



Police Home Visiting Program: Results of the Implementation Study

Overview

In 2010, the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) provided funds to 11 police departments to enhance their response to domestic violence. The grants allowed police officers an opportunity to conduct follow-up visits to homes where there was an initial domestic violence incident. Specifically, the program consisted of police officers returning to homes shortly after a domestic incident report to speak with the victim, offer the victim information, assist the victim to connect with domestic violence services, collect additional evidence, and arrest offenders that violated orders-of-protection.

As part of the grant, police departments were provided domestic violence training by the Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence (OPDV). OPDV and DCJS also provided police departments with technical assistance and

encouraged them to collaborate with other community stakeholders. OPDV and DCJS plan to use the experiences from this program to develop written policies and build a stronger model.

In 2012, the Center for Human Services Research (CHSR) completed an implementation study of the program by interviewing police officers and domestic violence advocates (DVAs) from the program sites. The evaluation consisted of telephone and in-person interviews on program processes, agency relationships, perceived outcomes and practice recommendations. A total of 19 interviews were completed with police officers (N=9) and DVAs (N=10). Findings from this study should be viewed cautiously as the sample of respondents is small and does not include the perspectives of victims who would provide important insights.

Evaluation Results

Implementation

In general, police officers are alerted about initial DV incidents through a 911 call. When the officers respond to the call, they inform the victim and perpetrator there may be a follow-up home visit. Many police officers also provide the victim with a contact card to the local DV provider. The police officers complete a Domestic Incident Report (DIRs) and in most program sites, provide a copy to DVAs. Most DVAs discussed the initial incident with police officers.

Follow-up visits are then conducted by police officers with select families. These visits are generally random and only a few involve DVAs. DVAs who did not go on home visits often contacted the victims by phone or mail. Criteria used to determine whether a victim receives a follow-up home visit include the seriousness of the offense, prior offenses, child involvement, and violent offenses.

Relationships

Overall, both the police officers and DVAs believed that their relationships were positive. Some had pre-existing positive relationships, while others credited the grant program for improving relationships. The officers and DVAs also agreed that the relationships with each

other could be improved by increasing opportunities for interaction, communication, and understanding of each other's roles. Some police thought the relationships could be improved by co-locating DVAs at police stations.

Perceived Program Outcomes

In addition to improved relationships between police and DVAs, there were many outcomes police and DVAs attributed to the program.

These included:

- Increased victim knowledge and utilization of services
- Improved victim perception of and relationship with police
- Improved police understanding of victims and DV issues

- Improved community awareness of domestic violence resources
- Enhanced victim safety

While some respondents believed the program improved evidence gathering, overall most DVAs and police officers seemed to focus on the preventive nature of the intervention rather than the investigatory components of the initiative.

Program Insights and Recommendations

Inform victims and perpetrators about follow-up home visits at the initial investigation and conduct random visits

It was generally agreed upon that informing the victim and perpetrator of the follow-up visit during the initial investigation seemed to have positive effects. Recognizing that the follow-up visit is part of the police protocol, rather than initiated by the victim, improved victim safety. The randomness of the home visits also kept the perpetrators on guard. Some believed that it was best practice to assign the same police officers who conducted the initial investigation to the follow-up home visit.

Choose police officers with an interest in and commitment to addressing DV issues

The characteristics of the police officers are important to achieving outcomes and therefore, police officer selection should focus on individuals who genuinely care about DV issues.

Provide program feedback

Opportunities to share best practice throughout implementation among program sites could inform program practice.

Provide additional state oversight and guidance

This can include structured protocol across jurisdictions as well as guidance on filling out DIRs more consistently and completely.

Provide comprehensive training to Police Officers and DVAs

The training should include opportunities to learn each other's roles and philosophies as well as the laws and regulations that govern each other's functions.

Emphasize the investigatory nature of the intervention

It was recognized that the respondents seemed to focus on the preventive nature of the intervention. Few emphasized the contribution the program can make to enhance the collection of evidence to build a case.

For more information:

<http://www.albany.edu/chsr/DomesticViolenceHomeVisit.shtml>