

Repeated Domestic Violence Police Calls: A Closer Look at Three Case Situations

Angela Hovey, PhD, RSW

Susan Scott, PhD

School of Social Work, Lakehead University, Orillia, ON

Lori Chambers, PhD

Gender and Women's Studies, Lakehead University, Thunder Bay, ON

BJ Rye, PhD

Psychology, St. Jerome's University, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, ON

Police respond to high volumes of domestic violence (DV) calls that can be time-consuming and often deal with repeat involved persons, regardless of whether or not charges are laid. This study extracts and examines three distinct cases of individuals/couples that involved almost 2% of 3,414 domestic violence calls to police that occurred over about a 3-year period for a small-sized urban community and its surrounding rural areas in Ontario, Canada. Most of the calls (86.2%) for these three cases did not result in any charges being laid. Each case represented a unique problem focus common in DV situations, and all three cases involved children. Key issues for one case included substance use and the cycle of violence; in another case, mental health problems and parenting challenges were prominent; and the third case pertained to child custody and access issues. Acceptance of offered support and services by the involved persons was minimal in all three cases. Implications for improved police responses involving collaboration with other service providers in smaller communities with limited resources are discussed.

KEYWORDS: intimate partner violence; policing; social support; social work; qualitative case study

Police in Canada and elsewhere experience a high volume of domestic violence (DV)¹ calls annually (Burczycka et al., 2018; Henning et al., 2021; Sechrist & Weil, 2018; Stanko, 2008). While a small proportion of the calls involve

lethality and more involve heightened risk and severity, a much larger proportion are more mundane, resulting in no charges laid (approximately two-thirds; Campbell et al., 2020) and appearing to be less serious (Burczycka et al., 2018; Sherman, 2018). Because police are the first responders to DV calls, they have a primary role in ensuring appropriate interventions and referrals to community support. However, the potential needs of involved persons may fall outside the scope of police practice (Retief & Green, 2015). Social work intervention during these critical moments could support the involved persons more effectively and thereby help to reduce the non-criminal demands on police.

This article presents a study of cases involving repeated calls to the police in a small-sized urban community and its surrounding rural areas in Ontario, Canada, that occurred during the 3-year study timeframe. Police leadership in this community indicated they experience a substantially higher volume of DV calls than other communities of similar size. In addition the policy requires that two officers must attend in response to any DV call, meaning that for every hour spent on the call, 2 hours of police time is expended. Following the response, one officer must complete all paperwork and follow-up needed to finalize the call response, adding more to the time already expended. We explore the challenges police face with these calls and recommend potential approaches that involve social workers. The recommended approaches consider the limited resources common to smaller cities and rural areas and support a broadened community response to improve service provision.

Policing and Domestic Violence Calls

Responding to DV calls comprises a large percentage of daily police work (Burczycka et al., 2018; Sechrist & Weil, 2018; Stanko, 2008), as much as 30%–40% of violent/assault crimes reported to police (Burczycka et al., 2018; Goodman-Delahunty & Crehan, 2016). Due to the volume of calls, more than one officer dispatched to each call. The amount of time required to respond and complete the extra associated paperwork (i.e., risk assessment and supplementary forms specific to DV), DV calls to place a substantial demand on limited police resources (Goodman-Delahunty & Crehan, 2016; Henning et al., 2021; Spivak et al., 2021). Officers describe the paperwork for DV calls as “excessive” (Johnson, 2004, p. 212). Studies also found high levels of police frustration, especially with victims they perceived as uncooperative or who repeatedly returned to their abusers (Goodman-Delahunty & Crehan, 2016; Horwitz et al., 2011; Jennett, 2012; Johnson, 2004). Some police become impatient with women they label “recidivist victims” (Jennett 2012, p. 38). These perceptions can impact police responses to repeat DV call but can be further exacerbated by the complexity of these calls.

Officers responding to DV calls are pressured to deal effectively with problems that are often more complex than other crimes (Horwitz et al., 2011; Johnson, 2004; Spivak et al., 2021). Arriving at a domestic call, officers must immediately assess

for risk for everyone at the scene, including themselves. Some calls can be dangerous for police (Huey & Ricciardelli, 2017; Johnson, 2011; Ruff, 2012). Although such incidents are infrequent, the risk of physical assaults on officers during calls can increase when a suspect appears hostile or has consumed alcohol (Johnson, 2011). Once police assess the situation, they decide whether or not to lay charges and provide short-term safety planning for victims.

Risk assessment tools often support the police in assessing the situation and predicting future offending behavior, but most tools were developed only for male abuser-female victim situations (Hilton et al., 2010; Medina Ariza et al., 2016; Seewald et al., 2017). Accurate risk assessment requires information from preceding calls and knowledge of associated risk factors, particularly related to the end of a relationship (Anderson & Saunders, 2003; Romans et al., 2007). Responses to risk assessment questions commonly rely on information provided by victims (Kebbell, 2019), who may appear uncooperative by refusing to respond (Carter & Grommon, 2016; Johnson, 2004), or may be distrustful of officers (Goodman-Delahunty & Crehan, 2016), whom victims experience as unfair or blaming (Stewart et al., 2013). Children are often present, and at risk in domestic disputes (Fallon et al., 2015; Kimball, 2016), yet, children's involvement is not necessarily well-captured on risk assessments or police reports (Swerin et al., 2018). Previous studies suggest alcohol and drugs are contributory risks in many DV cases and add to the unpredictability and volatility for responding officers and victims (Huey & Ricciardelli, 2017; Johnson, 2011). Assessing victims' relationships with their abusers can be complicated by issues of financial dependence and emotional attachment, absence of obvious injuries, and reluctance to cooperate with the police (Retief & Green, 2015; Ruff, 2012). Emotional or psychological abuse can be one of the most difficult types of abuse for police to detect or prove because it lacks visible evidence (Retief & Green, 2015). These same issues often resurface at repeat calls.

Regardless of whether or not the call resulted in charges, tracking repeat, DV calls data can provide important efficiency information to the police (Brimicombe, 2016; Medina Ariza et al., 2016; Stanko, 2008). For example, using risk management tools to track and analyze repeat caller data can help police to better manage service demands (Brimicombe, 2016; Stanko, 2008), more effectively aid in identifying victims' safety needs and linking them to appropriate resources and services (Brimicombe, 2016; Medina Ariza et al., 2016; Sebire & Barling, 2016; Spivak et al., 2021; Stanko, 2008); and, work to reduce escalation of harmful offender behaviors (Brimicombe, 2016; Stanko, 2008). Research found that police services were not effectively using the data they produced with their risk assessments (Ballucci et al., 2017; Brimicombe, 2016). Frontline officers viewed supplementary reports, especially when charges were not laid, as a cumbersome part of required paperwork that is not utilized in any meaningful way (Ballucci et al., 2017). However, some officers indicated tracking these calls can provide important risk and call history when dealing with repeat callers (Ballucci et al., 2017).

Current Paper

While violence and lethality must be prevented (Brimicombe, 2016; Stanko, 2008), the majority of DV cases are more mundane, e.g., verbal disputes) but still time-consuming (Ballucci et al., 2017; Johnson, 2004; Spivak et al., 2021) and impact limited resources (Conor et al., 2020; Huey & Ricciardelli, 2015, 2017; Zorn et al., 2017). Suppose we want police to have more time for an appropriate response to cases involving danger to victims of DV, who are most often women and children (Burczykca et al., 2018). In that case, we need to understand and reduce the pressures created by the volume of repeat DV calls, and to provide better community support for police particularly in dealing with repeat, but low level, cases.

DV call documentation completed by responding officers can provide insights about the people involved, the challenges police face, and how they manage responses to DV calls (Brimicombe, 2016; Stanko, 2008). Criminal justice system data commonly focuses on single incidents; however, by placing incidents from multiple call individuals within a context, we can use their “case stories” to identify behavior patterns over time (Hester, 2012, p. 1,071; Spivak et al., 2021). The study aimed to identify some key issues of repeat callers by qualitatively examining three cases comprised of the individuals/couples with the highest number of DV calls to the police. We hope to identify ways to reduce these kinds of resource-heavy DV calls and, as a consequence, reduce officer frustration (Goodman-Delahunty & Crehan, 2016; Horwitz et al., 2011; Jennett, 2012; Johnson, 2004). The guiding research questions: What were the key characteristics, issues, and challenges for the involved persons and responding officers contained within each case? What are the broader implications of these cases for social work to support improved responses to DV, particularly in small communities where police and community services funding is limited?

METHOD

A narrative case study and content analysis approach guided the methodology. Narrative case studies can capture the unique details of complex DV cases (Hartman, 2017) “within its real-life context” (Rowley, 2002, p. 18). The narrative approach helps to organize the large number of variables contained in data into an accessible and analyzable description, particularly when the case involves more than an individual unit or person (Hartman, 2017). Content analysis approaches are well-suited to categorizing and analyzing the numerous manifest and latent content variables that comprise each case (Bengtsson, 2016; Berg, 2001; Kleinheksel et al., 2020).

The case data for this study was extracted from a larger study, which examined police responses to DV calls from an Ontario, Canada, small-sized city and its surrounding rural areas. The real-world data were collected from January 2011 to March 2014 on two types of supplementary report forms police must complete for every DV call. One for Criminal Code (CC) incidents in which charges of any type are laid and one for Non-Criminal Code (NonCC) incidents when no charges are laid. The larger study analyzed police call data for 3,414 DV calls (CC calls: $N = 985$; NonCC calls:

$N = 2,429$). Calls that remained under investigation or were in the courts when data were retrieved were excluded. All data were anonymized and forwarded by the police to the researchers. The study was approved by our University Research Ethics Board in accordance with Canadian Tri-Council standards.

The supplementary reports contained information about the persons involved, location, presence and involvement of children, emotional state of involved persons, actions taken by officers, a risk indicators checklist (i.e., CC form has 20 risk questions and NonCC has 16 risk questions), and support service intervention for victims/complainants. The reports do include text boxes to allow for further descriptions of items. Information gathering differs somewhat between the two forms: CC risk data is collected for the accused; NonCC risk data applies to either or both involved persons (i.e., complainant and respondent). These reports are one part of the official police records and do not include a detailed description of the call circumstances, age or the gender² of persons involved, or the child(ren)'s gender(s). They primarily serve as a tracking tool for the investigation and to monitor case follow-up but are not used to manage policing practices.

Approximately 75% of calls across both data sets had individuals who were involved in more than one call (i.e., 2–23 calls). Therefore, call frequencies based on involved individuals were examined and categorized by the type of call (i.e., CC or NonCC), role within type of call (i.e., CC: Victim or accused; NonCC: Complainant or respondent), the number of calls within each call type, and total calls across both data sets. Five individuals identified with 16 or more calls across both datasets. Four of those individuals accounted for two couples (i.e., two cases), while the fifth individual was identified as a victim with multiple accused persons, which resulted in the creation of the three cases. The data was extracted from both data sets for the three cases consisting of these five primary individuals with the highest number of calls in the datasets.

Analysis Plan

The analytical approach blended manifest (e.g., data contained in the forms that were easily observed or counted) and latent (e.g., data contained in the forms that required researcher interpretation and exploration of implied meaning) content analysis strategies to extract and examine the cases (Bengtsson, 2016; Berg, 2001; Kleinheksel et al., 2020). The approach was adapted slightly to accommodate the unique requirements of deriving three distinct cases, which could then be individually and collectively analyzed. The narrative description for each case was drawn solely from the information contained in the specific supplementary reports (i.e., both manifest and latent content) relevant to the case. In creating the case narratives, each case's call data (e.g., comprised of 16–21 supplementary reports per case) were placed in chronological order. This helped to illustrate the context and evolution of each case over the time period of calls, providing more salient information that would not be available by looking at single-call incidents (Hester, 2012). The manifest content provided the consistent categorical structure on which the cases were organized.

Inclusion criteria established for the two cases were based on the primary involved persons' relationships with one another, and in the case with one primary person, only her direct partners, thereby clearly defining the units of analysis (Rowley, 2002). Call incidents peripheral to the cases were excluded (i.e., a call incident with one of the primarily involved persons that are not directly linked to the other primary involved person).

Latent content analysis was conducted for each case to determine the key constructs (i.e., issues and challenges) by combining the elements of items on the data forms, characters (i.e., involved persons and responding officers within the case), concepts within the data forms, and semantics of the notation descriptions contained in each relevant form for the case (Berg, 2001). A coding frame was created based on the form categories and exploratory question: What were the key characteristics, issues, and challenges for the involved persons and responding officers contained within each case? To ensure trustworthiness and a rigorous process, three of the authors independently coded the data guided by the coding frame and question. They then compared and contrasted their initial meaning unit codes for consistency and to derive a set of agreed-upon constructs for each case (Kleinheksel et al., 2020). These constructs were then triangulated with the literature to develop the final interpretation and analysis of the cases (Bengtsson, 2016).

RESULTS

The three cases were comprised of 58 calls (CC $n = 8$; NonCC $n = 50$) from the two data sets. Ten additional calls were peripherally associated with these cases and therefore excluded. All three cases included children, from infancy to 14 years old. The children were present for 56.9% of calls. This represented 52.4% of calls in two cases and 75% of calls in one case. Two of the cases accounted for all charges laid. Support offered to the victims was not accepted most of the time in each case. An involved person was taken to a place of safety in 27.2% of calls, and an involved person accepted a victim service referral when offered only 10.6% of the time. Refer to Table 1 for count details pertaining to call data variables by case.

TABLE 1. Call Data Overview of Three Cases ($N = 58$)

Call data variables	Cases		
	Ms. E	Ms. A & Mr. B	Ms. J & Mr. K
Time period	36 months	26 months	24 months
Number of calls	21	16	21
Type of call: CC	5	3	–
NonCC	16	13	21
Calls via 911	16	8	2
Number of children	2	2	2
Calls children present	11	12	11
No risk question data	14	9	4
Accepted referral to victim services	0 ^a	4	1 ^b
Taken to place of safety	6	8	2

Note. ^aNo offer noted on 4 calls; ^bNo offer noted on 7 calls.

Each case represented a unique problem focus common in DV situations. Ms. E's³ situation involved key issues of substance abuse, the cycle of violence, multiple partners, and Ms. E's children. Ms. A's and Mr. B's cases illustrated ongoing mental health challenges and conflicting ideas about parenting their children. Ms. J's and Mr. K's cases focused on marital and child custody issues. Each case is presented with a narrative description and interpretive analysis of the key characteristics, issues, and challenges.

Ms. E

Case Description. Ms. E was involved with three primary partners and a total of 21 calls between both data sets occurring over three years. While Mr. F was considered the predominant partner, in this case, Ms. E was also involved with two other partners: Five calls (2 CC; 3 NonCC) involved Mr. G; two NonCC calls involved Mr. H, who also had five NonCC calls with another partner; and 14 calls (3 CC; 11 NonCC) with Mr. F. All three men had prior DV incidents. However, the number of prior incidents to the calls reported on the forms from this timeline was unclear because the forms noted varied ranges (i.e., Mr. G: 2–33; Mr. H: 7–13; and Mr. F: 3–27). Sixteen (16) of the 21 calls were 911 emergency calls. Ms. E had two children who were aged 2 and 3 years at the beginning of the timeline. The paternity of the children was unclear, although police noted that she and Mr. H had children in common in one call. The children were present in 11 incidents. The Children's Aid Society (CAS) was notified in 19 incidents but was not notified after two incidents when the children were not present.

Ms. E had a history of drug use. She used crack cocaine and alcohol throughout the timeline. The first five calls occurred over the first 11 months of the timeframe and involved Mr. G, who also had a history of drug use. Both had relapsed on crack and had anger and impulsivity issues when under the influence. Relationship status was identified as "dating" during the first three calls and "married" in their final two calls. In the second call, Ms. E had redness and a swollen left cheekbone. Mr. G was charged with assault. The children were present for this occurrence. Four months later, during the third call, Mr. G was charged with failure to comply. In the fifth and final call with Mr. G, it was noted he had lost his job after he went to jail. It was unclear if the jail time was associated with the assault on Ms. E.

About one year later, Ms. E and her children were taken to a place of safety after police responded to a 911 call involving Mr. H. Both Ms. E and Mr. H had been using substances, and Mr. H was noted as extremely intoxicated. No charges were laid in this incident. Ms. E had one other NonCC incident with Mr. H about 11 months later. Relationship status indicated "separated" in the first and "divorced" in the second incident.

Within two weeks of the first call involving Mr. H, Ms. E experienced her first NonCC call involving Mr. F. On this call, he was noted as prohibited from owning/accessing weapons. There were six subsequent NonCC calls with Mr. F within

a 4-month period. On various calls, their relationship status was noted as “separated,” “dating,” “common-law,” or “married.” Risk question responses were noted as “refused” or “unknown” for five of these seven calls. Six months later, they had two more NonCC calls within seven days. Risk questions and safety planning were refused by Ms. E during these two calls. Three days later, Ms. E called 911, and Mr. F was charged with assault. Police noted “no real injuries at this time.” The children were not present during this incident. Ms. E was taken to a place of safety. Six weeks later, in another CC call, Mr. F was charged with breach of probation, and Ms. E and her children were taken to a place of safety. Again, they refused to respond to the risk questions. Following this series of calls with Mr. F, the second NonCC call with Mr. H occurred.

Three months after the last call with Mr. H, the final three calls with Mr. F occurred within a 3-day period. Two NonCC calls occurred. On the same day as the second NonCC call, a CC call also occurred, during which Mr. F was charged with assault, uttering death threats, and failure to comply with probation. Again, police noted “no injuries seen.”

Analysis. Ms. E’s case appeared as high risk (i.e., based on charges laid), complex, and challenging for police and other service providers. It illustrated the linkages between addictions and violence and the cycle of violence, particularly for Ms. E, who was involved with multiple partners across the calls. Drug and alcohol use by all parties was a central theme in the case. Ms. E and her children were at constant risk of DV, and their vulnerability was exacerbated by Ms. E’s substance use and involvement with violent men who also use substances. The extent of CAS involvement was unknown.

Ms. E could easily be labeled a “recidivist victim” in a repetitious abuse cycle, held by her substance use and marked by her limited acceptance of any support offered (Jennett, 2012, p. 38). She may not know any different lifestyle. Police responding to calls may have found themselves exasperated by their inability to impact change in Ms. E’s life and her partner choices. During 14 calls, it is not clear whether Ms. E refused to respond to risk questions or the attending police did not ask or complete the questions (i.e., the form was left blank). Police indicated that she was uncooperative during several calls, and she never accepted a referral to victim services when offered, potentially eliciting annoyance for those who intervened (Horwitz et al., 2011; Jennett, 2012; Johnson, 2004). Alternatively, Ms. E may have been distrustful of the officers (Goodman-Delahanty & Crehan, 2016) or found them to be unfair or blaming (Stewart et al., 2013) since she had a long history of calls, substance use, and continual cycle of violence. Nonetheless, arrests, charges, and convictions did occur, and she allowed police to take her to a place of safety on six occasions, which demonstrated that the police were using the law to address the violence and provided Ms. E with some support. Despite police efforts, the cycle may never be interrupted. While many calls were NonCC, this case should not be considered a lower-risk DV situation. A partner may someday use lethal violence with Ms. E.

Ms. A and Mr. B

Case Description. Ms. A's and Mr. B's cases involved 16 calls over a 26-month period, including 13 NonCC and three CC calls. Only Ms. A was charged. Half of the calls were 911 emergency calls. Mr. B and Ms. A had two children together. The second child was an infant at the time of the first call. Children were present in 12 of the 16 calls, but the CAS was notified in all 16 incidents. A place of safety was provided for either Ms. A or Mr. B in response to half of the calls. The couple either refused to respond to the risk questions, or the police left the questions blank for nine calls. The data indicated that the couple had reported domestic disputes to police before the timeline, ranging from 1 to 17 occurrences. Mr. B had three further calls with two other female partners near the end of this case's timeline. In these calls, Mr. B was also the complainant/victim.

Ms. A had severe mental health problems. She had been held and assessed under the *Mental Health Act* (MHA) previously, was diagnosed with bipolar disorder, was suicidal, and was suffering from post-partum depression. She was also described as extremely emotional and unable to control her temper. Ms. A had damaged Mr. B's property on numerous occasions. Mr. B had a learning disability and was described as impulsive and fearful. Their conflicts were over childcare and household responsibilities. Ms. A reported that Mr. B "tries to control her actions." Mr. B confirmed that he attempted "to control what she does in the house with regard to cleaning, childcare, and friends." The police noted, "both parties go off on each other, yelling and screaming." They also faced financial challenges as neither party was working.

During the fourth NonCC call, Ms. A was noted as "crying, angry, nervous, hysterical, upset, calm, afraid" and told the police that she wanted to "buy a gun." No charges were laid. Eleven months later, ten calls occurred within a 3-month period. Three of these calls occurred within two days, including a CC call when Ms. A gave Mr. B a "fat lip." She was charged with assault and taken to the hospital under the MHA. After being discharged two weeks later, Ms. A unsuccessfully attempted to have counter-charges laid against Mr. B. They were now separated, and subsequent conflicts were about child custody. There were four more NonCC calls and two additional CC calls in which Ms. A was charged with breaches of probation and failures to comply with conditions. Ten months later, two NonCC calls occurred, but both refused to respond to all risk questions.

Analysis. This case illustrated the difficulties police experience in domestic incidents when complex mental health issues are prominent, and only the female is charged. Mental health was clearly a central concern, along with high stress and parenting young children. Neither Ms. A nor Mr. B had the ability to manage conflict, particularly when the additional stress of a baby and post-partum depression compounded Ms. A's other mental health issues. CAS was likely involved, given they were notified in all 16 calls, but the extent of involvement was unknown. Both parties appeared to rely on the police to problem-solve. Ms. A did not seem to recognize her need for support, given the past interventions under the MHA and that the police opted to

use their powers under the MHA to take her to a hospital at the time of her arrest. The police also assessed her emotional state during one call as “hysterical,” among other emotions, despite the fact that police rarely selected this option in the full data sets. This suggested that Ms. A appeared volatile or unpredictable to the police and they may have feared she could place the police at risk (Huey & Ricciardelli, 2017; Johnson, 2011; Ruff, 2012). Ms. A seemed to fit Hester’s (2012) findings that compared to men, women as primary aggressors were more likely to be arrested and to be described “as alcoholic or mentally ill” (p. 1,072). However, it appeared that she needed mental health support and was hospitalized. Finances were identified as a risk factor that may have also impacted the couples’ ability to access needed support.

Mr. B was the identified victim. He was also involved in police calls with two other female partners, and charges were laid against one of these other women. Being a male victim is considered less common and often questioned as legitimate by police and service providers (Hines, 2015). Although Mr. B openly admitted to the police to trying to attempt to control Ms. A’s behavior, a potential red flag for coercive control (Robinson et al., 2018), police appeared to perceive him as a victim needing support given Ms. A’s mental instability and his learning disability.

Ms. J and Mr. K

Case Description. As a couple, Mr. K and Ms. J had the most calls in the data sets. All 21 of their calls were NonCC and occurred over two years. Two additional NonCC calls involved Ms. J and a different partner in the last four months of the timeline. Mr. K’s and Ms. J’s cases involved custody dispute issues. They separated a year before the first call in the data set and had at least the younger of two children in common. One or both children, ages 6 and 13 at the start of the timeline, were present in 11 calls. The CAS was notified in 18 calls regardless of the children’s presence. Forms noted a varied range of 4–10 domestic dispute calls prior to this timeline.

Mr. K and Ms. J were noted as separated and in an “on and off” relationship during the timeline. Mr. K described Ms. J as narcissistic, and each accused the other of jealousy and abusing alcohol and drugs. Neither appeared to be employed. During 18 calls, the police noted that they were calm. The couple had ongoing issues related to child custody and the division of property. The first incident in the timeline was an emergency call by a neighbor where police noted Mr. K “nearly ran [Ms. J] over with his vehicle.” All other calls were non-emergency calls made by the couple. Ms. J was the complainant in four calls, and Mr. K in 17 calls. Data indicated they harassed each other on a regular basis via texts and phone calls. Ms. J was taken to a place of safety in one call. In another call, it was unclear which of the two was taken. This was the only occasion where one of them accepted a referral to victim services. Some responses to risk factors were exact words from one form repeated in the next report five weeks later. Similar wording reappeared in several reports. Responses to risk questions and safety interventions on other calls indicated that the couple refused to respond or that the officers left the form blank in these areas.

Analysis. Custody of and access to children were central problems for this couple. The police seemed to be used to support their legal battle (i.e., call records can be evidence in legal disputes). Mr. K appeared more prone to call the police based on his role as a complainant in 17 calls. Potentially, Mr. K was trying to get Ms. J in trouble by enlisting the legal system as a means to indirectly control her (Hayes, 2012; Laing, 2017; Miller & Smolter, 2011). Calls to the police may have been an effort to build a custodial case or perhaps were due to poor communication skills. Frequent calls from people who obviously needed other kinds of help could be perceived as a nuisance by police, who may not consider verbal DV disputes part of their real duties (Ballucci et al., 2017). Neither Mr. K nor Ms. J seemed to manage anger well, nor did they appear to have communication or problem-solving skills. Social services might have served this couple's needs far better, but most of the time, they refused the services offered. The extent of CAS involvement was unknown.

Repeat DV call data is important to track (Brimicombe, 2016; Stanko, 2008), but this case's data quality was not particularly helpful (e.g., pro forma notes, lack of notes and incomplete forms). The data appeared to suggest police had minimal safety concerns. The couple could easily be perceived as an uncooperative recidivist couple based on the number of times police noted that they refused to answer risk questions (Horwitz et al., 2011; Jennett, 2012; Johnson, 2004). Mr. K and Ms. J may have been misusing and manipulating the DV call system for their own purposes.

DISCUSSION

These cases provide some in-depth understanding of couples/individuals who were involved in the highest number of DV calls to the police within the dataset. The cases each presented unique problem areas that the involved individuals were experiencing, along with some common themes. Common issues included declining supports that were offered, the presence of known risk factors (e.g., substance use, mental health concerns), children present at the call and often a source of discord, and using the police to intervene in relationship conflict. The cases also illustrate some of the complexities of DV situations that police are managing and provide insight regarding the way police complete the required supplementary forms, which include risk assessments.

Almost 2% of all DV calls in a 3-year period pertained to the three cases. Most of these case calls (86.2%) did not result in any charges. The police were likely very familiar with the individuals involved and may have been negatively impacted by their inability to create change in any of these circumstances, similar to previous research (Horwitz et al., 2011; Jennett, 2012; Johnson, 2004). Incomplete, pro forma, or minimal data was evident in each case, potentially indicating police frustration with the required paperwork (Goodman-Delahunty & Crehan, 2016; Johnson, 2004). Alternatively, the lack of unique supplementary form data might indicate a lack of cooperation by the involved parties. Also common to all three cases were the presence of children and the lack of acceptance of safety planning and support interventions.

In all cases, the children were present in 50%–75% of calls but were not directly assaulted. Witnessing, hearing, or being involved in (i.e., directly assaulted or engaged verbally) the incidents may place them at risk of continuing in a cycle of violence (Kimball, 2016) and impact their development (Lawson, 2019). In Ontario, police must notify the CAS of any DV calls involving either parent of underage children. However, the specifics of CAS involvement are not part of police supplementary reports. Similarly, the adults' actual involvement with support agencies cannot be verified. The case information suggested that they accepted limited support, consistent with Hatten and Moore's (2010) findings, and usually only in more severe circumstances (i.e., escalated violence and conflict).

Risk assessment items can be helpful for understanding and intervening with repeat callers. In seven of the eight CC calls, most risk items were unknown due to refusal to respond or were left blank. Among the 50 NonCC calls, 28 (56%) were noted as a refusal to respond or were left blank. The three cases either had uncooperative involved persons or police who did not fully complete these forms approximately 60% of the time. This creates problems in using the data to support decision-making for police. Furthermore, the supplementary report data is not in a format that can be easily accessed for police use in future calls. Similar to their New Brunswick, Canada colleagues, police who were completing the reports from these three cases may believe that it was "a waste of time" to complete these forms when they are not used any further (Ballucci et al., 2017, p. 253); however, this would require further research with the police to determine their specific beliefs. To maximize the use of data, it must first be collected in a comprehensive yet efficient manner and then be analyzed and reported in timely and easily accessible ways, which are available to the police responding to calls (Kebbell, 2019). A comprehensive collection, analysis, and reporting are missing in the cases discussed. Therefore, these supplementary reports are of minimal use to officers and the management of repeat callers.

Limitations

The limitations of this study need to be considered. The data itself was limited to supplementary reports that were usually completed at the office after the police responded to the call location. The data was completed inconsistently and not for the purposes of research. As well, these supplementary reports provided no information regarding the status of the follow-up (i.e., confirmation that the victim accessed support services, changes to the charges noted, and conviction information). In addition, although risk data from the criminal forms provided information when it was completed, it was not necessarily applicable. The risk assessment tools were developed based on data pertaining to male accused/female victim cases and, therefore, may not apply to a female accused/male victim, as in one of the cases. Nonetheless, the real-world data does offer some important information about DV police calls and highlights the gaps in support services provided to involved persons.

The common case issues of incomplete data and limited engagement with community support highlight specific areas for improved police response and the involvement of social workers in their responses to DV, particularly with repeat callers. The cases illustrated that few interventions that might reduce the number of NonCC calls or help couples manage conflict better were tried. Taking victims to a place of safety or offering a victim services referral appeared to have no impact. Hatten and Moore (2010), in their research about police officer perspectives of victim services, similarly found that police involvement in victim services was underutilized due to victims declining these service offers. Considering other kinds of intervention in the moments of crisis (i.e., at the time of police response to calls) could help reduce NonCC calls.

Implications

While the poor quality of the data collected by police can impact its utility for police management and case coordination purposes, a key problem identified in each of the cases was that when support services were offered (81%), they were usually declined. Had referrals been accepted, the couple dynamics may have changed, and the police may not have been used to resolve non-criminal relationship conflict. With no impetus for change, these couples will likely continue to call the police, which can become their default response, given the police funding model supports 24-hour/7 days-a-week availability (Huey & Ricciardelli, 2015). Thus, police are likely to become frustrated with these superfluous or mundane non-criminal types of DV calls. The cases suggest that some couples require excessive amounts of police time. Canadian police operating budgets have continually increased over the past 25 years (Conor et al., 2020), while simultaneously, social services have endured substantial funding cuts (Aronson & Sammon, 2000; Zanotti, 2019). In smaller urban and rural settings, police services are not as well-resourced as in larger urban settings, and DV issues are further exacerbated by limited available social services (Huey & Ricciardelli, 2015; Zorn et al., 2017). The question, therefore, becomes, how do police services in smaller cities and rural settings involve social services to potentially reduce the number of calls and time devoted to DV calls?

Connecting a social worker with a victim or family during a crisis can be effective in supporting the victim and leaving police to address the abuser or criminal aspects of DV (Johnson et al., 2021), but these programs are generally found in larger urban areas. For example, some police services have partnered with agencies or hired social workers to conduct follow-up calls and provide case management in DV cases (Messing & Campbell, 2016; Scott et al., 2015; Ward-Lashing et al., 2017). A police program in California integrated victim advocates (e.g., social workers, mental health outreach workers) from an agency on their DV response team, thereby increasing victims' use of support services from 8% to 72% after implementing the program (Police Executive Research Forum, 2015). Others refer complex cases to a local domestic assault review team (see DART Waterloo Region, 2020), situation table (see Russell, 2016), or multi-agency risk assessment conference (see Sebire & Barling, 2016). Interagency collaborations could be a more effective approach in smaller cities and

rural areas, where there is a greater risk of experiencing DV and victims have less access to adequate resources (Youngson et al., 2021; Zorn et al., 2017); however, limited funding, availability of needed services, services unable to meet the demand, and reliance on volunteers are barriers.

When collaboration is undertaken in smaller communities, the agencies and police often only consider established services in the community and how approaches could be adapted in a cost-effective manner. Social work education programs are often overlooked as a potential collaborative partner and resource. Field training of social work students is a required component of social work degree programs in Canada. Finding sufficient field placements to ensure students are well-trained is a common challenge for most programs (Canadian Association for Social Work Education, 2020). Smaller cities and rural communities often have education programs in their vicinity and could potentially engage schools of social work to create partnerships for service delivery. This would contribute to student training opportunities while addressing some of the issues presented in the cases. Although some resources would be required, this opportunity would require less than any single partner would need to contribute, given the dearth of resources in smaller cities and rural communities.

CONCLUSION

The cases present opportunities for learning and improved practices, particularly with repeat callers and non-criminal situations. Responding to DV calls is a large part of police work, yet many calls do not result in charges (e.g., about 66% in our full data sets). The individuals in the cases presented frequently relied on police to intervene in mundane domestic disputes. This points to the need for more effective partnering between police and other service providers to implement strategies that go beyond diffusing or de-escalating the immediate situation. Comprehensive documentation by police is important to understand repeat caller cases and call management decisions. Timely, lawful sharing of this information with service providers could help them work more effectively with victims. Collaborations between police, agencies, and social work education programs may create cost-effective opportunities to decrease demands on police regarding non-criminal DV disputes and improve access to social services in smaller cities and rural areas.

NOTES

1. We use “domestic violence (DV)” throughout rather than other common terms such as “intimate partner violence;” this was used in documentation and related processes by police when referring to police calls.
2. Although the forms contained no gender information, police included this variable in the data provided.
3. Gender-based titles (signifying male or female) with an alphabet letter are used to distinguish involved individuals within each case and to avoid potential attribution of race or culture (unknown for each case).

REFERENCES

- Anderson, D. K., & Saunders, D. G. (2003). Leaving an abusive partner: An empirical review of predictors, the process of leaving and psychological well-being. *Trauma, Violence and Abuse: A Review Journal*, 4, 163–191. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838002250769>
- Aronson, J., & Sammon, S. (2000). Practice amid social service cuts and restructuring: Working with the contradictions of “small victories”. *Canadian Social Work Review*, 17(2), 167–187.
- Ballucci, D., Gill, C., & Campbell, M. A. (2017). The power of attitude: The role of police culture and receptivity of risk assessment tools in IPV calls. *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice*, 11(3), 242–257. <https://doi.org/10.1093/police/pax018>
- Bengtsson, M. (2016). How to plan and perform a qualitative study using content analysis. *NursingPlus Open*, 2, 8–14. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.npls.2016.01.001>
- Berg, B. (2001). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences* (4th ed.). Allyn & Bacon.
- Brimicombe, A. J. (2016). Mining police-recorded offence and incident data to inform a definition of repeat domestic abuse victimization for statistical reporting. *Policing* 12(2), 150–164. <https://doi.org/10.1093/police/paw025>
- Burczycka, M., Conroy, S., & Savage, L. (2018). Family violence in Canada: A statistical profile, 2017. *Juristat: Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/pub/85-002-x/2018001/article/54978-eng.pdf?st=qgD7OY-Y>
- Campbell, A. M., Hicks, R. A., Thompson, S. L., & Wiehe, S. E. (2020). Characteristics of intimate partner violence incidents and the environments in which they occur: Victim reports to responding law enforcement officers. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 35(13–14), 2583–2606. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260517704230>
- Canadian Association for Social Work Education. (2020). Statement on the critical role of field education in social work education. *Canadian Association for Social Work Education*. <https://caswe-acfts.ca/statement-on-the-critical-role-of-field-education-in-social-work-education/>
- Carter, J. G., & Grommon, E. (2016). Police as alert responders? Lessons learned about perceived roles and responses from pretrial GPS supervision of domestic violence defendants. *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice*, 10(4), 361–377. <https://doi.org/10.1093/police/paw009>
- Conor, P., Carrière, S., Amey, S., Marcellus, S., & Sauvé, J. (2020). Police resources in Canada, 2019. *Juristat: Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics*. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/pub/85-002-x/2020001/article/00015-eng.pdf?st=_KOFHNe0
- DART Waterloo Region. (2020). *Domestic assault review team of waterloo region*. <http://dartwaterloo.ca/about-us/what-is-dart/>
- Fallon, B., Van Wert, M., Trocmé, N., et al. (2015). *Ontario Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect-2013 (OIS-2013)*. Child Welfare Research Portal. http://cwrp.ca/sites/default/files/publications/en/ois-2013_final.pdf
- Goodman-Delahunty, J., & Crehan, A. C. (2016). Enhancing police responses to domestic violence incidents: Reports from client advocates in New South Wales. *Violence Against Women*, 22(8), 1007–1026. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801215613854>
- Hartman, E. (2017). The queer utility of narrative case studies for clinical social work research and practice. *Clinical Social Work Journal*, 45, 227–237. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10615-017-0622-9>

- Hatten, P., & Moore, M. (2010). Police officer perceptions of a victim-services program. *Journal of Applied Social Science, 4*(2), 17–24. <https://doi.org/10.1177/193672441000400202>
- Hayes, B. E. (2012). Abusive men's indirect control of their partner during the process of separation. *Journal of Family Violence, 27*(4), 333–344. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-012-9428-2>
- Henning, K., Campbell, C. M., Stewart, G., & Johnson, J. (2021). Prioritizing police investigations of intimate partner violence using actuarial risk assessment. *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology, 36*, 667–678. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11896-021-09466-7>
- Hester, M. (2012). Portrayal of women as intimate partner domestic violence perpetrators. *Violence Against Women, 18*(9), 1067–1082. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801212461428>
- Hilton, N. Z., Harris, G. T., Popham, S., & Lang, C. (2010). Risk assessment among incarcerated male domestic violence offenders. *Criminal Justice and Behavior, 37*(8), 815–832. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093854810368937>
- Hines, D. (2015). Overlooked victims of domestic violence: Men. *International Journal for Family Research and Policy, 1*(1), 57–79.
- Horwitz, S. H., Mitchell, D., LaRussa-Trott, M., Santiago, L., Pearson, J., Skiff, D. M., & Cerulli, C. (2011). An inside view of police officers' experience with domestic violence. *Journal of Family Violence, 26*(8), 617–625. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-011-9396-y>
- Huey, L., & Ricciardelli, R. (2015). “This isn't what I signed up for”: When police officer role expectations conflict with the realities of general duty police work in remote communities. *International Journal of Police Science & Management, 17*(3), 194–203. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461355715603590>
- Huey, L., & Ricciardelli, R. (2017). Policing “domestic disturbances” in small towns and rural communities: Implications for officer and victim safety. *Canadian Review of Sociology, 54*(2), 198–215. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cars.12145>
- Jennett, C. (2012). From a man's castle to a woman's refuge: Changing police attitudes to domestic violence. *ISAA Review, 11*(2), 29–44.
- Johnson, L., Davidoff, E., & DeSilva, A. R. (2021). Motivations for police support of domestic violence response team implementation with advocates. *Violence Against Women, 27*(9), 1150–1172. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801220930821>
- Johnson, R. (2004). Police officer frustrations about handling domestic violence calls. *The Police Journal, 77*, 207–219.
- Johnson, R. (2011). Predicting officer physical assaults at domestic assault calls. *Journal of Family Violence, 26*(3), 163–169. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-010-9346-0>
- Kebbell, M. R. (2019). Risk assessment for intimate partner violence: How can the police assess risk? *Psychology, Crime & Law, 25*(8), 829–846. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1068316X.2019.1597087>
- Kimball, E. (2016). Edleson revisited: Reviewing children's witnessing of domestic violence 15 years later. *Journal of Family Violence, 31*(5), 625–637. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-015-9786-7>
- Kleinheksel, A. J., Rockich-Winston, N., Tawfik, H., & Wyatt, T. R. (2020). Demystifying content analysis. *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education, 84*(1), 127–137. <https://doi.org/10.5688/ajpe7113>

- Laing, L. (2017). Secondary victimization: Domestic violence survivors negotiating the family law system. *Violence Against Women, 23*(11), 1314–1335. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801216659942>
- Lawson, J. (2019). Domestic violence as child maltreatment: Differential risks and outcomes among cases referred to child welfare agencies for domestic violence exposure. *Child and Youth Services Review, 98*, 32–41. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2018.12.017>
- Medina Ariza, J. J., Robinson, A., & Myhill, A. (2016). Cheaper, faster, better: Expectations and achievements in police risk assessment of domestic abuse. *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice, 10*(4), 341–350. <https://doi.org/10.1093/police/paw023>
- Messing, J., & Campbell, J. (2016). Informing collaborative interventions: Intimate partner violence risk assessment for front line police officers. *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice, 10*(4), 328–340. <https://doi.org/10.1093/police/paw013>
- Miller, S., & Smolter, N. (2011). Paper abuse: When all else fails, batterers use procedural stalking. *Violence Against Women, 17*(5), 637–650. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801211407290>
- Retief, R., & Green, S. (2015). Some challenges in policing domestic violence. *Social Work/Maatskaplike Werk, 50*(1), 135–147. <http://dx.doi.org/51-1-432>
- Robinson, A., Myhill, A., & Wire, J. (2018). Practitioner (mis)understandings of coercive control in England and Wales. *Criminology and Criminal Justice, 18*(1), 29–49. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1748895817728381>
- Romans, S., Forte, T., Cohen, M. M., DuMont, J., & Hyman, I. (2007). Who is most at risk for intimate partner violence?: A Canadian population-based study. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 22*(12), 1495–1514. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260507306566>
- Rowley, J. (2002). Using case studies in research. *Management Research News, 25*, 16–27.
- Ruff, L. (2012). Does training matter? Exploring police officer response to domestic dispute calls before and after training on intimate partner violence. *The Police Journal, 85*, 285–300. <https://doi.org/10.1350/pojo.2012.85.4.516>
- Russell, H. C. (2016). *Situation table guidance manual*. <http://ckfirst.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Situation-Table-Manual-Dr.-Hugh-Russell.pdf>
- Scott, K., Heslop, L., Kelly, T., & Wiggins, K. (2015). Intervening to prevent repeat offending among moderate- to high-risk domestic violence offenders: A second-responder program for men. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology, 59*(3), 273–294. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0306624X13513709>
- Sebire, J., & Barling, H. (2016). Assessing the assessors: An analysis of the consistency of risk grading by police when conducting domestic abuse investigations. *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice, 10*(4), 351–360. <https://doi.org/10.1093/police/paw012>
- Sechrist, S., & Weil, J. (2018). Assessing the impact of a focused deterrence strategy to combat intimate partner domestic violence. *Violence Against Women, 24*(3), 243–265. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801216687877>
- Seewald, K., Rossegger, A., Urbaniok, F., & Endrass, J. (2017). Assessing the risk of intimate partner violence: Expert evaluations versus the Ontario domestic assault risk assessment. *Journal of Forensic Psychology Research and Practice, 17*(4), 217–231. <https://doi.org/10.1080/24732850.2017.1326268>

- Sherman, L. W. (2018). Policing domestic violence 1967–2017. *Criminology & Public Policy*, 17(2), 453–465. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-9133.12365>
- Spivak, B., McEwan, T., Luebbbers, S., & Ogloff, J. (2021). Implementing evidence-based practice in policing family violence: The reliability, validity and feasibility of a risk assessment instrument for prioritising police response. *Policing and Society*, 31(4), 483–502. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10439463.2020.1757668>
- Stanko, B. (2008). Managing performance in the policing of domestic violence. *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice*, 2(3), 294–302. <https://doi.org/10.1093/policing/pan044>
- Stewart, C. C., Langan, D., & Hannem, S. (2013). Victim experiences and perspectives on police responses to verbal violence in domestic settings. *Feminist Criminology*, 8(4), 269–294. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1557085113490782>
- Swerin, D., Bostaph, L., King, L., & Gillespie, L. (2018). Police response to children present at domestic violence incidents. *Child Maltreatment*, 23(4), 417–425. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077559518778795>
- The Police Executive Research Forum. (2015). Police improve response to domestic violence but abuse often remains the “hidden crime”. *Subject to Debate: A Newsletter of the Police Executive Forum*, 29(1), 1–11.
- Ward-Lashing, A., Messing, J. T., & Hart, B. (2017). Policing intimate partner violence: Attitudes towards risk assessment and collaboration with social workers. *Social Work*, 62(3), 211–218. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/swx023>
- Youngson, N., Saxton, M., Jaffe, P. G., Chiodo, D., Dawson, M., & Straatman, A. (2021). Challenges in risk assessment with rural domestic violence victims: Implications for practice. *Journal of Family Violence*, 36, 537–550. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-021-00248-7>
- Zanotti, D. (2019). The impact of \$1 billion in social services cuts. *Toronto Star*. <https://www.thestar.com/opinion/contributors/2019/04/23/the-impact-of-1-billion-in-social-services-cuts.html>
- Zorn, K. G., Wuerch, M. A., Faller, N., & Rucklos Hampton, M. (2017). Perspectives on regional differences and intimate partner violence in Canada: A qualitative examination. *Journal of Family Violence*, 32, 633–644. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-017-9911-x>

Disclosure. The authors have no relevant financial interest or affiliations with any commercial interests related to the subjects discussed within this article.

Funding. This work was supported by Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada under Insight Development Grant# 430-2016-00325.

Correspondence regarding this article should be directed to Angela Hovey, Associate Professor, School of Social Work, Lakehead University, 500 University Ave., Orillia, ON L3V 0B9. E-mail: ahovey@lakeheadu.ca