

# Implicit Bias Police Training: What Works?

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**Implicit bias** is an unconscious attitude based on one's experiences and societal exposure to social messages.<sup>1</sup> It is important because people with strong implicit biases may discriminate against target groups even if they do not endorse those stereotypes.<sup>2</sup>

**Law enforcement training** aimed at reducing police officer biases<sup>3</sup> has become popular with a growing awareness of implicit bias along with social outrage due to shootings of Black males.

## What Does Current Evidence Suggest?

- The training has **no effect**<sup>4</sup> on police officer behavior related to racially disparate stops, summons, arrests, and use of physical force. Implicit bias training has demonstrated only short-term positive changes in **attitudes**<sup>4</sup> and awareness. Some **research**<sup>5</sup> suggests that implicit bias trainings in high-stress environments may have larger effects because it better simulates actual job conditions.
- **Procedural justice**<sup>6</sup> training, an aspect of some implicit bias programs, builds trust between police officers and the communities they serve.
- Implicit biases might be affected by one's surrounding environment. Thus, trainings should be re-conceptualized to include **structural or environmental**<sup>7</sup> changes.

## Policy Recommendations to Achieve Positive Police Behavior Outcomes

State level revisions in implicit bias training are needed to reduce the adverse impact on minority group members. Trainings must be integrated with structural reforms. For example, policymakers can consider:

- Redesigning combative police training programs to shift away from forceful, fear-based police training and expectations, to those grounded in restorative justice and social wellness.
  - Indeed, these combative police programs are based on those that were used to control the enslaved in America.<sup>8</sup>
- Repealing laws leading to the majority of arrests and racial disparities, such as marijuana possession, fare evasion, selling loose cigarettes, loitering, and minor forgery. **Evidence**<sup>9</sup> suggests that repealing these laws dramatically reduces police searches of all groups including Blacks. However, racial gaps do persist, emphasizing the enduring nature of environmental inequality effects on individual implicit biases.
- Limiting the number of hours police can work may also promote less biased actions because people who are fatigued **rely more heavily** on stereotypes.<sup>10</sup>

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