

**The Bill Blackwood
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**

**Tactical Training in a
Small Law Enforcement Agency**

**An Administrative Research Paper
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ABSTRACT

Tactical training in a small law enforcement agency is relevant to contemporary law enforcement because of the rise in the number of mass fatality shootings and potential terrorist assaults, which has brought about a realization that police training for the small agency has not kept up with real world events. Several events over the past 40 years have brought about changes in police response to critical incidents. The changes have come in the form of specialized units and more firepower for individual officers; however, basic training in tactical situations for the ordinary officer has not kept pace.

The purpose of this research is to bring awareness to administrators of law enforcement agencies, the state government, and local governments of the need for tactical training. Tactical training should be a vital part of any basic police academy curriculum. Asking police officers to respond to a terrorist attack without tactical training can only lead to disaster.

The method of inquiry used by the researcher included: a review of articles, Internet sites, periodicals, journals, a survey distributed to 38 survey participants, and personal interviews. Articles on tactical training for Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) teams were easily found. The number of responders to the survey revealed that departments in the Texas Panhandle are concerned about tactical training.

The researcher discovered that in the Panhandle of Texas, tactical rifle training was not being offered by the regional academy on a regular basis. Basic tactical training in the form of active shooter has been offered, but approximately one half of officers in the Texas Panhandle have not received it. Further, the Texas Commission

on Law Enforcement Standards and Education (TCLEOSE) has not revised the learning objectives in the patrol section of the Basic Peace Officer Course since 1999.

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INTRODUCTION

There are many stories of officers coming to the station for the first day of work and, without any academy training, are being given a ticket book, a code of ordinances, and a pistol. The new officer is then told to go forth and fight crime. Whether these stories are true or not, many new officers find themselves in a similar situation. The officer will probably be working in a small agency of less than a dozen sworn officers. The officer will have most basic skills taught at a regional academy. The officer's total experience with a handgun could have come from the academy. There is a good chance he or she will be issued a rifle or will be told it is permissible to carry a personally owned rifle. The officer will probably not undergo a field training program of eight to fifteen weeks. Communities are asking these officers to respond to and bring about a successful conclusion to some very dangerous situations. Tactical training of police cadets must be implemented in the academy curriculum. At the same time, tactical training must be offered as mandated continuing education for veteran officers.

Law enforcement entities have faced challenges throughout the ages. With the turn of every century and with the ever-increasing growth in population today, new challenges are commonplace in all areas of the law enforcement community. Some of those challenges can be minor issues for large metropolitan police departments; on the other hand, smaller departments, faced with the same challenges, can be overwhelmed because resources are at a minimum. In the aftermath of Columbine and 9/11, the ever-increasing challenges faced by smaller sized law enforcement agencies can be a burden, in many ways, on the responses and resources available to safely and securely mitigate the event at hand.

The problem or issue to be examined considers whether or not small police agencies can respond to a localized critical event with the tactical skills necessary to bring the event to a conclusion. More than basic academy training must be provided before a line officer can effectively respond to a critical incident. Tactical training should be a part of mandated training by the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement Standards and Education (TCLEOSE).

The purpose of this research is to bring awareness to administrators of law enforcement agencies, state, and local governments of the need for tactical training. Much needed training in the areas of racial profiling, cultural diversity, and the mentally/emotionally handicapped has been adopted by TCLEOSE over the past ten years. Patrol procedures have not been updated to reflect the new threats police face.

The research question to be examined focuses on whether or not small police agencies are receiving tactical response training and appropriate firearms training for the assault type weapons that are issued by the agency or personally owned by the officers. The most common tactical training currently being offered to line officers is based on an "active shooter" school scenario. At best, other basic tactical training comes from agency field training programs if an agency has an extended field training program. TCLEOSE requires officers to qualify with the firearms carried both on and off of duty on an annual basis. This may be the only time during the year an officer fires a weapon. Annual qualification should not count as training.

The intended method of inquiry includes: a review of articles, internet sites, periodicals, a survey distributed to 38 participants, and personal interviews. The survey will be submitted to police agencies as the researcher is more familiar with this type of

agency than sheriff agencies. The personal interviews will be limited to the staff of the regional academies.

The intended outcome is anticipated to show that tactical training and appropriate level firearms training is not being provided to the officers. The patrol procedures portion of a basic regional academy is very generic. It has to be this way because individual agencies have their own policies and procedures. Likewise, the firearms portion is designed to give basic instruction in shooting and range safety; however, rifle shooting is not taught.

The field of law enforcement will be influenced by the conclusions because the rise in the number of mass fatality shootings and potential terrorist assaults have brought about a realization that police training for the small agency has not kept up with real world events. The ability of an agency to make an appropriate response to an incident will instill confidence in the community. Training breeds confidence in the individual officers, which makes policing the community a much easier task.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

When comparing what the military does and what the police do, goals are similar but each is different in their approach to problem solving. Both are trying to restore order to a given situation (Heal, 2000). Although law enforcement agencies are based on a quasi-military structure, police primarily focus on the traditional roles expected of them by society. Those roles include answering calls service, crime prevention, community relations, and other crime oriented community education. The average man on the street would probably define the role of law enforcement as “catching crooks,” but apprehending violators, as most officers know, is a small part of police duties (Heal,

2000, p. 19). Most police activities go unnoticed by the community, with the exception of the daily newspaper police blotter, until there is a dramatic arrest or a tactical incident goes wrong. When something goes wrong, the police and the tactical decisions made during the incident come under the strongest scrutiny by the community. This scrutiny, many times, results in liability suits that cost local governments thousands and even millions of dollars. Officers are also becoming subject to more criminal liability (Heal, 2000). Law enforcement administrators, educators, and legislators should undertake finding solutions to this and other problems.

The cornerstone of the basic academy is teaching cadets the law, but there must be changes to the curriculum, from time to time, to reflect the changes in society. The United States, as well as the entire world, lives under the threat of terrorism. Changes in curriculum should include mandated tactical training from the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement Officers Standards and Education (TCLEOSE) to meet these threats.

In the spring of 1996, Nancy Marion entered a police academy to study whether this one academy had a curriculum consistent with what the researchers of her day believed was adequate to train police recruits (Marion, 1998). Marion (1998) quoted a similar study by Richard Harris completed in 1973 as to why the study was undertaken. First, "In a time when a major social problem in America is law enforcement, it seemed an impartial study of police training should be made available to politicians and police officials" (Harris, 1973, p.viii). Second, the police organization is, supposedly, molding a "new breed of cop" (Harris, 1973, p.viii). In Marion's (1998) day, the quote was 20 years old. It is now 35 years old and is still true, especially in light of the new generation of officers, "the millenniums."

According to Sanow (2002), SWAT means Special Weapons and Tactics, and today's patrol officers need both. Officers have been taught for many years to contain the situation and then call SWAT (Sanow, 2002). According to Wood (2001), the officers responding to Columbine High School were caught off-guard. Wood (2001) went on to say that some first responders may not be the most aggressive or tactically sound officers, but with the proper training, most will accept the challenge and perform as expected. The process to change response tactics began, in part, shortly after the Columbine shootings (Wood, 2001). Walter Distelzweig, a deputy chief with the Columbus, Ohio police department, along with public school administrators and Columbus SWAT developed a strategy to meet the new threat (Wood, 2001). The Quick Action Deployment (QUAD) concept was born (Wood, 2001). This is an example of how response strategies were developed and implemented because a gap existed in the training of police officers. This training is now taught nationwide.

According to Plaster (1993), a retired United States Marine Corps Colonel, rifle shooting is a perishable skill maintained and developed by practice with live ammunition. Men have decided that they are natural shooters with little or no practice probably because of too many John Wayne movies as a child (Plaster, 1993). Women, on the other hand, make excellent students because they do not have any preconceptions about how accurately they naturally shoot. Departments issue patrol rifles and allow officers to carry their own rifles. They follow TCLEOSE firearms qualification guidelines, but the officers must get the training they need to become capable of deploying the rifle in a critical incident. The Panhandle Regional Law Enforcement Academy (PRLEA), located in Amarillo, Texas, serves as the focal point

for basic academies and continuing education for the panhandle area. The academy has scheduled two handgun courses, which could be classified as tactical courses. The descriptions of the courses are from the PRLEA Continuing Education Calendar from May 2007 to May 2008. There has not been a patrol rifle course offered by PRLEA in that same time period (A. Chancia, personal communication, April 25, 2008). A patrol rifle class was held in November 2008. The researcher is not aware if individual departments have provided a TCLEOSE approved rifle training course for themselves and other departments.

TCLEOSE, in association with the Texas Tactical Police Officer Association (TTPOA), developed the Basic SWAT course in December 2004 (TCLEOSE, 2004). The mission statement is as follows: "The mission of the SWAT unit is to provide a law enforcement agency with the ability to respond to unconventional incidents in a coordinated manner without unduly depleting the agency's ability to respond to routine calls for police service" (TCLEOSE, 2004). These incidents include armed and barricaded persons, hostage situations, hazardous warrant service, and suicidal/emotionally disturbed persons. Riot control and dignitary protection are also unconventional incidents. Active shooters are most certainly an unconventional incident. The difference is that there is no waiting for the SWAT team to arrive. The response to an active shooter involves a team of officers immediately seeking out and engaging the shooter. The least number of officers is two, but three to five officers are recommended. Providing specialized training to non-tactical personnel was a part of the mission of a SWAT team.

All of the listed incidents, with the possible exception of dignitary protection service, are everyday calls for service in police departments, regardless of the size of the department. The situations vary in number and frequency in relation to the size of the community. Police agencies with a minimum number of officers to resolve these incidents have a dilemma when they do not have a SWAT team. This is multiplied when the officers' levels of training has been limited to basic academy training, mandated TCLEOSE courses, and limited by minimal training budgets. It is confusing that TCLEOSE found providing tactical training to non-tactical personnel was important to the SWAT course mission statement but does not include tactical training in the Basic Peace Officer Curriculum (BPOC) (TCLEOSE, 2001).

Most police departments in the Texas Panhandle do not have a SWAT team. The Panhandle Regional Law Enforcement Academy (PRLEA) has not conducted a basic SWAT school in the past three years (A. Chancia, personal communication, April 25, 2008). They have left that up to the Amarillo Police Department through the Texas Tactical Officers Association (A. Chancia, personal communication, April 25, 2008). The Amarillo Police Department is the only agency in the Panhandle with a full-time SWAT team (A. Chancia, personal communication, April 25, 2008). The BPOC, although there have been some much needed changes, has not altered the teaching elements of the section on patrol procedures since the early 1990s. Since that time, new response tactics have been developed to address the large number of active shooter incidents. The new tactics evolved because the standard response in the Columbine school shootings was to contain and then call SWAT (Wood, 2001).

METHODOLOGY

The research question to be examined considers whether or not officers are able to respond to crisis situations and bring them to a successful conclusion. The researcher hypothesizes that officers are receiving very basic training at the regional academy in accordance with the learning objectives stated in the TCLEOSE Basic Officer Course curriculum. The researcher further hypothesizes that after joining a Texas Panhandle police department, the officer is not given adequate tactical training to respond to a critical incident.

The method of inquiry will include: a review of articles, Internet sites, periodicals, journals, a survey distributed to 38 survey participants, and personal interviews. The instrument to be used to measure the researcher's findings regarding the subject of whether or not an officer is receiving appropriate tactical training will be a survey. The size of the survey will consist of 17 questions, distributed to 38 survey participants from the 26 counties of the Panhandle Regional Planning Commission Council of Governments. The response to the survey instrument resulted in 28 responses to the survey or 74% of departments surveyed. The information obtained from the survey will be analyzed by the researcher utilizing graphs and charts.

FINDINGS

The breakdown of the responses to the survey was as follows: One department employed over 50 officers; two departments employed between 26 to 50 officers; three departments employed 16 to 25 officers; five departments employed 15 to 10 officers; six departments employed six to nine officers; and eight departments employed one to five officers.

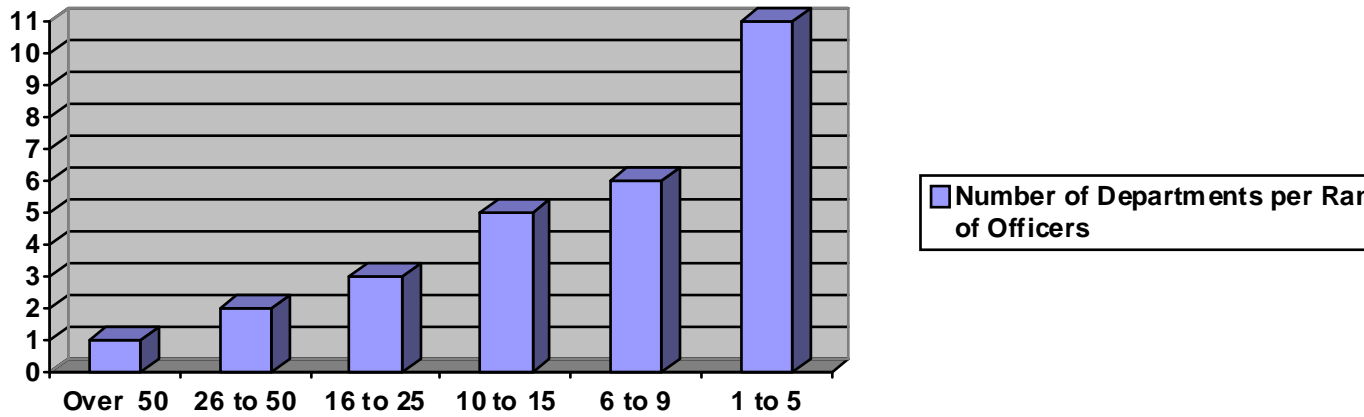


Figure 1. Breakdown of the number of departments by range of officers.

Research found that six of the reporting agencies had tactical teams. Of those six, there was only one full time team. This was expected, as the Amarillo Police Department was believed to have the personnel and budget to support a full time team. Four of the part time teams were funded by moneys from the general police budget. One team was funded from drug seizure money.

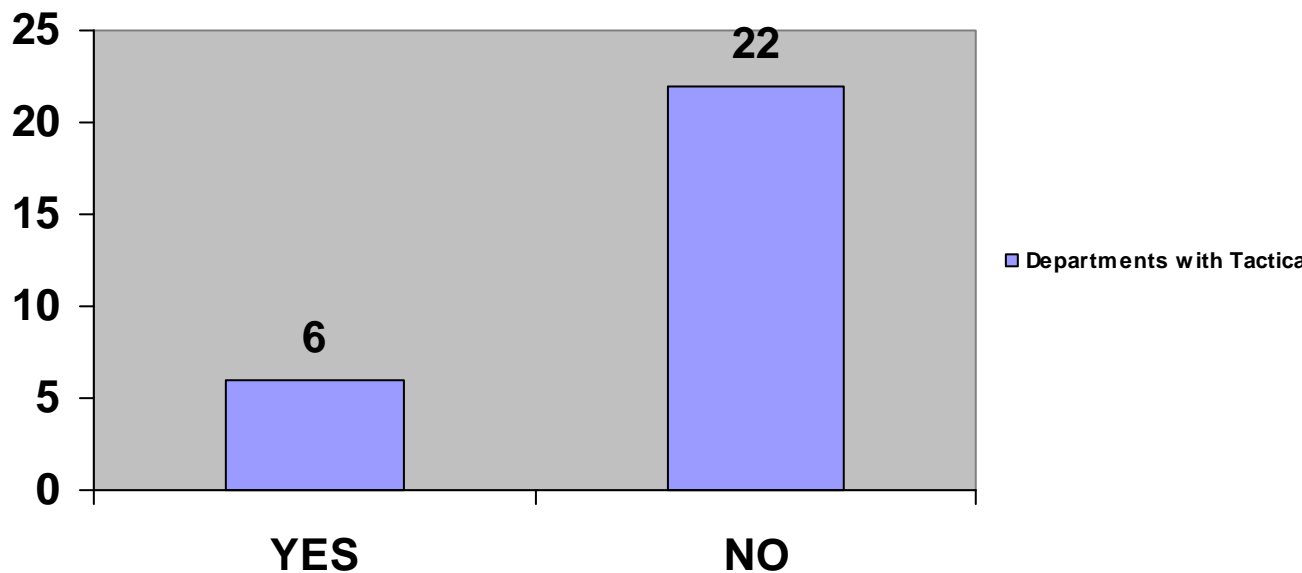


Figure 2. Departments with tactical units.

In the departments with tactical teams, 44 of the members of the six teams had completed basic SWAT school. The researcher estimates that the six teams had a total membership of 55. There are, undoubtedly, more officers within the departments that have attended a basic SWAT school, but that question was not asked.

Many departments are both issuing department owned rifles and are allowing officers to carry on duty their own rifle. Some departments are issuing rifles to selected officers. The officers on the six tactical teams are issued rifles. Seventeen of the departments surveyed are issuing rifles. Twelve departments that issued rifles were prone to allow officers to carry their own. Of the 11 departments that did not issue rifles, the majority did allow personally owned weapons.

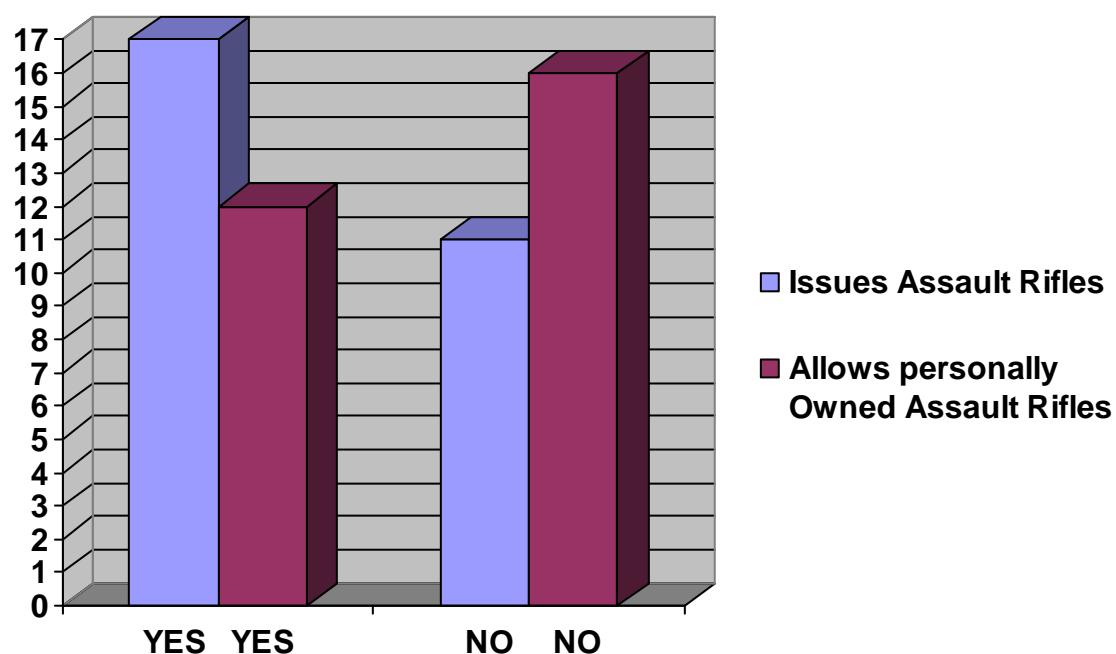


Figure 3. Assault rifles issued and assault rifles personally owned by department.

Practicing with a weapon is the key to proficiency with the weapon. The availability of practice ammunition for handguns, shotguns, and rifles is critical. Two departments did not furnish any practice ammunition. Both of those departments had between one and five officers. Five of the departments did not issue or allow rifles but did furnish handgun and shotgun ammunition. Twenty-two agencies did furnish rifle ammunition along with the handgun and shotgun ammunition.

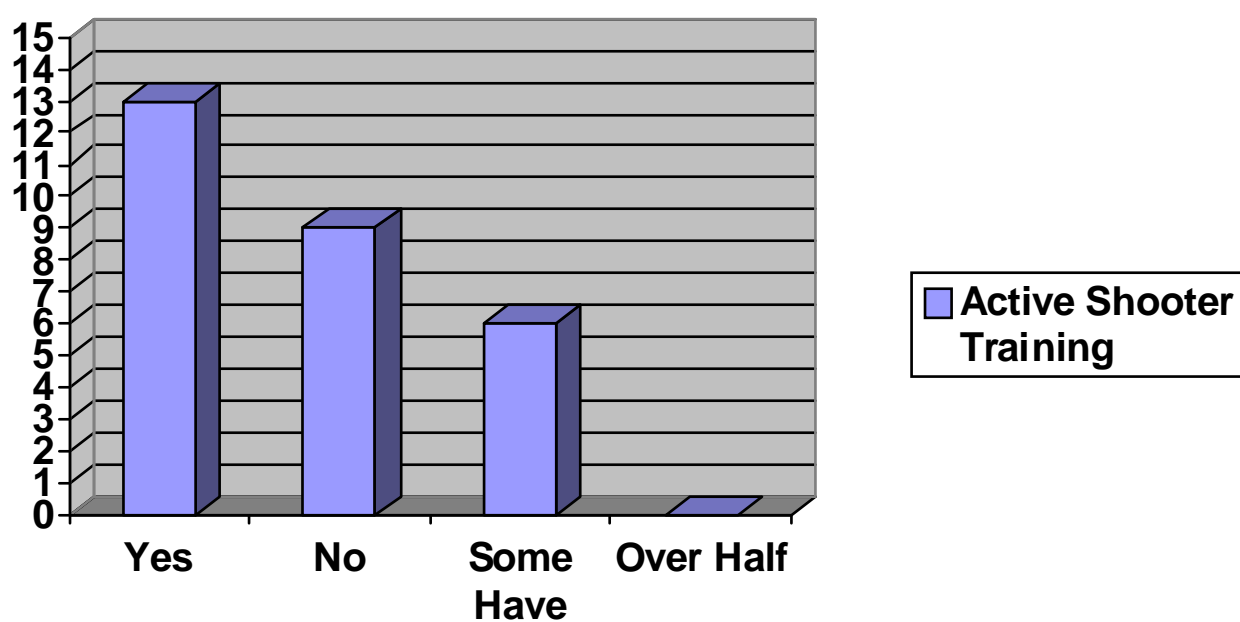


Figure 4. Active shooter training by department.

An important statistic of this survey was the number of officers that have completed “active shooter” training. It is the researcher’s belief that this training is the minimum amount of training needed to prepare an officer as a first responder to a critical incident. Fourteen of the respondents reported that their officers had completed the training, but nine had not. Six agencies reported that some of their officers had completed the training.

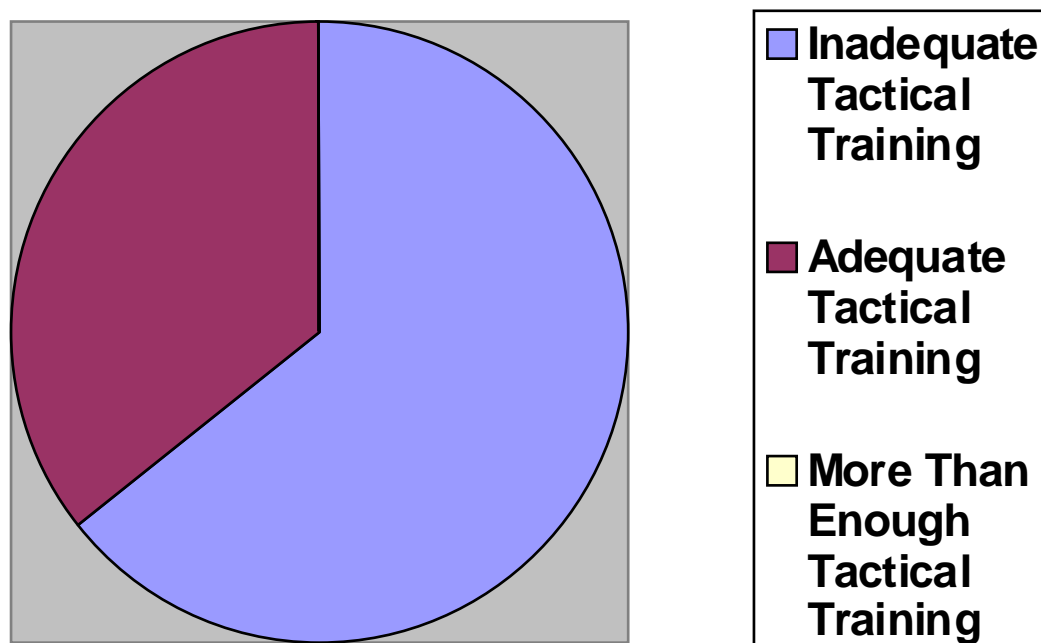


Figure 5. Opinions on tactical training from the regional academy by department.

Although each department carries out some in-service training, most departments rely on the regional academy to provide both mandated and advanced training. The respondent/participants were asked whether they believed the regional academy provided inadequate, adequate, or more than enough tactical training. Eighteen, or 64%, said the academy did not provide adequate tactical training. Eleven, or 36%, reported they believed the academy provided adequate training. None said they provided “more than enough.” When asked whether the department offers officers the opportunity to attend tactical training, 17 responders said yes, while 11 said no.

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSIONS

The problem or issue examined by the researcher considered whether or not small police agencies can respond to a localized critical event with the tactical skills

necessary to bring the event to a conclusion. There is no doubt that officers respond to calls for service on a daily basis and do a remarkable job of keeping the peace. Small departments do not expect four subjects armed with assault rifles, explosive munitions, and body armor to rob the local bank. For most of the departments in the Texas Panhandle, this type of incident will be an extreme challenge. The purpose of this research was to bring awareness to administrators of law enforcement agencies, state, and local governments of the need for tactical training. Training requirements for police officers are set forth by TCLEOSE, which acts on legislation from the state legislature and court cases. The state and local leaders must initiate a change in training for police officers.

The research question that was examined focused on whether or not small police agencies are receiving tactical response training and appropriate firearms training for the assault type weapons that are issued by the agency or personally owned by the officers. Firearms' training does not constitute a priority based on the number of firearms courses offered by the regional academy in the past three years. Area SWAT training is not being offered. Officers are getting practice ammunition for their assault rifles but are not getting instruction in their use.

The researcher hypothesized that little or no training for the individual officer involving tactical situations and rifle training was being provided by TCLEOSE or the regional academy. Agencies are concerned with meeting the status quo in regards to training, which is whatever is mandated in the four year cycle is the training the officers will receive. The researcher concluded from the findings that, in the Panhandle of Texas, tactical rifle training was not being offered by the regional academy on a regular

basis. Basic tactical training in the form of active shooter has been offered, but approximately one half of officers in the Texas Panhandle have not received it. Further, TCLEOSE has not revised the learning objectives in the patrol section of the Basic Peace Officer Course since 1999.

The findings of the research did support the hypothesis. The reasons why the findings did support the hypothesis are due to observations of law enforcement practices in the Texas Panhandle by the researcher over the past 16 years. Small agencies simply do not expend the time or money for training. Mandated training would force agencies to train for tactical situations. Limitations that might have hindered this study resulted because the researcher found it difficult to find published books on the subject. Many of the articles the research found were several years old. The questions on the survey could have been more specific as to exact numbers, like the number of sworn officers. More questions could have been asked about rifle training. Further analysis of the raw data from the survey could be completed concerning comparisons to the numbers of officers in a department.

The study of tactical training in a small law enforcement agency is relevant to contemporary law enforcement because of the rise in the number of mass fatality shootings and potential terrorist assaults, which has brought about a realization that police training for the small agency has not kept up with real world events. Ultimately, the community stands to benefit from the results of this research because law enforcement officers have pledged to serve to the community. The officers will benefit because of gained confidence in his or her ability to respond to a critical incident that will save lives. The departments will benefit because of a reduction in liability when first

responding officers are making the sound tactical decisions needed to resolve critical incidents in a minimal amount of time.

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APPENDIX

Survey to Support an Administrative Research Paper: “Tactical Training in a Small Law Enforcement Agency”

- 1) How many sworn officers in your department including reserves?
 - a) 1-5
 - b) 6-9
 - c) 10-15
 - d) 16-25
 - e) 26-50
 - f) Over 50
- 2) Do you have a Tactical Team?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
- 3) If the answer is yes, is it:
 - a) Full time
 - a) Part time?
- 4) If your answer was part time, how often does the team train?
 - a) Weekly
 - b) Bi-weekly
 - c) Monthly
- 5) How many hours are spent in training per session?
 - a) _____
- 6) How many of your tactical team has completed a “Basic Swat School?”
 - a) _____
- 7) Does your tactical team have a designated budget?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
- 8) If no, then how is it funded?
 - a) General budget
 - b) Fundraisers
 - c) Grants
 - d) Contraband seizures
- 9) Does your department offer officers the opportunity to attend tactical training?
- 10) Is your department training limited to the essentials, i.e.: Tcleose mandated courses?
 - a) Yes

- b) No
 - c) Somewhat
- 11) Has your department received “Active Shooter” training?
- a) Yes
 - b) No
 - c) Some have
 - d) more than half
- 12) Do you believe the regional academy provides:
- a. inadequate tactical training
 - b. adequate tactical training
 - c. more than enough tactical training?
- 13) Does your department provide practice ammunition for:
- d. handgun
 - e. handgun and rifle
 - f. handgun and shotgun
 - g. handgun, rifle, shotgun?
- 14) Does your department furnish assault type rifles for officers?
- a) Yes
 - b) No
- 15) Does your department allow the officers to provide their own assault type rifle?
- a) Yes
 - b) No
- 16) Does your department utilize less than lethal weaponry?
- a) Yes
 - b) No
- 17) Does your department have a mutual aid plan with another department?
- a) Yes
 - b) No