

The Public, The Police, and The Puzzle of Information

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LUND UNIVERSITY



The Public, The Police, and The Puzzle of Information

Thesis work submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the MSc in
Human Factors and System Safety

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Under supervision of Dr. Jim Nyce

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Abstract

When humans are involved, things can go wrong. This is a statement as factually true and yet dramatically undefined and dangerously ambiguous as any. No matter the industry or domain, where humans interact with other humans, perfect predictability is impossible and a focus on negative outcomes can seem natural. When outcomes are anything less than ideal and when these events and outcomes are made public, the perceptions and judgements that follow can become flashpoints in history and have very real impacts on those domains and professions.

So, what drives public perception? How is it influenced? Both questions are incredibly nuanced with branches in the "tree" of research and study that go beyond the scope of this specific research. In US policing, there are battles waged over what data and information is confidential, too personal, too hard to understand or explain and what information should the public know and be made aware of? When such delineations are defined, how does the public gain access to the information and what is made of that information in terms of how the public may perceive the incident they are exploring? Most often when it comes to these events, the public is fed very small amounts of information facilitated through 30 second clips as edited and provided by media channels, void of much context-rich information.

In this paper, the authors set out to research how the type of information provided to the public, regarding the police use of deadly force, impacts public perception of the officer's action(s). Focus groups were utilized to represent public perception. Two types of information were provided to each group: context light information- which is representative of the safety science concept of first story and context rich information -which is representative of the safe science concept of the second story. The context light information left the participants to make assumptions about what occurred, filling in the gaps with personal opinions heavily shaped by

previous media releases from similar occurrences. The context rich information showed a shift in perception with participants no longer making assumptions but instead trusting the information provided and expressing empathy for all parties involved including the officer. Participants noted understanding the complexity of the work environment and began to note how the work environment influenced the officer's decision in real time.

Despite the small sample size same/similar themes emerged within the participant groups that suggest a marked impact that context-rich accounts of such events may have on public perception shifting from individual blame to a much wider systems view of such incidents. Future research with larger samples may yield additional primary and sub-themes that could be explored and integrated into systems mapping of police - citizen encounters. Not only for after-action discussions but reverse engineered into police training, budgetary efforts, and citizen awareness campaigns among many efforts to positively impact both outcomes and the overall relationship between officers and their citizens.

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Dedication

To all of the women and men in safety critical industries, thank you for pursuing better for yourselves and our world each and every day! -Liam

To my late brother, Lewis (Seddy) Davis. The beautiful memory of your unwavering love and encouragement to dream the unimaginable and do it- kept me going to cross the finish line.

Thank you. - Natia

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“You don’t climb mountains without a team, you don’t climb mountains without being fit, you don’t climb mountains without being prepared and you don’t climb mountains without balancing the risks and rewards. And you never climb a mountain on accident – it has to be intentional.”

– *Mark Udall*

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1. Introduction

When humans are involved, things can go wrong. This is a statement as factually true and yet dramatically undefined and dangerously ambiguous as any. No matter the industry or domain, where humans interact with other humans, perfect predictability is impossible and a focus on negative outcomes can seem natural. When outcomes are anything less than ideal and when these events and outcomes are made public, the perceptions and judgements that follow can become flashpoints in history and have very real impacts on those domains and professions.

Your authors, one a 26-year veteran of United States policing, and the other having served 20 years in the child welfare industry, we have seen these flashpoints and events create waves of financial, career, trust and political impacts that are far reaching. Often the broader intensity of such impacts is very directly related to the level and reaction of the public who were never involved in the industry or events themselves. In these industries of policing and child welfare, our successes are quite frequently overshadowed and drowned by perceived and at times actual failures as judged by members of the public.

So, what drives public perception? How is it influenced? Both questions are incredibly nuanced with branches in the “tree” of research and study that go beyond the scope of this specific research. In US policing, there are battles waged over what data and information is confidential, too personal, too hard to understand or explain and what information should the public know and be made aware of? When such delineations are defined, how does the public gain access to the information and what is made of that information in terms of how the public may perceive the incident they are exploring? Most often when it comes to these events, the public is fed very small amounts of information facilitated through 30 second clips as edited and provided by media channels, void of much context-rich information.

Sir Robert Peel, considered the father of modern Policing, said “the police are the public and the public are the police” (Lentz, S., Chaires, R. (2007). Inextricably weaving the two together means a relationship between the police and the public that is critical to try and understand and nurture in a way that drives more understanding than ambiguity and cooperation over conflict.

When someone has more information on the event they are learning about, how does that affect their perceptions of decisions made and actions taken? If members of the public had access to other levels of context and information than what they usually have on a police encounter that involved use of force, how would this influence their feelings of the event and decisions made and if so, how?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Public Perception and Opinion

Over decades, research and academic writing has looked at how the public view and opinion is affected and shaped in various ways over various issues. There are few researchers willing to step onto the proverbial limb to state that media sentiment is the direct causation of public opinion. There are, however, those willing to indicate potential links. The statement of “media sentiment predicts public opinion on. . .” was made by Huang et al in their 2021 research on influences of public opinion on China. This may be as convincing a statement to be made whereas there is much grey area on the how’s and why’s public opinion sways on any given topic (Huang et al 2021). It is more broadly represented in the research that media exposure may be a part of shaping public opinion (Page et al, 1987, Baum and Potter, 2008, Iyengar and Kinder, 2010). Further commentators and so called “Experts” can influence media consumers views of any given topic have been explored and reported to be correlated (Page et al. 1987). Researchers have even made correlations between supply and demand as it relates to the media and consumers in those media outlets. Media sources directly respond to what their audiences “want” to see regardless of what may be considered objective information (Jacobs, L & Shapiro, R, 2011). This may have correlation regarding police and citizen encounters in times of social unrest or highly publicized events where persons were injured by the police are focused on in the media.

2.2 Perception of the Police

The inverse of this supply and demand view of public opinion has been described as the anticipated agreement hypothesis whereby people seek the views and information with which they already agree with (Lyengar et al, 2008, Baum, M. & Potter, B, 2008). In these analyses of how the public opinion may be shaped and then applied to matters of police reported use of force, the potential factors of influence need to be more specifically tailored to how these two variables may intersect. How the police use force and whom they use force against and in what circumstances they use force have been widely studied in the last few years in the United States as a reaction to highly publicized events. Much of this focus, however, in the research has been predicated on metrics such as the race of persons involved and other measurements such as relative income of persons involved (Ekins, E. 2016). However, as stated above, the intersections of public perception as it relates to uses of force and how such perceptions are shaped and influenced has been missing in the research when you remove the qualifiers such as race and income.

Further potential bias in this research can creep in when such publications and academic writings contain assumptive descriptors such as “misconduct” and “excessive” as it relates to use of force by the police and how these constructs are viewed both inside and outside organizations (Ouellet M., et al 2019). These terms are at best subjective and are not easily defined in any manner of consistency although some may leave them up to the “what is logical to most” litmus test which is dangerous in academic analysis.

Much of the analysis of public opinion of the police in the US reaches similar conclusion as to how formal versus informal contacts with officers may lead to sentiment in that citizens who have a casual non-enforcement related contact with the police have a higher opinion over those who may be contacted in an investigation or other formalized manner (US DOJ/NIJ, 2003, Rosenbaum et al, 2005). Previous research has acknowledged that because information that confirms pre-existing beliefs is more salient than disconfirming information, it is possible that individuals with pre-existing attitudes toward the police might be inclined to seek out media reports that confirm their feelings rather than to allow for information to conflict (or challenge) with those previously held thoughts (Weitzer R., Tuch S. A. 2005).

For more than 50 years there have been researchers who have sought to analyze how race may affect public opinion of the police (Jacob, H., 1971). In more recent research, the proliferation and availability of “first-person” views of police and citizen encounters through body-worn cameras and other media has been claimed to have dramatic impact on how members of the public may see the police as a whole, an agency or individual officers and their actions (Culhane, S. e al, 2016, Garrison, T. 2018, Ozkan, T. et al, 2018).

It appears that a large gap exists in the literature in evaluating how levels of information available, context-light (like most media accounts) versus context-rich (like the commission findings for example), and how this may affect the public opinion of police use of force. Therefore, this seems an appropriate area to explore.

2.3 Context- Light Incident Analysis

Information gathered regarding law enforcement use of force incidents and released by media outlets typically focuses on human error. This is reflective of what is referred to as the Old View of Safety. In the Old View, Dekker (2014) notes that human error is the cause of trouble within an organization. People are seen as a problem, and behaviors need to be directly modified by more organizational oversight (i.e., additional policy or sanctions) to improve the safety of the organization. System failures, near failure, and critical incidents are the usual triggers for

investigation of human performance. When critical incidents do occur, human error is often seen as a cause of the incident. The repeated finding of incidents occurring from human error has built confidence in the notion that there is a human error problem (Woods, 2010).

Public perceptions of police use of force have been a topic of longstanding interest to scholars. The 2014 officer-involved shooting death of Michael Brown in Ferguson MO and the 2016 murder conviction of a Charleston SC police officer for the death of Walter Scott ignited a national debate about police use of force and led to widespread concern about police relations with communities (Simon, Moltz, and Lovrich, 2021). This ongoing public debate tends to influence the reactions the public has to police use of excessive force. Moreover, the public's opinion and perception of policing and use of force is influenced by the type of information provided. In the face of uncertainty, we must, of course, make a judgement, even if only a tentative and temporary one. The public begins to hold on to a perception that has been influenced by only a fraction of information. Making a judgement means we create a "mental model" or an expected universe, often on partial or biased knowledge (Perrow, 1999). In real time decision making, use of force will be utilized in policing when deemed necessary by the officer. Furthermore, unfavorable outcomes, or incidents involving use of excessive force, can occur due to the complexity and unpredictability of policing.

Teller (2005) explores Normal Accident Theory (NAT) and provides an interesting critique of NAT and how hindsight bias impacts how incidents are investigated. NAT states that significant accidents are an inherent, and therefore inescapable, feature of these technologies, which it identifies as high-risk. When trying to assess accidents, there were several components listed by the author. One has to do with hindsight bias and how it impacts the effectiveness of the accident analysis. Teller argues that hindsight bias has the most damaging influence on the post-mortem analysis of the events leading to an accident. In other words, the very knowledge of the outcome of a sequence of events can frequently blind the reviewer to the situation of those who had to cope with the said sequence before they knew where it was leading to.

Flach (2011) focuses on the term complexity as the number of possibilities in the problem space of accidents. The greater the number of possibilities, which are emergent, the more complex the problem. In these types of spaces, it is impossible to fully eliminate complexity. Instead, the challenge is whether an organization can provide the tools to individuals to be successful within the complexity and achieve more favorable outcomes. In response, Flach poses the fundamental question "coping with complexity" or "coping with uncertainty" (Flach, 2011). When hindsight

bias and outcome knowledge is present, the reviewer, and the public, does not seem to focus on how the officer was able to cope with the uncertainties of the job and profession.

Media headlines often focus on blame and looking to hold someone accountable for an accident or tragedy. Romzek & Dubnick (2018) point out that regarding accountability within the public sector that accountability is a fundamental but underdeveloped concept in American public administration. The term is often used to refer to answerability for one's actions or behavior. Answerability implies that accountability involves limited, direct, and mostly formalistic responses to demands generated by specific institutions or groups in the public agency's task environment. Think of policies, protocols, agency expectations, metrics, etc. More broadly conceived, public administration accountability also involves how public agencies, and their workers, manage the diverse expectations generated within and outside the organization. The context shared by the media to the public rarely focuses on organizational features impacting the front-line decision-making process.

There is a root cause analysis undertone in most public reports of a critical incident involving the police use of excessive force. There is an implication that these incidents can be explained by finding the root – or real – causes. The assumption is in these types of cases that the incident can be described as a sequence, or tree, of causes and effects. The identification of such sequences is an illustration of the WYLFY principle (Hollnagel, 2008). *What You Look For Is What You Find*. The purpose of this type of investigation is to find one or more persons who did something that, in hindsight, was wrong and can be blamed for the outcome. This limited view leads one to categorize the incident as being the result of human error. The environmental features in which the work was completed is not explored or considered nor that these decisions are often made in real time. The consequence to this principle is the limited learning that takes place after the incident. The organization therefore will be less well prepared to deal with future events (Hollnagel, 2008).

The metrics are set, and requirements must be met. Making things more complex, the agency answers to outside entities such as the governor or federal oversight who may also review the metric. In the public sector like the police there are several critical factors here. (1) Whether the ability to define and control expectations is held by some entity inside or outside the agency; and (2) the degree of control that entity is given over defining those agency's expectations (Romzek & Dubnick, 2018). In high-risk organizations, such as policing, rarely is any one officer or employee empowered enough to be solely responsible for a critical decision. Decisions in complex systems, and organizations like the law enforcement community, typically depend on several factors

occurring near or at the same time. Tragedy takes place due to a cascade of events; only in retrospect can they be linked back to a single actor (Nyce et al, 2021).

2.4 Context- Rich Incident Analysis

Dekker notes the progression of how we review critical incidents and introduces the New View of safety. In the New View, these same behaviors often seen as human error are seen instead as a symptom of something deeper happening within the organization. “So, when there are bad outcomes, you must look beyond those people, at the conditions in which they worked at the time” (Dekker, 2014).

Snook (2000) argues that understanding outcomes in complex organizations cannot be linked to one single cause (human error). His approach can be compared to that of a curious investigator identifying and exploring each layer of the organization in which the incident occurred. Dekker (2017) explains that most people believe that unreliable humans are the weakest link in the chain of events leading to a critical incident. The link can be strengthened by more control of the human by providing additional education, training, more oversight, or simply by removing the human altogether. However, as Dekker explains when we focus on more defences (more procedures, more paperwork, more people), many of these must interact with each other to ensure safety. What is missed here is that the more complex a system, the more difficult it becomes to control and more difficult for people to know whether they still have adequate control or understand the system in which they are completing the normal work (Dekker, 2017).

Snook (2000) completes a review of what can be described as a critical incident. The raw data garnered during his research was broken down and rebuilt in a systematic approach with the inclusion of time. This step is about the reconstruction of the events which unfolded in real time to include how organizational processes impacted behaviors (Dekker, 2002). This analysis resulted in a detailed causal map. The causal map provides an in-depth illustration of the system interactions. There is, Snook found, no one cause to the critical incident, but instead multiple systemic influences that led to the accident. The map explores the most proximal influences and then traces influences linked to the hierarchy of the organization to include budget constraints, technology, processes, and procedures all to explore the current working conditions. Snook seems to be mindful of hindsight bias as he reconstructs the events identified in the causal map. The result is the inclusion of systemic contributors such as the pressures and dilemmas that drive human performance over time (Snook, 2000).

Hindsight bias plays an important role in accident reconstruction. There is a tendency to reconstruct events to prevent the past through preventing the future where learning occurs. Hindsight bias can obscure or narrow the view of the actions in retrospect. With this detailed reconstruction, Snook (2000) takes the reader deeper into the system in which the decision is made. Keeping the commitment of the New View in mind, he begins assessing actions to better understand the flow events to include the human interaction with the system at play (Dekker, 2004).

Jens Rasmussen (1983) explains the interplay of the human contribution within a complex system and how cognitive behavior is influenced by the complexity of the system. Everyone will have an individual response to the system based on multiple factors such as experience, prior successes or failures, interpretation of guidance. Modern technical systems are highly automated and at times do not rely on human intervention to control normally planned functions. However, the existence of these systems relies heavily on the support and expertise of human staff to maintain the necessary safe conditions. There is high risk involved within these types of systems and the potential for accidents when the unforeseen occurs and human performance is not predictable. To better understand risk, is necessary to start to explore the interplay between the complex system and cognitive human behavior such as human observation, reactions to stress, and redundancies intertwined in the system (Rasmussen, 1983).

LeCoze (2019) too shows how time constraints, resource constraints, political pressures, and external monitoring systems can impact how decisions are made. There is an opportunity to learn, and front-line staff have an opportunity to explain and discuss the influences on their decisions. While the front line may only hear messaging regarding meeting a metric, there are outside pressures that influence this type of messaging from managers. It is important to understand the roles of executive leadership, particularly those that lead policy creation. Because of the complexity of many work situations in sociotechnical systems, such as law enforcement, workers rely on elaborate and expert mental processes to cope with dynamic contexts, developing sophisticated trade-off capabilities which sometimes prove wrong in hindsight. Supervisors and managers deal with the complex task of balancing multiple dimensions, constraints, and resources. There is much to gain from understanding how their actions can lead to unforeseen outcomes. Without a better knowledge of what is happening from the point of view of the actors, we lack the ability to help managers and staff better understand the trap they can fall into, when attempting to design regulatory practices for inspecting high-risk systems. This can impact too the ability to obtain a fair retrospective judgement regarding the system's failure or success, in the context of a search for legal responsibility (LeCoze, 2019).

Typically, what is presented to the public is what we refer to here as the first story (Cook, 2019). The first story is the deviation from expected practice or procedure. The first story characterises the accident as both a catastrophe and a blunder made by a staff member. The first story is limited in information and tends to imply a single, simple causal link to human error essentially leading to the critical incident. The account simplifies the complexity of the work, and work environment, and is constructed to make the critical incident comprehensible to anyone interested. First stories are easy to remember, easy to recount, and easy to interpret, because the causal mechanism (human error) is always the same. The collection of first stories become instruments for asserting that an organization has ‘a human error problem’. Eventually the collection of first stories reaches a critical mass sufficient to evoke political/organizational action, which usually takes the form of a resolve to eradicate ‘error’ (Cook, 2019).

The chief premise of a systems approach to error is that overall safety improvement requires that old forms of individual interrogation (shame and blame) be replaced by new forms of “system interrogation”. Another premise of a systems approach is that success depends on the collection and analysis of information gleaned from those that complete the normal work (Sharpe, 2003). A system’s approach to error emphasizes responsibility in the prospective sense. We assume that errors are made by choice. Choice of the person making the decision. However, decisions made in real time are often influenced by the environmental features in effect at the time the decision is made. A system’s approach to error challenges the reviewer to not look at the decision made as a human error but instead to understand why it made sense the decision was made. Safety science challenges the reviewer to review the system and the possibility the system influenced the decision. It is taken for granted that errors will occur in complex, high-risk environments, and participants in that system should be responsible for active, committed attention to that fact. Responsibility takes the form of preventive steps to design for safety, to improve on poor system design, to provide information about potential problems, to investigate causes, and to create an environment where it is safe to discuss and analyze error (Sharpe, 2004). Stripped of all the context, first stories are appealing because they are easy to tell and locate the important cause of failure in practitioners closest to the outcome. First stories appear in the press and usually drive the public, legal, and regulatory reactions to failure. The distorted view leads to proposals for solutions that are weak or even counterproductive and blocks the ability of organisations to learn and improve.

Research suggests creating safety within an organization, engagement of those working within the sharp end of the organization needs to take place. This engagement allows the reviewer an opportunity to access the second story. The second story provides a context- rich explanation of

the decision that was made in real time given the systemic features at play such as time constraints, resource constraints, service availability, etc. The pursuit of the ‘second story’, directs the attention of the reviewer to the people completing the normal expected work at the sharp end, or the front-line work. The substance of the second story resides at the sharp end where organizational structures such as policy, protocol, or procedure is applied. Sharp end practitioners who work in this setting face of a variety of difficulties, complexities, dilemmas, and trade-offs and are called on to achieve multiple, often conflicting, goals. Safety is created here at the sharp end as practitioners interact with the hazardous processes inherent in the field of activity in the face of the multiple demands and using the available tools and resources. With the information gathered from the second story, organizational efforts to improve safety are directed at the systemic features such as the multiple demands, constraints, tools, or resources that appear at the sharp end. Improving safety depends on investing in resources that support practitioners in meeting the demands and overcoming the inherent hazards in that setting (Woods & Cook 2002).

3. Research Design

3.1 Epistemology and Methodology

Both functionalist and constructivist perspectives were considered for this research. This thesis looks at how the individual citizen, government and media interact, and influence each other when it comes to societal events like police incidents (Crossman, A. 2020) as well as how people in these circumstances construct their knowledge of such events (Gerstenmaier, J., Mandl, H. 2001). Here the focus is on how context light and context rich levels of information may inform these interactions and construction of events.

Functionalism seeks to explain how the parts of society work together and influence individual behavior (Pope, W. 1998). Constructivism sees knowledge as an active process whereby knowledge is constructed and built on other knowledge, often as a social activity (Hendry, GD. 1996 and Jemberie, LW., Awan, R. (2021). A constructivist looks at knowledge can include thoughts and beliefs that were not even conscious until brought it to the forefront of the individual (Boden, MT. Gross, J. 2013).

In these regards, analyzing how public perception may be influenced by information available in police use of force incidents touches on the construction of social relationships between the public, the police and information and the role media plays in this. In addition, how knowledge is constructed by members of the public will be analyzed in light of how participants built the knowledge of the incident used in this research.

As a police force is a function of the government and that government is a result of what the people deem necessary for society to function. Given this, the interactions and influences between these parts of the whole are critical to understand. There is also a fundamental interdependency between the government and the public so understanding how people form their knowledge and perceptions of government agents and how actors and government agents influence each other is critical to understand and building future successful relationships.

3.2 Interviews and Participants

For this research, we adopted a mixed methods design approach. Mixed methods involve the collection and “mixing” or integration of both quantitative and qualitative data. This method allowed us to integrate the two sets of data for analysis and provide additional insight into research problems or questions. We utilized a concurrent embedded design where we captured both sets (qualitative and quantitative) at the same time. During the analysis process, the quantitative data will be used to support the qualitative data captured (Creswell and Creswell 2017).

To gather the qualitative data, we utilized an experimental design using two focus groups. We began with creating a case file including:

- **Officer’s Report:** The report was loosely based on an actual event in which a male was reported to have a gun in his hand, standing in the middle of an intersection. The culmination of this event was that one officer used lethal force, shooting and killing the male subject with a gun in the intersection. Names and locations were changed to protect the privacy of the actual officers involved and to ensure the participants were not influenced by previous knowledge of the incident.
- **Media print article** of this same event.

Both focus groups received the same case file. However, Focus Group B received additional information.

- **Critical Incident Review:** This information provided additional context to the officer’s decision-making process at the time of the critical incident, the environmental features or conditions in which the decision was made and how those conditions may have impacted the officer’s decision in real time.

The results of a critical incident review are to help provide more information and less assumptions about the incident under review as described by Nyce et al. (2021):

A critical incident review consists of “systematic mappings” that attempt to move from participants’ understanding of the first story (i.e., who did what wrong that caused an incident) to the second story (i.e., a view that incorporates multiple perspectives and points of view). Everyone involved in the incident is asked to reflect on what happened at the time. Staff then are asked to identify all of the steps that were taken during the incident and why these specific steps were taken. These meetings allow staff to examine in detail what happened and why various steps were or were not taken. Systemic mappings also bring to light variations in unit goals and missions that can exist in complex organizations. Staff in only one unit of the organization may not be aware of how the goals of another unit may impact their own work. They can reveal things that to the staff involved do not seem relevant to whatever the incident was (Nyce et al., 2021, p.81).

This research included 10 participants in two focus groups with 5 participants each. There were 6 identifying themselves as female and 4 identifying as male. Within the group, 6 identified as white/Caucasian, 1 as African American and 3 preferred not to answer regarding ethnic/racial identity. For age range, 3 identified as 31-40 years of age, 2 as between 41-50 years of age, 1 between the ages of 61-70 and 1 as between 81-90 years of age. Three participants declined to provide their age. All participants were current members of or had served as representative(s) on a “citizen engagement committee” for the City of Prior Lake, MN. USA. This engagement committee is a volunteer group of citizen residents that advises the City on matters that may affect citizens ranging from parks and recreation programs, land development issues and other civic issues that do not include police matters.

3.3 Research Limitations

A primary limitation of this research may be the smaller sample size in terms of extrapolating to the general populus. While the demographics of the focus groups were varied, a larger sample size group may provide additional data and context for consideration on the larger impact of a context-rich account of an event.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

It should be noted that one of the researchers for this paper served as the Chief of Police in the same city in which the focus group participants resided and served on the volunteer committee. While the researcher had no process or other influence on the function of any participants within

the confine of the committee, it cannot be known whether being an active police officer and asking questions as to public perception on a police event influenced each other.

3.5 Analysis

Our research utilized focus groups given the same information (but with one group receiving additional material). Participants were asked to assign their own meanings and developed their own interpretations of the details and information they were given. From the analysis viewpoint of ourselves as researchers, we were not seeking to “prove” that the availability of context rich information in an event positively or negatively affects opinion as to the legality of police use of force. Simply, we wanted to see if the information provided had an impact on such opinion formations.

With a limited scope and prescribed set of questions for each group, we collected the answers and then sought to find consistent themes of answers using Braun and Clarke’s 6 phases of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006.) Additionally, we sought to identify any outliers. What reason(s) may exist for such outliers and what may be the reasons for the consistency among participants? Did the group with context rich information form a consensus re: the use of force where perhaps the group with context light information formed multiple differing opinions? Why might that be? Because we are seeking to find how public opinion may be influenced in such events and whether context rich information in fact has any impact on those opinions, allowing the participant group(s) to interact with the given information in different ways provides us with the opportunity to then interrogate their answers through the lens of their experience with the differences in context rich information.

We were attempting to collect data on personal perception. It was our goal to understand if context rich information has any type of impact on public perception when reviewing an incident. Abductive reasoning is the most fitting analytical perspective to take here. Abductive reasoning allows us to have the hypothesis that the type of information the public receives impacts their perception. In most instances, the public base their perception of the information provided by media outlets. The information gathered from a systems mapping contains perceptions from front line officers along with other organizational members who can provide more insight to why the decision made sense at the time to use excessive force. This is a novel notion and exploration. It is unclear if such context rich information has been presented to the public in most of the critical incidents that have occurred across the United States.

4. Results and Analysis

Information is presented in two distinct sections. The first results section is identified as “Context-Light” as described previously. To begin each focus group, a context-light account of the police-citizen event was presented to participants. The second results section is described as “context-rich” as detailed previously and this will be discussed separately below.

Table 1:1

Context Light Information (First Story)	Context Rich Information (Second Story)
Blame- Human Error	System Influence
Assumptions (Counterfactual Reasoning)	Not Identified
Information- misleading/media mistrust	Information- Trust
Empathy – Victim	Empathy- Worker and Victim

4.1 Context-Light

For this section, participants were given two separate documents to review. The first was a print-media account of the event. See index #1. The second document was a media-provided and redacted version of the primary officer’s police report. See index 2. Both documents were provided to participants prior to the focus group session.

Four common primary themes could be extracted from the context-light section of the focus groups. A brief description of each theme is provided, and exemplars given to create an explanation for the theme’s appearance. A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set (Braun and Clarke 2006.)

4.1.1 Blame – Human Error

“There is almost no human action or decision that cannot be made to look flawed and less sensible in the misleading light of hindsight.” – Sidney Dekker, *The Field Guide to Understanding Human Error*

Blame can be described as assigning responsibility for a fault or a wrong (Lozano, E. B., & Laurent, S. M. (2019.) Blame is well documented in research and literature (Lupton, B., & Warren, R. (2018), Vince, R., & Saleem, T. (2004.)

This concept of responsibility ran throughout the discussion with only context-light information available. Participants pointed to information and actions with a singular focus on either the officer or the citizen subject at multiple points in the event. Participant #2 when speaking of the citizen subject in possession of a gun stated “They made multiple requests to the guy to, you know, put the gun down. He didn’t put the gun down that’s you know, to me, that’s saying shoot me.”

Blame focus was also represented through counterfactual reasoning, which is discussed in the literature (Van Hoeck, N., Watson, P. D., & Barbey, A. K. (2015), Roese N. J. (1997.) Generally, it is described as the human tendency to create possible alternatives to life events that have already occurred; something that is often contrary to what happened (Roese N.J., 1997).

The utilization of words such as “should” was repeated in areas of the context-light discussion. When discussing the media and report-provided historical contacts with the suicidal subject, participant 3 stated “[the] guy had some history in the neighborhood so maybe some intervention should have happened before this incident came to this point.”

Blame focus was not limited to the individuals involved in this context-light environment. Participant 1 proposed that the healthcare system “failed” to get the suicidal individual the help needed saying “it wasn’t enough that got to this point.”

Participant 4 delineated that “blame” needed to be found on either one side or the other when they stated “is it blame for the individual having these problems, or is it blame for the officer killing the guy. So, it’s kind of like who’s to blame. There’s lots of levels of blame.” One participant (8) went so far as to say that based on the information “it almost seemed like you knew where it was going to go, it seemed like a person that wanted to have a outcome that happened.” When looking at the style of writing that the media account provided was done in, participant 8 assigned blame stating that the coverage of stories “like these” seems to “humanize the officer and dehumanize the [suicidal] person” appearing to refer to the participant’s past reading and exposure to other events of this type.

Participants consistently discussed the idea of wanting alternate methods and ways of handling the situation assigning apparent blame for the officer’s choice to use deadly force with participant 2 even using the word “extreme” when speaking of deadly force use.

4.1.2 Assumptions

Assumptions may be described as unexamined beliefs, that may be conscious or subconsciously attended to (Delin, P & Chittleborough, Philip & Delin, C. (1994.) Gigerenzer goes further to explain that assumptions are heuristics that allow us to operate within our natural world more efficiently (Gigerenzer G, Gaissmaier W. (2011.) In the context of this research we have conducted, the prevalence of assumptions that participants expressed may be seen as a manner and method that helped them put a bigger “puzzle” together to be able to understand these police – citizen encounter where perhaps more context-rich information was not available to consider. The theme of assumptions was even made express in some participants discussion of the event.

In this context-light section, the perceived dichotomy of those with authority (police) and those without (suicidal subject) stood out to participant 8 who said:

“I think where the assumption for the person in the position of authority is that they’re right and the assumption is that the person who is on the other side of it is wrong, and it. . . seems a picture is very easy to tell that story.” Participant 7 openly spoke of assumption and bias where the sentiment and judgement “has a lot to do with your journey and how you perceive.”

This concept of assumptions was brought to light further in discussion regarding how perhaps media outlets, in their reporting, make their own assumptions as to the credibility of information and illustrated a level of assumption that the reader (participants) may make about the “upstream” assumptions that perhaps the reporting was based on. Participant 8 stated “we’re supposed to trust them, right? Especially in the media, it’s really easy to just say, oh, what did the cops say? That will write the story.”

A further demonstration of the natural tendency to make assumptions and accept them thereby exemplifying that assumptions are beliefs that go unchallenged is a statement that participant 10 made when speaking about the assumption that media and reported accounts are assumed to be true by commenting “...you have to take what’s given, what’s provided.”

A stark assumption that was made surrounding a sub-theme of mental health issues, expressed by participant 10, was that if social worker(s) could have been present in this event and in other events that “it would reduce the amount of death that happens.” This statement made without any information provided as to social workers who may or may not have been involved nor any information as to effectiveness metrics of such initiatives anywhere in the US.

Lastly in regard to this theme of assumptions, participants were found to apply their own personal life experience(s) to the information given when making statements such as participant 9 who said “obviously he [suicidal subject] has mental health issues. I’ve been in these situations personally.” This concept of persons applying their own experience to fill in supposed information gaps may merit further study as to how it may affect perception in context-light situations.

4.1.3 Misleading Information / Media Mistrust

“Most people in most countries have a distrust – even a loathing, it would seem – of the news media.” (Newman et al. 2018)

A strong theme among both focus groups was expressed as a mistrust of the media or information provided by the media that was perceived as misleading. This area of consideration has been widely studied in the literature. Connections have been made between this issue of trust in the news and media and polarization of populations (Ladd, 2011.) This polarization may be another theme to be explored in furtherance to context-light and context-rich as it relates to police and citizen encounters.

Participants in both groups pointed out noticed differences between the redacted released version of the police officer’s report and the media generated account itself. Participant 1 made the statement “another issue it goes to, you know, the officer’s perspective in the officers report and then how it’s portrayed in the media to us as citizens.” This theme was proliferated with the conceptual question of why one “version” of the events had some info and why the media version did not have as much of that same info. This may be referred to as “selectivity of topics” [and info] that has again been studied in the literature (Koring / Matthes 2007.) A specific example of the perception of selectivity of what the media reported in this event was indicated by participant discussion surrounding personal recollection of previous police – citizen events, not this specific research event, in which media published accounts showed a police officer in uniform with a badge and what is commonly referred to as a “mug shot” of the victim (participant 8.)

This idea of information left out was perhaps made most pointedly by participant 11 who questioned that the “[media] chose to leave pieces and parts out of it. I was quite irritated quite frankly by the reporting.” Discussion continued with participant 7 stating “I don’t think a lot of reporters do so well on. . .keeping their feelings out of things and giving us. . .the facts.”

Repeatedly, participants pointed out that they felt that the media account was “missing a lot of details [that] makes people jump to conclusions so quickly.” (Participant 5) This expressed feeling of information missing even led participant 3 to conclude that they felt that “[it] kinda led you to think that there might be someone hiding something.” Likewise, participants stated that they wanted additional information with participant 1 summarizing the views of many by stating “Just there's always more than one side to the story, and I would just like to see from their perspective. You know it was.” Participant 11 stated that they “had” to make assumptions as to what happened because “information was missing and in a report [I] expected to see more.”

A sentiment of possibly conditioned responses created by media accounts was expressed by participant 8 when they stated “. . . I don't know, as a media consumer, I felt like [I've] seen this story a bunch of times.”

4.1.4 Victim-Focused Empathy

This event, as synopsised previously, resulted in the death of a citizen after the application of deadly force by a police officer. Information as provided indicated that the subject was a “suicidal” person. In this regard, participants comments and questions focused primarily on the suicidal subject himself including asking about what had been done to “help” the subject before the confrontation with the police officer. “I mean, he clearly did some issues that needed to be addressed beforehand” expressed participant 3. Another stated “It's mental health for the individual. Does that mean he wasn't getting help?” (Participant 5) Repeatedly, participants used counterfactual language such as “should” when making statements that the suicidal subject “should” have gotten the help that he needed.

Participants indicated assumptions that the subject male had not received assistance prior to these police contact without any such information available to them in this context-light section. “Maybe it's just society that kind of left this kid in the lurch” stated participant 4. The same participant made statements assuming that the male subject “certainly must have acted up in school.”

Other participants focused on their belief that the subject only wanted to harm himself with participant 5 asking “is he really harming others?” Participant 7 stated that they believed from the context-light information provided that the suicidal male “had [it] in their mind, I need attention. I need help.” Yet another indicated that they thought the media coverage was trying to blame the victim because they reported that he (victim) was holding a gun, and that manner of reporting was concerning.

A final thematic example for this victim-focused empathy is a statement made by participant 8 who said “...in our country (US) it’s if you’re crazy and you have a gun, you’re dead. If you do and you wave it around in public, you’re dead. But there should be ways for our Law Enforcement to handle people who are in a crazy moment to not be dead.”

4.2 Context Rich Information

As previously discussed, both focus groups were provided with a second set of information that included more information surrounding the incident. The information provided included the challenges and barriers to being able to complete some of the expected practices by the involved police officers. During this portion of the focus group, we saw a shift in perspective given the type of information provided. During our review of the data, there were 4 themes that emerged: Systemic Change, Trust, Empathy, Credibility.

4.2.1 Information

A discussion took place after the participants were granted time to read over the second case file. See indices 3 and 4. It was apparent that the participants saw a difference in the type of information that was provided in comparison to the information provided in the first case file. The information provided reliable and first-hand information from those involved in the incident without resorting to forming their own opinion as to what occurred. Participant 1 stated “But you can see from the full report that some of the missing elements, and some of the questions that we brought up like, was there a crisis team? Why wasn't there a counselor, a mental health specialist? We can see that they did try to get one. They couldn't get a response, and [participant 2] point about was less than lethal force an option, and we're able to see that.” Participant 5 noted “I definitely feel like the more information with it definitely helps clarify the stories that are in that could have been manufactured from this small amount of detail.”

The participants also noted that not only did the amount of information impact their perception but also who reports the information, and the source of that information impacts their perception. Participant 9 stated that “we cannot trust the media. We can't trust that people will do journalism appropriately, and we can't trust that the media is actually saying what actually happens because they're going to leave out critical information that helps change our perspective.” The participant goes on to explain that the second case file information, which includes information from the officer directly involved along with administrators and community partners, impacted the way they viewed the incident. “I would just have to say that it gives me a clear perspective. If you don't have the complete story, you're kind of making assumptions”.

When asked if the information changed their perspective the response was as follows: “I just felt like I was missing information that was critical to the whole situation at hand. I would say, it's for the better, because it's more informed. You can actually picture the situation when you have all the details.” This response is reflective of being able to understand why the decision made sense in real time.

Altogether, 10 of the 11 participants reported the information provided in the second case file provided more insight into the decision made and agreed that the information changed their perspective of the incident. The participants no longer had to make assumptions about why the officer resorted to use of deadly force and believed that the decision was done so prematurely to a perspective of seeing the use of deadly force as an option that made sense in real time for the safety of the officer and other citizens. Moreover, the participants trusted the information provided. Participant 7 stated “another thing that came to mind was something of credibility. When you get a report like that and you see who all is in the room now, it's not just based off one person's point of view or what they have seen. This is multiple people's morals, character, everything coming into play into the validity of the facts that are being displayed. It almost turns the wheel for you 365 degrees because it's not just one person's perception.”

4.2.2 Empathy

Empathy surfaced in two different ways during the exercise. After the review of the first case file, there was empathy for the victim. After the participants had time to review the second case file, empathy was shown for the officer. The officer's report provided insight to the barriers experienced while attempting to summon assistance from contracted community resources while encountering the victim and internal departmental resources. The officer was left without the assistance of these resources for multiple reasons outside of their control. After being provided with the case file with the second story, the participants were able to have their questions answered whereas the first case file left them with making assumptions as to what occurred.

Participant 1 stated “I have more empathy towards the officer, because it would be another element that would have been out of his control. The officers did not want it to end the way it ended, and they did everything that they could, but that they had the means to try to help this individual”. This participant made a direct comparison to the first case file (representing the first story) and how the second case file (representing the second story) as to how empathy impacts one's perception of a situation. “I guess the empathy for this impacts perception. For the people who would read the initial media report and would judge negatively because they didn't know the full story and see all steps. I feel like just society as a whole. We're not as empathetic as we should

be, and the whole try to view it from another person's or walk a mile and another person's shoes." After reviewing the second case file, participant 11 noted the multiple challenges and barriers the officer was faced with and stated, "I think that we are not equipped in any way to deal with the mental health problems". The participant showed empathy for what the officer was tasked with during a crisis moment and showed empathy towards the officer. During the conversation after the review of the first case file, this participant noted trying to show restraint and not pass judgement based on their own experiences and knowledge. They did not note who or how but did want more information to support their perception of the incident. Participant 10 also expressed empathy for the officer. "So that led with a little more empathy for me. With getting essentially the whole picture like that was very, very detailed. It laid out exactly what happened. And made me feel for the officer in that situation of where they really did try what sounds like everything that they could."

4.2.3 System Influence

With the information from the second case file (representing the second story), participants were able to identify the influence(s) to the officer's decision to use deadly force. These influences were not due to the officer's personal decision but were instead due to the environmental features that existed within the workplace such as resource and time constraints, service availability, etc. Statements were made such as "obviously the funding to give the police departments the resources with the mental health and the non-lethal force to help in these situations is needed, but really for preventative and for the future." The participants began to move away from trying to "fix" the officer and began identifying systemic changes or fixes to prevent events such as the one presented from happening again. "We need those resources like cushions that need to be allocated early on." Participant 5 stated the fact that our society does not put enough emphasis on resources, or value at all on mental health. We don't do it enough." This participant began to express their concern regarding the resource constraints that exist and how this constraint is impacting the officer's ability to have outcomes where deadly force is not the only resource available.

Participant 9 noted the value of asking those who do the work every day to provide information regarding their work environment and what is needed to support their work. "What came to mind for me was again not going to the people. They're actually on the ground doing the work. Asking them what they need to actually do their job properly and be in that space where they could actually maybe prevent". The participant went on to discuss how these types of efforts (i.e. engaging front line workers) in any industry would be helpful. "Regardless of if it's police

departments, health care, it doesn't matter what company, if they're not going to the people that are actually doing the work to see if they can find solutions, I think they're missing a grand opportunity to really change the outcomes of critical situations such as these.”

Initially, participant 4 noted that the additional information was more of an excuse instead of an explanation of the environmental features impacting the officer’s work. “What struck me was the additional information was kind of a making excuses for money. We don't have enough people. We don't have enough equipment. We don't have enough training, which is something we are truly hearing. In real life, it’s not just law enforcement, but everywhere we're short of people. We're short of equipment.” However, later in the discussion, the participant discussed how these systemic influences impact police departments across the United States. “The need for funding... and in the last few years the defunding kind of ideas that are out there...funding is important. And it's just something that we all have to address through our political systems and help the law enforcement be able to do their jobs better.”

5. Discussion

The purpose of the research was to identify any change of perspective after being provided more information pertaining to an officer – citizen incident involving use of force. More specifically, how the information pertinent to the environmental features, which may impact a worker’s ability to successfully complete the required work and achieve a desired outcome, impact the public’s perception regarding the police and what can be learned to potentially positively impact future events.

5.1 Second Story

The information provided in the second case file was context-rich, representative of the second story. According to Macready (2000) in a review of Richard Cooks’ analysis of the second story, human error—and how to prevent them— can best be understood by piecing together the “second story”: the story that emerges after the “first story” that blames human error has faded. Often, the first stories are misleading, incomplete, and virtually useless when trying to decide how to make a system safer. “The subtle weaknesses of the system, invisible on superficial examination, which contribute to failures, and the steps that the human components of the system have taken to cope with those weaknesses lie in the second story,” (Macready, 2000). In this research, providing a context-rich second story provides a much deeper understanding of the many factors that may have contributed to or led to eventual decisions and outcomes. The first story is what is usually provided to the public, often leaving out significant levels of information

contributing to the overall event and individual decision-making process. This limitation in information may foster the opportunity for the public and others to manufacture an analysis of what may have occurred.

5.2 Systems Thinking

As previously stated, the second case file included a critical incident review. This critical incident review includes the officer's full perspective along with capturing the challenges and barriers experienced when attempting to complete the normal work. Not only is the officer's complete account provided, but other agency and community stakeholders are invited to review the incident and provide their perspective to the overall incident and not simply what the officer encountered or decided. The results of a critical incident review provide more information and less assumptions about the incident under review as described by Nyce and colleagues (2021):

A critical incident review consists of “systematic mappings” that attempt to move from participants' understanding of the first story (i.e., who did what wrong that caused an incident) to the second story (i.e., a view that incorporates multiple perspectives and points of view). Everyone involved in the incident is asked to reflect on what happened at the time. Staff then are asked to identify all of the steps that were taken during the incident and why these specific steps were taken. These meetings allow staff to examine in detail what happened and why various steps were or were not taken. Systemic mappings also bring to light variations in unit goals and missions that can exist in complex organizations. Staff in only one unit of the organization may not be aware of how the goals of another unit may impact their own work. They can reveal things that to the staff involved do not seem relevant to whatever the incident was.

As expressly stated by the participants, this additional information improved their understanding of the incident and what was once identified as human error and assigning culpability, changed to fixing the environmental features such as service availability, resource constraints, etc. Delving into the ‘whys’ of action seemed to have promoted a recognition of complexity that had been hidden behind the linear, causal notion of policy adherence (Nyce et al., 2021.) This change to a discussion on the entire system and its influences opened a conversation to see many distinct aspects of the same singular incident that when only context-light info was available seemed singularly about blame. It is in this widened view that perhaps significant future impacts may be seen.

5.3 Empathy, Trust, Change in Perception

Empathy and compassion surfaced unexpectedly during this research. After the review of the first, context-light case file, participants showed empathy for the victim and questioned the actions of the police officer. After review of the context rich information contained in the second case file, the empathy shifted to focus on the police officer and what the officer endured during the incident. The responses showed that empathy can impact the public's perception. Also impacting the empathy was the source of the information. The participants trusted the information based on knowing who completed the review of the incident and that multiple perspectives were involved including representatives from the community. Prior research has shown the induction of empathy to be an effective means of changing attitudes toward members of stigmatized groups (Oliver, et. al, 2012). One participant specifically noted the credibility of the full report document in comparison to what was released by the media.

6. Conclusion

This research represents the attempt to evaluate the impact of the second story, context-rich levels of information on public perception in police use-of-force events. This was done with the hopes of unpacking the potential value of such context-rich accounts not only for potential effect on public perception in future events but for police organizational learning within and relational to the citizens they serve. Despite the small sample size as indicated in the limitations discussion, same/similar themes emerged within the participant groups that suggest a marked impact that context-rich accounts of such events may have on public perception shifting from individual blame to a much wider systems view of such incidents. Future research with larger samples may yield additional primary and sub-themes that could be explored and integrated into systems mapping of police – citizen encounters. Not only for after-action discussions but reverse engineered into police training, budgetary efforts and citizen awareness campaigns among many efforts to positively impact both outcomes and the overall relationship between officers and their citizens.

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Appendix A – Research Participant Consent Form

Consent for Participation in a Focus Group for Research

Lund University

Master's Program: Human Factors and System Safety

Research Study/Thesis Topic: Public perception of police use of force.

Researchers:

Natia Ellis

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William (Liam) Duggan

Email: liamduggan499@gmail.com

Phone: 1-xxx-xxx-xxxx

Purpose of Study: You have been asked to participate in a research study which is looking to understand how information provided to the public, after an act of police use of force, impacts the public's perception of the act and actions of the police.

Voluntary Participation: This discussion is voluntary. You do not have to take part in it if you do not want to. If any part of the focus group session, or questions asked, make you feel uncomfortable, you do not need to answer them, and you may leave the group at any time for any reason.

Risks: There are no risks involved in taking part in this research project.

Privacy: Your privacy will be protected. Your name, or any identifying information, will not be used in any report that may be published. The discussion will be kept confidential. While participants in the focus group discussion will be asked to keep what is discussed during the session confidential, this cannot be guaranteed.

Recording: Each focus group session will be digitally recorded and transcribed for further analysis. The recording will be done to ensure accurate depictions of the participants' perspectives and their quotes related to the session. Once the data has been analyzed by this researcher, both recordings will be permanently deleted.

By signing below, the participant understands the purpose of this focus group, the intent of this consent form and agrees to participate as outlined above.

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date

Appendix B – Media Account

ID's released in Johnsonville officer involved shooting

Deputy Mark Krans has been with the Johnsonville County Sheriff's Office for eight years.

The Bureau of Criminal Investigation (BCI) has identified the officer who discharged his weapon during an officer-involved shooting early Thursday in Johnsonville.

Deputy Mark Krans has been with the Johnsonville County Sheriff's Office for eight years. He is on standard administrative leave. The Ramon County Medical Examiner's Office has identified the subject as Kevin William Reynolds, 23, of Lake Georgia.

The BCI is investigating the incident at the request of the Johnsonville County Sheriff's Office. Shortly after midnight Thursday, the BCI reports Johnsonville County deputies responded to a 911 call of a suicidal male near the intersection of Lake Georgia Avenue and 34th Street North.

When deputies made contact with Reynolds he was holding a gun and told officers he wanted to kill himself, according to the BCI's preliminary investigation. Officers made repeated attempts to persuade him to put down the gun. At one point, Deputy Krans discharged his firearm, striking Reynolds multiple times.

The BCI says deputies immediately rendered medical aid. Reynolds was taken by ambulance to Mercy Hospital where he was pronounced dead.

BCI crime scene personnel recovered a handgun from near Reynolds' body. Body cameras and dash cameras captured portions of the incident, but not the totality of the incident.

When complete, the BCI says it will present its findings to the Johnsonville County Attorney's Office for review.

Appendix C – Officer's Report

(Excerpts as released and covered by media)

4/14/18

Deputy M. KRANS

On April 14, 2018, I was dispatched to a possible suicidal male with a gun in the area of Lake George Avenue and 34th St North in Johnsonville County.

The information provided from dispatch was as follows: The reporter notified police at 11:50 PM CST that the subject male was possibly suicidal and threatening to harm himself. It was suspected that the male was in possession of a handgun and making verbal threats to harm himself. The initial reporter was familiar with the male as the male had grown up in the neighborhood and had a long history of mental illness to include self-harming behaviors as well as harming others or vandalizing property when experiencing mental health episodes. It was reported to dispatch multiple times that neighbors heard the male subject yelling in the middle of the intersection, and they believed he was holding a gun to his own head.

As I exited my squad car, I saw a male yelling “leave me alone” and it appeared clear to me that he was holding an object in his right hand that looked exactly like a semi-automatic handgun.

After approximately 15 minutes the male started saying “you’re gonna kill me” and “I’m gonna make you kill me.”

Deputy Miller was begging for the male subject to stop walking around and for him to slowly put the gun down without pointing it at anyone. the male subject yelled “no” over and over.

The male subject turned and looked at Deputy Miller and I and he started moving the gun from his head down and away. As it moved, I believed that the barrel of the gun was pointing directly at me. At that point I believed that my life was in danger, and I fired my patrol rifle. I do not know exactly how many times I fired. The male subject fell to the ground.

Deputy Miller then secured the male subject in handcuffs, and we immediately began rendering medical aid to him while calling for medics to respond to the immediate scene.

Medics arrived and rushed the male subject into their medic rig and away from the scene.

Appendix D – Officer's Full Report

Officer's Report

4/14/18

Deputy M. KRANS

I am a patrol Deputy with the Johnsonville County SO and have been a licensed peace officer of 10 years. I have attended all the required pre-service and in-service training as required by the State as well as my department.

On April 14, 2018, I was dispatched to a possible suicidal male with a gun in the area of Lake George Avenue and 34th St North in Johnsonville County.

The information provided from dispatch was as follows: The reporter notified police at 11:50 PM CST that the subject male was possibly suicidal and threatening to harm himself. It was suspected that the male was in possession of a handgun and making verbal threats to harm himself. The initial reporter was familiar with the male as the male had grown up in the neighborhood and had a long history of mental illness to include self-harming behaviors as well as harming others or vandalizing property when experiencing mental health episodes. It was reported to dispatch multiple times that neighbors heard the male subject yelling in the middle of the intersection, and they believed he was holding a gun to his own head.

As I exited my squad car, I saw a male standing in the middle of Lake George Avenue and 34th St North. He was yelling "leave me alone" and it appeared clear to me that he was holding an object in his right hand that looked exactly like a semi-automatic handgun. The gun was dark in color and appeared to be the same size as my duty issued handgun.

I saw that the other deputies had their handguns drawn so I deployed my patrol rifle to be able to have the option of maintaining distance from the subject and address any lethal threat should the need arise. I know from my training and experience that a person holding what I believed to be and which was consistent with a gun to their own head can turn that gun to a firing position at another person in less than a quarter second and fire that gun in less than half a second.

The male was standing in the middle of the intersection with houses on all four corners. I could hear the male subject yelling "leave me alone" and "you can't help me" over and over.

As Deputy Miller was communicating with the male subject, I observed multiple people starting to walk out of their houses along the corners. I told them to go back inside so they would not get hurt.

It made me concerned for not only the male subject's safety but for my own and my partners as he (male subject) was not following asks and demands to put the gun down and to stop turning and walking around. I was worried that at any point, he could turn the gun and fire at me or others or that he could start walking or running toward other people. He did not appear to care that we were trying to help him.

Also note that I had called for medics to respond to the scene to stand by if any medical attention was needed.

After approximately 15 minutes of trying to help the male subject de-escalate himself, he started yelling more, now sounding angrier than upset. He started saying "you're gonna kill me" and "I'm gonna make you kill me." He would stare at Deputy Miller and myself when he said these things and took a few steps toward us, then stopping and turning back around. The gun was still to his head most of the time, however, he started moving it from his head to his chest a bit.

NOTE that negotiators had been called out and were on the way but were appx 45 minutes away. Additionally, mental health was contacted but no one answered, and a message was left.

Deputy Miller was begging for the male subject to stop walking around and for him to slowly put the gun down without pointing it at anyone. the male subject yelled "no" over and over. I told Miller that I was getting more nervous, that the male subject was getting angrier and that he could run at us or turn the gun and fire at us or harm someone else in the immediate area.

As I said that, the male subject turned and looked at Deputy Miller and I and he started moving the gun from his head down and away. As it moved, I believed that the barrel of the gun was pointing directly at me. At that point I believed that my life was in danger, and I fired my patrol rifle. I do not know exactly how many times I fired. The male subject fell to the ground. Deputy Miller and I ran toward the male subject who was still holding the gun in his right hand. I stepped on the gun and pulled it away from his hand with my foot.

Deputy Miller then secured the male subject in handcuffs, and we immediately began rendering medical aid to him while calling for medics to respond to the immediate scene.

Medics arrived and rushed the male subject into their medic rig and away from the scene.

I was later notified that the male subject was pronounced deceased at the hospital.

Appendix E – Case Summary

A review of this case was completed on May 24, 2018. The purpose of the review was to understand the systemic influences to the actions of the officers who responded to the incident involving the subject male. Those involved in the review process include:

- Chief of Police
- Patrol Sargent Aranz
- Department Lead Patrol Sargent
- Training Officer
- Department Crisis Intervention Training Officer
- Department Mental Health Liaison
- Mental Health Community Partner
- Department Community Liaison
- Community Representative (2)
- Patrol Officer (assigned to the same shift but not directly involved in the incident under review)
- State Director of Training

Review Summary

The officer using lethal force was influenced by the following:

- **Perception of threat of harm to himself, other officers, and community members:** This perception was influenced by the appearance of seeing the male subject with what appeared to be a handgun pointed to his head and making verbal threats towards the officers and the information received from dispatch. The officer also perceived that the male subject pointed the gun at him.
- **Training received re: threat of harm:** The recent training received indicated officers are to attempt to secure the area in which the officers directed the onlookers to return to their homes for their own personal safety. The officers provided the ASKS and DEMANDS to the male subject as they were trained to include asking the male subject to lay down his weapon.

- **Use of lethal weapons during public interaction:** Officer weapons remained drawn during the negotiation process. The weapons remaining drawn at the male subject was influenced by training suggesting officers to evaluate each situation and assess if there is an immediate threat of bodily harm to the officers or others. The subject officer observed for himself what he believed to be a handgun in the hand of the suicidal male.

- **Limited access to community resources:** The officers continued negotiations and de-escalation process as trained and called the mental health community partner to assist. The officers were not able to receive support from the mental health community partner to assist. This was influenced by limited access to the mental health community partner available. The mental health partner is limited to 3 employees available to the entire department. There is no emergency line and contact is limited to leaving voicemails and receiving return phone calls once someone is available. The limited contact and limited employee availability is impacted by a recent budget cut in the city funding for these positions. The recent budget cut was influenced by the community's request to allocate resources for schools and other community projects. It was proposed by the community to limit the resources allocated to the mental health contracts held by the police department.

- **Limited equipment, tools, and/or technology:** The subject officer's decision to use force was also influenced by having the rifle as the only source of defense to the male subject's handgun. The limited equipment option is impacted by the Department's policy that only a SWAT officer is assigned less lethal options. The availability of the equipment is influenced by several factors.
 - **Demand/Resource mismatch:**
 - **Training involved being assigned a less lethal weapon.** An officer must complete 6 weeks of training to be assigned this type of weapon. Officers are limited in their time to commit to this auxiliary training. At the present time, there is a limited number of officers available to commit time to take this training due to their patrol schedule needs. The limited

number of officers available is impacted by the Department experiencing staffing shortages.

- **Staffing shortages:** The staffing shortages are impacted by officers perceiving there is limited community support for officers when critical incidents occur and often lead to media scrutiny. Some officers have opted to resign from the department for their personal safety and the safety of their family members. Also contributing to the staffing shortages is the recent budget cut in officer pay. Current officers have not received cost of living raises in over 7 years and new officers are no longer offered pension or retirement plans as other officers have in the past. The budget cuts are influenced by the City Mayor allocating funds used in the past for officer retirement to more community projects as requested by the public. There is a limited number of candidates applying to be police officers. Historically the agency would have at least 200 people apply for one Deputy position. The last job posting had 4 people apply and none of those passed the first interview panel.

- **The cost of the equipment.** To outfit each officer with the less lethal weapon would cost \$1.2 million dollars. The cost was presented to the city council and was denied. The department requested grant funding and was denied as well due to the lack of community support the department had experienced. Although the training the officer receives is to use the less lethal weapon first where appropriate, the responding officers only had one option present and it was their department issued handgun or rifle.

- **The budget allocated to equipment and tools.** During a recent budget planning session, it was proposed and decided that the budget for equipment would be cut by 25%. This cut was influenced by the community's request for more positions allocated to the community schools that needed school resource officers, request for increased police presence in the community, and request for additional crisis management training for the entire department.