

**NikkiAnn Ryan**  
**Class of 2020**  
**Criminal Justice and Psychology double major**  
**Evaluating Public Perception of Law Enforcement Training in Connecticut**  
**Dr. Kento Yasuhara, Psychology Department**

As a double major, I wanted to ask a question that pertained to criminal justice and psychology. With the prevalence of mental illnesses, I wondered how law enforcement officers are trained to interact with and assist individuals with mental illnesses. I was also curious as to how the public perceives such training. With guidance from my mentor, I further specified my question to asking how members of the public perceive law enforcement training in Connecticut regarding (1) interact with individuals with mental illnesses, (2) interact with individuals with substance use disorders, (3) respond to domestic violence encounters, (4) assist with victim services, and (5) interact with juvenile offenders.

Broadcasting of officer mishandlings has drawn the attention of law enforcement toward the importance of public perception. It is equally important for citizens to understand law enforcement training because it influences the relationship between officers and citizens. If citizens deem officer training to be sufficient, then they will likely view their officers as effective and capable. If not, such views can lead to poor officer-citizen relations as well as hinder officers' ability to control crime (Decker, 1985). This is why I wanted to focus my research on the perceptions of the public.

I had three primary hypotheses for this study. First, before reading the short passage, study participants will rate their level of knowledge of these topics lower compared to after reading. Second, after reading, participants will not necessarily agree that law enforcement have sufficient training for the five topics in the state of Connecticut. And third, after reading, participants will show support for additional training procedures regarding these topics.

To assess public perception of law enforcement training, I used Qualtrics software to distribute a three-part survey to Connecticut residents. The survey was composed of a pre-learning questionnaire, a short reading passage that functioned as a learning intervention, and a post-learning questionnaire, which included three multiple choice questions with facts from the reading designed to measure whether participants read carefully.

After removing those who did not qualify, because they were not eighteen years of age or not residents of Connecticut, I had 121 remaining participants. Using SPSS software, I analyzed the data and found that my three primary hypotheses were supported. First, the self-rated knowledge of participants increased from time 1 (pre-learning intervention) to time 2 (post-learning intervention); second, the belief that current training procedures are sufficient decreased from time 1 to time 2; and lastly, support for additional training procedures increased from time 1 to time 2. The results of this study demonstrate that reading about law enforcement training procedures, influenced the participants' opinions regarding the sufficiency and value of additional training. This indicates the importance of public knowledge of how their law enforcement officers are trained because as previously stated, if citizens learn about training and

deem it to be insufficient, they may not view officers and the criminal justice system as effective. This can weaken the relationship between officers and citizens and subsequently hinder their ability to control crime (Decker, 1985).

I am excited to continue this avenue of research through my Honors Thesis. Considering only 33% of the participants answered all three manipulation check questions correctly, I plan to adjust the methodology, specifically the learning intervention, to address this and see how this influences the survey results.

Reference:

Decker, S. H. (1985). The police and the public: Perceptions and policy recommendations. *Police and Law Enforcement*, 89-105.