



Brazilian Jiu Jitsu—Inspired Tactics Training on Use of Force and Related Outcomes

White Paper

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Purpose and overview:

Law enforcement today faces unprecedented challenges, arguably surpassing those of any other period in modern history. In the aftermath of misconduct cases, many agencies were defunded, thereby straining resources and contributing to an increase in violent crime (Stepman, 2021). Additionally, community trust has eroded throughout the nation. Law enforcement leaders are tasked with addressing rising crime rates and rebuilding community trust. Moreover, reduced personnel levels place added stress on existing staff, who are struggling to respond to the pace of 9-1-1 calls. Overworked staff leads to more resignations, retirements, and detrimental impacts on officer and staff wellness. In navigating these complex issues, agencies are increasingly turning to innovative training methods rooted in grappling or Brazilian Jiu Jitsu (BJJ) principles. These tactics offer a strategic departure from conventional approaches, emphasizing control, de-escalation, and minimal use of force. This White Paper introduces BJJ-inspired training as a transformative tool in enhancing officer proficiency and community safety.

One of the inescapable realities for law enforcement agencies today is that one arrest, one poorly handled encounter with a resistant or uncooperative subject can lead to protests, political repercussions, and possible criminal charges against the officers or deputies at best. At worst, it could result in injury or death of the officer and/or the subject. The Rayshard Brooks case tragically illustrates the consequences of poorly used tactics. When two Atlanta law enforcement officers were unable to successfully detain Brooks, they perceived Brooks to be firing upon them when in fact he activated the taser he had taken from the officers. The officers reacted by using deadly force. Subsequent demonstrations engulfed Atlanta, Brooks' family received a million-dollar settlement, and most tragically, it resulted in the loss of human life. This poignant case underscores the need for comprehensive training to prevent such catastrophic outcomes in the future.

Furthermore, a deputy or officer struggling to maintain control of the subject while attempting to place them into custody, despite not engaging in brutality, may erroneously present the optics of brutality which will likely launch an immediate backlash. Oftentimes, the deputy or officer is poorly trained and as the encounter begins to fail, they lose their composure and ability to manage the situation in a successful way. In essence, a clumsy or flailing attempt to control a subject can look like law enforcement brutality in the eyes of a civilian audience.

It is imperative for law enforcement executives to not only ensure appropriate policy and de-escalation training is in place, along with duty to intervene, but to review their current quality and effectiveness of defensive tactics training. Even more importantly, a training supportive culture needs to be instituted. Instead of perpetuating a check-the-box approach to accreditation, agencies need to help the deputy or officer to be truly prepared with a set of reliable skills to

confront and successfully place subjects in custody. Furthermore, this new set of skills must be repeatedly practiced to maintain dependable proficiency with little degradation of capabilities.

This White Paper is a review of research and data to inform law enforcement leaders, who may be interested or considering these changes. Despite the reluctance to depart from familiar practices, the existing training culture in many agencies is causing well-meaning deputies and officers, who are woefully undertrained and ill-equipped, to be placed into confrontations with disastrous results for them, their agencies, and the community they seek to serve. The lack of training support, consisting of out-of-date tactics and a training culture that oftentimes only permits an hour or two annually, somehow expects them to be proficient in encounters that are extremely difficult to perform, under high stress, and always have the potential to become deadly.

The law enforcement leader reading this information will have their questions answered about whether it is time to institute change. In summary, there is existing evidence that these grappling tactics work and provide benefits that other types of training do not. Moreover, this movement requires a new culture of proficiency to be instituted, which the data shows will *not* cause additional worker compensation injuries. In fact, since the better-trained deputy or officer has increased confidence due to the improved effectiveness of the tactics, physical encounters are reduced as they are less likely to feel the need to use them. This outcome was demonstrated in Marietta, Georgia.

At the conclusion of this White Paper, there will be a number of resources that agencies of any size, budget, or current staffing level can use to begin this process of transformation.

The following questions will be researched and answered:

1. Does Brazilian Jiu Jitsu-inspired defensive tactics possess additional benefits over those being currently used?
2. Will the agency incur more injuries as a result of a transition to this type of defensive tactic?
3. What type of training culture and system is most effective in supporting and maintaining skills proficiency?



Question 1: Does Brazilian Jiu Jitsu-inspired defensive tactics possess additional benefits to those being currently used?

A review of the literature leaves little room for doubt. Brazilian Jiu Jitsu-inspired defensive tactics possesses a number of benefits due to its unique nature as a physical skill set.

Reduction of Use of Force Incidents

Marietta Police Department, Georgia, reported the following results after their introduction of these principles:

Taser Deployments:

- Since the inception of the program, non-BJJ officers used their Taser in 77% of Use of Force (UOF) incidents.
- BJJ officers used their Taser in 54% of UOF incidents (85% of which were used to stop a foot pursuit – not to end the physical altercation).
- There was a 23% reduction in Taser deployments in the BJJ officer group.

Use of Force Injuries to Suspects:

- In 2020, there were 33 UOF incidents involving Marietta PD officers: 20 incidents involving non-BJJ officers, and 13 incidents involving BJJ officers.
- In the 20 incidents involving non-BJJ officers, the suspect sustained injuries requiring hospitalization 65% of the time (13 incidents of suspect hospitalization).
- In the 13 incidents involving BJJ officers, the suspect sustained injuries requiring hospitalization 31% of the time (4 incidents of suspect hospitalization).
- Serious injuries to a suspect are 53% less likely when interacting with BJJ officers.

Use of Force Generally:

- BJJ officers are 59% less likely to engage in UOF than non-BJJ officers.

In St. Paul, Minnesota, a follow-up study of 2,845 incidents of officers at St. Paul PD using force between 2014 and 2020 found that they experienced a 37 percent reduction in the use of force after incorporating Brazilian Jiu Jitsu style of defensive tactics. They also experienced reductions in the following areas, mirroring the experience of the Marietta Police Department:

- 68% reduction in officers using strikes.
- 51% reduction in the use of chemical irritants.
- 39% reduction in Taser deployment.
- 44% reduction in injuries to people being arrested.

Mental Health Benefits

Numerous studies and behavioral impact evaluations have documented the positive mental health benefits of BJJ. As an example, one such evaluation in a publication sponsored by Evolve Mixed Martial Arts®, 2021, found that the physical benefits of Brazilian Jiu Jitsu play a positive role in improving the mental health issues and concerns among law enforcement officers. These ways include, but are not limited to, boosting motivation and energy levels, increasing cognitive function, relieving stress, improving mental concentration, enhancing awareness senses, increasing personal confidence, increasing resilience, and reducing symptoms of PTSD.

Another study, published in the *Journal of Community Engagement and Scholarship* (Weinberger and Burraston, 2021), found that veterans who participated in BJJ programs experienced increases in “assertiveness, self-confidence, self-control, patience, empathy, empowerment, improved sleep, and mindfulness.” As a result, they concluded that “the inclusion of opportunities and financial support for veterans to practice BJJ as a form of somatic psychotherapy would be highly beneficial.”

Another observation by Carl Brown in his book, The Law and Martial Arts, noted that practitioners are taught to manage how stress affects their performance. In fact, they use a principle called “Fudoshin” which, when generally translated, means calmness in an emergency. This is done with breath control. One of the most widely respected experts from the Gracie family, Rickson Gracie, pioneered a breathing control method as a key aspect of practicing Brazilian Jiu Jitsu as recounted in his book, Breathe, a Life in Flow. Breath control is associated with managing stress while performing difficult tasks.

Reduced Levels of Aggression

Research regarding the scientific literature around the benefits of Brazilian Jiu Jitsu (Mickelsson, 2021) found that 12 studies demonstrated BJJ practitioners reducing their levels of aggression after devoting themselves to its study.

Recruiting and Retention Impacts

Newer deputies and officers, unlike their more senior counterparts, are often familiar with mixed martial arts (MMA) and may even be more skilled in their use. When being trained by their agency in traditional, but less effective, techniques, they may feel disillusioned with the quality of the use-of-force training they are receiving.

In a study of 600 officers, there was widespread dissatisfaction with the limited training they receive for defensive and control tactics (Kaminski and Martin, 2000). Furthermore, the officers fully realize that they are at greater risk of being subjected to tactics used by those they encounter who are already conversant in MMA and therefore possess a superior advantage in these encounters.



The Florida Department of Law Enforcement, which oversees academy curriculum through the Florida Criminal Justice Standards and Training Commission, completed a survey in December 2016 seeking information about which defensive tactics techniques law enforcement, corrections, and probation officers currently use on the job. They looked at what officers think about the number of techniques taught in basic training and how frequently officers train in defensive tactics after basic training. With close to 2,200 responses, only about half of the respondents thought that the training they received in the Academy was adequate or felt confident in using the techniques they had been taught. 43% percent of defensive tactics *instructors* wished they had better defensive tactical skills.

Other notable survey results include respondents identifying ground fighting and grappling as the tactics they thought were most helpful. Additionally, respondents wanted more realism in their training. Finally, the largest number of responses indicated they felt in-service training spent too little time on these tactics. Agencies must invest in thorough, updated, and ongoing training to ensure officers can confidently and safely use these techniques in high-stress situations.

Boosting Confidence

Dr. Jeremy Butler, a former police officer who grew up in a violent community on the south side of Chicago, researched “confidence,” or as he calls it, “self-efficacy.” In his dissertation for a Doctor of Philosophy in Kinesiology in the Graduate College of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, he found that there is “evidence for the value of self-efficacy, self-defense experience, and a quality physical training program on an officer’s physical and mental preparation for force encounters” (Butler, 2020). Because of valuable techniques that BJJ provides the law enforcement officer in use of force situations, these techniques are now taught by Butler to law enforcement and civilians seeking the ability to improve their personal safety.

Greg Ellifritz, President and primary instructor at Active Response, a law enforcement defensive tactics company, studied six agencies in Ohio. Using responses from 166 law enforcement participants, he concluded that there was a positive correlation between confidence and the amount of defensive tactics training officers received. In summary, the more training a law enforcement officer receives, either provided by the agency or conducted in an off-duty capacity, the more confident an officer will be.

Recognition and Reward Systems

Incentives such as recognition, promotions, and monetary rewards motivate personnel to strive for proficiency. Gracie University, with a division solely devoted to law enforcement training for over 20 years, encourages the use of recognition and insignia that identifies achievement, the way agencies use the Expert and Marksman badge to identify superior achievement. Renner Gracie, President of Gracie University and one of the foremost experts on grappling style defensive tactics, describes this system in an interview with *Jiu Jitsu Times* where he notes that law enforcement agencies have a long history of incentivizing performance. As a result, Gracie is promoting this recognition system as another way to change the culture to move away from check-the-box annual training to one where accomplishment and mastery is recognized and encouraged.



Question 2: Will the agency incur more injuries as a result of a transition to this type of defensive tactic?

St. Paul Police Department, in a follow-up study of 2,845 incidents of officers using force between 2014 and 2020, found that, in addition to the 37% reduction in the use of force, there was a 25% reduction in injuries to officers. Marietta Police Department reported training injuries, stating that 95 officers attended over 2,600 civilian-operated BJJ classes with one (1) reported training injury.

- UOF Injuries to Officers
 - In the 18 months prior to instituting mandatory BJJ training, 29 officers were injured while carrying out arrests.
 - In the 18 months after instituting mandatory BJJ training for new hires, 15 officers were injured while carrying out arrests.
 - 48% reduction in officer injuries department wide.
 - None of the injured officers were BJJ officers.
- UOF Injuries to Suspects
 - In 2020, there were 33 UOF incidents involving Marietta PD officers: 20 incidents involving non-BJJ officers, and 13 incidents involving BJJ officers.
 - In the 20 incidents involving non-BJJ officers, the suspect sustained injuries requiring hospitalization 65% of the time (13 incidents of suspect hospitalization).
 - In the 13 incidents involving BJJ officers, the suspect sustained injuries requiring hospitalization 31% of the time (four incidents of suspect hospitalization).
 - Serious injuries to a suspect are 53% less likely when interacting with BJJ officers.
 - BJJ officers are 59% less likely to engage in UOF than non-BJJ officers.
- Financial Implications
 - Based on an average workers' comp claim of \$4,768, the total estimated savings from the reduction in officers' injuries is estimated at \$66,752.
 - Training Investment: \$26,000 (2,600 department-sponsored classes charged at \$10 per class).
 - Net Savings for MPD: \$40,752

In a study conducted by the *Orthopaedic Journal of Sports Medicine* (2014) based on 2,511 matches at statewide BJJ competitions, Brazilian Jiu Jitsu generally resulted in fewer injuries in competition than wrestling, judo, MMA or Taekwondo.

Question 3: What type of training culture and system is most effective in supporting actual skills proficiency?

One of the most basic principles of learning is the need for repetition to attain mastery of physical and/or cognitive skills. Numerous peer reviewed studies underscore the criticality of repetition and mastery. Rener Gracie, in a recent interview with former Navy Seal instructor Jocko Willink, advocates for one hour per week to keep skills sharp and reinforce a culture of defensive tactics proficiency.

Coaching and sports research shows that teams or individuals must continually practice techniques as close to reality so that they will perform as trained. It's obvious that any sports team only practicing once a year would be easily defeated by another team which practices regularly, despite any talent imbalance.

The book, Mental Toughness of Mixed Martial Arts Athletes at Different Levels of Competition, described the mental toughness and emotional regulation of fear attained by martial arts practitioners (Chen and Cheesman, 2013).

In his ground-breaking book, Emotional Intelligence, Daniel Goleman described the phenomenon where the ability to regulate emotions driven by the fight, flight, or freeze reaction is compromised when a person is confronted with a highly stressful event and is unable to rationally assess the circumstances (2020). He calls this the "amygdala hijacking." The amygdala is the part of the brain which activates the fight, flight, or freeze response, overriding any ability for the cortex to activate reason. Repeated training interrupts the amygdala hijacking process allowing for reason and judgment to drive outcomes. By repeatedly practicing skills under stressful and realistic conditions, this emotional regulation can be called upon even in the deadliest of circumstances.

In addition to simply teaching mastery of a skill to a level that it can be performed under stress, an organization must create or maintain a culture where this mastery is supported and perpetuated. To support this overall training culture, Gracie University recommends several features to be integrated into an agency's training environment. Gracie University has historically used an "open mat" process to introduce BJJ concepts in a non-competitive learning environment. However they caution care must be taken to ensure it does not devolve into an unstructured competitive driven setting leading to negative outcomes. As a result they introduced a new program, GST Hybrid which focuses on a highly structured process designed to develop trainers and students in law enforcement based techniques consistent with internal policies and optimizing safety and a positive learning environment.

Malcolm Gladwell, in his book, Outlier, concluded that 10,000 hours were required to reasonably attain mastery (2008). While some researchers have questioned that assertion, it's clear that the successful implementation of difficult skills requires repetition and continual training, in an organization that recognizes mastery and expertise. As important as it is for the organization to have the right skills with the right tempo of training, the organization and its leadership must be supportive and encouraging as change is occurring.

A more recent study published last year in the journal *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice* stated that training reduced reliance on pain compliance tactics, officer injuries, and injuries to subjects being arrested.

Conclusion

This White Paper highlights the pressing need for transformative approaches in law enforcement training to address the multifaceted challenges facing agencies today. With community trust at an all-time low, rising crime rates amongst a number of cities, and overworked personnel, proven strategies rooted in grappling or Brazilian Jiu Jitsu-inspired principles offer a promising solution. By emphasizing control, de-escalation, and minimal use of force, BJJ-inspired training presents a paradigm shift from traditional methods. Supported by research and data, this paper underscores the benefits of incorporating BJJ into defensive tactics training. From reducing use of force incidents and injuries to enhancing mental health and confidence among officers, the evidence is compelling. Moreover, the financial implications of reduced injuries underscore the practical advantages of this approach. However, successful implementation hinges not only on mastering skills but also on fostering a supportive training culture that encourages continual practice and recognizes expertise. By embracing these principles, law enforcement agencies can navigate current challenges effectively, ensuring the safety and well-being of both officers and the communities they serve.



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Resources:

Gracie University. The premier provider of law enforcement Brazilian Jiu Jitsu grappling training around the world. Their train the trainer model is premised on not only instilling the most effective tactics but promoting a culture where training is frequent enough to build competence and proficiency. They provide training to hundreds of sheriffs' offices and police departments around the country. Their President, Renner Gracie is one of the foremost experts on law enforcement tactics and has been working with law enforcement agencies for over 20 years.

- <https://www.gracieuniversity.com>

Adopt a Cop. This organization helps law enforcement agencies that do not have the resources to implement a grappling or Brazilian Jiu Jitsu style of defensive tactics, to partner with a BJJ studio willing to help out. They will provide 100% of training until the officer reaches the rank of Blue Belt.

- <https://adoptacopbjj.org>

Michigan legislation. In 2022 Michigan introduced a law which mandates grappling style law enforcement defensive tactics, requiring officers who hold a Michigan police license to be at least a Blue Belt. More about that law can be found here:

- <https://www.legislature.mi.gov/documents/2021-2022/billintroduced/House/pdf/2021-HIB-4525.pdf>

New Jersey Police Training Commission. In 2021 the New Jersey Police Training Commission voted to adopt defensive tactics based on Brazilian Jiu Jitsu. To facilitate this they allocated funds for each training academy to pay for a specific number of their instructors to attend Gracie University.

Brazilian Jiu Jitsu Cops. A training company which is staffed by active duty law enforcement officers who are certified state defensive tactics instructors as well as in some cases former MMA fighters. They provide courses across the country.

- <https://bjjcops.net/>

Louisville, Kentucky City Council Resolution. In June 2023 the Louisville Metro Council, reacting to a Department of Justice report on the conduct and practices of the Louisville Police Department, voted to support the use of Brazilian Jiu Jitsu style training for the department.

- <https://louisvilleky.gov/news/metro-council-vote-resolution-support-brazilian-jiu-jitsu-training-lmpd>