

Police Officer Training Collaborative Awarded a Two-Year Federal Grant to Further Develop their Mindfulness-Based Resilience Training

HILLSBORO, OR -- A community-based partnership of police officers, university research psychologists, and a mindfulness instructor has been working with officers on a novel approach to police officer resilience.

This month the National Institutes of Health's National Center for Complementary & Integrative Health has awarded Pacific University's School of Professional Psychology a grant of \$379,500 over a two-year period to further develop and study the effects of Mindfulness-Based Resilience Training (MBRT).

MBRT is a mind-body fitness course that brings contemporary neuroscience, medicine, psychology and experiential learning together in the classroom. Participants learn skills enhancing mental clarity, personal health, and mindful exercise emphasizing range of motion and injury prevention. Participants also learn practical skills to assist mitigation of stressors in the field, office, and at home.

Michael Christopher, an associate professor in the School of Professional Psychology and principal investigator, said the grant allows the collaborative to further examine the feasibility and impact of the training on specific stressors experienced by officers.

Christopher, whose research interests include mindfulness training among diverse groups, and assistant professor and principal investigator Matthew Hunsinger, whose research interests include mindfulness practice and intergroup relations, began their work with the collaborative in 2013.

Lt. Richard Goerling of the Hillsboro Police Department, a nationally recognized authority on mindfulness in police trainings and Brant Rogers of the Stress Reduction Clinic at Yoga Hillsboro, a nationally recognized mindfulness-based trainer certified by University of Massachusetts Medical School, initiated the collaborative police trainings in 2006.

Three groups of police officers have completed the MBRT training taught by Rogers with assistance from Goerling, and Christopher and Hunsinger investigated the preliminary impact of the program on officer resilience.

The initial findings, Christopher said, were very encouraging. "We found a variety of positive outcomes, including improvements in mental health, physical health, better sleep, less anger, and lower fatigue" he said.

To build on these preliminary findings, using a more sophisticated research design the researchers will measure outcomes such as stress hormone levels, unconscious social bias and its relationship to split-second decision-making, and mental clarity under duress. All of which are crucial elements of job performance in this very high-stress profession.

Any law enforcement agency or individual officer is welcome to participate, Christopher said. So far, the Hillsboro Police, Beaverton Police and Clackamas County Sheriff departments have all expressed interest in the training, which is expected to begin in January. Interested agencies or officers can contact Christopher at MBRT@pacificu.edu.

"This has the potential to improve the effectiveness and health of officers as well as the well-being of their families and the communities they serve," Christopher said.