

# DOMESTIC VIOLENCE REVICTIMIZATION PREVENTION IMPROVING POLICE RESPONSE TO REPEAT CALLS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

FREMONT POLICE DEPARTMENT, CALIFORNIA, 1997

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- THE PROBLEM:** The Fremont Police Department found that police officer's spent considerable amounts of time handling domestic violence calls, the most frequent type of repeat call for service. Calls for service showed a pattern in which violence increased over time—escalating from verbal dispute to violent assault. Officer's time spent of calls increased with the severity of the violence.
- ANALYSIS:** Data for 1994, 1995, and 1996 showed Fremont Police responded to over 2,500 domestic violence cases involving three or more calls for service. This constituted a major commitment of time and staff to specific locations of the city during peak activity hours.
- RESPONSE:** A domestic violence follow-up protocol was developed. Officers are required to conduct two follow-ups to a domestic violence call including education about services available assist victims in coping with domestic violence and reinforcing that the victim need not accept violence in the home. Officers document all actions and follow-up efforts to show a conscientious effort to stop the violence and create a paper trail to justify future prosecution when necessary. The early documentation can lead to more enforcement efforts other than a follow-up response when locations present chronic problems.
- ASSESSMENT:** The 1996 pilot program decreased repeat calls for service to domestic violence by 22 percent. In 1997, the program was expanded to the entire department and reaped a 57 percent decrease in three or more repeat calls for service to the same location. Efforts at working with the local domestic violence shelter advocates also show positive results towards outreach to victims to provide services which can further reduce the violence.
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## SCANNING

In 1994, the Fremont Police Department started a review of the quality of service delivery we provided our community and what changes were needed to improve service. One of the first issues reviewed by staff was the number of repeat calls for service to the same locations,

which generate an inordinate workload. Initial impressions by department managers and officers pointed to bars, nightclubs, and shopping centers as the primary causes of multiple return calls for service. The Information Systems Unit generated reports which cover 1993, 1994, and the first three quarters of 1995.

The data generated was built around parameters, which included all locations where three or more calls for service occurred. Over the time period studied, hundreds of locations were identified. Most surprising was the number of locations involving repeat calls for service for domestic violence and the number of calls to these locations. The information indicated this type of disorder was the most frequent repeat call for service experienced by the department. The data also indicated a distinct pattern, which showed an escalation from argument to restraining orders, battery, and assaults with weapons, and spouse abuse. Some calls escalated to attempt murder and murder. As the calls increased, so did the amount of staff time necessary to deal with the call and the reports resulting from more serious criminal cases.

## **ANALYSIS**

The crime of domestic violence was pervasive throughout the community and was not localized to any specific geographic area or group of people. The calls for service data as well as information from the Shelter Against Violent Environments (SAVE), a local Domestic Violence support organization, clearly showed a community problem, which has been in existence for many years. Approximately 98 percent of the victims in our community are women. Based on SAVE experience, they indicate the suspect is generally the husband, and drugs or alcohol play a role in most cases. The crime is one of control and power on the part of the batterer and in the majority of cases, the victim is most fearful of becoming homeless, encountering financial difficulties, and further alcohol abuse if efforts are made to leave the abusive environment.

The problem was identified as one, by its existence, damages the quality of life in the community, in addition to inordinate amounts of time required by law enforcement to handle the calls for service. Prior to the pilot project, police officers responded to the calls and unless a battery, assault, or other violent act occurred, they would mediate the matter and then leave without really solving the incident for the victims. Domestic violence locations were generally not identified until some act of violence occurred or the victim demanded an

arrest. Due to the dynamics of the crime, in many cases, the victim wanted no police involvement beyond the initial mediation efforts. Because calls were not always formally documented, a high percentage of these crimes went unreported which indicates even greater staff time was utilized to address the problem than the data indicates.

Research determined that the crime of domestic violence is not limited to specific time periods or locations but does occur more frequently during the evening hours. The shifts most impacted in Fremont are swing and the early portion of graveyard, with most of the calls for domestic violence taking place in the time frame from 3:00 p.m. to 1:00 a.m. each day. Day shift is impacted during the morning and early afternoon hours on weekdays and slightly more frequently on weekends.

Discussion among officers recognizes the nature of domestic violence, and the past training provided by the Shelter Against Violent Environments has built an understanding for the dynamics of the crime. Officers in Fremont, because of recent high profile cases associated with police response to domestic violence, believe an increased danger of injury or death exists. Some officers on the department expressed the opinion that it is not a call they wish to handle and would like to see the number of these calls reduced. They don't feel confident in what they accomplished after leaving the call. For the officers, the question was how to reduce the calls to domestic violence cases and continue to protect the victims. Officers do desire to help victims avoid violence and not be victimized again.

One of the practices exercised by the department was to arrest when arrest was warranted. Officers would mediate domestic violence calls where no arrest could be made. The officers took no follow-up action after the initial call was completed. While this resolved the immediate problem, it did not provide for long-term resolution necessary to reduce or eliminate the crime. The follow-up practice of the West Huddersfield Police in England had such success in the area of property crimes, the thought that a similar effect could be gained in domestic violence cases seemed possible. In West

Huddersfield, a follow-up protocol was developed for victims of burglary. After the first burglary follow-up with crime prevention techniques took place, help in reinforcing the home with better security and properly identifying property was given. Following a second burglary at the same location, additional measures taken included alarming the home, as well as neighborhood alerts. A third burglary resulted in greater steps, including video surveillance in the home and direct alarm to the local police station.

Taking the information learned from West Huddersfield, the thought of utilizing a follow-up approach to repeat victims of domestic violence began to form. By re-contacting both victim and suspect after the violence, counseling information could be provided in a calmer setting, and officers could reinforce the idea that domestic violence is a crime, which could result in criminal prosecution. Also, the police presence could emphasize to the victim that they did not have to remain in the violent situation.

## **RESPONSE**

A specific protocol was developed and initiated in January 1995, with a pilot team of officers who comprised approximately one-sixth of the patrol force at the time. The officers were required to document all calls of domestic violence in a police report and then complete an "in person" follow-up with the victim within seven days of the first call. A second follow-up was required within twenty-eight days of the first call. In each follow-up visit, officers were asked to determine if additional violence had occurred since the last contact, offer information about counseling services available to both victims and suspects of domestic violence, reinforce the support. For victims, and reinforce that the victim does not need to be victimized in the future. The primary concern was to follow up with the victim; however, follow-up with the suspect was encouraged. When possible, officers were to reinforce with the suspect that arrest and prosecution would be sought if further violence occurred. Each follow-up was documented in a supplemental report to the original case so a report package was created.

One of the key elements of the follow-up protocol was being open and honest with the people contacted at the call. Officers were directed to inform both parties of the follow-up protocol and there would be continued efforts to call on them in the future. No appointments were made; the parties were told the follow-up would occur at anytime during the officer's regular shift. The officers on the team were responsible for tracking their own cases and informing fellow team members of their cases so two officers did not have two separate cases in progress at the same location. Once an officer followed the protocol at a location, they were responsible for that location until the protocol was completed. With a small group of officers, tracking and following cases was not difficult. Directly interviewing officers about the responses they were receiving during the follow-up calls was done weekly during the first year of the program. The results of this program were surprising to the officers and shift supervisors alike. The officers reported positive feedback especially from the victims contacted. Most victims, and some suspects, reported seeking other avenues of conflict resolution. No officers reported negative contact during the follow-up protocol while some did report the parties requesting no further follow-up action, citing they did not wish to have the police returning to their homes. This request was honored when both the victim and suspect made the request but was not offered as an option by the officers. No citizen complaints were received for an officer completing the follow-up protocol during the 1996 pilot program year. Data for 1996, when compared to data for 1995, indicated a 21.88 percent reduction in repeat calls for service to domestic violence. In 1995, officers went to 221 locations three or more times for a total of 871 domestic violence calls for service attributed to these locations. The number of locations having fewer than three calls for service was not tracked. It was felt the greatest impact on service was occurring at locations requiring multiple calls for service. In 1996, during the pilot program, officers went to 150 locations three or more times for a total of 681 domestic violence calls for service. The follow-up program was designed to reduce domestic violence through proactive efforts to help victims through follow-ups rather than reactive response to calls. Since the data showed

the violence escalated as we went back to the same locations repeatedly, a reduction in repeat calls could indicate success of the proactive approach.

In the beginning, the goals of the pilot program were multifaceted. First and primary was to reduce the number of repeat calls to domestic violence and, therefore, the victimization. Second was to allow more time available for other patrol responsibilities. Finally, we wanted to identify the community response to the concept of a follow-up protocol without a call for service from the public. We hoped to build a framework for programs, which could be utilized in the future in reducing other activities, which generate multiple calls for service.

## **ASSESSMENT**

Measurement of the data concerning the reduction in domestic violence calls for service was based on very simple criteria. The locations tracked would only be those where three or more repeat calls occurred during the time frame reviewed. Comparison would be a simple number calculation to find the percentage of reduction or increase. For example, an estimated number of staff hours were added based upon the average staff time spent at each call being estimated at 1.5 hours. One measure of acceptance of the program by the victims and offenders was accomplished through interviews with the involved team of officers and analysis of the number of citizen complaints received as a result of the follow-up actions by the officers.

At the beginning of the pilot program, officers became concerned about accusations of harassment coming from the community and violation of privacy rights of the victims and suspects. Some officers felt the extra presence in a neighborhood and at a particular home or apartment may attach a negative stigma to the victim family. There was a definite fear of creating a more hostile and violent situation by opening the old wounds of the prior violence by returning to the home for the follow-up. Results of the year-long pilot program showed acceptance by victims and, in some cases, the suspect. None of these initial concerns came to fruition. The remainder of the patrol force later voiced these same concerns when the program

was expanded to the rest of the department. The same results occurred—not a single complaint has been received about the officers completing follow-up on cases of domestic violence. No victim or suspect has filed a complaint in 1997 concerning an officer completing the domestic violence follow-up protocol. Officers who were interviewed reported positive contacts with victims and suspects. Many reported no other violence, and counseling or separation was chosen as a means of resolving the conflict.

The Shelter Against Violent Environments proved to be a valuable resource during the pilot program. The ability to refer people directly to their services allowed the officers to recommend an agency that had the ability to professionally deal with the victims and suspects of this type of crime. SAVE also had a legal support mechanism to assist with temporary restraining orders and other legal aid when necessary. During the 1996 pilot program period, administrative staff with the Fremont Police Department worked on a federal grant application which funded staff positions within the four Southern Alameda County police departments to further follow-up on cases generated and to enhance early intervention in domestic violence situations. SAVE obtained a \$250,000 grant to hire advocates, develop community education programs, and build an advocacy program in the departments. Under the grant, domestic violence advocates were assigned to our department and provided an office and interview space, with copies of all domestic violence and family dispute cases sent to them. Advocates could follow up by telephone with victims, suspect, or both, and offer services to prevent future violence in the home. Counseling, safety planning, and community resources for other family programs, which can lead to violence, were also stressed.

The grant program fit well with the follow-up protocol by officers since the victim advocates are in a position to offer professional assistance much sooner and were based upon direct referral of reports from officers rather than waiting for the victims to contact SAVE. The grant advocates also work closely with officers and provide additional training to officers in techniques to better meet the needs of the victims and suspects in these cases.

Due to the pilot program success in 1996, the department decided to expand the program in 1997 to all patrol and investigative services. Training was conducted at patrol briefings along with training bulletins to document the procedures to be followed and the importance of completing follow-up in a timely manner. Because the expansion of the program includes all shifts and officers, a tracking system was developed. The Communications Unit had the ability to search the existing database for prior calls at the same location and then identify the types of calls previously dispatched. The officers would be made aware of this through the computerized incident history and would then know which officer, if any, was already working a follow-up on a previous case. To avoid multiple officers completing follow-ups at the same location, officers were required to identify who was already working a follow-up protocol at the location. When it was determined that an active case was on-going at a location, officers would write a supplemental report to the existing case and forward a copy to the initial responsible officer. This report then became the indicator of a need to increase police presence at the location to reduce the amount of future calls for service. When chronic locations are identified, officers conduct an intensive follow-up regime involving multiple follow-up efforts and other legal options to halt the problem, which requires our presence. Some of the efforts included victimless prosecution of domestic violence cases and restraining orders for both parties without either party desiring one.

An analysis of the first quarter of the program in 1997 was completed and compared to the same quarter for 1996 and 1995. The results were a 57 percent reduction in repeat calls for service over 1996 and a 66 percent reduction in repeat calls for service over 1995. This netted the department an estimated 109 hours of staff time for the quarter over 1995 and 75 staff hours of time saved over the same quarter for 1996. The positive reception officers receive from the public is an additional benefit. The percentages of reductions to repeat calls do indicate an impact is being made with this type of call. The department SAVE advocates report many of the people contacted are requesting more

information and are taking the steps necessary to resolve problems within the home before violence occurs. We also recognize the decreases could be because the suspect and victim are no longer calling the police or are moving out of the community. While this might be the case in some circumstances, it seems impossible for it to occur with enough regularity to result in a 57 percent decrease in repeat calls for service.

Preliminary data for the second quarter of 1997 indicates a continuation of the trend towards fewer repeat calls for domestic violence and more staff time saved for other problem-solving efforts. The program will continue to be monitored to match the effectiveness over the remainder of the year and in the future. Our projection is a reduction of domestic violence calls in the early stages of the program, which will be greater than in later stages. Once finally in place, the program should minimize the amount of repeat calls for service and limit these calls to chronic problem locations. In the next phase in the program, we will add an intense follow-up effort by a team of officers to the chronic problem locations in an effort to find solutions that prevent or eliminate the repeat calls for service they generate. Some ideas explored include court-ordered counseling, billing for exceptional service time, and mandatory drug and alcohol treatment in cases where these are a factor. SAVE is also tracking police officer referrals to determine if more victims are contacting SAVE as a result of the follow-up protocol.

Efforts with the Shelter Against Violent Environments to provide community education and expanded referral services will also be made to keep the number of calls for domestic violence at the minimum number possible. The expanded and future goal will be to provide intense, early intervention service to those needing this service. The primary goal is to avoid escalation to more serious crime that has extremely negative impacts on the community and the quality of life enjoyed by those living in Fremont.

Data figures for 1995 and 1996 where three or more repeat calls for service occurred at the

same location. Only domestic violence calls were tracked.

YEAR	CALLS	DECREASE	LOCATION
1995 (Traditional)	871		221
1996 (Pilot program)	681		150
Total both years	1552	21.88%	371

First quarter data for 1995, 1996, and 1997

YEAR	CALLS	DECREASE	LOCATION
1995	111	--	33
1996	88	67%	23
1997	38	53%	11

Data represents a 67% reduction in repeat calls for service over 1995.

Data represents a 53% reduction in repeat calls for service over 1996.

John "Mike" Eads, Sergeant  
 Fremont Police Department  
 2000 Stevenson Boulevard  
 Fremont, CA 94538  
 Phone: (510) 790-6800  
 Voicemail: 1508  
 Fax: (510) 790-6831

**NOTES**

1. The concept of solving the problem of repeat calls for service at domestic violence was recognized at both the patrol and management levels of the department. The belief all along was that the entire department would need to work on the project if an impact was to result. The question needing to be answered was whether the response was workable without requiring additional staffing and cost. Initiating a small limited response was a safe alternative to requiring over 100 officers to participate in a program without some measure of certainty that it was worth the time and effort.
2. All employees, sworn and non-sworn, in the department received problem oriented policing training. All our employees are encouraged to tackle

public safety problems facing the community in keeping with the mission statement of the department. Most officers use the SARA model as a guide in their efforts to identify, analyze, respond to, and measure problems in the community. It is the vehicle utilized to track and analyze the efforts as well as the success or failure of programs.

3. The Shelter Against Violent Environments was a community resource utilized extensively as a referral source for the officers. The departments computerized report system along with the computer aided dispatch system allowed for quick access to reports and tracking previous cases assignments to the same location. Officers were able to manage their own cases through the system and refer case to other officers when needed.
4. The department committed the resources of the patrol force to the project in order to test the effectiveness in the community. The project required only on duty time for the officers to complete the work and only required overtime if reports needed to be completed. Impact on the department budget was minimal and the success was worth the cost many times over.