

# POLICING HIDDEN CRIMES: PREVENTING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE THROUGH FOCUSED DETERRENCE

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## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE (DV)

“Violence, threats of violence or other acts of a criminal nature that may include elements of emotional and psychological abuse committed against a person by that person’s spouse, common-law spouse, boyfriend, girlfriend or other intimate partner, past or present.” (WPS, 2013, p.1).

## FOCUSED DETERRENCE (STRATEGY)

Targeting high risk areas and offenders through interaction while incentivizing for compliance and communicating clear consequences for offending (Kennedy, 2009).

## PROBLEM

70% of DV goes **unreported** (Statistics Canada, 2016).

A large proportion of DV offenders reoffend and are **known** to the Criminal Justice System (Department of Justice, 2015).

## A NEW “SOLUTION”

The High Point Police Department in North Carolina, U.S. is the first known police department to develop and apply a focused deterrence strategy to domestic violence. This strategy is known as the Offender Focused Domestic Violence Initiative (OFDVI), implemented in 2011 (Table 1; Sumner, 2015).

It’s apparent “success” is significant and worth further consideration.



**Table 1:** The structure for the OFDVI used by the High Point Police (VJC = Victim’s Justice Center; Adapted from Sumner, 2015)

Level of Offender	Criteria	Offender Notification & Response	Safety Planning and Support for Victims
“A” List	Three or more previous DV-related charges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No notice given</li> <li>Immediate prosecution</li> <li>Addressed by any legal means available</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All services offered at any level</li> <li>Referral to the VJC where all services listed under “B” are co-located in one building</li> <li>Services offered for children who witnessed violence or experienced trauma</li> </ul>
“B” List	Second charge of DV or violation of prohibited behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Face-to-face law enforcement and community message in group setting</li> <li>Custom legal notification detailing presumptive sentences for future acts of violence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Receives prior notice of offender notification</li> <li>Messaging reviewed with his/her first</li> <li>Offer of cocooning or proximity informant</li> <li>Direct contact post call-in for victims still in relationships with offender</li> <li>Dedicated prosecutor, Civil Attorney services, Victim Advocate</li> </ul>
“C” List	First charge for an DV offense	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Face-to-face individual deterrent message delivered by detective at arrest or before pretrial release</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Letter of services at the VJC</li> <li>Direct contact with Safety Planner</li> <li>Follow up with Detective</li> </ul>
“D” List	Domestic disturbance, but no previous charges for DV	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Letter from police putting them on a “watch list”</li> <li>Letter delivered by uniformed patrol officer within 48 hours</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Letter of services offered at VJC</li> <li>Explanation of the incremental approach used by police</li> </ul>

## PURPOSE

The goal of this research project is to better understand how some police practices may prove more effective than others in preventing DV so readers know whether the High Point Police Department’s focused deterrence strategy is effective in both increasing incident reporting and reducing rates of recidivism.

**Hypothesis:** Focused deterrence can encourage victims to report to police and can reduce high rates of offender recidivism in a way that is both proactive and combines effective components found in the literature.

## RESEARCH QUESTION

Can focused deterrence effectively reduce DV offender recidivism while balancing the needs of the victim?

## METHODOLOGY

An analytic case study of the High Point Police Department’s OFDVI involving an integrated description and analysis of the initiative. The literature review included risk assessments, arrest directives, use of officer discretion, and focused deterrence.

## OFDVI FINDINGS

- **Decreased** rates of recidivism
- **Decreased** rates of DV incidents resulting in injury
- **Decreased** rates of domestic homicide
- **No significant change** in victim calls

## DISCUSSION

Risk assessments are not a central component to the OFDVI. However, the initiative may be conceptualized as a risk assessment itself.

The organizational structure of offender categories is unique in that domestic violence prevention includes first-time offenders. Literature points to a number of resources aimed at high-risk offenders rather than low-risk offenders.

Decision-making in the OFDVI appears to exist primarily at the upper-levels of the initiative and are largely data-driven. These decisions involve a high degree of information sharing among project partners which appears to benefit the OFDVI. Information sharing allows police to better understand the complexities of a case.

## CONCLUSION

While it is clear that recidivism rates in police data decreased substantially, it is unclear whether victims saw the OFDVI as effective. We do not see much of an impact on calls for service so it is hard to tell, based on this measure, whether it works for the victim.

The OFDVI does not account for risk to victim (incl. fear of reprisal). This could be seen in the lack of calls for service.

Future work should consider:

- The impact of the existence of prior rapport between police and community members
- Ethnicity of victims and offenders
- Applicability of the OFDVI in other jurisdictions
- Needs of the community such as geographic isolation and culturally specific needs of victims and offenders