

# Council-Based Approaches to Intimate Partner Violence: Evidence for Distal Change in the System Response

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**Abstract** Communities across the United States are collaborating to create a coordinated response to intimate partner violence (IPV); ideally, this involves promoting best practices in the justice and human service systems and engaging a broad array of community sectors (e.g., human service; criminal justice; faith; business; education) to promote victim safety and batterer accountability (Pence, 1999). The current study examined the extent to which Family Violence Coordinating Councils resulted in change in the systems' response to IPV. Specifically, we examined judicial order of protection data from 1990 to 2005 to establish whether the formation and development of councils across the state of Illinois promoted the issuance of plenary orders of protection following the initial granting of emergency orders of protection. Such a pattern would indicate implementation of a best practice in the system response to IPV. Utilizing a multilevel logistic modeling approach, we found that the introduction and development of councils was indeed related to the accessibility of plenary orders of protection. The specific ways in which councils may have influenced such an outcome and the implications of this approach for research on council effectiveness are discussed.

**Keywords** Intimate partner violence · Family violence · Domestic violence · Collaboration effectiveness · Coordinated community response · Interagency coordination · Orders of protection

## Introduction

Communities across the United States are collaborating to create a coordinated response to intimate partner violence (IPV); ideally, this involves promoting best practices in the justice and human service systems and engaging a broad array of community sectors (e.g., human service; criminal justice; faith; business; education) to promote victim safety and batterer accountability (Pence 1999). To facilitate the development of a coordinated response, beginning in 1990, the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts spearheaded the creation of a network of Family Violence Coordinating Councils (FVCC) across 22 judicial circuits in the state. The creation of councils is a common approach to encouraging cross-system, interagency collaboration,<sup>1</sup> but, there is limited empirical evidence regarding whether such council-based approaches facilitate desired changes in the response to IPV in Illinois or other states (Allen 2005, 2006; Allen et al. 2008; Clark et al. 1996). Given the economic and human resources required to develop and

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<sup>1</sup> There is no central repository of information that tracks how coordinated responses are achieved across the country. The first author is currently working on assessing the current state of affairs via contact with state domestic violence coalitions. A similar assessment conducted a decade ago suggested that councils were quite common, but that Illinois was the only state with a connected network of councils via a state-level council and office. A search on the world wide web reveals thousands of sites representing councils across the country at the town/city, county and circuit levels.

sustain these efforts and the ongoing implementation of coordinating councils nationwide, it is essential to better understand their role in the promotion of systems change. The current study investigated the extent to which councils resulted in change in the systems' response to IPV by examining whether their formation and development across the state influenced the issuance of plenary orders of protection following the initial granting of emergency orders of protection.

While FVCC have focused on a wide variety of issues, preliminary evidence suggests that all have focused in some way on improving the criminal and civil justice (CCJ) response, including, for example, the courts, probation, prosecutors, and law enforcement (Allen 2006). This is not surprising given that many victims come into contact with the CCJ system (approximately 54 % of female victims of physical assault reported their abuse to the police; Rennison 2001) and the goal of the CCJ system response to promote victim safety and batterer accountability (Buzawa and Buzawa 2003; Hart 1995). Examining the extent to which council efforts result in change within the CCJ system response provides an important marker of council effectiveness. The current study focuses on the issuance of orders of protection, which are orders entered by the court after a formal hearing that prohibit an individual from engaging in a set of behaviors with the person requesting the order (e.g., prohibiting abuse and neglect; mandating exclusive use of residence; prohibiting contact at various locations such as school and workplace). An emergency order of protection involves temporary short-term protection (e.g., between 14 and 21 days), and is typically followed by the issuance of a plenary order of protection. Plenary orders can be set for up to two years and, if ordered in the context of other court proceedings (e.g., criminal charges, family court), can be set for more than two years or be made permanent. Further, plenary orders allow for restrictions that are unavailable in an emergency order (e.g., mandated counseling, temporary custody, payment of support, monetary compensation).

The accessibility of orders of protection is an important marker of councils' system change potential given that increasing the accessibility of such orders has been a desired and common criminal justice reform (DeJong and Burgess-Proctor 2006; Fagan 1996; Keilitz et al. 1997). Recent research suggests that orders have been associated with notable declines in abuse and a reduction of victims' reported fear. For example, a comparison of reports to police of physical assault two years before and after the issuance of an order demonstrated that physical abuse was significantly reduced (Carlson et al. 1999). Another study found a reduction of violence up to 18 months after a 2-year order was granted (i.e., a plenary order), regardless of whether or not criminal charges were involved (McFarlane et al. 2004).

A recent, extensive study on the effectiveness of orders of protection found that women who obtained orders reported a reduction of fear, abuse and violence in the 6 months after receiving the order (Logan et al. 2009). Importantly, longer-term orders, in particular, have been found to reduce physical abuse; temporary orders reduced the likelihood of experiencing psychological but not physical abuse when compared to victims who did not seek any order (Holt et al. 2002). These findings punctuate the potentially unique value of pursuing longer-term orders, as opposed to those issued for only a short period (e.g., 14–21 days). Each of these studies reported limitations, such as a reliance on abuse reported to police (unreported violence may remain undetected) and the challenge of locating a comparison group of victims who had not sought orders of protection. While the effectiveness of orders is not definitive, they remain a common tool and a frequent focus of CCJ systems reform, particularly with regard to making orders more accessible to survivors who seek them. To be clear, this study does not examine the effectiveness of the orders themselves, but rather the effectiveness of councils in facilitating the implementation of a desired reform (i.e., greater accessibility to orders of protection).

Given the positive potential of orders of protection, it is not surprising that councils focus on the accessibility of orders in local reform efforts. In fact, for many councils (74 % according to interviews with council coordinators), an explicit council goal was to improve the judicial response to domestic violence (see Allen 2009 for a full report of council activities). In particular, councils were concerned with making orders of protection more accessible. A prominent issue in such discussions was that many survivors who sought emergency orders did not return to pursue plenary orders. While the current study cannot document why survivors did not return for plenary orders—for some such a return may not have been prudent and an emergency order may have been sufficient—common concerns included that (a) survivors may have had negative experiences with the CCJ in the pursuit of emergency orders resulting in them not returning for plenary orders (e.g., overwhelming paperwork; lack of guidance to navigate the courts; limited knowledge regarding court processes; court processes that required survivors to face their abusers sometimes in close quarters; victim blaming by the courts); and (b) a lack of support to address acute safety issues and other unmet needs may make it difficult for survivors to return for plenary orders when they would be value added.

In the context of a coordinated response and greater collaboration among the courts, law enforcement, advocates, and other key stakeholders, survivors may be more likely to return for a plenary order. For example, council activities have resulted in a variety of local shifts in

protocol and practice, including, for example: (a) courts providing survivors referrals to advocates who can assist with the acquisition of an order; (b) co-locating advocates in the courthouse so they are readily accessible to survivors when they come to court to file; (c) creating informational brochures and videos that explain the steps involved in pursuing an order, what to expect in the court process, and available local resources; and (d) creating specialized courts with judges who routinely see such cases and are more familiar with intimate partner violence and with local resources (Allen 2009). The question remains, however, whether such council efforts actually result in a discernable shift in the accessibility of plenary orders relative to emergency orders.

The current study also advances research on the effectiveness of councils, generally speaking. Specifically, research on council effectiveness has typically relied on perceptual measures of effectiveness based on the collective perception of council members. Although the latter approach has inherent limitations, examining members' perceptions of council effectiveness provides one critical source of information regarding the types of outcomes that councils are well-positioned to achieve (Allen 2005, 2006; Allen et al. 2008). Yet, such measures do not indicate whether positive perceptions actually correspond to tangible changes in the system response to IPV. Documenting concrete outcomes is a challenge in research on councils as the research often begins *after* the development of councils and therefore does not afford a true baseline measurement. Given these challenges and because finding true comparison communities is difficult, it is difficult to draw inferences regarding the extent to which local changes can be attributed to council efforts. The current study overcomes these obstacles by using archival judicial reports as the outcome of council effectiveness, including data prior to council formation. This allows for a natural quasi-experimental design that compares order of protection data in multiple communities before and after council formation.

A related limitation of existing council research is the inherent challenge of linking community collaboration efforts (i.e., councils) to indicators of community-level change (Berkowitz 2001). The limited research on systems-level indicators of council effectiveness is not entirely surprising given that evaluating collaborative efforts is conceptually and methodologically challenging (Javdani et al. 2011). In his extensive review of the methodological barriers to studying coalitions, Berkowitz (2001) summarizes nine major obstacles. Key obstacles include, for example, not being able to randomly sample from the domain of existing councils or randomly assign communities to a "council condition;" identifying and controlling extraneous variables (i.e., activities and events occurring outside of the council such as the passage of the Violence

Against Women Act); establishing and measuring appropriate dependent variables; and finally, the difficulty of not usually being able to capture change over time (a true "baseline" has usually passed when research begins). Thus, traditional, experimental designs often are not feasible for the examination of council efforts. Still, it is critical to examine whether the formation and development of councils influences distal systems change markers, particularly when trying to examine the institutionalized, or systems change potential of councils.

## Current Study

The current study employed a method uniquely suited to current circumstances that capitalized on the existence of archival data regarding the issuance of emergency and plenary orders of protection across the state of Illinois (see Javdani et al. 2011, for a full account of the methodological approach). Given that the mission of the FVCC explicitly includes such systems change and that council activities frequently targeted the availability of orders of protection, the current study assessed evidence for change over time in an indicator targeted by councils: issuance of plenary orders of protection following the initial granting of emergency orders of protection. To this end, longitudinal, archival data were examined; specifically, the current study examined the ratio of emergency orders that become plenary orders, or as they are colloquially termed, "return rates." The current study examined the extent to which changes in return rates occurred as a result of council formation and development. Examining these data provided a *natural* quasi-experimental design as the information provided included data points prior to council formation ("pre" formation data points for the majority of councils) and following council formation for most councils across the state ("post" formation data points). Using judicial reports of emergency and plenary orders of protection for 15 years (1990–2005), this project examines: (a) *if* and *how* the order of protection return rate changed over this 15 year period, (b) the extent to which the formation of FVCC influenced this return rate, and (c) the extent to which the ongoing presence of councils was related to the odds of a plenary order being granted following an emergency order.

## Method

### Council Setting

At the time of the current study, there were 22 judicial circuits in the state, 21 of which were included in the analysis presented here (one circuit was excluded because

it functions quite distinctly from councils in the rest of the state). Judicial circuits typically included multiple counties (ranging from 1 to 12 based on population). Thus, FVCC represented regional efforts that encompass multiple locales that are sometimes quite distinct from one another (e.g., rural, suburban, urban). FVCC full membership lists can be quite large, including over 300 official members. FVCC varied in membership from 12 to 353 official members (i.e., those included in councils membership rosters). Councils included representation, on average, from 10 stakeholder groups (ranging from 5 to 15). All 21 councils had representation from at least two stakeholder groups involved in the formal response to family and interpersonal violence, including domestic violence service providers (95.23 %), batterer's intervention programs (66.67 %), law enforcement (95.23 %), or justice and court system (80.95 %), while fewer had representation from faith-based settings (42.86 %), neighborhood and community organizations (9.52 %), or cultural or ethnic organizations (14.29 %). Council age (i.e., the length of time the council had been in existence) ranged from 4 to 18 years with an average age of 11 years.

Councils included between 4 and 12 subcommittees ( $M = 6.79$ ;  $SD = 1.91$ ), which typically met monthly. These committees were usually organized around particular areas of the response to intimate partner violence, for example, criminal justice, schools, health care, and faith-based settings. In addition, each FVCC had a steering committee to oversee and coordinate committee efforts. Steering committees typically met quarterly and included the council chair, committee chairs, local council coordinator, and other policy level people chosen by the chair and/or steering committee. Given the geographic needs in some circuits, some councils had adopted county-specific subcommittees. Thus, rather than being organized by topic (e.g., law enforcement, courts), they were organized by county and included stakeholders from across all systems within one subcommittee (for a more complete rendering of how these councils operate, see Allen 2009).

## Archival Data

### Data Acquisition and Preparation

Judicial reports of emergency and plenary orders of protection for 16 years (1990–2006) were provided by the Illinois Courts. We received IRB approval before conducting a secondary analysis of these data. These data arrived with the following variables of interest: (a) year (1990–2006); (b) judicial circuit (hereafter referred to as “circuit”); (c) county; (d) number of emergency orders of protection, and (e) number of plenary orders of protection. We added information regarding the year of council

formation obtained from the state FVCC. For analysis, we created a variable to represent historical time, where 0 represented 1990 and 16 represented 2006. We also calculated the age of the council (i.e., “council age”) by subtracting the year the council was formed from the historic year (e.g., if historic year was 2005, and if the council was formed in 1995, council age = 10). Council age remained zero until the council was 1 year old. Thus we had two variables to represent time, historic time (i.e., 1990–2006) and council age.

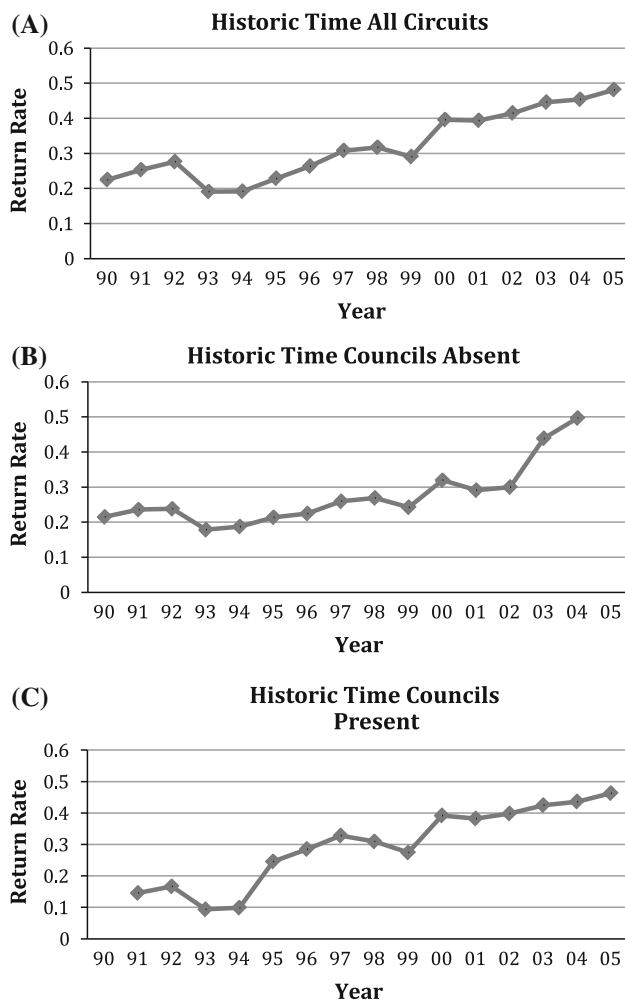
Given our interest in examining change at the level of the circuit, we combined across the counties in each circuit to give the total number of emergency or plenary orders of protection per circuit. This was done for every year, resulting in the total number of emergency and plenary orders of protection for each circuit for each year 1990–2006. The data for 2006 were incomplete and thus dropped; therefore the data used for analysis are from 1990 to 2005.

To calculate the ratio of plenary/emergency orders of protection (i.e., return rate), we divided the total number of plenary orders by the total number of emergency orders during the same year. Every emergency order had the potential to become a plenary order, thus, this ratio represents the *return rate* for further judicial involvement. Over the 15 years (1990–2005), the average return rate was 32.3 %. The average return rate across circuits was 22.5 % in 1990, 22.8 % in 1995, 40.0 % in 2000, and 48.1 % in 2005, as displayed in Fig. 1a. We also examined the return rates over the 15 years for each circuit and found that circuits had different return rates in 1990 and different change trajectories across the 15 years. This suggested that the variability in the return rate between circuits needed to be incorporated into the data analyses.

## Data Analysis Challenges and Analytic Strategy

### Challenges

There are inherent challenges in determining how councils may have influenced the return rate. First, it is difficult to separate historical trends independent of council formation from the maturation of the council over time. For example, the return rate demonstrated a positive trajectory over historic time, as displayed in Fig. 1a. Our task was to investigate if the increase in this historical trend was influenced by the ongoing formation of councils, or from factors separate from councils. Second, the initial starting return rate in 1990 (the first year for which data was acquired) was different depending on circuit membership (i.e., circuits had varied return rates in 1990). Third, councils were formed at different times across these 15 years, thus a simple pre-post examination of influence is



**Fig. 1** Historic time with and without councils present

difficult as there are multiple starting points. This creates a natural longitudinal design, but with multiple “pre” and “post” periods (i.e., periods before and following council formation). Although we could examine the age of the council, descriptive graphs that average across all councils for a particular council age are difficult to interpret. This is because the composition of councils represented at different council ages changes given that some circuits do not contribute data when younger councils drop out (i.e., a circuit with a council 5 years old stops contributing to the council age mean when looking at councils 6 years or older; for further explanation see Javdani et al. 2011). Thus, it is not advisable to use the mean return rate across all circuits at a particular council age given that the mean shifts as a function of the specific set of councils in place for a given year (e.g., when councils are ages 1–5 there are data from about 75 % of councils; however, at age 10 there are only data from 24 % of councils). Our analytic strategy addressed these challenges.

### Analytic Strategy

To address these challenges we used both descriptive graphs and a modeling strategy that disentangled historic trends and the influence of council formation on the return rate for orders of protection. First, we used descriptive graphs to guide our modeling, and to visually examine how the formation of a coordinating council was associated with change in the return rate. Second, we used multilevel logistic regression to model the probability of return over time (Molenberghs and Verbeke 2006; Snijders and Bosker 2012). Logistic regression was chosen because the dependent or outcome variable is the proportion of emergency orders that become plenary orders (see Javdani et al. 2011 for more details regarding why logistic regression is employed). Multilevel modeling was used to examine change where time (i.e., 15 measurement occasions) is the Level I unit, which is nested in circuits (i.e., 21 circuits which are the Level II unit). Thus, time points are nested within circuits. Multilevel modeling also allows for the study of the heterogeneity between circuits, both in terms of the proportion of returns in 1990 (i.e., an intercept), and the trajectory over time (i.e., slope and shape of change). We treated 1990 as the zero point in time when examining the influence of historical time. When examining council age, age zero is treated as the zero point in chronological time.

We used a four-step modeling strategy to separate historic trends from the possible contribution of coordinating councils on the return proportions or rate. First, we tested a series of models to assess the change of the proportions of returns across historic time. Second, we inspected a series of models to assess the change of return proportions over time for the period *prior* to council formation in circuits with no council present. Third, we examined a series of models to assess the change of return proportions over time for the period *following* council formation in circuits with a council present. Fourth, we tested a series of integrated models to assess return rate change including both council age *and* the presence of a council. Taken together, this fourfold modeling strategy allowed us to examine *if* and *how* the return rate changed over historic time, and the impact of council formation and council age on changes in return rate. We describe the logic along with each specific series of analyses throughout the results section. All models were fit to data by maximum likelihood estimation using adaptive quadrature as implemented in SAS/GLIMMIX (version 9.2). Fixed effects were assessed using Wald tests with sandwich (robust) standard errors (Snijders and Bosker 2012). Models were compared in terms of  $-2$  log-likelihood and information criteria where smaller values indicated better models. Because maximum likelihood estimation was used, we conducted deviance tests to



**Table 1** Historic time

Variable	Historic time			Historic time without council			Historic time with council		
	Model A	Model B	Model C	Model A	Model B	Model C	Model A	Model B	Model C
	<i>b</i> (SE) [95 % CI]	<i>b</i> (SE) [95 % CI]	<i>b</i> (SE) [95 % CI]	<i>b</i> (SE) [95 % CI]	<i>b</i> (SE) [95 % CI]	<i>b</i> (SE) [95 % CI]	<i>b</i> (SE) [95 % CI]	<i>b</i> (SE) [95 % CI]	<i>b</i> (SE) [95 % CI]
Intercept	-1.85* (0.12) [-2.09, -1.61]	-1.85* (0.21) [-2.28, -1.42]	-1.76* (0.21) [-2.19, -1.34]	-1.76* (0.18) [-2.14, -1.39]	-1.50* (0.16) [-1.82, -1.17]	-1.46* (0.18) [-1.83, -1.09]	-1.55* (0.12) [-1.79, -1.31]	-1.73* (0.50) [-2.78, -0.69]	-2.70* (1.18) [-5.16, -0.24]
Time	0.11* (0.00) [0.11, 0.12]	0.11* (0.02) [0.08, 0.14]	0.08* (0.02) [0.05, 0.11]	0.09* (0.03) [0.03, 0.14]	-0.01 (0.03) [-0.08, 0.06]	-0.03 (0.07) [-0.17, 0.10]	0.09* (0.00) [0.09, 0.10]	0.11* (0.04) [0.04, 0.18]	0.28 (0.19) [-0.10, 0.65]
Time <sup>2</sup>	-	-	0.00* (0.00) [0.00, 0.00]	-	-	0.00 (0.01) [-0.01, 0.02]	-	-	-0.01 (0.01) [-0.02, 0.01]
Variance component									
$\tau_{00}$	0.28 (0.09)	0.90 (0.28)	0.88 (0.27)	0.47 (0.12)	0.51 (0.12)	0.50 (0.12)	0.27 (0.08)	5.03 (2.39)	5.13 (2.62)
$\tau_{11}$ (Time)	-	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	-	0.02 (0.01)	0.02 (0.01)	-	0.02 (0.01)	0.03 (0.01)
$\tau_{10}$ (Covariance)	-	-0.06 (0.02)	-0.05 (0.02)	-	-0.03 (0.02)	-0.02 (0.03)	-	-0.35 (0.17)	-0.35 (0.19)
Fit statistics									
-2 LL	17,797	13,577	13,532	5,342	3,859	3,844	7,818	4,750	4,649
AIC	17,803	13,587	13,544	5,348	3,869	3,856	7,824	4,760	4,661

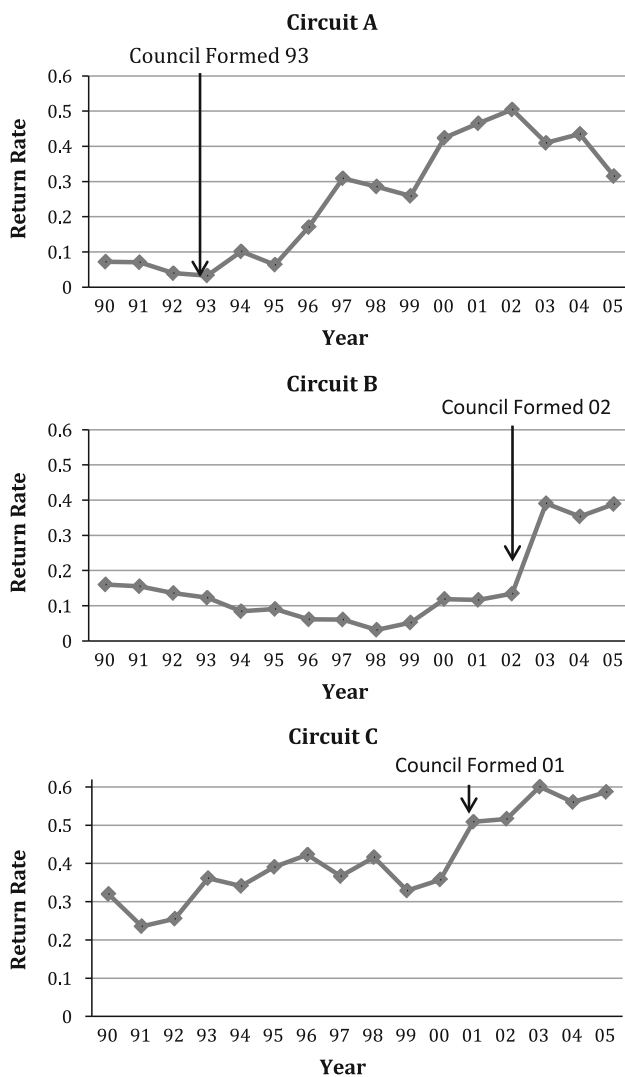
\*  $p < .05$ . -2 log likelihood = -2 LL. Model A includes a random intercept. Models B and C include both random intercepts and slopes. *b* regression coefficient, *CI* confidence interval

compare models (Snijders and Bosker 2012). All of these indices, along with theory, were considered to select a best model for each analysis. We also examined significant findings within each model to inform study conclusions.

## Results

### Step 1: Modeling Historic Trends in the Return Rate

We first examined the change in the return for plenary orders of protection over historic time. A plot of the return rate over historical time in Fig. 1a reveals an apparent increase in the ratio over time. To examine how the return rates changed over time, we ran a series of models to test the need for random effects (i.e., intercepts and slopes) and the pattern of change (i.e., linear, quadratic, and cubic). Given the large number of time points, we examined more complex patterns of change (i.e., quadratic and cubic) and examined the possibility that the change in return rates would be more pronounced after a council formation compared to other times. Initial analyses supported the inclusion of random effects for the intercept, suggesting that individual circuits had different return rates in 1990 (the intercept in this case would be the first time point for which data are provided). We present models including random intercepts and slopes in Table 1 and conducted deviance tests comparing adjacent models (Snijders and Bosker 2012). When models included changes to fixed effects the regular Chi square deviance test was used (Snijders and Bosker 2012), and the mixture Chi square was used if examining changes in random effects (Stram and Lee 1994, 1995). For change in the return rate over historic time, deviance tests indicated that Model B fit better than A (*Mixture*  $\chi^2_{1,2} = 4,220$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and that Model C fit better than B ( $\chi^2_1 = 45$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Thus, Model C was the best fitting and includes a random intercept (i.e., different return rates in 1990 for each circuit), different rates of change across circuits (i.e., a random slope for time), a covariance between the random intercept and slope, and significant positive fixed effects for linear and quadratic time. The positive linear coefficient indicates that the initial (instantaneous) change is increasing and the positive quadratic coefficient, although weak, indicates an increasing rate of change (Singer and Willett 2003). This model also includes significant variation in slopes and intercepts across circuits. Yet, although this model established a linear and quadratic trend across time, this model does not indicate whether this trend would have existed without the formation of the councils. It is possible that council formation contributed to this general trend. More specific analyses were aimed at understanding how

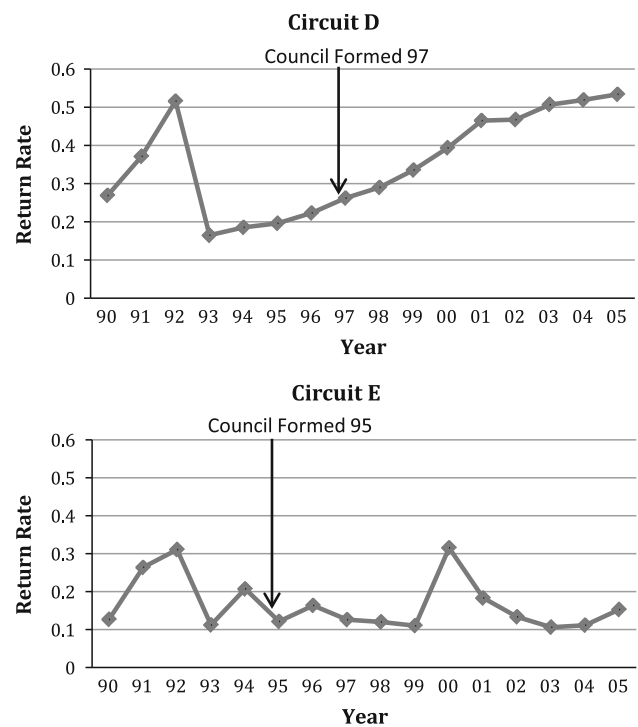


**Fig. 2** General patterns of change in return rate for three councils

councils may or may not have impacted this general increase in return rate for orders of protection across time.

#### Graphical Examination of Council Impact

As an initial step to assess the impact of council formation on the return rate, descriptive graphs were examined to determine trends across time for each circuit. A line to designate year of council formation was imposed on each of the 21 graphs of a circuit's data, thus allowing for an inspection of each circuit to assess potential council influence. Based on a visual inspection of these graphs for each circuit, it appeared that council formation might have an impact on about half of the councils (52 %, 11 of 21). Furthermore, there appeared to be different patterns of council influence. Using data from individual councils, we present an illustration of each general pattern of change in



**Fig. 3** Patterns of no change in return rate for two councils

Fig. 2, and of no change in Fig. 3. For example, Council A in Fig. 2 shows an increase beginning in their second year. Council B appears to show an increase in the year after formation, and Council C shows an increase in the year just prior to council formation. Naturally, there was variability across councils regarding the degree to which increases were clearly related to council formation. For example, in Fig. 3, Council D provides an illustration of a circuit that is already on a positive trajectory, which continues following council formation, and Council E shows no apparent change in return rate after council formation. Overall, the visual inspection of circuits showed, at least for some circuits, an apparent increase in the return rate for orders of protection around and after the time of council formation.

#### Step 2: Modeling Historic Time Prior to Council Formation

To understand how the return proportions changed across time *without* the influence of councils, we ran a series of models to examine historic time prior to council formation (1990–2005). We examined only circuits that did not have a council, and those time points for a given circuit up to the point that their council was formed. For example, Circuit A formed a council in 1993. Therefore, historic time (without the influence of a council) would include the data from 1990 to 1993 for Circuit A. Circuit C was formed in 2001; therefore, we included the data from 1990 to 2001 for

Circuit C. This was determined for all circuits, and we then examined change over historical time using only information from circuits without councils and used the same model testing process described earlier to assess change in the return rate over time without the influence of councils, with results presented in Table 1.

As can be seen in the graph collapsing across circuits with no councils (Fig. 1b), there may be a weak linear trend of return rate by historical time without councils present. However, the data points at the first and last few time points represent fewer circuits and are therefore less stable or trustworthy. Through our modeling process and an examination of deviance tests, we determined that Model B fit better than Model A (*Mixture*  $\chi^2_{1,2} = 1,483$ ,  $p < .05$ ), and that Model C fit better than B ( $\chi^2_1 = 15$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Thus, Model C was the best fitting model and included a random intercept and random slope for time and a covariance between the random intercept and slope. It should be noted that in Model B there was not a significant effect for the fixed effect for linear time, and in Model C there were not significant fixed effects for linear and quadratic time. Thus, in both Models B and C time was *not* a significant predictor of the return rate, indicating that the return rate did not vary systematically by historical time during the period in which there was no council in place.

### Step 3: Modeling Historic Time After Council Formation

To assess how the return rate changed over time *with* the influence of the council, we examined historic time with the presence of a council (1990–2005) by including information from a circuit from the year after the council was formed and beyond. This was the opposite strategy of the preceding analyses; instead of selecting data points with no council present, we only selected data points where councils were present in a given circuit. For example, Circuit A formed a council in 1993. Therefore, we will only include the data from 1994 to 2005. For Circuit C, the council was formed in 2001; thus we only include the data from 2002 to 2005. This was done for all 21 circuits and we then examined change over historic time using only information from circuits with councils present. We then used the same model testing procedures described earlier to assess council influence on the return rate, with results presented in Table 1.

Examination of Fig. 1c suggests that there may be a linear trend for time when councils are present. Again, the data points at the first and last time points represent fewer Circuits given that few were formed by the early 1990s. However, according to deviance tests, Model B fit better than Model A (*Mixture*  $\chi^2_{1,2} = 3,068$ ,  $p < .05$ ), and Model C fit better than Model B ( $\chi^2_1 = 101$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Thus, Model

C was the best fitting model and included random effects for the intercept and slope, a covariance between the random intercept and slope, but did not have significant fixed effects for linear (initial instantaneous change) and quadratic time. However, in Model B, there was a significant positive linear fixed effect for time. This positive linear effect for time in Model B indicates a positive linear trend across time when councils were present in circuits. These results show that linear time *was* a significant predictor of the return rate for plenary orders of protection, indicating that the return rate did increase during the period in which there was a council in place.

### Step 4: Integrated Model to Examine Impact of Council and Council Age

Finally, we examined an integrated model to examine the influence of council age on the return proportion of orders. The logic of the integrated model is as follows. First, we created a variable called “Council Age” that represents the age of the council in years. When this variable is zero (indicating that the council has not yet been formed), it drops out of the model. Second, we created a categorical variable called “No Council” to account for the variation prior to council formation. This No Council variable is coded “0” if a council is present, and “1” if no council is present. When a council is present this variable drops out of the model. Therefore, when a council is present, Council Age stays in the model, whereas the No Council variable drops out (and vice versa when a council is absent). At Level II, the random intercept is included in a standard fashion. To account for the apparent random pattern of the return proportion prior to council formation, a random effect is included for the No Council variable. In effect, this random component for No Council is only part of the model when a council is not present (because when a council is present, this variable is 0 and drops out of the model, with the associated random effect dropping out of the model as well). This formulation of the model results in the ability to use all of the data to estimate both the effect for the presence of a council (i.e., the effect for No Council) *and* the effect for the age of the council (i.e. Council Age).

Using this framework, we tested models that sequentially included a random intercept and Council Age (Model A), No Council (Model B), a random slope for No Council and the covariance between the random intercept and slope (Model C), and a quadratic term for Council Age (Model D) when predicting the return rate. As reported in Table 2, deviance tests showed that Model B fit better than Model A ( $\chi^2_{1,2} = 3,003$ ,  $p < .05$ ), that Model C fit better than Model B (*Mixture*  $\chi^2_{1,2} = 4,679$ ,  $p < .05$ ), and that Model D did not fit better than Model C ( $\chi^2_1 = 1.17$ ,  $p = .28$ ), indicating



**Table 2** Council age integrated model

Variable	Model A <i>b</i> (SE) 95 % CI	Model B <i>b</i> (SE) 95 % CI	Model C <i>b</i> (SE) 95 % CI	Model D <i>b</i> (SE) 95 % CI
Intercept	−1.28* (0.16) [−1.60, −0.96]	−0.80* (0.23) [−1.27, −0.33]	−0.88* (0.22) [−1.34, −0.42]	−0.90* (0.27) [−1.47, −0.32]
Council age	0.14* (0.02) [0.09, 0.19]	0.07* (0.03) [0.02, 0.13]	0.09* (0.03) [0.03, 0.15]	0.10 (0.09) [−0.08, 0.28]
No council	–	−0.68* (0.20) [−1.08, −0.29]	−0.51* (0.18) [−0.87, −0.14]	−0.49* (0.22) [−0.92, −0.07]
Council age <sup>2</sup>	–	–	–	−0.00 (0.01) [−0.01, 0.01]
Variance component				
$\tau_{00}$	0.34 (0.07)	0.35 (0.08)	0.42 (0.12)	0.42 (0.12)
$\tau_{11}$ (No Council)	–	–	0.45 (0.14)	0.45 (0.15)
$\tau_{10}$ (Covariance)	–	–	−0.19 (0.11)	−0.19 (0.10)
Fit statistics				
−2 LL	22,398	19,395	14,716	14,715
AIC	22,404	19,403	14,728	14,729

\*  $p < .05$ . −2 log likelihood = −2 LL. No council is coded “0” if a council is present, and “1” if no council is present. Models A and B include a random intercept. Models C and D include a random intercept and a random effect for no council. *b* regression coefficient, *CI* confidence interval

that Model C was the best fitting model. In Model C, Council Age had a significant positive effect indicating a positive, linear association between Council Age and the return rate. That is, as councils develop over time (i.e., age) the return rate also rises. Furthermore, the No Council variable also was significant. This shows a significant difference in the odds that an emergency order would become a plenary order when a council is present; specifically, the odds of an emergency order being extended to a plenary order when a council is present are 1.67 times the odds of an extension when a council is absent. Finally, the model improved with the inclusion of a random effect for No Council, capturing the variations between circuits before the formation of a council. In summary, this model shows an increase in the probability of emergency orders becoming plenary when councils are present and as they become more established (i.e., older).

### Summary of Results

The descriptive graphs and modeling of data indicate that the presence of a coordinating council has an influence on the probability of emergency orders that move to plenary orders of protection. First, examining the descriptive graphs show that, for many councils, there is a discrete change or elevation in the return rate around the time of council formation, with a continued increase as the council ages. This analysis is similar to a regression discontinuity, where at a discrete point in time there is a disruption (discontinuity) in the pre-existing pattern of change, or, as

may be more apt in this case, a pattern of change begins at a certain point in time and is related to the formation of the council (Shadish et al. 2002).

Second, examining the change of return rate over historic time when no councils were present showed a rather flat, or non-changing pattern. This was further confirmed, as there was not a significant effect for time in models with councils not present. In contrast, examining the change of return rate over historic time in the presence of councils showed a linear trend on the logit scale, indicating that in the presence of councils the return rate increased over time.

Finally, we built an integrated model to examine both council age and council presence on the probability of return for a plenary order. These analyses showed that council age was positively associated with the return rate such that returns for plenary orders increased as councils aged and that returns were more likely when a council was present.

### Discussion

The current study examined if and how council formation and development influenced returns for plenary orders of protection. Findings suggest that councils may indeed promote systems change in the judicial response to IPV. In particular, council formation and development was positively related to an increase in the movement of emergency orders of protection to plenary orders, which shows greater utilization of judicial resources. This is a critical advance in

the study of council-based approaches to systems change in the response to IPV, as community collaboration efforts (i.e., councils) were linked to increased utilization of tangible IPV judicial resources. These findings were supported using an innovative methodology paradigm that moved past perceptual indicators of effectiveness and demonstrated a link between community collaboration efforts and increased interactions with the judicial system through returns for plenary orders of protection.

The mechanisms by which the formation and development of councils facilitated the systems change in the increased issuance of plenary orders of protection likely reflect what some have termed partnership “synergy,” which refers to the generative potential of the collaborative process (Weiss et al. 2002). This synergy may be a function of the specific products generated through council efforts, but also may be produced through the development of new relationships and increased knowledge among stakeholders as a result of collaborative activities and greater access to influential leaders. The following are a few potential mechanisms and examples of this possible synergy.

First, in the state of Illinois, FVCC are organized by judicial circuits. Involvement of the Chief Judge (or their appointee) of each circuit as the formal council chair may create a unique opportunity for influence within the court system. The fact that there is some centralized authority within the courts—although there is also considerable autonomy for each judge—may allow for the dissemination of reforms within the courts. That is, policy changes regarding the issuance of plenary orders can be diffused throughout courtrooms within counties across a given circuit. This is consistent with literature suggesting that councils may promote desired changes via support from critical and powerful individuals who become champions for change (McCabe and Kalpin 2005).

Second, an analysis of council activities (see Allen 2009) indicated that making policy, protocol, and practice changes in the issuance of orders of protection was a common target of council activities. For example, in some communities, advocates were co-located in courthouses, making it easy for survivors who came to acquire orders to be linked to advocacy services. Being linked to an advocate may increase the probability that plenary orders will be pursued following emergency orders. Advocates could usher survivors through the process while also linking them with resources that might increase their ability to maintain their separation from an abusive partner.

Third, councils generated hundreds of “products” (e.g., educational pamphlets, intervention checklists, protocols, forms, interagency agreements) to enhance the community response to domestic violence and to harness the involvement of local stakeholders in the development and dissemination of such products (Allen 2009). Councils

developed such products collaboratively in response to a perceived local need. With regard to orders of protection, some councils identified the concern that seeking orders was an intimidating and confusing process. Thus, council committees focused on how to make the process of seeking an order smoother and created educational pamphlets to offer survivors as they sought orders. This seemingly simple act invites participation and cooperation from many stakeholders and may have served to galvanize committee efforts by identifying and focusing on specific and achievable goals. Importantly, the end product is likely *not* just the resultant pamphlet itself, but rather, it is the collaborative action across agencies, the increased awareness of various stakeholders regarding issues of access to orders in the local community, and the possibility of uncovering other local barriers to orders that must be locally addressed (e.g., choosing to co-locate advocates to ease survivors access to support). In this way, the pamphlet becomes a tangible resource for survivors, but also a mechanism by which the issues involved in survivors successfully seeking an order become more fully operationalized within a given community. This educates key stakeholders and likely has a radiating impact on other facets of the local response.

Fourth, as a result of council efforts, advocates working within domestic violence programs may experience greater entrée and cooperation with court officials. Indeed, council members frequently cited shifts in individual and organizational relationships as a critical achievement of councils (Javdani and Allen 2011; Allen et al. 2011). As a result of council activities some advocates noted that circuit clerks and judges would routinely send survivors to them for assistance (Allen 2009). Thus, as new relationships are formed or strengthened in the context of collaborative work, institutionalized changes may also ensue under the right conditions (Allen et al. 2012). Taking a dynamic view may be warranted given the inherent complexity of, and multiple influence in, systems change processes (Foster-Fishman et al. 2007). That is, one may not be able to draw a straight line between any one action on the part of a council (e.g., the creation of a pamphlet) and an increase in return rates. The literature on collaboration would be well served by charting some of those complex pathways of influence.

Beyond the need for greater exploration of the specific mechanisms by which councils may lead to an increase in the accessibility of orders of protection, the current study brings our attention to considerable variability across councils in the accessibility of orders and of return rates for plenary orders. This variability of council influence is not surprising given the consistent finding that collaboration does not always lead to desired outcomes (e.g., Allen 2005; Butterfoss and Kegler 2001; Roussos and Fawcett 2000). Future research might attend to what accounts for this circuit-level variation by looking at both internal council

functioning (e.g., council membership, leadership and decision-making) and also contextual or community factors that may affect the ability of councils to influence judicial processes (e.g., judges and agency leadership that is open to change; local resources to co-locate service providers in criminal justice settings). In one study of a council seeking to promote health care reform in the response to domestic violence, partner organizations' policies and climates supportive of change moderated the extent to which front line providers demonstrated desired behaviors over time (Allen et al. 2012). This is consistent with the organizational change literature that suggests a supportive climate for change is essential (Klein and Sorra 1996; Klein and Knight 2005). Local councils may vary in their ability to change the organizational conditions that surround particular institutional practices. Change may be more likely when judges have become invested in desired changes and, thus, become open to council influence. Attention to such "external" variables that influence or constrain council success would be a critical advance in the study of collaborative efforts and would help to understand variability across councils.

Although the current study provides compelling evidence for the influence of the formation and development of councils on return rate for orders of protection, the study is not without limitations. First, in this study we capitalized on a natural, quasi-experimental design given that we had data for all councils, pre- and post- formation, and an analytic approach that helped to address historical effects. However, the use of longitudinal data is not exempt from potential historical effects. While no single year stands out as explaining shifts in orders of protection (e.g., 1994 with the passage of VAWA), some councils demonstrated a positive trajectory that continued and increased following council formation. While our analysis does reveal a wholesale effect of council formation and development on councils, we cannot account for circuit-to-circuit variation in the degree to which councils were central to this process and we cannot rule out that other circuit-level processes were responsible for the observed changes (e.g., the introduction of a new chief judge). Second, findings should be generalized with caution. While the councils in the current study are typical of collaborative approaches to change (e.g., the convening of key stakeholders; face-to-face meetings as a mechanism for collaborative work; the creation of a shared vision and engagement in joint endeavors) it is also true that communities and states may have distinct structures and processes for forming councils. Future research is needed to understand the sources of such variability and what influence such organizational factors have on council functioning and effectiveness. Still, our findings point to the need for additional research to better understand how council formation and development prompts distal systems change.

The current study suggests councils may indeed have such capacity. Future research should capitalize on longitudinal archives to interrogate council effectiveness and to ensure that coordinating councils are doing just that—advancing coordination as reflected in systems changes and ultimately, in the improved experiences of survivors seeking supports from complex systems.

## Conclusion

The current study extends research on council outcomes by utilizing archival longitudinal data to explore change in distal systems change markers over time. We found that, indeed, councils appeared to influence the return rate of individuals to the judicial system seeking to pursue plenary orders following emergency orders. This punctuates the value of future research seeking and utilizing existing data sources to understand outcomes associated with collaborative processes, particularly because researchers often are not present from the start of the data collection process. Further, this study emphasizes the value of investigating council capacity to produce changes not only in the relationships among key stakeholders (a commonly cited outcome in collaborative work), but also in an outcome (i.e., increased accessibility to orders of protection) indicative of change within the system response. We hope future research will build on these findings to examine other concrete markers of system change resulting from council efforts with the ultimate goal of improving the coordinated community response to IPV.

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