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# Taking Leadership *to the Next Level*

## National Law Enforcement First-Line Supervisor Training on Violence Against Women

**LEADERSHIP EXISTS IN EVERY LEVEL  
AND RANK OF LAW ENFORCEMENT AND  
MUST BE CONTINUOUSLY CULTIVATED**

and supported at each of those levels. First-line supervisors fulfill responsibilities critical to the success of law enforcement organizations, and they play a very specific leadership role: balancing the expectations of agency executives with the needs of the first responders in the field. Through their leadership style and actions, supervisors can create, maintain, or change the culture within a team and, in doing so, can impact an entire agency. They also have the ability and potential to influence the commitment and skill with which first responders interact with the community and victims and address gender-based crimes and intimate partner violence (IPV).

In 2012, the IACP developed a training curriculum, with supplemental tools and resources, for supervisors who hold primary responsibility of overseeing first responders, designed to increase understanding of gender-based crimes and IPV—while also instilling mentoring, training, and leadership skills. The National Law Enforcement First-Line Supervisor Training on Violence Against Women, funded by the U.S. Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women, has close to 150 graduates (as of May 2019) throughout the United States who are dedicated to effectively addressing these crimes and acting as

ambassadors by spreading the knowledge they've gained to others.

Individuals who attend First-Line Supervisor Training on Violence Against Women take part in an interactive learning environment led by a consortium of subject matter experts. Participants are exposed to content-rich presentations focused on gender-based crimes and IPV. The sessions and activities aim to support supervisory efforts by enhancing problem-solving skills; defining promising practices for responding to victims of gender-based crimes and IPV; helping to identify personal strengths and areas of growth; and highlighting areas of the multifaceted social culture, myth and misperceptions, and complexities that might impact first responders' responses to victims. The content is divided into four educational component themes pertinent to first-line supervisors: You as the Leader, You as the Officer, You as the Supervisor, and You as the Solution.

### **YOU AS THE LEADER**

The first-line response to victims of gender-based crimes and IPV is largely influenced by the leadership and direction provided to officers by their supervisors. One of the most important roles of the first-line supervisor is to act as a mentor. Supervisors should ensure that officers understand and carry out the vision of the agency and inspire their teams

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## DEFINING IPV

For the purposes of this article, the term “intimate partner violence” (IPV) is defined as a pattern of abusive behavior in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over or to harm another intimate partner. IPV can include physical, sexual, emotional, economic, or psychological actions or threats of actions that are intended to control or harm (or control and harm) another person. This includes any behaviors that intimidate, manipulate, humiliate, isolate, frighten, terrorize, coerce, threaten, blame, hurt, injure, or wound someone.

to implement trauma-informed, victim-centered responses to victims of gender-based crimes and IPV.

Josh Bronson, who was the deputy chief of McDaniel College Campus Police when he attended the supervisor training in 2013, believes that first-line supervision can be the most rewarding yet most difficult level of law enforcement leadership. Balancing the needs of the command staff with those of the officers under one’s supervision takes skill and fortitude; first-line supervisors must navigate this delicate balance daily. Participants of the supervisor training are given tools to develop their communication skills in order to bridge any divides that might occur within their agencies. Culture change does not come easily to agencies, and first-line supervisors are integral to creating, sustaining, or changing the culture. The supervisor training provides the guidance, activities, and tools first-line supervisors need to build confidence in articulating why culture change is important, as well as strategies to accomplish change.

## YOU AS THE OFFICER

In order to best support their teams, supervisors need to understand the complexities of victims and perpetrators of gender-based crimes and IPV, as well as the influence of

societal attitudes and beliefs regarding these crimes. To be an effective leader regarding gender-based crimes and IPV and provide current resources to their teams, supervisors should continually seek out and embrace information regarding applicable state and federal laws, the impact of trauma, effective response to victims, conducting comprehensive investigations, holding perpetrators accountable, and promising practices in creating multidisciplinary partnerships to support agency and community efforts to address these crimes.

When applying to attend the supervisor training and arriving on-site, Bronson felt he had a good understanding of gender-based crimes and IPV. What he had not considered prior to the supervisor training was the interconnectedness of these crimes. When one hears “sexual assault” there is a hyper-focus on those two words. What is often missed are the additional crimes that can occur in the context of sexual assault such as strangulation, stalking, kidnapping, witness intimidation, and threats, among others. And, it is often forgotten that the overarching dynamics of sexual assault and domestic violence, for example, can be very similar. Recent research shows that the perpetrators of gender-based crimes and IPV commit multiple crimes. When officers start looking for co-occurring crimes, more offenders are held accountable, thus increasing victim, officer, and community safety.

## YOU AS THE SUPERVISOR

Law enforcement supervisors have the ability and potential to influence the commitment to and skill with which first responders address gender-based crimes and IPV. Supervisors should ensure that first responders are conducting thorough, comprehensive investigations in an unbiased, trauma-informed way. They also see and hear first-hand the morale of their officers and can recognize issues and problems early on. Systems to mentor and hold officers accountable and convey priority for effectively responding to these crimes must be implemented.

One of the most important discussions for Bronson at the supervisor training was about

reviewing reports. At the time, he was responsible for reviewing all of his department's reports. In the course, methods and information needed to effectively review reports with an eye on culture change are presented. An impactful strategy to change the culture of an organization—to make it more trauma-informed and sensitive to gender-based crimes—is to ensure reports are written effectively. Language and terminology in reports matter and can, in many ways, impact the case. It is up to first-line supervisors to review reports and put forward comprehensive reports that accurately capture the crimes that occurred.

## YOU AS THE SOLUTION

First-line supervisors are the critical link between the top of the organization and the individuals on the ground. They are also responsible for creating and maintaining an environment that supports learning and growth for officers and treats victims with respect, which will impact the entire community served. Successful response to victims of gender-based crimes and IPV is determined not only by agency policies, practices of the team and organization, and culture of the agency, but also by proactive plans of individual leaders.

In many ways, first-line supervisors, whether in local, state, tribal, or campus agencies, can have a profound impact on officer and agency response to gender-based crimes and IPV. In order to better understand the potential impact of supervisory influence, supervisors should consider the following questions:

- How do you get your team to reflect a commitment to effectively addressing gender-based crimes and IPV?
- How do you teach, discuss, and carry out policies, ethics, and professionalism regarding gender-based crimes and IPV every day?
- How do you motivate and keep your team motivated?
- How do you recognize employee fatigue and frustration responding to these calls to prevent burnout and unintended negative impacts on victims?

In order to support first-line supervisors, the IACP, as part of the training curriculum, created five report review checklists. These checklists, focusing on stalking, strangulation, sexual assault, domestic violence, and protection order enforcement, serve to assist supervisors in ensuring that reports capture significant and comprehensive details and the totality of crimes that occurred. The checklists can also be utilized as a training tool for first responders to highlight the specifics needed in a thorough report and as a resource for first responders as they complete reports, interview victims, and reflect on whether pertinent information has been effectively documented. To access the Report Review Checklists, please visit the [IACP.org/projects/police-response-to-violence-against-women-vaw](http://IACP.org/projects/police-response-to-violence-against-women-vaw). ☪

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