

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

Jiu jitsu for Law Enforcement

**A Leadership White Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Required for Graduation from the
Leadership Command College**

**By
Andrew D. Arnold**

**Nederland Police Department
Nederland, Texas
February 2023**

ABSTRACT

Police officers often find themselves using force in response to suspects that are resisting. Response to resistance is something that all officers will face sometime in their career. However, there is a concern that many officers have a lack of hands-on tactics training to deal with these individuals. Citizen noncompliance is on the rise and officers are experiencing use of force scenarios more often. Law enforcement agencies should integrate jiu jitsu tactics catered toward police encounters into their defensive tactics program. Jiu jitsu for law enforcement does not use strikes and creates safer encounters for police officers and suspects. Jiu jitsu is based in ground grappling which helps officers to maintain control of individuals with minimum force being exerted. This allows officers to buy time for the situation to de-escalate and/or for backup to arrive. There has also been a rise in mixed martial arts training among the civilian population. Mixed martial arts have grappling built in, so officers need to understand how to defend against it. Combined, all these issues make sense for police agencies to invest in their officer's safety by incorporating jiu jitsu into defensive tactics.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	
Introduction	1
Position	3
Counter Arguments	6
Recommendation	10
References	13

INTRODUCTION

Defensive tactics have been a part of law enforcement for many years. The mere use of handcuffs used to restrain a suspect when making an arrest is arguably one of the most often used tactics that police officers use daily. In a perfect world, this would be the end of the initial encounter and the suspect would go to jail quietly, without any resistance. It is when suspects do not go peacefully, and start to resist an officer, that the need for more tactics to help aid the officer in the response to the resistance is clearly shown. The response to resistance is referred to as a use of force. In actuality, the officer is only responding to a suspect's actions and is not generating the use of force. If the suspect was to not resist, the officer would not even need handcuffs.

This shows a need for some type of response to the resistance given by a suspect. When responding to a suspect, officers will resort to what they are trained to do. If not trained properly, officers will also respond with inefficient tactics. For example, officers may resort to some unorthodox style of response, such as a football style tackle that was learned while in high school. There is concern for the lack of hands-on training tactics for police officers to deal with resisting individuals.

Jiu jitsu is a form of martial arts that can be traced back to the ancient Japanese samurai. The samurai used an early form of jiu jitsu when there were no weapons available to them. This early form of jiu jitsu had wrist locks and body throws for the samurai to use as a form of hand-to-hand combat (Independence Hall Association, 2020). Jiu jitsu is known as the gentle art as it does not rely on strikes, rather it is a martial art that depends on submissions and body movement control. This is accomplished by using limb manipulation and ground control techniques. If an officer

can control a suspect's movements and allow them to tire out, then handcuffs can be put on the suspect in a safer way. This results in the officer and the suspect to be in less violent situations.

There is a current trend within law enforcement to offer Brazilian jiu jitsu to police officers (Kruger, 2019). The push is toward more force options for officers. Groups of police officers who train in Brazilian jiu jitsu have started movements toward more effective training. This includes groups such as Invictus LEO Jiu Jitsu Collective and Gracie University, who are trying to push the training out to officers across the United States and Canada. Police-citizen contacts are on the rise according to Erika Harrell, who is a Bureau of Justice Statistics researcher (Harrell, 2020). Officers need to be prepared for noncompliance. Mixed martial arts have been on the rise since the mid-1990s with more and more people having knowledge of grappling strategies. If a resisting subject brings the fight to the ground, the officer needs to be prepared. This is a call for more appropriate police officer training.

When building a defensive tactics program, police departments need to look at multiple variables to determine what type of tactics the department chooses to implement. Some of these variables may include costs and liability. However, the variables that need to stand out to agencies are effectiveness, efficiency, and necessity. Departments need to also look at what type of training to provide to the officers. The use of jiu jitsu tactics will expand the officers use of force options in a way that can de-escalate a situation when a suspect is resisting. Law enforcement agencies should integrate jiu jitsu into their defensive tactics training programs.

POSITION

There are multiple reasons why jiu jitsu tactics designed for police officers should be incorporated into law enforcement agencies defensive tactics programs. One reason is that jiu jitsu tactics for law enforcement has no striking. This does not necessarily mean the officer does not have the ability to use strikes, just as it does not negate the use of other forms of force such as the taser or firearm. The use of tactically placed strikes does have a place on the use of force continuum, but officers need to have other options as well. Officers who utilize strikes alone may end up over relying on these tactics. If an officer hits an individual in the head, this can cause damage to their hand. This can render the officer ineffective in further defending themselves. More than likely, the injured hand would be the same one they use for other force options, such as the taser, baton, and firearms.

Even if the officer is efficient with strikes, there still might be disadvantages to strikes alone. For example, if the other person has a substantial difference in body size to the officer, the officer will be at a disadvantage. According to Horowitz, jiu jitsu was designed as a fighting style that does not rely on brute strength and most significantly without punching (2002). Horowitz (2002) comments that this was evident during the 1993 Ultimate Fighter Championship match between 170-pound jiu jitsu practitioner, Royce Gracie, and 210-pound wrestler, Ken Shamrock, with Gracie defeating Shamrock within sixty seconds by submission (Horowitz, 2002). Shamrock outweighed Gracie by forty pounds. Had these two been in a stand-up fist fight, Shamrock would likely have had the advantage due to his significant size advantage.

Jiu jitsu for law enforcement gives officers a new skill set to help them to not have to rely on strikes. Kruger (2019) states that since police based jiu jitsu does not use striking, it is highly effective because it teaches officers to close the distance in the altercation where striking is of no advantage to either party. This leads into another advantage that jiu jitsu has is in that the officer can more easily control an individual with jiu jitsu accommodated for police tactics. Once the suspect is under control, handcuffs can be safely applied.

Many times, altercations find a way to the ground regardless of whether the individuals in the altercation wanted to bring it there or not. There needs to be a plan in place for the officer if, or when, they find themselves in this situation. Police based jiu jitsu fills this void. Kruger (2019) explains that many police officers do not have a tool in their toolbox to defend themselves in close quarters situations and that jiu jitsu is a tool that can help officers in tight spaces while also teaching them to control suspects. When an officer is on the ground there needs to be a plan to either get back up, control the individual, or go to other force options.

Weiss and Davis (2002) noticed while teaching law enforcement defensive tactics instructors, if the suspect is bigger and taller than the officer, the majority of police fights go to the ground. This observation comes from those who are in the field or teaching officers in the field. Officers do not get to choose the size of their opponents and must be ready to deal with individuals bigger and taller than themselves. The authors claim, to win the officer needs to have good technique using leverage rather than brute strength and physical size (Weiss & Davis, 2002). Weiss and Davis (2002) also commented that these jiu jitsu based techniques for law enforcement give high

attention to weapon retention and escapes from holds. If the fight does go to the ground, the officer will be able to control the suspect with weapon retention and escapes in mind.

All of this goes back to the fact that more and more people are starting to watch, train, and study mixed martial arts. It has become more mainstream in society with some of the major television markets taking interest in airing martial arts competitions on their channels. According to an article written by Schreiber (2011), Brazilian Jiu Jitsu is on the rise within the civilian population largely due to the popularity of the Ultimate Fighting Championship. If there is a rise in the civilian population, officers need to be prepared because they will be encountering at least some of these individuals on the street. Foreman (2010) also saw an increase in people training mixed martial arts and says that officers need to be prepared to defend against it. Officers need to be given the proper training for these encounters.

Neyra (2013) claims that mixed martial arts is a fast growing sport because of the Ultimate Fighting Championship and that children are joining in with learning and fighting. Children are learning how to use different techniques and officers need to be aware of what this looks like and how to respond to these individuals in the future. There are so many kids getting into the sport that legislators are looking to either outlaw it or regulate it (Neyra, 2013). Either way, children are learning how to fight. With the multitude of children learning how to fight, it is inevitable that police officers will be having to deal with some of them when they grow up. Some of these kids are adults already. This is an important take away because if the suspects are training, officers should be too.

There has also been a rise in opioid use globally. A group of researchers tracked the global aspects of opioids through overdose deaths and found the opioid epidemic came to popularity in three waves (Gardner et al., 2022). The first wave was opioids being over prescribed by physicians for pain management, then to the illegal use of natural opioids such as heroin, then to the synthetic version in the form of fentanyl (Gardner et al., 2022). This epidemic of opioid use and misuse finds its way to the law enforcement personnel.

Officers are often the ones who have to respond to individuals who are on these drugs. This can have an adverse effect on the ways that police officers typically train. If officers train solely on pressure point control tactics and strikes, they will not have the right tactics for dealing with someone high on opioids. Opioids are pain reducers which would make these techniques non applicable. On the other hand, jiu jitsu style techniques used to control an individual's movements through leverage would be better suited for these drug users. Kruger (2019) comments that the old tactics do not work on individuals who are either violent or on drugs. These subjects can be controlled and restrained more effectively and efficiently through jiu jitsu for law enforcement.

COUNTER ARGUMENTS

Society has made some changes in the recent years. Law enforcement agencies have to adapt to these changes. Throughout the years, agencies have done a good job of updating other equipment that officers use. Defensive tactics should be updated as well. Kruger (2019) comments that the traditional law enforcement defensive tactics are outdated. Due to the outdated and ineffective tactics, police agencies are in need of a cultural change from the top-ranking officers all the way down to the new recruits

(Kruger, 2019). As with any type of change, there will be several reasons that some agencies are hesitant, reluctant, or even refuse to adjust to. One reason would be the increase in the monetary costs associated with offering the training. It may be argued that the agency cannot afford the costs to train the officers. Another cost that may be associated with training in a martial art is through officer injuries. It may be the agency can afford the training, but they are worried about the liability involved.

These are legitimate concerns. However, there are reasons to invalidate them. Weiss (2002) mentions that integrating jiu jitsu for law enforcement would result in fewer injuries and could also save the lives of officers. These tactics are designed to control and not harm so suspect injuries would be fewer as well. Queiroz et al. (2016) concluded in a study that Brazilian jiu jitsu could be an effective fitness activity to actually improve health in elderly men. Police based jiu jitsu is structured to be even safer than training regular Brazilian jiu jitsu. Defensive tactics instructors are taught to train in safe environments to help mitigate injuries in training. As for injuries in the field, jiu jitsu can help to keep officers from being injured. This is accomplished by using the techniques to control and safely restrain a suspect until backup arrives, or the suspect simply gives up because they have lost their will to continue fighting. Smith (2015) writes that injuries to both staff and inmates went down when a correctional agency incorporated leverage and pressure point tactics to the defensive tactics program. Leverage is a large part of jiu jitsu techniques.

Harvey (2015) mentions the liability that defensive tactics programs must be reviewed and approved to be in compliance with the laws and the courts. Many police based jiu jitsu training providers are offering free subject matter experts for legal

defense to agencies who send officers to be trained as certified defensive tactics instructors. Agencies can actually be held liable if they fail to adequately train personnel. Ross and Brave (2020) mention if agencies fail to train personnel, they can be sued for being indifferent on an individual's constitutional rights under the United States Code 1983 and the agencies need to be prepared to defend against such lawsuits. This shows that agencies need to train officers in tactics relevant to their jobs. Society has changed, making jiu jitsu relevant. Also, the cost the agencies would incur from the civil lawsuit will likely far outweigh the cost to have some of the officers certified to teach the defensive tactics which would also include legally reviewed training with free subject matter expert testimony.

Another argument that agencies may have for not wanting to provide jiu jitsu for law enforcement is there may be a belief that it would actually encourage escalation of violence. This is presumed because jiu jitsu is a martial art. Mistakenly, martial arts are commonly thought to be combative in nature, entrenched in aggression, and promoting violence in practitioners. However, this is far from the truth. Irby (2019) mentions that the practice of martial arts can help an officer have empathy and encourage the officers to help citizens in need. He goes on to mention that it can help the officers to remain calm and control their mind (Irby, 2019)

There have been studies that disprove the notion of escalating violence. Anderson (1994) writes that psychiatric studies show that students of martial arts are better at inhibiting violence and appear quieter and more conscientious. Another study shows similar results. Harwood, Lavidor, and Rassovsky (2017) conducted a study of at-risk youth and found that martial arts was beneficial as an intervention treatment for

violent children. Those who train regularly have more confidence in their abilities and can stay calm under pressure. Anderson (1994) says that criminals can sense when an officer is not confident in their abilities based on aspects of the officer's demeanor, voice, and stance. By showing confidence as an officer, it may dissuade a suspect from wanting to test the officer's abilities.

Jiu jitsu for law enforcement instructors has input on the escalation topic as well. Kruger (2019) goes on to say that jiu jitsu for law enforcement is taught to use techniques without having to escalate to higher forms of less lethal or lethal force such as tasers, expandable batons, or firearms. When officers are confident in their ability to use control techniques, they will be less likely to rely on other force options. Defensive tactics training with jiu jitsu will help to build this confidence.

Another viewpoint from agencies that are against incorporating jiu jitsu for law enforcement is the belief that the taser is sufficient to handle the majority of subjects who display resistance. While the taser is a legitimate police tool, it is not the end all weapon that some believe it to be. Sometimes, there is an over reliance of the taser and misconceived thoughts on its application. According to Smith, Petrocelli, and Scheer (2007) law enforcement agencies hurried to get the taser because it was promised as a safe effective tool for resistant individuals. Police agencies were thrust into technology and started to rely on the taser as a way to get away from officers having to use physical force.

The effect of the taser is neuromuscular incapacitation. This effect locks the suspects movements and gives the officer an opportunity to either subdue the individual and/or place handcuffs on the person. This effect is only for the period the taser is

conducting a spark. While some subjects may give up after they have been given the electric shock, it does nothing to prevent the person from continuing to resist. Agencies and officers have been sued for the claim of excessive use of force attributed to the use of the taser (Smith et al., 2007) Even though the taser may be a safe and less lethal weapon to help officers, it does not protect them from liability or the need to use physical force.

RECOMMENDATION

There is a need to incorporate jiu jitsu into police defensive tactics. Law enforcement agencies should integrate jiu jitsu into their defensive tactics training programs. The lack of hands-on tactics to control subjects who resist officers is a major concern. There has been a rise in noncompliance by citizens with officers experiencing use of force scenarios more often. There are various benefits for agencies to include police based jiu jitsu in their training.

First, jiu jitsu for law enforcement does not rely on striking techniques. It is based on control and leverage. This generates a safer situation for the officer and the suspect. The lack of striking and reliance on leverage involved has a way of leveling the playing field for officers who may find themselves in a confrontation with a larger or taller person. Law enforcement officers are looking to protect others, even a suspect. Jiu jitsu allows for this. Another benefit is the aspect that jiu jitsu techniques allow officers to control a subject on the ground. Often, confrontations will end up on the ground. Jiu jitsu techniques help officers feel more comfortable with this aspect. It teaches officers how to control, escape, and retain their weapons. There has been a rise in the training of mixed martial arts. Officers need to be trained and vigilant to respond to those who have

mixed martial arts training. The opioid epidemic has created a situation where officers are dealing with suspects who are high on drugs and feel no pain. The traditional pressure point control tactics do not work as effectively on drugged people. Since jiu jitsu is based in leverage and joint manipulation and does not rely on pain compliance, it is more effective with people on drugs.

There are arguments against the use of jiu jitsu for law enforcement. These arguments include the costs associated with training, officer injury, and liability. This can be refuted because, if taught correctly, jiu jitsu is no more injurious than other forms of police defensive tactics training. There are health benefits for jiu jitsu training. As far as liability, there is more liability in failure to train than in training jiu jitsu. Also, many jiu jitsu for law enforcement training companies offer subject matter experts to testify in court as part of the program. Another argument against offering the training is that jiu jitsu for law enforcement would encourage escalating use of force situations. Much of the training in jiu jitsu for law enforcement is toward de-escalation. A well-trained officer will have more confidence on the street. The confidence the officers portrays can dissuade individuals from resisting the officer. Lastly, an argument is that the taser eliminates the need for physical force. However, this is simply not true. The taser is a valuable tool, but it does not negate the need to use physical force.

Agencies need to start looking at implementing jiu jitsu for law enforcement. Agencies should look at their policy manuals and clarify if any of the policies need to be updated or amended. Next, the agency will need to find one of the many training providers who offer defensive tactics instructor training based on jiu jitsu techniques. By sending officers to the instructor courses, it will allow these officers to go back to the

agency and teach the rest of the officers. Regular training is needed as this is a perishable skill, just like most other aspects of law enforcement.

REFERENCES

- Anderson, A. (1994). 'Marshaling' and old art. *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, 63(10), 24.
- Foreman, K. (2010). Ground defense skills becoming a necessity. *Kentucky Law Enforcement Magazine*, 9(3), 53.
- Gardner, E. A., McGrath, S. A., Dowlin, G., & Bai, D. (2022). The opioid crisis: Prevalence and markets of opioids. *Forensic Science Review*, 34(1), 43–70.
- Harrell, E. (2020). Contacts between police and the public, 2018 statistical tables. Bureau of Justice Statistics. <https://bjs.ojp.gov/library/publications/contacts-between-police-and-public-2018-statistical-tables>
- Harvey, W. (2015). Wish my FTO had told me. *Law & Order*, 63(4), 54–56.
- Harwood, A., Lavidor, M., & Rassovsky, Y. (2017). Reducing aggression with martial arts: A meta-analysis of child and youth studies. *Aggression & Violent Behavior*, 34, 96–101. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.shsu.edu/10.1016/j.avb.2017.03.001>
- Horowitz, J. M. (2002). Martial arts, Brazilian-style. *TIME Magazine*, 159(21), 9.
- Independence Hall Association. (2022). *The martial arts*. USHistory.org. <https://www.ushistory.org/civ/10d.asp>
- Irby, R. (2019). A Quantitative Analysis of Using Martial Arts Exercise for Stress and Coping Skills in Officers (Order No. 13806106). Available from Criminal Justice Database; ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (2198638423). <https://ezproxy.shsu.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/quantitative-analysis-using-martial-arts-exercise/docview/2198638423/se-2?accountid=7065>
- Kruger, L. (2019). Expanding the use of force toolbox with Brazilian jiu-jitsu. *Blue Line Magazine*, 31(7), 18–20.
- Neyra, D. (2013). Fight kids: The future of mixed martial arts or a detriment to America's youth? A call to regulate children's MMA. *Family Court Review*, 51(4), 727–741.
- Queiroz, J., Sales, M., Sousa, C., Silva Aguiar, S., Asano, R., Moraes, J., Soares, B., Neves, R., Moraes, M., & Simões, H. (2016). 12 weeks of Brazilian jiu-jitsu training improves functional fitness in elderly men. *Sport Sciences for Health*, 12(3), 291–295.
- Ross, D. L., & Brave, M. (2020). Assessing use-of-force liability and law enforcement response to the naked subject. *Law Enforcement Executive Forum*, 20(1), 1–21.

Schreiber, S. (2011). Black belt? *Law Enforcement Technology*, 38(11), 10–15.

Smith, J. (2015). Trends in defensive tactics. *Law & Order*, 63(3), 22–24.

Smith, M., Petrocelli, M., & Scheer, C. (2007). Excessive force, civil liability, and the Taser in the nation's courts: Implications for law enforcement policy and practice. *Policing: An International Journal*, 30(3), 398–422.

Weiss, J., & Davis, M. (2002). Defensive tactics: Ground fighting and weapon retention. *Law & Order*, 50(9), 271-273.