

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

---

---

**Family Violence in Law Enforcement**

---

---

**An Administrative Research Paper  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
Required for Graduation from the  
Leadership Command College**

---

---

**By  
Christie Pechacek**

**Brazos County Sheriff's Office  
Bryan, Texas  
September 2009**

## **ABSTRACT**

For as long as any person alive can remember, humankind has been abusing each other in one form or another. As far back as when dinosaurs roamed the earth, cavemen use to drag women by the hair on their head. At that time, it was common and acceptable behavior. Now, in the twenty-first century, it is not accepted by society to abuse a fellow human being. There are people in positions whose job is to make sure that this does not happen, and if it does, it is their job to arrest them and let the judicial system seek justice. These law enforcement personnel are also held to a higher standard than the rest of the population. If they are found to have committed abuse within their own family, they will lose their jobs. It is up to the respective departments to make sure that laws are enforced with their own officers.

There is a unity among law enforcement officers that make them want to protect one another. If they receive a call concerning domestic violence, some officers are not always able to investigate it without partiality. They have a strong need to protect one of their own, even though the officer has done wrong; the responding officer does not want to jeopardize the offending officer's career if he can help him avoid that. The officer may try to convince the victim that he or she misunderstood the abuser and that they really did not mean to hurt them. The officer may also try to belittle the victim so that they do not want to pursue any legal action against the officer. The responding officer will point out to the victim that the abuser will lose his career if he is found guilty of the abuse. If the officer responding to a call of domestic violence is also an abuser, he might not be able to investigate the situation objectively.

Domestic violence in law enforcement is relevant to contemporary law enforcement because there are strong needs to not only protect the fellow officers from losing their career, but as law enforcement officers, they are sworn to protect the public as well. This includes the family members of their fellow officers. No one in today's society is perfect, even law enforcement officers. They make mistakes, have problems, and, at times, let their tempers surface, but it is what they do to handle their issues that needs to be examined. The purpose of this research is to examine the issues concerning domestic violence within the law enforcement families and how the fellow officers handle the situations. The departments have a certain responsibility to their officers, and the researcher will examine how they address the issues and whether or not they have steps in place to help their officers before they become bigger issues.

The method of inquiry used by the researcher included: a review of articles, Internet sites, periodicals, journals, personal interviews, departmental policies and state laws, and a survey distributed to 32 survey participants. As a result of these inquiries, the researcher has found that there are different methods, policies, and opinions concerning domestic violence in law enforcement families and how the situations are handled with respect to the law enforcement officer. The ultimate goal is stated to be the protection of the victim, but too often, the ultimate goal is for the protection of the law enforcement officer's career.

The researcher discovered that domestic violence in law enforcement personnel does exist. There is documented evidence that the incidents were not handled properly by fellow officers, and there are departments that do not have policies to address these issues.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	
Introduction. . . . .	1
Review of Literature . . . . .	3
Methodology . . . . .	8
Findings . . . . .	8
Discussions/Conclusions . . . . .	10
References . . . . .	13
Appendix	

## INTRODUCTION

The problem or issue to be examined considers whether or not family violence does exist in law enforcement families and, if it does, whether or not it is being overlooked in an effort to protect the career of the peace officer involved. The relevance of family violence in law enforcement to law enforcement is whether or not officers use their capacity as law enforcement officers to police themselves using different standards than for the general public. The Texas Code of Criminal Procedure Article 5.01. Legislative Statement declares, "Family violence is a serious danger and threat to society and its members. Victims of family violence are entitled to the maximum protection from harm and abuse or the threat of harm or abuse as is permitted by law" (p. 171). This statement applies to all members of society, even families of law enforcement officers.

When a police officer responds to a call of domestic violence and discovers that the perpetrator is a fellow peace officer, how he handles it depends on the officer's conviction to do what is right and his loyalty to the fellow officer. His first inclination might be to protect the fellow officer because he knows that if the officer is convicted of domestic violence, he will lose his career. The responding officer might try to negotiate with the victim to work things out and play on his or her emotions so that a formal complaint is not filed. After all, the victim does not want to see the officer lose his career, the financial impact could be devastating for the family.

The purpose of this research is to determine if family violence does exist in law enforcement officers' families. If it does exist, it is being covered up or overlooked by other law enforcement officers in an attempt to save the careers of the involved officers

as well as the embarrassment to the family and the department. The research question to be examined focuses on whether or not the family violence issues filter into law enforcement families and how these issues are being handled. The modern day police culture could very well foster domestic violence in the law enforcement families by ignoring the problems of their officers. If it is not acknowledged, it would appear that it was not a problem. Not one citizen would want a police officer that could not control his own family. They have control, to some extent, in the daily events of their job. Law enforcement is a very stressful occupation, but sometimes the stress of the job ventures into the private lives of the officer. Also, with the high divorce rate and many families having the presence of non-biological children in the home, this may increase the rate of domestic violence among police officers.

The intended method of inquiry includes: a review of articles, Internet sites, periodicals, journals, a survey distributed to 32 survey participants, and personal interviews. A written survey will be given to peace officers in an effort to determine if family violence has affected their lives or another peace officer that they know. The survey will also will determine if their agency has a policy in place to assist the officers and officers' families in the event that a family violence issue should occur. The intended outcome or anticipated findings of the research will show that family violence does exist in law enforcement families. The researcher also anticipates finding that law enforcement officers will not be as willing to pursue the legal system as aggressively if the perpetrator were not a peace officer.

The field of law enforcement will benefit from the research or be influenced by the conclusions because the researcher intends to show that a real problem exists

concerning family violence and peace officers. The researcher will also propose a possible solution to coping with the problem before it becomes a legal issue and offer other avenues to officers before they find themselves in a situation where they could lose their career.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

According to the Family Code #71.004, family violence is:

an act by a member of a family or household against another member of the family or household that is intended to result in physical harm, bodily injury, assault, or sexual assault or that is a threat that reasonably places the member in fear of imminent physical harm, bodily injury, assault, or sexual assault, but does not include defensive measures to protect oneself. (p. 1302)

Most people might view family violence as a private matter and not a legitimate concern for law enforcement to intervene. It happens behind doors most of the time, out of sight of the public and their views of family violence. Over the years, it has come out from the privacy of the home and into the public eye and scrutiny. Family violence has been around for ages, but it was not until the last 50 years that it has been recognized as a problem within society; now, it is starting to be recognized as a problem within the law enforcement families. As peace officers, they are sworn in to uphold the laws of the land. When they actually break the law, then they have to police themselves. Elbow (1980) stated, "Family violence is a multifaceted issue reflecting not only the individual troubles of abusers, and their victims and families, but also the problems of the community, its agencies, and mental health practitioners" (p.1).

On Sunday, October 28, 2007 at 10:00 am, Stacy Peterson was last heard from by her family. She had left her home and was expected to go to a friend's house to help paint. She never showed up. Her family officially reported her missing in the early

hours of Monday, October 29, 2007. Stacy was a mother of four children. Two were her biological children, and she had legally adopted her husband's two children from a previous marriage. Stacy was the fourth wife of Drew Peterson, a 29-year veteran police sergeant with the Bollingbrook, Illinois Police Department. Drew claimed that Stacy had contacted him at about 9:00 pm on Sunday night and told him that she had left him for another man and that she had left her car at the Bollingbrook's International Airport ("Drew Peterson," n.d.). Shortly before her disappearance, Stacy had made the statement to a family member that she feared Peterson and thought he could make her death look like an accident.

Before being married to Stacy, Drew was married to Kathleen Savio. The police were called out to the home of Drew and Kathleen's home approximately 18 times during a two-year period. Each time, the reports of domestic abuse were not taken seriously. On March 1, 2004, Kathleen's body was found in the bathtub and her death was ruled an accidental drowning (CNN, 2007).

After Stacy's disappearance, Kathleen Savio's family requested that another autopsy be performed on Kathleen. The body was exhumed and the second autopsy revealed that she had drown following a struggle in which she had numerous bruises and abrasions on her body as well as a contusion on the back of her head. The Illinois State Attorney James Glasgow reported that he believed that her drowning was actually a homicide staged to look like an accidental drowning (CNN, 2007).

Within a two-year time span, the Bollingbrook Police Department was called to the home of Kathleen and Drew Peterson's home 18 times, and Drew was never arrested. Kathleen was the one that was arrested on two different occasions. Drew



convinced his fellow officers that he was the victim, not Kathleen, and she was charged with domestic battery and later acquitted. After the results of the second autopsy, the citizens of Chicago began wondering if the Bollingbrook Police Department was actually protecting one of their own. They also began feeling guilty for not taking Kathleen's accusations seriously. It may be that two women are dead because the police in Bollingbrook, Illinois did not want to put the career of a fellow police officer in jeopardy when, in reality, Drew Peterson was the one that was jeopardizing his career. Pablo Delira, a 59-year-old construction worker said that he had no doubt that if the police had been called to his home 18 times, he would have been led away in handcuffs (CNN, 2007).

Vickie Connolly, Drew Peterson's second wife, stated that during their marriage, Drew was very violent and told her that he could kill her and make it look like an accident. He had made this same statement to Stacy Peterson before her disappearance. During Drew's violent episodes, the police came to their house on several occasions but because everyone was friends, no charges were ever filed (CNN,2007).

Quinn (2005) quoted: "The National Institute of Justice (2002) reported that in a nationally representative telephone survey of 925 randomly selected American police officers from 121 departments, 52.4% of the officers agreed that it is not unusual for a police officer to turn a blind eye to improper conduct by other officers" (p. 4). In that same study, "61 percent disagreed with the statement" that "Police officers always report serious criminal violations involving abuse of authority by fellow officers" (Quinn, 2005, p. 3).

Peace officers are no different than any one else, but because they are held to a much higher standard than the rest of the public sector, what they do behind closed doors, in their own homes, is most often kept secret. If they are reported by a witness as having committed a crime, fellow police officers often try to smooth the situation over in order to save the career of the officer involved. This can happen over and over again until eventually someone gets seriously injured or killed.

Territo and Sewell (1999) stated that police officers' families are just like everyone else's family, except they deal with a lot more stress factors in their jobs that affect their families. There is a higher rate of substance abuse, divorce, suicide, and domestic violence. This is a lot more stress than the average family, but the public does not hear much about the effects of these stressors on the men and women who serve and protect them. The general public feels that the peace officers are made of steel and that they can stand up to anything. Sometimes it is forgotten that peace officers are human and have faults and weaknesses just like anyone else. When a peace officer commits a crime such as domestic violence, they should also be treated the same as everyone else that has committed the same crime.

Crystal Brame had been trying for several weeks before her death to receive the protection that anyone in this country deserves, and she was put off on several occasions. On April 11, 2003, Crystal made a frantic 911 call pleading for help. She was living with her parents, and David was supposed to come there to visit their children. He showed up with one of his assistant police chiefs, Catherine Woodard, who had also made many death threats to Crystal during the divorce proceedings. Crystal had asked a protection order be placed against David, but due to some legal issues, the protection

order was not to be issued until April 18, 2003. On April 26, 2003, Crystal Brame was shot by her estranged husband, Tacoma, Washington Police Chief David Brame, who then turned his gun on himself and later died. Crystal Brame died on May 3, 2003 (CBS News 48 Hours, 2004).

Due to the death of Crystal Brame and the circumstances surrounding her cries for help without response, The United States Senate issued Senate Bill Report SB6161 As Reported by Senate Committee on Judiciary in January of 2004. Title: "An Act relating to general authority Washington law enforcement agencies adopting policies addressing domestic violence committed by general authority Washington peace officers" (S. Rep. No. 161, 2004). This bill required that law enforcement agencies adopt policies concerning domestic violence by sworn personnel. The bill stated that law enforcement agencies did not have policies in place concerning domestic violence committed by peace officers, and due to the situation with David Brame, it stated that there was a definite need to protect the victims of domestic violence concerning law enforcement officers. As a result of the Brame tragedy, the Task Force on Officer Involved Domestic Violence was formed, which was comprised of domestic violence educators, counselors, and advocates, as well as the law enforcement community. It is the intent of this bill to proactively address the issue of officer involved domestic violence through education and training. The bill requires the adoption of a statewide model policy on officer involved domestic violence, as well as individual policies for all state law enforcement agencies.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The research question to be examined considers whether or not family violence in law enforcement does exist. The researcher hypothesizes that peace officers do commit family violence in their own families. This family violence is often overlooked for the sake of the career of the peace officer. This family violence often results in serious injury and even death of the victim. The victim has, oftentimes, cried out for help on several occasions, but the help was not there for them.

The method of inquiry will include: a review of articles, Internet sites, periodicals, journals, a survey distributed to 32 survey participants, and personal interviews. The instrument that will be used to measure the researcher's findings regarding the subject of domestic violence in law enforcement will include a survey. The size of the survey will consist of ten questions, distributed to 32 survey participants from the Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas (LEMIT) Module I and Module II in the state of Texas. The response rate to the survey instrument resulted in 100% response rate. The information obtained from the survey will be analyzed by the researcher.

## **FINDINGS**

This researcher took a survey of 32 law enforcement officers and had results that were not all that surprising. The survey asked if the participant or someone they knew had ever been involved in a family violence situation, 0% answered that they personally had been involved in a family violence situation. Twenty-eight percent said they knew a fellow officer involved in a family violence situation. Nineteen percent said that they had a friend involved in a family violence situation, and 38% said they knew an acquaintance involved in a family violence situation. Twenty-five percent said that they

had not been involved in a family violence situation and did not know anyone that has been involved in a family violence situation.

The survey asked if the participant or someone that they knew has ever been arrested in a family violence situation. Forty-three percent responded that they and no one that they knew had ever been arrested in a family violence situation. The survey asked if the participant or anyone that they knew had ever been arrested in a family violence situation. Sixty-five percent said no; they had not and did not know anyone that was arrested in a family violence situation. Fifty-eight percent said that they knew an acquaintance that had lost his career after being convicted of a family violence charge.

The survey asked the participant if on a scale of one to five, with five being the most physical damage done to the victim, how bad the family violence was. The result was that 30% of the participants felt that the physical damage rated a one, and 21% of the participants did not know of anyone losing their career due to family violence. Seventy-nine percent of the participants surveyed said that they had arrested someone for family violence that was a law enforcement officer while 1% said that they had not. The other 20% did not answer this question.

The survey asked if the participant's agency has a program in place that offers counseling for officers who want to seek help in a family situation before it escalates to family violence, 25% said that their agency does not have a program in place that offers counseling for help in family situations before it escalates to family violence. Seventy-five percent said that their agency does have a program in place that offers counseling for help in family situations before it escalates to family violence.

The survey asked if the participant's agency had a program in place for the family of law enforcement officers seeking help in family violence situations. Sixty-seven percent of the participants stated that their agency does not offer a program for the family of law enforcement officers seeking help in family violence situations. The survey asked if the participants felt that the family of an officer does not or would not seek help to avoid a family violence situation due to fear of his career being in jeopardy. Seventy-four percent said yes; they felt the family of an officer would not seek help to avoid a family violence situation due to fear of his career being in jeopardy. Twenty-four percent said no; they felt that the family of an officer would seek help to avoid a family violence situation even if it put his career in jeopardy, and 2% were undecided on the situation.

## **DISCUSSION/CONCLUSIONS**

The problem or issue examined by the researcher considered whether or not domestic violence in law enforcement families does exist. The purpose of this research was to find out if domestic violence in law enforcement officers' families does exist, and, if it does, how it is being handled. It also considered the response of a police officer that responds to a call of domestic violence and discovers that it is a fellow police officer and how the call is handled.

The research question that was examined focused on whether domestic violence in the home of law enforcement families exists. Peace officers have problems just like anyone else, and some do have issues with domestic violence. Because they are peace officers, their issues are getting handled the majority of the time differently than the rest of the public. The peace officer will lose his career if he is convicted of domestic violence. So, he is either not offered help from his department before the violence

escalates or he does not want to admit that he has a problem and commits the offense and it is being covered up, possibly with the help of his fellow officers..

The researcher hypothesized that domestic violence in law enforcement families does exist, and many agencies do not offer any kind of counseling for the officer before it can escalate to domestic violence. Once the offense is committed, the agency is bound by law to end the career of the officer. The researcher concluded from the findings that domestic violence in law enforcement families is a growing problem. It is a problem that is starting to come out to the departments and to the public. This problem has been considered in the past as something that was not talked about until it was a huge problem with the officer or until the victim was seriously hurt or killed. Now, the departments are starting to recognize that they need to offer help to the officer before it escalates to this point. Many departments offer counseling that is strictly confidential. It is up to the officer to take advantage of the program. He has to get over the fear that if he does go to counseling, he will not lose his career.

The findings of the research did support the hypothesis. The reasons why the findings did support the hypothesis are probably due to the fact that law enforcement agencies are recognizing that a genuine problem exists with officers. They do not want to lose the good officers to domestic violence. The departments are starting to offer programs that can help the officers and their families before the issues escalate to domestic violence. Limitations that might have hindered this study resulted because peace officers are still afraid to even discuss domestic violence in their own families. In the past, this subject was such a taboo in that if anyone even mentioned domestic violence, the officer had the stigma of being labeled a wife, husband or child beater.

The study of domestic violence in law enforcement is relevant to contemporary law enforcement because it is a real issue and one that should concern every law enforcement agency in the United States. It needs to be recognized that peace officers are human and under a tremendous amount of stress in their jobs. They cannot always leave the issues and stress at the door when they go home. A lot of them take it inside and end up hurting their families. Every peace officer in the state of Texas stands to benefit from the results of this research because it is time that these issues were brought forward and addressed by each department. The departments have a certain responsibility to their officers. They should realize what the job is doing to them personally and be there when the officer needs help.

The information gained from articles, web sites, and periodicals clearly points to the case of Crystal, where the victim reaches out for help and is turned away because the abuser is a law enforcement officer. Crystal Brame reached out for help several times and as a result of her cries not being heard, she ultimately lost her life, and her police officer husband committed suicide. If her calls for help were heard and taken seriously, her husband could have been offered help to take care of his situation before it escalated to murder (CBS News 48 Hours, 2004).

In the case of Kathleen Savio and Stacy Peterson, Drew Peterson has been charged and arrested for the murder of Kathleen Savio. He is currently in custody in Bollingbrook, Illinois for First Degree Murder. His original bond was set at \$20 million dollars, and he has pleaded not guilty to the charge. Stacy Peterson still has not been found, and, so far, there has not been enough evidence to charge Drew Peterson with her death (CNN, 2007; "Drew Peterson," n.d.)



## REFERENCES

- Brame 911 Tapes. (2003, May 1). *The News Tribune*. Retrieved July 26, 2008, from [http://www.thenewstribune.com/news/projects/david\\_brame/shooting/story/366738.html](http://www.thenewstribune.com/news/projects/david_brame/shooting/story/366738.html)
- CBS News 48 Hours (2004, June 9). Part II: A Dark, Unstable Past [News story]. New York: CBS [Transcript]. Retrieved August 19, 2009, from <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2003/09/25/48hours/main575077.shtml?tag=contentMain;contentBody>
- CNN. (2007, November 30). Peterson case: Did Cops Protect One of Their Own? [News Story]. Atlanta, GA: CNN [Transcript]. Retrieved July 27, 2008, from <http://www.cnn.com/2007/us/11/30/missing.wife.ap/index.html?ref=mpstoryview>
- Drew Peterson. (n.d.) Retrieved July 28, 2008, from Wikipedia: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drew\\_Peterson#Stacy\\_Peterson](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drew_Peterson#Stacy_Peterson)
- Elbow, M. (1980). *Patterns in Family Violence*. New York, NY: Family Service Association of America.
- Quinn, M. W. (2005). *Walking With the Devil - What Bad Cops Don't Want You to Know and Good Cops Won't Tell You*. Minneapolis, MN: Quinn and Associates.
- S. Rep. No. 161, 2004.
- Territo, L., & Sewell, J. D. (1999). *Stress Management in Law Enforcement*. Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press.

Texas Criminal and Traffic Law (2007). *Code of Criminal Procedure*. Charlottesville, Va:  
Matthew Bender & Company, Inc.

Texas Criminal and Traffic Law (2007). *Family Code*. Charlottesville, Va: Matthew  
Bender & Company, Inc.

Texas Statutes Code of Criminal Procedure, 5.01 (1985).

Texas Statutes Family Code, 71.004 (1997).

## APPENDIX

### Family Violence in Law Enforcement

This survey will ask questions that will be held strictly confidential. When you have completed the survey, please return it to: Christie Pechacek

#### Brazos County Sheriff's Office

Please utilize the following scale when answering the following questions:

1. Yourself
2. A fellow officer
3. A friend
4. A relative
5. An acquaintance
6. No

Listing the corresponding numbers above, you may list more than one:

1. Have you or someone you know ever been involved in a family violence situation? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Have you or someone you know ever been arrested in a family violence situation? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Have you or someone you know ever been convicted of a family violence charge? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Have you or someone you know ever lost their career in law enforcement after being convicted of a family violence charge? \_\_\_\_\_
5. On a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being the most physical damage done to the victim, how bad was the family violence? \_\_\_\_\_
6. Have you ever arrested anyone for family violence that you did not know but was a law enforcement officer? (yes or no) \_\_\_\_\_
7. Does your agency have a program in place that offers counseling for the officer who wants to seek help in a family situation before it escalates to family violence? (yes or no) \_\_\_\_\_
8. Does your agency offer a program for the family of law enforcement officers seeking help in a family situation before it escalates to family violence? (yes or no) \_\_\_\_\_
9. Do you feel that the family of law enforcement officers do not or would not seek help to avoid a family violence situation due to the fear of the officer's career being in jeopardy? (yes or no) \_\_\_\_\_
10. Do you feel that the family of law enforcement officers do not or would not seek help to avoid a family violence situation due to fear of the officer's career being in jeopardy? (yes or no) \_\_\_\_\_