

When Women Tell: Intimate Partner Violence and the Factors Related to Police Notification

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Abstract

We analyze how victim perceptions of mandatory arrest policies, perpetrator substance use, and presence of children are related to decisions to invoke law enforcement assistance. Logistic regression was used on survey responses from women receiving care in domestic violence shelters. Results suggest that as victim support for mandatory arrest increases, the odds of law enforcement notification of the abuse also increase. Accordingly, mandatory arrest may simply be reducing the probability of reporting intimate partner violence (IPV) among those who do not support the policy, instead of reducing IPV. Results also suggest that perpetrator substance use plays a significant role in law enforcement notification.

Keywords

intimate partner violence, mandatory arrest, policing

Introduction

Considerable research has been conducted to address law enforcement responses to cases of intimate partner violence (IPV). However, there is less research identifying the factors associated with whether or not an act of IPV is reported to law enforcement. Considering the evidence that IPV is already a significantly under-reported and “hidden” crime (see Barrett & St. Pierre, 2011; Catalano, 2007; Meyer, 2010; Truman, 2011), it is crucial that researchers identify variables that influence or are related to

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decisions to involve law enforcement. This study explores how three specific factors might be related to victim decisions to report IPV: (a) victim support for mandatory arrest policies, (b) the presence of children in the home, and (c) substance use by the offender. Below, we first briefly review the prevalence, incidence, and outcomes of IPV, and then outline key research associated with the effects of mandatory arrest.

Literature Review

IPV: Prevalence, Incidence, and Outcomes

Tjaden and Thoennes (2000) were among the first to provide nationally representative data on the extent, scope, and consequences of violence against women. Women were found to be significantly more likely to be assaulted by an intimate partner than were men. Twenty-five percent of surveyed women and only 8% of surveyed men reported being physically assaulted and/or raped by a former or current spouse, cohabiting partner, or date at some point in their lifetime. In “the past 12 months,” 0.9% of male respondents reported being physically assaulted and/or raped by an intimate other compared with 1.5% of women. These estimates translated to approximately 1.5 million women and slightly over 0.8 million men being victimized annually in the United States.

In 2010, the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS) was administered for the first time to determine the extent and severity of IPV and sexual violence among a contemporary national sample of adults. This nationally representative study revealed that the prevalence and incidence of IPV continues to be a troubling social reality (Black et al., 2011). NISVS data reveal that 51.1% of female victims of rape reported being raped by an intimate partner. Two thirds of female stalking victims were stalked by a former or current intimate partner. Over one third (35.6%) of women have experienced stalking, physical violence, or rape by an intimate partner in their lifetime. Among women who were victims of IPV, 24.3% experienced severe physical violence at the hands of their partner.

The outcomes of IPV range from sustaining minor to severe physical injuries, mental health consequences, long-term physical health consequences, substance abuse, sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancy complications, and a host of other societal and economic ramifications, which can lead to hospitalization, disability, and death (Black et al., 2011; see also Sutherland, Sullivan, & Bybee, 2001, for a review).

Mandatory Arrest

In the 1980s, policies were enacted in states across the country specifically designed to reduce IPV. These policies, deemed “mandatory arrest policies,” were the hopeful result of a social quasi-experiment that tested whether arrest policies could reduce subsequent acts of IPV. Specifically, Sherman and Berk (1984) found in their analysis of misdemeanor acts of IPV in Minneapolis that cases resulting in offender arrest were more likely than cases that did not result in arrest to have significant reductions in

subsequent instances of IPV. In a rush to address the social problem of IPV, the Attorney General's Task Force on Family Violence publicly declared their recommendation for automatic arrest as the "preferred response" to incidents of IPV after the Minneapolis results were published (U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, 1984). This occurred while six National Institute of Justice (NIJ) -funded replication studies simultaneously failed to find consistent support for the Minneapolis experiment (see Berk, Campbell, Klap, & Western, 1992; Dunford, 1992; Hirschel & Hutchison, 1996, 2003; Pate, Hamilton, & Annan, 1994; Sherman & Smith, 1992). After the Minneapolis results were published, it was estimated that nearly 50% of law enforcement agencies with a population of more than 100,000 citizens nationwide had instituted mandatory arrest as the appropriate law enforcement response to cases of IPV under the Attorney General's guidance (Cohn & Sherman, 1986).

The growing social and behavioral literature on mandatory arrest has been largely critical of the policy. Mandatory arrest policies have been described as problematic because such policies, for example, have the potential to create uncooperative or hostile relationships between law enforcement officers and IPV victims. After analyzing interview data from the National Crime Victimization Survey, which included responses from 529,829 respondents, Dugan (2003) found that increases in mandatory arrest policies led to parallel decreases in reporting rates among IPV victims. Wolf, Ly, Hobart, and Kernic (2003) conducted five focus group sessions with 41 battered women from social service agencies and utilized open-ended questions to identify barriers for battered women. One of the major reasons given for why IPV victims did not call law enforcement was because victims feared that they would be wrongfully identified as abusers. This is consistent with the research that has found that mandatory arrest laws and other policies that reduce the discretion of law enforcement officers have resulted in increases in the arrest rates of battered women (see Miller, 2001; Rajan & McCloskey, 2007). Another problem is that victims hesitate reporting their abuse because of perceived pressures by the legal system for victims to leave their significant other and to support prosecution (Fleury-Steiner, Bybee, Sullivan, Belknap, & Melton, 2006).

These unanticipated barriers that mandatory arrest policies create are likely to affect law enforcement reporting rates. Fears of being wrongfully identified as the aggressor, of getting arrested, and being pressured by the legal system to take legal action may negatively influence the perceived benefits of reporting IPV victimization to law enforcement and hence the probability of reporting the violence to police.

Live-In Children

Research has consistently found that 38% to 45% of IPV incidents occur with minor children below the age of 18 living in the home (Bledsoe, Yankeelov, Barbee, & Antle, 2004; Catalano, 2007; Gjelsvik, Verhoek-Oftendahl, & Pearlman, 2003). The number of children living in violent homes is concerning in light of the numerous documented negative effects children experience when witnessing IPV. These include feelings of sadness and anger, self-blame, and substance use (DeBoard-Lucas & Grych, 2011;

Fagan & Wright, 2011; Fosco & Grych, 2008). Mothers who are victimized by IPV have the added burden of considering how their victimization and consequent contact with the criminal justice system might affect the safety and well-being of their children.

Female victims of IPV are likely to have valid concerns about how their decisions to report or not to report might affect their children; such concerns are likely related to whether or not the abuse is reported. Wolf et al. (2003), for example, found that one of the most common reasons given by women for why they did not want their victimization reported to law enforcement was due to fears that their children would be taken away if the abuse was discovered. These fears are echoed in research that reveals deep concerns of being blamed for the disruption of the family unit. Women are also deeply concerned about being labeled “bad mothers” if and when female victims report their victimization to law enforcement (Rivett & Kelly, 2006).

Regardless of these mounting concerns, law enforcement notification may be more common in instances where children are living in the home because the well-being of children may be perceived as immediate, pressing, and requiring police intervention (Akers & Kaukinen, 2009). Whereas women may individually feel that they have less agency in reporting their own abuse, as mothers, women may feel a strong compulsion to protect their children. Decisions to report may in fact be a self-sacrificing decision, in that a woman risks possible blame from the criminal justice system, the state, and perhaps her immediate family for her and her children’s precarious situation. The internal pressures to contact law enforcement discussed above may be exacerbated in cases where children directly witness or experience abuse (Meyer, 2010).

Offender Substance Use

Another context that is likely related to whether or not an act of IPV will be reported to law enforcement is when substance use by the offender and abuse co-occur. Research has repeatedly documented the link between substance use and IPV (Catalano, 2007; Cattaneo & Goodman, 2003; Jasinski & Mustaine, 2001; Martin et al., 2010; Peralta, Tuttle, & Steele, 2010). According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, 42% of all non-fatal IPV victims reported the use of drugs and/or alcohol by the offender at the time of the offense (Catalano, 2007). Jasinski and Mustaine (2001) also discovered that nearly 75% of cases in which law enforcement officers were called to respond to IPV involved the use of drugs and/or alcohol by the offender. Cattaneo and Goodman (2003) similarly found that 48% of women in their sample reported that their abuser was consistently drunk once or more a week.

Research has also shown that IPV incidents that involve substance use by the offender are more likely to be physically more severe in nature compared with violent encounters where substance use is not present (Martin et al., 2010). Alcohol consumption rates, for example, have been positively associated with lethality rates (Testa, Quigley, & Leonard, 2003). Research has also found that alcohol use not only has a direct effect on committing IPV but also significantly increases the frequency of serious psychological abuse in relationships (Stalans & Ritchie, 2008). This would

certainly coincide with research that has found that police utilization by IPV victims escalates when the offender is drunk (Hutchison, 2003).

Cases that are characterized by offender substance use may be more likely to be reported to law enforcement because such cases are often associated with an elevated sense of urgency as well as increased public visibility. In sum, severe acts of physical abuse may be more likely to come to police attention because of the associated increased risk for sustaining severe injuries, increased awareness of IPV via neighbor involvement or exposure to the violence (e.g., hearing and/or witnessing IPV), and the desire to stop the immediate violent incident. Overall, this body of research indicates that offender substance use and IPV co-occur with some frequency, which needs to be considered in socio-behavioral research on IPV.

Hypotheses

Three specific hypotheses pertinent to the literature reviewed above are tested in the present article. The first hypothesis (H1) is that as victim support level for mandatory arrest increases, reporting levels of IPV will also increase. Such a relationship would suggest that only those who are supportive of the policy would feel comfortable calling for police assistance. The second hypothesis (H2) is that when children are involved, acts of IPV will be more likely to be reported to law enforcement. Specifically, cases in which respondents report that children were living at home at the time of the most recent violent incident will be more likely to disclose that their abuse was reported to law enforcement. Finally, we hypothesized (H3) that the probability of calling the police will increase when drug and/or alcohol use by the abuser is present at the time of IPV victimization. In particular, cases in which respondents report that their abuser was using drugs or drinking alcohol at the time of the most recent violent incident will be more likely to reveal that their abuse was reported to law enforcement.

Method

Procedures and Sampling

The data were collected through face-to-face, survey-led interviews during a 9-month period by the primary author. The participants include 101 women who were residing in a battered women's shelter at the time of the interview. Participants were recruited across five battered women's shelters, all within the same Midwestern state, from August 14, 2007 to May 31, 2008. Convenience sampling techniques were used to select shelters. Convenience sampling was used because the primary author had worked as a victim advocate at the time and was therefore able to make significant connections with program directors of shelters in the area. The primary author called and requested a meeting with each shelter director, explained the intended project, provided evidence of Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, and asked for permission to carry out the research project. Due to the primary author's extensive training in crisis intervention and victim advocacy, and because shelter directors were

involved in approving the survey instrument, the shelter directors felt comfortable granting access for this project.

After meeting with the shelter directors, the primary author decided that it would be best to recruit participants within 1 week of admission. This protocol would allow participants a few days to settle into their new living space. This time was seen as necessary not only because of the immediate trauma these women experienced but also because each shelter had a 2- to 3-day window, starting at admittance, where paperwork and case planning were established priorities. Each shelter also had a “72 hour” policy, which disallowed clients from leaving the shelter for the first 72 hours, due to safety concerns. For these reasons, the mean time from admission to interview was 3.5 days. The 1-week window was long enough to allow clients to settle in but also short enough to include those clients who only planned to stay for a short period. Being mindful of this time frame was important, as shelter-type living arrangements can deprive women of privacy, independence, and other practical concerns. In addition to the fact that many victims of IPV return to their abusers multiple times before leaving permanently, these living arrangements can motivate women to leave shelters as quickly as possible. Because participants were interviewed at only one point in time, this study is cross-sectional in nature. Also, study participants were strictly volunteers; they were not compensated for their time.

The principal investigator contacted directors from the selected battered women’s shelters on a bi-weekly basis to identify newly admitted clients for recruitment into the study. Eligible participants included those who (a) experienced an IPV incident, (b) were at least 18 years of age, and (c) were admitted to one of the shelters participating in the project. The primary author then met individually with shelter residents to explain the study and its purpose. A total of 108 respondents were considered eligible, and all were selected for inclusion in the study. Of these respondents, 101 agreed to participate in the interview, yielding a final response rate of 93%.

Researcher Identity, Positionality, and Reflexivity

It is important to note that the primary author’s concurrent experience as a victim advocate influenced the present methodological approach. First, the primary author’s role as an advocate influenced how the survey was constructed. For example, a strategic choice was made to ask respondents only about their abuser’s substance use. This decision was made to ensure that respondents felt as safe, secure, and comfortable as possible. The primary author made what she felt was an ethical choice to focus on the abuser’s substance use to avoid making respondents experience secondary victimization or feel that they were being blamed in some way for their abuse. Secondary victimization is something the primary author witnessed frequently in her role as a victim advocate, so this knowledge was incorporated into the research design. Focusing on the abuser’s substance use is also one of the reasons shelter directors felt secure in their decision to grant the primary author access to shelter residents; this provided shelter directors some legitimation that the primary author was sensitive to the needs of IPV survivors.

The use of battered women's shelters to recruit participants had several methodological and ethical advantages, all of which were especially important to incorporate based on the primary author's training as a victim advocate. First, interviewing participants in a shelter as opposed to the participants' homes, police stations, or over the phone reduced the likelihood that victims could be identified by others, particularly by their abusers (see Btoush & Campbell, 2009). Protecting the participants' identities was not only ethically important from a research standpoint but also because identity protection is a critical piece in safety planning for IPV victims. Second, participants would feel more at ease in a safe, non-disclosed setting, which would therefore increase comfort levels required for the disclosure of sensitive information. Interviewing women in shelters was also advantageous because trained crisis intervention specialists and counselors were readily available in the event participants became psychologically distressed during the interview, which did not occur.

We believe that our data collection methodology was enhanced because the primary author—a female with training and experience as a victim advocate—conducted all of the interviews with sensitivity and knowledge regarding the dynamics of abuse (Btoush & Campbell, 2009). The primary author's training as an advocate inevitably influenced the efforts she made to make interviewees feel comfortable and safe. However, it is important to note that although the primary author's role as an advocate did shape the methodological approach in the key ways identified above, the primary author's dual roles (advocate and researcher) never crossed during the research project. The primary author never worked with any of the research participants in her role as an advocate and did not provide any crisis intervention. The primary author's role of researcher was maintained throughout all interviews, and this was how she was introduced to interviewees.

Although the primary researcher's identity as an advocate was never revealed to participants, it may be the case that other, more apparent, aspects of the primary author's positionality or social location did affect the data collection. The primary author's social location may have made her seem more like an "insider" to participants in some ways, yet more of an "outsider" to participants in other ways (Adler & Adler, 1987; Lofland & Lofland, 1995; McCorkel & Myers, 2003; Naples, 2003). It is possible, for instance, that being female and therefore more closely positioned to the participants than a male researcher made it easier for participants to discuss their experiences as female survivors of violence. In this case, the respondents may have perceived the female researcher as more of an "insider" than they would have a male researcher. On the other hand, as most of the respondents in the sample never attended college, it is possible that the researcher's status as a post-college graduate may have made respondents with less education perceive the researcher as more of an "outsider." Most of the sample also involved women of color, so the researcher, being White, could have seemed more like an "outsider" in this regard to a significant portion of the sample. These considerations of researcher positionality are important in the research process, particularly as they relate to power and privilege in the field (Gallagher, 2004; McCorkel & Myers, 2003; Naples, 2003).

Interviews and Survey Instrument

Face-to-face interviews with consenting participants lasted an average of 15 to 30 min. Questions were prompted with a 26-item quantitative survey developed by the first author in consulting with the literature. The interview gathered information about (a) common obstacles to leaving violent relationships, (b) the history of the participant's relationship with the offender, (c) the participant's history of abuse by the offender, (d) the nature of the presenting incident, (e) the presence of children in the home, (f) substance use by the offender during the most recent violent incident, (g) whether or not the crime was reported to law enforcement, (h) what participants wanted law enforcement officers to do when they arrived, (i) what law enforcement officers actually did when they arrived, (j) the presence of a victim advocate at the scene, (k) the participant's evaluation of the services rendered by law enforcement at the scene, and (l) participant support level for mandatory arrest policies.

Setting and Participants

In terms of shelter demographics, the smallest shelter had 5 beds and the largest shelter had 40 beds. Combined, the five shelters admitted a mean of 14 new clients each month during the data collection period. All shelters provided 24-hr emergency housing services to female clients and their dependent children. Although these shelters were able to provide emergency shelter for male victims of IPV, at the time such services were limited to non-shelter housing such as hotels. In addition to emergency housing services, all five shelters also provided clients with access to crisis intervention, counseling, legal advocacy, job assistance, transportation, and general health services. The shelter locations were publically undisclosed and hidden within the community; their whereabouts were only disclosed to key staff members and police departments. Respondents were referred to the shelters by various sources, including community crisis centers, hospitals, law enforcement agencies, friends, and family members. Self-referrals were also utilized. Although these shelters generally had a solid paid staff foundation, the shelters relied heavily upon volunteers to operate.

Sample demographics of our respondents can be found in Table 1. Most respondents were 26 to 35 years of age (34%). The mean education level was a high school diploma or a general education diploma (GED). In addition, most respondents were women of color (56%), consisting largely of African Americans (86%; $n = 49$). The majority of abusers that respondents described were 46 years of age or older (33%). Roughly 52% of participants said that they had children living in their home at the time of the most recent violent incident, and 67% admitted that their abuser was drinking or using drugs during the most recent violent incident. The majority of respondents reported that the most recent violent incident was reported to law enforcement (64%). Finally, only 14% of respondents believed that mandatory arrest policies are rarely or never good policies. In fact, the majority of the sample generally rated mandatory arrest policies positively (61.4% reported that "mandatory arrest policies are a good thing *on some occasions*" or "mandatory arrest policies are *always* a good thing").

Table 1. Percentage and Frequency Distribution of Sample Demographics ($N = 101$).

Characteristic variables	<i>n</i>	%
Victim education		
Less than high school	23	22.8
High school graduate/GED	46	45.5
Some college or beyond	32	31.7
Victim age (years)		
18-25	17	16.8
26-35	34	33.7
36-45	25	24.8
46+	25	24.8
Victim race		
Race/ethnic minority	57	56.4
White (non-Hispanic)	44	43.6
Victim support for mandatory arrest		
Rarely/never a good thing	14	13.9
Not sure	25	24.8
A good thing on some occasions	35	34.7
Always a good thing	27	26.7
Presence of children		
Yes	52	51.5
No	49	48.5
Abuser substance use		
Yes	68	67.3
No	33	32.7
Law enforcement notification		
Yes	65	64.4
No	36	35.6

Variables

Dependent variable. This study explores three factors that may be related to reporting disparities in IPV cases: (a) victim support levels for mandatory arrest policies, (b) the presence of children in the home, and (c) substance use by the offender. The research question is whether these factors statistically predict the reporting of the most recent violent incident suffered by the victim. Reporting of IPV was coded “1” if the abuse was reported to law enforcement and “0” if the abuse was not reported to law enforcement.

This outcome variable is important because the ability of victims to obtain social service resources, legal aid, and criminal justice intervention rests largely on whether or not the abuse is reported to law enforcement officers who represent “gatekeepers” of the criminal justice system. Previous research has heavily examined law enforcement responses to IPV, but research identifying specific factors associated with whether or not IPV is reported to law enforcement is less common.

Independent (predictor) variables

Victim support for mandatory arrest. Victim support for mandatory arrest was measured with a standard Likert-type scale and was specifically designed to assess respondent attitudes toward the efficacy of mandatory arrest as a policy for members of a group directly affected by the policy. Respondents were asked: "What is your opinion about mandatory arrest policies (i.e., policies that say that no matter what, the police must arrest the primary aggressor at the scene when they are called)?" We operationalized mandatory arrest to be a distillation of the spirit of the law, which has been written differently across jurisdictions. Although all of the respondents in this study lived with the same statewide policy regarding mandatory arrest, we operationalized mandatory arrest in the question, so that all respondents were given the same explanation of mandatory arrest, regardless of their personal understanding of the policy. Support was coded "1" if mandatory arrest was perceived as "rarely or never a good thing," "2" if mandatory arrest was perceived neutrally, "3" if mandatory arrest was perceived as "a good thing on some occasions," and "4" if mandatory arrest was perceived as "always a good thing."

Victim support for mandatory arrest is an important predictor variable because mandatory arrest has been found to foster uncooperative or hostile relationships between law enforcement officers and victims (Dugan, 2003). This has been largely due to victim fears of being wrongfully identified as abusers, considered to be lying to law enforcement (Wolf et al., 2003), or because of perceived pressures from the legal system to leave their relationships and testify against their abusers (Fleury-Steiner et al., 2006). At the time the data were gathered, the state in which this study was conducted had a pseudo-mandatory arrest policy in which arrest was the "preferred" response in the absence of probable cause, and the mandatory response when the burden of proof for probable cause was met. The combination of the existence of this policy in the state where the research was conducted and the potential of the policy to create negative evaluations of law enforcement officers made victim perceptions about mandatory arrest policies an important predictor variable in our analysis.

Presence of children. The presence of children was measured by asking respondents whether or not children were living at home during the most recent violent incident. Responses were coded "0" for *no* and "1" for *yes*. Presence of children in the home was an important predictor variable because we anticipated that mothers might feel pressure to report their abuse compared with non-mothers out of fear for their children's safety. We acknowledge that such decisions would be self-sacrificing, as mothers who report violence to the police face the risk of blame for "exposing their children to a violent environment." Regardless, the presence of children theoretically increases the risks of remaining silent about abuse, which has the potential to affect decisions to report the abuse to law enforcement.

Abuser substance use. Substance use by the abuser was measured by asking respondents whether or not their abusers were drinking or using drugs at the time of the

most recent violent incident. Responses were coded “0” for no use at the time of the incident and “1” for use at the time of IPV perpetration. Substance use by the offender during the most recent violent incident was a key predictor variable for our analysis for two major reasons. First, the literature has consistently documented the link between substance use and IPV (Catalano, 2007; Cattaneo & Goodman, 2003; Jasinski & Mustaine, 2001; Martin et al., 2010; Peralta et al., 2010). In addition, research has demonstrated that IPV incidents that involve offender substance use are more likely to be physically more severe in nature (Martin et al., 2010; Testa et al., 2003). Accordingly, cases of IPV that involve substance use by the abuser may be more likely to be reported to law enforcement because such cases may be perceived as more urgent due to the heightened risk for sustaining severe injuries and because of an increased likelihood that neighbors will hear or witness the violence.

Control variables. Control variables were selected based on their relevance to our research question. In consultation with the literature, we incorporated victims’ educational background, age, and race as controls into our analysis.

Victim education. Education was selected as a control variable because the literature has documented with some consistency that women who are better able to provide for themselves and maintain a financially independent status are more likely to be educated, have access to resources, and leave their abusers (Anderson & Saunders, 2003; Jinseok & Gray, 2008). Women with higher socio-economic status (SES), although more likely to utilize certain resources and leave abusive relationships, may be less likely to utilize police resources specifically. Therefore, wealthier or more privileged women, because of access to alternative options for coping with abusive intimate situations, avoid formal involvement from the criminal justice system and the stigma that can accompany criminal justice system involvement (Baumer, 2002). Unlike many studies that measure income, however, we decided that education level would better reflect a woman’s ability to find and maintain financially adequate sources of employment. Measuring the highest education level achieved by our participants had the benefit of being a measure unique to each woman in our study; using income instead of education as a control may have conflated a woman’s financial status with her abuser’s financial status. Education was measured on a 1 to 3 scale, with “1” being less than a high school education (i.e., grade school or some high school), “2” being high school graduate or having earned a GED, and “3” referring to having some college or beyond.

Victim age. Research demonstrates that as female victims of IPV age, they are more likely to contact law enforcement, but this likelihood also levels off as women enter older ages (Akers & Kaukinen, 2009). This makes age a relevant control variable, as younger women and older women may be especially resistant to police involvement, whereas middle-aged women appear to be least resistant to law enforcement intervention. Age was measured on a scale of 1 to 4, with “1” being 18 to 25 years of age at the time of the interview and “4” being 46 years of age or older.

Victim race. The literature demonstrates distinct barriers faced by women of color when attempting to obtain public assistance generally and when attempting to obtain assistance from law enforcement specifically. Distrust of service providers and histories of negative treatment by police, lack of services designed to meet the unique needs of these women, and the intersectionality of race and class, in which being a woman of color can be exacerbated by being poor, are all cited reasons for why victim assistance utilization can be lower among women of color (Barnett, 2001; Christi-McMullin, 2005; Kasturirangan, Krishnan, & Riger, 2004). By contrast, White victims of IPV have been found to be more likely to report their abuse to police and engage in other help-seeking behaviors (Kaukinen, 2004). Due to sample size limitations, several race categories were combined to create a dichotomous dummy variable. African American, Hispanic, Asian, and “some other race” were combined and coded “0” for racial/ethnic minority. White/non-Hispanic respondents were coded “1.”

Analytic Procedure

We used a two-step logistic regression procedure to test our hypotheses: As victim support level for mandatory arrest increases, reporting levels of IPV to law enforcement will also increase (H1); when children are living in the home, acts of IPV will be more likely to be reported to law enforcement (H2); when drug and/or alcohol use by the abuser is present at the most recent violent episode, acts of IPV will be more likely to be reported to law enforcement (H3).

In Step 1, we entered control variables into Model 1. In Step 2, we entered control variables and our three hypothesized predictor variables: *victim support for mandatory arrest*, *presence of children*, and *substance use* into Model 2. This second step tested Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3. We expected that victim support for mandatory arrest would increase the likelihood of reporting abuse to the police, as would the presence of children and substance use by the offender during the most recent violent incident. These three predictor variables should add significantly to the variance explained (change in R^2). The hypothesized model is as follows:

$$\text{Ln} \left[\frac{p}{1-p} \right] = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{educ}_i + \beta_2 \text{age}_i + \beta_3 \text{race}_i + \beta_4 \text{manarrest}_i + \beta_4 \text{child}_i + \beta_4 \text{subuse}_i + \varepsilon.$$

After reviewing the correlation matrix (see Table 2), it is clear that multi-collinearity is not a problem for any of the variables used in the regression analysis, as all correlations are less than .80 and are therefore low to moderate. Normality assumptions were also met: All skewness and kurtosis values were less than 2.0 and 7.0, respectively. There were also no problems with outliers or assumptions regarding homoscedasticity.

Results

Descriptive results indicate that for 91% of the women sampled, the most recent violent incident was not an isolated case of abuse ($n = 92$). In fact, 59% of the women

Table 2. Correlation Matrix (*N* = 101).

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Victim age					
2. Victim education	.232*				
3. Victim race	.130	.057			
4. Victim mandatory arrest perception	.095	.139	.066		
5. Children living at home	-.456**	-.098	-.026	.027	
6. Abuser substance use	.141	-.117	.016	.137	.042

p* = .05. *p* = .001.

sampled reported being abused a total of seven times or more by their abuser in the past (*n* = 60). Only 12% of the women sampled reported being abused one to two times by their abuser (*n* = 12). These results demonstrate the pattern of abuse that tends to characterize IPV and the women who seek shelter. Many of the women sampled also reported being in long-term relationships with their abusers, which is another indication of the chronic nature of IPV. Although 28% of the women sampled reported being in the relationship for less than 1 year (*n* = 28), 24% of women sampled reported being in the relationship for 8 years or more (*n* = 24). Thirty-one percent of women sampled reported relationship lengths of 1 to 3 years (*n* = 31) and 18% reported relationship lengths of 4 to 7 years (*n* = 18).

Results also demonstrate the multi-faceted nature of IPV: Abuse tends to include physical, sexual, and verbal abuse. Forty-seven percent of the women sampled reported the most recent violent incident involved at least two out of the three aforementioned types of abuse (*n* = 47) and 24% of those sampled reported all three forms of abuse (*n* = 24).

Regression results are reported in Table 3. The first step includes control variables; the second step adds our hypothesized predictor variables (victim support for mandatory arrest, presence of children, and offender substance use). The regression analysis indicates support for Hypotheses 1 and 3, but not for Hypothesis 2. In particular, victim support for mandatory arrest is significantly and positively associated with the likelihood of reporting abuse ($\beta = .526$; $p < .05$; OR = 1.692). The odds ratio shows that for every 1-unit increase in victim support for mandatory arrest, the odds of having the abuse reported to law enforcement increase by 69%.

This indicates that instances of IPV are significantly more likely to be reported to law enforcement when victims perceive mandatory arrest policies favorably. There was no significant relationship found between children being present in the home and police notification. Thus, the presence of children in the home is not related to police notification of abuse in this study.

Substance use is also significantly and positively associated with the likelihood of reporting abuse ($\beta = .974$; $p < .05$; OR = 2.648). The odds ratio shows that when the perpetrator uses either drugs or alcohol at the time of the abuse, the odds of the abuse being reported to law enforcement increase by 65%. This indicates that instances of

Table 3. Reporting IPV to Police Regressed on Mandatory Arrest Support, Presence of Children, and Abuser Substance Use.

	Model 1 (n = 101)		Model 2 (n = 101)	
	b	OR	b	OR
Control variables				
Victim education (1 = less than high school; 3 = some college or beyond)	0.304	1.356	0.339	1.404
Victim age (1 = 18-25; 4 = 46+)	-0.332	0.717	-0.427	0.652
Victim race (0 = race/ethnic minority; 1 = White non-Hispanic)	-0.354	0.702	-0.493	0.611
Independent variables				
Victim support for mandatory arrest (1 = rarely/never a good thing; 4 = always a good thing)			0.526	1.692*
Presence of children (0 = no; 1 = yes)			0.259	1.296
Abuser substance use (at the time of abuse, 0 = no; 1 = yes)			0.974	2.648*
Intercept	0.989		-0.415	
Model chi-square	3.865		15.092*	
-2 Log Likelihood	127.706		116.478	
Nagelkerke R ²	.052		.191	

Note. Reference group: non-reporters of abuse. IPV = intimate partner violence.

* $p < .05$.

IPV are significantly more likely to be reported to law enforcement when the abuse involves drug or alcohol use by the abuser.

Discussion

We hypothesized that having a favorable impression of mandatory arrest policies for IPV would be related to law enforcement contact for IPV-related assistance. Our second hypothesis was having children present in the home would increase the probability of contacting police. Our final hypothesis was that if the abuser was under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol, the police would be more likely to be called compared with when abusers were not under the influence. We found support for the first and third hypotheses.

Women who supported mandatory arrest were more likely to call the police during the latest abusive episode compared with women who did not hold positive views about mandatory arrest. Therefore, women who do not espouse support for mandatory arrest may be less willing to call the police. Calls to police in jurisdictions where such

policies exist may in fact suppress the likelihood of women contacting police for assistance when violent exchanges with intimate partners occur. Women who are skeptical of mandatory arrest policies may be so because involving the criminal justice system in and of itself can have a limited value. Research has shown, for instance, that various forms of abuse, including “paper abuse,” can continue or even become exacerbated long after involving the criminal justice system or leaving a violent partner (see Miller & Smolter, 2011). Women who become formally involved in the criminal justice system may also risk losing their public housing benefits (see Renzetti, 2001). Thus, the policy may be having an opposite effect from the intended purpose of mandatory arrest, which was to reduce the incidence of IPV. Instead, the policy may be keeping the violence private and hidden, at least for some women. The decision to not reach out for help may be placing some women at a greater risk for further and perhaps more severe violence.

Next, we believed that having children in the home would be a compelling reason for women to contact the police due to IPV. We did not find support for this relationship. This non-significant finding may be due to the mean age of children living at home. Unfortunately, we did not collect data on children’s age. We can speculate that if most children at home were in fact adolescents, perhaps the likelihood of calling the police would be reduced because adolescents are less vulnerable compared with infants and toddlers. Also of note is children’s sex. We do not know if most children were female or male, but sex of the children may have had a bearing on whether to call the police or not. Perhaps women are more likely to call the police if their child is female due to gender socialization.

Another possible explanation for our results is that women with children are conflicted about involving police. Rhodes, Cerulli, Dichter, Kothari, and Barg (2010), for example, in their focus group of IPV victims found that women desired to protect their children from the effects of IPV and therefore had a compelling reason to involve the criminal justice system. Yet, these women were hesitant to involve the criminal justice system because of concerns that doing so would damage the family unit, create family instability, and undermine available resources needed for raising the children. In general, our results concerning children in the home may not be significant because victims perform multi-faceted cost-benefit analyses when deciding whether to involve the criminal justice system, and the costs and benefits of involving law enforcement are not always straightforward.

In regard to our third and final hypothesis, we found support for an increase in the frequency of calling the police when the latest episode of abuse involved substance use on the part of the perpetrator. This finding adds further support to the role and nature of substance use and abuse in IPV. Given the literature, perhaps the risk of escalating violence when under the influence compels women to call the police due to their prior experience with substance use and violence and/or fear stemming from contact with intoxicated partners.

Our study is not without limitations. First, we relied on convenience sampling techniques and our data are cross-sectional. The nature of our sample thus poses significant limitations to the generalizability of our study as well as our ability to make

claims of a causal relationship between perceptions of mandatory arrest and decisions to call the police. We thus took great care to avoid claiming causal relationships in the interpretation of our results. This article cannot conclude, for example, that perceptions of mandatory arrest influence the decision to call police because there is no way of knowing when that perception was formed. Our survey provided a definition of mandatory arrest at the time of data collection, but it remains unknown whether these women had that understanding during the actual violent incident. It could be that women who called the police would be more likely to support mandatory arrest after the fact as a result of their experience with police in their own case. Only a longitudinal design would be able to provide this type of definitive conclusion.

Designed as a preliminary study, our sample size is also small and our survey instrument is limited. The data derived from our survey instrument are limited in that we only have data on victims of abuse. The perpetrators of abuse were not interviewed, which restricts our data to victim perceptions. Our survey instrument is also limited because it would have been useful to inquire about the type of substance use the perpetrators were using at the time of the latest abusive episode. It is important to differentiate between alcohol use and other forms of substance use. Data on children's age and sex would have also been quite helpful in disentangling the relationship between family dynamics and decisions to call law enforcement. Moreover, although the literature clearly shows that IPV is a significantly under-reported and "hidden" crime (see Barrett & St. Pierre, 2011; Catalano, 2007; Meyer, 2010; Truman, 2011), many of these women could have had a prior encounter with police, particularly those who suffered from more severe acts of IPV (Bonomi, Holt, Martin, & Thompson, 2006). Thus, it is possible that this may have colored survivors' perceptions of mandatory arrest and likelihood of reporting to police subsequent violent incidents. Accordingly, it would have been useful to have prior encounters with law enforcement as a control variable. Controlling for prior encounters with police would have strengthened our study because we would have been able to assess whether prior encounters with law enforcement were related to survivors' perceptions of mandatory arrest as well as their likelihood of reporting to police subsequently, both of which are important gaps in the literature. Unfortunately, we did not include prior encounters with police as a measure in our original survey instrument, so we could not include this in our analysis.

Because of the limitations in our study, future research on this topic should expand survey measures to include the type of substance use the perpetrator was engaged in at the time of the abuse, the age and sex of children living in the abusive home, and prior encounters victims of IPV have had with law enforcement. There are important questions future researchers need to address with sensitivity and rigor. Are victims still more likely to report their abuse to law enforcement regardless of whether the perpetrator is using drugs or alcohol, or is there a difference? What of perpetrator misuse prescription drugs? Do the age and sex of dependent children help to explain why our study found that victims are not more likely to report their abuse to police when children are living at home? Do prior encounters with law enforcement influence victim

perceptions of mandatory arrest or affect subsequent choices to report to law enforcement in the future?

Aside from these limitations, our study has several methodological strengths. First, we interviewed women who were likely experiencing very serious forms of IPV such that they sought out shelter. This method provides data specific to victims of IPV who are often members of hidden populations (Adams & Campbell, 2012; Benoit, Jansson, Millar, & Phillips, 2005; Peralta & Ross, 2009). Because IPV victims constitute a hidden group or special population, it is often difficult to gain access to this population. This makes the data reported in our study especially valuable. The majority of our respondents (56%) were also women of color, which sheds light on a population that is commonly under-explored (see Btoush & Campbell, 2009), and one that is skeptical about police involvement. Next, the vast majority of participants who were eligible participated in the study, which resulted in a high response rate (93%).

Another strength of this study is that the primary author had extensive training in victim advocacy and had a solid knowledge base regarding how to effectively conduct interviews with study participants while being sensitive to the unique needs of battered women (see Btoush & Campbell, 2009). Finally, this study had the advantage of interviewing women soon after they left their abusers (women were interviewed within 7 days of being admitted to the shelter, but on average within 3.5 days). This methodological approach adds another level of rigor to our study, in that we decreased the likelihood of respondent recall bias, where respondents may not accurately report incidents because of the length of time between incident and interview.

Conclusion

IPV continues to exact a tremendous toll on victims, their families, and communities. The implementation of efficacious prevention policy as part of an effort to address patriarchal social structure is critically important to curbing and ultimately eliminating IPV in society. Consistent with other work that has examined the unintended consequences of policies on victims of IPV (see Renzetti, 2001), our study suggests that criminal justice efforts, as prevention measures, should be considered with caution, especially in terms of the potential for unintended consequences.

Our study provides support for the notion that women make informed and complex decisions about whether to involve law enforcement in their abuse. It is possible that IPV victims will decide to contact law enforcement officers when the benefits of reporting (e.g., fair treatment, favorable outcome, stopping the abuse, assistance for children) are high, and the costs of reporting (e.g., unfair treatment, being wrongfully arrested, not being believed, losing custody of children) are low (see Clarke & Cornish, 2001). We caution that mandatory arrest policies may be increasing perceptions among women that the costs of reporting are too high for the consideration of involving law enforcement.

We would also suggest that police involvement not be the only prevention option. Prevention approaches may be most effective when there is cross-institutional involvement. Police working with medical professionals, and representatives from critically

important institutions such as education, law, housing, health and human services, advocacy groups, media, employers, and the military would create an encompassing context in which victims of abuse can feel safe in speaking out. A multi-disciplinary approach would also create a context where violence against women is never condoned, where violence against women constitutes not only an illegal act but also a moral failing and social injustice. Future research should examine cross-institutional prevention efforts from a bystander approach (Moynihan & Banyard, 2008). How might such efforts address family dynamics, emotionally supportive environments, healing processes, trust creation, and respect for victims?

Future research might also explore our research questions among women who have not been admitted to domestic violence shelters to see if our results carry over to those who do not seek shelter. Abuse severity and resource availability may be important factors in decisions to involve law enforcement. It is also important for future researchers to more fully explore if women with children are less likely to report their abuse to law enforcement and why. Future research also needs to transcend the weaknesses of our study by analyzing how victim decisions to report may vary based on what type of substance the perpetrator was using at the time of the abuse as well as exploring how prior encounters with law enforcement by victims may color victim perceptions of mandatory arrest and subsequent decisions to report abuse to law enforcement. Of course, the literature would also benefit from research designs that interview women at multiple points in time. This would strengthen researchers' abilities to tease out how women are informed about, how women understand, and how women's preferences for mandatory arrest policies may shift over time.

In sum, the utility of mandatory arrest for the long-term assistance of victims of IPV must be questioned. Efficacious prevention efforts and the protection of IPV victims, which were the initial bases for implementing mandatory arrest policies, must first be established using data-driven theory, reliable and valid data, and strong research designs (see Feder et al., 2011, for an excellent discussion of how to incorporate sound methodology into researching IPV policies) to avoid unintended consequences that can be more harmful than beneficial to victims of IPV in the long term.

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