

Florida Researchers Complete a Five-Year Analysis on Less Lethal Weapon Effectiveness, Use of Force, and Suspect and Officer Injuries

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Charlie Mesloh (Ph.D., Public Affairs '02), director of the Weapons and Equipment Research Institute at Florida Gulf Coast University, and Ross Wolf, assistant professor of criminal justice at the University of Central Florida, recently completed a National Institute of Justice (NIJ) study entitled "Less Lethal Weapon Effectiveness, Use of Force, and Suspect and Officer Injuries: A Five-Year Analysis."

This study, funded by a \$99,000 NIJ grant, examined use-of-force levels by police and subject-resistance levels in two agencies in Central Florida: the Orange County Sheriff's Office (OCSO) and the Orlando Police Department (OPD). Both agencies provided copies of force documentation pursuant to public records requests as stipulated in Florida law. While previous research on police force has focused on the rate of police force, this study examined situations that required force and the actions taken by the police and citizens during an encounter.

The study broke down officer-suspect confrontation to iterations of force, examining each use of force encounter as a combination of sub-conflicts, or iterations. The study examined a total of 4,303 documented police use-of-force incidents, 2,395 of which ended at the first iteration. TASERS, which were an important facet of this study, were deployed 2,113 times in the first iteration, with a 69% success rate at conflict resolution. In comparison, other less lethal weapons such as the impact weapon (baton) represented a 45% success rate, compliance holds were successful 16% of the time, takedowns were successful in 41% of the cases, and chemical agents were 65% effective in stopping conflicts before they escalated to a higher level, or an alternative was used.

Within the study, which examined use of force cases between 2001 and 2005, there were 1,001 incidents of suspect injuries and 136 incidents of officer injuries. An important finding of the study was that the severity of the injuries increased when lack of sufficient force allowed confrontations to escalate.

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