

Final Draft Report

A goal or distinct tactics?

Proposing a practical definition of crisis intervention & de-escalation in the context of policework



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FOREWORD

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Police use of force is a highly contentious issue, as using force incorrectly has the potential to damage police-citizen relations and place the police and/or citizens at an increased risk of being injured during an encounter. Viewed as a natural solution to improve outcomes for both the police and the public, the concept of de-escalation was introduced into policing. Despite being regarded as a sensible mechanism for reducing police use of unnecessary force, the concept of de-escalation remains ill-defined. The purpose of this project was to further delve into crisis intervention and de-escalation (CID) from the perspective of use of force experts and frontline police officers and move towards a more concrete understanding of both the defining features of CID and how it can be implemented in policing.

The project included a literature review focusing on the current state of de-escalation in policing, with a particular focus on the defining features of de-escalation and the impact of de-escalation training on police-citizen encounters. To further our understanding of crisis intervention and de-escalation (CID), the researchers completed interviews with nine individuals widely regarded as experts on police use of force and crisis-related incidents in British Columbia. The interviews were semi-structured, and focused on questions related to conceptualizing CID, as well as the challenges associated with implementing CID into policing policy and practice. In addition to the interviews, the researchers analyzed survey responses from 93 frontline police officers in Vancouver, British Columbia. The surveys aimed to gain insight into how frontline officers perceive CID and use it in practice.

Several key themes emerged from the interviews. The experts generally agreed that, even though CID has always been a core component of policing, this concept is not well understood by those outside of policing. The interviewees noted that one of the main concerns about CID is that it remains ill-defined. The experts were quick to point out that CID is not a single technique or set of techniques, and it cannot be viewed as the sole solution to handling volatile police-citizen encounters. In addition to the fact that CID may not always work, CID may also look different depending on the unique circumstances of the incident, as well as the responding officers' unique skillset and aptitude for engaging in CID. The interviewees noted that the nuances of CID pose challenges for capturing the success of CID in practice.

Mirroring the results from the interviews, the survey data suggest that police officers are quite familiar with CID, feel that they receive sufficient CID-related training, and believe that they are using CID regularly and successfully. Again, analyses of the survey data indicate that CID is not a one-size-fits-all tool consisting of a set of specific techniques. Rather, officers perceive CID to be context-dependent and involve a variety of different tactics and skills, including communication and active listening. There were a number of challenges associated with CID that were identified by frontline officers, including the misunderstandings of CID from non-police officers, and the limitations of CID, including its feasibility and/or chances for success in more acute situations.

In addition to highlighting important considerations throughout the report, several key recommendations are provided. Based on the interviews and survey data, a practical definition for CID has been proposed along with advisements for evaluating CID. Other recommendations concerned developing and diversifying officer skills, understanding the limits of CID, and incorporating CID into existing practices.

INTRODUCTION

In the aftermath of several high-profile incidents involving police use of aggressive tactics and abuses of force, police relations with communities, particularly racialized and marginalized communities, have deteriorated. Adding to the concerns about police use of force, there has been an increase in anti-police sentiment, which has resulted in an increase in the number of officers being injured or killed while on duty (Engel et al., 2020). Given the current climate, some police officers are becoming less motivated, engaging in less proactive policing, and expressing concerns for their safety (Engel et al., 2020; Morin et al., 2017; Shjarback et al., 2017; Todak, 2017). Practitioners, academics, police executives, and citizens acknowledge that not only is there a need for increased mechanisms of police accountability and legitimacy, there is also a need for solutions that will reduce the frequency and severity of violent encounters between the police and the public (Engel et al., 2020; Todak & White, 2019). One of the most prominent recommendations for improving policing and increasing the protection of both officers and citizens is ‘de-escalation’. Highlighted as part of the Police Executive Research Forum’s (PERF) guiding principles, and touted as the common-sense approach to reducing unnecessary police use of force, de-escalation policies and training are believed to temper police-citizen encounters by improving officers’ communication and conflict resolution skills (Engel et al., 2020; Todak, 2017). However, despite increasing calls for the adoption of de-escalation training and approaches, at present, there still lacks a clear definition of what constitutes de-escalation, as well as what the exact tactics or approaches to de-escalation entail. To ensure police policies and training are evidence-based and in line with best practices, it is imperative that police organizations prioritize further inquiries into the features and implementation of crisis intervention and de-escalation (CID) tactics and approaches (Todak, 2017). By exploring the concept of crisis intervention and de-escalation from the perspective of use of force experts and frontline police officers, the purpose of the current study is to add to the burgeoning conversation about CID, and provide further clarity for moving forward with developments aiming to improve the outcomes for police officers and citizens.

PROJECT METHODOLOGY

This study aims to contribute to the growing body of literature on de-escalation. Utilizing information gathered from interviews with police practitioners who have extensive experience with use of force, de-escalation, and crisis incident response, as well as survey responses from frontline police officers, this study contributes to the existing knowledge base, and aims to further inform de-escalation policies and training. To achieve these objectives, the project

involved a review of the existing literature on de-escalation in policing, as well as qualitative and quantitative analyses.

INTERVIEWS

Engaging police as experts in their experiences is imperative for promoting real and sustainable change in the field (Mehari et al., 2021). With the purpose of gaining a deeper understanding of de-escalation, the researchers conducted interviews with nine individuals who were identified by peers as being among the top police use of force experts in British Columbia, Canada. The first two interviewees were police officers widely regarded as experts in police use of force. Snowball sampling was used to generate the remainder of the sample. The interviews took place online during the fall of 2021¹. A semi-structured interview was utilized as a guide, with questions focused on understanding crisis intervention and de-escalation, police training on CID tactics, defining and assessing CID, building CID into policy, and the challenges for police officers to implement CID tactics in real-world situations. During the interviews, emerging topics of interest were followed up to gain a deeper understanding of the context and considerations for defining de-escalation and implementing this concept into practice. The interviews lasted between 30 to 90 minutes.

To identify key themes, the data from the interviews were analyzed using a qualitative content analysis. Given the exploratory nature of this study, even though some a priori themes specific to the research aims were identified (e.g., definition of CID), an inductive approach was utilized to identify emergent themes that appeared to be meaningful to the officers (e.g., training and recruitment of officers). To initiate the inquiry, an open coding scheme was utilized: both researchers independently categorized all potentially relevant material by focusing on recurring words/phrases. Through regular discussion, a thematic framework was identified, and the initial themes were then expanded to create sub-themes. After further discussion, a number of themes and sub-themes that represent the officers' thoughts, opinions and experiences in relation to CID were identified. The findings from this qualitative analysis are illustrated with quotations from the interviews. In order to ensure confidentiality, respondents are not individually identified.

MEMBER SURVEY

In addition to the interviews, a survey was also developed to be completed by VPD members. The survey reflected the results of the extant literature, as well as comments that emerged during the interviews and included questions about the respondents' understanding of the goals and core elements of CID, the level and type of CID-related training they have received, their level of confidence in utilizing CID techniques, what factors influence their decision-making process in crisis scenarios, their perceptions regarding the utility and effectiveness of CID, and any challenges with adopting or utilizing CID techniques. The Vancouver Police Union reviewed and approved the survey, and graciously agreed to facilitate the survey. At the end of April 2023, the

¹One officer opted to be interviewed in person at a public coffee shop.

survey was made available to VPD members via a secure link to Survey Monkey. Participation in the survey was voluntary, and respondents were assured confidentiality; limited demographic information was collected, and this information was only reported in the aggregate. When the survey closed on June 15, 2023, the data were downloaded and analyzed in SPSS. Initially, 106 responses were received. However, validation checks revealed that some surveys had high levels of missing data. To maintain the integrity of the data, a minimum threshold of 90% completed data was adopted. As a result, the final sample was comprised of 93 respondents². The majority of the sample was male (71%), but there were enough female respondents to draw reasonable statistical inferences. Just over half of the sample was made up of Constables (51.6%), with the other large group being Sergeants/Saff Sergeants (44.5%).³ Because the rank variable was dominated by these two groups, any assessment of the effect of rank involved a comparison between Constables and Sergeants. The sample skewed toward individuals with longer years of service, with the average respondent having 20 years of service. Originally, the sample was divided into three years of service categories: up to 10 years (8.6%), 11 to 20 years (46.2%), and more than 20 years (45.2%). Unfortunately, the small number of respondents in the “up to 10 years” category made statistical comparisons unfeasible. Thus, this variable was also recoded to be binary: those with up to 20 years of service (54.8%) and those with more than 20 years (45.2%).

LITERATURE REVIEW

It is generally argued that de-escalation, which requires officers to develop and rely upon conflict resolution skills and communication, will reduce the rate at which police use physical force in tense or volatile situations (Oliva et al., 2010). Theoretically, with decreases in officer use of force, de-escalation is believed to improve outcomes in police-citizen encounters, which will not only reduce tension and conflict between police and citizens, but ultimately lead to higher citizen perceptions of police legitimacy (Todak, 2017). At present, the concept of de-escalation is grounded in three fundamental principles: (1) the protection of human life as the police mission, (2) police must rely on training, background, and experience to select the optimal alternative for resolving an encounter with, at the very least, the minimal amount of force necessary, and (3) de-escalation needs to be grounded in the transactional view of police-citizen encounters, where police decisions to use, or not to use, force in a given context are contingent on a sequence of decisions and resulting behaviours occurring at different stages of a police-citizen encounter (Todak & White, 2019).

Despite a general acknowledgement about what de-escalation involves, there remains a lack of consensus pertaining to the very precise definition of the concept. There have been several definitions put forth for what de-escalation means, with most emphasizing processes or tactics

² After completing the online survey, one member contacted the principal researcher and voluntarily participated in a follow-up interview that was conducted over the telephone. The interview was loosely structured to allow the respondent to add to areas touched on in the survey and expand on their personal experiences with CID.

³ Because of concerns of privacy, the ranks of the other members who responded to the survey have been masked.

used to prevent, reduce, or manage conflict behaviours (e.g., aggression, violence, verbal agitation, etc.) during an interaction between two or more individuals (Engel et al., 2020). The National Consensus Policy on Use of Force (IACP, 2017, p. 2), for instance, defined de-escalation as:

Taking action or communicating verbally or non-verbally during a potential force encounter in an attempt to stabilize the situation and reduce the immediacy of the threat so that more time, options, and resources can be called upon to resolve the situation without the use of force or with a reduction in the force necessary.

Providing some caveats, Lexipol's updated Use of Force Policy's alternative tactics section outlines that de-escalation involves the use of *non-violent* strategies and techniques to diminish the intensity of a situation, improve decision-making and communication, decrease the need for force, and increase voluntary compliance (Ranalli, 2020). By specifying that de-escalation is an alternative strategy that should be applied when circumstances reasonably permit, Lexipol's concept acknowledges that, while police have an obligation to produce outcomes that minimize harm, they need to respond in an objectively reasonable matter to the circumstances (Ranalli, 2020). This policy statement acknowledges the reality of many police incidents, wherein the situation and subject contribute to what ultimately transpires (Ranalli, 2020).

Even as policy statements emerge, the concept of de-escalation remains ill-defined amongst practitioners. According to Flosi (2016), the general sentiment among police officers is that de-escalation has been a core element of police training for decades; in addition to communication, verbal persuasion, use of distance, time, and cover, and Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training, officers develop de-escalation skills while working in the field. In an effort to further understand officer perceptions of de-escalation, researchers completed interviews and a focus group with officers who were nominated by their peers as highly skilled and respected de-escalators (Todak, 2017; Todak & White, 2019). Coupled with observations of academy training and ride alongs, the researchers developed several key themes related to defining de-escalation and barriers to de-escalation. In terms of the definition, the researchers suggest that de-escalation consists of three components: (1) bringing a situation or citizen in crisis back to a state of calm, (2) providing officers with tactics to build rapport and gain a citizen's cooperation, and (3) using the least amount of force possible to bring a problem to a safe conclusion (Todak, 2017; Todak & White, 2019). Their findings also revealed that the most typical forms of de-escalation involve communication, both verbal and non-verbal (e.g., eye contact and body language). Emphasizing human qualities, including showing emotion, and treating citizens with dignity and respect, while minimizing official police authority (e.g., matching officer emotion and body language to the citizens' to reduce power differential) is believed to foster a positive tone in interactions and create opportunities to show compassion without compromising safety (Todak, 2017; Todak & White, 2019). Listening and paying attention to details may help officers to legitimize a citizen's concerns and achieve calm and cooperation. When it does not pose a risk to safety or undermine

the goals of law enforcement, compromise may be a useful de-escalation tool that allows officers to turn a potentially violent encounter into a short conversation (Todak, 2017). Honesty and empowerment may also provide officers with the tools to build an understanding between themselves and a subject and involve citizens in the decision-making process (Todak & White, 2019). Interestingly, Todak (2017) noted that many police officers believe that physical force can be considered de-escalation when it brings a problem to a safe conclusion and avoids the need for more serious force. Ultimately, de-escalation is about risk reduction.

In addition to the core components of de-escalation, Todak (2017) and Todak and White's (2019) findings further revealed that there are certain qualities that officers must possess to become adept at de-escalation, with the most important being good communication skills. Many times, officers viewed as being skilled de-escalators are those who are well known crisis negotiators and are seen to obtain positive results after talking to citizens in the field (Todak, 2017). Empathy, coupled with the ability to control emotions and remain calm in crisis situations are also viewed as necessary for being able to effectively engage in de-escalation (Todak, 2017; Todak & White, 2019). Officers who have perspective of their own life circumstances and can develop clear plans of action may have an enhanced ability to connect with citizens and de-escalate them when in a crisis (Todak, 2017).

Officers have also been vocal about the challenges associated with de-escalation. Many police officers in the United States believe the potential to successfully utilize de-escalation to resolve volatile situations has been overestimated by people outside of policing (i.e., citizens, government officials, media, etc.) (Flosi, 2016; Jackman, 2016; Martinelli, 2016; Todak, 2017). Non-police officers often believe that all situations can be de-escalated verbally, and that officers resort to using force too quickly (Todak, 2017). Todak (2017) noted the discrepancy between police experiences and citizen perceptions about de-escalation is due to the lay-person's limited understanding of the realities of police work, including the types of situations and problems officers face. Based on these misunderstandings of the realities of police work, officers have expressed concerns that they are being placed in increasingly dangerous situations due to the increased pressure to de-escalate in unsafe situations (Flosi, 2016; Jackman, 2016; Martinelli, 2016). Todak and White's (2019) findings further highlight the challenges officers face when attempting to engage in de-escalation. The participants in their study acknowledged that de-escalation is not always appropriate: in violent situations, protection of life trumps the use of de-escalation. The type of situation an officer is responding to, as well as the characteristics of the subject(s) will also influence an officer's ability to engage in de-escalation. Research suggests that police officers often engage in de-escalation by utilizing lower levels of force than warranted given a subject's behaviour (Terrill, 2005). In their systematic observations of police use of de-escalation on ride alongs, for instance, Todak and James (2018) found that police often engage in active listening by allowing citizens to explain their side of the story, and make attempts to reduce the power imbalance by being respectful and appearing more "human" (Todak & James, 2018). Their regression analyses further revealed that calm citizen behaviour was associated with

police utilizing specific tactics, including maintaining a calm demeanour and emphasizing humanity. However, Todak and White (2019) noted that, compared to contained situations, dynamic situations have more unknowns and may limit an officer's response options. Persons who are under the influence of alcohol or drugs, and/or suffering from a mental illness, as well as those who are 'committed' to their course of action may not be receptive or responsive to de-escalation tactics (Todak & White, 2019).

The outcome of this research is important for a variety of reasons. First, it showcases that de-escalation may improve police legitimacy by aligning with principles of procedural justice. Humanity and compromise echo respect and dignity, while honesty, listening, and empowerment achieve fairness and neutrality (Todak & White, 2019). Second, the research reveals that de-escalation is not limited to specific situations; police are always utilizing de-escalation techniques to resolve disputes, remain professional, and save lives. Because officers do not report on incidents that are resolved successfully, however, de-escalation remains an 'invisible' form of police work (Todak & White, 2019).

Despite the lack of a singular, consensus-derived definition, there has been a general consensus that de-escalation training is necessary for police officers, and many police organizations across North America continue to adopt de-escalation policies and/or implement de-escalation training (Engel et al., 2020; Mehari et al., 2021; Todak, 2017). Typically, de-escalation training includes a variety of strategies designed to reduce conflict, aggression, injuries, and violence between practitioners and clients, including verbal and non-verbal interaction/communication styles, selecting appropriate responses in potentially violent encounters, and various physical intervention techniques (e.g., control and restraint techniques, protection, and breakaway skills) (Engel et al., 2020). Proponents argue that the application of such tactics by police officers will allow officers to use time, distance, and cover to slow down situations and resolve police-citizen encounters with less frequent and severe uses of force (Engel et al., 2020). However, despite the anecdotal evidence, theoretical propositions, and testimonials in support of the adoption of de-escalation policies and training, there are several concerns. Some police departments are altering their policies without offering new training, which raises questions as to how well de-escalation is being implemented into police practice (Todak, 2017). Lacking standards governing the implementation of training has also resulted in inconsistent curriculum content and number of required hours among agencies (Todak, 2017). Furthermore, there is very little scientific evidence regarding the success or effectiveness of restrictive use of force policies and training, such as de-escalation (Deveau, 2021; Engel et al., 2020; Todak, 2017). Based on the limited available research, the evidence to support de-escalation tactics and training is inconclusive, which hinders law enforcement agencies' ability to train officers from an evidence-based perspective (Deveau, 2021).

Examining the outcomes associated with de-escalation training, Engel and colleagues (2020) conducted a multi-disciplinary review of 64 studies. Even though they noted that training, dosage, topics covered, and tools for delivery varied across professions, Engel and colleagues

noticed that the primary focus for de-escalation training centered on physical management of aggressive individuals, and the prevention of, or early intervention in aggressive incidents (Engel et al., 2020). In terms of outcomes associated with de-escalation training, the studies' results suggested that, in general, de-escalation training improves trainees' knowledge of the causes of aggression and violence, their awareness of effective strategies for the prevention and management of aggression and violence, as well as their confidence in their abilities to manage volatile situations (Engel et al., 2020). However, despite finding that de-escalation training is generally well-received by participants, there was a lack of consensus as to whether or not de-escalation training actually leads to positive changes in self-reported behaviours. Furthermore, examining the impact of de-escalation training on incidents of aggressive/violent incidents is less positive. Although some studies found a decrease in the frequency and severity of violent/aggressive incidents following training, many others found no change or, more alarmingly, increases in the frequency of violent incidents post-de-escalation training (Engel et al., 2020). More general research on the effectiveness of police trainings suggests that the process, including active listening strategies (e.g., reflection, practice, discussion, etc.) and scenarios may be important for reducing use of force (e.g., Bennell et al., 2021; Jenkins et al., 2021). And still others highlight communication skills as the key to effective de-escalation (Rajakaruna et al., 2017). Given the critical impact de-escalation training could have for the safety and well-being of all parties involved in potentially violent encounters, additional research is required to identify and fill the gaps in our knowledge regarding the impact of de-escalation training, and enable law enforcement agencies to develop and implement empirically-based, feasible, and sustainable de-escalation trainings (Engel et al., 2020; Mehari et al., 2021).

The lack of consensus about the definition of de-escalation, as well as the limited research and evaluations of police de-escalation training and the efficacy of these tactics in the field is concerning (Engel et al., 2020). A lack of evidence to support de-escalation training and tactics, for instance, may mean that police departments are investing a significant amount of time and money into training that may or may not be effective (Todak & White, 2019). To ensure that de-escalation is implemented as evidence-based policy and practice, it is imperative that practitioners, particularly those who are experienced and have accumulated context-specific skills are important for responding to the more ambiguous situations (e.g., ability to remain calm, how to rationalize through sets of facts to come to best decisions), are consulted (Todak, 2017; Willis, 2013). Because officers have unique knowledge about whom is best suited to handle particular types of incidents, they are in the optimal position to provide insight and offer valuable advice when adopting 'new' concepts, such as de-escalation (Kane & White, 2009; Todak & White, 2019). It is suggested that the capabilities required to improve police responses to volatile situations is already being employed by highly skilled officers (Todak, 2017; Willis, 2013). Thus, successful ideas in evidence-based policing, therefore, will take into account the views of police practitioners, particularly those with significant work experience and well-developed skill sets (Willis, 2013).

SCAN OF EXISTING DE-ESCALATION STANDARDS AND PRACTICES

The *BC Provincial Policing Standards (BCPPS)* have been updated to include reference to crisis intervention and de-escalation. Revised on February 1, 2015, *BCPPS Standard 1.0 - Use of Force* was updated to make specific reference to crisis intervention and de-escalation techniques in relation to the use of Conducted Energy Weapons (CEWs) (Province of British Columbia, 2023). According to Subject 1.3.1(2), an officer is prohibited from discharging a CEW against a person, unless, based on reasonable grounds, CID techniques, which include verbal and nonverbal communications that are designed to de-escalate a crisis, have not been or will not be effective in eliminating the risk of bodily harm (Province of British Columbia, 2023).

In accordance with the *BCPPS* Section 3.0: Subject 3.2.2, all police officers are required to complete a Crisis Intervention and De-escalation training course, or other provincially sanctioned training in CID (Province of British Columbia, 2023). To ensure front-line officers and supervisors maintain CID skills, the Standard also mandates the completion of a refresher CID training course once every three years. The provincial CID training course was developed by the BC Ministry of Justice, Police Services Division in consultation with a working group of police and non-police subject matter experts, and the Braidwood Recommendation Implementation Committee, and was designed to ensure police officers are able to effectively use CID techniques to de-escalate crisis situations (Canadian Police Knowledge Network, 2023). Involving face-to-face components, including scenarios, this course takes approximately seven hours to complete. Some of the specific learning outcomes include explaining the importance of CID techniques, describing the *BC Provincial Policing Standards*, specifically the standard related to CID training, explaining assessment and response to risk in crisis situations, identifying emotionally disturbed persons, defining mental health and mental health disorders, and explaining medical considerations in crisis situations (Canadian Police Knowledge Network, 2023).

The Vancouver Police Department has yet to formally prescribe CID into their policies; however, the department has focused on incorporating elements of de-escalation into their existing use of force training practices. Romolo Ranallo, Staff Sergeant, and John Roberts, Retired Sergeant, provided key insights into the direction the VPD has taken with regards to CID. Starting from the recruit level, the department's use of force training is grounded in the National Use of Force Framework. Recognizing that de-escalation is more of a goal or desired outcome of a situation rather than a specific set of tactics or techniques, use of force training officers emphasize the importance of action criteria and the use of language that orients the patrol officers' mindset to the importance of communication and the use of less force or lower force options. Stressing that de-escalation is situation-based with public safety at the forefront, the VPD's use of force training requires officers to consider three key pieces of information when making decisions about type and level of response. First, officers should consider whether the action(s) is necessary, which involves asking questions, including: Why now? Is there urgency? Second, officers need to determine if the action(s) is risk effective (i.e., does the risk equal the reward for the end goal?). Finally, officers must consider whether their actions would

be deemed acceptable (i.e., would the officer's response be considered acceptable from professional and ethical standpoints, as well as based on public perceptions?). All of these considerations must then be framed in reference to priorities of life, with an officer considering the safety and threat posed to the victim(s), public, officer, and subject(s), in that order.

INTERVIEW DATA WITH USE OF FORCE EXPERTS

UNDERSTANDING CRISIS INTERVENTION AND DE-ESCALATION (CID)

CID is NOT a new concept.

It is clear that policing is undergoing monumental transformations, and police continue to have to juggle new requirements with, oftentimes, competing interests. With the newest shift in policing, there have been various terms/phrases introduced into the policing vernacular, including crisis intervention and de-escalation (CID). According to the interviewees, however, even though the term "CID" is new, the concept itself is not. Most of the interviewees explained that elements of CID have always been central to policework. As one respondent explained:

The police response model in Canada is based on crisis intervention and de-escalation – that's the starting point. This is not a new concept in policing or approach in policing – [it has] been embedded in Canadian policing for as long as I have been involved and longer.

CID is also believed to be a central component of the use of force model, the National Use of Force Framework (NUFF), which has been adopted by police agencies across the country. Embedded within this model is training in crisis intervention and de-escalation. The starting point for all interactions with the public where there is any potential for force is CID: by default, officers are trained to "approach low and slow."

Disconnect between public expectations and reality of policework.

There was consensus amongst the responding officers/law enforcement representatives that there are problems with the way the public, media and politicians understand and utilize the term CID. Some of the interviewees suggest that the public, media, and/or politicians do not fully understand what CID means in a practical sense. This may be due to a misrepresentation of CID as a whole or just an incomplete understanding about what CID is, including the context and legal framework surrounding how police services are delivered. As one of the respondents explained:

CID is poorly informed and misunderstood in terms of how it's imbedded in policing and how it fits into various situations.

Feeding into this lack of understanding may be that the public, media, and/or politicians hold unrealistic views about how often police engage in de-escalation and crisis intervention, and the

efficacy of these techniques. Similar to the opinions expressed by officers in the United States (Todak & White, 2019), the general sentiment among the responding officers is the public does not understand the context of situations in which the police are involved. As most people have not participated in trying to de-escalate a person in crisis, they do not understand how dynamic, unpredictable, and volatile these situations can be. It is naïve for the public to expect that police will be able to deal with dynamic and violent encounters with a “talk down”, or that more crisis intervention or de-escalation training alone would change outcomes.

Another issue is that the level of expectation in terms of officer performance does not coincide with the level of training/practice officers are likely to receive. As one respondent stated:

[The] public has an expectation of extremely high level of performance for officers but we struggle to find ways to give officers enough practice to meet the mark... One of the things I would like the general public to understand is the complexity of de-escalation and becoming good at it. It's a learned skillset and we have significant challenges funding training for police officers in the first instance, and we do a good job in this province overall of training but officers don't get a comprehensive training overall and we have to hire people with a good foundation in these skills to begin with... Complex to be good at de-escalation in a variety of circumstances, and when you factor in human factors, [like] physiological response, fear, etc., when you need to de-escalate and the stakes are high with serious consequences like safety.

The interviewees also noted that CID is more of a problem for the public, media, and politicians than it actually is for police. Contrary to media portrayals, wherein police are depicted as being incapable of dealing with people in crisis, the interviewees believe that, in the vast majority of cases, police are getting it right. Police must meet certain standards for conduct as outlined by the *BC Provincial Policing Standards*, and, from the respondents' perspective, police are meeting these standards. In addition, the respondents noted that the fact most calls/incidents do not result in use of force (as indicated by filing Subject Behaviour-Officer Response forms (SBORs)) is a good indication that police must, more often than not, be using CID techniques properly, and are successfully intervening in crisis situations. As one respondent explained:

Volatile, uncertain, complex calls to begin with that officers resolve just by showing up doesn't even show up in SBOR... The few incidents we hear about suggests [CID] is being done well. Officers are communicating with people overwhelmingly at this level.

DEFINING CID

There is no single, clear, universally accepted definition of CID.

Linked to the previous two themes is the problem of defining what CID actually means. Similar to Todak and White's (2019) findings, the term "de-escalation" evades a simple definition, even amongst experienced professionals. At the most basic level, CID refers to the use of any verbal or non-verbal tactics (usually precluding physical interventions) to resolve a situation. The respondents explained, however, that many organizations have adopted their own meanings for CID:

Police Executive Forum has a definition, International Association of Chiefs of Police has a definition, special interest groups have definitions, PIVOT has a definition... [these] definitions reflect their own biases, [and] what's best for their clients.

The concern is that, even with a degree of overlap amongst the various existing definitions, having too many different ideas about CID renders the concept almost meaningless. It becomes one of those "I can't tell you what it is, but I know it when I see it" terms. As one respondent explained:

[A]t best [CID] is loosely defined and just bantered about, [so] it becomes a nebulous notion without parameters – no box around it.

Despite the lack of an overarching definition, respondents were able to articulate some of the important elements that are, or should be, part of a practical definition of CID. Some of the respondents focused on the importance of CID as a tool to recognize someone in crisis and provide members with the means to interact with/deal with these individuals without the need to resort to force. Some of the respondents highlighted the importance of CID being a tactic used by police to place them in a position of advantage when interacting with subjects whose mental state may prevent them from comprehending commands. And still other respondents emphasize that safety is always the priority, but CID dictates that the 'solution' to an incident cannot be worse than the problem. Broadly, the respondents suggest that CID can be both a goal, as well as a set of techniques.

THEORY VERSUS REALITY

CID can look very different in different situations.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to successfully engaging in CID, and it would be naïve to think there is a certain way that CID should always 'look' (i.e., a certain tone, phrasing/word choice, response style, etc.). All situations are unique: each officer will perceive the situation slightly differently, and rely on/employ different strategies, techniques, and skills. Even though the respondents all acknowledged that CID will look different depending on the situation and officer(s) involved, they did not all agree about whether or not the use of physical force can/should be included as part of CID. Some respondents suggest that physical force may form part of CID if it prevents serious harm. As one respondent stated:

[The] solution cannot be worse than the problem, but police need to be able to use a reasonable amount of force to gain control in a situation.

Some respondents were unsure as to whether communication in a CID framework could include inferences about consequences through implied or overt threats. For instance, some questioned whether communication, both verbal and non-verbal, includes implied force options such as posturing with a baton. Some argued that if an officer obtained compliance without having to follow through with the force option, this would constitute de-escalation. On the other hand, some of the respondents believed that use of force should be a completely separate concept, arguing that if you have to resort to physical force tactics then you have not successfully de-escalated a situation. The differing opinions pertaining to the relationship between use of force and CID suggests that this requires further consideration and clarity.

Even if used properly, CID does not always work.

There is a general sentiment amongst experienced police officers that de-escalation and being able to talk someone down can help to prevent tragedies (Ranalli, 2020). Based on the statements provided by the respondents, use of force experts believe that, even though police officers are successfully employing CID techniques, they were quick to point out that, for a variety of reasons, CID tactics will not be sufficient to manage all situations. Police work occurs in an uncontrolled environment, and, oftentimes, interactions occur in difficult circumstances and unfold in dynamic ways. Simply put, the context matters. It is evident that officers can start off with the best of intentions and employ de-escalation techniques and intervention strategies, but sometimes the circumstances force officers to change their approach/tactics in order to regain control and resolve the situation safely. As one respondent described:

We are responding to another person's actions. Generally speaking, we react to what a person is doing. Can start out with everything calm and it's just a routine call, and suddenly something triggers a person. And then it goes from a very calm situation you think you de-escalated and then it becomes violent with someone you know you have to try to control. How do you de-escalate in that situation where it is stressful, dynamic, etc.? CID is the starting point, but it's not perfect.... Unpredictable people that can be hard to read, respond to, and understand. It's not simple. Cannot just give CID training and expect it's going to work every time. It won't.

Other respondents even suggested that there are many instances where CID is not appropriate at all. For instance, there are some situations where the subject(s) is set on a course of action, and regardless of officer efforts, whether that be through the use of verbal or physical forms of manipulation, the subject will not change their trajectory. In these instances, requiring CID even as a starting point may result in police hesitating or failing to react (i.e., under-reacting), which

could jeopardize the safety and well-being of officers, civilians, or even the subject. As one respondent noted:

[W]e need to accept that police need to use force to gain control... it may look awful but it is lawful.

As Ranalli (2020) suggests, perhaps rather than asking why an officer did not de-escalate a situation, it would be more accurate and appropriate to ask who escalated the situation and why. It would also be more prudent to ask whether the force option utilized was ‘lawful’ (i.e., reasonably necessary) given the circumstances.

CHALLENGES TO EFFECTIVE CID IN POLICING

Training and recruitment: CID requires practice and a certain skillset

In order to ensure de-escalation is implemented properly, training is paramount (Ranalli, 2020). It is clear that training, in general, is an issue for police. With an ever-growing list of requirements/standards police must adhere to, the number of different training topics for officers is formidable. Even with the desire to build capacity and increase efficiency in training members, agencies are constantly challenged to overcome constraints related to time, money, and availability (e.g., number of training days available in a calendar year). In a perfect world, officers would always have more training. However, without the appropriate resources, police organizations are unable to formally train officers as much as they deserve or should, which may leave officers unable to meet the expectations of the public when performing their duties. As one respondent noted:

[There is an] expectation that members will deliver Olympic-level in terms of services, but we give less than recreational practice time.

Referring to CID training specifically, not all respondents believed that police officers were lacking in training on CID tactics. Similar to findings from previous research (e.g., Todak, 2017), many of the respondents noted that officers receive a large portion of their training informally. By responding to calls, officers are able to gain experience and “build a suitcase informally.” Officers get good at what they do by repeatedly dealing with similar situations and determining what works in different contexts, including the use of certain language and tone.

Regarding the formal training, the general consensus was that more CID training would always be beneficial for officers. However, many felt that the formal training offered is sufficient, or, at the very least, is a good start to incorporating these techniques into policing culture. In terms of improving the existing training, it was apparent that the mode of delivery may be a key to the success of training. Respondents suggested that adding more reality-based and scenario-focused training to the current training program would be an improvement. Providing officers with the opportunity to learn by doing and watching in a safe environment would allow officers to develop their tactical skills, as well as fine tune their decision-making and competency in de-

escalation. As noted by Todak (2017), this type of carefully created, realistic practice would expose officers to diverse situations, enable officers to get in the habit of considering alternative force options, and provide officers with critical feedback to improve their ability to utilize different de-escalation techniques.

All respondents agreed that CID has brought to light how critical it is for an officer to have excellent communication skills. This sentiment corresponds with the literature; the success of de-escalation requires officers to be aware of the potential safety risks to the public, while also being able to distinguish between the type of communication required to resolve a crisis or volatile incident (Ranalli, 2020). Conflict communication, for instance, involves negotiation, bargaining, and problem-solving techniques that enable constructive resolutions in situations with subjects, usually criminal, who are rational, goal directed, produce substantive demands, and require assistance to meet their needs, such as money (Vecchi, 2009). Crisis communication, on the other hand, is required in situations where the subject has exceeded their own ability to cope and meet their needs (e.g., emotions, identity, etc.), and requires focusing on active listening with the goal of establishing a line of communication through carefully selected phrasing, tone, and mannerisms, adopting a non-judgmental attitude to defuse intense emotions, buying time, and gaining intelligence (Vecchi, 2009). Applying the wrong communication strategy may worsen a situation, and possibly result in violence. Because a person who is in severe emotional crisis or is severely agitated may not be able to comprehend or hear attempts at de-escalation, officers must be very aware of the situation and whether there is a proper opportunity to engage in effective de-escalation techniques (Ranalli, 2020; Vecchi, 2009). The communication component of CID should be incorporated into all training streams to provide officers with the ability to recognize opportunities to utilize multiple verbal communication strategies and other de-escalation techniques.

According to the respondents, in addition to improving officers' abilities to communicate on scene, there needs to be a focus on improving officers' ability to articulate what happened and their decision-making process after-the-fact. In terms of articulation, it is understood that if officers are unable to explain what they did and why they did it, it will be difficult for police to review situations, and address any complaints made against officers. As one respondent explained:

We need more training in articulating... Training should be rippling out another level – technical and tactical, and then an articulation piece to tell us what happened. Scenario and then come in to articulate the simulation to give them real world experience before it is in a critical moment.

Another key skill that should be emphasized in CID-related training is *active listening*. One respondent explained that most of the current training focuses on how to talk, but there is less emphasis on the listening component of communication. In order to successfully intervene in a crisis, police need to be able to meet the subject(s) where he/she/they are at. This requires that

officers are paying attention to subject dialogue and engagement, tone, and body language. Thus, by training officers to listen and acknowledge, departments can ensure that subjects can feel heard and officers are provided with more information to better address the subject's needs.

When discussing training, many respondents were quick to recognize that training only goes so far. Whether or not CID is effective depends on whether the officer has the right skills to not only comprehend the training, but to apply what they have learned when responding to crisis situations. Of concern is whether the right kinds of officers are being recruited and hired. Many respondents suggest that departments need to reconsider the qualities they are looking for in new recruits, with a greater emphasis placed on attracting officers who come equipped with life experiences, resiliency, courage, confidence, and good communication skills. It became apparent that all respondents were particularly concerned about the lack of basic communication skills amongst new recruits. Society's increasing reliance on technology has changed the way we communicate. Younger individuals engage in more online forms of communication, including use of social media and texting, which has become the foundation for their communication in everyday life. This may impact their ability to properly employ verbal CID techniques:

Communication. Just talking to people, which is the bread and butter of what we do... because they are a gadget generation, they lack assertiveness to just talk to people. They communicate by text and not face-to-face. When dealing with someone in crisis, the gadget is not the solution.

Difficult to determine efficacy of CID

It is evident that assessing the impact of CID on policing outcomes presents huge challenges. The only time officers are required to formally report an encounter is when they utilize some form of physical force (i.e., soft or hard hand controls, compliance tools, or lethal force). Given that use of force occurs very infrequently, and, when used is often low in severity (e.g., Garner & Maxwell, 2002; Hickman et al., 2008; Terrill, 2005) there are unlikely to be official records capturing volatile situations that have been resolved without police use of force. Good policing practices, such as the successful de-escalation of a volatile situation, remain hidden. At present, much of what is known about CID is based largely on anecdotal evidence. Even though they acknowledge the challenges of directly measuring CID events, the respondents did suggest some methods for capturing CID. Given the lack of official records, some respondents suggest that the absence of negative events may be indicative of CID being used successfully. This may be found in a decreasing trend in SBOR reports or complaints. Other respondents postulated that, where records of events do exist, conducting a robust word search for particular language used by officers to signify chaos may produce some evidence of the use and efficacy of CID. Reading through SBORs where officers noted that using CID proved ineffective, for instance, may inform training pertaining to when officers will have to escalate or use other tactics to gain control of a situation.

Given the issues with official records, other respondents suggest that determining whether CID was done correctly requires input from officers, as well as individuals who were the subjects of police use of CID tactics. In order to ensure the right kind of training is being provided and it is effective, police agencies need feedback from those receiving the training, which includes monitoring their actions to see if their performance has changed. Using surveys during team training may yield some information about unreported uses of CID, which could be correlated with SBOR data to start to get a picture about whether CID training is translating into operational effectiveness. If we could understand the verbiage used by officers in CID situations, we could try to determine how often the principles underlying CID are being put into practice. Interviewing or surveying subjects to determine if they felt heard/listened to by the police during their encounters may also help to ascertain whether police are applying CID tactics like active listening.

Creating policy around CID

The purpose of policy is to guide officers in their decision-making processes, and ensure they are meeting certain standards when performing their duties. However, if a policy is overly prescriptive, it can create problems for members by limiting their ability to adapt to dynamic situations. CID is already being incorporated into policing standards. Part of the requirement is that officers have online training and engage in scenarios to learn de-escalation techniques. The challenge with the way it is being integrated in a policy-sense is in achieving the right kind of balance. The aim is to create a positive impact on policing; however, CID is still poorly informed and misunderstood in terms of how it is imbedded in policing and how it fits into various situations. Adding to this is the fact that policy is often quite black and white, but the environment within which police work is chaotic, unpredictable, and complex. Given that CID can look so very different depending on the presenting circumstances, the policy guiding CID practices needs to be flexible enough to allow officers to respond to the situation correctly. Those in charge of creating policing standards, therefore, need to acknowledge that, while it is important to ensure officers are given the correct tools to prevent a situation from escalating, officers need to have enough room to be able to adapt and respond to subjects as they are presenting in the moment. Essentially, the concern is that by creating policing policies based on guttural reactions to events rather than being informed by evidence and proper contextualization, there is a risk that the resulting changes to policing may be less positive than anticipated.

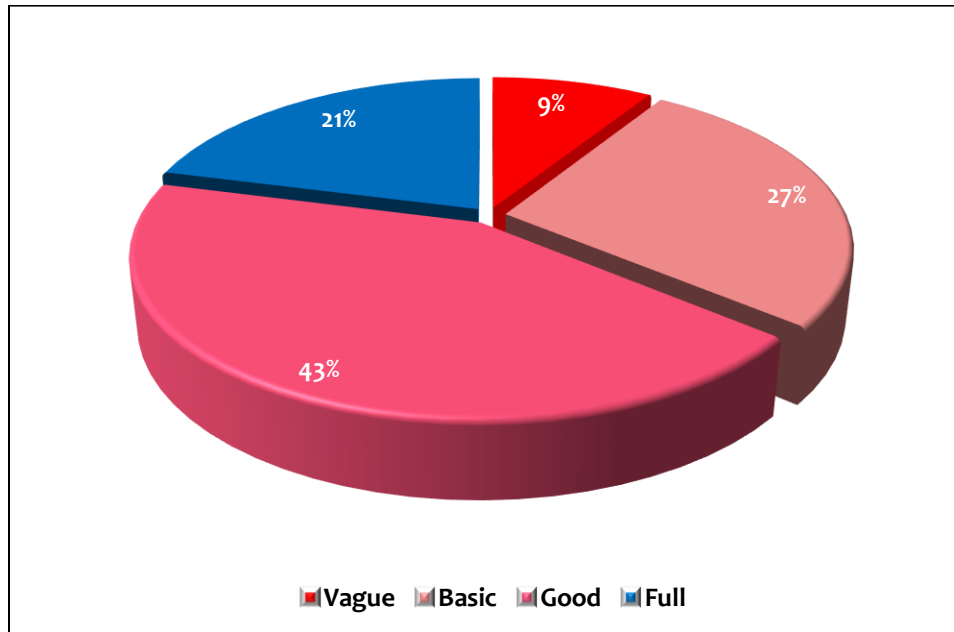
ANALYSIS OF MEMBER SURVEY RESPONSES

UNDERSTANDING AND CONCEPTUALIZING CID

The results displayed in Figure 1 indicate that nearly two-thirds of respondents (64%) feel their level of CID understanding is Good or Full, while few, one in 10, characterized their level of understanding as Vague. On one hand, this suggests the vast majority of police officers have at least a Basic Understanding of CID. Conversely, it appears that the complexity of the topic

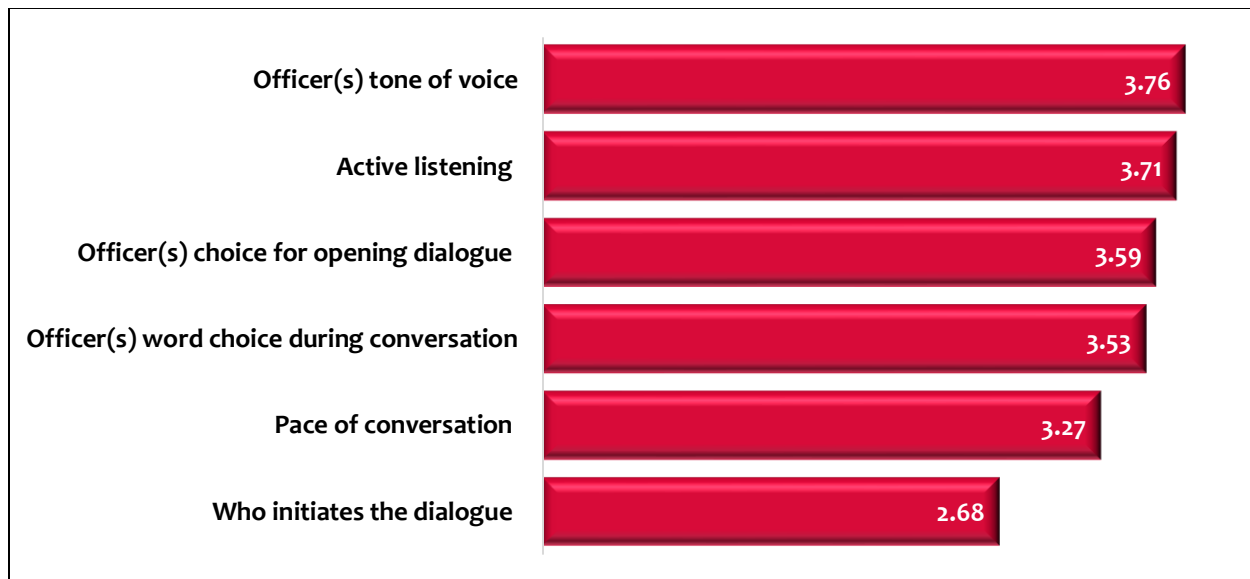
prompts the majority of officers to be cautious in their self-assessments. Further analyses revealed that these results are very stable and do not vary according to officer gender ($\chi^2 = 0.71$; $p = 0.871$), rank ($\chi^2 = 0.30$; $p = 0.960$), or years of service ($\chi^2 = 6.65$; $p = 0.355$).

Figure 1. How would you rate your level of understanding of CID?



Given the lack of conceptual clarity around CID, respondents were asked to rate a number of elements related to Communication, Demeanor, and Situational Factors on a 4-point scale, ranging from “Not at all important” to “Critically important.” The results (averages) of these assessments are highlighted in the next three figures. Figure 2 demonstrates that several factors related to *Communication*, particularly “officer tone of voice” and “active listening” are regarded as critical CID considerations, followed closely by “how the officer initiates or first responds to the individual in crisis” and “officer word choice during the incident.” Together, these elements comprise four of the top five most important CID factors, underscoring the centrality of communication to the process of CID. Also of note, there is variability among communication factors, as “the pace of conversation,” as well as “whether the dialog was initiated by the officer or the individual in crisis,” are categorized as comparatively less important.

Figure 2. Ranking of Importance of CID Elements - Communication



In contrast, factors related to *Officer Demeanor*, while not unimportant, are regarded as less central to CID (as illustrated in Figure 3). It is interesting that officers view their demeanor and presence as being less central to CID when the extant literature suggests that police presence may be a reason for escalations in distress. Research suggests that an officer's demeanor, including remaining calm and appearing more 'human' (i.e., reducing the appearance of the power differential) may assist with calming a subject's demeanor (Todak & James, 2018). Further, studies inclusive of vulnerable client experiences (i.e., those experiencing a personal or mental health crisis) also suggest that certain attributes of police presence, including uniforms and being physically touched by police during an encounter, may be viewed as scary, and even trigger a trauma-response that leads to negative outcomes (e.g., agitated behaviours that lead to an arrest) (Lamanna et al., 2018; Reach Out Response Network, 2020). However, it has also been surmised that officer demeanor may be a more important factor in less acute situations. As situations become more dynamic and volatile, the number of situational and subject-related unknowns increase. In these more complex scenarios, the utility and effectiveness of any one factor, including officer demeanor, is less obvious. Therefore, the findings presented here serve to further highlight the idea that CID is context-dependent. A more in-depth examination of officer perceptions of CID relating to specific types of calls for service (e.g., mental-health crises) may highlight some nuances pertaining to the influence of officer demeanor and presence that are obscured by this broader exploration of CID.

The majority of *Situational Factors* explored in Figure 4 are similarly seen to be less critical to CID. The most obvious exception is "stage of crisis," which overall ranked as the fourth most important factor. Throughout the results it will become clear that one of the perils of thinking about CID is treating it in a "one size fits all" manner. Despite the use of the umbrella term, crisis situations vary significantly across a number of important considerations, such as the stage

of crisis. Many treatments of CID assume, implicitly or explicitly, that *all* critical events are amenable to de-escalation. This is simply incorrect. Officers do not always arrive at the beginning of a crisis situation. In fact, often the converse is true; officers are much more likely to appear later in the process (i.e., after a situation has escalated to a state of emergency). The responses here clearly acknowledge this reality. The stage of the crisis may also interact with other factors. For example, as noted earlier, communication is a key tenet of CID. However, communication, as they say, is a two-way street. It assumes that the individual in crisis is receptive to efforts at communication, and further, is capable of adequately responding to communication. As one respondent noted, where meaningful dialogue is not possible, CID is also not possible:

“The missing middle is the perspective of the officer, as you have indicated. Sometimes officers cannot communicate with people for a variety of reasons, but people do not speak of this if it doesn't suit their agendas. When subjects are determined to jump out of windows, as was the case in Toronto or recently at the Patricia Hotel in Vancouver, or they are emotionally charged, as was the case in Myles Grey's case, or they are very high on drugs as was the case in a death I was first on scene to many years ago, they are not going to listen. CID needs to have that component - the other person needs to have the basic ability to listen and comprehend. Without it, communication is not possible.”

This sentiment has been found in other research on de-escalation (e.g., Todak & James, 2018; Todak & White, 2019), and there is also ample evidence from incident reports that the assumption that communication can be utilized to effectively de-escalate is often not valid. In certain instances, by the time the officer arrived on scene, the individual was not able to respond to the officer in a coherent/rational manner. This will, by necessity, have to be incorporated into how the officer evaluates the next steps in bringing the incident to a resolution. As one respondent noted:

“[CID is] a good tool but like anything it can't always be the answer. There needs to be a recognition that timing and circumstances may dictate that de-escalation was not appropriate or possible in a particular incident.”

The nuances of CID are also reflected in responses to the question about the “characteristics” of the individual in crisis. While it is rated as more than moderately important, it is not critical. This is consistent with an understanding that it is less about the individual *per se*, and more about the individual's specific circumstance and behavior (i.e., “what is going on with the individual?”). This contextually-based framework for thinking about CID emerges throughout the survey findings.

Figure 3. Ranking of Importance of CID Elements – Officer Demeanor

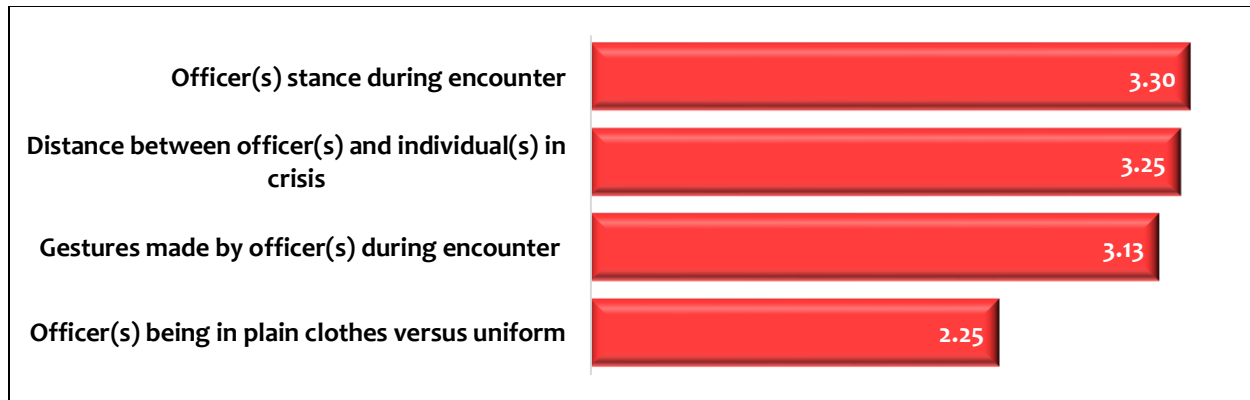
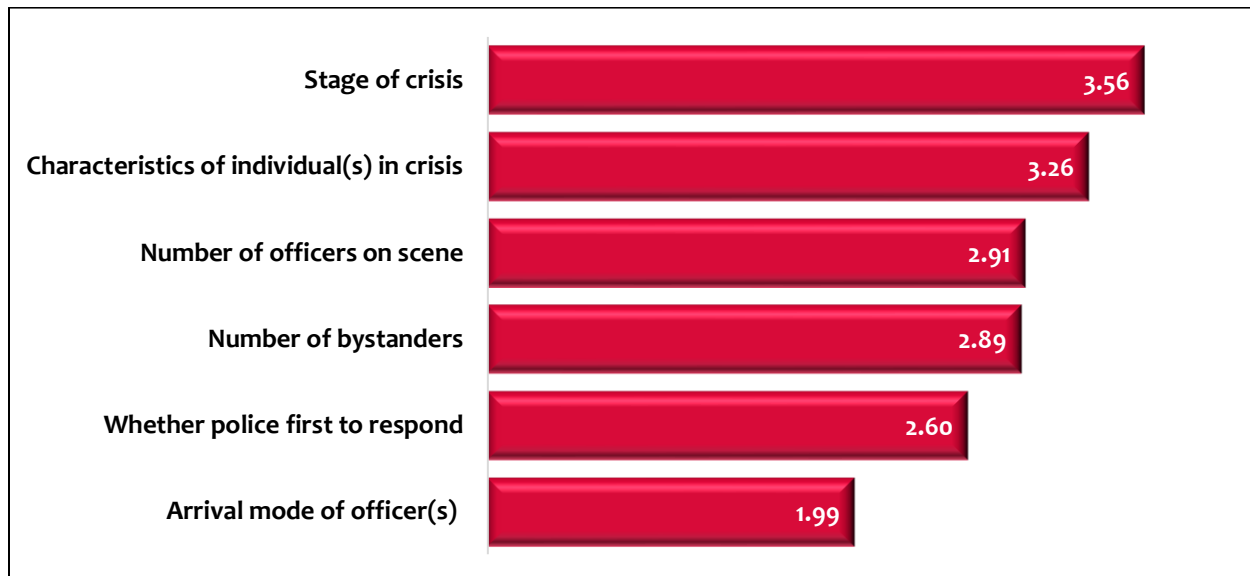


Figure 4. Ranking of Importance of CID Elements – Situational Factors



One of the most contentious aspects of CID is the belief expressed by some that it cannot involve the use of force. Put another way, some have argued, or at least strongly implied, that de-escalation and officer use of force are somehow incompatible, that officer use of force automatically indicates that the techniques of CID have not been appropriately applied. The respondents are almost unanimous in their rejection of this assertion: 97% maintained that physical force does have a role in CID. As one respondent noted, “SOMETIMES use of force is the only alternative and thus a necessary part of CID.” The more relevant question, therefore, would be whether the force used was appropriate to the situation, given all relevant contextual factors. Respondents identified at least three circumstances where CID may include use of force. Consistent with priority of life considerations, respondents were unequivocal in regarding “threat to public safety” as once such circumstance. Several respondents noted situations where the level of violence or risk posed by

the subject prevented the use of CID or made CID ineffectual. Figure 5 also shows that a very high proportion of respondents noted that force could be appropriate in situations involving “intervening in the commission of a crime.” Finally, force may also be necessary to de-escalate cases where “dialogue is not possible.” This sentiment reflects that fact that public and responding police officer(s) may not be the only persons at risk during a crisis situation. Rather, the individual who is the subject of the incident is also potentially at risk, often of self-harm.

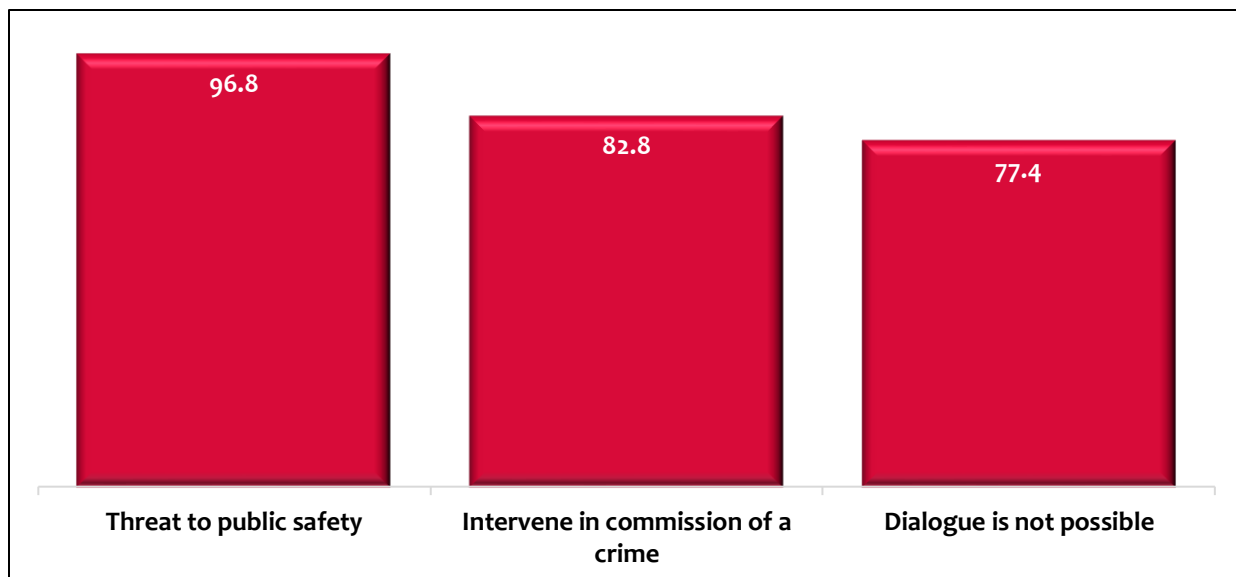
Despite acknowledging that use of force is sometimes unavoidable, it was clear from the respondents’ written statements that, in general, officers do not want to have to resort to using physical force options:

“Having used all my training to attempt to de-escalate someone, I am unable to negotiate/convince them to calm down - resulting in force needing to be used to ensure public safety.”

“I tried to de-escalate and the subject remained uncooperative and violent.”

“These incidents are dynamic and things do not always go the way we hope. We always want the subject to comply calmly, but sometimes they don't and force has to be used. It is frustrating but part of dealing with human beings.”

Figure 5. Instances where physical force may be necessary (%)

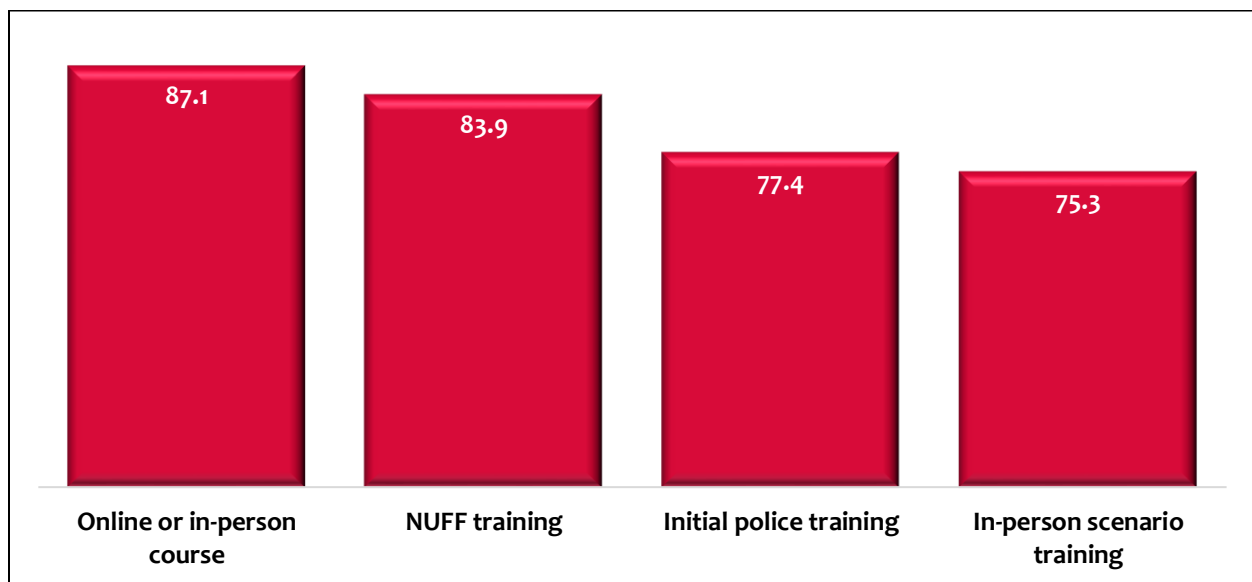


TRAINING

Simply put, CID and CID-related training is ubiquitous throughout VPD. Figure 6 demonstrates that the officers experience such training in a variety of ways. A more detailed analysis reveals

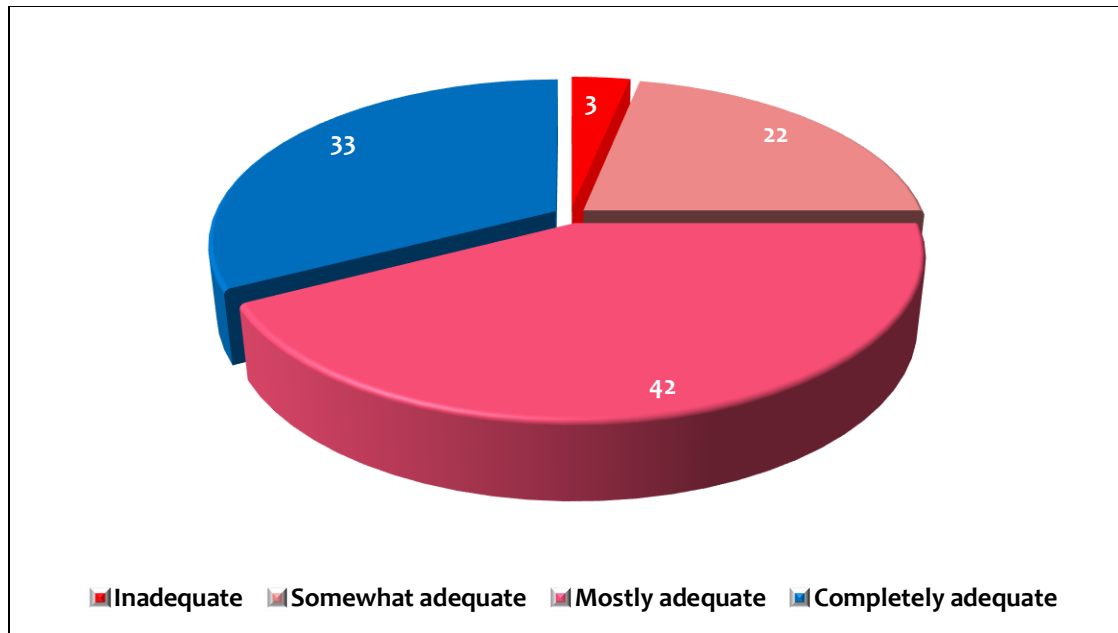
that nearly 95% of respondents have received at least two types of training, and over half have received all four. In broader public conversations, CID is often framed as something that is novel for policing. There is no evidence at all that this is true in Vancouver. Several respondents noted that policing has always been de-escalating incidents, both critical and non-critical. It was also of interest that many respondents, when asked to identify “other” types of training, noted “experience” or “experiential learning” and indicated that much of their knowledge of CID was garnered by practicing it on a routine basis. Although calls for ‘more training’ have become an almost obligatory recommendation from policing research, in this instance a blanket recommendation for more training would be misplaced.

Figure 6. Type of CID training received (%)



Much the same picture emerges in relation to respondents’ assessments of the adequacy of their preparation for CID. In Figure 7, three-quarters characterized their training as mostly or completely adequate, while only 3% felt that it was inadequate. Secondary analyses showed that these results are statistically consistent across officer gender ($t = 0.32$; $p = 0.753$), rank ($t = -0.32$; $p = 0.749$), or years of service ($t = 0.96$; $p = 0.339$).

Figure 7. Adequacy of training (%)



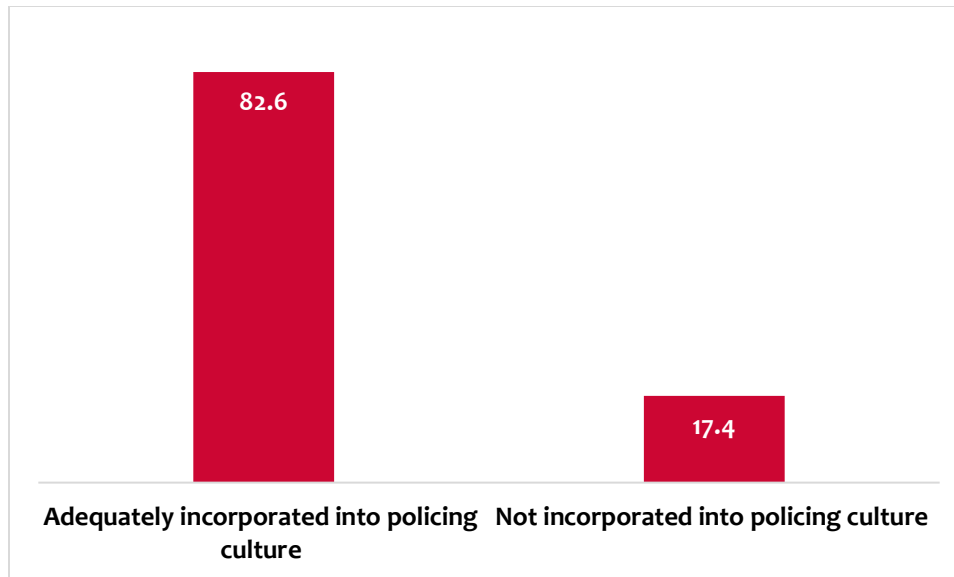
It is evident from the responses that officers believe de-escalation has always been a key element of policing, and that they receive multiple opportunities to engage with CID during formal training sessions, as well as in the field. It is no surprise, therefore, that the majority of respondents (82.6%) also believe that CID has been adequately incorporated into the policing culture (see Figure 8). Despite believing that de-escalation is well ensconced in police training and practice, however, this does not automatically translate to all officers having an equal aptitude for engaging in CID. Some respondents noted some concerns about consistency in police skills and/or responses:

“Generally speaking, there are a small number of officers, who are not equipped to effectively deal with people in crisis no matter how much training they receive. Infrequently I have experienced situations where these officers escalate the situation through poor dialogue skills. This is a human factor that is difficult to overcome.”

“Not all members aware of the techniques of CID or, by virtue of subjective analysis of the dynamic situation, had a different perception of threat and response.”

“Officers intervened too quickly when there was no sense of urgency.”

Figure 8. Presence of CID in Policing Culture (%)

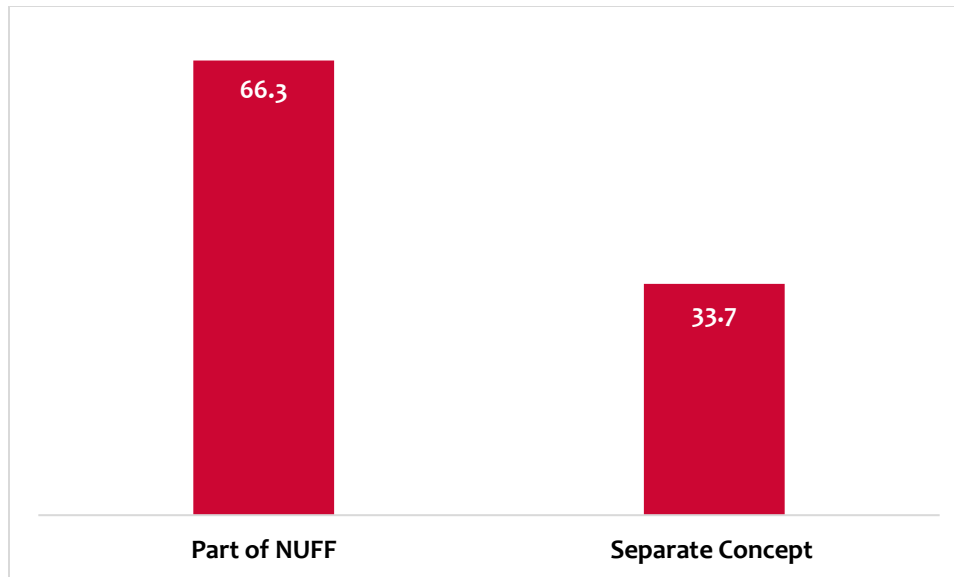


Due to a lack of standardization in CID training and varying degrees of exposure to CID in the field, officers may develop different understandings and skills that may impact the overall success of CID in any given situation. How CID is defined and integrated into police training and the broader culture is, therefore, crucial. As depicted in Figure 9, the majority (66.3%) believe CID is adequately captured within the existing National Use of Force Framework: CID is believed to fit within the presence and dialogue elements of the model:

"I believe it's the start of every call like on the NUFF: presence and communication."

However, approximately one-third of respondents believed that CID should be treated as its own concept. Depending on the definition adopted, therefore, the notion of de-escalation may extend beyond decisions to use force. Clarifying what de-escalation entails and how it fits into the policing context is important. Not only will this help to inform policing standards, it will also help to create more consistency in police policy and practice.

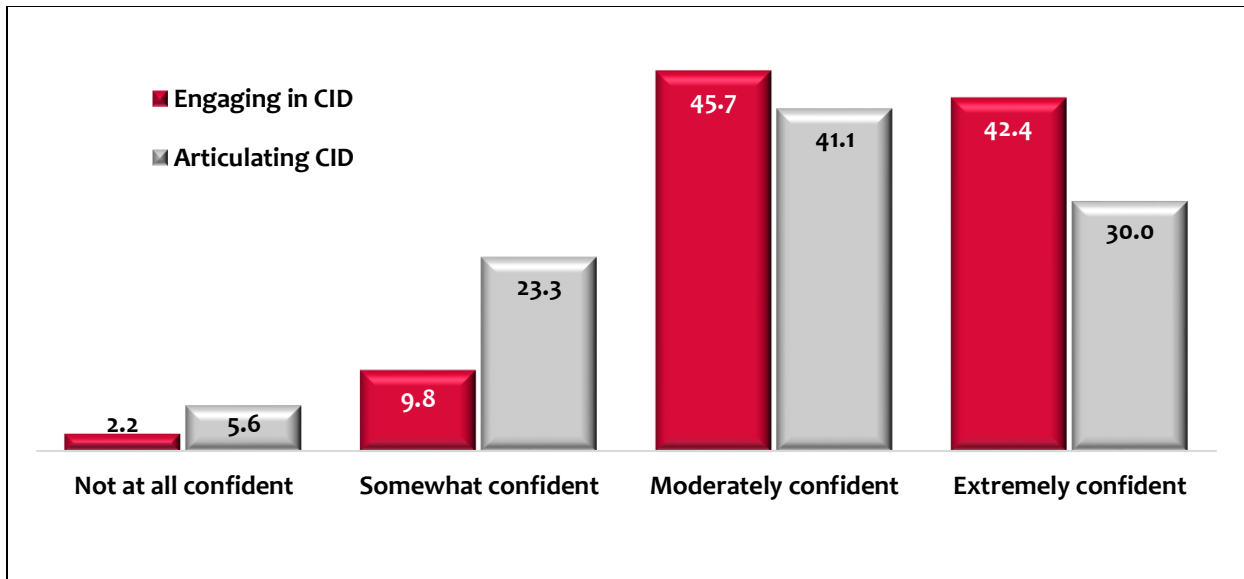
Figure 9. How Should CID Be Captured (%)



USE AND SUCCESS OF CID

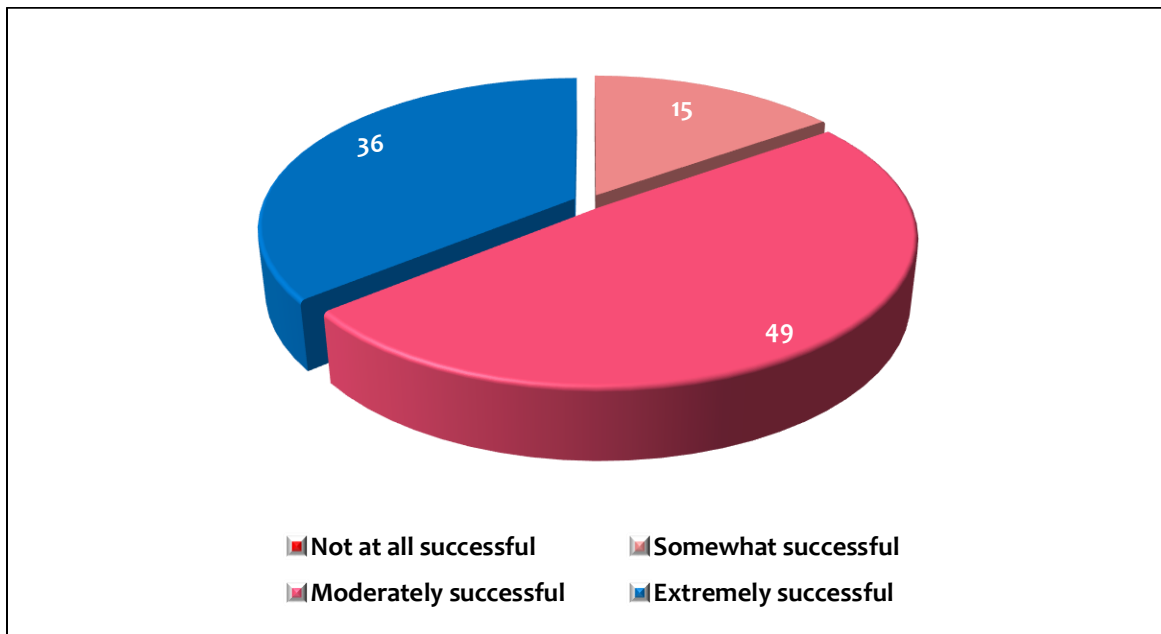
Consistent with largely positive views on training, Figure 10 demonstrates that close to 90% of respondents reported being at least moderately confident engaging in CID. Once again, the levels of confidence were statistically equivalent between male and female officers ($t = 0.11$; $p = 0.913$), Constables and Sergeants/Staff Sergeants ($t = -0.40$; $p = 0.693$), and officers with less than versus more than 20 years of experience ($t = 0.45$; $p = 0.651$). In contrast, however, respondents felt significantly less confident in their abilities to articulate CID ($t = 2.74$; $p = 0.007$): that is, to explain how they utilized CID techniques in a given situation. It is very likely that the conceptual vagueness that has plagued CID is contributing to these articulation challenges. It is also plausible that there is a bleed over effect as well. Although nearly 90% of respondents reported being at least moderately confident engaging in CID, only about two-in-five felt extremely confident. It is probable that greater conceptual clarity would improve officer confidence not only in relation to CID articulation, but in usage as well.

Figure 10. Confidence in Relation to CID (%)



Despite their reservations over articulation, respondents generally expressed that they have been successful in utilizing CID (see Figure 11). Not surprisingly, there is a strong positive correlation between assessments of success and previously noted levels of confidence ($r = 0.62$; $p < 0.001$): the more confident respondents are in engaging in CID, the more likely they are to perceive that they are utilizing CID successfully.

Figure 11. How Successful Do You Believe You Have Been In Utilizing CID Techniques (%)



In addition to inquiring about incident success generally, respondents were also asked specific questions about what constituted success. The results, presented in Figure 12, highlight some of the challenges inherent in capturing and evaluating CID. Consistent with the notion that CID is situation-specific, the responses suggest that the success of CID will depend on the unique circumstances of each case. Given the dynamic nature of police work, and the increasing complexity of calls for service (e.g., mental health concerns), it is unlikely that the same tactics will work in every situation. As one respondent noted, “everyone is different and what may work for someone can do the complete opposite for another.” Thus, each ‘de-escalated’ situation may look very different. It is, therefore, difficult to identify broad measures of success. However, it may be possible to obtain indirect measures of CID success in individual cases. Consistent with the centrality of priority of life protocols, more than three-quarters of respondents indicated a key marker of success is that the incident was resolved safely. This may appear as incidents resolved without injury to any of the parties involved in the incident, or perhaps ‘lower than warranted’ force options were used. However, there may also be more subjective methods for evaluating CID that result from positive interactions with police, including a lack of complaints following an incident, public or subject support or appreciation for how the police handled an incident, and/or reports that the subject feels safe.

However, it is important to note that, for almost an equal proportion of respondents, refraining from utilizing physical force is a key criterion of success. On the face of it, this would seem to contradict the 97% of earlier responses that argued that CID could involve force. Secondary analyses revealed that 70% of respondents held both of these beliefs simultaneously, pointing to the complexities of CID. On one hand, this could reflect nuance in how officers think about CID and force: it may be that resolving the incident without force is a preferred outcome, but may not always be possible:

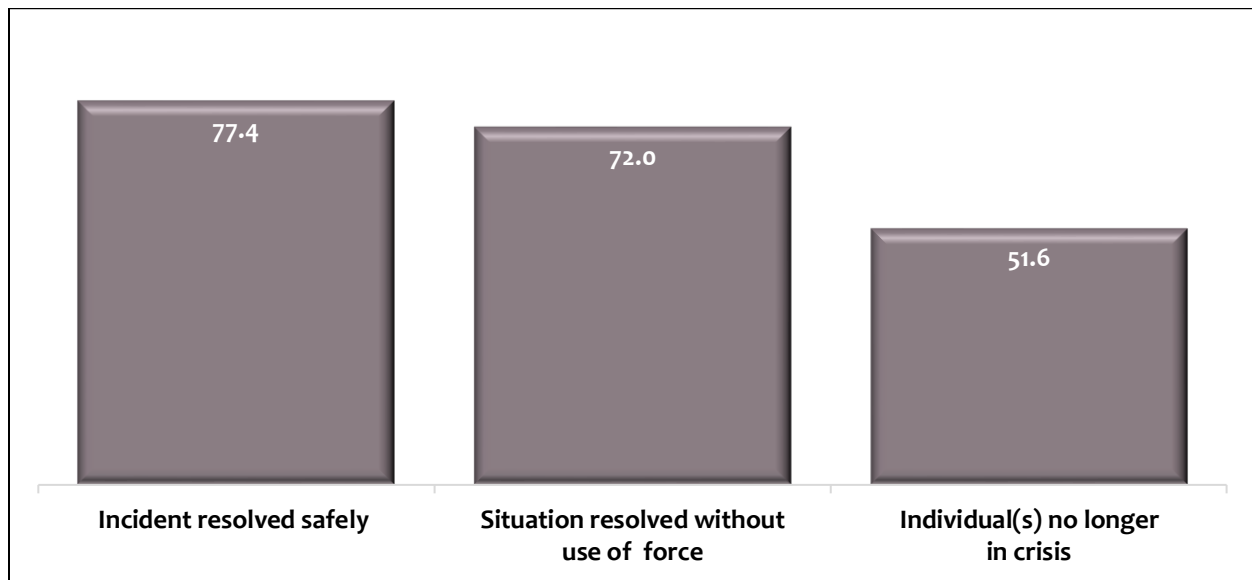
“CID can be used to resolve an event with a lower level of physical force than may have been otherwise required as well. Just because some Use of Force is used does not mean CID was not effective.”

“De escalation skills are used by officers in every call. Verbal, nonverbal, police presence and active listening. For some subjects there are no words that will help to gain their cooperation. But the police can’t walk away. If the police are there for lawful purpose then they still have to deal with the situation and the subject so CID is not a 100% guarantee.”

On the other hand, these responses may reflect a tension between what officers believe (force may be required) and how they perceive their actions will be judged by others. Either way, it is clear that there is more work to be done to reconcile the relationship between use of force and CID.

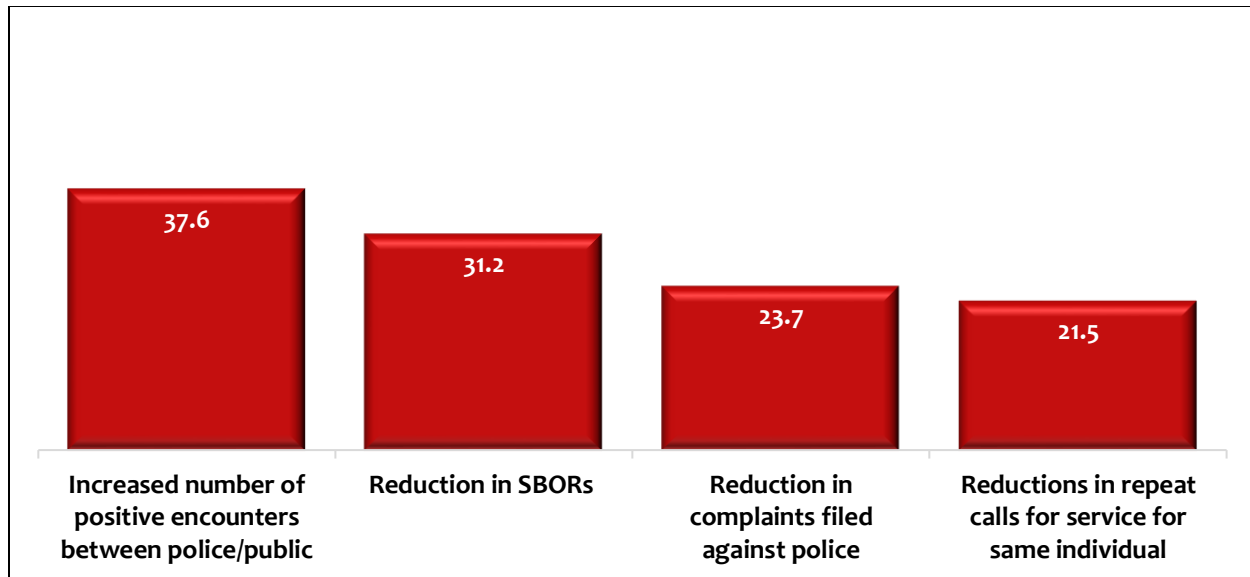
Another enlightening finding shown in Figure 12 concerns the notion that successful applications of CID result in the individual involved no longer being in crisis (i.e., no longer requiring a response from emergency services). Respondents were split roughly 50/50 on this issue. As with the above consideration, this lack of agreement points definitively to the need to improve both the conceptualization of CID, as well as articulating the criteria for what constitutes success.

Figure 12. How Do You Know CID Has Been Successful (%)



Finally, beyond a focus on individual incidents, Figure 13 illustrates the results from questions relating to the potential *aggregate* effects of CID. Despite the dearth of research, one key outcome that has been used to highlight the success of de-escalation training is reductions in aggressive or violent incidents (Engel et al., 2020). The broader impacts of CID, therefore, may be captured by recorded changes in trends in escalation in police-citizen encounters. However, the majority of respondents did not perceive changes in calls for service, complaints/compliments, or SBOR records to be valid indicators of policing success. Pointing out that many positive interactions are not captured in official records (e.g., SBOR forms are only filled out when force is utilized), these results raise the larger question of whether it is appropriate to evaluate CID in relation to aggregate trends. Given that officers believe CID is being used on a daily basis, perhaps the evaluation of the effectiveness of CID is best limited to individual outcomes.

Figure 13. What Are Broader Indicators of Successful CID in Policing? (%)



CONTEXT

This section of the report focuses on the wider context of CID. Policing does not occur in a vacuum. On the contrary, there are any number of factors *unrelated to the specific incident* that can impinge on police decision-making and behavior. Among the most notable challenges in policing generally, and with regard to CID in particular, are what officers feel are negatively biased views held by the public and fostered by the media. Figure 14 demonstrates that 90% of respondents strongly disagreed with the statement that “the media presents critical incidents fairly.” In terms of the public, almost all of the respondents denied that the public has a good understanding of CID (67% strongly disagreed), and 90% did not believe that the public had reasonable expectations of the police in CID instances (65% strongly disagreed). Respondents believe that the public is largely uninformed about the limitations of CID:

“CID is being used effectively in Vancouver and by the Vancouver Police Department by hundreds of members each and every day. I believe part of the issue is that the perception from the [p]ublic and media is that we do not know how to do CID or did not try any de-escalation in situations.”

“While CID is an important component when police deal with persons in crisis, the public has unrealistic expectations and beliefs surrounding the ability/appropriateness to apply CID in all situations. When there are imminent safety concerns or weapons involved it is not always feasible and could endanger the public, police, and the individual.”

Thus, CID policing is occurring in an environment that is perceived to be hostile to the police, and where the nature of their work during these cases is grossly misunderstood.

Figure 14. Media Presentation and Public Perception

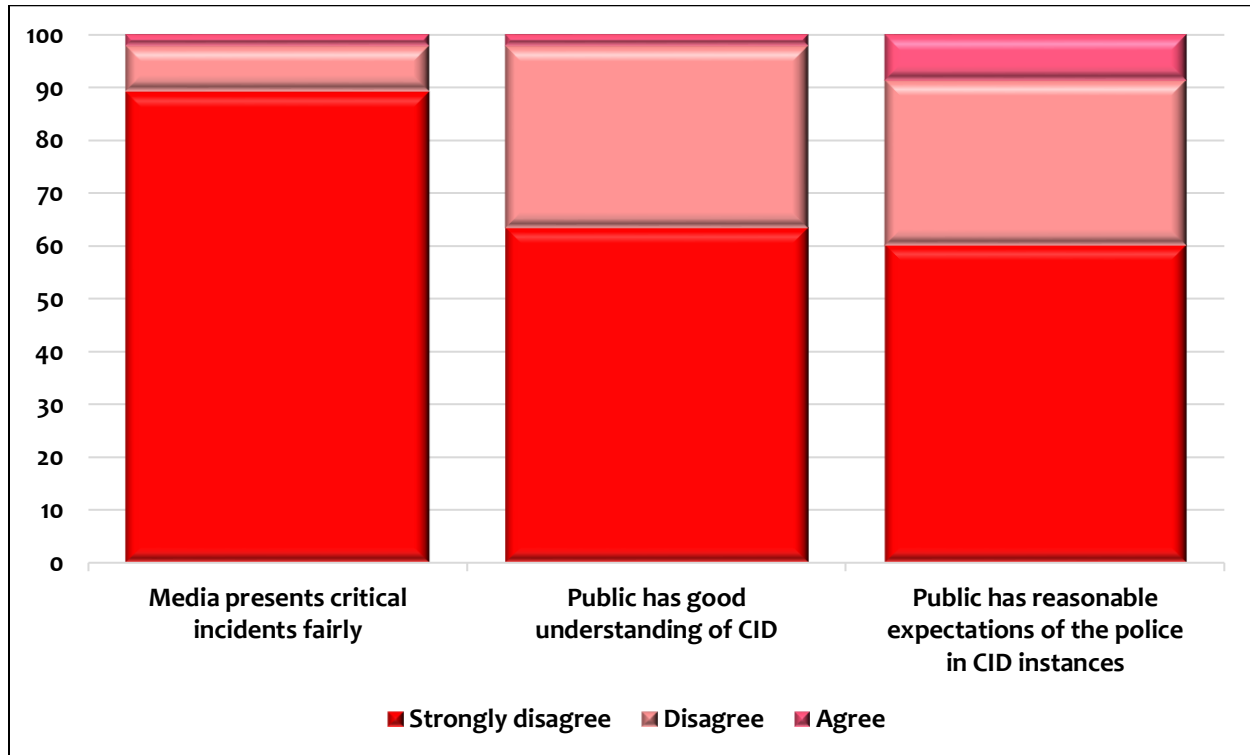
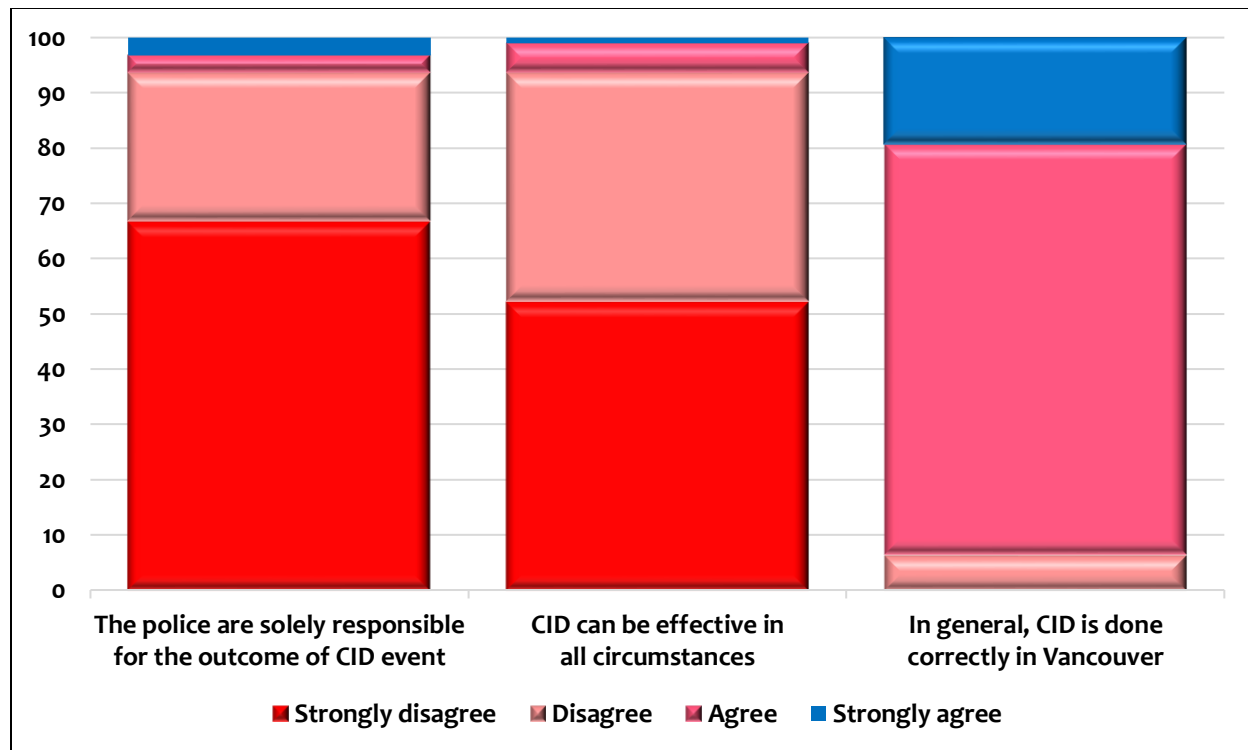


Figure 15 further shows more precisely the problematic nature of two widely held views of CID held by the public/media. First, the police are not *solely* responsible for the outcome of CID events. The key word here is *solely*. Of course, the police are an important part of the unfolding dynamic. However, the individual in crisis, as well as potentially bystanders or witnesses, undoubtedly also play a significant role in the outcome. An apt analogy here would be use of force reporting procedures that have been adopted in several jurisdictions in Canada. In Vancouver, these reports are captured in the subject behavior – officer response (SB-OR) framework, reflecting the understanding that police officers inevitably respond to what a subject is doing, or perceived to be doing (Davies et al., 2019). This same logic applies during crises: officers will be responsible for assessing the situation and meeting the individual in crisis where they are at.

Figure 15. Misunderstanding CID



A second misunderstanding is that CID can be effective in *all* circumstances. The vast majority of respondents disagreed with this sentiment. As one respondent stated:

“It’s one tool available to police. It does not replace use of force concepts. Sometimes force is required. De-escalation does not always work.”

As noted above, if the individual in crisis is, for whatever reason, set on a particular path, it simply may not be possible to move them off that path. It is wishful thinking to believe otherwise. A number of contexts within which CID is less likely to be effective are illustrated in Figure 16. Nearly 80% of respondents identified incidents involving drugs or alcohol and those where the individual in crises was set on a violent course of action, as being especially problematic. This was further confirmed by qualitative responses provided to a question about negative CID outcomes. When explaining why a particular incident was not resolved to their satisfaction, many respondents highlighted the fact that they could not communicate with individual, or that the individual could not be dissuaded from their actions:

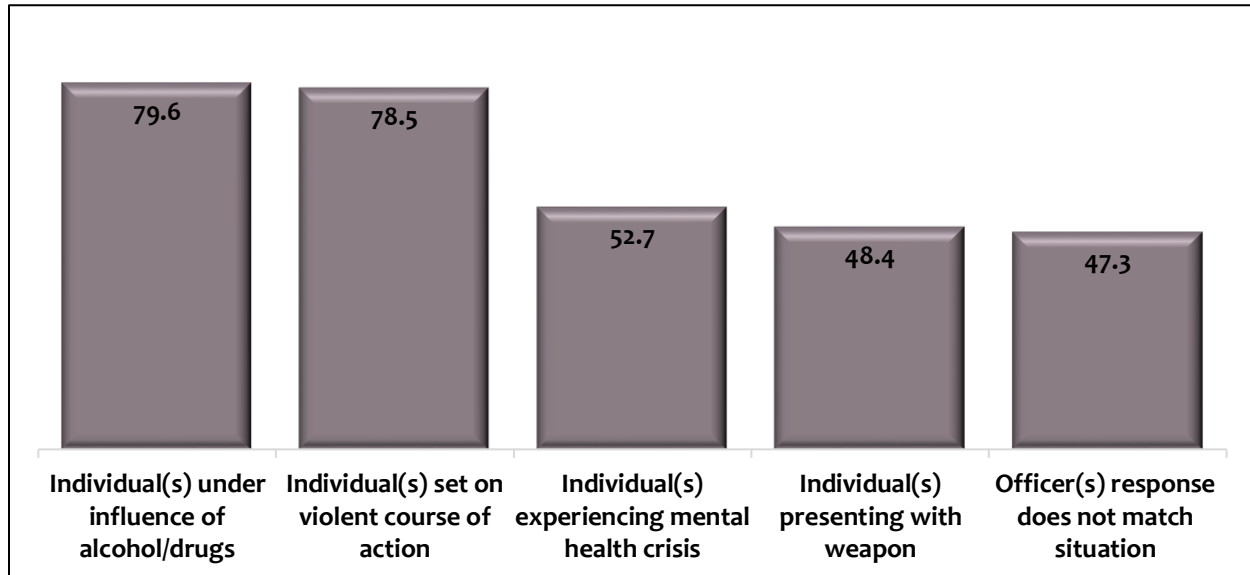
“Attempts to use CID were unsuccessful. This individual was determined to do what they were going to do.”

“The suspect was so focused and goal oriented that force was required.”

“CID was inappropriate given the level of violence demonstrated by the subject.”

“I tried to de-escalate and the subject remained uncooperative and violent.”

Figure 16. Contexts Within Which CID Is Less Likely To Be Effective (%)



Mental illness was also often singled out as a further complicating factor:

“... a simple traffic interaction with a person suffering from some mental health issues turned assaultive, despite attempts to de-escalate the situation verbally. In some cases, de-escalation techniques are ineffective and persons in crisis continue along their own path.”

“It wasn't immediately evident but the person was suffering from delusions. Once we realized this, we attempted to speak to the individual and do CID but because of the delusions, he hit my partner in the face with a laptop breaking his tooth.”

“I was dealing with someone who was completely out of their mind and nothing I could say or do had any effect whatsoever (the person believed I wasn't human).”

“When subjects are in severe psychosis, this can cause breaks from reality, which make using CID techniques more difficult. Persistent efforts can have impact during brief moments of lucidity but it is definitely a challenge for effecting CID processes.”

Moreover, officers often encounter circumstances that have already escalated beyond the point where de-escalation is feasible, or even desirable:

“Sometimes there is no opportunity to “set the scene” when the crisis is already unfolding and others are at risk.”

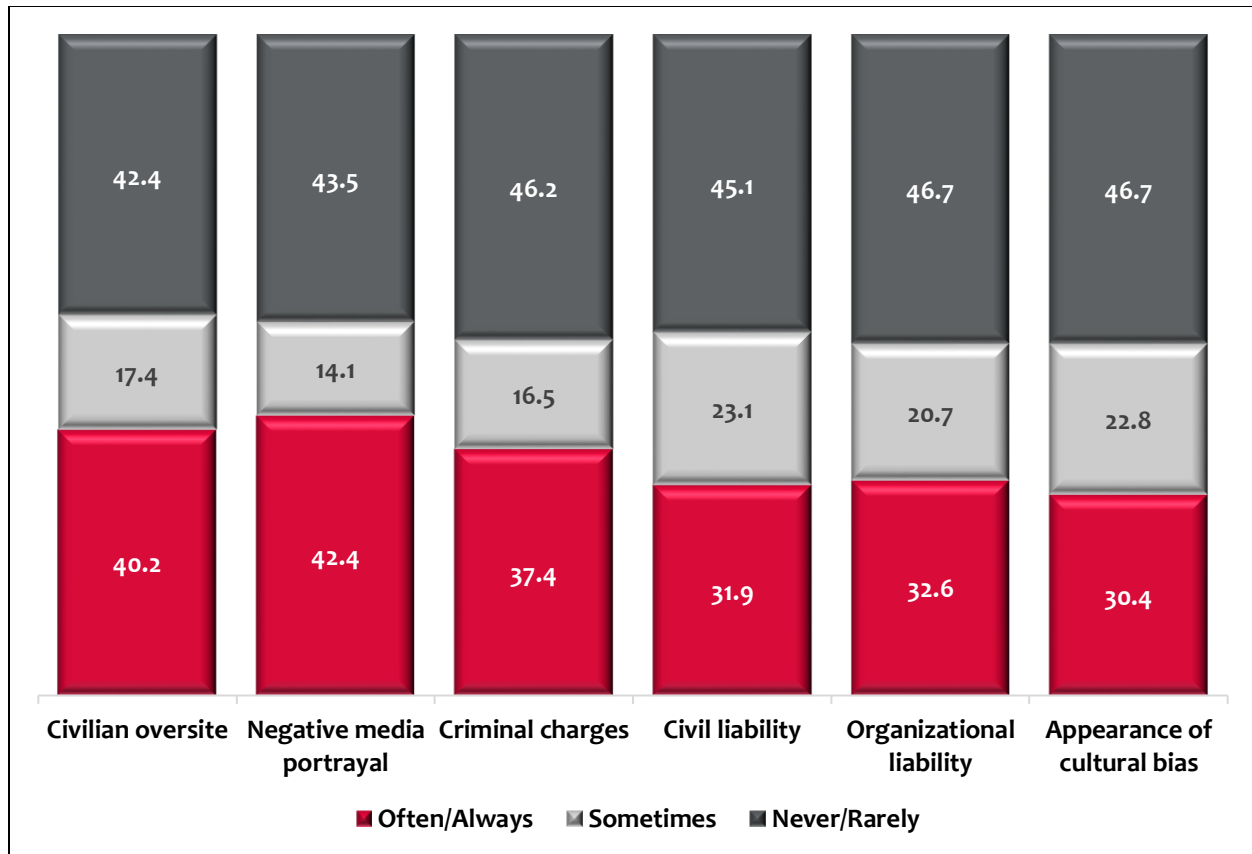
“Dealing with persons in crisis is highly unpredictable. Prejudgment of the situation (i.e., I can negotiate with this person) often does not fit with reality. The unexpected and unpredictable happens frequently.”

In any police incident, safety is a balancing act. In some crises or volatile incidents, safety is zero sum, and the safety of the individual in crisis must be weighed against that of the public and the officers. And, in some cases, that calculus is necessarily going to produce a resolution that may not align with the dictates of CID. Finally, some respondents cautioned about the potential dangers of hesitation or failing to act quickly enough. The belief that ‘more time’ will always result in a more positive outcome is fallacious, and one that can be dangerous. “Sometimes, quick intervention is the safest option.” As respondent noted:

“[T]here are people who cannot be dialogued with and in some cases, going to unreasonable lengths to dialogue with a subject can create greater risk (including increased risk to the subject) rather than resolving the situation using force. Timing and the application of a judicious level of force, I would submit, can be a CID technique yet this is not considered in the conversation.”

It was noted earlier that police officers overwhelmingly feel that the media does not portray acute situations/crises fairly, and that the public does not hold reasonable expectations of crisis interventions. But these are not the only challenges that officers have to navigate. Many respondents reported being guided by their training, lawful authority, and professional ethics, and making decisions based on subject behaviour and situational awareness. However, there are various other considerations, unrelated to the specifics of any incident, which may further complicate police responses. The decision-making of over half of respondents is influenced, at least sometimes, by one of more of the factors highlighted in Figure 17. Secondary analyses showed that the external pressures are acutely felt by a subset of officers: 25% of respondents answered that they considered at least four of these factors often or all of the time. In other words, in addition to dealing with the immediate crisis situation, many officers feel constrained by a host of other contingencies.

Figure 17. How Often Do These Considerations Impact Your Decision-Making (%)



RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Adopt a practical definition of de-escalation

While still lacking a complete definition of de-escalation, there appears to be consensus among practitioners that CID is all about what police see when they show up to an incident, and how they choose to initiate their response. The goal should always be for officers to meet the subjects “where they are at” in the moment (i.e., what they are presenting with at the time police intervene). This means that officers should be guided by the **circumstances** and use their presence, words and/or actions to react to the person in terms of how they are presenting to prevent the onset or continuance of harm to victims, civilians, officers, and/or subjects. When developing a definition and training programs, therefore, it is important to recognize that, while de-escalation may involve specific types of skills being activated, such as active listening and verbal and non-verbal communication, de-escalation will manifest in different ways in different situations.

In the policing context, crisis intervention and de-escalation is the resolution of an incident by the police using a) whatever techniques are appropriate to the situation, and b) no more force than is reasonably necessary given the totality of the circumstances posed by the incident. Essentially, CID should be conceptualized as both an outcome and tactical toolkit. The recommended definition for CID is:

*The goal of resolving police-citizen encounters using **situationally appropriate** skills, tactics, strategies, and techniques, including verbal and non-verbal communication, active listening, and, when required, reasonable and necessary physical force option(s) that will reduce the potential for injury/harm while prioritizing the safety of the victim(s), the public, the officer(s), and, when possible, the subject(s).*

Along with adopting a definition of CID, there are several important considerations for evaluating CID:

1. “No more force than is reasonably necessary” is distinct from “minimal force.” While there is no way to get around the subjectivity inherent in the assessment of police use of force, the notion of “minimal force” is especially problematic, particularly given contextual realities. “Reasonably necessary” is a more realistic standard for evaluating incident outcomes in light of situational differences involved in any specific incident.
2. De-escalation does *not* mean that force was not employed by the police. Where a lower level of force is used to prevent higher levels of force from needing to be utilized, the threshold of de-escalation has been met. Similarly, the use of force to preserve “priority of life” represents successful de-escalation.
3. De-escalation is complex. There are multiple variables involved in police-citizen encounters. Reducing the outcome of incidents to the police response is grossly misleading. Understanding the outcome of any crisis necessitates examining the entirety of the encounter, including situational and subject factors.
4. The issue of “length of time” (i.e., how long the police take to resolve the incident) varies according to incident circumstances. It is not always the case that waiting is the most appropriate option. In some cases, de-escalation may be achieved by acting sooner rather than later.
5. The legitimate need to evaluate outcomes of crisis situations must not devolve into second-guessing and Monday-morning quarterbacking. Too often, the comment “they should have de-escalated” actually means “I don’t like what happened. I don’t like the outcome of this incident.” No one, including the police officers involved, want crisis situations to result in negative outcomes. But the simple reality is that not all of these incidents can be resolved without force and/or negative outcomes for the individual in crisis. To believe otherwise is wishful thinking.

6. The police must make detailed pronouncements to the public to explain the outcomes of crisis situations. However, it is equally imperative that the media and public provide police with enough time to do a proper assessment of the incident. It takes time to get an accurate understanding of what transpired during an acute incident; the more complicated the incident, the longer it will take to understand it fully.

B. Focus on developing a diverse toolkit and officer confidence

It is important to recognize that the outcome of police-citizen encounters is not always due to split second decisions made by police; outcomes are most often the result of the totality of the circumstances in any given interaction (Todak, 2017). Situational factors, including a subject's behaviour, are important predictors of police reactions. For instance, more disrespectful or aggressive subject behaviours will often elicit higher levels of police response (Todak, 2017). While each element in a situation will influence an officer, police are known to make multiple attempts to regain control, with verbal commands being the most common 'force' option utilized (Todak, 2017). Escalation in police-citizen encounters, therefore, is likely the result of a series of increasingly negative reactions by citizens to continued efforts by police to control the situation (Alpert & Dunham, 2004). Rather than attributing the outcome of violent police-citizen encounters solely to the police response (e.g., word/phrase/action by police), then, it would be more prudent to view the outcome as the result of a dynamic interplay between citizen actions and police reactions at various phases of an interaction⁴ (Todak, 2017).

Given the variable nature of police-citizen interactions, in terms of de-escalation, it is important to refrain from presenting CID as a discrete technique or set of techniques that can be used as a "cure-all" for handling crisis situations. There needs to be an emphasis on dialogue and active listening as the starting point; however, officers must have room to shift their responses as the situation changes/progresses. Because situations are dynamic, officers must be equipped with a complete toolkit that includes a diverse array of techniques, tactics, and strategies that will prove effective in various circumstances. Examining current training programs and outcomes in connection with SBOR data may highlight what types of skills/training require further advancement. Given that years of service is often correlated with use of force, with less experienced police officers receiving more complaints about excessive use of force (Brandl et al., 2001), it would be particularly beneficial for the department to examine the skill types and

⁴ It has been suggested that there may be as many as four phases that influence the outcome of any police-citizen encounter. For instance, when an officer first becomes aware of the problem by receiving information from dispatch or another source, or via their own personal observation, this is their first opportunity to assess the seriousness of the problem (anticipation phase) (Binder & Scharf, 1980). Upon entry (i.e., arrival at the scene), the officer establishes authority, which will clarify expectations for citizens and set the tone for the police response. In the third phase, officers gather information, and this can last from seconds to hours or weeks of negotiation (Binder & Scharf, 1980). The fourth phase, final decision-making, occurs when the officer diagnoses the problem and then employs a solution, which may or may not include the use of force (Binder & Scharf, 1980). In each of these phases, the communication between police and citizens and actions taken by all parties will be influential in producing the final outcome. This suggests, therefore, that, at every different stage, officers have the ability to change the course of the interaction (Todak, 2017).

levels of their new recruits to determine where recruit training could be improved to ensure new/less experienced police officers are properly equipped with more complete skillsets.

In addition to ensuring officers have a diverse set of skills, it is also essential officers have confidence in their abilities to put their different skills into action. To make proper decisions, select appropriate response options, prevent hesitation, and ensure officers can maximize opportunities to create time and distance, officers must be confident that they are capable of handling each situation they are responding to. There is a dearth of research pertaining to officer confidence. It is recommended the department examine the backgrounds and training of their officers to determine if there are key factors that differentiate between officers who are more and less successful in handling volatile situations. Understanding where officers are lacking in confidence may help the department to better allocate training resources.

C. Understand the limits of CID

To ensure officers are best equipped to handle volatile situations, it is imperative that officers understand when CID will work and when it will not. In Canada, the majority of calls for service (98%) are believed to require de-escalation rather than a forceful/combatative response (Public Safety Canada, 2015). This is especially the case when officers are called to events that are non-criminal in nature and involve vulnerable populations, including persons with severe mental illness (Lurigio et al., 2008). Because many subjects in crisis may not be able to comprehend and/or respond to verbal commands, the likelihood of officers employing some degree of physical force, even lethal force, tends to be higher when subjects are mentally ill (Lurigio et al., 2008). In fact, one of the deadliest situations for law enforcement officers involve calls for service with mentally ill individuals (Lurigio et al., 2008). Mental-health related contacts consume inordinate amounts of an officer's time and energy, and necessitate that the officer depart from their traditional role and practices to enforce the law and maintain public order, and uphold their duty to protect the welfare of citizens by responding to the needs of the individual in crisis (Lurigio et al., 2008). Therefore, while it is unreasonable to expect police officers to be able to diagnose mental illness, it is critical that officers are able to contain, control, and/or arrest an individual without resorting to excessive force or actions that would exacerbate the subject's mental health condition (Lurigio et al., 2008). It is important, therefore, that police officers have skills that extend beyond tactical and combative techniques. Key de-escalation, conflict resolution, and mediation skills are essential to ensure officers are able to regulate their own emotions and select the safest, most humane, and appropriate response option in a given situation (Deveau, 2021). However, part of this skillset involves recognizing when certain methods will be less effective. Verbal communications, for instance, may not only prove ineffective, they may lead to frustrations on the part of police and escalations in officer response to gain control. To ensure the best outcomes for police and citizens, it would prove beneficial for the department to examine how often and under what circumstances CID is untenable. This will help to further inform training, situational awareness, and police decision-making.

D. Incorporate CID into existing practices and training programs

It is also recommended that officials refrain from treating CID as a “new concept” and, instead, focus on how components of this have already been incorporated into policing. Treating this as though it is something ‘new’ creates an expectation of seeing tangible changes in policing. However, if CID has already been a core component of policing (i.e., an entrenched component of police training and objectives), it is unlikely we will see measurable changes in police behaviours that would be indicative of ‘meeting a new standard’ in policing. Perhaps rather than focusing on CID as being a new concept, a better way forward would be to examine where police could improve upon their existing protocols, policies, and procedures to more fully incorporate CID principles into their culture and practices. The Vancouver Police Department is already bringing focus to de-escalation by emphasizing action criteria into their use of force training.

To obtain a clear picture about which, if any, skills/techniques appear to be associated with more successful policing outcomes, it is recommended that the department obtain information from their use of force experts and training officers about the techniques that are being utilized to effectively handle volatile situations. To determine where improvements can be made, the department should also consider evaluating their current training curriculum in relation to their SBOR data. This would provide insight into situational factors that prove challenging, as well as highlight where additional training/skill development is required for officers, such as communication and articulation.

Because CID appears to be central to all elements of policing, referring to CID as a separate/standalone concept may only serve to silo CID from the other policing requirements and standards, and, ultimately, add to the complexity of prioritizing a growing list of policing standards. Given the limits to training resources and time, police agencies may not have the capacity to properly add separate CID training into their existing training programs. As evidenced by the responses here, reconciling the relationship between CID and use of force may prove to be a useful first step.

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