A Practical Plan for Prevention and Intervention: Florida's New Model Policy on Officer-Involved Domestic Violence

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Abstract

This article describes the development and innovative dissemination of Florida's new Model Policy on Officer-Involved Domestic Violence and explains its expanded focus on training, employee assistance programs, and victims, as well as its application to a much broader group of officers than any other related policy in the U.S. The article also presents data from research surveys taken by the first group of 491 criminal justice officers who viewed the Model Policy online. An analysis of the data reflects the promise of the Model Policy’s potential impact and the broader impact of the Law Enforcement Families Partnership.

*Keywords:* criminal justice officer, correctional officers, law enforcement officers, domestic violence, law enforcement policies, victims, prevention
Introduction

Faced with alarming and high-profile news reports of law enforcement officers accused of domestic violence, the International Police Chief’s Association (IACP) sounded a clarion call in 1999 for law enforcement agencies to develop specific policies to address the tragedy (IACP, 1999). Funded by the Office on Violence Against Women, the IACP Model Policy on Domestic Violence By Police Officers policy is a comprehensive outline of the responsibilities of individual officers, supervisors, and managers in preventing and responding to officer-involved domestic violence (Prabhu & Turner, 2000). It was updated in 2003 (IACP, 2003a). Despite the policy’s broad dissemination, however, researchers in 2006 found no evidence that the IACP Model Policy was being widely adopted or implemented (Lonsway, 2006).

Florida’s criminal justice community finally took on the challenge to implement the IACP’s recommendations in 2009 as part of a new statewide effort to reduce officer-involved domestic violence (Oehme et al., 2011). Beginning with the IACP model and drawing from the experiences of other states, the Florida Model Policy Committee created a new statewide plan with an expanded focus and novel online dissemination strategy. This article describes the development and innovative dissemination of Florida’s new Model Policy on Officer-Involved Domestic Violence, and explains its expanded focus on training, employee assistance programs, and victims, as well as its new application to a broader group of officers. The article also presents data from research surveys taken by the first officers who viewed the Model Policy online. An analysis of the data reflects the promise of the Model Policy’s potential impact.

Florida’s Model Policy on Officer-Involved Domestic Violence was created in conjunction with a unique statewide Law Enforcement Families Partnership (LEFP), a component of the Institute for Family Violence Studies (IFVS) at Florida State University. The
broad mission of the LEFP is three-fold: to educate officers about the crime of officer-involved domestic violence, to promote a criminal justice culture that condemns officer-involved domestic violence and holds offenders accountable, and to prevent violence by encouraging officers to seek help so that they do not become offenders (LEFP, 2010c). The LEFP has many components, including an online curriculum, short videos, posters, brochures, and affirmation cards reinforcing the importance of keeping officers’ families safe. The overarching message is, “There is no code of silence, and no excuse for domestic violence,” alluding to the close-knit bonds developed between officers (LEFP, 2010b). The cornerstone of the LEFP project is the online curriculum, with several training modules specifically dealing with officer-involved domestic violence. Officers can receive mandatory retraining credit from their agencies for taking the curriculum. Beginning in July, 2010, the Model Policy was the sixth module added to the online curriculum. Other modules include the dynamics of officer-involved domestic violence; the administrative, agency, and criminal consequences of such violence; understanding primary and secondary victimization issues; materials and resources for supervisors and administrators; and the fundamentals of healthy relationships. The new Model Policy on Officer-Involved Domestic Violence completes the curriculum by explaining how to reduce the risk of officer-involved domestic violence, and address it appropriately when it occurs. It encourages agencies and officers to take concrete steps to prevent the crime.

The Committee Process

The Model Policy was created by a large statewide workgroup whose members have a direct stake in reducing officer-involved domestic violence. Jay Romine, a police chief and the 2009-2010 Chair of the Standards and Training Commission at the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, led the Committee. He was joined by a host of other criminal justice officials from
across the state, with the aim of ensuring broad support for the Model Policy. Representatives from the Florida Police Chiefs Association, Florida Sheriffs Association, Florida Highway Patrol, Florida Police Benevolent Association, Florida Department of Corrections, Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence, Florida Council Against Sexual Violence, and the Florida Attorney General’s Office served on the Committee, along with representatives from several local law enforcement agencies. (For a complete list of the Committee members, log onto: http://familyvio.csw.fsu.edu/LEF/lef_mem.html.) To compensate for agencies’ reduced or nonexistent travel budgets due to the national economic downturn of 2008, the Committee met by phone conference at least once a month beginning in September, 2009, and communicated extensively by email. Agendas, notices, and minutes of the meetings are also available on the LEFP website. To increase the likelihood that the Model Policy would be more than simply an academic exercise, the union that represents officers, the Florida Police Benevolent Association, was included in the process from the outset. Copies of all drafts of the Model Policy are available on the LEFP website. In addition, drafts were sent by the Florida Police Chiefs Association and Florida Sheriff’s Association by agency email to all Police and Sheriff agency heads, with letters explaining the Committee process and goals and asking for feedback.

Before this endeavor, the most recent statewide model protocol for law enforcement responses to domestic violence in Florida was “Responding to Domestic Violence: Model Policy Number Two for Florida Law Enforcement November 1999.” The purpose of that policy was to improve the overall police response to domestic violence crimes (Tatum & Clement, 2007). That policy is still in effect; it has only a brief reference to officer-committed domestic violence. That short reference was replaced by the new comprehensive Model Policy to create a high profile and proactive response to the crime.
Literature Review

The issue of law enforcement officers committing domestic violence has gained considerable attention among researchers and victim advocacy organizations over the last two decades. Researchers have noted the cruel irony of individuals engaging in this crime when they are responsible for upholding the law (Gershon, 2000; Johnson, Todd, & Subramanian, 2005). Many researchers believe that there is a connection between the skills that law enforcement officers must use on the job and the use of violence in the home (Ammons, 2005; Lott, 1995; Klein & Klein, 2000). For example, Johnson, Todd, and Subramanian (2005), hypothesize that a police officer’s knowledge of weapons, exercise of authority, and command presence and control techniques can become embedded in his/her behavior and “spill over” into his/her home life. These skills, coupled with the close bonds that are formed between officers who rely on each other for safety and support, may strengthen a “code of silence” in police ranks, which allows domestic violence to continue (Ammons, 2005).

Researchers have established that law enforcement officers consistently report using violence with their intimate partners, although the reported rates have varied. Klein & Klein, (2000) found rates lower than that the general population--around 5%--while other studies found much higher rates, up to 40% (Neidig, Rusell, &Seng, 1992). Feder found 24% in 1997; Ryan found 10% in 2000; Gershon found 9% in 2000; and Johnson found 40% in 1991. While no precise rate of officer-involved domestic violence has been formally established, it is clear that officer-involved domestic violence exists and deserves careful attention (IACP, 2003).

While rates of officer-committed domestic violence have been explored among law enforcement officers, there is little known about domestic violence behaviors among the other set of officers charged to enforce the law: correctional officers. Studies on correctional officers have
focused on the stressful work environment of correctional officers that can lead to burnout and to disruptions in their home life (Dowden & Tellier, 2004; Lambert, Hogan & Tucker, 2009; Lambert, Hogan, & Barton, 2004). The LEFP project is in the process of publishing the first study exploring the domestic violence rates among correctional officers, finding that 11% reported using physical violence with an intimate partner or family member (Oehme, Martin & Valentine, under review). About half of correctional officers responding in that study indicated that they believe domestic violence is “common” among criminal justice families. These results suggest that the incidence of domestic violence among correctional officers may be comparable to the rates among law enforcement officers, and that both populations should be targeted for prevention and intervention techniques.

Other State Policies

A review of all published statewide policies outside of Florida reveals that only New Jersey, North Dakota, Washington, and Wisconsin currently have stand-alone comprehensive policies based on the extensive IACP policy (New Jersey Domestic Violence Fatality and Near Fatality Review Board, 2006; North Dakota Council on Abused Women/Coalition Against Sexual Assault in North Dakota, 2005; Washington State Office of the Attorney General, 2003; Wisconsin Department of Justice Training and Standards Bureau, 2009). Wisconsin’s model policy also provides training suggestions and a broad appendix that covers scenarios, amendments, and a glossary. That model is available on the Internet in a non-interactive PDF format. Other states approach the issue in a variety of ways.

Illinois and Maryland have included policies regarding officer-involved domestic violence within their general (civilian) response protocols (Illinois Criminal Justice and Information Authority, 2007; Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services,
Those reflect the general IACP guidelines; however, Maryland’s policy lacks a comprehensive procedural section, and Illinois’ policy has several missing components, such as the purpose and policy statements. Two states, Hawaii and Idaho, have no model policy regarding domestic violence at all – civilian or officer-involved (Burke, 2010; Carter-Yamauchi, 1999).

Six states – California, Colorado, Kansas, Kentucky, Minnesota, Nevada, and New York -- have statewide policies regarding domestic violence generally – but none of these policies has any reference to officer-involved domestic violence, and none of the six has a free-standing policy involving officers, either (Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training, 2004; Colorado Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2002; Governor’s Council on Domestic Violence, 2010; Kansas Office of the Attorney General, 2009; New York State Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence, 2010; Pirius, & Zollar, 2007). In California, several large counties have their own formal policy for responding to officer-involved domestic violence, but none of these local policies apply to the entire state. Alabama, Connecticut, Georgia, Massachusetts, Michigan, Nevada, New Hampshire, North Carolina, and Tennessee currently have model policies on civilian domestic violence with only brief references to officer-involved domestic violence (Advisory Council for Prosecuting Attorneys, Peace Officers, and Training, 2000; Massachusetts Executive Office of Public Safety, 2002; Domestic Violence State Coordinating Council, Law Enforcement Subcommittee, 1997; Michigan Domestic Violence Law Enforcement Training Project, 2009; North Carolina Governor’s Crime Commission Violence Against Women Committee, 1998; Police Officer Standards and Training Council, 2006; Searcy, 2007; State of New Hampshire Office of the Attorney General, 2002; Georgia Commission on Family Violence, 1998). Ohio and Texas simply placed a copy of the IACP
policy into the appendix of their general civilian protocol (Texas Council on Family Violence, 2003; Legal Aid Society of Cincinnati, 2003).

Such efforts reflect an acknowledgment that officers have been perpetrators of domestic violence. However, they do not respond to the IACP and researchers call for the creation of separate and independent policies to elevate the issue of officer-committed violence. Separating and elevating the issue encourages states to incorporate progressive reform, innovative practices, early identification, and assistance for officers and their families (Lonsway, 2006). The authors could not find any other published policies regarding statewide domestic violence protocols besides the ones mentioned here.

**Florida’s Improvements to the IACP Policy**

**Expansion to corrections.**

While the groundbreaking IAPC model was hailed as novel in its sweeping recommendations to reduce incidents of a crime that had rarely been acknowledged, Florida’s Committee expanded the model’s scope. The IACP model applies to police officers, as do the models from the various states that used it as a template. Florida’s Model Policy, on the other hand, applies to law enforcement, correctional, and correctional probation officers, thus recognizing that all these officers are considered criminal justice officers in the state and are held to many of the same statutory mandates (Florida Statute 953.10). This addition was also important because each kind of officer has been arrested for domestic violence-related crimes in the state, and both law enforcement and correctional agencies wanted to implement prevention efforts (Cundiff, 2008; IFVS, 2009). Also, the Committee noted the similar—though not identical—responsibilities for protecting public safety required of both kinds of officers, law enforcement and correctional, and noted that there are more correctional officers than police
officers in the state (FDLE, 2009). There are over 80,000 certified criminal justice officers in Florida, and because the new Model Policy refers to them all, every agency that employs these officers is encouraged to highlight the issues involved in the crime and take proactive steps to prevent it. No other state has undertaken such an extension of the IACP design.

**Increased emphasis on victims.**

Consistent with the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) emphasis that first-time perpetration and victimization should be prevented (CDC, 2010), the Florida Model Policy highlights that officers can also be victims as well as perpetrators of domestic violence. Thus, officers should be provided with “information about relevant services for preventing and ending victimization and perpetration of domestic violence.” This acknowledgement was added as news reports reflected that officers had not only been arrested for domestic violence (Planas, 2010), but had been alleged victims as well (Hawaii News Now, 2010; The Orlando Sentinel, 2009).

**Recommendations for employee assistance programs.**

The IACP policy states that the department should be able to refer officers to confidential counseling with professionals who are “knowledgeable about” domestic violence (IAPC, 2003b, p.4). Many of the programs to which agencies refer employees are employee assistance programs (EAPs). EAPs are often provided by government and industry to help employees deal with personal problems that seriously affect job performance (Kemp, 1985). They provide for referrals to professional services aimed at rehabilitation and prevention. Florida’s Model Policy goes a step further than the IACP, encouraging criminal justice agencies to **contract** with employee assistance programs that “include professionals who have training in domestic violence dynamics”—in other words, to ensure that their EAPs have expertise in the issue before
relying on them to help officers (LEFP, 2010, p. 11). This provision acknowledges the role of the EAP in agencies, and attempts to make referrals to such entities meaningful for the officer.

**Training.**

The IACP policy states that the department must incorporate initial and ongoing training about domestic violence, understanding domestic violence, departmental domestic violence response protocol, warning signs of domestic violence by officers, victim safety, and federal domestic violence laws (IACP, 2003b, p. 2). Florida goes further to enumerate a variety of topics specific to the crime when committed by an officer. For example, agencies are free to use a variety of ways to access training on the following:

- The dynamics of officer-involved domestic violence, including misuse of authority, power and control, and surveillance techniques.
- Information about available employee-assistance programs or local resources that can help officers before violence escalates.
- How to recognize potential indicators of domestic violence behavior by law enforcement officers.
- How to investigate or document information on indicators of potential abusive officer behavior.
- How to notify the immediate ranking supervisor who will inform the agency head in accordance with the agency’s chain of command.
- The consequences of officer-involved domestic violence.
- Special considerations of victim safety and confidentiality.
- Information about programs for victims and batterers.
• Understanding why a victim’s fear of a perpetrator may make the victim (whether
civilian or officer) afraid to cooperate with responding officers. This includes, but is not
limited to, a victim’s fear that a perpetrator’s status as an officer may mean that the
officer will not be held accountable for his/her actions.

**Unique online dissemination of the Model Policy.**

Dissemination of Florida’s Model Policy began at the statewide Police Chiefs
Association annual conference in Miami Beach in 2010, where every attendee received a copy
printed by the Police Benevolent Association. In addition, the policy was posted on the
Institute’s website in PDF, on the Florida Sheriff’s Association (Florida Sheriff’s Association,
2010), and on the Florida Police Chief’s Association sites (Florida Police Chiefs Association,
2010) The policy was integrated into an interactive module — Module Six -- in the password
protected “Officer-Involved Domestic Violence: A Prevention Curriculum.” Finally, hard copies
were sent to all criminal justice agencies in the state. Module Six (“Florida’s Model Policy on
Officer-Involved Domestic Violence”) went live on August 1, 2010. Within a few weeks, over
100 officers had accessed the online module of the Model Policy. The feedback from the surveys
attached to the module shed light on the reactions of the officers who have reviewed the Model
Policy online.

**Methods**

**Demographics**

The data was gathered through Qualtrics© online survey software. There were 491
respondents to the pre-survey and 450 respondents to the post-survey. Respondents for the
current investigation were criminal justice officers in Florida who reviewed Florida’s Model
Policy by taking Module Six of the Law Enforcement Families Partnership online multimedia
training, *Officer-Involved Domestic Violence: A Prevention Curriculum*. Only Florida agencies were provided with the passwords for the online project. Half (50%) of respondents were affiliated with law enforcement, while about half (47%) were affiliated with corrections, and 3% identified their affiliation as “other” (N = 434). A majority (61%) of respondents reported not having a supervisory role at their agency, while the remainder (39%) reported that they did have a supervisory role. Forty percent of the officers reported working in an urban area, 31% reported working in a suburban area, and 29% reported working in a rural area. Officers had varied lengths of time they had worked as a criminal justice officer; 22% had been an officer for 0 - 4 years, 21% had been an officer for 5 - 9 years, 18% had been an officer for 10 – 14 years, 14% had been an officer for 15 - 19 years, and 26% had been an officer for 20 or more years. No information was gathered from this sample regarding race, gender, or age.

**Measures**

In the present study, we examined responses from criminal justice officers who answered questions attached to online training module on Florida’s new Model Policy on Officer-Involved Domestic Violence. The surveys were anonymous and voluntary, but users created a unique user ID which allowed researchers to track responses across the pre-survey and post-survey. The surveys included questions exploring thoughts and attitudes about the new Model Policy, user satisfaction with the online training, officer’s help-seeking behaviors, and agency relationships with local domestic violence and rape crisis centers. Also included were some basic demographic questions, as described above.

**Results**

**Relationships with centers**
In order to determine how officers gauge their own agency’s relationship with existing community resources that offer assistance to victims and information to the public on domestic violence, respondents were asked, “How would you rate your agency’s working relationship with your local certified domestic violence center?” and, “How would you rate your agency’s working relationship with your local rape crisis center?” Of the respondents (N = 480), only 50% of officers reported that their agency had a “Good” working relationship with their local certified domestic violence center, while 48% reported having a “Good” relationship with their local rape crisis center. Of those that did not report the relationship as “Good,” a majority of respondents (30% for domestic violence centers, 32% for rape crisis centers) reported that they did not know the quality of their working relationship. Furthermore, regarding their relationship with domestic violence centers, 4% of respondents reported they did not have a relationship with the center, 5% said the relationship was poor, and 11% said the relationship was fair. For rape crisis centers, 4% reported that they did not have a relationship with the center, 6% reported that it was poor, and 9% reported that it was fair.

**Effectiveness of Policy**

Officers were also asked a series of questions to assess how beneficial officers believed the Model Policy would be. Most respondents indicated that they believed Florida’s Model Policy on Officer-involved domestic violence will be useful. Specifically, when asked, “How useful do you think this policy will be to your agency?” (N = 450), 51% stated that they believed it will be “Somewhat useful” and 42% of respondents believed that it would be “Very useful.” Only 7% indicated they believed the model policy would be “Not at all useful.” When asked, “Do you think that this Model Policy encourages zero-tolerance for domestic violence in criminal justice agencies?” (N=404), almost all (93%) respondents answered “Yes,” while only
7% answered “No.” Officers were also asked, “If your agency does not currently have a Model Policy on officer-involved domestic violence, how confident are you that your agency will consider this Model Policy to develop its own policy?” (N = 439), a majority (65%) of officers reported that they were “Fairly confident” (33%) or “Confident” (32%) that their agency would consider this Model Policy to develop its own policy. Thirty percent of officers reported that their agency already has a policy addressing officer-involved domestic violence, while only 5% reported that they were “Not at all confident” that their agency would use this Model Policy to develop its own policy.

**Help-Seeking Behaviors**

Because the Model Policy encourages officers to seek help when they need it, before violence escalates, officers (N = 475) were asked, “Do you know enough about your Employee Assistance Program and how to access it?” Over half (60%) of officers responded “Yes,” while 24% responded “No,” and 16% responded “I don’t know.” Very few officers (15%) have ever accessed their Employee Assistance Program, as indicated by a “Yes” response to the question, “Throughout your career as an officer, have you ever accessed your agency’s Employee Assistance Program?” (N = 466). The majority (85%) of officers responded “No,” they have never accessed the EAP. Fifty four officers responded to an open-ended question indicating the number of times they had accessed the employee assistance program. A majority (65%) responded they had accessed the service once, 19% indicated twice, 7% indicated three times, and the remaining 10% indicated other responses. Furthermore, when asked, “How likely would you be to access your Employee Assistance Program for domestic violence related issues?” (N = 474), only 27% reported that they would be “Likely” to access their EAP for issues related to
similar percentage (34%) reported that they were “Unlikely” to use the EAP for this service, while the remainder (39%) reported that they were “Undecided.”

Similar to the number of officers who reported using their EAP, 16% of officers responded “Yes” to the question, “Throughout your career as an officer, have you ever sought any type of counseling, therapy, or doctor’s advice to deal with job-related stress or emotional well-being issues?” (N = 467). The remainder (84%) responded “No,” indicating that they had not accessed these services. The most common issues for which officers reported seeking assistance (whether through their EAP or other service) were stress, family concerns, depression, and intimate partner issues. Officers were asked, “If you felt that your behavior showed risk factors for domestic violence, who would you turn to for help?” (N = 418) and, “If one of your coworkers felt that their behavior showed risk factors for domestic violence, who do you think they would turn to for help?” (N = 416). Officers were prompted to check all that apply. The top two responses were “Agency Employee Assistance Program,” and “Friend.”

Project effects on behavior

Officers were then asked about their opinions of the effectiveness of the Law Enforcement Families Partnership project (including all of the components of the project). Specifically, officers were asked, “Do you think that this project can help reduce domestic violence by officers over time?” (N = 430). Only 10% of officers responded “No;” a majority (62%) reported “Yes,” they believed it could reduce domestic violence; and 28% stated “Maybe.” Officers were also asked, “Do you think that this project will increase the likelihood that an officer will seek help to prevent his/her own violent behavior at home?” (N = 425). Just over half (53%) of officers responded “Yes,” while only 12% responded “No,” and 35% responded “Maybe.” Officers also seemed to believe that this project will increase the reporting
behaviors of other officers, indicated by a “Yes” response to the question, “Do you think this project will increase the likelihood that an officer will report a colleague’s domestic violence?” (N = 422). Half (50%) responded “Yes,” while 13% responded “No,” and 38% responded “Maybe.” Officers were then asked, “Do you think you learned anything from this Module that can be used in your own life to maintain safe relationships?” (N = 427). A majority (68%) of officers responded “Yes,” while 12% responded “No,” and 19% responded “Maybe.”

Discussion

Throughout Florida, local communities are served by 42 certified domestic violence centers and 30 rape crisis centers (Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2010; Florida Counsel Against Sexual Violence, 2010). These agencies are crucial links to information and services regarding domestic violence, because they offer a wide range of free outreach services, including including 24-hour hotlines, emergency shelter, counseling, and advocacy (Bennett, Riger, Schewe, Howard, Wasco, 2004). These centers do the majority of the prevention work on domestic violence in each community they serve. Researchers have found that victims who utilize these services are more likely to feel less depressed and more hopeful, as well as more likely to use legal remedies (Bennett et al., 2004). Yet the present study indicates that around half of all officers reported that their agencies have a good working relationship with their local domestic violence center and rape crisis center. About a third of officers reported that they did not know the quality of their agency’s working relationship with these centers, while about 20 percent reported that the relationship was something other than good (fair, poor, or non-existent). Taken together, these results raise two issues: knowledge about domestic violence and rape crisis centers, and the quality of the agency’s relationship with these centers. First, since roughly one-third of officers did not know the quality of their agency’s relationship with these centers, these
results indicate that knowledge about and use of certified domestic violence centers and rape
crisis centers can be improved. Though it does not necessarily indicate that these officers lack
sufficient knowledge of their local centers, it does suggest that these officers do not interact with
or access these services. While it is not expected that every officer interacts with these agencies,
it is important that agencies work to maintain a good working relationship with these centers, and
communicate the importance of these centers to their force. By improving knowledge of these
centers and the agency’s working relationship with these centers, service to victims of these
crimes, and agency cross-training and collaboration can be enhanced. Secondly, a large
percentage of officers reported that their agency’s working relationship with these centers was
something other than good. These numbers indicate that these agencies have room to improve
their relationships with these centers, which will ultimately assist victims of crime better, and
will provide more cooperation between agencies and centers.

As a result of this early data, the Institute produced a Practical Prevention Tips document
was disseminated to agencies (LEFP, 2010d). This first tips document recommended that
agencies “should create or increase existing working relationships with local domestic violence
and rape crisis centers, inform their officers about the centers and services, and invite center
personnel to conduct cross-training at the agency to further inform officers about domestic
violence issues and services.” The IFVS plans to continue to offer practical prevention tips to
agencies based on information gathered from this project.

Officers who responded to the surveys were overwhelmingly positive about their
impression of the effectiveness of Florida’s new Model Policy. Most officers believed that the
policy will be somewhat useful or very useful for their agency, and almost all officers also
believed that this policy encourages zero-tolerance for domestic violence in criminal justice
agencies. Of officers who reported their agency did not have a policy on officer-involved domestic violence, only 5% of officers reported they were not at all confident their agency would use this Model Policy to develop one. Taken together, these results indicate that officers perceive that the Model Policy both accomplishes its goal of encouraging zero-tolerance for domestic violence and can be useful to agencies.

Over half of officers reported they knew enough about their agency’s EAP to access it, while the remainder either did not know enough about their EAP to access, or were unsure about whether they had enough information to access it. Similarly, most officers reported they were undecided or unlikely to access their EAP for domestic violence related concerns. Furthermore, most officers reported they had never accessed the EAP. Of the officers who did report using their EAP, most had accessed these services less than three time throughout their career. These facts taken together indicate that this service is underutilized. Because a notable percentage of officers reported that they are undecided about whether they would access their EAP for concerns related to domestic violence, the authors suggest that agencies need to focus on enhancing the knowledge of the EAP and on enhancing the image of the EAP (since most officers were undecided on whether they would access it). Since the officers reported that they were undecided rather than “unlikely,” these agencies are in a unique position to influence the perception of using the EAP, which in turn may increase the likelihood that officers would utilize these services when needed. The Institute for Family Violence Studies’ Practical Prevention Tips for agencies includes the recommendation that “agencies should immediately review the EAP availability and protocols with all staff” so that officers knew about how to access EAPS.

Regarding other help-seeking behaviors, a similarly small percentage of officers had ever accessed other professional counseling for stress or emotional well-being issues than had
accessed their EAP. Officers reported that the most likely place/person they or their coworkers would turn to for help for domestic-violence-related concerns were the a friend or their agency’s EAP. The fact that the agency’s EAP was the number-two response to this question further indicates that agencies need to work to improve knowledge about this program, as well as improve the image associated with accessing these services so that more officers would consider using it for domestic-violence related concerns.

Many officers believed that the Law Enforcement Families Partnership project could reduce domestic violence by officers over time. The Model Policy (LEFP, 2010a) emphasizes that officers are obligated to report knowledge of another’s officer’s domestic violence. Over half of the respondents reported that they believed the project would increase the likelihood that an officer would seek help to prevent domestic violence, and half believed that this project would increase the likelihood that officers would report a colleague’s domestic violence. These results indicate that officers believe that domestic violence is a behavior that can be stopped, and that this project may have an impact on both perpetration of domestic violence and accountability of officers. This indicates that the Model Policy, and more broadly, the entire Law Enforcement Families Partnership, may have begun to break through the code of silence (Ammons, 2005) that many believe has kept the issue of domestic violence shrouded in secrecy.

The results of the data gathered from the first set of respondents indicate favorable reactions to Florida’s new Model Policy on officer-involved domestic violence. The Law Enforcement Families Partnership was formed in reaction to the IACP’s call to address this tragedy, and Florida went beyond its recommendations by expanding the scope to include correctional officers, emphasizing the needs of officers as victims, making recommendations for employee assistance programs, expanding training recommendations, and disseminating the
Policy in a unique online format. While the results of this data are preliminary (as they were gathered from a convenience sample), they do indicate that this project may have the potential to reduce the tragedy of officer-involved domestic violence.
References


