

**The Second Responders Program:
A Coordinated Police and Social Service
Response to Domestic Violence**

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2004
NCJ 199717

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This project was supported under award 98–WT–VX–0001 from the National Institute of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. Findings and conclusions of the research reported here are those of the authors and do not reflect the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

In the past decade, multiagency approaches to problem solving in the criminal justice system have moved into the foreground. Nowhere has an integrative approach been more fully recognized and advanced than in issues relating to violence against women. Scholars and practitioners have stressed that successful approaches against domestic violence should be multidisciplinary and coordinated across agencies (e.g., see Crowell and Burgess, 1996; Hart 1995; Pence, 1983; Pence and Shepard, 1999; Witwer and Crawford, 1995). The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), Title IV of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 (Public Law 103–322) required “the coming together of various professions and perspectives to forge partnerships in responding to violence against women in all its forms” (Travis, 1996).

As interest in coordinated approaches to domestic violence continues to increase, new interagency programs are developing across the United States. It is important to learn how such programs operate and to evaluate their effectiveness in order to develop successful models that may be adapted in multiple jurisdictions.

The Second Responders Program

Richmond, Virginia, responded to the call for coordinated approaches to public safety with the development of the Second Responders Program, a collaborative effort of the Richmond Department of Social Services and the Richmond Police Department. The Second Responders are a unit of social workers from the Department of Social Services who work out of two (of four) police precincts in Richmond between 6 p.m. and 9 a.m. They respond to incidents of domestic violence (and other human service cases) while the police are still onsite. At the scene, they offer immediate services to victims and their families. Second Responders’ first task is to assess and ensure the safety of the victim. In almost all situations Second Responders provide victims with information about services offered through the Department of Social Services and other agencies and assist in developing a plan to access these services. Second Responders can provide the victim with a wide range of information about such matters as protective orders, court, legal aid, battered women’s shelters, and counseling services. They can place victims in hotels for short periods of time, provide them with food and baby supplies, transport them to safe locations, accompany them to the emergency room, or provide them with bus tickets for getting to and from court or the Department of Social Services. Before going off duty the following morning, Second Responders refer the night’s domestic violence cases to the Family Violence Prevention Program (FVPP) in the Department of Social Services. Each case is assigned to an FVPP worker, who is required to contact the victim within 72 hours.

Program Goals

While other programs have involved coordinating efforts of police and social workers (Davis and Taylor, 1997), the Second Responders Program emphasizes the immediacy of the response to the domestic violence event. By offering assistance while the incident is fresh and undeniable, the city of Richmond hoped that victims would be more likely to succeed in obtaining social and other services, in pursuing their rights and legal remedies, and in improving their situations generally. Although other programs emphasized prosecution (Gamache, Edelson, and Schock, 1988; Pence, 1983; Steinman, 1988, 1990; Syers and Edelson 1992), the Second Responders

Program considers criminal prosecution one among many outcomes of interest. Most important, planners hoped that the Second Responders Program would reduce the incidence of domestic violence in Richmond by reducing repeat victimization.

Research Design

The larger study from which this paper is taken involves evaluation of the Second Responders Program as well as a process evaluation of the researcher/practitioner partnership formed between the Police Foundation and the Richmond Police Department and Richmond Department of Social Services. This paper examines the Second Responders Program and considers several process and outcome measures that the authors assessed at the time of the conference on Violence Against Women and Family Violence: Developments in Research, Practice, and Policy. Findings are based on two waves of victim interviews with women who received Second Responder intervention and women who received only police intervention. Field researchers contacted eligible subjects and attempted to interview them within 1 week of the domestic violence incident to which police were called; the second interview took place 6 months later. A complete analysis of the outcome evaluation, including measures of the impact of the Second Responders Program on repeat victimization, will be provided in the full report to the National Institute of Justice (Greenspan et al., 2003).

Because Richmond implemented the Second Responders Program fully in two of its four police precincts, researchers were able to employ a quasi-experimental design: the experimental group was drawn from the First and Second Precincts, where the program was adopted, and the control group from the Third and Fourth Precincts. Control cases received the conventional police response. The experimental cases received intervention from both the Richmond Police and the Second Responders.

During the sampling period, Police Foundation researchers daily reviewed domestic violence reports routinely submitted by police at the end of each shift to identify eligible subjects, defined as age 18 years or older, a resident of Richmond, and a female victim of abuse by a former or current intimate partner. Only cases that occurred during the Second Responders' working hours—6 p.m. to 9 a.m.—were included to ensure experimental and control group comparability.

Readers who have experience conducting interview-based studies with victims of domestic violence know what a challenge it can be to make initial contact and obtain cooperation, as well as to locate subjects for followup interviews 6 months later. Once researchers reached a potential subject, they achieved a 72-percent cooperation rate on the first interview. Including potential subjects they could not contact, the first-wave response rate was 50 percent. For the second wave, the cooperation rate was a remarkable 92 percent. Including subjects who could not be contacted for the second interview, researchers achieved a response rate of 76 percent. (For a detailed description of case selection methodology and process, contact methods, and interview protocols, see Greenspan et al., 2003.) Researchers conducted a total of 158 first-wave interviews and 120 second-wave interviews, on which the findings in this report are based.

Findings

Interview findings are presented in four general areas: services provided by police and Second Responders, attitudes toward police and Second Responders, the likelihood of receiving followup from an FVPP worker, and the likelihood of obtaining an emergency protective order.

Characteristics of the Sample

Because the experimental and control groups are defined by geographic boundaries rather than random assignment, researchers paid special attention to the comparability of experimental and control subjects. They collected a wide range of (self-reported) demographic data, including age, race, marital status, living situation, education, work status, income, and household size (see exhibit 1). The data revealed no significant differences between groups on any measured demographic variable.

Exhibit 1. Selected Demographic Characteristics of Sample

Characteristic	Experimental	Control	Total
Living together at time of incident	70% (54)	71% (56)	71% (110)
Not married	65% (51)	69% (55)	67% (106)
Living with minor children	76% (65)	65% (53)	71% (118)
18–29 years old	49% (38)	33% (26)	41% (64)
African American	87% (65)	80% (62)	83% (127)
Employed	64% (49)	63% (50)	64% (99)
High school graduate or GED	72% (55)	74% (59)	74% (114)

Second Responders' Services

Did the Second Responders Program provide the wide range of services intended? Although the services provided varied greatly, field observations and victim interviews suggest that this variation depended largely on the perceived needs and desires of individual victims. In most cases, Second Responders provided safety assessments and informational services, including referrals to the Department of Social Services and information on a range of available social assistance and legal protections. Much less frequently, they provided direct services such as vouchers for emergency hotel stays, food, childcare supplies, or transportation. Exhibit 2 shows the services experimental subjects reported receiving from Second Responders and the extent to which they were provided.

Exhibit 2. Services Provided by Second Responders

Service Provided	Percent of Experimental Subjects Who Reported Receiving Service From Second Responders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refer to social services • Assess safety of subject and others 	>75
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss services available from social services • Discuss protective orders (with subject) • Talk with subject about legal rights 	60–69
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide information about court process • Talk with subject about where she can go/stay 	50–59
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide victim service referral card • Ask if medical attention needed 	40–49
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refer to legal services • Provide crisis counseling 	30–39
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a safety plan with subject 	20–29
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help contact places where subject can stay • Discuss alarm systems 	10–19
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transport subject somewhere to stay • Provide bus tickets • Remove a child from the home • Provide food or food vouchers • Provide a cellular phone • Contact a mental health worker 	<10

Very few of the victims in either the experimental or the control group had had contact with an FVPP worker prior to this incident (12 percent and 14 percent, respectively). An important aspect of the program design was assignment of an FVPP worker, who would contact the client within 72 hours of assignment to the case. Findings on this dimension are somewhat mixed (see exhibit 3). Many more experimental subjects were contacted by an FVPP worker shortly after the incident than were control subjects (55 percent compared to 4 percent). On the other hand, 45 percent of experimental subjects said that they were not contacted by an FVPP worker. Through discussions with practitioners, researchers learned that the Second Responders were promptly passing the referral to FVPP, but followup efforts by FVPP often were not successful. Nevertheless, more than half the women in the experimental group were contacted by a FVPP worker; most of them would not have had this followup without the Second Responders’ intervention.

Exhibit 3. Contact With Family Violence Prevention Program (FVPP)

FVPP Contact	Experimental (N = 78)	Control (N = 80)	Total (N = 158)
Contact with FVPP prior to incident	12%	14%	13%
Contact with FVPP since incident*	55%	4%	29%

* $p < .01$

Subjects' Assessment of Second Responders

For the program to succeed, it is important that subjects perceive the Second Responders in a positive light. Researchers asked a number of four-point Likert-like scale questions, which respondents answered by expressing their views of the Second Responder(s) who came to the scene on the night of the incident. Exhibit 4 reports on the numbers that rated them in the highest category for six different measures. For most of these questions, far more than half the subjects ranked the Second Responder service in the most positive category.

Exhibit 4. Attitudes Toward Second Responder Service

Measure of Attitude Toward Second Responder	Percent of Responses	Number of Responses
Reported that Second Responders "really wanted to help"	92	70
Reported that Second Responders listened "very carefully"	88	65
Reported that Second Responders took situation "very seriously"	82	61
Would recommend Second Responders "very strongly"	79	60
Reported being "very satisfied" with Second Responders	73	54
Reported that Second Responders were "very useful"	51	38

Attitudes Toward the Police

It is reasonable to expect that domestic violence victims will be less likely to contact the police for assistance if their previous experiences have been negative. Consequently, a positive encounter can enhance victim safety by encouraging the victim to reach out for help.

The data suggest that subjects who received Second Responder assistance had much more positive views of the police encounter than control subjects did (see exhibit 5). This view may reflect the influence of Second Responders on officers to provide better service to victims. A number of officers remarked that the presence of Second Responders in their precincts led to casual conversations about domestic violence and greater awareness of the problem. Positive experiences with Second Responders also may generate a halo effect that elevates victims' opinion about the police response in general. Whether the police in fact do better or are only perceived to do better when accompanied by Second Responders, a victim's improved view of the police may lead to increased victim safety.

Exhibit 5. Attitudes Toward the Police

Attitude Toward Police Encounter	Experimental	Control	Total
Very satisfied with the way police handled the situation***	64% (49)	38% (30)	50% (79)
Police officers took situation very seriously**	71% (55)	55% (42)	63% (97)
Police officers listened very carefully to my side*	75% (58)	57% (45)	66% (103)

*** $p < .01$ (analysis based on all response categories)

** $p < .05$ (analysis based on all response categories)

* $p < .10$ (analysis based on all response categories)

Services Provided by Police

Subjects also describe significant differences in the types and extent of services provided by the police in the experimental and control groups. Again researchers cannot be certain whether the police in fact offered far more assistance when Second Responders were present or whether a halo effect allowed police to receive credit for services provided by Second Responders. Exhibit 6 shows the services subjects reported receiving from the police.

Exhibit 6. Services Provided by Police

Service Provided by Police	Experimental	Control
Assess safety of subject and others***	74% (55)	53% (38)
Ask if medical attention is needed	65% (51)	59% (43)
Discuss protective orders (with subject)***	64% (48)	37% (28)
Talk with subject about legal rights	46% (35)	39% (30)
Provide information about going to court	44% (34)	32% (24)
Refer to social services***	41% (32)	3% (2)
Discuss services available from social services***	30% (23)	4% (3)
Tell about places to go and stay**	27% (21)	13% (9)
Provide referral card	15% (12)	6% (5)
Help contact places to stay*	14% (5)	0% (0)
Refer to legal services**	12% (9)	3% (2)
Take somewhere to stay	7% (4)	4.3% (1)
Transport to medical facility	7% (5)	5% (4)

*** $p < .01$

** $p < .05$

* $p < .10$

Obtaining Emergency Protective Orders

Is the presence of Second Responders instrumental to the victim in obtaining legal protections? In Richmond, emergency protective orders (EPOs), good for 72 hours, must be obtained before a judicial officer either by the victim herself or by a police officer on her behalf. The analysis shows that victims in the experimental group are more likely to have obtained emergency protective orders the night of the incident (see exhibit 7). Forty-seven percent of experimental cases compared to 25 percent of control cases obtained EPOs the night of the incident ($p = .01$). The higher proportion of EPOs reflects a higher proportion of police obtaining the orders rather than more victims themselves. Police obtained EPOs for the victims in 33 percent of the experimental cases, but in only 19 percent of the control cases.

Exhibit 7. Emergency Protective Orders

Did You Get an Emergency Protective Order (EPO) That Night?			
	Experimental ($N = 73$)	Control ($N = 75$)	Total ($N = 148$)
Obtained EPO**	47%	25%	36%
EPO obtained by police*	33%	19%	26%
EPO obtained by victim	9%	5%	7%

** $p < .01$

* $p < .05$

Conclusions

Reported here are some preliminary findings of this study of the Second Responders Program. These results indicate significant promise for the program and for similar interventions that bring social workers and police together to the scene of a domestic violence incident. Subjects expressed very positive views about their experience with Second Responders and reported receiving a range of information and services from them. Perhaps more important, subjects who received intervention from both the police and the Second Responders were significantly more likely to rate the police very highly across several measures. Whether this difference is due to better police service or a more positive opinion of service because of Second Responders' presence, the beneficial effects may be the same—increased willingness to seek assistance.

Experimental subjects express significantly more positive attitudes toward the police, are significantly more likely to be protected with EPOs, and are significantly more likely to have contact with social services. Together, these findings suggest the possibility that victims served by Second Responders *and* police have an increased chance of avoiding future incidents of domestic violence. The final report explores this question in depth, examining the 6-month period after the initial incident on a broad range of dimensions, from the domestic situation to types of services obtained to legal actions and, importantly, to a detailed analysis of repeat victimizations (Greenspan et al., 2003).

Implications for Researchers

The richness of data obtained in interviews with victims of domestic violence cannot be matched by any other method of data collection. Nevertheless, obtaining sufficient cases for analysis is a long and arduous process. The best advice the authors can offer is—patience!

Implications for Practitioners

The researcher/practitioner partnership, which has not been examined in depth in this paper, faced some difficult issues, especially concerning program implementation. For most of this study, the police officer who responded to a domestic violence call for service was solely responsible for calling the Second Responders. Implementation was initially far from complete—a fact that was very important to the researchers, but initially of less concern to the Second Responders and the police. The advice the authors offer is to collaborate.

An immediate combined social service and police response to incidents of domestic violence may be so promising that the authors cannot but urge further experimentation and analysis.

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