

# Policing Hidden Crimes: Preventing Domestic Violence Through Focused Deterrence

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## ABSTRACT

With approximately 70 percent of domestic violence incidents going unreported in Canada, domestic violence is a societal issue that requires innovative ways to encourage incident reporting and to prevent offender recidivism. This thesis views law enforcement as having the potential to act proactively to address these challenges.

The High Point Police Department in North Carolina (HPPD) is the first law enforcement agency to apply a focused deterrence strategy, known as the Offender Focused Domestic Violence Initiative (OFDVI), to domestic violence offenders. The OFDVI is analyzed and discussed alongside findings from the literature review on current policing strategies, organizational components, and directives impacting domestic violence policing. These components are considered according to two criteria found in domestic violence literature: reducing the likelihood of revictimization through recidivism and increasing the likelihood of incident reporting. Findings from the literature review and case study are then used to discuss how police can reduce rates of domestic violence, and to propose recommendations.

I argue that focused deterrence can be beneficial for preventing subsequent domestic violence and that the OFDVI should be considered in other jurisdictions. However, policing efforts should focus on balancing the needs of victims with the needs of offenders when strategizing how to best reduce rates of domestic violence. This is best accomplished by ensuring a swift and certain police response to offenders, establishing and strengthening partnerships within the community, regularly evaluating and assessing policing operations, and maintaining communication with victims to inform police practices.

## INTRODUCTION

### 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.

### **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.

### **METHODS**

- 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.

### **Research Question**

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

### **RESULTS**

#### **Findings from the OFDVI (Summarized)**

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

## CONCLUSIONS

- 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

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