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A CENTRALIZED RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: SAN DIEGO COUNTY SHERIFF

MAY 2002

Criminal Justice Research Division

Susan Pennell
Cynthia Burke, Ph.D.

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FINAL REPORT

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ABSTRACT: This research, conducted by the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG), and supported by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ), examined the implementation of a specialized domestic violence unit within the San Diego County Sheriff's Department. This study reflected the NIJ's program category entitled, *Researcher-Practitioner Partnerships: Evaluations of Grants to Encourage Arrest Policies for Domestic Violence*. Prior to receipt of the Department of Justice funding, the San Diego County Sheriff's Department did not have a specialized approach to respond to and investigate crimes involving intimate partners. The SANDAG researchers completed a process evaluation that focused on the progress of implementation, staff training, and changes in policy and practice with regard to handling of reported cases of domestic violence.

The evaluators convened an advisory group comprised of representatives from victim advisory groups, the prosecutor, the public defender, probation, the medical community, treatment providers, and members of the sheriff's domestic violence unit. The design of the evaluation was framed by addressing the objectives of the sheriff's grant and determining indicators that would best measure their efforts. Research tasks included pre and post tests of unit detectives to assess their knowledge about the laws concerning domestic violence; collecting a sample of cases to examine characteristics of the incidents, the participants, and the justice response; and comparing those data with baseline data previously compiled. In addition, a small sample of victims of domestic violence was contacted to evaluate their satisfaction with the services provided by the sheriff's patrol deputies and detectives. The advisory group members also suggested the types of indicators that could demonstrate successful impact of a specialized unit, although this study was specifically directed toward a process evaluation.

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REPORT NARRATIVE

REPORT NARRATIVE

INTRODUCTION

In 1997, the San Diego County Sheriff's Department received a grant from the Office of Justice Programs' (OJP) Violence Against Women Grants Office (VAWGO) through the program entitled *Grants to Encourage Arrest Policies Program*. With this funding, the sheriff intended to develop a specialized unit of investigators who would focus only on incidents of domestic violence. One year later, the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) was awarded a grant from the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) to conduct a process evaluation of the implementation of the sheriff's program.

This research study reports the findings of the process evaluation by linking the activities of the unit with the intended project objectives and examining the unit's policies and practices with regard to the handling of domestic violence cases. This narrative first describes the sheriff's program, the features of the process evaluation that differentiate it from an impact assessment, and then presents the findings of the process evaluation.

THE SHERIFF'S DOMESTIC VIOLENCE UNIT

With an annual budget of over \$200 million, the San Diego County Sheriff's Department is the fourth largest sheriff's department in the country. The sheriff serves a jurisdiction of over 800,000 residents across 4,237 square miles and includes nine contract cities and 23 Indian tribal communities. Law enforcement services are provided by patrol deputies and investigators assigned to seven stations, eight substations, and four rural offices. Of the ten law enforcement agencies in San Diego County, the sheriff's is the second largest, after the San Diego City Police Department.

The vastness of the sheriff's jurisdiction allows for urban, suburban, and rural communities with distinct differences, not only in terrain but also in population characteristics and numbers of reported crimes. Each community served by the sheriff is unique with respect to socio-economic indicators, density, land uses, and community tolerance. In 1999, the FBI crime rate for the sheriff was 22.2 crimes per 1,000 overall, relatively low compared to the overall county-wide rate of 34.3 crimes (Allnutt and Pennell, 2000). However, the crime rate for the sheriff varied widely across communities, ranging from 13.0 in one rural area to 43.5 in another slightly more suburban area.

With respect to domestic violence calls, there were 20,181 such incidents reported to all San Diego County law enforcement agencies in 1999, with the sheriff's jurisdiction reflecting 18 percent of the total (3,590). Five years earlier in 1995, there were 27,846 incidents of domestic violence reported in the entire county. At that time, the sheriff's department claimed 24 percent of the reported calls. From 1995 to 1999, such calls dropped 28 percent countywide, similar to overall crimes.

An example of contrast between the sheriff's communities is the following information for 1999: the number of domestic violence incidents ranged from 12 in the City of Del Mar to 501 in the City of Vista, both within the jurisdiction of the sheriff. Del Mar is an upscale coastal town with a population of 5,391, whereas Vista is in the northern, inland part of the county with 85,659 residents. These differences present unique challenges for a single law enforcement agency.

PRIOR TO A CENTRALIZED DOMESTIC VIOLENCE UNIT

This study uses the definition of domestic violence as stated in the California Penal Code and includes "crimes against spouses, cohabitants, individuals who have parented a child together, or persons having a dating or engagement relationship. Victims can be the same gender as the offender and include emancipated minors."

Prior to the implementation of a specialized domestic violence unit in 1997, these types of incidents were handled by field deputies, with follow-up by detectives in individual stations who handled a variety of offenses, such as burglary, assault, auto theft, robbery, and vandalism. Special attention to cases of violence between intimates did not occur due to heavy caseloads and lack of training regarding this type of crime.

With the assistance of the OJP grant, the San Diego County Sheriff's Department incorporated a centralized domestic violence unit staffed with two sergeants and ten detectives selectively recruited. Teams of two are responsible for specific geographical areas of the sheriff's jurisdiction. The activities of the unit detectives are activated through reports of domestic violence completed by field deputies and faxed on a daily basis to the unit detectives. The goals of the OJP grant, as outlined in the sheriff's proposal, were the following:

- to increase the percentage of offenders arrested for cases involving criminal violations;
- to provide an increased level of protection for victims of abuse;
- to increase the percentage of cases issued by local prosecutors;
- to provide victims and their families with support and access to appropriate social services;
- to provide public education and awareness programs within the community;
- to establish a liaison with agencies providing domestic violence services; and
- to provide a tracking system to identify repeat offenders.

The sheriff's proposal intended to meet the above goals in phases, beginning with

- the selection, hiring, and training of ten detectives and two sergeants;
- developing a data tracking management information system;
- revising the department's policy and procedural manual in accordance with the countywide domestic violence protocol;
- providing training to field deputies as first responders; and
- developing collaborative relationships with other service providers and victim advisory group agencies.

THE PROCESS EVALUATION

The approach for the process evaluation initially focused on the activities of the unit detectives and basic monitoring of efforts. Soon after the evaluation project was funded, NIJ and the Violence Against Women Office (VOWO) held a meeting in Minneapolis, Minnesota, for VOWO grantees and researchers. During the course of the meeting, objectives were revisited, with an enhanced focus on victims' safety and sensitivity toward the inclusion of survivors. As a result, the following activities were undertaken as part of the process evaluation:

- conducted a pre- and post-test of domestic violence unit detectives' knowledge of pertinent laws, policies, and practices associated with the handling of domestic violence cases;
- surveyed station deputies' knowledge of pertinent laws, policies, and practices;
- reviewed training materials and monthly and quarterly reports;
- tracked nearly 400 domestic violence cases from initial report to final disposition;
- interviewed 46 victims of domestic violence to determine satisfaction with the sheriff's response to their incidents; and
- conducted monthly meetings with a domestic violence Advisory Group.

The monthly meetings with members of the domestic violence Advisory Group were a significant feature of the process evaluation. The group was instituted soon after SANDAG received the NIJ grant. Participants included victim advocates, representatives from the District Attorney, the City Prosecutor, the Defense Bar, the medical community, probation, the research team, and two staff from the sheriff's domestic violence unit. The group convened monthly during the course of the project to discuss the process evaluation, data collection instruments, available data, unit practices, and case studies. Most importantly, members spent a great deal of time discussing "how to measure what matters." Each month, time was set aside to "brainstorm" about the indicators that reflect "success" when investigating domestic violence within a

law enforcement perspective. While the protection and safety of the victim and offender accountability are always paramount in the discussion, it has been difficult to operationalize the concepts of safety and accountability beyond arrest, prosecution, and conviction. In some cases, those outcomes are not desirable. A number of indicators of effectiveness were offered and discussed at length as to their validity. What was agreed to was that all offenders and victims are not alike and that the violence must be stopped. The commitment and dedication of these individuals are indicative of a genuine effort of collaboration toward the issue of domestic violence.

PROCESS VERSUS IMPACT

It is important to distinguish the components of a process evaluation compared to an impact assessment or evaluation. Simply put, a process evaluation monitors effort, not effect. The emphasis is on quantity, rather than quality; on inputs, not outputs; and on activities, not outcomes. A process evaluation asks "how much," while the impact assessment asks "how well?" Through the process, the assessment measures who did what to whom, without gauging the effect.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following questions framed the process evaluation.

- Was the San Diego County Sheriff's Department Domestic Violence Unit implemented as stated in the project proposal?
- What features of the project describe specialization?
- What types of training are provided to investigators in a specialized domestic violence unit?
- How effective is a specialized approach in impacting the response of field deputies who are the first responders to domestic violence calls?
- Does the quality of response to domestic violence reports improve with specialization so that more cases result in prosecution and conviction, thereby holding offenders accountable and helping victims?
- What are the nature and scope of coordination and collaboration with other agencies providing services in the domestic violence area?

RESEARCH TASKS

In accordance with the research questions, the process approach involved the following tasks by the evaluator.

- A monthly meeting of the Advisory Group was convened to clarify the expectations of the research, monitor the research, including data collection instruments, and comment on findings during the course of the research.
- A survey of field deputies was conducted to assess their level of knowledge about domestic violence laws and adherence to the countywide domestic violence protocol.
- Source documents of the unit were reviewed to identify training topics, staffing changes, and issues relative to specialization.
- Phone interviews were conducted with victims of domestic violence to explore the responsiveness of the field deputies and the unit detectives to the needs of victims.
- A case tracking study was conducted of reported cases of domestic violence handled by the domestic violence unit to determine changes in procedures compared to an earlier case tracking study when there was no specialized unit. Of particular interest were the extent and scope of documentation in the reports regarding specific information items, including if the incident was witnessed by children, if substance use was apparent, and if evidence was collected.

In the next section, each of the research questions are addressed, with detailed information about the conduct of the tasks, the sources for information, and the results.

RESEARCH QUESTION: Was the San Diego County Sheriff's Department Domestic Violence Unit implemented as stated in the project proposal?

This question is the crux of the process evaluation, and the remainder of this report provides an overview summary of the efforts that took place over the course of the project. Based upon the objectives outlined by the sheriff's proposal to OJP, the results suggest that the project was successful in meeting the goals of their implementation plan. Within the first quarter of the grant period, the two sergeants had developed interview protocols for hiring detectives, ordered equipment, and set up training dates with specific agencies, such as the San Diego Police Department, that had long experience with a specialized domestic violence unit. The sergeant, early on, began working with collaborative agencies such as the San Diego Domestic Violence Council and the Sexual Assault Response Team. The data tracker database was developed by a deputy in the sheriff's department and the system was ready for entry of domestic violence cases as well as retrieval for update purposes. By January 1998, all ten detectives were on board, having been selectively recruited from a field of 58 candidates, screened, and interviewed by the two sergeants.

Over the course of the project, the number of arrests for domestic violence offenses increased. The unit honed its specialized approach and centralized the department's approach to domestic violence cases by training field deputies in report writing, evidence collection, and policy and protocol. The specialized unit coordinated its efforts with other agencies and systems and gave presentations to community groups throughout the county to inform and educate the public about domestic violence. The success of the division was, in part, due to the dynamic nature of the female sergeant, her commitment to reducing domestic violence, and her concern about victims. Her leadership inspired the detectives who worked in the unit. This sergeant had major responsibility for developing the sheriff department's policy and protocol for responding to domestic violence. In a county of over 4,200 square miles, with diverse communities, a consistent, standardized approach to domestic violence is critical.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS: What types of training are provided to unit detectives and patrol deputies throughout the sheriff's department?

What features of the project describe specialization?

The first priority for the unit was the training for the detectives selected to be in the unit. All attended a 40-hour domestic violence course in state-certified Police Standards and Training (P.O.S.T) in Los Angeles. The course is basically Domestic Violence 101, explaining the pertinent penal code sections, the nature and characteristics of the crime, and the appropriate response by law enforcement. Since domestic violence generally involves more than one victim (such as children), the deputies also had required training in stalking, child abuse, elder abuse, domestic violence in the workplace, profiles of batterers, and interviewing techniques. Additional training included a course on Temporary Restraining Orders and Emergency Protection Orders; lethality assessments to determine level of risk posed by the offender, and information regarding steps to determine the primary aggressor.

To fully understand and appreciate the meaning of both centralization and specialization, it is helpful to understand what was taking place prior to the implementation of the domestic violence unit. In 1996, the San Diego County Domestic Violence Council, comprised of agency administrators, service providers, and victim advocates, developed a standardized protocol for responding and managing crimes involving domestic violence. The protocol included all components of the justice system as well as victim advocacy groups. While all ten (10) law enforcement agencies in the county signed the agreement, there was no official monitoring to determine if the practices and policies outlined in the protocol were being followed. Before 1997, the San Diego Police Department was the only police agency to have a specialized domestic violence unit.

The Sheriff's jurisdiction is comprised of many suburban and rural communities. Nine municipal cities contract with the Sheriff for law enforcement services and each of these is served by a sheriff's station with a Captain. Additionally, there are communities served by the Sheriff that are not incorporated. The communities are diverse with regard to socio-demographic characteristics. Prior to the implementation of the domestic violence unit, crimes of this nature were handled by area detectives in the outlying stations, if follow-up occurred at all. Patrol deputies are usually the first responders to calls for service. Following the law of mandated reporting, deputies completed reports on all calls whether or not a "crime" was

reported. A significant number of these reports were classified as "verbal" only, according to the Sergeant and deputies were in compliance with the law. Few of the misdemeanor cases were ever followed up by area detectives. When cases were given to detectives in the stations for follow up, the procedures differed by station command and priorities. This was apparent in an earlier study conducted by SANDAG that examined reports of domestic violence by area station. Some stations had very few arrests, some had many. Dual arrests were common, though inconsistent with the countywide protocol. The station detectives had caseloads involving several crime types, some working both person and property offenses, depending on the workload and the staffing within the station. Although sergeants in area stations must "sign-off" on patrol reports, there were no standard practices for reports of domestic violence. Although the countywide protocol suggested a domestic violence supplemental report be completed that incorporated additional questions about children present, substance use, victim statements, etc., the supplemental was not completed by most deputies. Issues surrounding the crime of domestic violence are complex and extensive, compared to other types of crimes. Without being armed with special knowledge, the patrol deputies could not be expected to respond as suggested through the countywide protocol.

With the implementation of the unit, the procedures for conducting follow-up investigations of domestic violence rested with the unit detectives. Centralizing investigations meant that all unit detectives are housed in one location, with detectives in teams of two covering different geographical areas of the county. The unit is located in the administration headquarters for the sheriff's department, along with other investigative units such as child abuse and homicide. Patrol deputies or sergeants in the stations are responsible for faxing over, every morning, incident reports of domestic violence taken by patrol officers the day before. The unit sergeant screens the reports and assigns the cases to the detectives. The detectives are responsible for prioritizing their cases. Cases that include a suspect arrested and taken to jail would require immediate attention since the suspect must be charged within 48 hours of arrest. Cases in which the victim is hospitalized would also take priority. *Every* case is assigned for follow-up by unit detectives.

With the patrol deputies acting as first responders, the need for training became apparent to the domestic violence supervising sergeants. The lead sergeant updated the department's policy and procedure manual pertaining to domestic violence, aligning it with the countywide protocol. The department manual had not been updated since 1986, when the mandatory reporting law went into effect.

With the updated manual, the two sergeants "went on the road" to train the station deputies. Their efforts were assisted by an executive memo from the sheriff underscoring the importance of the training and the administrative commitment to saving victims and ensuring offender accountability. The sergeants provided one-hour training to all patrol shifts in all stations throughout the county. In addition, supervising sergeants in the stations received additional training. Also, the training officers within each station participated in an eight-hour training at the law enforcement academy. Deputies and supervisors were provided information about domestic violence laws and procedures to be undertaken at the scene. Completion of reports was an important topic since these later become the basis for filing charges with the prosecutor. Deputies were advised to complete the domestic violence supplemental, to interview any children that might be present at the scene, to take photographs, and collect evidence. They

were encouraged to include victims' statements in their reports and to question victims about prior abusive behavior by the same partner. Sergeants were informed about the completeness of reports and their role in ensuring that reports contained sufficient information. Deputies learned how to distinguish the primary aggressor and that dual arrests were discouraged. The importance of arresting the offender was emphasized. Incomplete reports were bounced back to area station sergeants and well-written reports received "atta boy" memos.

The lead sergeant developed and had printed a small, pocket-sized booklet entitled *Domestic Violence Field Notes*. One of these was provided to every patrol deputy (approximately 900). The booklet provided concise information about penal code sections relevant to domestic violence, defined the actions of the primary aggressor, described "serious bodily injury," the laws of arrest, steps to take when responding to domestic violence calls, and procedures for handling a violation of a restraining order. The size and conciseness of the booklet provided easy access for deputies compared to a bulky policy and procedural manual stuffed in the trunk of their car.

The deputy training is a continuous process. Four of the detectives in the unit are certified domestic violence instructors at the law enforcement academy. These detectives, along with the sergeants in the unit, provide quarterly "refresher" training to patrol deputies in all stations. The sergeant also puts a considerable amount of information on the sheriff's computer network accessible by all sworn personnel. The information includes the entire knowledge of the patrol deputies policy and procedural manual, updates on pertinent legislation, training opportunities relevant to domestic violence, and locations and addresses of battered women's shelters and victim advocacy services.

The specialized domestic violence unit resulted in a cadre of ten (10) detectives with expert knowledge and skills relative to domestic violence. The unit sergeants are on call 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The unit detectives also conduct joint investigations with the homicide division when a reported homicide is domestic violence-related. In addition, the unit detectives go to calls of sexual assault involving domestic violence victims. For the unit detectives, domestic violence is their highest and only priority in contrast to the detectives in the area stations. The same detective follows the case from investigation through prosecution. If the victim is re-victimized, the same detective conducts the new investigation. The sergeant believes that this special focus, along with their expertise, has made a difference with regard to the quality of life of their victims. When asked what she looks for in recruiting detectives for the unit, the lead sergeant listed the following attributes: being open to change, highly motivated, "can do" attitude, and an understanding of victims and batterers. The unit detectives, in turn, enhanced the knowledge of the patrol deputies. The changes that occurred in patrol practices due to training for the deputies are articulated in the next section in the results of the case tracking study.

To assist the specialized unit in developing training topics for the stations, the SANDAG researchers, with the assistance of the Domestic Violence Advisory Group, developed a short test to assess the knowledge of field deputies. The true/false and fill-in-the-blank survey addressed recent domestic violence legislation, protocols concerning restraining orders, reporting, and evidence collection requirements. Upon approval and support by the sheriff, research staff distributed the surveys at line-up briefings twice a day over a two-day period at

all stations in the county. The survey was conducted in the spring of 1998, nine months after the project was initiated. Overall, field deputies scored well on the surveys, with a couple of exceptions that demonstrated to the unit those areas requiring more in-depth training. Also, there was disparity across stations, suggesting an emphasis on standardizing practices.

The survey of the field deputies was not intended to assess changes in the knowledge of the deputies due to training received. If that were the case, a pre-post survey would have been conducted. The purpose was to identify areas that may have required targeted training in specific stations.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS: How effective is a specialized approach in impacting the response of field deputies who are the first responders to domestic violence calls?

Does the quality of response to domestic violence reports improve with specialization so that more cases result in prosecution and conviction, thereby holding offenders accountable and helping victims?

Prior to the evaluation funding, SANDAG researchers conducted a study of the processing of a sample of domestic violence cases reported to all ten law enforcement agencies in San Diego County (see Pennell, Burke, and Mulmat, 2000). The study examined the actions of police with respect to arrest and filing of charges, disposition of cases, and sentences, as well as characteristics of incidents, suspects, and victims. The results of this study for the sheriff's department became the baseline data for the current study to measure change *after* implementation of the specialized unit. The next section responds to the above questions with the analysis of the pre- and post-tracking of domestic violence cases.

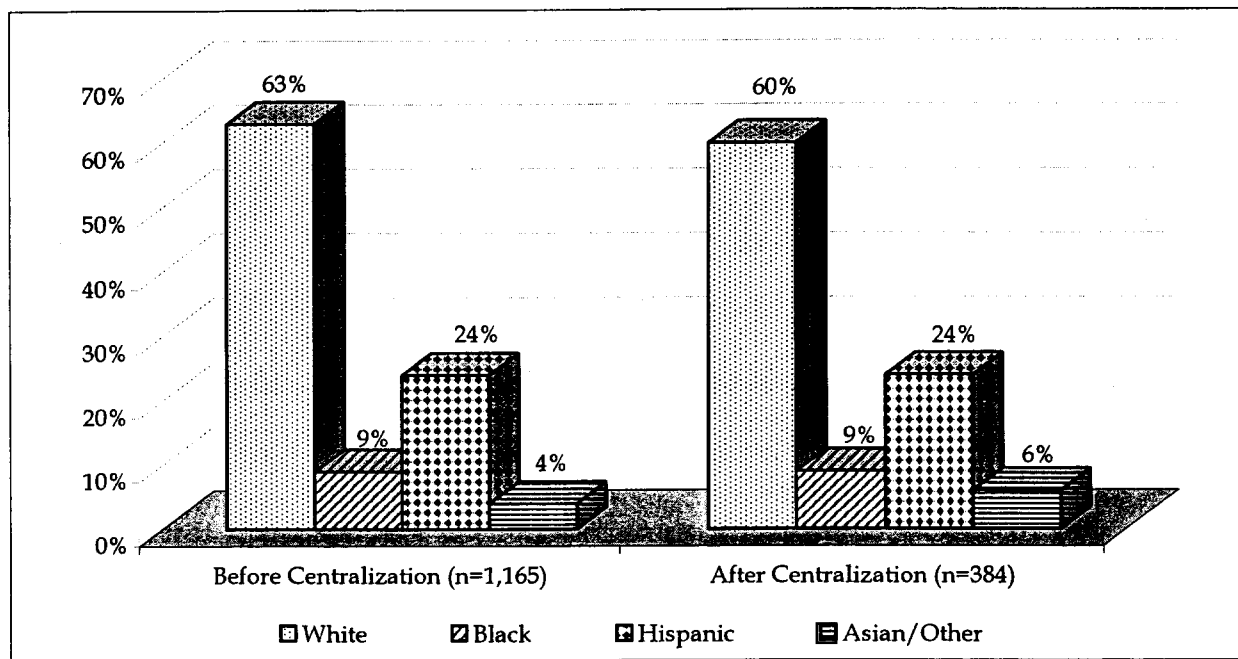
For the 1996 study, 1,168 cases were sampled from the 6,551 incidents (cases and calls for service) that were reported to the sheriff's department prior to centralization. For this study, 385 domestic violence cases were sampled from the 2,685 that were reported to the sheriff's department between July 1, 1998, and March 31, 1999, *after* centralization. For both samples, researchers compiled data from manual files, including socio-demographic information about the victim and suspect, the characteristics of the situation as reflected in law enforcement reports, as well as case outcome. The purpose of this second study was to determine if the creation of the sheriff's department domestic violence unit would be related to increased and improved reporting, and more filings for prosecution.

RESULTS FROM CASE TRACKING STUDY

Victim and Suspect Characteristics

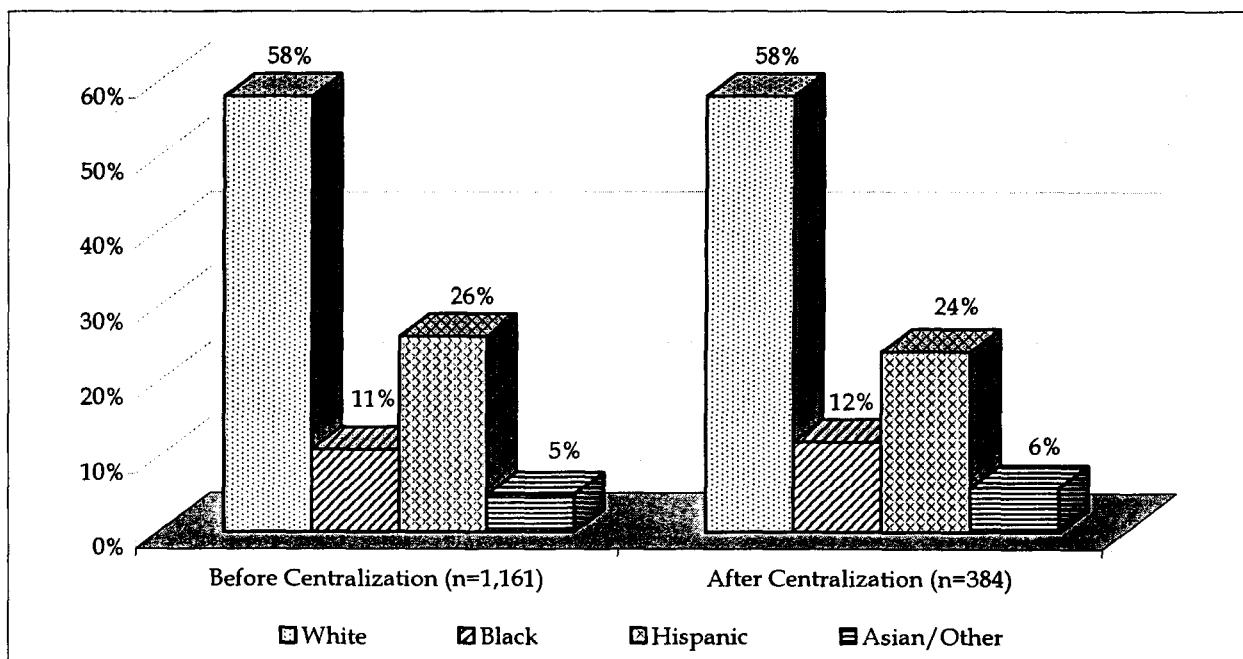
The socio-demographic features of victims and suspects were fairly constant in both samples and are presented not to show change, but as a description of the two samples. As Figure 1 shows, more than one-half of the victims in both groups (63% and 60%) were White, almost one-quarter were Hispanic, and less than ten percent were Black. The victims in the *before* centralization sample ranged in age from 14 to 78, and the average age was 32.6. For the *after* centralization sample, the range was 15 to 70, with an average of 33.1. Approximately four out of five (81%) of the victims in both samples were females, and the rest were male (not shown).

Figure 1
VICTIM ETHNICITY
San Diego County Sheriff's Department, 1996 - 1999



As Figure 2 shows, the racial composition of the suspects was almost identical in the two studies and was also very similar to the victim profile: over one-half were White, approximately one-quarter were Hispanic, and the rest represented Blacks, Asians, and other ethnic minorities. The suspects in the *before* centralization sample ranged in age from 16 to 83, with an average age of 33.4. The suspects in the *after* centralization sample also ranged in age from 16 to 83 and had an average age of 34.4. For both samples, 80 percent of the suspects were male and 20 percent were female (not shown).

Figure 2
SUSPECT ETHNICITY
San Diego County Sheriff's Department, 1996 - 1999



Ten of the 1,168 cases in the *before* centralization sample involved victims and suspects who were the same gender, as did five of the 385 cases in the *after* centralization sample (not shown).

Presence of Weapons

When one considers hands and other parts of the body as weapons, almost all of the cases in the *before* centralization sample (98%), as well as in the *after* centralization sample (97%), involved weapons (not shown). As Table 1 shows, fewer incidents in the *after* centralization sample involved the suspect using his/her hands, while a greater proportion involved threats, verbal abuse, and telephones.

Table 1
WEAPON TYPE USED BY SUSPECT IN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE INCIDENT
San Diego County Sheriff's Department, 1996 - 1999

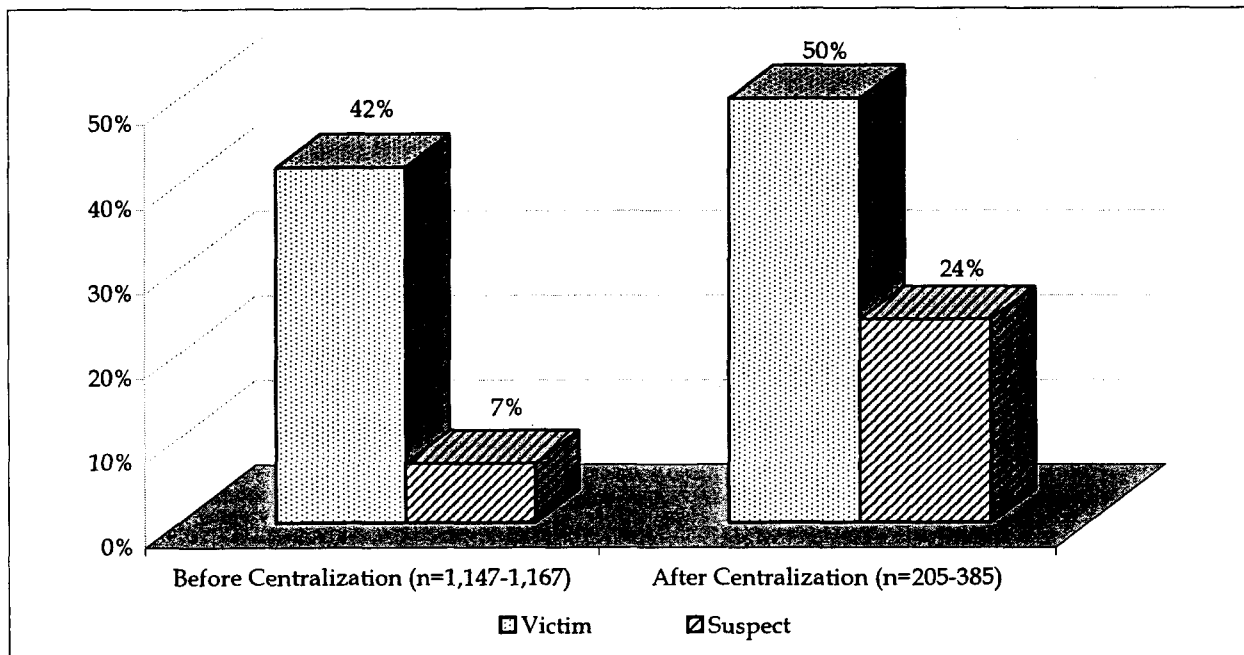
	<i>Before Centralization</i>	<i>After Centralization</i>
Hands	87%	80%
Property Items	7%	8%
Threats	10%	13%
Verbal Abuse	8%	12%
Telephones	4%	9%
Other Items	5%	5%
Knives	2%	3%
Firearms	2%	1%
TOTAL	1,138	373

NOTE: Percentages based upon multiple responses. Cases with missing information not included.

Victim and Suspect Injury

In both samples, approximately one-half (42% *before* centralization and 50% *after* centralization) of the victims were injured during the incident (Figure 3). However, there was a difference in the proportion of suspects who were injured, with less than one in ten (7%) injured *before* centralization, compared to almost one in four (24%) *after* centralization. This difference could either be a reflection of more violent incidents, or more likely, better documentation on the part of deputies. Of the victims who were injured, 15 percent *before* centralization and 16 percent *after* centralization received some type of medical treatment at the scene (not shown).

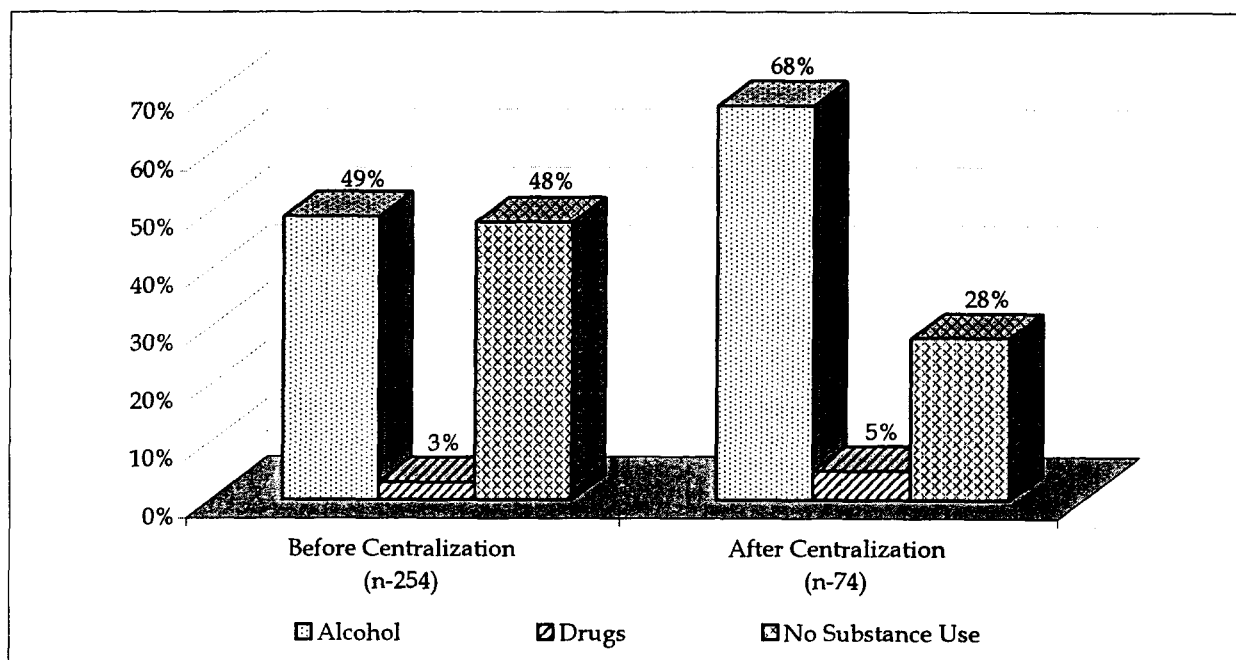
Figure 3
VICTIM AND SUSPECT INJURY
San Diego County Sheriff's Department, 1996 - 1999



Victim and Suspect Consumption of Alcohol and Other Drugs

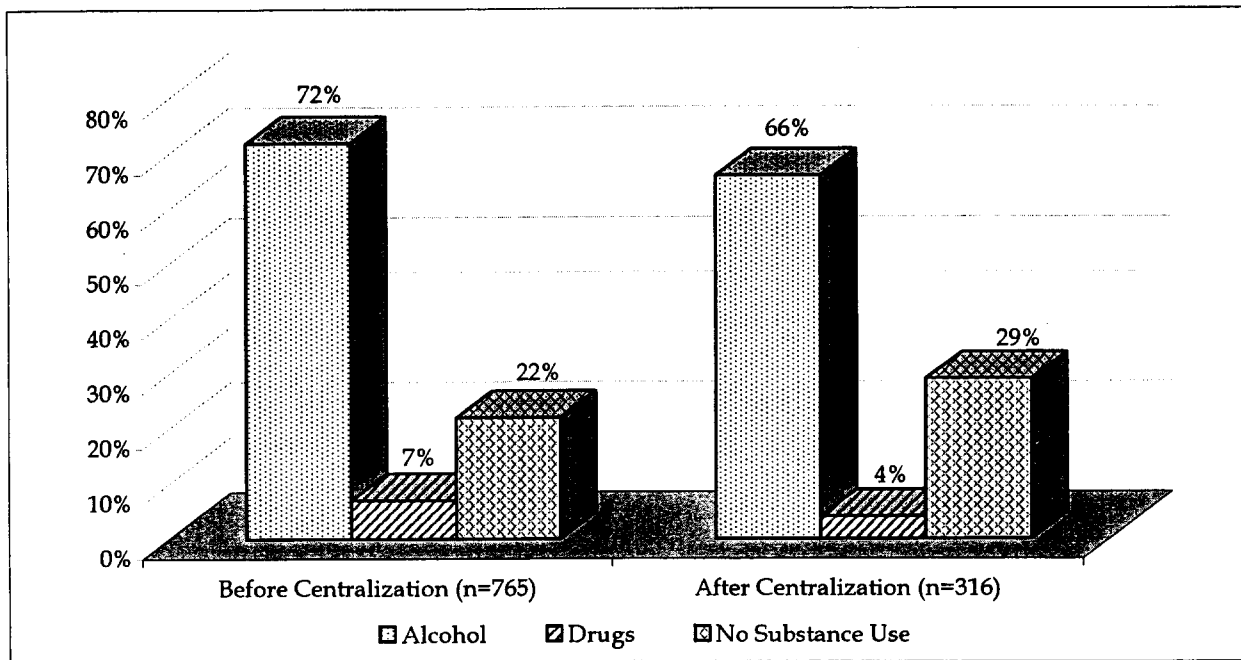
Information regarding the victim's use of alcohol and other drugs was only available for one out of five arrest reports. Documentation was better for the suspect and improved in the second time period, with two-thirds (65%) of the *before* centralization cases and over four-fifths (82%) containing information in the *after* centralization group (not shown). With the understanding that missing information could alter the pattern of findings, Figure 4 presents the percent of victims in both samples who were reported having used alcohol or drugs prior to the abuse incident. *Before* centralization, approximately one-half were documented as having consumed some alcohol, compared to over two-thirds (68%) *after* centralization, and three percent and five percent, respectively, had used drugs. Presumably, the higher proportion is associated with improved documentation rather than more victims abusing substances. Part of the training for the field deputies involved alcohol and drug use recognition and deputies are encouraged to ask if substances are used on a regular basis.

Figure 4
VICTIM ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUG USE
San Diego County Sheriff's Department, 1996 - 1999



As Figure 5 shows, two-thirds or more of suspects were described as having consumed alcohol prior to the most recent incident in both time periods (72% *before* centralization and 66% *after* centralization) and less than one in ten (7% and 4%, respectively) had used some type of drug. In addition, one percent of each sample was documented in the arrest report as showing some signs of use.

Figure 5
SUSPECT ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUG USE
San Diego County Sheriff's Department, 1996 - 1999



Mutually Combative Situations

According to penal code 13701, as of 1986, dual arrests are discouraged, and responding officers should attempt to determine who is the primary aggressor during the preliminary investigation. The primary aggressor is defined as the person who is most significant, rather than the first aggressor. For the *before* centralization sample, the deputy was unable to determine who the primary aggressor was in six percent of the cases. For the *after* centralization cases, this percentage was slightly smaller, at four percent (not shown).

Children

Prior to the special unit, 49 percent of the sample cases had documentation of children witnessing the abuse. After specialization, that figure rose to 77 percent. Before the unit, children witnessed 65 percent of the domestic violence cases that were tracked, according to the 575 that had any information included regarding the presence of children. *After* centralization, approximately one-half (53%) of the 298 cases that included this information noted that any children were witnesses. The unit supervisors suggested that these numbers appear misleading because patrol is following protocol and allowing unit detectives to do follow-up investigation. Also, all cases with children present result in cross reports to Children's Services.

Information regarding whether or not the victim was pregnant was only available for 53 of the *before* centralization cases and 16 of the *after* centralization cases. The percentages that were pregnant in these two samples were 80 and 81, respectively (not shown).

Relationship History: Type and Length of Relationship

As Figure 6 shows, the majority of victims and suspects were in some type of current relationship at the time of the incident, with 47 percent and 42 percent married to the other individual, and 38 percent and 36 percent in a dating relationship. The rest of the victims were separated or divorced from the suspect or had previously dated him/her. Similar to socio-demographic data, the nature of the relationship between victim and suspect would not be expected to change in the two time periods. They are presented for descriptive purposes, not for comparison based upon specialization.

As Table 2 shows, almost one-half (49%) of the *before* centralization sample had been together from one to five years. This length of time in the relationship was also the mode for the *after* centralization sample (43%). Approximately one-third (32%) of the *before* centralization sample and 40 percent of the *after* centralization sample were together longer than five years.

Figure 6
VICTIM-SUSPECT RELATIONSHIP TYPE
San Diego County Sheriff's Department, 1996 - 1999

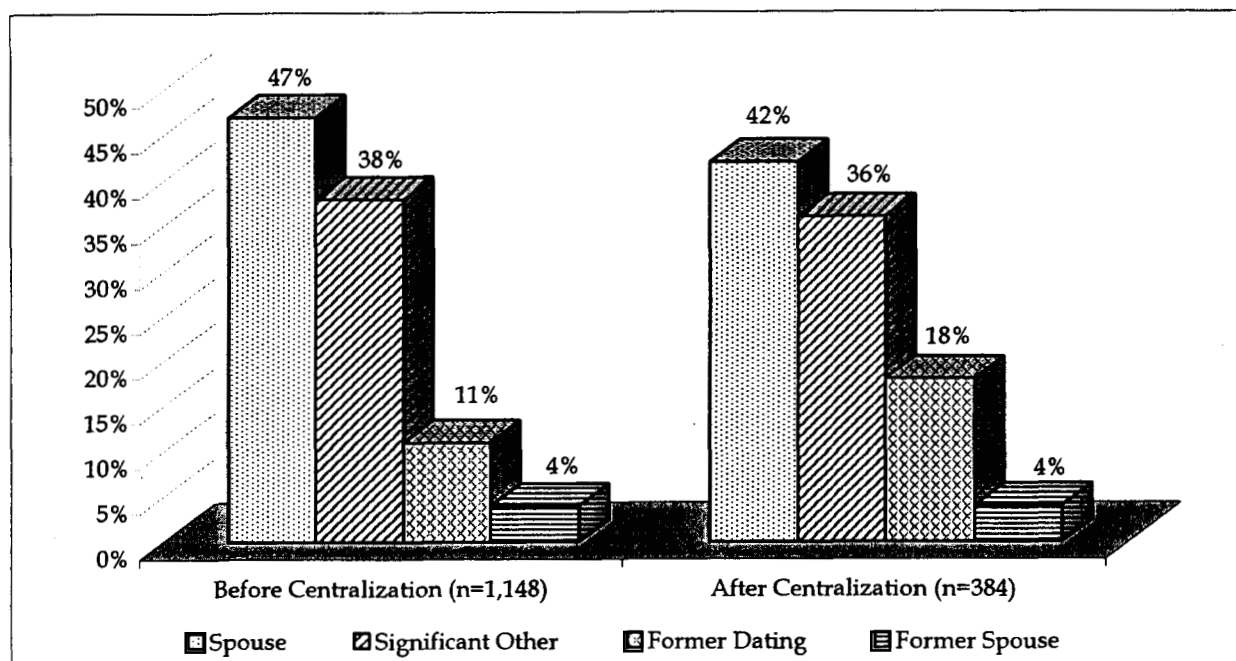


Table 2
LENGTH OF VICTIM-SUSPECT RELATIONSHIP
San Diego County Sheriff's Department, 1996 - 1999

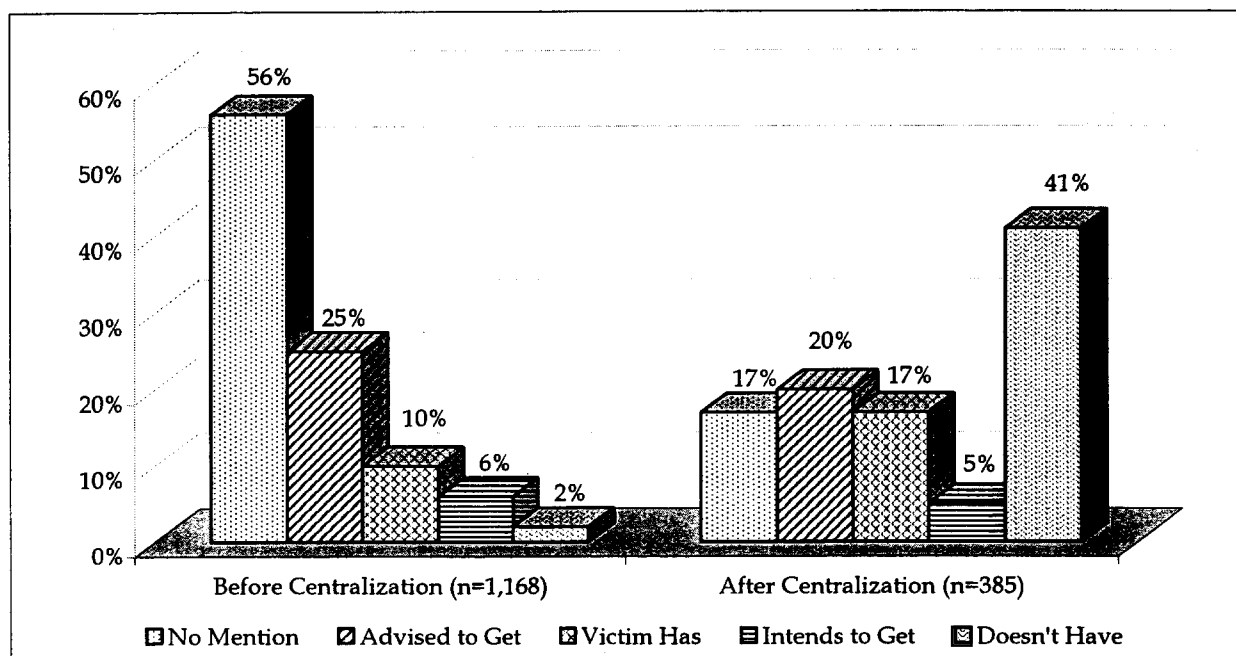
	<i>Before Centralization</i>	<i>After Centralization</i>
Less than one year	19%	17%
One to five years	49%	43%
Six to ten years	16%	23%
Over ten years	16%	17%
TOTAL	752	340

NOTE: Cases with missing information not included.

Restraining Order

For both samples, information was collected regarding whether or not the victim had a restraining order, intended to get one, or was advised to do so. If there was no mention of a restraining order, this was also documented during data collection. As Figure 7 shows, the percentage of cases with no mention of a restraining order dropped considerably (56% to 17%) after centralization. Correspondingly, 41 percent of the *after* cases indicated that the victim did not have an order, compared to only two percent (documented) before centralization.

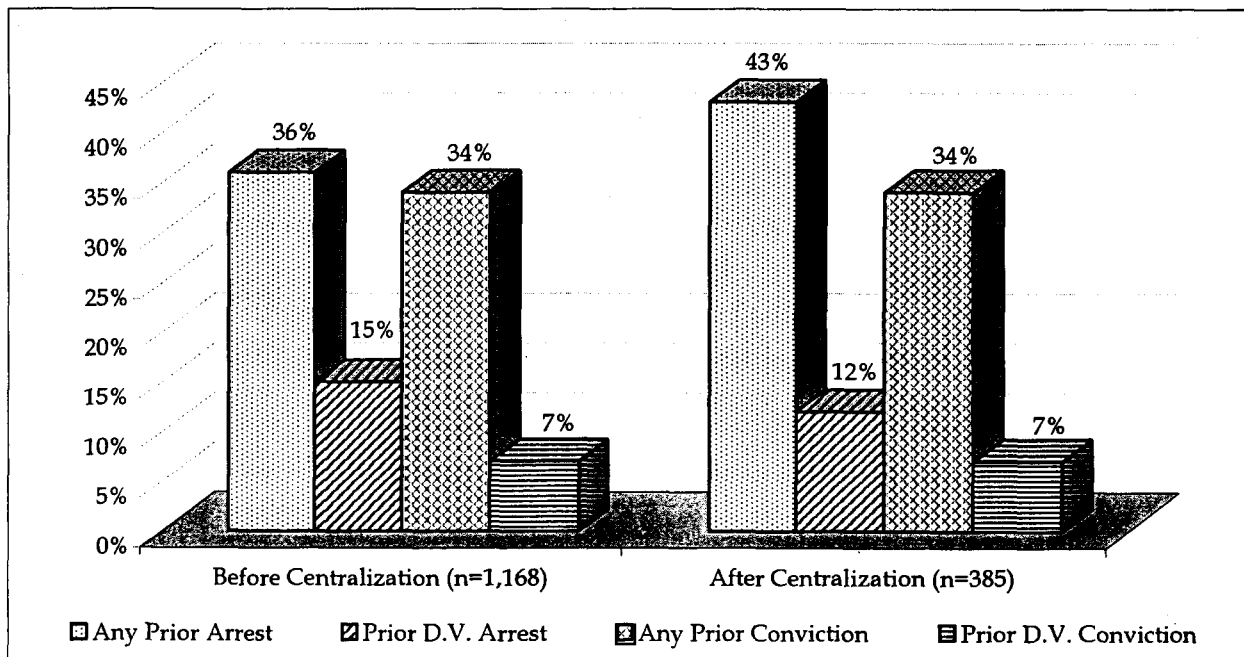
Figure 7
RESTRAINING ORDER STATUS
San Diego County Sheriff's Department, 1996 - 1999



Suspect Criminal History

With the approval of the sheriff's department, researchers examined the criminal history of the suspect. As Figure 8 shows, more than one-third of suspects *before* centralization (36%), as well as *after* centralization (43%), had at least one previous arrest, and 15 percent and 12 percent, respectively, had a prior arrest for a domestic violence-related offense. Of those who were ever arrested, the average number of arrests was 3.1 for the *before* centralization sample and 3.2 for the *after* centralization sample (not shown). One-third of the samples (34% in both years) had a previous conviction in the criminal justice system, and seven percent in both samples had a prior conviction for domestic violence. The average number of convictions for both groups was 2.4 and 2.6, respectively (not shown).

Figure 8
SUSPECT PRIOR CRIMINAL HISTORY
 San Diego County Sheriff's Department, 1996 - 1999



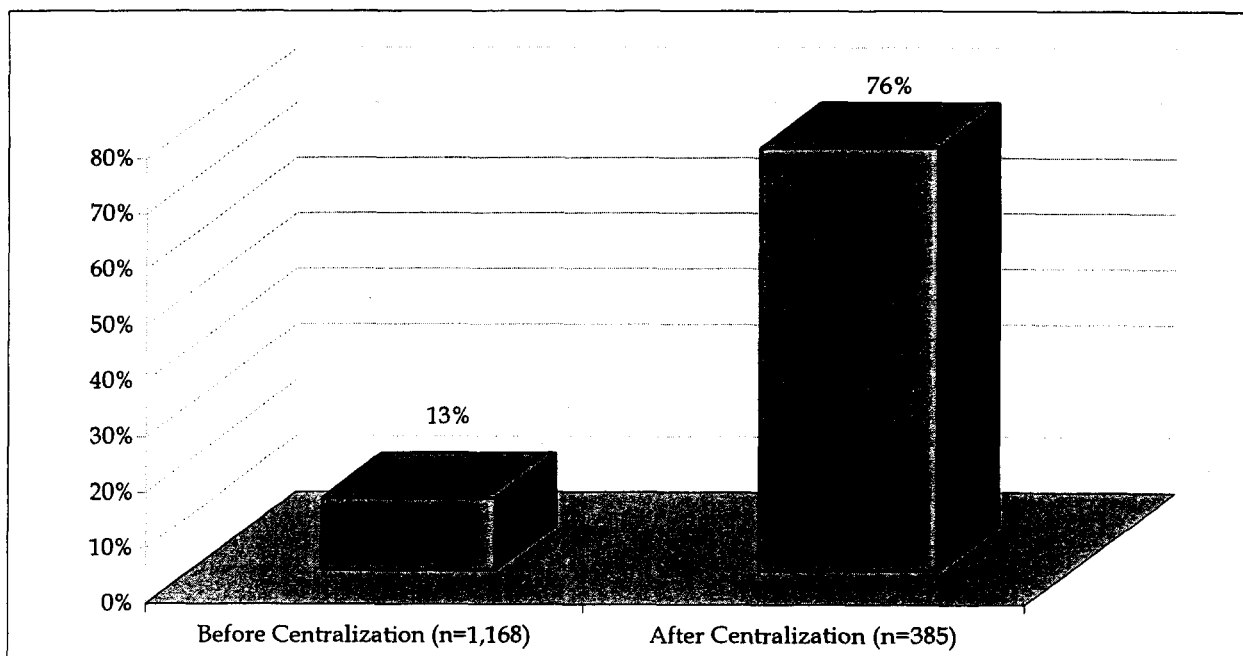
Law Enforcement Investigation of Prior Abuse

According to the sheriff's department protocol, deputies are to consider whether the suspect in an incident has a prior history of violence or arrests or citations for domestic violence. For the *before* centralization sample, whether or not there was a history was documented for 753, or 64 percent of the 1,168 cases. In 84 percent of these, there was a prior history. For the *after* centralization sample, this piece of information was documented for 349 of the 385 cases or 91 percent, with 71 percent having some type of domestic violence history between the two individuals (not shown). The improved documentation of abuse history (from 64% to 91%) may be related to unit detectives taking the time to examine prior reports.

Domestic Violence Supplemental

In 1996, deputies were encouraged, but not required, to complete a domestic violence supplemental form regarding the incident to collect additional information important to domestic violence investigations. With the initiation of the grant project, the sheriff's protocol required the supplement. As expected, the number of cases that involved the completion of a domestic violence supplemental increased dramatically over time. *Before* centralization, a supplemental was completed in only 13 percent of all cases. *After* centralization, this percentage had increased to over three-quarters (76%) (Figure 9).

Figure 9
PERCENT OF CASES WITH A DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SUPPLEMENTAL
San Diego County Sheriff's Department, 1996 - 1999



Suspect Arrest

Before centralization, one-third (33%) of the suspects were arrested at the scene, with an additional two percent arrested within 24 hours. *After* centralization, this figure had increased to 42 percent arrested at the scene, with an additional ten percent arrested at a later time (not shown). So, overall, cases resulting in an arrest rose from 35 percent to 52 percent with centralization. As Table 3 shows, the most common highest arrest charge for suspects in both time periods was for penal code 273.5, inflicting corporal injury on a spouse or cohabitant (50% *before* centralization and 49% *after* centralization). Other individuals were arrested for one of the other 43 sections of the penal code designated in the 1998 domestic violence protocol as potential domestic violence charges. Included in the "other" category are violating a restraining order, robbery, and brandishing a weapon.

Table 3
HIGHEST CHARGE AT ARREST
San Diego County Sheriff's Department, 1996 - 1999

	<i>Before</i> Centralization	<i>After</i> Centralization
Inflict corporal injury on spouse/cohabitant	50%	49%
Battery	14%	20%
Other domestic violence related charges	10%	13%
Battery with serious bodily injury	10%	8%
Assault with a deadly weapon	6%	3%
Terrorist threats	3%	3%
Malicious destruction of a telephone	2%	3%
TOTAL	410	201

NOTE: Cases with missing information not included.

As Table 4 shows, the most common reason for not arresting a suspect at the scene in both samples was because he or she was not present at the time the deputies arrived (56% and 79%). Over time, the proportion of cases with no arrest because it was against the victim's wishes declined from almost one-quarter (23%) to less than one in ten (7%). This is directly associated with the sheriff's protocol that suggests that the wishes of the victim should not influence the decision to arrest.

Table 4
REASON FOR NOT ARRESTING A SUSPECT
San Diego County Sheriff's Department, 1996 - 1999

	<i>Before Centralization</i>	<i>After Centralization</i>
Suspect not present	56%	79%
Verbal abuse only	2%	4%
Victim wishes	23%	7%
Mutually combative	6%	2%
No visible injury	13%	3%
Officer discretion	4%	5%
Other reason	2%	1%
TOTAL	721	218

NOTE: Cases with missing information not included.

Evidence Collection

Before centralization, some type of evidence was collected for 44 percent of the cases; *after* centralization, it was collected for 40 percent (not shown). As Table 5 shows, the most common evidence collection technique was taking photographs (73% *before* centralization and 83% *after* centralization). Slightly less than 20 percent in both years involved other techniques, including taking fingerprints, hair, stain, and blood samples.

Table 5
EVIDENCE COLLECTION
San Diego County Sheriff's Department, 1996 - 1999

	<i>Before</i> Centralization	<i>After</i> Centralization
Photographs	73%	83%
Other steps	18%	16%
Confiscate weapons/tools	14%	10%
Victim-witness statement	9%	7%
Domestic violence paperwork	9%	7%
Assess property damage	7%	2%
TOTAL	508	155

NOTE: Percentages based upon multiple responses. Cases with missing information not included.

Providing Information to the Victim

According to law enforcement protocol in both time periods, responding deputies are directed to provide all victims or alleged victims with the following written information: phone number of a shelter or community service agency, statements explaining procedures for criminal prosecution, how to file for a restraining order, and how to file a civil suit. For both time periods, it appeared that deputies were appropriately following protocol, with 93 percent providing some type of information *before* centralization, and 81 percent doing so *after* centralization. This decrease may be related to the fact that deputies are aware that the unit deputies will be contacting all victims and, therefore, placed less emphasis on completing this task. In both time periods, a domestic violence information sheet was provided most frequently, to approximately four in five victims (81% of both samples). Other things provided to the victim at the scene included a contact to receive crisis intervention, crime case information, an explanation of domestic violence laws, and transportation information (not shown).

Case Outcome

Of the original 1,186 cases *before* centralization, 471 or 40 percent were referred to the prosecutor. Of these, 53 percent were filed, 38 percent were rejected, and 9 percent were not filed (Figure 10). *After* centralization, a greater percentage of the 385 cases was referred for prosecution (50%) and approximately the same percentage was filed (52%). The highest charge filed on for both time periods was inflicting corporal injury on a spouse or cohabitant (i.e., 273.5 p.c.) (46% *before* centralization and 41% *after* centralization) (not shown).

Figure 10
CASE PROSECUTION OUTCOME
San Diego County Sheriff's Department, 1996 - 1999

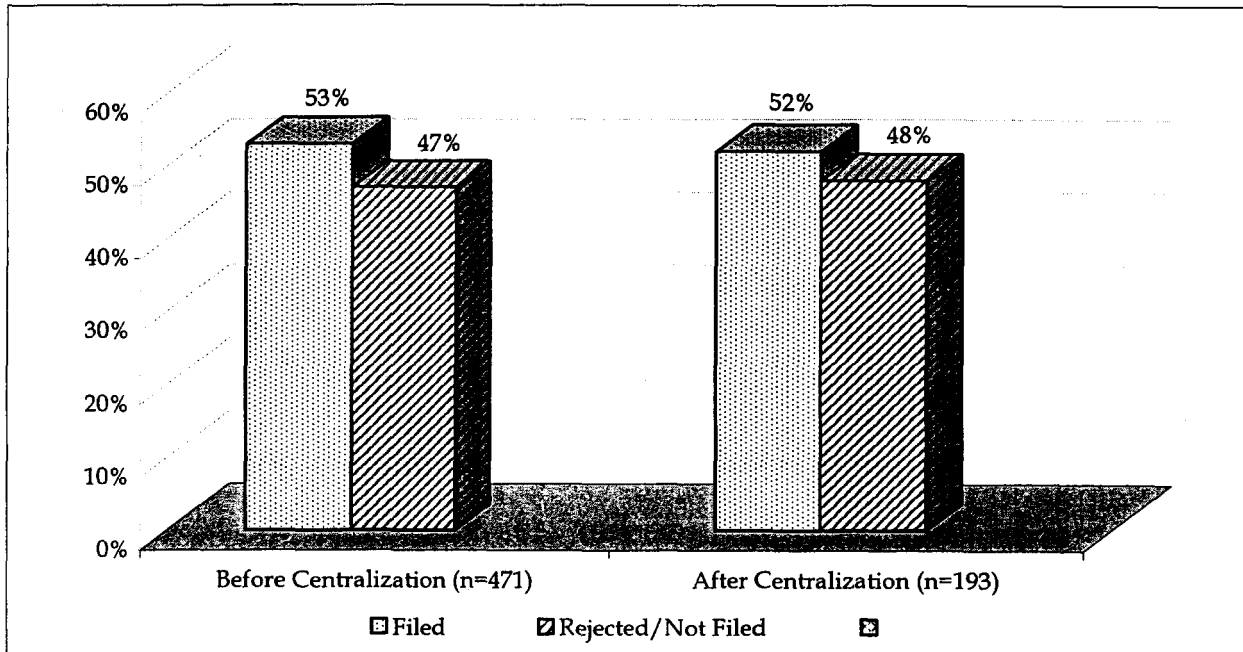
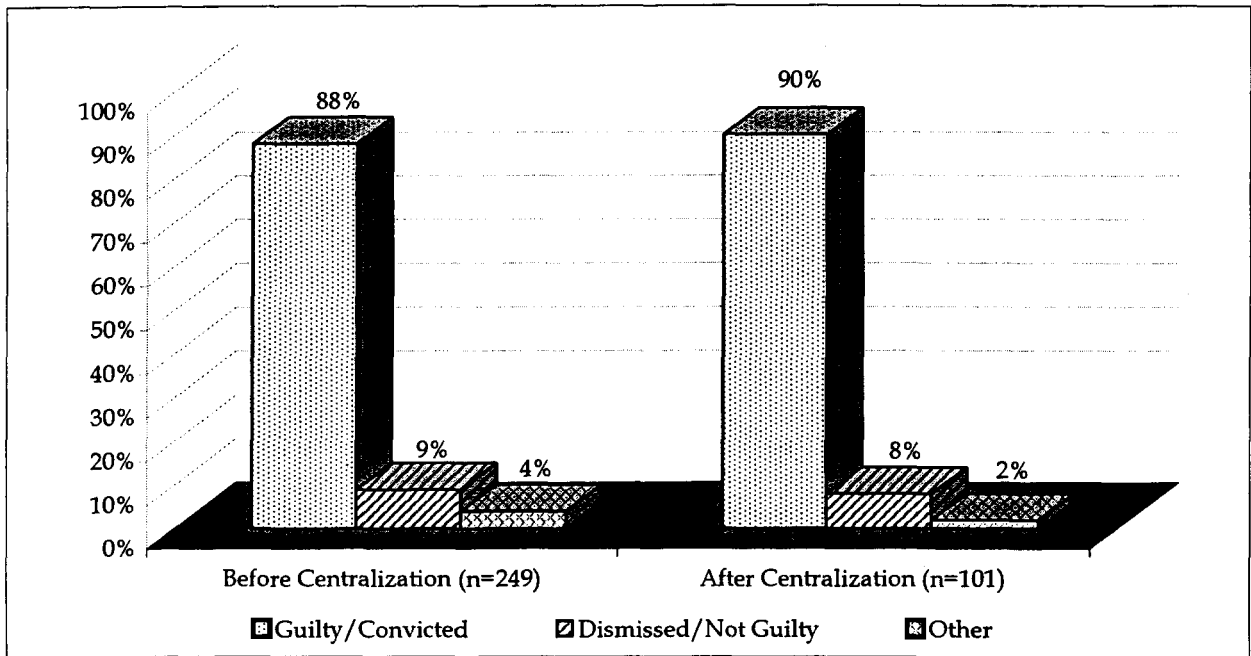


Figure 11 presents the case disposition for the 249 cases filed *before* centralization and the 101 cases *after* centralization. Overall, almost nine in ten suspects were convicted or pled guilty in both time periods.

Figure 11
CASE DISPOSITION
San Diego County Sheriff's Department, 1996 - 1999



The most common sentence for those convicted was probation, followed by serving time in jail (Table 6). Other obligations placed on the offender in both time periods included paying a fine or restitution, attending a domestic violence class, or completing work furlough. Five percent of the offenders in the *before* centralization sample and two percent in the *after* centralization sample were sentenced to state prison.

Table 6
OFFENDER SENTENCES
San Diego County Sheriff's Department, 1996 - 1999

	<i>Before</i> Centralization	<i>After</i> Centralization
Probation	85%	82%
Jail	71%	68%
Fine	62%	80%
Domestic Violence Class	26%	22%
Prison	5%	2%
Restitution	2%	1%
Work Furlough	<1%	15%
TOTAL	220	91

NOTE: Percentages based upon multiple responses.

Surprisingly, although 49 percent or 98 of the 202 arrests involved felony charges of inflicting corporal injury on a spouse (273.5 P.C.), only seven defendants were convicted for this charge. More important, no one convicted of this charge was sentenced to a domestic violence treatment program.

Level of Documentation

As the previously presented data show, there was variability among the amount of information available for the various data elements and across the two samples. As Table 7 shows, the level of documentation increased to the greatest degree *after* centralization in terms of the suspect's use of alcohol and other drugs, the length of the relationship between the victim and suspect, the suspect's prior history, the presence of children at the scene, and whether or not the victim had a restraining order.

Table 7
LEVEL OF DOCUMENTATION
San Diego County Sheriff's Department, 1996 - 1999

	<i>Before</i> Centralization	<i>After</i> Centralization
Victim Ethnicity	100%	100%
Victim Injury	100%	100%
Mutually Combative Situation	100%	92%
Suspect Ethnicity	99%	100%
Presence of a Weapon	99%	100%
Victim-Suspect Relationship	98%	100%
Suspect Injury	98%	53%
Suspect Alcohol and Other Drug Use	65%	82%
Length of Victim-Suspect Relationship	64%	88%
Suspect Prior History	64%	91%
Presence of Children	49%	77%
Victim Restraining Order	44%	83%
Victim Alcohol and Other Drug Use	22%	19%
Victim Pregnant	5%	4%

The results of the tracking study that examined the management of domestic violence calls before a special unit and cases subsequent to the unit implementation indicate that the special unit did have an impact on how cases were managed at time of arrest. The most significant changes occurred in the documentation in the reports taken by deputies. Indications of injury of victims were more likely to be noted in the incident report after the unit was developed. In addition, more victims were documented as having used alcohol. Presumably, this change is due to improved reporting of use, not an actual increase in use. Cases reporting having children witnessing the violence also proportionately increased after the unit implementation, suggesting improved documentation on the part of the field deputies. In over one-half of the cases prior to the unit, there was no mention of restraining orders in the reports. Following implementation, that percentage dropped to 17 percent. Perhaps the most compelling indicator of improved practices, at least in respect to documentation, is that of the inclusion of a supplemental report. Prior to implementation, only 13 percent of the reports included the supplemental. Following the unit and the subsequent training of the deputies, 76 percent of the reports had a supplemental. This tool is considered to be important for complete documentation of a case since it requires the deputy to indicate information about the presence of children, substance use, weapons, injury, criminal history, and victim statements. It is presumed that improved case documentation contributes to the likelihood of prosecution, although this was not specifically examined. Given the improvement in reporting practices, one might also expect a change in other practices as well. This was indeed the case, with the percentage of arrests increasing from 35 percent to 52 percent. Arrests can be considered one measure of offender accountability. Of interest also are the proportionate changes in the reasons an arrest did not take place. Prior the unit, 56 percent of the cases did not involve arrest because the suspect was not present. After the unit, that percent rose to 79 percent. Cases involving "no arrest" due to victims' wishes declined from 23 percent to seven percent, consistent with the protocol. No arrest for the reason that there was no visible injury changed from 13 percent to three percent. Mutual combat as a reason dropped from six percent of the reasons to two percent, also consistent with the protocol.

Objectives of the Sheriff's project included an increase in arrests and prosecutions based on specialized expertise and knowledge dedicated to one crime type and extensive training of field deputies. The tracking study demonstrates that these objectives were met through improved documentation of reports, more arrests, and more referrals to prosecution. Additionally, overall statistics for the Sheriff's department support these conclusions. In 1997, prior to the unit, there were 1,392 arrests recorded for domestic violence. By the end of 1998, that number rose to 1,485, a seven percent increase. In 1999, arrests involving domestic violence numbered 1,541, an 11 percent increase since 1997. These increases are of particular interest since **reported** incidents of domestic violence declined in these time periods. The unit's lead sergeant believes that these efforts contributed to making offenders accountable and keeping victims safe from harm. The following sections present the results of conversations with victims regarding their feelings about how the Sheriff's personnel responded to their situation.

VICTIM INTERVIEWS

A goal of the sheriff's centralized unit was to provide support to victims and assist them in finding appropriate services and resources in the community. The Advisory Group was tasked with determining the means to address this objective, given limited resources. After a great deal of discussion, it was decided that the researchers, with the help of the detectives in the unit, would call the victims and ask relevant questions about the response by the field deputies as well as the unit detectives. The researchers used the data tracker system to randomly select cases entered into the database between July 26 and September 11, 1999. Ten cases for each detective were selected for a total of 137 cases from a total of 393 during the time period. A number of steps were taken to ensure the victims' safety. Prior to being contacted by the researchers, it was decided that the unit staff would first call the victims to explain the purpose and nature of the interviews. Detectives were provided with a script to use that assured the victims that their participation was voluntary, their information would be considered confidential, and that their willingness to participate would not affect their case. Detectives also asked if there was more than one phone line in the household and, if so, was there one that was preferred. Also, victims were asked the best time of day to call, and their sense of safety was assessed.

A total of 71 victims were contacted by the unit detectives. The remainder of the 137 either could not be contacted, because of an incorrect or disconnected phone number, repeated attempts failed, or the victim said no to the interview. Of the 71 victims contacted, 65 percent or 46 completed interviews with SANDAG researchers. When researchers contacted the victim, they identified themselves as such, reminded the victim that he or she had previously agreed to be interviewed, and reminded them of the purpose of the interview. Researchers again assessed victim privacy, sense of safety, and appropriateness of the time. Ground rules were explained, including the following:

- Code words were defined if he or she had to hang up before an interview could be completed.
- It was suggested that children should not be within earshot of the interview.
- If any questions made the victim uncomfortable, he or she didn't have to answer.
- The victim could stop the interview at any time.
- Victims were reminded of the incident in question through information gained from the crime report.

Issues addressed during the phone interviews included victim perceptions of the demeanor and behavior of the field deputies who first responded to the incident as well as actions taken by the domestic violence unit detectives. The following findings describe the results of the 46 interviews. Percentages must be interpreted within the context of the small number of interviews. Two female researchers conducted all 46 interviews. To allow time for the detectives to follow up with victims, the victims were contacted two weeks following the date of the incident.

Since this research effort was not intended as an impact evaluation, the purpose of the victim interviews was not to assess victim perceptions before and after unit implementation, but as a means to incorporate victim voices into the conversation. There was a great deal of discussion among the Advisory Group members about the importance of inclusion of victims in the study. The results were intended only to get victim opinions about how their cases were managed and assist the unit with areas that might suggest a need for training. Also, the Advisory Group members felt that this approach could be used on a periodic basis in the future as a barometer of how victims feel they are being treated by the department's deputies. Given limited time and resources, it was decided to access victims through the unit detectives who had already interacted with them. Obviously, such an approach is subject to some distortion. Despite this limitation and the small sample size, the results provide interesting, descriptive material about victims' perceptions.

Findings

- Nearly three-quarters (74%) of the victims were females and 26 percent were males.
- Most of the victims were White (76%); 11 percent were Hispanic; 7 percent reported themselves as Black or African-American, and the remainder were in other ethnic groups.
- Field deputies expended considerable time at the location, based upon victims' reports that over one-half remained at the scene 30 minutes or more. Over one-third (36%) of the deputies were at the location 15 minutes to half an hour.
- About one-quarter (26%) of the victims reported that just one deputy responded; 57 percent stated two deputies; and 18 percent of the cases involved three or four deputies at the scene.
- Sixty-three percent (63%) of the victims reported having received written materials about available services from the deputy, such as a pamphlet. Nearly 80 percent of the victims said that the deputy explained the content of the information; however, only 38 percent said they used the information provided.
- Of those who did use the information (11 victims), most used the data about restraining orders, information on rights as a citizen, and referral information for counseling services. In addition, over 60 percent found the information helpful. The following comments demonstrate how it was helpful:

"It gave me a chance to contact somebody if I needed to. But they won't give me one (Temporary Restraining Order) because he's disabled and in a nursing home right now. The day before, he was given a prescription for anxiety and it made him worse."

"I didn't know a lot of information about domestic violence, like about restraining orders. It was nice. I was nervous and upset when they came here; by the time they left, I was calm and smiling."

"I felt they were extremely professional and laid out all the options on how things could go."

- When asked if there was anything the deputy could have done to make the information more useful, the majority (93%) said “no”.
- Just over one-quarter of the victims (13) asked the deputy to do something in particular. Some asked that the suspect be arrested, and a few asked that the offender *not* be arrested. Others had practical requests such as transportation, moving belongings, calling someone, or making the offender leave the property.
- Of the 13 victims who responded to the question about if they were satisfied with the actions of the deputy, over one-half indicated having been either very or somewhat satisfied.
- Additional responses included the following:

“He was here fast enough and he handled it pretty good.”

“They were concerned and wanted to give her a ride to the hospital. I was very upset.”

“He went over and above what was expected. His concern seemed genuine. I didn’t expect that to happen. I didn’t know what domestic violence was until he showed me; it’s not just physical.”

“I felt he was very professional in responding to everything.”

- Some stated that they were not satisfied and gave the following reasons.

“I told him not to take pictures, but he said that was how he interpreted the law and what he had to do.”

“We could have worked things out. I just wanted her to leave. If she wasn’t arrested, we could still be together today. But now she’s mad and I don’t know if we’ll get together. They just look at domestic violence as domestic violence and one of them is going to go.”

“...because she didn’t hear me. She didn’t listen. She had her mind up when I told her there was some contact. She questioned my daughter about whether he had ever hurt her.”

Only 20 percent or nine of the victims reported that there were guns or knives present at the scene where the incident occurred. In all cases, deputies were told of their presence and seized them in five cases.

Given a Likert scale with five levels of agreement, victims were asked to rate their perception of agreement with several statements that follow.

- Over 80 percent of the victims agreed that the responding deputy was very attentive to their needs.

- Over 80 percent of the victims agreed that the responding deputy was very patient.
- Over 70 percent of the victims agreed that the responding deputy acted in a non-judgmental way.
- Over 70 percent of the victims agreed that the deputy who responded understood what they were feeling.
- Over 70 percent of the victims agreed that they felt confident in the deputy's ability to help them.
- Overall, about three-quarters (74%) of the victims stated that they were comfortable with how the responding deputy handled their case. Verbatim examples include the following:

"...because he listened and explained things to me. He was very friendly and understood everything."

"Sometimes police officers are very arrogant, and she was not at all. She was basically counseling me and she was good at it."

"He was really nice and kind. He talked me through a lot of it. He showed compassion. I was surprised."

"I felt very safe. He was very understanding and listened to everything. He assured me that everything was going to be OK, and nothing else was going to happen that evening. He also helped me and explained about the TRO."

"They saw what the situation was and took appropriate action - taking my husband to the hospital. They realized he was too sick to go to jail."

"...because it was a difficult thing to unravel ... a male victim and a female persecutor ... and he did it in a very conscious way."

"Everything was out in the open. I don't know, it's better to report the thing. He was human. He wasn't a jerk or nothing. He was all right. He listened."

"He listened to both sides and, even though she was crying, they believed what really happened and both officers came to the conclusion together that she was at fault. They understood things happen and in California women have certain rights and they didn't even bring that to the table."

"...because he just told me why I don't have to put up with this and nobody has the right to do this to me. He was really nice."

- Those victims who indicated that they were not comfortable with the responding deputy/deputies (10) held somewhat different views:

"...because at the time, nothing was explained to me, what they were doing, and nobody told me about 'no contact order'."

"...because I thought they would do more, but they didn't. They didn't take him away."

"They were jerks. The way they handled the arrest and everything. It was a mess. Their attitudes – well, one of them anyway."

"I was asked to go out and meet them in the driveway and then it got blown out of proportion. I learned a lesson myself. I couldn't make him understand this was a mistake and then the deputy got upset."

"It wrecked everything between me and her."

The next set of questions referred to the victims' perceptions of the follow up actions taken by the detectives in the specialized unit and were similar to the questions asked about the field deputies. Fourteen (14) of the victims indicated that they had no contact with the unit detective. This seems odd in that all 46 victims were to have been contacted by the detectives and told of the nature of the interview. It is possible that not all victims were actually contacted by the unit detectives for appropriate reasons. All domestic violence cases are reviewed by the unit sergeant, but not all are assigned to the detectives. Results pertain to only the 32 victims contacted.

Detective Actions

- Ninety-one percent (91%) of the victims stated that they were first contacted by telephone. The remaining victims were contacted in person.
- Just over one-half (53%) reported that the detective provided helpful information to them. And nearly one-half (47%) said they did not.
- When asked what types of information were provided, the following types were noted in order of frequency: information about obtaining a protective or restraining order, information on rights as a citizen, information about counseling services, and information about the citizen arrest process.
- Over one-half (59%) of the victims said they had used the information. Types of information *used* was the same that was provided above; that is, information about obtaining a protective order, information about their rights as a citizen, and information about counseling services.
- Those who thought the information was helpful had the following additional comments:

"I didn't have a clue about the process and she gave me a time frame on everything that was going to happen."

"He penetrated into the details and dynamics of the situation, and that was very helpful. The advice was good and in-depth."

"She explained information about my choices and the options for going about prosecution."

"It reminded me that I have rights and things to live for. Next time, by the time they respond, it might be too late."

- Similar to the previous findings about the field deputy, over 80 percent of the victims thought the detective was attentive to their needs, was very patient, understood what they were feeling, acted in a non-judgmental way, and felt confident in the detective's ability to help them.
- Over three-quarters of the victims (76%) felt that, overall, they were comfortable with how the detective handled their case. Examples of corroborative comments included the following:

"She was very helpful. She was the only person I was able to find out how the law works, and find out my feelings, and she was the only one that listened to my side of the story. She asked if I was frightened or fearful and then she talked to both of us. I was in the dark and my whole world crumbled and she made me feel like I was a person and explained my rights and the way the law works."

"In regard to the police report - it normally takes two weeks to obtain a copy and my court date was within ten days. When I spoke with the detective, she said she could expedite the process. I received the report within 72 hours. In court, it becomes a verbal tug of war about who did what. With the police report, I was able to obtain a TRO. Most victims don't know this."

"He just reinforced and told me I was doing the right things. He gave me his phone number if I needed help. It was a good experience."

"I felt that he was giving the information that I needed, not just what I wanted to hear."

Although the results of the interviews with victims represent only a small number, the process suggests that, overall, victims were satisfied with the services provided by the sheriff's department, both as first responders and follow up by unit detectives. The advisory group felt very strongly that the voices of victims are critical in determining how services are being received and what areas of service warrant change or improvement. The interviews also demonstrate the range of emotions felt by victims, such as fear, anger, and confusion; about the law, and their rights. This highlights the importance of the role of the first responder, both to ensure victim safety and advise victims of their options. This requires extensive and continuous training for field deputies. In the course of the grant, the sergeant developed an "atta boy" commendation for deputies who wrote complete and accurate reports, advised victims appropriately, and took some extraordinary action. The certificates are provided to the station captains for the deputy's personnel file. Also, as a result of the findings from the victim interviews, the sergeant developed and instituted the sending of postcards to victims a couple of weeks after the incident. The purpose of the postcard is to reassure victims that the sheriff's

department is available to assist them in finding resources or understanding what happens after arrest with respect to court proceedings.

A future study in another department could conduct 'before' and 'after' interviews to address the actual impact of a different way of handling domestic violence cases with respect to victim perceptions. Internally, law enforcement agencies might consider conducting similar types of follow up with victims after the cases have closed as a means to monitor how victims feel about their services. Such efforts, of course, require commitment by the administration as well as the resources to carry out the tasks.

RESEARCH QUESTION: What are the nature and scope of coordination and collaboration with other agencies providing services in the domestic violence area?

To answer this question, research staff talked with the supervisors in the domestic violence unit at the monthly advisory meeting, as well as on other occasions, reviewed the unit's monthly status reports, and talked informally with members of the domestic violence community in San Diego County.

To place the efforts of the specialized unit in context, it is important to acknowledge that San Diego County has had a long history of collaboration, not just with respect to domestic violence, but within the criminal justice community as a whole. Administrators and managers of different agencies talk with one another. Problems are addressed, not in a vacuum, but by bringing individuals together to discuss the issues and reach consensus on a solution. Violence in the home is recognized as a problem that affects children and families. Agencies must pool their expertise and resources to promote the safety of victims, yet ensure that offenders are held accountable. No one agency can take this sole responsibility. Practitioners in San Diego County practice these principles.

The sergeant of the sheriff's specialized unit sits as a member of the San Diego Domestic Violence Council and took her turn as chair of the law enforcement sub-committee. The larger council has been in existence for over 20 years and includes representation from the justice agencies, medical community, social services, victim advocacy, and the community. In 1998, members of the council developed a domestic violence protocol that was subsequently approved by all ten law enforcement agencies in the region, as well as the prosecution and the judiciary, and victims' services agencies. The sergeant updated the protocol for the sheriff's department by framing it within the regional domestic violence protocol.

Also, the sergeant serves on a regional death review committee that examines all domestic homicides to determine if any warning signs about the participants should have been apparent to justice officials. With extended funding received by the sheriff's department, the sergeant assisted in the development of a Domestic Violence Response Team, or DVRT, that was piloted in a couple of contract cities under the sheriff's jurisdiction and patterned after the Sexual Assault Response Team (SART). This team, composed of a deputy, a social worker, and a medical technician, responds to calls involving sexual assault and conducts triage with the victim and the children. During the grant period, the sergeant also headed up the annual fund raising event for the SART team.

During the course of the grant period, domestic violence detectives participated in meetings of various groups and sub-committees of the larger domestic violence council. Some of these included the teen relationship violence sub-committee, the medical sub-committee, the elder abuse sub-committee, and the teen summit. In the period of the evaluation, all staff members of the domestic violence unit participated either in providing training and informational seminars to community groups or attending such events.

MEASURING WHAT MATTERS

A conundrum of the field of domestic violence research is to determine what works to prevent, reduce, and end the violence. On a less grand, but no less important, scale, is the question about whether a specialized team in a law enforcement agency is more effective than a decentralized approach. This research effort, although it was not an impact evaluation, suggests that specialization increased the number of arrests, filings for prosecution, and documentation on crime reports. The Advisory Group of practitioners from diverse fields spent considerable time discussing what measures should be used to determine the effectiveness of efforts to reduce the violence. Although arrest and prosecution were the goals of the sheriff's grant, they are not always the optimal outcomes, according to members of the advisory group. Throughout the course of the project, time was set aside at each meeting to discuss "what matters."

Public agencies, including law enforcement, must be accountable to the public. More governmental entities are demanding "proof" that certain programs or strategies work to reduce and prevent crime. Although a department administrator has the ability to allocate resources as he or she deems necessary, the governing bodies with the purse strings can and do question policies and practices in the public safety arena. With this in mind, the Advisory Group felt that it was important to identify measures that could be used in the future to assess the effectiveness of a specialized domestic violence unit.

This final section summarizes the discussions of the advisory group with regard to measuring effectiveness of a violence prevention and reduction strategy. Paramount to the discussion was the point that responsibility for victim safety and offender accountability lies with many agencies and systems and each has a role. It was apparent from the limited number of interviews with victims that education of the public remains an important piece in stopping the abuse. The findings suggested that many victims were better informed about their rights and the resources available to them *after* being contacted by the sheriff's personnel. As first responders, law enforcement officers in the field must be well-informed to advise victims. This suggests the continuous need for training of future officers in the police academy. Follow up training is also suggested on a periodic basis, particularly when new laws related to partner violence are enacted. The following variables were suggested as important ones for determining how well an agency is responding to reports of partner violence.

- Calls for service relative to partner violence should be compared to actual reports completed to determine if accurate and complete information is being documented about the calls. A department should have a policy about report completion based upon nature of the call and if an officer was dispatched to the scene. Examination of the number and nature of calls for services compared to the number and nature of the number of reports completed will allow

an agency to determine what kind of ratio is considered acceptable. For example, if 100 domestic violence calls are reported, but only 50 reports are completed, is this acceptable and appropriate?

- The advisory group felt strongly that a reduction in repeat offending/repeat victimizing is a key element in determining success with regard to stopping domestic violence. Unfortunately, the data tracking system initiated by the domestic violence unit intended to capture repeat offending, but this did not occur.
- Another measure considered to be important is that of the number of filings by the prosecutor. This could be expressed as a ratio of arrests to filings, or refined to a ratio of requests for charges to actual filings. Perhaps more meaningful are the reasons that cases are rejected by the prosecutor. Although reasons for rejection must be understood within the context of the procedures and policies of the prosecutor, it can be useful to explore the reasons that cases are not being filed. Reasons may be associated with poor case documentation or insufficient evidence collection, areas in which law enforcement training might be necessary. Finding out why cases are rejected can be a valuable exercise that may reveal the need to make changes, either in police procedure or in prosecutor filing practices.
- Monitoring of victims' perceptions after an incident is another means for assessing victim safety, recurrence of abusive behavior, and victims' opinions of the justice response to the incident, including law enforcement, prosecutor, and the judiciary. This effort obviously involves expending time and resources and must be based upon a commitment by the law enforcement administration.
- The advisory group also thought it is important to monitor the number of restraining and protective orders granted versus the number that are requested.
- Most counties do not have the capability to track an arrested offender through the justice system electronically without linking to several different computer systems. San Diego County is no exception. After arrest and prosecution, there is a need to understand what takes place during the court process. Our tracking sample of cases for the sheriff's department showed that of the 41 persons arrested for felony abuse against a spouse/partner, only seven were convicted of this charge. None of these were sentenced to the state-mandated domestic violence treatment class, yet the law states that this should be the case. This finding highlights the necessity of examining the entire system response to domestic violence, although this report focused only on a law enforcement agency.
- Finally, advisory group members agreed that other systems should be monitored to measure the extent of domestic violence, such as emergency rooms in hospitals and caseloads in child protective services in which domestic violence is known to be an issue.

SUMMARY

A centralized unit in one location with experts with extensive training who are focused on one priority (i.e., domestic violence) had a positive impact on domestic violence cases in San Diego County. Documentation in incident reports improved considerably, which is associated with greater likelihood of arrest and referrals for prosecution. Documentation also is important to track repeat victimizations. The case tracking study demonstrated that the training of the field deputies led to consistency with countywide and departmental protocol relative to domestic violence. The training reduced reports of mutual combat and cases not leading to arrest due to victims' wishes. Statements by a limited number of victims suggested that victims were pleased with the response by the Sheriff's Department. Although the unit detectives collaborate with many justice agencies as well as social service providers and victim advocates, it is difficult to measure the impact of those efforts. Intuitively, it suggests that victims are better served and all the parties involved are sharing information and keeping one another advised. The greatest challenge faced by the lead sergeant during the implementation of this project was that of "burn out" experienced by the detectives. The nature of the crime and the characteristics of the partners, as well as the involvement of other family members, create different issues for law enforcement compared to other crimes, such as property offenses or stranger-to-stranger crimes. According to the sergeant, the best thing to do is to be aware of "burn-out" and suggest time off.

This process evaluation of the implementation of the San Diego County Sheriff's centralized domestic violence unit suggests that the unit was implemented as designed and the objectives of their grant were met or exceeded. It also appears that centralization has resulted in improved management of domestic violence cases, both by the first responding deputies and the unit detectives. This particular crime warrants a specialized approach to examine the intricacies involved in each case. The nature and amount of training needed to investigate and respond appropriately to these cases suggest a different type of crime compared to other assaults and batteries. Since the sheriff's department has jurisdiction over a wide array of diverse communities, it makes sense to have a centralized, specialized unit managing domestic violence cases and ensuring that the field deputies continue to be well informed about changes in the law.

REFERENCES

REFERENCES

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

CONFIDENTIALITY STATEMENT -
SAN DIEGO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
WORKING GROUP

CONFIDENTIALITY STATEMENT

SAN DIEGO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE WORKING GROUP

Pursuant to Section 28 of the federal code, the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) has the obligation to maintain the security and privacy of all information that is collected as part of the current National Institute of Justice (NIJ)-funded research project, including the names of private citizens.

As a member of the San Diego Domestic Violence Working Group, I understand the importance of maintaining the confidentiality of all information that is shared at Domestic Violence Working Group meetings and through other channels of communication. Based on this knowledge, I agree to not share any confidential information with individuals that are not a part of the Working Group.

Name (Please Print)

Signature

Date

APPENDIX B

**SAN DIEGO COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE UNIT
DEPUTY SURVEY**

**SAN DIEGO COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE UNIT
DEPUTY SURVEY**

The San Diego Association of Governments is assessing the progress of the Sheriff's Specialized Domestic Violence Unit. We need your help. Please take a few minutes to answer the following questions. All of your answers will be confidential and anonymous. Do not discuss the questions with others. Your cooperation is appreciated.

Command Area: _____

Section I: Please mark each of the following statements as either "True" or "False".

- | | | |
|---------|-------|---|
| 1. TRUE | FALSE | In a domestic violence situation, the person considered the primary aggressor is the person who commits the first act of aggression. |
| 2. TRUE | FALSE | A criminal violation is <u>not</u> required for a victim to receive an Emergency Protective Order (EPO). |
| 3. TRUE | FALSE | A law enforcement officer can decide whether or not a domestic violence supplemental report should be completed if a crime report has been taken, but an arrest has <u>not</u> been made. |
| 4. TRUE | FALSE | In mutually combative situations, deputies are encouraged to make dual arrests of offenders and victims to end the cycle of violence. |
| 5. TRUE | FALSE | Medical and health providers are obligated by law to report all incidents or suspected incidents of domestic violence to law enforcement. |
| 6. TRUE | FALSE | According to penal code section 13700, placing another person in reasonable apprehension of imminent serious bodily harm is a reportable act of abuse. |
| 7. TRUE | FALSE | Arresting someone for 273.6 PC is <u>not</u> appropriate unless the victim has a restraining order against the offender. |
| 8. TRUE | FALSE | If a responding officer is able to verify that a restraining order exists, but the suspect says that s/he has not been served, the officer can serve it at the scene. |

9. TRUE FALSE The decision to prosecute a suspect lies within the discretion of the District/City Attorney.
10. TRUE FALSE Emergency Protective Orders (EPOs) are valid for 10 days.
11. TRUE FALSE If there is reasonable cause to believe that a misdemeanor offense has been committed, an arrest should be made.
12. TRUE FALSE A minor 12 years of age or older may seek a protective order against an abusive partner.
13. TRUE FALSE The potential financial consequence of an arrest should be a factor for consideration.
14. TRUE FALSE Penal code section 12028.5 provides for seizure of firearms in domestic violence situations.

Section II: Please answer these background questions.

1. How many years of law enforcement experience do you have, including other law enforcement agencies? *(Please check only one)*
- Less than one year
 - 1-4 years
 - 5-8 years
 - 9-15 years
 - More than 15 years
2. Which of the following best describes your formal education? *(Please check only one)*
- High school diploma or certificate
 - Some college, but no degree
 - College degree
 - Some graduate school
 - Graduate degree (e.g., JD, Masters)

APPENDIX C

SAN DIEGO COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE UNIT VICTIM INTERVIEW CONSENT FORMS

**San Diego County Sheriff's Department Domestic Violence Unit
Victim Interview Consent Forms**

Detective: _____

Victim Last Name: _____

Victim First Name: _____

Home Number: _____

Other Number: _____

Work Number: _____

Case Number: _____

Incident Date: _____

Please document your efforts to reach the victim:

Date	Time	Number Called (Home, Work, Other)	Result
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

Please convey the following to the victim:

"I'm calling to see if it is okay for someone to call to ask you a few questions about how the Sheriff Department has handled your case. The person who will call you is a researcher with the San Diego Association of Governments, or SANDAG, and does not work for the Sheriff's Department. SANDAG is conducting a study about our department's specialized domestic violence unit and they would like to get input from some of the individuals we have contacted regarding what your needs have been and how well they have been met. The survey should only take a few minutes and your name won't be on any information that is collected. You don't have to participate in this survey, but SANDAG would greatly appreciate getting your input. Whether or not you talk to the researcher will not affect your case in any way. If you agree, someone will call you in the next few weeks at whatever time is most convenient to you. Would it be okay for someone from SANDAG to talk to you about your case and how it has been handled?"

_____ Yes
What phone number(s) can be used? Home _____ Work _____
Other: _____

Best day/time to call? _____

_____ Any other information the researcher should know?

_____ No

This document is a research report submitted to the U.S. Department of Justice. This report has not been published by the Department. Opinions or points of view expressed are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

APPENDIX D

SAN DIEGO COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE UNIT VICTIM INTERVIEW

**SAN DIEGO COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE UNIT
VICTIM INTERVIEW**

Hello. My name is _____. I'd like to ask you a few questions about the Sheriff's deputies who have handled your case. What we learn may help the department as they respond to other individuals that are in need of their services. Is this a good time to talk? (If not, ask if it is ok to call back at a later time.) All of your answers will be confidential and anonymous and you will not be identified by name.

This first set of questions is about the deputy who initially responded to your call for assistance.

1. About how much time did the deputy spend at the scene when s/he responded to the call?
(Read choices; only check one)

Less than 15 minutes
 15 minutes to a half-hour
 A half-hour to an hour
 More than an hour

2. How many deputies did you interact with at the scene?

_____ (No ranges)

- 2a. Was this deputy/were these deputies male or female?

_____ (How many) were male
_____ (How many) were female

3. Did the deputy give you a domestic violence pamphlet or any other information about the types of help you could get?

Yes
 No (Skip to Question 4)

- 3a. Did the deputy spend any time explaining the information to you?

Yes
 No

- 3b. Did you use any of the information the deputy gave you?

Yes
 No (Skip to Question 3e)

- 3c. What types of information did you use? (*Read choices; check all that apply*)
- Referral information for counseling services
 - Referral information for legal services
 - Referral information for shelter services
 - Information on getting an Emergency Protective Order (EPO) or Temporary Restraining Order (TRO)
 - Information on your rights as a citizen
 - Information on the citizen arrest process
 - Other (*please specify*) _____

- 3d. How helpful did you find this information? Would you say
- Very helpful (*Probe for reason below*)
 - Somewhat helpful (*Probe for reason below*)
 - Neither helpful or unhelpful
 - Somewhat unhelpful (*Probe for reason below*)
 - Very unhelpful (*Probe for reason below*)
- Explanation:

- 3e. Is there anything the deputy could have done that would have made this information more useful for you?
- Yes
 - No (*Skip to Question 4*)

- 3f. What could the deputy have done?

4. Did you ask the deputy to do anything in particular for you?
- Yes
 - No (*Skip to Question 5*)

- 4a. What did you ask the deputy to do? (*Don't read choices; check all that apply*)
- Arrest the suspect
 - Provide transportation
 - Assist in getting an EPO or TRO
 - Provide referral information (*please specify*) _____
 - Confiscate a weapon(s)
 - Other (*please specify*) _____

4b. How satisfied were you with how the deputy responded to this/these request(s)? (*Read choices; only check one*)

Very satisfied (*Probe for reason below*)

Somewhat satisfied (*Probe for reason below*)

Neither satisfied or unsatisfied

Somewhat unsatisfied (*Probe for reason below*)

Very unsatisfied (*Probe for reason below*)

Explanation:

5. Were there any weapons, such as guns or knives, present at the scene where the incident occurred?

Yes

No (*Skip to Question 6*)

5a. Did the deputy know that these weapons were around?

Yes

No (*Skip to Question 6*)

5b. Did the deputy take these weapons?

Yes

No

6. I'd like to now have you rate the deputy on a number of characteristics. I'm going to read you a few statements and I'd like you to tell me how much you agree with them on a 5-point scale where

- 1 is "Completely Agree"
- 2 is "Somewhat Agree"
- 3 is "Neither Agree or Disagree"
- 4 is "Somewhat Disagree"
- 5 is "Completely Disagree"

6a. The deputy who responded was very attentive to my needs. (*Read choices*)

1 2 3 4 5

6b. The deputy who responded was very patient. (*Read choices*)

1 2 3 4 5

6c. The deputy who responded understood what I was feeling. (*Read choices*)

1 2 3 4 5

6d. The deputy who responded acted in a nonjudgmental way. (*Read choices*)

1 2 3 4 5

6e. I felt very confident in the deputy's ability to help me. (*Read choices*)

1 2 3 4 5

7. Overall, how comfortable were you with how the deputy handled your situation? Would you say

- _____ Very comfortable (*Probe for reason below*)
- _____ Somewhat comfortable (*Probe for reason below*)
- _____ Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable
- _____ Somewhat uncomfortable (*Probe for reason below*)
- _____ Very uncomfortable (*Probe for reason below*)

Explanation:

This second set of questions is about the Sheriff's detective who followed-up on your case.

8. Do you recall how the detective made follow-up contact with you? *(Don't read responses; only check one)*

- Called you over the phone
 Came to see you in person
 Made contact some other way? *(Describe)* _____

9. Did the detective give you any type of information that was helpful to you?

- Yes
 No *(Skip to Question 10)*

9a. What type of information did the detective give you? *(Read choices; check all that apply)*

- Referral information for counseling services
 Referral information for legal services
 Referral information for shelter services
 Information on getting an Emergency Protective Order (EPO) or Temporary Restraining Order (TRO)
 Information on your rights as a citizen
 Information on the citizen arrest process
 Other *(please specify)* _____

9b. Did you use any of the information the detective provided?

- Yes
 No *(Skip to Question 8e)*

9c. What type of information did you use? *(Read choices; check all that apply)*

- Referral information for counseling services
 Referral information for legal services
 Referral information for shelter services
 Information on getting an EPO or TRO
 Information on your rights as a citizen
 Information on the citizen arrest process
 Other *(please specify)* _____

9d. How helpful did you find this information? Would you say

- Very helpful *(Probe for reason below)*
 Somewhat helpful *(Probe for reason below)*
 Neither helpful or unhelpful
 Somewhat unhelpful *(Probe for reason below)*
 Very unhelpful *(Probe for reason below)*

Explanation:

9e. Is there anything the detective could have done that would have made this information more useful for you?

- Yes
 No (*Skip to Question 10*)

9f. What could the detective have done?

10. I'd like to now have you rate the investigator on a number of characteristics. I'm going to read you a few statements and I'd like you to tell me how much you agree with them on a 5-point scale where

- 1 is "Completely Agree"
2 is "Somewhat Agree"
3 is "Neither Agree or Disagree"
4 is "Somewhat Disagree"
5 is "Completely Disagree"

10a. The detective was very attentive to my needs. (*Read choices*)

1 2 3 4 5

10b. The detective was very patient. (*Read choices*)

1 2 3 4 5

10c. The detective understood what I was feeling. (*Read choices*)

1 2 3 4 5

10d. The detective acted in a nonjudgmental way. (*Read choices*)

1 2 3 4 5

10e. I felt very confident in the detective's ability to help me. (*Read choices*)

1 2 3 4 5

11. Overall, how comfortable were you with how the detective handled your situation? Would you say

- _____ Very comfortable (*Probe for reason below*)
- _____ Somewhat comfortable (*Probe for reason below*)
- _____ Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable
- _____ Somewhat uncomfortable (*Probe for reason below*)
- _____ Very uncomfortable (*Probe for reason below*)

Explanation:

Interview Date: _____ / _____ / _____

Interviewer Initials: _____

(Obtain from the tracking data base & detective)

Detective: _____

Victim Gender: Male Female

Victim's DOB: _____

Victim's Race: White Black Hispanic Asian Other

Date of Incident: _____

Case Status: _____

Station: _____

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