



Program Evaluation: A Social Change Approach

by **Red Crowley**

Once a friend told an anecdote about a talk given by our founding executive director, Kathleen Carlin. Kathleen was speaking at a national conference and was asked, "What is your success rate?" Without hesitation, Kathleen responded, "Almost 100%." She then paused while the shock settled in and went on to explain that the question evolves out of a male-centered universe and assumes that we are working for men. She clarified that although we work with men, we work for women and for a world that is free of the sexist values that make violence against women inevitable. Change in that world can be the only true measure of success.

So, Men Stopping Violence (MSV) has avoided traditional evaluations of our Batterer Intervention Program (BIP) because evaluators insisted that outcome measures focus on recidivism of men who completed our 24-week curriculum. Because we see such measures as misleading if not impossible (See uptake, Fall 2000), we have consistently declined involvement in such evaluations. However, in 1994 the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) responded positively to our proposal to evaluate our BIP based on its ability to shift the institutional response to battering in two outlying Metro Atlanta counties. With the award in hand, the Community Intervention Evaluation (CIE) project was born.* In cooperation with the local battered women's shelter, a scientific team from the CDC and an evaluation specialist from Georgia State University, MSV replicated its social change agenda in Douglas and Paulding Counties. There we hoped to test our theory that battering is a logical outgrowth of social norms that promote contempt for women; that the true function of a BIP is to influence those norms in a way that promotes greater safety and justice for battered women; and that its success is appropriately measured in those terms.

With this philosophical frame, what then would our interventions look like and how would their efficacy be evaluated? Any institution or complex of institutions (education, business, medical, religious, government, etc.) could have been targeted. We chose to focus on changes in the criminal justice system (CJS) for three reasons. First, data on arrests, prosecutions, convictions and sentencing are public record and, relatively speaking, readily accessible. Second, prosecution is a formal expression of social norms. Third, because men's violence against women has not historically been treated as criminal, changes in CJS behavior vis-à-vis men's violence against women are a particularly valuable indicator of substantive shifts in the area.

Goals and Objectives

The goal of the project was: "In service to safety and justice for battered women, the project aims to move the intervention communities toward a zero-tolerance for battering."

And our objectives were:

1. During the course of the intervention, to increase the legal sanctions (arrests, prosecutions, convictions, sentencing and referrals to batterer intervention programs) for domestic violence offenses.
2. During the course of the intervention, to raise community awareness of legal sanctions for battering.
3. To introduce and maintain a batterer intervention program in the two intervention counties.

4. On an ongoing basis, to assess the possible negative side-effects on battered women of introducing a BIP into the community.

Activities and Outcomes

By way of example, the activities and their timeline for year three of the project are displayed in the chart on page 5. As indicated in this timeline, we conducted a public awareness campaign that included a wide range of initiatives with the faith community, the business community, the print and broadcast media, the physical and mental health communities, and educational institutions. Examples of such initiatives were a bumper sticker campaign, essay contests in the grade school and middle schools, teaching anti-violence courses in the high schools and at Sunday school classes, working with the local hospitals to develop protocols for screening and reporting domestic violence injuries, public service announcements, articles and interviews for local newspapers, and a brochure about gender-based violence.

Given our objectives, we expected the following outcomes:

- increased arrests of men who batter;
- decreased arrests of women for family violence offenses;
- decrease in the number of mutual arrests for family violence offenses;
- decrease in the time between arrests and prosecutions;
- increase in the percentage of prosecutions of batterers;
- increase in the percentage of convictions of batterers;
- increase in the severity of sentences for batterers; and
- increased perception by community residents that battering would be met with meaningful legal sanctions;

Outcome Measurements

To measure the response of the CJS to the initiative, we used a time-series analysis. That is, we collected data on arrests, prosecutions, convictions and sentencing for family violence offenses for a period of four years prior to interventions. With these data we were able to project what the pattern of response by the CJS would be if there were no intervention. Using these data to construct a baseline, we could then determine if our efforts shifted the behavior of the CJS away from that projected baseline.

To measure any increased awareness by community residents that a shift in legal sanctions had taken place and that battering would be met with meaningful legal consequences, we conducted an annual telephone survey in the two intervention counties and in two control counties. The telephone survey was designed to assess what residents felt the various components of the CJS should do in response to men's violence against women, what they felt the various agencies actually did, how serious a problem residents perceived men's violence against women to be, and respondents' belief that women provoke men's violence against them.

Summary of Key Findings

The time-series analysis reflected three different CJS responses to the CIE initiative. In Paulding County the intervention elicited the hypothesized results. In Douglas County there was no change in arrest patterns for Family Violence offenses by the Douglasville Police Department (DVPD) and a negative effect on the arrest pattern by the Douglas County Sheriff's Department (DCSO). These findings were mirrored by the telephone survey results. While these three different data sets bolster our analysis of the function of the CJS institutions in ending men's violence against women, the outcomes in Douglas County are disappointing, often in disturbing ways.

Paulding County

In Paulding County the nature of the relationship between arrests of men and arrests of women changed significantly in favor of women. Further, following the intervention, the percentage of women who were

prosecuted each month decreased from 16% to 6%, while men continued to be more likely to be prosecuted for family violence offenses. It is important to note that even when fewer women were arrested in Paulding County, a smaller percentage of those women were actually prosecuted. This reflects not only the enhanced responsiveness of law enforcement but that of the District Attorney's office as well. This is especially encouraging given that the start date for interventions in Paulding County was a full year later than that in Douglas County. In addition, 98% of the cases that were prosecuted for family violence offenses in Paulding County resulted in convictions. Of those convicted, there was a significant increase in the percentage that received probation time, from 82% to 92% following the intervention. There was no change in the percentage of defendants who received jail time, nor did the amount of jail time they received change post-intervention.

Because the intervention elicited change in the CJS in Paulding County, there was the expectation that community residents would be aware of these changes and the telephone survey would, in turn, capture a shift in knowledge and attitude among residents. There was, in fact, a difference in the perceived seriousness of men's violence against women in Paulding County that approached statistical significance ($p < .05$). However, a greater number of older residents were sampled in the control county (Newton County), and older respondents were more likely to view men's violence against women as a problem. This leads one to suspect that there might have been a more significant indication of change in Paulding County if the samples had been more closely matched by age. The other telephone survey scales did not reflect change at statistically significant levels.

Douglas County

There was a significant increase in the number of arrests for family violence offenses by both the DVPD and the DCSO. The relationship between the arrests of men and women remained constant for the DVPD. However, the number of arrests of women by the DCSO for family violence offenses increased post-intervention. Given the personal experiences of the programmatic team with the Douglas County Sheriff, the direction of this change can only be interpreted as a negative side-effect for women. Contact with the sheriff consistently indicated his hostility to the goal of the project. He did not hesitate to express his belief that men's violence against women was, for the most part, provoked by women. Moreover, his hostility was apparently made policy and is reflected in the time-series findings of court activity. Not only did arrests of women by the DCSO increase post-intervention, but those arrests led to significantly more prosecutions of women. For this to take place, arresting officers from the DCSO had to make the arrests in such a way that the woman would be described in compelling ways as the "primary aggressor". The DCSO's response to the initiative can both quantitatively and qualitatively be characterized as "backlash". That is, the Sheriff responded to the goal of the project in a manner designed to thwart it. The DVPD did not systematically thwart the efforts of the initiative, nor did they adopt the goal of the project.

Convictions for family violence offenses remained constant in Douglas County. Of those convicted, there was a significant increase in the percentage that received some level of probation following the intervention, from 83% to 91%. There was no change in the percentage of defendants who received jail time, nor did the amount of jail time they received change post-intervention. Women convicted of family violence offenses were fined significantly less than men, but received more months of probation.

Reflecting the regressive response by the Douglas County CJS, there was no significant change in the knowledge and beliefs of community residents.

Lessons Learned

One of the primary reasons for evaluation is to monitor whether the program is producing the desired results and to enable managers to improve the program's effectiveness. Especially with long-range social change initiatives, a best-practices strategy would ideally include an evaluation to identify unanticipated problems after the program is in effect and to point to appropriate modifications. Process evaluation could determine whether the procedures are, in fact, reaching the intervention population as planned.

With the CIE project, had these intermediate evaluative tools been in place, we could have shifted our intervention population from the resistant DCSO, which actively worked to thwart our program, to another

local institution. For example, we could have focused our interventions on the print media. Effectiveness could have been measured by the number of lines of print in local newspapers pre- and post-intervention. Or perhaps the measure could have been the number of print lines expressing support or opposition to the goal of the project as compared to news coverage in the control counties. Social science leads us to believe that with a critical mass of community-based support, resistant agencies will change their stance, their directors, or both.

Conclusion

This paradigm shift for understanding the work of BIPs can certainly feel daunting at times. However, none of us wants pseudo-solutions to pseudo-problems. Perhaps we can use the shock value of Kathleen's "Almost 100%" to bump ourselves into this new conceptual framework and shift our thinking about what true success involves. If BIPs are dedicated to the movement to eradicate men's violence against women, their practice must be intentional about changing woman-hating social norms. Also, their evaluations must be designed to measure those changes.

*Kathleen Carlin, ACSW, served as Principal Investigator from 1994 to 1996. Elizabeth Cates-Robinson, Ph.D., served as the Principal Investigator from 1996 to 1999