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# COMMUNITY POLICING AND FAMILY VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN: LESSONS LEARNED FROM A MULTIAGENCY COLLABORATIVE

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*Although traditional attitudes and policies toward family violence are now changing to reflect its magnitude and severity in the United States, multi-agency collaborative partnerships have emerged in an effort to develop a system that promotes the safety and welfare of victims of family violence and to prevent further abuse. This study analyzes the process of a multiagency collaborative involving a large, municipal police department and other service providers as an attempt to find meaningful solutions to family violence against women in a southwestern metropolitan area. The results suggest that even in an era of multiagency collaboration, one cannot presume that personnel of relatively autonomous organizations have the organizational capacity and/or the willingness among personnel to truly collaborate. Formidable barriers toward effective collaboration abound and result in a less effective process of negotiation rather than collaboration.*

Traditionally, law enforcement agents, the criminal justice system at large, religious organizations, health care providers, and society in general have reinforced the idea that family violence is a family problem. This perception

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has led to a long history of criminal justice noninterference in family assault cases in the United States (Asmus, Ritmeester, & Pence, 1991).

According to the results of national surveys, family violence victims include children and adults—both male and female. These studies show that 3.4% of American women, or 1 in 22, are victims of severe, abusive violence and that, on average, a married woman who is a victim of abuse is abused three times each year (Gelles & Cornell, 1990; M. Straus & Kantor, 1995). Violence of a less serious nature against women appears to be much more common.

Traditional attitudes and practices toward family violence are changing. Multilevel, public-private, collaborative partnerships among the criminal justice system, the medical community, educational leaders, the religious community, human services, and public and private advocates have emerged as an effort to promote the safety and welfare of the victims of family violence and to prevent further abuse.

The collaborative approach to family violence recognizes that crime problems and their effects on victims are not solely a law enforcement matter. Through the formation of partnerships and collaborative decision making within the context of community policing, a comprehensive—coproductive—approach to family violence is currently viewed as a promising way to reduce the occurrence of family violence. For example, D. Straus (1993, p. 29) emphasizes that “complex, multiparty conflicts require the design and large-scale collaborative problem solving processes.” The administration of justice in cases of family violence is complicated by varying social philosophies surrounding the privacy of the family and by relatively new, largely untested legal definitions and responses by a variety of law enforcement agencies, the courts, and corrections.

Despite the appearance of interagency collaboration, barriers toward effective problem solving remain. In the discussion that follows, we first offer a brief review of a coordinated, interagency response to family violence within the context of community policing. We then discuss one such approach to interagency collaboration—a domestic violence prevention commission, followed by a presentation of focus group and archival data, which highlight the obstacles facing collaborative problem-solving approaches. We conclude by suggesting that participating agencies should examine their own policies and procedures that either obstruct or facilitate collaboration. Finally, effective team-building interventions should be planned in an effort to move closer to collaborative problem solving.

## COMMUNITY POLICING AND COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS ADDRESSING FAMILY VIOLENCE

Community policing represents a philosophical shift in the mission of policing. Rather than simply enforcing laws, community policing recognizes the importance of community mobilization and public-private partnerships with the police in addressing crime and its victims. Accordingly, rather than relying solely on the police, citizens are encouraged to come together in an effort to address a wide range of community problems, including crime and fear of crime. To this end, community policing is an attempt to address quality-of-life issues at the neighborhood level and, like other current reform movements in the public and private sector, it emphasizes decentralized decision making, problem solving, and attention to customer needs in achieving these goals (Eck & Rosenbaum, 1994, p. 4).

As Eck and Rosenbaum (1994, p. 3) note, the emergence of the community-policing movement is reflected not only in the growing body of literature concerning the topic but also by the resounding endorsement of community policing by all of the national police research organizations and by the proliferation of community policing in practice. Several factors have contributed to this redefinition of the police role at the same time that traditional isolation of the police from the public, the ineffectiveness of police as crime fighters, and research findings called into question Wilson's police management principles (e.g., Skolnick & Bayley, 1986, pp. 4-6), with the result that many police executives and academics have called for a new approach to policing.

Evaluations of community policing have focused, in part, on the relationship between strategic problem-solving efforts and fear of crime, crime rates, disorder, and satisfaction with the police. For example, Eck and Spelman (1987) found evidence that proactive problem-solving approaches in concert with efforts by community members and relevant city agencies can lead to a reduction in the incidence of specific crimes. In addition, Toch and Grant (1991) found that a collaborative approach to problem solving involving the police, residents, and representatives of various city agencies can stem neighborhood social and physical disorder.

However, as Yin (1986) notes, the key to successful community-based efforts to reduce crime and fear of crime and to improve neighborhood conditions seems to be the active involvement of the police in educating citizens

about crime prevention and collaborative efforts with citizens, business owners, and private, nonprofit, and public agencies to solve problems.

It is within the community-policing context that many coordinated, multifaceted, problem-solving approaches dealing with family violence have arisen. According to Gwinn and O'Dell (1993, p. 1502) and Sadusky (1995), rather than relying on only one particular strategy, such as mandatory arrest or victim assistance, these coordinated community responses emphasize a broad, holistic approach to the problem of family violence. Their focus centers on early criminal justice system intervention at the misdemeanor level, policies dealing with the abuser rather than the victim, elimination of policies that tend to revictimize victims, and long-term accountability for the abuser (e.g., National Law Enforcement Policy Center, 1990).

In grassroots collaborative efforts, planning and coordination of family violence responses typically are undertaken through public-private partnerships that include law enforcement agencies, prosecutors, judges, shelters, therapists, medical service providers, advocates, educators, military, probation officers, churches, local bar associations, youth groups, social services, and other groups who have dealings with victims of domestic abuse or abusers themselves (Gwinn & O'Dell, 1993; Lerman, 1992). In some areas (e.g., Dane County, Wisconsin), grassroots collaborative efforts have been combined with top-down task forces in a blended arrangement, which allows for the potential implementation of suggested policy revisions.

Whether these collaborative partnerships take a distinct top-down approach, a grassroots approach, or a combined approach to family violence, they tend to be multifaceted, addressing both the victim and the abuser (see, for example, the Duluth Initiative as outlined in Asmus et al., 1991). Although no two collaborative efforts are alike, many attempt to integrate two or more of the components described below.

## SYSTEM INTERVENTION AT EARLY STAGES OF VIOLENCE

As noted above, the traditional police response of noninterference in family violence situations gradually has been replaced in many jurisdictions with coordinated police department efforts directed at early intervention at the misdemeanor level. The idea is a simple one: Family violence at a misdemeanor level (a) may still be quite serious (as in the hidden tax of verbal and mental abuse), and (b) may escalate to serious injury or death (Wangberg, 1991).

Police departments such as the San Diego Police Department and the Seattle Police Department have established new procedures in responding to misdemeanor family assault cases. In all departments in which early intervention is valued, the message is strong: If there is probable cause to arrest, the police officer not only should do so, but he or she should also begin to prepare the case for an effective prosecution.

Practically speaking, this policy means that officers need to be trained in a number of important areas so that the prosecutor has a case that he or she may prove beyond a reasonable doubt in court. In San Diego, a domestic violence coordinator oversees training for patrol officers, ensuring that those who respond to allegations of family violence are well versed in proper investigation techniques and know how to avoid revictimizing victims (Gwinn & O'Dell, 1993). Family violence cases then are forwarded to the Domestic Violence Investigations Unit, with the aim of working gently with victims, assuring them that prosecution is focused on the conduct of the abuser and attempting to engender the support of the victim during criminal prosecutions.

## FOCUSING ON THE ABUSER

Although traditional police and prosecutorial responses in family violence cases placed a substantial burden on the victim to press charges or testify in court, recent policy changes in a growing number of jurisdictions (e.g., Los Angeles and Seattle) now focus on building a criminal case against the alleged offender and removing the responsibility of such an effort from the victim. According to Wangberg (1991), this allows the victim to focus on her safety issues—and those of her children—whereas the criminal justice system focuses its attention on the criminal prosecution. Of course, the key to the success of such efforts is the ability of the prosecutor, working jointly with police, to build a substantial case consisting of direct, physical, and/or circumstantial evidence, with less dependency on the victim as the centerpiece of the case. Recent police-training initiatives in many jurisdictions have focused on essential police investigation techniques (Asmus et al., 1991).

## POLICIES DEALING WITH VICTIMS

Some collaborative efforts across the country have been focusing on the problem of what to do in the event that a victim who is served a subpoena

does not show up for court hearings. This problem has been a common one in family violence criminal prosecutions because prosecutors traditionally have relied on the testimony of the victim in court to prove his or her case. Without the victim, the prosecutor risked losing the case.

However, in recent years, increased collaboration between local police departments and prosecutors' offices, in an effort to gain enough evidence to successfully convict an abuser, even without the victim's testimony (Asmus et al., 1991), has occurred. And in those instances in which the victim's testimony is essential to the successful prosecution of the abuser, an arrest warrant directed toward the victim no longer is a given in many areas. For example, in San Diego, if a victim fails to appear at a trial for which she was subpoenaed, a special domestic violence prosecutor, who understands the reasons why many victims are unwilling to testify, is referred the case. If the prosecutor believes the case can be proved without the victim's assistance, he or she will not request a warrant for the arrest of the victim (Gwinn & O'Dell, 1993). Even in those instances in which an arrest warrant is issued, special prosecutors make numerous attempts to contact the victim and bring her to court before an arrest warrant is executed.

The San Diego experience is simply one example of how coordinated efforts can effect change in the criminal justice system so that risk of revictimizing the victim is minimized. Other efforts have centered on victim-assistance services (Berk, 1993; Wangberg, 1991). Cities such as Bellevue (Washington), New York, and Phoenix have collaborated with social service and mental health providers to take a more proactive approach to victim assistance (National Law Enforcement Policy Center, 1990). In Bellevue and New York, the police departments team with social service agencies to follow up with victims regarding available services. And in Phoenix, trained volunteers assist police officers on the scene to provide on-site crisis intervention (National Law Enforcement Policy Center, 1990).

## OFFENDER ACCOUNTABILITY

In an effort to find long-term solutions to family violence in the United States, several states and localities (e.g., California, Colorado, and Duluth, Minnesota) are moving far beyond traditional noninterference practices toward newer mandatory-arrest policies (Buzawa & Buzawa, 1993) and even newer expedited arraignments (Mickish & Schoen, 1991). These programs emphasize treatment and counseling, and harsh sanctions (usually



confinement) have been enacted to ensure that offenders not only are provided treatment services but also are held accountable for violations of probation contracts (Buzawa & Buzawa, 1993).

In these jurisdictions, fines and diversion programs are de-emphasized. Fines tend to also punish the victim, and diversion programs typically allow an offender to avoid responsibility for his actions. Although unsuccessful completion of a diversion contract may result in the prosecutor's filing charges against the defendant, successful prosecutions of these types of cases are rare (Gwinn & O'Dell, 1993).

The preceding discussion illustrates some relatively recent innovations in criminal justice responses to allegations of family violence. Many of these programs and policies have come directly from collaborative, multi-level, public-private partnerships in an era of community policing. Although we do not argue that these changes are a direct result of community-policing initiatives—indeed, many changes have been the result of successful lawsuits initiated on behalf of victims or as a result of the shelter movement (Asmus et al., 1991)—we do suggest that community policing, with its emphasis on collaborative problem solving, has led to community and agency mobilization and has facilitated the establishment of collaborative organizations and a new commitment among law enforcement agencies to address the problem of family violence.

## COLLABORATION: NECESSARY CONDITIONS

Recent organizational research sheds light on the necessary conditions for a successful social, multiagency collaboration. According to Gifford and Pinchot (1993), an essential ingredient is "community," which

serves as the vessel of vision, values, and mutually beneficial connections that guide the work of individuals and teams and shape market interactions. The ideal community combines freedom of choice and responsibility for the whole—everyone's relationships are full of choice and collaborative, vision sharing and value driven. (p. 216)

Also, Pfeiffer (1995, p. xi) contends that community is essential to successful collaboration and argues that organizations simultaneously augment the power of individuals and limit their freedom. Without a sense of community, individuals are intolerant of limitations on freedom. When effectively balanced, this duality optimizes collective creativity and problem solving. Furthermore, Gifford and Pinchot (1993) maintain that community must not only stem from individuals accepting limits on their freedom but



must also be maintained by all members of the collaborative. They summarize the effect of this by stating, "Without balance of community responsibility, markets often produce results nobody would choose" (p. 220). An ineffective product of a multiagency collaborative effort, whose sole purpose is to resolve family violence, would be erroneous policy recommendations and increased polarization of participating agencies.

Among the many major forces for an effective collaborative effort in bureaucracies (see Gifford & Pinchot, 1993; D. Straus, 1993), four are particularly relevant to social, multiagency collaborative efforts:

1. Intraownership and owning a piece of the whole, which allows retention of independence and identity of each of the component agencies, yet results in a unified sense of achievement and speaks to the need for mutual responsibility of the component agencies and the balance between individual freedom and community.
2. Processes of democratic self-management, in particular the lateralization of power, which allows a sense of contribution and control by each component agency.
3. Widespread information and education regarding the bigger picture, occurring in the form of educating the component agencies about causes and legal constraints of processes surrounding family violence.
4. A sense of safety, security, and wider systems' memberships, which allows a free-flowing exchange of information about each agency's resources and practices, without fear of a lack of reciprocity from other agencies. This sense also decreases the fear of loss of resources or the right to continue agency practices deemed valuable and efficient by the agency.

Each of these forces is addressed in light of the findings from this research. In the paragraphs that follow, we briefly discuss the context under which a domestic violence prevention commission was established in one southwestern metropolitan area. We describe the problem of family violence in the city, the local police department's community-policing initiatives, and the commission itself.

### THE CITY: FAMILY VIOLENCE AND COMMUNITY POLICING

With an estimated population of approximately a half million, this city is a large and growing metropolitan area located in the southwest United States. Its corporate limits encompass approximately 250 square miles. According to the 1990 census, this metropolitan area is a minority-majority city with more than two thirds of the people of minority descent.

**TABLE 1. Family Violence Statistics From Police Department in Southwestern United States City, 1996 to 1998**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Reports to Police</i>	<i>Reports Filed</i>	<i>Arrests Made</i>
1996	29,997	7,108	3,655
1997	29,952	10,548	4,371
1998	27,328	10,413	3,455
Average	29,092	9,356	3,827

## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN THE CITY

One of the local police department's most frequent calls for service is for a reactive response to allegations of family violence. For purposes of record keeping, family violence is broken down into three categories: (a) child abuse, (b) abuse of the elderly, and (c) spousal abuse. Table 1 shows the police department's family violence statistics from 1996 through 1998. On average, the department received 29,092 family violence calls for service per year (representing approximately 2,424 calls per month).<sup>1</sup> Of these calls, more than 9,356 were determined by officers to be serious enough to result in the writing of a police report, and in 3,827 instances, probable cause was found to arrest an alleged offender (Domestic Violence Prevention Coordination Unit, 1999).

According to police department records, family violence against female spouses is the most common type of reported family violence. On average, 81% of family violence arrests between the years 1996 and 1998 were of males who allegedly either committed or threatened acts of violence against women (Domestic Violence Prevention Coordination Unit, 1999).

In addition, the police department and prosecutor's office have an agreement whereby police officers at the scene of an alleged family violence offense (where the alleged offender(s) is/are present) speak via telephone with a prosecutor, who screens the case and determines whether there is probable cause to make an arrest. This screening process occurred with 1,655 incidents in 1996, the 1st year the agreement was implemented. Of those incidents, 71% of the cases ultimately were dismissed by the prosecutor or resulted in a pretrial diversion program. And, in 25% of the cases, an offender either pled guilty or was found guilty by a judge.

## COMMUNITY-POLICING INITIATIVES

Under the direction of a newly appointed chief of police, the department's commitment to policing innovations and the broader philosophy of community policing appears to be well developed. Both departmental mission and values statements involve a community-policing philosophy of police-citizen partnerships in the coproduction of order and the collaborative process of identifying and solving problems of crime, drugs, fear of crime, and social and physical disorder at the neighborhood level. As a result of the department's philosophical shift from traditional to community-based policing, several operational and programmatic innovations have been implemented, including decentralization of command and a number of other initiatives geared toward collaborative problem solving.

## THE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PREVENTION COMMISSION

In addition to its other community-policing initiatives, the department applied for federal funding from the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) under its Community Policing to Combat Domestic Violence solicitation. The grant ultimately was awarded in March 1997 under Category I of the solicitation, "Department-sponsored multidisciplinary training initiatives." With funding from the COPS Office, the department established the Domestic Violence Prevention Commission (hereafter, commission) for the primary purpose of developing an effective approach to reduce family violence in the city.

Representatives of the commission reflect a public-private, multilevel collaborative partnership and include members of the police department, the district attorney's office, the county attorney's office, the city attorneys' office, probation, parole, the military, the school district, the council of judges, state, county, and municipal legal assistance, juvenile probation, the battered women's shelter, the YMCA, the transitional living center, the clergy, and other volunteer services dealing with the problems of family violence.

In addition to formalizing the commission, the police department, with support from the COPS Office, established the Domestic Violence Prevention Coordination Unit (DVPCU) in March 1997 for the primary purpose of implementing a multifaceted approach to combating family violence in the city, based on recommendations from the commission. The DVPCU, in

conjunction with the commission, has begun initial planning into the efficacy of police officer family violence training.

Here, the department will make use of its community-policing initiatives and departmental decentralization and will empower sergeants from each of five regional command centers throughout the city not only to be trained in effectively dealing with family violence cases but also to be involved in the implementation of the training program for line-level officers. Police officers will be trained in the techniques of proper investigation documentation of family violence cases, how to avoid revictimizing the victim, accountability for a police officer's action or inaction, the writing of detailed reports, and the taking of witness statements and pictures of the crime scene and victim. Initial police officer training was offered in 1999, the findings of which are reported elsewhere (Smithey, Green, & Giacomazzi, 2000).

## METHOD

Focus-group interviews and archival research were employed in this process evaluation as the primary methods to assess the interagency effort and the extent to which collaboration existed among members of the Domestic Violence Prevention Commission. According to Stewart and Shamdasani (1990, p. 16), focus-group interviews are an ideal way to collect qualitative data. In addition, there are other advantages to focus-group interviews, including (a) they allow the researcher to interact directly with the program recipients, (b) they allow the researcher to obtain large amounts of data in the respondents' own words, and (c) they allow the researcher to further question responses and build on answers for further discussion.

Four focus-group interview sessions were conducted at strategic points in the evaluation process; two were conducted in February 1998, which corresponds to the end of the commission's planning efforts (Phase 1), and two additional focus groups were conducted in April 1999, approximately 1 year into the commission's implementation efforts (Phase 2). Focus-group participants consisted of representatives from commission agencies. For the Phase 1 focus groups, a systematic random-sampling procedure was used to select 19 agencies. Once agencies were selected for possible participation from the list of all commission agencies, telephone calls were made to the designated agency member who had been participating in commission activities. Fourteen individuals agreed to participate in the focus-group discussions, and 11 individuals (7 females and 4 males) participated in the

scheduled focus-group meetings. Although small in number, focus-group participants represented the breadth of membership for the commission: 2 probation officers, 1 police officer, 1 private security officer, 2 nonprofit advocates, 2 human service employees, 1 educator, 1 municipal court administrator, 1 military officer, and 1 legal aid attorney. On average, focus-group participants attended approximately 7 commission meetings/subcommittee meetings.

The same procedure was used for Phase 2 focus groups. Here, 18 agencies were randomly selected, and the designated agency member who had been participating in commission activities was contacted. All 18 agency members agreed to participate (15 females and 3 males). As was the case for Phase 1 focus groups, participants were representative of the commission membership: 4 representatives from the courts, 4 law enforcement personnel, 4 private social service representatives, 1 educator, 3 public/nonprofit social service representatives, and 2 individuals from the private sector.

Focus-group discussions were moderated by the authors. One undergraduate and one graduate student served as recorders. Focus-group questions centered on participants' perceptions of the mission of the commission, the process of collaboration within the commission, barriers to achieving the commission's goals, and reasons for the participants' agency's involvement with the commission. In the section that follows, we discuss the findings of the focus-group interviews by transcribing representative comments from those participants who voice their opinions and attitudes in a particular topical area.

In addition to focus-group interviews, archival data in the form of meeting notes and other documentation were used to provide descriptive information regarding the number of commission meetings, average attendance at meetings, and agencies participating in commission activities.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Archival data revealed that a total of 22 collaborative meetings took place during the Phase 1 planning stage, beginning with the first commission meeting on April 23, 1997, and the last on September 17, 1997. The average attendance at the meetings was 36. The meetings not only included the 6 joint commission meetings but also meetings of the commission's subcommittees, including the human services' subcommittee, the law enforcement subcommittee, and the judicial subcommittee. Also included in the total were 4 community forums seeking input from citizens regarding

family violence interventions. These forums, which commenced in July 1997, took place in four distinct regions of the city.

These data also reveal that the commission is a public-private, coordinated effort representing 88 distinct organizations (not including concerned citizens who do not have an organizational affiliation). Organizations represented include the clergy, courts, education, law enforcement, medical, nonprofit agencies, private sector service providers, and public social service agencies. All commission members were asked to join one of three subcommittees in which they could make the greatest impact: law enforcement, judicial/prosecution, or human services.

Subcommittees met independently of the commission and as often as its members felt necessary. Subcommittees elected a chair, vice-chair, and recording secretary and proceeded with brainstorming activities, eventually narrowing their problem-solving activities to specific issues. Subcommittees also presented progress reports to the general membership of the commission during monthly commission meetings from April through September 1997. The monthly commission meetings also afforded members the opportunity to hear topical presentations on a variety of family violence issues.

Commission members ultimately developed formal recommendations to achieve their mission. This process led members (a) to examine how each agency addressed the issue of family violence, (b) to determine areas in which the current system was not sufficient, (c) to decide which areas were most important to address, and (d) to identify the improvements needed. The recommendations were organized within six focused areas: (a) prevention through public awareness, (b) specialized domestic violence response team, (c) enforcement of domestic violence cases, (d) victims' assistance, (e) programs for offenders, and (f) funding. The presentation of these recommendations in late 1997 put closure on Phase 1 of the commission's efforts.

Beginning in May 1998, the commission undertook Phase 2, the implementation of the recommendations. At the first Phase 2 commission meeting, Phase 1 recommendations were prioritized, and subcommittees were formed to explore the implementation of the recommendations. Through October 1999, approximately 10 subcommittees, including the judicial, speakers' bureau, law enforcement, and education subcommittees, met on various occasions and presented reports to the full membership at eight separate commission meetings. The average attendance at the Phase 2 commission meetings was 30.

Despite the high activity of commission members during Phase 1 (and to a lesser extent during Phase 2), and the outward appearance of collaboration, focus-group data reveal the practical and philosophical problems that threaten interagency, collaborative efforts both during planning and implementation phases.

## OBSTACLES JEOPARDIZING COLLABORATION

### *Self-Interest as a Motivation to Participate: Turfism*

Focus-group data reveal that agency motivations for participation in the commission's activities are not directly goal oriented. At the very least, focus-group responses raise the question of whether agencies are motivated to participate out of self-interest in the form of protecting one's "turf."

If collaboration truly is goal oriented, then it is a process that brings together all relevant partners in an effort to solve problems. However, many apparent collaborative endeavors suffer from turfism: partners who consciously or unconsciously strive to remain in control, protecting their own interests. We found that the Domestic Violence Prevention Commission is no different. Turfism emerged naturally during the Phase 1 focus groups and, once prompted, arose as an extreme and continuing problem in the Phase 2 focus groups. In fact, it was the consensus of all focus-group participants that turf issues remain a stumbling block for true collaboration. Several qualitative data from focus-group participants illustrate this point.

Turfness is almost palpable. It is entrenched, and the commission may have nicked a little hole into it, but agencies are still only cordial, with all clutching to their territory.

I think this [turfism]<sup>2</sup> is true. I attended the commission to shore up weak points of my agency and also to defend my agency.

I saw turfness in the beginning and it has continued with the commission.

Similar comments were made from Phase 2 focus-group participants. Here, turfism appears to affect each agency's sense of safety, security, and wider systems' membership. The need to defend one's agency seems to constrict an individual's ability to assess the social problem from various angles, an important component that leads to the creativity necessary for innovative and effective solutions to the problem of family violence against women.



### *Leadership and Dominance*

Several Phase 1 focus-group participants were concerned that the commission was established by the police department. Although others were more supportive of the police department's establishment of the commission, the following examples illustrate an ongoing tension at two levels. First, there is a perception that the police department controls the commission's activities, which may be counter to true collaboration.

It is a flaw that the commission was brought up by the police department. To improve it further, we need a separate agency because of the tendency of the police department to dominate and repel criticism.

The [local] police department might be a hindrance. If they are the power players, the police department has more power to move the commission in their direction.

Second, among human service providers and educators, there appears to be a philosophical difference regarding the solution for family violence when compared with law enforcement. Human service providers and educators exhibited a decided emphasis toward preventive activities rather than law enforcement responses. The following data, first from a Phase 1 focus group, then a Phase 2 focus group, illustrate this difference.

The police department came into it as the lead; but, once the police are dealing with domestic violence, it is too late. Those in human services should take the lead and give up-front education and outreach to children and employees.

No one here is really looking at prevention, just punishment.

Perceived dominance by the founding agency (in this case, the local police department) appears to undermine the necessary conditions of lateralization of power and intraownership. According to D. Straus (1993, pp. 31-32), resistance to a collaborative process results from a growing dissatisfaction and distrust with leadership, fueled by a fear of loss of power and a need to try to solve all the problems by making all the decisions themselves. Persons who are subordinated must therefore "legitimize" their ownership in the solution to the problem by pointing to flaws or omissions by the dominant agency. Flaws or omissions by the police department were articulated by several non-law enforcement commission members.

I wonder if [the] commission investigations of just violent community occurrences heighten public awareness [a commission goal]. . . . The advertising and education of

private sector [groups] is more successful than legal actions of [investigative] agencies. (private sector member)

There is a great deal of domestic abuse within policing [Here the participant is implying the police department cannot solve domestic violence within its own agency, therefore it is incompetent to solve it at the community level]. (private sector member)

The law enforcement checklist [one of a few tangible DVPC objectives] was successful[ly completed], but it is not accepted yet by the police department. It may never be implemented. (social service member)

[Referring to the police department's not implementing the checklist] If others had suggestions to make things better for us, we will try it. That is all we want to do . . . make things better. Here, we [the commission] have a checklist that nobody is gonna use because of resistance [by the police department].

But despite the division that arose in the Phase 1 focus groups concerning the leadership role of the police department during the commission's planning stage, by April 1999, Phase 2 focus-group participants were concerned about the general lack of leadership in the commission's undertakings, regardless of which agency representative took the lead.

There can still be more collaboration, but more leadership is necessary.

There is a lack of direction by the leadership of the commission.

With the [police department] sergeant leaving, who had a personal mission to change views of domestic violence, there has been a change [in active leadership].<sup>3</sup>

### *Organizational Ambiguity Resulting in Unclear Expectations*

A variety of other barriers to the realization of the commission's goals were also reported, including perceptions of waning interest in the commission's activities, lack of organization, scheduling of meetings, and unclear expectations of participants.

I attended a host of Phase 1 meetings but feel like a casualty as I have not been invited to the first two meetings of Phase 2, so I am less motivated. My interest in domestic violence has not lessened, but I have less of an interest in the meetings.

To meet the goals, you expect Phase 2 to be as organized as Phase 1, but it is not.

During Phase 1, you knew what was expected and the dates of the meetings. Everything was laid out in black and white, and all was in front of you. This is not the case for Phase 2.

I'm not exactly sure what had happened, but the implementation aspect of the second phase was never achieved.

These examples illustrate other practical problems of multiagency collaborations. Although collaborative efforts may offer the best hope for long-term solutions to the problem of family violence, loss of interest due mainly to long time frames for the commission's activities and organization problems related to the scheduling of meetings and concise expectations pose potential threats to collaboration and the realization of the commission's goals.<sup>4</sup>

### *The Absence of Key Players in the Implementation Phase*

Although the commission itself is cochaired by the director of the battered women's shelter, the chief of the police department, and the president of the local university, Phase 2 focus-group respondents were frustrated by the lack of involvement of these and other key leaders in commission activities. In addition, in the fall of 1998, the chief of the local police department resigned his position.

The university is absentee from the commission, and who knows the loyalty of the new police chief. Also missing from the commission is the school superintendent, and it is the kids in the schools who are the witnesses.

The sanction to do new things must come from the top level, so things are accepted quickly. The top-level involvement by key agencies seems to be missing from the commission.

Territorial issues have not gone away, and the higher-ups are needed to help this go away.

The major city representatives are missing, and no one knows their agenda or whether they are proactive about the commission.

The above data attest to implementation problems that the commission is experiencing. Without the involvement and buy-in of key leaders in the representative agencies, implementation becomes problematic. Although the product for Phase 1 activities simply was a plan that outlined recommendations for change, the product for Phase 2 activities is action. It appears the old adage "easier said than done" certainly applies here.

### *Marginalization of Commission Members from Non-Law Enforcement Agencies*

As noted above, if there is, indeed, a direction that the commission seems to be taking, it is one primarily focused on law enforcement responses to family violence against women. This was manifested in law enforcement

training for handling domestic violence calls for service, prosecutors' efforts to bring more cases to court, and more programs for offenders.

As such, this direction appears to be marginalizing those agency representatives who are primarily concerned with proactively—rather than reactively—preventing family violence against women. And, although we have little in terms of actual data to support this assertion, collectively, we sense that marginalization of non-law enforcement agencies is occurring and is a hindrance to interagency collaboration. For example, much of the frustration concerning the commission activities, both in Phase 1 and Phase 2, has stemmed from focus-group participants who represent non-law enforcement agencies, such as private citizens with no organizational affiliation, educators, and social service agencies in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors.

In fact, an unintended consequence of our focus-group selection technique for Phase 2 was a distinct difference in agency representation of each group. The first Phase 2 focus group consisted of 6 participants: 4 from law enforcement and only 2 from non-law enforcement agencies. Conversely, the second focus group consisted of 12 participants: 8 from non-law enforcement agencies and only 4 from law enforcement agencies.

The first focus group (majority law enforcement) was more likely to describe the commission in positive ways, such as “extremely organized,” “energetic,” “positive collaboration,” “very vocal,” and “coordinated.” In fact, one law enforcement official described the commission as “superb and beautiful—a united front to remedy domestic violence.” Conversely, participants in the second focus group (majority non-law enforcement) were far more likely to describe the commission in a negative way, such as “frustrating,” “very erratic,” “stalled position,” “lack of direction,” “a little bit lost,” and “fragmented and disappointing.”

This finding prompted us to conduct a separate analysis to determine the ratio of public to private agency participation in this public-private collaborative effort. We reasoned that the public-private ratio was appropriate given that the great majority of public agencies within the commission are law enforcement agencies, whereas those from the private sector primarily have a service orientation. The analysis included agency participation in 12 commission meetings beginning in May 1997 and ending in October 1999. The results are shown in Table 2 and suggest that although the ratios fluctuate from meeting to meeting, public agencies overwhelmingly dominate the commission in terms of numbers of participants.

**TABLE 2. Public-Private Ratio of Agency Participants for 12 Meetings of Domestic Violence Prevention Commission**

<i>Meeting Date</i>	<i>No. of Private</i>	<i>No. of Public</i>	<i>Public-to-Private Ratio</i>
May 1997	11	74	6.73:1
June 1997	8	55	6.86:1
July 1997	14	54	3.86:1
August 1997	6	57	9.5:1
September 1997	1	42	42:1
May 1998	2	16	8:1
November 1998	4	25	6.25:1
February 1999	7	19	2.71:1
May 1999	6	15	2.5:1
June 1999	8	23	2.88:1
September 1999	3	14	4.67:1
October 1999	5	17	3.4:1

The distinct differences in general perceptions of the commission activities at the same point in time combined with a more reactive approach to family violence supported and undertaken by some commission members, as well as the disproportionate numbers of participants from the public sector, suggest a marginalization process for those who support a more preventative approach to reducing family violence.<sup>5</sup> Although it remains to be seen whether marginalization continues, it most certainly is negatively affecting a collaborative approach to remedying the problem.

### CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

If police agencies are to embrace collaborative problem-solving efforts, police culture, attitudes, and practices must change to begin the process of a meaningful response to family violence. This change must embrace a sense of community, with the necessary conditions for collaboration in place. Although this change is easier said than done, the community-policing context—one that encourages these conditions (intraownership, democratic self-management, education, and a true sense of membership)—certainly appears to be a ripe environment for necessary changes to take place that would enhance collaborative efforts.

This commission—as well as other coordinated, multifaceted efforts described earlier—is viewed as a promising problem-solving strategy for reducing family violence against women. However, we found that the

combination of turfism, the motivation to simply acquire new information, leadership and dominance, organizational obstacles, the absence of key leaders, and the marginalization of representatives of non-law enforcement agencies have hindered collaboration both in the planning and implementation phases and has transformed this process into a negotiative one.

Of course, these conclusions are tentative rather than definitive. Although we took care to collect objective data over the course of this 3½-year process evaluation, we acknowledge the possibility of errors. For example, the total number of participants for our focus-group interviews was rather small in comparison with the total number of commission participants. This may lead to problems with generalizability. However, random selection procedures and an analysis of the breadth of representation among participants suggest that all viewpoints were captured. We also recognize other validity and reliability problems dealing with the focus-group method *per se*. These include reactive effects, dominance by one or more participants, and the possibility of leading questions. Despite these legitimate concerns, we have some confidence in our findings, many of which have been corroborated by non-focus-group participants during informal interviews.

Our findings indicate that the need to retain turf has clouded what could be a comprehensive, collaborative strategy addressing the social problem of family violence. But, other issues have led to this transformation as well. Most important, 3½ years after the establishment of the commission the membership still had not established clear goals, objectives, and working agreements on which to focus its activities. This has resulted in some ambiguity concerning the direction of the commission and heightened dissention among law enforcement and non-law enforcement members. And, particularly relevant to the implementation phase has been the absence of agency decision makers in commission activities. This has led to considerable frustration among commission members because effective implementation requires buy-in from top executives in the component agencies.

Despite these barriers to effective collaboration, there are some encouraging signs for this particular commission. First, focus-group respondents overwhelmingly agreed that the commission's planning and implementation activities have provided an educational forum for its membership. We consider this a benefit, which enhances collaboration. And although education can be regarded as simply acquiring new information, focus-group responses suggested that education here refers to providing a broader understanding of agency procedures and policies geared toward solving the social problem of family violence, as well as to understanding the general

nature of family violence from a variety of perspectives. As such, the component agencies have been inspired to work together by their expanded understanding about the causes, legal and social constraints surrounding family violence, and roles they and others play in response to the problem of family violence against women.

In addition, with the assignment of a new sergeant to the police department's DVPU, the commission now benefits from a sense of coordination that had previously had been lacking in Phase 2 activities, when the original sergeant had resigned. And, although there was some resistance to the idea that the police department would again take the lead in commission activities, that sentiment has been tempered of late, as a representative of the battered women's shelter (a non-law enforcement agency) has occasionally stepped in to mediate and work with the police sergeant.

We should also note that several other focus-group participants identified a primary motivation for participation in the commission as the acquiring and sharing of new information and resources. Although on the surface, the acquisition of new information and resources may appear as a benefit to collaboration, it is also may be an indication of the fragility of the collaborative effort. One could question the likelihood of continued motivation for participation if the desire for new information is left unfulfilled or becomes satiated. Ideally, motivation for participation would come from the desire to solve the social problem, and sustained motivation would stem from a unified sense of community and the attainment of such goals. Although the dispersion of information is an important by-product of the collaborative effort, it is not a direct goal of the commission and, combined with the protection of one's turf, could transform the collaborative process into one that is closer to negotiative. On the other hand, however, the mere act of sharing and acquiring new information among component agencies could be considered a first step in an act of collaboration.

Finally, we would be in error not to point out that some Phase 1 recommendations—despite the general lack of collaboration—have, in fact, been implemented. For example, a draft of a police officer checklist training was finished, a citywide resource directory has been completed, a specialized police department domestic violence response team has been established, and a better working relationship between the police department and the prosecutor's office has developed.

Regardless of whether this interagency, public-private process is collaborative or negotiative in nature, some positive outcomes will continue to be realized. However, we anticipate differences in the means by which these



outcomes will be attained based on whether the process is collaborative or negotiative. On further evaluation, it is expected that a collaborative process ultimately will result in more innovative and comprehensive, longer term solutions to the problem of family violence, which have greater chances of becoming institutionalized in the region. And, although the current negotiative process likely will continue to produce sporadic programs and initiatives to reduce family violence in the area, the quality of response to family violence is likely to be lower due to a lack of clear, open, comprehensive evaluation of agency capabilities and resources and a lack of vision and concrete objectives.

The results of this research suggest that in an era of multiagency collaboration, we cannot presume that the personnel of relatively autonomous organizations—both public and private alike—have the organizational capacity and/or the willingness among personnel to truly collaborate. Formidable barriers exist here and elsewhere that hinder collaborative efforts and transform the process to one based on negotiation. Agency policies and procedures that either obstruct or facilitate collaboration should be examined, and effective team-building interventions should be planned in an effort to move closer to collaborative problem solving, the approach that offers the most hope for finding meaningful, long-term solutions to social problems.

## NOTES

1. There is some undetermined amount of error here. These numbers are generated from the department's Computer Aided Dispatch center. Operators initially may determine that a call for service is "family violence" when, in fact, it may turn out not to be. According to department administrators, there is no systematic procedure in place to correct CAD entries. These numbers, therefore, are exaggerated.

2. Brackets denote words or phrases inserted by the authors for clarification purposes.

3. With regard to this comment, it is of some interest to note that the sergeant who secured the original grant to form the Domestic Violence Prevention Unit (DVPU) had recently announced that he was leaving his position at the police department and was moving out of the area. This sergeant, who at the very least symbolically represented law enforcement as the leader of the commission, left a leadership void at a crucial time in the commission's existence.

4. It is worth noting, however, that some of these practical problems recently have been addressed. For example, in late 1999, a new police department sergeant was assigned to the DVPU. This sergeant has taken over the leadership role of the commission, has restructured the subcommittees and their assignments, and has developed regular and clear meeting dates and times for the commission. Of course, it remains to be seen whether yet another law

enforcement leader will breed the resentment that was manifested by some participants in the Phase 1 focus-group sessions.

5. However, we are reminded by one of our anonymous reviewers that although many human service providers ideally engage in preventive activities, in practice, their activities are typically reactive in nature. Our findings, here, may be the result of small sample sizes.

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