

**WHAT WILL BE THE IMPACT OF PROVIDING DOMESTIC  
VIOLENCE EDUCATION TO SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN  
IN THE CITY OF BREA BY THE YEAR 2005?**

JOURNAL ARTICLE

MIKE MESSINA  
BREA POLICE DEPARTMENT

COMMAND COLLEGE/EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE CLASS XXIV  
PEACE OFFICER STANDARDS AND TRAINING  
SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA

JUNE 1997

24-0496

**This Command College Independent Study Project is a FUTURES study of a particular emerging issue in law enforcement. Its purpose is NOT to predict the future but rather to project a number of possible scenarios for strategic planning consideration.**

**Defining the future differs from analyzing the past because the future has not yet happened. In this project, useful alternatives have been formulated systematically so that the planner can respond to a range of possible future environments.**

**Managing the future means influencing the future--creating it, constraining it, adapting to it. A futures study points the way.**

**The views and conclusions expressed in the Command College project are those of the author and are not necessarily those of the Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST).**

## IMPACTING THE FUTURE

### *Law enforcement's leadership role in domestic violence education*

By: Lieutenant Mike Messina  
Brea Police Department

The screaming and sobbing of the six year old girl almost made the information she was relaying to the police dispatcher unintelligible. Between sobs you could hear "Please, please daddy no, you'll hurt the baby," and "Oh please help me, my daddy and mommy are having a fight." The dispatcher attempts to keep her composure, but it is nearly impossible given the heart rending pleading coming from the little girl. In the background an adult male and female can be heard fighting, both verbally and physically and the sounds of a crying infant are apparent. This situation was tape recorded from the police dispatch center in the San Diego Police Department. Six year old Lisa called 9-1-1 when her father had begun to strike her mother during a verbal argument. By the end of the tape, it seems as though the only responsible person present at the scene is Lisa as she attempts to get both parties to stop the violence and to think of the baby, who is being held by the mother. Eventually, police officers arrive, the father is arrested for domestic violence and the mother is transported to the hospital for head injuries suffered during the fight.

Similar scenes are played out frequently throughout the country; in fact a woman is beaten in her home every 15 seconds.<sup>1</sup> Some of these incidents have seemingly lesser physical injury consequences, but some result in permanent injury and even death. In the majority of these cases there is one serious consequence that has not

been sufficiently addressed; the psychologically damaged children. As a society, we have brought domestic violence issues to the forefront of public concern. Laws have been passed to ensure that violators are arrested even in the absence of a willing victim. Research has shown that women are victims in 95% of all domestic violence crimes but are not willing or able to press charges against violators for a variety of reasons.<sup>2</sup> This means that the children who are exposed to domestic violence are usually repeatedly exposed over a long period of time. One study indicates that 63% of batterers came from families where the father had beaten the mother.<sup>3</sup> This indicates a learned behavior pattern that is sometimes carried from generation to generation. Couple this with the fact that children are present in 41-55% of homes where police intervene on domestic violence calls, the widespread impact is staggering.<sup>4</sup> The effect of this violence is not only felt in the home, it is reflected in our crime rates as a whole. Thirty eight percent of youths from non-violent families reported involvement in some type of violence. Though, 78% of youths exposed to violence at home participated in violent acts.<sup>5</sup> There have been numerous studies documenting the effects of children's exposure to violence, both in and outside the family environment. The following list shows thirteen of the most common effects:

1. Learn to accept violence as a means of conflict-solution and often fail to develop inner controls.
2. Learn to maintain control of others by using threats of violence.
3. Learn that loved ones have the right to hurt one another.
4. Often feel responsible for the violence between their parents or for the violence toward themselves.
5. Feel angry toward one or both parents.

6. Experience anxiety and fear.
7. Often protect the abuser in the face of outside intervention.
8. Have sleep disturbances such as bed-wetting problems, nightmares, and insomnia.
9. Have difficulties in school such as staying awake, concentrating on work, playing with peers.
10. Have poor appetites.
11. Often confuse love and violence.
12. Learn unhealthy sex-role stereotypes from parents.
13. Grow up to be abusers of their own mates or children.<sup>6</sup>

A brief look at the history of the domestic violence issue reveals deeply seated religious and cultural beliefs, that not only have tolerated abuse, but have actually encouraged physical chastisement. These abuses have, almost without exception, been perpetrated against women both in the American culture which is greatly influenced by English law, and certainly in other patriarchal based cultures. So, for the purposes of this article, domestic violence will concentrate on the fact that, by and large, the victims are female. A working definition of domestic violence is that it involves the use of force, threats and intimidation by one partner upon another in order for the dominating partner to exercise control over the victim.<sup>7</sup>

The 1970's, as part of the women's movement, saw the issue of family violence brought to the forefront of public awareness. Women's shelters began to proliferate nationwide, and the legal system began to more seriously, although not effectively, address this significant social problem. In the 1980's law enforcement saw several successful lawsuits filed against police departments by battered women who alleged a

lack of enforcement and protection. Women also had been found not guilty, in the legal system, for murdering their abusive partners when a long history of abuse was demonstrated. The 1990's have shown that the family violence issue is one that permeates our society and specifically affects our youth negatively. Although treatment programs for batterers and victims both have proliferated in the nineties, successes are few and recidivism rates still run high.

Domestic violence has long been a part of our past and will continue to be a part of our future. Research conducted for the POST Command College indicates that most contemporary police agencies continue to approach the family violence issue from an enforcement posture. Some agencies have expanded to providing victim assistance to battered women and their children. Police departments have also formed family or domestic violence units that specifically provide vertical prosecutions of batterers and even do some collaborative work with area shelters. Although this enforcement/victim education strategy has assisted in increasing the number of prosecutable domestic violence offenses in some communities, there is no apparent long term identifiable prevention benefit. There has been no wide spread attempt to lessen the prevalence and impact of domestic abuse through a long term approach of educating young people in our society. Education has been deemed one of the best ways to prevent an action or behavior from beginning. The process of providing domestic violence education cannot be complete without discussing acts of violence in general. The nature of domestic violence in our society has been punctuated with random acts of violence by our youth including the increased use of guns. Participation by youth in the 90's has been a central theme of major acts of violence against our society. With this in mind, it is

essential to look into the future. Change is synonymous with the challenge of violence that faces our future. Education is the catalyst to this change. With more blended families, single parent households and increased ethnic diversity it is essential to address the issues of differing view points for handling conflict. It is essential to develop and implement a domestic violence education program that encompasses many variables of violence. A program of education must include dating relationship violence and power and control issues as they relate to the dating environment. Experts agree that these are the seeds for future violence in relationships and they must be addressed if there is any hope for a long term solution to domestic violence. Even more important, is to reach young people prior to the dating age and when they are not in crisis in their existing families. This situation provides the greatest opportunity to instill strong relationship values with long term positive results.

Panel discussions with noted experts in the field of domestic violence and education have revealed interesting implementation strategies for providing anti-violence education. Although it was felt that the public education system is well suited to targeting young people, political realities might make this proposition difficult. There are still a number of other venues available to local law enforcement agencies such as; boys and girls clubs, community centers, youthful offender referral programs, churches and women's shelters. Once suitable locations are identified, community youth should be surveyed to measure the level of knowledge they possess in regard to domestic violence. It is also critical that the law enforcement agency collaborate with outside organizations in order to involve as many stakeholders as possible. By teaming with local organizations such as women's shelters, juvenile justice authorities, PTA

groups, school board members and community services representatives, project managers will encounter fewer barriers to implementation. This collaboration will also create shared responsibility for providing a quality program. Members of these groups should also form internal committees that are responsible for creating the appropriate curriculum for domestic violence training. By starting the program in local community youth groups, program managers will be able to start small, and then work toward expanding the project into the school system. This approach allows for successes to be realized and gives group members the opportunity to use the media to present a positive picture of the goal of the project.

In conclusion, research indicates that the future struggle in society against family violence cannot be successful without re-socializing young people. There have been numerous laws passed geared toward punishing offenders and providing counseling to batterers and victims. These laws have not, to any large degree, reduced recidivism rates and have in no way addressed the silent victims, the children. Experts agree that there is a definite need for a program that provides domestic violence education for children. This program must be approached with an eye on the future. There will be no immediate widespread impact observed until those children that receive the training begin to date, and to later raise families of their own. In the short term there may, in fact, be a rise in reported cases of violence as children become more aware of unacceptable behavior and have resources available to assist them in reporting that behavior.

Law enforcement has the opportunity to take the leadership role in the development of a policy that takes into account the long term impacts on family life in

our community. Although this is a leadership role, it is not the role of sole provider. The approach of educating young people must be done in a collaborative environment, and the many stakeholders must share responsibility for providing a comprehensive program. Still, the leadership implications should not be underestimated, as they are significant. This project allows police departments to play the role of community activist in an effort to create a vision of the future that could change the culture of entire generations. By providing this leadership with a politically controversial subject such as domestic violence education, the police department has the opportunity to demonstrate commitment to quality of life issues in spite of political influences. This commitment will ultimately give police agencies the duty of playing a vital role in shaping a desirable future.

## ENDNOTES

---

<sup>1</sup> Bureau of Justice Statistics, Report to the Nation on Crime and Justice. The Data. Washington DC Office of Justice Program, US Dept. of Justice. Oct 1983 p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Douglas, H., "Assessing Violent Couples", Families in Society, 1991.

<sup>3</sup> Walker, Lenore, The Battered Woman Syndrome 1984

<sup>4</sup> "Children: Forgotten Victims of Marital Violence", Virginia Child Protection Newsletter Vol. 19, Spring, 1989.

<sup>5</sup> "Violent Families and Youth Violence" Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Fact Sheet, No. 21, 1993

<sup>6</sup> "Group Treatment of Children in Shelters for Battered Women", J. Alessi and K. Hearn.

<sup>7</sup> Allison Proctor "Domestic Violence Information"  
[www.en.com/users/allison/dvpage.html](http://www.en.com/users/allison/dvpage.html) 12, July 1997