and interactions with community members.

Many researchers have found that when a law enforcement agency does provide disability-related training to new recruits as well as sworn officers, training hours are usually minimal (Borum et al., 1998; Compton et al., 2006; Dupont & Cochran, 2000). Therefore, most departments are not likely to offer simulated or interactive training with disabled persons (Reaves, 2016). Perhaps the public's perception of ineffective or unsuccessful interactions with individuals with disabilities is not based on officers'

complete lack of training but the limited nature of the training provided. This assertion held for the majority of officers in this study who supported further training on these interactions.

The present study found highly disparate responses on the hours of disability awareness training received in the police academy. Responses from officers ranged from two to 120 hours, with most under 20 hours; most participants (73%), however, did not remember the number of training hours received. Most officers reported receiving less than 50 additional hours of outside the academy training once on duty, however, many also reported not remembering the exact number of training hours received. It is noteworthy that on-duty calls do not differentiate based on officer preparation and readiness to handle interactions with disabled individuals. Therefore, despite individual levels of experience and training, any officer could be called in at any time to deal with a situation they might not be prepared to handle. In such instances, the outcome might not be the desired one and could potentially result in unfavorable treatment and consequences for both the officers and individuals with whom they interact.

Mental Illness and Disability Versus Other Disabilities

Research Question 2: Have the officers whose disability awareness training was limited to mental illness and disability only also encountered individuals with other disabilities (e.g., physical, developmental) as part of their work duties?

Hypothesis 2: Police training on interactions with the disabled often is limited to mental illness illness and disabilities, but officers regularly encounter individuals with a broad range of disabilities.

The results from the present study provide strong support for Hypothesis 2, as nearly all officers who reported receiving disability awareness training reported encountering persons with mental illness as well as other types of disabilities while on duty ($n = 187; 97$). Although not all officers had received disability awareness training, out of those who reported having obtained training, whether in police academy or outside the academy, 42% ($n = 83$) reported that this training was limited to mental illness and disability only. Participants noted the various disabilities encountered while on duty and many of the additional conditions selected were non-mental illness related disabilities. Further, many reported having encountered multiple disabilities citing autism, deafness, Alzheimer's, Down syndrome, and blindness.

Results from the present study show that although almost half of respondents did not receive training beyond mental illness, almost all had encountered individuals with mental illnesses and disabilities as well as non-mental illness related disabilities as part of their duties. These findings (lack of training on non-mental illness related disabilities) could explain some officers' lack of preparation to interact with disabled individuals, leading to unfavorable outcomes. The best example could be Robert Saylor, whose death led to public calls for more training on a wider set of disabilities (Vargas, 2019). Expecting untrained officers to handle situations for which they have never received training is unfair to both the officers and the disabled individuals they serve. Many professionals, including law enforcement officers, are increasingly held to a different standard by the public, with their behaviors, actions, and reactions expected to be near perfect (Hadar & Snortum, 1975).

Training and Confidence Level

Research Question 3: Is receiving disability awareness training (regardless of when it was received) associated with increased officer confidence in handling interactions with this population as measured via the hypothetical case scenarios?

Hypothesis 3: Receiving disability awareness training while in the academy, and receiving training outside the academy, will each be associated with a greater officer confidence in handling interactions with this population in the two presented scenarios.

As previously stated, almost all officers in this study received either police academy training or training outside the academy (or both). The officers were not asked to specifcy, but training outside the academy may have taken place in any context (e.g., with a previous employer, as part of their time in the law enforcement). When provided with two hypothetical scenarios, officers' responses indicated that disability awareness police academy training is associated with greater officer confidence in handling interactions with this population. However, only in the first scenario did police academy training have a significant impact on officer self-confidence while in the second scenario it was found to be insignificant. The observed police academy effect remains statistically significant in the later (Research Question #4) regression analysis that includes personal experience.

Officers receive an average of 840 hours of general training at police academies with a small portion of it dedicated to disability awareness (Reaves, 2016). The findings in this study suggest that the disability awareness training in the police academy is associated with greater officer confidence in handling interactions with the disabled.

Certainly, future research should seek to better understand how academy and outside the academy training may differ in their approach to disability training and how such differences might affect officers' confidence. Argyris and Schön (1978) developed organizational learning theory which focuses on the different ways that organizations provide knowledge to their learners and could be used to assess the differences between police academy and outside the academy training and their impact on learning (Berta et al., 2015).

Training and Personal Experience Impact on Officer Confidence

Research Question 4: Are personal and on-duty experiences with the disabled associated with greater officer confidence in handling interactions with this population in the hypothetical case scenarios when controlling for training?

> *Hypothesis 4:* Personal and on-duty experiences with the disabled are associated with greater officer confidence in handling interactions with this population in the two presented scenarios when controlling for training.

The study's findings strongly support Hypothesis 4, indicating that on-duty experience is significantly associated with greater officer confidence in interactions with disabled individuals. In the full regression model, the role of on-duty experience and personal experience in influencing officers' confidence levels in the two presented scenarios were examined while controlling for police academy and outside the academy training received. In the first scenario (movie theater), two variables in the model were significant (police academy training and on-duty experience). The variables tested accounted for 11% of the variance in officers' reported confidence. Considering that 97% of officers had some on-duty experience with the disabled population, the findings

suggest that almost all officers who participated in the study had at least one interaction with a disabled individual and that those interactions are associated with greater officer confidence in those interactions. The findings for the crisis intervention scenario were similar demonstrating that two predictors, personal and on-duty experience, had a significant effect on officers' reported confidence. In total, 7% of the variance in officers' reported confidence levels in handling this scenario were explained by these predictors.

The majority (65%) of sampled officers had some personal experience with persons with disabilities, yet surprisingly, that experience did not have a statistically significant impact on their reported self-confidence in interacting with the disabled population in relation to the presented scenarios when controlling for training. It is noteworthy that nearly 98% (n = 128) of those who had personal experience reported that these experiences made them more confident, despite the lack of a statistical association.

The significance of on-duty experience and police academy training in the last model suggests that officer self-confidence could benefit from the adoption of experiential learning, which seeks to incorporate real or simulated experiences in officer training. Moreover, these experiences can be as simple as learners taking part in social interactions with the disabled and participating in events where persons with disabilities are present (Armstrong & Fukami, 2009).

Experiential learning theory suggests that experience is a pivotal part of each person's life, resulting in more knowledge and direct participation where the learner develops new skills and ways of thinking (Lewis & Williams, 1994). Therefore, because the incoming calls for police service from individuals with disabilities do not undergo screening and direction according to officers' experience with this population, officers

could benefit from learning how to appropriately and effectively respond to such situations. For example, experiential learning research conducted with police has found experiential learning to be superior to traditional teaching methods (Henshaw & Thomas, 2012).

Experiential learning has been a part of law enforcement organizations around the world, not just in the United States. For example, Henshaw and Thomas (2012) found that much of officers' disability awareness knowledge comes from on-job experience rather than training or other resources. As these experiences allow for more natural and in-depth encounters with the disabled, they may provide the exposure necessary to acquire disability related knowledge associated with officer confidence. Moreover, personal experiences might also play a significant role in how disability is perceived and how confident one can be in interactions with the disabled (Maddux & Volkman, 2010).

In a study of English, Australian, and Canadian law enforcement officers and their interactions with the disabled, researchers found that many of the crime suspects who suffered from intellectual disabilities reported negative experiences with the criminal justice system (Gulati et al., 2020). The researchers found the officers were reported to be lacking in terms of demonstrating effective communication or providing emotional support, based on the experiences of the 1,199 citizens with intellectual disabilities in the study (Gulati et al., 2020). The respondents stated that in most of their encounters with law enforcement they felt intimidated, isolated, bullied, dehumanized, and frightened (Gulati et al., 2020). The Scottish Equality and Human Rights Commission (2017) found that that such experiences can be the result of lack of consistency in the manner that law

enforcement officers identify intellectual disabilities and that this could be facilitated by more exposure and experience.

Moreover, these results also support the concept of organizational learning theory, which centers on a process of knowledge development, knowledge retention, and knowledge transfer within a business or organization (Argyris & Schön, 1978). Since the present study found that police academy training had a significant effect on officers' reported confidence in the hypothesized scenarios, the idea of organizational learning allowing learners to change their performance and behavior is supported. Moreover, most participating officers agreed that more training on interactions with disabled individuals would be beneficial, which supports the organizational learning theory's expectations for continuous learning (Argyris & Schön, 1978).

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

This study was limited to a convenience sample of agencies in Florida and thus might not reflect the entire United States nor the state of Florida as a whole. Nevertheless, the study innovates by examining the predictors of officer self-confidence in their interactions with the disabled while also furthering the limited past literature on the state of disability awareness training (McAfee & Musso, 1995; Reaves, 2016).

Although a quantitative methodology was used to test the predictors of officers' self-confidence in the hypothesized scenarios, the study could have benefited from qualitative research tools. For example, open-ended questions and interviews with a sample of officers completing the survey could add valuable information not captured by the quantitative items. For example, interviewing officers and police departments about the content of their training could provide better awareness of the components that

contribute to officers' confidence in handling interactions with disabled individuals. Such input could ensure the training's effectiveness and help officers feel more confident in their interactions with persons with disabilities.

Another limitation is including only police departments and not a full range of law enforcement agencies in Florida. Although the purpose of this study was to examine police officers, future researchers could expand the population to all law enforcement agents, including but not limited to those employed by federal institutions.

Most studies have focused on mental health and how to properly respond to an individual affected by mental illness (McAfee & Musso, 1995; Reaves, 2016). This narrow focus leaves other disabilities (e.g., physical, developmental, etc.) often neglected or only minimally discussed. The present study supported the findings of previous researchers that almost half of the officers reported receiving training limited to mental illness and disability. This suggests that not much has changed in the two decades since McAfee and Musso's (1995) study. This study's findings on the broad range of disabilities encountered by officers calls for the inclusion of disabilities beyond just mental illness in police training.

A potential limitation of this study could be officers' possible misunderstanding of what constitutes a mental illness. Certainly, assessments on police officers' recognition of different disabilities may be challenged by gaps in knowledge. Disabilities such as Alzheimer's or autism could be incorrectly perceived as mental illnesses due to the similarity of their characteristics. For example, autism, is included in Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), as a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by serious and persistent deficiencies in social interactions, communication,

and repetitive behavior (van‘t Hof et al., 2019). Asperger’s syndrome (a high functioning form of autism), however, has been removed from DSM-5 possibly making it difficult to differentiate what constitutes a mental disorder. Alzheimer’s, like autism, is a neurodegenerative disease that affects one’s cognitive domains, such as language, behavior, personality, and memory (Weller & Budson, 2018). Since many neurological disabilities share a plethora of behavior and language related characteristics, they might be incorrectly labeled as mental illnesses. Thus, it is unknown whether officers in this study had a correct understanding of the difference between these disabilities and illnesses which could impact their responses to the questions provided in the survey.

This may specifically have impacted officers responding to the question on their police academy or outside the academy training being limited to mental illness and disability. It is unclear whether the participants always interpreted the question correctly. Those whose disability-related knowledge came as part of a larger training topic (e.g., culture or diversity) may have interpreted the distinction between mental illness and physical disabilities differently than those specifically learning to recognize and react to different forms of disability. Moreover, the intention of this question could have been interpreted incorrectly as it asks about officers’ training being limited to “mental illness and disability” instead of “mental illness and mental disability”. Thus, officers who received disability related training that included other than mental disabilities, could have answer the question inaccurately.

Finally, the findings from this study combined the responses of all participants, despite the length of their law enforcement careers. Therefore, another angle from which to analyze the collected data could be to compare officers with fewer than five years of

on-duty experience to those who have more experience and, consequently, more training. The purpose of such analysis would be to measure the confidence levels of newly hired officers who, despite police academy training and personal experience, have the same likelihood of working with disabled individuals as officers with more training and on-the-job experience.

Implications for Law Enforcement Training Change

The 21st-century law enforcement workforce is more educated and diverse than in previous decades, with more opportunities for disability awareness training (McCluskey & McCluskey, 2004). From innovative techniques of delivering knowledge to technology implications in every field, it has become easier for officers who seek to change and improve their existing tactics and strategies to provide better service (Schwandt & Marquardt, 1999). Law enforcement agencies must continually evolve and adapt based on societal changes (Stafsudd, 2017).

The findings from this study indicate that police training policies might not be as progressive and inclusive as the public may expect. A lack of proper and adequate officer training to handle interactions with disabled individuals affects all U.S. citizens, whether they or their loved one has a disability. Therefore, cases in which a lack of such training has led to tragic or unfavorable outcomes or consequences should be the basis for change. Most notably, Reaves (2016) found that the OVC's first response guidelines have not been implemented within disability awareness training in most state law enforcement academies in the U.S. The OVC materials, however, could be essential for positive and effective interactions between law enforcement officers and disabled individuals as they provide practical directions on how to interact with the disabled in an effective way and

how to recognize the needs caused by certain disabilities. Therefore, when subjected to disability awareness training, officers should also be introduced to the OVC guidelines, which may help improve interactions with this population and in turn increase confidence.

This study suggested that on-the-job experience plays an integral role in officers' self-reported confidence in the hypothesized scenarios. As such, implementing more experience-based training may lead to more confident and successful interactions between law enforcement officers and the disabled population. Unlike personal experience, officers' on-duty experiences are malleable. Experiential learning theory supports the idea of expanding knowledge through experience-based events, such as field trips, interactions with live speakers, and substituting instructor-based experiences for research projects (Cromwell & Birzer, 2012). For example, visiting or volunteering at facilities in which disabilities are more often observed or having a disabled person speak to the officers as a part of their classroom training may benefit future interactions with the disabled. Such replacements allow learners to gain hands-on experience rather than just textbook knowledge (Braswell & Miller, 1986).

Perhaps to better prepare officers for interactions with persons with disabilities, there should more field experience with these populations to supplement police academy training. Providing recruits with videos and simulated cases involving different categories of disabled persons could familiarize cadets with potential scenarios they may encounter while on duty. Such hands-on experience have been found to be beneficial and useful as officers in other studies have reported greater confidence in their interactions with the disabled following more on-duty exposure (Henshaw & Thomas, 2012). Experiential

learning has also been found to be superior to traditional theoretical teaching as it is more applicable and practical in field settings, especially for students in law enforcement coursework (Braswell & Miller, 1986). Experiential learning often allows for additional insight and knowledge necessary to address similar problems in the future and such applicability can usually be provided only by experience (Braswell & Miller, 1986).

Additionally, providing future officers with opportunities to interact with people with disabilities—in person, via virtual conferences, or by visiting facilities where specific disabilities are more prominent—could provide additional exposure, translating into better performance with this population once hired. A senior police officer stated that such training is "overlooked because mental health sufferers generally do not have a loud or powerful voice in society" (Chown, 2010, p. 268). Requiring officers to volunteer for a specific number of hours at such facilities could provide them with not only the much-needed understanding of disabled persons and their medical conditions but knowledge of what they have never seen, heard, or experienced before. Because there are many stereotypes and misperceptions regarding disabled individuals, it is crucial that police officers see them as people and not as their disabilities (Matthews & White, 1990).

The purpose of providing disability awareness training to law enforcement officers is to equip them with proper knowledge and suggestions to handle a wide assortment of situations they may encounter. Expanded officer knowledge and training should encourage an understanding of the symptoms of the most common disabilities, the proper response, and expected accommodations for these disabilities. This is especially relevant as 76% of officers reported providing an accommodation for a disabled individual while on the job. Implementing these changes could potentially minimize

harmful interactions and subsequently reduce litigation toward police departments that have faced scrutiny over untrained officers whose actions have led to negative consequences (Callahan, 1997).

Conclusion

Approximately one in five Americans have been diagnosed with a disability (CDC, 2018). Such a high rate increases law enforcement officers' chances of interacting with a person with a disability. Therefore, it is essential to understand the role of disabilities in interactions between the disabled and the criminal justice system. Training is crucial for law enforcement officers to provide better-quality service to disabled individuals, and to feel confident and prepared to interact with disabled persons effectively. Findings from this study support previous literature that most officers receive training related to individuals with mental illness (Reaves, 2016). However, most study participants reported having on-duty encounters with individuals with other types of disabilities.

In a country with more than 61 million citizens with disabilities, most officers have not received the breadth or depth of awareness training necessary to navigate interactions with such a wide range of disabilities. People with disabilities have protection against disability-related discrimination through the ADA, and officers should know when and how to accommodate disabled individuals adequately. A lack of proper training or knowledge might violate ADA mandates and lead to the unfavorable treatment of disabled individuals. The participants of this study were, on average, moderately familiar with the Americans with Disabilities Act and stated that its compliance played a role in many interactions with the disabled, such as encounters with victims, witnesses,

and suspects. Most have made at least one accommodation (such as providing a sign language interpreter or space for medical equipment, etc.) in the past to assure that the ADA was not violated.

Recognizing and understanding disabled individual's needs, especially those of the most vulnerable, is crucial. Law enforcement agencies hire personnel based on their skills and competence; however, both areas require continuous improvement to fulfill societal needs, norms, and changes. By implementing experiential learning theory, agencies could provide officers with another form of learning. Experiences are a valuable tool for adjusting behavior and unlearning undesired behavior, leading to better outcomes and improved job performance. Observations can often substitute for formal learning and could lead to a better understanding of unfamiliar situations.

Due to the increasing number of disabled individuals in the United States, it is crucial to recognize the importance and need for enhanced officer training related to individuals will all types of disabilities. To best train U.S. officers, agencies should combine and implement additional steps and diverse learning methods. A well-conceived and implemented disability awareness training programs are necessary for U.S. officers to adequately protect all citizens.

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APPENDIX A

Section I. Training Questions

This section refers to your training on and interactions with disabled individuals. The questions below define disability as follows: physical, sensory, mental, or intellectual limitation that may restrict one's participation in society by creating struggles with daily activities (such as walking, seeing, hearing, talking, etc.) and may or may not require an individual to necessitate treatment or therapy (such as the use of medical equipment or prescribed medication).

1. As part of your police academy training, did you receive formal training on interactions with disabled individuals (interactions of any capacity with victims, witnesses, suspects, and general population)? Such interactions can include but are not limited to traffic stops, calls for service, making arrests, issuing citations, and negotiating order.
   - ☐ Yes
   - ☐ No
2. Outside of the police academy, have you received any formal training on interactions with disabled individuals?
   - ☐ Yes
   - ☐ No
3. If no, do you believe such training would be helpful in interviewing victims, suspects, witnesses, or communicating and interacting with disabled persons in general?
   - ☐ Yes

☐ No

4. If yes to Question 1and/or Question 2, was your training limited to mental illness and disability only?

   ☐ Yes

   ☐ No

5. If yes to Question 1and/or Question 2, please rate on a 5-point scale how well this training prepared you for interactions (interactions of any capacity with victims, witnesses, suspects, and general population; such interactions can include but are not limited to traffic stops, calls for service, making arrests, issuing citations, negotiating order) with disabled individuals while on the job.

   1 = *training did not prepare me at all*; 5 = *training prepared me extremely well*

6. If yes to Question 1and/or Question 2, please rate on a 5-point scale how confident this training made you in interactions with disabled individuals.

   1 = *not confident at all*; 5 = *extremely confident*

7. Collectively, how many hours of training have you received on interactions with disabled individuals in the police academy?

   ☐ _____ hours

   ☐ I don't remember

8. How many hours of training related to disabled individuals have you received as part of your job?

   ☐ _____ hours

   ☐ I don't remember

9. Is specific training required before an officer is allowed to interview a disabled victim, witness, or suspect?

    - ☐ Yes
    - ☐ No

Section II. Interactions With Disabled Individuals

10. In what capacity do you typically interact with disabled individuals? Select all that apply.

    - ☐ Crime victim
    - ☐ Crime witness
    - ☐ Criminal suspect
    - ☐ Traffic infraction
    - ☐ Community outreach
    - ☐ Other

11. As a law enforcement officer, have you ever encountered individuals with disabilities as part of your daily job functions?

    Definition of disability: physical, sensory, mental, or intellectual limitation that may restrict one's participation in society by creating struggles with daily activities (such as walking, seeing, hearing, talking, etc.) and may or may not require an individual to necessitate treatment or therapy (such as the use of medical equipment or prescribed medication.

    - ☐ Yes
    - ☐ No

12. In your current position, do you ever interview (choose all that apply):

    - ☐ Victims
    - ☐ Witnesses

- ☐ Suspects
- ☐ None

13. If yes, how many crime victims, suspects, or witnesses would you estimate that you interview in a typical week?

    _____

14. Of the crime victims, suspects, or witnesses you interview in a typical week, how many of these individuals would you categorize as having a disability?

    _____

15. Have you ever heard of the U.S. Department of Justice's Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) first response guidelines?

    OVC's first response guidelines provide directions and suggestions on how interact with disabled persons in an effective and yet sensitive manner and how to recognize the particular needs that people with disabilities might have.

    - ☐ Yes
    - ☐ No

16. If yes, have you received formal training on the Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) first response guidelines?

    - ☐ Yes
    - ☐ No

17. If yes, please rate on a 5-point scale how well the training prepared you for interactions with disabled victims while on the job (interactions of any capacity with victims, witnesses, suspects, and general population – such interactions can include but are not limited to traffic stops, calls for service, making arrests, issuing citations, negotiating order)

1 = *training did not prepare me at all*; 5 = *training completely prepared me*

18. Have you ever heard of the term "invisible disabilities"?

Definition of invisible disabilities: various concealed debilities not necessarily apparent to others that are often neurological in nature and limit performing daily tasks and may not require specific visible medical devices such as hearing aids. Such conditions can include asthma, autism, and cystic fibrosis.

☐ Yes

☐ No

19. If yes, have you ever encountered a crime victim, suspect, or witness with an invisible disability? Choose all that apply:

☐ Victim

☐ Witness

☐ Suspect

☐ None

☐ Other

20. On a 5-point scale, how familiar are you with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)?

ADA is a civil rights law that protects disabled individuals against disability-based discrimination and requires that disabled individuals are provided with reasonable accommodations to be made in various situations, such as interactions with medical, education, or law enforcement professionals.

1 = *not familiar at all*; 5 = *extremely familiar*

21. Does ADA compliance play a role in your interactions with victims, witnesses, and suspects? Choose all that apply:

☐ Victims

☐ Witnesses

- ☐ Suspects
- ☐ N/A

22. From the list below, please indicate the typical source of information on a victim, suspects, or witness you would receive before interacting with this person at the scene of a crime.
    - ☐ Dispatcher
    - ☐ First arriving officer
    - ☐ Fellow investigator
    - ☐ Other witness(es)
    - ☐ Other victim(s)
    - ☐ I typically do not have this information
    - ☐ Other
23. Have you ever been informed by the parties listed above about the disabilities of an individual?
    - ☐ Yes
    - ☐ No
24. When thinking about past interviews with disabled persons, how is knowledge of the individual's disability typically disclosed?
    - ☐ Informed by other parties prior to the interview
    - ☐ Informed by the person during the interview
    - ☐ I have not interviewed a disabled individual in the past.
    - ☐ Other. Please specify.
    - ☐ _____

25. From the list below, please select the disabilities of individuals you have encountered while on duty:

- ☐ Autism
- ☐ Down Syndrome
- ☐ Epilepsy
- ☐ Parkinson's
- ☐ Alzheimer's
- ☐ Cerebral Palsy
- ☐ Multiple Sclerosis
- ☐ Deafness
- ☐ Blindness
- ☐ Mental illness (including depression)
- ☐ Other. Please specify_____
- ☐ None

26. Have you ever had to make accommodations (for example, providing a sign language interpreter, adjusting lights and noises, providing space for medical equipment, etc.) for disabled person while on the job?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

27. Do you have any personal/off-duty experience interacting with disabled persons? Such interactions can include those with family members, friends, colleagues, etc.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

28. If yes, do you believe that such personal experiences make you more confident in your general (including on-duty) interactions with disabled people?

    ☐ Yes

    ☐ No

Section III. Scenario Questions

In this section, you will be asked a few questions on the below scenarios where you, as a law enforcement officer, respond to involving a disabled person. This section is to examine how confident you feel in such situations as well as to examine how the training prepared you for such interactions.

Scenario 1:

You received a call from a dispatcher stating that there is a 22-year-old man who refuses to leave the movie theater, and the manager asks for help in solving the situation. Once you arrive at the theater, you are either informed by others or notice yourself that the man has Down syndrome. There is no caretaker in sight. Despite asking the man multiple times to leave the movie theater or pay again to see another movie, he still refuses to leave or pay for another ticket.

29. How well do you feel that your training prepared you to handle this particular disability in this particular situation?

    1 = *not prepared at all*; 5 = *extremely prepared*

30. How confident are you in handling the above-mentioned situation?

    1 = *not confident at all*; 5 = *extremely confident*

31. Do you think that more training (specific to working with Down syndrome individuals in this scenario) would be helpful?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Scenario 2:

You received a call from a dispatcher stating that the mother of a 13-old-boy called for help in handling her son's "mental breakdown" and is asking for a crisis intervention team to help her manage the situation and ger her son treatment. You are the first officer arriving. The boy, who has Asperger syndrome, gets mad, starts yelling, and runs away.

32. How well do you feel that your training prepared you to handle this particular disability in this particular situation?

    1 = *not prepared at all*; 5 = *extremely prepared*

33. How confident are you in handling the above-mentioned situation?

    1 = *not confident at all*; 5 = *extremely confident*

34. Do you think that more training (specific to working with autistic individuals in this scenario) would be helpful?

    ☐ Yes

    ☐ No

Section IV. Officer Demographics

35. Please indicate your gender

    ☐ Female

    ☐ Male

    ☐ Other

36. Please indicate your age in years.

_____

37. What is your ethnicity?

- ☐ Caucasian
- ☐ Latino
- ☐ African American/Black
- ☐ Asian/Pacific Islander
- ☐ Native American/Alaskan Native
- ☐ Mixed Race
- ☐ Other (please specify) _____

38. What is your highest level of education?

- ☐ High school diploma
- ☐ Some college credits
- ☐ Associates degree
- ☐ Bachelor's degree (BA, BS, etc.)
- ☐ Some graduate school credits
- ☐ Master's degree (MA, MS, etc.)
- ☐ Doctoral degree (Ph.D., Ed.D.)
- ☐ Juris Doctor (JD)
- ☐ Other (please specify)

39. How many years of experience do you have as a law enforcement officer?

_____

40. What type of law enforcement agency do you currently work for?

- ☐ Federal

- ☐ State
- ☐ County
- ☐ Local
- ☐ University/college
- ☐ Other

41. What department do you currently work for?

_____

42. What is your position at the department you work for?

_____

43. How many years of experience do you have working in your current department?

_____

44. What division do you work for?

_____

45. What shift do you typically work?

- ☐ Days
- ☐ Evenings
- ☐ Midnights
- ☐ Other. Please specify _____

46. How many sworn personnel does your agency employ?

- ☐ Less than 20
- ☐ 20-50
- ☐ 50-100
- ☐ 100-200

☐ More than 200

47. What year did you graduate from the police academy?

_____

VITA

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PUBLICATIONS

Bender, S., Brown, K.S., Kasitz, D., & Vega, O. (2020). *Academic womxn and their children: Parenting during COVID-19 and the impact on scholarly productivity.* [Manuscript submitted for publication].

Brown, K.S., Bender, S., Vega, O., & Kasitz, D. (in press). Academic womxn and their partners: Impact of COVID-19 on relationships in quarantine and recommendations for couples. *Family Relations.*

BOOK CHAPTERS IN PREPARATION

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