



National Institute of Justice

Research Preview

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Evaluation of Family Violence Training Programs

From 1986 to 1992, 23 law enforcement training projects throughout the country received funding through the Office for Victims of Crime to train 16,000 police officers, other justice system staff (such as prosecutors and judges), and community service providers to improve responsiveness to victims of family violence. An NIJ-sponsored study found that the training programs appeared to have brought more uniform and progressive domestic violence policies in participating jurisdictions, improved training participants' attitudes and services to victims, and enhanced working relationships among agencies. However, the study also found that additional efforts will be needed to sustain and expand the effects of this training project.

Method

To learn about the implementation and effects of training programs, researchers from the Urban Institute:

- Reviewed project proposals and interviewed project staff.
- Analyzed case studies based on visits to model projects and interviews with key officials in New York State, Texas, Massachusetts, Tennessee, Kentucky, and Indiana. Projects were selected for the strength of their programs and diversity of training conditions.
- Surveyed 547 family violence victims in New York and Texas.

Effects of training on agency staff

The most significant results of the training programs, according to police officers interviewed at the model sites, were the development of high-quality educational materials and a pool of trained individuals who could train more line officers.

Most agencies did not track how many officers went through the programs or whether trained personnel were sharing their new knowledge with other staff. However, Indiana and Texas—States with training mandates—had records that showed widespread dissemination.

Interviews also indicated that training was a significant impetus to policy development within many criminal justice agencies and that model policies provided in the training materials were often used to create new agency policy. Several projects surveyed law enforcement agencies to determine if policy changes could be directly attributable to the training project, but the low survey response rate limited the interpretability of the results.

Most agencies tested participants before and after their training and found that the training both increased knowledge and had a positive effect on attitudes toward victims of family violence. Although many law enforcement agencies did not have hard data to verify these results, some had records showing an increase in domestic violence arrests from pretraining to posttraining periods.

Many of those interviewed also indicated that the training project improved cooperation between law enforcement and other community agencies. For example, several communities formed multidisciplinary task forces as a consequence of the working relationships established during the training process.

Victims' evaluations of officers' responses

Results of the surveys of victims in Texas and New York indicated that police officers' emotional support was a key factor in a positive evaluation of law enforcement's response. Victims who were satisfied (50 percent of those surveyed) reported officers most often responded in

pairs, insisted on seeing the victim when the abuser tried to prevent contact, did not use a mediation approach, and showed interest in the victim's story.

According to the survey, victims were less likely to receive concrete assistance and followthrough on law enforcement procedures. Victims said that police failed to collect evidence, to issue warrants or appearance tickets, to make arrests, and to provide followup contacts. Victims who had a history of abuse or past encounters with police were less likely to receive any services.

Was there a difference between pretraining and post-training services? In Texas, greater satisfaction was found among victims who received intervention after the training had been concluded. These results may have been brought about by the training, but they also may have been caused by other occurrences, such as changing attitudes in society or legislative initiatives. The differences were not as sharply defined as anticipated, but this may have been because some victims who were visited in the post-training period were assisted by untrained officers (some officers did not receive training). In New York, no differences between victims' satisfaction before and after training were found.

Implications

This study indicates that future training projects would be enhanced by incorporating mechanisms to assess project impact from the beginning of the projects, including funding for maintaining records on policy changes,

training dissemination, arrest rates, and victim services provided as well as surveys to assess long-term effects.

Considerations for improving training programs include:

- Ongoing support for training of law enforcement personnel (i.e., funding for resource materials and retention of qualified trainers).
- Enhancing responses and providing training for others outside the criminal justice system who encounter domestic abuse, such as child/adult protection agencies, clergy, and health care providers.
- Enacting legislation to protect victims better and to allow law enforcement agencies wider discretion in dealing with offenders (i.e., mandatory sentences, better victim notification, and closer supervision by the courts of mandatory treatment for batterers).

Perhaps the most fundamental need is to reach a shared understanding that the primary goal of any government agency's intervention in family violence cases is to stop violence and help the victim.

The report on this project, prepared under grant 92-IJ-CK-K009, *Evaluation of Police Training Conducted Under the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act*, by Lisa Newmark, Adele Harrell, and William P. Adams of the Urban Institute, is available on interlibrary loan or as photocopies for a minimum fee. Contact the National Criminal Justice Reference Service, 800-851-3420. Ask for NCJ 157306.

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