

# Integrity, Action, and Justice

## *Strengthening Law Enforcement's Response to Domestic and Sexual Violence National Demonstration Initiative*

BY

Denise Jones, Sergeant, Clark County Sheriff's Office, Ohio; Michael Rizzo, Program Manager, IACP; Scott Stevens, Sergeant, Iowa City Police Department, Iowa; and Angela Weekes, Corporal, Nampa Police Department, Idaho

**IN 2015, THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE (DOJ)**, Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) released guidance designed to support law enforcement agencies in their efforts to prevent gender bias in the response to sexual assault and domestic violence. The document, *Identifying and Preventing Gender Bias in Law Enforcement's Response to Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence*, focuses on the need for clear policies, comprehensive training, and responsive supervision protocols and accountability systems in order to effectively investigate these crimes, support victims, and focus investigations on the suspects. The guidance presents eight principles that law enforcement agencies should integrate to ensure that gender bias, intentionally or unintentionally, does not undermine efforts to keep victims safe and hold offenders accountable.

1. Recognize and address biases, assumptions, and stereotypes about victims.
2. Treat all victims with respect, and employ interviewing tactics that encourage a victim to participate in the criminal justice system.
3. Investigate all sexual assault or domestic violence complaints thoroughly and effectively.
4. Appropriately classify reports of sexual assault or domestic violence.
5. Refer victims to appropriate services.
6. Properly identify the assailant in domestic violence incidents.
7. Hold agency members who commit sexual or domestic violence accountable.
8. Maintain, review, and act upon data regarding sexual assault and domestic violence.

The IACP, in partnership with the National Crime Victim Law Institute (NCVLI) and supported by a cadre of multidisciplinary subject matter experts, was awarded a \$5 million grant from the DOJ Office for Victims of Crime to develop a comprehensive program and strategies to address sexual and domestic violence while building the capacity of law enforcement and raising awareness of the existence and impact of gender bias. In 2018, six U.S. law enforcement agencies were selected through a rigorous application process to become demonstration sites for the Strengthening Law Enforcement Response to Domestic and Sexual Violence National Demonstration Initiative (National Demonstration Initiative). The agencies selected were City of Shawnee Police Department, Oklahoma; Clark County Sheriff's Office, Ohio; Denton Police Department, Texas; Iowa City Police Department, Iowa; Nampa Police Department, Idaho; and Vancouver Police Department, Washington.

While significant progress has been made by law enforcement in responding to sexual and domestic violence over the past few decades, like anything, this is an ongoing, continual process and more work always can and should be done. A number of factors can play into the immediate assessment of the crimes of domestic and sexual violence: resources, training, and understanding of the crime that occurred, as well as cultural and personal biases, assumptions, and misperceptions. Often, inherent and explicit bias regarding gender, specific populations, the relationship of the victims and offenders, and the victims and perpetrators of sexual and domestic violence impact the response to and

## SEXUAL ASSAULT, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, STALKING, AND GENDER BIAS AFFECT PEOPLE OF ALL GENDERS AND SEXUAL ORIENTATIONS



investigation of these complex cases. Together, these contributing factors can lead to victims of sexual assault and domestic violence receiving an inadequate response or being underserved, or even unserved, by the criminal justice system.

The presence of gender bias when responding to victims of domestic and sexual violence can lead to the erosion of trust in law enforcement throughout communities. Gender bias can reinforce myths and misconceptions that sometime exist among law enforcement and can manifest in many different ways, including

- the belief that sexual and gender-based violence is expected, accepted, encouraged, or wanted;
- distrust and disbelief of victims;
- desensitization and apathy to victims;
- exaggerated credibility given to the perpetrator's account;
- failure to identify or arrest the predominant aggressor;
- failure to properly and thoroughly document the crimes that occurred;
- lack of training and resources specific to sexual and gender-based crimes;
- absence of partnerships and collaborations needed to support victims; and
- negative impacts on the key decisions and progression of the investigation.

Over the past year and a half, the IACP and project partners have worked hands-on with the demonstration sites to build the capacity of these agencies to increase understanding and skills, provide access to information and resources, and present promising practices for

the effective response to domestic and sexual violence (including strangulation and stalking). This has included assessing and addressing crucial questions related to policy development and implementation; hiring, promotion, supervision, and training efforts; interviewing and investigation procedures; internal culture and accountability; and community needs.

Specific recommendations in the four broad categories of training, leadership, performance monitoring, and partnering were developed by subject matter experts for each agency based on site visits, case reviews, and an overall agency assessment that presented questions and content that correlated with the eight principles in *Identifying and Preventing Gender Bias in Law Enforcement's Response to Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence*. These recommendations focused on strategies to identify and address gender bias and create victim-centered, trauma-informed responses to victims of domestic and sexual violence.

In order to foster a commitment to effectively address domestic and sexual violence and institutionalize comprehensive response, investigations, and practices, first-line supervisors from each of the sites attended the IACP's National Law Enforcement Supervisor Training on Violence Against Women. In this three-day training event, a team of subject matter expert faculty trainers guided participants through an interactive curriculum that captured the realities of domestic and sexual violence. Participants identified supervisory priorities; created practical, proactive action plans to strengthen the response to domestic and sexual violence, including

**WHILE SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE BY LAW ENFORCEMENT IN RESPONDING TO SEXUAL AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE OVER THE PAST FEW DECADES, MUCH WORK REMAINS.**

sexual misconduct and domestic violence by agency members, strangulation, and stalking; and identified methods to increase officer accountability.

The IACP, with project partners, continued to develop and disseminate a variety of agency assessment tools focused on domestic violence, protection order enforcement and firearms, strangulation, sexual assault, stalking, and working with LGBTQ communities. Numerous ongoing technical assistance events have facilitated dialogue and presented information on trauma-informed response, vicarious

trauma, predominant aggressor determination, identifying stalking, responding to non-fatal strangulation, victim rights, and more. The project team has also provided support for updating and creating agency policies,

informing agency mission statements, engaging community partners, and providing case reviews.

Every sworn and non-sworn agency employee plays a key role in the response to victims of domestic and sexual violence. The experience of previous demonstration initiatives and comprehensive projects supports the premise that the goal of strengthening law enforcement response to victims can be accomplished with minimal impact on existing personnel and financial resources. Throughout the project, the six sites made great strides in assessing and addressing gender bias in the response to domestic and sexual violence and effecting strategies for creating thorough, comprehensive responses to victims. The three efforts detailed herein highlight a sampling of these accomplishments and represent models of success that can be implemented by all law enforcement agencies to address the impact of gender bias on the response to and interaction with victims and strategies to develop victim-centered, trauma-informed agencies.

### IOWA CITY POLICE DEPARTMENT: VICTIM-FOCUSED MISSION STATEMENT

One of the first steps the Iowa City Police Department (ICPD) completed after being selected for the National Demonstration

Initiative was an overall agency assessment to identify gender bias in the department's response to sexual assault and domestic violence. This assessment focused on agency policies and practices related to domestic violence and sexual assault; community coordination and partnerships; and the organizational culture of the agency, including values and behaviors.

Based on the findings from the assessment, the ICPD was presented with a comprehensive list of agency recommendations to effectively address domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and strangulation. One of the recommendations presented to the agency was to update the agency mission statement to embrace the spirit of a victim-centered response. Chief Jody Matherly and his team began working in October 2018 to update the existing mission statement, which was lengthy, very broad, and not reflective of the community the agency serves. ICPD was provided with examples of mission statements from various other agencies to help them identify what would work best for the agency and the community.

The ICPD team wanted to develop a statement that captured the operational agency values and provided direction for agency members. They wanted it to be transparent for the community, and, most important, they wanted it to clearly state their victim-centered philosophy so agency members, external partners, and the wider community would understand the dedication, professionalism, and leadership exhibited by all members when responding to victims of crimes. Chief Matherly and his team arrived at a new mission statement:

*To work in partnership with the community, enhance trust, protect with courage and compassion, and empower victims of crime through excellence in service.*

This was initially reviewed by a group of ICPD officers who supported the message and understood the impact of the words presented. Sergeant Scott Stevens then presented the statement to the team working on the National Demonstration Initiative, where the new mission statement was met with applause. The representatives of the community-based advocacy programs were particularly moved by the incorporation of the phrase "empower victims of crime."

The approved mission statement was then disseminated to all agency members to review and sign. Placards with the mission statement have been placed around the department building, including in the chief's conference room, the





stationmaster and report writing room, and the Investigations Division lobby so that the message can be seen by all on a daily basis.

From this mission statement came the agency's new motto, "Excellence in Service." Each squad car has been outfitted with a vinyl graphic of the motto on the front fender, and the concept has been implemented in every aspect of the department: interactions with the public; teaching, mentoring, and training officers; and the expectation for officers to exhibit high levels of professionalism rooted in the victim-centered foundation.

### **NAMPA POLICE DEPARTMENT: TRAINING RESPONDERS ON THE NEUROBIOLOGY OF TRAUMA AND SEXUAL ASSAULT**

One way to dispel bias-driven inaccuracies and misperceptions about sexual assault, including those about victims and perpetrators of these crimes, is by presenting comprehensive, effective training to first responders. This training also needs to provide information on the neurobiology of trauma and investigative strategies to respond to sexual assault crimes in a victim-centered, trauma-informed manner.

Emergency medical personnel often respond to calls for sexual violence incidents that involve injuries, yet there is very little training available for this discipline. In early 2019, the deputy director for the Canyon County Paramedics (Idaho) reached out to the Nampa Police Department requesting specific training related to responding to victims of sexual assault. The request was presented to Corporal Angela Weekes, who has been working closely on the demonstration initiative efforts. With existing resources and training tools and a foundation of strong partnerships, Corporal Weekes was able to organize and facilitate a joint training event for members of the Canyon County Paramedics, Nampa Fire Department, and Nampa Police Department.

The free training that Corporal Weekes presented to the first responders included information and statistics including, but not limited to, the following facts:

- Sexual assaults are most often committed by someone the victim knows.
- Most sexual assaults do not result in physical injury and perpetrators rarely use weapons.
- Reports of sexual assaults are often delayed due to a multitude of factors.
- Many victims do not physically resist the assault.
- Only between 2 percent and 10 percent of reports of sexual assault are false.

Additionally, information about the response to and neurobiology of trauma was provided in order to increase the law enforcement and paramedics' understanding of victim reactions to an assault.

It is imperative that sexual assault training content for first responders address the neurobiology of trauma and information about agencywide strategies to create trauma-informed methods for responding to victims on calls. Corporal Weekes presented information about the complexities of sexual assault and other traumatic incidents and addressed how trauma might impact victims' response or ability to recall information. The traumatic event can have a significant impact on victims, so they may behave in a way that seems counterintuitive to responders. The training also addressed how a victim-centered, trauma-informed response to victims is critical to avoid further victimization and can increase the likelihood victims stay engaged with the system and access resources.

It is imperative that responders, whether law enforcement or medical, implement trauma-informed practices and use effective investigation techniques in order to provide victims with needed services and support. A multidisciplinary collaboration between law enforcement, health care, EMTs, prosecutors, and advocacy professionals can strengthen the response to victims of sexual assault. Law enforcement agencies are encouraged to partner with their communities to facilitate training events to develop trauma-informed practices and policies across systems, strengthen relationships, and identify best practices and consistent responses for supporting victims.

### **CLARK COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE: POLICY TO ADDRESS INTERACTIONS WITH TRANSGENDER INDIVIDUALS**

Gender bias can create unfair treatment of individuals based solely on their sex, perceived sex, or ingrained social stereotypes of an individual's presented or perceived sex or gender. Often, there is an emphasis on identifying a person as only "woman" or "man," which can cause responders to miss or ignore the specific interplay of a victim's identity, which can be fluid and changing. This, in turn, can lead to overlooking specific needed services, resources, and interactions. In order to build stronger relationships and create a consistent, department-wide response, it is imperative that agencies review or develop policies, training, and procedures that might affect interactions with individuals who identify as transgender.

Policies that specifically address or impact individuals who identify as transgender should be

**A MULTIDISCIPLINARY COLLABORATION BETWEEN LAW ENFORCEMENT, HEALTH CARE, EMTs, PROSECUTORS, AND ADVOCACY PROFESSIONALS CAN STRENGTHEN THE RESPONSE TO VICTIMS OF SEXUAL ASSAULT.**

informed and reviewed by community organizations and stakeholders who work directly with and provide services to the transgender population. These policies may include topics such as profiling, stops, search and seizure, use of force, transportation, arrest processing, agency member sexual misconduct, report writing and documentation, policing prostitution-related offenses, access to medical treatment and medications while in custody, use of restrooms while in custody, confidentiality, responding to intimate partner violence and sexual assault, and responding to hate crimes, among others. However, creating a stand-alone policy focused on interactions with individuals who identify as transgender sends a powerful message to the community regarding the dedication and prioritization of agency leadership to support and build healthy relationships with those they serve.

The Clark County Sheriff's Office identified a gap in service when it came to interactions with the transgender community in their jurisdiction. The sheriff's office did not have a policy or guidelines for deputies to support them when interacting with individuals who identified as transgender. Sergeant Denise Jones began researching existing policies and procedures to identify what would work best for the Clark County community.

In order to better understand the community needs, Sergeant Jones reached out to multidisciplinary partners in the jurisdiction including the local domestic violence and sexual assault advocates at Project Woman and CitiLookout, as well as reaching out to the Buckeye Region Anti-Violence Organization, Equality Springfield, and the Ohio Peace Officer Training Academy. Through these interactions and conversations, Sergeant Jones was able to gather input and ideas about the challenges the community faces, experiences they are having with the transgender community, and needed areas of improvement and guidance. The community partners were extremely supportive of the sheriff's office creating a policy specific to interactions with individuals who identify as transgender.

The Clark County Sheriff's Office consistently strives to ensure that the quality of the services provided is the same across all of the community's diverse groups. The purpose of developing the stand-alone policy was to provide agency members with guidelines and promising practices for interacting with members of the community who identify as transgender or gender nonconforming. Drawing from existing policies and documents, including IACP's Concept and Issues paper, "Interactions with Transgender

and Gender-Non-Conforming Individuals," and IACP's *Responding to Sexual Violence in the LGBTQ+ Communities: Law Enforcement Strategies and Considerations*, Sergeant Jones began drafting language and identifying areas where the deputies would need the most guidance. To ensure that the information would provide the needed directives for agency members and foster positive interactions with community members, the content was reviewed by both internal and external stakeholders.

The policy is currently in the final stages of review and approval. The information presented in the policy addresses various interactions agency members may have with individuals who identify as transgender or gender nonconforming. In order to ensure that all the agency's members have a better understanding of accurate and appropriate terminology and language, the policy begins with definitions. Terms such as "gender nonconforming," "transgender," and "gender" are defined. The policy also presents information about how to address individuals and appropriate questions to ask in order to establish the correct pronouns and names to use, as well as details about reporting. It is encouraged that correct names and pronouns for individuals who identify as transgender or gender nonconforming be used in all reports. The policy also cautions that members should be mindful of transgender or gender nonconforming individuals who may not be "out" and take care to not "out" the individual, intentionally or unintentionally.

Effective strategies for the searches and transportation of individuals are clearly outlined in the policy. Agency members are discouraged from using a body search to ascertain the gender of any individual, for the sole purpose of viewing an individual's anatomy or genitalia, assigning gender, or for any demeaning or harassing purpose. Because individuals who identify as transgender or gender nonconforming may be hesitant to report crimes or engage with law enforcement for numerous reasons, the policy also addresses issues of privacy, confidentiality, and safety concerns.

Agencies are encouraged to work with subject matter experts and community partners, as the Clark County Sheriff's Office did, to develop information and content for related policies and a training curriculum. Because agency members are in the community every day, it is imperative that they build and sustain trust, support all victims of crime, and treat all individuals with respect. A policy such as the one developed by Sergeant Jones at the Clark County Sheriff's Office can facilitate this and help to strengthen community relationships. ♡