

Policy Recommendations for Cultural Humility Practices in Police Witness Interviews

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THE ISSUE

- Cultural differences between police officers and the communities in which they serve and protect are increasingly receiving more scrutiny.
- Both uniformed officers and police leadership have identified cultural awareness and related available training as barriers to serving their communities (Fletcher et al., 2019; Holohan, 2019).
- Cultural competence is defined by the achievement of skills, attitudes, values, and beliefs which are apparent in individuals and organizations to help navigate unique characteristics among diverse populations.
- Cultural humility places more emphasis on attitudes and approaches of openness, self-reflection, mutual understanding, and life-long learning rather than an outcome of achievement (Fletcher et al., 2019; Molinaro et al., 2019; Nguyen et al., 2021).
- Whether striving for cultural competence or cultural humility, prior research indicates the importance of training and socialization tactics, regardless of the specific framework (Fletcher et al., 2019; Khoury et al., 2021).

CURRENT STATE

- In examining typical policing interactions where cultural sensitivity and humility may be most beneficial, witness interviewing is commonly mentioned (Fletcher et al., 2019; Tipton, 2021).

CURRENT STATE (cont.)

- When examining interviewing techniques, trained officers outperform their non-trained counterparts, and while officers are aware of scientifically proven methodologies, less than 15% of investigators reported receiving training on these methods (MacDonald et al., 2017; Molinaro et al., 2019).

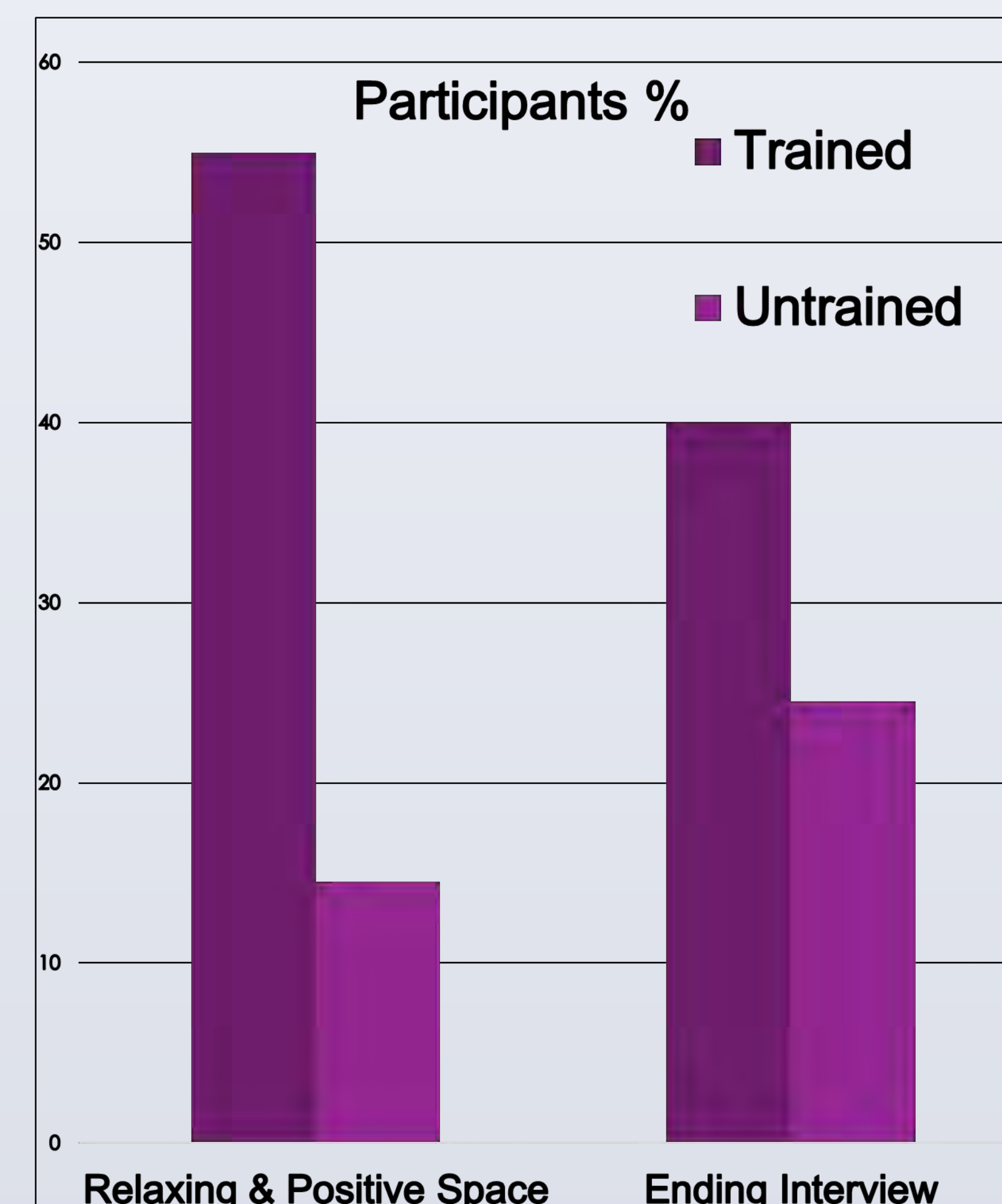


Figure: Percentage of trained and untrained police officers who created a relaxing & positive space in interviews and ended interviews effectively. *Source of Data:* MacDonald et al., 2017

RECOMMENDATIONS

- While information gathering is the primary purpose of interviewing those impacted by crimes, using a cognitive interview approach relies on more open-ended questions, leading to less bias and more opportunity for witnesses to share details as accurately as possible, rather than being influenced by the interviewer (Molinaro, 2019).
- This approach aligns well with care-oriented interviewing, when witnesses take the lead on pertinent details, allowing for healing to occur as well as knowledge transfer (Tipton, 2021).

RECOMMENDATIONS (cont.)

- To create a standardized training policy based in cultural humility that would build on cognitive interviewing tactics, bringing in non-law enforcement perspectives can enhance cultural humility and competence in departments.
- Mirroring therapeutic best practices, inclusive intake forms and other information gathering tools can increase solutions-focused, relationship-building questioning ("how can we help?") versus problem-based questioning ("what seems to be the issue?"), and build on open-ended questions to allow those impacted by crime to define themselves by asking about pronouns, language in which they are most fluent and comfortable, who else lives at home, etc. (Liang & Shepherd, 2020).
- Additionally, specializing training by specific issues or populations, rather than simply based on seniority of service in interviewing, can be of use because it may impact the quality of the interview experience (Derous, 2017).
- In-person mandated training can be difficult for professionals like police, however, a policy that relies on a hybrid curriculum of self-paced, virtual modules, and follow-up in-person discussions may be effective.
- Allowing personal learning virtually, online simulated role plays, and time for self-reflection, followed by discussions can lead to safer exchanges about culturally-charged topics (Egonsdotter et al., 2020; Holohan, 2019).
- Such training can ideally lead to better and more culturally competent interactions between police officers and the communities they serve.

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