

An Inside View of Police Officers' Experience with Domestic Violence

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Abstract Since the recognition of domestic violence (DV) in the late 1970s, police officers have been frontline providers. Despite their changing role as a result of the criminalization of DV, little is known about their experiences and responses to this public health issue from their unique perspective. Via focus groups, 22 police officers discussed their scope of practice and emotional reactions to DV calls. Participants reported frustration with the recurring nature of DV and with the larger systems' lack of accountability (e.g., courts, prosecution and community) that follow their initial interventions. Participants discussed

the limitations of their role as protectors of public safety, attitudes that evolve over time and their beliefs as to contributing factors that perpetuate DV. Additionally, the officers recommend: more professional training, counseling, incident debriefing for officers including feedback on case disposition, better collaboration across professional groups, and evidence-based prosecution. Harsher penalties were also recommended.

Keywords Domestic violence · Law enforcement · Policing · Community coordinated response · Focus groups

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Introduction

Domestic violence (DV) has most frequently caused serious injury to women (National Institute of Justice, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2000). Studies estimate that it affects between 12 and 23% of women over their lifetime and 7–12% of men (National Institute of Justice, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2000). Due to prevalence of DV as a major public health problem, it must take a high priority on community agendas (Saltzman et al. 2000).

Since recognition of DV as an issue in the late 1970's, government officials, activists, and social scientists have debated the best method and delivery of responsive action. In the mid 1980's, social scientists tested policing interventions, namely mandatory or pro-arrest, as a possible alternative to counseling and social service actions (Sherman and Berk 1984). As a result of these studies, and subsequent legislative action, the police, more than any other professionals, became frontline responders. Officers have reported feeling more vulnerable when responding to a domestic dispute than to a robbery or other crime due to the unpredictability of the outcome and the passion inherent in

DV calls for service. Given the frequency of 911 calls for help with domestic disputes, coupled with victims' expectation for relief through police intervention, effective policies must consider the perspective of the police as gatekeepers and first responders.

A victim's decision of whether to call the police has been made more complex by the introduction of mandatory or pro-arrest policies. While the individual may seek immediate respite from the violence, mandatory arrest was coupled with myriad new prosecutorial approaches, which included pro- and mandatory prosecution (Buzawa and Buzawa 2003; Davis et al. 2008; Dobash 2003; Ford and Regoli 1993; Hanna 1996; Hirschel and Hutchison 2001; Rauma 1984; Rebovich 1996). Mandatory prosecution required that prosecutors move forward with or without the victims on board, while pro-prosecution policies favored prosecution over allowing victims to drop the charges, which was common practice at the time. There is little known about how these changes affected victims' willingness to use services.

This paper fills a gap in the literature by asking police officers for recommendations on how to reduce and ameliorate this public health problem. Through this unique study, police officers participated in focus groups to share their experiences with, and responses to, DV.

Background and Significance

Sherman and colleagues changed the face of policing in the United States. As a result of a series of studies, researchers identified that mandatory and pro-arrest policies would reduce DV (Sherman 1992b; Sherman and Berk 1984; Sherman 1991, 1992a). After replication studies, researchers narrowed the scope of this belief that arrest reduced recidivism for those perpetrators with a stake in conformity (Maxwell et al. 2001, 2002; Sherman et al. 1992). Nonetheless, nearly all states have adopted some form of legislation that have addressed DV. Some states have required or permitted a call for service for DV, coupled with probable cause that a crime has been committed, to result in an arrest (Dejong and Burgess-Proctor 2006; Hirschel and Buzawa 2002). All fifty states have also enacted some form of civil remedy, which might include protection orders issued through civil courts, as well as through bond requirements (American Bar Association Commission on Domestic Violence 2009). However, even for those victims who utilize a civil remedy, many had a police encounter first.

Such legislative action made police officers first responders, responsible for using a variety of remedies to ameliorate DV. Though their role seems clear and straightforward, police efforts to both "eliminate" and interrupt DV have been complex. Literature on police involvement in

DV incidents has focused on current arrest policies, victims' access and attitudes toward police, police attitudes toward victims and perpetrators, and gender differences between male and female police officers. However, there is scant literature that directly asks police officers what they think and feel about their role in intervening with DV.

Victims' Influence on Arrest Decisions

As previously noted, pro-arrest and mandatory policies permit, and sometimes require, police to make an arrest under certain circumstances when responding to DV cases (Sherman 1991; Sherman et al. 1992; Sherman and Berk 1984). Though mandatory arrest appeared to remove the element of choice for police officers, results showed that other important themes might override this mandated policy (Felson et al. 2002; Hirschel and Hutchison 2003).

One such theme is self-determination and the victim's right to influence arrest policies. Self-determination issues have caused controversy in the DV arena for over a decade. Some advocates supported the victim's right to participate in the decision to arrest her partner. Advocates called arrest policies patriarchal and suggested in some ways the state's power replaced the power of abusers over their victims (Mills 1997, 1998, 1999). Previously, victims influenced the officer's decision to arrest a perpetrator, expressing her need for her partner's income or his presence to care for their children so she could work. She may have blamed herself for the altercation in the hopes that the officer would allow him to "walk it off," rather than arrest him. Due to recent mandatory arrest policies and prosecutorial pressure to adopt evidence-based prosecution, however, victims now have less impact on police decisions regarding arrests. Concomitantly, police have less discretion when deciding whether to arrest (Hirschel and Hutchison 2003), a change that some officers appreciate, while others do not.

Despite mandatory arrest policies, police officers have often taken victims' requests into consideration before proceeding with an arrest. Research has documented that police still yield discretion even regarding mandatory reporting policies (Cerulli et al. 2010). Some have noted the victim, more knowledgeable about the situation, might have a greater awareness of the potential negative effects of the arrest (Mills 1997, 1998, 1999). If victims' voices are ignored, the very system designed to protect them may be the catalyst for causing more harm. Research has documented that in a multi-jurisdiction study of mandatory arrest venues, the police make an arrest only 50% of the time (Eitle 2005).

Even if an officer takes a victim's wishes into account at the call for service, it is possible that the prosecutor may not

(Buzawa and Buzawa 2003; Davis et al. 2008; Dobash 2003; Ford and Regoli 1993; Hanna 1996; Hirschel and Hutchison 2001; Rauma 1984; Rebovich 1996). Mandatory prosecution strategies, sometimes referred to as evidence-based prosecutions, move the responsibility of the prosecution from the victim to the state. Even without victim testimony, the prosecution may proceed (Buzawa and Buzawa 2003; Davis et al. 2008; Dobash 2003; Ford and Regoli 1993; Hanna 1996; Hirschel and Hutchison 2001; Rauma 1984; Rebovich 1996). Earlier work documented that even when victims dropped the charges, they still may have been safer as they used the criminal justice system to rebalance the power in their relationship (Ford 1983, 1991). Because victims are aware of this potential loss of control, their decision-making process when dealing with the police may be even more complex.

Factors Determining Victim Access and Barriers to Police Intervention

Despite concern for arrest as a result of police intervention, victims still seek respite from law enforcement. Victims are more likely to call the police in situations where perpetrators: (1) have a previous history of violence, (2) injure them, (3) use weapons, and (4) consume alcohol at the time of the offense (Felson et al. 2002; Hirschel and Hutchison 2003). Though other factors initiate police action, these four factors appear in the literature with the most consistency. Demographic variables such as age, sex, race, marital status, employment and education are considered notable, but less influential.

Wolf et al. (2003) reported women often expressed disappointment regarding police responses to DV. These feelings influence utilization rates of police during or after a DV offense. First, victims reported police officers tended to minimize the severity of the situation; at times, they felt ashamed when their situation was presented to other people in what appeared to be a humorous manner. Second, victims reported feeling diminished and invalidated when officers verbally changed the victim's statement while relating the information to a third party (Stephens and Sinden 2000; Wolf et al. 2003). Discrediting the victim occurs in cases where the officer threatens to arrest both parties, making the victim feel as if she/he participated in the crime. Third, when police officers presented a flat affect during a domestic dispute, victims sensed a lack of emotion or empathy from the officer toward her/his situation. Lastly, victims in the process of making decisions to call for help were less likely to proceed if they feared police officers would respond to them in an arrogant and rude manner (Stephens and Sinden 2000; Wolf et al. 2003); these behaviors made victims feel undeserving of police assistance. Other barriers victims identified were: (1) fear of

repercussions by the perpetrators, (2) involvement of Child Protective Services who may file charges of neglect and remove the children, and (3) other personal factors such as financial dependency (Stephens and Sinden 2000; Wolf et al. 2003).

Influences on Arrest Decisions

When alcohol is involved in a domestic dispute, police are less likely to find only one spouse responsible for the act and assume mutual accountability (Lavoie et al. 1989). Over two decades of research examined the influence of factors that resulted in an arrest for a DV call for service. Stewart and Maddren (1997) (Stewart and Maddren 1997) focused on arrest rates and thought processes reported by police officers regarding the interaction of gender and alcohol by the perpetrator and the victim. Presence of alcohol influenced police decisions; blame tends to be placed on the person who was drinking. For example, in circumstances where the perpetrator is sober and the victim is under the influence of alcohol, blame was attributed to the victim because she/he (generally) was viewed as a participant in the violence or was unable to avoid it. In situations where the perpetrator was under the influence of alcohol and the victim was not, blame was attributed to the perpetrator (Stewart and Maddren 1997). These findings have been duplicated regarding alcohol (Berk and Loseke 1980). Overall, findings suggest that police are more likely to charge the perpetrator when the victim is female, and alcohol is a key factor in making an arrest.

Studies have demonstrated that perpetrator and victim gender and relationship status, as well as that of the officer, may affect the officer's course of action on a DV call (Berk and Loseke 1980; Stalans and Finn 2000). Officers have been found more likely to make an arrest when the couple was married and both parties used violence (Berk and Loseke 1980). In a study conducted by Stalans and Finn (2000) (Stalans and Finn 2000), four specific police perceptions were measured: (1) general attitudes toward domestic disputes and perceptions about specific cases, (2) the effects of the officers' gender correlated with job experience, (3) considerations male and female officers gave to victims' willingness to settle the argument before deciding to arrest, and (4) the decisions of male and female officers to refer victims to counseling or shelters. Findings indicated that male and female rookie officers produced comparable arrest rates and made similar decisions to refer victims to counseling or shelters. Studies have documented that female officers, however, show greater patience and have a tendency to provide information, refer victims to shelters as opposed to marriage counseling, and express empathy (Homant and Kennedy 1985; Stalans and Finn 2000).

In addition to victim, perpetrator and officer characteristics, incident variables also played a role in the decision to arrest a perpetrator. Whether there was an injury, where the incident occurred (indoor v. outdoor), and the geographical location (urban vs. rural) were factors in police decision-making (Eitle 2005; Logan et al. 2001). Police were more likely to make an arrest when there was a crime committed with a weapon, which resulted in injury and occurred indoors (Eitle 2005).

While the research findings discussed above address police activities and decision-making in the line of duty, there is a dearth of information on officers' perceptions on their role. This study sought to understand police officers' experiences and internal processes when responding to calls for service. This study, using grounded theory, did not have a specific hypothesis. Rather, we hoped to learn more about officers' frustrations, concerns, and perspectives relevant to the challenges inherent in responding to DV.

Methods

Setting and Participants

This study occurred in upstate New York, where DV is not defined as a specific crime. Rather, DV cases might be charged as separate offenses for behaviors such as assaults, menacing, and sexual assaults. DV is considered within a specific crime against the state and may be categorized as a violation, misdemeanor, or felony offense, depending on the severity of the violent contact.

The department selected for this study was the only department for a large urban community. The department was engaged in a community response for domestic violence which included community coordinated protocols for pro-arrest and prosecution. At the time of the study, New York State Criminal Procedure Law permitted an arrest when one of three circumstances was present: a felony has been committed, an order of protection has been violated, or a family offense was committed (which is enumerated in the Family Court Act) (Arrest without a warrant, by police officer, & when and where authorized 2011). The departmental policy enhanced this statutory approach by including evidence-collection and protocols that were consistent with the surrounding law enforcement offices. The prosecutor's office had a specialized domestic violence unit for felony level crimes, but not for misdemeanor crimes. Approximately 80% of the cases that resulted in arrest were misdemeanor crimes. Regardless of whether an arrest was made, an officer completed a DV incident report which included evidence collected, statements by any witnesses and incident level information (use of a weapon, alcohol present, etc.) (Arrest without a

warrant, by police officer, & when and where authorized 2011). Should a conviction be secured for a DV arrest, the penalties are case dependent. For felonies, the options include a potential state prison sentence, a combination of prison and probation supervision, probation supervision in isolation of a sentence, a protection order, fine, community service or none of the above. For a misdemeanor conviction, the options are the same although the correctional facility would be the local county jail and terms would be for less than 1 year. Under most circumstances with DV cases, they are often pled down to a harassment violation level crime, with or without a protection order, especially for first time offenders. Many judges in this jurisdiction also include the use of batterer's intervention programs as well.

Twenty-two police officers, 10 women and 12 men, participated in three focus groups: one all-male, one all-female, and one mixed gender group. Police officers' ages ranged from 20 to over 50 years old (*s.d.* = 47.2); mean level of experience was 18 years in the department. Fourteen (63.6%) of the 22 officers had a bachelor's degree or higher. Twelve officers (54.5%) identified themselves as Caucasian, five (22.7%) as African American, three (13.6%) as Latino and one (4.5%) as Asian American. One officer did not report a race or ethnicity. Fourteen (63.6%) of the officers were married and four (18.2%) officers reported being divorced. The others (18.1%) were either living in a committed relationship, or never married. Twenty officers (90.9%) had children. Their ranks ranged from leadership to frontline responders.

The University of Rochester Institutional Review Board deemed the project exempt. Research team members invited participants via an introductory letter and a list of questions to be addressed prior to the focus group meeting. A designated liaison to the Chief of Police chose the participants in an effort to meet our request for diversity in the sample.

Procedure

Each of the groups followed the same format, completing a demographic survey. A 20-min PowerPoint presentation summarized the results of a previous quantitative study in which urban police participated. The earlier study was a survey administered by the first author as part of her dissertation on community coordinated response to DV. The presentation included how the officers in the earlier study had responded to the survey on attitudes and perceptions in comparison to other professional groups (e.g. attorneys, clergy, medical staff) (Horwitz 2002). Questions asked and discussed during the focus group included: officers' opinions on the results of the earlier study, officers' preparedness and understanding of their roles, officers'

protocols, their opinions on why victims ask for help at current rates, what the next steps for the officers and community should be, as well as what encourages and discourages officers. Finally, they were asked how other professionals can help.

The content from the three 1.5-hour audiotapes produced the qualitative data for this analysis. The tapes were transcribed and sent to the participants for their review and edits. The officers made no changes to the transcriptions.

Analysis

The authors were members of the Domestic Violence Intervention Project, a research team in the Wynne Center for Family Research, and the Laboratory of Interpersonal Violence and Victimization, at the University of Rochester Medical Center. Team members met and read the transcripts aloud, which were imbedded into ATLAS.ti, a software program that electronically organizes and stores information coded thematically (Muhr 1993–2010).

The research team used the constant comparative method (Strauss and Corbin 1990) to analyze the data. This method generates theoretical constructs through a coding and categorizing process that leads to a theory or a description about a particular phenomenon. The team coded and recoded the data at three distinct levels by consensus; identifying phrases, sentences or paragraphs that expressed ideas germane to the police officers’ experience of domestic violence. The ‘open coding’ phase of the analysis (Level 1) involved naming these ideas with a code (a one-to-four

word label). This process of reading the content of the transcripts, discussing police officers’ responses to the questions and coding by consensus continued until saturation occurred. Saturation is the point in the process where no new codes are generated from the data (Creswell 1998). The team then studied the forty-two codes generated during the ‘open coding’ phase, collapsing like codes together, eliminating codes that seemed irrelevant and aggregating the remaining codes into categories, or ‘code families’ by identifying emerging patterns in the police officers’ responses. Six code families emerged from the team’s discussion and consensus. ATLAS.ti electronically generated the list of quotations from the coded transcripts and organized these quotations by code family. The coding process continued at a higher level of abstraction (Level 2) by independently generating concepts that described the collective quotations within each code family. Team members met to collate these concepts and subsequently three themes emerged that reflected the police officers’ experience and response to DV: Police Practice Patterns, Chronicity and Complexity of Domestic Violence, and Future Connections to Larger Systems.

Findings

Police Practice Patterns

Figure 1 shows a schema describing elements within the three themes. The boxes in the middle of the schema delineate the process by which police officers became

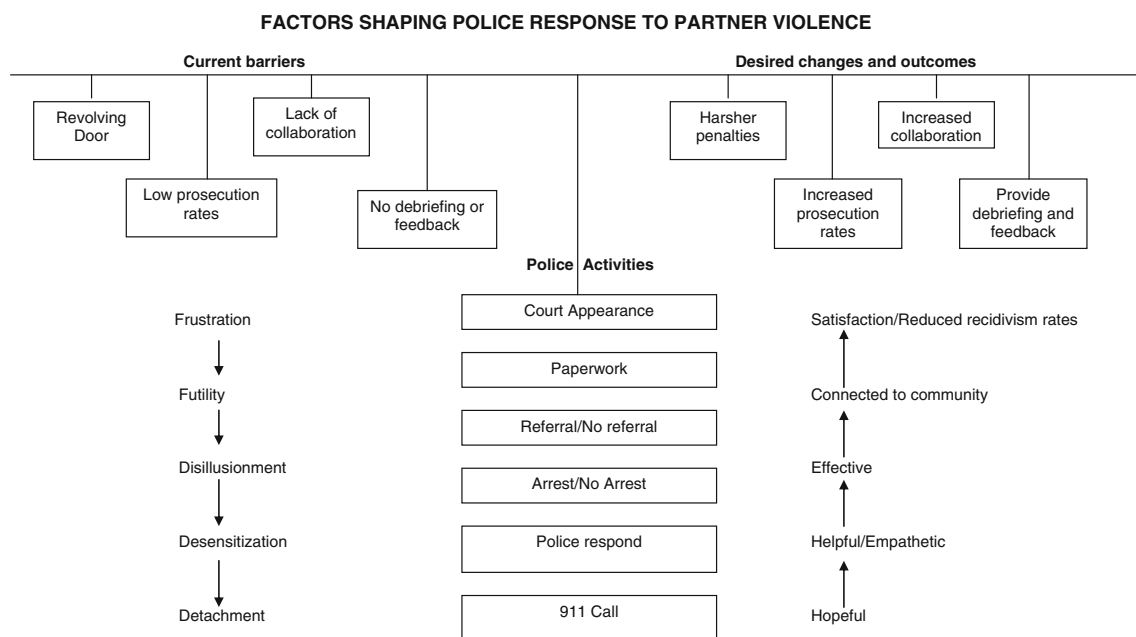


Fig. 1 Factors shaping police response to partner violence

involved in DV incidents in ascending order from the time of the 911 call to their appearance in court. The police described their mission as ensuring the public safety. As a “first responder” to the 911 call, they assessed the individual’s safety (and danger), identified the presence (or absence) of DV, provided short-term crisis interventions, enforced the law by arresting the perpetrator, became the gateway to the court system and referred the victim to services. Further responsibilities included writing a report that explicated the events leading to the incident, described in detail the reported acts of perpetration and noted the police officers’ intervention. In prosecuted cases, the officers may testify.

I would say that we’re prepared because we’re told what we have to do. We know how you’re gonna handle every domestic situation because there’s mandatory arrests, there’s things; there’s procedures we have to follow. So, most of them are the same. You go in there, you do a specific report, you arrest the person that you think is the one who started it, or, so they’re the same.

And we are still held to that standard to spend 3 hours on paperwork for a criminal contempt first arrest. And when the victim doesn’t show, no one follows through on that. And that’s just kind of one of these difficulties in the protocol; I mean it’s out there so you get kind of jaded to it. You get there [to the house] and you’re like, great, there goes another criminal contempt. There’s another one on our wanted board. The downside of that protocol [required steps in addressing domestic violence] is that it adds to personal frustration.

Chronicity and Complexity of the Problem

The boxes on the top left of the diagram represent police officers’ report of the current barriers to effective interventions (both for the criminal justice and service provider systems) and to the perpetuation of DV. Officers’ emotional responses to these barriers can be viewed in descending order along the left side of the diagram. The officers were forthcoming with their feelings, and frequently expressed frustration with the victims because they often did not follow through with the legal case, which resulted in the officers returning to the home multiple times to manage their disputes.

And so we look at the woman getting thrashed around and you’ve been to the house four times, and you say, you know lady, you own some of this. And I don’t know that we’re empathic enough with people who really are helpless and victimized and not able to

extract themselves because we have a hard time picturing ourselves doing that, or being that way.

You always go back to those same houses, and we’ll arrest on an order of protection and they’re back out, and it’s like, it starts over and over again.

What if, if there’s a domestic violence situation and you have a partner [victim] that doesn’t want to cooperate with the police, you know, what can you do to her?

And we had a situation just like that last week. We picked up a guy on the wanted board, wanted contempt, we find him back with the girlfriend who put the paperwork on him. It’s frustrating.

I take bail almost every day for someone who, you know, just, I mean they have the black eyes and they come in and they’re there barely, the guy they just arrested the day before.

You’d be amazed at how many [cases] are dropped because they [victim] don’t show up.

Yeah, I’m kind of numb to it.

It’s like, it’s almost like we’re wasting our time.

As they moved from rookie to experienced officer, their feelings of futility emerged, stating that they didn’t feel as though they made a difference in the lives of these troubled people. Futility gave way to disillusionment. Some officers found themselves handling these cases in an insensitive manner and eventually detached emotionally due to their constant exposure to the lack of resolution.

What I find interesting was, and we talked about the seriousness [referring to the police response in the original survey], the perceived lack of perception on the police’s part that it’s serious and again, it just sort of desensitizes me, to go so often [to the same houses]. You know, well, it’s a way of life, it’s the way they’re raised, it’s sort of desensitization [referring to the victim]. And other people from the outside probably perceive it as, you know, much more profound than it is.

In the early stages of the analysis, we learned that police officers seemed frustrated primarily with the victim and blamed her (references were all female) for the problem. In fact, only one person expressed any frustration with the perpetrator. It appeared the police saw the situation as preventable. During higher levels of the coding process, however, the officers’ frustration, disillusionment, feelings of powerlessness and detachment were more evident as they discussed what they viewed as ineffectiveness of the larger systems. Complexity not only applied to factors that prompted the ‘revolving door’ scenario between the members of the couple, but also chronicity within the entire criminal justice and service provider system.

And how many don't show up [victim] and are dropped [charges] because it [the case] lingers in some never, never land before it gets where it needs to be.

Future Connections to the Larger System

Boxes on the top right of the diagram explain the officers' recommendations for themselves and other community professionals to create desired changes and outcomes. The officers were clear about what would reduce recidivism and improve job satisfaction. Several officers expressed a need to debrief their experiences and receive feedback about what their efforts yielded.

And if we had that same kind of debriefing and analysis around issues of domestic violence [as they have with community violence incidents], we might do some things different. I mean, if, as a group, we knew we were successful in these five interventions on the west side in the past month with domestic violence, and we were successful in these eight times on the east side because we didn't go back to the houses and nobody got killed and the kids weren't abandoned and this and this and this happened. But, here are two examples of times when we weren't successful that resulted in a murder, or that resulted in a woman spending 6 weeks in a hospital in a coma... then we could look at how we intervened. How did we fail? We do it with street violence all the time. Why are dead women worth anything less than dead guys on the street who are all slinging guns anyway? I think at least, you know, the attitude of the officers would be more optimistic in the fact that their actions are going to have some positive effect on a solution to the problem.

The officers expressed the need for more resources and the benefits of improved collaboration with the District Attorney's office and community service providers.

We've partnered with other agencies to make better solutions for some of the problems that we deal with. We've done a really good job with that. I mean, the cease fire stuff is great stuff. My, all I'm suggesting is that if that kind of effort and focus was put on domestic violence, I would bet that we could impact, not all of it, because we, we're not fixing all the street stuff. But, we could impact a segment of it and think about how that would trickle down for the next generation of kids coming up.

The officers were proponents of evidence-based prosecution and harsher penalties. Interventions were viewed as

improving the prosecution rate and sending a vital message to perpetrators and victims who they felt abused the system by taxing resources and then re-engaging in their violent relationships. The officers believed that evidence-based prosecution and harsher penalties would offer them more leverage to stop future violence and to feel more effective at protecting the public's safety.

I mean right now there's nothing at all, so you, you kind of go through the motions. When you have some teeth, you feel more confidence. You feel better about what you're doing. It will eliminate the frustration.

If the penalties would be harder and the courts would follow through, you would see an impact.

Finally, several police officers expressed the need for updated training on DV for themselves and other professionals, as well as counseling for victims and perpetrators.

Discussion

In this study, participants were emphatic and clear about how they viewed themselves as one thread in a complex and interwoven fabric, limited by scope of practice to make long-term changes without an effective link to other professionals. Police officers had feelings of powerlessness when following protocol and subsequently, when some perpetrators were not punished because of the victims' lack of cooperation or inability to appear in court. Without the victims' testimony, judges were obligated to drop the case. Due to the limitations imposed on all professional practices, police officers cannot protect the victim effectively. Though the officers believed that they were well trained and capable of creating change at one level (e.g., intervention at the scene, writing reports, gathering evidence and referring to services), they noted their efforts would only create temporary relief for the victims and their witnessing children.

The police know what to do. They know where to refer victims. They have the authority to arrest. Why, then, do they feel unsupported by their fellow professionals when their tasks are so prescribed? The problem is not in the protocol, but rather in the redundancy of ineffective, albeit often heartfelt efforts. If the police felt "backed up" by the system, would they dismiss DV as "life style choices?" Self determination, as described by Hirschel and Hutchison (2003) is important. The authors support the notion that a victim should have a voice in decisions that affect her/his life. Women often vacillate in their decision to return to perpetrators because of fear, shame, stigma, housing, childcare, or pure exhaustion from not understanding the system. How do we distinguish those who return to their abusive relationships for survival from those who return for other reasons?

The problem of increased violence against a victim who seeks police intervention is the most serious. One police officer from the current study voiced the same concern raised by Hirschel and Hutchison (2003) who identified that some perpetrators' rage is more heightened by incarceration, rather than deterred from abusing his/her partner, making the police officer a catalyst for further violence. Again, both the police officer and the victim feel powerless to effect change in this instance. Why would a woman call the police for help if she knew that by doing so, she'd be beaten again? How can the police protect her, if the call never comes? After meeting with the officers and hearing their stories, their disappointments and their frustrations, the authors began to understand the emotional responses that the participants described. The picture became clearer of the victim who calls for police intervention and finds herself invalidated and discredited as described by (Stephens and Sinden 2000). The disillusioned, desensitized and detached officer, working hard to keep himself protected from his feelings of powerlessness, may well present to a victim in a most uncaring way.

These findings should be considered within the context of several limitations. This study was conducted in an upstate New York community that may not be reflective of rural and suburban officers' experiences. Future work might include larger sample sizes to be able to cross comparisons based on officer characteristics such as race, age and gender. The state laws also, while enacting mandatory arrest policies, did not provide adequate fiscal resources with which to provide staffing needed to enforce the statute. Although this study was deemed exempt, the militaristic nature of the police profession raises issues about officers' freedoms to speak openly. Perhaps individual interviews may yield different findings. Lastly, this qualitative study lays the foundation for a larger study that seeks to integrate the findings and have officers themselves elucidate their experiences.

Conclusion

Officers see the problems: unresolved conflict in the couple, legal dispositions that may not fit the crimes, lack of resources for overworked Assistant District Attorneys (ADAs) and judges who see DV as an event, rather than a series of knotted fibers woven into the community's fabric, or who cannot levy sentences on perpetrators without evidence. The police know that they cannot make a difference without a shift in the community's agenda. Despite a community wherein a coordinated community response is utilized, with integrated agency protocols and an active advocacy community, more work is needed. The police can do their part, enforcing the laws that protect the

public's safety. However, for them to have job satisfaction and continue to be engaged, we must begin to pay attention to their specific needs: debriefing, feedback and continuing DV education. As the scientific community advances the field through evidence-based interventions, we must inform the police academy so appropriate referrals can be made and stale curriculums updated.

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