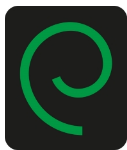

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Lynn Westbrook

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Guidelines for mandated documents

Law enforcement and intimate partner violence survivors

Lynn Westbrook
School of Information, University of Texas, Austin, Texas, USA

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to present findings on the efficacy of documents that US police are required to provide to domestic violence survivors, specifically intimate partner violence (IPV) survivors. Triangulating data from survivors, shelter staff, and law enforcement officers across four stages of IPV experiences, this national study identifies priorities among essential information needs and proposes information guidelines for law enforcement.

Design/methodology/approach – A nationally distributed, 13-item, e-mail questionnaire was submitted to a stratified sample (ten largest, median, and smallest) of law enforcement agencies in all 50 states. Domestic violence shelters in each of the 1,500 cities were similarly recruited; survivors were recruited indirectly via shelter staff. The questions were clustered in terms of four common situations. Responses from 839 individuals were obtained, self-identified as police officers (481), shelter staff (263), and IPV survivors (95).

Findings – Documents should be formatted for safety (i.e. small), developed for specific situations, and written simply. They should also offer information about non-law enforcement services. All three of the populations queried agreed that the immediate needs of survivors are stronger than their long-term needs.

Research limitations/implications – The primary limitations are that the survey could include no means of determining the degree to which the respondents match the sample, and the response rate was insufficient to support inferential statistical analysis.

Originality/value – This national study, the first of its kind, explicates the nuances of information elements in the personally situated experiences of survivors, and it presents the first set of suggested law-enforcement document design guidelines.

Keywords Criminal justice, Information research, Documents, Questionnaire, Information science and documentation, Domestic violence

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

In virtually every US jurisdiction, law enforcement officers (LEO) are required to provide some form of information to intimate partner violence (IPV) survivors. Maximizing the effectiveness of these required documents encourages individuals to reflect on their situation, and influences their decision making. This national study[1] examines the efficacy, content, information density, and physical format of the documents delivered. It triangulates data from survivors, shelter staff, and LEO across four situated experiences common to the emergency response. The findings identify priorities among essential information needs and lead to proposed information guidelines for law enforcement.

IPV survivors[2], the subset of domestic violence survivors addressed in this study, get information on a regular basis but it is information that might not be to their advantage or even accurate. It comes from their abusers and their extended social

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network (Westbrook, 2009.) Through this most potent information communication channel, i.e. one-on-one, in-person interactions, these women[3] learn that their life choices and their ability to function independently are severely limited. This kind of information is powerful, visceral, and deeply personalized.

Gaining alternative sources of information requires varying levels of intention and agency. Some medical settings, particularly hospital emergency rooms, have staff trained to offer information (Beynon *et al.*, 2012). In highly resourced communities, survivors may be able to take the initiative to seek verbal, print, and online information from social services, such as shelters. Others make active use of online communities (Westbrook and Gonzalez, 2011).

However, the only people legally required to give information to survivors are the LEO[4] who respond to emergency calls. Each of these responses creates a brief opportunity to chip away at the accretion of inaccurate information promulgated by abusers and reinforced by experience. The professional presence of law enforcement personnel is a strong indication that society at large views IPV as a serious legal matter. Giving out their mandated information material, such as brochures and business cards, officers help establish the existence, reality, and even the value of various resources available to survivors. Most departments include at least one item from an outside social-service agency, creating a set of documents that moves beyond the immediacy of the law enforcement context.

These documents can raise awareness, suggest opportunities, encourage change, and/or provide a shield. While not in and of themselves tools for change, they serve as signposts to services and resources for those survivors who are able to make use of them. Successful outcomes of multiple 911 responses and their tandem information deliveries are generally unknown. The victim leaves; the couple establishes more healthy boundaries; the calls stop. Concrete, practical information supports safer outcomes, and officers can, through their persistence, channel it into survivors' lives even when they cannot see its impact.

Law enforcement departments create information resources and draw together those provided by social-service agencies. These deliberate choices generate both single items and packets of documents. Unfortunately, all these materials are often created and grouped without benefit of information development expertise. No national or even statewide guidelines support their design; no study of their potential efficacy exists. Both are needed if for nothing more than the "first do no harm" principle. As one respondent noted, "These things can be dangerous for a victim to have." The information, indeed the act of creating a document for a specified audience, can be a tool for changing individuals' life choices. In this particular instance information is designed to help IPV survivors make sense of and choose among a set of options to mitigate a high-risk, high-affect aspects of their lives. This work intends to develop concrete support for LEO' reflective creation of these potentially life changing documents.

Literature review: IPV, service interactions, information experiences

In the USA, one in four women experiences "severe physical violence by an intimate partner" and 16 percent of women are stalked (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010). In addition to generally recognized forms of violence, such as beatings, IPV includes control of life fundamentals, e.g. educational and employment opportunities. Health care is regularly used as an abuse tool, e.g. denial of medical treatment and sabotaged birth control (Miller *et al.*, 2011). (The latter is particularly critical in light of the fact that physical abuse is most likely to begin during the first pregnancy.) From stalking

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(Tamborra, 2012) to dead pets on the doorstep (Faver and Strand, 2003), IPV takes an almost infinite variety of forms.

Like other life crises, IPV is not a monolithic situation. "Situational couple violence" consists of emotional denigration with irregular physical outbursts scattered among periods of apparently positive interactions. "Intimate terrorism" employs a wide range of abuse forms (e.g. social, verbal, financial, medical, physical) to create a near constant threat of serious injury or even death with dominance as the primary relationship dynamic (Leone *et al.*, 2007). Some relationships move between these forms of IPV; it is not uncommon for situational couple violence to escalate (gradually or suddenly) to intimate terrorism. Even trained LEO do not always understand the complexities involved in these relationships, much less the array of social services needed to support a move toward safer living (Eigenberg *et al.*, 2012; Russell and Light, 2006).

A common public expectation is that the survivor retains control of all but the most extreme abuse situations and, even then, simply being in such a relationship is primarily her fault (Policastro and Payne, 2013; Thapar-Björkert and Morgan, 2010). Some survivors share this belief in their own character weakness, reflecting the socially constructed power dynamics expected in such an intimate connection (Enander, 2010). If the relationship is unhealthy, physically or emotionally, then she "should just leave." Several serious practical impediments inhibit such a change, including the lack of income, fear of homelessness, inability to provide for children, lack of education, and – of course – fear of retaliation (Baly, 2010; Fugate *et al.*, 2005; Gillis *et al.*, 2006):

> […] when I ended a four month relationship I was still taking him to court four years later for a second restraining order. I learned about the system and how difficult it is. Victims need to be walked through the process. Sitting in the courthouse I spoke to other women, most of them with young children and uneducated. They were thinking of dropping the charges because their fears were not being addressed. As I was a wreck for my own situation, I wound up counseling them. It woke me up to the help victims really need (questionnaire respondent).

The emergency IPV-based interactions between survivors and police form a constellation of authority and social structure dynamics. Officers are rarely prepared for managing these complexities; their role, after all, is law enforcement rather than social work (Watkins, 2005; Westbrook and Finn, 2012; Wolf *et al.*, 2003). From control over instigating the interaction to following it through to a conclusion, other actors participate (e.g. the abusers, on-site victim advocates), various laws proscribe actions (within the framework of local socio-political norms), and individual survivors shape events (with widely varying degrees of intentionality, agency, and opportunity). Officers' socially sanctioned authority to categorize the abuser's actions as illegal lends weight to the information they offer – particularly if the information is appropriate and given with respect (Finn and Hughes, 2008).

Underpinning many of these emotionally charged interactions are the information experiences that both groups draw from their wider life perspectives. Effective use of legal IPV domain knowledge, for example, requires police and survivors to develop an understanding of explicit laws, implicit implementation of those laws, tacit knowledge of the immediate abuse experience, factual knowledge of the power/control dynamic, and other matters that are rarely conceptualized as information factors. The factual information may be consistent but their phenomenological frameworks differ so radically that the shared experience of the emergency call is insufficient to build common ground.

Many survivors expect Internet-housed information to be accurate and complete (Finn and Banach, 2000; van Schaik *et al.*, 2010). Social networking, such as Facebook,

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has undermined the protection of anonymity (Diamond *et al.*, 2011) and electronic government information on support resources is, at best, incomplete (Davenport *et al.*, 2008a, b; Wathen and McKeown, 2010). As one of this study's respondents noted, "There needs to be more information about specific kinds of abuse and specific kinds of help, especially online. It is SO hard to find help[5]."

LEO information fits within survivors' trust frameworks that have been shaped by abusers' power (Gilchrist, 2009), survivors' self-perceptions (Enander, 2010), their past experience with law enforcement (Leisenring, 2012), and their use of social service agencies (Kirst *et al.*, 2012; Kulkarni *et al.*, 2012). Consistent messages from several sources reinforce survivors' trust in the information (Pennington-Zoellner, 2009), for good or ill. One study found that when police offer concrete, specific steps in developing self-protection, 87 percent of survivors are willing to call 911 again (Johnson 2007, p. 506). Similarly officers are seen as trustworthy and helpful when they provide information on and referrals to shelters (Erez and Belknap, 1998; Robinson, 2000; Robinson and Stroshine, 2005; Yegidis and Renzy, 1994). In general, referral information increases survivors' perception of police as a valuable, trusted resource (Kennedy and Homant, 1983; Stalans and Finn, 2000). As might be expected, using a respectful tone greatly strengthens the efficacy of any LEO interaction with survivors (Smith Stover, 2012). Indeed, the "federal government has […] passed legislation to ensure a victim's right […] 'to be treated with fairness and respect' " (Fais, 2008, p. 1,204). Implementing the law is another matter as exemplified by various respondent comments, such as: "These 'victims' are more often than not are under the influence of alcohol or drugs. They are also frequently illiterate. Less is more. It would be best to give them one very simple item […] that they can access when sober."

Outside of the LEO/survivor encounter, other actors in these personally situated relationships (e.g. co-workers, abuser's family) may be trusted informants (Krugman *et al.*, 2004). They are seen as more knowledgeable about the individual's private situation than, for example, medical professionals who are perceived to be stepping outside their area of expertise by moving from medicine to social work. IPV survivors trust information from the one-to-one, personally focussed conversations on national hotlines (Cattaneo and DeLoveh, 2008; Finn and Hughes, 2008). At the heart of any effective information interaction, however, is the outsider's conviction – of lack of conviction – that IPV is a crime perpetrated against an individual. "The most important and helpful thing a first responder can do is treat a victim with respect and kindness. Even if they don't have all the information, letting them know that they deserve better & that they deserve help is the most important thing" (questionnaire respondent).

Theoretical perspective

This paper reports the final stage of a three-part examination of documents provided by LEO to IPV at the point of response to an emergency call. The initial examination of the documents employing a constructionist perspective, identified "five key content areas of information: the nature of abuse, survivor norms, police information, legal options, and community resources" (Finn *et al.*, 2011 p. 933). The second paper, employing a symbolic interactionist perspective, focussed on this information as a boundary object between police, survivors, and social service agencies. Police took responsibility for immediate law enforcement activities and provided limited information indicating that social services had responsibility for immediate support (Westbrook and Finn, 2012). This paper, employing Savolainen's (2008, 2006) social phenomenological perspective on "everyday life information

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seeking" (ELIS), examines information elements and forms in terms of situational utility as viewed by the three primary participants, i.e. police officers, shelter staff, and survivors.

For IPV survivors and the police officers who answer their emergency calls, the ELIS "life world" (Savolainen 2008, 2006) contains the exchanges, conversations, materials, formalities, and voice of personal violence. That lived experience *is* daily practice for officers, shelter staff, and survivors. The responding officers stand as society's formal agency; the shelter acts as the local community's informal agency. Both fit into the survivor's life world – whether invited, forced, or discovered. The document content and format foci of this study speak to the most fundamental issues in everyday life. Food on the table, a safe place to sleep, and sufficient education to get a job should be part of life, and their absence is just as foundational as is their reliable presence. The ELIS lens places the four common situations (explained below) in the survivor-police shared response to IPV.

Research question

Law enforcement documents usually focus on moving survivors out of their current relationship. Survivors, however, may seek a return to the pre-911 status, a more modest change in the relationship, or a gradual preparation for change. Shelter staff practice within both frameworks, supporting survivors who want to work with police in the criminal justice system to effect a "permanent" change as well as supporting survivors who want to move more cautiously as they explore various paths. Shelter documents are often included with those that the police distribute, giving survivors a chance to consider these more open goals in their deliberations. These differences between law enforcement and shelter perspectives generate four common situations that an LEO may encounter when responding to an emergency call:

- The survivor is just starting to make changes in the IPV situation. Women are starting to realize that their present circumstances may not be inevitable and information on resources could be useful.
- The survivor is first thinking about getting help from police. The police, when acting professionally, are the primary authority on personal safety. Knowing more about their intentions and services can give survivors an opportunity to consider safety outside of the immediate 911 response.
- The survivor is ready to start building a new life after leaving the abuser. When responding to a 911 call, LEO might find someone preparing to leave for the first or second time and, therefore, interested in information on the immediate post-abuser situation. Those fundamentals mentioned earlier, such as food and shelter, come to the fore.
- The survivor is working on long-term plans: Some women, after leaving several times or experiencing a severe physical attack, recognize that long-term planning is essential for a complete break. Responding officers might find someone looking past immediate food and shelter to the education and employment required to obtain them. Counseling becomes important as self-reflective planning highlights the need for recovery.

It is within that context, that the following research questions are posed.

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In reference to the documents that LEO provide when answering an emergency call for IPV:

RQ1. How many documents and which physical formats do LEO, shelter staff, and IPV survivors consider most effective?

RQ2. Which information density level and which content elements are considered most effective by LEO, shelter staff, and IPV survivors within each of four common situations:

RQ2a. The survivor is just starting to make changes in the IPV situation.

RQ2b. The survivor is first thinking about getting help from police.

RQ2c. The survivor is ready to start building a new life after leaving the abuser.

RQ2d. The survivor is working on long-term plans?

(In this context, "density" refers to "concentration" as in the sheer amount of information presented. For example, the fact that IPV is illegal could be presented as a simple statement (low density) or as the actual legal code (high density).)

The individuals at the core of these questions may well lack the affective and cognitive strength or momentum to make immediate use of information. As one respondent noted, "We have found that in some cases the victim would receive the material but be so exhausted from the abuse that she would be too tired to read the material. Then, by the time she wakes up the next morning her abuser is being released making it difficult or impossible to then take advantage of the information provided to her." Nevertheless, this mandated interaction has potential and must, therefore, be as well structured as possible.

Research method

These four situations are not necessarily stages, linear, or even mutually exclusive. They are, however, essentially internalized moments in a survivor's life world in which she is on the cusp of making a choice that might move her private situation into a more public sphere. (That choice may be to maintain or even strengthen privacy; moving away from social and law enforcement help is, in itself, a choice.) This potential for developing new daily practices is, ideally, supported by officers' provision of practical information.

Data gathering

The original studies identified police chiefs[6] in 1,500 agencies, 30 from each of the 50 states. The 30 communities constituted the ten most populous, the ten least populous (with at least 400 citizens), and the ten at the median. The domestic violence shelter administrators in each of the communities, where available, were identified and similarly recruited. E-mail questionnaires were sent directly to individual LEO and IPV shelter directors. To avoid imposing on women in crisis situations, survivors were recruited indirectly through shelter staff. Each chief received three e-mail calls for participation with the latter two emphasizing the need to spread the word within their

larger professional networks. Shelter staff also received three e-mail solicitations and were encouraged to share the questionnaire with any individual or group of survivors they thought appropriate. The National Domestic Violence Hotline news administrator agreed to post the call for participation on its web site[7]. Data gathering extended over five months (August to December 2012) to address varying administrative cycles that might cut response rate, e.g. annual reports.

Questionnaire design and responses

The questionnaire covered document content and density in each of the four situations as well as the number of documents provided and their format. Content questions referenced elements identified as important, even critical, to survivors (Westbrook, 2008a; Postus *et al.*, 2009). Respondents were invited to select as many items as they deemed appropriate. Density questions consisted of two card-like images addressing the same topic; the images had no visual differences in size, color, shape, or font. One had brief bullets or phrases; the other had complete sentences. They covered the exact same topic in the same neutral tone. Frequently identified as critical in interpersonal communication (e.g. Sullivan *et al.*, 2010), tone was not conflated with density. Each question included the standard invitation to add commentary. A questionnaire design specialist, a shelter director, and a police officer specializing in IPV reviewed the questionnaire. No changes were suggested.

Responses came from 839 individuals who identified themselves first and foremost as LEO (481), shelter staff (263), and IPV survivors (95). A number of respondents reported that they fit more than one category, which might indicate a response bias in that shelter staff and LEO with personal experience of IPV might be particularly willing to complete the questionnaire.

Limitations

Although substantial, the results from survivors and shelter staff are too limited to support inferential statistical analysis; descriptive statistics are, however, of substantial value. The stratified, national sample ameliorated this limitation to some extent but bias of indeterminate nature surely minimizes the generalizability of the findings. A confounding factor is the relationship between shelter staff and survivors in terms of recruitment power dynamics and individuals' proximity. The most obvious example of this point was the following: "This survey was done at the […] Domestic Violence Shelter with eight of our clients participating together."

As might be expected, the most practical outcome of the work (i.e. guidelines for LEO materials) garnered responses from the population most immediately affected (i.e. LEO). While law enforcement agencies were available in every community, shelters were often shared across county and community borders. The raw number of agencies recruited for each city was identical but responsibility for covering geographical territory varied. Given the potential for imposition in a crisis situation, IPV survivors were recruited indirectly; their response rate reflects that limitation.

Findings

Number and format of documents

Excessive documentation is generally believed to inhibit effective decision-making, and the first question addressed this belief by examining the number of documents distributed at a single visit. Among survivors, 44 percent preferred "as many items

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as needed" while 50 percent of LEO found a single item most effective. This disconnect may be, in part, an artifact of the survivor recruitment in that participating survivors might be those with some experience in navigating the social service system. If so, they might see the value of controlling their own information access. Shelter staff see both the survivors' varied temporal foci and law enforcement's primary focus; their 26, 33, 36 percent responses reflect that multi-layered perspective (see Figure 1). (In each group, no more than 1 percent was interested in the six-to-ten items option.)

Shelter staffers, more so than LEO, tend to be closely tied to community social service agencies. This may account for the fact that they value the smaller numbers of documents. Their knowledge of local resources leads them to act as a community referral service.

Actual information overload is a distinct but related matter. A single item may contain as much information as 20 separate items, as several respondents noted. "The number doesn't matter. If you have on highly informational brochure, that would be all that would be needed. If not, then as many necessary to get all of the information available to that victim." The question of document number, however, speaks to a basic question police must address when compiling their material.

Document format pertains directly to safety (Figure 2). When the LEO intervention is completed, a prominent set of documents on resources for changing the relationship

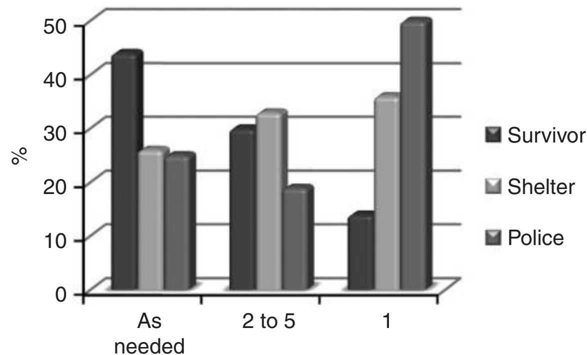

Figure 1.
Number of items needed at a 911 call

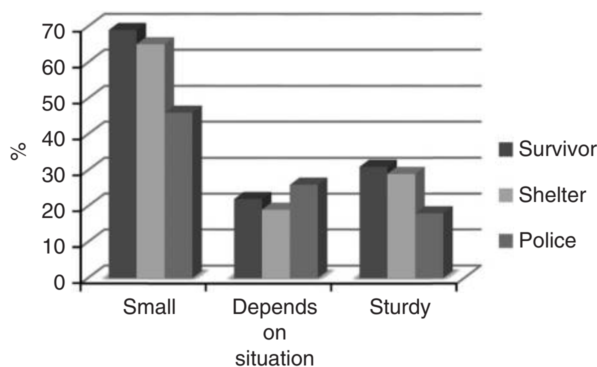

Figure 2.
Document format

can act as a catalyst for further violence. The time a woman is most likely to be hospitalized or killed is when she gives an indication of leaving (Sagrestano *et al.*, 2004). Some documents are designed to fit into a lipstick tube, wallet, or shoe for just this reason. The vast majority of all three groups valued the small document format.

The inherent contradiction between survivor preferences for the easily hidden small document format (69 percent) and the "as needed" number of documents (44 percent) exemplifies the fundamental tension in designing these information resources. Small documents can be distributed fairly safely in high-risk situations. Unfortunately, the resources needed to manage those high-risk situations require a number of support mechanisms. Having both risk and need play out on this document level mirrors the conflict on the survivor's active choice level.

Considering a life change

Two questions require a trustworthy answer before any significant movement toward safer living is viable. How can I get away safely? Where will I go when I'm out? Answers to both are complicated by individual situations and the larger community context. For example, getting away with three small children who must show up at school the next morning is significantly more difficult than moving out while the abuser is in jail for a month. Likewise, a local shelter with a waiting list and two-month stay limitation is less viable than long-term transitional housing. "Information about the amount of time survivors can stay at a shelter is important. When the police hand out information on shelters the maximum stay needs to be included. This will allow the survivor the opportunity to know the timeline for the decisions they have to make" (questionnaire respondent).

Documents for this moment of considering a life change are fairly standardized in terms of the two essential questions mentioned above. Getting away is a high-risk effort commonly addressed by a "safety plan" document, which walks survivors through the process of preparing to leave home in an emergency. Finding a place to stay is marginally less immediate and, given sufficient resources, best answered through a local shelter contact who can navigate agencies to find emergency housing. (Most US communities lack a domestic violence shelter but a number of alternatives, including cross-jurisdictional referrals, are often available.) Finally, although somewhat counterintuitive, many survivors need to understand the nature of abuse and its warning signs:

> I have been out of a 34-year marriage that was abusive for almost 8 years now. What helped me the most was being educated on the issue of domestic violence [….] Once I learned about the cycle of abuse, I was finally able to make the break with the abusive relationship (questionnaire respondent).

The abuser, cultural norms, family expectations, religious leaders, and other authorities often define "abuse" as an unprovoked physical attack resulting in highly visible injuries. Even the legal definition can be mangled in the flow of misinformation. "It is VERY important also to explain what spousal rape is and to investigate that on EVERY call! No one ever explained to me that I had been raped for 10 years" (questionnaire respondent).

Understanding the warning signs of abuse and framing it as an act of domination provide a rationale for leaving by placing the responsibility where it belongs, i.e. on the abuser.

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All three of these document components (safety plan, safe-house contact, and abuse signs) were highly valued by all three groups with a range of 61-90 percent over the documents and groups (Figure 3).

The safety plan may well include safe-house contact information but the purpose of each of these items correlates with the intensity and immediacy of need. Recognizing abuse signs lends impetus to making use of the other two items. "Information about the effects on children is also helpful, as this is sometimes a motivator for women to get help […]" (questionnaire respondent).

Considering asking police for help

LEO have extremely limited services to offer survivors. It is the criminal justice system that prosecutes abusers and provides protective orders for survivors. It is the civil court system that puts children in the custody of the survivor rather than the custody of the abuser. Nevertheless, LEO can act as the gateway to these legal systems. That potential has, of course, difficulties of its own. "Most people don't know the difference between misdemeanors and felonies and mentioning that most times only causes confusion" (questionnaire respondent). Additionally, as mentioned earlier, LEO stand as society's condemnation of IPV's criminality. Asking these authority figures for help entails trusting their intentions and their attitude toward abuse:

> Sometimes when you dial 911 the police dont come and then you have to have the courage to walk to the police for help. When I first went in the detective acted as if she didn't believe me so I wasnt willing to explain more about my abuse. If police would be more proactive and not reactive when someone is abused, then maybe the victim would be more willing to share (questionnaire respondent).

Five pieces of information encourage that trust (Figure 4), three of which were particularly valued in all three populations: police contact information, statements that domestic violence[8] is a crime, and information on protective orders.

Each of these pieces of information encourages survivors to actively seek help from the individuals charged with keeping them safe. The first two would, like abuse warning signs, appear self-evident, particularly to LEO. However, actually having police provide documentation can move survivors' hope for support to belief in support – at least in general terms. "I feel so trapped because everywhere I turn for help Im told there is nothing that can be done unless he hits me. I feel like Im never going to be free of him" (questionnaire respondent). Information clearly stating that domestic violence is a crime and that contacting the police about it is permitted, even encouraged, opens

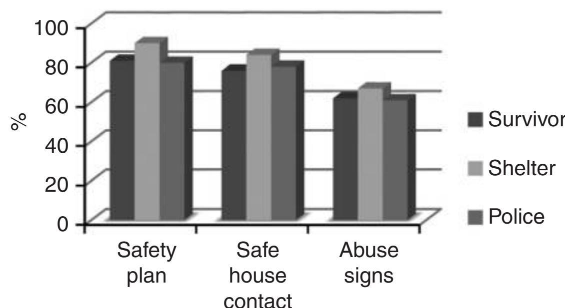

Figure 3.
Document content for considering a life change

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the door to a powerful means of moving toward safer living. This is particularly important for those who have experienced problems with police. Consider the problematic attitudes in the following statements:

- "I believe in old school ways of policing in that if victims simply are not willing to cooperate, AFTER the victim has been made fully aware of the DV process then the police should not get involved any further" (questionnaire respondent).
- "I have actually had police officers ask me why doesnt she just leave and that if they have to go back again they will arrest them both […]" (questionnaire respondent).

Protective orders prohibit abusers from having specified levels of contact with survivors and, in some cases, their children and extended families. They provide a concrete instantiation of that police support. The last two pieces of information are more locally determined. An increasing number of jurisdictions have some mechanism for alerting survivors when their abusers have been released from custody. Finally, communities determine whether or not IPV in same-sex couples will be recognized, much less prosecuted.

Considering building a new life after leaving the abuser

Police commonly respond to 911 calls at the same residence on a repeated basis primarily because creating a safer relationship, rather than leaving, is the survivor's goal and/or many women need to make six to eight efforts before they are able to leave permanently (Frasier *et al.*, 2001, p. 214). At some point in this series of events or over the course of repeated abuse incidents, survivors may begin planning for a post-abuse life. They consider filing charges against their abusers, getting custody of their children in a divorce, and using a wide range of social services. Documents on community services (Figure 5) have the potential to move those considerations closer to action.

Victim services generally works on a triage or caseworker model in which one individual serves as a bridge to a full range of social services. Typically this service is only available to survivors at the point of a 911 call or in a criminal justice procedure, such as filing charges against an abuser. "I feel that the very best information to give a victim is information on gaining an advocate, who can 'walk her through' the process, eliminating anxiety and helping to minimize 'excuses' not to get help" (questionnaire respondent). That all three groups should highly value that service in the context of an emergency response, therefore, makes good sense.

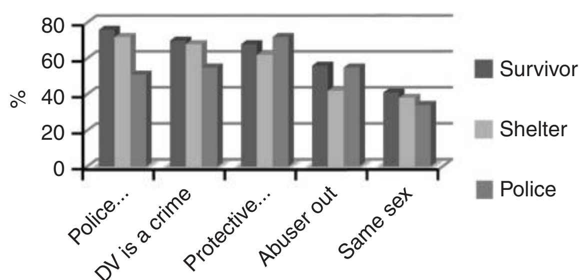

Figure 4. Document content for considering asking police for help

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LEO with their experience of seeing survivors' complex needs often recognize the essential role that the wider social service infrastructure plays, or could play, in moving toward safer living:

> As a law enforcement officer working 18 years in patrol and dealing with this type of situation on a regular basis. I saw too many victim that had no place to turn if they left the abuser and the cycle just continued for the victim (questionnaire respondent).

Community services vary widely in terms of availability and stability. Shelter staffers, quite naturally, value their own services (87 percent) more than those of the community at large (71 percent). Survivors value criminal justice information (67 percent) even more than do LEO (57 percent):

> When you look online all you find is signs you are in an abusive relationship, safety plans and shelters. Nothing beyond that initial step. I wanted to know what happens after and how to start rebuilding your life, etc." (questionnaire respondent).

Simply anticipating this situation requires an ability to navigate complex social service systems.

Findings: considering long term planning

Survivors experienced in working with shelters and other social services often use these resources over the course of several months or even years in long-term planning for self-sufficiency. Mental and physical health barriers, particularly when deeply embedded at an affective and heuristic level, must be breached before any substantial change is possible. Both health problems and job preparation needs require long-term planning. "Since I left and divorced my abuser, I have gotten my Bachelor of Arts degree in communication and am currently working toward my MFA in order to write about my experience" (questionnaire respondent).

As Figure 6 indicates, survivors most value information on counseling (95 percent) while shelter staff (94 percent) and LEO focus more on job preparation (79 percent).

"The abuser hates hearing that she is seeking any type of help but she might get away with something presented as 'counseling' " (questionnaire respondent). General counseling may be considered useful for the affective aspects of substance abuse, an area valued by at least 50 percent of all three groups. Careful planning on this level can help generate the self-efficacy needed to take control of essentials, such as employment.

In all four situations, the three groups seek a balance between immediate safety and a future state of self-reliance. Without exception, the content items of these documents were

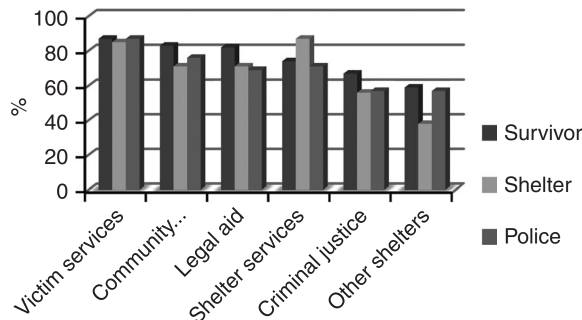

Figure 5.
Document content for considering building a new life

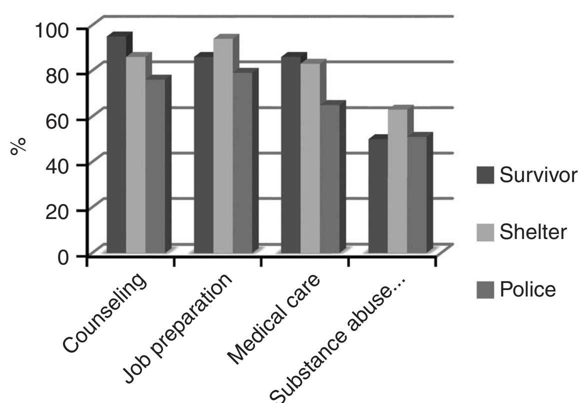

Figure 6.
Document content for long-term planning

valued by at least a third of each group and most by over 50 percent. In each of the four situations, at least one content item was valued by 70 percent in one of the three groups. This pervasive call for information demands development of documents in an area commonly considered as outside the law-enforcement arena. Without long-term planning, however, survivors are likely to return to or remain in their abusive relationships.

Findings: information density

The hundreds of documents studied in the first two stages of this work covered legal and social services. Frequently, the information points considered worthwhile in this study were addressed in a single, text-heavy brochure; other items had the physical shape and brevity of a business card. In most cases, however, an effort had been made to put distinct pieces of information into individual paragraphs or bullet points. That variation in information density prompted this information density research question.

At the most general level, in all four situations dense information took precedence (Figure 7). (Providing the "total" for each option provides an additional point of comparison by combining responses across all three groups.) The "both" and sparse levels of density judgments were roughly the same, indicating that content may trump density at times.

The variations within each of the four situations spark additional questions regarding information-need intensity and information overload. Figure 8 was evaluated in question 4. Similarly Figures 9, 10 and 11 are evaluated for questions 6, 8, and 10.

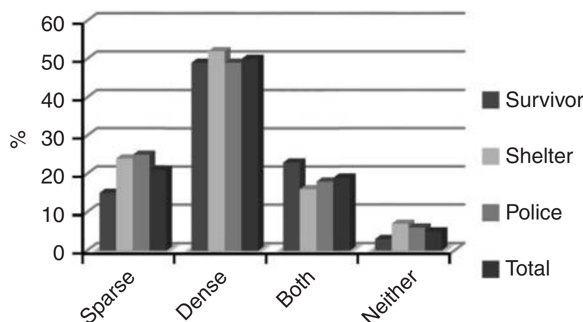

Figure 7.
Information density across all four situations

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The images are identical in terms of color, border, and font. As with the text-based questions, these image-based questions were approved by all three of our consultants. Here the reviewers focussed on consistency of content and tone.

In this initial stage – moving toward safer living – survivors are often depicted as too emotionally and cognitively fragile to accept, manage, and/or use much information (e.g. Goodman *et al.*, 2009). These findings (Figure 12) indicate that information content may well play a greater role than information density. The topic of this example is one of the most commonly used issues, i.e. the definition of abuse (e.g. Wolf *et al.*, 2003). As one respondent noted, so complex a matter merits denser information:

> I would use a more comprehensive list - kick, beat, with closed fist, shove, hold down, slap, backhand, etc., and belittle, yell, demean, insult, not listen, mean teasing, put down, etc. something like that - just include as many as you can so you will reach as many people as possible, becasue there are so many variations of abuse.

Given the nascent state of change here, simple information can affirm the value of reflection. "If its someone just starting to make changes, maybe something short and to

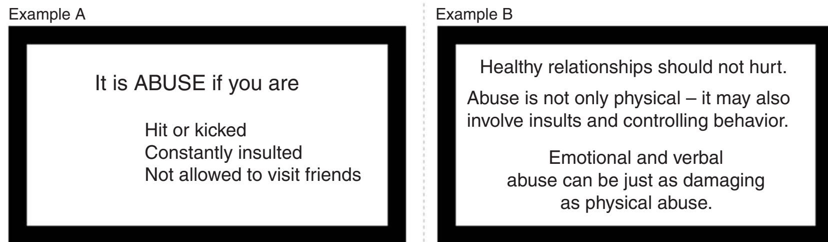

Figure 8.
Images for question 4: just starting to make changes in the IPV situation

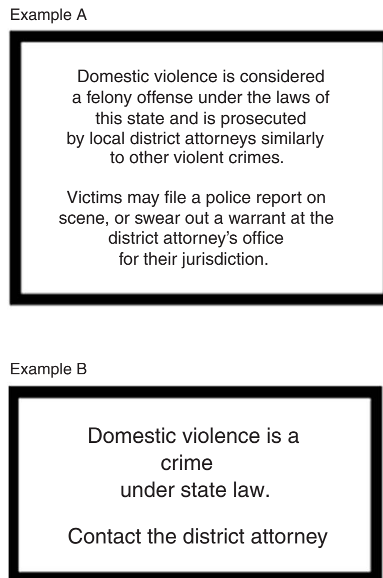

Figure 9.
Images for question 6: considering asking police for help

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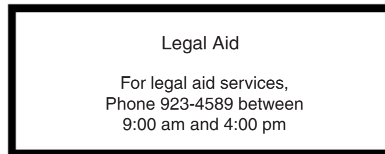

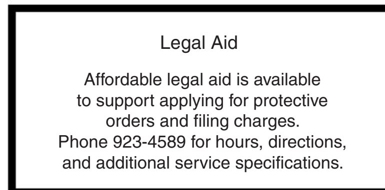

Figure 10. Images for question 8: considering building a new life after leaving the abuser

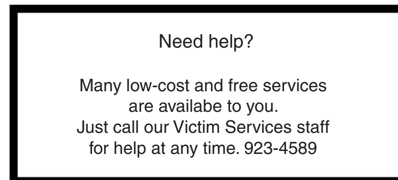

Figure 11. Images for question 10: considering long-term planning

the point might be better to get their attention, then offer them more information to read" (questionnaire respondent).

In the next situation – considering asking police for help – the differences between preferences for sparse and dense information were much smaller in all three groups (Figure 13). Survivors were more interested in gaining information than were LEO while shelter staff valued sparse and dense loads equally.

Survivors preferred the sparse information as much as the LEO disliked both levels of density. This may be an artifact of the topic, i.e. that IPV is a crime. LEO often take that as a given; if it were not a crime, then they would not have answered the call. However, one survivor comment identified a problem with the assumption that the

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officer knows that IPV is a crime. "It would be helpful to cite the actual code sections […] so victims can show to an officer on scene who may not be aware or complying with the law." Survivors often need confirmation that their particular form of IPV is indeed legally classed as a crime.

In the third situation – survivors ready to start building a new life after leaving their abusers – shelter staff and LEO value dense information to virtually the same extent (Figure 14).

Survivor interest in dense information reflects the intertwined changes needed to build a post-abuse life. Housing and employment, for example, actually encompass education, childcare, transportation, and financial literacy.

In the final situation – long-term planning – all three groups clearly value dense information more than in any of the prior situations.

This is the situation toward which all earlier work has been focussed. When police answer a 911 call for a woman who is ready to start thinking about a long-term change in her life, then a rich information base is highly productive (Figure 15). Police do value sparse information more than do survivors, 23-9 percent. These differences are small but their impact may create an unnecessary hurdle at a critical juncture. "It would be nice to see brochures on help information on who to keep in contact with to help with the long term healing process. Some survivors have no family or friends and will find themselves falling right back into the same cycle of abusive if they are not very careful" (questionnaire respondent).

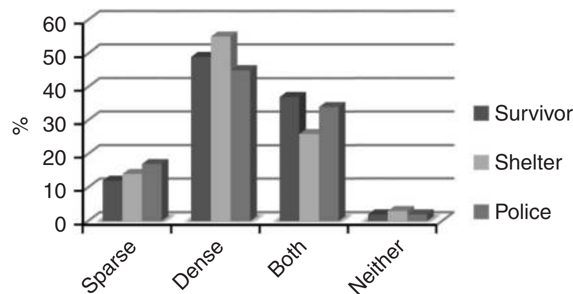

Figure 12.
Information density when considering a life change

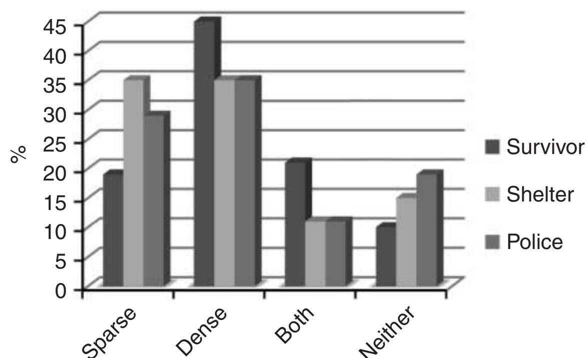

Figure 13.
Information density when considering asking the police for help

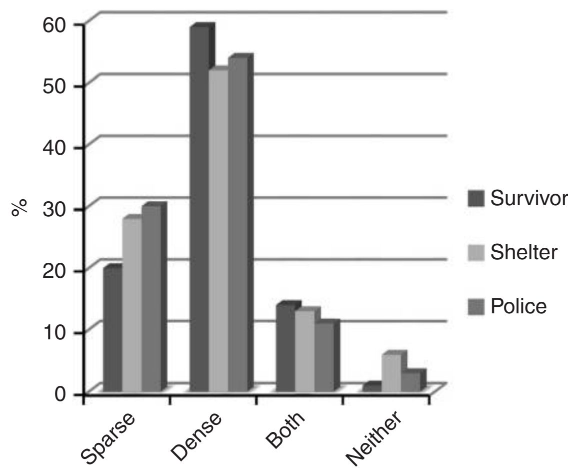

Figure 14. Information density when starting to build a new life

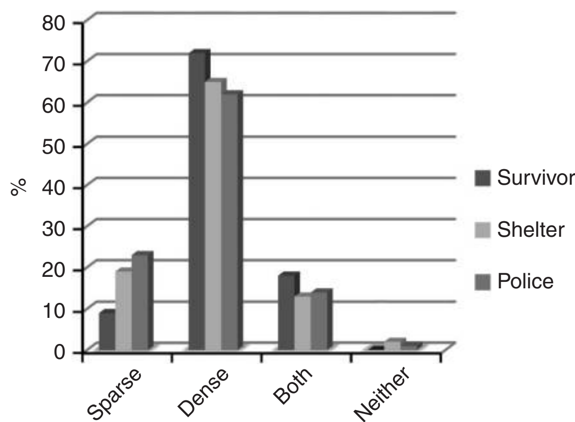

Figure 15. Information density when starting long-term planning

Implications

The most obvious implication of these findings is that information overload is considerably more complex than earlier IPV studies would indicate. A number of studies agree that survivor emotions generally run so high that an onsite victim advocate is the only truly viable support. Given that well-established expectation, a single document with low-density text should be universally valued in this study. Nevertheless, only 14 percent of survivors, 36 percent of shelter staff, and 50 percent of LEO preferred a single item. In the same vein, averaging all three groups' responses to density questions in all four situations yielded a 50 percent preference for dense information. Add in the rate for those who accept text of any density and the total rises to 69 percent. Those preferences would have officers deliver, at a minimum, two text-heavy documents at a moment in which emotional experiences come to the fore and, in some cases, physical injuries require medical attention. Assuming the materials are provided in expectation of future use, survivors deciding to use two information-rich documents would be required to make multiple choices, even decisions.

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At least one possible explanation in each of the affective, cognitive, and behavioral realms is worth follow-up study. On an affective level, giving and receiving documents may matter more than the actual document content. Perhaps documents are not seen as vessels of information so much as vessels of support. Alternatively, the tension between present and future experiences may push a temporal perspective in that information's potential for future use trumps the survivor's present emotional and physical state. Finally, in terms of LEO behavior, proper delivery renders such substantive documents even more useful. Non-judgmental, respectful actions engender trust in LEO value and, by extension, the information's value. The complexities of information overload most certainly involve cognitive, affective, and behavioral components. No single explanation suffices. These questions are certainly worth further examination in face of the common assumption that IPV survivors are almost universally incapable of assimilating information at the point of a 911 response.

A second implication posits the relationship between any at-risk, marginalized population and the public socio-legal response to their varying situations. IPV survivors face virtually all of the problems for which support must be needed including housing, education, employment, childcare, and health care. This study provides a starting point for extending the integration of community and legal services to individuals facing a variety of life crises.

Another implication lies in the realm of survivor safety. The LEO approach privileges future escape more than survivors and shelter staff privilege immediate safety. For example, 69 percent of survivors and 65 percent of shelter staff prefer an easily hidden document as opposed to 46 percent of police. In a related area, shelter staff (72 percent) and survivors (76 percent) want contact information for police, a point valued by only 51 percent of officers. An easily hidden means of reaching out to an officer who knows her situation enhances both emotional and concrete safety. In terms of safety tools for which the survivor is responsible, however, LEO match the other two groups more closely. LEO (80 percent) and survivors (81 percent) value the safety plan, as do 90 percent of shelter staff. Both the plan and its execution can be somewhat supported by outsiders but the survivor has ultimate responsibility for it. Victim services, while designed to support survivors through legal proceedings and self-sufficiency processes, are only as effective as the survivor's commitment to the work. Those who are not yet ready to move ahead or find changes too difficult to make, step out of the victim services context. Again, police and survivors (87 percent) value that resource heavily, as do shelter staff (85 percent). This dichotomy of safety responsibility may come down to the police role in IPV as a crime:

> Don't make the police responsible for spoon feeding the victims - they need to take ownership and make things happen for themselves. Often times they are used to being controlled so they only follow what someone (IE police) tells them. To get out of the cycle they need to be guided in how to make decisisons for themselves and get comfortable with this - which is far more than a police role (questionnaire respondent).

This question of responsibility reinforces that found in the second stage of this study (Westbrook and Finn, 2012). The actual text of documents primarily framed police responsibility in terms of law enforcement writ large, rather than law enforcement functioning at an individual level. The Police/IPV Information Model (Westbrook and Finn, 2012, p. 14) posits LEO identification of the survivor in terms of individual responsibility.

This study has implications for officer IPV training in terms of the temporal aspects of IPV impact. Training certainly continues to make substantive progress in terms of

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the practical (e.g. recognizing defensive wounds), the nature of the crime (e.g. multiple forms of abuse), and survivor behaviors (e.g. refusing to leave). Police academies and continuing education programs face the obvious logistical difficulty, i.e. officer access to the most basic training in general, much less special IPV training. Attitudes still inhibit effective policing as in the following: "[…] stop being a professional victim, relying on tax dollars" (questionnaire respondent).

The mere existence of so much information provision, however, is just one of many indications that significant progress continues. Theoretical (e.g. Eigenberg *et al.*, 2012) and applied research (e.g. Blaney, 2010) move the work ahead. LEO, however, experience the 911 engagement as an incident while survivors experience it as a way of life. Officer-driven "solutions" are limited only by the time it takes to file charges, enforce a protective order, arrest an abuser, or some similarly codified act. Outside of those procedures, their perspectives are, quite naturally, less intense. Even a minimal understanding of the temporal aspects of long-term survivor progress should more fully contextualize their in-the-moment engagements at 911 calls.

Finally the standard operating procedures (SOP) within which police options are framed need to encompass the situational variables pertaining to the potential utility of these documents. "While providing information is important there are other considerations often forgotten. […] the officer gets so bogged down with useless information they MUST provide the truly important things are forgotten" (questionnaire respondent). When the information is actually useless or is perceived to be "useless" in a particular encounter, then the SOP should provide alternative means of enhancing information utility. The boundaries on any such procedural determination are, of course, absolutely contextually set. Responding to IPV 911 calls in the innumerable under-resourced, rural communities in which officers need only a high-school education requires a different SOP from the relatively few urban communities in which multiple cultural IPV norms are addressed in police academies.

Suggested guidelines

The highly individualized life worlds of those police/survivor interactions entail issues of trust, authority, and in-the-moment situations. Documents, howsoever designed, are – at best – a clumsy tool for supporting safety and, at worst, somewhat dangerous. Their potential value is substantial and they are certainly more useful than oral information alone. Given their mandated distribution, raising awareness of and providing support for their development is worthwhile. Based on feedback from LEO, shelter staff, and IPV survivors, this brief list of suggested guidelines is designed for law enforcement departments to use in writing, compiling, and delivering documents for IPV survivors. At this first iteration the guidelines are, as labeled, simply suggestions. Significant testing and evaluation are essential for developing a more definitive set:

(1) Set up situation specific material: when logistically feasible, use three levels of documentation. "Keep in mind that every situation calls for different actions and resources and although situations may be similiar the victims are very different from eachother. They all respond to different approaches and may need different services" (questionnaire respondent):

- First, for virtually any response, provide an easily hidden card with the officer's name and the name and phone number for the closest shelter. This can be easily carried in a shirt pocket.

- Second, develop a very small packet, one that can be put in a letter-sized envelope. It should be flat and have no text on the outside. It would include only essential emergency information including a safety plan, a handout from the closest shelter, a victim services handout, and the national hotline number. Distribute it if a survivor shows any interest in pursuing legal remedies or otherwise moving toward safety.
- Design a larger packet for survivors who actively seek information on local resources. Although it will be given out rarely, it can support survivors at the critical moment of making a radical change. This packet is not a catchall for community information but should contain the same information as the small packet augmented by material pertaining to counseling, job training, legal services, medical care, and abuser responses. Paperclip a cover sheet on the documents with referrals to the local police, victim advocates, and shelter. If the change becomes overwhelming, then this cover sheet still provides a clear set of essential resources. These latter two items would be left in the squad car until needed.

Community resources, SOP regarding response responsibilities, and situation-specific variables drive officer choices, and provide an opportunity to actually make the choice. "When in doubt, ask them what they need and dialogue" (questionnaire respondent):

(2) Consider literacy levels: keep the material easy to read with short sentences, phrases, bullets, and limited jargon. Direct translations require specific review to match cultural and linguistic norms of written text. When in doubt as to the survivor's literacy level, take particular care in providing information verbally. Even highly literate people have trouble absorbing new information in times of high stress.

(3) Make accurate referrals: specific facts, such as hours of operation, require regular updating. As one respondent pointed out, "Nothing is worse than giving bad contact information to a victim/survivor so that once she finally decides to reach out, there's no one there!"

(4) Be generous with documents: if an established support figure (e.g. a friend or sister) is on site, give her the card also and, if she actively seeks additional information, one of the packets. Survivor situations are frequently in flux. A full packet at one point may have, ultimately, proved unhelpful. At the next call, go back to the card. "(Provide multiple deliveries) – you might not see the one that works" (questionnaire respondent).

(5) Use documents to augment, not replace, verbal information: "People tend to want to hear the answers from someone rather than read it, and when they are told what to do and how to do it as opposed to reading it and interpreting it themselves, there is less margin of error" (questionnaire respondent). Open questions can act as guides to specific document information. For example, "What questions could I help with?" might lead to a question on shelter services. Pull out the appropriate item to best answer the question so that the document reinforces the verbal.

Implementing any of these suggested guidelines requires the departmental will to make changes in SOP, a view of this particular type of 911 as an opportunity to support change, and the ongoing commitment to update information and training.

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When sparse local community resources make the social services information irrelevant, then national and regional referrals become more critical and must, therefore, be more fully developed.

Further research

These documents intend to make imminently practical opportunities available to a high-risk population. Follow-through applied research on this set of suggested guidelines needs to reflect the "life world" (Savolainen, 2008 and 2006) in those complicated police/survivor intersections. Substantive guideline development requires longitudinal, evaluative studies involving LEO, shelter staff, and survivors in a variety of settings. For example, local IPV norms and resource levels are likely to influence guideline efficacy in fairly predictable ways, which means that alternatives can be developed and tested.

Recognizing the critical nature of situational document delivery, law enforcement training for maximizing the intersection of written and verbal presentations bears review. A concerted effort to develop a set of best practices for law enforcement would be of particular use in the innumerable small departments that cannot afford additional resources.

An applied research approach could be used to construct a tool for gathering and sharing means of getting information into survivors' lives. Even within this study, respondents shared a few ideas and examples:

> One of the best suggestions that I have seen in my years in this field is a magnet that has the local DV hotline information and National DV hotline number on it. As part of safety planning officers can instruct victims to put in on the back of a fridge or somewhere that isnt visble that only they know where it is in case they decide to stay. This can be a very empowering option for victims because then they dont feel the pressure and judgement to leave but know that there are options when they are ready (questionnaire respondent).

Several questions regarding the life world of IPV require a grounded theory approach. Each of the four situations framing this study can guide follow-up studies on survivor information needs, seeking, and avoiding, as well as information encounters following document delivery. Social support service information practices, particularly as they intersect with those of law enforcement, can become part of survivors' expectations. Mapping intersections and blockades within those information practice norms could extend the suggested guidelines to help survivors make choices that cross these boundaries.

Police and social services increasingly recognize the other's role in working with marginalized communities that face a law enforcement element in their life world, such as the homeless (particularly those with mental illness), sex workers, and immigrants without documentation. How do the information experiences of these individuals affect their choices in that intersection of police and social services? Do the four situations in this study have counterparts in other settings that could be examined through the ELIS lens?

Intensely personal, private situations have a strong affective component that inhibits self-revelation, particularly to strangers. Would consistency of voice, terminology, and/or content structure between legal and social service materials help address this concern? Might it, for example, lower the "outsider" threshold by underscoring ties between law enforcement and shelter staff?

Both emotional and practical information play a role in moving toward safer living. At what point, if any, in these mandated documents would it be useful to use affective

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narrative? As one respondent suggested, it could be useful to intertwine the factual and emotional:

> Your abuser may apologize and make promises to stop. He/she probably is sincere, but it is highly probable that he/she either CANNOT or WILL NOT stop! It is UP TO YOU to put a stop to it. You've taken the first step- congratulations, now don't let yourself (or your children) down. Carry through and make yourself safe.

We need to continue working toward a grounded understanding of survivors' daily lives. This information opportunity provides an excellent window on that world.

Conclusion

In the last of a three-part study, this paper triangulates data from LEO, domestic violence shelter staff, and IPV survivors in a national study of the documents distributed by US officers responding to an emergency domestic violence call. The four common situations in which the documents are delivered provide a situated "life world" framework (Savolainen, 2006, 2008): the survivor is just starting to make changes, first thinking about getting help from police, ready to start building a new life, and working on long-term plans. Using a three-part stratified sample of communities identified by size, data were gathered regarding each group's judgments on specific content items and information density in each situation, as well as document format and the number of documents delivered. Respondents consisted of 481 LEO, 263 shelter staff, and 95 IPV survivors for a total of 839 completed questionnaires.

Findings indicate three major differences between law enforcement and shelter staff/survivors. In terms of the number of documents delivered, the former prefer a single item far more than do the latter. This distinction reflects the possibility that information overload is less critical than commonly assumed. In terms of document format shelter staff and survivors prefer small documents more than do police, a difference that points to a focus on immediate safety among the former and a focus on future safety among the latter.

In terms of the four situations, police and shelter staff are in concert more often regarding those content items for which success is determined, within reason, by the survivor's active engagement. Officers tend to take the criminal justice aspects of the "considering leaving" and "considering working with police" situations for granted while shelter staff and survivors want them spelled out and confirmed more fully.

Follow-up work should, initially, focus on testing the five document guidelines, particularly designing situationally driven materials and ensuring content currency. A grounded theory approach to understanding the interplay between the documents and the act of their delivery should extend the value of this work by moving more fully into the "life worlds" of survivors and police.

Information scholars and practitioners understand but do not overestimate the potential of information to support survivors' movements toward safer living. This series of studies provides the groundwork for moving from understanding to action.

Notes

1. This paper concludes a three-stage examination of this substantive information interaction. The introduction and literature review sections will, therefore, cover some of the same material. To avoid repeated self-citations, this note indicates such appropriate references (see: Westbrook and Finn, 2012; Finn *et al.*, 2011).

2. In law enforcement the term "victim" is the norm in the sense that IPV is a crime and, therefore, has a victim. In shelters the term "client" is commonly used in that the shelter is a social service. "Victims" of abuse who are "clients" of a shelter certainly have a full range of other defining life roles such as "mother" or a work position. In the context of this paper, the IPV experience is foremost as is the whole person perspective. No designation adequately covers that complexity but "survivor" places the focus on the individual apart from agencies. As one of this study's respondents noted, "Thank you also for using 'survivor' instead of 'victim' – it is a much more empowering word without defeatest [sic] connotations."
3. The population is identified as female in that 85 percent of IPV is male on female violence. While female-on-male, male-on-male, and female-on-female violence certainly exist, the primary power dynamic and the law enforcement infrastructure fall within that 85 percent.
4. Law enforcement titles vary across states. In Alaska, for example, the "state troopers" respond to emergency calls. The top administrative officer may be a "chief" or some variation on a military rank. The terms "police" and "law enforcement officer" are, therefore, used interchangeably with reference to the immediate context.
5. Respondents' quotations are used as written in terms of grammar, punctuation, spelling, and other elements of formal writing. Information that might inadvertently lead to identifying someone has been redacted. The [sic] convention is not employed. These quotations are drawn from respondent in all three groups and were chosen to best exemplify the data at hand.
6. As mentioned earlier, these titles vary by jurisdiction. In each case, we determined the correct form of address and used that in all communications.
7. "Help us know which resources best help victims" www.thehotline.org/2012/02/help-us-know-what-resources-best-help-victims/ (accessed August 31, 2013).
8. The term "domestic violence" was used throughout the questionnaire because it is in common use in all three populations. "Intimate partner violence" is a sociological term used far more in scholarship than in practice.

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About the author

Lynn Westbrook is an Associate Professor at the University of Texas School of Information with an MLS from the University of Chicago and a PhD from the University of Michigan. Her research interests focus on the cognitive and interpersonal aspects of situated human-information interactions with emphases on women, social justice, and individuals in high-risk situations. Author of four monographs and numerous articles, she most recently contributed to *Library & Information Science Research*, *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, *Journal of Documentation,* and *Library Quarterly*. Associate Professor Lynn Westbrook can be contacted at: lynnwest@ischool.utexas.edu

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