

## **Police Culture, Police Training, and Police Administration: Their Impact on Violence in Police Families**

**Robert Sgambelluri**

***Abstract:** This inquiry examines the impact of police culture, police training and police administration on domestic violence in police families. Police training teaches skills, which not only make effective officers, but possibly contribute to domestic violence. Officers who display power and control gain high regard and more frequent promotion. Police culture encourages authoritarianism, isolation, and a sense of entitlement. Domestic abusers have these traits as well. Loyalty among police serves to protect police abusers and further victimize victims. Police managerial behavior may model authoritarianism. This article discusses the implications of these factors and makes recommendations.*

**KEY WORDS:** police domestic violence, police culture, police training

Address correspondence concerning this article to Robert Sgambelluri, Sergeant,  
Illinois State Police, Strategic Planning and Analysis Bureau,  
500 Iles Park Place, Suite 200, Springfield, Illinois 62718.

## **POLICE CULTURE, POLICE TRAINING AND POLICE ADMINISTRATION: THEIR IMPACT ON VIOLENCE IN POLICE FAMILIES**

Police officers value strength, power and authoritarianism. Numerous studies of police culture reveal how policing itself can negatively impact the officer and his relationships (e.g., Alexander, 1994; Baker, 1985; Besner, 1982; Bouza, 1990; Drummond, 1976; Honig and White, 1994; Kaufmann, 1994; Kirschman, 1997; Swann, 1994; and Violanti, 1981). More recent studies (Johnson, 1991; Neidig, Russell, and Seng, 1992) have shown that police perpetrate domestic violence at a significantly higher rate than the general population (28 percent versus 16 percent). A review of the literature reveals little examination of the causes of the high incidence of domestic abuse within police families. A problem-solving approach and the development of an appropriate response require a thorough understanding of the problem, including how police officers and their organizations differ from the general population.

Little consensus exists about the cause of domestic violence. Studies on violence against women suggest that these behaviors occur as a result of biological and psychosocial factors as well as social processes. Violence, in general, and violence against women occur for different reasons (Crowell and Burgess, 1996). Paymar (1993) suggests that systematic male domination and control of women cause domestic violence. Dutton's (1994) study, however, shows no simple correlation between patriarchy and violence against women. Effective responses can not emerge without a more accurate understanding of the many causes of violence in police intimate relationships. This inquiry examines how police culture, training and administration may impact violence within police families.

### **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE BY POLICE OFFICERS**

In perhaps the first study addressing violence in police families, Johnson (1991) discovered an alarmingly high incidence of violence. In the survey and during follow-up interviews, 10 percent of police spouses reported actual physical abuse and 20-30 percent reported verbal and emotional abuse. When officers were asked if in the previous six months they had "lost control and behaved violently" toward a spouse or child, approximately 40 percent indicated a positive response. Neidig, et al. (1992) surveyed officers and their spouses and included specific descriptions of behaviors which he categorized as "minor violence" (thrown object at spouse, slapped, kicked, hit, bit, pushed) and "severe violence" (choked, strangled, beat up, threatened or used a knife or gun). All of these behaviors constitute criminal conduct, which, by current federal law, would bar the perpetrator from owning or possessing a firearm. This study revealed 25 percent of police officers perpetrate "minor violence" and another 3 percent engage in "severe violence." Interestingly, greater numbers of officer's wives (33 percent) self-disclosed violent behavior. Among male officers, 41 percent indicated their relationship at home experienced some physical violence. Although these findings appear alarmingly high, both studies speculate even higher actual numbers because police and their spouses may not accurately report the frequency or severity of abuse.

Wetendorf (1997), after extensive clinical work with intimate partners of police officers, concluded domestic violence victims of police officer perpetrators constitute a unique population with needs going beyond the needs of other victims of domestic abuse. Wetendorf also identified behav-

iors specific to police officers who perpetrate domestic violence. These include psychological threats (claim to know how to commit the “perfect crime;” interrogation; misrepresentation of the law to abuser’s advantage; knowledge of criminals willing to do the “dirty work”), weapons and force (officers trained to inflict pain without injury or marks - pain compliance techniques; weapons “inadvertently” displayed during arguments), and surveillance techniques (patrol locations frequented by the victim; uses others to assist). The solution certainly includes immediate steps to provide for the safety of victims, but as with any societal problem, change must also occur at a structural level.

## **POLICE CULTURE**

The observations and conclusions following are derived from findings published in the literature as well as my 12 years of experience as a police officer with assignments in patrol, internal investigations, tactical operations and training, and my limited experience in counseling. Honig and White (1994) identify risk factors for domestic violence among officers and Kirschman (1997), in her book for family members, addresses the types of abuse, effects on children and staying safe. These two works effectively delineate the issues addressed in this section of the present article. The section examines the impact of six elements of police culture on an officer’s intimate relationships: isolation, need for control, entitlement, loyalty, rugged individualism and authoritarian spillover.

**Isolation.** Several studies identify isolation as both common and destructive in the lives of police officers. (Besner and Robinson; 1982; Bouza, 1990; and Drummond, 1976). When family members complain about the impact of policing on the family, the officer, dedicated to his profession, understandably feels hurt. To avoid further conflict, many officers simply withdraw (Bonifacio, 1991). Kirschman (1997) notes that an officer’s reluctance to socialize outside his profession contributes to this isolation. This becomes destructive when it limits an officer’s perceived resources and responses to conflict. Coupled with violence against an intimate partner, the isolation encouraged by police culture only serves to promote abuse within the police family by keeping the problem “in the closet.”

**Need for control.** All of the literature on police culture reviewed supports a need for power and control. In an early work examining nonverbal communication, Hickman (1972) observed, “officers had a pronounced tendency to tilt their chins upward, and maintain a rather fixed trunk posture while approaching citizens in stress encounters.” Officers closed the distance between themselves and the other subject “in an obvious attempt to physically and psychologically dominate.” Street encounters can become an exercise in posturing where, as in the animal kingdom, an “alpha male” must appear. In his study on police suicide, Turvey (1995) frankly describes how policing encourages a need for control:

Police officers are trained to take control, and are controlling individuals. When they arrive at a situation, they are trained to take charge and establish themselves as the regulatory element. When a situation has deteriorated beyond their verbal control, or they lose control because of some intervening element, they are trained to take physical control. The final solution to a situation that the officer cannot physically control is their weapon. The gun is control. The police officer is trained to resolve a completely deteriorated situation, one way or another, with their sidearm.

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Tragedy can occur when an officer resolves the problem of a deteriorating relationship in this manner.

Relationship problems develop as officers become hyper-vigilant and begin to question family members as to their whereabouts and with whom they visit (Besner and Robinson, 1982; Kirschman, 1997). Bonifacio quotes Violanti (1981) in describing how isolation and control both develop to create a destructive dynamic in the police marriage:

The family soon becomes less important to the male officer. He becomes afraid to express emotion to his family or anyone else. Compassion is subdued in favor of “macho” image maintenance. As a result, the police officer begins to enforce his own independent brand of law, both at home and in the street.

Even with the current emphasis on community-oriented policing and the transition within police training toward greater problem-solving and communication skills, the reality remains that the ability to control others remains a job skill indispensable to an officer.

**Entitlement.** Officers frequently perceive themselves as better and more deserving of respect than a civilian (Bonifacio, 1991; Drummond, 1976). A police discount or “professional courtesy” (released by another officer for a traffic violation) reinforces this mind set. Bonifacio (1991) describes officers as “the law whom everyone must obey or face punishment...” Marital conflict results when “everyone” includes an officer’s spouse. Furthermore, the police, paramilitary environment, where challenging an order may constitute insubordination, encourages some officers to expect “exact compliance” from citizens (Honig and White, 1994). Carried home, a clash over power sharing will result, which, as Dutton (1994) points out, constitutes the “main contributor to marital conflict.”

**Loyalty.** Police loyalty has a devastating effect on victims of police-perpetrated domestic violence. Yarmey (1990) notes: “In a profession that involves the likelihood of danger and risk, it is important that an officer knows that his or her partner will assist should danger arise.” The danger, however, may not come from a threatening criminal, but from the threat of losing one’s career as a result of an arrest for domestic violence.

One of my students related a 1997 incident in a Chicago suburb where officers responded to a domestic incident involving an off-duty police officer. A police sergeant was called to the scene. In spite of the visible injuries to the off-duty officer’s wife, the sergeant responded by taking no police action and telling his subordinates, “We’re the hell out of here!” This sends a powerful message of approval to a police perpetrator and only serves to encourage his sense of entitlement.

Years ago Drummond (1976) identified this cultural phenomenon. Bouza (1990) perhaps, says it best:

The sense of “us and them” that develops between cops and the outside world helps to forge a bond between cops whose strength is fabled. It is called the *brotherhood in blue*, and it inspires a

fierce and unquestioning loyalty to all cops, everywhere. It is widened by the dependence that they have on each other for safety and backup. The response to a summons for help is the cop's lifeline. An "assist police officer" call is every cop's first priority. The ultimate betrayal is for one cop to fail to back up another.

As Wetendorf (1997) points out, the police response to another officer accused of domestic violence often twists into an "officer in distress" call where the victim of abuse becomes the betrayer of police loyalty and a threat to the officers. This becomes even more likely to happen when the responding officers have inadequate training in the dynamics of abuse. Tragically, the victim of abuse may then become the target of police reprisal.

**Rugged individualism.** The police culture values independence, the suppression of emotion in favor of reason and denial of vulnerability. (Besner, 1982; Bonifacio, 1991; Bouza, 1990; Drummond, 1976) Many officers maintain a "macho" attitude toward life that includes a belief in traditional male and female roles. Kirschman (1997) points out, "real men" ignore their feelings and don't ask for help. They value action over talking things out, and anything that threatens their authority threatens their self-esteem."

Although perpetuated by the police culture, research suggests many new recruits may bring similar traits with them upon joining a police department. K. Engel (personal conversation, December, 1997), after administering the Myers-Briggs Type Inventory (MBTI) to police cadets, found that nearly 3 out of 4 display personality traits characterized as "practical" and "matter-of-fact" (MBTI types Extroverted, Sensing, Thinking, Judgmental or Introverted, Sensing, Thinking, Judgmental), but less likely to consider others' feelings and points of view. While these qualities may benefit policing, they may well interfere with effective conflict resolution at home.

**Authoritarian spillover.** Research and observation of police officers frequently describe some officers taking home police behaviors such as giving orders, interrogating and punishing violations (Besner and Robinson, 1982; Bouza, 1990 and Drummond, 1976). Honig and White (1994) report, "[because] most police officers find it extremely difficult to turn [emotion] off at work and then turn it back on at home, the result is often emotional detachment and withdrawal, decreased communication, inhibited expression of affection and intimacy, and subsequent marital distancing." Ready (1979) adds to our understanding of this destructive process:

Day after day and week after week the officer is confronted with people who regard his uniform and his profession as the ultimate symbols of his authority. This continuous reinforcement of an officer's ideals can develop an emotional erosion which tends to allow him to forget or ignore his humanity whether on or off duty. The officer who is affected with this syndrome tends to become more rigid and authoritative with those whom he encounters, including his wife and children. His home becomes less of a domestic affair and more of an extension of his squad room.

Combining this dynamic with an officer's desire and ability to control, we can imagine an officer in a stressful marital encounter impulsively acting to disempower and control his mate.

## POLICE TRAINING

Whether in an academy environment, in-service or on-the-job with a field instructor, training does more than merely provide information. In the broadest sense, an organization transmits its values through training. Some values enhancing officer safety and organizational effectiveness can ruin family relationships.

**Academy Training.** Many police academies still operate under a paramilitary format with recruits wearing uniforms, undergoing inspections and strict discipline. While effectively establishing esprit de corps and discipline, it also isolates the new police officer from civilians. Pride, while enhancing self-confidence, can, in some officers, lead to the feeling of entitlement discussed earlier.

Police training curricula (Creighton, et. al., 1996) refer to the “Use of Force Behavior Response Model” which describes responses legally available to officers for controlling aggressive subjects. Wetendorf (1997) indicates that abusive police officers use these same techniques against their intimate partners. Table 1 illustrates the authoritarian spillover of police use-of-force training.

**Field training.** Field training, a point of intense transmission of values and the culturalization process, reinforces officer loyalty and rugged individualism. Recruits mimic the attitudes of their instructor, and instructors must do more than transmit knowledge. Instructors must ensure recruit capability in establishing control over encounters with citizens. No “solo patrols” by recruits occur until they have demonstrated this skill. Bouza (1990) describes this control aspect of field training:

Older cops tutor their apprentices in how to assume control. Cops are taught to take charge in all situations. They take assaults on their authority very personally because they see their effectiveness rooted in the question of who’s in charge.

And when an intimate partner challenges “who’s in charge,” some officers respond at home as they would on the street, with force.

## POLICE ADMINISTRATION

**Command presence.** Officers possessing the ability to establish control over others are said to possess command presence, an “outward appearance which denotes that the person has the ability and qualifications to take command of any situation” (Iannone, 1987). Officers having this trait, other things being equal, receive more promotions. Vulnerability, while essential in an intimate relationship, earns little respect in the police organization. Supervisors seen as “thinking” persons likely receive respect rather than good will from their subordinates. Conversely, supervisors seen as “feeling” persons receive more good will but less respect. Police may interpret compromise as weakness. Police officers highly value power and the ability to control others.

**Managerial behavior.** Research into management strategies has identified two dimensions, *dominance - submission* and *hostility - warmth* as most important in explaining how people interact

in organizations (Lefton, et. al., 1980). Combining these dimensions produces four basic patterns of managerial behavior. Table 2 outlines two of these strategies.

In the mid-1980s in one agency (P. T. Kelly, personal conversation, September 4, 1998), three out of four police supervisors displayed the *dominant-hostile* pattern. These behaviors resemble those of a domestic abuser. My experience with other police agencies confirms the prevalence of this managerial style in policing. These powerful leaders will often promote subordinates who share their values and beliefs. This “cloning” process conveys to others in the organization the value of strength and winning. This sends a clear message: Power brings status and entitlement; hostility and rugged individualism works.

Fortunately, far more police supervisors tested in 1998 display the *dominant-warmth* pattern. Perhaps this shift in managerial style mirrors trends observed throughout business and industry.

In a paramilitary environment, the necessity for and efficacy of these traits may occur but they may bring unintended consequences. Examining policing and its impact on officer stress and family life, the Behavioral Science Unit of the Michigan State Police (1998) hypothesized, “The more dedicated officers become to their career in law enforcement, the better their job performance will be perceived by instructors and supervisors. However, the price of this dedication may be the deterioration of family relations.”

**Denial of the problem.** Although many agencies (Illinois State Police, Chicago Police Department and Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Office) have taken a proactive approach to this issue, other police administrators effectively deny the problem exists. Although often invited to provide in-service training on domestic violence to local police officers, I have more than once met resistance when the inviting police administrator discovered my curriculum included information on officers who commit domestic violence. In a survey of 123 police administrators, 63 percent indicated only the imposition of counseling or a written reprimand after the first, sustained case of domestic violence against an officer (Boyd, Carlson, Smith, and Sykes, 1995). In a separate survey of 277 police chiefs and sheriffs regarding domestic violence training, most reported an aggressive response to an officer-involved domestic complaint. Others, however, indicated a lack of preparation for this. Another administrator wrote, “If this is a seminar about cops and domestic violence, or a way to sneak it in, then I smell a big fat rat, and I think it will be done only once.” (Fischer, 1998). Because research indicates domestic violence by police occurs at all ranks, some officers of rank may find the issue “hits too close to home”. Whether consciously or unconsciously, these actions deny the problem and, as a consequence, further isolate victims and tacitly condone the actions of abusive officers.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND LEGISLATION

Within the United States, there are approximately 900,000 city, county, state and federal police and correctional officers (U. S. Department of Justice, 1996). The work of Johnson (1991) and Neidig, et al. (1992) suggest 28 percent (252,000) of these officers behave in a criminally violent manner toward an intimate partner and 40 percent (360,000) experience violence in their home. While

victims urgently need protection, another implication of these findings involves the effect of violence within police families on domestic violence intervention as a whole. Officers who value power may find themselves resenting a victim of domestic violence for apparent weakness. Domestically abusive officers may not respond effectively to a domestic crime. Legislation and funding can positively impact widespread organizational changes in policing.

### **IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELORS AND ADVOCATES**

The dynamics of police-perpetrated domestic abuse dictate that, without an understanding of the police culture, the dynamics of domestic violence and their interrelatedness, helpers need to refer individuals or couples experiencing this pattern of abuse to others rather than risk reinforcing existing destructive behaviors. Furthermore, rather than simply accepting as “true” popular statements about causes and effective responses to domestic violence, each of us must remain current. When new research suggests a need for change, we must revise our opinions accordingly.

### **IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICE AGENCIES**

No officer likes to hear of one of their own crossing the ethical line. Yet solving a problem requires first acknowledging its existence. Resistance to confront the issue suggests a need for a detailed policy and procedure.

The frequency, severity and complex dynamics of police-perpetrated domestic violence necessitate training for *all* officers. Discussing police misconduct, however, frequently leaves officers ill at ease. Furthermore, most officers display little interest in theory (K. Engel, personal conversation, Dec. 1997). Effective training, necessary to protect victims and preserve careers, departs from an officer’s learning “comfort zone.”

Additionally, I offer five comments:

1. Silence and isolation impact police domestic violence as makeup affects a bruise; they deny the violence and cover up the problem, thereby allowing the abuse to continue. Address authoritarian spill-over and the negative effects of policing on police families early on. Make family programs as accessible as possible to intimate partners for both traditional and nontraditional relationships. Provide useful strategies to strengthen relationships and prevent family problems.

2. Employ effective marketing techniques for services including the support of fraternal groups. Some officers distrust police command because the administrative function includes investigating misconduct and sanctioning officers.

3. Make services as confidential as possible. Maintain records separately from department records and not generally accessible. Without strict confidentiality, those needing assistance most resist for fear of ending their career.

4. Implement a zero-tolerance policy toward domestic abuse to get the attention of officers who prefer to look away. This protects the integrity of the agency as a whole. While this admittedly may push the problem into the closet, research shows very few domestic abusers self-refer. Mandate intervention for officers committing abusive behaviors which fall short of termination criteria. Cultural and organizational change requires a variety of responses, including at times, a “big stick.”

5. Empower officers through education and the example of leadership that authentic strength includes the possession of a *variety* of skills related to coping, self-awareness, self-regulation and communication.

## CONCLUSION

Policing attracts and encourages characteristics associated with authoritarianism. The ability to establish power and control, while an underlying motive of domestic abuse, is an essential job skill for police. Officers who display this ability achieve higher status as leaders among their peers. The police culture itself encourages isolation, a need for control and a sense of entitlement, all traits present in a domestic abuser. Additionally, law enforcement academies train officers in skills designed to physically and psychologically establish control over another person without causing injuries or visible marks, a useful tactic for a batterer. Tragically, the skills and traits which make an officer effective could make an abuser more dangerous (Wetendorf, 1998). Loyalty among police serves to protect police abusers and further injure victims. We need research to determine why, when all police officers experience the training and cultural influences noted above, only some become abusers. Policing clearly influences attitudes and behaviors, but does not, in itself, cause domestic violence by officers.

POLICE TRAINING APPLIED CORRECTLY IN ON-DUTY SITUATIONS		POLICE TRAINING APPLIED IN AN INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP (AUTHORITARIAN SPILL-OVER)	
<u>Behavior of Suspect</u>	<u>Officer's Response</u>	<u>Behavior of an Officer's Intimate Partner</u>	<u>Officer's Response</u>
Cooperative	<b>Officer Presence Verbal Interaction</b>	Cooperative; Submissive.	<b>Authoritarian posture Dominant voice tone</b>
Verbally uncooperative	<b>Verbal Control Tactics Pepper Spray Soft Unarmed Control</b>	Verbally uncooperative; Communicates dissatisfaction with power imbalance.	<b>Denial of access to transportation, phone, other resources Soft unarmed control</b>
Resistive	<b>Control Instruments Hard Unarmed Control</b>	Resistive; Officer fears loss of control.	<b>Hard unarmed control Control instruments</b>
Unarmed physical assault	<b>Intermediate weapons</b>	Unarmed physical assault; Officer fears loss of control.	<b>Intermediate weapons</b>
Armed physical assault	<b>Firearm - Deadly Force</b>	Armed physical assault; Officer perceives complete loss of control over relationship.	<b>Deadly force - homicide/suicide</b>

On-duty versus off-duty use of force. Adapted from the Use of Force Behavioral Model (Personal Safety Institute. In Creighton, et al., 1996).

Table 1

<b>Management function</b>	<i>Dominant - hostile strategy</i>	<i>Dominant - warmth strategy</i>
Basic attitude	People must be pushed.	People produce when involved and committed.
Planning	Does own planning without help.	Strategically involves subordinates.
Organizing	Runs a tight, rigidly-controlled operation.	Provides for optimal participation, autonomy, and responsibility for everyone.
Controlling	Relies on fear and insecurity.	Fosters self-control through understanding of objectives.
Leading	Leads by driving and threatening.	Guides people toward full use of their potential.
Decision-making	Does it on own.	Strategically involves others in search for optimal decision.
Motivating	Negative reinforcement.	Appropriate positive and negative reinforcement.
Disagreement	Suppresses it.	Confronts and resolves it.
Communications	One-way.	Two-way.

Superior-subordinate management strategies (Lefton, et al., 1980).

Table 2

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