

# PRIDE: POLICE RESPONSE TO INCIDENTS OF DOMESTIC EMERGENCIES

## REDUCING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE RELATED HOMICIDES

NEWPORT NEWS POLICE DEPARTMENT, VIRGINIA, 1998

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- THE PROBLEM:** Detective Marvin Evans examined the homicides occurring in the City of Newport News to determine if the quality of life and social issues of a community bore a causal relationship to the number of homicides.
- ANALYSIS:** Between 1976 and 1984, 174 homicides occurred in Newport News. Eighty-four or 49.4 percent were the result of domestic violence. Nearly all of the domestic related homicides had calls for service to the police prior to the death and more than half of the cases had six or more. The criminal justice system, mental health agencies, and battered women's shelters were all working independent of each other on the same problem. Positive and effective intervention was nonexistent.
- RESPONSE:** Representatives from women's advocates, mental health, courts, prosecution, law enforcement, as well as the news media were contacted to participate in a task force that would develop a multi-disciplined response. The goal was to achieve a mechanism that would help the parties resolve the cause of violence before it resulted in a death.
- ASSESSMENT:** The primary objective of the PRIDE program was the reduction of domestic violence homicides. Even though the number of homicides generally increased over the years, the number of domestic violence homicides began a noticeable decrease. In the 13 years since the P.R.I.D.E. program was implemented, we investigated 277 homicides and only 44 (or 16 percent) were attributable to domestic violence. Of the 199 homicides investigated since 1990, 23 (or 12 percent) were domestic related.
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### SCANNING

In 1984, the Newport News Police Department, in conjunction with the Police Executive Research Forum and the National Institute of Justice, embarked on an attempt to develop a more effective means of analyzing and

responding to a wide variety of problems facing police.

A Crime Analysis Task Force was selected to work on this project. As a detective with the Homicide Division, Marvin Evans requested assignment to the task force, as he wanted to

find a means of reducing the number of homicides occurring in Newport News.

Evans initially speculated the homicides were related to economic and social conditions existing in the predominately black southeast community. This area had a low median income, a high number of female head-of-households, a high drop-out rate, high unemployment, and a high concentration of subsidized housing.

While these elements were certainly contributing factors, they lacked a definite causal element. He reviewed 174 homicide cases occurring in Newport News between 1976 and 1984. His review indicated domestic violence was the single most significant force behind 48% of the killings. Realizing the significant impact domestic violence had in reference to homicides, Evans applied the problem-solving model developed in Newport News, Scanning, Analysis, Response, and Assessment (SARA), to create a more effective response.

## ANALYSIS

To accurately determine the extent of the domestic violence problem, an examination of the calls for service recorded for the addresses where a domestic homicide had occurred, and in the city in general, was conducted. Records showed more than 8,000 calls for service being recorded each year with the following trends reflected:

- Many of the calls for service were repeat calls, indicating we had responded to the participants on more than one occasion.
- Few calls resulted in an arrest. Most were "Handled by Officer".
- Nearly all arrests for domestic violence came as the result of warrants being obtained by the victims.
- The vast majority of victim-initiated warrants were dropped at first arraignment, at the request of the victim, resulting in a congested docket and wasted effort on the part of the prosecuting attorney's office and the police.

- Nearly all of the domestic homicides had calls for service recorded prior to the death and over half of the homicide cases had six or more.

Upon examining the typical response of law enforcement, it was found the most frequent response was to issue either a warning or the threat of an arrest. Many officers experienced frustration dealing with domestic calls because the victims did not follow through with the case once a warrant was obtained. Most officers merely threatened to make an arrest if the problem continued.

Unfortunately, more often than not, those threats were never carried out. There was little in the way of standardized training on domestic violence and officer response was left to their discretion. Victims and abusers were interviewed. The lack of follow through was directly related to the cycle of violence. By the time the matter came up in court, the crisis event had passed and the parties were then in the "honeymoon stage".

In some of the cases, fear of reprisals and future beatings played a part in the non-prosecution. Additionally, fear that a breadwinner might be sent to jail, thus eliminating the family income, caused some victims to drop warrants. Regardless, the root cause of the problems that precipitated the violence went unabated.

Prosecutors, knowing they had reluctant witnesses, most often would not advance the prosecution of the warrant and the matter was dropped. To expand the field of information, representatives from the battered women's shelter, mental health providers, courts, Commonwealth's Attorney, law enforcement, military, and the news media, formed an advisory committee to initiate a collective dialog on domestic violence. The problem of domestic violence tremendously impacted many organizations in the area.

Each organization was attempting to address the problem in their isolated environments and each focused on a single element of the problem, without fully defining the problem. Evans consulted with psychologists, psychiatrists,

social workers, and other law enforcement agencies. He continued interviewing victims and abusers, and reviewed several studies that indicated arrest was an effective deterrent to domestic violence.

However, research indicated a need to go beyond temporarily deterring the violence to developing a mechanism that would assist the parties in resolving the underlying problems.

## RESPONSE

As a result of this problem analysis, a multidisciplinary response was developed that involved organizations that were actively working on the problem of domestic violence. The response would better coordinate the efforts of the organizations to achieve a positive and long-term effect. The major elements of the response included:

- Law enforcement was to strictly enforce the law and not issue idle threats of arrests. They would investigate and document acts of domestic violence as aggressively as they would acts of violence committed by strangers. Police officers would obtain warrants based on probable cause, to reduce the threats, intimidation and other factors that previously resulted in warrant being dropped prior to prosecution.
- The prosecutor's office agreed to prosecute the domestic violence cases in lieu of having the victim simply testify against the abuser.
- The courts would not allow arbitrary withdrawal of warrants once obtained by the victims before any effective intervention took place.
- Mental health agencies agreed to provide evaluation and counseling to dissuade violent behavior on the part of the abusers.
- The battered women's shelter agreed to provide a victims' advocate to the victim for court appearances and to provide services to victims and their children.

- The news media agreed to keep domestic violence in the forefront of the public.

The most significant obstacle to implementing the response was changing the attitude of the police. Many officers viewed domestic violence as a situation they could not control. They felt victims contributed to their problems; otherwise they would have left the abusive relationship. There was little understanding of "learned helplessness" or the "cycle of violence".

Professionals from outside of law enforcement developed training, so that officers could come to fully understand the dynamics of domestic violence, to see victims as victims, and abusers as persons who violated the law. Younger officers adapted much more readily than veteran officers, but they, too, eventually came to realize the positive potential of this plan.

Training on domestic violence, with particular focus on the application of this concept, was also provided to all supervisors, from sergeant to chief. It was important for supervisors to understand and support this approach, which was a radical change from the non-intervention approach most commonly used heretofore.

Once the training was completed, community support was secured, and service providers committed, the department implemented PRIDE. The local newspaper provided public awareness with an extensive report on domestic violence and the PRIDE program in a Sunday edition. Shortly thereafter, articles and reports about PRIDE began appearing in newspapers, on radio, on television, and in magazines.

A formal policy and procedure was approved and distributed to all police personnel and the community components involved in the program. While the police department's role was investigating complaints and taking enforcement action, followed by detailed reporting and collection of evidence and statements, the majority of the effort was performed by the prosecutors, courts, mental health professionals, and the battered women's shelter.

The police assumed the role as a coordinating element that brought the groups together, to work as a team on the problem, rather than have everyone continue to work independently.

Implementation of the PRIDE response resulted in a greater understanding of laws relative to domestic violence by the law enforcement officers. It also resulted in the identification of inadequacies in the existing laws on protective orders and enforcing those orders. Actions by those associated with PRIDE were instrumental in successfully having state laws amended to provide for an immediate arrest of persons found to be violating a protective order.

Today, a number of state laws exist that require reporting of domestic violence, mandatory arrest, victim assistance, and stronger protective orders. Many of these laws were proposed by agencies associated with the PRIDE program. Officers from our department have testified before the Attorney General's Task Force on Domestic Violence in order to bring about change in those laws.

## **ASSESSMENT**

The objective of this program was to reduce the number of domestic violence related homicides. From 1976 to 1984, Newport News Police investigated 174 homicides of which 84 (or 49.4 percent) were domestic violence related. PRIDE was implemented in 1985. From 1985 to 1989, we had 78 homicides, of which 21 (or 27 percent) were domestic related. From 1990 to 1997, we had 199 homicides, of which 23 (or 11.5 percent) were domestic related. (In 1992, we had 33 homicides and none were attributed to domestic violence).

The determination of effectiveness of this program was based on the frequency of domestic violence related homicides in comparison to the total number of homicides.

This graph (see appendix) represents the homicides in Newport News from 1980 through 1997. It clearly indicates a decline in the frequency of domestic homicides since the PRIDE was implemented in 1985. In 1996, six out of the 27 homicides in Newport News were domestic related. However, this included a

single event where a distraught husband killed his wife, his two children, and then himself.

Using the reduction of domestic violence related homicides as the primary objective, PRIDE has been successful.

Since 1985, even though the frequency of homicide has fluctuated, domestic related homicides have been on the decline. PRIDE has resulted in a measurable and continual reduction in the number of domestic homicides in Newport News. We did realize a significant increase in the number of domestic related calls for service for the first several years of the program, however, we attributed this to the frequent media coverage on PRIDE and increased public awareness on domestic violence. Another unexpected benefit of PRIDE was a significant reduction in the number of assaults on police officers responding to domestic calls.

With the media attention given to PRIDE, hundreds of law enforcement agencies across the United States, England, Canada, France, and Israel have contacted our department for information on our program. The Victim Service Agency of New York, prepared videotape titled "Agents of Change", that featured two exceptional domestic violence programs; one in Rye, New York, the other was PRIDE in Newport News, Virginia.

Since PRIDE was implemented, the only additional funding was a grant to obtain informational pamphlets and posters. No funds other than the department's operational budget was required to implement this policy.

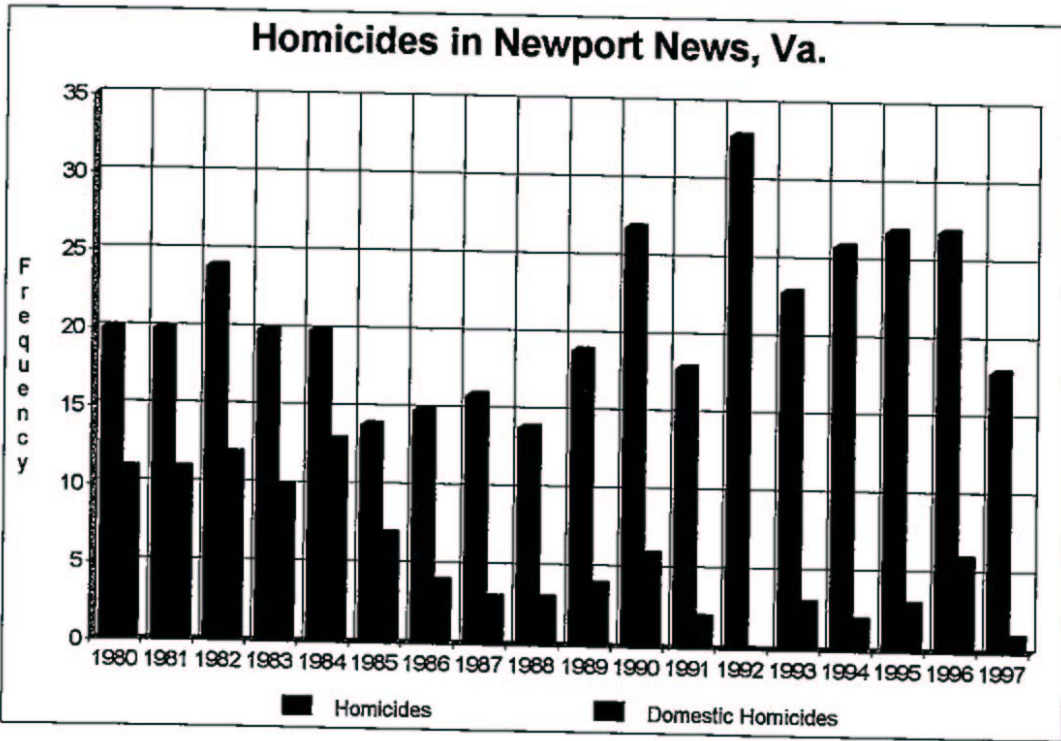
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**NOTE**

1. A detective working homicides while he continued to perform his daily responsibilities accomplished this

problem solving initiative. He was able to determine homicide was not the problem, but a symptom of a far greater problem, that of domestic violence. No additional funds were required for law enforcement to implement this policy.



Year	Homicides	Domestic	% Domestic
1976	18	7	39%
1977	13	6	46%
1978	12	5	42%
1979	27	9	33%
1979	20	11	55%
1980	20	11	55%
1981	20	11	55%
1982	24	12	50%
1983	20	10	50%
1984	20	13	65%
1985	14	7	50%
1986	15	4	27%
1987	16	3	19%
1988	14	3	21%
1989	16	3	21%
1990	27	6	22%
1991	18	2	11%
1992	33	0	0%
1993	23	3	13%
1994	26	2	8%
1995	27	3	11%
1996	27	6	22%
1997	18	1	6%
Prior to Implementation of PRIDE			