



Police Response to Family Violence: The Effect of Mandatory Training on Case Processing Using Redacted Case Notes

Family violence happens with frequency and produces significant harm, including long-term negative health consequences for survivors. When family violence is not reported to formal authorities, this contributes to significant case attrition for criminal justice processing.

Estimates of intimate partner violence (IPV) have demonstrated that nearly 25% of women and 10% of men have experienced partner abuse (Smith et al., 2018). Family violence has been defined as acts of physical or psychological aggression, sexual coercion, stalking, and/or emotional abuse perpetrated by a family member, former or current intimate, or domestic partner with the intent to cause harm, instill fear, and control the victim. Family violence also includes child maltreatment and elder abuse.

Despite the frequency of its occurrence, family violence remains somewhat underreported. In particular, research has suggested that approximately 45% of rape, sexual assault, aggravated assault, and robbery perpetrated by a current or former intimate partner were reported to police in 2018 (Morgan & Truman, 2018). This has largely been the result of a series of myths surrounding family and domestic violence that have neutralized harm and justified perpetrator violence (Burt, 1980; Koss et al., 1994). Efforts to dismantle cultural myths have seen some success, though the durability of stereotypes surrounding family or domestic violence as a “private, family matter” have been slower to change. Lutze and Symons (2003), for example, noted the ways in which a male-dominated criminal justice system shaped and defined the criminal justice processing of domestic violence offenses in ways that eliminated survivor agency by highlighting male privilege as heads-of-household and capitalized on their right to discipline wives and children. After a series of legal fights and social movements (Dicker, 2008; Freedman, 2002), change across the U.S. took hold as what Lutze and Symons (2003, p. 322) referred to as “male power and the right to protect” which involved no-drop prosecution policies, mandatory arrest, dual arrest, and other forms of criminal justice system activation that ultimately undermined survivor autonomy and decision-making. Current research has identified the present time frame as one in which agencies are engaged in collaborative empowerment and trauma-informed care when responding to myriad forms of gender violence. This report presents abbreviated findings from a trend analysis the formal case processing of family violence offenses following a mandatory trauma-informed training delivered to a sizeable police department located in one of the five most populous and diverse U.S. cities.

Training to Improve Police Response

Extensive research has noted the ways that police are the formal “gatekeepers” of the criminal justice system (LaFree, 1989). These are the individuals tasked with decision making when presented with reports of victimization and have substantial discretion in terms of how to proceed once an incident has been brought to their attention. There has been a history of limitations in terms of police response to

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family and domestic violence, though the Department of Justice has underscored the importance of enhancing law enforcement processing of gender violence broadly through training and programming to educate and augment

existing practices (see DOJ Guidance, 2015). Despite this formal guidance, limited research has evaluated programs designed to enhance police response to family and domestic violence. In particular, the dearth of literature has relied on pre/post trend designs to capture police participant attitudes following training. Findings from this research have acknowledged little *long term* change in maladaptive attitudes (like rape or domestic violence myth endorsement) toward gendered crimes. Though Franklin et al. (2019) did report changes in misperceptions of trauma following training on the neurobiology of trauma and gender crime and Sleath and Bull (2012) noted changes in perpetrator culpability following specialized sexual assault training. There have been issues surrounding the dosage or length and frequency of exposure to programming, and memory decay. In other words, as time passes, programming becomes less effective at producing attitude change (e.g., Lonsway et al., 2001). Further, some studies note problems associated with the therapeutic integrity of the programming. Finally, attitudes do not always translate to behavior change (Pearce & Snortum, 1983). There is limited evaluation research examining case file notes or incident reports drawn directly from police agencies to determine the effect of training on case processing outcomes.

Purpose of the Present Study

The present study used a stratified random sample of redacted family violence case files from a sizeable, urban police department located in one of the fifth largest and most diverse U.S. cities to evaluate the effect of a mandatory trauma-informed training on arrest decisions.

Mandatory Trauma-Informed Training

The Texas Commission on Law Enforcement (TCOLE) has mandated two 24-month periods in a training cycle from 2017-2020 for all licensed and certified Texas Peace Officers. The training mandate requires 40 hours to include general courses on state and federal laws, cultural diversity, investigative topics, and crisis intervention. During the first of these two 24-month periods, 5300 police personnel participated in an innovated, agency-wide, mandated 4-hour training block—the first of its kind for this agency—as part of the larger 40-hour unit, which addressed best practices in responding to crimes of sexual and family violence, gender bias, neurobiology of trauma, and resource referral for crime survivors. The training cycle began on September 1, 2016 and concluded on August 31, 2017. Sessions were held once a week and curricula were delivered by police department trainers and employees from the local women’s center.

Methodology

Data were derived from a stratified random sample of

redacted family violence case files collected from a sizeable municipal police agency located in one of the five largest and most diverse U.S. cities. A population of 98,041 family violence cases were generated from both the pre-training time period of January 1, 2014 through August 31, 2016 and the post-training time period of September 1, 2016 to February 28, 2018 by the police partner agency. These incident numbers and respective case dispositions were provided to the Principal Investigator (PI), who created a stratified random sample that included 125 cases in each category by disposition: 1) cleared—arrest, 2) cleared—other, 3) open, and 4) inactive in the pre-training time frame and the post-training time frame. Additionally, a population of unfounded cases from both pre- and post-training were added to the sample. A total of 1240 family violence incident numbers were provided to the police partner agency and personnel collected, printed, and redacted each case file so that victim, suspect, and officer information were de-identified. Once that information was obtained, files were coded and entered—research team members extracted quantifiable data for each case. One case file was labeled confidential, precluding research team access. Cases with a single perpetrator or suspect and a single victim or complainant, producing sample size of 1065. Table 1 presents the complete stratified random sample by disposition. Table 2 presents the case descriptive statistics involving a single victim and a single perpetrator by case disposition for the study period.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics by Disposition for Study Period

Case Disposition	n	%
Open	250	20.2
Cleared—Other	247	19.9
Cleared—Arrest	248	20.0
Inactivated	250	20.2
Unfounded	244	19.7
Total	1239	100.0

Table 2. Single Victim/Single Perpetrator Descriptive Statistics by Disposition for Study Period

Case Disposition	n	%
Open	209	19.6
Cleared—Other	213	20.0
Cleared—Arrest	217	20.4
Inactivated	222	20.9
Unfounded	203	19.1
Total	1066	100.0

Generation of Incident Number by the Police Agency

It is important to note the process by which an incident number is generated and a case file is created. First, a complainant or victim contacts police, activating the criminal justice response. In this jurisdiction, a CFS to the 911 dispatcher sends a responding officer to the scene of the incident. Once on scene, the responding officer will identify the nature of the current or *presenting* incident, noting characteristics such as the incident location, victim demeanor, physical appearance, injury; suspect(s) on scene, suspect demeanor, physical appearance, injury; and the presence of witnesses. During this initial report, the responding officer will record information obtained from any person on scene. This typically involves an interview with the victim for the presenting incident to record the details of the family violence offense. Depending on the circumstances, the responding officer may make an on-scene arrest, provide service referral, gather contact information, take initial statements, and record any notable injury or weapons present at the incident location. Once this report is taken, the case file may be assigned to a specialized investigator from the Family Violence Unit

for follow-up investigation. When an investigator has been assigned, tasks involve securing sworn statements, making contact with victims, witnesses, and suspects, evidence retrieval/tagging evidence into police custody, arrest, and presentation to the district attorney (DA). Each time an investigator engages with a particular case, a new document or supplement is produced and added to the case file that is identified by the initial incident number from the presenting incident to which the responding officer was called.

Dependent Variables

Arrest was captured with a binary variable coded from the case file narrative and police records management system's (RMS) administrative data on whether an arrest was made in the present incident [yes = 1 ($n = 291$, 27.3%), no = 0 ($n = 775$, 72.7%)].

Victim Cooperation was captured through one item, coded from the case file narrative and RMS administrative data on whether the victim/complainant provided a sworn statement to the responding officer or investigator [yes = 1 ($n = 217$, 20.4%) no = 0 ($n = 849$, 79.6%)].

Service Referral Was captured through one item, coded from the case file narrative on whether the responding officer or investigator provided service referral information to the victim involved in the presenting family violence incident [yes = 1 ($n = 727$ 68.3%), no = 0 ($n = 337$, 31.7%)].

Independent Variables

A series of legally-relevant variables were quantitatively captured and include on-scene physical evidence, victim injury, victim self-defense/resistance behaviors, suspect weapon use, suspect official criminal history, suspect history of domestic violence, suspect sworn statement, victim criminal history, victim provided consistent statements to police, victim motive to lie, responding officer mentions victim credibility issues, completed sexual assault in the presenting family violence incident, victim/offender previous or current intimate partner, victim/offender have children together, and children witnessed the incident

Results

Data were screened for multicollinearity and results demonstrated this was not a problem. Next three multivariate binary logistic regression models were estimated to predict the outcomes under investigation.

First, a multivariate binary regression model predicting arrest was estimated while all independent variables were entered simultaneously. Model 1 accounted for approximately 26% of the variation in arrest as evidenced by the Nagelkerke R^2 .

Table 1. Binary Logistic Regression Predicting Arrest

Variables	β	Wald	Exp(B)
Training (0 = yes, 1 = no)	-0.09	0.33	0.91
Evidence	0.97	19.84*	2.63
Suspect Criminal History	1.16	54.69*	3.20
Suspect History of DV	0.50	8.98*	1.65
Witnesses	1.20	48.73*	3.33
Victim sex	0.70	10.09*	2.01
Nagelkerke R^2		.258	

Table 1 presents the effect of training on arrest in family violence offenses and the remaining significant predictors of arrest in the sample of family violence cases. As is demonstrated in Table 1, trauma-informed training did not have a significant effect on whether or not an arrest was made in the presenting family violence incident. Presence of physical evidence was a significant, positive predictor of arrest where cases with physical evidence were 2.63 times more likely to result in arrest as compared to cases without evidence. Suspect criminal history

was also a significant, positive predictor of arrest for family violence cases where those incidents involving a suspect with a prior criminal history of any kind were 3.20 times more likely to result in arrest compared to those cases where the suspect did not have a criminal history (or suspect criminal history was unknown). Presence of witnesses had a positive, significant effect on arrest such that those family violence incidents with witnesses were 3.33 times more likely to result in arrest than those without witnesses. Finally, victim sex was a significant, positive predictor of arrest where cases involving women victims were 2.01 times more likely to result in arrest than cases involving men victims. Victim race, age, injury, resistance behaviors, consistent statements, motive to lie, and credibility issues did not have a significant effect on arrest outcomes. Additionally, sexual assault in the presenting incident and whether or not children were present did not have a significant effect on arrest.

Table 2 presents the results of the effect of training on victim cooperation (as measured by whether or not the victim provided a sworn statement to police) and those variables that emerged as significant predictors of victim cooperation in the sample of family violence cases.

Table 2. Binary Logistic Regression Predicting Cooperation

Variables	β	Wald	Exp(B)
Training (0 = yes, 1 = no)	-0.03	0.02	0.97
Evidence	0.70	10.30*	2.20
Suspect Criminal History	1.32	55.67*	3.73
Suspect History of DV	0.51	7.63*	1.66
Suspect Weapon Use	0.61	9.92*	1.83
Sexual Assault in FV Incident	2.57	19.76*	13.27
Victim Resistance/Self-Defense	0.49	6.69	1.63
Witnesses	0.50	7.12	1.65
Inconsistent Statements (0 = y, 1 = n)	-1.93	18.19	0.15
Credibility Issues (0 = y, 1 = n)	-1.40	4.28	0.25
Children Witness	0.58	6.87	1.78
Nagelkerke R^2		.261	

Model 2 accounted for approximately 26% of the variation in victim cooperation as evidenced by the Nagelkerke R^2 . As demonstrated in Table 1, trauma-informed training did not have a significant effect on victim cooperation in the presenting family violence incident. Similar to the model predicting arrest, presence of evidence had a significant, positive effect on victim sworn statement where cases with evidence increased the odds of victim cooperation by 2.20 times. Both suspect criminal history and history of domestic violence were significant, positive predictors of victim cooperation and increased the odds of victim sworn statement by 3.73 and 1.66 times, respectively. Suspect weapon use was also a significant, positive predictor of victim sworn statement where incidents involving a weapon were 1.83 times more likely to produce a victim sworn statement compared to incidents without a weapon. It is notable that in incidents involving a completed sexual assault, victims were 13.27 times more likely to provide a sworn statement to police compared to incidents that did not involve a sexual assault. Victim resistance and the presence of witnesses also significantly increased the odds of victim cooperation by 1.63 and 1.65 times respectively. The variables capturing consistency in victim statements and officers' perceptions of victim credibility were significant and negatively related to victim cooperation such that when victims provided inconsistent statements to law enforcement or officers mentioned concerns surrounding victim credibility, victims were significantly less likely to provide a sworn statement than when they were perceived as consistent and credible. Finally, the presence of children at the scene of the family

violence incident was a significant, positive predictor of victim cooperation such that the presence of children increased the odds of a victim sworn statement by 1.78 times.

Table 3 presents the results of the effect of training on service referral and those variables that emerged as significant predictors of service referral in the sample of family violence cases.

Table 3. Binary Logistic Regression Predicting Service Referral

Variables	β	Wald	Exp(B)
Training (0 = yes, 1 = no)	0.16	1.36	1.18
Evidence	0.89	32.38*	2.43
Suspect History of DV	0.35	4.33*	1.41
Witnesses	-0.35	4.81*	0.70
Victim sex	0.57	11.36*	1.76
Nagelkerke R^2		.091	

Model 3 predicting service referral by the responding officer accounted for approximately 9% of the variation in the dependent variable as evidenced by the Nagelkerke R^2 . Training was not a significant predictor of service referral. Presence of physical evidence and suspect history of domestic violence were both positive, significant predictors of service referral such that these incidents were more likely to receive police referral to advocacy organizations by 2.43 and 1.41 times respectively as compared to incidents without physical evidence and with first time family violence offenders. When witnesses were present, police were significantly less likely to refer the victim to services. Finally, female victims increased the odds of service referral in family violence incidents by 1.76 times.

Discussion and Implications for Texas

This report presents abbreviated findings from an analysis of the effect of trauma-informed training on a series of criminal justice processing outcomes to include arrest, victim cooperation in the form of providing a sworn statement, and law enforcement service referral using family violence case file data. Several findings are worthy of discussion.

First, results presented here indicate that trauma-informed training did not have a significant effect on the outcomes under investigation. To that end, case files disposed before and after the training were not significantly different in terms of arrest, victim sworn statement and service referral. While disappointing, this finding is not altogether surprising given existing research on the lack of long term behavioral change in assessing the effect of crisis intervention training (Pearce & Snortum, 1983) and among web-based training for officer-involved domestic violence incidents (Oehme et al., 2016). Additionally, a study of Canadian police training for domestic disturbance calls demonstrated behavioral change following training to include an increase in arrest, collection of evidence, and informal police response, though these findings were bivariate and therefore, the independent effect of training while considering all factors was not estimated (Ruff, 2012). Conclusions cannot be drawn then on the effect of training at the multivariate level.

In assessing all three outcomes, legally relevant case factors such as evidence, witnesses, and suspect history of domestic violence were significant predictors. It is interesting to note the findings presented in model 2 predicting victim sworn statement reflect a concern on behalf of the complainant related to presence of children, victim resistance/self defense behaviors, weapon use and completed sexual assault. These factors were significant in this model only and may have to do with the severity of the offense and the way a victim perceives the need for formal intervention.

In terms of implications for future training modules, perhaps law enforcement personnel would benefit from trauma-informed training

longer in duration (e.g., Darwinkel et al., 2013) and involving peer-to-peer delivery where training participants have the opportunity to work through interactive scenarios guided by a peer mentor as opposed to lecture-based educational programming. These types of formats have been successful in military settings (Katz, 1995) and may be translated to police academy settings with some success. Currently, the Texas state legislature has mandated trauma-informed training for all Texas Peace Officers to improve response to gender violence offenses. This is an instructive starting point and research has demonstrated the potential for attitude change (Franklin et al., 2019).

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