

JIU-JITSU TRAINING AS A TRANSFORMATIVE FORCE IN RURAL POLICING: A STUDY OF OFFICER EXPERIENCES AND APPLICATIONS IN RURAL CENTRAL TEXAS

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Abstract

This qualitative study explored the Jiu-Jitsu training experiences of law enforcement officers in rural central Texas. Using Brizin and Kernspecht's general theory of combat, a modern interpretation of Carl von Clausewitz's combat logic theory, the study integrated qualitative data from interviews, questionnaires, and observations to assess training outcomes, suggesting that research participants (RPs) found Jiu-Jitsu training highly beneficial, enhancing their tactical skills and daily operational effectiveness. The findings advocate incorporating Jiu-Jitsu into law enforcement training programs, highlighting its potential to improve officer safety and community relations. Additionally, it proposes that law enforcement agencies develop ongoing training partnerships with martial arts institutions to sustain skill levels and adapt training methodologies to evolving operational needs. This study not only reinforces the value of Jiu-Jitsu in promoting officer development and community safety but also provides a methodologically sound model for replicating similar training outcomes in diverse law enforcement settings worldwide, suggesting a scalable framework that other regions globally might adopt to enhance their policing strategies.

Keywords: Jiu-Jitsu, police officer training, general theory of combat, feedback, dialogue

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This study describes the Jiu-Jitsu training experiences of law enforcement officers in rural central Texas. The unique challenges faced by rural law enforcement officers are well studied and documented in the literature, as described in the works of Weisheit et al. (2005), Smale (2011), and Donnermeyer (2016). Rural policing differs from urban policing in resource allocation, community engagement, and the types of crimes typically encountered by officers. For example, studies by the scholars mentioned above discuss that rural officers often deal with issues such as longer response times and limited backup. These issues necessitate different tactics, training, and community relations approaches. Also, these challenges are compounded by the increased scrutiny of a rural officer's urban counterpart concerning encounters surrounding the use of force (Torres,

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2020). Over the last decade, activists and policymakers have demanded increased accountability and training among police departments, prompting a search for viable solutions for efficacious and responsible policing in urban and rural areas.

This study builds upon prior research from the author's doctoral work but uniquely focuses on how Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu (BJJ) training impacts officer adaptability, community relations, and tactical responses in rural environments. Unlike the broader analysis in the thesis, this article examines nuanced factors such as community perceptions, officer reflections, and scenario-based training's effectiveness in high-stress, resource-limited settings typical of rural law enforcement. In rural law enforcement, officers are often required to be "generalists" with the ability to handle a wide range of situations due to limited resources (Weisheit et al., 2005). This adaptability is critical in rural settings where officers may need to respond to incidents alone or with minimal backup, increasing the importance of versatile and effective skills. BJJ training supports this adaptability by equipping officers with techniques that enhance confidence and competence across various scenarios, allowing them to manage volatile situations with greater control and safety.

While martial arts training is not new in law enforcement defensive tactics, recent debates have emphasized it as a method to enhance safety for officers and the individuals they encounter (Parks, 2022). BJJ, in particular, is being adopted as an empowering tool for police officers, offering a technique-focused approach that emphasizes control without excessive force. Unlike some other combative martial arts, BJJ relies on leverage, joint locks, and chokeholds to subdue a suspect, allowing officers to neutralize threats without relying on strikes or weapon-based defenses (Brower, 2018; Stellpflug et al., 2020). This emphasis on control, rather than aggression, aligns with public expectations of proportionality in police responses and has shown potential to minimize injuries for both officers and suspects, a critical factor in modern law enforcement practices (Williams et al., 2019). The problem is that although law enforcement officers are trained in various defensive and offensive tactics, they lack real-life fight training from which Jiu-Jitsu practitioners' benefit. This gap can yield inappropriate physical and psychological stress responses that result in unreasonable use of force.

This work applied the general theory of combat logic to examine BJJ training experiences of law enforcement officers in rural central Texas, focusing on its effectiveness in safely controlling combative subjects. By emphasizing techniques that prioritize control and minimize injury, BJJ presents an approach that contrasts with more aggressive tactics, potentially fostering

a safer environment for both officers and suspects. This study explored whether such training could not only improve officers' ability to handle violent encounters but also contribute to enhanced relationships with both suspects and the broader community, given the reduced risk of physical harm and the perception of less aggressive policing tactics. This study attempted to answer the following questions:

1. How can the Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu training experiences of law enforcement officers in rural central Texas contribute to improved relations with suspects and the broader community?
2. In what ways do rural central Texas officers believe Jiu-Jitsu is an effective tool for policing?
3. How do rural central Texas officers use Jiu-Jitsu training to improve their tactical knowledge and skills?

This work builds upon previous research concerning the utility of Jiu-Jitsu as a force option conducted by the author, which has been presented in various academic forums and published in peer-reviewed scholarly journals and trade magazines. This study incorporated a new narrative to expand on the existing literature, particularly relating to rural policing, as discussed by Weisheit et al. (2005), Smale (2011), and Donnermeyer (2016). This includes examining how Jiu-Jitsu training influences officers' responses in high-stress situations and its implications for police-community relations in rural settings.

1.1 Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu in Law Enforcement

BJJ's application in law enforcement is gaining traction as a method that enhances control and reduces physical harm in confrontations. Sipe (2024) discusses BJJ's role in supporting officers during use-of-force scenarios by enabling effective restraint without resorting to aggressive techniques. This method aligns with the goals of modern policing, where minimizing injury and prioritizing non-lethal tactics are central. Similarly, Arnold (2023) highlights BJJ's capacity to improve officer confidence and precision through skill-based techniques that allow for de-escalation in potentially volatile encounters.

Harmon (2022) provides insight into the perceptions of officers trained in BJJ, noting that those who completed the training felt more prepared to manage aggression without needing to escalate to forceful measures. This perception is particularly relevant in rural contexts where officers often respond to high-stress situations with limited support. Krasnicki (2023) extends these

findings to show that BJJ training may reduce tendencies toward aggressive policing, promoting institutional changes that favor controlled, proportionate responses and thereby fostering positive community relations. This evolving perspective frames BJJ not only as a tactical advantage but as a vehicle for fostering a culture of balanced policing.

Together, these studies demonstrate that integrating BJJ into law enforcement training can enhance officers' ability to manage confrontations safely and effectively. These insights support the broader adoption of BJJ as part of a comprehensive, community-oriented approach to law enforcement.

2.0 METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore how law enforcement officers use Jiu-Jitsu training to manage physical confrontations, aiming to address excessive force concerns (Akinlabi, 2020; Christopher et al., 2020; Deuchar et al., 2020; Hassan et al., 2020; Staller et al., 2019; Torres, 2020). Data were collected from 30 rural central Texas officers through semi-structured interviews, participant observations, and questionnaires, ensuring a comprehensive analysis of their experiences. Officers were purposively selected based on their engagement with Jiu-Jitsu training, providing a diverse and experienced sample. Data analysis utilized NVivo software, facilitating a rigorous thematic analysis aligned with Brizin and Kernspecht's (2014) theory. The methodology supported reliability through data triangulation and ensured validity via iterative coding, making the findings applicable in diverse law enforcement settings.

This study used empirical and reflective methods to gather data (Fuster Guillen, 2019). Multiple sources were utilized in line with best practices for ensuring robust data triangulation and validation, including qualitative questionnaires, semi-structured individual interviews, and naturalistic observation (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Creswell & Poth, 2018). This combination was chosen to thoroughly explore officers' lived experiences and enhance understanding from various perspectives (Mehrad & Zangeneh, 2019; Miller et al., 2018; Rahman, 2020).

2.1 Qualitative Questionnaire

The first data collection approach for this research was an online qualitative questionnaire. This approach examined the lived Jiu-Jitsu training experiences of participating law enforcement

officers and their perspective on the impact their training has had while performing their duties. An open-ended qualitative questionnaire was used to collect data, and a proprietary cloud-based application analyzed the responses using its propriety analysis tool and identified codes and themes. The qualitative questionnaire responses were used with other qualitative data from the interviews and observations.

2.2 Individual Interviews

The second data collection source was semi-structured interviews through purposeful sampling. Deliberately selecting the interviewees based on their ability to explain specific topics, ideas, or events, as well as consideration for demographics such as age, ethnicity, and gender (Ames et al., 2019 Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2017), was a critical component of this work because it allowed the RPs to share their lived experiences in their own words. The RPs were all sworn law enforcement officers with at least five years of experience, and each was directly involved in or with Jiu-Jitsu training. The interviews consisted of 15 RPs. The RPs' training, experience, and education suited them to assess their Jiu-Jitsu training knowledge.

2.3 Naturalistic Observation

Naturalistic observation was the third approach to data collection for this research. This work's observations aimed to witness teaching methods, training tempo, and content and how the RPs applied learned concepts. The idea was to produce qualitative results critical to evidence of instructor and student performance when teaching and learning. For this research, three defensive tactics classes with Jiu-Jitsu components were observed. Each training session was an all-day event.

The study utilized the Teaching Dimensions Observation Protocol (TDOP), a well-regarded and fully validated method of instructional observation focused on the events in the classroom rather than an instrument to rate teachers. Furthermore, TDOP allows for flexible coding and observation of both student and teacher actions, both interactive and independent (Hora, 2015). Jiu-Jitsu instruction requires extensive physical practice, which is not typically recorded in instructional observation protocols.

2.4 Research Design

A transcendental phenomenological approach was appropriate for exploring rural officers' complex attitudes, beliefs, and experiences. It provided insight into how enhanced training might influence police-community relations, particularly in high-stress encounters. Transcendental phenomenology, developed by Edmund Husserl (1970) and further refined by Clark Moustakas (1994), focuses on identifying and understanding the essence of experiences by setting aside biases and preconceived notions. This approach emphasizes the importance of returning to the original experience to understand meaning from it, a process known as "epoché" or bracketing. This approach allows researchers to objectively analyze participants' lived experiences (Mehrad & Zangeneh, 2019; Miller et al., 2018; Rahman, 2020). Transcendental phenomenology was selected for its ability to offer a qualitative perspective into officers' perceptions and interactions during training and to help understand their experiences beyond subjective interpretations (Moustakas, 1994; Miller et al., 2018). This approach aligns with the study's aim to explore how Jiu-Jitsu training affects rural officers' responses in combative situations and its broader implications for community relations. The transcendental phenomenological approach facilitated an understanding of the impact of training on officers' use of force, guided by Moustakas's (1994) framework on how new information interacts with preconceived paradigms.

2.5 Setting and Participants

The research setting was a regional law enforcement training center (RLETC) in rural central Texas. The central Texas area is characterized by a mix of small towns, agricultural areas, and sparsely populated regions, distinguishing it from the more urbanized environments of Dallas/Fort Worth to the north, Austin, the heart of central Texas, and San Antonio to the south. According to the Texas Demographic Center, rural areas typically have populations under 50,000, and the regions selected for this study align with these criteria (Texas Demographic Center, 2022). The RLETC, a state-of-the-art campus with multiple classrooms, multi-purpose training rooms, and a firearms range, was selected for this research because it serves officers from these rural police departments and sheriff's offices. This setting allowed the study to focus on the specific challenges and training needs of rural law enforcement, providing a relevant context for evaluating the impact of Jiu-Jitsu training.

Although Austin is the heart of central Texas, the city is composed of four major areas: north, south, east, and west. These areas are primarily suburban and sometimes mistakenly associated with being outside of Austin when, in fact, they are part of the larger metropolitan area. Austin's closest neighbors, the cities of Round Rock, Cedar Park, and Pflugerville, are also considered suburban but still contribute to the overall rural characteristics of the region. However, this study focused on areas beyond the cities that share a city limit line with Austin. For example, cities farther out, such as Taylor, Liberty Hill, Elgin, Marble Falls, and Johnson City, are very rural. The population of these is between 2,000 and 17,000. (*QuickFacts United States*, n.d.). These areas have significantly lower population densities, extensive agricultural lands, and limited urban infrastructure compared to the Austin hub. As previously mentioned, rural classifications often include communities with populations under 50,000, dispersed over large geographic areas. Policing the outskirts of Austin requires different policing strategies.

Local law enforcement officers from different agencies in rural central Texas were selected as research participants (RPs). The selected law enforcement agencies included three rural police departments, one rural sheriff's office, and one urban sheriff's office. While the average number of sworn officers across all five agencies is 147, and they are responsible for law enforcement services to an average population of 112,000 across three cities and two counties, it is important to understand the geographic and demographic context. These populations are spread over large, sparsely populated areas typical of rural regions. For example, these agencies cover expansive rural areas and small towns with low population densities. This requires different policing strategies compared to the surrounding urban cities such as Austin, San Antonio, or the Dallas/Fort Worth areas. Additionally, while the urban sheriff's office in this study serves a mixed jurisdiction, a significant portion of their duties involves patrolling and providing law enforcement services to rural areas as defined by the Texas Demographic Center and the U.S. Census Bureau (Texas Demographic Center, 2022; U.S. Census Bureau, 2020).

Each agency has several divisions, including community affairs, criminal investigations, patrol services, special operations, training, and support services. The training division for each department is responsible for providing in-service training to all personnel. These trainings include legislative updates, cultural diversity, defensive tactics, and other state-required courses. The inclusion of rural jurisdictions in their service areas highlights the unique challenges faced by these

officers, such as longer response times, limited backup, and the necessity for officers to be generalists, handling a wide range of issues without the support of specialized units available in more urban settings.

The RPs in this research were state-certified law enforcement officers between 21 and 51 years old. They were full-time, duly employed peace officers with full arrest powers. The RPs were all volunteers; they were not compensated. The specific demographics of the RPs are discussed in this work's Findings. Selecting research participants from rural central Texas was particularly beneficial, as it allowed for an in-depth exploration of BJJ's impact within smaller, close-knit communities where law enforcement interactions often carry different social dynamics compared to urban settings. Although the Texas Department of Public Safety has adopted Jiu-Jitsu as a force option statewide, examining its use in rural areas provides unique insights into how these techniques affect relationships and public perceptions in communities with limited exposure to varied policing methods.

Table 1: *Rural Central Texas Law Enforcement Officer (LEO) Participants*

LEO	Sex	Age	Highest Degree	Current Assignment	Years
Participant			Earned		Experience
Lt. A	M	51	Bachelors	Shift Commander	28
Lt. B	M	48	Masters	Shift Commander	26
Sgt. A	M	37	Bachelors	Patrol Sergeant	15
Sgt. B	F	35	Bachelors	Patrol Sergeant	12
Cpl. A	F	29	HS Diploma	Patrol	6
Cpl. B	M	28	Bachelors	Patrol	6
Det. A	M	42	Associates	Criminal Investigations	18
Det. B	M	44	Bachelors	Criminal Investigations	21
Ofc. A	M	33	HS Diploma	K-9 Handler	10
Ofc. B	F	22	HS Diploma	Patrol	1
Ofc. C	F	25	Bachelors	Patrol	3
Ofc. D	M	27	Associates	Patrol/SWAT	5
Dep. A	M	30	HS Diploma	Patrol	7
Dep. B	M	29	Bachelors	K-9 Handler	5
Dep. C	M	21	Associates	Patrol	1

2.6 Data Synthesis

This study used Moustakas's (1994) modified Van Kaam method in conjunction with Saldaña's (2021) approach to coding. These approaches were combined for coding practices. The modified van Kaam approach offered utility in organizing interview transcriptions in four ways: listing, reduction and elimination, clustering, and final identification. In addition, emotion coding was appropriate for this study because it helped investigate an officer's intra- and interpersonal lived Jiu-Jitsu training experiences and actions related to or associated with their training. Saldaña (2021) discusses the appropriateness of emotion coding in qualitative research and how it gives researchers insight into a participant's perspectives, worldviews, and personal conditions. The coding, thematic analysis, and data synthesis occurred during and after the qualitative questionnaire, interview, and observation processes and can be found under **Findings** and **Conclusion**.

3.0 RESULTS

Following an extensive evidence-gathering process and triangulating from qualitative questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and naturalistic observations, clear themes emerged from the collected data. The themes were consistent with each participant and identified through thematic analysis discussed in the works of Moustakas (1994), Creswell and Poth (2018), and Miller et al. (2018). The primary themes identified were officer safety and reflection, tactics and experiential learning, skill level, and learned applications. In addition, the data showed concepts and ideas as sub-themes aligned with the primary themes. Figure 1 (Brizin and Kernspecht's general theory of combat) and Figure 2 (themes of this work) depict how the identified themes align.

Metacognition's utility and structured reflection were sub-themes that emerged from the officer safety and reflection theme. Discretion, candor, and the value of shared experiences were sub-themes under the tactics and experiential learning theme. Diverse learning and diverse perspectives were sub-themes from the skill level theme. Finally, scenario-based training and feedback were the sub-themes under the learned application theme.



Figure 1: *Brizin and Kernspecht's (2014) general theory of combat hierarchy diagram*



Figure 2: *Themes of this work*

3.1 General Training Strategy

The RLETC's general training strategy embraces Jiu-Jitsu's principles and concepts. Within martial arts, physical strength is foundational for overcoming adversaries, a principle that varies across diverse fighting systems (Williams et al., 2019). However, Jiu-Jitsu distinguishes itself by placing significance on the efficient execution of techniques and the economical allocation of physical energy. Furthermore, Jiu-Jitsu empowers its practitioners with a skill set encompassing

a spectrum of takedowns, pins, joint locks, and choking techniques underpinned by leverage, fulcrum use, and precise body positioning principles.

3.2 Themes from Officer Experiences with Training BJJ at the RLETC

The following sections highlight key themes that emerged from officers' experiences with the RLETC training, particularly regarding the BJJ component. These themes captured the various ways in which the training shaped officers' skills, decision-making, and interactions with the community. Each theme reflects specific insights drawn from participant accounts and provides a comprehensive view of how BJJ principles translate into real-world policing practices and officer perceptions.

3.3 Officer Safety and Reflection

Officer safety is foundational in law enforcement training, characterized by a "go home at all costs" attitude. Daily briefings and continuing education instill this principle early and reinforce this principle to prevent officer injuries and fatalities. According to Lt. A, safety training involves learning from past incidents to avoid repeating mistakes. Lt. B emphasized the role of Jiu-Jitsu in ensuring control during confrontations, noting its effectiveness in handling situations where opponents are on their backs.

3.3.1 Metacognition's Utility

Metacognition involves understanding and regulating one's learning processes, essential for strategic planning and effective response in law enforcement. Lt. A described Jiu-Jitsu as akin to "playing human chess," promoting critical thinking essential for dynamic situations. Lt. B highlighted mindfulness's importance in training and operational contexts, stressing that effective Jiu-Jitsu usage requires a deep understanding of body mechanics and situational responses.

3.3.2 Structured Reflection

Structured reflection is integral to training at the RLETC, with designated times for officers to discuss techniques and experiences post-training. Sgt. A noted that these sessions allow sharing of insights and challenges, enhancing learning through collective experiences. This practice is vital for developing personal and professional growth, helping officers to learn from each other, and improving decision-making skills.

3.4 Tactics and Experiential Learning

Experiential learning is emphasized through scenario-based training, where officers discuss and analyze different use-of-force situations. Sgt. B underlined the importance of peer

learning, where experiences from various officers enrich the training environment. These sessions help officers gain diverse perspectives, crucial for their growth and confidence in applying learned skills.

3.4.1 *Discretion and Candor*

The training environment supports open dialogue and honest reflections, which are essential for a comprehensive learning experience. Det. A and other officers noted that a culture of openness and trust facilitates deeper discussions and more effective learning outcomes. Instructors are encouraged to foster an atmosphere where officers can freely express concerns and share feedback, which is critical for continuous improvement and safety.

3.4.2 *Value of Shared Experiences*

Shared experiences form the core of learning at the RLETC, enabling officers to engage deeply with the training material and each other. Ofc. A emphasized the impact of trust and open communication on effective learning, noting that discussions often delve into detailed analyses of real-life scenarios, enhancing the practical application of training.

3.5 *Skill Level*

Officers' skill levels are developed through theoretical knowledge and practical application, with training to adapt to diverse learning modalities and perspectives over time. Sgt. B highlighted how physical capabilities and mental toughness are honed through continuous training and real-world experiences, which are critical for effective law enforcement.

3.5.1 *Diverse Learning*

At the RLETC, training modalities are varied to meet the dynamic needs of law enforcement. Lt. A and Lt. B emphasize the evolution of learning techniques, highlighting the integration of Jiu-Jitsu into scenario-based training, guest lectures, and practical exercises. This approach challenges officers and encourages active engagement with instructors and peers. The curriculum places officers in challenging positions to navigate and overcome, fostering a deep understanding of tactical advantages in real-world situations.

3.5.2 *Diverse Perspectives*

The training sessions underscore the importance of diverse perspectives in effective law enforcement training. The training promotes a broader understanding of use-of-force scenarios by fostering an environment where officers from different agencies collaborate on common challenges. Dep. B's observations highlight how such diversity in training approaches enhances

problem-solving skills and strategic thinking, essential for ensuring safety and efficacy in law enforcement operations.

3.6 Learned Application

Experiential learning is central to the RLETC's curriculum, focusing on the practical application of Jiu-Jitsu techniques. Officers learn through doing and engaging in scenario-based exercises that mimic real-life situations. This method helps officers internalize the training, making it more applicable to their daily responsibilities. Ofc. A's comments reflect the value of integrating theoretical knowledge with hands-on practice, enhancing skill acquisition and situational awareness.

3.6.1 Scenario-Based Training

Scenario-based training, such as the "Crucible," challenges officers with intense physical and sensory experiences to simulate real-life encounters. This training is crucial for preparing officers to handle high-stress situations effectively. Lt. A points out the unmatched value of this training format in developing decision-making skills and physical readiness, which are critical in high-stakes environments.

3.6.2 Feedback

Feedback mechanisms are integral to the training process, providing officers with insights into their performance and areas for improvement. Tang and Zhan's (2021) research supports the role of feedback in enhancing learning outcomes. At the RLETC, feedback is a continuous loop that informs training delivery and curriculum development, ensuring that learning remains relevant and impactful.

4.0 DISCUSSION

A systematic and methodical approach was critical to the data collection phase to address the questions this work aimed at answering. The data produced themes and sub-themes through the coding process. Each theme and sub-theme that emerged bore a direct and purposeful alignment with the questions the research endeavored to answer, elucidating insights into this work's purpose, which was to seek to understand how Jiu-Jitsu training might positively impact the interactions between law enforcement officers in rural central Texas and suspects.

4.1 How can the Jiu-Jitsu training experiences of law enforcement officers in rural central Texas improve relations between officers and suspects?

RPs all endorsed the Jiu-Jitsu program and attested to their unique experiences during the training cycle. Ofc. C, whose thoughts were echoed by the other RPs in one fashion or another, said:

“To receive the type of training that gives you the space to learn and to invest in yourself, which ultimately makes you a better officer to your peers and the community, and to be surrounded by instructors and students with different, but similar experiences, well there’s no better way of self-development, right?”

Ofc. C’s statement highlights critical components of the lived experiences that all RPs shared. Promoting personal and professional development, discussions with peers and instructors with varying degrees of experience, and interactions during the training cycle were key themes and sub-themes.

According to Weisheit et al. (2005), rural law enforcement officers rely on personal relationships and community trust to perform their duties effectively. Jiu-jitsu training can enhance these community relations by reducing the perception of bad optics during violent confrontations and fostering a professional yet approachable demeanor. This aligns with the emphasis on building trust and reducing the use of force in rural settings (Smale, 2011).

4.2 In what ways do officers believe Jiu-Jitsu is an effective tool for policing?

The main themes of officer safety, reflection, and learning application speak directly to Jiu-Jitsu’s effectiveness as a policing tool. Lt A said, “The military has embraced Jiu-Jitsu’s fundamental concepts to train our warfighters for years. We (law enforcement) are a little late to the party, but we’ve repeatedly seen its (Jiu-Jitsu) effectiveness. In Texas, DPS (Department of Public Safety) has taken the lead with incorporating Jiu-Jitsu in its arrest and control tactics training, and smaller agencies across the state have followed DPS’s lead.” The RPs applied the learning concepts and demonstrated Jiu-Jitsu’s effectiveness during the Crucible event. Lt A said, “The learning opportunity, for both instructors and students, to have a full-blown, real-life, fight

for your life exercise, and demonstrate what students learned is a unique and rewarding experience for everyone involved. This type of training will save the lives of officers or citizens.”

Smale (2011) argue that effective training programs are essential in equipping rural officers with the skills to independently manage a wide range of incidents that their urban counterparts might not see. Jiu-Jitsu, as part of a comprehensive training program, equips officers with practical, non-lethal techniques that enhance their effectiveness and safety in the field (Donnermeyer, 2016).

4.3 How do law enforcement officers use Jiu-Jitsu training to improve their tactical knowledge and skills?

The scenario-based training activities were rigorous and robust, and instructors employed different modalities to afford students learning opportunities to apply their knowledge and increase their tactical fighting skills. Dep. A said he applied his learning through “the different scenarios in class, and of course, the final training exercise,” Dep. B said he applied the concepts during discussions and feedback sessions in which “someone shared an experience about an arrest and control incident” while the class worked through practical applications in class and Sgt. B described the force option scenarios and said, “Having discussions and debates on tactics and then trying to apply your classmates' inputs based on their experience made training so much better.” The different stations allowed students to practice specific techniques with instructors and for additional mat time with fellow students, which broadened the student experience beyond the traditional defensive tactics curriculum of days past.

Weisheit et al. (2005) assert that rural officers must be “generalists” and experts at performing various tasks due to the limited resources available in rural areas. Jiu-Jitsu training enhances this adaptability by allowing officers to handle different situations confidently and competently. This aligns with Donnermeyer’s (2016) work, which suggests that training that enhances adaptability enables officers to handle a variety of incidents with certainty and skill.

4.4 Interpretation of Findings

Four primary themes and eight sub-themes surfaced from the data collection process and after thematic analysis. The primary themes identified were officer safety and reflection, tactics and experiential learning, skill level, and learned application. Data collected from the RPs

developed this work's themes and aligned them with Kolb's (2003) experiential learning process and Clausewitz's general theory of combat logic (Brizin & Kernspecht, 2014). For example, Kolb (2013) asserts that effective learning occurs during a four-stage process of continuous navigation of experience, reflection, conceptualization, and experimentation. In addition, Brizin and Kernspecht (2014) distill Clausewitz's work into a "general idea of how to fight optimally and efficiently" using methodologies from various combat arts and military tactics. This study's findings support the lived experiences of the RPs and show that specialized training, such as Jiu-Jitsu, can significantly enhance rural officers' capabilities. These findings align with the literature on rural policing and emphasize the need for effective, adaptable training programs to meet the unique challenges faced by rural law enforcement (Weisheit et al., 2005; Smale, 2011; Donnermeyer, 2016).

4.4.1 Summary of Thematic Findings

In qualitative research, thematic findings emphasize the nexus between theoretical influence and raw data and are critical to a study's trustworthiness (Thompson, 2022). In this work, RPs emphasized the significance of peer connections that enhanced their training experience, eliciting varied yet insightful thoughts on enhancing safety while advancing better community relations. In addition, the RPs underscored how the scenario-based exercises proved the effectiveness of the training as a policing tool, driving them to go beyond their current skills and knowledge and apply new concepts and ideas. For example, even though the discussion on efficient defensive law enforcement tactics has been argued for decades (Lavoie et al., 2022), Kaminski and Martin (2000) assert that law enforcement leaders might lack objective information on whether training managers teach officers the most efficient methods for safely subduing resistive and combative suspects. However, instructors and students fundamentally agree that training through experiential learning promotes interactive discussions and the sharing of lived experiences that offer solutions through conversation (Smith, 2022). Following the scenario-based exercises and the final event, the RPs entered the reflection and feedback phase. The RPs continued the learning cycle as they discovered new ideas through their classmates' lived experiences and how those experiences would help them in their careers.

4.4.2 Augmenting the Experience Through Personal Connections

The relationships law enforcement officers form is unique compared to other workforces because of shared experiences, stress, shift work, and situations that impact their attitudes (Somers & Terrill, 2022). The relationships formed and developed observed during this study were significant to the RPs' learning experience. Communicating with and understanding the perspectives of peers and instructors enhanced the RPs' relationships and ability to partner with their classmates in the future, whether in the classroom or the field. The classroom discussions, feedback from practical exercises, and the time spent with such a diverse group during their training cycle promoted learning well beyond the curriculum. The relationships the RPs developed supported the learning cycle and catalyzed them to draw from their lived experiences, consider alternative ways to perform, and share their perspectives to create new experiences for themselves and their classmates.

4.4.3 Jiu-Jitsu is More Than Just Another Training Component

The defensive tactics program structure, specifically its Jiu-Jitsu component, encouraged and provided time for reflection and thought, which promoted mental well-being. In their systematic review of the relationship between physical activity and mental health during the first year of COVID-19, Marconcin et al. (2022) concluded: "that higher physical activity is associated with higher well-being, quality of life as well as lower depressive symptoms, anxiety, and stress, independently of age." Although law enforcement agencies encourage personal fitness outside mandatory training, time and facilities are sometimes scarce. The RPs described the time the curriculum afforded them to train, and the state-of-the-art facilities were conducive to learning and gaining more skills and a nice mental break from daily police work. In addition to their Jiu-Jitsu training, the training cycle allowed the RPs to spend time with friends and peers in a relatively enjoyable environment less stressful than the streets. The instructors' emphasis on improving safety, health, and wellness helped prepare the RPs for learning by establishing a like-minded, positive learning environment.

4.4.4 Equipping Students for Present and Future Roles

According to Weng et al. (2010), factors such as goal progress, professional development, promotion, and higher salary opportunities contribute to career growth. The Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu training in which the RPs engaged not only fostered these aspects of career development but also enhanced critical thinking and tactical planning skills. This training, focused on street-level

scenarios, required participants to assess real-time situations, adapt to rapidly changing dynamics, and make strategic decisions under pressure. Practical exercises, drawn from similar law enforcement encounters, addressed current concerns related to officer safety and community service. Discussions with peers and instructors—many of whom held tenured or leadership positions—pushed the RPs to think beyond their immediate roles, aligning their perspectives with those expected of mid-level supervisors and senior leaders. Participants who had completed the training previously returned to their assignments with enriched insights, eager to apply and share their knowledge, develop professional relationships, and capitalize on their expanded skill set.

4.5 Domestic and Global Implications

Rural central Texas law enforcement is a testimony to the impact that Jiu-Jitsu training can have on the competence and safety of officers. Similar training could be beneficial in a domestic and international context for law enforcement agencies often hamstrung by a lack of physical skills in managing the challenges of increased violent encounters between officers and suspects. Jiu-Jitsu training that fits into the different legal and cultural environments domestically or worldwide can help standardize an approach to a more humane way of subduing an unarmed, violent, or resisting suspect, which could lead to lower complaints of excessive force.

4.6 Limitations

The limitations of this research were the RPs' work shifts and the population sample. The first limitation was the RP work shift. The RPs' work shifts were trifurcated to either a day, swing, or night shift, and the training staff curated the training schedule to have day and afternoon sessions to accommodate the different shifts. The different shifts posed an issue with scheduling the semi-structured interviews and timely responses to the qualitative questionnaire. As a mitigation strategy, interviews took place during a participant's shift, and reminder emails were sent concerning returning the responses to the qualitative questionnaires. The second limitation was the population size and the number of RPs who volunteered for this study. Law enforcement agencies nationwide are experiencing a workforce crisis due to increased retirements and fewer qualified applicants; therefore, finding volunteers at a single law enforcement agency was not feasible, and the population sample needed to be expanded to three total agencies. However, the most significant limitation of this work is the existing body of knowledge from the literature on Jiu-Jitsu's utility as a law enforcement tool to improve police-community relations.

5.0 CONCLUSION

RPs' participation in Jiu-Jitsu training as part of their force options and arrest control tactics at the RLETC and through ongoing in-service education significantly enhanced their knowledge and boosted their confidence in handling high-pressure situations. Despite these benefits, continuing such professional development faces challenges related to time constraints, financial limitations, and staffing shortages. Law enforcement agencies can mitigate these issues by incentivizing participation in first responder programs or seeking additional funding from municipal leaders to increase the frequency and duration of training sessions.

Moreover, training managers should consider integrating remote learning opportunities that do not require physical presence to ensure continuous learning and adaptability. Feedback from the participants has affirmed the effectiveness of Brizin and Kernspecht's (2014) general theory of combat, emphasizing the importance of ongoing education in tactical principles, attack and defense strategies, and the sequential application of techniques. The overwhelmingly positive feedback from officers, such as Officer D's remarks on the potential life-saving impact of expanded training, underscores the need for administrative support to enhance and extend such programs. This initiative promises to elevate officers' professional and personal development and significantly improve community safety outcomes.

Ethics Declaration

This research included human participants. The researcher/author confirms that all the research in this work has met ethical guidelines and adhered to the legal requirements of the United States of America. The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and approved the application to conduct research involving human subjects (IRB-FY23-24-198) under the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and found the research associated with this work to be exempt from further IRB review under 45 CFR 46:104(d). In addition, the researcher/author is compliant with the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) Program on social and behavioral researchers and social and behavioral responsible conduct of research training.

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