

SCAN

After experiencing four homicides of women by intimate partners or family members, from January 2002 to August 2003, we conducted research through our Department records and observed a problem with the accessing of police and community services by persons experiencing violence in their homes. The research indicated that only one of the victims in these homicides had called for police and/or community social service assistance, even though investigation indicated that all had histories of violence in their relationship with the alleged offenders.

One victim, a 75-year-old woman who resided with her 42-year-old daughter, suffered severe abuse and assaults for several years. Interviews with neighbors and co-workers revealed that many people were aware that the elderly mother was being victimized by her daughter but no one was able to connect her to services that would assist her.

The command staff of the Department, which includes representatives from every division, identified this problem during the weekly CompStat meetings. This problem was selected because it involves the greatest threat against one-half of the population, women. The community's high value of human life requires this intervention and it is the WPDPS responsibility to the community to prioritize this crime problem. We know that the consequences of failing to respond to this problem would lead to more deaths and mistrust of the WPDPS by the community.

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ANALYSIS

To identify and understand the reasons why domestic violence victims do not call the police or access social services in the community we spoke with community service providers and victims of domestic violence. We learned that there are many reasons why this problem persists. Some victims are not aware of what services are available. Many victims are ashamed and do not want anyone to know that violence is happening in their homes. Victims have cultural and religious issues that they must deal with and often the victims are so traumatized that they are unable to seek help on their own.

During the past twenty years, the City of White Plains generally experienced one or two homicides a year, usually involving persons with relationships, it has been extremely rare for the City to experience murders perpetrated by strangers. The spike in domestic violence related murders in 2002-2003 was quickly identified as a priority.

In order to understand and analyze this problem we began by reviewing the case files and tried to identify why the victims did not seek help. Each of these cases included a history of the victim's relationship with the offender based upon information obtained from family, friends, and other police jurisdictions. We then identified other information we needed to gather in order to understand this problem in regards to the entire community. Our domestic violence policy had been developed by following the recommendation of the New York State Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence, along with the assistance of a domestic violence service provider so we felt confident that it was

exemplary. We needed to assess why the police were not called. The homicides were all the proof we needed to realize that the harm from this problem was the greatest harm – death.

We needed to survey the local service providers to gather information they learned from victims they work with about our response to domestic violence. The quality of our relationships with service providers and the quality of our domestic violence training were considerations we needed to explore.

We also had to gather information regarding what public education the Department has done regarding this problem. Quantitative information regarding number of incidents, number of arrests, recidivism, gender, ethnicity, type of incidents, weapons, children, and number of public education events held, needed to be analyzed.

Prior to this initiative the Department met its requirement of offering referrals by explaining that services are available and contact numbers are on the back of the police report, or we put eligible victims in contact with PWJC by way of Project Assist. This unfortunately meant that many victims who were not eligible to be served by PWJC were on their own.

The analysis indicated that the reason most victims did not access the available services is because they did not know what to do or what was available. The victims are embarrassed and often felt alone and trapped by their circumstances, which include

immigration status, language, poverty, and fear. Our community partners convinced us that there are many victims needing assistance, especially in the growing immigrant population.

RESPONSE

The command staff of the Department identified this problem during the CompStat meetings. Problem oriented policing strategies were identified as the most effective method to reduce this crime problem. Because problem oriented-policing works best when it is integrated with other private and public sector agencies a new division was created, Community Advocacy and Strategic Initiatives (CASI).

Alternative intervention methods used by other communities that we considered include the creation of a Domestic Violence Response Team and hiring a social worker.

Research was conducted by using the internet (i.e. www.popcenter.org, National Center on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault) to learn how other agencies had responded to similar problems in their jurisdictions. We decided at this time it would be best not to duplicate services already established in the Department and in the community.

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A captain that had extensive training and prior experience in dealing with domestic violence was assigned to create the new Division and to develop innovative strategies to address the problem. We began our efforts by putting the “customer” first. CASI members meet with each victim of a domestic incident either in the victim’s home or in

the Division's office. The goal is to guide the victim to services before the situation escalates to physical violence.

Analysis indicated that victims were either unaware of the many services available in the community or unable to seek out help on their own. We believe by personalizing our outreach with the victims we would increase the accessing of services. Officers who have genuine interest in addressing these issues were chosen to be assigned to the new division.

Each incident report is reviewed for quality to assure that state mandates and Department policy have been followed and that the customer has been given the best service. The incidents involving arrests are monitored to make certain that the best case is presented for prosecution. The review process has also increased the number of protection orders obtained by persons who elect to proceed in family court without an arrest to address behaviors that are not criminal but may develop into violence if there is no intervention

In order to increase compliance with orders of protection the use of the department wide HIT (High Impact Targeting) initiative is used. This effort involves several types of intervention. The CASI members identify families that continue to have issues despite previous intervention. Unannounced visits are made to homes that continue to struggle with domestic violence, if a violation of an order of protection is discovered an arrest is made. If there is no violation further assistance to access services is offered. The Operations Division also assists in monitoring order of protection compliance. On a daily basis, a prisoner release report is received from the County Department of Corrections. If

an inmate governed by an order of protection is released a patrol officer will visit the protected parties home. If appropriate, an arrest will be made but most importantly, the victim is again offered assistance in accessing services.

Our evaluation criteria is based more upon quantitative measures. We decided to respond to the problem in a manner that had great potential for being effective and truly reflected the value the community has placed on human lives and safe homes.

Pace Women's Justice Center (PWJC) was the first community partner engaged after the identification and analysis of the problem. The Department has been collaborating with the PWJC since 1998. This collaboration includes grants to encourage arrest funded by the US Department of Justice – Violence Against Women Office.

Members of the Division began their efforts to develop additional community partnerships. The other partnerships developed include The Westchester County Office for Women, My Sister's Place, Victim Assistance Services, the White Plains Hospital Center, numerous houses of worship, Centro Hispano, Public Housing Authority, Tenant Councils, and the White Plains Schools.

Through partnership with PWJC, eligible victims have access to an attorney at no cost that will assist them in accessing civil protection orders and other partners in the domestic violence service community handle those victims that are not eligible for PWJC's services. PWJC's role includes acting as evaluators of police reports involving

domestic violence. PWJC attorneys review police reports for conformance with NYS Laws and best practices, they maintain a database that identifies victim needs, potential problems with police response, and services victims have accessed. This collaboration began the process to increase victim's ability to access services. The information maintained by PWJC is used to develop police training and to address problems with police response as perceived by victims. PWJC and the WPDPS now work together in the City's diverse community to do public education

Since the initiative to increase victim's access to services began the Westchester County Office for Women and the WPDPS have collaborated to develop grant applications aimed at addressing the need to provide services to children that witness domestic violence and to create a family justice center. The Office for Women provided training to the members of the Division regarding the dynamics of domestic violence and other relevant issues. The Office for Women included the WPDPS in the County's Domestic Violence Council's efforts in developing a policy and training for police departments regarding children at the scene of domestic incidents. The Office for Women also recommended that WPDPS be the test site for an innovative strategy aimed at facilitating the service of ex-parte protection orders issued by the family court. The Office for Women shares information that it receives from the community regarding police response to domestic violence and has participated in Department training to share this information.

My Sister's Place provides shelter and advocacy services for victims. In January 2004, the WPDPS was invited by My Sister's Place to represent law enforcement in a

roundtable funded by DOJ. The WPDPS was proud to be the host for these monthly roundtable meetings.

Victim Assistance Services has been a partner with the WPDPS since 1996 when the Department applied for and received a COPS grant to train all members on improving our response to domestic violence. VAS reviewed Department procedures regarding domestic violence and made recommendations for improvement. A clinical social worker from VAS provided training regarding “Vicarious Traumatization” to assure that CASI members are able to provide the best services and not become “burnt out.”

Centro Hispano has been instrumental in facilitating access for the Department to the Hispanic community to permit the sharing of information by way of community forums. These forums are held after the Spanish language religious services held at St. Bernard’s Church and guarantee a turn out of hundreds. Information is provided to the attendees regarding all kinds of public safety issues including domestic violence, sexual assaults, and safe housing.

The White Plains Public School District is another long-standing partner of the WPDPS. This collaboration includes School Resource Officers, DARE officers, advisory committees, Safe Schools Task Force, sharing of facilities for training purposes, and forums for community discussions regarding safety. The District facilitates access to children exposed to violence in their homes so that SROs and DARE officers can meet

with the children in the school setting to check on their well-being. The officers share information with the school psychologist or social worker to assist them in dealing with the children who may have been traumatized by violence in the home.

In order to increase the number of public education events each partner was approached to either host the event or to provide a representative to participate in the event. Power point presentations that are informative and entertaining were created. The audio-visual equipment needed was purchased. To assure attendance at events food and drink was made available and announcements of the event were made by way of church bulletins, take home fliers for public school students, cable access television and neighborhood newsletters.

Each of the agencies that the WPDPS is collaborating with expects to accomplish a reduction of violence in the home for all in the community. In order to reach this goal the following objectives were identified as being necessary to accomplish:

- increase the number of public education events held with community partners
- increase the number of persons reporting domestic violence
- increase the number of referrals to service providers by the police
- increase the number of victims accessing services
- increase the number of arrests made for domestic violence
- increase the number of order protections issued
- increase compliance with the orders of protection
- increase the quality of the arrest to assure offenders being held accountable

- increase the quality of police training

ASSESSMENT

Since the inception of the Division, there have been no homicides in White Plains between intimate partners. In 2004, in house training resulted in arrests for domestic violence increasing by 90% and public education efforts have increased the reporting of incidents by 10%. Domestic Violence victims are assured that they will be supported.

CASI completed its first full year in December 2004. CompStat (Comparative Statistics) is the instrument that is used to measure the service that is being provided to the community. CompStat was adapted to measure CASI's capabilities in providing services that connect crime victims to community social service agencies, in particular victims of domestic violence. The CASI members developed a measuring tool using the Department's technology that specifically addresses this unique initiative.

The primary goal of the evaluation was to measure the effectiveness, efficiency, and equity of the services victims receive. The measurements emphasize quality over quantity and the results of creative teamwork. CompStat enables us to measure the number of incidents, the number of arrests, and location of incidents. These criteria are

used to measure the level of community trust and confidence in the Department's ability to provide victim services.

On a daily basis, the members of CASI record on an Excel spreadsheet the following information from the domestic incident reports and the Department's records:

Incident number

Week day

Incident type

Injury type

Weapon used

Property damaged

Evidence seized

Victim/Offender relationship

Names

Ethnicity

Gender

Location

Previous DV arrest

Arrest made

Order of Protection issued

Children present

Referral services

Recidivism

Training issues (based upon victim's experience)

Community Presentations

Protection Order Compliance checks

The purpose of these criteria is to efficiently measure trends in the community. CASI officers can immediately identify if violence is escalating for a particular family or victim. If violence is escalating, there is immediate intervention with the family or victim. The training issues section facilitates quick identification of problems with specific officers and emerging training issues. This information is obtained from the CASI supervisors' review of reports and interviews with victims. This tool permits CASI members to identify geographical locations that may benefit from a community forum to address violence in the home. The tracking of location, gender, and ethnicity allows us to measure how equitable the delivery of services are to the community. The referral section measures the contributions made by our partners and indicates if we need to seek out new opportunities for partnerships

Daily monitoring in combination with CompStat meetings, with police leaders in attendance, allows us to measure how the implementation of the initiative is going and if we need to address any problems.

Since the initiation of the Division, procedures require that each victim of a domestic incident be personally advised of services available. In 2004, every victim in a Domestic Incident was given the opportunity to access a service provider. Division members referred 255 persons to PWJC, 27 referrals to VAS, 58 to My Sister's Place, the

remaining 440 received referrals to other agencies such as Mental Health Association, Family Court, parenting programs, Youth Bureau, and elder services. Keeping victim safety in mind, Division members visited victim's homes; spoke with them by telephone or by way of a prearranged meeting in the Public Safety Building. No statistics regarding referrals are available for the preceding years.

The overview of all DIRs by the Division for conformance with NYS laws and department policy and an improvement in the quality of training increased the number of domestic violence related arrests by 90%, from 112 for 2003 to 212 for 2004. At this time, there is no statistical data available, but in conversation with the prosecutors, it has been indicated the cases have been more than satisfactory to assure offender accountability.

During 2004, the number of reported domestic incidents increased by 10%, from 770 to 843. From January 1, 2005 to May 28, 2005, the number of reported domestic incidents increased by 18% from the same time period in 2004. On May 28, 2004, there were a total of 9 aggravated domestic assaults reported to the Department, as of May 28, 2005, there have only been 2 aggravated domestic assaults reported. The fact that reported incidents have increased but aggravated assaults have dropped by 77% indicates that the initiative is a tremendous success because it clearly illustrates that people call the Department before a serious assault occurs because they believe the police will assist them. While displacement was a not a concern in addressing this problem, we were concern that people would choose not to call the police for assistance. However, these

statistics are encouraging, they indicate that the community is confident with our response.

The Department is continuing work to reduce the simple domestic assaults. However, the real proof of our success is evident in the increase in calls reporting domestic violence. A long term goal is to eventually have crime levels at such a low level that there will be more calls for social assistance than calls reporting violence. We are also in the process of developing a weekly CASI report that will specifically address the objectives, so that the entire department can monitor our progress.

Department policy requires that any person arrested for a violent act against another cannot be released without an order of protection being issued. The increase in domestic violence arrests by 90% has resulted in an increase of at least 90% for orders of protection.

Since we began using the HIT initiative in response to order of protection compliance checks, approximately 50 checks were made. These checks resulted in 2 arrests for order of protection violations and gave us another opportunity to educate the victim about services.

During 2004, 70 public education events were held to address the prevention of violence. Having our partners participate in the presentations, permitting the community to see the WPDPS along side partners increased credibility with the community. During 2004,

approximately 1700 persons attended various events held by the WPDPS and its partners. The community had the opportunity to meet all the members of the Division as individuals and see their dedication and commitment.

The remaining goals were all met with significant increases. This success was presented recently to the policy makers and taxpayers during a recent budget presentation. The overall reduction of crime by 15% in 2004, indicates that problems are being solved and it is being done with the community's participation. The revitalization of White Plains indicated by companies choosing to do business here and families wanting to live here demonstrates that the reduction of crime has resulted in a decrease in fear and an enhancement in the quality of life.

Prior to this initiative the Department met its requirement of offering referrals by explaining that services are available and contact numbers are on the back of the report, or we put eligible victims in contact with PWJC by way of Project Assist. This unfortunately meant that many victims who were not eligible to be served by PWJC were on their own. Prior to 2004, no statistics were maintained regarding referrals made to victims. This initiative assures that a CASI Police Officer gives each domestic violence victim everything needed to make an informed decision about what services they can access, including accompaniment to the service provider. In 2004, 843 victims were provided with information aimed at addressing their particular situation. Reaching all victims assures that every member of the community can receive equal treatment with respect and impartiality. The inclusion of Spanish speaking officers to the Division has

assured that the Latino community, which accounted for 40% of the domestic incidents in 2004, has equal access to services.

PWJC maintains and shares data to measure the effectiveness of victim services they provide. They track information from each referral they receive that is very similar to that maintained by CASI. Their information also tracks issues such as visitation, custody, types of protection order received, and dual arrests. The sharing of this information on a daily basis is another way to measure the effectiveness of not only the ability of victims to access services but also, the effectiveness of the training they provide and identifies other areas where training is required.

Finding affordable training for police officers that meet our new needs is a challenge. We rely upon our partners for training in all aspects of domestic violence. PWJC, VAS, and the Office for Women provide training. My Sister's Place monthly DOJ Roundtable provided continuous training regarding all types of domestic violence related topics. These partnerships permit us to stay current regarding state laws, federal laws, trends, and available services.

Ongoing input from the partners assures the constant improvement of the quality of police domestic violence training. The excellent quality of training generated by this initiative has brought recognition to the Department as proven by the invitation received in 2004 from the regional police academy for White Plains instructors to provide the domestic violence training to all police recruits.

The first year of the initiative achieved credibility for the Division with the police community when there were zero homicides in 2004. It was challenging to have the police community recognize this innovative style of work as true community policing. This has required that the members of the Division quickly respond to work with partners and victims to solve problems associated with violence.

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The fact that the ultimate goal of the initiative is one that will not be seen for many years has been a meaningful lesson for the agency members to learn. Police leaders historically have been comfortable with presenting immediate successful impacts to their citizenry. We now have to learn how to communicate to the community that while some results of our efforts will be seen immediately others may not be seen for several generations. For example, it is well known that children who are exposed to violence in their homes often grow up to be the perpetrators or victims of violence, they get involved in other criminal behaviors, they have mental health issues, abuse substances and drop out of school, which all in turn contribute to many of our society's ills. It will require constant public

education and highlighting of successes, no matter how minute, to maintain the community's participation. The WPDPS is committed to continuing to be immersed in the community by way of facilitating access of services to service providers, public education, protection order compliance checks, professional police response to domestic violence incidents and offender accountability.



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The Department has made considerable changes in its organization in order to practice true collaboration with our community partners. This is accomplished by requiring that all services provided to the community be linked to an initiative that involves collaboration with community partners. Captain Anne Fitzsimmons has supervised this division since its inception.