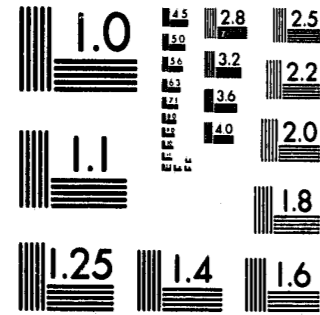


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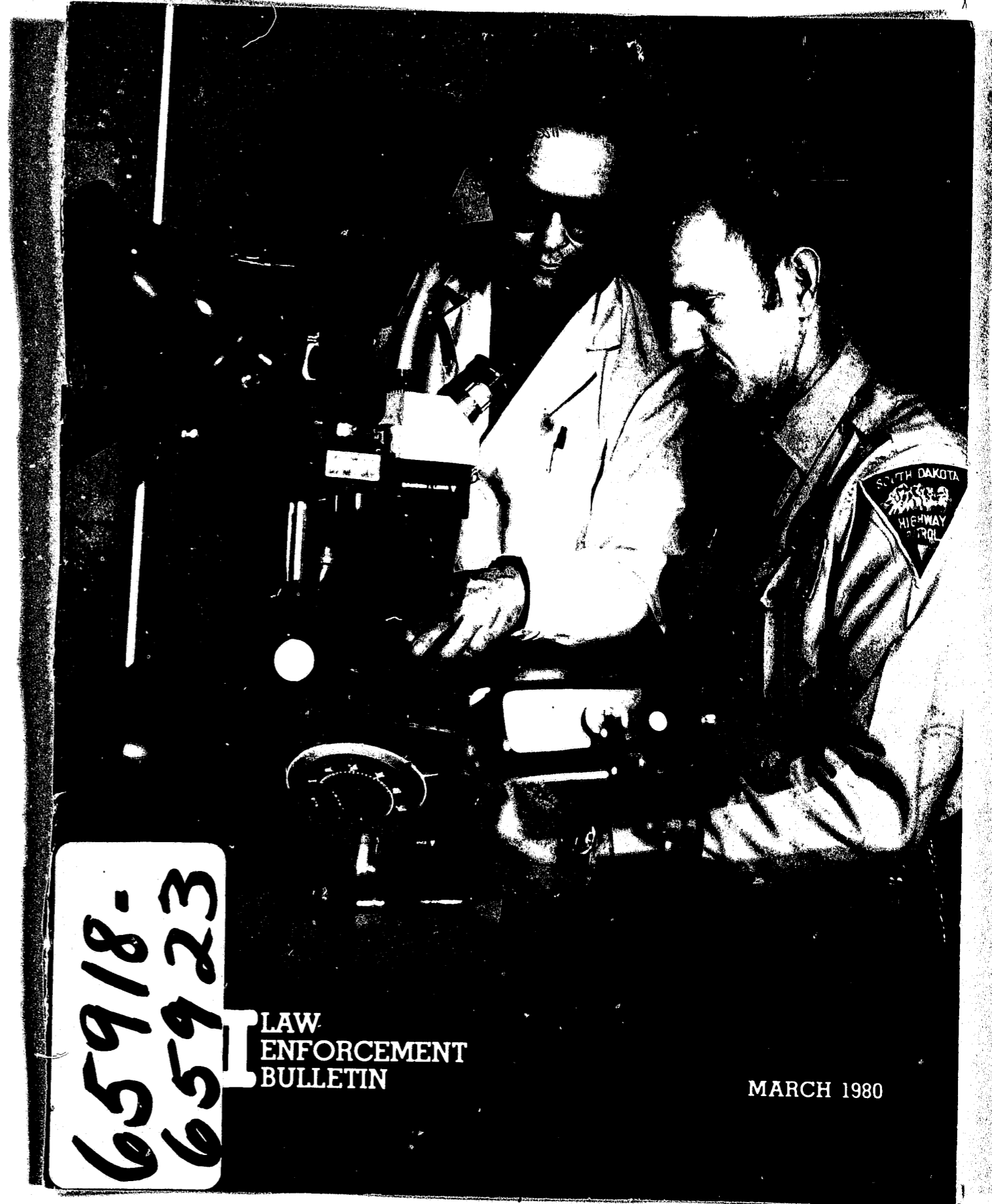
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Police and Social Worker Cooperation

A Key in Child Sexual Assault Cases

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Until recently, relationships between police officers and social workers have been characterized by mutual distrust and suspicion. The causes for this antagonism are complex, but appear to be based on assumptions held by both groups that their roles are fundamentally different and are incapable of working together.

Many police officers have the opinion that social workers are "do gooders" who lack an understanding of the problems faced by the police. They see social workers regarding crime as a social disease that requires "treatment" without involvement in the criminal justice system. At the same time, many social workers look upon the police as being insensitive to the offender and victim. They frequently believe that involvement with the criminal justice system produces negative consequences for the offender, as well as victim, which outweigh the effects of the original crime.

In different situations, both perceptions may be partially accurate. However, these perceptions need not hold true. Indeed, the roles of police and social workers can be made compatible.

In 1978, a study of sex crimes perpetrated against children in the first 6 months of that year was conducted by the Sexual Assault Center of the Harborview Medical Center in Seattle, Wash. The purpose of the project, which was funded by a grant from the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, was to develop new procedures to be used by criminal justice personnel when dealing with these child victims.

Table 1

Victim Characteristics

Sex of Victim	Age of Victim*	Race of Victim
Male (8) 13.6%	1-5 (7) 12.1%	Caucasian (57) 96.6%
Female (51) 86.4%	6-12 (30) 51.7%	Other (2) 3.4%
Total (59)	13-17 (21) 36.2%	Total (59)
	Total (58)	
	*1 missing	

Note: All percentages are based on individual table totals.

County police records and a series of semi-structured interviews with criminal justice personnel provided the information needed to conduct the study. The detective logs of the county sex unit were searched by a police detective in order to compile a list of sex crimes against children by month and county police case number. Specific files were then pulled from the central filing system and data collected from the narrative reports contained in these files. Interviews with a sample of police officers and prosecuting attorneys who had been involved with the center during the course of the project were conducted telephonically, ranging in length from 1-2 hours.¹

Child Victims of Sex Crimes

Between January and June 1978, the county police investigated a total of 59 cases of sex crimes perpetrated against children.² Of the victims, 86.4 percent were female and predominately Caucasian (96.6 percent). Although the age of the victims varied, the majority (51.7 percent) ranged between the ages of 6 and 12 years. (See table 1.)

Suspects in these cases were almost exclusively male (93.2 percent) and Caucasian (91.1 percent), with 57.6 percent being adult and 30.5 percent juveniles. The data reflect the majority of the cases involved a family member or a person known to the victim. Family members accounted for 32.2 percent of the perpetrators, and 49.2 percent were known to the child, but were not related. Only 18.7 percent of the suspects were strangers to the child. (See table 2.)

In terms of assault characteristics, 45.8 percent of the assaults involved intercourse and 54.2 percent were child molestations. The assaults took place in the victim's home in 47.5 percent of the cases, in the suspect's home 32.2 percent, and 20.3 percent occurred in a public place. The frequency of the crime varied from a single offense (57.6 percent) to several offenses occurring over a period of more than 1 year (16.9 percent). Table 3 presents a summary of the assault characteristics.

It was also learned that most of the cases were reported within 48 hours of the last assault (46.5 percent). In only 10.3 percent of the cases was the crime reported more than 6 months after the last assault. Family members of the victim reported the crime in 55.2 percent of the cases. The remainder were made by the victim (10.3 percent) or by someone other than the victim or family member (34.4 percent).

Police/Social Worker Cooperation

Social workers from the Sexual Assault Center, police officers, and members of the county prosecuting attorney's office worked together over a 2-year period in order to establish new procedures for dealing with the child victim of a sexual assault. Individual police officers and social workers would meet informally to discuss cases shared in common. Joint meetings between all involved would take place

weekly. In addition, social work personnel participated in police and prosecuting attorney training sessions.

Both the formalized training sessions and informal meetings served as mediums for the exchange of information. In this way, social workers were able to increase their understanding of police procedures, rules of evidence, and the process of developing a case. Police personnel became more aware of offender psychology and the needs of sexually abused children and their families. These interactions aided police in improving their interviewing skills, especially those necessary to interview the very young or developmentally disabled child.

Both groups began to look upon each other as a source for consultation and referral. Social workers would frequently ask police officers if there was sufficient evidence in a case to pursue prosecution. Police would seek the advice of the social workers on how to handle a difficult case, for example, a young child who would not talk. Brochures describing typical child reaction to sex abuse and the criminal justice system's response to a police report were made available to police and social work personnel to be distributed to the parents of the victim.³

Social work personnel see their role with child victims and their families as having two major components—counseling and advocacy. Counseling includes immediate crisis counseling to help the child and his/her family overcome the immediate crisis reaction to the abuse and/or reporting the abuse. Advocacy efforts are directed toward working with the child and family to understand the criminal justice system and its procedures, in order that the victim(s) may make an informed decision about reporting and prosecution.

Table 2

Suspect Characteristics

Suspect Sex*	Suspect Age in Years**	Victim/Suspect Relationship	Suspect Race*	
Male (55) 98.2%	12-16 (17) 32.1%	32-37 (4) 7.5%	Stranger (11) 18.7%	Caucasian (51) 91.1%
Female (1) 1.7%	17-21 (6) 11.3%	38-42 (7) 13.2%	Family Member (19) 32.2%	Other (5) 8.9%
	22-26 (6) 11.3%	43-47 (5) 9.4%	Nonfamily but known to victim (29) 49.2%	
	27-31 (5) 9.4%	48+ (3) 5.7%		
Total (56)	Total (53)	Total (59)	Total (56)	

*3 missing
**6 missing

Table 3

Assault Characteristics

How Reported to Police*	Time Lapse Between Last Assault and Report*	Location of Assault	Frequency of Offense
Child Protective Service (14) 24.1%	Less than 48 hours (27) 46.5%	Victim's Home (28) 47.5%	Single Offense (34) 57.6%
Victim's Family (32) 55.2%	2 days-2 weeks (11) 19.0%	Suspect's Home (19) 32.2%	Several, less than 1 year (15) 25.4%
Victim (6) 10.3%	2 weeks-6 months (14) 24.1%	Public Place (12) 20.3%	Several, more than 1 year (10) 16.9%
Other (6) 10.3%	6 months or more (6) 10.3%		
Total (58)	Total (58)	Total (59)	Total (59)

*1 missing

Police personnel would frequently inform victims and their families about the supportive counseling/advocacy available from social workers at the Sexual Assault Center. They reported that the availability of counseling and support services relieved them of the worry about emotional reactions and freed them to concentrate on the legal aspects of the cases.

Although formal training efforts appear to have been an important development in the close cooperative relationship between social work and police personnel, another important result is the close interpersonal relationship which developed over the 2 years of the project. This relationship is characterized by a sense of trust and mutual respect.

This relationship was formed, in part, by the social worker's emphasis on prosecution of the offender. Hence, a commonality of purpose between the police officer and social worker developed. Social workers became more knowledgeable of the legal process and increased their efforts to help the victims and their families understand this process.

On the part of social workers, the development of this relationship was facilitated by their view that involvement with the criminal justice system, when undertaken with the understanding of the child and his/her family, could be an important component of the treatment process. Such involvement communicates to the child and the nonoffending parent that the child will be protected from reabuse. This involvement also assists the offender in accepting responsibility for his behavior and to remain in treatment.

For the police, this close working relationship with social workers was based on the confidence that social workers now better understand the working of the criminal justice system and the realities and frustrations of the police role and responsibilities. Police voiced the opinion that they could rely on social workers to present accurately the problems and requirements of family involvement in the criminal justice system. In addition, they indicated that the availability of social workers to deal with the emotional reactions of sexually abused children and their families freed the police to pursue their investigative and reporting responsibilities.

Table 4

Outcome of Criminal Investigation		
Unsolved	(5)	8.5%
Insufficient Evidence	(2)	3.4%
Family Not Prosecute	(16)	27.1%
Felony Charged	(36)	61.0%
Total	(59)	

Outcome of the Investigation

Police officers reported not liking to investigate cases of sexual assault against children. Their reasons included personal feelings of horror and shock at the abuse of small children and being uncomfortable when dealing with the emotional reactions of children and their parents. Many officers report a sense of relief when social workers are available to assist them in interviewing small children and in dealing with the emotional reactions of both victims and their parents.

Criminal cases involving the sexual abuse of children can be successfully investigated. Of the 59 cases studied, only 11.9 percent went unsolved or lacked sufficient evidence to file charges. A felony charge was filed in 61 percent of the cases, and in only 27.1 percent did the victim's family refuse to prosecute. (See table 4.)

Data are not available at this time on the reasons for refusal to prosecute. However, based on the experiences of police and social workers, ignorance about and fear of the consequences of involvement with the criminal justice system, pressure from the offender on the victim and family, or feelings that participation with the criminal justice system will have a traumatic effect can be motives for refusing to prosecute the offender.

Table 5

	Last Assault and Outcome of Investigation by Time Lapse Between Last Incident and Report To Police*				
	Unsolved	Insufficient Evidence	Family not Prosecute	Felony Charged	Total
Less 48 Hrs.	(5) 8.6%	(1) 1.7%	(7) 12.1%	(14) 24.1%	(27) 46.6%
2 Days-2 Weeks	—	—	(4) 6.9%	(7) 12.1%	(11) 19.0%
2 Weeks-6 Mos.	—	—	(3) 5.2%	(11) 19.0%	(14) 24.2%
6 Mos. or More	—	(1) 1.7%	(2) 3.4%	(3) 5.2%	(6) 10.3%
Total	(5) 8.6%	(2) 3.4%	(16) 27.6%	(35) 60.3%	(58) 99.9%

*1 missing

One of the factors police frequently mentioned as the reason for their dislike of child sexual assault cases is that they received the report some time after the incident and this made processing the case difficult. Interestingly enough, although 46.6 percent of the cases in this sample were reported to police within 48 hours of the last assault, only one of the remaining cases, reported 6 months after the last incident, lacked sufficient evidence to prosecute. As can be seen in table 5, cases can be successfully investigated and charges filed even though some time had elapsed since the last incident.

Both the police and social workers involved believe that a cooperative handling of these cases was helpful to both the victim and family and resulted in a significant number of successful investigations. The efforts of these police and social work professionals suggest that their roles can be complementary and work toward the end that society and children are protected.

FBI

Footnotes

¹ This sample of the criminal justice system was not selected to be representative of all personnel either nationally or locally. No attempt was made to interview police from jurisdictions other than the county. Information obtained from these interviews may or may not reflect opinions of other police personnel. However, this information is presented to illustrate what is possible in terms of police and social worker cooperation.

² It should be pointed out that no other data either from a different or longer time period are available against which to compare the data reported here. County crime statistics and information reported similar to that which was generated for this report does not exist elsewhere. As a consequence, it is impossible to make any statements about the representativeness of these data. No conclusions will be made which are intended to reflect any population of child victims or offenders except the 59 cases for which data were collected.

³ Copies of brochures and interview guidelines are available from the Sexual Assault Center, Harborview Medical Center, Seattle, Wash. 98104.

END