

Offender Focused Domestic Violence Initiative: The First Two Years

August 1

2014

The High Point Police Department in partnership with High Point Community Against Violence, Guilford County District Attorney's Office, Family Service of the Piedmont, and University of North Carolina-Greensboro researchers have implemented a strategy to combat domestic violence known as the Offender Focused Domestic Violence Initiative (OFDVI). OFDVI has resulted in re-offense rates of 9% across 1,000+ offenders. The recidivism rates for DV offenders after OFDVI implementation are staggering given the rates for DV offenders in the literature, which range from 20-34%. The strategy applies the evidence-based focused deterrence approach to the problem of DV and shifts to an offender focus in combatting DV. One of the strategy's critical features is the ability to focus on offenders at earlier stages of offending, before the secrecy of offending entrenches and violence escalates. Research suggests that early intervention is key in stopping the cycle of DV.

**“It is not
JUST
domestic
violence; it is
Violence”**

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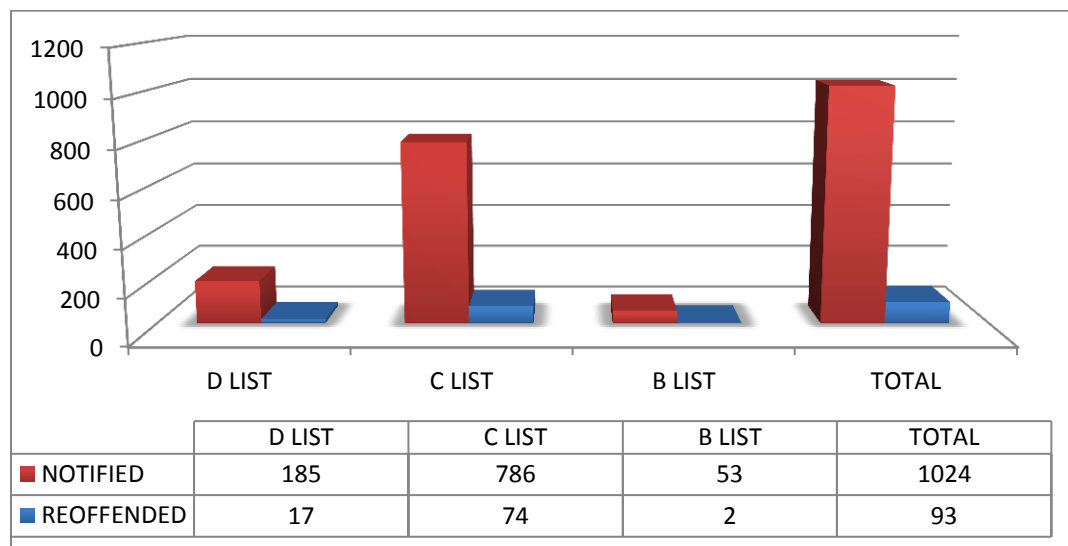
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A DIFFERENT RESPONSE TO INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is a community crime problem that costs the US over \$5.8 billion every yearⁱ. IPV is a major drain on law enforcement resources involving a high volume of calls, repeated calls to the same location, consuming large amounts of time and often resulting in injuries or death. Intimate partner homicides make up 40–50 percent of all murders of women in the United States (NIJ)ⁱⁱ. Women who have experienced a history of IPV report more health problems than other women; they have a greater risk for substance abuse, unemployment, alcoholism, and suicide attempts (CDC). So how could a national problem, so costly and harmful to families and children, persist year after year? Are these offenders resisting “our best efforts”?

For the community of High Point, North Carolina our answer was no, it was time for an innovative approach to this problem. Now, two years after full implementation of a completely different approach designed to hold the offender accountable, we offer hope that we have found what “our best efforts” look like. The strategy applies the evidence-based focused deterrence approach to the problem of IPV and shifts to an offender focus in combatting domestic related violence. One of the strategy’s critical features is the ability to focus on offenders at earlier stages of offending before the secrecy of offending entrenches and violence escalates. Research suggests that early intervention is key in stopping the cycle of IPV. The first two years of implementation resulted in re-offense rates of only 9% across 1,000+ offenders. These rates for IPV offenders are significant given the rates for IPV offenders in the literature, which range from 20-34%.



The average
recidivism
rate is **9%**

The idea for our approach came from Professor David M. Kennedy, the Director of the Center for Crime Prevention and Control at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York. Professor Kennedy believes the focused deterrence approach that has proven effective at controlling gang, gun and drug related violence likewise can be adapted to control IPV offenders. Kennedy suggests that not enough attention has been paid to controlling the offender. Traditional approaches have been victim-focused with heavy emphasis on helping the victim avoid patterns of abuse, on disengaging from abusers and on physically removing themselves from abusive settings. What if in addition to providing services for the victim we used very focused formal and informal sanctions against the offender? Can the IPV offender be held accountable with real predictable consequences without creating additional harm for the victims?

The High Point Police Department formed a partnership early in 2009 with researchers, practitioners, prosecutors and community to develop, implement and evaluate a focused deterrence initiative targeted at the chronic IPV offender.

The goals for the initiative are:

- 1) Protect most vulnerable women from most dangerous abusers
- 2) Take the burden of addressing abusers from women and move it to state/police
- 3) Focus deterrence, community standards, outreach and support on most dangerous abusers
- 4) Counter/avoid “experiential effect” of offenders (right or wrong lessons learned from experience of other offenders)
- 5) Take advantage of opportunities provided by offender’s variety of offenses
- 6) Avoid putting women at additional risk

Despite the widespread belief that IPV is qualitatively different from other types of violence our research shows it is not. Our analysis of ten years of arrest data tells us the repeat IPV offender in High Point has a lengthy criminal history beyond intimate partner violence. In fact, their criminal histories were similar to the gang and drug offenders the focused deterrence approach had proven so effective at controlling. The IPV offenders studied averaged 10 arrests, assaults were the predominant charge but all included assaults other than for IPV and 93% were unemployed. Since these offenders have rich criminal histories and are known to the criminal justice system they can be identified based on past behavior.

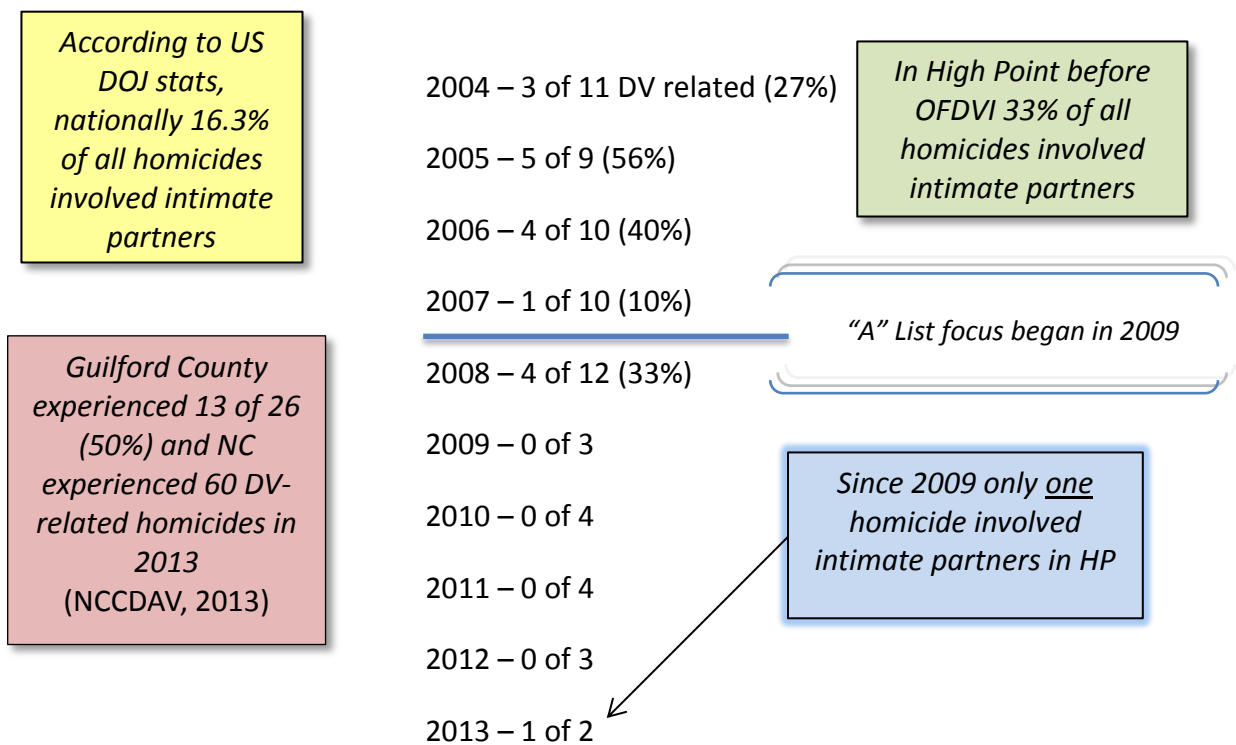
A new discovery came when research pointed out there are four very different levels of offenders, which led the team to develop a specific notification and sanction regime for each level. They range from the most violent, who have extensive criminal records, to those contacted on the first call who have never been charged with an IPV offense. The table on the next page shows the criteria established to properly match the offender to the response. It also shows the safety planning and support for a victim that is provided.

OFFENDER CRITERIA / RESPONSE / VICTIM'S SERVICES

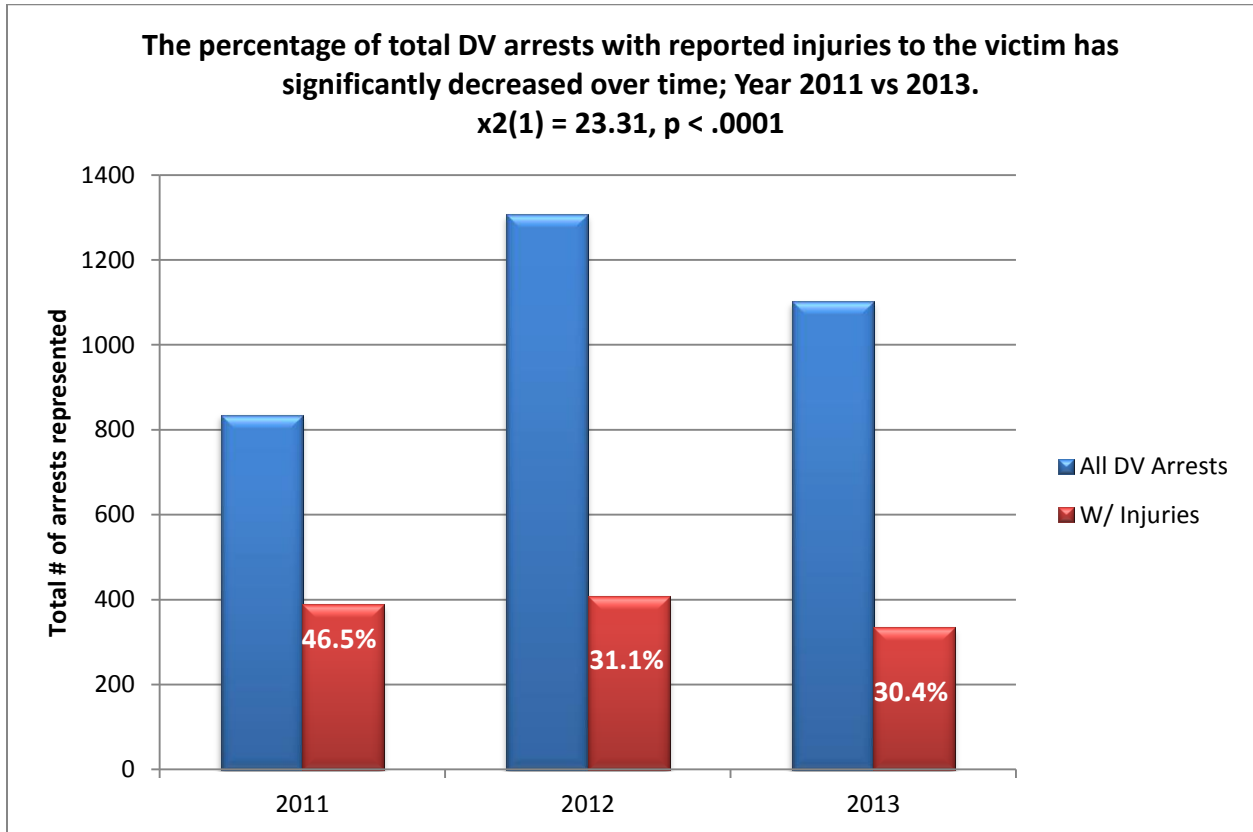
Level of Offender	Criteria / One or More Apply	Offender Notification Type & Response	Safety Planning & Support for Victims
"A" List	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 3 or more previous IPV related charges – Offender has violent criminal record including IPV – Violated a protective order – Used weapon in the past when committing IPV – Convicted felon 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – NO Notice Given – Most Violent – Selected for immediate prosecution as example to lower levels of offenders – Addressed by any legal means available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – All services offered at any level – Referral to the Victim's Justice Center where all the services listed under "B" are co-located in one building – Services offered for children who witnessed violence or experienced trauma, also located in Victim's Justice Center
"B" List	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 2nd charge of IPV OR – Violation of prohibited behavior for which offender received notice as a C List offender (for example: violating pretrial release condition, no contact order, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Face-to-Face law enforcement and community message – Framing of intervention as from state and community – Offenders required to attend a notification as a group – Receive individual custom legal notification letter detailing presumptive sentences for future acts of violence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Victim receives prior notice the offender is being called in – Message reviewed with her first – Offer of cocooning or proximity informant – Direct contact post call-in for victims still in relationship with offender – Dedicated prosecutor, Civil Attorney services, Victim Advocate
"C" List	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 1st Charge for an IPV offense 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Face-to-face individual deterrent message delivered by detective – At the time of arrest or before pretrial release 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Victim receives letter of services at VJC – Direct contact with Safety Planner – Follow up with Detective
"D" List	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Identified when police are called to a domestic disturbance call – An intimate partner relationship exists – Aggressor has no previous charges for IPV – No violence occurred on this incident requiring charges 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Receives letter from police putting them on official notice they are now on a "watch list" – Delivered by a uniform patrol officer the next day or within 48 hours on a follow up visit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Victim receives letter of services offered at Victim's Justice Center – Explanation of the incremental approach to prohibited acts for holding the offender accountable

The measurable impact of this strategy so far includes a dramatic reduction in IPV-related homicides, lower recidivism rates for IPV offenders notified, reduction in IPV arrests, reduction in victim harm reported in IPV assaults, and fewer repeat calls for service. In the five years since the shift to this strategy (2009 – 2013), only 1 of the 16 homicides in High Point was IPV; as compared to 17 of 52 (2004 – 2008) before. In other words prior to 2009, 33% of homicides were IPV compared to 6% since. It should be noted the “A” list offenders, the most violent, were initially identified in 2009 and targeted for examples before notification began to the B – D levels of offenders. For context in 2013, Guilford Co. (the county containing almost all of High Point) experienced 13 IPV of 26 homicides or 50%. As stated earlier the average recidivism rate for all levels of offenders is 9%. A look at the break down between levels shows even the “B” list offenders can be deterred at a high rate. In comparing years 2012 and 2013, IPV arrests are down 17%, IPV arrests with reported victim injuries are down 19%, and IPV-related calls for service are down 10%.

Homicides in High Point / DV Related



Is Victim Harm Decreasing?



Evaluation

A 2014-15 Community Oriented Policing Office grant is funding a formal evaluation conducted by our research partner, the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, led by Stacy Sechrist, Ph.D. and John Weil. The Lexington, NC Police Department became the first agency to replicate the OFDVI with an implementation date of July 1, 2014. The COPS grant will also evaluate the first year for Lexington PD.

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ⁱ http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/ipv_factsheet2012-a.pdf

ⁱⁱ <http://www.nij.gov/topics/crime/intimate-partner-violence/pages/extent.aspx>