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Police Decision Making in Wife Abuse: The Impact of Legal and Extralegal Factors

Pam Waaland* and Stuart Keeley†

The impact of legal and extralegal information on patrol officers' decision-making policies for wife abuse was investigated using regression analysis. Individual differences in officers' propensity to arrest abusive husbands were also examined. Thirty-six police officers made responsibility and prescriptive judgments based on simulated police reports describing seven sources of information ("cues"). Regression analyses indicated that victims' extralegal behavior generally was the primary determinant of responsibility assigned to both victims and assailants. However, legal prescriptions were based primarily on legally relevant information. Implications of the obtained judgment policies as well as use of the regression methodology in legal decision-making research are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Wife abuse has reached epidemic proportions in the United States today. National survey figures (e.g., Nisoff & Bitman, 1978; Gaquin, 1979; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980) estimate that 19–28 million American women—no less than one-third of all U.S. wives— will be physically assaulted by their spouses over the course of married life. Detection of the "hidden crime" of wife abuse has heightened societal concern for not only battered women, but also the agents who protect them. Statistics indicate that domestic disturbances account for a substantial portion of all crime-related injuries and deaths of intervening police officers (FBI Uniform Crime Report, 1974). Law enforcement agencies, as society's peacekeepers, are also in a pivotal position to help battered women. Police involvement in domestic disturbances exceeds their total involvement in murder, rape, and all forms of aggravated assault (Wilt et al., 1977). Nevertheless, the primary reason for societal concern is the notable failure of officers to protect the legal rights of wife assault victims. Investigations reveal that officers seldom

* Crater Child Development Clinic, 2002 Wakefield Street, Petersburg, Virginia 23803.
† Department of Psychology, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio 43403.

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arrest assaultive husbands, even when substantial grounds exist for arrest (e.g., Black, 1980).

Because of the implications arrest policies have for the safety of battered wives (see Wilt et al., 1977), researchers have attempted to isolate the factors which influence these important decisions. Both field (Black, 1980) and archival (Berk & Loseke, 1980–81) investigations reveal that the legal seriousness of a domestic assault has little or no impact on its legal outcome. Instead, extralegal factors are primary determinants of arrest policies. Influential extralegal factors range from the assailant's drinking behavior and social class to his demeanor toward investigating officers. Thus, an abusive husband's personal characteristics and presentation potentially may determine whether he will be arrested for assaulting his wife.

Results of the select studies examining police domestic arrest policies are provocative, but potentially misleading. Berk and Loseke (1980–81), for example, based their conclusions on a select sample of police-recorded disputes. They limited their sample to only those domestic disturbance incidents which were deemed serious enough *by the police* to warrant thorough attention. Black's (1980) field observations provide a more representative sample of disputes. However, his data were collected well over a decade ago and may not reflect contemporary police practices. Both of these investigations focus only on arrest decisions, although police appear to have many other available options. Neither of these investigations, which apply nomothetic methodologies, examined individual differences in police decision making. Yet, documented variability in domestic arrest practices (Potter, 1978) may be the result of systematic differences in use of legal and extralegal information to make arrest decisions as well as random variability in the decisions.

Many researchers attribute what they describe as lax negative police attitudes toward victims (e.g., Langley & Levy, 1977; Hoeffler, 1981). They argue that police may blame victims directly for "provoking" the crime or indirectly for remaining with abusive spouses. These charges are based on informal observations of police practices rather than systematic empirical evidence and, consequently, may not reflect typical decision making. However, experimental investigations have revealed lay judgments of domestic assaults are heavily influenced by victim, as opposed to offender, behavior. The latter investigations indicate that the woman who participates in a precipitating argument (Kalmus 1979) or drinks prior to her assault (Richardson & Campbell, 1980) is likely to be held more, and her husband less, accountable for her assault. In contrast, offender drinking behavior or assaultive history does not affect responsibility attributed to him. Although it has not been determined whether police judgments parallel lay judgment policies, recent comparisons of the rape attitudes held by police officers and others provide some preliminary expectations for police behavior (Feldman-Summers & Palmer, 1980; Feild, 1978). These investigations indicate that police officers are more likely to hold antivictim biases than are other societal members.

The present investigation attempts to clarify how officers use available information to arrive at their personal and professional decisions for wife assaults. A second goal is to examine individual differences in officers' arrest policies. A

policy-capturing methodology (Slovic & Lichenstein, 1971) developed to study judgment and decision making quantitatively is used for these purposes. Officers make a series of judgments based on seven sources of legal and extralegal information describing violent marital disputes. Statistical analyses provide information about how individual patrol officers weigh and combine these factors to reach responsibility judgments and legal intervention decisions.

METHODS

Subjects

Participants were 26 male (aged 22–46; M = 34.7 years) and ten female (aged 23–36; M = 30.5 years) patrol officers from a metropolitan city in Oregon. All participants reported professional experience with domestic disputes (range = 10 to over 100 cases; *Mdn* = over 100 cases), and they had a mean of eight years of patrol experience (range = 1–20 years).

Materials

Each officer was given a loose-leaf casebook which contained task instructions, profiles of 71 wife assault cases, and several questionnaires. The instruction set described the nature of the task, judgments, and the information presented in each case description. A postexperimental questionnaire which concluded the casebook solicited written descriptions of officers' use of informational cues and perception of the task.

The 71 case descriptions were written to simulate actual police reports. Case descriptions contained seven informational cues (see Table 1), selected on the basis of pilot investigations with police officers and prior field studies examining their arrest policies (e.g., Black, 1980). A representative range of cue levels was devised for each of the seven cues. Cue level descriptions were designed to exemplify cases described in survey and police accounts. At the same time, extreme levels (e.g., "he killed his wife") were excluded from the set to avoid biased cue saliency or nonlinearity between cues and obtained judgments. To make the task more realistic for participants, verbal descriptions within each cue level were varied slightly. Two pilot investigations were conducted to assure the equivalency of descriptions within each cue level and the distinctiveness of between-level descriptors. The seven cues and a summary of their respective cue levels appear in Table 1.

The 56 unique combinations of the seven cues which appeared in case descriptions were generated using random number tables. These combinations were modified slightly until all cue intercorrelations were less than .20 to facilitate later comparison of each cue's unique contribution. In addition to the 56 unique profiles, 15 duplicate profiles were randomly selected and distributed across the case set to assess intrajudge reliability.

The order of information presented within each of the 56 cases was random-

Table 1. Cues and Cue Levels Appearing in Profiles

Cues	Cue levels
1. Occupation	1) Blue collar (e.g., assembly line worker) 2) White collar (e.g., bank administrator)
2. History of wife assault	1) Never struck wife before 2) Struck wife on several occasions in past 3) Struck wife on many occasions in past
3. Assailant's behavior toward officers	1) Cooperative/respectful 2) Somewhat belligerent/insulting 3) Extremely belligerent/insulting
4. Extent of victim injury	1) No injuries 2) Moderate injury (e.g., black eye) 3) Severe injury (e.g., broken arm)
5. Drinking by the assailant	1) No evidence of alcohol involvement 2) Had a few drinks 3) Had far too much to drink
6. Drinking by the victim	1) No evidence of alcohol involvement 2) Had a few drinks 3) Had far too much to drink
7. Verbal antagonism	1) No apparent precipitant 2) Moderate antagonism (e.g., "she nagged him to pick-up after himself while he was trying to eat dinner") 3) Extreme antagonism (e.g., "She repeatedly shouted her regrets for marrying someone as worthless as he")

ized with several restrictions. Each cue was presented in the first and last positions in case descriptions a total of five or more times to counterbalance for previously reported serial order effects (Arkkelin, Oakley, & Mynatt, 1979; Austin, Ruble, & Trabasso, 1971). In addition, the sequence of the 71 cases was reversed in half of the 36 booklets to counterbalance for profile order effects.

Dependent Measures

After reading each case, officers rated both husband and wife responsibility for the incident and assigned one of four possible legal outcomes for the offender. The two responsibility judgments were made on a 7-point scale that ranged from (1) "not at all responsible" to (7) "totally responsible." Legal sanctions ranged in severity from (1) "no action," (2) "severe reprimand," (3) "removal from premises," to (4) "immediate arrest." The selection and scaling of legal prescriptions were based on extensive interviews with officers and field reports of their practices. A sample profile is depicted in Table 2.

Procedure

After presiding captains had approved the project, a sign-up sheet was posted in five police precincts. This sheet listed the three times the task would be administered in each precinct and offered cash payment and confidential feedback to participating patrol officers. Ninety-five officers from four precincts volun-

Table 2. Sample of Domestic Dispute Profile and Officer Rating Scales

Case 68

This domestic dispute involves an outdoor laborer for the city park, Jessie H., and his wife Rene. According to reports, both Rene and Jessie appeared extremely inebriated at the time of the investigation. Jessie became assaultive for no apparent reason, and has physically abused Rene on many occasions during their marriage. Rene was sporting a black eye as a result. Jessie was very cooperative with the officers.

To what extent do you think Rene is responsible for this incident?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all responsible						Completely responsible

To what extent do you think Jessie is responsible for this incident?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all responsible						Completely responsible

What action should be taken?

1	2	3	4
No action	Severe reprimand	Removal from premises	Immediate arrest

teered to participate. Cash payment was apparently a powerful incentive as no volunteers were enlisted from the fifth precinct where cash payment was prohibited. Because of the large number of volunteers, only those who would participate at one of the three times designated for each precinct ($N = 36$) were included in the final sample.

Groups of two to five participants reported to their precinct training rooms at the designated times. Officers were told to read instructions carefully, read through the first ten cases, and ask any remaining questions before they began making their judgments. On the average, officers took 61 minutes ($SD = 31.3$ minutes) to complete the 71 cases. After they had completed all materials, the experimenter determined if officers had detected duplicate cases. No one reported an awareness of these duplications. Fifteen of the officers were also interviewed at length concerning their perception of the task and wife assault. Each participant was paid $15.00 and provided with a report of his or her decision-making policy. The project was completed during a three-week period in August.

RESULTS

Reliability and Predictability of Judgments

To obtain a reliability index denoting intrajudge consistency, Pearson product-moment coefficients were computed on the 15 duplicate cases for each officer and each type of judgment. Overall, officers made fairly consistent judgments on identical cases. Reliability coefficients average from .65 to .78 on the

three scales. Only nine of the 108 coefficients (3 judgments × 36 officers) fail to reach the .05 significance level (critical $r = .48$; $p < .05$), and these nine coefficients are distributed across different judges and all three rating scales. Consequently, the responses of all judges are included in subsequent analyses.

Given that officers use reasonably consistent "rules" to reach their decisions, can their judgments be predicted on the basis of a linear model? To address this question, a stepwise multiple regression analysis was performed on each officer's responses to the 56 unique profiles. Numerical values representing cue levels (0–2 on six variables; 0–1 on the seventh variable) served as predictor values, and the 56 unique judgments officers made on the three rating scales serves as criterion values in the 108 (3 judgments × 36 officers) stepwise analyses. The R^2 values derived from these analyses indicate the total proportion of variance accounted for when all seven cues are entered into the model.

Comparable to the findings of other policy-capturing judgment studies (e.g., Kreutzer et al., Note 1; Arkkelin et al., 1979), some officers generally responded more predictably and some types of judgments were better predicted than others. Average R^2 values were highest for the prescriptive judgments (mean $R^2 = .66$, range = .51–.84), followed by the wife responsibility judgments (mean $R^2 = .55$, range = .24–.76). Multiple correlation coefficients were significant ($p < .01$) in all cases; more than half of the scale variance was accounted for by the linear model in 94 of the 108 judgment policies. Consequently, the linear equation provided a reasonably accurate model of police decision making with these seven cues.

Individual Judgment Policies

Statistical models describing how officers used and weighted each cue were derived from the preceding regression analyses. Signed beta weights obtained for each cue indicate the directionality between a cue and each officer's judgments. Usefulness indices (Darlington, 1968) indicate how heavily each cue is weighted by the officer in making his or her decisions. Statistically, the usefulness index corresponds to the decrement in R^2 when the cue of interest has been dropped from the regression equation. Because cue intercorrelations are near zero, this index provides a measure of the variance uniquely accounted for by each cue.

Four summary indices describe officers' use of each cue (Note 2). Table 3 summarizes, for each of the three judgments: (a) the number of judges for whom each cue contributed a *significant* ($p < .05$) proportion of variance to their judgment policy; (b) the number of judges for whom each cue made the most *salient* contribution; (c) individual variability in cue utilization; and (d) the "composite officer's" weighting scheme (denoted "C_{UI}"). The "composite officer" policy is an index of the weights obtained when officers' judgments are averaged; thus, it estimates a group policy. Stepwise multiple regression analyses were computed on the 56 mean case ratings, and normalized usefulness indices were computed for each of the three judgment types. Because no significant differences existed in the relative ranking of usefulness indices as a function of officer gender, these data are not discussed separately.

Table 3. Summary Indices of Relative Cue Utilization over the 36 Judges and Composite Judgments[a]

Dependent measure	Occupation	Assault history	Behavior toward police	Extent injury	Alcohol assailant	Alcohol victim	Antagonism by victim
Summary of individual cue utilization:							
Wife responsibility judgment							
Cue/judgment relationship	+	−	−	−	−	+	+
Significant cue utilizations	1	5	8	17	17	32	36
Cue utilization ranked first[b]	0	0	0	1	0	5	30
Usefulness index range	0–5	0–25	0–10	0–54	0–25	0–59	6–96
Husband responsibility judgment							
Cue/judgment relationship	+	+	+	+	+	−	−
Significant cue utilizations	2	16	13	30	21	24	35
Cue utilization ranked first	0	0	1	8	4	0	23
Usefulness index range	0–10	0–32	0–40	0–77	0–46	0–34	0–95
Legal sanction judgment							
Directionality of cue/ judgment relationship	+	+	+	+	+	±	±
Significant cue utilizations	4	21	26	36	18	5	9
Cue utilization ranked first	0	2	1	33	0	0	0
Usefulness index range	0–6	0–61	0–41	17–100	0–25	0–8	0–9
Composite judgment policy[c]							
Wife responsibility	0	1	1	3	3	17	75
Husband responsibility	0	2	6	19	12	12	49
Legal sanction	0	6	6	85	3	0	0

[a] Tabled values indicated the number of judges who utillized a particular cue to a significant extent ($p < .05$). As it is possible for a particular judge to utilize all cues in arriving at a decision, the maximum value for *each* cue is 36.
[b] Tabled values indicate the number of judges who utilized a particular cue to the greatest extent. Therefore, numbers for *all* cues sum to 36.
[c] Tabled values reflect the total proportion of variance in a judgment accounted for by each of the seven cues. For ease of comparison, the usefulness indices presented above have been converted to percentages and sum to 100 for any particular judgment.

Officers show a quite uniform directional pattern of cue utilization (see Table 3), but the extent to which they attended to particular cues varies considerably. Victim antagonism clearly is the overriding determinant of responsibility assigned by judges to both the victim (significant = 36 officers, salient = 30 officers; C_{UI} = .75) and the assailant (significant = 35, salient = 23, C_{UI} = .49). To a lesser extent, drinking by the victim also serves to increase her perceived responsibility significantly (significant = 32, salient = 4, C_{UI} = .17) and at the same time, to reduce her assailant's perceived role in the assault (significant = 24, salient = 0, C_{UI} = .12). The five remaining cues account for only 8% of the total variance in the composite wife responsibility judgment. Responsibility assigned to the assailant also generally increases when he has injured his victim more severely (significant = 30, salient = 8, C_{UI} = .19) or appears more intoxicated (significant = 21, salient = 4, C_{UI} = .12).

On the average, officers hold an abusive husband more responsible (M = 5.1, SD = .65) than his wife (M = 3.4, SD = .66). However, the difference between officers' average responsibility assignments to the husband and wife on the two scales is extremely variable (range = −.16 to 3.60). Three officers hold wives relatively more responsible than their abusive spouses overall, while several officers consistently hold husbands more responsible under all conditions. Responsibility assignments tend to be reciprocal; ratings made by 34 of the 36 officer

on the two responsibility scales are significantly related to one another ($M = -.65$, range $= -.16$ to $-.99$).

In contrast to responsibility judgments, prescriptive judgments clearly are best predicted by the victim injury cue. This cue is reliably utilized by all officers, makes the greatest contribution to 33 of the 36 policies, and accounts for 85% of the variance in the composite judgment policy. The assailant's behavior toward investigating officers (significant = 36, salient = 2, $C_{UI} = .06$) and his assaultive history (significant = 21, salient = 1, $C_{UI} = .06$) also make significant but small average contributions. However, variability in the extent to which officers attend to the two latter cues is larger. Police behavior usefulness indices vary from zero (10 officers) to 41%. Even more diverse are usefulness indices representing use of past assault information; they account for from zero (15 officers) to 61 percent of the officers' judgment variance. Surprisingly, occupation, victim antagonism, and drinking cues do not meaningfully affect officers' legal decisions.

Differences in how heavily officers considered each cue are paralleled by striking differences in the types of sanctions they prescribe. Six officers prescribe either no action or only a reprimand for offenders in more than half of the 56 cases. In contrast, seven officers prescribe removal and another seven, arrest for more than half of the offenders portrayed. The ranges of percentages obtained for the sanctions are: none, 0–48; reprimand, 0–43; removal, 16–64; and arrest, 7–68.

To examine interjudge agreement, the number of judges selecting each prescription was determined for each case. The percentage of all judges selecting the most popular choice is generally low and extremely variable across the 56 cases (median percentage selecting the most popular option = 58%; range = 33%–97%). All four prescriptive choices are represented among judgments on three-fourths of the 56 cases. In short, officers do not readily agree on what type of action should be taken against offenders in many of the cases reviewed.

Do any salient case characteristics lead to a greater consensus among officers? Cue levels associated with a majority choice of each option reveal only one consistency. Victims are depicted as severely injured (e.g., broken arms or jaws) in all cases ($n = 20$) for which more than 50% of the officers prescribe arrest. Officers clearly show better agreement upon the legal disposition of cases involving severe injury (*Mdn* of most frequent disposition = 75%, range = 50%–97%) than of cases resulting in no or only moderate injury (*Mdn* = 51%, range = 33%–92%). However, half of the officers fail to consistently prescribe arrest for severe injury cases. Also, 58% prescribe arrest under no other conditions, even though victims are depicted as moderately (e.g., black eye) injured in 19 of the 56 cases. *All* cases portrayed provide grounds for arrest on the basis of Oregon's domestic dispute statute.

To determine whether arrest decisions are influenced by officers' perception of blame, the relationship between responsibility and prescriptive judgments was computed for each officer. Since husband and wife responsibility judgements are substantially intercorrelated, partial correlation coefficients were computed. With the victim responsibility judgment measure held constant, 26 of the 36 correlations between the husband responsibility and prescriptive judgment measures reach

the .05 significance level (mean r = .38, range = .07–.74). In contrast, victim responsibility judgments with husband responsibility judgments held constant are reliably related to prescriptive judgments in only two cases (mean r = .07, range = −.25 to +.39). Thus, police perceptions of victim blame did not influence their professional decisions.

DISCUSSION

One of the central purposes of this study was to determine how and to what extent police use extralegal factors not only to assign blame, but also to make professional decisions for wife assault. Results clearly reveal that police officers use information differently to make these two types of judgments.

Police officers' use of many of the cues to assign responsibility for wife assault closely parallels lay use of this information (Kalmus, 1979). Police officers, like citizens, appear to focus heavily on the victim's behavior in assigning responsibility to both her and her assailant. As with the rape victim (e.g., Hursh & Selkin, Note 3) the provocative behavior of an abused wife may overshadow many other factors in determining who police will blame for an assault.

Nevertheless, the abused woman who has been more severely injured can be expected to receive less, and her husband more blame by both citizens (Kalmus, 1979) and police officers. Attribution researchers (e.g., Heider, 1957; Kelley, 1973) have found that past history of intentionality of, and justification for an act significantly influence responsibility attributions. People undoubtedly find it difficult to rationalize severe injury as "unintentional" or as "justified" by even the most provocative verbal blow. But surprisingly, neither the attributions of this group of officers nor those of laypersons (Kalmus, 1979) are significantly influenced by a man's history of wife abuse. Perhaps it is the perception of perfect covariance of chronic victimization and chronic abuse in the case of marital violence which leads many perceivers to discount prior assault information. That is, he beats and she stays, so there are no "real" victims.

Although past history was not predictive of blame, alcohol use was quite salient. In many respects, police blame for intoxicated parties converges with corresponding judgments of laypersons. In accord with previous findings (Richardson & Campbell, 1980), officers gave as great or even greater consideration to whether the victim, as opposed as her offender, had been drinking prior to her assault. Ironically, victim intoxication not only provides the assaultive husband "time out" from responsibility, but also leads her to be blamed for her own assault. However, the fact that officers hold the drinking assailant more responsible for his actions contrasts with lay judgments, which indicate reduced responsibility for intoxicated perpetrators (Richardson & Campbell, 1980; Kreutzer et al., Note 1). Factors underlying these judgment differences should be addressed in future research.

While officers' blaming policies shed some light on how they think about wife abuse cases, of greater practical importance are police intervention decisions

which may or may not reflect attribution policies. Such decisions affect the fates of thousands of battered women annually. Previous field research indicates arrest decisions are affected by extralegal factors such as the offender's drinking behavior or demeanor toward the police rather than the legal evidence (e.g., Berk & Loseke, 1980–81; Black, 1980). In the present study, however, officers do not show a pronounced bias in their use of extralegal information. Rather, most officers base their intervention decisions primarily on legal information, that is, how extensively a woman has been injured by her husband.

Several critical differences between the present study and previous field research may account for the more unbiased use of information by this group of Oregon officers. First, field investigators have considered only whether or not injury has occurred, without regard for its seriousness. In the present study, arrest policies for major and minor injuries are clearly different; a majority of officers prescribe arrests only when victims had been severely injured. Second, Oregon's recent adoption of legal standards for domestic interventions also may account for obtained discrepancies. Because these statutes clearly define domestic injury as an arrestable offense, officers may be less likely to rely on "intuition" and personal beliefs about marriage in making domestic arrest decisions. Third, reported discriminatory action toward lower-class and disrespectful citizens are based on data collected more than a decade ago (Black, 1980; Lundman, 1980a, 1980b). Yet many police departments have adapted more rigorous academy training, more rigid screening policies, and higher educational standards for recruits since these data were collected. These policy changes undoubtedly have affected police professionalism and practices.

Of course, social desirability effects may simply be more pronounced on a paper-and-pencil task than in the field, leading officers to avoid using extralegal evidence in the present study. If so, such effects are not similarly reflected in officers' use of extralegal information to make responsibility assignments or in their baserate decisions made on the three rating scales.

Despite officers' consistent tendency to weight injury information most heavily, variability in their relative use of several other cues represents a source of concern. For example, assailant's demeanor toward the police was a significant cue in determining the legal outcomes prescribed by several officers, while many officers failed to weight this information. Also, the policies of 16 of the officers reflect no weighting of past assault information. Research revealing that past assaults often preclude severe and fatal injuries (Wilt et al., 1977) suggests that officers might profit from closer scrutiny of an assailant's abusive history.

The generally low rates of arrests represent a more serious concern. In the present study, 36% of the 56 victims were depicted as severely injured. Half of the officers did not consistently prescribe arrests under these conditions; 58% prescribed arrests under no other conditions. Apparently, most officers do not consider multiple bruises or black eyes sufficient cause for taking legal action, even though this evidence explicitly defines unlawful assault in the state of Oregon.

While our findings are suggestive of important sources of officer judgment variability, the generality of these findings to other types of cases, samples, and

actual disputes should be further investigated. For example, many officers indicated that inclusion of other cues (e.g., victim's willingness to prosecute, housekeeping prowess, or children present) and other types of cases (i.e., mutual assault or male victims) may have affected their arrest policies. Additionally, officers were generally well educated, well trained, and lawfully required to arrest physically abusive spouses. It is certainly questionable whether many of our findings can be generalized to other samples of officers stationed across the United States.

It is important for researchers to examine judgments made in actual disputes. Officers undoubtedly find it much easier to make a paper-and-pencil decision than a real-life intervention which entails not only a substantial amount of paperwork to process an assaultive husband, but also personal risks. The present group of officers also were fairly homogeneous, the case characteristics were unambiguously presented, and their decisions were unchallenged. Consequently, even greater variability can be expected in the many domestic interventions which occur in the United States on a daily basis.

Our results have a number of implications for police decision and policy making. First, sensitizing police departments to officers' variable use of information and variable judgments made for the same crime seems a desirable starting point for addressing important questions about police decision making. For example, how responsive should officers be to situational differences in domestic disturbance calls? How much freedom should they have in deciding what dictates sufficient cause for arrest? Perhaps officers should be given leeway in making these decisions. Yet, if the law is to be defined as "fair and impartial," then police officers clearly will need to better agree upon what constitutes admissible evidence and an arrestable offense. Examining individual "policies" such as those captured in this study may facilitate better agreement.

Second, low rates of arrest prescribed by officers suggest that many members of the police force are not responding in a punitive fashion toward abusers. Recent evidence clearly indicates that recidivism rates for wife abuse offenders can be lowered by increasing arrest rates relative to more informal types of actions. Society also seems to be demanding firmer action. Judges have concurred with societal demands in a number of recent lawsuits brought against responding officers by wife abuse victims (e.g., see Breslin, 1978). To avoid repeat offenses, further criticism, and formal law suits, police departments may want to take a closer look at their philosophy for responding to wife assault. Because wife assault represents a significant proportion of police work, administrators may want to intensify training efforts. Training programs might focus on existing laws, how to treat alleged victims and their assailants, and the dangers posed by domestic disturbances. However, until the limits of "police discretionary powers" are more carefully defined, both officers and administrators will continue to struggle with distinguishing between police discretion and police discrimination.

Third, major cues being used for responsibility judgments are extralegal ones. Among these cues, the victim's behavior has the most salient impact on responsibility assignments. These biases do not influence intervention decisions, but may affect the way female victims are treated by officers. Subtle antivictim biases also may account for the high rates of dissatisfaction reported by abused women

seeking police protection (Roy, 1978). Future research should focus on not only arrest decisions, but also the degree to which officers act civilly toward victims and adhere to procedural guidelines and constitutional guarantees.

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