

POWER Training Program

Los Angeles Police Department cohorts

Final Evaluation Report



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January 31, 2022

Executive Summary

As part of an initiative funded by the State of California, Center for Council has partnered with the Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST), to train LAPD officers in Council practice and mindfulness through the Peace Officer Wellness, Empathy and Resilience (POWER) program. POWER is a six-month course that teaches participants to cultivate an enhanced awareness of themselves and their surroundings, and an ability to acknowledge and articulate thoughts and emotions without immediately reacting to them. This report presents findings from a program evaluation of the POWER training program using survey data from 36 participants who completed a pre- and post-intervention survey. The findings from this evaluation revealed statistically significant improvement in the following areas for the program participants:

- ❖ Empathy
- ❖ Emotional awareness

Ten officers participated in listening sessions facilitated by Center for Council to engage in discussion on the impact of the POWER program, which was recorded and transcribed. The transcripts were analyzed using standard qualitative methods. Overall, the officers who participated in the listening sessions felt that the program was extremely beneficial because it provided them with tools that they could use in all areas of their lives to help them be more present and calmer, which they believed was important when approaching tense situations at work because these tools could help prevent things from escalating. Several officers also indicated that they started to be more open to other perspectives about things and became more aware of their own emotional states, which is consistent with the survey findings that showed significant increases in empathy and emotional awareness. Some of the officers also experienced improvements in sleep and other health issues that they have attributed to the incorporation of the mindfulness-based practices into their daily life that helped them to shift how they respond to stressors in life and the world in general.

While there are several limitations to the evaluation that limit the generalizability of the findings, the preliminary findings from this evaluation suggest that this program had a positive impact on participants who completed it with many indicating a high level of satisfaction with the program. Many of the officers who took part in the listening sessions expressed a desire to see POWER become a permanent fixture in their department as a result of their participation and think this should be required training for new officers. By providing officers with tools and other supports to help them manage their stress, the overall performance and function of law enforcement agencies can be improved through reduced absenteeism, staff turnover, and risk management. The preliminary findings of this evaluation suggest that the POWER program has the potential to assist law enforcement agencies in meeting these objectives.

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Introduction

Law enforcement officer (LEO) burnout and stress has been a major concern in the field of corrections for decades.

LEOs are exposed to traumatic and chronic stressors on daily basis that often include high levels of physical threat (e.g., physical altercations) and/or social threat (e.g., interpersonal conflict). Stress is an inherently complex construct that involves both exposure to *external life stressors*, such as a dangerous work environment, and a cascade of highly integrated, *internal psychological and biological processes*, such as changes in neural, sympathetic, metabolic, and immune system function, which combine to strongly influence human behavior and health (Slavich, 2016). Fatigue, stress, and related biobehavioral factors have been shown to greatly increase the risk for a number of negative outcomes, including mental and physical health problems, substance use, aggression, and social and interpersonal difficulties (Slavich, 2016; Shields & Slavich, 2017). Work-related stress has also been shown to negatively impact work performance and lead to increased absenteeism, tardiness, and turnover in correctional settings (Lambert, Hogan, & Allen, 2006).

Together, these effects underscore the pressing need to implement effective interventions that can help reduce LEOs' stress burden and enhance their work performance, health, relationships and wellbeing.

POWER Training Program

In 2019, Center for Council received funding to implement their Peace Officer Wellness, Empathy & Resilience (POWER) Training Program in the Los Angeles Police Department. POWER is an intensive and interactive six-month curriculum for police and correctional officers that utilizes mindfulness practices, compassion-based communication exercises, and training in wellness-related areas such as stress management and self-care. With a focus on skill building to enhance self-awareness, attunement to others, compassion, wisdom and elite performance, participants learn skills that can be translated to their personal and professional life.

Program Evaluation Overview

An independent evaluator from the University of California, Los Angeles evaluated the POWER program to see if program participants improved in their perceived stress, empathy, mindfulness, emotional regulation, and anger after completing the program approximately six months later. A secondary aim of the evaluation was to assess participant satisfaction with the program and qualitatively assess the program's impact. As part of the POWER program, Center for Council Staff administered pre- and post-intervention surveys to all program participants. The survey does not collect any personally identifiable information. The evaluator conducted a secondary analysis of the POWER survey data to assess change over time in the key outcomes. The POWER pre/post surveys included items drawn from the following standardized scales:

Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire –Short Form (FFMQ-SF)

The FFMQ-SF is a 24-Item scale derived from the full version of the FFMQ (Baer, Smith, Hopkins, Krietemeyer, & Toney, 2006). The FFMQ Measures five facets of mindfulness: observing, describing, acting with awareness, nonjudging of inner experience, and nonreactivity to inner experience. Responses are based on a Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (Never true) to 5 (Always true). Each facet included five items that were summed to include a total score ranging from 5 to 25 with higher scores representing greater levels of mindfulness.

Difficulties in Emotional Regulation Scale (DERS)

The DERS was used to measure emotion dysregulation. DERS is a multidimensional self-report measure assessing individuals' characteristic patterns of emotional regulation (Gratz & Roemer, 2004). The 18-item short version was used for this evaluation (Victor & Klonsky, 2016). It contains six subscales that were theoretically formulated and confirmed through factor analysis: (1) Nonacceptance of Emotional Responses, (2)

Difficulties Engaging in Goal-Directed Behavior, (3) Impulse Control Difficulties, (4) Lack of Emotional Awareness, (5) Limited Access to Emotion Regulation Strategies, and (6) Lack of Emotional Clarity. Items are rated from 1 (“almost never”) to 5 (“almost always”), and some items are reverse-coded, such that higher scores reflect greater difficulty in emotion regulation.

Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI)

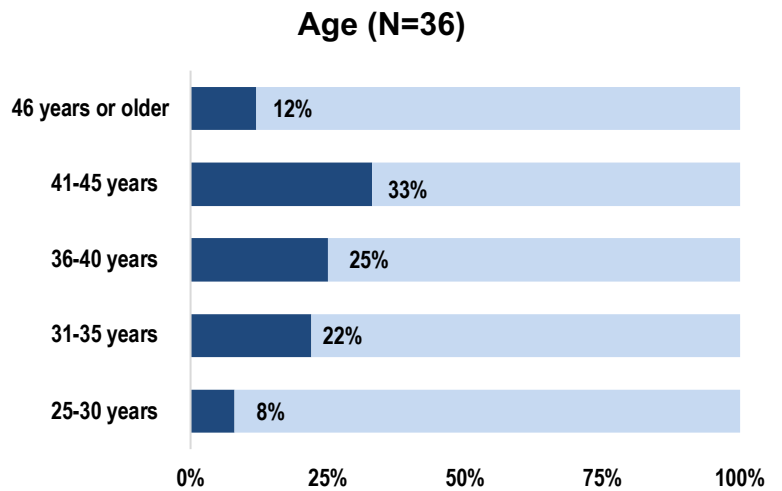
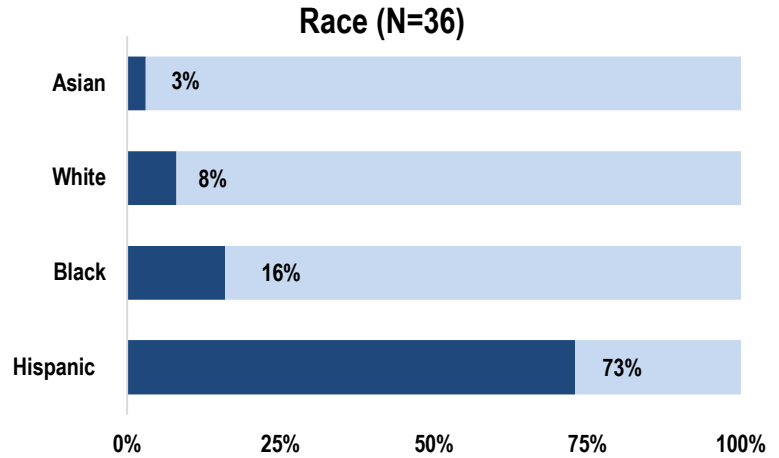
The IRI is designed to measure both cognitive and affective empathy (Davis, 1983). The Perspective-Taking (PT) subscale was used for this evaluation. The PT subscale assesses the tendency to spontaneously adopt the psychological point of view of others. Responses are based on a Likert-type scale, ranging from 0 (Does not describe me very well) to 4 (Describes me very well), and summed into an overall subscale score ranging from 0 to 28 with higher scores representing greater levels of empathy.

Perceived Stress Scale – 4 items (PSS-4)

The PSS-4 is a 4-item measure of global perceptions of stress derived from the full version of the PSS (Cohen, Karmarck, & Mermelstein, 1983). Participants indicate how often they have felt a certain way (0 = never, 4 = very often) with the past month. The PSS-4 includes two positive and two negative items. The negative items assess lack of control and affective reactions, while the positive items measure the degree of ability to cope with existing stressors. Higher scores indicate higher levels of perceived stress within the past within the past month.

Participant Characteristics

During the grant period, a total of 146 POWER participants completed baseline surveys and 79 completed post-intervention surveys. However, only 36 participants completed both surveys, and their survey data was used to assess change in outcomes. No significant differences were found between POWER participants included in the final data set and those lost at follow up in any of the baseline characteristics.



POWER participants education and employment status (N=36)

47% completed some college	Employed in current occupation for 14 years on average	Worked 43 hours per week on average	17% were supervisors
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Analytic Plan

Paired-sample *t*-tests were conducted to assess changes in mindfulness, emotion dysregulation, empathy, and perceived stress across time among the POWER participants who completed a baseline and post-intervention survey. Paired-sample *t*-tests allow us look at change over time per individual but report the findings for the group. Thus, we do not need to control for other variables (e.g., age or race, etc.) because each person is their own control case and demographic variables will not vary over time.

Statistical significance is represented by the “p-value.” This value represents the probability that the observed results would have occurred if the program indeed did not have an impact on the participants. The commonly accepted minimal p-value that represents statistical significance is $p < .05$. Thus, a p-value of $< .05$ means that there is only a .05 percent probability that the observed difference between the pre- and post-test means for an item would have occurred if the program did not have an impact on the participants.

Pre- and Post-Intervention Survey Results

The results from the paired sample *t*-Test analyses are presented in Table 1. The findings showed there was slight improvement in two mindfulness outcomes (observing and describing), three emotion dysregulation outcomes (emotional awareness, impulse control, and access to emotion regulation strategies), and empathy. However, changes were only statistically significant for empathy and emotional awareness. The small sample size may have limited our ability to detect significant effects for some of these outcomes.

Table 1: Pre- to Post-Assessment Change in Outcomes

	Pre (n=36) M(SD)	Post (n=36) M(SD)	t (df)
Mindfulness			
Nonreactivity	17.1 (3.3)	16.5 (4.4)	0.9 (35)
Observe	12.9 (4.4)	13.8 (4.4)	1.5 (35)
Awareness	19.9 (4.4)	19.6 (3.8)	0.5 (35)
Describe	19.0 (3.3)	19.3 (3.4)	0.5 (35)
Nonjudgmental	18.3 (3.9)	18.2 (4.1)	0.2 (35)
Emotion Regulation (Total Score)	29.6 (8.8)	29.4 (9.0)	0.1 (35)
Emotional Awareness*	7.0 (2.9)	6.1 (2.6)	2.0 (35)
Emotional clarity	4.6 (2.5)	5.1 (2.1)	0.9 (35)
Engaging in goal-directed behavior	5.8 (2.5)	5.9 (2.9)	0.2 (35)
Impulse control	4.1 (1.9)	4.0 (2.0)	0.3 (35)
Nonacceptance of emotional responses	4.0 (1.6)	4.5 (2.0)	1.8 (35)
Emotion regulation strategies	4.0 (1.5)	3.9 (1.6)	0.5 (35)
Empathy***	16.6 (5.2)	19.5 (4.5)	4.6 (35)
Perceived Stress	4.4 (3.0)	4.9 (2.6)	1.1 (35)

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Participant Quote

“So when I went through the training, I remember that traffic stop. And I thought, that's what this training's about. That's Center for Council. And it's not just traffic stops. It's everything. It's having an awareness because we've seen, especially in the last couple years, when you're not aware of where you're at mentally, emotionally, psychologically, and you are in the mix dealing with a group or an individual, we have seen several instances in the past two, three, four years of where it does end very badly.”

Participant Satisfaction and Feedback

This next section presents findings on what the POWER participants thought about the program. Participants were asked to rate the POWER program on a scale of 1 (very poor) to 10 (excellent) as part of the post-intervention survey. A total of 74 participants provided a rating of the program on their post-intervention survey. The mean rating provided by these participants was 9.16, indicating a high degree of satisfaction with this program.



Listening Sessions

To learn more about the impact of the POWER program on participants, Center for Council staff held three listening sessions with ten of the officers who participated in the POWER training program. Similar to focus groups, listening sessions are a facilitated discussion with a group of people with the objective of eliciting information about their experiences. The listening sessions were recorded and transcribed, with any identifying information removed from the transcript.

The evaluator conducted a secondary analysis of the de-identified listening session transcripts. Analyses of the transcripts was guided by the constant comparative method (Boeije, 2002; Corbin & Strauss, 2014). The evaluator read all of the transcripts several times and conducted open coding to identify general themes across the transcripts. Each code was constantly compared with all other codes to identify similarities, differences, and general patterns.

Participant Expectations

POWER participants who attended the listening sessions all reported that they did not know what to expect when they walked into the first training session. Several reported that they were a little uneasy about that first day because the set up was not like any other training they had experienced. Even though many felt forced into doing the POWER training program, there was a general consensus that this program was exactly what they needed. Because they started to unpack some of the trauma and stress that they had been holding in for so many years, some participants felt that the circle was equivalent to therapy for them.

Participant Quote

"Yeah. I needed it. I needed that circle. I was going through a tough year, man...And that really, you take it home and there's only so much you can put on your wife, but you don't want her have to deal with that stuff. Your friends don't get it, your parents don't really get it...So that circle gave me a chance to open that bottle up and let some of that stuff out. And people were just listening, no judgment, taking it all in. And they were just saying, "Oh man. Wow. Well, this is how I feel about it." And then that would spark another conversation."

Participant Experience

One of the things this program does very well is to create a safe space for participants to share whatever is on their mind without any judgment. While many people are initially hesitant "to be the first to grab the little thing and speak how they're feeling or who they're going to dedicate," once someone does take the leap to share, others feel more comfortable sharing as well. According to one officer, the training gave his group "the opportunity to have enough

courage to be more vulnerable with each other," which helped them become closer. Several officers were surprised to see many officers, known for being tough and keeping things in, really engaging, and opening up in the group.

Participant Quote

"I saw some of the toughest cops I know in tears by halfway through the day. And I was one of them - and you don't expect that. You expect everyone to be standoffish, we're cops, we don't really want to put all our business out there like that."

A number of officers noted that listening to others' experiences during the council session, helped them to realize that they are not alone in this. That other officers have gone through similar things as they had.

Participant Quote

"Sitting in the circle and hearing fellow officers, listen to them and be like, "Hey, I'm not alone." Knowing that you're not alone is almost like having a support group. And it helped me a lot, to the point where I was more relaxed."

Program Impact

Officers who took part in the listening sessions identified numerous ways in which the POWER program has aided them not only at work but also in other aspects of their lives. This next section provides an overview of the various benefits provided by the listening session participants.

Learned new ways to deal with everyday stressors in a healthy way

The officers in general found the breathing exercises they learned during the program to be very effective in helping them get into a particular mindset where they do not automatically react to negative situations or interactions and let things go.

Meditation and the breathing exercises have helped many to be more present in their day-to-day life. The officers believe that their ability to be present when interacting with others has helped them to become more effective at problem-solving.

Participant Quote
<p><i>“When I’m getting information that I might not necessarily like or agree with, just be there, kinda in the moment, not just be quick to react, just practicing the breathing methods and then thinking before I actually speak before I take the next step.”</i></p>

Participant Quotes
<p><i>“Something about the mindset of being present, for whatever reason, slowed the game down, meaning work, or what’s happening in a situation, that’s moving fast for everyone else, but in my mindset, it’s like in slow motion, which allows for me to think quicker or whatnot and apply something like a solution or resolve anything like that. But it was something about being present, gave me that ocean view, that wider view of things”</i></p>
<p><i>“If I get wrapped up in distraction, then I’m not going to be present enough to, to come up with solutions. So Center for Council training really does map on to what we do, whether it’s out in the field or whether it’s on the administrative side, internally with our own people. It’s teaching people, officers, how to show up to something so that their mind is in the right place to provide some sort of solution or to just listen.”</i></p>

Several officers have also noted that being more present helps to prevent things from escalating in a variety of different situations because they have greater awareness of the bigger picture of what is going on.

and aware of the bigger picture would be of particular interest to the city and the department because it has the potential to reduce risk management and the number of lawsuits as it can help officers to be less reactive and more likely to utilize de-escalation techniques to keep situations from becoming volatile and dangerous.

Participant Quote

"It was on a big gang group that just got out of hand. Gang unit just put it out...And so, it was this line of angry people wanting to fight the police. And we have guys, officers ready to do what we have to do. So, I remember approaching and just...being present in that and kind of like just slowing down, gave me like a very, I guess, a global, a wide view of the whole entire situation. And the present-ness of it is listening to the people...why they were angry and what happened? And that allowed me to have a line of communication with that angry crowd, to calm them down, to get them to calm down. And then for me to find out for my supervisors of exactly the overall goal of what they want. So even talking with them to build that line of communication in the most chaos but having enough awareness and presence to resolve the situation."

One officer in particular believed that training officers to cultivate a mindset that allows them to be more present



Participant Quote

"What this training I believe will do is significantly lower that because of the mind frame of the officer going into a situation, just as we're giving you all examples here of slowing everything down, looking at it for what it is and taking it step-by-step breathing before that. So when we went through this training, like I said, we didn't talk about a bunch of police stuff. We all equated to the things that we've been doing on the job and saying, "Man, I could have done that better," or, "Next time this happens, this is what I'm going to do based on what we've learned here." And I think

officers coming in, patrol gangs, command staff, once they go through the training, I think that we'll see a major impact on lowering that risk management to the city and the department."

Gained a greater understanding of self and the broader world through participation in the program

The POWER program has assisted participants in developing a better understanding of their mental, emotional, and physical states. One officer in particular stated that the training assisted him in defining or comprehending why they were feeling a certain way. Another officer appreciated how the program helped him to narrow down what makes him tick and do certain things. Many officers in the program reported how they learned to be more open to other perspectives and really becoming active listeners when interacting with others.

Improved Relationships

The officers attending the listening sessions have reported that many of their relationships have improved since starting the program. This includes relationships at work and at home.

Becoming more open to understanding the other person's point of view has contributed to improvements in interpersonal relationships.

Participant Quotes

"I started thinking about my relationship, my wife, and some of the arguments that we have, and I'm like, well, this is based on my perception actually, not hers. So, then I put two and two together and it started to improve my relationships. Just that one little thing."

"But for the most part, by being a supervisor, I got to know my officers a little bit better. And I understood as to why they do things. We talk about it. Without this training I would always talk to them, but this really encouraged me to listen more and understand them more. And it just created a unity within the group, which we already had, but it just became stronger. A true team, and that's what I'm taking from this training."

Physical Health Benefits

A number of participants reported improvements in sleep since starting the program. They attribute their improvement in sleep to a shift to being

more grounded and present throughout their daily life as a result of learning specific strategies and techniques through the POWER program. One officer felt that his improvement in sleep and new mindset helped to keep his physical health in check.

Participant Quotes

"I'll get six, seven hours now, which to me that's really good because I wouldn't do that before, but I feel more relaxed, more at ease, more calm. I don't wake up like how I used to before. I'll wake up and I'm like, oh, I got to do this, I got to do that. No, I haven't done that since we started this. Just because I've, I've been listening to everything that you guys have been saying heart in all of our sessions to be present, not to be rushing, to take things one day at a time, listen to your body. So I've been doing a lot of that, which I wasn't doing before. So it's definitely helped a lot with sleeping and I feel relaxed. I notice a difference."

"Went to get a physical, get everything checked out my heart, everything. So, the first thing they do, they take your blood pressure. It has never been this low, ever... Did an EKG, about to do stress test next week. The EKG was great. The heart was great. Everything was good. Everything was good. So I'm like, okay,

there's some physical changes here probably because of the amount of sleep that I've been getting and just where my head is now."

Additionally, several listening session participants reported having lower blood pressure and a greater desire to exercise as a result of their participation in the POWER program.

Participant Quotes

"In other words, if you just take those blocks of time, or if you carve out some time to do these things that we learned in the Center for Council training, stuff just starts showing up, whether it's lower blood pressure or you find yourself."

"So, the first thing they do, they take your blood pressure. It has never been this low, ever."

"And along with all that came the idea that you need to start walking again, you need to start running again. And so I felt like, well, I could meditate while I walk. This is all coming from Center for Council stuff. And so I'd go for a walk and I'd walk half a mile because I was out of shape at this point. And, and then I said, well, I'll go for a little jog and I would still meditate. And next thing you know, I'm running eight miles, nine miles, 10 miles, 12 miles."

Conclusion

Overall, the officers participating in the listening sessions found the program to be very beneficial and helpful in multiple areas of their life. Many wished that this program was around when they first started their careers and believed that this program could have helped prevent a lot of staff turnover as well as mental health problems. Even though participants will continue to use the tools they learned in the POWER program, they expressed a desire to see POWER become a permanent fixture in their department and think this should be required training for new officers. By providing officers with tools and other supports to help them manage their stress, the overall performance and function of law enforcement agencies can be improved through reduced

absenteeism, staff turnover, and risk management. The preliminary findings of this evaluation suggest that the POWER program has the potential to assist law enforcement agencies in meeting these objectives.

Given that the findings from the listening sessions revealed a variety of physical health benefits associated with POWER participation, future studies should include measures to assess improvement in physical health outcomes (e.g., sleep, blood pressure, and exercise). Although these findings are preliminary, they serve as a foundation for larger, more rigorous studies that will be able to provide conclusive evidence of the efficacy of this program.

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