
BRAIN SCIENCE & IMPLICIT BIAS

EXPLORING MINDFULNESS TRAINING TO REDUCE BIAS IN PUBLIC SAFETY

For the last several years, a team of trainers and researchers at Pacific University and the Hillsboro Police Department have explored how to translate the science of resilience to training law enforcement officers. Our training objectives are simple: 1) improve the health and well-being of the individual officer by reducing the impact of occupational stress and trauma, 2) cultivate greater emotional intelligence through skills training, and 3) positively impact the officer's capacity to meet citizens with awareness, compassion and skillful action. This trauma informed, evidence-based skills training has been grounded in the science of mindfulness and resilience.

Research studying the training's impact on local police officers—a 2013 pilot study and an NIH funded randomized control trial in 2017—has demonstrated outcomes that are relevant to the conversation on implicit bias in policing. Some of these outcomes among police officers include:

1. Reduction in:
 - a. Bodily stress reactivity (cortisol)
 - b. Anger
 - c. Aggression
 - d. Alcohol use
 - e. Perceptions of operational and administrative stress
2. Improvement in:
 - a. sleep quality
 - b. fatigue
 - c. pain management

Important conversations around bias in policing often ignore the impact of occupational stress and trauma, which lead to well-documented consequences such as burnout, clinical depression, substance abuse, illness, and cultural hardening. Mind-body science illuminates a training pathway that allows us to train skills in health and humanity that offer to prevent much of the long-term negative impact of occupational stress and trauma. These skills of awareness and compassion (mindfulness) can be nurtured by the individual, the organization, and the culture to sustain the impact and foster a space where the Guardian (Warrior) and Humanitarian are one in the same.

Police agencies across North America, Europe, Australia and Asia are training in some variant of mindfulness skills practice. The epicenter of thought leadership, training and research on mindful policing exists here in Oregon. Our research and training team is exploring the impact of mindfulness training on how we interact with ourselves and with others. We believe that mindfulness training fosters less judgement, greater compassion for self and others, and greater capacity for meeting others in their suffering with skill and equanimity. This will certainly have an impact on equanimity in policing.

Richard Goerling, CFM Mindful Badge Initiative richard@mindfulbadge.com