

POWER Training Program Jacksonville Sheriff's Office



Final Evaluation Report

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Executive Summary

Center for Council partnered with the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office (JSO) to train their 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 with JSO officers using survey data from 17 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:

- ❖ Mindfulness - nonreactivity
- ❖ Mindfulness – describing
- ❖ Emotion regulation – emotional awareness
- ❖ Emotion regulation – engaging in goal directed behavior
- ❖ Emotion regulation – emotion regulation strategies
- ❖ Empathy
- ❖ Perceived Stress
- ❖ Anger

Participants were also asked to indicate their overall satisfaction with the program and to provide feedback. The findings from the feedback portion of the evaluation provide further evidence of the positive benefits of the POWER program that was found in the main survey results. Overall, participants tended to have a high degree of satisfaction with the program. However, there were differing views on the appropriate length of the program. Some thought it should be longer and others thought it should be shorter due to the difficulty of some to stay engaged in the program over a longer period when they have competing demands for their time. Given that at least one participant reported physical health benefits associated with POWER participation, future studies should include measures to assess improvement in health outcomes (e.g., weight, blood pressure, and other stress-related health issues). While there are several limitations to the evaluation that limit the generalizability of the findings, this evaluation serves as a foundation for larger, more rigorous studies that can provide more conclusive evidence of the efficacy of this program.

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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 2021, Center for Council implemented their Peace Officer Wellness, Empathy & Resilience (POWER) Training Program in the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office. 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 mindfulness, emotional regulation, empathy, perceived stress, 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.

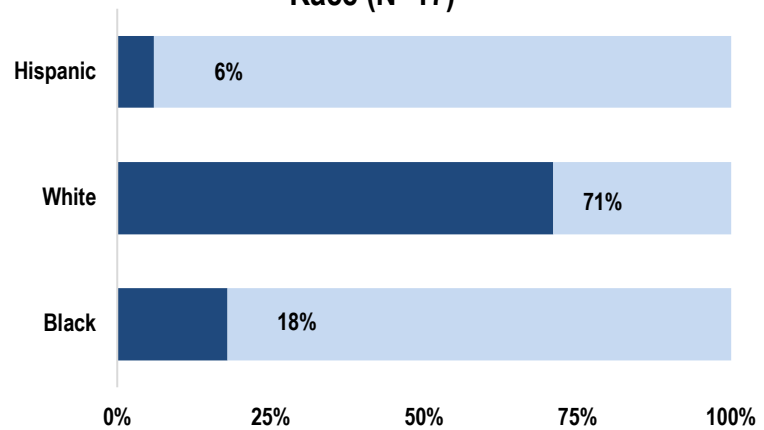
PROMIS[®]-ANGER

The PROMIS[®] (v1.0) short form version of anger (5 items) was used, and has shown acceptable internal consistency and correlations with expected legacy measures ([Cella et al., 2010](#)). Items are rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 =Never to 5=Always). Higher scores indicate higher levels of anger.

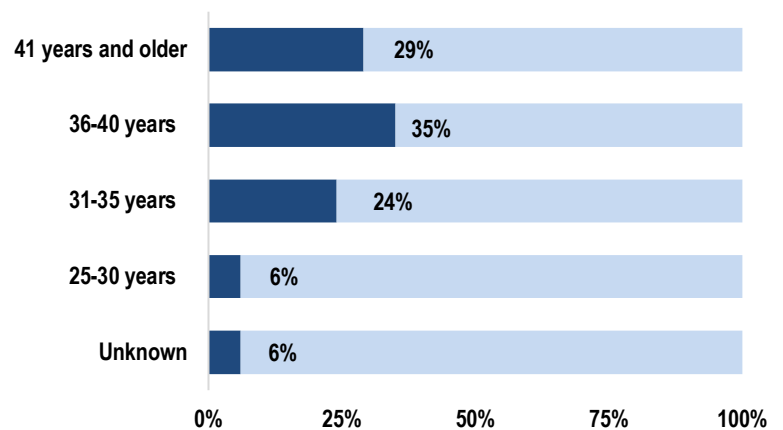
Participant Characteristics

During the project period, a total of 24 POWER participants completed baseline surveys and 17 completed post-intervention surveys. Data from the 17 participants who completed both surveys was used to assess change in outcomes. No significant differences were found between POWER participants included in the final data set and those lost to follow up in any of the baseline characteristics.

Race (N=17)



Age (N=17)



POWER participants education and employment status (N=17)

40% completed a bachelor's degree

Employed in current occupation for 14 years on average

Worked 47 hours per week on average

36% were supervisors

Analytic Plan

Paired-sample *t*-tests were conducted to assess changes in mindfulness, emotion dysregulation, empathy, perceived stress, and anger 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 significant improvement in two mindfulness outcomes (nonreactivity and describing), three emotion dysregulation outcomes (emotional awareness, engaging in goal-directed behavior, and access to emotion regulation strategies), total emotion regulation, empathy, perceived stress, and anger. While there were slight improvements in many of the other mindfulness and emotion dysregulation scores, these changes from pre to post were not significant. The small sample size may have limited our ability to detect significant effects for these outcomes.

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

	Pre (n=17) M(SD)	Post (n=17) M(SD)	t (df)
Mindfulness			
<i>Nonreactivity*</i>	14.3 (3.5)	15.8 (2.3)	2.0 (16)
<i>Observe</i>	13.9 (4.4)	15.1 (3.1)	1.4 (16)
<i>Awareness</i>	17.9 (5.0)	18.2 (4.1)	0.4 (16)
<i>Describing**</i>	16.9 (4.6)	18.8 (3.3)	2.8 (16)
<i>Nonjudgmental</i>	16.4 (4.4)	17.1 (4.9)	1.2 (16)
Emotion Regulation (Total Score) *	38.1 (15.7)	33.1 (10.5)	2.4 (16)
<i>Emotional Awareness **</i>	7.5 (3.3)	5.8 (2.1)	3.5 (16)
<i>Emotional clarity</i>	5.2 (2.3)	5.2 (1.7)	0.0 (16)
<i>Engaging in goal-directed behavior**</i>	8.5 (3.3)	6.8 (3.3)	3.1 (16)
<i>Impulse control</i>	5.0 (3.3)	4.8 (2.6)	0.4 (16)
<i>Nonacceptance of emotional responses</i>	6.5 (4.3)	6.4 (3.9)	0.2 (16)
<i>Emotion regulation strategies*</i>	5.4(2.9)	4.2 (1.5)	2.2 (16)
Empathy***	15.2 (4.5)	20.5 (5.0)	5.8 (16)
Perceived Stress*	6.4 (3.5)	4.2 (3.3)	2.2 (16)
Anger**	15.4 (5.5)	11.5 (4.8)	3.6 (16)

* Significant levels: $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Participant Quote

I feel like I listen and feel for others more and try to understand things from their perspective instead of what I think about it. I am happier and at peace with myself.

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 17 participants provided a rating of the program on their post-intervention survey. The average score of these participants was 9.12, which shows a high degree of satisfaction with this program.

Best Aspects of the Program

Participants were asked to describe what they liked best about the POWER program. Over half of the program participants indicated that they really enjoyed the council group sessions. Many felt that these sessions allowed them to connect with others. One participant noted that it helped to see that others were experiencing similar things, and another participant appreciated the authenticity other members brought to the group, all of which helped to create a sense of community among the participants.

Participant Quotes

“Realizing that most of us have the same issues, we just don't discuss it.”

“It is good to see other people not afraid of their emotions and sharing them, which helped me to not be ashamed.”

A few participants really liked the diversity of materials (i.e., articles, podcasts, videos). One participant found the meditation practices and weekly reflection questions to be the best part of the program because it helped to facilitate the change that she needed.

Program Impact

The program participants identified numerous ways in which the POWER program has aided them in various aspects of their lives. This next section provides an overview of the various benefits identified by the participants

Learned how to slow down

Several officers indicated that the program has helped them to slow down and not immediately react to negative emotions and situations. Being able to slow down also help some to be more

present in their daily experiences and interactions with others.

Participant Quotes

"Since practicing mindfulness, I feel human again and can experience emotion without overreacting."

"Slowing down and thinking before acting or making calls on what to do or not to do."

"Slowed down my life and enjoyed the people and experiences around me."

Increased level of awareness

Many participants believed that their level of self-awareness had increased as a direct result of their participation in this program. This self-awareness helped one participant to identify areas in need of healing. Some participants have also noted that they have gained a greater awareness of what is going on with others and the world around them.



Participant Quotes

"It gave me an opportunity to see within myself and let myself heal when I didn't want to admit I needed healing."

"Tuning into others' tone, body language, trying to see things from their perspectives, I'm more aware of things around me and try to tune into my senses."

Increased empathy

A few of the participants believe that they have become more empathetic towards others.

Participant Quotes

"I feel like I listen and feel for others more and try to understand things from their perspective instead of what I think about it."

Improved Communication Skills

One participant felt that their communication skills improved because of the program.

Participant Quotes

"On the occasions when I have, it has allowed me to be a better communicator."

Physical Health Benefits

One participant saw some improvement in their health, which they attributed to the program. Specifically, they reported that they lost weight and no longer had to take medications for high blood pressure.

Critiques of the Program

The length of the program was problematic for several participants. While some would have liked the program to have lasted longer than six months, several thought that six months was way too long to keep people engaged in the program. One participant in particular reported having trouble doing the program due to being overwhelmed at work. Another participant recommended reducing the length of the program to two or three months. There were also reports of problems with program delivery.

Specifically, some experienced problems receiving emails from the program and some were not able to meet with their "cuddles" on a consistent basis. So one participant noted that a lot of the work had to be done independently.

Conclusion

Overall, the findings from this evaluation show that the POWER program has had a very positive impact on the program participants. Specifically, there were significant improvements in aspects of mindfulness, emotion regulation, empathy, perceived stress, and anger. The findings from the participant feedback section of the post-intervention survey provide further confirmation of the beneficial effects of the POWER program. While there were mixed opinions about the appropriate length of time for this program, there was a high degree of satisfaction with this program overall. Although these findings are preliminary, they serve as a foundation for larger, more rigorous studies that can provide more conclusive evidence of the efficacy of this program.

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