



Journal Club
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A Case Study of Community-
based Responses to Rural
Women Battering

Hightower N. & Gorton J. Violence Against Women, 8(7), 845-872.

Background

- Little research on rural community-based interventions for physical, emotional and sexual abuse
- This study seeks to provide analysis of how patriarchal values intersect with political factors to influence DV intervention
- Increased vulnerability of women in rural areas
 - Physical isolation
 - Patriarchal attitudes of rural police officers
 - Difficult to use rural domestic violence services

Method

- Data collected in a rural Texas County that is racially and ethnically diverse
- Interview for 1.5 to 2 hours during the period of May 2000 to August 2000

Method

- Interviews
 - 8 of 59 women referred to DV services by prosecutors
 - 22 local service providers (law enforcement, administrators, health providers, religious leaders etc.)

Results

- Characteristics of Survivors
 - Aged 19-67
 - Three black and five white
 - All but one woman divorced or separated
 - Average of 3 children
 - Five of the families' children had different biological fathers
 - Survivors subject to physical, emotional, economic and sexual abuse

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- Five had been threatened with firearms by their abuser
 - Commonalities of economic dependence
 - 6 pregnant or living with abuser as teenagers
 - Of those, 5 dropped out of high school

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- 5 lived in sparsely populated locales
 - Most had no employment

- **Survivors Assessment of Criminal Justice Interventions**

- 7 of 8 women made initial outreach to law enforcement
- 5 of the 8 were generally dissatisfied with these interventions

Dissatisfaction With Police

- Received inadequate information about legal options
- Insensitivity to their victimization
- Accommodations police made to batterers
"Twice I had called the police...they told us there was really nothing they could do...if he didn't want to leave, they couldn't make him leave. They could just ask him to leave"

Dissatisfaction with DA

- Prosecutor provided inadequate information about the status of cases
- Did not file charges without informing the victim
- Reduced the severity of charges " ...I was at work and he calls me and tells me that he's getting' out of jail-come pick him up"

Dissatisfaction With the Judicial System

- Judges issue protective orders but grant child visitation rights
- Perpetrators do not have their probation or parole revoked because of their DV
- Case falling through the cracks

Dissatisfaction With DV Shelter

- Shelters distance from home
- Preference to stay near family or friends
- Lack of transportation

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- Most of women did not seek health care for injuries resulting from assaults
 - 3 did seek health care, all three spoke of their abusers to doctors, only 2 were referred to the DV shelter
 - Over the years all 8 women received routine health care, only 3 were screened for intimate violence
 - Most sought assistance for survivors are family members

Law Enforcement Perspective

- Key issues to police responses to intimate partner violence
 - Victim protection
 - Providing written information to victims
 - Arresting suspects
 - Family violence training
- Only one of 6 officers named “protection of the abuse victim” as the primary responsibility

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- In contrast, the remaining administrators viewed the protection of the victims and batterers as equally important
 - TX state law requires officers to hand out written information on available services to battered women
 - Data shows this is not a high priority *“The DA has a pamphlet that you can hand out. Though I don’t know if there is any here or not. It is just a list of do’s and don’t and can’s and can’ts, and things that they might use that would help them do better...”*

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- TX has a mandatory arrest policy when a person is engaged in woman battering
 - Many only arrest if they *'feel like it will occur again'*
 - Some feel their goal is to never make an arrest, but to find a solution where they can handle their own problems (counseling)
 - Some officers state that arrests are complicated by victim credibility
 - Due to inexperience and absence of standard procedures for assessing probable cause

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- Most law enforcement administrators feel intimate violence training is inadequate *“if the funds are there, we can send them. If not, and they want to go, they can pay for it themselves. But generally, you are not going to find that”*

Perspective of Other Criminal Justice Officials

- Victim blaming by officials
- Unsupportive attitudes towards battered women and the influence of these attitudes on prosecutions
- The DA is the central decision maker “*I don’t believe punishment changes anybody’s behavior...require them to go to counseling” We haven’t had a single trial on any assault for a family violence case.*

Community Service Perspective

- Respondents from a list of potential service providers by the DV shelter
- They did not have a proactive approach
- Health care administrator did not view DV as a public health problem, thus relied on patients initiative

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- Reasons for passive role of community
 - Lack of training
 - Lack of support
 - Lack of social services for DV
 - None of the respondents could identify other county services for battered women

Limitations of the Study

- Survivors who did not participate
- Quantitative account missing


Discussion and Conclusions

- Prominent beliefs about law enforcement by survivors
 - Law enforcement protection is inadequate
 - There is a need for courteous and respectful treatment
 - Need to be informed of their legal options

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- Prominent beliefs about DA by survivors
 - There is a need to be informed fully about their cases
 - Want charges against abusers to correspond to the severity of the crime
 - The failure to provide broad-based community response impedes the survivors ability to deal with problems caused by DV

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- Community Response
 - Passive action
 - Insufficient services
 - Victim blaming
 - Uneven policy implementation
 - Inadequate training for workers of intimate violence

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- Historically anti-women battering movements took place in urban areas
 - Rural areas often lack political activism, population density, robust middle class, colleges and universities, and extensive communication and transportation systems
 - Women's movements generally bottom-up process, but in rural areas generally top-down mandates that focus on criminal justice interventions

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- “Battering is an obsessive campaign of coercion and intimidation designed by man to dominate and control a woman which occurs in the personal context of intimacy *and thrives in the sociopolitical climate of patriarchy*”-Goetting

Implications of Study

- Without grassroots advocacy service delivery is not likely to change
- Political efforts can shift the balance of resources and power for battered women
- Social scientists and other researchers need to focus on politics and policies of rural women battering