

Itchy Trigger Finger? How About Itchy Brain?

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The Huffington Post:

Police work is very dangerous, often involving bad people with guns, and one of the most dangerous policing tasks is searching and clearing a house. This is where the police go through a building room to room in pursuit of a suspect who may be armed and dangerous. The police officer must be fully prepared to shoot — finger on the trigger, mind alert — in case he or she does confront a suspect who is armed and ready to shoot. But the officer must also have the self-restraint to refrain from pulling the trigger if he or she bursts into a room and confronts an innocent bystander.

Getting this right is cognitively challenging, which is one reason innocent people get shot — not just by the police but by soldiers as well. Shooting a gun involves a complex cascade of actions, each linked to a specific cognitive ability. From a psychological perspective, a police officer in this frightening situation must mentally inhibit an already initiated action — stop in his tracks, cognitively — in order to keep from squeezing the trigger if an innocent person is detected. And it all happens instantaneously.

Psychological scientist Adams Biggs of Duke University has been studying shooting performance and cognition. As part of this project, he has been working with colleagues to link civilian casualties to failures of response inhibition — and, more importantly, to see if civilian casualties might be reduced by improving trainees' cognitive inhibition abilities. Here's a description of their work:

Read the whole story: [*The Huffington Post*](#)

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