

# Stress Management as a part of Police Work

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# Today

- Selected parts of the article written to an oncoming publication by the Police University College of Finland

Koskelainen, M. 2016. Stress Management as a part of Police Work. In: Mutttilainen, V. & Potila, P. Poliisin toimintaympäristö. Poliisiammattikorkeakoulun katsaus 2016)

- Available as English translation in electronic format and some paper copies
- To be published as a shorter version in the oncoming Cepol Bulletin

# What stress in police work?

- It exists! Research proves this!
- **Stress caused by work related tasks**
  - **Critical/challenging situations**
    - Field and investigation
  - Cumulative stress
- Organisational stress
  - Resources, management, red tape...
- Impossible to separate the two completely

# Why is this important?

- An established connection between stress and health, and...
- **The ability to perform well during situations that evoke a strong stress response**
- The topic is approached by reviewing the research findings on police related stress research and the practices that are utilised in the Finnish National Police

# Fact

The demanding events encountered as a part of police work evoke both psychological and physiological stress responses



## Fact

- A stressful situation = Elevation of, e.g. cortisol and adrenalin, levels in the body
- This **HELPS** the body and mind prepare to a challenging situation, however,
- Being able to cope in the situation gets worse if the stress levels remain high and the task is **experienced** as too demanding

Andersen et al 2015c.

# Evidence to support the Facts

- Andersen, J.P. & Gustafsberg, G. 2016. A Training Method to Improve Police Use of Force Decision Making. A Randomized Controlled Trial. Sage Open. DOI: 10.1177/2158244016638708
  - <http://sgo.sagepub.com/content/6/2/2158244016638708>
- The iPREP intervention was developed to address identified outcomes that are known to enhance use of force decisions (e.g., situational awareness)
- Published 7 April 2016

## Summary of the study

- The goal: To test a training method to improve use of force decision making among police.
- Randomized controlled pilot study
- Participant selection: 12 from a pool of 80 police officers
- Trained officers to apply techniques **to enhance psychological and physiological control during stressful critical incidents**



# Hypothesis

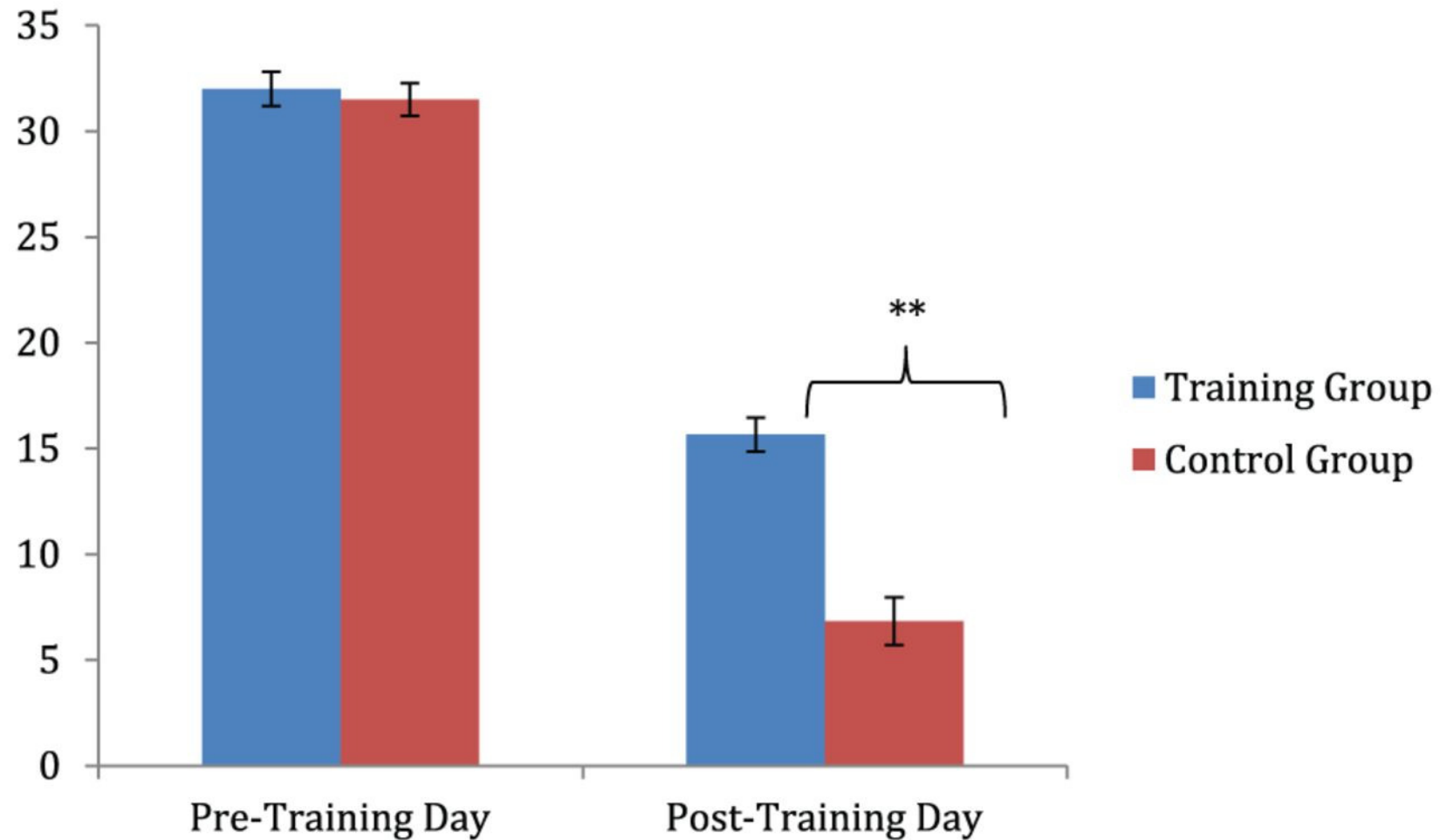
- **H1:** Intervention group will display significantly better situational awareness and overall performance than those in the control group
- **H2:**
- **H3:**
- **H4:**

# Results

- The intervention group displayed significantly better physiological control, situational awareness, and overall performance, and made a greater number of correct use of force decisions than officers in the control group (all  $ps < .01$ )

Judith P. Andersen, and Harri Gustafsberg SAGE Open 2016;6:2158244016638708

## Pre- and post-training: Daily overall performance



Judith P. Andersen, and Harri Gustafsberg SAGE Open  
2016;6:2158244016638708

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# How can we utilise this in training of police officers?

- This is how we do it at the Police University College of Finland



## We believe...

- That stressful situations can be prepared to in such a way that the stress response and, for example, the levels of cortisol remain optimal

Andersen ym. 2015b

# We do a Training Intervention

## Core components

1. Education about the physiology of the stress response system
2. Instruction on how to use mental focus and to enhance sensory perception and situational awareness
3. Practice engaging in controlled **breathing exercises** that have been shown to enhance control during stress ([McCraty et al., 2012](#))
4. Training during realistic critical incident scenarios to help to recognize arousal to enhance situational awareness and decision making

# Correct breathing, optimal coherence

- Not a relaxation exercise
- Balances the activity of the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous system during stress
- Facilitates states of moderate arousal
- Blocks panic reactions and hyperventilation responses that lead to responses such as tunnel vision and auditory exclusion



([Johnson, 2008](#))

# What about the stress other than that experienced during critical incidents?

- We acknowledge it exists!
- The method described can, however, help in
  - 1. Preparing** to
  - 2. Managing** the adverse impact of stress **during** and
  - 3. Dealing with** the impact of stress responses **after****ALL POLICE WORK RELATED TASKS, not just critical incidents in operational work**
- Research is needed in other areas



# Does this work for all stress experienced?

- Could try!
- The real possibility of traumatisation as a result of doing police work
  - Critical incidents, not just those in operational work
  - Being exposed to experiences as a part of investigations
  - Connection of both to cumulative stress

- A protocol (instruction/order) for addressing the impact of critical situation exists in the Finnish Police
- It includes, e.g.
  - Debriefing practices
  - Posttrauma workshops

Good results reported by the facilitators and participants

An area for further research!

## Other ways of dealing with stress?



# Thank you!

## Questions welcomed

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## Literature used in the article

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