

# THE FAMILY VIOLENCE FOLLOW-UP TEAMS REDUCING REPEAT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

EDMONTON POLICE SERVICE, ALBERTA, CANADA, 1994

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- THE PROBLEM:** In many cases, the Edmonton Police Service was responding to complaints of spousal violence on a repeat basis without affecting the problem. In some cases the Service responded to over 20 calls from the same couple in a six-month period.
- ANALYSIS:** In the past, family violence was dealt with on a case-by-case basis. No formal mechanism for identifying repeat or complex cases existed. Other agencies were not in the problem solving process.
- RESPONSE:** A coordinated community response was developed to mobilizing community leaders and gain resources to combat the family violence. Interagency cooperation was established and special measures were taken to select, educate, and train personnel to respond to family violence.
- ASSESSMENT:** The project was successful in many ways including: 97% of the victims who dealt with the teams reported that they had made positive changes in their lives; twice as many of the victims left their abusive relationships; the team approach was instrumental in intervening in complex cases; 62% of the clients from original project were no longer in abusive relationships; 87% of the clients took positive steps to change their abusive situations.
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## INTRODUCTION

This paper documents an innovative initiative that is being conducted in Edmonton, Alberta. The initiative—the Family Violence Follow-up Teams—targets repeat, complex cases of violence or abuse that occurs between intimate partners, the most common example of which is wife assault.

The City of Edmonton has a population of 627,000. The city is policed by the Edmonton Police Service (EPS), which has a sworn strength of 1115 members.

The EPS has divided the city into four Response Divisions. Each Division has approximately 150 uniformed members assigned to it, who have the responsibility of dealing with initial calls for police service. Some members in the Division are assigned specific geographical areas, known as “turfs.” Other

members are assigned to Neighbourhood Foot Patrols, and are responsible for smaller areas, or beats. All members in the Division carry on problem identification and problem solving as part of their regular duties, including the identification of repeat or complex cases of family violence.

The four Response Divisions also have a Criminal Investigation Section (CIS), which is staffed by nine Detectives. The CIS Staff Sergeant supervises the Detectives. Since 1990 it has been the responsibility of this Staff Sergeant to identify those family violence cases, which require follow-up, and to assign those cases to a Detective for problem solving. This Detective was identified as the Divisional Family Violence Coordinator. Detective assigned to these matters were expected to use appropriate community resources as they dealt with the problem. This model was developed and

implemented by Detective Jack Tetz in 1990. Detective Ken Mackay also served in this position in 1992.

Since 1991 the EPS has been working in a collaborative relationship on the problem of family violence with another department of the City of Edmonton, Community and Family Services. The result of this collaboration has been the creation of the Family Violence Follow-up Teams. These teams have a mandate to identify the most severe and complex cases of family violence, and to provide an effective intervention in those cases.

The term “family violence” will be used interchangeably in this discussion with “spousal assaults” or “spousal violence.” The specific problem that is being discussed is that of violence or acts of intimidation or aggression that are committed on one partner by another in an intimate, adult relationship. The most common form of this problem is wife assault or wife battering.

In the late 1980s the EPS adopted the community based policing model as the model that would be used to deliver police services to the community. An integral part of CBP is problem oriented policing. In 1989 Detective Jack Tetz identified a problem with repeat cases of family violence, and conducted a comprehensive review of the EPS response to this problem.

The resulting report made 28 recommendations for change in the way this problem was dealt with. The recommendations for change included the ways in which the E.P.S recruited and trained personnel, the way in which the Service evaluated and dispatched calls, and the way in which members conducted investigations and wrote the investigative reports.

The report not only consisted of an analysis of the problem; it also documented an effective method of intervening in these problems. Detective Tetz was able to outline a number of initiatives and community partnerships that were developed to address the problem. As a result of this analysis, the position of the Divisional Family Violence Coordinator was established.

In 1991 the Edmonton Police Service and Community and Family Services (C and FS), a City social service agency that provides services to battered women, established joint police/social work teams to conduct follow-up investigations on cases of family violence. The development and implementation of this model will be outlined in the following sections.

## SCANNING

The identified problem was the need for the community to provide an effective intervention in repeat or complex cases of spousal assaults.

This was identified as problem for the EPS because, in many instances, the Service was responding to complaints of spousal violence on a repeat basis, while having no effect on the problem. In some cases the Service responded to over 20 calls from the same couple in a six-month period. A need was identified to develop an effective intervention because of the costs that are associated with family violence, not only within the Service, but also in the community.

This was identified as a problem for the community because of the impact that family violence had on the individuals and the families that make up the community. The costs were measured in ways as diverse as homicide and suicide statistics, low school success rates for the children and decreased job productivity for the adults. It was—and is—a problem that affects the community in a profound way, and a problem that needed effective and innovative interventions.

The entire community was affected. The police expended countless hours responding to complaints of family violence. Costs associated with the problem included everything from the response provided by the uniform members to the follow-ups provided by Detective in the various specialized units. The costs continued on through the criminal justice system, and could also be seen in the health care system—domestic violence has been identified as a leading cause of injury to women. Other parts of society affected included the education and social welfare systems. There is not one area of society that was not and is not affected by this problem.

In the past the problem of family violence was dealt with on a case-by-case basis. There was no formal mechanism for identifying repeat or complex cases, or for involving other agencies in the problem solving process.

## **ANALYSIS**

The analysis that was conducted by Detective Tetz has already been mentioned in the introduction. In 1991 the EPS, along with Community and Family Services and several other community and government agencies, examined the problem of family violence in the City as part of the Mayor's Task Force on Safer Cities. The Family Violence Committee produced a report which documented their findings and made recommendations in five areas: Education; the Criminal Justice System; Provision of Services; Coordination of Efforts; and Aboriginal Concerns. (The analysis was completed by Detective Tetz and used by the committee in their work and report.)

One of the recommendations made by the Committee to the EPS and C and FS was that the two agencies try out a joint police/social work follow-up to incidents of family violence. Deputy Chief Jim Henderson from the EPS, and Maria David-Evans, the Operations Manager for C and FS, arranged for staff from their agencies to try the approach on a pilot project basis. A project team was struck, and the problem solving effort started.

## **RESPONSE**

### **Elements of an Effective Response to Wife Assault**

#### **Coordinated Community Response**

The most important part of the process in developing an effective response to wife assault is the development of a coordinated community response. An effective police intervention in wife assault cases cannot occur in isolation from other community responses.

This process involves developing awareness of the problem in the community, and mobilizing

community leaders and resources to combat the problem. This approach fits very well with the movement to community-based policing; with its emphasis on community involvement and problem oriented policing. (The ability of police members to initiate, coordinate, and participate in this process has obvious implications for police recruiting, hiring, and training practices).

Some of the specific tasks that are part of this process are the development of protocols between the police, local shelters, social assistance agencies, churches, counselling centres, legal aid societies, the medical and dental professions, hospitals, and the criminal justice system—i.e., all those parts of the community that play a role in responding to complaints of violence against women.

The development of this coordinated response holds the greatest promise for an effective, long-term response to complaints of family violence.

#### **Senior Police Managers**

Senior Police managers can play an integral role in achieving this coordinated response. They can work with senior managers, policy makers and leaders in government and the community in the initial stages of the process. They can also assist in eliminating structural and systems related problems that are identified.

Their public commitment to dealing with the problem has strong symbolic importance both within the police organization, and in the community.

#### **Developing an effective police response**

The primary focus of both the police and community response incidents of wife assault should be on ending the violence. This focus means that, for the police, the criminal system becomes a means to an end, rather than an end in itself.

## **Initial responders (Generalists)**

### **Knowledge**

Police members who are the initial responders to complaints of violence against women by their partners need a broad grasp of the dynamics of family violence. They also need a thorough grounding in the Criminal Code and criminal process. They should also have some knowledge of the civil processes that often arise in domestic situations, such as that process for obtaining restraining orders, custody orders, and the police role in breaches of these orders.

### **Attitudes and Values**

As was mentioned in the section on developing a coordinated community response, the recruitment and hiring process is a critical part of the overall police response to family violence.

Selecting members who hold appropriate values about violence against women, who are able to work well with community groups and with people from different cultures and backgrounds, is of prime importance. (These values are important not only for wife assault investigations. They are also important for police work in general.)

Knowledge and skills can be taught. Values are much more difficult to change.

### **Supervisors**

Front line supervisors play an integral role in the initial police response to incidents of family violence. They need the same training that all members receive in the dynamics of family violence. They also need to be able to provide their members with direction in those cases where the member needs it.

### **Specialists**

In medium to large police organizations, there is a need for a structural change in the way family violence is handled. This change is required so that the police can respond appropriately to complex and repetitive cases of family violence. The change

required is the establishment of positions within the organization that are responsible for the investigation and follow-up of those complex or repetitive cases.

Members assigned to these duties would be responsible for the following duties:

- Review all initial investigations
- Identify repeat / problem situations
- Contact victims and offenders
- Liaise with collateral agencies
- Conduct follow-up investigations
- Enforce release/bail conditions, restraining orders
- Work with initial response members on problem solving techniques
- Identify structural or organizational barriers
- Work with community groups active in the area

### **Values**

The comments made in the previous section is also relevant for members assigned as specialists in the area, only more so. Any member who must work quite closely with victims, offenders, and community agencies needs to have credibility. The foundation to this credibility lays in the values that the member holds.

### **Skills and Knowledge**

Members working in this area need to have the same basic understanding as the generalists. However, members assigned as specialists in the area need a more comprehensive knowledge of the Criminal Code. They also must have a broader grasp of the

civil processes that they will be using or encountering.

Members must also develop some knowledge of medical terminology. We have found that victims of long-standing physical abuse have often been violently assaulted in the past. These assaults have, on many occasions, caused broken bones, which have been documented by the woman's family physician or dentist, or by medical facilities. Charges can be laid based on the evidence contained in the medical records.

Interviewing skills are critical. Members will often be dealing with victims who are very upset and emotional, and who still feel a bond with their attacker. These barriers have to be overcome in order for an effective interview to occur.

Members working in the area must have a demonstrated ability to work well with a broad range of community groups.

### **Collaborative Intervention**

The approach that holds the most promise is one that combines all of the elements that are outlined above, but adds to it a collaborative police/social work intervention. This approach provides for an effective initial police response, appropriate follow-up on selected cases, and the addition of a client-centred, multi-disciplinary response to complex situations.

The goal of the problem solving effort was to develop an effective model of intervention in complex and repeat cases of family violence. A concomitant goal was to improve the community response to the problem of family violence.

### **ASSESSMENT**

The model of intervention that was developed and tested by Detective Tetz and Susan Kinsman, the social worker who was his partner on the follow-up team, was documented in the evaluation report titled *Family Violence: Follow-up Team Demonstration Project Research Report and Findings*.

Some of the key findings of the evaluation were:

- 97% of the victims who dealt with the teams reported that they had made positive changes in their lives.
- Twice as many of the victims left their abusive relationships (compared to women who received a traditional police response).
- The team approach was instrumental in intervening in complex cases, as it helped deal with problems within the legal and social systems that the victims become involved with.

The team was given the freedom to design and develop effective ways of intervening in family violence cases.

The police response provided by Detective. Tetz was based on the premise that spousal assault is a serious crime, and that charges would be laid where the evidence existed to support them. Detective. Tetz used the tools provided by the Criminal Code of Canada to prevent violence from occurring, and to provide protection for the victim.

The social worker acted as a link to the helping systems, and provided short term counselling when appropriate.

The team used specific strategies that included:

- Identifying high risk cases to police members, and ensuring that effective and appropriate police responses occurred when complaints were received.
- Working with other community agencies to overcome identified barriers that battered women face, such as in the prosecution of their partner, difficulties that they experience with social service agencies, and problems with the civil court system.
- Working with the abuser by: holding him accountable for his actions; providing support to him if he chooses to make change in his life; and providing appropriate consequences if he chooses not to make changes in his abusive behaviour.

Because of the success of the initial project, it very quickly became a highly regarded resource within the community—both the Edmonton Police Service and Community and Family Services adopted the model as a formal part of their response to the problem of family violence.

In March of 1993 two teams were established. The police members assigned to the team were Staff Sgt. Dave Bell (the police supervisor), Detective Colin Milton, and Detective Jack Tetz. The social work members assigned to the teams were Mike Kroening (the social work supervisor), Mela Roper, and Jeannette Wright.

The two Detectives, working in collaboration with their partners, provided service to the clients that were identified as being involved in high risk, repeat, or complex cases of family violence. Their interventions are documented in the evaluation report titled *Family Violence: Follow-up Team Implementation/Expansion Phase Research Report and Findings*.

S/Sgt. Bell, the police supervisor, worked on the problem at both a direct service level and at a policy level. On many occasions he intervened when it was determined that the police system response had not been adequate or appropriate by meeting with the women who were clients of the teams, and then taking the problem to the appropriate level within the police system.

S/Sgt. Bell continues to be involved in this type of service. He also represents the EPS on several committees that are working on the problem in Edmonton, and acts as the Service representative on provincial committees that are working on the problem at a Provincial level.

As was mentioned above, the evaluation members of the team again evaluated the model of intervention. Some of the key findings of the evaluation were:

- 62% of the clients from original project were no longer in abusive relationships.

- 87% of the clients from the expansion phase took positive steps to change their abusive situations.
- Couples involved in abusive relationships typically face multiple problems, which require immediate attention. (This finding illustrates the need for a comprehensive community response to incidents of family violence. The police response is an essential, necessary response, but it is not a sufficient response)

As was true in the first evaluation, the most important source of information about the value of the teams was the women who were served as clients. The consistent, resounding response from these women was that the teams were an essential and valuable part of the community response to the problem of family violence. Several of the teams' clients were quite direct in telling the evaluators who interviewed them that, if it were not for the intervention of the teams, they would still be in the abusive relationships - or they would be dead.

The stories that these women tell is the most powerful way that we can find to indicate that the problem solving model that has been developed by the members of the teams is successful, and that, in fact, the goal of developing an effective collaborative and interdisciplinary model of intervention has been achieved. The concomitant goal—the improvement of the community response to the problem—is being addressed by the development of a coordinated community response to the problem.

## CONCLUSION

The problem solving approach that is used by the Family Violence Follow-up Teams has been documented and validated in two comprehensive evaluation reports. A third team was added in 1994. The members on this team are Detective Ken Mackay and Cynthia MILLS, and there are plans to add a fourth team in the near future.

The EPS has received requests for information on this approach from police agencies across Canada,

and from American police agencies, including the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department.

The Teams have been profiled and documented in the local media, as well as in provincial and national publications in the area of family violence. Team members have been asked to make presentations about the teams to local, provincial, and national conferences.

There have been a number of measurable successes associated with the teams. Two of these successes are:

- The EPS charge rate has gone from 29% to 70%.
- There has been a marked increase in the number of cases reported to the teams through agencies, such as battered women's shelters, which serve many clients that would not normally report their cases to the police. This is a strong vote of confidence from these organizations in the ability of the teams to respond appropriately and effectively to their clients.