

BAKER ONE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE INTERVENTION PROJECT

IMPROVING RESPONSE TO CHRONIC DOMESTIC VIOLENCE INCIDENTS

CHARLOTTE-MECKLENBURG POLICE DEPARTMENT, 2002

- THE PROBLEM:** Baker One District was concerned about an increase in domestic assaults. A Baker One officer embraced the concept of indicator crimes, which, if properly analyzed, could enable police to intervene in domestic cases before the abusive behavior rose to the level of an assault or homicide.
- ANALYSIS:** Analysis of domestic assault reports showed that the average victim had filed nine previous police reports, most of which involved the same suspect and occasionally crossed police district boundaries. Many of the prior reports were indicator crimes. Most repeat call locations were domestic situations. Victim and suspect are moving "hot spots", as opposed to a fixed geographic location
- RESPONSE:** All of the offense reports involving a victim/suspect pair were analyzed. Tailored responses were developed for each case, including zero tolerance of criminal behavior of suspect and the use of other criminal justice and social service agencies. Victims were encouraged to use a Police Watch Program and Domestic Violence Hotline. Case files were used to create a base for victim/offender data, which was used to track victims and offenders as moving "hot spots" across district boundaries.
- ASSESSMENT:** Repeat calls decreased by 98.9% at seven target locations. During first year of project, domestic assaults remained flat in Baker One, while rising 29% in rest of city. In 105 cases with indicator crimes, only three victims later reported a domestic assault. Only 14.8% of domestic violence victims in project reported repeat victimization as opposed to national average of 35%. Additionally, no Internal Affairs complaints were generated by officer contacts with suspects.

SCANNING

The police response to domestic violence has gradually improved since the early 1970s when research established that the police had prior contact with the victims and/or suspects of serious aggravated assaults and homicides. Over the years we have learned that these encounters

escalated from verbal arguments and threats of violence between the participants. Nevertheless, finding an effective way to prevent domestic violence cases has remained an elusive goal for most police departments. Police have tried and continue to use a variety of approaches. They include separating and counseling the victim and suspect; mandatory arrest policies; special

domestic violence units to provide follow-up investigation, focusing on repeat call locations; the use of court ordered counseling and referral services; and special programs for batterers and victims. While these approaches have had varying levels of success, they all tended to address the problem after a series of domestic calls or a domestic assault has occurred and typically focused on the victim, not the aggressor.

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department has made domestic violence a priority for a number of years and worked to reduce the number of assaults in our community. An intensive effort has been made to intervene at locations where there have been repeat domestic disturbance calls. The department established a Domestic Violence Unit that teams investigators and counselors who take a close look at locations where there have been repeat calls. In 2000, Charlotte had 14 homicides, 18.7% of its total, which were classified as domestic related. The Police Department has always analyzed those cases to determine if there was an earlier opportunity to intervene. All of these efforts have had a minimal impact on the ultimate goal of preventing domestic assaults or homicides from occurring.

Over a year ago, Officer Keith Way of the department's Baker One District was investigating a serious domestic assault case. Officer Way had been concerned about the number of domestic assaults that he saw in his district. In 2000, Baker One investigated 305 domestic assaults that comprised 30% of the total assaults in that district for that year. He had also been doing some reading about indicator crimes-incidents that could suggest the potential for escalating criminal activity.

Officer Way decided to apply that idea to the case that he was investigating so he looked for previous reports involving the victim and suspect. He found a number of reports for other offenses such as vandalism and communicating threats. Some of those offenses had occurred outside his patrol district. An examination of all the case reports clearly suggested that trouble followed the couple around the county and, had the reports been linked earlier, police might have been able to intervene before the situation

escalated into a violent encounter. Officer Way was intrigued by what he found with this one case and wanted to pursue the concept which he defined as reducing domestic violence calls by utilizing indicators to target potential victims/suspects. Rather than the repeat call location being the "hot spot" he surmised that tracking all incidents involving the participants might be a better indicator of future violence.

Police could then intervene to prevent violence because they would have a more global view of the encounters between the participants.

He approached the Baker One Captain, David Graham, for approval to further explore the concept. Given the number of domestic assaults occurring both citywide and in the Baker One District, as well as the escalating rate of domestic related homicides, Capt. Graham thought the idea had merit and gave his full support and involvement in further exploration of the concept.

ANALYSIS

Officer Way and Officer Karl Bannerman began analyzing all domestic assault reports received by the district. They then reviewed all incident reports involving both the victim and the suspect in each case. They found that, on average, each victim had filed nine previous police reports, most of which involved the same suspect as the domestic assault case. In many instances, these previous reports were not domestic assaults but involved crimes which were indicative of a troubled relationship and a suspect who appeared to be involved in a pattern of escalating criminal activity. These crimes ranged from hit and run to check fraud.

Prior to the inception of this project, the criminal history of the relationship between the victim and the offender would not have been apparent until a serious domestic assault had actually occurred and been referred to investigators for follow-up. The focus had been primarily on the location where the participants lived and the domestic disturbances took place. There had been no organized attempt to examine interactions between participants that might have taken place at other locations or involved incidents that were not domestic assault related.

From the analysis of these cases and their research, the officers were able to develop a list of indicator crimes that, in situations involving the same victim and suspect, could establish a pattern of events that show an abusive relationship. These indicator crimes can range from harassing phone calls, to hit and run depending upon the particular victim/suspect pair. In many cases, the pattern of behavior that the suspect displayed against the victim followed the accepted domestic violence continuum of verbal abuse, harassment, stalking related offenses, escalating violence, and, finally, serious assault or death.

One of the ways in which the department identifies chronic crime problems is through an analysis of repeat calls for service to the same location. The departmental standard had been that five calls for service per month at the same location was an indication of a more serious crime or disorder problem that should merit police attention. In analyzing domestic cases, it became clear that one way of identifying locations where the indicator crimes for domestic violence might be present would be to look at the repeat call locations. The district felt that, if they were going to work toward the goal of developing meaningful intervention in potential domestic violence cases, waiting until there were five repeat calls at a location a month would be too long. They changed the parameters for repeat call locations for their district so that the addresses were flagged after three calls for service in a month. While this significantly increased the number of repeat call locations the district would need to analyze and monitor, Baker One officers felt that it would provide enhanced opportunities for early intervention.

The officers were aided in analysis of these cases by the department's implementation of its automated records management system that enabled officers to search multiple departmental databases to build a complete history of the victim and suspect. They found that the activity in many of these cases crossed district boundaries. For example, a victim could live in Baker one but work in another district where the suspect harassed her at her place of employment. As they looked closer at these cases, the officers realized that they were going to have to develop

a mechanism to track victims and suspects whose involvement in criminal activity occurred in different parts of the city.

For some years, the department has concentrated much of its enforcement activity on chronic "hot spots", areas where there have been patterns of offenses over an extended period of time. These locations were identified through GIS mapping and analysis of cases done by the patrol districts in conjunction with their assigned crime analyst. This has become a cornerstone of the problem solving activity that accompanies community policing. The concept has largely been based on a particular location or geographic area designated as the hot spot. The Baker One officers saw that the hot spot concept was a critical component of this project but realized that the "hot spot" was the victim and suspect, who moved around the city, not one specific geographic location. This is the first time that the department has considered anything other than a fixed geographic location as a hot spot and represents a major advance in our thinking about the interactions between domestic violence participants. The officers knew that a key component of their response would be finding a way to track victims and offenders across district boundaries and developing a mechanism for sharing information on these cases throughout the department.

As Officers Way and Bannerman worked through this problem, they utilized other available resources to assist in their analysis. They talked with an Assistant District Attorney about the prosecution of these cases since domestic assaults are often not prosecuted. The goal was to present the linked cases to the District Attorney in such a manner that the assault charges would be prosecuted and the offender would experience some judicial consequences for his actions.

They talked with both investigators and counselors from the department's Domestic Violence Unit to validate the concept and discuss ways to intervene effectively. The officers also talked with community agencies that deal with the domestic violence issue including NOVA, a program that deals with batterers. They were enthusiastic about the

concept and felt it was another way of addressing a community priority.

RESPONSE

Once officers had determined that indicator crimes and repeat calls for service could be used to identify relationships between victims and offenders where there was a significant risk of domestic assault, they began to devise an action plan. They knew that the circumstances in these cases varied widely and that they would need to develop an arsenal of potential intervention strategies that could be tailored to fit each individual case.

The potential responses included referring both the victim and the offender to agencies and programs that could help them deal with both the abusive behavior and with building the life skills to move beyond that phase of their lives. Another form of intervention would involve a zero tolerance policy toward those offenders who clearly displayed escalating patterns of criminal behavior. Police officers would make arrests for even the most minor offense in hopes of getting the suspect into the criminal justice system and where possible, would use the habitual misdemeanor assault statute to get longer sentences for the suspect.

The zero tolerance policy included maintaining a strong presence in the life of the suspect, using all resources available to change his or her behavior. Police officers make it abundantly clear to suspects that they are aware of their behavior and that they will be receiving close scrutiny from the police. Officers discussed this concept with police attorneys to insure that some of the tactics they planned to use, such a surveillance of the suspect, would not constitute harassment.

One additional intervention tactic is to check the driving records of some of the suspects. In cases where the officers found that the suspect's license had been revoked, the officers set up surveillance on the suspect and, as the suspect left home behind the wheel of a car, conducted a probable cause traffic stop. The traffic stop is one more way of reinforcing with the suspect that police are watching his behavior and taking a zero tolerance attitude.

The victims in these cases were to also benefit from an increased police presence through the Police Watch Program, which is patterned after a program in Great Britain. This includes systematic zone checks of both the victim's residence and work place when appropriate. The frequency of the checks on the victim is based on the severity of the case and can, in some instances, include neighbors and family members- In conjunction with the increased police presence, officers may also do crime prevention surveys of places the victim frequents such as the home and workplace in order to provide the victim with more options for self-protection.

The officers felt that it was critical for them to build on existing partnerships with other components of the criminal justice system in order to intervene effectively in these cases. The officers established a stronger partnership with the District Attorney's Office to achieve increased evidence-based prosecution of these cases. Research had shown that many of the offenders had prior criminal records and were frequently still on probation for prior offenses. The Baker One officers reached out to Community Corrections, the probation and parole officers for Mecklenburg County, to gain their understanding of the concept and to get them to focus on the behavior of the domestic violence suspects who would be found to be in violation of the terms of their probation and/or paroles.

These intervention tactics were developed in conjunction with domestic violence investigators and counselors, prosecutors, probation officers, and practitioners in social programs that offer services to domestic violence victims and offenders. The social service agencies included NOVA, Victim Assistance, Legal Services of the Southern Piedmont, and the Battered Women's Shelter. All of these entities agreed to work with Baker One in dealing with these complex cases. Guidelines were established to provide as uniform a response as possible to each case.

All of the standard criteria were considered in evaluating the potential responses including legality, effectiveness, community values, cost, and practicality. Ultimately, the overriding

concern was to identify tactics that protected the safety of the victim and did not result in an escalation of the violence. Cost and practicality also played a critical role as the Baker One District had to implement the project, including all of the research associated with it, with its existing resources, as the department was unable to reassign any additional personnel to the district.

In the response phase, all cases involving indicator crimes, domestic relationships and repeat calls for service are reviewed. As soon as a potential victim and suspect are identified, Officer Karl Bannerman opens a case file. Interviews with the victim, suspect and others are included in the case file, along with photos, documentation on warrants, court appearances and any referrals to other agencies, including those made on behalf of any children in the relationship. This information facilitates criminal and civil prosecution of the suspect and is useful background information in the referrals to self-help agencies for the victim and/or the aggressor.

The Baker One District also established a Domestic Violence Hotline voice mail system that is a dedicated voice mail box that victims can use to report miscellaneous incidents involving the suspect in their cases. Much of the information reported has been in regard to non-criminal matters that warrant documentation in the case file. Establishment of the hot line builds rapport between the officer and victim and facilitates the more open flow of timely information.

The officers also established a separate database for the project that initially consisted of two or more cases involving the same suspect and victim and cases involving a domestic relationship where indicator crimes were present. As the project has progressed, the database has been expanded to include any case involving a victim and suspect involved in a domestic relationship as defined by departmental directives; any case with an indicator crime where the suspect is the opposite gender of the victim, and any location with three or more calls for service in one month.

Once the district lowered its threshold for repeat calls for service to three calls at one location in a month, they found that the majority of those locations involved domestic calls.

The database that tracks the victim and suspect treats the victim as the "hot spot." The victim and suspect are kept separate for tracking purposes. This particular database is evolving into an information warehouse with report generating capability for police, district attorneys and probation officers.

After reviewing each case file, the officers plan a tailor made intervention response that includes contacting the suspect and informing him/her that his actions are being monitored and tracked. In a number of instances, these intervention tactics have alleviated the domestic problem and have enabled the victims to rebuild their lives.

One victim and suspect were married with two children but had separated. The suspect had assaulted the victim in the past and made her live in fear through his threats to her, their children, and other family members- The victim had reached a point where she secluded herself in her apartment and sat in a chair holding a telephone to call 911 when the next incident occurred. Baker One officers became involved after the victim filed a report for communicating threats. During their background investigation, the officers found that the suspect was on federal parole for counterfeiting charges. One of his parole conditions required that he did not leave the state without notifying his parole officer. The victim notified police that the suspect had traveled to Mississippi without notifying his parole officer and had bragged of having a handgun in his possession. Police officers notified the parole officer who joined police in a raid of the suspect's apartment. No weapons were found; however, the suspect was arrested for the original communicating threats charge. The suspect was told that, if he continued his aggressive behavior towards his estranged wife and did not comply with the conditions of his parole, he could expect to see a lot more of the police. More than a year has passed since this initial intervention. The victim has had no further problems. She is working two jobs and has no concerns about her children walking

home from school unescorted and playing safely in the neighborhood.

In another of the cases investigated by Baker One, the victim and suspect had been involved in a dating relationship for approximately six months. The suspect became intoxicated and viciously attacked the victim. Investigation into the suspect's background revealed a long history of arrests for disorderly conduct, assaults, and kidnapping and rape. The victim was completely unaware of the suspect's past and told officers that this incident was the first time that she had ever seen him become violent. The victim failed to appear in court; however, the suspect pled guilty to assault on a female. The judge was made aware of the suspect's violent past and sentenced him to 30 days in jail and completion of an alcohol abuse program.

During the initial background investigation of the suspect, officers discovered that he was in this country illegally. While the suspect was in jail, they contacted the Immigration and Naturalization Service. INS reviewed the suspect's activities and, upon his release from jail had the suspect deported to Ecuador. This case is a good example of how the Baker One officers have been able to partner with other criminal justice agencies in addressing these domestic assault cases.

In another case, the officers were able to use the suspect's prior record to leverage his cooperation. The suspect had been living with the victim for a short period of time when he attacked her and caused serious injuries. After separating, the suspect continued to harass the victim and officers helped her to obtain a restraining order.

During their interviews with the victim, officers discovered that the suspect had taken a check from the victim, forged her name and attempted to purchase a vehicle. The suspect had been convicted of fraud and forgery charges in the past and is currently on probation for a fraud conviction. The officers got the District Attorney to accept the most recent fraud case for prosecution and a felony warrant was issued for the suspect. Convinced that officers were serious when they told him that the police would be

watching him, the suspect has left the victim alone since his most recent arrest.

A couple at one of the repeat calls for service locations fought on a weekly basis. Further investigation led to an investigation by the Department of Social Services, referral to the Baker One Street Crimes Unit for drug activity and contact with the aggressor's probation officer. The suspect called Baker One officers and said that he and the victim were not going to fight anymore due to the referrals and his probation officer becoming actively involved in his case.

One suspect was arrested and in custody when the officers' follow-up investigation uncovered an outstanding probation violation on the suspect that was overlooked when he was booked. The warrant for the probation violation was subsequently served, resulting in additional jail time for the suspect. That additional time gave the victim the opportunity to relocate without fear of reprisals from the suspect.

One of the greatest challenges that the officers have faced is dealing with those victims and suspects whose interaction crosses district boundaries. Ultimately, the department wants to establish a master database that can be used by officers in all 12 districts to link domestic assault cases and those with indicator crimes. Currently, the database for this project encompasses only the Baker One District. When officers find that the activity involving one of their victims and/or suspects has moved into another district, they contact the officer assigned as the domestic violence liaison in that district and pass along the information. In some cases, they have contacted the district captains and have asked to become involved in the enforcement activities in their districts and have been allowed to do so. This has enabled them to have some continuity in enforcement and to maintain the relationships they have established with the victims and suspects.

ASSESSMENT

Although this concept is relatively new and is being used in only one patrol district, Baker One and the department's administration believe it is

an innovative way to lower the number of domestic assaults and homicides. During 2001, the Baker One officer assigned to this project reviewed 229 cases. Of those cases, 46% or 105 cases, had indicator crimes. Once the district decided to begin looking at repeat call locations at three calls per month instead of five, they found that the majority of the repeat locations were domestic related. After applying their intervention tactics at seven initial locations, they reduced the calls for service by 98.9% at those locations.

Perhaps the most significant indicator of success is the domestic assault rate for the Baker One District as compared to the rate jurisdiction wide in 2001. Domestic assaults increased 29% in Charlotte-Mecklenburg during 2001 but remained flat in Baker One during 2001 (see Appendix). Officers attribute this to their early intervention in these cases, their tracking of the suspects, and their work with the victims, including walking them through the court process. In the 105 cases where indicator crimes were present, only three of the victims ended up reporting an actual assault. Again police officers feel that their aggressive early intervention played a major role in reducing the number of victim/suspect pairs where the criminal activity escalated. The aggressive intervention with suspects has not generated any complaints to Internal Affairs, another indication of the viability of the concept.

Another major indicator is the rate of repeat victimizations. Of the 124 victims of domestic assault in Baker One in 2001, only 14.8% of the victims were victimized again. 11.2% of the victims were victimized by the same suspect; 3.6% were victimized by a different suspect. National estimates are that 35% of victims of domestic violence become repeat victims in a given year.

In the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department, other patrol districts have taken note of Baker One's success in holding the level of domestic assaults flat while "they have increased significantly in the rest of the city. Chief Darrel Stephens would eventually like to see this approach used department wide, supported by a master domestic violence victim/suspect database. While this approach can be labor intensive, we believe that the

dividends, over time, will be well worth the manpower investment. Most important, this early intervention, with the victim and suspect tracked as the "hot spot", gives police officers a new way to look at an old problem.

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FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

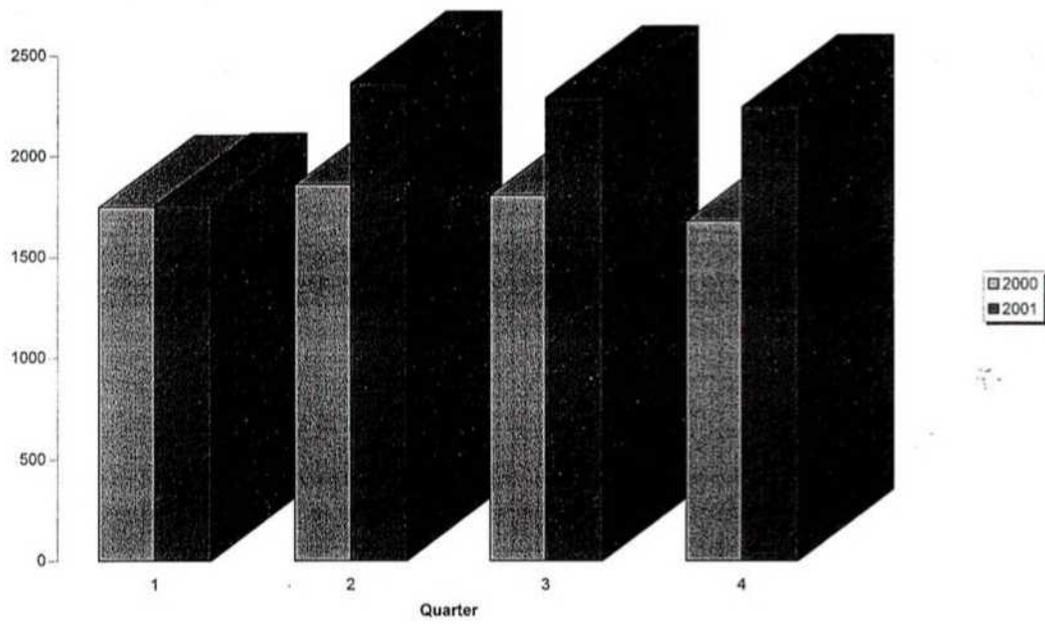
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NOTES

1. This program is currently adopted at the district level.
2. All officers and managers involved in the project were trained in problem solving prior to the initiation of the project.
3. Officers received no additional incentives to engage in problem solving.
4. The initial work was done using the SARA model. Past research into domestic violence was used to determine what factors should be considered important in developing a response to the problem. Research into repeat victimization in Great Britain was used to develop and implement the Police Watch Program. Research materials are detailed in the Reference List.
5. In this project the officers had a concept, indicator crimes, that they wanted to test. They then used the SARA model to apply the indicator crime concept to domestic assault.
6. One full-time officer was committed to the project for the district. That officer then worked with other officers in his district and throughout the department, as well as outside partners.

APPENDIX

CMPD DV Assaults 2000-2001



Baker One DV Assaults 2000-2001

