



HOW EFFECTIVE HAVE POLICE OPERATIONS BEEN AT REDUCING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CASES IN OKLAHOMA?

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to answer the extent to which police operations have been effective at reducing domestic violence in Oklahoma. By reviewing the history of how police have handled domestic violence cases in the past years until now, this paper has uncovered factors that have impacted the reduction of domestic violence cases: (i) the polices' involvement in domestic disputes, (ii) the victims' involvement in reporting their violent intimate partners, (iii) the domestic violence abusers' involvement in committing the offense, (iv) and other external parties that have partnered with the Oklahoma City Police Department for the purpose of fighting domestic violence. Case studies with the application of these variables will be provided to convey how these contributing factors affect police operations' efficiency rate at decreasing domestic violence cases. These factors will be a tool to determine to which extent police operations have been efficient at reducing domestic violence in Oklahoma.

KEYWORDS: Police force, Domestic violence, Justice System, Recidivism, Victimization, Law.

Introduction of Domestic Abuse & its History with the Police Force

Domestic violence is a pattern of behaviors used to gain or maintain power over a partner. Emotional abuse, verbal abuse, financial abuse, and stalking are just some of the ways violence in a relationship is manifested.

Throughout the 1970s, domestic violence was not of police concern. Police agencies did not want to involve their officers in domestic disputes, since domestic violence-related cases were viewed as high risk for officer injury, or simply a waste of time (Isaza et al., 2019). Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) cases were common in Oklahoma, which ranked Oklahoma top 10 in domestic violence cases. However, during the late 20th Century, research by the U.S. Surgeon General discovered that "battering of women by husbands, ex-husbands, or lovers is the single largest cause of injury to women in the United States" (Zorza, 1992, p. 46).

The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (2010) found that 49% of women and 40% of men experience intimate partner violence (IPV) at some time in their lives. 4.7 million women are assaulted, and 2.3 million women are stalked by intimate partners annually in Oklahoma alone. These recent discoveries caused the Oklahoma Police Department to start taking action. Police officers-initiated programs to help combat and reduce domestic violence cases. These operations were efficient but were not perfect due to backfires that occurred. Over the years, officers have gathered more data and by finding solutions for these drawbacks in their operations, have further improved them in reducing domestic violence cases.

Methods

Secondary research has shown case studies of real operations that have been implemented in Oklahoma in the past few years. These case studies have shown continual improvement throughout the years, due to rectifying faults in programs that have been made to help diminish IPV cases.

Case Study of Operation 922

The Oklahoma City police department initiated a program called operation 922. Prosecutors and the police force team up to target domestic violence abusers in an effort to "stop repeated violence by domestic abusers through enforcement of federal law in domestic violence-derived cases." (Department of Justice, 2021). The federal level includes the assistance of the U.S. Attorney's office. When "police officers respond to domestic violence calls, state and federal prosecutors work closely with investigating officers to determine whether firearms charges or other federal charges are applicable to the offenses committed. Common federal charges include illegal possession of a firearm or ammunition by a person (1) previously convicted of a felony offense, (2) previously convicted of a misdemeanor crime of domestic violence, or (3) subject to an active Victim Protective Order" (Department of Justice, 2021).

The U.S. Attorney's office combines their workforce of lawyers with the Oklahoma County District Attorney's Office. Thus, the U.S. Attorney's aid increases the capacity to handle more domestic violence cases that occur in Oklahoma.

The duration of the sentence received by domestic violence abusers is also increased, due to the involvement of the federal level. 122 abusers were sen-

tenced by federal judges to serve, on average, nearly 75 months in federal prison (Department of Justice, 2021). The harsh sentences have been observed to discourage recidivism in domestic violence abusers.

The Flaw in Operation 922

The drawback found in taking domestic violence cases to the federal level was that victims tend to refuse reporting domestic violence incidents to police due to "desire for privacy, desire to protect the offender, and fear of reprisal from the offender." (Isaza et al, 2019).

As previously stated, the U.S. Attorney can charge a violent intimate partner for a previously convicted misdemeanor crime of domestic violence. To gain such evidence, the police have to interview the victims for their statements that last up to weeks. Victims also have to disclose their partner's assaults that took place in private disputes. Furthermore, the cases are brought to court where they are to testify their violent experiences in hopes of winning over the juries in the court. This can be daunting to victims who feel as though their lives are held in the hands of the justice system. The stigmatization that police officers cannot and will not help still exists today because of the 1970s, when victims were unable to seek any help from uninterested police officers.

Victims also desire to protect their relationship with their spouses. The federal level prolongs a sentence passed upon a domestic violence abuser, causing a pressing strain among the relationship of the victim and abuser. The only time a prisoner is able to connect with the outside world is through making a phone call. Phone calls that can be made from prison are extremely limited since they are more of a privilege rather than a right to prisoners. Victims also have to deal with the fear of their abusers taking revenge on them if they were to be reported and charged with jail time.

Although a sentence given by the state supreme court may be long, it will not keep the abuser in prison forever. The abuser can be put on parole or even probation. This possibility makes it hard for victims to trust the justice system and report their intimate partner.

The Introduction of the Lethality Assessment Program

To counteract the victims' hesitation when it came to reporting domestic abuse incidents, police officers have been trained in the Lethality Assessment Program (LAP). The program was developed in 2015 and has been on-going due to its success in decreasing domestic violence cases. It specifically focused on reducing the frequency and severity of intimate partner violence (IPV).

This was done by training officers to assess situations related to domestic violence. If they assess a situation to be dangerous, police officers have the ability to connect the victim with a social service provider that empowers the victim, by giving them options of various safety measures they would be able to take. Social service providers are capable of making referrals to other providers, such as health care professionals, lawyers, or financial counselors.

If there were signs of domestic violence, the officer would sit down with the victim to give a lethality screen. A lethality screen is a questionnaire that helps assess whether the victim is in any risk of homicide due to domestic violence.

Some questions that could be asked are,

- "Does he/she have a gun, or can he/she get one easily?"
 "Do you think he/she might try to kill you?"
 "Have you left him/her or separated after living together or being married?"

If most of these questions were answered with a yes, there is an overwhelming possibility that the victim's life is in danger. The lethality screen, although a simple questionnaire, portrays a clear picture of the victim's current situation. From there, action could be taken. The effectiveness of the program depended on the victim willingly reaching out to police officers, allowing police officers to have a brief discussion with the victim about safety measures to take and a contingency plan for the next 24 hours.

The second approach is for victims who are not as willing to cooperate with the police or are at a low level of danger. This approach is more passive and informs victims of the nearest police station, and the hotline of social service providers. Although there is not much intervention, the information can still prove vital if the victim's situation has been altered negatively.

Field Testing the Lethality Assessment Program

The Lethality Assessment Program (LAP) was put to the test to see if it can reduce cases of domestic violence. The experiment consisted of the treatment group, that were 347 IPV victims at high-risk homicide who spoke with a social service provider after being connected through LAP. The experiment also included the control group, which were 342 IPV victims that were at high risks of homicide and were treated with standard police responses.

The victims were not chosen at random, rather participants were referred to researchers for inclusion in the study.

Victims had follow-up interviews about whether they had to use any protective actions and if any subsequent instances of IPV occurred. The results showed that the LAP reduced risks, due to the treatment group in LAP being more likely to take protective actions (removing weapons, changing addresses, seeking an order of protection, etc.) compared to the control group. LAP was successful in encouraging victims to report their abusers and take action to ensure their safety.

Literature Review of Operation 922 and LAP

The experiment for the Lethality Assessment Program suggests that participants who were more willing to participate and seek help were less likely to be victimized. Operation 922 was found to be unsuccessful in terms of empowering the victim. The operation's focus was mainly on making sure domestic violence abusers were put behind bars for a long time with the help of the U.S. Attorney's workforce and the police force. Operation 922's flaw was that the victims were not given any support from the justice system. This led to victims' hesitation when it came to reporting their intimate partner.

The experiment showed that through LAP, victims were empowered to take safety measures. Victims had support from police officers and social service providers to discuss their needs. Overall, the experiment showed an importance between law enforcement and social service agencies, in which they are capable of effectively reducing intimate partner violence. Operation 922 was an operation that was effective but was not entirely perfect when it came to reducing domestic violence cases. Adding to my point, LAP was later implemented in Oklahoma which covered operation 922's flaws and further helped reduce domestic violence cases. The two case studies prove the point that police operations have been improving with time.

Conclusion

From the 1970s, where police were not involved in domestic violence to the current times, where recent police work has clearly conveyed the message that domestic violence will no longer be tolerated in Oklahoma. The Oklahoma City Police department has taken serious measures by the implementation of police operations which have been proven effective against domestic violence cases. Data from these operations have clearly shown that police need to work with victims in order to ensure the victims' protection and the apprehension of the abusers. Victims who were stuck defending their abusers for their own safety, now have the aid of law enforcement to lean on. This encourages victims to report their intimate partners. These reports are a tremendous support for the police force.

Although Operation 922 was effective against prosecuting and discouraging the actions of a domestic violence abuser, it cannot operate alone. Without the knowledge of the whereabouts of active domestic violence abusers. Operation 922 cannot be activated in the first place. Reports sent in by victims help locate these abusers. Furthermore, the role of a police officer is vital in bringing evidence to the court for the conviction of these domestic violence abusers and providing support that is needed for victims who have had to deal with violence from their intimate partners. The improved communication between the victims and law enforcement, and the resources of the government (i.e., social service workers and the U.S. Attorney) have continued to advance police operations to fight domestic violence.

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