

**The Bill Blackwood
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**

**Responding to Domestic Violence Calls with
Community-Oriented Policing in Mind**

**A Leadership White Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Required for Graduation from the
Leadership Command College**

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July 2013**

ABSTRACT

Every day, a call is taken by a police agency of a domestic violence call. These calls can occur at any time, to anyone, and for any reason. Everyone involved or having knowledge of the violence is affected. With no delineation between race, ethnicity, or religious belief, law enforcement officers must always be open-minded, educated, and prepared for each event.

Likewise, Community-Oriented Policing is multi-faceted. This policing method seeks to address community problems by looking into the conditions that cause the problem. For the purposes of domestic violence calls, law enforcement agencies can partner with government or civic organizations for assistance or they may generate a focus group within the department to look into the matter. These partnerships and problem-solving techniques can be brought together to focus on a lasting conclusion.

To combat the serious problem of domestic violence calls, law enforcement agencies should employ Community-Oriented Policing methods. In doing so, these agencies could reduce repeated calls to the same household. Likewise, family bonds could be strengthened and perceived generational patterns could be broken.

This paper utilizes online articles, books, internet sites, and journals in order to strengthen the premise. A lasting solution can be achieved through coordinated efforts between law enforcement, civic groups, government agencies, and family members. Open communication and empowering all family members to find a lasting solution to family problems is the key. These same techniques can also combat the concerns associated with tight budgets, manpower constraints, and close-minded family members.

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INTRODUCTION

Family fights, sibling arguments, and a fractured marriage are some descriptions assigned to domestic violence calls for service. Law enforcement officers across the nation have come to understand that during the course of their career, they will be expected to respond to a multitude of domestic violence calls. Many times, the calls end with someone leaving for the night, someone going to jail, or the argument simply ending on its own. A happy ending, however, should not mask the reality that, to these families, their lives have been turned upside down. And to some families, domestic violence issues can be a crisis situation full of violence and charged with emotion.

Yet, officers respond to these calls on a daily basis and oftentimes to the same family over and over. Once at the scene, officers use the same method or approach on these calls with the same results. In spite of simply hoping to end the repeated performance for good, officers usually settle the call by separating the involved family members or taking someone to jail. Instead of the continued “hoping for a lasting conclusion,” law enforcement agencies should focus on ending the conflict for good through improved response methods. The idea should be to look at other resources and resolve the matter with finality so that the family dynamic actually has a chance of functioning at a traditional family level.

Community-Oriented Policing is a philosophy that seeks to determine the root cause of a problem, examine it, and find a lasting solution. The method for this policing style involves partnering with the community and seeking their advice or input into the problem. Once the community becomes a partner with a vested interest, problems can then be addressed by the people who may be affected the most. Utilizing Community-

Oriented Policing methods allows agencies to focus its strengths and resources to bring about a lasting good for the benefit of the entire community.

In a domestic violence event, officers should follow the pattern in Community-Oriented Policing and act as partners with the family in an effort to end the perpetual cycle of violence. The process for working through domestic violence issues is to work with all parties in order to facilitate a lasting conclusion where all parties are free to express themselves without fear in order to achieve a healthier family and a brighter future for all involved. Through community resources and law enforcement's guiding hand, officers may just be able to bring about a lasting conclusion through this open dialogue.

A report by Davis and Maxwell (2002) stated that after an initial report of domestic violence, subsequent calls to the same home are greatly increased. There are many different reasons for the recurrence. One example could be that the aggressor, once arrested, only fuels their anger or directs it to the victim believing that they are responsible. The added financial burden associated with bail or the public embarrassment associated with being arrested at their home may also be contributing factors. These may not be valid excuses in the eyes of the general public, but to the aggressor, only one of the reasons may be all that it takes to initiate a second violent act.

Police agencies should employ the Community-Oriented Policing method in order to reduce repeated calls to the same household and to strengthen wholesome family bonds. By initiating Community-Oriented Policing, officers are better able to delve into the problem instead of simply focusing on the immediate call. It is no longer a matter of

taking an offender to jail but a matter of getting to the heart of the problem to get the family back on track.

POSITION

Community-Oriented Policing focuses on the source of a problem in order to present a lasting impact. Morash and Ford (2002) stated, "The overall philosophy of Community-Oriented Policing focuses on taking a customer-based approach to policing. This customer-based approach leads to the development of partnerships to better meet community needs and thus enhance police effectiveness" (p. 1). In domestic violence situations, police officers are providing a service to all parties involved. Victims and aggressors alike remain customers although the service may be different to each one. Ancillary customers are also present and need consideration in these matters. Children at home, guests at the time of the assault, and extended family members are also affected and should be considered. Rahtz (2001) expressed a philosophy of approach to crime with the acronym S.A.R.A which stands for Scanning, Analysis, Response, and Assessment.

At the scene of an event, officers should scan the event for all the elements of abuse and/or continued abuse. The elements of a domestic violence event could be as simple as a comment gone astray between siblings to continued alcohol abuse by an adult. The scanning process involves officers identifying the impact or trauma the event may have had on others (Rahtz, 2001). Children, for instance, are susceptible to trauma more so than an adult victim, so any subtle clue to the problem would be helpful.

Once elements are established, it is up to the officers to analyze the information, not only for the elements of the offense for reporting purposes but also for extenuating

circumstances that could lead to more conflict in the future. Proper analysis should involve not just physical injury to those involved in the fight but also emotional trauma to young children and lasting emotional scars to witnesses or family members who attempted to intervene. Underlying financial strains associated with losing a job or substance abuse may also be a catalyst for violence (Rahtz, 2001).

Upon completion of the analysis phase, officers should then consider community outreach programs and government resources available. These considerations must be made before making a response. Organizations such as Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous strive to help victims and aggressors cope with their disease. These programs can be referenced by law enforcement officers as a means to end the abuse cycle within the family. In addition to these programs, parenting classes, stress management, and financial planning courses are routinely offered through local organizations.

Ultimately, it is the goal of law enforcement officers at the scene to ensure that victims and family members are safe once they leave. Simply arresting the aggressor is not the end-all solution to the problem. If an arrest is made, law enforcement officers have no legal responsibility to ensure that community resources are initiated, but there should remain an obligation within the Community-Oriented Policing philosophy to ensure the resources are provided so that long term help is known in the event victims do desire assistance.

A follow up assessment should be completed with the aggressor and victim separately at the beginning. By doing this, officers are able to provide individual guidance in order to strengthen the individual, victim or aggressor, prior to bringing them

together for group sessions. The focus of a group session is simply to ensure that all community resources have been considered and provided where needed. Once the aggressor understands that he/she can get help, they may be able to mature or grow within and make a more concentrated effort to solve future problems peaceably.

A government study conducted by Carty (2008) supported the position by stating that law enforcement simply cannot continue in the same practice due to limited resources and opted that community policing is necessary in order to bring about a more positive change. The point of this statement is that law enforcement agencies cannot continue to operate autonomously and accomplish Community-Oriented Policing without a drastic increase in manpower and/or resources. Community organizations and law enforcement agencies must partner in order to effect a change in any pattern of domestic violence.

Community resources and outreach programs strengthen families and provide guidance to empower themselves for a solution and to work together to strengthen family bonds. In doing so, the victim is empowered to speak out and search for their own solution. The aggressor is empowered differently in that he/she is able to relieve himself of stress using community resources and, therefore, better able to draw on his family for support and encouragement. Law enforcement personnel are simply facilitators for these strengthening sessions.

Domestic violence involves many members and groups far above what is perceived. It is not simply a matter of man versus woman. A couple with no children for instance, would still have relatives, coworkers, or friends who hear and are a part of an event. Believing that there is no burden or harm to them is also a false belief. By

empowering everyone involved to seek a solution, law enforcement officers are able to guide and facilitate instead of referee and protect. Empowered members seek their own solution which increases their commitment for the overall good of the family.

Understanding the dynamics of domestic violence and the varied reasons for it is essential for law enforcements proper response. As traditional home dynamics change, so do the complexities associated with domestic violence which generates the increased risk. Mullender (1996) found that domestic violence, specifically men's abusive power and control over women in intimate relationships, is a widespread but still largely hidden problem. The book, in its entirety, is dedicated to examining the abuse between husband and wife. Yet traditional family dynamics have changed dramatically in this age of self-realization and self-pleasure. Recent generations have evolved into families where there are two fathers and no mother; two mothers and no father, heterosexual parents who are still teenagers and single parent families. Understanding this changing dynamic strengthens law enforcement's ability to provide proper resources to those in need.

Community-Oriented Policing methods highlight law enforcement officers' ability to seek community resources for a wide variety of problems. Modern resources have evolved from one-on-one counseling with high-dollar psychiatrists to group therapy sessions provided free of charge. Departments are making an effort to develop police "partnerships" with agencies, including public welfare, social services, and private and community-based groups, to establish a more holistic approach to policing than that of conventional paramilitary models (Buzawa & Buzawa, 2003).

Modern community outreach programs offer an avenue for social work agencies, nonprofit organizations, and church groups to work through community problems and provide services to people in need. When this concept is narrowed to solving one family's domestic violence dilemma, resources become available for multiple family issues. These resources are focused as one resource to provide the maximum benefit to a family in need.

COUNTER POSITION

Opponents of this philosophy could have as many varied opinions as the resources available for domestic violence victims. Family genes, limited agency resources, and the contradiction between Community-Oriented Policing and necessary enforcement actions are just a few of the conflicts. Other conflicts could be the modern perception of the male role in the family. Regardless of the opposition, they do require mention because addressing them can also lead to addressing the overall problem.

One belief is that a physical attack on family members is a trait inherited from descendents. Playing on the notion that generation after generation of father figures abused their spouses could somehow account for the youngest generation's capability to do the same is common in this discussion. One article looked into the relation between heredity and family violence. Capaldi and Clark (1998) stated, "Findings indicate that the major hypothesized pathways through unskilled parenting practices and the boys' antisocial behavior were implicated in the intergenerational transmission of aggression" (p. 6). The environment a child lives in as he grows may contribute to the domestic violence behavior that he displays as he gets older. Being a witness, on a routine basis, to family violence may make a child prone to violence as he grows. In

other words, a child who observes domestic violence events in his younger years and demonstrates or acts in the same manner may later display characteristics of a learned behavior.

The family structure of growing up in a rough environment could have the potential to make a person jaded when he grows up. There is no doubt that, over time, a person could easily become desensitized to violent behavior. There must also be a point when violence breeds violence. However, this does not mean that he simply becomes violent because his father did. It only indicates that growing up with a rough lifestyle tends to create a rough adult. Buzawa and Buzawa (2003) explained that growing up in an abusive family may lead to an impression that the best way to handle negative feelings is to act out and become aggressive toward weaker family members. This notion lends to the belief that this behavior travels from one generation to another.

Limited department resources are also a concern for limiting Community-Oriented Policing. The nation's declining economy requires police agencies to do more with less and still provide service and protection to their community. The Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department recently identified economic concerns impacting their operations and introduced ways to maintain their services. The 'city of sin' is correctly stereotyped with instances of substance abuse and a poor job market. The community dynamics of high levels of unemployment and higher levels of substance abuse necessitate proactive measures to reduce domestic violence concerns (Schofield, 2010). Studies were documented which highlight this premise. For the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department, the Crimes Against Youth and Family Bureau was formed. Schofield (2010) reported that "The Crimes Against Youth and Family (CAYF)

Bureau and the area commands worked in concert to develop and implement a plan to address increases in domestic violence” (p. 84). To combat this problem, protocols were established for responding to domestic violence calls, like adding phone contacts to a domestic violence outreach organization, such as SafeNest, Westcare, and Rape Crisis. This allowed the officer on the scene to make a phone call for the victim to receive services (Schofield, 2010).

Between 1996 and 2009, 771 law enforcement officers were murdered in the line of duty according to statistics gathered in 2009 with the United States Department of Justice (U.S. Department of Justice, 2009). Law enforcement is a profession fraught with danger, not only from domestic violence calls but from every other conceived problem in society. The perils of policing are a day-to-day reality for officers and a topic that deeply concerns law enforcement executives (Meyer & Carroll, 2011). Domestic violence calls rank high in terms of officer injury or death. Taking that into consideration, there is no doubt that police officers must remain vigilant when handling a call of domestic violence and when necessary, take swift action. This behavior is contradictory to the philosophy of Community-Oriented Policing in that officers are not simply counselors and mentors. When it is necessary to take swift action at a scene, officers must act according to policy and training. The first premise of Community-Oriented Policing is to make an event safe. This premise should not change as officer safety is paramount.

The overall process of responding to domestic violence calls using Community-Oriented Policing philosophy should not be construed to overlook basic officer safety requirements. Since the first premise of Community-Oriented Policing is to make an

event safe, officers must make quick decisions and act according to the dynamics of the event. Once the scene is under control, however, the officer is then able to transition to a Community-Oriented mindset and accomplish all that he initially set out to do, which is solving the problem. The transition from facilitating order at a scene to seeking resources should be fluid and immediate. This transition process leaves no doubt that law enforcement officers are in control but also leaves family members with the correct impression, which is that officers are also there to help.

CONCLUSION

There is no right way to respond to complaints of domestic violence because each event has different dynamics. The reasons for varied response outcomes vary because of officer experience, training, and the behavior of all interested parties who play a part in the outcome. One thing is certain, however; there are wrong ways to respond. Domestic violence calls can lead to the injury and death of officers. For this reason, it is imperative that new ways of handling these types of calls are looked into. Gafken (1994) stated that community policing can be described as citizens and law enforcement working together to solve these problems. Furthermore, he stated, “with the police no longer the sole guardians of law and order, all members of the community become active allies in the effort to enhance the safety and quality of neighborhoods” (Gafken, 1994, p. vii).

By utilizing the Community-Oriented Policing philosophy when investigating domestic disturbances, law enforcement officers may be better able to determine a lasting conclusion. Through open communication and the use of outreach programs and counseling resources, law enforcement officers should be better equipped to assist

the families in need. Diminishing recidivism of domestic disturbances for particular households is thusly created, and law enforcement officers would then be free to respond to other calls and fulfill the ever-pressing obligation to serve and protect.

This approach does not go without concerns. Many law enforcement officers themselves would argue that this philosophy would take too long to implement at a scene and could be dangerous for officers if exposed to hostile environments for long periods of time. This issue is addressed in that lowering the number of responses to one particular household has positive long term implications. Furthermore, outreach groups and government agencies specializing in community needs are growing and equipping their employees with skills necessary to assist law enforcement agencies.

Detractors to this approach mention problems associated with manpower, safety, and available resources. Current economic troubles and ever-tightening budgets weigh heavy on any organization; law enforcement is no different. These same principles, however, guide this concept. Community-Oriented Policing has the potential to end domestic violence for good and improve the lives of each family member. Given the stressful environment of this day and age, it is only logical that new and innovative ways of responding to these calls be attempted. Community-Oriented Policing strives to charge each family member with the responsibility of that family. A measure of success cannot be weighed with regional or municipal measurements but in individual outcomes.

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