FAMILY VIOLENCE PROGRAM

COMMUNITY

POLICE

FAMILY
VIOLENCE
CENTER

MULTI-AGENCY
COMMITTEE

OTHER
COMMUNITY
RESOURCES
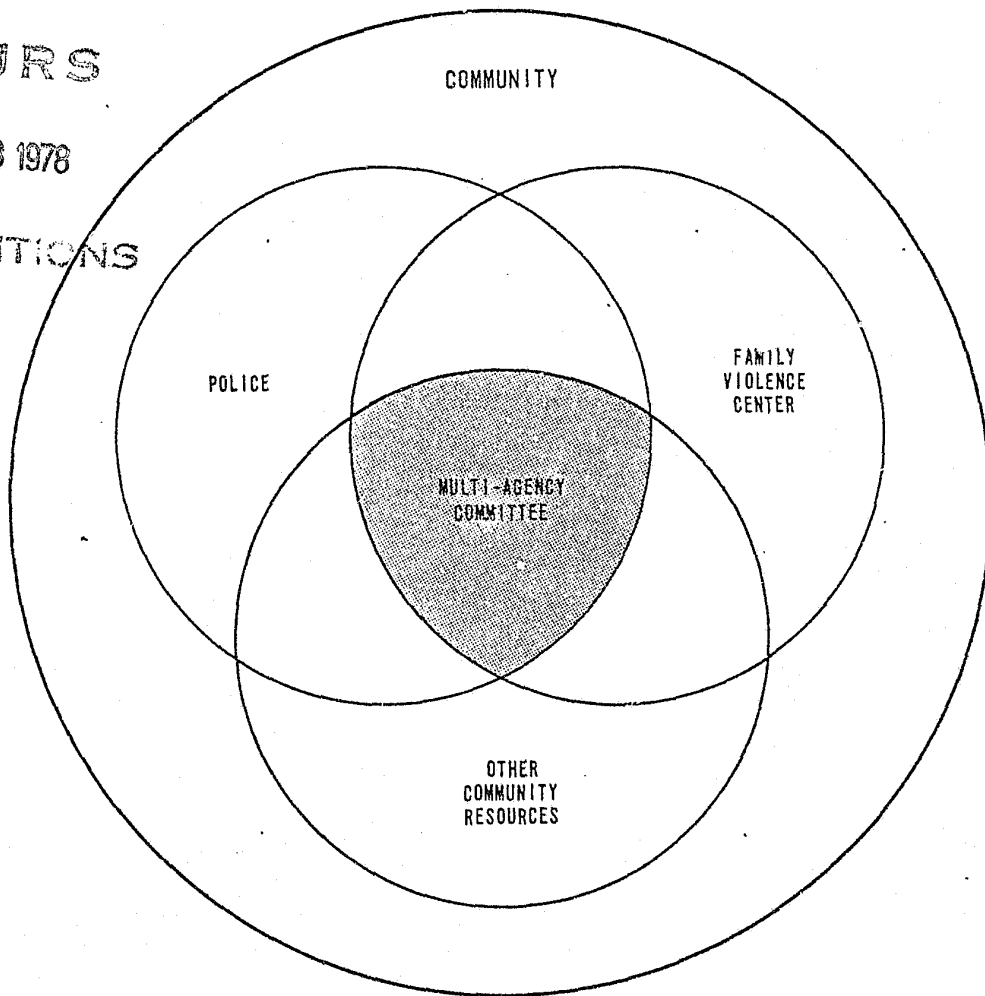
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I. Introduction

The issue of family violence has recently come under intense public scrutiny. Although crime, as a whole, has decreased slightly, there has been a disturbing increase in the amount of violent crime, both nationally and locally. Statistics for the City of Birmingham, for example, have shown a 5.3 percent increase in violent crime from 1976 to 1977. At the time of this proposal, several bills have been introduced to Congress pertaining specifically to the problem of battered spouses. Statistics on battered women illustrate the magnitude of the problem (see page 42 in appendix).

Family violence has typically been assigned to the realm of the criminal justice system. The system has, with reluctance, accepted the responsibility, in part because of the relationship of family disturbances to assaults and homocides, and, in part, merely because they are the only social service agency available twenty-four hours a day. Recent research has indicated a relationship between child abuse and subsequent delinquent behavior on the part of the child, thus deepening the rationale for intervention in family violence by the criminal justice system. There have also been indications, however, that intervention by police officers may not be the best solution to the problem. Often, it is felt that their behavior in critical situations may, in fact, actually increase the problem.

In an effort to meet the responsibility of the criminal justice system to respond to family violence and to provide

the best form of intervention possible, the Birmingham Police Department proposes the integration of the police with social service components. The police-social work team appears to be a viable answer to the dilemma of the family disturbance. Both the police and social worker contribute essential elements. The police bring their knowledge, authority, and years of experience. The social workers bring their clinical skills and knowledge of resources. The idea is not for social workers to take over the function of police officers. It is obvious that many situations necessitate the presence of, or at a minimum, the initial presence of a police officer. In many other situations, however, it would appear that a trained professional would be better able to help the family initially and/or on an extended basis. In addition to manpower resources, there must also be adequate facilities to cope with the problems of battered spouses. Several communities have experimented with such facilities and they have reported that the response has been overwelming.

In light of the critical and far reaching nature of family violence, it is essential that social agencies and groups combine their ideas and resources to combat the problem.

II. Literature Review

Family Violence and the Role of the Criminal Justice System

Family violence has followed the human race since Cain
slew his brother, Abel. Although criminal violence has produced
a fear of strangers for many Americans, recently documented
studies have revealed the extensive nature of criminal violence
in the family. Statistics from the FBI's Uniform Crime Re-
ports illustrate the gravity of this problem. "In 1976, 27
percent of the murder victims were related to the offenders"
(Uniform Crime Reports, 1976:13). The percentage of intra-
family aggravated assault was somewhat lower; however, it is
obvious that friends and intimates play an important role in
aggravated assault, as well as murder.

> "Homocide often appears to reflect the dynamic
> interplay between two persons caught up in
> a life drama where their relationship plays
> a role in explaining why such a flagrant
> violation of conduct norms has occurred. Every-
> one is within easy striking distance of inti-
> mates for a large part of the time. Although
> friends, lovers, spouses, and the like, are
> a main source of pleasure in one's life, they
> are equally a main source of frustration
> and hurt. Few others can anger one so much."
> (Mulvihill, Tumin, and Curtis, 1969:218).

A great deal of stress is placed on families today, due
to the extraordinary rapidity of social change, which has
strained the family's flexibility and adaptability to its
limits. The family group, itself, is "not ideally manned to
withstand stress, yet society has assigned to it the heaviest
of responsibilities: the socialization and orientation of
the young and the meeting of the major emotional needs of all
citizens, young and old" (Hill, 1965: 34). In fact, the loss

of the social and economic supports of a kinship structure,
and the resulting disturbances in the nuclear family unit have
been referred to as the "normal psychopathology of contemporary
family life" (Ackerman, 1961).

To understand a family in crisis, one must understand the
vital processes of family life in much the same way that one
would try to understand a living person. "A family, as a family,
has strivings, conflicts, patterns of emotional control, an
inner face, and an outer face; it has, so to speak, a soul
of its own. Much like a person, it has a natural life history,
a beginning and an end. It passes through sequential stages
of development. It has a certain growth potential" (Ackerman,
1961: 149). A healthy family is one which balances essential
family functions.

The family molds the kinds of members it needs to carry
out these functions and, in turn, the members mold the family
in certain ways to meet their own needs. By this constantly
evolving, dynamic interaction, the roles of the family members
are determined, and each member "responds with a unique balance
of tendencies to conform or rebel, to submit or actively to
alter the family role expectations" (Ackerman 1961: 150).
The identity of the family, its particular balancing of
functions, its role adaptations and family alignments are all
structured by the family's allegiance to a set of values and
expectations. When there is a conflict over these values and
expectations, a rift is caused in the family, moving one segment
against another, and if the family is unable to cope with this

within their normal range of problem solving methods, a crisis is created, and violence often ensues. A family crisis, then, can simply be defined as "the point at which one or more members of the family cannot cope with stress" (Coffey, 1974: 9).

Family violence is often of a cyclical nature. Studies show that abused children often become abusing parents. In many homes children learn no other way to deal with their emotions than through an outward display of aggression. This mode of behavior carries over into their adult life, where it becomes increasingly more difficult to learn new ways of thinking and behaving.

Early research also suggests that there is a "correlation between the abuse of children and their subsequent truancy, running away, drug and alcohol abuse, suicide, and other acts which lead to criminal behavior" (LEAA, 1977: 2). If this is true, intervention by the criminal justice system into family problems should extend beyond the protection of the individual.

The Birmingham Police Department received 6,335 calls for service on domestic disputes.* A fact sheet published by the Center for Women Policy Studies also indicates the magnitude and severity of domestic disturbances and the problem of battered women across the nation (see page 42 in the Appendix). On top of this, we must realize that the degree to which reported crime and reported incidences reflect the actual number of offenses is, at best, merely speculation. It is, in fact, obvious that many family disturbances are either not reported or "under reported".

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*This number does not reflect the total calls for service involving domestic problems, as many such calls were coded as "affray," "man with a gun," "disorderly person," "mentally disturbed person," etc.

"Neighbors, disposed toward recognition of
having to live next door after the fight is
over; may feel extremely reluctant to 'call
the cops' - particularly when the 'fighting
family' can 'explain' black eyes, bruises,
and even broken bones in terms of 'accidents'
or other 'face saving accounts'. Certainly,
the conspicuous reluctance of many police
officers to 'deal' with family matters is
sufficiently perceptable after an initial
call that subsequent calls are even less
likely" (Coffey, 1974: 22).

The reluctance of police officers to intervene in family
disturbances is understandable. Many officers feel that their
training has been inadequate to enable them to deal with the
emotionally charged situation resulting from a family dispute.
They are also highly aware of the fact that domestic disturbances
account for the highest number of police fatalities in the line
of duty and account for forty percent of the time lost due to
disabilities resulting from injuries (Auten, 1974). The officers
realize they stand on very shaky legal ground within the home,
and they are faced with the frustrating experience of seeing
the same problems occur over and over in the same families.
In addition, family disturbance calls are not considered "real"
police work by some officers. There seems to be a trend towards
"professionalism" in police circles which places a great deal of
emphasis in "purifying" the police functions in order to enable
the officers to concentrate on "real" police work. "Real" police
work is viewed as that which involves enforcing the law. According
to Cummins (1971) the police officers themselves consider
service work, such as family disturbance calls, as being "knit-
shit stuff." They feel that service calls are an added burden

that they must perform. The administration in the police
department matches the subcultural view of service calls by
concentrating the rewards, both internally and externally
on specific law enforcement behaviors. The numbers of arrests
and citations are used as indicators of officers' activities.
This is in spite of the fact that the majority of a patrol
officer's time is spent in service related activities. Barocas
and Katz also report in Dayton's Pilot Training Program that
in attempting to train the officers in crisis intervention
techniques, these problems arose. "The patrolmen felt the
approach was not consistent with their professional image ...
and that their time investment in a crisis intervention call
must be restricted, which may vitiate some of the effective-
ness of crisis intervention tr ning" (1974: 195). Another
problem in dealing with family disturbances is that the police
tend to see themselves as realists, and as such they believe
that the only deterent to undesired behavior is the judicious
application of stern measures. For this reason they reject
what they consider a "soft" approach to the offender, which is
generally supported by the behavioral sciences in regards to
the cause and treatment of offenders (Newman, 1974).

Intervention in family fights is particularly resisted
by police officers. "No police function is more misunderstood,
more underrated, or more grudgingly performed than calls to
break...up family fights. Unlike other police activities, such
as murder investigations, or criminal surveillance, intervention
in family fights is commonly regarded at all levels in the

police department as a thankless job that poses the danger of grave personal risk and the distinct possibility of becoming embroiled in charges of police brutality, with very little promise of reward" (Sullivan 1968: 11). Euler, Brand, Fosterling and Colback (1974), however, have found that police officers' attitudes towards performing social services were not all similar. They report that there are mixed feelings about the service aspects of police work within the police system. One extreme, are those who insist that the police system should deal only with crime. Interestingly, this attitude seems to be held most widely by newer, less experienced officers. Another prevalant attitude is that the responsibility to deal with social service situations is unjustly placed on them, that the officers are forced to deal with them, but that they should be eliminated. There is, however, a growing number of officers who feel they should provide social services, but who are concerned with their current inability to provide them adequately.

Not only is there role conflict between what the police actually do and how they perceive their role should be, but there is also conflicting pressures applied to police by society. "Job conflict refers to the situation in which an individual is caught between discordant expectations" (Kroes, 1976: 16). The police in our society are caught in such a dilema. They are urged, on the one hand, to become more sensitive to the needs of the communities and to gain a better understanding and ability to handle new social problems. Sometimes this

expectation is far above what is practically possible. As
Kroes remarks ironically, "The officer is expected to have
the knowledge of a person with a combined M.D., Ph.D., LLB,
MSW, SJ, and be a diligent blue collar worker besides"
(1976: 26). On the other hand, there is very strong pressure
to deal with the increasing crime rate with a "get tough"
policy. In fact, according to More (1972) and others, the
dominant pressure being exerted on the police demands that
they engage only in "law and order" maintaining activities.
Service work "is not publically conceived as a part of police
work, perhaps even less so as the war on crime spirals"
(Cummins 1971: 282). And yet, in the face of this demand,
police officers have no choice but to spend the majority
of their time in service related activities.

Another aspect of police role conflict is the fact
that police activities, such as intervening in family dis-
putes, neighborhood arguments, and dealing with drunks,
are "often interpreted as the implementation of criminal
sanctions, and are likely to be met with hostility, resent-
ment and increasingly with physical resistance" (Caldwell,
1972: 8 and 9). On the other hand, if the police agency
ignores their public service functions to deal primarily
with traditional crime, they will be subject to societal con-
demnation. They are "damned if they do and if they don't."

One of the reasons that the police are called upon to
answer family disturbance calls is that only the police of
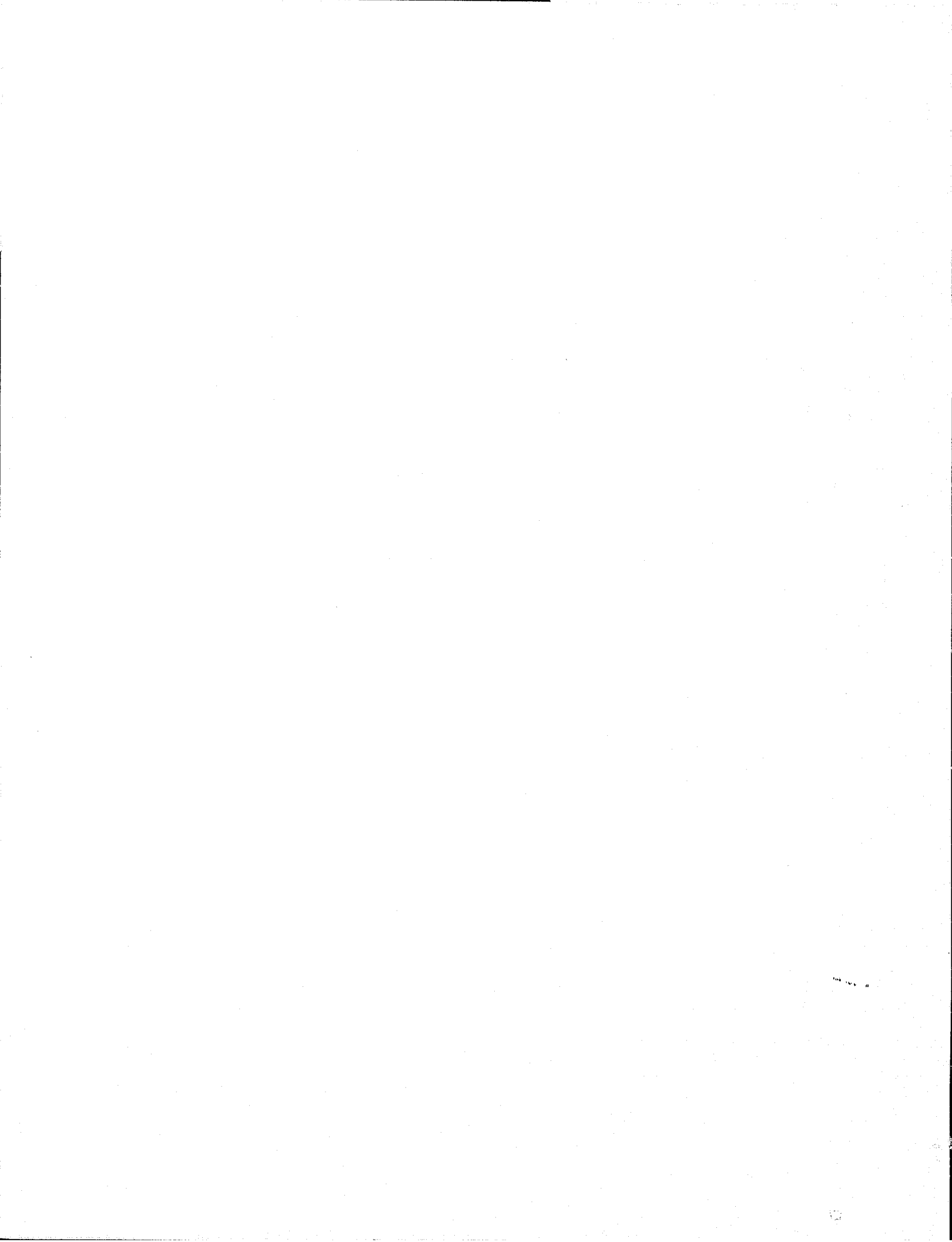all the social service institutions in a community, are

available twenty-four hours a day, every day of the year to answer calls. If has been noted by Cummings, Cummings and Edell (1965) and by Turnage (1976) that the highest incidence of social service related calls and situations occur after regular business hours on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays. It is the, "the police who perform these services, not the professionals who flee the city after daylight hours" (Mendelsohn 1971: 42).

This "job conflict" is reflected in the ways in which police handle family disturbances. Some of the violence which erupts in a family disturbance and is aimed at the police may due to the presence and behavior of the officer, himself. Toch (1969) in his studies concluded that persons in authority frequently trigger violence because they allow themselves to fit into a preconceived stereotype which may contribute to or encourage aggressive acting out behaviors. His study showed that the most frequently given reason for attacks against officers was that the officer touch.d or threatened the individual. Bard (1974: 151) has also stated that a

> "family crisis which has deteriorated to the
> point of threatening violence is in critically
> delicate balance and requires a high level of
> skill on the part of the one who intervenes.
> Regretfully, the police officer, if he is un-
> prepared for this function and left to draw upon
> his own often biased notions of family dynamics
> and upon his skills as a law enforcer, may
> actually behave in ways to induce a tragic out-
> come."

In summary, the problem of family violence has many facets - the need for intervention by the criminal justice

system is apparent, yet police do not regard it as "real"
police work; they are not given the sanction, nor the training
to intervene effectively; citizens regard police intervention
as intrusion and the "implementing of criminal sanctions";
and an adequate resource network is not available on a twenty-
four hours a day basis. Without changing these facts or pro-
viding alternative solutions, it is highly doubtful that the
"cycle of violence" in family conflicts can be effectively
broken.

END