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URSA  
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NATIONAL EVALUATION OF THE  
LEAA FAMILY VIOLENCE DEMONSTRATION PROGRAM:

Summary of Major Findings

OJJDP Grants:

78-MU-AX-0049  
80-JN-AX-0004

September, 1978 - October, 1981

URSA Institute  
San Francisco, CA

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**NATIONAL EVALUATION OF THE  
LEAA FAMILY VIOLENCE DEMONSTRATION PROGRAM**

**Final Report**

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## I. BACKGROUND

### A. FAMILY VIOLENCE PROGRAM ORIGINS

- The origins of the Family Violence Program are to be found in LEAA's Citizen's Initiative program and its successor, the Victim Witness program. The Family Violence Program was begun in 1978 as one of LEAA's major new initiatives.
- Beginning in the early 1970s, increased societal attention focused on the plight of family members who experienced violence within their own homes. The actions of women's groups, community service providers and academic researchers revealed a picture of family life vastly different than the commonly held notions about the family as a haven of love, security, and comfort. Rather, what was found was that a surprising number of women and children had experienced violence, often of severe and long duration, at the hands of members of their families. Many families were found to be battlegrounds rather than sources of nurturing.
- A priority of LEAA for many years was the development and refinement of services to improve the justice system's response to crime victims, and especially victims of "sensitive crimes." The Family Violence Program emerged out of this commitment to supporting services for victims, and improving and facilitating interactions between citizens and the criminal justice system.
- A nationwide demonstration program was initiated by LEAA to test various service delivery approaches to preventing and reducing family violence through criminal justice intervention and coordination of services among legal, medical, social services, and private agencies. In total, 23 projects serving adult victims of family violence and two projects serving child sexual abuse victims received \$8,200,000 over four fiscal years from FY1977-FY1980.

### B. PURPOSE AND GOALS

- The purpose of the Family Violence Program was to demonstrate effective mechanisms for criminal justice interventions as part of a community-wide response to family violence. The program goals included:
  - reduction in community acceptance of intra-family violence;
  - increased reporting of incidents of intra-family violence and documentation of the extent, nature, and interrelationship of these crimes;
  - demonstration of an effective mechanism for institutional coordination among police, prosecutors, protective services agencies, welfare, hospitals, community mental health, and other relevant public and private agencies and community organizations to respond to family violence situations;
  - documentation of the needs of these families and the development of methods to address these needs, including a reallocation of existing services as well as creation of new services;
  - improved knowledge, skills, and cooperation of medical and social service agency personnel in the collection and transmission of evidence and information to the legal system in cases of intra-family violence;
  - reduction in the number of repeat calls to the police related to family disturbances;
  - increased prosecution of cases involving repeated violence of a severe nature;
  - establishment of community corrections and/or pre-trial diversion programs specifically designed for defendants involved in intra-family violence cases; and
  - reduction in the number of intra-family homicides and serious assaults.

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### C. PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

- The Family Violence Program tested the efficacy of deterrence and social control theories in reducing the incidence and severity of family violence. While encouraging a diversity of service design strategies, the "center-piece" of the national program's approach was the involvement of criminal justice agencies and concerted attempts to coordinate responses of multiple service sectors—medical and social service providers—with those of the criminal justice system.
- The projects were funded in three waves:
  - Seven projects, including the two child sexual abuse projects, received funding under the Victim Witness program (one of these projects was terminated at the end of its first program year);
  - Fifteen projects were supported during the first year of the Family Violence initiative; and
  - An additional ten projects, for a total of 25 grantees around the country, received federal support during the second year of the national program.
- In addition to supporting the 25 local grantees, the Family Violence Program awarded a grant to the Center for Women Policy Studies of Washington, D.C., to enable them to provide technical assistance and training to the local demonstration projects. Additional grants were awarded for development of media campaigns to encourage reporting of family violence and training of prosecutors in the demonstration sites.
- The 1977 Amendments to the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act directed OJJDP, through its research division, the National Institute for Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, to assess the effects of family violence and sexual abuse on children and youth. To meet this mandate, a grant was awarded to URSA Institute, a nonprofit social research organization, to evaluate the LEAA Family Violence Demonstration Program.

### II. FAMILY VIOLENCE PROGRAM DESIGN

#### A. DIRECT SERVICE IMPLEMENTATION

- An array of approaches to delivering client services flourished under the national program. While the majority of direct services were aimed at victims of family violence, predominantly women and their children, some services were designed specifically for batterers. Direct service interventions included:
  - short term shelter for battered women and their children;
  - individual, family, and group counseling;
  - advocacy and accompaniment;
  - civil justice advocacy and representation;
  - criminal justice advocacy and representation;
  - mediation;
  - diversion for batterers;
  - crisis intervention; and
  - "hotlines" and information and referral services.

## B. SYSTEMS INTERVENTION

- Efforts to improve the identification, documentation, and inter-agency processing of family violence cases were central project activities. As reflected in the national program goals, criminal justice agencies were a focus of system interventions, although involvement with medical and social service agencies also was emphasized. A variety of methods were employed to effect system interventions, including:
  - training of agency staff around the dynamics of family violence, legal requirements, the agency's role in these cases, and available community services;
  - inter-agency advisory boards or coordinating committees so as to promote dialogue among key actors, improve cross-agency service responses to clients, and concerted mobilizations of local resources; and
  - development of new policies and procedures to streamline and enhance local agency intervention techniques and case processing.

## C. COMMUNITY EDUCATION

- The local Family Violence Program grantees conducted presentations and trainings for numerous professional and civic groups. Many also undertook ambitious public service advertising campaigns through both print and electronic media. These activities were designed to educate the community about the problem of violence in the family. Community education activities emphasized the fact that these acts were crimes, that the community had a responsibility to condemn these forms of behavior and that family violence should be reported to law enforcement agencies.

#### D. PROJECT CHARACTERISTICS

- The 23 projects for adult family violence victims were arrayed across organizational and service dimensions so as to develop analytically useful typologies.
- Organizational factors assessed included:
  - staffing patterns;
  - administrative and decision-making processes;
  - characteristics of the host agency; and
  - level of resources available.
- Assessment of primary service emphasis yielded two general orientations--shelter projects and criminal justice projects. While projects within each of these types may have offered several different services, they were characterized by this dichotomy of orientation.

#### III. EVALUATION DESIGN

##### A. PURPOSE AND GOALS

- The purpose of the Family Violence Program Evaluation was to document and assess the efficacy of the various service approaches to deterring family violence and improving client life outcomes. The evaluation also generated research and policy data on the characteristics of disputants, their service needs, and policy directions that would support viable and cost effective intervention methods. The goals of the evaluation included:
  - develop information on the epidemiological characteristics of family violence project clients (incidence, severity, chronicity) compared to national samples and determine the implications for programs, policies, legislation, and service delivery;
  - determine how well the family violence projects receive cases from both the justice system and community resources of referral;
  - assess the impact of family violence and subsequent intervention on children and youth;
  - describe and analyze implementation problems, project service strategies, community education and outreach activities, and methods of system coordination and improvement;
  - determine the extent to which the family violence projects improve the responses of service agencies and institutions to victims of domestic violence, including service integration and delivery; and
  - explore and assess whether the family violence project intervention strategies (direct service and system change) contribute to reductions in repeated incidents of intra-family assault and acts of violence.

## B. EVALUATION DESIGN

- Several methodological approaches, including both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods, were specified in the evaluation design. Since there were no universally applicable or agreed upon measures of successful outcomes, the evaluation employed multiple techniques for data gathering. The data collection strategies included:
  - the development and implementation of a client-based management information system (MIS) across sites;
  - structured interviews with project staff and community leaders;
  - on-site field staff who recorded observational and process data at selected, "intensive" sites; and
  - post-termination and follow-up interviews with a sample of clients from five projects.
- Three major data gathering and analysis components were used to measure the project and program goals, and attain the evaluation goals. These components included:
  - a History and Development Study documenting the local and national contexts for project emergence, project descriptions, and start-up processes, and immediate local consequences of project implementation;
  - a Process Study assessing project operations and service approaches, modifications over time in the projects' organizational and service delivery techniques, and descriptive assessments of the projects' client populations; and
  - an Impact Study addressing the projects' effects on the justice and social service systems, community responses and attitudes, and on the victim and families who used project services.

## C. DATA SOURCES

- The data sources for the evaluation effort included:
  - client-based data for approximately 2,500 clients collected by project staff specifically for the evaluation;
  - follow-up interview data for 270 clients from five of the projects collected by evaluation staff;
  - interview data from project staff and key community actors obtained by evaluation staff at multiple time points in the projects' grant periods; and
  - qualitative, observational data recorded by on-site field staff at five designated "intensive" sites.



#### IV. VICTIM, FAMILY, AND OFFENDER CHARACTERISTICS

##### A. VICTIM AND FAMILY CHARACTERISTICS

- Victims were overwhelmingly females (94.6%), about 27 years of age, and from various ethnic groups (59% were white, 34% were black).
- Victims were mostly high school graduates, and nearly three in ten were college-educated.
- Over two-thirds of the victims were employed full- or part-time. Another 18% were homemakers.
- Pregnant women comprised 5.5% of the projects' clients, and 10.1% of the shelter clients.
- Few victims (11%) were heavy drinkers, and 69% said they abstained from alcohol. Drug use was reported by 6% of the victims.
- Children comprised 3% of the victims, and also were present in 80% of the households. The average number of children per family was 1.9, below the national average of 2.2 per household.
- Most disputants were either married or cohabitating (63%) or separated (26.4%). About 10% of the victims were other family members. The average relationship was between five and six years.

##### B. OFFENDER CHARACTERISTICS

- Assailants were overwhelmingly male (94.4%). Their age and ethnic characteristics were the same as the victims.
- Assailants were also mostly high school graduates, but there were fewer college-educated assailants (23.1%) than victims (29.5%).
- About 70% of the assailants were employed full- or part-time.
- About one assailant in three abstained from alcohol, compared to two in three victims. Among those who drank, 65% were reported to be heavy drinkers. About one in four assailants used drugs, compared to 6% of the victims.

### C. VIOLENCE HISTORIES AND ABUSE PATTERNS

- Abuse in the relationship had been occurring for two years or less, but was frequent--about 40% of the victims suffered abuse at least once each week and 7% were victimized daily. Injury had occurred in at least two thirds of the cases, and happened frequently in 27% of the cases. Abuse during pregnancy occurred in 44% of the cases; 17.8% suffered miscarriages due to abuse.
- Assaultants had been victimized as children (37%) more than victims (25%). Assaultants' and victims' parents had been violent toward each other (41% and 45% of the cases).
- The instant incident (leading to referral to the family violence project) was most often for physical violence (75%); weapons were present in 6.3%. Over two thirds of the victims suffered physical injury of bruises or worse. Only 24.8% sought medical care. About half the assaultants had been drinking, and one assaultant in six had been using drugs. Alcohol and drugs were causes of neither severity of violence nor injury.
- Over half the assaultants (54%) were violent toward strangers as well as their spouses; most (80%) were arrested at least once for stranger violence. Those assaultants abused as children or witnesses to parental violence were more often violent toward both strangers and spouses, and inflicted more severe injuries on their spouses.
- Most victims (89%) had called the police prior to project intervention; the average number of prior calls was two. Over 60% had separated at least once due to violence; 10% had filed for divorce. Nearly 10% had obtained restraining orders, and 13% had previously sought help from a family violence project.

### D. IMPACTS ON CHILDREN

- Children were present in 80% of the violent homes; they witnessed parental violence in 44% of the cases, and 23% attempted to stop it. Most victims (60%) took their children with them to their first contact with the family violence project.
- Children were victims of abuse in 41% of the cases, threatened in 40% of the cases, and suffered injury in about one case in four. Children received medical care for such injuries in 18% of the cases.
- Most victims were reluctant to discuss their children's problems. Few children (4%) were referred to juvenile court for delinquency; only 2% had been removed from the home. Behavioral problems included two types: "external" problems such as property destruction and violence against parents, or "internal" problems such as temper tantrums and loss of appetite.

## E. SERVICES REQUESTED

- Police were contacted in 57.5% of the cases, and were more common for justice system projects. Arrests were made in 15% of the cases; police officers made no arrest (22%) or took "informal" action (14%) in many cases.
- Criminal complaints were filed by victims in 27.8% of the cases. Shelter clients less often filed complaints than clients of justice system projects.
- Legal services, counseling, and shelter were the most frequently requested services. Diversion and crisis intervention were requested least often.
- Client service requests appeared to reflect their certainty about a course of action to end the abuse. Those certain of wanting to end the relationship requested shelter services or justice system interventions. Those uncertain requested information or counseling. These strategies are mediated by the length of the relationship--victims in shorter relationships seek shelter or justice assistance, while victims in longer relationships seek advice or comfort.
- The services received by clients reflect these two strategies, as well as the general differences between shelters and justice system projects. The more severe or lethal cases tended to be seen by shelters, while victims with fewer injuries sought legal assistance.

## V. IMPACTS ON VICTIMS AND FAMILIES

### A. REINCIDENCE OF ABUSE

- Over half (56%) of the victims reported an abusive incident within four months of their last family violence project contact. Half of these were for violence, and one-fourth (14%) had called the police during that time.
- The family violence projects impacted directly or indirectly on a wide range of victims' life circumstances. The areas with highest change were:
  - physical health
  - family relations
  - ability to handle family disputes

The areas with no change were:

- work
- education
- substance abuse

The only area which worsened was victims' financial situation.

- Four victims were living with the assailant after project intervention. Nearly half (47%) moved out, while 30% remained together. The others either stayed apart (15%) or moved in (8%).

## B. THE EFFECTS OF SERVICES

- Criminal legal interventions were most effective in preventing further abuse and violence.
- Shelter services, counseling, and children's services were not associated with preventing further abuse. However, shelters tended to serve more complex, lethal, and difficult cases.
- Most project interventions (in different combinations) were positively associated with obtaining a job, improved relationship with children and friends, improved physical health, and improved financial status.
- Services were not positively associated with ability to handle disputes, improved relationship with the assailant, improved mental health, or reduced substance use.
- Services associated with obtaining civil restraining orders were associated with ending cohabitation. Diversion services were associated with disputants staying together.

## C. THE EFFECTS OF BACKGROUND CHARACTERISTICS

- Life circumstances were improved in cases with shorter or less severe violence histories. Also, younger, white victims with higher educational attainment were more likely to improve their "life circumstances."
- Post-project abuse is most likely when the violence history was longest or most severe, and when the assailant was exposed to abuse as a child. Further abuse is also likely if the victim was abused as a child, or when the victim had sought previous separations from the abuser.
- Neither victim, assailant, or relationship characteristics were associated with changes in living situation. The results neither confirm nor disprove various theories on why abused wives leave or remain in violent homes.

#### D. WHAT WORKS FOR WHOM?

- Most services are effective in reducing the recurrence of abuse for those victims with less severe violence histories.
- Criminal legal services were more effective in reducing violence than any other service, but only for victims with more severe violence histories. Victims with less severe violence histories were not appreciably affected. No other services were effective for the more severe cases.
- Shelter services were effective in improving life outcomes for younger, more highly educated victims with shorter violence histories. However, victims with children in shelters with more severe violence histories were associated with higher recurrences of violence and abuse.

#### VI. JUSTICE SYSTEM IMPACTS

##### A. IMPACTS ON LAW ENFORCEMENT

- Shelters established cooperative relations with law enforcement agencies with relative ease. Police officers used shelters as resources to expand their dispositional alternatives for domestic abuse cases.
- It is difficult to get police agencies to handle family violence as a criminal act i.e., to treat it the same way as nonfamilial cases.
- Procedural changes are easier to effect and raise less resistance than attitudinal changes.
- Documentation changes are virtually impervious to change in the absence of legislative mandate or departmental edict.
- When victims are assisted by police, there is a decrease in repeat calls to police for recurrences of abuse.

## B. IMPACTS ON THE CRIMINAL COURTS

- Special prosecutors can reduce attrition and acquittal rates in family violence cases.
- Special prosecutors are most effective in a special unit with support staff.
- Advocacy and victim-witness cases identify family violence cases as "serious" and improve case handling.
- Diversion services, in the abuse of an existing diversion program and/or prosecutorial experience with such services, are extremely difficult to implement.
- Diversion services are critically influenced by their institutional auspice and credibility among system actors. They are most effective when located in prosecutorial agencies.

## C. IMPACTS ON THE CIVIL COURTS

- Implementation of civil legislation for family violence victims is very difficult, especially when criminal sanctions are attached for violations. This is due to the multiplicity of justice system linkages required.
- Features of civil legislation can prove to be barriers to implementation. Requiring attorneys to file protection orders in civil court consumes limited time and legal resources while presenting obstacles to victims unable to obtain legal representation.

## VII. POLICY IMPACTS

### A. INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF SERVICES

- The continuation of family violence services at the conclusion of the demonstration period depended on whether it was successfully implemented at the outset of federal funding.
- Police crisis intervention services were never institutionalized due to a lack of detailed arrangements between family violence projects and the police during the planning steps.
- Diversion services did not survive the implementation stage unless operated under criminal justice system auspices, due to disagreements over referral mechanisms and client flow procedures.
- Political support by the district attorney determined whether special prosecution efforts were continued.
- Shelter facilities were viable when given a stable and sufficient local funding base. Shelters which were forced to divert staff resources to fundraising were not continued after the demonstration period.
- Advocacy services were continued depending on institutional auspice. Advocacy services which were either totally separate from the justice system or which were totally embedded in the justice system were continued. Advocacy services dependent on justice system referrals were severely hampered.

### B. ORGANIZATIONAL INFLUENCES

- Subcontract arrangements for family violence justice intervention services are problematic. For non-justice system services, subcontracts for shelters or advocacy are viable.
- Projects which are units of a larger agency require strong support within the agency as well as considerable independence to be successfully continued. Diversion services and special prosecution efforts are examples.
- Private organizations are dependent on strong coalitions or community (political) support to maintain a stable funding base when competing for scarce resources. Local support is critical, but access to public funds (such as Title XX) is necessary to avoid the uncertainty and drain of continuous fundraising efforts.

### VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

The evaluation of the Family Violence Demonstration Program suggests that certain legislative, policy, and procedural changes are required to further the justice system's response to the problem of family violence:

- The extent of family violence must be documented as fully as possible, preferably by changing the FBI Uniform Crime Code to include family violence or by individual state legislative mandates for similar data collection changes.
- Special prosecutors for family violence must be retained and vertical integration of cases instituted to allow them to handle both felony and misdemeanor assaults.
- Screening and case evaluation techniques must be developed to target the most serious and potentially lethal cases for special court processing and dispositions.
- Protective restraining orders must be made available through the criminal courts to victims of family violence who serve as complaining witnesses. Violations should result in criminal penalties.
- Civil legislation for family violence must be tested explicitly through experimental programs designed to determine the best method(s) of implementation.
- Civil legislation for family violence should be modified to impose criminal sanctions for violations of civil court restraining orders.
- Family violence legislation must be framed to allow the victim to file a petition for protection in the criminal courts without the assistance of an attorney.
- Diversion counseling programs for batterers must be formulated with explicit experimental designs that allow for rigorous evaluation of their efficacy.
- Police training should include sensitization to the problem of family violence and specific procedures for the handling of initial incidents and violations of protective orders.
- Research into the causes of family violence should include longitudinal studies of the onset, escalation or desistance of violence, and its environmental and individual correlates.

- Funding for shelters should be made available through contract support to private organizations. Per diem reimbursements should include case management and legal advocacy as well as room and board. Funding should be structured to avoid fiscal crises and sustain organizational development. Children's services in shelters are critical.
- Shelter residents who have been forced to leave their homes to ensure the physical safety of themselves and their children, should be eligible for emergency assistance (cash, food, and housing) as well as more traditional entitlement programs.



**END**