

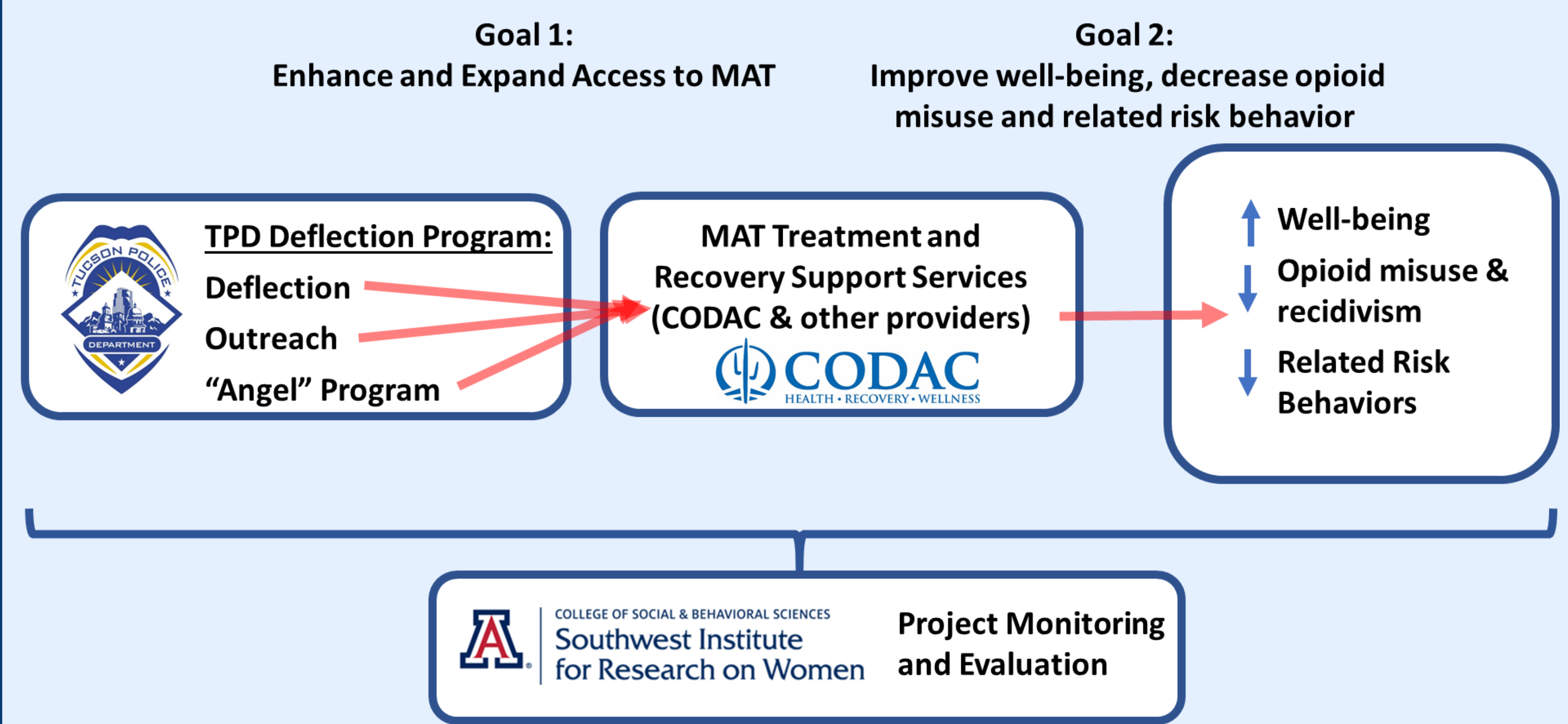
Background:

The opioid epidemic has been called the most fatal drug crisis in U.S. history (National Safety Council, 2018). According to the CDC, in April 2021, drug overdose deaths in the U.S. exceeded 100,000 for the prior 12-month period (https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/nchs_pressreleases/2021/20211117.htm). This is a 28.5% increase from the preceding 12-month period.

In response to the limited effectiveness of traditional approaches to addressing substance misuse and additional problems created by justice involvement, some jurisdictions have started to implement pre-arrest deflection models (TASC, 2017). These models attempt to deflect individuals with substance use issues away from justice involvement to appropriate substance misuse treatment. Relatedly, The law enforcement/behavioral health co-responder model has emerged as a promising approach to addressing police incidents with suspected mental health and, to a lesser extent, substance use issues (White & Weisburd, 2017).

In consideration of health disparities, it is important to examine whether law enforcement involvement in substance misuse interventions is differentially acceptable across gender groups.

The Deflection Program Overview:



Tucson Police Department Deflection Program:

The Tucson Police Department (TPD) Deflection Program aims to address misuse of opioids and other substances as well as related issues, such as criminality, by identifying individuals with substance use issues, encouraging them to get treatment, and immediately transporting them to a treatment provider.

Department-wide Deflection Component: Under the Deflection Program, police officers have the discretion to deflect individuals with substance use problems who are willing to consider treatment. That is, they encourage them to seek treatment in lieu of arresting them, which includes transporting them immediately to a partnering treatment provider when possible.

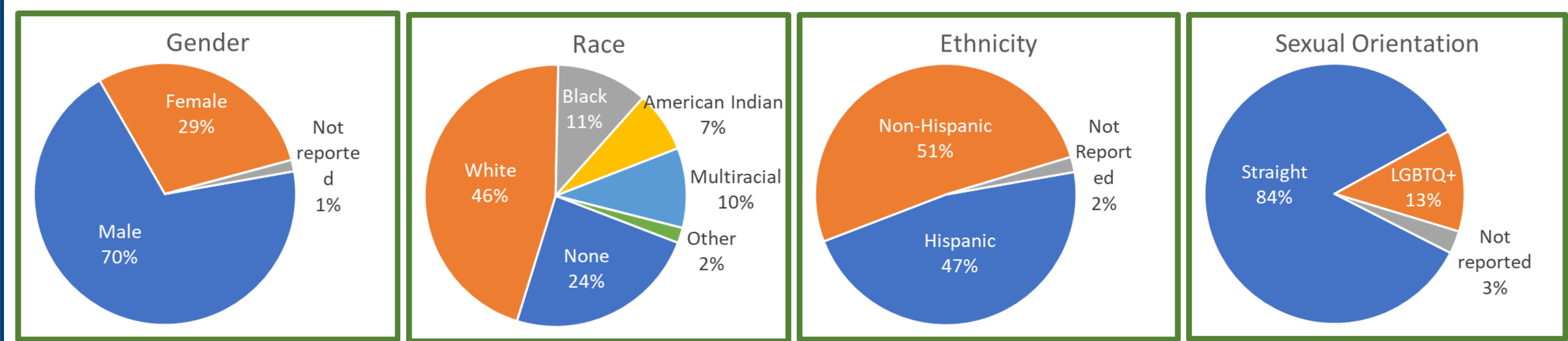
Outreach Component: Another key component of the Deflection Program is the law enforcement/behavioral health peer support co-responder teams who are conducting active outreach in the community focused on encouraging people to seek substance misuse treatment or to re-engage in treatment if they had been in treatment before. These efforts are led by TPD's Substance Use Resource Team (SURT). SURT officers partner with behavioral health peer support Outreach & Engagement Specialists co-located at a TPD facility.

Angel Program: A subcomponent of the Deflection Program is the Angel Program, where police officers help individuals get connected to substance misuse treatment providers when they approach police officers in the community or at a TPD facility and ask for assistance.

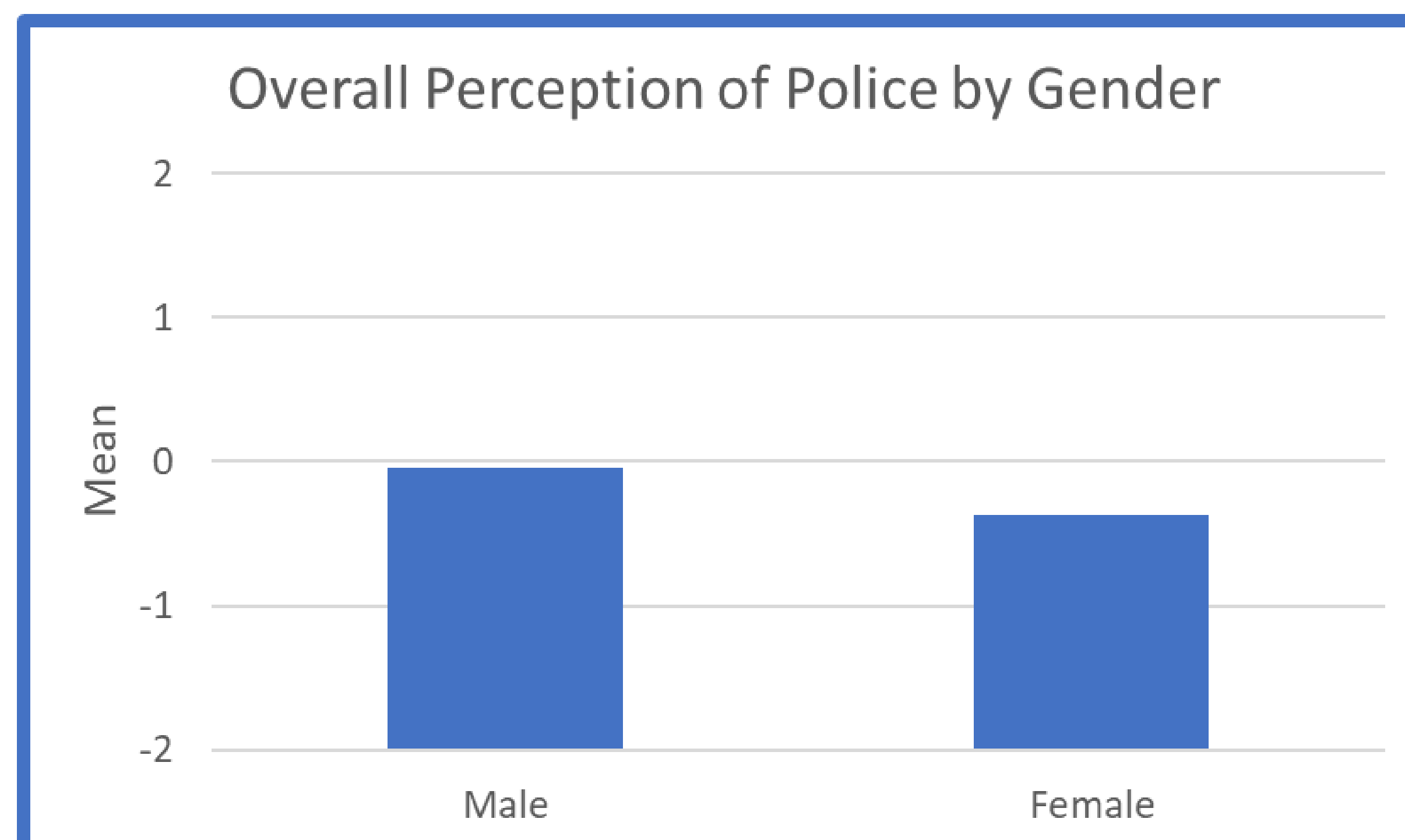
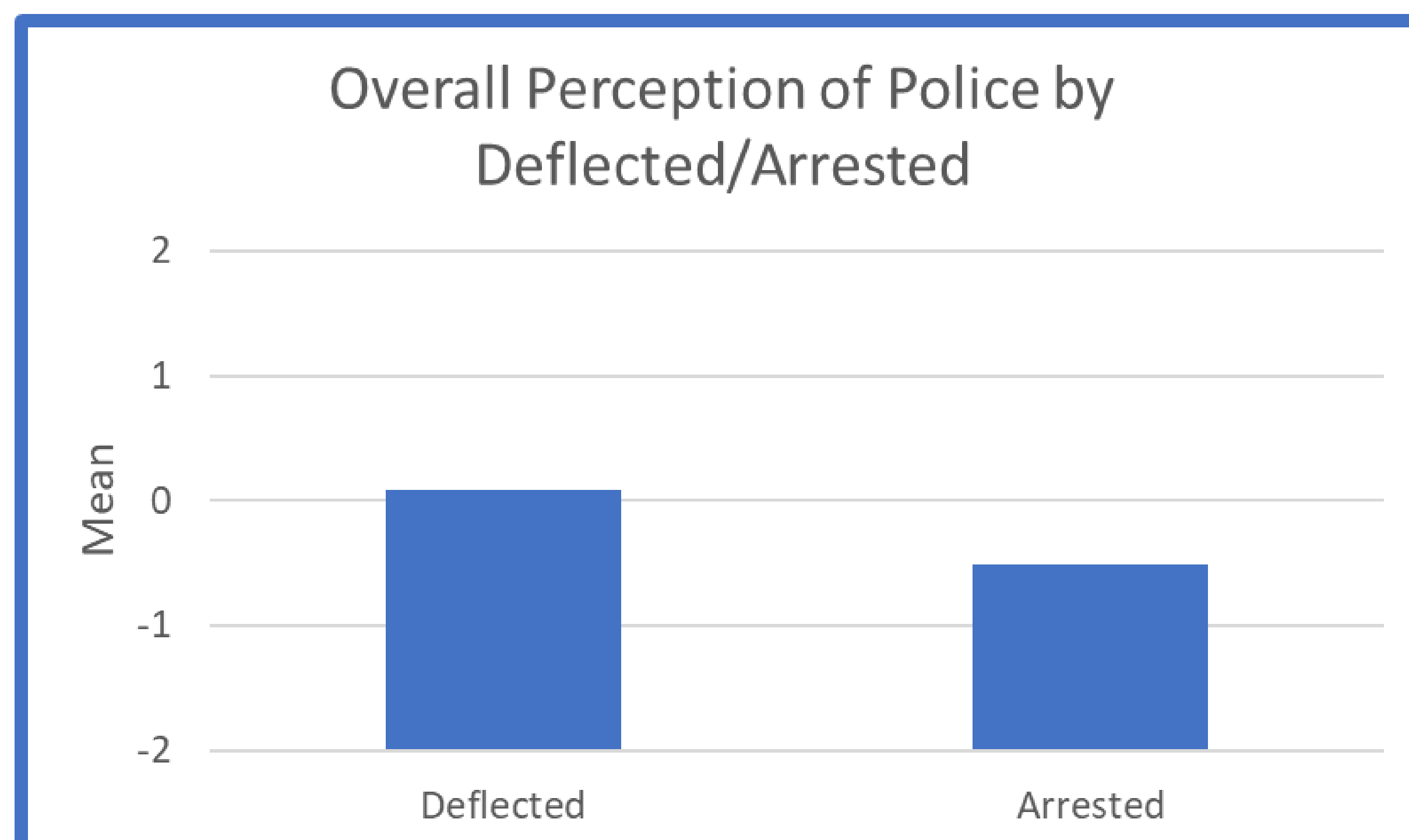
Methods:

We surveyed 213 adults who had been arrested for a drug-related offence or provided a brief intervention to substance misuse treatment in lieu of arrest (were "deflected"). We utilized the Perceptions of Police Scale (Nadal & Davidoff, 2015) to assess 1) attitudes towards law enforcement and 2) beliefs about police bias specific to the recent arrest or deflection. We created 4 additional items to assess beliefs about police support of people with substance misuse and mental health problems. Possible scores range from 2 to -2 with larger values reflecting more positive attitudes and beliefs.

Participants:

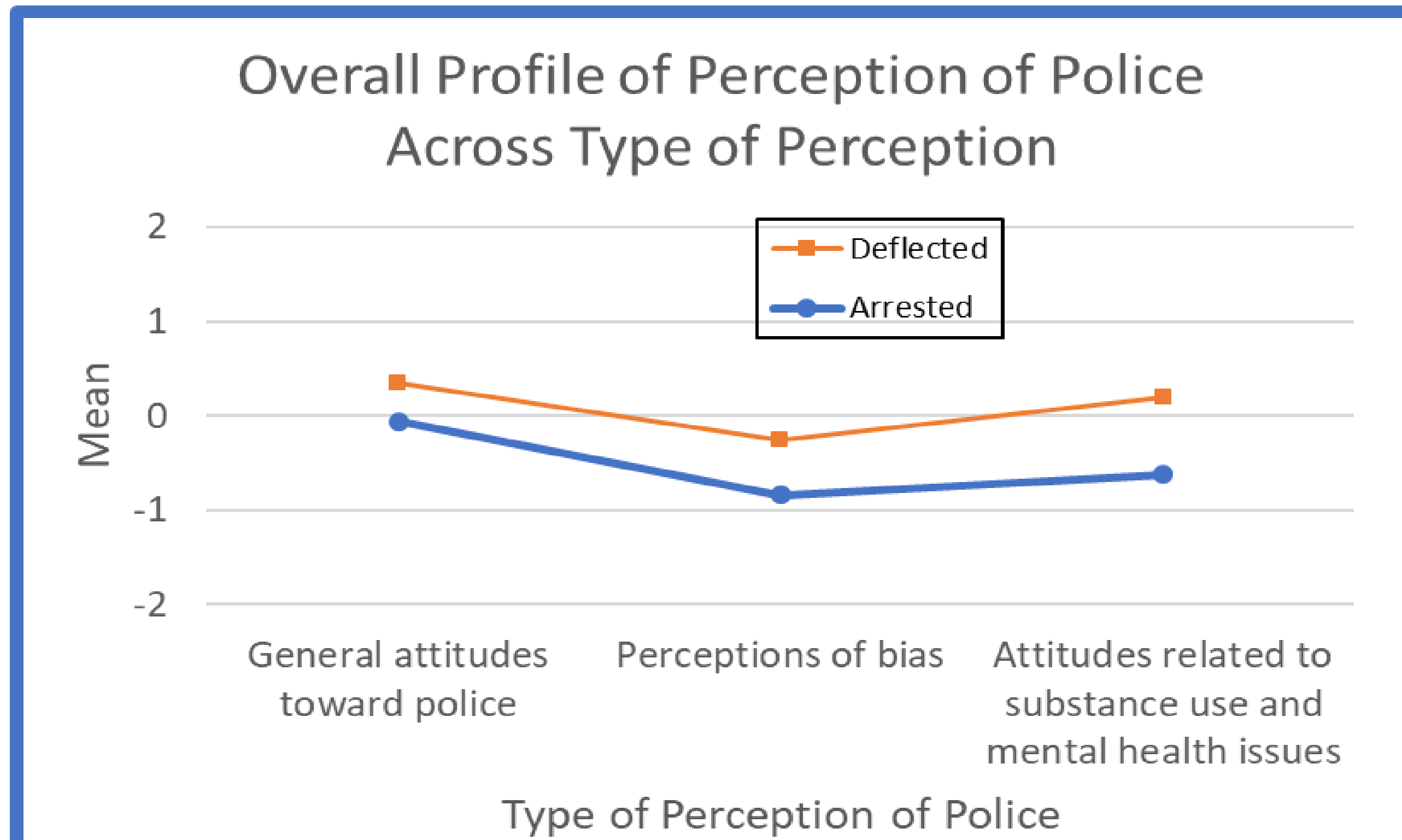
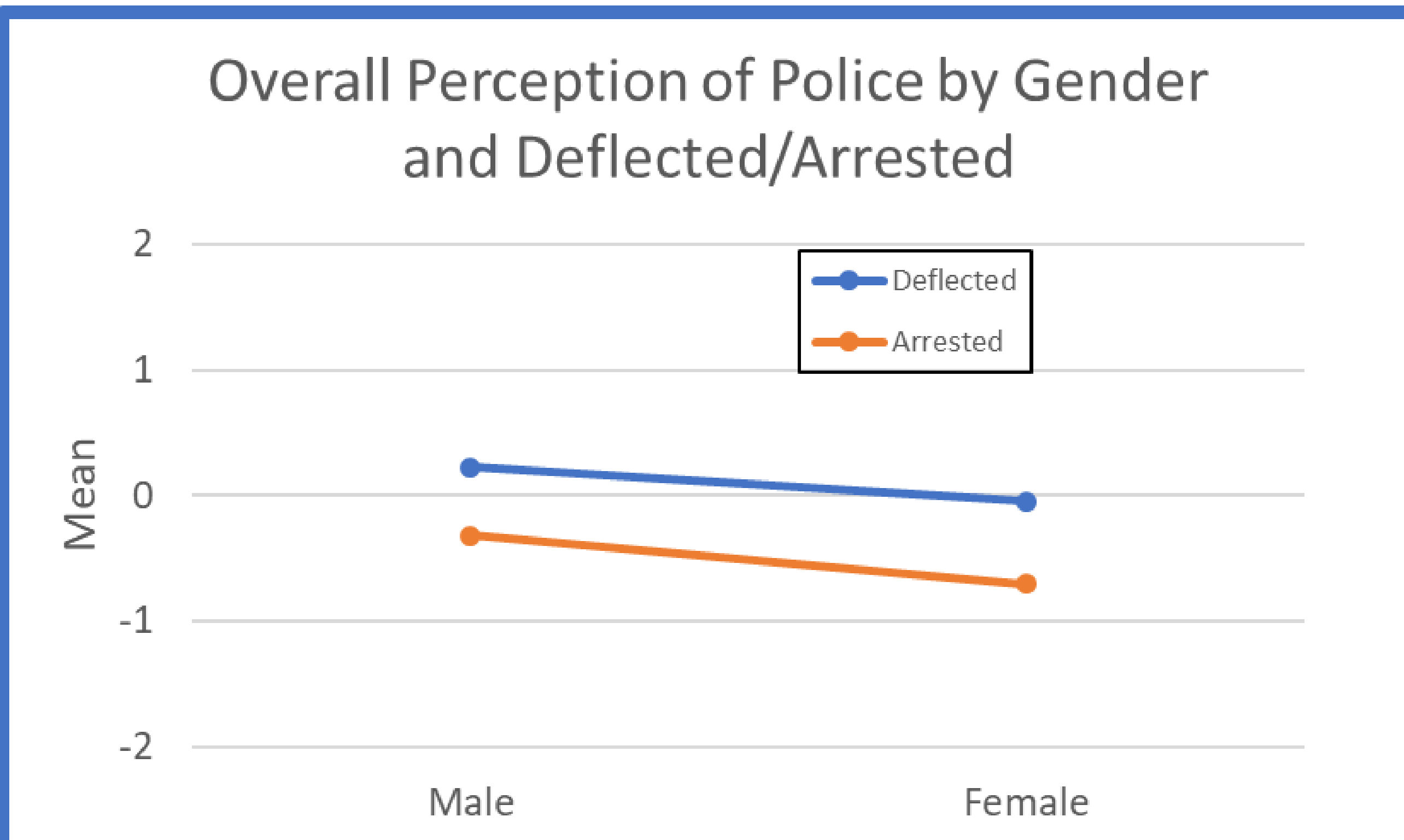


Results:



Individuals who had been arrested had more negative perceptions of police involved in the incident compared to individuals who had been deflected ($F = 15.92, p < .001$).

Overall, females had more negative perceptions of police involved in the incident compared to males ($F = 4.86, p = .029$).



No gender by deflected/arrested interaction ($F = 0.14, p = .706$). Males and females had, on average, equally more positive perceptions of the police involved in the incident when the incident resulted in deflection rather than arrest.

There was a deflected/arrested by type of perception interaction ($F = 4.37, p = .014$). Deflection, compared to arrest, had the most positive impact on perceived attitudes related to substance use and mental health issues and the least positive impact on general attitudes towards the police.

Discussion:

The Deflection Program had a positive impact on perceptions of police particularly in relation to attitudes related to substance misuse and mental health issues.

While individuals have more positive views of police when they respond with interventions to treatment, females have a more negative view overall of their interactions with police than males do.

Having a negative view is likely to impact response to the brief intervention to substance abuse treatment offered by law enforcement. Thus, females might not respond as positively to the brief intervention as males and, consequently, are less likely than males to benefit from the intervention in terms of connection to a treatment provider.

Equitable intervention benefit across gender groups might be realized if the intervention is tailored by gender, such as by tailoring the intervention messaging or approach by gender.

Acknowledgement:

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