

Gender differences in perceptions of arrest laws and factors associated with arrests in domestic violence incidents

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Abstract

Domestic violence severely impacts individuals and society as a whole. The purpose of this research study was to explore the gender differentiation observed in police officers' perceptions on mandatory arrest policies and domestic violence incidents, as well as to examine how those perceptions influence the decision to arrest in domestic violence cases. The first research question attempted to identify how officers are guided by arrest policies, specifically, mandatory arrest policies. Secondly, the researchers wanted to examine how officers perceive having to use mandatory arrest policies. Finally, the researchers sought to find out what other factors guide their decisions to make an arrest, as well as the difficulties that may arise during a domestic violence incident. A majority of officers believed that mandatory arrest policies are effective. While most officers believed that mandatory arrest policies were effective, many suggested that they might step outside of policy during certain situations. Factors such as weapon use, child involvement, substance use, injuries, and the scene of the crime were all found to be predictors of arrest in domestic violence situations. Challenges discussed by both male and female officers included difficulty in determining who the perpetrator was and overcoming language barriers in domestic violence incidents. Gender-based differences observed in responses among officers were minimal.

Keywords

gender, law enforcement, arrests, domestic violence

The National Coalition against Domestic Violence conducted research using data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2011) and reported that "on average, 24 people per minute are victims of rape, physical violence, or stalking by an intimate partner in the United States. Over the course of a year, that equals more than 12 million women and men." Many of these individuals experience multiple assaults over time, which can lead to long-lasting negative consequences. In

response to advocacy and feminist groups, many jurisdictions have implemented mandatory arrest policies. "Policies that encourage or require arrest of domestic abusers play a prominent role in the government's attempt to combat domestic violence" (Lyengar, 2009, p. 86). While these mandatory arrest policies are enacted to help protect victims of violence, they take away an officer's discretion to decide whether an arrest is warranted and can ultimately lead to the wrong party being arrested.

Current literature examines how mandatory arrest policies, laws, and other situational factors such as weapon use, injuries, and the use of substances influence an officer's decision to make an arrest in a domestic violence situation (Eitle, 2005; Hirschel, Buzawa, Pattavina, Faggiani, & Reuland 2007; Horwitz et al., 2011; Logan, Shannon, & Walker, 2006; McLaughry et al., 2013). While numerous studies have examined laws and situational factors associated with the decision to make an arrest in a domestic violence situation, few studies have done so from a qualitative perspective. Furthermore, the literature does not thoroughly examine gender differentiation between officers and how this differentiation affects the decision to make arrests during domestic violence incidents.

A lack of female law enforcement agents minimizes notice of the differences between genders. Because there is a lack of female police officers, an interesting but difficult problem emerges. When women are out in the field, their voices are often not heard. There is a constructed hierarchy of male dominance in policing which segregates female officers through words, acts, and organizational policies (Shelly, Morabito, & Tobin-Gurley, 2011).

This paper attempts to fill two gaps in the literature, first by exploring officers' perceptions through a qualitative approach to the following questions: (a) What policies and procedures guide an officer's decision to arrest in domestic violence incidents? (b) Has the officer had to step outside of the boundaries outlined in law and how does that impact an officer's job? (c) What perception do female officers hold in regard to domestic violence arrests? How do their perceptions differ from their male colleagues? (d) How do officers perceive mandatory arrest laws, and what impact do they have on the decision to arrest? (e) What do police offi-

cers perceive to be important factors when determining whether to make an arrest in a domestic violence situation? (f) What are the difficulties that arise when on scene at a domestic violence incident? Secondly, by using a qualitative perspective, generally not used in this type of research, the researchers will be able to explore gender differentiation in relation to following departmental policies and laws, perceptions of arrests in domestic violence cases, factors that they associate with the need to arrest, and difficulties that arise when making arrests.

Literature Review

Arrest Laws

Typically, police officers have been reluctant to make arrests in domestic violence situations (Berk and Loseke, 1981). Researchers have found that in many cases before the implementation of mandatory arrest policies that an arrest would rarely, if ever, occur (Langley & Levy, 1977; Roy, 1977). In fact, Bard and Zacker (1974) and Black (1980) found that only 5% of reported domestic violence calls resulted in offender arrest. Sherman and Berk (1984) completed a study that examined three responses to simple assault: an arrest; "advise"; and an order for the suspect to leave for eight hours. The results indicated that those suspects arrested for domestic violence were less likely to commit subsequent violence six months after their original arrest dates than those who were just ordered to leave. Today, with the implementation of mandatory arrest laws, the number of domestic violence related arrests have significantly increased.

Mandatory Arrest Laws

Mandatory arrest laws play an important role in the decision about whether to make

an arrest in a domestic violence case. It is still unclear whether mandatory arrest laws decrease the amount of domestic violence, have no effect on domestic violence, or will play a role in the accidental negative consequences such as the victim being arrested (Hirschel et al., 2007; Simpson, Bouffard, Garner, & Hickman, 2006; Zeoli, Norris, & Brenner, 2011). When either the victim or a third (sometimes unknown) party calls the police for assistance, mandatory arrest laws allow for an officer to make the decision to arrest a suspected perpetrator without a warrant. Mandatory laws also allow police officers to make warrantless arrests for restraining order violations (Phillips & Sobol 2010; Zeoli et al., 2011). Officer discretion is often taken away in these circumstances, which requires police to take action against perpetrators of domestic violence.

Studies have indicated that in states with laws that include a mandatory arrest component, police officers may believe that an arrest is necessary when there is probable cause, and therefore police make a decision to arrest (Toon, Hart, Welch, Coronado, & Hunting, 2005; Zeoli et al., 2011). This may occur regardless of the distinctive circumstances of the case, such as when the victim requests that no arrest be made. If state law indicates a preference for arrest, a police officer may arrest more often than not, but that officer may take the circumstances of the case into the consideration before making an arrest. According to Herbert (2001), officers make decisions based upon the duties and required departmental tasks assigned to them as police officers. These duties and tasks are guided by policies, procedures, and laws, including deciding whom to stop, when to write a ticket, and whom to arrest in different situations, especially in those cases when domestic disputes occur.

While research has indicated that police officers will make an arrest when required in those states that have mandatory arrest policies, historically police officers have had the ability to use their own discretion for their general duties, including the decision to make an arrest. Toon et al. (2005) surveyed police officers about their attitudes towards officer discretion; the research indicated that police officers desire more discretion to determine an arrest outcome in domestic violence situations and believe that they are capable of determining when an arrest is necessary. While mandatory arrest laws are meant to help the victim and are intended to limit officer discretion when making an arrest, police officers have indicated that they should be allowed to make that decision and arrest. Research has also found that mandatory laws result in increased arrest rates in comparison with discretionary arrests laws (Hirschel et al., 2007; Simpson et al., 2006; Toon et al., 2005). Hirschel et al. (2007) used a cross-sectional design and data from the National Incident-Based Reporting System for 19 states in the year 2000 to examine the relationship between mandatory arrest laws and the arrest rates for domestic violence incidents. The researchers examined offender demographics, witness demographics, and evidence found at the scene to study the differences in arrest rates. The researchers found that the presence of mandatory arrest laws increased arrest rates. In mandatory arrest states, the figures of arrest in intimate partner incidents increased by 97% compared to discretionary arrest states. In contrast, the increasing number of arrests is even higher (about 177%) in preferred arrest states. Lyengar (2009) also found that by utilizing mandatory arrest laws the number of family violence homicides decreased over time.

Mandatory arrest laws result in a more consistent and punitive response to domestic

violence. Presumably, mandatory arrest laws could fill the gap between having to use an officer's personal discretion when deciding to arrest and an officer being required by policy to make an arrest in a domestic violence dispute, regardless of the circumstance of the incident. Often when no policies or procedures require an arrest, officers will examine other factors, such as the extent of injury, the weapons used at the scene, and the levels of intoxication of either or both parties.

Factors Associated with the Decision to Arrest

Policies and procedures often impact an officer's decision to arrest in a domestic violence incident, especially when those regulations are mandated either by state law or departmental policy. When there are no mandated policies regarding the decision to arrest, an officer must use his or her discretion. Factors such as injury to the victim, weapon use, and the use of alcohol by one or both parties help to determine whether anyone should be arrested.

Injury and Weapons

When weapons are used in a domestic dispute, the severity of violence will increase and may result in minor to serious injuries. These injuries can come from any type of weapon use, including punching, kicking, biting, beating, and attacks with guns and knives. Kyriacou et al. (1999) completed a study that examined injuries inflicted on individuals involved in domestic disputes. Drawing from a sample of 914 women, the researchers found that women who were injured (compared to those who had no visible injury) received severe physical injuries, including contusions, lacerations, fractures, dislocations and soft-tissue injuries. The se-

verity of injury and the inclusion of weapons in a domestic violence dispute have been found to be factors that influence an officer's decision to arrest.

McLaughry et al. (2013) completed a study that examined police arrest decisions in cases of intimate partner violence and the severity of trauma. The study utilized a total of 256 cases from six different police departments with discretionary arrest laws. The researchers found a statistically significant difference between arrests made when there was trauma versus situations when there was little or no trauma and when no arrests were made. Trauma severity was one of the major factors in an officer's decision to make an arrest when only discretionary laws were used by police departments.

Finn, Blackwell, Stalans, Studdard, and Dugan (2004) completed a study that examined several different scenarios involving domestic violence assaults to examine the factors that were most influential when making a decision about whether to arrest. Police officers were asked how they understood their responsibility to either make an arrest or not to make an arrest, and then the officers were read a scenario and asked to determine the type of arrest that should be applied. Over 81% of the officers indicated that they would make an arrest in any of the given scenarios; however, only slightly fewer than 20% indicated that they would make a dual arrest. Other mitigating factors in the decision to arrest included departmental policies and whether injuries were present. If the female victim was the only party injured, officers were likely to make an arrest in over 71% of the cases, whereas if both parties were injured almost 56% would make a dual arrest, and only a slightly lower percent (36.5%) would use informal options other than arrest. Similar research results have indicated that factors such as victim

race, injury, age, and weapon use were all significant predictors in the likelihood of an arrest occurring (Eitle, 2005; Lee, Zhang, & Hoover, 2013).

Alcohol

The use of alcohol and or drugs causes a loss of impairment among individuals and in a domestic violence situation can increase the likelihood that a violent situation may occur. The use of substances also decreases the likelihood that a victim will call the police (Kraanen, Scholing, & Emmelkamp, 2010). Alcohol and drugs may lower an individual's inhibitions, which may result in a violent situation to occur. Research on domestic violence has indicated that the use of alcohol and or other drugs are correlated with intimate partner abuse (Busch & Rosenberg, 2004; Martin, 1997).

Studies have indicated that alcohol and other substance use can lead to more severe violent situations. Research suggests that this is also a significant predictor in the likelihood of an arrest. Brookoff, O'Brien, Cook, Thompson, and Williams (1997) examined 62 incidents of domestic violence and found that in a majority of cases (72%) the victim was female. Weapons were involved in 68% of the incidents; 15% of those cases resulted in serious injuries, and in 64% of the cases, drugs or alcohol were used on the day of the assault. Other studies (Hirschel et al., 2007; Kraanen, Sholing, & Emmelkamp, 2010; Simmons, Lehmann & Cobb, 2008; Thompson & Kingree, 2006; Zeoli et al., 2011) have found similar results, all suggesting that the use of intoxicating substances was a significant predictor in making a decision to arrest in a domestic violence incident.

Kraanen et al. (2010) found that individuals who had alcohol dependencies and abuse tendencies were more likely to be

under the influence at the time that the domestic violence incident occurred and were more likely to threaten or use a weapon against their partners. Studies by Thompson and Kingree (2006) and Archer (2000) report that the risk factors for potential injury and the likelihood of reporting an incident are increased when the perpetrator was drinking versus when neither party was drinking during a domestic dispute. Data from the National Violence against Women Survey conducted by Tjaden and Thoennes (2000) indicated that one third of the women interviewed reported that the perpetrator had consumed alcohol at the time of the dispute; only 6.9% of victims had been drinking when the confrontation took place. Just over 38% of the victims had sustained injuries during the incident but only approximately 18% of those victims reported the violence to police.

A review of the current literature leads to the conclusion that the decision to arrest in domestic violence cases by police officers is a complex process and depends on several factors, including mandatory policies, departmental procedures, and situational factors. Situational factors such as the extent of injury, weapons use, and drug use have all been found to be significant predictors in deciding whom, if anyone, to arrest in a domestic dispute.

Female Police Officers

Another gap in the current literature is the examination of the differences between male and female officers. In regard to employment trends and women police officers, Shelly, Morabito, and Tobin-Gurley (2011) suggest that police departments have had "difficulty hiring, retaining, and promoting female officers" (p. 351). In a male-dominated employment institution,

females have a difficult time retaining their positions. Because females are limited by numbers, it is thought that “the constructed hierarchy of male dominance in policing exerts itself via individual, organizational, and possibly community levels and segregates female officers through words, acts, and organizational policies” (p. 354). The segregation between male and female officers might lead to the trouble of retaining female officers. Furthermore, if female officers feel that through words, actions, and policies that they are regarded as inferior to males, then their roles as officers might be diminished, leading the female officers to feel like their opinions in the workforce do not matter.

While law enforcement is still considered a male-dominated workforce, new research has suggested that women are making strides in law enforcement (Dodge, Valcore, & Klinger, 2010). While women are obtaining careers in law enforcement,

masculinity and femininity are the aspects of gender that can be achieved or disputed in any given social arena. All persons hold assumptions about how a masculine man or feminine woman should appear or act and look for appropriate gender clues according to what the particular occasion requires. (p. 220)

Little research has been conducted on how traditional masculine and feminine gender roles in policing play a role in the perceptions of how police officers feel when directly on the job, specifically when dealing with domestic violence cases.

Methodology

Many studies have focused on domestic violence from a quantitative perspective. The current research used a qualitative methodological approach to gather in-depth information on police officers' oper-

ational behavior in the field. Pretests were conducted on four retired police officers to ensure content validity in the study. From the initial pretests, two questions were omitted and two were added. Twenty police officers (five females and 15 males) from two departments in central Texas were selected using convenience sampling and then interviewed. Semi-structured interviews of 20 to 30 minutes were conducted individually with each officer. All interviews were recorded with the officers' permission. Initially, there were seven questions for each interviewee; however, after the first interview the idea of cultural challenges was discussed between the interviewer and interviewee. The researchers believed that this concept was important when discussing some of the challenges that the officers face when at the scene of a domestic violence incident, and therefore an eighth question was added. Officers were given a letter of consent and an overview of the current study, and they had the opportunity to ask questions. The interview script was transcribed and a content data analysis was completed using NVivo. Themes and patterns were discovered within each interview explaining the perceptions that officers have regarding mandatory arrest laws, providing insights into the process and perceptions of making an arrest in domestic violence situations. Three officers were also randomly chosen to read the results section of the analysis to check for internal consistency among the various responses. The test of internal consistency was completed to verify that each theme captured what was originally intended by the officers. The current study used an inductive methodological approach in which the police officers' responses direct the empirical generalizations and conclusions. Subsequently, several themes were discovered and analyzed.

Results

Upon an examination of the 20 interviews, several themes began to emerge regarding the perceptions of officers when examining arrest policies and procedures. Factors associated with the decision to make an arrest when at the scene of a domestic violence incident were identified.

Themes

Arrest Policies

The first question sought to examine the policies that are in place regarding the decision to make an arrest in a domestic violence case, as well as whether officers perceive current arrest policies as mandatory, pro-arrest, or officer discretion. Three separate responses were frequently observed.

Forty percent of female officers discussed the law in terms of being required to make an arrest in any domestic violence incident. One officer said: "As far as our policies go they follow the Texas State law and it's very specific.... [Y]ou will arrest if there's signs of physical violence or domestic violence" (Case 19).

Similarly, a majority (86%) of the male officers also discussed how the laws and policies require a mandatory arrest. One officer said: "Sure, policy, well, policy follows the law...it's a shall arrest...that's the wording they use in the code of criminal procedures and it's there's no discretion" (Case 2).

Other responses given by both male and female officers regarding the decision to make an arrest was that officers go by the Texas State Family Code § 71.004 and can use discretion when making an arrest. One female responded: "I don't think we have anything that just pertains directly to domestic violence...not so much a mandatory

arrest... when we are to arrest it is more our decision" (Case 1).

Regardless of the gender of the officer, most (14 officers) perceived the laws as requiring an arrest regardless of the circumstances involved. Only six of the twenty officers perceived that the laws follow the Texas Family Violence Code § 71.004, or are not required by law.

Perception of Mandatory Arrest Policies

The second question determined whether or not officers liked or agreed with mandatory policies. While mandatory arrest policies take away officers' discretion to make decisions that they have been trained to make, both a majority of male (75%) and female (60%) officers believed that mandatory arrest policies were necessary and approved of them. One officer said: "I think it's a good thing. I have been an officer for twelve years and it's always been in effect for me when I've been enforcing" (Case 2).

The other 25% of officers neither agreed nor disagreed with policy (5%) or indicated that they did not like the idea of having to arrest a perpetrator in every circumstance. One officer said: "I don't think I would like it...because it's hard to pin point exactly what should make a good arrest" (Case 1).

While many officers argued that mandatory arrest laws were effective for a number of different reasons, several of the interviewed officers felt that the laws were unnecessary in every domestic violence case, and therefore should be left up to the discretion of the officer.

Stepping Outside of Policy

The third question determined whether the officers had ever stepped outside of the boundaries of the law to either make an ar-

rest when possibly they should not have or chose not to make an arrest when one was warranted. Sixty-five percent of males and 20% of females said that they had at one time or another gone beyond the policies of the department to either make an arrest or not. One stated: “Sometimes you have to go outside of the box and see what the history is and then sometimes make a determination based on that” (Case 5).

Those officers who responded with a no simply said no, or suggested that “we’ve given the officer here the tools to make that determination and the only time that they would make an arrest is when there are no injuries...and are conflicting statements about what happened” (Case 18).

Male officers were more inclined to step outside of the scope of policy. However, there were several female officers who had stepped outside of the boundaries either because of the gray area regarding certain situations that they encountered during a domestic dispute, or because they felt that an arrest was not warranted. Overall, a majority of officers in this study (80%) believed that stepping out of the scope of the policy was necessary at one time or another.

Factors and Challenges Associated with Arrests

Quantitative data analysis has shown that factors such as weapon use, injury, and substance use affect an officer’s decision to arrest. When asked about factors that influence an officer’s decision to make an arrest, 15 out of the 20 officers suggested that injuries were an important factor in deciding to make an arrest. One officer said: “I mean physical injuries, umm, history of the residence or history of domestic violence and then the suspect’s history or violent tendencies or whatever and the believability of

the victim” (Case 5). Factors that followed included statements made by a witness, the perpetrator, or the victim, as well as keeping the victim safe and history of violence. Statements are also incredibly important when it comes to determining who is responsible for the violence: “Initially you have to go on what the victim statement is then you are looking for things that substantiate their accounts” (Case 6). “We speak to both parties, the victim and the suspect, any witnesses, you kind of have to look at the scene and the demeanor of the people” (Case 11).

Other factors that were important in the decision to make an arrest included the use of a weapon, what the crime scene looked like, whether substances were involved, and whether children were present: “If someone has a knife or you threaten with a knife that would definitely influence my decision to make an arrest” (Case 14). “Mainly physical signs also maybe what the crime scene looks like; they’re talking about furniture being broken and the furniture is indeed broken” (Case 4). “And another challenge is when children are involved because children don’t understand necessarily what’s going on” (Case 23).

The factors found to be most influential in the decision to make an arrest in a domestic violence situation align with those found in quantitative studies (Hirschel et al., 2007; Kraanen et al., 2010; Simmons et al., 2008; Zeoli et al., 2011). Factors such as weapons, injuries, children involvement, and substances were important for both male and female officers when determining whom to arrest.

There are many challenges that each officer faces as he or she enters into a domestic violence scene. Only two female officers answered that communication was a challenge. Thirteen officers responded that figuring out what really happened was one of the most challenging aspects of a domestic

violence scene. One officer said: “The most challenging thing is, I think, really determining whether or not they’re telling the truth when there’s no injury (Case 16).

Other challenges included “not knowing” the scene of the crime, aggressive behavior, and children’s involvement: “Alcohol and once you get alcohol involved in people’s homes a lot of people do not like us coming into their homes they don’t want us there...kitchens make me the most nervous because there are knives everywhere so kitchens people that know their own houses” (Case 12). “The hardest part is the kids.... I always try to leave the kids in the house, take the person outside so they don’t have to see their parents getting put in hand cuffs” (Case 13).

Little to no gender differences appeared in examination of factors that influenced the decision to make an arrest, as well as the challenges with entering into a domestic violence scene.

Discussion

This exploratory research study had several goals: (a) to examine how officers perceive policy and their perceptions of mandatory arrest laws, (b) to examine whether an officer would step outside of the mandated boundaries, and how he or she perceived consequences for stepping outside of those boundaries, (c) what officers perceive to be important factors in the decision to make an arrest in a domestic violence situation, (d) and whether there were perceptual differences between male and female officers.

A majority (75%) of the officers, regardless of gender, perceived the laws in Texas regarding the decision to arrest as a mandatory arrest policy. With such a large number of officers understand the laws as a mandatory policy, a large number of victims could

be at risk for being arrested under the wrong pretense. It has been suggested that mandatory arrest policies might actually harm the victim if an officer mistakenly arrests the wrong party.

Although research has indicated that mandatory arrest policies could potentially negatively affect a victim of violence, about 75% of officers perceived that mandatory arrest policies were necessary and effective. One officer argued that by having a policy there was little room for officer error, therefore liability on the officer is reduced. Contrary to previous literature, one officer argued that domestic violence laws protect the victim and therefore are helpful in domestic violence situations. Only a few officers believed that every situation is different and therefore that laws are ineffective because the decision should be based on individual cases. Despite a majority of both male and female officers who reported that mandatory policies were necessary and effective, an interesting finding was that 65% of those officers were likely to step outside of the boundaries of policy. These findings could be related to other factors associated with the decision to arrest, such as the use of weapons, injuries, and substance abuse by the offender and or victim. Not surprising were the factors associated with the decision to arrest. As previous research (Eitle, 2005; Hirschel et al., 2007; Horwitz et al., 2011; Logan et al., 2006; McLaughry et al., 2013) has indicated, factors such as weapon use, injury, child involvement, and the crime scene are considerations outside of policy that an officer examines when deciding to make an arrest. Challenges were found to include the language barrier between officers and the parties involved in the domestic dispute, as well as deciding which party was the perpetrator. If no party is willing to talk, an officer must use his or her discretion in determining the perpetrator.

There were very few differences found between male and female officers with regard to perceptions of policy, whether stepping outside of policy was ever warranted, and the factors and challenges that are examined when deciding to make an arrest in a domestic violence situation. Given that previous literature (Shelly et al., 2011) has suggested that segregation of words, actions, and organizational policies occurs between male and female officers, initially it was believed that this segregation would carry over when both male and females were at the scene of a crime, with women stepping back and not making decisions regarding arrests. This was not the case, however; there were very few differences found between the arrest decisions made by male and female officers.

A new questionnaire was constructed which attempted to tap into the perceptions of arrest policies and procedures conducted during domestic violence incidents. While each question was influential in examining perceptions, one question not asked was whether the respondents had either directly or indirectly experienced domestic violence personally. This question would have provided additional support as to why police officers perceive domestic violence situations the way they do and how it might impact the decision to make an arrest.

Limitations

Although this research study found several emerging themes—including the perceptions of policies regarding the decision to arrest in domestic violence incidents, perceptions on whether mandatory arrest policies are beneficial to officers, the perceptions of what would happen if policy were to break under certain circumstances, factors that determine the likelihood of ar-

rest, and challenges that arise when at the scene of a domestic violence incidence—there were several limitations.

The first limitation to the research was that it was conducted only in central Texas, and only two police departments were used for the analysis. Because officers came from two departments, the sample was not representative of Texas law enforcement as a whole. The second limitation was the sample size. Only 20 officers were interviewed and only five were female officers. Because the sample size was so small and females were under-sampled, drawing conclusions regarding the differences between genders might be a bit premature.

Future Research

Future research should focus on gathering a larger sample from different Texas locations. Gender differentiation in policing should also be examined in the future, and to do so, one should gather an over-representative sample of female officers so that adequate comparison can be made between male and female officers.

Another focus should be to expand the survey and ask officers whether they had experienced domestic violence either personally or indirectly. It would be valuable to explore how personal experience influences the decision to make arrests when no policies are in place regarding the decision to arrest. Another question that should be addressed closer is how ethnic differences among individuals both challenge and sometimes hinder an officer's ability to make an arrest in a domestic dispute.

One last area of research should examine if there are differences in perceptions of violence and decisions to arrest between different racial and ethnic police officers. According to Pollock (2012), there is an

increase of diversity within police departments including African Americans, Hispanics, other ethnicities, and women. Original beliefs held that female and male officers would differ; similar beliefs are held about minority officers in the police force. It is important to determine whether there are differences between groups and how that impacts perceptions of violence and the decision to arrest.

Conclusion

A great deal of quantitative research has been completed examining mandatory arrest laws and factors associated with the decision to arrest; however, little research has been conducted from a qualitative methodology to examine how officers perceive such policies and the factors that shape their decision to make an arrest in a domestic violence situation. Most officers know the policies and procedures that must be followed when on scene; however, some officers are willing to go beyond on policy and examine other factors that occur in a domestic dispute. Overall, domestic violence scenes are some of the hardest scenes to approach due to heightened emotions and vulnerability of the parties involved. It is important for individuals to realize what officers face when entering into a domestic dispute and their perceptions of the laws that require them to take action. More research must be completed when examining factors associated with the decision to arrest and the perceptions that officers have when examining domestic violence situations. ■

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