

Title: Behavioral reactions to the use of less-lethal weapons in four countries

Author: Michael D. Silver, Ph.D., Anacapa Sciences, Inc. (msilver@anacapasciences.com)

Author Title: Principal Scientist

Abstract:

For effective planning and successful operations, law enforcement and military users of less-lethal weapons (LLWs) as well as policy makers need to be able to anticipate how a person will react behaviorally to the use of those weapons. However, most research on LLW effects focuses on technical aspects (e.g., accuracy, force imparted) or physiological/medical effects (e.g., injury patterns, probability of unintended lethality). LLW users, policy makers, and the public can be better-informed about the behavioral consequences of using LLWs if research is conducted that focuses on the behavioral reactions of the people affected by the weapons as well as other people who observe those people being affected. However, behavioral data are currently in short supply. Even less well-known are potential differences in reactions to LLWs by people in different cultures; for example, using a particular LLW in one culture may de-escalate violence whereas using the same weapon in a similar situation in another culture may escalate violence.

This presentation describes the results of a recently-completed research study with law enforcement officers in four countries exploring: 1) how people react behaviorally when one of a variety of less-lethal weapons is used on them, 2) how people react to seeing other people affected by these weapons, and 3) whether and how such reactions differ between cultures. The study used structured interviews with approximately 150 officers from Bosnia, Timor L'Este (East Timor), the United Kingdom, and the United States regarding their personal experiences using a variety of LLWs, including various impact munitions, chemical irritants, electrical devices, and other LLWs in hundreds of operational (not training) situations. The goals, methods, and result highlights of the study will be presented.

Keywords: effectiveness, behavior, international, law enforcement