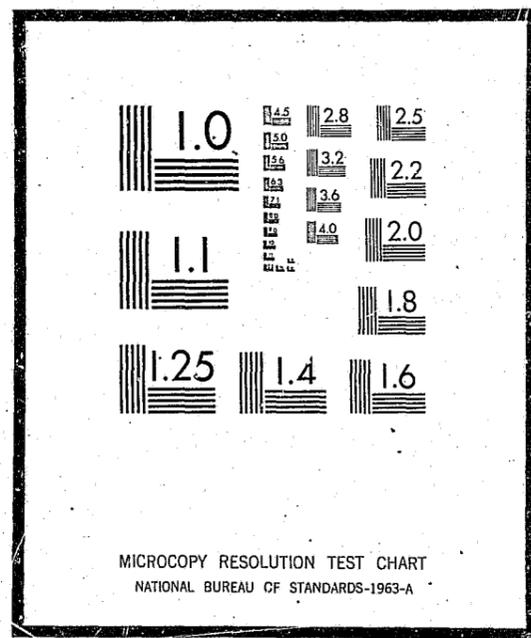


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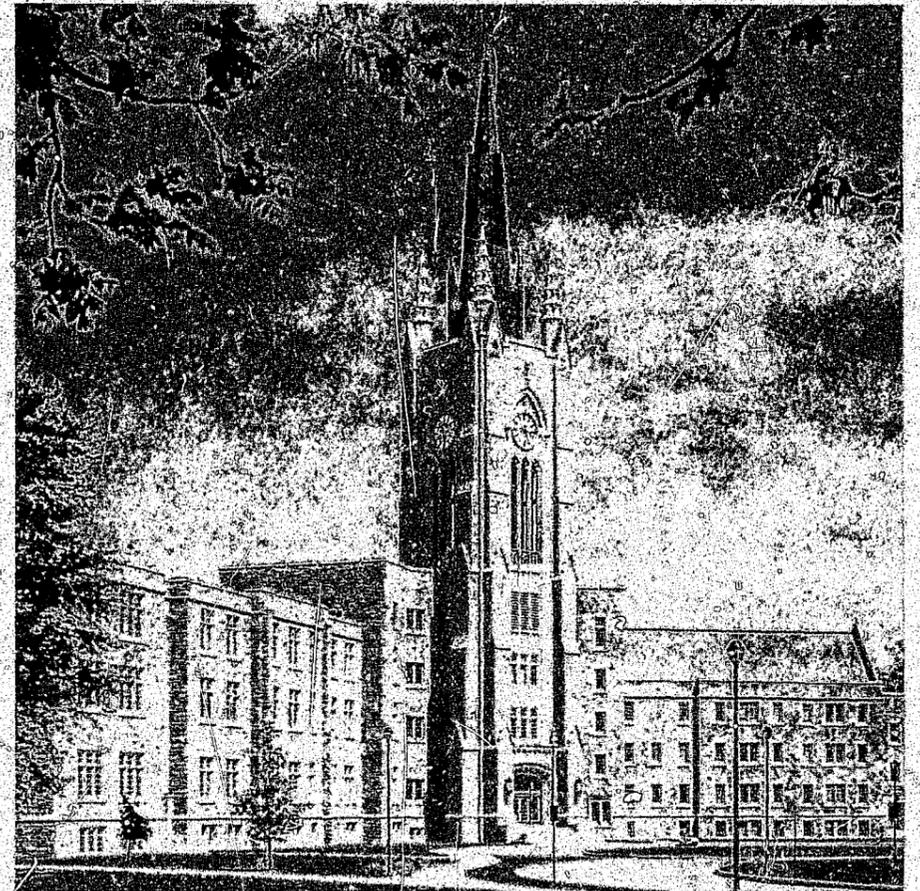
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EVALUATION OF POLICE FAMILY CRISIS

TRAINING AND CONSULTATION

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Evaluation of Police Family Crisis Training and Consultation

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The London Police Department serves a community of 231,000 people in southwestern Ontario. Family crises account for about 4-5% of their dispatched calls or approximately 4000 per year. Most of these calls originate in the evening hours, or on weekends between 5 p.m. and 3 a.m. At these times, most social agencies are not open with the exception of hospital emergency departments. In handling those calls, police feel they are trapped in a "revolving door". They restore order 'keep the peace' but are often called back many times by the same family. Even if the family does not call back often, police raise the question of whether their service goes far enough in aiding a family whose problems are of such a magnitude as to require police intervention. As a group, they further feel they have neither the time, competence, nor societal mandate to deal with such problems further. A final point is that family crisis calls are among the most dangerous that police make.

It was because of these considerations that a program was set up aimed at alleviating such conditions. The basic program was designed to span two years and had two major components. First, in 1972 a training program was provided to every member of the force (excluding inspectors and higher administrative personnel). This program was set up to train half the force in the first six weeks of 1972 (who acted as an experimental group) and the remainder near the last six weeks of the year (control group). A variety of indexes, discussed below, were gathered between the training periods to evaluate effects of training.

The second major component of the overall program was the provision of family consultant services to police. These services covered two shifts per day (12 noon to 4 a.m.), seven days a week and were deliberately delayed until January 1, 1973 in order to not confound the evaluation of training effects. The basic format of the service was as follows: when a constable makes a family crisis call, he 'puts out the fire' and does anything else within his power and competence. If he feels that one or more family members could use the services of a consultant, and if the family agrees, the consultant is called out. The consultants are housed in the police station, have a portable radio and a car.² The purpose of this article is to report on this program and its evaluation.

1. This project was funded jointly by the Donner-Canadian Foundation and the Richard and Jean Ivey Fund. The author also expresses appreciation to Police Chief Walter Johnson and his administrative staff for their support throughout the project. In addition, thanks are due to Miss Jean Poole, Assistant Program Director, and the Family Consultants, Roser Broemling, Peter Jaffe, Bill Lewis and Jim Rae for their large contributions to the success of the project.
2. Appreciation is expressed to the London Association of Franchised Automobile Dealers for providing cars gratis throughout the project.

Goals

A number of interrelated goals were formulated and agreed upon. General goals were to provide improved crisis service to families in need and to evaluate the results of such service. More specifically it was hoped to a) utilize police as case finders and increase the number of referrals to helping agencies; b) increase police knowledge of and use of community resources; c) sharpen police skills in handling family crises, d) improve police-community relations.

The Training Program

Each man on the force was provided with a week of in-service training. Groups were assembled in classes of approximately 20-25 and met from Monday morning through Friday afternoon. In general, intact groups of platoons who worked together were trained in a given week. The determination of which platoon was trained in which week was done by police administrators based upon such questions how many had asked for holidays at what time. In each group, the range of experience varied from Cadets through Detective-Sergeants with 20 or more years experience. An explicit rationale of the program was that, while professionals were being used as instructors, they did not see themselves as experts in handling family crises. Some instructors had participated in such crises but to a much less extent than police and under different, usually less dangerous, circumstances. We thus wanted to set up conditions where police could learn from each other--inexperienced learning from experienced and the experienced learning from each other. At the same time, through the instructors' knowledge, somewhat different experience, and guiding of discussions, our hope was that a maximal learning situation could be developed.

The training program itself was broken down into two major components. The first component consisted of traditional lecture method and covered topics relevant to family crises. To begin with, the chief or his assistant introduced the program. A policeman presented local police-gathered statistics on the magnitude of the problem. Two lawyers covered Family Law and the Landlord and Tenants Act. A Social Worker covered Crisis Theory weaving in local experiences. A psychologist covered Alcoholism and the Family. Child battered syndromes and victim-precipitated homicides were covered by a Sociologist. Officials of central Social Agencies (e.g., Childrens Aid and Psychiatric Hospitals) covered the operation of their agencies and Provincial Acts governing their activities. A few movies were shown throughout the week on topics like alcoholism, police home calls and police handling of problematic persons.

The second part of the training program was more experiential in nature. Here, short, 8-10 minute plays were enacted in front of the men. Each play depicted a typical family fight and went per script until the point of intervention. (A professional director selected and directed the actors). At the point of intervention, a uniformed officer who had been socially isolated, intervened and handled the situation as close to real life as possible. The actors improvised and based their reactions on what had just happened in the

plays as well as on the constables' behavior. The same play was then re-enacted but with a different intervening officer for a second and a third time. In all cases the officer neither saw nor heard the play nor any previous intervention. Plays were also videotaped for later playback. Once the three consecutive plays were completed, a discussion was held comparing and contrasting the various intervention styles, methods and results as well as other possible outcomes. This training process was similar to that in Bard and Berkowitz' pioneering work (1967) except that they trained a small corps of specialists as contrasted to an entire force being trained here.

Evaluation of Training

Evaluation of any large program can be accomplished by a variety of means. At the most general level one can speak of a goal-attainment versus a systems model (Schulberg *et al.*, 1969). In the present instance our choice was for a combination of these two approaches: We had specific goals in mind by which we could measure success, but at the same time we wanted to be aware of and assess any changes produced within the larger police-mental health system. Several relevant indexes were gathered and are reported below.

Interviews with recipients of police service

Just before the second training phase took place, a sample of families were drawn for interviewing purposes. Since our interest was to evaluate training, our sample consisted of 113 families that had had a single intervention by a single trained officer (Experimental Group) and a comparable group of 118 families who had had a single intervention by a single untrained officer (Control Group). Interviewers were largely housewives and university students who were trained and paid. They were given addresses upon which to call but were uninformed concerning the nature of the project. In order to minimize citizen defensiveness about being asked questions only regarding police services, the questionnaire was made more general and dealt with 'Living in London'. As such questions were asked about other services like Education, Transportation, Health, Recreation and Sanitation. A letter providing a rationale for the questionnaire preceded the interviewer by a few days. The rationale was essentially that such information was needed for planning services and would be provided to appropriate bodies.

A total of 22 questions were asked which had an evaluative component re police services. Of these, three were statistically significantly different from each other and each in favor of the trained group. One question asked "How satisfied were you with police handling of the first problem for which you called them". The second one asked the same question about the second problem about which they called. (While these groups had only one family crisis intervention, some called police for another reason. The number of families, of course, for this item was substantially smaller, but still reached statistical significance). The third question asked "How did London Police act toward you?" Thus each time a statistically significant result was obtained, it favored the trained group. Furthermore, looking

over the entire set of 22 items, 14 of the means favored the trained group. This result with an appropriate statistic was also significant. These results suggest that the trained group was perceived by the recipients of the crisis intervention as providing better police service.

Spontaneous Letters

The Police Department keeps files on all letters of commendation or condemnation received on officers. These files were read and analyzed for the year preceding the training program (1971) and the year of the program (1972). Two analyses were carried out, one using the letter as the unit of analysis and one using individual constables as the unit. Commendatory letters were classified according to Experimental vs. Control for both years. Persons not in the training program were excluded as were letters that were nonspecific about men. If more than one person was named, the letter was assigned to the appropriate group based upon sheer quantity. This analysis revealed that while both groups received more letters in 1972 than in 1971, the Experimental Group rose by 75% whereas the Control Group raised only 31%. Also the number of non-specific letters fell 11%.

When the number of different men mentioned in commendatory letters were analyzed, the Experimental Group rose 29% and the Control Group fell 16%. The number of condemnatory letters was sufficiently small as to be unanalyzable.

Constable Evaluations of Training

At the end of each week of training, classes were asked to evaluate each component of the program along five evaluative dimensions: Worthless-valuable, enjoyable-unenjoyable, useless-useful, interesting-uninteresting, and desirable-undesirable. Each dimension was rated on a six-point scale. For purposes of this report, these ratings were summarized and averaged, yielding overall ratings. In general, the averaged ratings for the total program across the twelve weeks ranged between 5 and 6 (anything over 3.5 is favorable and 6 is a maximum). The specific components the men liked best were the plays, the lawyers and the judge. The overall results were clearly favorable with less than 5% of the men giving overall ratings that even dropped into the unfavorable range.

FAMILY CONSULTANTS

Evaluation of the Family Consultant Service was less formal and non-experimental. Given an n of 1 design, however, (one police force), one can conceptualize evaluation within the limits of a single system design. The Family Consultants can be viewed as a complex system of personnel and facilities, organized to provide certain services, e.g., aiding police in handling family crises, making appropriate referrals, and to provide other services of a socially useful nature to the Police Department, Community Agencies, families in crisis, and any other citizen in the community. Looked at this

way, the system can be observed along various dimensions to obtain baseline data at any point in time. Planned changes, such as the introduction of Family Consultant Services, can then be introduced, and effects assessed.

On January 1, 1973 the family consultant service was introduced. Three consultants were hired to cover two shifts a day (12 noon to 4 a.m.). The criteria for hiring the consultants were that they a) have crisis handling experience, b) have personal characteristics that make them able to enjoy and relate well with many classes of people (including, and perhaps especially, police), c) know community resources well, d) be interpersonally mature, competent and stable, and e) be willing to work non-9 to 5 hours. No preferences were held regarding professional identification. Two males and one female were hired. (The force had been surveyed regarding the desirability of a female with over 99% favorable). Two of the consultants had been obtained in sufficient time for them to participate in the last few weeks of the second training session. This condition had the effect of introducing them to the force and opening up discussions of how to maximize their usage.

From the outset the Family Consultants (FC's) were used and appeared to be received enthusiastically. After six months of operation the entire police force was surveyed by Questionnaire for their reaction to the FC service. By that time, the FC's had averaged 117 interventions per month. Sixty four percent of these were family crises and 36% 'other' - suicides, missing persons, runaway youths, etc. The general reaction of the police force was overwhelmingly favorable to the service. Ninety-one percent of the officers had utilized the service, 88% indicated they had received feedback on referrals and 97% indicated the FC's had been available when needed. Regarding the same six-point scale used earlier and considering only ratings of 5 and 6, 91% rated the service as valuable, 94% as desirable, and 90% as necessary. Finally, 68% felt the service should be expanded. Spontaneous comments from the force were also solicited. These qualitative data were in keeping with the quantitative results above. In general, they might be best summarized by the comment "we don't know how we ever got along without them".

Similar questionnaire data were obtained from the agencies accepting referrals. Sixteen agencies returned 69 questionnaires. Sixty seven percent were from Social Workers, 18% from nurses, 11% from psychiatrists and 4% from teachers. Considering the same six-point scale used above (and only ratings of 5 or 6), 90% rated the service valuable, 97% desirable and 89% necessary. Furthermore 93% felt the service should be continued and 76% felt it should be expanded. These figures compare favorably with those obtained from the police department. Thus, both the Police Department and local agencies appeared in agreement regarding the value of the Family Consultant service.

Referrals

A check was made of police logs for six months prior to the program's beginning. This check revealed that 2.5% of all police family interventions resulted in a referral. Most (88%) of these referrals went to the statutory

agency responsible for administration of the Child Welfare Act (Family and Children Services). The remaining few were scattered across three agencies, two of which were 'official' (court related). By the beginning of the second training session, the referral rate was 10.4% of all interventions (11% for the Experimental Group and 9.6% for the Control). However, 76% of these were still being made to the same statutory agency. Since the FC's have been available, the referral rate has risen slightly to 11.5%. The distribution of referrals by officers alone is still similar to that in the past although the absolute numbers have gone down drastically. The FC's now account for approximately 90% of all referrals. Of these, approximately 25% go to each of three large city agencies with the remaining 25% being distributed among 18 other agencies.

A further question relates to what proportion of referrals are actually reaching an agency. Our feedback results from agencies to date indicate that 56% of those referred had accepted an appointment and were seen. It should also be pointed out that these referrals represent new cases. That is, when the FC's discover an individual or family is already being seen by an agency, the individual is asked to return there but is not counted as a referral.

A point might be made about the characteristics of the persons or families been seen. One expectation might be that they might be largely welfare families. To check this out, a random sample of families requiring police intervention was checked against both municipal and provincial welfare rolls. Only 29% of our sample had been on welfare at any time during the first 9 months of 1973.

A final point has to do with 'hard-core' families. Our data indicate that the vast majority of families have a low number of interventions (mode equals one). Thus a low number of families have a high number of interventions. It was our hope that these families who very frequently use police services might require such services less often. Families with 10 or more interventions in the two years were checked for frequency. There was a significant reduction in police calls to those families in 1973 as compared with 1972.

OTHER EFFECTS

A number of other events occurred of an anecdotal nature which appear to be a direct result of the program. For example, most films available relevant to this program were American in content. In general, the men reacted negatively to these films. Given this fact, the Director of the plays is applying for funds to produce a series of films containing wholly Canadian situations, policemen, laws, and procedures.

Reactions from the press and public media have been consistently favorable. In the first 18 months of operation, publicity was assiduously avoided in order, again, to not confound treatment effects. Once basic effects were established, however, publicity has been permitted. Several

local T.V. programs have focussed on the program as has one large newspaper article. In addition, requests have been honored to present the program at conventions of nurses, social workers, police personnel and inter-agency meetings. The Family Consultants have spoken frequently at local meetings as well as served on community-wide committees. The author has honored requests to consult with other police departments who would like to or are attempting similar projects.

The Family Consultant service was also used as approved practicum experience for a graduate student in clinical psychology. Numerous inquiries have been received from other professional groups regarding the possibility of placing their students. Understandably, this is a delicate issue and is being approached carefully. Along this line, informal impressions gained from talking with various officers is that the family consultant service has helped open up the traditional 'closed fraternity' of police departments. Before its inception, many (especially seasoned) officers doubted its viability and expressed fears regarding 'civilians' doing this kind of work. Now, for the most part, they not only praise the service, but invite the Consultants to police social gatherings, and are anxious for the service to continue.

CONCLUSIONS

Our data appear to justify the following conclusions: a) The training program was positively perceived by the police themselves, b) The program resulted in desirable changes in police behavior in handling family crises which were discernable by the recipients of the service, c) The program changed police behaviors toward the public generally, resulting in more commendatory letters, d) The program resulted in an increase of referrals to social agencies, e) The Family Consultants service was well received by both police and community agencies, f) The Family Consultants service resulted in further increases in referral rates and more equitably and appropriately distributed them, g) The majority of new referrals were in fact seen by an agency, h) Families frequently using police intervention services have reduced their requests. In general, the program appears to have achieved its goals and had little, if any, negative effects on the police-mental health system.

By now, a number of other similar programs have been carried out across North America. Liebowitz and Schwartz (1972) reviewed 14 such programs. None, however, had been adequately evaluated. Our aim in the current program was to make evaluation sufficiently rigorous as to make conclusions possible. Once such studies begin appearing, comparative reviews can then build up a body of reliable information upon which to formulate public policy and distribute funds.

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