

Examining the Circumstances of Interactions Between Law Enforcement and Adults with  
Autism in Ventura County

AP Research

April 28 2018

Word count: 4850

### **Language Disclaimer**

The author would like to acknowledge that there is discussion surrounding language use in the context of disabilities, specifically whether to utilize person-first or identity-first language. Throughout this paper, person-first language will be used, although it is recognized that some people prefer identity-first.

### **Abstract**

Within the realm of police interactions with the general public as a whole, there are a variety of factors that impact the public's opinion of police procedures and conduct. Currently, assurance of fair treatment and procedural justice are major influences on residents' comfortability with the protection and service provided by law enforcement (LE) across California, and the United States. Individuals with disabilities constitute one third to one half of police killings, and those with developmental disabilities are seven times more likely to come into contact with police. As supported by numerous anecdotal cases of police violence and negative police encounter outcomes, an individual with autism may exhibit behaviors perceived as suspicious or unsafe by bystanders and officers, increasing an encounter's potential for miscommunication or misinterpretation. This study aims to identify and characterize the perceptions derived from experiences within the context of interactions between law enforcement and individuals with autism in Ventura County. Three online surveys were distributed to Ventura County Sheriff's Office patrol officers, adults with autism, and parents/caregivers of individuals with autism, and the results offer a basic qualitative depiction of the relationship between Ventura County's LE and ASD communities.

## **Introduction**

Between 2004 and 2014, the Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring (ADDM) Network had found that the prevalence of individuals with autism in the United States had progressed from 1 in 125 to 1 in 59 (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018). Even with this growth, the statistic does not account for children with autism who are not yet at or are past the opportunity for official diagnosis, likely meaning that there is an even higher prevalence than that reported (Autism Speaks, 2018).

As the number of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) diagnoses has grown, so too has the degree of community integration. The now prevailing policy of deinstitutionalization of those with mental illness and developmental disabilities, such as autism, has facilitated the involvement of individuals with autism in more community settings. The combination of both these factors has necessitated the need for law enforcement officers to understanding the populations of individuals with autism they are patrolling. Case studies and media coverage of ineffective police and autism encounter outcomes demonstrate relatively low police awareness and understanding of the complications of having an autism diagnosis in these settings (Ruderman Foundation, 2016).

Facets of autism that may complicate interactions with law enforcement include, but are not limited to, sensory and processing differences, and trouble with verbal commands, reading body language, and understanding social implications. The manifestation of these differences within the context of interactions with law enforcement can provoke officer responses from places of uncertainty or apprehension. In the interest of the officer's safety and wellbeing, as well as that of the individual with autism, frontline officers must have basic knowledge of behavior symptoms and contact approaches (Dennis Debbaudt, 2012).

Ventura County, as a fairly well-resourced, mid-sized community, prioritizes successful police training and best practice relating to autism, yet still has relatively few training options. - limited to Crisis Intervention Team Training (for law enforcement), Autism Society (for law enforcement, individuals with autism, parents), and Be Safe the Movie (for law enforcement and individuals with autism). Even with adequate levels of training, however, the application of the knowledge obtained from these trainings is rendered ineffective without improving the officers' ability to properly and confidently administer the learned tactics and act on their newfound knowledge.

### **Literature Review**

One of the most relied-upon studies for tracking/quantitatively examining police and autism interactions is sourced from K. Curry, M. Posluszny, and S. Kraska's "Training criminal justice personnel to recognize offenders with disabilities" (1993), which states that individuals with developmental disabilities--including ASD--are about seven times more likely than members of the general population to have opportunities for contact with law enforcement.

As the first points of contact in the Criminal Justice System, patrol officers are a primary target for efforts to improve encounter outcomes with persons with ASD. The Ventura County Sheriff's Office website states that the persons of the patrol division are out in the community "24 hours a day 7 days a week and are the most visible members of our force". At this primary interface between law enforcement and members of the public, a large percentage (approximately 80%) of patrol responses do not even involve criminal activity. allowing for more points of contact. With this

comes more opportunity for officers to encounter persons with ASD in the community, and to have to accommodate for added complexity associated with their autism diagnoses.

Certain features of Autism Spectrum Disorders tend to complicate encounters with law enforcement (Debbaudt, 2009) and/or increase the frequency of exposure to such situations (K. Curry, M. Posluszny, and S. Kraska, 1993). A combination of physical, lingual and communicational, social/emotional, and behavioral implications can be perceived as forms of noncompliance or resistance, or misinterpreted as effects from being under the influence of drugs or alcohol. While persons with ASD may have the appearance of “not cooperating or resisting an officer”, they likely do not “understand the situation due to ASD associated impairments” (Jerrod Brown, et al., 2016). Literature suggests that four main behavioral/sensory response categories can be associated with Autism Spectrum Disorders: (1) “hyporesponsiveness”, (2) “hyperresponsiveness”, (3) “sensory interests, repetitions and seeking behaviors” and (4) “enhanced perception” (Karla Ausderau, 2013). These behavioral patterns put an individual with autism in a place where they may feel overwhelmed in a situation involving law enforcement. As put out in the “Contact with individuals with autism: Effective resolutions” feature of the 2001 FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin, sensory issues, such as that of sensitivity to loud vocalization of commands or yelling, and touch to the individual can induce a “‘fight or flight’ response” (Debbaudt, Rothman, 2001). These responses are some of what put police and autism encounters in the position to go negatively or be unsuccessful.

So as to deescalate and limit reactivity from the individual with autism, professionals recommend to “talk calmly and softly”, “maintain a safe distance”, and generally model calming and appropriate behavior for proper and effective field response (Debbaudt, 2001). However, there

exists an expression when talking about autism, which is once more iterated in “Autism Spectrum Disorders: A special needs subject response guide for police officers”: “If you’ve met one person with autism, then you’ve only met one person with autism” (Joel Lashley, n.d.). Individuals with autism can take on a range of behavior characteristics, and each interaction will go differently (Debbaudt, 2012).

The handling of these situations lies in the abilities of the officer to handle each situation fairly, and on a case by case basis. A journal article, which investigated how perceptions of procedural justice among persons with significant mental illness (SMI) are associated with cooperation and resistance in encounters with police, found that individuals were more cooperative and less resistant when presented with greater perceived procedural justice by the officer (Watson & Angell, 2013). Applying the perceived procedural justice concept to persons with disabilities, researchers might theorize that a more knowledgeable officer might elicit greater cooperation and compliance from a person with autism.

However, data from ““Do you have any difficulties that I may not be aware of?”: A study of autism awareness and understanding in the UK police service” (2009) suggests that, as supplemented by an earlier US study, police officers are generally unable to appropriately deal with persons with autism and do not receive a level of training proportionate to the complexity of these interactions (Chown, 2009). The referred-to United States study on officers’ knowledge and perceptions of persons with general disabilities had found that 80% of respondents could not accurately identify characteristics of autism (Modell and Mak, 2008). A study evaluating a subject group of 394 police officers from England and Wales found that less than half of the total number of surveyants (42%) were satisfied with the ways in which they had interacted with persons with ASD, with an even

fewer number (37%) indicating they had received ASD-specific training (L. Crane, K. Maras, T. Hawken, S. Mulcahy, & A. Memon, 2016). Their research extended to two other survey groups (adults with ASD and their parents), who were largely dissatisfied with their police experiences. These studies demonstrate that law enforcement largely lack sufficient information with which to make informed decisions in the field about how to identify and interact with individuals with autism.

Existing scholarship, such as the aforementioned, has focused on the actual knowledge (or lack of) that police officers have relating to autism, rather than how they feel they can apply it. Current literature also lacks focus on parents and caregivers as catalysts for positive encounter outcomes. Members of the ASD community suggest that in addition to training law enforcement, individuals with autism and their parents must also have just as much knowledge of “the realities of interfacing with law enforcement” (Nora Baladerian, The Disability and Abuse Project, 2015). Bill Burke, as a member of the Ventura County Autism Society and past organizer of police and safety trainings with Autism Risk and Safety Management, reported that “a significant percentage (if not the vast majority) of parents and caregivers believe law enforcement must ‘deal with’ ASD”. Sole responsibility on the part of law enforcement is unrealistic, as officers cannot best employ their training and facilitate positive responses, without the cooperation of the ASD community. Parents, caregivers, and individuals with ASD must safely disclose diagnosis to law enforcement as early in the encounter as possible and participate in training of the ASD community, in order to prompt the most successful encounter outcomes. Insufficient research necessitates an advance in the gathering of knowledge relative to the shared responsibility of these encounters, extending to further researching the actions taken by parents and caregivers, and how those interplay with the roles of their children, and police officers.

This study examines perceptions of patrol officers, adults with autism, and their parents/caregivers regarding interactions between law enforcement and individuals with autism.

### **Methodology**

Similar to the Wales study of experiences within the context of encounters between police and individuals with autism (2016), this project identified and targeted the three groups that bear the most significant influence on success of interaction, and are affected most directly by resulting outcomes: frontline, or patrol, officers, individuals with autism, and their parents.

133 in-the-field police, specifically frontline/patrol officers, on active duty for the Ventura County Sheriff's Office (VCSO) were reached by network connections for distribution of a 10-15 minute online survey. The Assistant Chief of Police for the Department shared the survey link to all applicable officers with appropriate qualifying traits. Factors such as age, experience, and gender were not determinants of participation. Subjects were identified from the VCSO's seven patrol stations within the patrol division, and participation was expedited by the distribution of online surveys by local commanders and chiefs of police. Out of 503 patrol officers countywide and 1214 officers total countywide (not including CSUCI Police, Community College Police, California Highway Patrol, Naval Base Police, County Probation Agency, or other State/Federal agencies operating in VC), 133 total surveyants were gathered to demonstrate accurate trend results.

The second sample population, parents and/or caregivers of individuals with autism, was utilized as the larger of two forms of representation for Ventura County's ASD Community. The other subset of the VC ASD Community for the study was adults with autism.



Parents and/or caregivers of individuals with autism anonymously self-identified their roles and indicated their child's diagnosis and age, among the typical survey questions, which aimed to gather perceptions of and the nature of their experiences with police, relating to encounters with their children with ASD. Survey participants were recruited via parent networks, references from within a professional network, and local community groups. Specifically, the survey link was shared through the Facebook pages of the following service providers to their client bases: The Ventura County Autism Society, Channel Islands Social Services, and Conejo Recreation and Park District. Though the aim for this sample size was a 20 person minimum, the final response number was 71.

To qualify as an individual with ASD, clinical diagnosis could not be utilized for reasons of confidentiality. To avoid this issue while ensuring that results obtained from this subject group had a high level of accuracy, self-identified individuals with autism that the surveys were administered to were referred from trusted professional connections. Individuals who took the survey were above age 18, so that they might self-consent to the taking of the survey, and so that there would be a higher likelihood/opportunity for encounters with the local police force. While the projected minimum for this survey group/subset was 5-10 persons, in order to realistically achieve more than an anecdotal study, within the restrictions and time limitations, the actual number of individuals with autism represented was two.

These three surveys altogether aim to collect local data for contexts of contact experiences, preemptive attitudes towards the other involved parties, and perceptions resulting from experience (or lack thereof). The surveys elicited three categories for data analysis: experiences (frequency & contexts for encounters, engagement in training), perceptions (confidence levels, quality of/difficulties with experience), and opinions on future developments (recommendations,

free-response commentary). The Institutional Review Board (IRB) gave ethical approval for the methodology behind the study's research goals, including the various survey components, and analysis methods.

### **Findings/ Results**

Because the surveys contained a varying format of compulsory and voluntary pre-selected option and free-response questions, not all responses total up to the overall number of participants. All findings and results will be expressed, as divided up by survey population size from greatest to smallest- law enforcement (n=133), parents and caregivers of individuals with autism (n=71), and adults with autism (n=2).

#### **Law Enforcement**

For the survey directed towards VCSO patrol officers, the demographics of the group reflected officers of 22-52+ years of age, with majority falling between 32 and 51 (72.9%). Officers amongst all seven of the patrol stations of the Ventura County Sheriff's Department were represented, with 21 respondents from Camarillo, 25 from Fillmore, 27 from Headquarters (Ventura), 1 from Lockwood Valley, 27 from Moorpark, 7 from Ojai, and 22 from East County (Thousand Oaks), in addition to officers from California State Parks within Ventura County (n=3).

To establish a baseline understanding of officer experiences, the survey asked participants to report whether they had *had any interactions with someone with special needs, as a patrol officer*, to which 95.5% (n=127) of responses confirmed "yes". In introducing the particular scope of the project and to understand the overall experience of participating officers

with individuals with autism in the field, 103 individuals (77.4%) reported at least one interaction. As shown in Figure 1, 12% (n=16) responded with similar certainty that they had not interacted with an individual with ASD, while 10.5% (n=14) of the total participants were unsure (*maybe*).

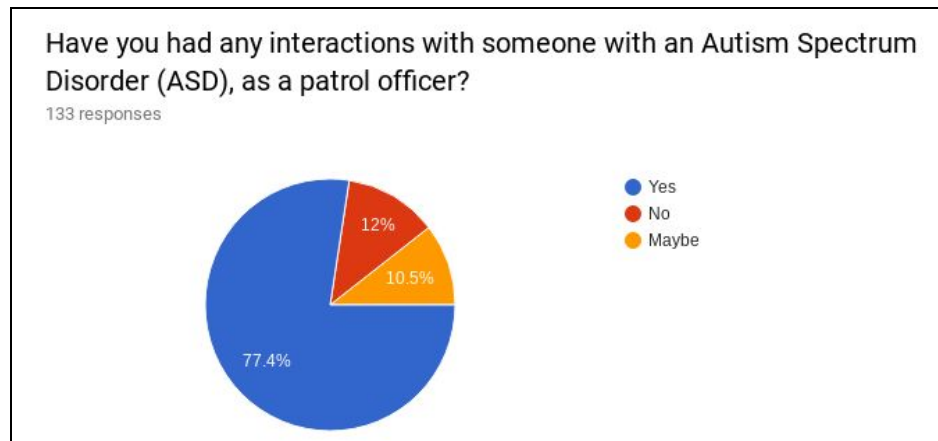


Figure 1:

Expanding upon results that 87.9% of participants either potentially or definitely experienced interactions with individuals on the Autism Spectrum, the reported sources for awareness of diagnosis occurred under the following circumstances: own suspicion/intuition (n=66), informed by dispatch (n=43), informed by the individual with ASD (n=17), informed by the family member or friend (n=94), school staff (n=2), and informed by fellow officers who had prior contact with the individual (n=1).

The scenarios for these interactions were reported to be through domestic calls --also noted as family disturbances-- (n=42), patrol stops (n=49), calls for service (n=33), elopement/wandering (n=57), and facilitated meets (n=5). It should be noted that two responses-- positive citizen contacts and missing person-- could not be classified within the major categories, as it was not indicated the specificities of these scenarios, such as how the persons came into contact or whether the missing person had eloped or been missing for an ulterior reason. The

most common of the manually inputted values for *in which situations have you professionally interacted with an individual with autism* was *call for service or disturbance* (n=32), which the Police Data Initiative (2017) cites as “calls to ‘911’ for emergency assistance”, and potentially “calls to non-emergency numbers”, “maintained in law enforcement computer-aided dispatch systems”. Because of the pre-cultivated choice for *domestic call*, implying a home situation concerning the family of the individual with autism, one can deduct that these indications of service calls refer to other persons outside the individual with autism’s family as reasons for police dispatch.

Out of 5, the average self-rated confidence in *ability to identify persons with ASD* for those who answered “Yes” to having *had any interactions with someone with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), as a patrol officer*: was 3.67. For those describing a “maybe” or “no” for encounters with individuals with autism, ratings were found to be lower for perceived ability, specifically a 2.68 and 3.21. Exhibiting a similar trend, self-rated confidence for *ability to interact with persons with ASD* was averaged at 3.76 for those who answered “Yes” to having *had any interactions with someone with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), as a patrol officer*, 3.42 for those with potential interactions, and 3.14 for those with none.

Compared to the overall average values of 3.51 for ability to identify and 3.65 for ability to interact, results demonstrated that lower confidence values for identification did not translate to reported difficulty. Out of the two key components of encounter, as identified by existing literature (Debbaudt, 2012), contact approaches-- referring to methods of interacting with individuals with autism--- were reported as being the *more difficult* aspect of interactions.

Altogether, however, identification of behavior symptoms and knowledge of approaches to interaction were similarly challenging for officer respondents.

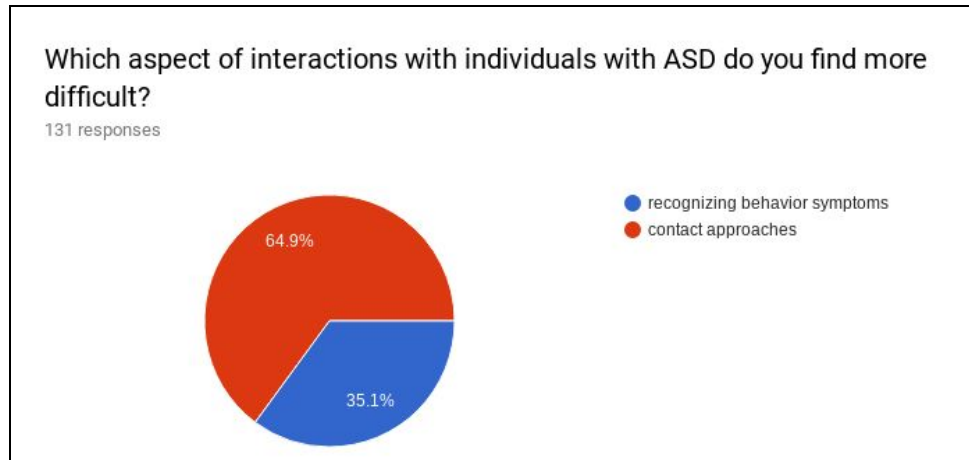


Figure 2:

Regarding feelings of preparedness relating to the provision of training, the average confidence in ability to identify and interact with individuals with ASD for those who had received autism-specific training content (3.64) did not significantly differ from the average confidence rating for those who had not (3.08). As per the Program Assistant for Ventura County Law Enforcement’s Crisis Intervention Team, there are 405 out of 503 patrol officers (80.5%) countywide trained in CIT, with education in the most common forms of severe mental illness, developmental disabilities, and traumatic brain injury. 121 (91.0%) of the 133 patrol officers surveyed reported receiving training that specifically touched upon aspects of dealing with individuals with autism.

**Parents/caregivers**

Parent and caregiver respondents came from, in alphabetical arrangement: Aguanga (n=1), Albany (n=1), Camarillo (n=13), Fillmore (n=2), Moorpark (n=2), Moreno Valley (n=1), Newbury Park (n=4), Ojai (n=3), Ontario (n=1), Oxnard (n=9), Port Hueneme (n=2), Simi

Valley (n=6), Somis (n=1), Thousand Oaks (n=11), Ventura (n=13), and West Covina (n=1) in Ventura County with a total of 71 respondents.

As for the officer surveyees, it was similarly reported by parents and caregivers that majority of their children with autism (56.3%) had *had contact with the police in some capacity*, as opposed to 43.7% who had not. The quantity of children having experienced police contact in this survey was comparably less significant than the inverse form of contact indicated in the law enforcement survey, suggesting that certain individuals with ASD would have contact with multiple officers. In fact, for *times... your child/dependent [has] been in contact with the police*, 47.9% (n=34) reported 1-2 occasions, 9.9% (n=7) reported 3-5 occasions, 2.8% (n=2) reported 10+ occasions, 1.4% (n=1) reported 6-10 occasions, and 38% (n=27) reported 0 occasions.

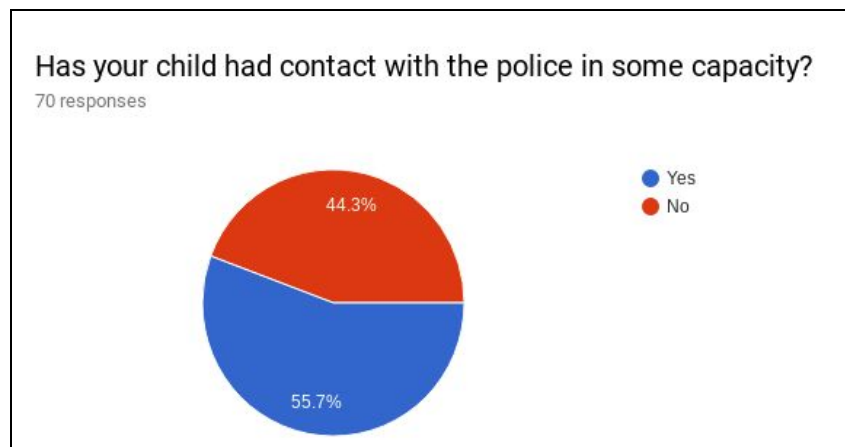


Figure 3:

Considering the indicated frequency of encounter values, only 17 out of 71 (23.9%) of parent/caregiver survey respondents indicated that they or their child definitively had *attended a training or seminar on interactions with law enforcement*, as represented in Figure 4. 63.4% (n=45) of parents/caregivers responded that they would *consider attendance at a training or seminar on autism interactions with law enforcement*. 64.8% of survey participants (n=46) had

neither sought nor been provided *with resources for your child/dependent to improve/prepare for interactions with law enforcement.*

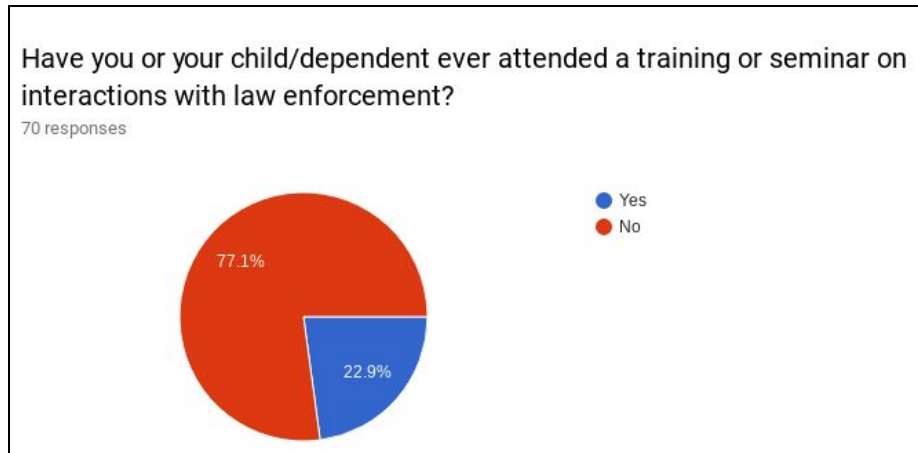


Figure 4:

One more individual than had attended a training or seminar had *contacted law enforcement to indicate [their] child/dependent ha[d] an Autism Spectrum diagnosis* (n=18). 53 (74.6%) of surveyees had not indicated diagnosis at all. Circumstances for the 18 instances of indication of diagnosis were largely in preemptive contexts (n=12), while 5 (7%) had disclosed diagnosis *during an interaction with law enforcement*, and 2 (2.8%) had disclosed *after an interaction.*

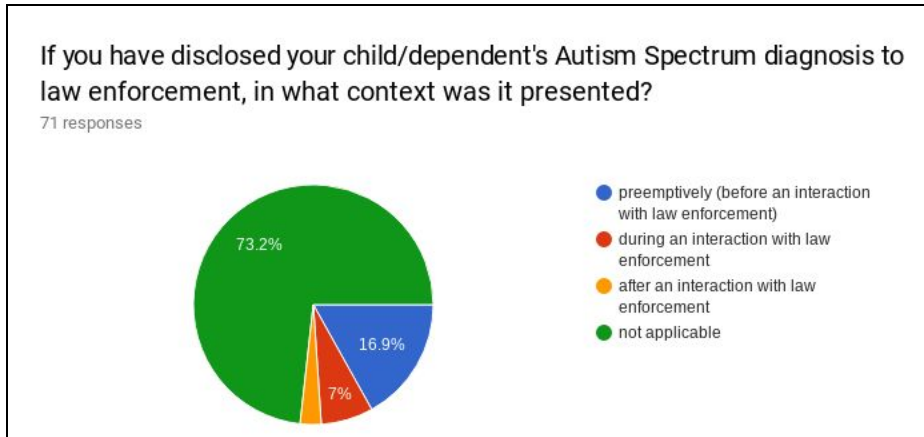


Figure 5:

Respondents gave an average rating of 2.76 for their *confidence in the police's ability to interact with your child in the community*, and 2.45 for their *confidence in your child's ability to positively respond in police interactions*, out of 5. Surveyed parents/caregivers perceived the two parties' abilities to be lower than a moderate confidence rating of "3", with no significant difference between confidence in a law enforcement officer and their child with autism. Not statistically significant but interesting on an anecdotal basis, two more parents had rated their child's ability to be at "5", than had rated for police ability.

**Adults with ASD**

Although with some similar responses, the two surveys showed oppositely-ranked responses for *how an experience with a police officer was*, *how much you trust the police to make the best and safest decisions*, and *how comfortable they are with the police*. One of the two individuals had negative experiences, that resulted in them not being comfortable around police; this person reported feelings of anxiety and upsettedness when considering how they would feel meeting police officers out in the community. On the contrary, the other survey response demonstrated an overall positive view of their interactions with patrol officers and police in



general. As per this set of responses, the person indicated a high level of trust in and comfort with police, via their positive experiences with police officers and prior attendance at *any training or seminar about interactions with police officers*.

Although for the majority of the survey (questions 5-10), the two responses comparatively showed diverse, and even opposite, perceptions of and experiences with police, both participants similarly described having *met with a police officer before* (n=2), wanting to learn more about *how to be safe around police* (n=2), and thinking it would be *helpful to meet local officers before you see them out in the community* (n=2). Combined with prior studies which indicate that individuals with autism are interested in facilitating fair and positive interactions (Watson & Angell, 2013), these results indicate potential commonalities between adults with autism, with regards to thoughts about police interaction, likelihood for police interaction, and a willingness to prepare for such encounters.

## Discussion

### Confidence

Across the board, patrol officers, adults with autism, and their parents and caregivers indicated low to moderate confidence in their own ability and the ability of their counterparts to respond in scenarios of police and autism interactions and facilitate positive encounter outcomes. Self-ratings of officers on a 5-value scale indicated average values of 3.51, 3.65, and 3.11 for confidence in their *ability to identify*, confidence in their *ability to positively/effectively interact with individuals with ASD*, and their *knowledge of ASD relative to that of their fellow officers*. Parents and caregivers responded similarly for their perceptions of the police's and their child's

ability to respond in scenarios with each other. Within the parent/caregiver survey, an average rating of 2.76 was awarded for confidence in the *police's ability to interact with your child in the community*, as opposed to a rated 2.45 for level of confidence in their *child's ability to positively respond in police interactions*.

Evaluation of results from all three of the surveys presented an absence of highly positive outlooks from the respective groups to act and respond in these scenarios. These poor confidence ratings factor into interactions between individuals with autism and law enforcement significantly, as their low-confidence attitudes influence their behavior and response within the interactions. A concept called “learned evaluative response” allows patrol officers and individuals with autism to revert to a secure knowledge base in their interactions (Henshaw & Thomas, 2011). If they do not feel confident in the accurate knowledge that they have, they may go back to an ineffective way of dealing with the situation. Going into these encounters with low confidence levels can affect their ability to act on acquired knowledge, which may render their training ineffective. The results of low confidence and uncertainty from the three surveyed groups may indicate the presence of feelings of apprehension and heightened tensions at the actual points of contact.

### **Attitudes towards perceived responsibility**

The attitudes of parents and caregivers surveyed largely reflected ignorance of trainings offered locally, and low attendance rates at such trainings. With a lack of motivation and awareness of ways to participate in promoting positive encounter outcomes between their children and law enforcement, this study indicated that the members of the VC ASD community

perceive themselves as less responsible for actively preparing for encounters than the police. Overall, these results aligned with anecdotal perspectives that law enforcement are generally relied upon for sole responsibility in interactions between individuals with autism and patrol officers.

32 parent/caregiver surveyants declined to answer what content they would like to be provided to them or their child if they were to attend a training or seminar, either indicating their obliviousness or lack of interest towards training on interactions with LE. Compared to the police attendance at ASD-specific trainings (91%), the engagement of parents and caregivers at similar trainings was minimal (23.9%), indicating little interest on the part of the parent/caregiver to assume responsibility in facilitating positive interactions for their children with police.

It should be duly noted that, for patrol officers, it was indicated that they felt their levels of training were sufficient, even with their low levels of confidence. To bridge this gap, officers mainly proposed that parents and caregivers give their children physical indication of diagnosis (bracelets, ID cards, etc.), rather than proposing ways to refine their own skills or learn how to apply them. This suggests that patrol officers similarly feel that they should not receive the sole or major responsibility in interactions with individuals with autism.

### **Increasing Confidence: Facilitated Interactions**

While majority of surveyed VCSO patrol officers indicated that they felt the training they had received relative to individuals with autism had adequately prepared them for real-life scenarios, those same officers reported not feeling properly fit for or confident in their ability to

actually identify or interact with individuals with autism. This inconsistency in reporting their ability to apply their training-based knowledge demonstrates a disparity between the provision of training and an officer's perceived ability to apply and execute actions based on that knowledge. In addition, most responding officers communicated some sense of want for or interest in ensuring that the training they received would be applicable in encounters with persons with ASD, whether it be through refresher trainings or meeting with individuals with autism in non-criminal and casual settings. Both adults with autism and 73.2% (n=53) of parents and caregivers similarly conveyed that it would be *helpful for [themselves or their child/dependent] to meet local officers before [they] saw them out in the community.*

Majorities of both adults with autism and parents/caregivers directly indicated that meeting local officers would be of interest to them, and would be seen as helpful for future experiences with officers in the community. Officers, through their responses for *what training on autism would you like to receive, what recommendations would you offer family members or persons with autism to help police identify/interact with persons with ASD, and comments about training members of the Police Service in autism awareness and understanding*, similarly drew attention to the potential benefit of meeting with individuals with autism in their communities and the want for real-world applications for their "training knowledge".

Contrary to the evidently idealized scenario of patrol officers having contact with individuals with autism before encountering them in situations out in the community, only 5 officers of the 133 total respondents had interacted with individuals with autism in facilitated and casual settings. The responses from this study, in consideration with results from "Police Officers and Disability: Perceptions and Attitudes", would indicate that the theoretical impact of

more training and experience would be: less apprehension & fears, address misconceptions, and safer responses (Modell & Cropp, 2007).

## **Conclusion**

### **Applications**

This data highlights the disconnect between the local law enforcement and ASD communities, where all parties are not as knowledgeable as they could be about a complicated situation. Without remedy, tensions and false preconceived notions about circumstances surrounding encounters between patrol officers and adults with autism can lessen the likelihood for positive and successful encounter outcomes. Analysis of individual responses, both within survey groups and comparatively, conclusively demonstrates that all parties recognize the benefit of facilitated meets between the two communities, so that an open discussion and exchange of information can follow, and the dynamic for these encounters can be changed

The results of this research will specifically benefit local entities, such as the Ventura County Sheriff's Office and varying subsets of that institution (Crisis Intervention Team, patrol services, POST), collectives of autism advocacy groups (The Autism Society, Autism Speaks, parent networks), and independent training providers (The Autism Society, Autism Risk & Safety Management, Be Safe the Movie), but also on a broader scope, law enforcement agencies, and families of and individuals with ASD across the nation and within countries with similarly functioning law enforcement, and criminal justice system roles. Within these broader contexts, the prevalence of this kind of encounter holds the same level of significance, and studies documenting the specific qualities of local police and autism relations holds value for

understanding the needs of these respective populations, so as for training and development of other resources to encourage the probability for success of encounter.

### **Limitations**

As expressed in the discussion portion of this paper, limitations to the study's application to a larger subset especially fall upon the responses of surveyed adults with autism. Without a mainstream platform for survey distribution and little initiative for response, participation was limited to only represent two specific stories, isolated to the experiences for the two individuals that took the survey directed towards individuals with ASD. Although the two individuals' responses, however diverse in their noted experiences, both reflected common themes of an interest in improving and preparing for future interactions with police officers, this study cannot conclusively deduce that adults with autism in Ventura County at large share the same attitudes.

A potential source of error for research application and accuracy presents itself in that those who participated in all three survey efforts, were likely to already be more invested in the topic than their counterparts. Although this may have influenced survey results to be restricted to more involved or opinionated persons, the various surveys were made accessible for distribution through various outlets or service providers, that made great ease of access and availability for any potential participants, regardless of opinion on the topic. In addition, the results revealed diverse attitudes and experiences from all subject groups.

### **Acknowledgement**

The author of this paper would like to acknowledge several persons and groups who particularly inspired and helped to shape this project, including Dr. Jon Swanson, official

instructor, Cecilia Laufenberg, unofficial advisor, Bill Burke, of the Ventura County Autism Society, Scott Walker, Crisis Intervention Team Program Assistant, Dennis Debbaudt and Brian Heritt of Autism Risk and Safety Management, Dr. Darla Rothman, and Laura Crane and her team of researchers. In addition, several persons and entities helped to distribute the survey materials and reach broader audiences for participation in the study, such as VCSO Assistant Sheriff William Ayub, Captain Don Aguilar, of the Thousand Oaks Police Department, the Autism Society, Channel Islands Social Services, Conejo Recreation and Park District Therapeutic Recreation, and other private individuals. Special thanks and credit to the aforementioned entities for their invaluable contributions of support, time, and effort.

## References

- Ausderau, K., Sideris, J., Furlong, M., Little, L., Bulluck, J., & Baranek, G. (2013). National survey of sensory features in children with ASD: Factor structure of the sensory experience questionnaire (3.0). *Journal Of Autism And Developmental Disorders*, 44(4), 915-925. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10803-013-1945-1>
- Autism Speaks: Information for law enforcement. (2018). Autism Speaks. Retrieved from <https://www.autismspeaks.org/family-services/autism-safety-project/first-responders/law-enforcement>
- Baladerian, N. (2015). *Both individuals with autism and law enforcement benefit from training*. Autism Spectrum News, 8(2).
- Brown, J., & et. al. (2016). Autism Spectrum Disorder in the Criminal Justice System: A review for caregivers and professionals. *Journal Of Law Enforcement*, 5(5), 1-13.
- Calls for Service - Police Data Initiative*. (2017). Police Data Initiative. Retrieved from <https://www.policedatainitiative.org/datasets/calls-for-service/>
- Chown, N. (2009). 'Do you have any difficulties that I may not be aware of?' A study of autism awareness and understanding in the UK police service. *International Journal Of Police Science & Management*, 12(2), 256-273. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1350/ijps.2010.00.0.174>
- Crane, L., Maras, K., Hawken, T., Mulcahy, S., & Memon, A. (2016). Experiences of Autism Spectrum Disorder and policing in England and Wales: Surveying police and the autism



community. *Journal Of Autism And Developmental Disorders*, 46(6), 2028-2041.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10803-016-2729-1>

Curry, K., Posluszny, M. and Draska S. (1993) Training criminal justice personnel to recognize offenders with disabilities. *Washington, DC: Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services News In Print.*

*Data and statistics | Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) | NCBDDD | CDC.* (2018). Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/data.html>

Debbaudt, D. and Rothman, D. (2001) Contact With individuals with autism: Effective resolutions. *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, 7, 4, 20-24.

Debbaudt, D. (2002) Autism, advocates and law enforcement professionals: Recognizing and reducing risk situations for people with Autism Spectrum Disorders. *London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.*

Debbaudt, D. (2008) Autism & field response instructor's guide

Henshaw, M. and Thomas, S. (2011). Police encounters with people with intellectual disability: prevalence, characteristics and challenges. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*, 56(6), pp.620-631.

Lashley, J. Autism Spectrum Disorders: A special needs subject response guide for police officers. *Children's Hospital And Health System*, 1-20. Retrieved from

<http://www.autismsocietyofwa.org/v2/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/Autism-Guide-for-Police-Officers-0311.pdf>

Modell, S., & Cropp, D. (2007). Police officers and disability: Perceptions and attitudes.

*Intellectual And Developmental Disabilities*, 45(1), 60-63.

[http://dx.doi.org/10.1352/1934-9556\(2007\)45\[60:poadpa\]2.0.co;2](http://dx.doi.org/10.1352/1934-9556(2007)45[60:poadpa]2.0.co;2)

Modell, S., & Mak, S. (2008). A preliminary assessment of police officers' knowledge and perceptions of persons with disabilities. *Intellectual And Developmental Disabilities*,

46(3), 183-189. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1352/2008.46:183-189>

*Patrol Services*. (2013). Ventura County Sheriff's Office. Retrieved from

<http://www.vcsd.org/division-patrol.php>

Perry, David M., Carter-Long, Lawrence (2016) *The Ruderman white paper on media coverage of law enforcement use of force and disability: A media study (2013-2015) and overview* [White paper], Retrieved from

[http://rudermanfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/MediaStudy-PoliceDisability\\_final-final.pdf](http://rudermanfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/MediaStudy-PoliceDisability_final-final.pdf)

Watson, A., & Angell, B. (2013). The role of stigma and uncertainty in moderating the effect of procedural justice on cooperation and resistance in police encounters with persons with mental illnesses. *Psychology, Public Policy, And Law*, 19(1), 30-39.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0027931>

Wright, A. (2016). Police interactions with individuals with developmental disabilities: Use of force, training, and implicit bias. *SSRN Electronic Journal*, n.p.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2903331>