Article

# Police Responses to Cases of Officer-Involved Domestic Violence: The Effects of a Brief Web-Based Training

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**Abstract**   No national research has examined the effect of law enforcement officer training on the problem of officer-involved domestic violence (OIDV). This study investigated responses of officers ($n = 852$) to case scenarios of OIDV before and after they participated in the National Prevention Toolkit on OIDV, an online training. Officers were asked how likely they were to take particular actions, including assisting a victim in finding help for domestic violence, arresting the perpetrating officer, and filing an internal report against the officer. Officers' responses from pre- to post-training indicated their increased likelihood of reacting to scenarios with desirable, victim-supportive behaviours including an increased likelihood of arrest and filing of internal reports. Officers indicated that the Toolkit would influence them and others to intervene in suspected cases of OIDV. Limitations of the methods are discussed. Implications for research, advocacy, and training are provided.

## Introduction

The widespread prevalence and serious effects of intimate partner violence have been well documented in the USA and worldwide (Ellsberg *et al.*, 2008; Black *et al.*, 2011; Howarth and Feder, 2013). The criminal justice system's recognition of and response to such violence has increased markedly over the years, with mandatory training for police officers now required by most states. The training topics include victim assistance, rights, and resources (Ark. Code Ann. §12-9-113, 2015; Fla. Stat. §943.171, 2015; N.J. Stat. Ann. §§2C:25-20, 52:4B-47, 2015), interview techniques that are victim-focused and sensitive, and trauma-informed practices (50 Ill. Comp. Stat. 705/7(a), 2015). Researchers have called training for police on responding to domestic violence 'essential' (Eigenberg *et al.*, 2012), and have heralded its marked improvement over the last several decades (Buzawa, 2012), noting that most police academies now have at least some training on domestic violence. The federal government has also made major efforts related to officer training and policy development through its STOP grant program since the Violence Against Women Act was passed (U.S. Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against

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Women, 2014). Although strides have been made to curb intimate partner violence, it also remains critical to stop such violence when it is committed by the very officers charged with assuring public safety. Domestic violence by police officers and their intimate partners must be prevented so as to assure officer and family safety and ultimately, to save lives.

Law enforcement organizations have recently begun to examine how departments and individual officers respond to cases and potential risk factors of officer-involved domestic violence (OIDV). Some police and sheriff's departments have instituted more thorough hiring and screening processes, added supplementary training and prevention education, and adopted new policies for departmental responses to OIDV (Oehme and Martin, 2011; Garvey, 2015). Many of these local and state policies for prevention, reporting, victim safety, and investigation are based on the recommendations of the International Association for Chiefs of Police (International Association of Chiefs of Police [IACP], 2003; Mazzola, 2013).

## Rates and responses to OIDV

The rates and consequences of domestic violence are well known; however, determining precise rates of officers' domestic violence against an intimate partner has proven difficult. The incidence of OIDV remains unclear despite increased attention on domestic violence training for law enforcement. The difficulties in determining accurate incidence often stem from small samples and imprecise measures (Oehme *et al.*, 2011; Valentine *et al.*, 2012; Garvey, 2015). Estimates of officers committing this crime range from fewer than 10% of all officers to more than 40% (Neidig *et al.*, 1992; Gershon, 1999; Blumenstein *et al.*, 2012; Valentine *et al.*, 2012; Stinson and Liederbach, 2013; Friedersdorf, 2014; Garvey, 2015).

Victims of OIDV face unique barriers to seeking help, which may further maintain OIDV. Victims know that their abuser has access to lethal weapons

and is familiar with the locations of domestic violence shelters and other locations in the community to which the victim might retreat for help. According to the National Center on Women and Policing (2013), abusers in cases of OIDV have experience within the criminal justice system and are therefore readily able to manipulate the system so as to shift blame to the victim. In fact, victim advocates often advise OIDV victims that they will encounter strong resistance from the system if they accuse their partners (Wetendorf, 2015). Victims may also fear that reporting the domestic violence will threaten the abusive partner's job (Wetendorf, 2015). In a survey of police spouses, more than 50% of respondents believed that their partner's career would suffer if family problems were made known to the agency (On the front lines, 1991). Victims may also know that officers will be prohibited from possessing a firearm and face legal consequences if they are convicted of charges of domestic violence (Lonsway, 2006), further reducing their desire to report their partners.

Also complicating efforts at determining incidence and prevalence of OIDV, as well as efforts to hold abusive officers accountable, is the so-called 'Code of Silence' that emphasizes secrecy and discourages reporting of colleagues' misconduct (Roslin, 2016). This cultural value may serve as a critical impediment to officers' willingness to report colleagues' perpetration of domestic violence or take action to assist the victim, further minimizing reported rates of OIDV. Studies of adherence to the Code of Silence have focused less on domestic violence than on other types of wrongdoing (Gershon, 1999; Hickman *et al.*, 2001; Chappell and Piquero, 2010; Wolfe and Piquero, 2011).

Previous studies have found that officer cynicism, unethical attitudes, association with negative or deviant peers, and abuse of seniority are each associated with police misconduct. One study found that officers who associated with deviant peers who favored minor forms of misconduct

had more favorable attitudes regarding the Code of Silence, closely paralleling earlier findings (see Chappell and Piquero, 2010). Similarly, there is evidence that when an agency is perceived as just—as exemplified by fair decision-making, adherence to managerial procedure, and polite and courteous interactions—officer respondents were less likely to adhere to the Code of Silence (Wolfe and Piquero, 2011).

## Risk factors related to OIDV

Previous studies have identified three specific job 'spillover' effects that may trigger an officers' abuse of an intimate partner. These effects include: 1) attitudes and behaviours instilled as part of police training, such as the use of command presence and interrogation techniques, 2) the traditional masculine and authoritarian culture of the department, and 3) officers' work stress and professional burnout.

The extensive job training officers receive in subduing and interrogating suspects can be distorted to exert power and control over intimate partners (Johnson et al., 2005). In addition to training effects, the police subculture has been examined in light of OIDV. Specifically, an officer's lower risk of being arrested, the role of hypermasculinity, and difficulty 'turning off' the law enforcement role at home have been cited as potential correlates of OIDV (Johnson, 2010). Because police face dangerous conditions on the streets and often rely on one another for safety and support (Garvey, 2015), officer solidarity is considered an important job component (Mazzola, 2013). Officers may then carry this cohesive culture and its values of authority, power, and control over to personal, domestic contexts (On the front lines, 1991). In fact, authoritarianism has been linked to psychological, but not physical, domestic abuse in one convenience sample of police officers (Blumenstein et al., 2012). In addition to training and subculture effects, previous evidence has indicated that officers' on-the-job exposure to violent and traumatic situations results in higher rates of job stress (Edwards,

2006), PTSD (Bell and Orcutt, 2009), and substance abuse (Stinson and Liederbach, 2013)—these may also enhance the risk of OIDV.

More recent research also suggests that factors separate from job spillover may influence OIDV, such as that officer's own maltreatment or exposure to domestic violence (Zavala et al., 2015). Specifically, having experienced maltreatment as a child was associated with police officers self-reporting IPV perpetration in adulthood (Zavala et al., 2015). Other research findings have indicated abuse as a child and exposure to domestic violence to be related to positive responses to victims in other professional groups (Saunders et al., 2011). Thus, findings are not consistent. Each of these influences, combined with officers' individual characteristics, can work independently or interactively to shape a highly trained abuser (Garvey, 2015).

Although we found no other research on the effects of officer training on OIDV prevention, and found very little on domestic violence training for officers overall, other research has examined the effects of training on officers' attitudes towards and their responses to incidents of sexual assault. These prior studies, however, yielded conflicting results and it remains unclear how these attitudes and responses might affect OIDV. Trainings have been offered to correct victim blaming and other undesirable police responses to sexual assault, since some studies find victim blaming to be common (Campbell and Johnson, 1997). One such study concluded that the training was effective in improving officers' behavioural performance, but not cognitive or attitudinal outcomes (Lonsway et al., 2001). One study showed no significant differences between officers who were specially trained and those who were not. However, the authors noted a significant increase in perpetrator blaming for his actions among the specially trained (Sleath and Bull, 2010). A more recent study of police sexual assault training revealed decreased perceptions of victim responsibility post-training (Darwinkel et al., 2013).

The current study provides an initial evaluation of The National Prevention Toolkit on OIDV (hereafter, 'Toolkit'), a national training program on OIDV, and expands previous descriptive findings (see Saunders *et al.*, 2016). The brief, web-based training focuses on the dynamics and warning signs of, and responses to OIDV. Using a pre-post design, we evaluated the Toolkit by comparing officer's responses before and after training. We asked officers how likely they would be to take certain actions if faced with two descriptive OIDV case scenarios. We examined officer responses to the case scenarios on several desirable behaviours such as supporting the victim with referrals, reporting offenses to supervisors, and arresting the perpetrating officer. We also examined subgroups of officers, based on demographic (e.g. race, marital status) and professional characteristics (e.g. supervisor versus non-supervisors), to determine whether some groups improved more than others after the training.

## Methods

### Training development and implementation

The National Prevention Toolkit on OIDV can be found at http://nationaltoolkit.csw.fsu.edu. Funded by the Verizon Foundation, development of the Toolkit took place over 4 years (2009–2013) and involved the support of multiple national, state, and local stakeholders, including the executive directors of the Police Chiefs Associations of several states, as well as the Major Cities Chiefs Association. Chiefs and sheriffs from across the USA have emphasized the importance of free, easily accessible training. The Toolkit's self-paced curriculum was made available at no cost to both officers and administrative staff—including police and sheriffs, correctional officers, and probation officers in law enforcement and criminal justice settings in all regions of the USA. The Toolkit includes two modules: one for rank-and-file officers and one for officers in supervisory and administrative positions. The training emphasizes prevention and therefore is not directed at those officers who have been accused or found guilty of OIDV.

Module 1 focuses on the complex and multifaceted nature of domestic violence, as well as the distinct dynamics that may exist when an officer is violent at home. This module describes the impact of OIDV on the victim, the family, the department, and the community, and it explains how some qualities that make an effective law enforcement officer can be problematic in intimate relationships. For example, one section reminds participants that 'Being suspicious is part of an officer's job, and can save an officer's life. Being suspicious and paranoid *at home* can destroy an officer's family.' This module identifies warning signs based on the IACP Model Policy (IACP, 2003) to help participants recognize behaviours in their colleagues that might be associated with domestic violence. The module identifies resources within the department and community available to both perpetrators and victims. This module also emphasizes the many departmental and systemic consequences of OIDV. Justifications and avenues for reporting a fellow officer's domestic abuse are discussed in depth.

The module acknowledges that, even though officers know that domestic violence is a crime, some may be reluctant to take action against the abuser when that abuser is a colleague. Module content discusses the ethical and professional decision-making processes associated with an officer sharing suspicions about a colleague with a supervising officer or internal affairs, and it makes clear the reasons why such reporting is essential. This module describes domestic abuse victim dynamics and the barriers that often prevent victims of OIDV from leaving their relationships. The module tells how officers can help victims overcome those barriers by making referrals to community resources.

Throughout, the training reminds officers that the safety of vulnerable family members is the highest priority whenever OIDV (or any domestic

violence) is suspected or alleged. Important departmental and community resources are listed to help officers help victims before violence escalates. These resources include the department's Employee Assistance Program (EAP), counseling, and the department chaplain. Videos reinforce the importance of the role of a police officer in the community and show how the legitimacy of the department can be called into question if an officer is violent with an intimate partner. Chief Walter McNeil, former President of the International Association of Chiefs, is shown in one video telling officers that they are role models:

> Our criminal justice agencies need the trust of the community to do their jobs. And every officer should earn that trust. I know how brave you are. You put your lives on the line every day. But it takes a different kind of courage to refuse to tolerate officers in the ranks who may be abusive to their loved ones. And it takes courage to get help if you need it. Have that courage.

Module 2, not evaluated in the current study, is designed for those in leadership roles and describes the crucial role of administrative staff and supervisors in preventing and responding to OIDV.

## Measures

A variety of demographic and professional characteristics were used to describe the sample of officers and to examine subgroup differences between pre- and post-training. Furthermore, case scenarios were used to measure officers' responses to cases of OIDV before and after training. These scenarios were derived from known cases of OIDV and were embedded within the Toolkit.

Previous studies have evaluated domestic violence trainings with child protection workers and supervisors (Saunders and Anderson, 2000), as well as TANF welfare workers and supervisors (Saunders et al., 2005) using case scenarios. Case

scenarios may reduce response bias by encouraging professionals to become more engaged in a descriptive vignette. Compared with traditional survey techniques, professionals are likely to feel challenged to use their skills, especially when asked to engage in perspective taking when responding to case scenarios (Hughes and Huby, 2012).

*Officer demographic characteristics.* Demographics included race, gender, sexual identity, highest level of education, age, marital status, current living situation (e.g. lives alone, or with intimate partner), and region of residence in the USA (e.g. Southeast).

*Officer professional characteristics.* Professional characteristics included years serving as a criminal justice officer, agency, or department setting (i.e. urban, rural), agency or department affiliation (police, sheriff), and supervisory status (supervisor, non-supervisor).

*Case scenarios.* The Toolkit contained two case scenarios, each with two segments (i.e. Case scenario 1, segments 1 and 2; Case scenario 2, segments 1 and 2; see Saunders et al., 2016 for case scenarios). Case scenario 1 gave clear evidence that injuries had occurred whereas Case scenario 2 involved apparent stalking with only circumstantial evidence. Segment 1 of each scenario described a male colleague's behaviour towards his intimate partner followed by a series of questions. Segment 2 of each case scenario then added more details related to later events. For questions after both segments 1 and 2 of each scenario, officers were asked to indicate how likely they were—on a scale from 0% to 100% likely—to take particular action in response to the situation portrayed in the case scenario.

Desirable responses examined included an officer making referrals to the victim for assistance (e.g. domestic violence shelter); asking specific questions about the domestic violence history of the couple; arresting the perpetrating officer, making referrals for help for the perpetrating officer (e.g. EAP, department chaplain); and reporting the perpetrating

officer to internal affairs. After officers answered questions following each case scenario segment they were directed to the 1-h Toolkit. After the Toolkit, officers were presented with the same case scenarios and asked how likely they were to take particular actions.

Principal component factor analysis with varimax rotation was conducted for each case scenario. Responses to Case scenario 1 were reduced to six factors. Arrest of the woman was in the same factor as arrest of the man, but was separated for conceptual reasons, given the concerns over arresting OIDV victims in error. Responses to Case scenario 2 were reduced to three factors. Reliable subscales were formed and internal reliability coefficients (alpha) were excellent for 13 of 16 scales created for both pre- and post-scenarios (above 0.80), good for two scales, and fair for one. These factors were used in later subgroup analyses to explore differential training effects.

## Sample

*Recruitment.* Researchers used three methods to recruit potential participants into the training program, including emailing a 3,500 member listserv of police chiefs and sheriffs in all 50 states. Second, the Florida Police Chiefs Association and the Florida Sheriffs Association were asked to send out their own email announcing the Toolkit to their respective listserv contacts nationwide. Third, the password-protected Toolkit was also publicized at conferences of the Major City Chiefs Association in Philadelphia in 2013 and at the International Conference on Violence, Abuse, and Trauma in San Diego in both 2013 and 2014. Researchers conveyed to potential participants that they could decline to answer the demographic and professional questions, as well as the case scenario questions, and still access the Toolkit. Researchers could not track whether departments made the Toolkit mandatory.

*Respondents.* This study focused only on law enforcement officers who had the power of arrest. Therefore, all respondents in the analysis are officers with one of two department affiliations: police and sheriff officers. Reclassifications were made for officers who responded with narrative entry to the 'Other' racial and 'Living with Status' categories. Only those officers who answered 90% or more of the case scenario questions were included in the analyses ($n = 852$). Most officers were male (86.8%) and Caucasian (82.2%), with 11% identifying as Black/African American, 5.1% as 'Other,' and less than 2% biracial. Nearly 8% identified as Hispanic. Most officers (91%) were between the ages of 26 and 55 years. Regarding education, 47.1% were college graduates, 20.1% had some college, 19% had 2-year degrees, 8.6% had advanced degrees, and 5.2% had a high school diploma. The majority (54.7%) were married, with 28.3% divorced, 15.2% single/never married, and 1.5% separated. Most (80.3%) reported current living situation as residing with a spouse or intimate partner, while 13.4% reported living alone. A high percentage lived in the Southeast (86.9%), with a minority living in the West (3.5%) and Southwest (2.8%), and the rest elsewhere in the USA. Most officers (57.2%) were affiliated with a police department, while a large minority (42.8%) was affiliated with sheriff's departments. Most worked in an urban setting (62%). The majority (54.6%) had worked in law enforcement for 10–24 years; 34.9% for 0–9 years; and 12.9% for 25 years or more. One-fourth (25.4%) held supervisory positions.

## Analyses

Univariate statistics were calculated to describe sample demographic and professional characteristics. Next, dependent sample *t*-tests were used to compare officers' responses on both case scenarios prior to and after completing the Toolkit. Values reported reflect the average likelihood (i.e. mean) across responding officers for each particular action. Finally, multivariate analyses (i.e. one-way ANOVA, Tukey post-hoc tests) were used to determine whether significant differences existed among varying subgroups' pre-post change scores.

# Results

## Post-training impact questions

Immediately after completing the Toolkit, officers were asked about the likelihood that it would prompt them and their fellow officers to act differently in the face of potential or actual OIDV. They also graded the usefulness of the Toolkit in keeping their own and other officers' families safe. Table 1 reports these results.

The majority of officers believed that it would be somewhat likely, likely, or very likely (74%) that they would seek help to prevent potential or actual OIDV. A similar percentage (79%) said it was likely the Toolkit would increase their or their colleagues' willingness to report other officers for domestic violence. A high percentage said the Toolkit made them more willing to intervene in suspected cases of OIDV (85%). Nearly 80% agreed or strongly agreed that the Toolkit could be used by officers to keep their own families safe. Finally, 65% agreed or strongly agreed the Toolkit 'can be used in my own life to maintain safe relationships.'

These items were correlated with the pre-post change scores on 11 outcome variables (mostly sub-scales) from the two case scenarios. Of the 66 correlations, 86% were statistically significant and the correlations were in expected directions. The significant correlations were relatively low, from 0.07 to 0.19. However, the results provide some cross-validation of the two measures of outcome. Supervisors, officers who were older, and those with more service experience reported a significantly greater belief that officers would be willing to report a colleague's OIDV, and that they would be more likely to intervene in suspected cases themselves. Those with the most education (4 years of college or more) reported less optimism about the effects of the training on all five of the questions.

## Pre-post changes

*Case scenario 1 (Carol and Mike).* Table 2 shows the mean change scores between pre- and post-tests to Case scenario 1 segments 1 and 2. Due to the large number of comparisons, there is a high likelihood of finding significance by chance. Therefore, we divided the $p$ value by the number of comparisons (Bonferroni's correction). Although 16 of the 24 comparisons were highly significant, some of the means changed only a few points on the 100-point scale. We therefore focus the results and discussion on the 'clinically significant' findings, specifically those with an effect size measured with Cohen's $d$ values of 0.20 or larger.

The largest change between pre- and post-training responses was for the option of arresting the perpetrating officer, Mike, with the reported likelihood of arrest rising from 26% to 47% between the first and second completions of segment 1. Segment 2 introduced clear information that an assault occurred. The reported likelihood of making an arrest after that segment was high prior to completing the Toolkit and did not change significantly afterwards.

Several other potential positive responses also increased in likelihood when we compared pre- and post-Toolkit responses (highly statistically significant with small clinical significance). The likelihood of an officer making a report to his or her supervisor or to internal affairs was high for segment 1 before the Toolkit, but still managed to increase afterwards (from 82% to 88%). This response was even higher after segment 2 (93%) and did not increase with the Toolkit. The likelihood of officers recommending that the perpetrating officer see a counselor or contact the EAP rose between pre- and post-training responses for both segments (small clinical significance). Officers were somewhat less inclined to recommend Mike see the chaplain before the Toolkit; however, this recommendation showed the greatest increase in reported average likelihood after completion of the Toolkit in both segments. Before completion of the Toolkit, officers were somewhat inclined to recommend couples counseling to perpetrator and victim—approximately 40% likelihood—which rose after the Toolkit. Officers were not initially strongly inclined

**Table 1:** Percentage of officers reporting likelihood of new behaviours and agreeing training will increase family safety

| | Very likely | Likely | Somewhat likely | Undecided | Somewhat unlikely | Unlikely | Very unlikely |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| What is the likelihood that this project will lead an officer to seek help that prevents his/her own violent behaviour at home? | 14.5 | 30.4 | 28.8 | 15.0 | 4.9 | 4.1 | 2.2 |
| What is the likelihood that this project will increase an officer's willingness to report a colleague's domestic violence? | 17.3 | 37.6 | 24.2 | 14.3 | 2.1 | 2.1 | 1.9 |
| After viewing this curriculum, how much more willing/likely are you to intervene if you suspect officer-involved domestic violence at your agency? | 33.1 | 39.4 | 12.2 | 12.5 | .7 | 1.0 | 1.1 |

| | Strongly agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| The tools, skills, and information learned and/or implemented from this Module can be used by officers to keep their families safe. | 27.9 | 50.4 | 18.7 | 2.0 | 1.1 |
| I learned tools, skills, and information from this Module that can be used in my own life to maintain safe relationships. | 21.4 | 44.0 | 26.9 | 5.7 | 2.1 |

to tell the couple to end their relationship. After the segment 2, however, this inclination increased somewhat.

Several responses focused on assisting the OIDV victim, Carol. These were: informing her of her rights; gathering a history of Mike's abuse; encouraging her to file a report; and connecting her to a domestic violence hotline or centre. All of these had very high response likelihoods prior to and after the Toolkit. Two of the responses—encouraging report filing and connecting to a hotline/centre—increased slightly with completion of the Toolkit. After reading segment 2, officers' reported likelihood of arresting Carol was just below 50%, and this did not change with exposure to the Toolkit.

*Case scenario 2 (Mary and Charlie).* Table 3 shows the mean change scores between pre- and post-tests to Case scenario 2. All of the changes were both highly statistically significant ($p < 0.001$) and clinically significant, with 5 of 13 changes in the moderate-to-large range ($>0.4$).

The belief that Charlie (perpetrating officer) should be arrested rose between pre- and post-Toolkit responses (40–61% likelihood; though this question was only provided in segment 2). Also, the likelihood of the officer reporting to their supervisor was high prior to training and became even higher after training (74–85% likelihood to 85–90% likelihood); segment 2 likelihoods were overall higher than segment 1 likelihoods. The likelihood of an officer recommending that Charlie see a counselor, contact the EAP, or see the department's chaplain all rose between pre- and post-Toolkit; the likelihood of recommending he see the chaplain rose the most, while, in absolute terms, the likelihood of this recommendation stayed below the likelihood of recommendations for the other forms of help. Likelihoods of asking Mary, the OIDV victim, for her history of being abused and of helping her contact domestic abuse resources rose substantially from before training to after training for segment 1. For segment 2, the likelihood of these two responses was relatively high before training, yet managed to increase after completing the Toolkit to a clinically significant degree.

**Table 2:** Officer pre- and post-toolkit responses (average likelihood and standard deviations) for Case scenario 1 (Carol and Mike; $n$ = 838–849)

| How likely are you to … | Segment 1 | | | Segment 2 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | PRE | POST | $d$ | PRE | POST | $d$ |
| Inform Carol of her legal rights and remedies | 87.8 (23.2) | 87.7 (23.4) | 0.00 | 88.2 (25.7) | 89.0 (23.3) | 0.00 |
| Inform Mike of his legal rights and remedies | – | – | | 87.0 (27.3) | 86.8 (25.8) | 0.00 |
| Ask Carol specific questions about Mike's history of abusive behaviours | 86.2 (25.4) | 84.7 (26.3) | 0.06 | – | – | |
| Encourage Carol to file a report of the incident with the agency or state attorney's office | 82.3 (27.6) | 86.0 (24.7) | 0.14 | – | – | |
| Assist Carol with obtaining help through a domestic violence hotline or centre | 81.1 (28.0) | 84.2 (26.4) | 0.12 | 81.9 (28.5) | 84.9 (26.3) | 0.11 |
| Make a report to your supervisor or internal affairs (or your agency's equivalent) | **81.5** (29.7) | **87.8** (23.2) | **0.23** | 92.7 (19.5) | 92.2 (18.0) | 0.00 |
| Recommend Mike see a confidential counselor or mental health professional | 61.3 (37.9) | 68.0 (37.5) | 0.18 | **62.5** (39.7) | **70.0** (37.2) | **0.20** |
| Recommend Mike contact the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) | 65.6 (37.2) | 72.4 (35.9) | 0.19 | 68.5 (38.3) | 75.3 (34.8) | 0.18 |
| Recommend Mike see the department's chaplain | **42.6** (38.8) | **52.9** (41.2) | **0.29** | **43.8** (41.3) | **54.7** (41.7) | **0.27** |
| Tell Mike he must End the relationship | – | – | | **27.1** (34.6) | **36.6** (38.4) | **0.26** |
| Tell Carol she must end the relationship | 32.6 (34.1) | 38.1 (38.1) | 0.15 | **28.2** (35.3) | **36.8** (38.6) | **0.23** |
| Recommend couples' counseling | 58.3 (37.6) | 61.0 (38.7) | 0.07 | 55.5 (40.8) | 62.9 (39.2) | 0.19 |
| Arrest Mike based on the probable cause a crime has been committed | **26.3** (35.5) | **47.2** (40.0) | **0.55** | 71.3 (33.4) | 72.3 (33.2) | 0.05 |
| Arrest Carol based on the probable cause a crime has been committed | – | – | | 45.3 (37.5) | 47.2 (38.7) | 0.05 |

*Notes: M*(SD); effect size, Cohen's *d* values, 0.2–0.3 = small; 0.5 = medium; 0.8+ = large; values with *d* over 0.2 are highlighted. Dependent *t*-test comparison of differences from PRE to POST; –, question not posed in case/segment.

## Sub-scale analysis

Desirable responses (eight of nine subscales or items) increased significantly from pre- to post-Toolkit. No change was observed for 'Informing [the victim] of rights/assisting her,' though pretest average likelihood was very high ($M$ = 84.5–85.6, n.s.). The changes in the other scales showed effect sizes ranging from low to high (recommend couples counseling and report man C1 = 0.14; tell them to end relationship = 0.23; recommend help for man C1 = 0.25; report man C2 = 0.31; recommend help for man C2 = 0.34; arrest man = 0.39; assist woman C2 = 0.76). Despite the use of factor

analyses, two correlations among subscales were quite high. A recommendation for couples counseling (Case scenario 1) was correlated highly with a recommendation that the perpetrating officer receive other forms of help ($r$ = 0.53; $p$ < 0.001). Reporting the perpetrating officer to internal affairs/supervisor was also correlated highly with informing the OIDV victim of her rights and assisting her in other ways ($r$ = 0.41; $p$ < 0.001).

## Subgroup comparisons

We compared the mean change scores of officers in 11 different subgroups. Using the nine subscales

**Table 3:** Officer pre- and post-toolkit responses (average likelihood and standard deviations) for Case scenario 2 (Mary and Charlie; *n* = 838–849)

| How likely are you to … | Segment 1 | | | Segment 2 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | PRE | POST | *d* | PRE | POST | *d* |
| Ask Mary specific questions about Charlie's history of abusive behaviors | **41.7** 38.9 | **72.7** 35.2 | **0.46** | **76.1** 32.3 | **84.1** 27.4 | **0.26** |
| Assist Mary with obtaining help through a domestic violence hotline or centre | **41.4** 39.1 | **74.9** 34.8 | **0.90** | **71.5** 34.6 | **84.9** 26.9 | **0.42** |
| Make a report to your supervisor or internal affairs (or your agency's equivalent) | **73.7** 33.6 | **84.6** 26.9 | **0.35** | **84.9** 26.9 | **90.0** 21.0 | **0.20** |
| Recommend Charlie see a confidential counselor or mental health professional | **58.6** 39.4 | **68.4** 37.3 | **0.23** | **59.7** 39.3 | **69.6** 37.3 | **0.26** |
| Recommend Charlie contact the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) | **62.9** 39.2 | **73.3** 35.4 | **0.23** | **63.7** 39.5 | **74.0** 35.3 | **0.27** |
| Recommend Charlie see the department's chaplain | **38.5** 39.5 | **53.5** 40.9 | **0.67** | **41.2** 40.3 | **54.5** 41.6 | **0.32** |
| Believe Charlie should be arrested based on the probable cause a crime has been committed | – | – | | **40.4** 37.7 | **61.2** 38.6 | **0.55** |

*Notes: M*(SD); effect size, Cohen's *d* values, 0.2–0.3 = small; 0.5 = medium; 0.8+ = large; values with *d* over 0.2 are highlighted. Dependent *t*-test comparison of differences from PRE to POST; –, question not posed in case/segment.

obtained via factor analysis and two additional items on arrest, few subgroup differences emerged (10 of 121 tests, or 8%) (Table 4).

When comparing supervisors and non-supervisors, three differences in change scores were observed. In both Case scenarios 1 and 2, non-supervisors made greater gains in reporting the perpetrating officer to internal affairs or to a supervisor, although both supervisors and non-supervisors both made significant gains in Case scenario 2. Non-supervisors also made greater gains in recommending help for the perpetrating officer in Case scenario 1, although gains for both supervisor and non-supervisor groups were significant. When it came to reporting the perpetrating officer to internal affairs or to a supervisor, the supervisors were at high likelihood levels of doing so before the Toolkit and thus had little room for improvement. Even after training, the non-supervisors mean scores did not match the supervisors' pre-training mean scores (88.6 versus 93.2; *t* = 3.6; *p* < 0.001). Supervisory status was related to the number of years serving as an officer ($\chi^2$ = 147.1; *p* < 0.001).

Officers with more experience (15 or more years versus 0–14 years) showed greater gains on the scale 'Assist Her' in Case scenario 2 (though both groups made significant gains). A slight increase in officers' reported likelihood they would arrest the OIDV victim in Case scenario 1 was observed for officers affiliated with police departments when compared with officers affiliated with sheriff's departments. Although both rural and urban officers reported an increased likelihood in arresting the woman post-training, a significantly greater post-training likelihood was observed for rural officers.

Only one difference appeared between male and female officers. While both male and female officers increased their reported likelihood of arresting the man in Case scenario 1, the increase among females was significantly greater. Older officers increased their likelihood of assisting the woman in Case scenario 2 more than did younger officers, although increases for both groups were significant. Single officers increased their likelihood of reporting the abuser to internal affairs or to a supervisor more than did married or divorced officers (Case scenario 1 only). Similarly, those living with someone

**Table 4:** Significant interactions of officer demographic and professional variables and pre- and post-toolkit responses: average likelihood of responding (SD)

| | Inform about rights/ assist in DV help | | | Report to internal affairs or supervisor | | | Recommend professional help for the man | | | Arrest man | | | Arrest woman | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | PRE | POST | t-Value | PRE | POST | t-Value | PRE | POST | t-Value | PRE | POST | t-Value | PRE | POST | t-Value |
| Supervisor | | | | 93.2/87.4 (14.8/20.2) | 94.3/92.8 (13.9/17.3) | 2.3* C1 | 62.5 (29.2) | 67.5 (31.8) | | | | | | | |
| Non-supervisor | | | | 85.4/76.8 (22.4/32.4) | 88.6/85.5 (20.2/23.3) | 2.0* C1 C2 | 55.7 (32.4) | 64.9 (33.1) | 2.3** C1 | | | | | | |
| Years as Officer 0–14 | 58.4 (29.4) | 78.0 (26.3) | 2.2* C2 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Years as Officer 15–30+ | 57.1 (29.8) | 80.7 (26.0) | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Police | | | | | | | | | | | | | 42.5 (36.0) | 46.1 (38.9) | |
| Sheriff | | | | | | | | | | | | | 48.9 (37.8) | 48.2 (38.4) | −2.0* C1 |
| Urban | | | | | | | | | | | | | 47.4 (37.7) | 49.9 (38.4) | |
| Rural | | | | | | | | | | | | | 41.4 (36.7) | 49.3 (37.9) | −2.0* C1 |
| Younger 18–36 | 71.8 (32.3) | 73.2 (33.9) | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Older 37–56+ | 72.1 (35.3) | 76.1 (34.9) | 2.5** C2 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Male | | | | | | | | | | 48.4 (27.1) | 59.3 (31.1) | | | | |
| Female | | | | | | | | | | 50.2 (26.8) | 65.8 (27.6) | 1.9* C1 | | | |
| Single | | | | 78.9 (25.9) | 84.8 (22.9) | | | | | | | | | | |
| Married | | | | 88.6 (19.7) | 90.6 (18.1) | 2.0* C1 | | | | | | | | | |
| Living with Spouse | | | | 88.6 (20.3) | 90.4 (18.9) | | | | | | | | | | |
| Living with 'Other' | | | | 79.1 (25.0) | 92.7 (15.7) | −2.9** C1 | | | | | | | | | |

*Notes:* * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. C1 = Case 1; C2 = Case 2.

other than a spouse/intimate partner increased more in their likelihood of reporting to internal affairs or a supervisor than did those living with a spouse or intimate partner. There were no differences in pre-post changes for these three officer characteristics: race, Hispanic ethnicity, and educational level (HS through 2 years of college versus college or advanced degree).

## Discussion

Officers reported large increases in the likelihood of arresting the perpetrating officer between pre- and post-Toolkit responses to two segments in each case scenario. The reported likelihood of arrest was already high in response to segment 2 of Case scenario 1 before the Toolkit and remained high after the training. This is not surprising since segment 2 of Case scenario 1 included direct observation of injuries by the officer in the scenario, specifically that 'Carol has a split lip and red marks on her neck' and that she stated that 'Mike tried to choke her.' These findings may indicate an increased willingness of trained officers to find probable cause to arrest a fellow officer when explicit evidence of domestic violence exists. Officers also reported a fairly high likelihood, which stayed the same after training, that they would arrest the woman in Case scenario 1, most likely because segment 2 of the scenario described her partner as having a visible scratch and saying that 'she wouldn't get off me.'

Many US states require that domestic violence training include the identification of a primary aggressor (e.g. Florida § 943.171; for a full list see the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges [NCJFCJ]). As a result, officers are being trained to designate primary aggressors in cases of domestic violence and thus avoid 'mutual arrests,' that is, arresting women who fight back. Further, some researchers and practitioners continue to debate the extent to which domestic violence is best described as violence against women or as 'mutual combat.' The OIDV training focused on men's

use of violence because women use violence more often in self-defense than men, especially in lethal situations; women are more severely injured physically and psychologically than men; women are sexually assaulted and stalked at much higher rates than men; and women have more difficulty than men leaving violent relationships (Kimmel, 2002; Saunders, 2002). Importantly, this training was designed to target the majority of US policing personnel—men. Women continue to remain underrepresented in law enforcement (Martin and Jurik, 2007).

Officers are sometimes reluctant to assess the full context of domestic violence incidents (Finn and Bettis, 2006), and some states have worked to reduce this reticence. For example, in Arkansas, a law enforcement officer is required to consider statements from both parties, the extent of personal injuries received by both parties, evidence that one or both parties acted in self-defense, prior complaints of domestic abuse against the perpetrator, and other factors, to determine the primary aggressor (Arkansas §16-81-113). The content of the training evaluated in this study only briefly discussed the importance of determining the primary aggressor, without providing explicit instruction on how to make that determination. Based on our findings, the statistically lower likelihood of an officer arresting a female domestic violence victim may be a sign that officers recognize gender differences in size, strength, and motives for the use of violence in intimate relationships.

Before the Toolkit training, officers were very likely to report the incidents to a supervisor or to internal affairs in both Case scenario 1 and Case scenario 2. Despite having little room for improvement in three of four segments (two per case scenario), the likelihood of reporting increased slightly after the Toolkit. The likelihood of recommending that the perpetrating officer see a mental health counselor or an EAP worker was moderately high in both cases prior to training and increased somewhat after training. Before training, likelihood of recommending the perpetrating officer see the

department chaplain was lower than the reported likelihood of the other options for help above, and showed the greatest increase after training.

The option of referral to a chaplain raises some concern because, while most departments see the chaplain as a good resource for officers, evidence suggests that clergy are less likely than other helpers to have domestic abuse training (Kroeger and Nason-Clark, 2010). Previous qualitative studies have described clergy's misconceptions about domestic abuse and their resistance to training (Skiff et al., 2008; Walker, 2014). Further, domestic violence counseling is not specifically indicated as a role of police chaplains by the International Conference of Police Chaplains (2016).

A recommendation for couples counseling was given as an option only in response to Case scenario 1. The likelihood of this response was moderately high prior to completing the Toolkit and rose slightly after training for segment 2. Officers need to be aware of concerns associated with couples counseling, a topic not covered in the training. Couples counseling for abusers and victims must 1) focus on ending the domestic abuse, 2) be facilitated by professional counselors trained in that focus, and 3) is only most appropriate for less severe cases of domestic abuse (Stith et al., 2011). In another study training on domestic violence significantly decreased the likelihood of recommending couples counseling (Saunders and Anderson, 2000). This recommendation appears to be part of a general inclination to take action to help officers and their families, as it was highly correlated with the recommendations for the perpetrating officer to seek other forms of help.

Various offers of help for the OIDV victim (encouraging filing of a report, informing them of their rights, assisting with obtaining help at a domestic violence program) were at high levels in three of the four segments prior to training and still managed to increase in Case scenario 2 segment 2 to a clinically significant degree. In the first segment of the Case scenario 2, involving circumstantial evidence of stalking, assisting the OIDV victim

with linking to domestic abuse services and asking the victim for a history of domestic abuse were at 42% likelihood prior to training and rose to over 70% likelihood after training, once more explicit (but still inconclusive) evidence was presented. Officers were asked if they would tell the couple to end the relationship after Case scenario 1 and reported a relatively low likelihood of this action prior to training (27–33%), which rose only slightly after training. We were reassured by the overall low likelihood of this response as it may demonstrate a lack of empathy for the material and psychological ties that hold victims in abusive relationships (Anderson and Saunders, 2003).

We cannot conclude with certainty that the changes in likelihood noted above are the result of the Toolkit training, but they are encouraging. Positive changes were reported for a variety of responses including for arresting officers who apparently abused or stalked an intimate partner, for reporting these incidents to a supervisor or internal affairs officer, for recommending the man see a counselor or EAP worker; and for assisting the women in obtaining help. All of these responses demonstrate a willingness to acknowledge and to respond actively to OIDV.

When we assessed the degree of pre-post change across various demographic and professional characteristics, few differences emerged. 'Ceiling effects' seemed to explain why supervisors did not improve as much as non-supervisors: they had already responded at the pre-test with a high likelihood for several behaviours. However, when asked for general perceptions about the impact of training on their own and other's likelihood of intervention, supervisors, and older, more experienced officers were more optimistic. Older and more experienced officers also showed greater gains than younger ones in their likelihood of assisting the victim in the scenarios. Their initially low levels of likelihood may reflect a sense of futility or cynicism about making a difference in people's lives (Horwitz et al., 2011). Horwitz and colleagues (2011) noted that officers experienced ever greater

disillusionment and emotional detachment as their time with the agency increased. As a result, it is possible that these more senior officers' had a lower initial likelihood of helping victims, and thus had increased room to improve.

Several limitations must be noted when interpreting the results of this study. No control group was used and therefore, extraneous variables may account for change scores. Second, self-report measures were used and these can be biased, though the use of scenarios can reduce social desirability response bias by engaging officers in the application of their professional skills (Hughes and Huby, 2012). Third, while the measures developed for this study proved sensitive to change, and almost all had very good to excellent internal reliability, more evidence of their validity is needed. Finally, the sample was not drawn randomly from a population and thus results cannot be generalized.

These findings have several implications for improving the web-based training. The training will be modified to provide detail on primary aggressor identification. Content will also be added to describe concerns regarding couples counseling. In addition, Module 2 (designed for supervisors), as well as our future correspondence with police departments from the Law Enforcement Families Partnership, will emphasize the need for agency chaplains and EAPs to have extensive training on domestic violence and OIDV, specifically. Finally, the results of this study will be summarized in Module 2 training, emphasizing the need for ongoing training in OIDV and suggesting additional opportunities for such training. These opportunities may include training by local domestic violence centres, since local victim advocates may be the best qualified trainers in many communities.

Understandably, serious doubts exist regarding researchers' and advocates' ability to shape law enforcement officers' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours related to OIDV. One author cites a 'shameful' lack of progress made in confronting OIDV (Wetendorf, 2014), and victim advocates have also expressed pessimism regarding departments' abilities to prevent or even reduce OIDV. Changes must also take place in the agency environment to reduce risk of intimate partner abuse perpetrated by officers (Goodmark, 2015). However, evidence from this study suggests that change is possible and some officers (viz. supervisors) are likely uniquely positioned to facilitate change.

As communities seek to promote departmental change, it is important to develop trust between victim advocates and officers (Huisman *et al.*, 2005). Police and domestic violence agencies both have an important incentive to build such trust. Training that helps officers relate to the needs and feelings of victims—and officer's participation in creating such training—are important elements of OIDV curriculum development (Huisman *et al.*, 2005). It should be noted that, while the Toolkit was developed by a partnership between multiple law enforcement agencies and a major state university, we did not ask specifically whether officers trusted the source of the training or the anonymity of the research scenarios. However, trust and other positive relationship characteristics may serve as critical factors in furthering the safety of officers and their families.

We identified no state law that specifically mandates OIDV prevention and intervention training. Given the risks to intimate partner victims of OIDV, the need to assure officer and family safety, and to help officers carry out the mission of community policing, we recommend agencies, researchers, and advocates support policies that would require law enforcement officers to obtain training in how to prevent and intervene in OIDV.

## Acknowledgements

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