



Examining Domestic Violence Response Teams (DVRTs) within the State of New Jersey

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Final Report
Examining Domestic Violence Response Teams (DVRTs) within the State of New Jersey

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Background

Coordinated community response (CCR) is a method of multi-agency response to domestic violence (DV) incidences. CCRs can include intervention at the primary, secondary, or tertiary levels and are based on the belief that properly addressing DV requires a response that takes into account the multifaceted and complex dynamics that underlie DV situations. Victims and perpetrators of DV tend to be involved in multiple community systems including the civil and criminal justice systems, social services, hospitals, and drug and alcohol services (Klevens, Baker, Shelly, & Ingram, 2008). While CCR models vary with regard to which interagency partnerships are incorporated, some communities have chosen to include a crisis intervention team that pairs law enforcement with an advocate during police responses to DV situations. In New Jersey, collaboration between law enforcement agencies and DV organizations is required by N.J.S.A.2C:25-20b(3) which states, “Law enforcement agencies shall: (1) establish domestic crisis teams or participate in established domestic crisis teams, and (2) shall train individual officers in methods of dealing with domestic violence and neglect and abuse of the elderly and disabled. The teams may include social workers, clergy or others persons trained in counseling, crisis intervention or in the treatment of domestic violence and neglect and abuse of the elderly and disabled victims.” This collaboration is often referred to as a Domestic Violence Response Team (DVRT) or Crisis Response Team. For the purpose of this report, the term DVRT will be utilized.

In situations where no CCRs exist, victims of DV are left to navigate the different systems individually, which involves considerable patience and a knowledge of community resources that not all victims may possess (Greeson & Campbell, 2013). Most CCRs emerged

recently, forming as a direct result of funding from the 1994 Violence Against Women Act (Uekert, 2003) and may include law enforcement, prosecution, family courts, mental health professionals, victim advocates, and community representatives. CCRs, like the DVRT, are often the result of the efforts of one municipality to bring together relevant organizations with the goal of closing gaps in service for DV victims and/or perpetrators (Uchida, Putnam, Mastrofski & Soloman, 2001).

The DVRT emphasizes a quick response to a crisis situation based on the framework of crisis theory which proposes that individuals are most receptive to intervention at moments of extreme stress (Davis, Weisburd, & Taylor, 2008). The response aims to add an intervention component to the law enforcement response to DV, which is often criticized for being reactive rather than proactive (Whetstone, 2001). An implicit goal for CCRs like DVRTs is the creation of positive interagency relationships in order to facilitate better understanding of DV in the context of the community. Ideally, the advocate and law enforcement officer will serve to “round out” the other’s experience and philosophy with DV (Uchida et al., 2001; Whetstone, 2001).

The success rate of DVRTs and similar interventions is ambiguous, due to both the lack of consensus about how success should be measured and the lack of standard operating procedures for programs examined in the research. Uncertainty around how to best measure program success is common throughout the literature and reflects the sometimes divergent goals of advocates and law enforcement. Advocates’ often prioritize “victim empowerment” as a program goal, which is a difficult outcome to track (McDermott & Garofalo, 2004). There is no single quantifiable measure of empowerment. Further, what a survivor views as an empowering act may vary by individual and situation: for one victim, empowerment could mean creating a

safety plan while another victim's empowerment may consist of filing a temporary restraining order. In comparison, law enforcement perspectives often favor increased arrest, prosecution, and conviction rates as an indicator of success.

In New Jersey, the DVRT program has three primary goals: "Volunteers will provide victims of [DV] with immediate support at the moment of crisis and provide all available information regarding the law, safety options and available resources to: a) decrease the emotional trauma experienced by victims, b) increase a victim's ability to make an educated decision about their options, and c) increase the victim's access to community resources" (New Jersey Coalition Against Battered Women, 2013). The purpose of this study was to examine the current state of the DVRT program within New Jersey with a focus on: 1) the organizational structure of the DVRT; 2) recruitment and training requirements for volunteers; 3) the nature of the collaborative relationship among the DV organizations and police departments involved in the implementation of the DVRT; and 4) how to measure the success of the DVRT program.

Methods

Sample

Participants were invited by email to participate in the study, which involved in-person one-on-one semi-structured interviews. The New Jersey Coalition to End Domestic Violence, an organization with a membership that includes 30 domestic violence programs across New Jersey, provided contact information for DVRT Coordinators across the State. In cases where contact information was not up-to-date, researchers checked organization websites and reached out to organization staff by phone or email. Ultimately, contact information for 18 coordinators was located and all of these coordinators were invited to participate in the research study. Four

coordinators did not respond to contact attempts or were otherwise not able to meet with the research team. In addition to the county-level coordinators, one municipality-level coordinator was also identified and interviewed.

Multiple methods were utilized to invite Domestic Violence Liaison Police Officers (DVLOs) to participate. DVLOs are police officers designated by departmental leaders to collaborate with the DVRT Coordinators around the implementation of the DVRT. DVRT Coordinators were also given the opportunity to recommend DVLOs in their county to be interviewed. Additionally, the research team created a comprehensive list of all municipalities in the State. A website search was conducted in order to find contact information for DVLOs or other personnel who would be able to provide information on DVLOs. In some cases, the research team reached out to police departments through phone calls or through website contact forms in order to find this information. Ultimately, 50 rural, urban, and suburban police departments were invited to participate in the project, 41 of which did not respond or were otherwise unable to participate in the research due to departmental regulations.

Interviews were conducted between February and August 2018 and were approximately 30 minutes in length. A total of 24 participants (15 domestic violence response team coordinators and 9 law enforcement officers) were interviewed. Overall, the majority of the sample (71%) was over the age of 41 and identified as White (79%) and female (75%). More than half of participants (62%) had earned a bachelor's degree or higher. The officers interviewed held the ranks of lieutenant (n=6), detective (n=2), and patrol officer (n=1).

Data Collection

The research team created a semi-structured interview guide based on prior literature around CCRs and guided by the research questions. Semi-structured interviews were utilized, as this method allows questions to be guided by theory, but is also flexible enough to allow participants to share their lived experiences on the subject matter (Galletta, 2013). Interviews were audio recorded when participants consented. In instances where participants did not consent to be audio recorded, comprehensive notes were taken. The audio recordings of the interviews were professionally transcribed; prior to analysis a member of the research team compared the transcription to the audio recording to ensure accuracy.

Data Analysis

A content analysis of the data was then conducted by the research team using the data analysis program ATLAS.ti. Content analysis is an analytic method in which the researcher looks for patterns within the data without imposing preconceived notions about what these patterns may be (Patton, 2015). The interviews were reviewed and initial concepts were coded by two members of the research team. These concept codes were then collapsed into sub-themes, and eventually themes. Some of the quotes presented below were edited for clarity.

Findings

Key findings from the interviews with the DVRT Coordinators and DVLOs centered around four primary thematic areas: 1) DVRT functioning, 2) volunteer management, 3) motivation for implementation, and 4) implementation challenges. Each of these thematic areas will be discussed in turn.

DVRT Functioning

One of the primary goals of the key stakeholder interviews was to better understand how the DVRT program functions. Interview questions were designed to collect information on two aspects of the DVRT procedures: a) activation of the DVRT, and b) the nature of the intervention between the volunteer and the DV victim.

Activation. In New Jersey, the DVRT operates in each county as part of the county DV organization or the county's dual domestic violence/sexual assault agency, with the exception of one county where the DVRT operates under the county's Department of Human Services. Each county employs a part-time or a full-time DVRT Coordinator; however, in some counties this position is combined with other roles within the organization. Some police departments also employ their own DVRT Coordinator. The DVRT Coordinator is tasked with managing the team's volunteer base, as well as collaborating with police departments and other community stakeholders (i.e. hospitals, prosecutor's office) in order to promote effective implementation of the DVRT program.

DVRT Coordinators utilize two primary methods for scheduling volunteers: rolling call out and shift system. Some DVRT Coordinators utilize a rolling call out, in which dispatchers are provided with a list of available volunteers in their area. The dispatchers will contact volunteers based on the order of the list working from the top of the list to the bottom. One key stakeholder described, *"Our hotline actually calls out our advocates. It's a rolling callout, so there's not an advocate that's specifically on call each night. We found that that would be easier for people to sign up for."* Others utilize a shift system in which volunteers sign up for shifts at

the beginning of the month and are expected to respond to any activations that occur during their shifts.

DVRT volunteers are activated by the police when a DV case meets the activation criteria: 1) The DV victim must be present at the police department. Volunteers are not called to respond to the scene; 2) The victim is not under the influence of drugs or alcohol; 3) The police have clearly identified the primary aggressor and it is not the victim (DVRTs are not activated following dual arrests); 4) There has been no sexual assault, as sexual assault incidences require activation of the Sexual Assault Response Team. A few DVRT Coordinators indicated that their teams will respond to local hospitals.

The DVRT is activated by the police officer investigating the DV incident. The volunteer is notified and asked to respond either directly by the 911 dispatcher or through the DV organization's hotline. The timing of the activation depends on several factors, including the agreement between the police department and DV organization, the Standard Operating Procedures of the police department, and the individual police officer making the activation. Some police departments mandate DVRT activation as soon as the officer knows the victim will be going to the police department (for example, at the scene, prior to bringing the victim to the station), as to ensure that the victim meets with the DVRT volunteer in a timely manner. Other police departments do not specify when the officer is required to activate. Further, some police officers will ask their victims if they want to activate DVRT, while other officers will activate the DVRT without consulting with the victim first, typically due to mandated activation policies.

In some instances, a volunteer may not be available to respond following a DVRT activation. Some DVRT Coordinators will personally respond to calls during office hours or after

hours if no volunteer is available. Alternatively, if no one is available to respond to the police department, the victim may be provided with the DV organization's hotline information for intervention by phone.

Nature of DVRT intervention. The DVRT intervention typically takes place in a separate room that is not accessible to the public. While some departments are able to provide a specific area for the DVRT intervention to take place, others utilize an available meeting room, office, or interrogation room. Due to space constraints, some police departments do not have a private room available for this purpose. During the intervention, volunteers usually provide the victim with the opportunity to tell their story, provide resources to the victim, and safety plan. Volunteers will also educate victims on the criminal justice system and explain the process for requesting a restraining order. Volunteers are expected to provide victims information around a range of resources and empower victims to make informed decisions about how they wish to move forward. Volunteers only provide victims with their first names and follow-up after the intervention has concluded is directed to the DV organization, rather than the volunteer.

Some key stakeholders noted that the DVRT also has systems in place for facilitating the intervention when DV victims are accompanied by their children in the police department. This includes finding ways to keep children occupied while the volunteer meets with the DV victim, which some police officers assist with. For example, with parents' permission, officers will sometimes let children watch television in the squad room, provide a tour of the headquarters, or buy a snack from a vending machine. As one key stakeholder shared:

If, depending on how old the kid is, if mom or dad wants the kid to stay with them, obviously... We have that conversation and sometimes if the kid's... disrupting their conversation, then we'll grab a crayon and coloring book and we'll take a kid in the different, in another room and if we gotta occupy them, we gotta occupy them.

Volunteer Management

The DVRT program is almost entirely dependent on volunteers to implement the intervention. As such, the recruitment and retention of volunteers is important to its successful functioning. Interview questions were designed to collect information on three aspects of the DVRT procedures related to the utilization of volunteers: a) recruitment and retention, b) training, and c) management and supervision.

Recruitment and retention. DV organizations use a range of methods to facilitate volunteer recruitment. Some agencies recruit actively using social media, flyers, and volunteer websites, while others depend on word-of-mouth or the name recognition of DV organization and therefore do not have to expend as much energy in active recruitment. Further, in some communities the police departments also assist with volunteer recruitment by posting information on their websites and social media pages.

The application and interview process for volunteers appears fairly uniform across the State. Volunteers are required to undergo an interview and a criminal background check in order to be eligible to participate in the DVRT training. The police department's level of involvement in the volunteer recruitment process varies by department. Some key stakeholders noted that volunteer interviews are conducted in the presence of both the DVRT Coordinator and the DVLO to ensure that both organizations have an equal say in who volunteers. Some DVRT Coordinators noted that exclusion criteria for volunteers include a history of perpetrating abuse; sometimes applicants with a recent history of victimization may be excluded as well. DVRT Coordinators explained that they consider the 40-hour training to be an extension of the application process, as it provides the DVRT Coordinator to see how volunteers respond to DV issues and interact with others.

Volunteer retention proves challenging for most agencies. DVRT Coordinators shared that they have to balance the number of volunteers utilized. If too few volunteers are enlisted, the DV organization may not have the capacity to respond to DVRT activations or the volunteers that are frequently responding may begin to burn out. However, if the number of volunteers exceeds the number of DVRT call-outs received by the DV organization, volunteers may begin to lose interest. To navigate these challenges, some DVRT Coordinators developed strategies for volunteer retention that include providing ongoing training, support systems, volunteer events, and meetings. These activities serve the dual purposes of keeping volunteers engaged in the program during periods of time where there are few activations, while simultaneously keeping volunteers' knowledge and skills up to date in the event they are activated.

Volunteer training. The volunteer training is a minimum of 40-hours as required by the State of New Jersey. In dual agencies that provide services to both DV and sexual violence victims, additional hours may be required to cover sexual violence. The training is taught by the DVRT Coordinator and other DV organization staff. While there are guidelines and best practices available for the training at the state-level, DVRT Coordinators reported using different methods for conducting the training based on their organizational policies, methods they have learned through their own education, and personal teaching style. Role playing and presentations by experts in specialized areas (e.g. trafficking, immigration law) are commonly utilized by most DVRT Coordinators. Several Coordinators also invite the DVLO to present on the criminal justice system. One DVRT Coordinator also takes her volunteer class to a police department in order to do a run through of the response process.

Motivation for Implementation

Throughout the key stakeholder interviews, a common theme that emerged were factors that motivated police departments to implement the DVRT intervention. Key stakeholders suggested that police support for implementing the program is motivated by: a) perceived benefits to the police response and investigation, b) perceived benefits to DV victims, c) the need to comply with mandates for program implementation, and d) recognition of DV as a potentially fatal crime.

Perceived benefits to police response/investigation. Key stakeholders suggested that police departments were more likely to implement the DVRT intervention if they perceived it to be useful to their police investigations. One way in which the DVRT program was found to be useful is that it keeps victims occupied while they are waiting at the police department. Key stakeholders indicated that the paperwork associated with DV crimes can be quite lengthy and victims often must sit and wait for the officer to complete this paperwork before they can leave. The DVRT intervention keeps victims occupied while they are waiting for the police officers to complete their paperwork. As one key stakeholder noted:

...A lot of times, it's actually a good thing [that an advocate comes] because we have so much paperwork to do on our end that a lot of times the victims, they're sitting there not doing anything while... While we're filling out all this paperwork and getting ready to call the judge for a restraining order or do whatever and they're kind of looking at their watch like how long is this gonna take.

Key stakeholders also felt that the DVRT intervention could potentially strengthen victims' statements. The impact of trauma may impede a victim's ability to describe the DV they experienced in a clear, concise manner. As such, key stakeholders felt the presence of a volunteer with expertise in DV was helpful for calming victims, focusing thoughts, and potentially eliciting

additional details about the nature of the DV incident, which in turn could strengthen victims' statements to police and judges, if filing a restraining order. One key stakeholder shared:

If [the victim is] going to talk to the judge, then a [volunteer] is going to explain that process. Which again, an officer's not, doesn't have the time to do that and doesn't have the time to really understand this person across from them is in trauma, right. Many times restraining orders will be denied because victims can't get to the point, victims cannot, they don't present well. And if a judge does not hear their level of need, they're not going to get what they need, all right. So we say okay, they've already heard the story. So they're gonna be able to say to them okay, are you afraid, I heard you say you're afraid, make sure the judge hears that you're afraid...

A few DVLOs also suggested that their ability to respond to DV cases was strengthened as a result of their collaborative relationship with the DVRT Coordinators. More specifically, DVLOs that participated in their DV organizations' 40-hour training for volunteers felt that they gained a great deal of knowledge around the issue of DV and were better able to understand what victims of DV experience. One key stakeholder described the training experience as "profound" sharing:

As a police officer, you see the physical side of it. But you really don't take into account the psychological side or the emotional side. A lot of times, police officers will get discouraged because we will have a victim, that we, you go to their house and you will see a stack of victim notification forms.

While this training is not required of all DVLOs, those who participated responded a favorable experience and gained a better understanding of the dynamics of DV.

Lastly, some key stakeholders suggested that a benefit of the DVRT to police officers is that it has the potential to break the cycle of repeat calls. Repeat calls for DV at the same residence are sometimes a source of frustration for officers. However, DVRT Coordinators, in particular, believed that the program provides a "concrete intervention" that can potentially connect victims to resources that they may need to eventually leave their abuser.

Perceived benefits to victims. Key stakeholders identified several potential benefits of the DVRT intervention for victims. The intervention helps to clarify the criminal justice process, which key stakeholders acknowledged can sometimes be confusing and overwhelming for victims to navigate. In particular, key stakeholders suggested that victims benefited from learning about the restraining order process from the DVRT volunteers.

Key stakeholders also suggested that the DVRT intervention is invaluable to victims because they are provided with information related to DV, along with a range of resources. In addition to the criminal justice system, topics volunteers commonly discussed during the intervention included the nature of power and control in abusive relationships, safety planning, and information on potential services that victims may be eligible for. A few key stakeholders also emphasized that the intervention provides victims with the opportunity to receive support and have their experiences validated. One key stakeholder noted:

I've seen that we've had so many victims in the past that just don't know where to go. They've been with the offender for so long. Usually, they feel like they're captive. They're held in this house. They don't have anybody to reach out to or anything like that. So I think it is nice having that outlet, somebody that they could talk to and find out what they can do, what they can't do, how the process goes, because I think a lot of them don't really know how the court process is. So I think it's like, I don't want to say crutch, but I think it's very helpful that the DVRT members can kind of guide them through that relationship. I don't know if it fits, our DVRT members are very proactive. We've had pretty much all positive experiences with them when they come to meet the victims, which is nice. We've never had any complaints that I'm aware of from a victim or anything like that. So, I mean, I think that goes hand in hand then with meeting with them and walking them through the process and all that as a positive experience.

Mandates for implementation. In addition to the perceived benefits that the DVRT program has for both officers and victims of DV, some key stakeholders cited mandates as a motivation for implementing the intervention. Throughout communities in New Jersey, the reported mandating-entity varied widely, from department-specific Standard Operating

Procedures to county Prosecutor's Offices to the New Jersey Statute requiring municipalities to establish DVRT programs. While some key stakeholders referenced mandates that were very concrete in nature, for others the perception of a mandate served as a source of motivation. One department noted that implementation is motivated by their desire to remain accredited by a national organization. Although the accrediting body does not mandate the implementation of the DVRT program per se, it does require departments to operate at a high level of professional standards. The key stakeholder acknowledged that this drives the department to operate "*very by the book.*"

Recognition of domestic violence as a potentially lethal crime. Several key stakeholders noted that implementation of the DVRT is motivated by the perception of DV as a serious and potentially lethal crime. In some communities, DVRTs were established following the occurrence of a DV fatality. Other key stakeholders noted that DVRTs were already present in their communities, but the occurrence of a DV fatality led to the reinforcement of activation policies and procedures following DV incidents. Key stakeholders also noted that there has been an increased recognition that DV is a serious crime, just like any other, and that DV victims deserve the allocation of such resources. One DVRT Coordinator shared:

I think many of the police stations have activated more in the past couple of years... Than they would have prior because I've made sure that they've understood that each domestic violence incident could be potentially deadly - No matter if it was something they thought was frivolous or not. So they will call us because it's better for them to be safe than sorry.

Implementation Challenges

While key stakeholders generally acknowledged the benefits of the DVRT intervention, they also highlighted some implementation challenges that they experienced. These challenges

generally centered around: a) mandatory activation, and b) administrative support from police department.

Mandatory activation. The term “mandatory activation” refers to a policy in which police departments are required to activate the DVRT when DV cases meet the activation criteria discussed previously. Mandatory activation is generally viewed favorably, at least when implemented as intended. Key stakeholders identified several benefits to mandatory activation. First, it takes officer discretion and victim preference out of the process, thereby ensuring that all victims eligible of receiving the intervention have the opportunity to meet with a volunteer, as long as one is available. Key stakeholders suggested that if offered, victims may decline the opportunity to activate DVRT because they do not want to inconvenience a volunteer. However, the victim may be more willing to engage with the volunteer if they are already at the police department. One key stakeholder shared the following story:

I got called to a DVRT a few weeks ago for a male victim at state police barracks. They called, and they have to call, and so I talked to the hotline advocate, and she says they're telling me that he doesn't want you to come, the victim. He thinks it's ridiculous. He doesn't want to talk to you, but you know the state police have to activate. I said, “You know what? I'm just going to go he doesn't have to talk to me but I'm going to bring a brochure and we'll see where it goes.” I walk into the barracks, He's sitting there in the lobby, and he verbalizes, “Oh, great.” I smile, I walk in, I talk to the police officer, I get the background, and I come out, and I think it's just about how you handle it. Like you're not going to force yourself on them. And I just looked at him, and he looked at me, and I said, “I understand you don't want to speak to me...” I said, “...but I would love to give you a brochure.” And he said, “Fine, sit down and talk to me.” And I wound up being there an hour and a half.

In this way, the DVRT intervention creates a “window” in which a volunteer has an opportunity to engage with a DV victim and provide support.

However, while mandatory activation requires that a DVRT volunteer be called to respond to the police station regardless of whether the victim requests the intervention,

mandatory activation policies typically do not specify the timing of when the activation must occur. As one key stakeholder explained, “*A lot of the teams do make it mandatory, but even if it’s mandatory, they can’t mandate when in the process [the officers are] going to call for a volunteer.*” Key stakeholders specified that officer discretion in the timing of activation is one challenge to implementing the DVRT intervention. Key stakeholders suggested that ideally the DVRT activation would be made as soon as an officer knows that an eligible DV victim will be going back to the police department. This timing would ensure that a volunteer is available to meet with the victim as soon the police officer is done speaking with the victim and that the victim would not have to wait for the volunteer to arrive. However, in some instances, officers wait to activate the volunteers, thus causing victims to have to wait for the volunteers to arrive or leaving before the volunteer arrives.

Another challenge to the implementation of mandatory activation is that sometimes either the DV organization, police department, or both do not have the staffing to respond effectively. Key stakeholders discussed one challenge to mandatory activation is the response capacity of the DVRT volunteers. The availability of volunteers to respond to DVRT activations varied widely by community. While some teams are well staffed and able to respond to most activations, others do not have enough volunteers to respond to the majority of calls. One key stakeholder explained, “*I think that [mandatory callouts are] great in theory, but I think for counties like mine, I think it’s unfeasible and I think you’d be stretching us so thin [because of limited volunteer capacity]*”. Another echoed, “*I think the idea’s great. I think it’s definitely necessary and they need it, but we have to get more volunteers to respond - You know, so, and that’s*

nothing against [the DV organization]. It's just they need the help to do it. They need more people."

As noted previously, DVRT Coordinators also discussed challenges with balancing the number of volunteers they recruit so that there are enough to respond to activations, but not so many that volunteers do not have an opportunity to respond. Coordinators expressed concerns about volunteers losing interest in serving the organization if they are not utilized. Some DVRT Coordinators indicated that they would respond to calls in instances where other volunteers are not available. One key stakeholder shared, *"I'll go to anywhere in the county... I work 24/7 which again is why this position, if you want it to work, you have to be willing to do that. I don't shut my phone off."* Another key stakeholder noted that in a large city with a high volume of DV cases, mandatory activation was not logistically feasible and therefore only cases deemed high risk resulted in activation.

Key stakeholders also shared that the response capacity of police departments is another challenge to the implementation of mandatory activation. Key stakeholders acknowledged that the investigation process for DV cases can be quite lengthy, particularly due to the amount of paperwork that is required following DV incidents. As a result, officers are already kept off the road for extended periods of time when working on these cases. As such, DVRT activation may be perceived as too time consuming. Further, officers may feel concerned that the time it takes to wait for the intervention to end is additional time that an officer is off the road and not patrolling. As one key stakeholder stated:

And I really feel like from a compassionate standpoint, they are overloaded. There are so many responsibilities that they have on them and then there's more stuff every year that keeps getting put on them... Like I think ODARA is great and really important, but that's

just for them. That's like seriously, we have to fill out another form before we're able to like get back and like continue going out into the community.

Another explained, “...*they do not call because they do not want to bring the victim back to the police station. Somebody would have to stay there with the victim and the crisis response team volunteer, and they don't have time for that.*”

Administrative support from police department. Lastly, key stakeholders overwhelmingly agreed that support for the DVRT intervention “*starts at the top,*” suggesting that administrative buy-in from the police chief and other leaders is important to successful implementation of the program. First, the police chief and departmental leaders are responsible for appointing the DVLO. Typically, in each police department the DVLO is tasked with collaborating with the DVRT Coordinator to ensure that information related to the intervention is received and communicated back to other officers at the police department. As a liaison to the DVRT, the DVLO consults with the DVRT Coordinator about cases and is available to address concerns volunteers may have about police officers within the department and vice versa. However, these officers often have additional responsibilities beyond those required of the DVLO position. As such, the amount of time DVLOs are able to invest into the position varies widely by department. While DVLOs may be committed to the implementation of the intervention, their ability to ensure effective delivery may be hindered by their availability, as well as the administrative support they receive for their position.

While some DVLOs conveyed enthusiasm toward the position, other key stakeholders suggested some DVLOs are “*volun-told*” that they will be in the position, meaning the officer must complete the DVLO responsibilities whether they are invested in the overall objectives of the program or not. In addition to influencing whether the officer appointed to the position is the

right fit, the chief's commitment to the program may also influence the DVLOs ability to be effective in the position. As one key stakeholder described, *"I'm limited to what I can do because the upper management, I don't see [DV] as a priority to them, you know."* In this instance, the DVLO recognized that their department could be more responsive to DV incidents, but was unable to shift organizational culture due to a lack of administrative support. Another key stakeholder echoed, *"And even if you have like a good relationship with a police department or the DVLO, doesn't mean that the officers are going to call."* However, DVLOs have the potential to be influential within the department, particularly if the DVLO is high in rank and invested in the DVRT program.

Police chiefs, administrators, and other senior officers can also influence the overall department culture around DV. These individuals can foster a culture that communicates that DV cases are prioritized and reinforces the importance of interventions like the DVRT. One key stakeholder shared:

I could just say that I take pride in this that our agency is recognized as one of the best agencies in dealing with domestic violence, our response, and our... Because the guys care. I mean, and we - Take it seriously from the chief down. He's a big advocate of that. He's involved, very involved with all that.

Another key stakeholder explained:

You know, we have a lot of new officers - But in the years that I've been doing this, I've gone through a bunch of different people, and I would like have a meeting and say DVRT, really need to call them, and they're helpful, and then you'll get guys who are like oh, they jump onboard. And then things kind of slide... You kind of have to constantly reinforce that these people can help you - And this is how they can help you, because these guys have so much on their plates.

As noted previously, the inclusion of mandatory activation in department Standard Operating Procedures may also increase the frequency of DVRT utilization, as this standardizes the practice

of DVRT activation and communicates that the police department views the implementation of the DVRT as important.

Discussion and Implications

Both DVLOs and DVRT Coordinators in this sample expressed the belief that the DVRT is beneficial to both police officers and DV victims. Benefits to police officers included that the intervention keeps victims occupied while officers work on their police reports following a DV investigation, that meeting with a volunteer may help to clarify and ultimately strengthen victims' statements, and that the collaborative relationship provides DVLOs with additional training opportunities. Perceived benefits to victims included that the interaction helps to clarify the criminal justice process for DV victims and connects victims to needed resources. These benefits may provide a useful tool for building support with DVRT Coordinators and DVLOs for the DVRT intervention, particularly within departments that have reservations about implementation.

Despite reported benefits, key stakeholders also shared several implementation challenges. One specific element of the DVRT intervention in which implementation challenges emerged was the incorporation of mandatory activation policies in some communities. Although mandatory activation was viewed as well-intentioned and beneficial to victims of DV, logistical challenges may not make it feasible in all communities. Key stakeholders identified staffing limitations, across both the DV organizations and the police departments, as the biggest barrier to implementing mandatory activation. Key stakeholders reported that some DV organizations do not have the volunteer capacity to respond to every eligible DV case received by community police departments. Similarly, key stakeholders noted that some police departments do not

activate DVRT due to concerns that implementing the intervention will keep officers tasked with patrolling off the road for extended periods of time. To mitigate this concern, one DVRT Coordinator encourages volunteers to keep the intervention to 45 minutes or less to respect the police officers time as well.

Key stakeholders described a number of mechanisms that are utilized to navigate the logistical challenges associated with DVRT implementation. To enhance volunteer capacity, key stakeholders employ different volunteer scheduling systems, with some DVRT Coordinators preferring rolling call-out schedules to increase volunteer flexibility. Key stakeholders have also explored different team structures within their counties to maximize response times and to better distribute volunteers. For example, some counties have sub-teams focused on specific municipalities or regions. One county was also exploring the development of a high risk response team, as to ensure victims who are identified as high risk for re-assault based on their Ontario Domestic Assault Risk Assessment scores get prioritized when volunteer availability is limited. To keep volunteers engaged with the DV organization, DVRT Coordinators scheduled a range of events, including trainings, meetings, and informal receptions to express appreciation.

In instances where volunteers are not available to respond, police officers typically provide the victims with the DV hotline information as an alternate method to communicate with a DV advocate. Lastly, several of the DVRT Coordinators communicated that they are also available to respond to DVRT calls when volunteers are not available, although if the DVRT Coordinator is required after hours too frequently this could contribute to job burnout.

Despite these challenges, key stakeholders expressed a continued interest in increasing DVRT activation by police departments. This suggests that while mandatory activation may not

be logistically feasible in all communities, key stakeholders generally believed that the benefits of the policy outweighed the limitations. One concern key stakeholders communicated related to the DVRT intervention is that police officers are sometimes reluctant to offer to activate the program because there may not be a volunteer available to respond once a victim requests a volunteer. Such a scenario may be best navigated through mandatory activation procedures. A benefit to mandatory activation is that the police officer does not offer to activate DVRT, but rather just moves forward with doing so. If no volunteer is available, the police officer can simply offer the DV hotline number instead. This eliminates a situation in which the police officer offers a volunteer, but then has to tell the victim that one is not available to respond. However, such a protocol would also require that police officers activate DVRT as soon as possible.

Many key stakeholders emphasized that effective implementation of the DVRT program is contingent on support from the police chief and other leaders within police departments and the broader criminal justice community. Police chiefs, in particular, may influence many aspects of program implementation including appointing the department's DVLO, shaping department culture around the issue of DV, and enforcing the utilization of the DVRT. Chiefs should communicate the importance of the intervention to officers within the department and provide support to DVLOs. Key stakeholders also emphasized that one of the motivating factors for utilizing the intervention were mandates. Police chiefs can increase DVRT activation by mandating the program as part of the department's Standard Operating Procedures for DV incidences and holding officers that fail to follow these procedures accountable. DVRT mandates

by the Attorney General and Prosecutors' Offices may also be effective for increasing DVRT activation rates.

The purpose of this exploratory study was to interview key stakeholders involved with the administration of the DVRT program to learn about their perceptions of its functioning. Data collected did not include the voices of survivors nor quantitative data on case outcomes. Future qualitative research should include interviews with survivors of DV who have utilized the DVRT program to gain survivor feedback on program. Future quantitative research could use surveys with survivors, as well as the analysis of administrative data, to examine whether the intervention influences outcomes such as survivors' perceptions of safety and confidence in the criminal justice system following the DVRT, survivors' access to and/or use of additional DV services following the DVRT intervention, DV reporting to police, DV incidence rates, receipt of restraining orders, and offender accountability through arrest and prosecution.

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