

Violence Against Women

<http://vaw.sagepub.com/>

The Impact of Victim-Focused Outreach on Criminal Legal System Outcomes Following Police-Reported Intimate Partner Abuse: Reply to the Commentaries

Anne P. DePrince and Joanne Belknap

Violence Against Women 2012 18: 906

DOI: 10.1177/1077801212456988

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://vaw.sagepub.com/content/18/8/906>

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

Additional services and information for *Violence Against Women* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://vaw.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://vaw.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

>> [Version of Record](#) - Sep 23, 2012

[What is This?](#)

The Impact of Victim-Focused Outreach on Criminal Legal System Outcomes Following Police-Reported Intimate Partner Abuse: Reply to the Commentaries

Violence Against Women
18(8) 906–912
© The Author(s) 2012
Reprints and permission:
sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav
DOI: 10.1177/1077801212456988
<http://vaw.sagepub.com>



Anne P. DePrince¹ and Joanne Belknap²

Keywords

coordinated community response, intimate partner abuse, reply

The article, “The Impact of Victim-Focused Outreach on Criminal Legal System Outcomes Following Police-Reported Intimate Partner Abuse” (DePrince, Belknap, Labus, Buckingham, & Gover, 2012), responds to calls from researchers and practitioners to evaluate community-coordinated responses (CCRs) that advocate for and reach a broader base of intimate partner abuse (IPA) victims. As we review in that article, a CCR involves collaboration between community- and criminal justice system-based agencies to locally coordinate IPA intervention and prevention efforts. Victim-centered CCRs confront constraints imposed by the criminal legal system that are critically important to victim service provision, such as the lack of confidential advocacy within the criminal legal system for victims. Our article described a study that balanced rigorous research methods (randomly assigning women to one of two conditions) with ecological validity (recognizing and including women who could not fit into those two conditions because of the reality of victim service practice). We are grateful to Denise Gamache, Meg Garvin, and David Hirschel for their commentaries on this article, and we are pleased to have the opportunity to reply

¹University of Denver, Denver, CO, USA

²University of Colorado Boulder, Boulder, CO, USA

Corresponding Author:

Anne P. DePrince, Department of Psychology, University of Denver, 2155 S. Race St., Denver, CO 80222, USA

Email: adeprinc@du.edu

here. Although the commentaries overlap to some degree, each offer unique and important perspectives as well as interesting questions, some of which we address here.

Gamache (2012) places this research in an important historical context. In particular, she documents the significant role that the remarkable Ellen Pence as well as the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project (DAIP in Duluth, MN) had on developing victim-focused responses to IPA. Pence was a role model in many ways. She demonstrated the potential impact of a single individual as well as the power possible when an individual can bring together seemingly disparate communities, agencies, and voices. Highlighting Pence and DAIP's work, Gamache's commentary carefully conveys the inception and history of proactive models to assist women victimized by IPA, especially the development of a CCR. The results presented in our article offer support for CCR approaches based on a study of diverse women survivors of IPA using rigorous research methods that included both an experimental and longitudinal design (both of which are rare in IPA research). However, data considered in the absence of a sociopolitical context and history tell only part of a story. Gamache steps in to provide the necessary sociopolitical and historical accounting of the why and how behind the development of CCRs. Her commentary raises an important challenge: to evaluate research findings in light of the sociopolitical context of IPA as well as the history of women IPA survivors' treatment in the criminal legal system. From this perspective, one might ask how large gains in criminal legal system outcomes have to be—if they are required at all—to justify victim-focused approaches. Indeed, Hirschel (2012) expresses concern that “there is no information showing that the ‘victim-focused’ program actually produced benefits for the victims in excess of those provided by the standard response” (p. 899).

Garvin (2012) addresses this challenge and Hirschel's (2012) concern by sharpening readers' focus on victim agency. She points out a critically important assumption/fear that has guided some criminal legal system responses to victims: that increasing victims' agency (such as through a CCR) will distract from or diminish the criminal legal system response to offenders. She helps to articulate a perceived dichotomy between facilitating victim agency *or* pursuing a criminal legal system response to offenders. Addressing the question implied by Gamache's commentary, Garvin brings a new and important perspective to the lack of significant differences in the severity of case disposition between the Outreach (O) and Referral (R) groups. Where researchers are often quick to interpret null findings as evidence against interventions, Garvin notes that this pattern *is* a positive finding in that “agency, albeit on a small scale, does not undermine or interfere with the process (a charge often leveled in opposition to victim agency)” (p. 888). In short, she points out that facilitating victim agency through a CCR in this study does not hinder criminal legal system outcomes. Rather, victim “agency can co-exist with traditionally positive criminal justice outcomes” (p. 888). In contrast, Garvin reviews past research indicating that limiting victims' agency in the criminal legal system has negative implications for victims (and their children) as well as the system's ability to hold offenders accountable.

Relatedly, Gamache (2012) summarizes the challenges the first CCRs faced and can continue to face, such as holding abusers accountable when their victims do not want them

prosecuted or charged; or do want formal action against them, but are (realistically) afraid to “cooperate” in their prosecution. Similarly, Garvin’s (2012) review of our study addresses the potential of an impasse when perspectives of IPA victim agency (feminist approach) meet the more traditional paradigm of the criminal legal system. Just as the Denver Triage CCR (Outreach) is victim-focused, Gamache (2012) stresses DAIP’s primary emphasis as “victim safety.” That is, all criminal legal system responses must start and end with victim safety, and feminist scholarly endeavors of CCRs should have a starting point of victim-focus for outreach, including responses to intimate partner abusers. Similarly, Hirschel (2012) stresses the importance of victim focus in IPA cases because abuse is almost always ongoing. As Gamache (2012) gamely points out, such a victim focus is far more complicated to adhere to than to state alone.

Gamache (2012) also identifies a sort of “full circle” from Pence’s (1985) *The Justice System’s Response to Domestic Assault Cases: A Guide for Policy Development to The Blueprint for Safety: An Interagency Response to Domestic Violence Crimes* (Praxis International, 2010), which appeared nearly a quarter of a century later. The *Blueprint* recommends tailoring IPA survivor responses to the characteristics of the individual survivor and her abuser, consistent with Davies, Lyon, and Monti-Catania’s (1998) book, *Safety Planning With Battered Women*. We are excited to see these developments in CCR implementation and strategies by the leaders in Minnesota, including the documentation of specific and detailed strategies. We view our study as part of this movement to be victim-focused and to document what works following IPA, for which women, and under what conditions, though Gamache (2012) accurately points out the insufficient description of specific Denver Triage outreach strategies in our article (for more information, see DePrince, Labus, Belknap, Buckingham, & Gover, 2012; http://www.denverda.org/prosecution_units/FVU/Triage_Team_Project.html). While we were honored to have the opportunity to work with our Triage partners to evaluate the impact of the Denver Triage Project, we did not develop or implement this CCR. Gamache’s comment may reflect, in part, the absence of our partners’ voices in this article. In contrast, when we have had opportunities to present with our Triage partners, we together provide better coverage of protocol details and research outcomes that help to address Gamache’s call for more information. As with *The Blueprint*, we hope that our partners will have opportunities to document details about Triage’s development, implementation, protocols, and best practices—the latter hopefully informed by this and future research. But Gamache’s call highlights what is gained when we have interdisciplinary spaces to bring together the best of practice, policy, and research perspectives, as illustrated by the important conversations raised with the interdisciplinary commentaries here.

Garvin (2012) opens conversations about important future research directions. For example, she points out the insufficient data in our study on the women’s understanding of their “choices” and agency in decisions around going to court, including what a subpoena legally demands, what information is privileged versus confidential, and the differences between these levels of protection. This is consistent with Hirshel’s (2012) wish that we had provided more detail on the operationalization of being asked to go to court. We agree

with and would like to stress Garvin's description of the need to engage "the more complex questions regarding authentic agency and its intersection with the goals and principles of the paradigm" (p. 889) of the traditional criminal legal system.

Among the three commentaries, Hirschel (2012) raises the most concerns about our study, some of which we have already addressed. Among his other concerns are questions about why we did not report on more variables in the current article. As is often the case with large longitudinal studies, it was impossible to include all of measures, potential analyses, and findings in one article. We are grateful that he took care to request and cite our *Final Report* to the National Institute of Justice, which documented that women randomly assigned to the Outreach condition (relative to Referral) reported significantly lower levels of depression symptoms, PTSD symptoms, and fear a year after the initial interview (see DePrince, Labus, et al., 2012). Hirschel also expressed concern about sampling issues though having reliable contact data for IPA survivors is an endemic problem with this population (e.g., lack of access to phones; housing transience). Indeed, we recently documented women's reports of abusers damaging and/or stealing victims' phones and/or computers, or using phones/computers to stalk or threaten them (Belknap, Chu, & DePrince, in press).

Hirschel (2012) also raised two concerns that speak to larger issues in conducting IPA research. First, Hirschel questioned the cost of victim-focused research, noting the costs of compensating participants for their time as well as conducting three interviews with the required participant tracking. Returning to Gamache's (2012) grounding of this work in a sociopolitical and historical context, we think the more important question is what is the cost of *not* doing victim-focused research? The costs of not doing victim-focused research are innumerable, such as missed opportunities to use empirical data to inform policy and practice; the loss of basic research on a critically important public health and criminal justice topic; and a lack of data to inform policy-makers' decisions about funding CCRs and related programs. To this last point, we share Gamache's concern that economic downturns present threats to the continuation or establishment of CCRs like the Denver Triage. IPA is one of the most common crimes and, as Hirschel notes, the most repeated between the same offender and victim. The consequences can be huge not only for women but for their children as well. The Minneapolis Experiment (Sherman & Berk, 1984) reported that "arrest works" (in deterring intimate partner abusers' recidivism), but then many of the follow-up studies reported, in effect, it did not work (see Dunford, 1992; Dunford, Huizinga, & Elliott, 1990; Hirschel & Hutchison, 1992; Hirschel, Hutchison, & Dean, 1991, 1992; Pate & Hamilton, 1992; Sherman et al., 1992). Feminist legal scholars questioned the methods and interpretations of these findings, withdrawing support for proarrest policies for domestic violence (e.g., Bowman, 1992; Frisch, 1992; Lerman, 1992; Zorza, 1992), with concerns including whether intimate abusers' recidivism should be the only "what works" measure.

Second, Hirschel questioned the inclusion of two nonexperimental groups (women who declined contact with or could not be reached by system-based advocates) alongside the experimental groups, suggesting that this diminished the rigor of the study. We believe our decision to include the two nonexperimental groups balanced experimental rigor with ecological validity. In terms of rigor, inclusions of the two additional groups had no effect on the implementation of the experimental conditions, and we used noncausal language when

discussing the nonexperimental conditions (such as describing *links* between early versus no engagement and outcomes). While including the nonexperimental groups posed no cost to the experimental manipulation, *excluding* those groups would have incurred high costs to ecological validity. The reality for our Triage partners is that some women decline contact or cannot be reached by system-based advocates. Prior to this research, our partners knew little about those women and their case outcomes. Because of this study, our partners now have information about what happens in those cases, which is critical for their developing practice and policy work. We believe that feminist, community-engaged approaches to IPA research must maximize both research rigor and responsiveness to the real-world complexities faced by practitioners.

Conclusion

Not surprisingly, practitioners and citizens often tire of hearing what “doesn’t work.” The findings reported in our article, from a large study on a CCR that used a longitudinal, experimental design (the “gold standard” as noted by Hirschel) point to ways that CCRs “work” in terms of criminal legal outcomes. For example, among women living with their offenders after IPA, 100% of those randomly assigned to Outreach had cases that ended in a verdict being entered, relative to only about 33% of women assigned to Referral. Among ethnic minority women, those who were randomly assigned to Outreach (relative to Referral) were significantly more likely to go to court. Other research from this project (DePrince, Labus, et al., 2012) documents that women randomly assigned to Outreach, relative to Referral, reported significantly less psychological stress (measured in three ways) and greater readiness to leave their abusive partners a year later. We hope that these findings, reported 25 years after Ellen Pence and DAIP started advocating for CCRs, lead to further adoption and development of CCRs as well as more research to inform their best practices.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The authors disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This project was funded by Award No. 2007-WG-BX-0002 awarded by the National Institute of Justice Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of Justice. The views expressed in this report do not necessarily represent those of the National Institute of Justice.

References

- Belknap, J., Chu, A. T., & DePrince, A. P. (in press). The roles of phones and computers in threatening and abusing women victims of male intimate partner abuse. *Duke Journal of Gender Law & Policy*.

- Bowman, C. G. (1992). The arrest experiments: A feminist critique. *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*, 83, 201-208.
- Davies, J., Lyon, E., & Monti-Catania, D. (1998). *Safety planning with battered women*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- DePrince, A. P., Belknap, J., Labus, J., Buckingham, S. E., & Gover, A. R. (2012). The impact of victim-focused outreach on criminal legal system outcomes following police-reported intimate partner abuse. *Violence against Women*, 18(8), 857-877.
- DePrince, A. P., Labus, J., Belknap, J., Buckingham, S., & Gover, A. (2012). The impact of community-based outreach on psychological distress and victim safety in women exposed to intimate partner abuse. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*. Advance online publication. doi:10.1037/a0027224
- Dunford, F. W. (1992). The Measurement of Recidivism in Cases of Spouse Assault. *The Journal of Crime and Criminology*, 83 (1), 120-136.
- Dunford, F. W., Huizinga, D., & Elliott, D. S. (1990). The Role of Arrest in Domestic Assault: The Omaha Experiment. *Criminology*, 28, 183-206.
- Frisch, L. A. (1992). Research that succeeds, policies that fail. *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*, 83, 209-216.
- Gamache, D. (2012). From victim safety to victim engagement. *Violence against Women*, 18(8), 878-884.
- Garvin, M. (2012). Harmony or discord between victim agency and the criminal justice system: A comment on DePrince, Belknap, Labus, Buckingham, and Gover. *Violence against Women*, 18(8), 885-892.
- Hirschel, D. (2012). The benefits of more "victim focused" coordinated community responses to intimate partner violence: A critique of "The impact of victim-focused outreach on criminal legal system outcomes following police-reported intimate partner abuse," by DePrince, Belknap, Labus, Buckingham, and Gover. *Violence against Women*, 18(8), 893-901.
- Hirschel, J. D., & Hutchison, I. W. (1992). Female spouse abuse and the police response: The Charlotte, North Carolina, Experiment. *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*, 83, 73-119.
- Hirschel, J. D., Hutchison, I. W., & Dean, C. W. (1991, Summer). The Charlotte Spouse Abuse Study. *Popular Government*, 57, 11-16.
- Hirschel, J. D., Hutchison, I. W., & Dean, C. W. (1992). The failure of arrest to deter spouse abuse. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 29, 7-33.
- Lerman, L. G. (1992). The decontextualization of domestic violence. *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*, 83, 217-240.
- Pate, A. M., & Hamilton, E. E. (1992). Formal and informal deterrents to domestic violence: The Dade County Spouse Assault Experiment. *American Sociological Review*, 57, 691-697.
- Pence, E. (1985). *The justice system's response to domestic assault cases: A guide for policy development*. Duluth, MN: Minnesota Program Development.
- Praxis International. (2010). *The blueprint for safety: An interagency response to domestic violence crimes*. St. Paul, MN: Author.

- Sherman, L. W., & Berk, R. A. (1984). The specific deterrent effects of arrest for domestic assault. *American Sociological Review*, 49, 261-272.
- Sherman, L. W., Schmidt, J. D., Rogan, D. P., Smith, D. A., Gartin, P. R., Cohn, E. G., . . . Bacich, A. R. (1992). The variable effects of arrest on criminal careers: The Milwaukee Domestic Violence Experiment. *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*, 83, 137-169.
- Zorza, J. (1992). The criminal law of misdemeanor domestic violence, 1970-1990. *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*, 83, 46-72.

Bios

Anne P. DePrince is an Associate Professor of Psychology and Director of the Center for Community Engagement and Service Learning at the University of Denver. She received her PhD in Psychology at the University of Oregon and is a licensed clinical psychologist in Colorado. Her research with youth and adults focuses on consequences of as well as interventions following trauma, particularly violence against women and children.

Joanne Belknap is a Professor of Sociology at the University of Colorado and the author of *The Invisible Woman: Gender, Crime, and Justice*. She received her PhD in Criminal Justice at Michigan State University in 1986. Her current work focuses on the trajectory from trauma to offending, as well as intimate partner abuse.