

Running Head: A Continuing and Complex Social Problem

Domestic Violence: A Continuing and Complex Social Problem

University of West Florida

\*Data for this research were made possible in partnership with the Department of Children and Families, funded through the United States Department of Justice, Violence Against Women Office. Points of view expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office, Department of Children and Families or The United States Department of Justice.

## INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The purpose of this research is to portray domestic violence as the complex social problem it is. Historically, a number of different strategies were employed in attempts to address this “problem”. However, it remains a serious violent crime with repercussions that affect all aspects of society. Law enforcement remains the primary gatekeeper in terms of identifying potential domestic violence offenders and victims. Relying on law enforcement to solve this problem is futile. In order to better understand the complexity of the problem, this research explores domestic violence-related data collected by a local Sherriff’s Office. Beginning with law enforcement efforts, domestic violence comes to the attention of society at large.

“A home, a family should be a place of support, should be a peaceful place – not a place of cruelty and brutality”. This statement was made by President Bush in 2003 when he declared October Domestic Violence Awareness month. Awareness is essential in eradicating domestic violence being that every 15 seconds a person is a victim of domestic violence. With staggering statistics such as these, it is no wonder that domestic violence is the leading cause of injury to women aged 14 – 44 (Fact Sheet, 2006). In addition, almost one third of female homicide victims are murdered by their partners. With that said, it is not hard to believe that 95% of the reported victims are women (Fact Sheet, 2006).

In the 1970s, domestic violence began to get the attention and funding needed for research. In the last 30 years, a variety of federal agencies, municipalities, counties, and states have funded prevention and control research. Domestic violence has undergone substantial changes in the last fifty years (Maxwell, 2005). Prosecutors and judges have

introduced special domestic violence prosecution bureaus, specialized domestic violence courts, victim advocacy programs, court-community partnerships and mandatory “no-drop” prosecution policies. Policy has changed to include alternatives such as mandatory arrest and stiffer sentencing (Peterson & Dixon, 2005).

Lutze and Symons (2003) describe the evolution of domestic violence policies in three periods. The first period gave the male figure the right to discipline, granting the male legal right to punish and abuse his wife in his own home. The second period afforded men power and the right to “protect” their women. The reality of this period is the only women who were “protected” were the women who “obeyed” their men. The third period enters present day scenarios such as mandatory sentencing and prosecution policies.

Nearly forty years ago, the Attorney General Task Force recommended studying this topic (Attorney Generals Task Force, 1984). After studying domestic violence, the task force’s recommendations included: written policies be instituted, arrest be considered the preferred response, all current orders of protection be kept track of, no delay in law enforcement response to these incidents, orders of protections be made available by access of forms at all police and sheriff offices, and that all violations of pre-trial release conditions be documented. Additionally, the Department of Justice funded research projects focused on domestic violence, with two of these projects being the partnership between Bard/Zacker with the New York City Police Department and the Minneapolis Domestic Violence Experiment.

Morton Bard and Joseph Zacker partnered with the New York City Police Department to gauge the positive effects of police officers when they use mediation to

handle family crises (Maxwell, 2005). For example, instead of using arrest tactics, the officers would attempt to help the individuals work through the problem or refer them to a community agency. Though this project did not make a huge impact on domestic violence research, it did raise awareness of domestic violence being a social problem that needed further attention. Millions of dollars were spent on overtime and training that encouraged the use of Bard's model with police officers. This made officers aware of domestic violence as a social problem and gave them a small amount of knowledge to take back to their constituents as well as knowledge of local resources available to victims and offenders.

Another notable study was the Minneapolis Domestic Violence Experiment conducted in 1981. This experiment found "when suspects in misdemeanor spouse assault incidents were not arrested, their prevalence of reoffending within six months was 50% higher than the rate of similarly situated suspects who were arrested" (Sherman & Beck, 1984 p.264). Arrest was found to be more effective than the other two options of counseling both parties or sending one of the two parties away from the house for a few hours, minimum. The most common police actions at the time were: negotiating or talking out the dispute, threatening the couple and then leaving, asking one of the parties to leave, or very rarely making an arrest. After arrest, the victims were met with every two weeks for twenty-four weeks to measure events after police intervention. The prevalent population in this study was: unmarried couples with lower than average education level (60% were unemployed), disproportionately minority, and individuals who have had prior scrapes with the law (59% had prior arrest records). Though the

experiment called for presumptive arrests in domestic violence situations, many areas turned to mandatory arrest policies (Sherman & Berk, 1984).

After the conclusion of the Minneapolis Experiment, other communities were asked to take part in the same study to see if their community would produce the same results. According to Felson, Ackerman, and Gallagher (2005), attempts to recreate the study yielded results that were at best mixed. They did, however, point out “a substantial limitation” to experiments dealing with domestic violence. According to Felson, Ackerman, and Gallagher, a large number of domestic violence incidents that are “of significant theoretical and policy interest” (p. 563) are not accounted for in experiments and they are the unreported incidents. According to the researchers, including these incidents will allow for the “study of the effects of police involvement as well as the study of arrest” (p. 563). The researchers go on to state “reporting an incident might deter future assaults even if the police do not arrest the offender” (p. 563).

According to Maxwell (2005), experimental studies examined sociodemographic characteristics of the offender and found that re-offending was associated with the offender’s age, race, employment status, and use of intoxicants. Evidence suggested that offenders who were young and unemployed, and who were intoxicated during the incident had a higher rate of re-offending. Additionally blacks had a higher rate of recidivism than whites but lower rates overall.

Clearly, domestic violence is a vastly underreported social problem. Among processes that have been tried and failed are mandatory arrest, mediation, and outsourcing to local referral agencies. Society has made advances, politically and

socially to understand and support the victims of domestic violence, however, there is still a long way to go.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

President Clinton, on September 13, 1994, signed the Violence Against Women Act, incorporated into the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act. This is the first legislation to address violence against women. This offered funding for prosecution of offenders, education about domestic violence, sexual assaults, and legislation, training for law enforcement and other criminal justice workers, creating partnerships among law enforcement and victim service providers, improving direct services to victims, and the ability for immigrants to get legal status independent of their abusers, as well as increasing penalties for offenders.

In the most recent reauthorization, in January 2006, the National Task Force to End Sexual and Domestic Violence Against Women has added additional tasks on which to focus. These additional aspects are technical corrections to the immigration laws, giving victims reasonable unpaid leave time to address the violence without fear of losing their jobs, improving delivery of healthcare by supplying training, education, and additional funding, recognizing and addressing the co-existence of domestic violence and child abuse, prevention of domestic violence, addressing homelessness, and solutions for improving the response from the criminal justice system. In terms of the young, the Act provides services to children and the non-abusing parent who live in domestic violence situations, provide families with the highest risks parenting classes, develop and implement programs for teenagers, focusing on boys and young men, and fund programs

such as Head Start which can help identify at-risk families at an early stage. Addressing these additional issues strengthened the Act and added additional protection to the victims that rely on the services and laws (Violence Against Women Act Reauthorization, nd).

Within the last three years, President Bush initiated The President's Family Justice Center Initiative (PFJCI). This initiative is administered by the Office on Violence Against Women and supported by the Attorney General and the President's Administration. The goal of this program is to eradicate violence towards women. To do this, the pilot program has awarded more than \$20 million dollars to 15 communities. This funding is for the planning, development, and establishment of comprehensive domestic violence victim service and support centers. The goal of this initiative is to bring together the professionals that the victims of domestic violence deal with to make their search for help more efficient and effective. It helps the victim "in a fragmented system of separate agencies offering uncoordinated services" (Fact Sheet, 2006, p. 1). This center combines the following services: advocates from non profit groups, victim services organizations, law enforcement officers, probation officers, governmental victim assistance, forensic medical professionals, attorneys, chaplains, and representatives from community based organizations. This allows the victim to go to one place and receive all of the services he or she needs to continue with the judicial processes necessary to ensure prosecution of the offender and recovery for themselves. President Bush states "With laws and police and all the rules and regulations of a free society, it must be confusing and disheartening. The victim has been so traumatized, and then she has to tell her story over and over again, which repeats the trauma" (President Bush, 2003, p. 1).

The locations of the centers are chosen based on geographic location, economic and cultural diversity, service to under served populations, and coordination with Native American Communities. These centers have been opened thus far in St. Louis, MO; Brooklyn, NY; San Antonio, TX; Nampa, ID; Alameda County, CA; and Monroe County, LA. There are centers scheduled to open in Boston, MA; Defiance, OH; Buffalo, NY; Tampa, FL; Knoxville, TN; Sitka, AK; Las Vegas, NV; St. Joseph County, IN; and Tulsa, OK (Fact Sheet, 2006).

An additional initiative that President Bush has created is the Safe and Bright Futures for Children. This initiative is funded by the selling of stamps created by budding artists in support of eradicating domestic violence. This initiative works with faith based groups that provide counseling, mentoring services, and healthy activities to children who are often the silent victims of domestic violence. Since children of domestic violence often express depression and anxiety, it is important to engage them in positive activities such as sports, scouting, or mentoring programs (President Bush, 2003).

Aside from being a criminal problem, domestic violence also creates a social problem. Women with fewer resources, less education, no mobility, and no job training perceive no other option than to stay, being abused, to have a place to live (Rosewater, nd). Minority women, non – English speakers specifically, often have no shelters to turn to as they have limited or no English skills. Even if women can get in to shelters, they are limited in bringing their belongings, sometimes having to leave behind their children. Many shelters will not allow the mothers to bring teenagers, especially if they have a teen age boy (Rosewater, nd).

Homelessness is an additional issue for both sides of the abuse (The Violence Against Women Act, n.d.). The victim may become homeless because of the abuser no longer residing in the home, working, and paying the bills. The offender often times ends up homeless due to serving time in jail. Not only do the offenders lose their jobs and have a hard time finding another because of domestic violence charge on their record, the offenders also have trouble finding housing because of their record.

Race has often been a variable when researching domestic violence. According to Benson, Wooldredge, Thistlethwaite, and Fox (2004, p.326) “general population surveys, studies of calls to the police, and case studies of women’s shelters and emergency rooms consistently find a disproportionate share of African American offenders and victims”. Upon finding results such as these, the researchers wondered if it is the individual minority citizens committing crimes or if there is a race wide phenomenon that causes the race as a whole to have a higher rate of violence? It has been noted by Sampson and Wilson (1995, p. 42) that “the seemingly higher levels of involvement by minorities and violent crime are due to part to larger proportions of African Americans residing in environments of extreme poverty within metro areas”.

Surveys in the last two decades have supported these findings. Previous surveys such as the National Family Violence Survey from 1980, the National Crime Victimization Survey in the 1970s, along with recent surveys such as the National Violence Against Women Survey and the National Survey of Families and Households have supported the theory as well. Researchers have found that environments that accompany urban communities, which are highly minority populated, foster joblessness, poverty, no means of tele-communications, no transportation, public assistance

recipients, and lower educated individuals which may feed the current culture that is more tolerant of violence and crime (Benson, et al, 2004).

Sampson and Wilson's (1995) idea of collective efficacy displays how these neighborhoods foster anonymity, reduced social control, and the appearance of "street codes" which support the rise of violence as a way to solve problems. These individuals may be unwilling to personally intervene or involve law enforcement in episodes of domestic violence because people in these neighborhoods are expected to mind their own business. Additionally, the individuals who grew up in this same environment of violence are more likely to accept it as the norm. Reverend Cheryle Albert, director of Safe Haven Interfaith Partnership Against Domestic Violence in Boston, offers "the power behind domestic violence is that it's a secret. We work with the faith community because we feel it's the best way to break the silence" (President Bush, 2003 p.1). This is especially important in disadvantaged neighborhoods because church may be the only place that some of the residents are able to attend since the churches are intertwined in the neighborhoods. Statistically, poverty and urban neighborhoods have been found to be more of an aggravating factor relating to domestic violence as compared to race. African Americans and other minorities have a higher rate of poverty and living in urban areas than Caucasians. When minorities were compared with like Caucasians, Caucasians that live in poverty and in urban areas, there was no difference in domestic violence rates (Benson, et al, 2004).

Children living in poverty are often the silent victims in domestic violence situations. Betsy Groves (2002), domestic violence expert, suggests that children's safety should be a basic right, not a privilege that comes with social class or education.

Exposure to domestic violence increases a child's risk of maltreatment. Approximately 30 – 60% of families experiencing either domestic violence or child maltreatment, the other form of violence is also present (Edelson, 1999). There are various ways that children are involved in domestic violence within their household. Some of the ways include: direct witnesses to the violence, intervening to protect a parent, overhearing the violence, seeing injuries and or bruising on parent, and being physically harmed either intentionally or unintentionally in the course of an assault on a household member. Upon witnessing the violence in the household, the effects of domestic violence are long lasting. Though each child may respond differently to domestic violence, some common effects are: sleep disturbances, eating problems, developmental delays, psychosomatic disorders, violently acting out, withdrawing, problems at school, depression, bedwetting, nightmares, and anxiety. The effects for each child may vary due to the severity and frequency of the violence, the age of the child, the child's resiliency and temperament, and the child's relationship with the parent (Sadusky, nd). One study of Head Start has shown that 17% of three to five year olds have been exposed to domestic violence (Rosewater, nd).

The Vermont Model Protocol: Law Enforcement Response to Children at the Scene of a Domestic Violence Incident listed effective responses for law enforcement when dealing with children at domestic violence scenes. These responses are as follows: first, assess whether the children are physically harmed, second, minimize the impact and repercussions to children who are present, next, empower children as much as possible throughout the process, maintain victim safety, and finally, maintain the batterers

accountability. By doing these things, trauma is minimized as much as possible to make the situation as smooth as possible for the children involved (Sadusky, nd).

Each state has different laws pertaining to children witnessing abuse. For example, Florida has a law that mandates a call to the Abuse Hotline when children witness domestic violence. This informs the Department of Children and Families of the incident. In Vermont, the child witnessing domestic violence does not, in itself, constitute abuse and the call is only made if the attending officers sense that the child may be in danger in any way (Sadusky, nd).

Common relationships that are involved in domestic violence situations are spouse/spouse, intimate partners, siblings, parent/child, step parent/step child, ex partners, and in-laws. Often times the two parties live together but if they have a child in common, they do not have to live together to be considered domestic violence.

Though the majority of reported victims are women, gender is an element that is often a variable when studying domestic violence. According to the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 5.3 million women and 3.2 million men are victims each year, with only an estimated 25% of incidents reported. Domestic violence accounted for 20% of nonfatal violence against women and 3% for men (Fact Sheet, n.d.,a). Knowing that domestic violence overall is unreported, research hints that it is vastly under-reported in men. Murray Straus, a family violence researcher, suggests that men are less likely to call the police, even when there is injury because they feel shame. But for men, shame is compounded by the shame of not being able to keep their wives under control (Hoff, 2001).

Female victims are more likely than men to suffer from moderate to severe health problems. Health problems that are prevalent in female victims of domestic violence are depression, panic attacks, high risk behaviors such as substance abuse and sexual promiscuity, migraines, high blood pressure, chronic pain, gastrointestinal problems, and delayed prenatal care when pregnant. When the victim is pregnant, the risk of the baby being born prematurely is increased (Cost of Intimate Partner Violence, nd).

A survey conducted in Orlando, Florida of 300 women living in shelter, sought to find what motivated the women to contact law enforcement. Victims that contacted law enforcement had higher levels of education, greater sense of self preservation, and the long duration of beating. Although contacting the police may involve the necessity to seek shelter outside their homes, many of these victims find the courage to do so (Abus & Suh, 1987).

Domestic violence is not a series of unrelated events but rather a patterned, persistent, and cumulative process (Rosewater, nd). Defined by Florida Statute 741.28, domestic violence is “any assault, aggravated assault, battery, aggravated battery, sexual assault, sexual battery, stalking, aggravated stalking, kidnapping, false imprisonment, or any criminal offense resulting in physical injury or death of one family or household member by another family or household member”. Family or household member is defined as spouses, former spouses, persons related by blood or marriage, persons who are presently residing together as if a family or who have resided together in the past as if a family, and persons who are parents of a child in common regardless of whether they have been married. With the exception of persons who have a child in common, the

family or household members must be currently residing or have in the past resided together in the same single dwelling unit.

Domestic violence can be physical abuse such as hitting, slapping, shoving, grabbing, pinching, biting, and hair pulling. Sexual abuse is a form of domestic violence by forcing sexual contact without consent. Emotional abuse undermines the victims' sense of worth and self esteem. This can be done by name calling, criticism, and undermining the victim with the children. Economic abuse is often times a main reason a victim will stay with his/her abuser. Maintaining dependence by the offender having total control of the family finances withholding the victims' ability to access money is a form of domestic violence. Additionally, psychological abuse is an abuse that may be hard to prove but could be one of the most damaging. Traits in this type of abuse are: intimidation, threats, destruction of the victim's important items, and isolation from family and friends. Deputy City Attorney of Los Angeles, Alana Bowman, points out that power and fear may not be immediately evident or obvious. It may be hard for local law enforcement to prove most forms of domestic violence other than physical abuse (Fact Sheet, n.d.,b).

There are three types of police responses to domestic violence. Policies of the department will depend on which type officers use. The first type of response is mediative. This response is a non arrest policy in which police act as peacemakers or counselors until the situation is under control and calm. The officers may give referrals to social service agencies. The second type of response is pro-arrest. This response type encourages arrests but leaves discretion to the officer. Generally, if there is probable cause, an arrest will be made. The last type of response is mandatory arrest. This

dictates that an arrest will be made whenever probable cause exists, even in misdemeanor offenses (Egan, n.d.).

### OKALOOSA COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE PROCEDURES

Locally, the Sheriff's Office writes its policies and procedures based on the Florida statutes in regard to domestic violence. Although Okaloosa County does not have a mandatory arrest policy, "arrest is the preferred response in situations where probable cause exists." When dispatch receives a domestic violence call, communications personnel should try to determine whether medical treatment is necessary, what happened, whether the suspect is present, if the suspect is aware the police were called, if there are any weapons on the premises, if anyone is under the influence, if there is anyone else present in the home, whether there is a current injunction, a history of complaints from that residence and if the suspect fled, what they fled in and where they may have gone. This is not only for the protection of the victim; it lets the officers know what type of situation they are entering. Upon presence of law enforcement, if entry is denied and telephone contact is not possible and the officers sense that the victim is in imminent danger, the deputies may use force to gain entry (Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office Policy Manual [OCSO], 2003).

Once law enforcement has made contact with the parties involved, they are separated, preferably into different "visual areas". Securing all weapons, assessing injuries and locating and ensuring the welfare of others at the scene are the initial actions taken to ensure everyone's safety. The procedures once on the scene are to interview all parties and witnesses, special accommodations for those unable to communicate with the officers, determine the extent of all injuries, and determining the primary aggressor. Dual

arrests are discouraged by the Sheriff's Office. If there is an allegation from both parties that they are the victim, the deputy is to investigate and find the primary aggressor. This is done based on: extent of injuries, fear, actions taken to defend themselves, previous or existing orders for protection, and any written or taped conversation regarding this or previous incidents. If the victim fought back in self defense, an arrest of the victim is not to be made. It must be noted, however, that the officers must have the time, training, and willingness to investigate to find out who the primary aggressor is (OCSO Policy Manual, 2003).

If there were children present during the incident, the deputy is to make a report to the Abuse Hotline (OCSO Policy Manual, 2003). This is to make the local authorities aware that there may be a situation in that household that needs further attention. This does not mean the children will be taken from their home. Rather, there may be services available to the victim that may make his or her parenting easier. Such services may be daycare to allow the victim to become employed, housing assistance, and the victim may be offered counseling and parenting classes for better management of the home. If the child is taken out of the home, the court is working in what most consider being in "the best interest of the child".

In accordance with Chapter 751 F.S., the deputy is to make a written report "if there has been an allegation of domestic violence, regardless of whether an arrest was made". This report is forwarded to the nearest domestic violence shelter. This adds credence to their portrayal of the incident. Since space is limited, the shelters must make sure the victim is in a violent relationship versus being homeless or in an unhappy situation.

## METHODOLOGY

The data for this research were obtained from the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office. Therefore it includes only the unincorporated areas of Okaloosa County Florida. This research does not include the cities of Fort Walton Beach, Valparaiso, Niceville, or Crestview as these cities within Okaloosa County are served by their own police departments and not the Sheriff's Office. The data collected by the Sheriff's Office was funded by a STOP Violence Against Women grant from the Department of Children and Families (OCSO Grant Application, 2004). The following information is collected by the Sheriff's Office on each domestic violence offense: the date and zone of the occurrence, the name of the offender, the relationship between the offender and the victim, if the victim was under the influence, and the victim's race, gender, and age. Additionally, if known, the length of relationship is noted as well as if there were any injuries, if there was an injunction in place, and if children were present during the altercation. Facts pertaining to how the case closed and the disposition of the case are also listed. For the purposes of this research, offense type, relationship between the victim and offender, gender, race, injury, injunction, the presence of children, and the how the case closed will be addressed based on the grant information. Additionally, the N/A calls, or the "verbal altercations" will be addressed as well as common sentences for domestic violence offenders in Okaloosa County.

Realizing "the impact domestic violence has in the disruption of basic family values and the eventual impact domestic violence has on future criminal behavior" the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office applied to receive the STOP grant (OCSO Grant Application, 2004, p.1). The STOP Violence Against Women grant was funded in the

amount of \$86,834.00(OCSO Grant Application, 2004 p.1). This grant was awarded to the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office in partnership with the Department of Children and Families and funded through The US Department of Justice Violence Against Women Office. These funds are provided to "further efforts to combat domestic violence and sexual assault". The grant period started on July 1, 2004 and continues through June 30, 2007. The Sheriff's Office is dividing this time period into three years, running from July to June each year, compiling information monthly as well as completing a yearly report (OCSO Grant Application, 2004).

The program goals of this grant were to "increase domestic violence and/or sexual assault arrests resulting in charges being filed for prosecution". The tasks involved to ensure compliance with the program goals are to make sure that law enforcement is serving victims of domestic violence. This means documenting the victims and tracking the information for future use. The tracking of the data may offer insight to trends in the County. It also allows for officials to reference the statistics. For example, the data can show if law enforcement is making the arrests and the State Attorney is or is not prosecuting. It may offer further insight to which agency is performing and which one is not. (OCSO, 2004).

According to the 2000 Census, Okaloosa County was home to 170,498 residents. This is up 18.6% from 10 years prior (OCSO Grant Application, 2004). The Sheriff's Office is responsible for law enforcement to the unincorporated portions of the county as well as the cities of Mary Esther and Destin. The ethnic breakdown of the county is as follows: Caucasian 82.1%, African American 9.1%, Hispanic 4.3%, American Indian .6%, Asia/Pacific Islander 2.6%, and other 1.3%. The per capita money income is

\$20,918. This is the total money income for all persons within a geographic location divided by the total number of persons in that location.

The need for tracking of domestic violence information was evident when reviewing the case numbers from the prior years. For example, in 2000, there were 633 incidents, in 2001 there were 606, and in 2002 there were 935 incidents. The current trend in Okaloosa County is rising. Using the information from July 2004 – June 2005, there were 1684 calls, nearly double the number from 2002 (OCSO Grant Application, 2004).

## RESULTS

During the first year of the grant period (July 1, 2004 – June 30, 2005), there were 1684 total calls. These included 667 battery calls (417 arrests), 56 aggravated battery calls (43 arrests), 56 assault calls (16 arrests), 47 aggravated assault calls (35 arrests), 3 attempted homicide calls (3 arrests), 746 family disturbance calls (16 arrests), 1 call to enforce court order (1 arrest), 95 injunction violation calls (52 arrests), 2 kidnapping calls (2 arrests), and 10 stalking calls (4 arrests). Overall, there were 689 arrests which left an overall arrest rate of 41%. Of these 1684 calls, 656 calls were found to be verbal altercations and are not included in the following analysis but are discussed below.

There were 749 female victims and 292 male victims. Note that even though there were 1028 calls, some of the calls produced more than one victim/offender. For the female victims, 130 of the offenders were ex partner, 2 were acquaintances, 19 were boyfriend/girlfriend, 32 were siblings, 1 was in laws, 240 lived together, 226 were married, 14 were other, 74 were parent/child, 1 was step parent/step child, and 2 were unknown incidents. Of these incidents, there were 402 arrests, boasting a 54% arrest rate

for incidents involving female victims. There were 16 cases where the offender was arrested but the State Attorney chose not to file charges. For the male victims, 73 of the offenders lived together, 86 were married, 63 were parent/child, 4 were boyfriend/girlfriend, 1 was boyfriend/boyfriend, 26 were siblings, 20 were ex partner, 1 was in laws, 11 were other, and 6 were step parent/step child. Of these incidents, there were 181 arrests, boasting a 64% arrest rate for incidents involving male victims. There were 30 cases where the offender was arrested but the State Attorney chose not to file charges.

When considering the race of the victim, there were 154 African American victims with 48 of those victims being male and 111 being female. There were 83 arrests and 70 of those arrested had charges filed. This reflects an arrest rate of 53% and a filing rate of 84%. There were 17 Asian victims, all being female, with 11 arrests and 8 offenders having charges filed. This reflects an arrest rate of 65% and a filing rate of 73%. There were 27 Hispanic victims, 23 being female and 4 being male, with 16 arrests and 10 having charges filed. This reflects a 59% arrest rate and a 63% filing rate. There were 826 white female victims, 597 of them being female and 229 of them being male. Of the 826 cases, there were 478 arrests and of those 384 had charges filed. This reflects a 58% arrest rate and a filing rate of 80%. Note, there is no information on the race of the offender.

Referring to the Sheriff's Office statistics, there were 456 injuries out of the 1041 victims. That reflects 44% of the victims. Of these injury cases, there were 351 arrests which reflect a 77% arrest rate. There is no data available on how minor or severe the injuries were.

There were 117 violations of injunction calls. Of those calls, 64 were arrested. This reflects a 55% arrest rate. There is no data available on if this is a first occurrence of violation of injunction or if there were multiple violations.

There were 409 cases that had children present while the incident occurred. Of those 409 cases, arrests were made in 170. That reflects a 42% arrest rate. There were four cases where both of the parties involved were arrested. The parties were made up of: one of siblings, two live together couples, and one married couple. If a child witnesses abuse, the law enforcement personnel are to call the Child Abuse Hotline to give them the information. This is for the welfare of the children but can additionally offer services to the parents that may help in their situation. For example, agencies may be able to help with childcare so a parent is able to work, budgeting, parenting classes, and counseling. In these 409 cases, there were 23 that were not reported to the Child Abuse Hotline. Additionally, the officer noted that there was one case categorized under domestic violence that should have been child abuse.

In summary, the data indicate that the typical victim is women of any race. When the victim and offender live together, this type relationship had the highest number of domestic violence incidents, followed closely by married couples. There were more family disturbance calls than any other call though most of those calls were considered “verbal only”. The next highest incident type was battery. Arrest rates ranged from 53% at the lowest end to 65% at the highest end. For African American victims, their offenders were arrested at a rate of 53%, for white victims, their offenders were arrested at a rate of 58%, for Hispanic victims, their offenders were arrested at a rate of 59%, and for Asian victims, their offenders were arrested at a rate of 65%.

Though not addressed in the grant, sentencing is an important aspect of the offense since some thing the sentence may be a deterrent for future occurrences. For those offenders arrested in Okaloosa County, the common sentence for misdemeanor battery/domestic violence is one year probation, attendance at Batterer's Intervention Program (BIP), no contact or no violent contact order, sometimes restitution, and a total fine of \$542.00, with \$190.00 in fines and court costs, \$201.00 state charge, and \$151.00 going to the rape trauma fund.

BIP is a 29 week program with only three individuals recognized to teach this class at this time in south Okaloosa County, with one in training to teach this class in Spanish. The intervention program consists of an individual intake session, an individual psychosocial assessment, an individual orientation session, twelve group sessions, an individual feedback session, twelve group sessions, and the last meeting is an individual session, evaluating and discussing the clients' progress. The sessions teach weekly themes on issues such as: Non-Violence, Non-Threatening Behavior, Respect, Support and Trust, Accountability and Honesty, Sexual Respect, Partnership and Negotiation and Fairness.

There are five objectives to the Batterer's Intervention Program. They are as follows:

- To help the participant to understand his/her acts of violence as a means of controlling the victim's actions, thoughts, and feeling by examining the intent of his/her acts of abuse and belief system from which he/she operates.

- To increase the participant's willingness to change his/her actions by examining the negative effects of his/her behavior on his relationship, his/her partner, his/her children his/her friends and self.
- To increase the participant's understanding of the causes of his/her violence by examining the cultural and social contexts in which he/she uses violence against his/her partner.
- To provide the participant with practical information on how to change abusive behavior by exploring non-controlling and non-violent ways of relating to women/men.
- To encourage the participant to become accountable to those he/she has hurt through his/her use of violence by encouraging him/her to acknowledge his/her abuse and accept responsibility for its impact on his/her partner and other (BIP Objectives, nd).

By meeting these objectives, the individuals will be able to understand their abusive behaviors. The objective is for the offenders to be willing to change these behaviors in present and future relationships.

Once completed, the instructor will let the offender's probation officer know that he/she completed that aspect of probation. Domestic violence, however, is one of the offenses that does not allow one to terminate probation early so the offender must complete the full year of probation without committing another crime or committing a technical violation to complete the probation term successfully.

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The research shows that domestic violence is a complex, continuing social problem with many avenues that need to be addressed. Items to be addressed are early intervention, in depth training for educators, law enforcement, and civic workers, all encompassing domestic violence centers, and mandatory child abuse reports. By addressing these aspects of domestic violence, the likelihood of reporting may increase which will educate victims of needed resources to end the cycle of violence.

Early intervention/prevention is essential in various ways. The first way is to work with children, youth, and young adults to establish positive identities, identify normal relationships, and targeting young families that have a high probability of domestic violence. Based on the current research, children can and often do suffer extreme side effects from the effects of domestic violence. Though it may manifest itself differently in each individual as well as each age group, the effect it has is long lasting and unforgettable. The ideal recommendation would be to eradicate domestic violence by teaching individuals that it is wrong while they are young. Teaching youth alternate ways, other than violence, of handling problems is paramount to eradicating domestic violence. Schools would be the ideal place to teach these children since the majority of children attend. However, after researching this issue, schools seem to be the least likely place to co-operate due to the sensitive nature of the subject. To reach them, educators will have to turn to churches, after school programs, and public service announcements. The curriculum will be the message of their importance, self worth, and positive relationships through out their lives. This education would be aimed at the “new generation” neither committing nor tolerating acts of domestic violence. Additionally,

when they are in a situation of domestic violence, what the appropriate steps are to take. Give the children the Abuse Hotline, the domestic violence shelter numbers, the police departments' number, any resource that will get the help into the family that is needed.

Studies conducted on domestic violence show that this offense is often repeated. Being that, intervention may be needed to avoid recidivism. In research such as the Minneapolis Experiment, it showed that arrests deter the offender from re-offending. Subsequent research has not supported that research unequivocally. For example, in cases of domestic violence homicides, 85% of victims have had police intervention in the last two years, 50% have had police intervention at least five times in the last two years, and violence was preceded by threats in 50% of the cases. This shows that in many cases, police had an early warning system. Felson, Ackerman, and Gallagher's (2005) research shows that reporting the violence, whether an arrest was made or not, was a larger deterrent than arrest.

An additional aspect of early intervention/prevention is to attend to the "verbal only" calls. Statistics show that domestic violence situations tend to escalate over time. Using homicide statistics as an example, the police are called on approximately 80% of the cases in the 12 months previous to the homicide (Fact Sheet, n.d.b). If measures are taken to work with these "high risk" families, the chances of intervening and deterring escalation would be greater. Recalling from the local statistics that over 600 calls were "verbal only", that amounts to approximately 40% of the total calls and there was no action taken. Based on this information, one might wonder what percent of Okaloosa County's homicides started as "verbal" only.

Steps that can be taken are wide in range such as a simple follow up phone call to check on the “welfare” of the family unit to working with social service agencies that their family members may already be involved such as Department of Children and Families and probation departments. Those caseworkers may have the ability to require additional services or goals to be met. Interventions or services such as childcare, education for the adult, or job training would be an asset to the family to reduce stress levels. Budgeting classes as well as parenting classes would benefit all involved. This would be offered at either no cost or low cost to the attending individuals. This type of intervention would be appropriate for the “verbal only” calls to prevent them from becoming an actual “domestic violence” call. If the families’ needs are met, would the number of incidents decline?

The second recommendation would be to educate the employees and volunteers of civic agencies that may come in contact with the offender, victim, or their families. This education will allow for employees and volunteers to make educated statements and decisions with the individuals. An important part of the education will be to make the policies and procedures they work by clear and concise. This will make for easier situations when the officers, for example, must rely on discretion in any given situation. If the officer knows the local resources as well as somewhat knowledgeable about the “system” in general, it will make for a smoother transition for the victim and offender. An example of this is in the Sheriff’s office domestic violence policy. It gives the Florida Statute regarding domestic violence and then underneath states “Although dating relationships are not covered by this statute, this policy encourages law enforcement to respond to these victims and perpetrators following the guidelines of this policy”. Dating

relationships are in fact considered domestic violence if they are living together, have resided together in the past as if a family or if they have a child together regardless of whether they have been married or resided together during a previous time period.

Though this would be known if the statute was read, it should refer back to the statute for those situations. The clearer the expectations of both law enforcement and the offender, the easier the situation is to handle. Law enforcement is able to follow policy for their part in the incident and the offender knows what to expect.

The workers need to understand the ramifications of domestic violence on the entire household. It is important to stress the delicate nature of working with the victims, along with the family members, to ensure that they will turn for help again if needed. Victims must not be afraid to speak out and ask for help when it is needed. Too many times victims have not been treated with respect or felt they “weren’t believed” and have stated that they would not rely on the “authorities” to help them again. Additionally, the workers may be able to see early warning signs in the “verbal only” calls. If so, this will allow the workers the opportunity to offer intervention/prevention services.

The third recommendation would be to have an all encompassing center located in the county for victims of domestic violence. Okaloosa County does not have an extensive public transportation service so it is often hard to get to the places the victims needs to get to. For example, a victim may need to go to the State Attorneys office, the probation office (to speak to the probation officer if necessary), receive medical care, and work with an advocate. If all of these entities employed at least one person as their representative in one building cohesively, it would be to the victims’ advantage. The handicap that the victim often has of no transportation or gas money would not be a

hindrance in this situation. By doing this, it may increase reporting numbers because the center would be more visible. It would also decrease the victim's need to relive the situation over and over. In fact, Okaloosa County has a similar facility, The Children's Advocacy Center, for children who are mistreated. Why not create one for domestic violence victims?

The fourth recommendation is to gauge the effectiveness of mandatory calls to the Child Abuse Hotline if a child is present during a domestic violence altercation. The question would be if they serve a productive purpose or if they actually end up being counterproductive. For example, if Joe and Sue take part in an altercation while their children are present and Sue contacts the police. Joe is arrested for domestic violence. The Child Abuse hotline is contacted by the Sheriff's office and the Child Abuse investigator comes to their house. Intervention strategies and classes are offered and Sue accepts. Sue is told if the investigator has to return to the house, intervention services will not be offered, rather the children will be taken out of the home. Joe does not return when he is released from jail and, in the meantime, Joe and Sue attend counseling and participate in parenting classes. After "doing all the right things" they move back in together. Unfortunately, a second occurrence of violence happens and Sue does not report because she does not want her children removed from her home. What is the victim to do in this situation? The victim is "victimized" no matter which choice she makes. The victim is too scared to report the second incident due to threats from the Child Abuse workers. Is she to risk losing her children or risk the violence? Did this intervention help or hurt the victim? This situation definitely relates to low reporting numbers. It can affect the "verbal only" calls in that if domestic violence does occur, it

may stop the victim from calling the police again. Considering there were more female victims than male, the female could be very afraid of losing her kids to the system, or the offender.

In conclusion, domestic violence knows no boundaries. It affects all ages, all races, both genders, as well as all income levels. Until the public is educated and comes forward to report these incidents, there will be no way to know how many “victims” there really are and what populations to target for intervention strategies. Early prevention and intervention are the keys. Arrest may not be the “right” answer for all individuals but society must hold the offenders accountable for their actions. Additionally, society must deal with the social issues that the offenders leave behind: the psychological effects on the victim and family, the economic stressors of having to live without the offender’s income, and the employment problems including the victims’ lack of job training, daycare, or inability to hold a job for any length of time. With strategies that have been tried and tested in other areas, Okaloosa County can add to their arsenal of strategies and work toward eradicating this social problem.

References

- Abul, E.M. & Suh, E.K. (1987). Use of Police Services by Battered Women, *Social Work*, 32, 526 – 528.
- Attorney Generals Task Force on Family Violence (1984). Final Report, Washington DC: US Government Printing Office.
- Batterers Intervention Information. *Pattison Professional Counseling*. n.d.
- Benson, M.L, Fox, G.L., Thistlethwaite, A.B, & Wooldredge, J. (2004). The Correlation between Race and Domestic Violence is Confounded with Community Context. *Social Problems*, Vol. 51, 3; 326.
- Cost of Intimate Partner Violence Against Women in the United States (n.d.). Retrieved on 7/20/2006 from [www.cdc.org](http://www.cdc.org)
- Egan, N. (nd). The Police Response to Spouse Abuse. Retrieved on 7/9/2006 from [www.lib.jjay.cung.edu](http://www.lib.jjay.cung.edu)
- Edelson, J.L. (1999). The Overlap between Child Maltreatment and Women Battering. *Violence Against Women*. Vol. 5,134 – 154.
- Fact Sheet: Department of Justice Family Justice Center Initiative (2006). Retrieved on 7/13/2006 from [www.usdoj.gov](http://www.usdoj.gov)
- Fact Sheet: National Coalition Against Domestic Violence: Domestic Violence Facts (nd,a). Retrieved on 7/13/2006 from [www.ncadv.org](http://www.ncadv.org)
- Fact Sheet: Domestic Violence (nd,b). National Domestic Violence Hotline.
- Felson R.B., Ackerman, J.M. & Gallagher C.A. (2005). Police Intervention and the Repeat of Domestic Assault. *Criminology*. Vol. 43, 3; 563
- Groves, Betsy (2002). *Children Who See Too Much*. Beacon Press.
- Lutze, F.E. & Symons, M.L. (2003). The Evolution of Domestic Violence Through Masculine Institutions. *Criminology & Public Policy* 2:319 – 328.
- Maxwell, C.D. (2005). Prosecuting Domestic Violence. *Criminology & Public Policy*, Vol. 4, 3; 527.
- Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office Grant Application (2004).
- Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office Policy Manual (2003).

- Peterson, R.R & Dixon, J. (2005). Court Oversight and Conviction Under Mandatory and Nonmandatory Domestic Violence Case Filing Policies. *Criminology & Public Policy*. Vol. 4, 3: 535
- President Bush's Statement on Domestic Violence (2003). Retrieved on 7/15/2006 from [www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov)
- Rosewater, A. (2003). Promoting Prevention, Targeting Teens: An Emerging Agenda to Prevent Domestic Violence. *Family Violence Prevention Fund*. 11.
- Sampson R. J. & Wilson W.J. (1995). Toward a Theory of Race, Crime, and Urban Inequality. *Crime and Inequality*. 37 – 54.
- Sadusky, J. (n.d.) Vermouth Model Protocol: Law Enforcement Response to Children at the Scene of a Domestic Violence Incident. *Battered Women's Justice Project*.
- Sherman, L.W. & Berk, R. (1984). The Specific Deterrent Effects of Arrest for Domestic Assault. *American Sociological Review*, 49, 261 – 272.
- Siskin, A. (2001). Violence Against Women Act: History, Federal Funding, and Reauthorizing Legislation. Retrieved on 8/1/2006 from <http://usinfo.state.gov>
- The Violence Against Women Act Reauthorization 2005: National Task Force to End Sexual and Domestic Violence Against Women. Retrieved on July 11, 2006 from [www.ncadv.org](http://www.ncadv.org)